



Evaluation of Rural Aberdeenshire **LEADER** Programme 2007-2013

Aberdeenshire Council

Blake Stevenson and SRUC's final report

August 2013



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Foreword

Aberdeenshire is a large rural area renowned for its scenery and quality of life. From mountains and rolling heather moorland in the rural hinterland the area extends to prime agricultural land in the lowland areas until reaching the expanse of beautiful coastal areas with dramatic cliffs and pristine beaches interspersed between major fishing ports and traditional coastal communities. There are approximately 50 rural settlements with populations up to 5,000 and a rural population of 148,000 in the Rural Aberdeenshire Local Action Group (LAG) area.

The opportunity to revitalise rural communities and contribute to local social and economic prosperity was enabled through the launch of the Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER Programme 2007-2013 in June 2008. Aberdeenshire LEADER has delivered a wide range of projects that collectively are making tangible improvements to people's lives through provision of fit for purpose community facilities, skills development and capacity building, environmental enhancement and a celebration of Aberdeenshire's distinct cultural heritage.

None of this would have been possible without the contribution of the LAG partners, the LEADER Team and the vision of many rural activators who willingly have given their time to implement projects, using their professional skills in a voluntary capacity to make things happen for the benefit of their local communities. I consider this approach to community development to be a real success story – responding to local aspiration and working together delivering positive outcomes from rural development funding – which is what LEADER is all about.

As the 2007-2013 Aberdeenshire LEADER programme enters its final phase now that all project funding has been committed, the Rural Aberdeenshire LAG considered an independent evaluation of the programme to be essential, in order to explore the merits of the programme's delivery and how well the priorities in the strategy have been met.

When drawing up the evaluation proposal, completed by a consortium comprising Blake Stevenson and Scotland's Rural College (SRUC), we felt case studies showcasing the range of



Aberdeenshire LEADER projects delivered in the 2007-2013 programme would complement the evaluation analysis while assessing impacts of project delivery.

The evaluation therefore has three main aims, to assess the processes, systems and operational efficiency of the Aberdeenshire LEADER Programme, to undertake detailed case studies of around 10% of the projects approved by Aberdeenshire LAG and to consider options for the 2014-2020 programme.

The Evaluation Report has produced some very interesting findings, while also identifying strengths and weaknesses. I think some very useful outcomes from the evaluation will help the LAG move forward with key recommendations for the Local Development Strategy 2014-2020. The case studies provide a valuable snapshot of local projects and their impact within local communities.

My thanks go to all who contributed to the evaluation project, namely the Project Managers who have generated initiatives in our rural communities, LAG members who contributed to the evaluation surveys and the LEADER Team who have serviced the administration of the project on behalf of the LAG.



Belinda Miller

Rural Aberdeenshire LAG Chairperson
and Head of Economic Development at
Aberdeenshire Council.





Executive summary

Introduction and context

In March 2013, the Aberdeenshire LEADER Local Action Group (LAG) commissioned Blake Stevenson, in association with Scotland's Rural College (SRUC), to evaluate the delivery and impact of the Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER programme 2007 – 2013.

The LEADER programme is an EU rural regeneration programme that aims to harness local knowledge to enable a bottom-up approach to rural development. The Scottish Government put in place LAGs to oversee the administration and delivery of LEADER funds at local level. The Aberdeenshire LAG has 21 members representing 14 organisations and the Lead Partner is Aberdeenshire Council. This LAG chose to deliver two themes – 'revitalising rural communities' and 'progressive rural economies' – and it prioritised the following areas of work (set out in the Local Development Strategy (LDS)):

- ▶ Sustainable communities
- ▶ Sustainable tourism
- ▶ Versatile rural workforce
- ▶ Sustainable energy
- ▶ Micro enterprise
- ▶ Conservation of rural environment
- ▶ Innovative value added products and markets

Methods

In conducting this evaluation we used a range of qualitative and quantitative methods including:

- ▶ project database review;
- ▶ an online survey of LEADER-funded projects (61 responses);
- ▶ project visits and interviews with staff, volunteers and beneficiaries, to form 14 case studies;

- ▶ telephone interviews with LAG members and the Scottish Government (16 interviews); and
- ▶ LAG meeting and workshop.

Overview of LEADER-funded projects

Between 2008 and 2013, Aberdeenshire LEADER funded 146 projects. This study relates to the 142 projects that were funded up to December 2012. These projects addressed a number of priorities set out in the LDS, in particular those relating to improving community facilities, as well as local culture and traditions, tourism and the environment. Some priorities were under-addressed, in particular sustainable energy, transport and housing, and very few of the funded projects undertook work relating to supporting businesses and enterprise.

LEADER funded a wide range of types of projects, from projects to promote cultural heritage, improve community facilities or increase employment; to projects embracing renewable energy and innovative new technologies such as high speed broadband. LEADER funding reached all administrative areas of Aberdeenshire, although there was some imbalance in geographical distribution, with fewer projects funded in the South East – an area known to be more deprived than other Aberdeenshire areas and therefore in need of such funding. This raised questions about community capacity to apply for LEADER funding in different areas of Aberdeenshire.

Aberdeenshire LEADER grants ranged in size from very small grants of less than £2,000, to large-scale grants of up to £200,000.

LEADER processes

We found that Aberdeenshire LAG and LEADER staff operated well-established processes and systems for governance, finance and administration. The LEADER delivery team was seen as committed and efficient. LAG members and projects gave very positive feedback about the staff's support of projects during the various LEADER stages and their role in running the LAG. Aberdeenshire Council was felt to be an appropriate Lead Partner.

LEADER staff and the LAG ran a systematic application process, which was generally felt to be easier to participate in for larger, more experienced organisations than smaller ones. The LEADER delivery team gave a considerable amount of support to many applicants during the application process. This was highly valued by projects but raises questions about the complexity of the application process and the resulting need for support.

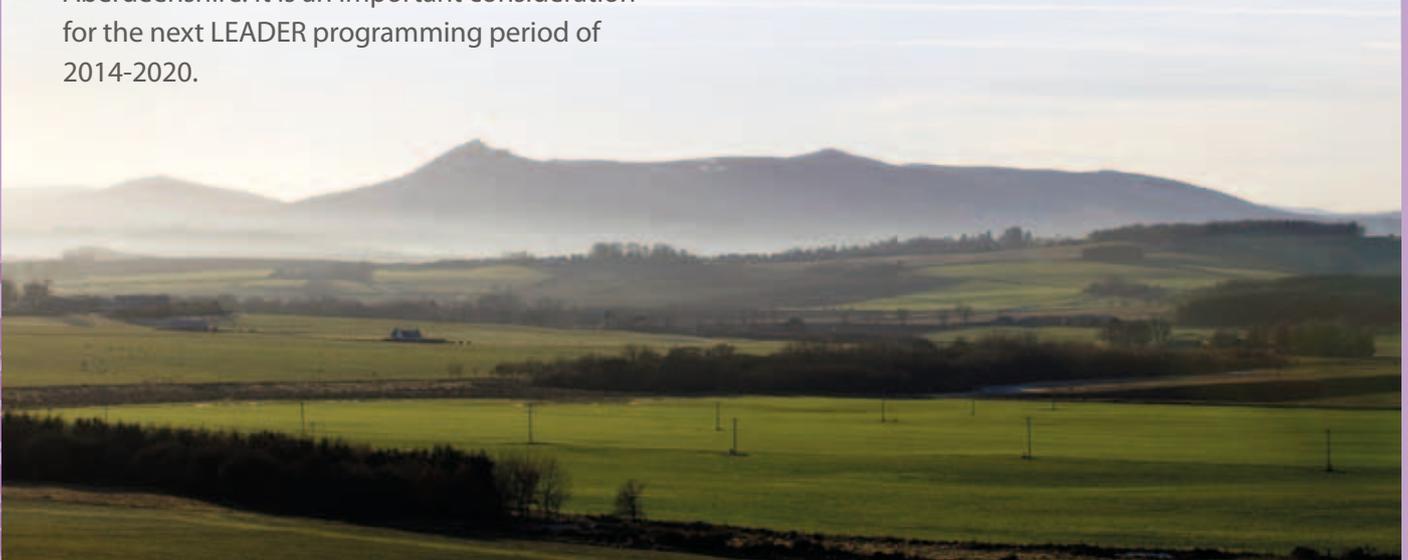
Projects raised concerns about the claims process, despite it being administered very efficiently by the LEADER delivery team. LEADER operates on defrayed expenditure, which requires organisations to have financial reserves in order to be able to make upfront payments. This is not possible for many community groups, which are therefore inadvertently discriminated against. This issue arises from the Scottish Government rules in respect of payments and is not unique to Aberdeenshire. It is an important consideration for the next LEADER programming period of 2014-2020.

Monitoring and evaluation processes were one of the weaker elements of programme delivery in Aberdeenshire, in part due to a lack of direction from the Scottish Government in the early stages of the programme. Projects had difficulty at the application stage in identifying outcomes and outputs, and there was no systematic reporting of outcomes data to the LAG. The output and outcomes monitoring data was incomplete, and therefore the impacts of projects over the course of the LEADER programme were difficult to determine.

Levels of audit were found to be high at project and programme levels. Some LAG members felt that it was appropriately stringent, but others thought it was overly so.

The LAG was considered to represent a range of organisations and areas of work. Members were reported to be committed, skilled and well-networked. Questions arose in relation to the PAC/LAG structure and possible duplication between the roles of these groups. Some participants in our research suggested that the timing and location of meetings could also be reviewed in future to enable better attendance.

Finally, there seemed to be potential for greater connection between LEADER and other rural partnerships and structures as well as to other strategies and priorities across Aberdeenshire. The LEADER team and LAG members had already identified this as a weakness which they are keen to address in moving forward to the next programme.



Impact of LEADER

In undertaking the evaluation, we found strong evidence that LEADER had delivered positive impacts on communities and individuals in a range of ways. It has had:

- ▶ Positive social impacts, such as feelings of wellbeing resulting from volunteering and having suitable spaces for communities to gather.
- ▶ Positive environmental impacts, including conservation/protection of native species and environmental education activities.
- ▶ Economic benefits, such as job opportunities, and increased sales and trading in the project area.
- ▶ A catalytic effect, for example, enabling projects to lever in additional resources and supporting new networks, partnerships and relationships within communities.

Outcomes were achieved by projects across the following areas of impact:

- ▶ Volunteering and community engagement, with many projects involving volunteers and community members, for example in running initiatives and attending events. This has led to increased wellbeing of those involved and participants learning new skills and knowledge.
- ▶ Community facilities, with 75% of survey respondents agreeing that their project has resulted in either more or better community facilities. The improved facilities have filled gaps in venue provision, helped to widen access to events and groups, and contributed to the local economy in a number of ways. Improved community facilities fostered connections and links by bringing people together from the wider community.
- ▶ Local culture, language and traditions, through a number of events, festivals or heritage building developments. These have helped to provide a sense of identity and links with the past, revive art forms and forge links between people.



- ▶ Natural environment and conservation was the focus for a number of projects which resulted in the conservation and protection of the natural environment, improving the appearance of the landscape, reducing energy consumption and raising awareness of environmental issues.
- ▶ Tourism was impacted on positively through a range of heritage, cultural, tourism infrastructure and capital build projects.
- ▶ Education and skills, with communities developing increased skills and confidence through educational initiatives and through taking part in new activities.

There were two main challenges associated with impacts. Firstly, owing to issues with monitoring and evaluation processes, capturing the impact of projects was difficult and project leads often lacked time, knowledge and skills to be able to capture appropriate data. Secondly, some areas of potential impact, highlighted in the LDS as priorities, were not addressed through the projects that were funded, for example, sustainable housing and rural transport initiatives.

Looking ahead

A number of areas for consideration and potential improvement arise from our evaluation of LEADER 2007-2013, which are relevant to all stakeholders involved in LEADER.

The **Scottish Government** could acknowledge the tension between EU directives about rural development requiring a high level of audit and the desire for a bottom-up approach to rural development, driven by community-based projects. Establishing clear monitoring and evaluation indicators, guidance and templates for data collection and valuing qualitative evaluation evidence to highlight the impact of LEADER are important. The Scottish Government could consider different volumes of information being required according to different values of funding requested, and application forms that are tailored accordingly. It should also acknowledge and value volunteers; the hidden army delivering outcomes in rural communities.

The **Lead Partner** and **LAG** should ensure that the content of the Local Development Strategy 2014-2020 is based on consultation with communities, other rural partnerships and networks, and identify how it can work with other funds that fall under the auspices of Community Led Local Development (CLLD). The LDS should be a living document, and fund projects according to the priorities and action plan it sets out. In line with this, the LAG should act more strategically and less as a funding distribution body in the future to ensure that LEADER reaches all parts of rural Aberdeenshire and delivers the impacts it aspires to.

Additional resources would enable the Aberdeenshire **LEADER delivery team** to undertake more capacity building activity than has been possible in the current programme.



Introduction and context

- 1.1** Aberdeenshire LEADER LAG commissioned Blake Stevenson, together with Scotland's Rural College (SRUC), to conduct an evaluation of the delivery and impact of its 2007-2013 LEADER Programme.
- 1.2** The evaluation was conducted between March and July 2013 and this report contains the findings and conclusions from the research.

Overview of LEADER

- 1.3** The LEADER programme was established in the early 1990s as a European Union (EU) rural regeneration programme. Since 2007, LEADER has been a 'delivery option within a mainstream programme' rather than a freestanding pilot initiative, and became the LEADER Approach instead of 'LEADER Programme'¹. In practice, this means that it became part of overall EU rural development policy and part of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), falling under the fourth axis of the second pillar of the CAP, i.e. alongside the other three rural development axes. In Scotland, LEADER is part of the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) and accounts for 6% of SRDP's spend. By the end of the 2007-2013 round of funding, LEADER will deliver approximately £52 million to rural areas².

The LEADER approach

- 1.4** LEADER aims to harness local knowledge to enable a bottom-up, community-led approach to the delivery of Rural Development Programme funding in rural areas³ delivered through Local Action Groups (LAGs). LEADER encourages rural territories to explore new ways to become or remain competitive, to make the most of their assets, and to overcome the challenges they face⁴.
- 1.5** There are 7 Principles of the LEADER Approach which guide its design and delivery in the areas in which it operates. These are:



¹ Rural Development and the LEADER Approach in the UK and Ireland, Carnegie UK Trust Research Paper, Carnegie Trust, 2010.

² www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/farmingrural/SRDP

³ Rural Development and the LEADER Approach in the UK and Ireland, Carnegie UK Trust Research Paper, Carnegie Trust, 2010.

⁴ The LEADER approach, European Commission, 2006.

- 1.6** Through using the LEADER Approach, LEADER should both build social capital and enhance development outcomes. According to the LEADER 2014-2020 Working Group, whilst the LEADER Approach may have additional costs to more traditional top-down rural development programmes and initiatives, these are justified because of the added value that flows from the bottom-up and partnership approach: 'better identification of local needs and local solutions, more engagement on the part of local stakeholders and greater scope for innovation'⁵.
- 1.7** Local Action Groups (LAGs) are responsible for creating a local development strategy for the LAG area and in awarding funding based on closeness of fit with the local strategy. LAGs therefore have financial decision-making authority and strategic obligations. LAGs are a partnership made up of key representatives from rural development stakeholders across the local public, third and private sectors⁶. The aspiration as set out in the LAG guidance is for at least 50% of the LAG membership to be comprised of community representation through the private and voluntary sectors⁷.

LEADER – operating context

- 1.8** LEADER sits within a complex web of policies, structures and funding streams from the EU via the Scottish Government and local authorities down to the grassroots local level in the LAGs. At the national level, it must link to the National Performance Framework and the co-financing component provided by the Scottish Government needs to deliver to Scottish policy targets⁸.
- 1.9** LAGs cross over with other issue- and geographically-based groupings and need to liaise and work with them, as well as ensuring that their actions and aims do not conflict with but complement other funding streams and priorities such as Rural Priorities⁹.
- 1.10** Whilst the local partnerships and projects mentioned above draw on similar principles of devolving decision making power to the lowest level and drawing on principles of place-based community-led development, LEADER retains,

***'a distinctive niche to support multi-sectoral community-based development. It articulates upwards to EU territorial development policy, connects to the national level localism agenda, bridges to Councils and other public sector actors and, most importantly, gives a voice to, and empowers local development actors to come together to design and implement local development strategies.'*¹⁰**

⁵ SRDP 2014-2020 LEADER Working Group, Report for SRDP Programme Manager, Aug 2012.

⁶ www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/farmingrural/SRDP/LEADER/lags

⁷ LEADER 2007-2013, Technical Guidance for Local Action Groups and Coordinators. Accessed at www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0039/00392191.pdf

⁸ SRDP 2014-2020 LEADER Working Group, Report for SRDP Programme Manager, Aug 2012.

⁹ Rural Development and the LEADER Approach in the UK and Ireland, Carnegie UK Trust Research Paper, Carnegie Trust, 2010.

¹⁰ SRDP 2014-2020 LEADER Working Group, Report for SRDP Programme Manager, Aug 2012.

Aims of LEADER in Rural Aberdeenshire

‘A vibrant, sustainable rural economy, which supports and builds upon current business and community infrastructure and enhances the existing cultural and natural heritage.’¹¹

1.11 The Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER area covered by the LAG is the Aberdeenshire local authority area minus the western part, which is covered by the Cairngorms LAG, and settlements with a population of over 5,000. The LAG ‘footprint’ encompasses rural communities across the region, from upland and rural hinterland areas in the west to the lowland and coastal areas in the north, east and south of Aberdeenshire¹². The LAG area includes around 50 settlements with populations ranging from 432 in Cuminestown to around 4,500 in Turriff and Huntly. Approximately 70,000, or 47% of the LAG population, live in rural areas outwith settlements¹³.

1.12 The aims and aspirations for the Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER 2007-2013 were articulated in the LAG’s Local Development Strategy (LDS), which was created after a period of community consultation. All LEADER LAGs were invited by the Scottish Government to prepare their LDS under five themes:

- ▶ Progressive rural economies
- ▶ Revitalising rural communities
- ▶ New markets and products
- ▶ Conservation of the rural environment
- ▶ Rural community capacity

The Aberdeenshire LEADER LAG chose to focus on the first two themes – ‘revitalising rural communities’ and ‘progressive rural economies’.

1.13 The LDS refined these overarching themes into seven priorities, and a range of actions through which the priorities could be delivered were highlighted. Figure 1.1 illustrates the themes, priorities and example actions contained within the Aberdeenshire LEADER LDS.

Figure 1.1: Aims and aspirations for LEADER 2007 – 2013



¹¹ Rural Aberdeenshire Local Development Strategy, 2007. Available at: www.aberdeenshireleader.org/Document_Library/documents/LEADERStrategydraftv_000.pdf

¹² www.aberdeenshireleader.org/LAG_Area/index.html

¹³ Rural Aberdeenshire Local Development Strategy, 2007.

1.14 The LDS detailed 20 outcomes that it was anticipated would follow from the implementation of the strategy. Outcomes included: improved access to training and employment for the under-employed; targeted solutions to enable young people to enter the rural workforce; creation and enhancement of essential rural services and access to ICT; improved co-operative marketing between rural businesses, and improved access to social, recreational and commercial facilities.

1.15 The LDS also envisaged that there would be a number of inter-LAG and inter-regional projects resulting in an increase in co-operation, knowledge transfer and the establishment of a working relationship with other LAGs.

1.16 The LAG currently has 21 members representing 14 organisations. The Lead Partner for LEADER in rural Aberdeenshire is Aberdeenshire Council, and there are three staff tasked with managing and implementing LEADER across Aberdeenshire. Additional resources have been provided through Aberdeenshire Council's Economic Development department on an ad-hoc basis.



Aims and methods

Evaluation aims

- 2.1** The evaluation team used a range of methods to address the key aims of the evaluation which were to:
- ▶ Consider the aims of the Strategy and Business Plan (2007) and identify whether approved projects reflect the aims, objectives, themes & priorities.
 - ▶ Identify a cross section of projects and produce case studies demonstrating how LEADER has made a difference to communities, including softer outcomes.
 - ▶ Consider overall programme delivery, highlighting strengths and weaknesses and areas for improvement.
 - ▶ Consider the structure, function and operation of the LAG/PAC including LAG staff.
 - ▶ Help identify the most cohesive way forward for the LAG and help identify potential strategic priorities for the 2014-2020 Local Development Strategy.

Methods

- 2.2** Figure 2.1 summarises the methods used, which are described below

Figure 2.1: Overview of research methods



Project database review

- 2.3** During the early stages of the evaluation, we reviewed the data in the LEADER project database. The purpose of the database review was two-fold: first, to create an overview of projects funded in order to establish which parts of the LDS were being addressed most/least by funded projects, and to give an overview of the type, nature and beneficiary groups of funded projects. Secondly, the database review informed the development of a sampling frame from which to select a cross-section of LEADER-funded projects to be the subject of case studies. The sampling considered project type (e.g. event, training, access improvements); focus/theme (e.g. young people or women, support for the local economy, helping the natural environment); geographic factors (e.g. accessibility, a spread across the Aberdeenshire LAG area); total value and LEADER intervention rate, and award date (to ensure a spread of early and recent projects).

2.4 The evaluation team then created a sample (i.e. shortlist) of potential case studies which were discussed with the LEADER team in order to then select the final projects. This discussion focused on feasibility, e.g. if the project was still 'live' and whether people would be available to conduct case study research with, and practicalities/logistics. 14 case studies were selected, which represented roughly 10 per cent of approved projects and a total project value of £478,956 (i.e. slightly below 10% of the £4,951,371 total committed LEADER funding).

Online survey

2.5 At the same time as the database review and sampling activity was taking place, an online survey was sent to all 142 LEADER-funded projects. The survey asked questions about the nature and size of projects that were funded, which along with the database review helped us gain an overview of the range and scope of projects funded under LEADER.

The survey also asked questions about LEADER processes (e.g. application, claims, monitoring and evaluation) and about the impact of LEADER-funded projects in their communities.

2.6 The survey contained two sets of multiple choice questions about impacts: one set asked about the ultimate, or end-outcomes of the funded project (e.g. increased employment); the second asked about softer outcomes which help to facilitate and support rural development outcomes (e.g. developing networks and increasing in confidence). The survey questions were drawn from the themes and priorities set out in the Aberdeenshire LEADER Local Development Strategy.

2.7 The survey was in the field for two weeks in May and June and received 61 responses. This represents over half of the individuals who applied for LEADER funding (118 people) as some individuals were responsible for up to four LEADER projects.





Case studies

- 2.8** The purpose of the case study fieldwork was to gather evidence both about processes (e.g. experiences of finance and administration) and about outputs and outcomes, including anticipated and unanticipated outcomes. This allowed us to look at strengths and weaknesses of the Rural Aberdeenshire LAG approach.
- 2.9** We conducted case study fieldwork with 14 projects through a review of the projects' funding application, final claim form and any local evaluation evidence or monitoring data they had collated. This evidence review was followed with a project visit which included interviews with a range of stakeholders, i.e. the Project Manager, volunteers, other stakeholders (e.g. other connected local organisations or projects) and beneficiaries (e.g. members of the public, service users). Interview guides were tailored to the different stakeholder groups that were consulted. Project Managers, for example, were asked to give an overview of the project origins and history, as well as their experiences

of delivering a project with LEADER funding (e.g. the claims process and monitoring and evaluation requirements), as well as their views on the impact of the project. Volunteers and other beneficiaries were asked to reflect on the difference that being involved with the project had made to them personally, and to their local communities. A total of 48 people were consulted across the 14 case studies.

Telephone interviews with LAG and the Scottish Government

- 2.10** The evaluation team carried out semi-structured telephone interviews with 16 people, including members of the LAG, the Scottish Government and the LEADER delivery team (see Appendix 1, Acknowledgements, for a list of interviewees). The purpose of the interviews was to support us to consider the overall LEADER programme delivery, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses and areas for improvement.
- 2.11** During this stage we evaluated the structure, function and operation of the LAG and asked questions about programme delivery and future priorities for the 2014-2020 LEADER programme.

LAG meeting and workshop

- 2.12** The evaluation team presented initial evaluation findings to the LAG and representatives from the Scottish Government on 19th June 2013 at a LAG meeting. Following the presentation, the evaluation team facilitated two group discussions about the priorities the LAG believed should feature in the next Local Development Strategy. Views gathered in these discussions are included in the final section which looks ahead to 2014-2020.



Overview of LEADER-funded projects

- 3.1** Between September 2008 and December 2012, Aberdeenshire LEADER committed funding to a total of 142 projects. The Aberdeenshire LEADER delivery team set up a database to record details about each LEADER-funded project. Information the team recorded and, in some cases, coded includes total project cost, which priority in the LEADER Local Development Strategy projects address, the type of beneficiaries reached and project duration.
- 3.2** Our findings from the database review and online survey questions relating to the nature of LEADER-funded project work are presented in this section, in which we examine:
- ▶ the types of projects funded through LEADER;
 - ▶ the size of funded projects and their proportion of match funding; and
 - ▶ the geographical spread of LEADER funding across Aberdeenshire.

Nature of LEADER-funded projects

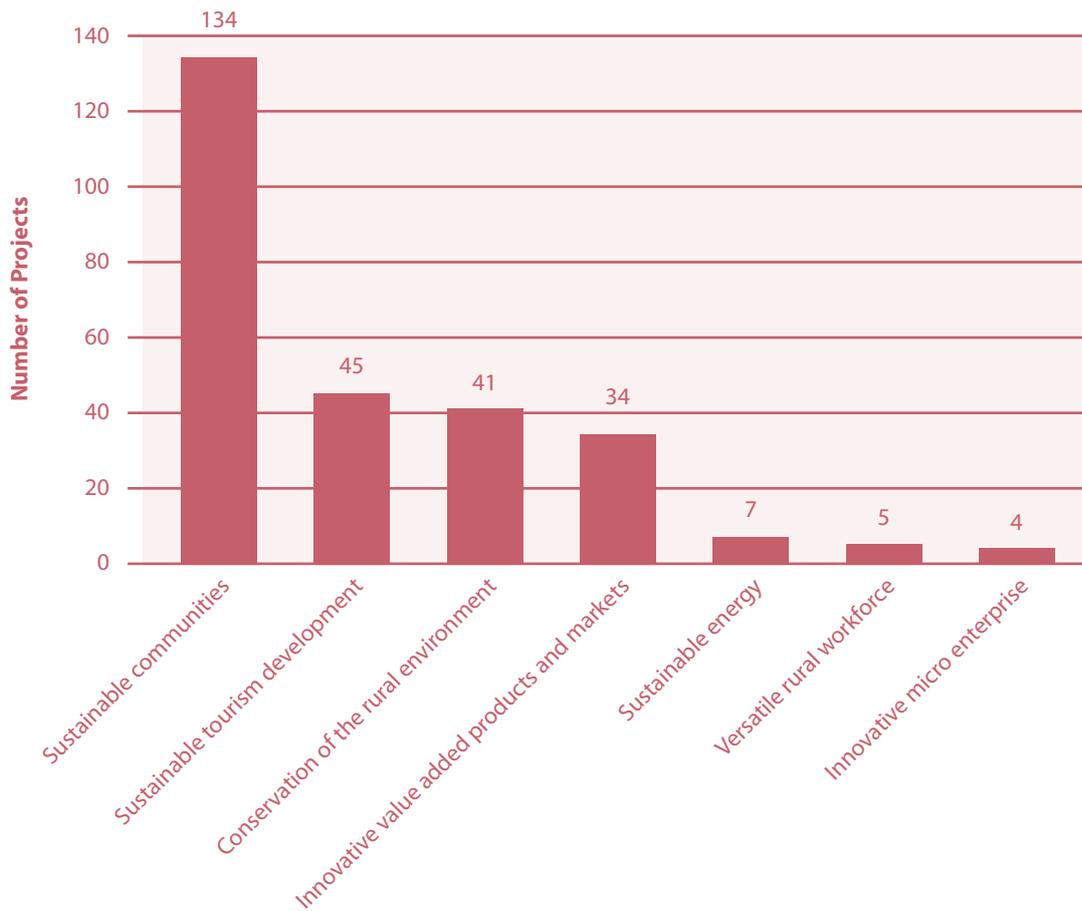
- 3.3** Information about the nature, or type, of project was reviewed through the LEADER project database in terms of which priority in the LDS the project related to, and through two survey questions: one about the nature, or area, of the project's work, and the second about the specific types of activities projects delivered.
- 3.4** Projects were coded on the LEADER database according to Aberdeenshire LEADER priorities as set out in the Local Development Strategy which are:
- ▶ Sustainable communities (SC)
 - ▶ Conservation of the rural environment (CRE)
 - ▶ Innovative value added products and markets (IPM)
 - ▶ Sustainable energy (SE)
 - ▶ Sustainable tourism development (STD)
 - ▶ Versatile rural workforce (VRW)
 - ▶ Innovative micro enterprise (IME).



3.5 Figure 3.1 shows the number of projects working towards each of the Aberdeenshire LEADER priorities. Almost all projects (94%) were working towards ‘Sustainable Communities’. Almost a third (29%) were working towards ‘Conservation

of the Environment’, a similar number towards ‘Tourism’ (32%) and slightly fewer towards ‘Innovative Value Added Projects’ (24%). Very few were working towards ‘Sustainable Energy’ (5%), ‘Workforce Development’ (4%) and ‘Innovative micro-enterprise’ (3%).

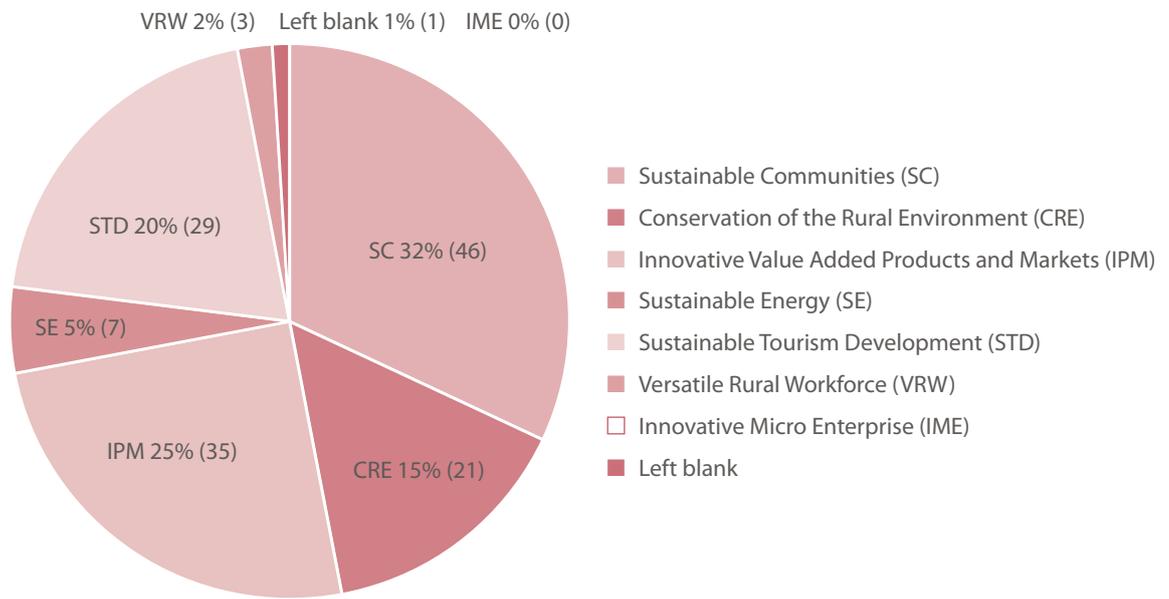
Figure 3.1: Numbers of funded projects working towards each of the Aberdeenshire LEADER Priorities (n=142)



3.6 In the database, most projects were double or triple-coded (for example SC, CRE and IPM) and all but eight were coded to ‘Sustainable Communities’ (SC). In order to gain a more nuanced picture of the LDS Priorities to which projects were working, and to support our sampling strategy, we undertook a second stage of analysis in which we

discounted the SC code unless it was used as a single code. For example, in the case of the ‘CRE’ code, we included those projects only coded to ‘CRE’ as well as those coded to ‘SC, CRE’ and allowed for human error in the original coding so included ‘RCE, STD’ too. Figure 3.2 presents the re-coded information from this work.

Figure 3.2: Recoded percentage and numbers of projects funded through each of the Aberdeenshire Priorities (n=142)



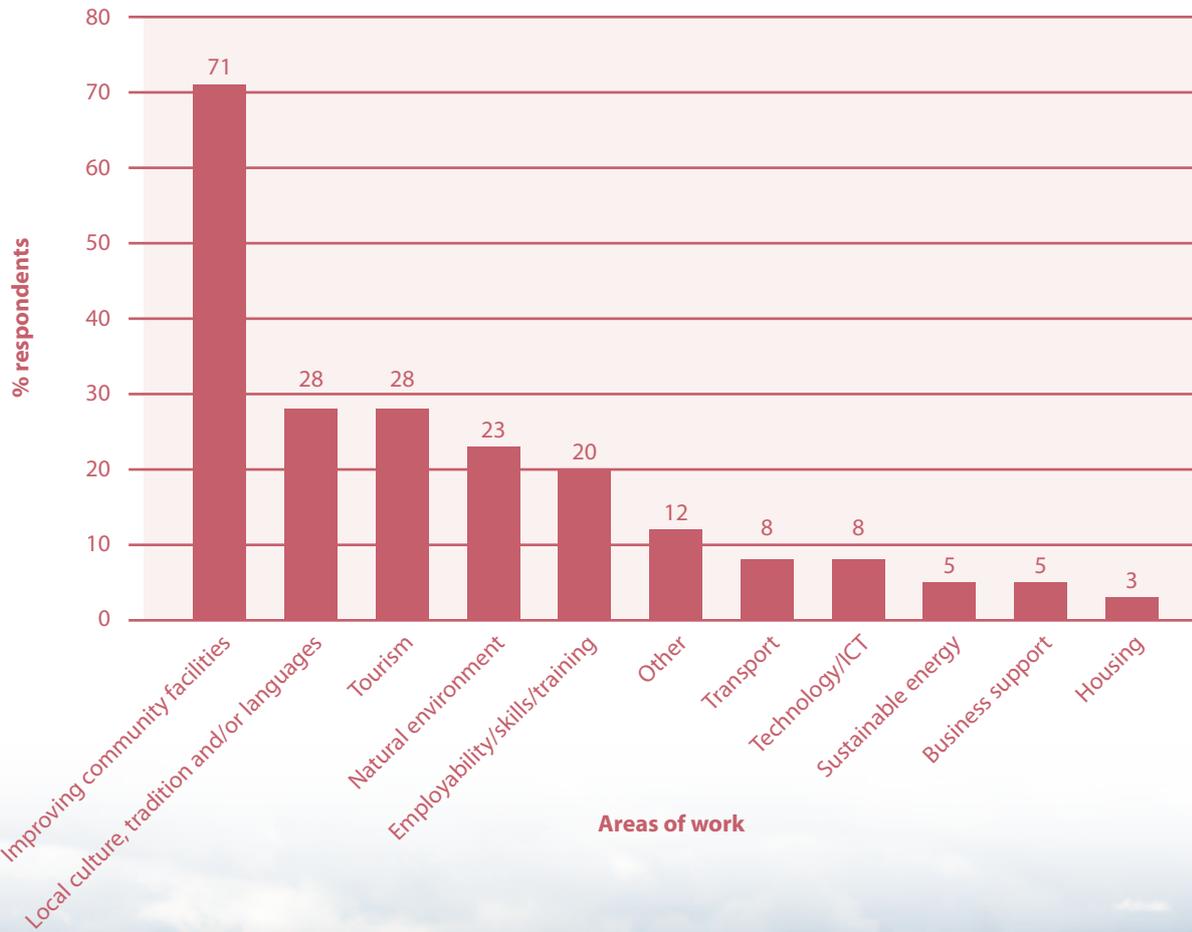
3.7 Figure 3.2 reveals that even after re-coding the data by discounting the SC code except where it appeared on its own, almost a third (32%) of projects were funded solely to address the ‘Sustainable Communities’ priority. ‘Innovative Value Added Products’ also accounts for a considerable proportion of projects (25%) and ‘Tourism’ and ‘Conservation of the Environment’ are also fairly well represented with 20% and 15% respectively. ‘Sustainable Energy’ and ‘Workforce Development’ are under-represented and no projects were coded to the ‘Innovative Micro Enterprise’ priority. This raised questions about the type of priorities LEADER-funded projects are contributing to, and suggests that community-focussed priorities were more commonly addressed than those relating to economic activity.

3.8 Survey respondents were asked to indicate the nature of activity being delivered through their project by selecting from a range of areas (more than one option could be selected). Figure 3.3 reveals that community-themed projects dominated, with 71% of respondents selecting the ‘Improving community facilities’ option. Around a quarter of respondents selected ‘Natural environment’ (23%), ‘Local culture, tradition and and/or languages’ (28%) and ‘Tourism’ (28%). From the survey responses it seems that LEADER projects have worked least in areas such as ‘Housing’ (3%), ‘Sustainable Energy’ (5%) and ‘Business support’ (5%). Responses for ‘Other’ included ‘Ensuring functionality of a local landmark – listed-building’ and ‘Improving a place of worship’.

3.9 For this survey question, respondents were able to select multiple areas of work for one project. Just over half of respondents (31) selected just one area of work, most notably, 19 respondents

indicated that their projects were working to improve community facilities, and six indicated that their work relates solely to local culture, traditions and/or languages.

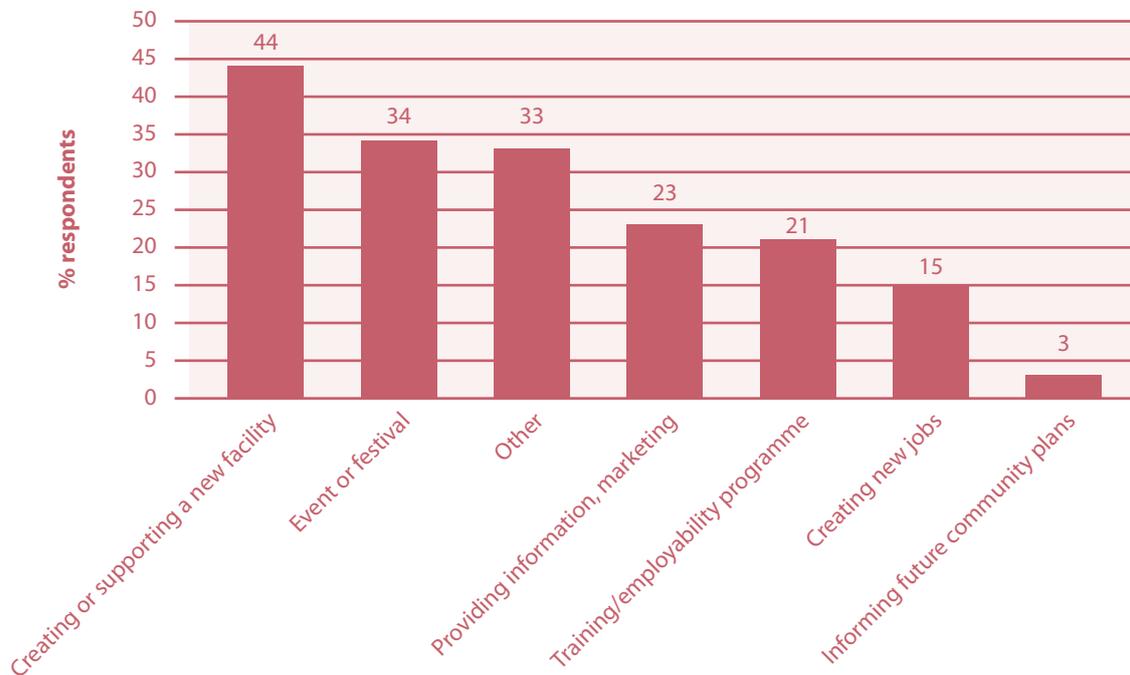
Figure 3.3: Nature of survey respondents' projects' work (n=61)



3.10 In order to understand the kinds of activities that were being delivered through projects, survey respondents were asked about the types of activities

their project undertook. Again, respondents could select more than one option. Figure 3.4 gives an overview of their responses.

Figure 3.4: Survey respondents' types of project activities



3.11 The high volume of work in the area of 'Improving community facilities' in Figure 3.3 is also reflected by project activities in Figure 3.4, in which 44% of respondents indicated that their project was involved in 'Creating or supporting a new facility'. A substantial number of projects indicated that their project activities involved an 'Event or festival' (34%). 'Informing future community plans' was being undertaken by very few projects (3%) and 'Creating new jobs' (15%) did not feature highly either, though 'Training/employability programme' (21%) did.

3.12 Survey respondents had the option to select 'Other' and to specify additional activities being undertaken by their projects, which a third of respondents did. Of these, most were expanding on explanations for the given categories,

for example, 'Provides a venue for community activities and a meeting place/central place' when they had selected the category 'Creating or supporting a new facility'.

3.13 12 respondents only selected 'Other' and of these, four were highlighting different types of activities: 'Football, under 5s playgroup, WRI and other interested groups'; 'environmental research'; 'worship/community meetings' and 'healthy living programmes'. The remaining eight were mostly related to creating or supporting a new facility and a few fell into training or events, but these additions to the self-selected categories just served to increase the amount of activity related to 'creating or supporting a new facility' so do not affect our overall findings in this area.

Funding: Total and match funding

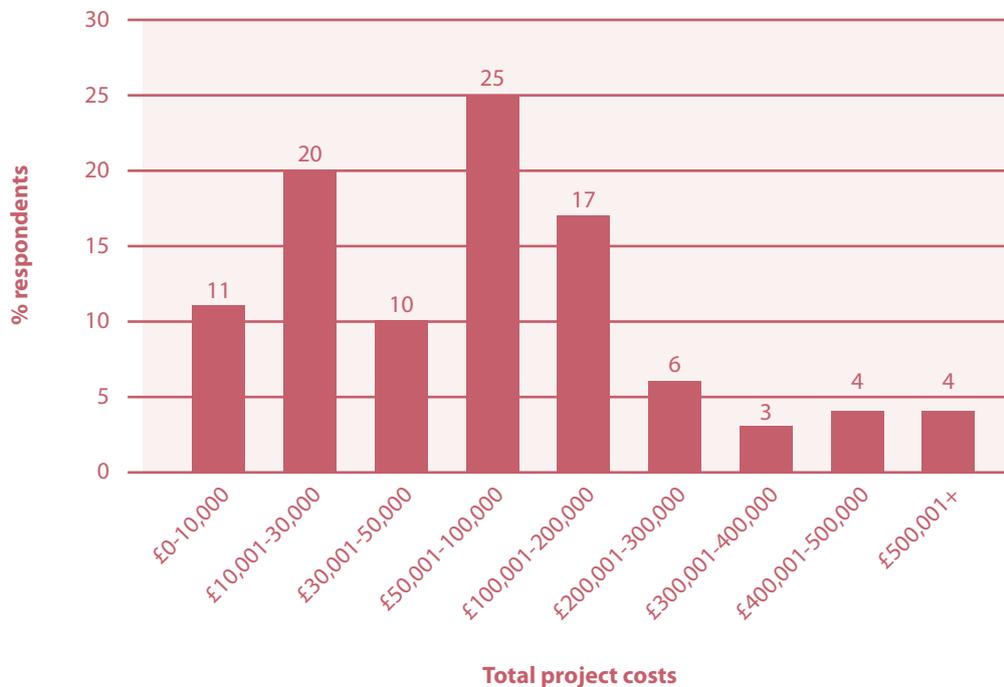
3.14 In this section we explore the value of LEADER projects, how LEADER funding was distributed, and provide an overview of the match-funding attracted by LEADER projects.

3.15 The LEADER project database breaks down funding received by projects according to the total value, the LEADER contribution, private and public match. Between 2008 and 2013, LEADER committed a total of almost £5 million to community projects in rural Aberdeenshire. Projects levered in a total of £4.9 million in private match funding and £8.7 million in public match funding. The total value of LEADER-funded projects was over £18.6 million.

3.16 LEADER funding is intended to be part of a package of support for community projects, and the application form guidance for projects describes what is meant by the different forms of funding (public, private) as well as what projects can expect from LEADER, namely that, 'Intervention rates will not normally exceed 50% of your total project cost' (although the maximum allowable intervention rate was increased by the Scottish Government up to 90% during the programming period).

3.17 The total value of individual LEADER-funded projects ranged from £2,800 to £1,841,868. The value of most projects was between £10,001 and £200,000 and a quarter of projects were £30,001 to £100,000 in value. 11% of projects were small (under £10,000) and there were very few projects worth more than £300,000, as Figure 3.5 illustrates.

Figure 3.5: Total project costs for projects (n=142)



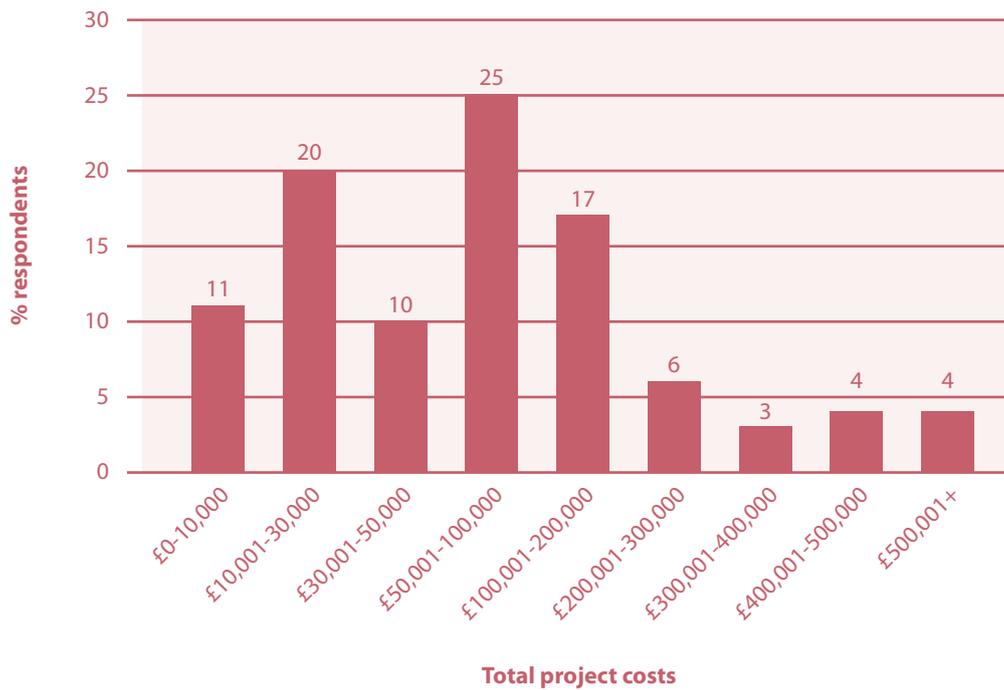
3.18 The highest value projects were either capital projects such as Haddo Country Park Regeneration Project and Newmachar Community Centre Project (the largest two), or large-scale projects covering more than one LEADER area, such as Strategic Mink Control in Northern Scotland and Cairngorms and Mid-Deeside/Rural Aberdeenshire Communities Path Network Project.

3.19 A total of 75 capital projects were funded. The total costs of capital projects ranged from £6,150 to £1,841,868 and the average total cost was £161,411. The average LEADER contribution to capital projects was £46,509 (29% of average total costs), with grants ranging from £3,075 to £200,000.

3.20 Aberdeenshire LEADER grants ranged in size, from very small grants of less than £2,000 to large-scale grants of up to £200,000. Figure 3.6 shows the LEADER project intervention rates, which ranged from 4% to 90%. Most projects – 73% – had an intervention rate of 30-60%, with an average intervention rate of 39%. The most common LEADER intervention rate was between 41-50%, with 66 projects (46%) falling into this bracket. Only nine projects received 51% or more of their total funding through LEADER.

3.21 The average LEADER grant was just under £70,000. The average private match contribution was £34,500 and the average public match contribution was £61,400.

Figure 3.6: Percentage of LEADER funding awarded to projects



Project funding by area

3.22 LEADER funding has been awarded to projects across the Aberdeenshire administrative areas as Table 3.1 and Figure 3.7 illustrate.

Table 3.1: Number of projects in Aberdeenshire administrative areas

Number of projects	Administrative Area
14	All
17	Buchan
24	Banff & Buchan
1	Banff & Buchan/Formartine/Marr
19	Formartine
17	Garioch
11	Kincardine & Mearns
39	Marr

3.23 The greatest proportion of projects (27%) is in Marr, which is the largest geographical area, although some of this administrative area is covered by the Cairngorms LEADER programme instead of the Aberdeenshire programme. A small number of projects (10%) deliver across Aberdeenshire. Kincardine and Mearns received the smallest amount of LEADER funding (only 8% of projects are situated in this area).



Figure 3.7: Map showing % total projects funded in administrative areas

Aberdeenshire's Administrative Areas, Electoral Wards and Settlements

BANFF AND BUCHAN

- 1 Banff and District
- 2 Troup
- 3 Fraserburgh and District

BUCHAN AREA

- 4 Central Buchan
- 5 Peterhead North and Rattray
- 6 Peterhead South and Cruden

FORMATINE AREA

- 7 Turriff and District
- 8 Mid Formatine
- 9 Ellon and District

GARIOCH AREA

- 10 West Garioch
- 11 Inverurie and District
- 12 East Garioch
- 13 Westhill and District

MARR AREA

- 14 Huntly, Strathbogie and Howe of Alford
- 15 Aboyne, Upper Deeside and Donside
- 16 Banchory and Mid Deeside

KINCARDINE AND MEARN'S AREA

- 17 North Kincardine
- 18 Stonehaven and Lower Deeside
- 19 Mearns

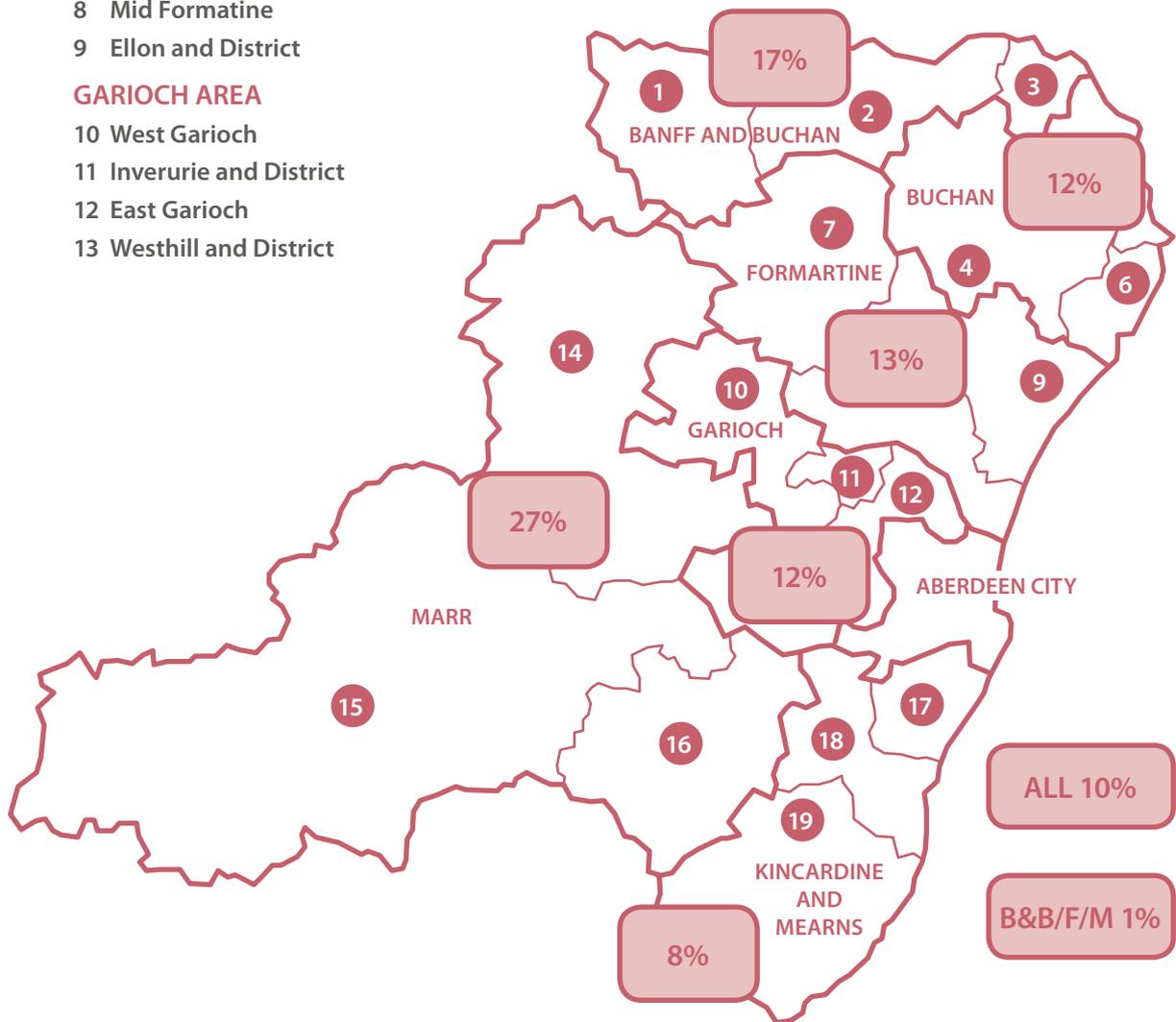
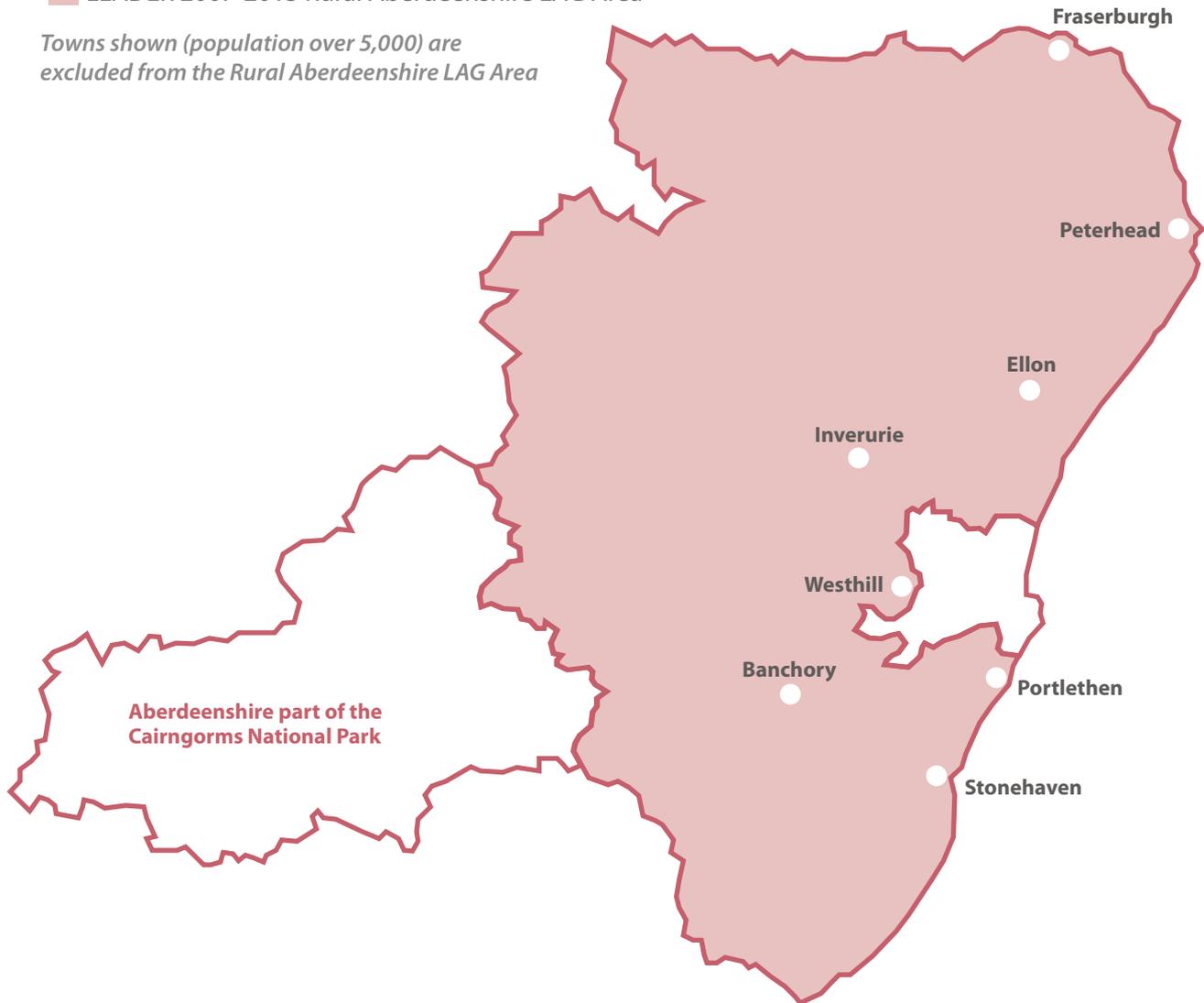


Figure 3.8: Map showing Rural Aberdeenshire LAG area¹⁴

LEADER 2007-2013 Rural Aberdeenshire LAG Area

■ LEADER 2007-2013 Rural Aberdeenshire LAG Area

Towns shown (population over 5,000) are excluded from the Rural Aberdeenshire LAG Area



¹⁴ www.aberdeenshireleader.org/LAG_Area/index.html

LEADER processes

- 4.1** This chapter examines the processes that underpinned and facilitated the delivery of LEADER 2007-2013 in Aberdeenshire, considering the strengths and areas for improvement to consider in the next programming period.
- 4.2** During the evaluation, we gathered evidence through interviews and the online survey about areas of the LEADER programme related to project delivery and governance, each of which is explored in turn:
- ▶ Application process
 - ▶ Finance and administration
 - ▶ Monitoring and evaluation
 - ▶ Local Action Group
 - ▶ LEADER delivery team
- 4.5** Despite the initial enquiry process and meeting being viewed positively, the work involved in completing the application form was seen as challenging by both LAG and project interviewees. Particularly challenging elements for applicants included the: length of form; technical terms (e.g. 'outcomes'); estimating beneficiary numbers; making links to local strategies, and providing supplementary evidence.
- 4.6** Our project visits and LAG interviews indicated that the application form is too complex and challenging. Whilst applicants with more experience in applying for grants seemed to cope well with the process, the common view was that the application form was very onerous and off-putting. Project staff used words such as 'long', 'daunting' and 'bureaucratic' to describe it and smaller organisations lacked the personnel and skills to undertake the writing of such a technical form:

Application process

- 4.3** The application process first involved an initial enquiry, with projects usually being invited to an initial meeting with LEADER staff to talk through the content of their application. Projects that were deemed to be suitable for LEADER were then supplied with an application form and, where necessary, supported by project staff to complete it.
- 4.4** The initial enquiry process and meeting received positive ratings from survey respondents (97% rated it good or excellent) as well as from project interviewees. Applicants said it was helpful to meet with the LEADER team to fully understand the process and requirements. LAG members felt that the initial meeting was valuable in ensuring that ineligible projects did not waste their time trying to apply.
- 4.7** The work involved in completing the application could explain why support agencies, such as Buchan Development Partnership, had helped applicants with the process. Some projects paid an external consultant to complete the application form for them – a cost that would be prohibitive for smaller, volunteer-dependent community groups, especially since these costs would not be eligible to be recovered through LEADER.
- 'We were asked for lots of details that would be very hard to know if you were just a volunteer with no support... We're just community volunteers – we don't know what 'outcomes' are.'* (Project leader)**

4.8 The survey responses, however, suggested a more positive view of the application process, with 89% of

respondents rating the application process as either good or excellent, as Figure 4.1 illustrates.

Figure 4.1: Survey ratings for initial enquiry and application process



4.9 One reason for the differences in views on application processes between survey and interview data, may be that face-to-face interviews helped participants to reflect on and explain the challenges associated with LEADER processes. Also, in rating the process, respondents may have been considering more than just the application form, and may have been rating on the basis of the high quality support that they had received from the LEADER team too.

‘[LEADER is a] Highly regarded and well recognised funding body with a thorough process which in turn offers confidence and trust to other potential funders.’ (Survey respondent)

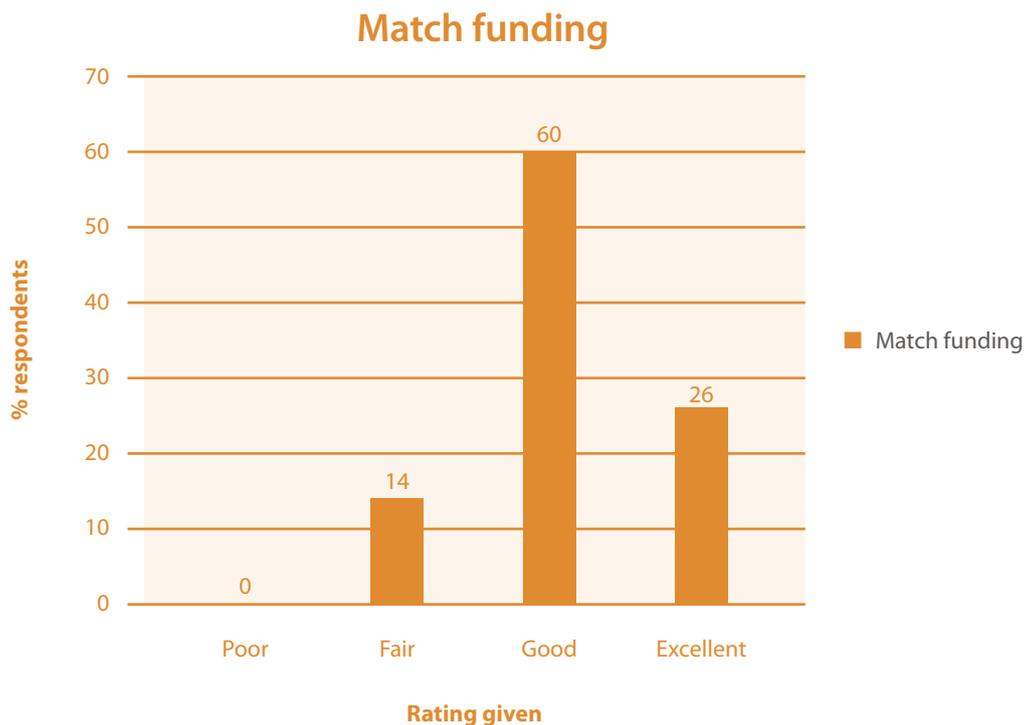
4.11 However, interviews with some project staff revealed that attracting match funding was also an area of significant challenge, in part because of the uncertainty of knowing if one funding source had been successful or not and the time delays between funder decisions:

Securing match funding

4.10 Securing match funding was rated positively by survey respondents, with 86% rating their experience as either good or excellent (see Figure 4.2). Interviewees and survey respondents noted that attracting LEADER funding sometimes reassures other funders of the worth of the project and is therefore a catalyst that enabled applicants to attract funding from elsewhere:

‘It was hard to get them [funding commitments] at the same time. I wasn’t sure whether they would come in and that was worrying because [the organisation] doesn’t have that money to put in.’ (Project leader)

Figure 4.2: Survey ratings for ease of securing match funding process



Application process suggestions for improvements

4.12 A number of LAG members felt that the high level of support with the application process required by projects should be addressed. As one explained:

‘Hand-holding is a useful but expensive way of working... They couldn’t cope with large numbers of applicants under this model... They should reconsider the application process and the relationship between staff and applicants.’ (LAG member)

4.13 There were a number of suggestions for changes that would make the process easier and smoother for applicants:

- ▶ Clearer guidance about what exactly is required in the way of supplementary information

- ▶ Clear and concise technical guidance that mirrors scheme legislation and aligns with European legislation
- ▶ Templates being fit for purpose (application & claim form)
- ▶ Robust IT system and the option of using ‘smarter’ application systems (use of website for online applications, video conferencing facilities, innovative application media such as DVDs)

4.14 44% of survey respondents felt that electronic applications would improve LEADER processes. 49% felt that training workshops on how to apply for grants, develop business plans or to make claims would be helpful.

Finance and administration

4.15 Projects are required to pay for their projects costs upfront, and submit receipts to the Aberdeenshire LEADER team who reimburse projects. The claims process was one area that research participants highlighted as being onerous and not weighted in favour of the projects, connected with the bureaucratic way in which LEADER functions:

‘LEADER continues to be the most bureacratic of the funders (speaking with experience of applying for and claiming from all major public and private funders); luckily the Aberdeenshire staff were excellent and constructive in navigating the process’ (Survey respondent)

‘The claim process created a lot of work for us and was rather long winded. We are fortunate to have someone dedicated to this type of work. For other organisations they may not have the resources to be able to do this.’ (Survey respondent)

4.16 Despite the widely held view from interviewees that there was an issue with the claims process, 80% of online survey respondents stated that their experiences of the claim process were good or excellent. In relation to the payment of claims, this figure was 96% and for final claim and closure it was 95%. The distinction between the rapidity with which the LEADER team processed claims and the claims process itself is important: the former being praised, but the latter being a problem linked to cashflow that was highlighted in the interviews.

Fig 4.3: Survey ratings for the claim process, payment of claims and final claim and closure



4.17 Research participants highlighted a major issue with the way in which projects are reimbursed for expenditure. By working on defrayed expenditure, projects were forced to pay upfront costs out of their own pocket:

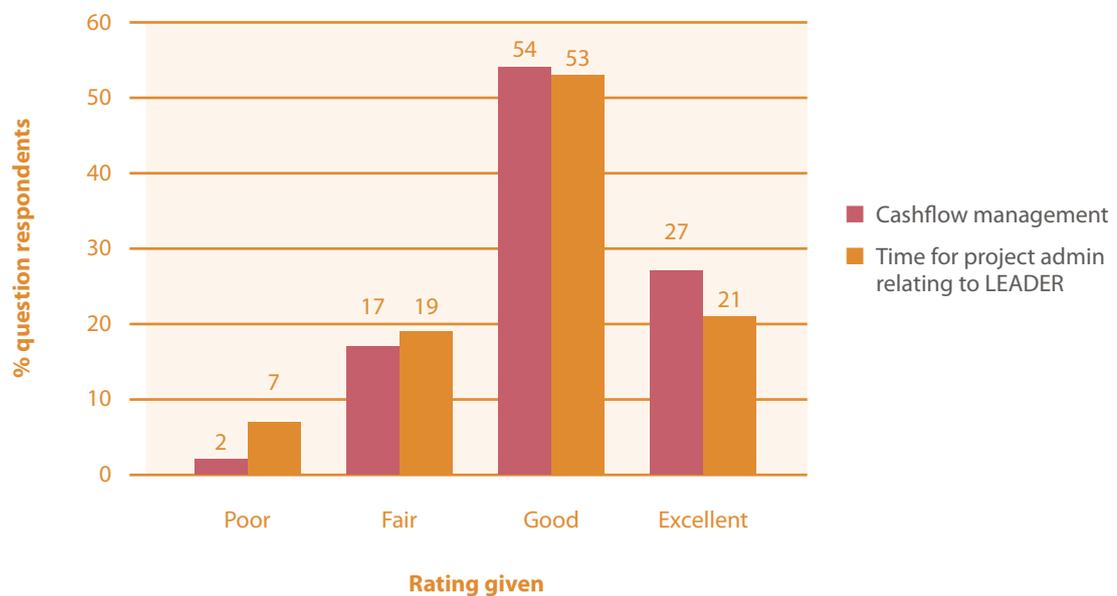
‘LEADER funding is on defrayed expenditure: this is a disaster. You do the work, get the invoice, the cheque clears and only then can you put in a LEADER claim. The community council which led the project begged, borrowed and stole £20,000 as working capital.’ (Project leader)

The problem that this highlights related to cashflow – a serious issue for many projects:

‘Cashflow is a nightmare for small projects with little back-up funding. All our large bills came in at once from relatively small contractors who had to wait for ages for payment. Creates unnecessary ill-will.’ (Survey respondent)

4.18 A common view from interviewees was that the LEADER administrative burden was heavy for projects. Just over a quarter (26%) of survey respondents rated the amount of time spent on administration for LEADER as poor or fair. Interestingly, although cashflow was highlighted as an issue by interviewees, it was not highlighted as being a concern in the survey, as Figure 4.4 illustrates.

Figure 4.4: Survey response rating of cashflow management and LEADER admin time



4.19 Part of the administrative process relates to audit, the levels of which were felt to be high both at programme and project level. LAG interviewees felt that audit should be stringent, given the large sums of money that the LAG handles, but several felt it was overly so.

One LAG member suggested that:

‘The Scottish Government and Aberdeenshire Council should accept each other’s audits’ in order to cut down on duplicated elements.’ (LAG member)

4.20 Some projects were involved in the external Scottish Government LEADER audit and one in particular found this a very onerous process. As a result of having one missing bank statement and a very small under-spend, one project leader told us that they were ‘made to feel like criminals’.

4.21 The implications of the finance and administration processes of LEADER for community projects are significant.

Because smaller projects may not have the funds in their bank accounts to pay project costs upfront, it may prohibit them from applying for LEADER funding in the first place – a view that was aired by several research participants. For example, one project said that a major public body used to ‘hold the purse strings’ for the LEADER project and deal with the finance, but they decided that the project had to ‘stand on its own two feet’ with finance being the responsibility of the voluntary committee, namely the treasurer. The role was described as ‘onerous’ and the interviewee reflected that they needed ‘new blood’ on the committee because she questioned if any current committee members would be prepared to take on the role. This view was echoed by a LAG member:

‘If I was a community group and looking for a small amount of money, I’d probably go elsewhere – the hassle and claims process would have put me off.’ (LAG member)





Finance and administration: interviewees' suggestions for improvement

4.22 Advance payments were seen by 52% of survey respondents as a way to improve LEADER processes in the future:

'It should be possible to make a grant payment based on an invoice about forthcoming work' (LAG member)

- 4.23** Smarter systems were also seen by some as a potential improvement to claims. Others urged caution with doing too much online for organisations that do not have IT capacity. A member of the LEADER team suggested a less paper-heavy trail should be possible, and 41% of survey respondents endorsed keeping evidence of expenditure and having electronic claims on a secure website.
- 4.24** Research participants commonly said that the claims form was convoluted and should be designed in a format that is easier for claimants to complete.
- 4.25** One of the case study projects worked across different LEADER areas and had come across a number of challenges in relation to being funded by multiple LAGs.

They hoped that in the future there could be more consistency between the ways in which LAGs operate and the format of reporting that they require. For example, Highland LAG allows 40p per mile for personal vehicles, whereas Cairngorms, Moray, Tayside and Aberdeenshire all allow 43p per mile. This has made reporting very challenging and they felt that this should be reviewed for any future projects that involve a number of LAGs.

- 4.26** One LAG member was aware that projects are trying to meet the requirements of two to three other funders, and suggested that there is a need to rationalise and streamline the funding environment itself.
- 4.27** One LAG member raised concerns about the possibility of LEADER claims being paid out by the Scottish Government rather than by the lead partner in the next programme, suggesting that this would result in an increase in bureaucracy due to checking and validation at LAG level and then the Scottish Government level before the grant is paid. This could result in delays and therefore cashflow problems for beneficiaries. This LAG member also felt that it puts into question the meaning and interpretation of devolved delivery.

Monitoring and evaluation

- 4.28** Project monitoring involved asking projects for projected figures as part of their application (for example, numbers of potential beneficiaries and details of outputs, such as numbers of jobs created or training courses delivered) and projects providing updated data through the quarterly and final claims forms. Pre-completion visits and reports were completed by LAG staff on 52 projects and 16 projects had monitoring visits and reports completed.

4.29 Monitoring and evaluation was ‘the weak link in the current LEADER programme by a long shot’ according to one LAG member. A considerable problem with monitoring and evaluation was having no set of indicators agreed by the Scottish Government at the beginning of the 2007-2013 programming period. Indicators were eventually agreed in 2011, but this meant that insufficient information was gathered over the earlier project delivery period, and the LEADER team highlighted the difficulties in gathering this information retrospectively.

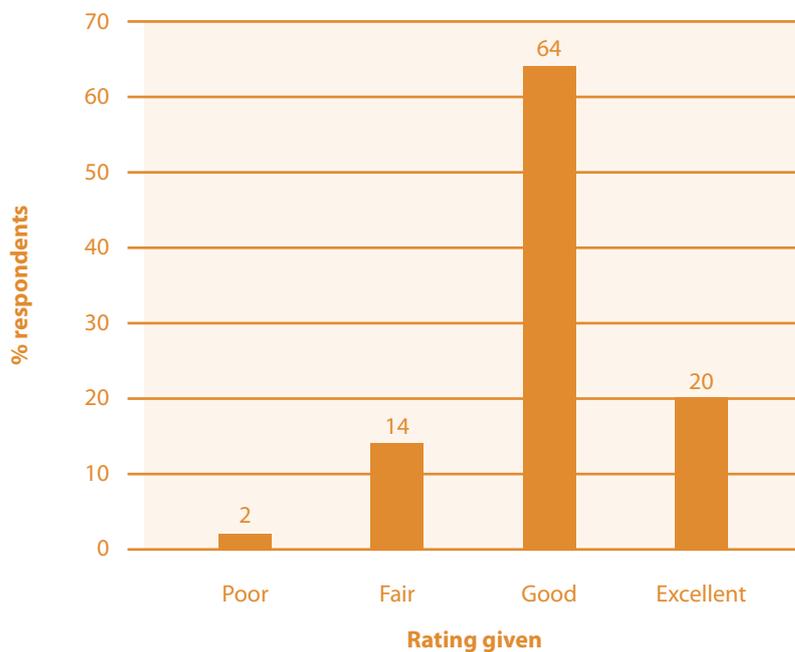
4.30 Many projects noted the challenges associated with estimating projected outcomes such as employment – with a lack of clarity about whether they were required to highlight seasonal, temporary and part-time work. Estimating and then monitoring the numbers of beneficiaries their project reached was identified as a further challenge. For example, a community radio station Project Manager described not having the means by which to poll members of the community to establish listener numbers and several interviewees involved in developing community halls struggled to monitor

the number of people attending each event or group that uses the venue. The validity of the output and outcomes data that were collected is questionable, in part because of the way in which projects could interpret the data collection requirements.

4.31 There was no process in place to aggregate the recorded outputs and outcomes to any meaningful extent and there does not appear to have been any systematic reporting to the LAG on project output or outcome data. However, LAG members did receive financial, claims and project updates at their quarterly meetings from the LEADER team, and were given presentations by LEADER-funded projects at LAG meetings on their achievements. The LAG was also provided with outcomes data (e.g. on employment creation) via the LEADER Annual Report to the Scottish Government, which was circulated to LAG members.

4.32 Projects did not feel that monitoring and evaluation requirements placed on them had been onerous. Figure 4.5 shows that most survey respondents rated the monitoring and evaluation processes positively, with 84% rating these as good or excellent.

Figure 4.5: Survey response ratings for monitoring and evaluation processes



Monitoring and evaluation: interviewees' suggestions for improvement

- 4.33** A number of LAG members and LEADER staff felt that monitoring and evaluation systems and requirements on projects need to be in place from the start and that these should be outcomes-focused. Some suggested that a set of common outcomes should be included as part of the new Local Development Strategy and should fit with those required by the Scottish Government.
- 4.34** One LAG member also suggested appointing an external evaluator to provide regular reports on progress to the LAG.

Local Action Group

4.35 Aberdeenshire Council was the lead partner for the 2007-2013 programme. The LAG had overall responsibility for the management and delivery of the programme. As outlined in the LAG Terms of Reference document, its roles included:

- ▶ Inviting and approving applications in support of the strategy
- ▶ Reviewing progress made towards achieving targets set in the business plan
- ▶ Setting up and review monitoring and evaluation exercises
- ▶ Advising on communication and publicity strategies

The LAG comprised 21 members from a range of sectors and organisations, in addition to the LEADER project staff.

LAG process

- 4.36** Applications from communities went through a two-stage process. They were reviewed first by the Project Assessment Committee (PAC – a sub-group of the LAG) and then two to three weeks later by the full LAG. Meetings of the PAC and the LAG took place every three to four months.
- 4.37** The PAC included the lead partner, and representatives from business, community, enterprise, environment and land-based interests. The PAC considered applications in full, assessing them against a set of criteria (see Appendix 2). The PAC made recommendations to the LAG and the final award decision was made by the LAG. The PAC had delegated authority to approve grant applications up to £5,000 but this authority was withdrawn in 2012.





4.38 The PAC agreed recommendations to be made to the LAG, (approval, deferral, further information required or unsuccessful). The LAG then considered the projects and took final decisions on grant awards. The dual process of applications being reviewed by both PAC and LAG was seen by some as unnecessary duplication, while others saw this as a useful way of ensuring that the LAG would have sufficient information on the project and in ensuring that it functioned as efficiently as possible.

LAG membership and attendance

4.39 In general LAG membership was thought to reflect a good range of sectors and organisation types:

‘There is good representation from the private, public and voluntary sectors’ (LAG member)

However, some LAG members identified gaps in the LAG membership, either through lack of selection or lack of attendance. Suggestions of gaps included the third sector, private sector, and community representatives and some thought that LAG membership should have been made up of a greater proportion of these, with several LAG members suggesting that there was a public sector dominance in the group. Many LAG members noted that whilst they wanted to include young people on the LAG, this has challenges, largely because they leave to go to university, are busy with other priorities and may be intimidated by this group of professionals. However, all felt that including young people in the process in some way is important.

4.40 Poor attendance, particularly from private sector representatives who juggle day-jobs with attending the LAG, was raised, and there were concerns about decisions being made with a depleted LAG presence, albeit meetings held

have been quorate. However, it was also acknowledged that some poor attendance may be down to meeting times because all take place during the day, which may be difficult for some to attend. Poor attendance also led to concerns among some LAG members about low numbers of people making decisions related to awards of funding especially when the members in attendance do not have the relevant expertise to consider particular projects.

- 4.41** Although LAG members were able to input to all discussions, one member questioned the value of their own continued involvement in the LAG because so few applications from their field of expertise were submitted.
- 4.42** Despite questions being raised about representation and attendance, LAG members saw the group as having a good skills-base and the relevant expertise to enable informed decisions to be made regarding the applications received, and to add value to projects where appropriate. LAG members were therefore seen as a resource in themselves, bringing their expertise, networks and contacts, and match funding potential:

‘If you’re only there doing your LAG job, that would be remiss – there is so much more the LAG can do to support.’ (LAG member)

- 4.43** Aberdeenshire Council was considered to be an appropriate lead partner that does a good job. Many LAG members recognised that this role needs to be taken on by an organisation of considerable size. While some felt that there is no harm in considering other organisations to lead in the next LEADER programme, the majority view was to continue to capitalise on the Council’s organisational knowledge and processes in the forthcoming programme.

Role of the LAG

- 4.44** The LAG was seen more as a funding decision-making body than as a strategic body:

‘It has become a decision making body rather than a partnership that is concerned with promoting rural development.’ (LAG member)

- 4.45** While a number of LAG members have jobs, roles and backgrounds that enabled them to contribute to the LAG from a strategic perspective, and applicants were required to link their project aims with local strategies in the application form, the way in which decisions were made was driven from the bottom-up, by the applications that were submitted rather than by strategy driving the types of projects coming forward.

- 4.46** The Aberdeenshire LEADER Local Development Strategy was not considered to be a living document from which decisions about funding flowed:

‘We are not using or being led by the Local Development Strategy. We are being led by the applicants’. (LAG member)

- 4.47** Decisions as to whether or not to fund projects were made in accordance with whether the application met a number of criteria, including the ability of the project to deliver its ambitions and whether the project demonstrated innovation (see Appendix 2). Although applications were scrutinised carefully, usually by the whole LAG, as long as it met the criteria, it was granted funding.

- 4.48** One member suggested that it was only later in the programme, when there were insufficient funds to awards grants to all applicants who fitted the criteria that real decisions were made. At this point decision-making tools were put in place so that awards were made on the basis of a ranking system.

4.49 The result of the lack of strategic approach to funding allocation was an imbalance in the types of projects and distribution of LEADER funding across geographical areas and across Aberdeenshire priorities, as the 'Overview of LEADER-funded projects' section highlighted. One survey respondent highlighted a possible reason for the geographic imbalance of funding across Aberdeenshire:

'The South of Aberdeenshire attracted less funding from the scheme than the North. One of the reasons for this I think was earlier availability of funding for the North prior to LEADER. This developed a culture of enterprising groups in the North not matched in the South. When LEADER arrived the South was at a disadvantage.'
(Survey respondent).

4.50 Many agreed, however, that the LAG worked well as a group, with members able to speak out and open debates taking place. Most LAG members were seen to take their role seriously and to understand its importance. Membership of the LAG demands a sizable time commitment for meetings and background reading, and most were happy to give this. A number also recognised benefits that they or their organisation gained from their LAG membership, such as networking opportunities and greater understanding of local initiatives and organisations.

LEADER promotion

4.51 LAG members and project interviewees were generally happy with the level and breadth of publicity for LEADER. Many acknowledged that originally there was no local knowledge or understanding of LEADER but this was developed by a combination of press coverage, LEADER events, LEADER attendance at local events and word of mouth.

4.52 Many LAG members felt that word of mouth and local communities seeing the impact of LEADER funding were the best ways of promoting the programme. Our survey findings showed that word of mouth was the most common way that respondents had originally come to hear of the programme (36%). 'Other Aberdeenshire staff' was another common way of respondents finding out about LEADER (20%) as were 'Community seminar/information event' (15%) and LEADER staff or member of LAG (13%). Other sources, such as Aberdeenshire Council website (12%), Aberdeenshire Local Action Group (LEADER) website (12%), and other funding bodies (12%) were much less frequent. The overwhelming majority of case study participants leading projects already knew about LEADER as a result of being well connected and linked in to the local area.

4.53 The LEADER team carried out community seminars in areas in which they understood from colleagues and their knowledge of Aberdeenshire to be in need of extra support in accessing LEADER funding. For example, three community seminars to promote LEADER were carried out in Kincardine and Mearns and one was carried out in Garioch – both areas that received fewer LEADER applications than other areas, and less funding, as outlined earlier in the report. This was in addition to various other Council-wide promotional activities.

LAG suggestions for improvement

- 4.54** A commonly held view among LAG members was that while representation from different sectors has been good, in the next LEADER programme there will need to be more LAG members from the private sector and with economics backgrounds in line with the shift in priorities.
- 4.55** Some LAG members felt that to help attendance at LAG meetings and to ensure good representation of areas such as young people and private sector representatives, meetings should be held at various times of the day:

‘50% [of LAG meetings] could be in the evening’
(LAG member)

- 4.56** Many felt that the way in which LEADER operates should also be considered. Some suggested that the LAG should operate in a more strategic way:

‘I think next time around the LAG should be more proactive in terms of identifying what they want to see delivered on the ground but linking to the Local Development Strategy.’
(LAG member)

- 4.57** Several interviewees suggested that the LDS should be aligned to other strategies and avoid duplication with other strategies. One LAG member suggested linking with the European Fisheries Fund to ensure that LEADER covers appropriate areas. There were also suggestions that the LAG should be going out and actively seeking applications from under-represented themes in the LDS. For example, if there are proportionally few applications coming in from activities relating to micro-enterprise, then these should be actively sought from relevant groups.



- 4.58** One LAG member felt that the LAG could act as a central hub and router for a range of funds. Applicants would fill out just one form to apply to a variety of relevant bodies, thereby reducing the application and reporting burdens on projects.
- 4.59** There were varying views on areas of priority for the future. Common suggestions included young people/ education, business and enterprise and environmental issues.
- 4.60** One member suggested that there should be no more support for broadband projects, while others felt that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is still an important priority.

LEADER delivery team

- 4.61** The Aberdeenshire LEADER programme employs three members of staff. LAG members and project staff had an overwhelmingly positive view of LEADER staff and the way they carried out their role as conduit between an initial project concept and getting an application worked up to be ready to come to the committee.
- 4.62** As mentioned previously, many applicants struggled with the application process and the LEADER staff were reported to be vital in providing extensive support which enabled them to complete the process. Survey respondents all rated the support and knowledge of LEADER staff as either

good or excellent (100%), of which 79% rated them 'excellent'. 17 survey respondents used the 'Any other comments' section of the survey to praise the support they received from LEADER staff:

'Aberdeenshire LEADER staff are a credit to the principles of LEADER and are invariably helpful, supportive and extremely positive.'
(Survey respondent)

- 4.63** LEADER staff were also seen as crucial in the running of the LAG. They provided communication and information on projects that were invaluable to the running of the LAG and the PAC. They sifted out inappropriate or poorly completed applications, thereby making the operation of the LAG significantly more efficient.

'Without them we wouldn't have achieved anything.'
(LAG member)

- 4.64** LEADER staff faced several challenges. A number of project staff and LAG members commented on the volume of work that is placed on a small LEADER staff team. There were also some who felt that the support given to the LEADER staff by the Scottish Government was inadequate at times, leading to situations such as lack of clarity in eligibility criteria at the beginning.



Impact of LEADER

5.1 The vision for LEADER in Aberdeenshire was set out in the Local Development Strategy as:

‘A vibrant, sustainable rural economy, which supports and builds upon current business and community infrastructure and enhances the existing cultural and natural heritage.’¹⁵

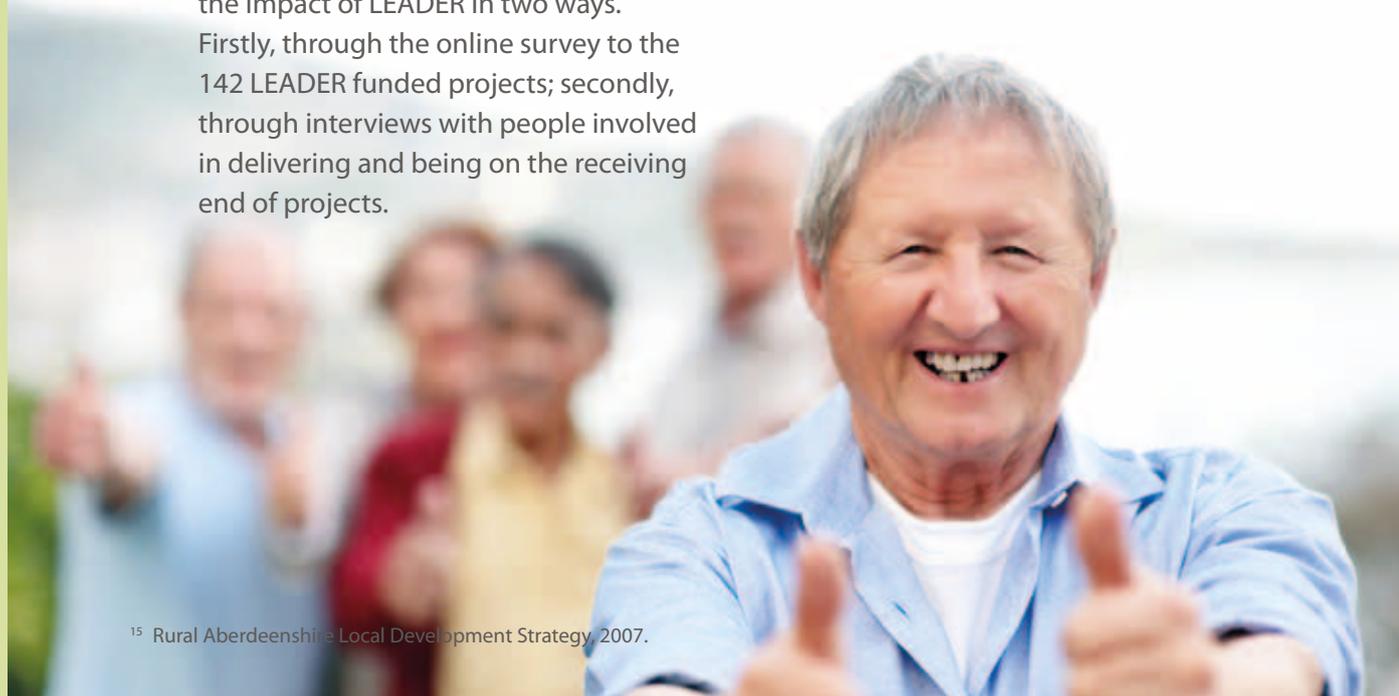
5.2 Through funding projects contributing to the priorities set out in the Local Development Strategy (LDS), within the overarching themes of revitalising communities and progressive rural economy, LEADER aimed to make a real difference to rural communities in Aberdeenshire. A key aim of the evaluation project was to identify, through case study and survey work, where LEADER has had an impact on the communities within which it has operated through, for example, providing jobs or training; whilst also capturing the softer outcomes such as developing networks and partnerships.

5.3 This evaluation gathered evidence about the impact of LEADER in two ways. Firstly, through the online survey to the 142 LEADER funded projects; secondly, through interviews with people involved in delivering and being on the receiving end of projects.

5.4 This section reports on the outcomes that LEADER-funded projects achieved through exploring the impact of LEADER through the following categories:

- ▶ Volunteering and community engagement
- ▶ Community facilities
- ▶ Local culture, language and traditions
- ▶ Natural environment and conservation
- ▶ Tourism
- ▶ Education & skills
- ▶ Employment
- ▶ Business & economic competitiveness
- ▶ Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

5.5 The section concludes by drawing out cross-cutting themes about impact. This final section outlines the role of LEADER as a catalyst in leveraging in additional resources, the legacy of LEADER, and finally explores what may have happened in the absence of LEADER.

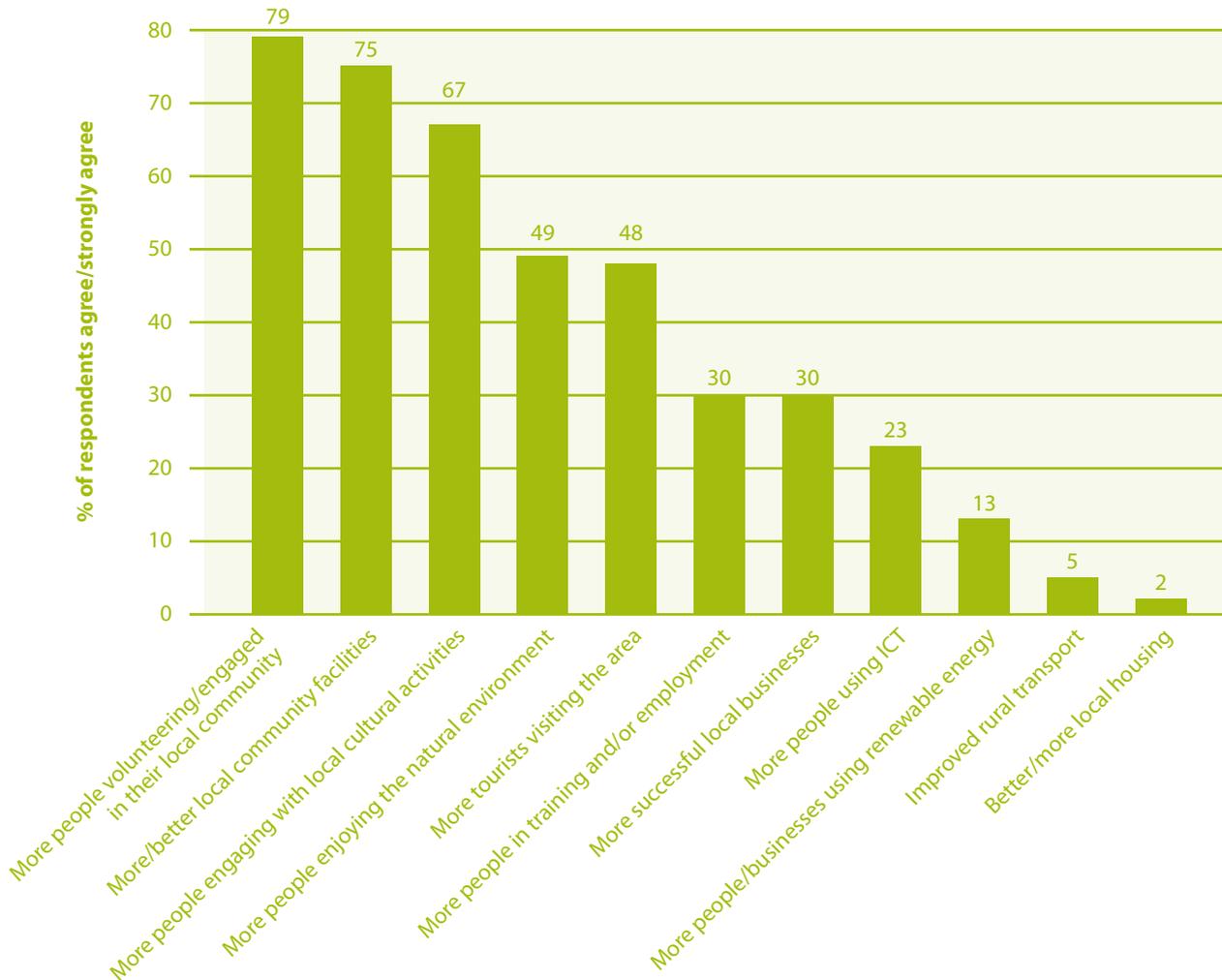


¹⁵ Rural Aberdeenshire Local Development Strategy, 2007.

Outcomes achieved through LEADER-funded projects

5.6 Our survey asked respondents to select from a list of 11 options the outcomes they thought their LEADER-funded project had delivered. Respondents could select as many options as they wanted to. Figure 3.8 shows the survey findings.

Figure 5.1 Extent to which LEADER – funded project has resulted in outcomes



5.7 We can see that earlier reported findings about the type of activity LEADER-funded projects were undertaking (Fig 3.4) and the priorities that project were working towards (Fig 3.1) are consistent with the reported impacts. Three quarters of respondents (75%) highlighted 'More/better community facilities' as an impact of their project, with 67% reporting 'more people engaging with local cultural activities' as an outcome. Almost four in

five respondents (79%) stated that their project had resulted in 'More people volunteering/engaged in their local community'. The areas that received least responses were housing, transport and renewable energy.

5.8 Each of these areas of impact is now explained in turn through drawing primarily on evidence gathered through case study fieldwork.

Volunteering and community engagement

- 5.9** Volunteering is critical to the implementation and sustainability of the majority of LEADER-funded projects. Whether people are giving their time for free to apply for funding, manage the delivery and administration of LEADER-funded projects, sitting on voluntary or community group committees or organisations managing LEADER funding, or offering their skills and time to support events or services, the success of LEADER is contingent on volunteer time and energy.
- 5.10** Survey data and evidence gathered through case studies testifies to this: of those survey respondents who agreed/strongly agreed that their project had resulted in 'more/better community facilities' (46 respondents), 39 also agreed/strongly agreed that their project had resulted in 'more people volunteering/engaged in their local community' (i.e. 85%). Similarly, of those survey respondents who agreed/strongly agreed that their project had resulted in 'more people engaging with local cultural activities' (41 respondents), 37 also agreed/strongly agreed that their project had resulted in 'more people volunteering/engaged in their local community' (i.e. 90%). These combinations of outcomes: volunteering/community engagement happening alongside the theme/activity (e.g. community facility or an event) underscores the importance of LEADER projects in harnessing the power of local volunteers.
- 5.11** The numbers of volunteers that projects have involved are often impressive. For example:
- ▶ A project to manage the mink population across Scotland relies on 450 volunteers.
 - ▶ Community radio station, Mearns FM, has involved between 70-80 volunteers at different times since 2009.
 - ▶ The Portsoy Salmon Bothy has roughly 25 volunteers on its books, the recruitment of whom was the responsibility of the LEADER-funded Bothy Manager.
 - ▶ Fyvie Homecoming Festival utilised many volunteers, from Rainbows creating bunting, to women's groups making soups and sandwiches, to the Air Cadets organising parking.
- 5.12** Whilst volunteering is clearly an important facet of engaging communities, there is also evidence of LEADER-funded projects drawing in a range of people through the facilities, events and services that they have provided. For example:
- ▶ 3,000-4,000 people attended a Castle Garden Party as part of the Fyvie Homecoming Festival.
 - ▶ Turriff Haughs Show Ground has hosted a range of large-scale events, including Turriff Motorfest (c. 10,000 attendees), National Pipe Competition (c. 5,000 attendees) and Relay for Life sponsored walk (c. 2,000 attendees). These would not have been possible without the LEADER-funded covered Exhibition Hall and WCs.
 - ▶ Involvement of the community of Portsoy in the community consultation event held as part of the options appraisal of the Back Green site.
- 5.13** The impacts of volunteering and community engagement, facilitated through LEADER-funded projects, range from increasing people's wellbeing through fostering new ties and connections to volunteers learning new skills and knowledge. These impacts are explored in the following sections.

Community facilities

- 5.14** The survey findings about community facilities being a key area of LEADER funding are mirrored in 75% of survey respondents agreeing that their project has resulted in either more or better community facilities.
- 5.15** Five of the 14 case studies sit squarely in the community facility themed category: MacRobert Hall Development Project; Portsoy Salmon Bothy; Glamourhaugh Allotment Creation; New Deer Public Hall and Turriff Haugh's Exhibition Hall. We also found evidence of impacts from other projects which were not necessarily primarily focused on improving or creating a community facility, namely: Boyndie Broadband; Mearns FM Community Radio and Fyvie Homecoming Festival.
- 5.16** The range of impacts reported from building or improving community facilities are varied, and range from differences made to individuals and small groups to affecting whole communities, mainly in terms of fostering social connections and also economic benefits.

- 5.17** Creating or improving community facilities can fill a gap in provision. For example, the Turriff Haughs Exhibition Hall is the only facility in the town associated with outdoor activity for groups to use. Sometimes the building itself provided the space, atmosphere and opportunity for groups to emerge, as in the case of the Portsoy Salmon Bothy:

'A number of groups have grown out of the Bothy. One summer we ran a photography workshop and a camera club sprang up out of this. A knitting club, 'knit and natter', started and provides a social reason to meet up'. (Project Leader)

- 5.18** We heard stories of LEADER-funded projects widening access so that new parts of communities can use facilities, for example in New Deer, elderly people from a local care home now attend a whist drive in the public hall because there of the LEADER-funded upgrading of facilities to include a disabled WC. Similarly, in Huntly through the Glamourhaugh Allotment Creation project, access has been widened for older people to be able to take part in growing through the provision of raised growing beds.



5.19 Improving or installing new equipment was a commonly cited benefit resulting from LEADER-funding. For example, the investment in MacRobert Hall included setting wires in the ceiling so there is a permanent way to install a projector and sound system. This opens up the Hall to a range of events and groups and have moved the Hall from,

‘being unusable to being a fantastic venue that is more welcoming, more useful and is the centre of the community’
(Project Leader)

5.20 The New Deer Hall improvements mean that audiences no longer need to bring their own cushions to sit on uncomfortable chairs. However, improvements are still necessary in some cases: Mearns FM community radio interviewees noted that the studio is not soundproofed and that they get complaints from neighbours about noise levels.

5.21 Whilst LEADER is commonly used to fund community facility physical structures and equipment, it was also used to fund people, for example the Portsoy Salmon Bothy Manager, who was part-funded through LEADER. The funding of the manager position was to ensure that the Bothy became a heavily used facility, which the Chair of the charity that holds responsibility for the Bothy stated had happened:

‘The objective of the funding was to fund the position and ensure the Bothy became a heavily used facility. The use of the facility has been a huge success... the catalyst for this was the Manager having the overview of all elements.’
(Project Leader)

5.22 We identified several examples of community facilities serving to foster connections and make links by bringing people together from the wider community. The online survey supports this finding, with three quarters of respondents agreeing/strongly agreeing that their LEADER-funded project had enabled their community to ‘develop new and lasting networks’. People come from outside New Deer, for example, to attend functions and events at the renovated village hall, and it brings people together through the groups that it hosts, from badminton to sewing. We were told that the hall is seen as the community hub, and by the Project Manager that ‘without it, there would be nothing’. A similar view was reported about MacRobert Hall being seen by one interviewee as ‘the heart of the community’. The summer house that was part of the Glamourhaugh Allotment Creation project is a gathering place for allotment users to socialise and chat, and because of this facility and the compostable toilet and running water on site, other courses and events (e.g. the Big Lunch) can be hosted at the allotments. These examples underscore the importance of physical space for people to come together.

5.23 Mearns FM community radio station reaches people who cannot get mainstream radio reception, and some of its volunteers engage with other community radio stations through membership of the Association of Community Radio Stations. The radio station is also helping to support a sense of place, as the following quote illustrates:

‘[It’s] Making Mearns a bit more Mearns. It’s pulled Mearns together.’
(Project Leader)

5.24 Interviewees also reported clear economic benefits arising from improvements in community facilities, evident in a range of ways. Increasing and diversifying the use of the building was one reason, for example in the case of the New Deer Hall, they are now able to host wedding receptions and other 'high class' events because the facilities are now appropriate for these. Similarly, the Turriff Haughs Exhibition Hall has significantly contributed to the scaling up of the Turriff Haugh Show, Scotland's largest two-day agricultural show, as there are now permanent WCs and a covered hall used for cookery and butchery demonstrations, amongst other things. The success of the Show is significant and in 2013, the Turriff District Agricultural Association was awarded the Farmers Guardian Show Business Award for 2013. The prestige and success of the Show, which was in turn aided through the new Exhibition Hall, helped to lever in donations from across local community businesses and groups for £100,000 for a new road over the field that links to the main show ground. Further evidence of the economic impacts of LEADER-funded projects is highlighted in the 'Employment' and 'Business & economic competitiveness' sections.

5.25 Given the wealth of evidence we gathered about the impacts of LEADER funding on community facilities, and on what flows from these facilities – from widening access to fostering connections and ties – it is perhaps not surprising that 75% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their LEADER-funded project had enabled their community to 'make the most of its assets'.

Local culture, language and traditions

5.26 The online survey responses revealed that 'Event or festival' was an activity for a substantial number of projects (34%), and 28% stated that their project's area of work related to 'local culture, tradition and/or languages'. Case study research provides qualitative evidence of the impact of LEADER-funding on supporting local culture and traditions in a range of ways, from the intrinsic heritage value of LEADER-funded buildings, to providing space for cultural groups to meet, to putting on cultural events.

5.27 The funding can support the development of buildings which may be of cultural or heritage interest in and of themselves, for example in the case of the Options Appraisal of Back Green – a site with a Grade B listed building which may be saved, in part due to the work undertaken in the options appraisal. The Portsoy Salmon Bothy is a building with considerable heritage value and interest: it comprises a museum housed in what were the ice chambers which displays artefacts and information about Portsoy's harbours, the industry and trade and the Salmon Fishing operations. Traditional boat building and folk singing take place in the Bothy and there is a volunteer family historian working from the 'Wee Bothy', the sleeping quarters (which remain complete with bunk beds) and which also houses a growing resource bank about family history with books and resources available to browse or borrow on request.

5.28 Providing the physical space for local groups to meet and hold traditional cultural activities was highlighted as an impact of LEADER funding by interviewees from New Deer Community Association, which hosts Highland Dancers and touring theatre productions,

and from MacRobert Hall which hosts ceilidhs and gigs for local bands. Similarly, the Salmon Bothy holds 'Folk in the Bothy' – a monthly folk night.

- 5.29** Festivals and events are important incubators for cultural activities. The Harvest Folk Festival, for example, aims to revive the tradition of singing Scots 'Muckle' ballads. Hundreds of people experienced this type of music over the course of the festival, which included over 30 performers. The festival gained publicity in local magazines, papers and radio, which may also help lead to greater awareness of the art form and of the area. As one Folk Festival organiser explained,

***'Culture is like a stream that flows and changes, carrying traditions along. It changes and bends with requirements, gives us a sense of the past, a sense of identity and place through Scots language. We can shape the future because we are aware of the past. It keeps us in touch with our ancestors and keeps their memories alive.'* (Project Leader)**

- 5.30** Another festival, the Fyvie Homecoming Festival, showcased local culture and history through a 'ballad bus' which went on a local tour with singers performing relevant songs at various points of interest. Having the platform of a funded event enabled the festival organisers to invite well known artists to perform; without the security of funding, this would have been a significant and prohibitive financial risk for folk club organising the performers to take. The event rekindled interest in heritage and a heritage room in school reopened as a result of the festival.

- 5.31** A Huntly youth club involved in the transnational Linking with Finland project has engaged in traditional music as a

result of this. Previously the youth club's music group played pop/indie/rock music, but the LEADER-funded project enabled them to bring in a traditional musician to teach Scottish folk music, which they have since shared with their Finnish counterparts. This has led to an interest being kindled in the Finnish young people about their Finnish folk music.



- 5.32** In a similar way to the physical space provided by community facilities helping to accommodate and initiate activities/groups and foster connections between people, both the Harvest Folk Festival and the Fyvie Homecoming Festival are reported to have helped to rekindle and spark connections across generations and cultures. Fyvie Festival, for example, brought disparate groups together and renewed old links between, for example, the Cherokee Indian community and Australian community. We heard that,

***'... bonds were tightened and greater knowledge of community groups was disseminated'* (Project Leader)**



5.33 The Linking with Finland project was a transnational cooperation project which enabled a group of delegates from Huntly to travel to Juankoski in Finland to discuss the potential for collaborative rural development projects. One such project that led on from this initial LEADER-funded visit took place in the Glamourhaugh Allotments in Huntly in which a group of users of a local mental health and wellbeing charity learnt traditional stone walling techniques and are due to go to Finland this summer to share those skills with Finnish counterparts. One project participant explained that her dad and grandad did stonewalling so she thought it would be interesting to understand more about what they did and carry on the family tradition.

Natural environment and conservation

5.34 LEADER-funded projects were reported to have impacted positively on the environment in several ways: through conserving and protecting the natural environment, through improving the visual appearance of the landscape, through reducing the energy consumption of community buildings and through raising awareness both through educating teachers and children about nature and the outdoors and in reporting on environmental issues on community radio.

5.35 One of the largest LEADER-funded projects, both in terms of geographical coverage and total project cost, is about controlling the mink population across Scotland. Mink are not native to Scotland and pose a big problem because they eat other animals and birds. The project has funded staff and equipment to help control the mink population and by

catching and killing mink, the project is protecting a range of other species across Scotland including species of biological, ecological and economic importance, such as water vole, Atlantic salmon, grouse and black-throated diver.

5.36 In three case studies, we were told about the positive impact that a LEADER-funded project has had on the visual landscape. For example, the building that preceded the Turriff Haughs Exhibition Hall was dilapidated: the roof had fallen in and there were pigeons nesting in it. As this is a popular dog-walking place for Turriff residents, interviewees believed that in 'tidying up the corner' of the site, they had improved the environment for this part of the town. Similarly, the area of Back Green at the end of the town of Portsoy is derelict and there would be a huge visual impact of renovating the site:

'People say it will be good to see Back Green not derelict' (Project Leader)

5.37 Creating Glamourhaugh Allotments had brought a piece of underused land into use, which was also facilitated through a path being built around the edge of the allotments as part of the funding. Not only has this widened the access of the site, but also motivated the local Rotary Club to fund a bench for people to sit on:

***'I have seen very elderly people walking around there as [the path makes it] easy for them to walk. The Rotary put a bench up subsequently by the river, and that is used and appreciated. So the project is about bringing an underused piece of land into use, and making it look nice – once all the fruit trees come into being it will be an enhancement of the site.'* (Project Leader)**

- 5.38** Other impacts relating to environmental issues include the MacRobert Hall development which included materials for insulation, which has saved 50% of the costs of energy, and reduced the environmental footprint of the hall, and Mearns FM community radio which occasionally covers environmental issues and invites guest speakers with relevant environmental knowledge.
- 5.39** The Forest Education Initiative Group works in schools or with community groups to encourage active involvement in woodlands. LEADER funding supported the employment of a Forest Education Initiative Co-ordinator to support sustainable woodland education projects in rural Aberdeenshire to raise awareness and increase the use of the woodland environment. One teacher reported that, through receiving Forest Schools training (which was facilitated through the FEI Coordinator brokering funding), she was educating nursery aged children and their parents in the joy of the outdoors and importance of nature. An important part of this is reusing and recycling play materials.

Tourism

- 5.40** One case study project, the Banffshire Coast Tourism Programme (BCTP), was focused exclusively on tourism through funding for a range of initiatives to support and promote the Banffshire coast as a tourist destination. The funding contributed to creating a photographic library – a free resource for the BCTP to promote the area where formerly they had to pay for image licences, and to developing an interactive website (see www.banffshirecoast.com). These projects have enabled the BCTP to promote the area more effectively, and will support Aberdeenshire Council to promote the area both within and outwith Scotland (e.g. to Frankfurt, which has three flights a day to Aberdeen and is a potential tourism market):

***‘The photographic library has had a massive impact on us being able to promote the area. Likewise with website.’
(BCTP Project Leader)***

- 5.41** A visitor survey helped the BCTP understand some of the issues that tourists identified about their visit to the area:

***‘One of the things that came back was that there was nowhere to eat after 8pm and a few of the hotels got together and did a rota. The other thing was trying to use more of local food and describing this in the local menus – they ran a project trying to get someone come in and help chefs devise menus.’
(Project Leader)***

- 5.42** Whilst not directly focused on tourism, the heritage and cultural content of some projects can also have positive impacts on tourism. The Portsoy Salmon Bothy, for example, through providing an accredited museum explaining the salmon fishing industry heritage of Portsoy, and through helping people understand their ancestry through the volunteer genealogist, is a popular visitor attraction:

***‘People come to Scotland to help understand their ancestry. The website means I get enquiries from all over the world. I feel I’m a small cog in a big machine – my activities have repercussions’
(Project volunteer)***

- 5.43** The Turriff Haughs Exhibition Hall has enabled large-scale events to be hosted, which has pulled in visitors from across Scotland and beyond. The national Bluefaced Leicester Sheep Show was hosted at the site last year and they requested to return this year. This event brings people from all over the UK.

Education and skills

- 5.44** The survey highlighted that the overwhelming majority of respondents (82%) either agreed or agreed strongly that their LEADER-funded project had enabled their community to develop skills and increase confidence. One of the case study projects was specifically designed as an education initiative, although there was evidence reported from across the case studies about how LEADER-funded projects support people to learn new skills and gain new knowledge.
- 5.45** The Forest Education Initiative aims to increase the understanding and appreciation, particularly amongst young people, of the environmental, social and economic potential of trees, woodlands and forests and of the link between the tree and everyday wood products. LEADER funding supported the employment of a Forest Education Initiative Co-ordinator, whose role was to create sustainable woodland education projects in rural Aberdeenshire to raise awareness about and increase the use of the woodland environment. One such project was an outdoor classroom. Teachers and students at Alford Academy wanted to create an outdoor classroom in a nearby forest on a plot of land the school owned but was not using. The FEI Coordinator facilitated the development of the classroom and taught fire-lighting and forest safety to small groups of students. A local forestry contractor demonstrated timber-milling and helped the students to build benches, tables and a shelter using the timber. Several students asked about careers in the forestry sector as they were involved in this project, which links with another aim of the FEI which is to highlight the potential career opportunities that exist within the Forest industry.
- 5.46** Another aim of the FEI Coordinator role is to support teachers to embed outdoor learning into the curriculum and to support and deliver Forest Schools. The FEI Co-ordinator arranged and facilitated a Level 3 OCN Forest School Leaders course for 16 trainees, and has supported these trainees to develop their own Forest School programmes. One trainee explained how they had developed their expertise and confidence in outdoor learning through the training and implanting it, and that 'if we hadn't had the training, our initial interest would never have been sparked'.



5.47 There was considerable evidence from other case study interviews about the educational benefits of LEADER-funded projects. The Mearns FM community radio station, for example, airs shows hosted by pupils from a local comprehensive school who received training from the station volunteers. The MacRobert Hall involves young people in delivering and managing activities and events, something a volunteer youth worker told us increased independence, socialising, organisational skills and community activism – something which one young person involved in the Hall had won a youth achievement award for.

5.48 The Salmon Bothy in Portsoy is used by a local primary school for teaching children boatbuilding skills. And as part of the publicity drive for the Fyvie Homecoming Festival, one of the organisers got a local school to do project on Fyvie Farming Folk. An important impact of the Boyndie Broadband project was enabling school children to do homework that required the internet; they had been having to stay late at school to use school computers, or make alternative arrangements. As one resident explained, 'you're left behind without broadband.'

5.49 LEADER-funded projects have also impacted positively on the skills and knowledge of the volunteers and staff who deliver projects. We heard about people acquiring new skills such as stonewalling (as a result of the Linking with Finland project), new knowledge about the natural world (in the case of the Mink Control project) and developing skills in local traditional music (Linking with Finland). The summerhouse built as part of the Glamourhaugh Allotment creation project is used to share knowledge amongst plot holders and groups and to host training/events such as a permaculture course; progressive drystone dyking and trellis horticultural network meetings.

5.50 The staff delivering projects through LEADER told us about how their skills and knowledge had increased, for example the Salmon Bothy Manager who learnt about museum accreditation and volunteer recruitment and retention through the varied role, and the FEI Coordinator who had 'thoroughly enjoyed' the role in which he had learnt about theories of child development and how to communicate with children – something that, as a trained biologist, he had hitherto not been familiar with doing.

Employment

5.51 The evidence about jobs created through LEADER-funded projects is somewhat tenuous. As the monitoring and evaluation section outlines, projects found reporting back on the numbers of jobs created difficult – unless, of course, the project was directly contributing to salary costs, as in the case of the employment of a Project Manager and administrator for the Banffshire Coast Tourism Partnership, the FEI Coordinator or the Salmon Bothy Manager.

- 5.52** Whilst projects are invited to complete a section of the LEADER Application Form that asks how many jobs will be created as a result of their project, the data captured on this is somewhat patchy. The vast majority of projects (84 per cent) did not appear on the LEADER database with any information about the number of jobs created. Two projects out of 142 stated that they created jobs for under 25 year olds; 8 stated they created jobs for females over 25, and 14 stated they created jobs for males over 25 years old. Should the Back Green bunkhouse go ahead, in part due to the LEADER-funded options appraisal, it would safeguard five jobs at the Scottish Traditional Boat Festival and create two jobs within the bunkhouse.
- 5.53** Another indicator of the impact of LEADER-funded projects on employment is looking to what happens when LEADER-funded roles reach the end of the funding period, where we can see evidence of impact. All three people who were directly funded through LEADER had remained in employment in the same organisation after LEADER funding completed. In the case of the Banffshire Coast Tourism Partnership, the project grew membership from c.50 (2009) to c.86 local businesses, whose membership fees have helped the BCTP be sustainable. Whilst this is not to say that these jobs are secure, nor that the impact of their employment on the reserves of charities such as the Scottish Traditional Boat Festival (which now employs the former-Bothy manager on a part-time basis) is not of concern; it does reflect that positions formerly funded through LEADER have been deemed important enough to source funds for once LEADER-funding ends.
- 5.54** A final area of impact relating to employment regards employing local crafts or tradespeople to work in LEADER-funded projects. In the case of the Glamourhugh Allotments, local contractors were employed to carry out the works, which was also the case for the refurbishment of MacRobert and New Deer Halls.
- 5.55** The economic impact of LEADER-funded projects beyond employment is now explored in the 'business' section.

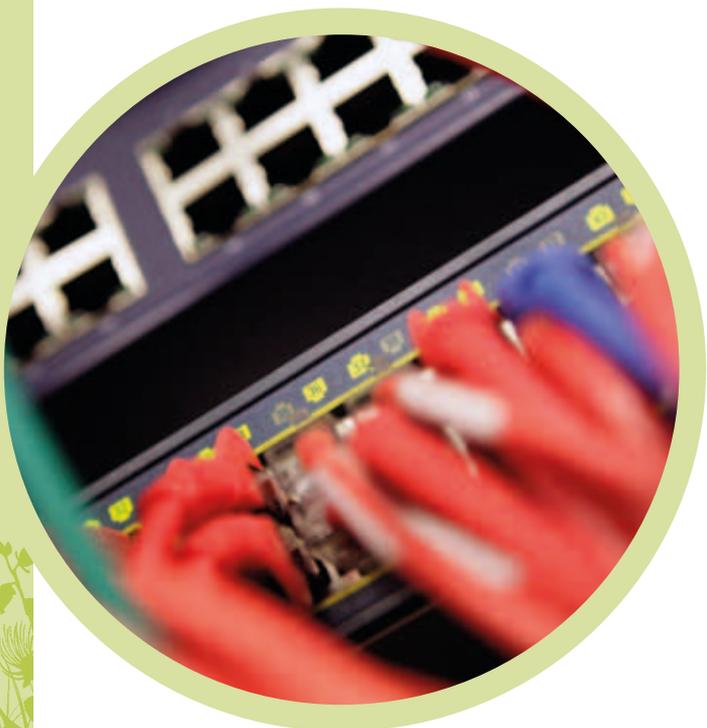
Business and economic competitiveness

- 5.56** The survey data did not provide strong evidence about economic or business impacts, for example 61% of respondents did not support the statement 'To what extent do you agree that your LEADER funded project has enabled your community to explore new ways to become or remain competitive' and less than a third (30%) agreed/strongly agreed that their LEADER-funded project had resulted in 'more successful local businesses'. However, the impact of LEADER funding on local businesses was evidenced through several of our case studies.
- 5.57** Two projects had an overtly economic element driving them: the Boyndie Broadband service, and the Banffshire Coast Tourism Programme. The Boyndie Visitors Centre is a medium-sized social enterprise, with a popular cafe and garden. A lack of broadband provision was affecting approximately 100 properties in the area, of which approximately 20 were businesses including the Visitor's Centre and farms. Through the installation of broadband, businesses are now able to do online banking, pay staff through PAYE, order goods online and do (mandatory) online VAT returns. Not being able to conduct

basic business activities online was forcing the manager of the Visitors Centre to consider moving elsewhere, which would have led to unemployment and the removal of a centre of local economic activity. A local farmer described life before broadband, in which he couldn't take part in online cattle auctions or look at cattle movements, nor look at the Scottish Government regulations (e.g. on nitrate vulnerable zones) or information (e.g. on sources of funding) or complete forms (e.g. farming subsidies).

5.58 The Banffshire Coast Tourism Programme (BCTP) aimed to enhance visitor experience to the area through a range of projects in order to increase tourism and spending. Through conducting a Visitors Survey, the BCTP learnt about areas for improvement, for example the area's high streets. The Project Manager explained that,

'Whilst we can't improve the high street but we can promote the more quirky things/places that people may find less easily'. (Project leader)



5.59 The BCTP also brokered a project with Wendy Barrie, author of the Scottish Food Guide and a leading contributor to the Scottish food scene, in which local businesses could receive training and advice from Wendy for a subsidised fee – something which wouldn't have been possible if the businesses were operating without the umbrella of BCTP. One beneficiary explained that,

'Before there was this handful of businesses – 4 or 5 – prepared to pay for the whole [Wendy Barrie] service. This gave the opportunity for Wendy to stay a couple of extra days and work with B&Bs and very small enterprises – so one or two larger ones like us, she could do the smaller ones at the same time.'

5.60 In the case of several of the capital refurbishment projects, LEADER funding had supported them to make better use of their asset and generate income from it. Weddings and other events were taking place at the Salmon Bothy and New Deer Hall, and the increased capacity of the Turriff Show due to the LEADER-funded Exhibition Hall has raised the profile and prestige of the events, making it possible to host large-scale events in Turriff and get new national business, such as the National Bluefaced Leicester Sheep Show which brings people into Turriff from across the country.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

5.61 As noted above, 23 per cent of projects either agreed or strongly agreed that their project had increased the number of people using ICT. Five LEADER-funded projects were to support the development of broadband (one of these was an extension to an existing project).

One of these, Boyndie Broadband, has enabled the technology to be available for broadband in 100 local properties.

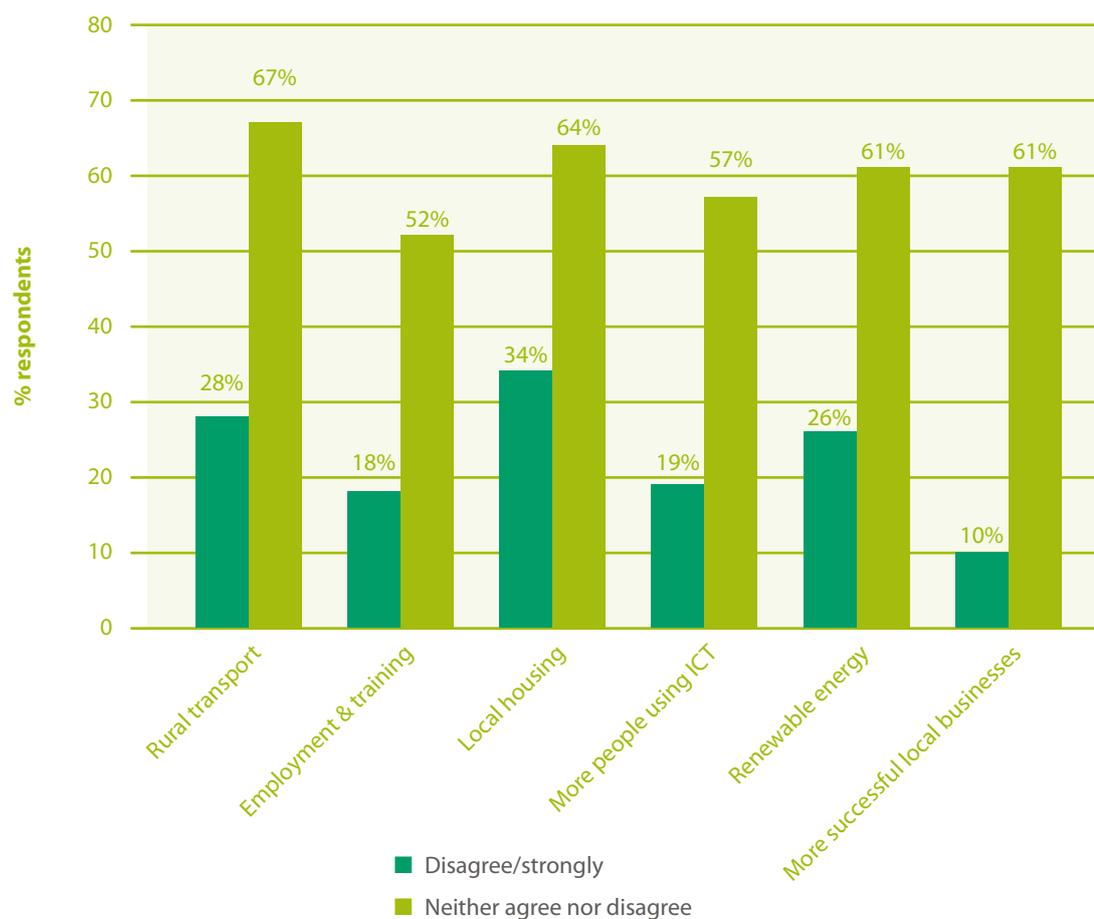
- 5.62** Our case studies revealed some less obvious effects from ICT too. For example, one interviewee in the Mearns FM case study explained that the radio station had inspired other ICT projects providing the forum for getting local technical experts together, such as a wi-fi network in the Stonehaven area.

Little evidence of impact

- 5.63** Our case study evidence was consistent with the survey and database review findings about a lack of notable impact in

three areas of work that were highlighted in the Aberdeenshire Local Development Strategy: **sustainable energy, transport and housing**. These three were not reported as areas of notable impact through case study fieldwork. Survey responses were similarly muted in response to these three issues: 34% of respondents disagreed that LEADER had contributed to better/more local housing, 28% of respondents disagreed that it had resulted in improved rural transport and 71% were either ambivalent about or disagreed that their project had resulted in more people in employment or training.

Figure 5.2 Extent to which LEADER-funded project has resulted in





Overarching reported outcomes of LEADER

5.64 This section details two overarching outcomes delivered through LEADER, namely the role of LEADER as a catalyst and the legacy of LEADER.

LEADER as a catalyst

5.65 Given that most LEADER-funded projects (73%) had an intervention rate of 30-60%, with an average intervention rate of 39% (see Figure 3.6), we can see that projects were able to lever in additional resources from outside LEADER. These figures help us to understand the added-value of LEADER. LEADER was highlighted as being a useful way to lever additional resources in by community groups across our research participants. The LAG commented on it, as did survey and case study participants. This could be because LEADER funding is committed first, and then other funders are given the confidence to come forward and fund:

‘The early commitment of [LEADER] funding acted as a catalyst for other funders. Chicken and egg scenario if you know what I mean.’ (Survey respondent)

5.66 Having a little funding at the beginning of a project can help to catalyse momentum within a community too through fundraising activity. One survey respondent highlighted how LEADER funding had been crucial in ‘kick starting’ the goal of completely upgrading a community-owned harbour by making it possible for the Trust that owned the harbour to begin the upgrade process through an initial upgrade to the harbour’s central jetty:

‘That job of work allowed the berthing of many more leisure and inshore fishing vessels; increasing income to the Trust, which will be ploughed back in further improvements to the harbour infrastructure. The project also heightened public interest which has had the effect of increasing harbour income through community fund raising events.’ (Survey respondent)

5.67 Although some LEADER-funded projects are small, such as Linking with Finland (£6,600 total cost) or the Back Green Options Appraisal (£11,425 total project cost), they can act as an important starting point from which to create a larger project. The North East Scotland Preservation Trust (NESPT), for example, which managed the Back Green Options Appraisal, has secured £148,000 from Historic Scotland and applied for £300,000 from the Coastal Communities Fund for their proposed developed of the dilapidated buildings into a 4-star bunkhouse. Whilst this is only part of the £1.6 million required, it is an important starting point – and without the different options for the site having been explored through the options appraisal, it is unlikely that NESPT would have been able to draw in any of the significant funds they need.

5.68 As highlighted earlier, some LAG members themselves can fund projects through their organisation. So by bringing an application form to the LAG for consideration, applicants have a range of potential funders around the table who may find a good fit between their funding criteria and the aims of the project.

Legacy of LEADER

Networks

- 5.69** When thinking about the legacy of LEADER, softer outcomes are crucial: the 75% of respondents who agreed that their LEADER-funded project had helped to develop new and lasting networks may, for example, go on to do future collaborative work together. Evidence from our case studies supports this. For example, the Connecting with Finland project created links with counterparts in Finland and has drawn in a range of people and projects from across the local area, including the FEI Coordinator who has been approached to deliver some sessions as part of an NHS-funded project called 'Huntly Healthy Wednesdays'.
- 5.70** The FEI Coordinator was tasked with facilitating a network of Forest School trained educators, which the Coordinator anticipates will become a self-sustaining network and which was highly valued by two beneficiaries of the project to whom we spoke. He set up a meeting between the Open College Network (OCN) and the Forest Education Initiative about creating an outdoor education group with a more commercial focus. A separate organisation – North East Scotland Outdoor Learning Group (NESOLG) – was established and the FEI is delivering training on the OCN accredited course it provides.

- 5.71** Events such as Fyvie Homecoming Festival and the Harvest Folk Festival have brought together a range of local community groups and individuals. As well as showcasing talents of, for example, local ballad singers, it has raised awareness of local groups and has possibly inspired new members to join. The Fyvie Homecoming Festival also led to the creation of a 'Fyvie Heritage' Facebook page, which has 418 'likes'. It aims to create an online network of people across the world with an interest in Fyvie's history and heritage.
- 5.72** Huntly's Linking with Finland project brings together a wide range of community members who benefit from the support of other group members. For instance, a number have mental health problems and have never been abroad before. The idea of going abroad and going through the processes this entails, such as obtaining passports, means that they rely heavily on support and guidance from other group members. One member of the group felt the value of bringing together a wide range of people of all ages and backgrounds. He felt that this leads to a feeling of 'Team Huntly'.



Sustainability and the 'ripple effect'

- 5.73** The enduring nature, or legacy, of LEADER-funding is evident through the people LEADER has funded, in the case of the Salmon Bothy Manager, the FEI Coordinator and the Banffshire Coast Tourism Programme Project Manager.
- 5.74** A clear outcome from the funding of the Salmon Bothy Manager is that this community facility has achieved museum accreditation, established a core team of volunteers, promoted the Bothy both on and offline, and financial and administrative systems for managing the Bothy. Whilst the post is no longer funded, these systems endure and the Bothy is a heavily used community facility.
- 5.75** The Continuing Professional Development (CPD) element of the FEI Coordinator's role has, according to the Coordinator, had a multiplier effect. Through training teachers in outdoor education, they then pass on their knowledge to the children they teach – which is a new cohort each year. Similarly, teachers can act as ambassadors for outdoor education for their school or nursery and encourage other staff members to become trained or involved in outdoor learning. One teacher explained how the FEI Coordinators (both the current Coordinator and his predecessor) had impacted on them personally:

'Their love of nature has helped me love nature and pass it on – it's a ripple effect.'

- 5.76** In the case of the BCTP Project Manager, the photographic library and the website are two clear outcomes that have endured, and will continue to ensure a resource supporting the tourism infrastructure of the Banffshire coast.

- 5.77** The capital projects that LEADER funded will also continue to provide a facility for the communities in which they are located. Sometimes these facilities are essential services – broadband internet provision for the 100 residents of Boyndie is a good example. The importance of having spaces for people in communities to come together was evidenced through the village halls that had been extended or refurbished through LEADER – from New Deer to Turriff. These halls provide the meeting space and facilities for many community groups and activities.



- 5.78** A number of project staff and volunteers felt that their involvement in a LEADER project contributed to their participation in other organisations. For example, the manager and host of the Harvest Folk Festival has since been appointed Artist in Residence at the University of Edinburgh; and the ex-convener of Mearns FM was recently asked to be chair of the Benhom Mill project because through the LEADER-funded project he 'got a name as someone who can do things'.

Innovation

5.79 One of the aims of LEADER is that communities are more able to innovate. We asked about innovation through the survey question, 'To what extent has your LEADER-funded project enabled your community to create greater scope for innovation', to which 77% agreed/strongly agreed. Whilst there appears to be agreement from projects that innovation is an outcome of their work, it was a challenge to dig beneath this in interviews to really understand what kinds of innovative work was taking place. Without a shared understanding of 'innovation' it is difficult to measure. However, we did gather evidence about innovation in products (e.g. testing out a new way of providing broadband technology in Boyndie), approaches (e.g. to CPD provided through the FEI Coordinator) and activities (e.g. creating original music as part of the Harvest Folk Festival).

5.80 The Strategic Mink Control Initiative uses an innovative approach to Invasive Non Native Species with a volunteer-based approach. As well as planning to control the mink population in the area, they hope that learning from this approach can be applied in the future to controlling other Invasive Non Native Species (other animals or even plants). In conjunction with the University of Aberdeen and the James Hutton Institute, the initiative is developing and researching an online database and interface, which collects data and uses generated emails to maintain volunteer engagement.



Conclusions and recommendations for 2014-2020

- 6.1** The first part of this chapter summarises the main conclusions from our evaluation of the 2007-2013 Aberdeenshire LEADER Programme Evaluation, structured to reflect the three key areas of evaluation activity: overview of the nature, value and location of LEADER-funded projects; LEADER processes; and the impact of LEADER.
- 6.2** Drawing on the evidence gathered across the evaluation, we then set out a series of suggestions and considerations for improvements that could be implemented in the forthcoming 2014-2020 LEADER programme. These are divided into recommendations at the Scottish Government, governance, programme management and project delivery levels.

Summary and conclusions

Nature, value and location of LEADER-funded projects

- 6.3** The database review and survey confirmed that Aberdeenshire LEADER funds a good range of projects and activities. Certain priorities set out in the LDS were addressed through the projects that received funding, particularly those relating to improving community facilities, as well as local culture and traditions, tourism and the environment.
- 6.4** However, some priorities were not addressed through LEADER-funded projects. For example, there are only a small number of LEADER-funded projects geared towards supporting business and enterprise. The priorities of sustainable transport and housing were not addressed to any meaningful extent through the projects currently funded through LEADER in Aberdeenshire despite appearing in the original LDS. Whilst several capital projects (i.e. community facilities) contained energy saving features (e.g. improving energy efficiency through insulation, biomass boilers and solar panels), 'sustainable energy' was the primary focus of a very small number of projects.
- 6.5** LEADER funding has been awarded across all Aberdeenshire administrative areas, although there are fewer projects funded in the South East. This raises questions about the relationship between need and funding, and about the equitable distribution of funding across the region. The South East is more deprived than some other areas of Aberdeenshire; so it is safe to assume that the need and potential benefit of LEADER funded projects may be more significant than other already well-resourced areas. This imbalance of the geographic spread of projects also raises questions related to the capacity of all communities in Aberdeenshire to apply for LEADER funding.
- 6.6** Aberdeenshire LEADER grants range in size, from very small grants of less than £2,000 to large-scale grants of up to £200,000. LEADER grants also vary in terms of proportion of total project cost, for example, with the very large capital investment projects, LEADER funding, whilst large in value, may not equate to a large percentage of overall project cost.

6.7 50% was the original percentage that LEADER guidance states is the ceiling for LEADER contributions but which was updated in 2010 by the Scottish Government to be up to 90%. Only nine projects received 51% or more of their total funding through LEADER. The higher amount of 90% was used with discretion, for example for broadband projects because the Council's bid to the Broadband Challenge Fund was unsuccessful due to heavy over-subscription.

LEADER processes

6.8 There are well-established processes and system in place for LEADER governance, finance, and administration, which are serviced through an efficient and committed LEADER delivery team. The lead partner, Aberdeenshire Council, was largely viewed as the right organisation to be fulfilling this function.

6.9 A universal application process for projects seeking funding exists: it is more straightforward for larger organisations with experience of applying for funding and/or with paid staff than for volunteer-led community groups to navigate. There is a lack of proportionality in the process, with the same form being used for projects seeking £1,000 as those applying for large sums in excess of £100,000.

6.10 The support given to LEADER applicants by the delivery team was praised. Questions arise regarding the level of support projects needed and whether a simpler application form and process would reduce the level of support required. This in turn may free up the delivery team to focus on capacity building in those communities not currently applying for LEADER funding, and to conduct project monitoring visits.

6.11 Concerns were raised with regards to the level of audit undertaken and the burden this places on projects. This was felt to be high both at programme and project level. LAG interviewees felt that whilst audit should be stringent given the amount of public money the LAG handles, several felt it was overly so.

6.12 Many questions were raised about the claims process. By paying out on defrayed expenditure, LEADER inadvertently discriminates against small community groups which do not have the levels of reserves required to make upfront payments for project activities. This process sits uncomfortably with the overall aim of LEADER as a bottom-up, community-led development programme. The level of administration required to process claims is also a strain on the delivery team, although they were praised for the speed with which they processed claims.

6.13 Monitoring and evaluation was identified as the 'weak link' in the 2007-2013 LEADER programme and evidence gathered from interviewees about LEADER monitoring and evaluation processes reveal that this is an area for improvement in the next funding programme. The difficulty projects had at application stage in identifying outputs and outcomes, despite support from the LEADER delivery team, combined with the lack of systematic checking of whether projects were achieving their targets, lead to questions about the robustness of the output data collected over the course of the LEADER programme. The fact that people delivering projects did not report that they found the monitoring and evaluation requirements onerous may reflect a rather light-touch and unsystematic monitoring and evaluation process.

6.14 Whilst to some extent challenges associated with monitoring and evaluation can be attributed to the lack of an agreed set of indicators from the Scottish Government at the outset, there are other issues. The disconnect between the monitoring/output information required and the content of LEADER projects means that evidence about the real impact of projects has not been fully captured on an ongoing basis, and the data that has been collected is therefore incomplete.

6.15 LAG members were provided with financial, claims and project updates at every LAG meeting, and LEADER-funded projects presented regularly at LAG meetings about their achievements and impact on the local community. Besides the outcomes data (e.g. on employment creation) reported in the LEADER Annual Report to the Scottish Government, which was circulated to LAG members, there was no systematic reporting of outcomes data to the LAG.

6.16 The LAG was viewed as a collective of skilled and well-networked individuals who took their role and responsibilities as LAG members seriously. There were questions about some duplication of work between the PAC and the LAG, and whether the process, timing and location of meetings could be reviewed in order to

facilitate attendance by non-public sector staff, whose role on the LAG constitutes part of their day job, in contrast to private sector members such as those working in agriculture.

6.17 The level of connection and reach across between LEADER and other rural partnerships and structures appeared weak and non-systematic. There was little evidence of connections to other strategies and priorities across Aberdeenshire.

Impact of LEADER

6.18 LEADER has had a positive benefits on the social, environmental and economic fabric of the communities in which projects have operated. Social impacts range from feelings of wellbeing resulting from volunteering and outdoor learning, and having well-equipped and welcoming spaces for communities to gather, learn and create together. Environment impacts include conservation and protection of native species and educating teachers, young people and children about the joy and fragility of the natural world.

6.19 Whilst economic benefits were more difficult to capture, they included providing job opportunities – both directly through employment in LEADER-funded projects, and less directly



through employing local contractors to deliver parts of projects (e.g. quantity surveyors, architects, builders, caterers). Improving facilities lead to increased sales and trading (e.g. food, accommodation) in communities in which they were based, from being able to host large events (e.g. Turriff Show) and more exclusive (e.g. weddings) or niche (e.g. Folk at the Bothy) events.



6.20 LEADER has acted as a catalyst for projects to be able to lever in additional resources, and has supported the creation of new networks, partnerships and relationships within communities where projects have operated. Whilst the evaluation team identified some ways in which projects were being innovative, given the vagaries of the term, it was challenging to evidence.

6.21 Capturing the impact of LEADER-funded projects was challenging due to the issues already highlighted with monitoring and evaluation and questions over the accuracy of data included in original application forms. Project leaders were often unsure about how to capture

information for evaluation purposes, and did not have the skills or the time to be able to do so.

6.22 Some areas highlighted in the LDS as priorities, however, were not addressed through LEADER projects: sustainable housing, transport and energy being three areas of note. This raises several considerations for the future, including:

- ▶ How will the LAG more systematically address priorities set out in the LDS?
- ▶ How will the LDS be developed in order to reflect community needs?
- ▶ Is LEADER the most appropriate vehicle for addressing structural problems in rural communities – or is another funding programme or public body more appropriately placed to do so?

Looking ahead to 2014 – 2020

6.23 A number of areas for consideration and potential improvement arise from our evaluation of LEADER 2007-2013, which are relevant to all stakeholders involved in LEADER: from the EU and the Scottish Government level, through to the Lead Partners and the LAG, the LEADER delivery team, and projects themselves. The next section outlines suggestions for improvement in the forthcoming 2014-2020 LEADER Programme.

EU/Scottish Government

Bottom-up vs top-down

6.24 Acknowledge the tension between EU directives about rural development requiring a high level of audit and the desire for a bottom-up approach to rural development, driven by community-based projects. The current aspirations of LEADER as being driven upwards from the grassroots is at odds with the bureaucratic and financial constrictions of the funding programme.

Monitoring & evaluation

- 6.25** Provide clear guidance on monitoring and evaluation requirements from the start, and clarity about where responsibilities for collecting and auditing information lie (i.e. what lies at Government; Lead Partner; LAG; Delivery team and project level).
- 6.26** Establish sets of indicators and templates to facilitate consistent reporting. Guidance on information required by potential applicants, and clarity about terminology (e.g. 'innovation') is also important. These aspects could be discussed at national LEADER coordinator events.
- 6.27** Capturing evidence of impact needs improvement. Whilst the evaluation gathered some evidence about economic impacts, it seems that evidence about economic impact may need more careful extraction through face-to-face questioning, or more specific survey questions, in order for community projects to be able to fully capture this type of impact. Valuing qualitative evaluation evidence will be crucial.
- 6.28** There is currently little evidence of decision-making based on the size of grants and a connection with the impact that they are anticipated making. In a future programme, some sort of impact measure in relation to the size of LEADER investment, and in relation to the amount of additional resource projects have levered in through LEADER, could be developed – this will help unpack questions about the difference small amounts can make.

Proportionality

- 6.29** There is no proportionality between size of LEADER awards requested and the processes in place, i.e. the same form is used for projects seeking £1,000 as £100,000. The Scottish Government could consider different volumes/types of information being required according

to different values of funding being applied for, and application forms that are tailored accordingly.

Recognise the hidden contribution of volunteers

- 6.30** Delivering LEADER funded projects relies on the skill, energy and time of an army of volunteers. Consideration about the fragility of this free workforce, for example in the time required of the voluntary treasurer to complete claims forms; or of the busy farmer who takes time out to open up community facilities for local groups to use, is important. Recognising and valuing this contribution is vital to maintaining goodwill and volunteer motivation. There are many ways to do this, for example in an annual LEADER volunteer awards event; or by holding a volunteer of the month award in the LEADER newsletter.

Lead partner and LAG

Local Development Strategy 2014 – 2020

- 6.31** LDS 2014-2020 should be based on community consultation, i.e. bottom up in its content; combined with links to other existing strategies in the area. It is vital that the LDS is treated as a living document that is regularly refreshed, and used, to ensure that decisions reflect changes in the local and national context, and reflect priorities set.
- 6.32** The LAG could make connections with other rural partnerships & networks (this will aid the above) specifically to help identify needs, themes and geographical areas for focus. This could be done as the LDS is developed, and as preparation for responding to project ideas from communities. It would also enhance the opportunity for the LAG to even consider requesting or 'commissioning' projects from single or multiple communities.



6.33 The LAG should identify how to work with the other funds which may come under the auspices of Community Led Local Development (CLLD). This is likely to include regional development funds and fisheries funds. The LAG will need to maintain close dialogue with the Scottish Government to ensure that they are up to speed on this range of funds, including the Common Strategic Framework (CSF) as it evolves, since the CSF and SRDP will be aligned through the relevant EAFRD Articles. There will be an increasing need for the Aberdeenshire LEADER LAG to be thinking more of broad rural development for Aberdeenshire rather than solely of single LEADER projects.

Membership

6.34 Membership of LAG should continue to be monitored and additional representation from business and young people be recruited as required, dependent on the content of the new LDS.

Role of LAG

6.35 The LAG should act more strategically and less as a funding distribution body in the future to ensure that LEADER reaches all parts of rural Aberdeenshire and delivers the impacts it aspires to. There are a number of ways in which this can happen:

- ▶ Ensure the LDS has clear priorities which form the basis of the application process. Develop a set of outcomes that they aspire to deliver under each priority, much like other funders such as Big Lottery Fund, then fund according to the LDS. One emphasis which is being indicated for the next programming period is the “enabling, capacity-building” function. This, along with the overall Rural Development Priority of “Promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development”, needs to form a key basis for the LDS discussions now taking place.

LEADER delivery team

- 6.41** In this section we make a number of recommendations related to the role of the LEADER team.
- 6.42** Based on guidance provided by the Scottish Government, the LEADER delivery team should provide clear guidance to projects on monitoring and evaluation requirements from the outset. This will be informed by clear guidance on indicators with associated guidance from the Scottish Government (see earlier recommendations).
- 6.43** The LEADER team should provide support to project leaders to help them develop evaluation plans at the start of their project and make information available to projects on ready-made evaluation tools. An evaluation workshop format for a group of projects may help to reduce the burden on the LEADER delivery team of 1:1 project meetings. The team should also provide assistance to projects at project development stage to help them establish baselines, estimate beneficiary numbers and other relevant outputs as necessary. This will improve the quality of information on which the LAG will base its decisions, lower the risk for the LAG, and ensure it knows what it is buying for its money.
- 6.44** The delivery team should ensure that projects collect consistent data from the point that a grant award is made. The project database should be improved to ensure that the data gathered is easy to interrogate, and ensure that there is a consistent approach amongst staff to populating the database.
- 6.45** The LEADER delivery team should commission mid and end programme independent external evaluations.

- 6.46** The assistance given to LEADER applicants by the delivery team was praised. This aligns with the LEADER approach and deserves merit. However, questions arise from the level of support projects needed and whether a simpler application form and process would reduce the level of support required. This in turn may free up the delivery team to focus on capacity building in those communities lacking in LEADER projects, and to conduct a higher number of project visits.
- 6.47** LAG administrative expenses can account for up to 20% of the indicative LAG budget. Funds allocated to Aberdeenshire LEADER 2007-2013 account for 11% of indicative budget. This suggests that additional resources could be allocated to LAG administration – therefore extending and broadening the capacity building element in programme delivery. This may be a pointer for the next programme, whereby local animateurs could undertake promotional and capacity building activity in specific areas.

Concluding comment

- 6.48** The forthcoming LEADER programme presents both challenges and opportunities for Aberdeenshire Council, the LAG, the LEADER Delivery Team and local communities. Some of the challenges of delivering a bottom-up rural development programme through a centralised European funding mechanism will remain. However, the LAG is in a strong position to develop an Aberdeenshire LEADER 2014-2020 Local Development Strategy that takes into account the considerable achievements of the current programme, and that recognises the need for a more strategic, networked and targeted approach to delivering community-led local development through LEADER.

Appendix 1: Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to the many people who have contributed to this evaluation. We would like to thank all the LEADER and Scottish Government staff, LAG members and project leads who supported this work and took time to share their views and experiences: Vicky Thomson, Anne MacLennan, Jennifer Kinnaird, Moira Gordon, Scott Petrie, Dawn Tuckwood, Keith Newton, Bob Leonard, Belinda Miller, Jamie Bell, Gavin Clark, Shona Anderson, Maureen Stephen, Alistair Prior, Jody Fleck, Charlie Adam, Gilly Diggins, Donald Boyd, Doug Gooday, Chris Horrill, Paul Higson, Roger Goodyear, Duncan Leece, Rachel Stewart, Elaine Booth, Zillah Jamieson, Susan Robertson, Bruce Fergusson, Ian Hunter, Tony Brown, Mike Powell, Greg Manning, Raye Marcus, Frieda Morrison, Anne Iravani and Alasdair Cunningham.

We would also like to extend our thanks to the many other project staff, volunteers and beneficiaries who are too numerous to name but who were valuable contributors to this report.





Appendix 2: Aberdeenshire LEADER project selection criteria (2007 – 2013)

- ▶ The overall aim of the project is clearly identified
- ▶ Ability of applicant to deliver the project
- ▶ Level of match funding available through other sources
- ▶ Demonstration of value for money
- ▶ Economic viability over the longer term
- ▶ Level of integration with other local strategies and activities
- ▶ Brings community benefit through social, economic or environmental actions
- ▶ Co-operation/collaboration with projects and actions in other LAG areas
- ▶ Level of innovation demonstrated in the project
- ▶ Approach to addressing risks associated with project
- ▶ Project has appropriate plans for publicity and promotion
- ▶ Project has participation, involvement and support from the community
- ▶ Approach to equal opportunities and inclusion
- ▶ Sustainability of project
- ▶ Transferability of project
- ▶ Capacity to create new employment particularly for women, young people and the under-employed.

Appendix 3: Case studies

1 Options appraisal of Back Green, Portsoy

Total project cost: £11,425 LEADER funding: £4,205

Organisation overview

North East Scotland Preservation Trust (NESPT) is a building trust operating in Aberdeenshire which acquires and restores buildings of architectural and historic interest which are neglected or at risk.

Project overview

NESPT owns the B listed complex of 19th Century Ropery and Cottages at Back Green in Portsoy, a town of c. 2,000 people on the Banffshire Coast. NESPT had acquired the dilapidated buildings from the Seafield Estate in 2007 for £1.



Rear of Back Green cottages

The assumption of NESPT was that the buildings would be used for housing as a previous planning application had been approved for this. A new Project Manager joined the Trust in 2009 and suggested opening up the options for the development of the buildings. This was in part because of the location of the buildings at the very edge of the village which, had low-cost housing be approved there, stood in danger of becoming ghettoised as they are separated from the rest of the village.



View of Back Green taken from the adjacent Caravan Park

NESPT applied for LEADER funding to commission an options appraisal report for the buildings with a view to supporting future funding applications to develop the properties for future use. The approach taken in the options appraisal was prescribed by the Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF), a co-funder of the work.

A team including a conservation accredited architect, quantity surveyor, structural engineer and economic consultant contracted to do the work, which included conducting a community consultation to gauge local interest and opinion for future uses of the site.

The options for the cottages that were explored included low cost housing, and self-contained, self-catering accommodation. However, because of the risk of flooding, both these options were eliminated as the sleeping area would have been susceptible to flooding. A craft studio and a catering facility/restaurant were also explored, as well as a bunkhouse.

Challenges of delivering the project

The main challenge was that on the day of the visit from the appraisal team, a flood occurred from the adjacent burn. This impacted practically on the logistics of conducting the site visit and drew the options appraisal team into being preoccupied with potential future flooding issues:

‘They spent a lot of time on flooding, asking “What can we do about the flooding?” and looking at flood alleviation schemes rather than designing something that can cope with being flooded, which was essential.’ (NESPT Project Manager)

The Project Manager stressed that an options appraisal can’t propose a particular course of action for a site unless there is an operator readily available and prepared to manage it, which was a further challenge.

Impacts

Back Green is next to a caravan park, which is managed by the charity, the Scottish Traditional Boat Festival (STBF). The Chair of STBF was at the time developing another nearby building (a boat shed) and was keen to be able to provide accommodation for users of the boat shed.

The impact of the options appraisal was to create the conditions for an operator to come forward in the guise of the STBF because the proposal for the use of Back Green is that the buildings are converted into a 4* bunkhouse. This will provide the accommodation STBF are looking for, and will get around the issue of flooding because the sleeping accommodation can be upstairs and communal areas on the ground floor so should a flood occur at night, people sleeping would be safe upstairs.

The options appraisal also helped to eliminate options which had previously been considered a likely use for the building:

‘It was an essential process that helped us eliminate the housing issue’ (NESPT Project Manager).

Should the bunkhouse go ahead, the Project Manager and STBF Chair anticipated the following impacts:

- ▶ Listed buildings saved and open to the public to be enjoyed
- ▶ Heritage benefit, given the former use of the buildings in rope- and sail-making (i.e. part of the industrial heritage of Portsoy).
- ▶ Job creation: two at the bunkhouse, and five safeguarded at STBF.
- ▶ Economic impact of having tourists in Portsoy buying local goods and services.
- ▶ Filling a gap in provision of accommodation through 25 additional bed spaces (there is currently no bunkhouse in Portsoy).
- ▶ Environmental impact of smartening up a derelict building in a prominent position on the sea front.

Looking to the future

NESPT are awaiting a decision on planning permission for the site, as well as embarking on fundraising. A total of £1.6 million will be needed for the development of the bunkhouse.



Architect's drawings for Back Green cottage development

The NESPT has secured funding of £148,000 from Historic Scotland through the Portsoy Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) towards the project. Applications for £300,000 from the Coastal Communities Fund and £150,000 from the Aberdeenshire Fisheries Fund Axis 4 have been submitted. An initial enquiry has been submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the new Heritage Enterprise Scheme.

2 Banffshire Coast Tourism Programme

Total project cost: £200,000 LEADER funding: £90,000



Organisation overview

Scottish Enterprise is Scotland's main economic, enterprise, innovation and investment agency (www.scottish-enterprise.com). The organisation's ultimate goal is to stimulate sustainable growth of Scotland's economy, and in doing so contribute to the Government's Economic Strategy. Scottish Enterprise's strategy for rural economic development aims to maximise the potential of Scotland's natural assets to support growth in national priority industries such as tourism, food and drink and renewable energy.

Project overview

The opportunities for tourism development on the Banffshire Coast were identified via independent research carried out in 2005. The outstanding landscapes and seascapes of the coast were identified as strengths, with weaknesses including poor quality accommodation and tourist products, lack of profile, peripherality and a lack of co-ordinated tourist industry activity.

The Banffshire Coast Tourism Partnership (BCTP), a volunteer-run membership organisation, wrote a comprehensive business plan that set out a programme to address some of the weaknesses and capitalise on the strengths identified in the 2005 research. It was awarded a total of £200,000 in funding from a combination of Scottish Enterprise, LEADER and Aberdeenshire Council in September 2009 to deliver the aspirations set out in the business

plan, which comprised a number of projects and initiatives. One of these initiatives was the employment of two part-time development staff to ensure the delivery of projects within budget and timescale. Scottish Enterprise wrote the LEADER application and was the body responsible for the overall financial claims and reporting to LEADER.

The Development Manager was responsible for the delivery of a number of initiatives and projects, including:

- ▶ the development of a new website, including a mobile-friendly version;
- ▶ delivering a marketing plan for the area, including rebranding, the website, social media activity and a number of marketing initiatives;
- ▶ delivery, via third parties, of a programme of workshops and seminars, including 'Listening to Our Visitors', business measurement, quality assurance, marketing, food tourism development and social media;
- ▶ commissioning an accommodation opportunities research study, a Visitor Feedback mechanism and a Photographs Library;
- ▶ project managing marketing collateral, including a What to Do and See Guide, 3 walking leaflets and a mobile website promotional flyer;
- ▶ growing the membership base to ensure future sustainability; and,
- ▶ establishing an effect means of membership communication, including members meetings.

Challenges of delivering the project

The Scottish Enterprise project director noted that staff turnover for the support role had caused some delay to the delivery of the project because it was challenging finding someone with the requisite skills to do the job.

A learning point for the BCTP over the duration of the project was that the organisation had anticipated that members (i.e. local tourism businesses) would visit the office with enquiries, but this did not happen. The BCTP has now channelled resources away from having a physical office (the development manager works from home) and into supporting members through outreach work.

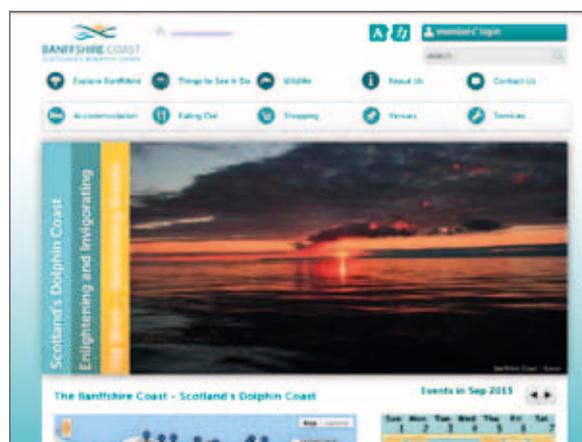
Impacts

The 3-year programme funding enabled the BCTP to deliver all the initiatives and projects that they set out to achieve. This was made possible through the employment of staff for the first time, rather than relying on volunteers. Having paid staff delivering tourism initiatives and projects helped the BCTP become recognised as,

‘a key player in the Aberdeenshire tourism infrastructure [and] build strong links with other organisations including VisitScotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, Aberdeenshire Council. The impact of this now is that we are invited to participate in initiatives – we’re on the radar’. (BCTP Project Manager)

The Banffshire Coast website was launched in 2010, and has since been updated and restructured, with a launch of a mobile-friendly version. The Project Manager said that the website had given BCTP the infrastructure to be able to strengthen their ability to promote the area, and that it was a minimal cost to maintain now it is done.

The membership of BCTP almost doubled, from 50 businesses to 90 by the end of the 3 year project, which provides an income stream and supports future sustainability.



BCTP website

The refreshed website uses images from the photo library, a catalogued store of over 800 photos of the area. Because the BCTP owns the licence for these images, it means that they no longer need to pay to use photos. BCTP can give images to others to help them promote the area, for example BCTP gave over 130 photos and the marketing flyer developed by BCTP to an Aberdeenshire Council employee who is responsible for promoting the area in Germany (there are three flights a day from Aberdeen to Frankfurt).

The Visitors Survey means that the BCTP gets factual rather than anecdotal information and can tailor its marketing accordingly.

The BCTP also brokered a project with Wendy Barrie, author of the Scottish Food Guide and a leading contributor to the Scottish food scene, in which local businesses could receive training and advice from Wendy for a subsidised fee – something which wouldn't have been possible if the businesses were operating without the umbrella of BCTP.

Looking to the future

The BCTP were awarded a further three years funding from Scottish Enterprise, Aberdeenshire Council, the European Fisheries Fund and the Scottish Government for the Project Manager to continue the work that began under the LEADER-funded programme.

3 Boyndie broadband service

Total project cost: £76,212 LEADER funding: £68,591

Organisation overview

The Whitehills & District Community Council is a conduit for the views and aspirations of the local community between Banff and Portsoy on the north east coast of Scotland. The Community Council facilitates dialogue between local people and organisations (e.g. public agencies) and develops projects for the benefit of the local community. It has nine Community Councillors which are democratically elected from within the community.

Project overview

Some years ago, Boyndie telephone exchange was closed by BT, which split telecom services for the community. Coastal properties are served by Whitehills Exchange and inland properties by Portsoy Exchange. However, due to the distance from Portsoy, the inland properties (approximately 100 properties, roughly 20 of which are businesses) are unable to receive broadband service via BT lines.

The Community Council undertook a community consultation to determine demand for improved broadband for the 100 properties. It found that many residents felt disadvantaged and isolated, for example through not being able to engage in web-based social networking, or to order their shopping on line – something particularly difficult for those without their own transport. Out of the 100 potential properties that could benefit from broadband, 55 registered their interest at this consultation meeting.

Broadband Enabling Technology (BET) is the product name for a new technology designed to address the problems of the non-availability or slow speed of broadband in rural areas. It has been pioneered in Scotland by Scotnet, the internet service provider for BET.

BET technology amplifies the broadband signal as it travels along the user's phone line. By use of signal boosters located at the approximate mid-point of the phone line, the reach of standard broadband can be almost doubled¹⁷. Through using BET, this LEADER-funded project was designed to improve broadband speeds for local businesses and households in the Boyndie area that wished to take up a new service.

The cost of installation of BET technology is £1,500 per property. LEADER funding was sufficient for this initial capital outlay for 40 properties. Of the initial 55 that registered their interest, 43 properties benefitted from the BET technology (the Community Council funded 10% of the cost).

Challenges of delivering the project

There were a number of challenges of delivering the broadband service. The first was that the application form for the service could only be completed online. To overcome this logistical problem, Boyndie Visitors' Centre, one of the first properties to benefit, invited people to complete their forms at the Visitor's Centre.

There was considerable delay with the installation of the service because the BT engineers were unfamiliar with the new BET technology. This caused frustration on the part of residents, some of whom had to wait for a long time for the service. Another time-delay was caused because of the nature of LEADER funding operating on defrayed expenditure, i.e. the work needs to be completed and paid for before a claim can be made to LEADER. Because the Community Council did not have sufficient funds to pay for every property to have BET installed upfront, a waiting list was in place and the installation was done in phases, with 15 properties having the work done at a

¹⁷ www.scotnet.co.uk/services/rural-broadband-solutions/

time. Whilst the allocation process was fair with names being drawn out of a hat, it meant that properties further down the list were waiting for many months and the Community Council borrowed money in order to pay for some installations.

The long delays, and perceived complications in getting a service connected by BT Openreach after lodging an order, led to a loss of confidence in the BET system and to some potential customers withdrawing their interest. Several others decided against the Scotnet system because they had found big improvements in internet services available via the mobile phone network, and decided to stick with that rather than risk transferring to Scotnet.

Impacts

Not being able to conduct basic business activities online was forcing the manager of the Boyndie Visitor's Centre, a sizeable local employee with 35 paid members of staff, to consider moving elsewhere, which would have led to unemployment and the removal of a centre of local economic activity. Through the installation of broadband, businesses in the Boyndie area are now able to do online banking, pay staff through PAYE, order goods online and do (mandatory) online VAT returns.



Boyndie Visitor's Centre

A local farmer described life before broadband, in which he couldn't partake in online cattle auctions or look at cattle

movements, nor look at the Scottish Government regulations (e.g. on nitrate vulnerable zones) or information (e.g. on sources of funding) or complete forms (e.g. farming subsidies). He is now able to operate and compete on equal terms to his peers.

An important impact of the Boyndie Broadband project was enabling school children to do homework that required the internet; they had been having to stay late at school to use school computers, or make alternative arrangements. As one resident explained, 'you're left behind without broadband.'



Looking to the future

The broadband service received through BET by the 43 Boyndie residents and businesses appears to be suitable for their current needs. Should the remaining residents want BET technology installed, they will need to pay the considerable £1,500 fee which may prevent wider take-up. A longer term solution that would keep up with technological developments would be the installation of a BT fibre optic cable; something that is not being considered by BT at present.

4 Forest Education Initiative Co-ordinator

Total project cost: £120,000 LEADER funding: £7,614

Organisation overview

The Forest Education Initiative (FEI) aims to increase the understanding and appreciation, particularly among young people, of the environment, social and economic potential of trees, woodlands and forests, and of the link between the tree and everyday wood products (see www.foresteducation.org)

Project overview

LEADER funding supported the employment of an FEI Co-ordinator to support sustainable woodland education projects, thereby raising awareness and increasing the use of the woodland environment and in doing so meeting the aims of the FEI.

The FEI Co-ordinator worked on a number of projects, including:

1. Improving environmental education in schools through Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teaching staff

Example activities: The FEI Co-ordinator has supported teachers to embed outdoor learning into the curriculum through giving talks to head teachers and CPD training sessions to teachers to increase their confidence in using their local woodland and other habitats for environmental education. One example is a Forest Skills workshop delivered by the FEI Co-ordinator to 60 teachers from across Scotland.

2. Forest Activity Programmes for schools

Example activity: The FEI Co-ordinator supported local teachers and students to develop an outdoor classroom on a piece of unused forest owned by the local school. He taught fire-lighting and forest safety to small groups of students and a local forestry contractor demonstrated timber-milling and helped the students to build benches,

tables and a shelter using the timber. Across all activity programmes, the FEI have catered for around 130 children.

3. Demonstrations of forestry and forest management

Example activity: The FEI Co-ordinator had a stall at the TechFest conference (www.techfestsetpoint.org.uk/tis/) – the annual festival promoting science, technology, engineering and mathematics to young people. In contrast to the high-tech nature of the conference, the FEI have a mini forest and give demonstrations during the week of how to use timber. Over 600 school children visited the stall over the course of the week.

4. Supporting and delivering Forest Schools

Example activity: The FEI Co-ordinator arranged and facilitated a Level 3 Open College Network Forest School Leaders course for 16 trainees, and has supported these trainees to develop their own Forest School programmes.

5. Teacher training

Example activity: The FEI Co-ordinator contributes to B. Ed. teacher training programmes at Dundee University (80 students) and Aberdeen University (70 students) Schools of Education and lectured on sustainable development education to 20 students studying for degrees in Countryside Management and Environmental Management at SRUC in Aberdeen.

Impacts

The CPD element of the FEI Co-ordinator's role has, according to the Co-ordinator, had a multiplier effect. Through training teachers in outdoor education, they then pass on their knowledge to a new cohort of children each year. The FEI Co-ordinator estimates that

450-500 children are benefitting from Forest Schools support each year either directly from sessions delivered by FEI or by one of the Forest School Programmes, of which there are 15-20 across Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire.

Teachers can act as ambassadors for outdoor education for their school or nursery and encourage other staff members to become trained or involved in outdoor learning. For example, one teacher explained that,

‘. . . you need the knowledge to know how to use nature. . . Training in Forest Schools gave me the tools. If I hadn’t had the training, my initial interest would never have been sparked’.

She described the ways in which the outdoor education sessions she leads in a nursery in Gardenstown are fostering the interest of children and parents in nature.



Outdoor play area in Gardenstown

These ranged from one of the children’s grandparent’s building a bird hide in the school grounds with the children’s help, to one little boy asking for chickens for his birthday present, to a parent sending the teacher a photo of her son climbing a tree, with a note saying ‘Who taught him this?’

The FEI Co-ordinator set up a meeting between the Open College Network (OCN) and the Forest Education Initiative about creating an outdoor education group with a more commercial focus. A separate organisation, North East Scotland Outdoor Learning Group (NESOLG), was established and the FEI Co-ordinator is delivering training on the OCN accredited course it provides.

Challenges of delivering the project

Squeezed public spending is having a knock-on effect on the FEI. The Co-ordinator highlighted that whilst there is a shift in the Curriculum for Excellence towards a broader learning style and connection with Forest Education, this is not matched by staffing levels: there is one person based in the Scottish Government with responsibility for outdoor education. There appears to be a mismatch between the expectation that schools do outdoor education and the central commitment to resourcing it.

Looking to the future

The FEI Co-ordinator was tasked with facilitating a network of Forest School trained educators, which he anticipates will become a self-sustaining network. This network is highly valued by two beneficiaries of the project to whom we spoke. The multiplier effect of CPD and other teacher training (e.g. in Forest Schools), teaching modules to students on university courses, and demonstrations to young people at events like TechFest spread the love of nature and outdoors that FEI is aiming for. This dispersal of knowledge helps to ensure the longevity of the impact of the FEI Co-ordinator:

‘The [FEI Co-ordinators]’ love of nature has helped me love nature and pass it on – it’s a ripple effect.’ (Forest Schools trained teacher).

5 Fyvie Homecoming Festival

Total project costs: £40,620 LEADER funding: £4,800

Organisation overview

Fyvie is a village with a population of about 500¹⁸. Fyvie Amenities Committee exists to look after the facilities in the village, with the help of volunteers and organisations based there. The committee acted as the official conduit for the grant applications and disbursements for the Fyvie Homecoming Festival.

'Homecoming Scotland 2009' was a series of events designed to attract people of Scottish ancestry to visit Scotland

LEADER funded project overview

LEADER was a funder of a three day Homecoming Festival held in various locations around the village of Fyvie.



Fyvie Laird offering the Quaich

A Fyvie Homecoming Festival Organising Committee was established to organise and manage the festival. It included representatives from festival partners such as Fyvie Castle, Fyvie Folk Club, Fyvie Parish Church and choir, The Royal British Legion and Fyvie Amenities Committee.

Events included:

- ▶ Folk concert at Fyvie Castle, featuring folk musicians Eric Bogle and John Munro (120 attendees)
- ▶ Scottish Evening and traditional Burns' Supper (80 attendees)
- ▶ 'Open Village' with venues throughout Fyvie holding exhibitions and entertainment
- ▶ Lunchtime jazz concert with soup and sandwiches
- ▶ Opportunity to trace family roots and links to Fyvie
- ▶ Football Gala (50 players)
- ▶ Ballad Bus Tour led by Fyvie Folk Club (51 participants)
- ▶ Family Ceilidh (150 attendees)
- ▶ Homecoming Songs of Praise
- ▶ Community Garden Party at Fyvie castle (3,000 – 4,000 attendees) with over 40 commercial stands and entertainment throughout the day.

The festival involved a wide range of organisations and individuals and Alex Salmond attended the Community Garden Party in his capacity as First Minister. The event also received a large amount of in kind support: Fyvie Women's Group provided soup and sandwiches; the Rainbows provided bunting; the Air Cadets stewarded the parking; and many local organisations and businesses provided entertainment, refreshments and stands at the Community Garden Party.

The event publicity was extensive, both in UK and overseas. It included Fyvie Primary School to carry out a project on Famous Fyvie Folk, which was exhibited at the festival.

¹⁸ www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/statistics/population/smallarea_settlements.asp

Challenges of delivering the project

Before the festival, the organisers reported that some members of the local community were sceptical about the need and demand for it, and that some local businesses were not forthcoming with sponsorship because they were doubtful that the event would bring in the visitors that the organisers anticipated.

The resilience and determination of the organising committee meant that they were not deterred and instead sought support from other businesses and organisations.

One event – the tea dance – was cancelled due to lack of interest, but anyone who had bought a ticket was reimbursed and the lack of interest in this was far outweighed by the overwhelming attendance at other sell-out events.

There were a few, inevitable logistical challenges on the day, such as the Ballad Bus arriving late, but these difficulties were resolved and 'many felt the Ballad Bus Tour was one of the highlights of the festival' (Chairman of the Festival Organising Committee).

Impacts

The scale and financial backing of the festival enabled organisers and participating organisations to involve high profile individuals which would otherwise have been too financially risky. For example, for example inviting Eric Bogle to perform at the Folk Concert.

According to the Chairman of the Festival Organising Committee, the strong interest that this high profile event generated has helped with the revival of Fyvie cultural heritage and identity of the area.

Visitors to the festival included people from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, USA, and Europe. A festival organiser described old links being rekindled with people outside the area and some have been back since the event,

showing that the festival has contributed to giving local tourism a boost.

The festival brought together many different groups and individuals, resulting in the development of networks and cultural communities 'like a big happy family' (Chair of Fyvie Folk Club). Participants described making new friends, new contacts and gained an insight into cultural opportunities that are open to them.

As a result of the festival there were economic impacts. With hundreds of people visiting the area and using local services, local businesses benefitted from this revenue. The local organisations who were involved in the event itself, such as the Royal British Legion which ran the Burns Supper, also benefited financially as they retained the profits from their individual events.

Looking to the future

The success of this inaugural Homecoming Festival means that the organisers are keen to run another in 2014. Planning and preparations will soon be under way.

The festival resulted in renewed interest in the area's local history. As a result, the Heritage Centre, based in Fyvie Primary School is being reopened, an electronic database of local records is now available and a 'Fyvie Heritage' Facebook group has been created, which is 'proving extremely popular' (Chairman of the Festival Organising Committee).



Dancers at the Garden Party

6 Glamourhaugh allotments creation

Total project cost: £51,381 LEADER funding: £25,690

Organisation overview

Huntly Rotary Club is part of the world-wide Rotary movement which aims to harness the energy and goodwill of local business and professional people in the development and promotion charitable works, both locally and internationally. At a local level, this includes supporting young people on youth development programmes, providing equipment and activities for older people and supporting community-based projects.

Project overview

The Huntly Rotary Club applied for LEADER funding to develop an under-used site at Glamourhaugh in the middle of Huntly, a town in north-west Aberdeenshire of just below 4,500 people. The site was formerly an allotment site, but was cleared in the early 1990s in anticipation of the site being built on. Since then, it has been ruled out as a possible building or development site due to its proximity to the River Bogie and risk of flooding.



Glamourhaugh allotment site before development

The project created an allotment site for the benefit of the Huntly community, providing growing space, a summerhouse, storage shed and a composting toilet. Sixteen plots were created and an all-ability footpath with seating areas was built to surround the fenced allotment.

Two members of Huntly Rotary Club were heavily involved: one managed the site development ('Allotment Site Manager') and the other managed the finances and administration ('Allotment Finance & Administration Manager').



Opening day at the allotments

Challenges of delivering the project

The Allotment Site Manager highlighted five key challenges to delivering the project: local opposition; planning regulations; practical and logistical issues; heavy time commitments, and dealing with LEADER finances.

In terms of local opposition, some local residents had become accustomed to,

'using the site as their private garden... they did what they could to stop it' (Allotment Site Manager).

This local resistance, combined with difficulties negotiating the Council's Planning Department were obstacles that took some time and perseverance to resolve and which caused the people involved in the project considerable stress:

***'I fell out with Planning in a big way. We had got along fine until they said that every single plot holder had to apply for planning permission.'* (Allotment Site Manager)**

The practicalities were challenging: from getting water to the site and creating a well, to managing contractors and installing a compostable toilet. The financial challenge of the LEADER claims process operating on defrayed expenditure almost caused the project to stall, with the Rotary Club committing some of its own finances to safeguard against a potential shortfall.

Another challenge was the time involved in delivering such a large-scale site development project. The huge effort and time commitment of both Rotary Club members cannot be overstated. The Allotment Site Manager, for example, estimated that he put in around 400 hours (or nearly 60 days) of his time.



Allotment Site Manager

Impacts

The immediate impact of bringing an under-used piece of land into use is on the visual landscape. Additional trees and hedging were planted as part of the project which are growing well and providing a place for birds and insects to flourish. The path around the outside of the allotments is well-used, Allotment Fundraiser & Administrator has observed elderly people walking on the path and making use of a bench by the river which the Rotary Club funded to enhance the allotment site for local residents.



Raised beds in the allotment

The ambition for the allotments was that they would become,

'... more than a place that people would go and grow vegetables, and I think that's happened – I think people go there and meet, they socialise.'
(Allotment Fundraiser & Administrator).

According to a local health and wellbeing charity worker, who works for the charity Huntly Mental Health, this aspiration is being realised. The charity manages three of the 16 plots, and the employee described the positive difference that being part of the allotment brings to the people she works with. She has observed the summerhouse acting as a social space for service users to meet, socialise, learn and share their knowledge of growing with other plot holders. She has observed her clients becoming more confident and open through their involvement in the allotments.

Community events such as the Big Lunch have been held at the allotments, and local school children have used the site as the school has a plot there. It has also been used to run a permaculture course; progressive drystone dyking and trellis horticultural network meetings.

7 The Harvest Folk Festival – ‘The Second Hairst’

Total costs: £9,342 LEADER funding: £5,818

Project overview

The inaugural Deeside Harvest Folk Festival in Portarch was held in September 2011. It aimed to provide a platform to contribute to the revival of Scots ballads and ‘muckle sangs’ that originate in the North East of Scotland. Organisers and participants were keen to build on the success of the first festival which took place in 2008, and applied for LEADER funding to contribute to costs associated with making ‘The Second Hairst’ an even bigger event to include local food as well as local music.

The director of Birsland Media, a locally based multimedia company, was the driving force behind the festival and it was Birsland Media that made the application for LEADER funding.

The director galvanised an organising team of seven enthusiastic local people who were responsible for running the event. They all had an interest in local culture and some performed in the festival.

This festival was run over three days, from Friday to Sunday. Over 30 performers, from 14 years old upwards, were involved in the events which included:

- ▶ Friday: Harvest supper in local hotel with guest speaker Shirley Spears from the Three Chimneys restaurant in Skye
- ▶ Saturday: Afternoon concert of ballads and traditional music
- ▶ Saturday: Evening concert including well-known Scottish singer/songwriter Dougie McLean
- ▶ Sunday: Storytelling by Lorna and Derek Summers
- ▶ Sunday: Open mic sessions

Audience members came from all over Aberdeenshire and Scotland as well as from countries abroad, such as the USA. Organisers estimated that 100 people attended during each of the daytime events on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and about 200 people attended the evening concert on Saturday.

Challenges in delivering the project

The Portarch Hotel was used because it was the only local pub/restaurant. However, it has limited capacity and was sometimes slightly overwhelmed by demand for food and drink by festival goers. Organisers suggested that future festival of this size that they run will probably be held in areas where there are more and/or larger local venues for festival goers to eat and drink.

Organisers experienced issues with the marquee they hired, in particular they found it too large and difficult to heat. They plan to use permanent buildings as venues in the future.

The variable quality of performers and the open mic session led organisers to reconsider holding this in the future.

Impacts

The festival brought people with similar interests together. One organiser felt that the best thing about the festival was ‘Folk getting together and sharing music, ideas and song... like a big family’. Singers felt that by coming together they gained new friends and new contacts, which will allow for more musical collaboration in the future.

The local economy benefitted from the festival. Local businesses, such as B&Bs and the farm shop, commented to organisers that they had enjoyed the festival goers being around and had profited from their patronage of local services and accommodation.

The festival showcased local talent in ballad singing and the festival organisers saw it as contributing to the revival of this local art form. The Festival Director felt that this revival is important for a number of reasons:

‘it gives us a sense of the past, a sense of identity and a sense of place through Scots language.’

Organisers saw the Harvest festival as the catalyst for a number of educational initiatives with young people. These included: the festival director working with Onye School to hold a ‘School Oscars’ using ballads; young people being involved in the ‘Kist o’ Riches’ which works to preserve, digitise, catalogue and make available online several thousand Gaelic and Scots recordings; and the festival director being appointed Artist in Residence at the School of Celtic and Scottish Studies at Edinburgh University.

‘It’s not just a once a year event.’ (Festival Director)

Future/legacy

This year the Director has not had the free time to apply for funding, so the 2013 festival will run as a slightly smaller event. However, organisers plan to have a festival in 2014 that will encompass more venues. Ideas for expanding the festival include:

- ▶ Using a less remote venue for example by holding bits of the festival in Aboyne or Banchory; and
- ▶ Including a film element – collaborating with contemporary film makers to create film soundtracks



Portarch Hotel



8 Linking with Finland

Total costs: £6,600 LEADER funding: £4,950

Organisation overview

Huntly is a town of almost 4,500 residents in the North West of Aberdeenshire. The Huntly Development Trust (HDT) led the 'Linking with Finland' initiative, an exploratory visit to Finland with a view to establishing a transnational cooperation project. The Trust has 12 volunteers and two staff members, and aims *'to build a resilient, inclusive, enterprising community capable of dealing with ongoing change.'*¹⁹ It does this through developing and managing projects to make the town a better place to live, work and visit.

In January 2010, a Finnish LEADER-funded delegation from the area of Juankoski in Finland visited Aberdeenshire with a view to learning from and perhaps linking up with a Scottish community. A cooperation project with Huntly was proposed as a result of this visit and the next step was to explore ways in which this could work.

Project overview

LEADER funding contributed towards travel, accommodation and meals for a group of six community members from five organisations in Huntly to visit Juankoski for four days in September 2010. The purpose of the visit was to explore ways in which Huntly could collaborate with Finnish partners on projects that would bring lasting benefit to both communities.

The particular interests of the different organisations were as follows:

- ▶ HDT was interested in renewable energy, rural tourism, food and drink, environmental issues and local currency;
- ▶ Huntly Nordic Ski Club in gaining a temporary ski coach;
- ▶ Aberdeenshire Council in youth exchanges and projects in music, film and digital media;
- ▶ Huntly Mental Health Association in community gardening and wider mental health issues; and
- ▶ Deveron Arts in art in the rural Scandinavian context.

The trip to Juankoski included visits to local sites of potential interest, such as schools, a community garden, church and art gallery, as well as meetings and presentations with community members and representatives of the University of Eastern Finland to explore potential areas of linkage.

Challenges in delivering the project

Because the project involved a four day trip abroad, participants had to give careful consideration to its timing and length in order that it would fit in with their families, work and other commitments.

Impacts

From this scoping visit all visiting organisations, except the Nordic Ski Club, were able to achieve at least some of their objectives in learning about their areas of interest (see above). The Ski Club found that Juankoski was not a suitable place to find a coach because they do not have a tradition of competitive Nordic skiing there. Instead the club became interested in building a forest cabin as a sheltered base for members and young skiers similar to that which they had seen in a Finnish forest. All participants identified a range of potential areas for the communities to learn about from each other.

Dominant themes emerged after discussions between Finnish and Scottish partners. Themes included youth music and traditional building skills and these guided the areas and activities for the partnership.

¹⁹ www.huntly.net/community/groups/details.php?name=Huntly+Development+Trust

Participants spoke of differences made by the follow-on activities that came about as a result of this first visit. Activities included:

- ▶ An additional two Finnish LAGs joined the partnership in May 2011 to help progress the youth music activities;
- ▶ Representatives from all three Finnish LAGs visited Huntly in May 2011 to plan the themes and activities;
- ▶ In December 2012 Huntly was successful in its application to LEADER for funding of the 'Yes CommAct' transnational cooperation project between Aberdeenshire LAG and the 3 Finnish LAGs;
- ▶ 'YesCommAct' project activities run Jan-Dec 2013 and relate to youth music and skills exchange.

Currently, two staff and one volunteer from Huntly Development Trust are working (part-time) on the activities. One staff member each from the Mental Health Association and Aberdeenshire Council (Youth Forum) and two volunteers from the Nordic Ski Club manage an area:

- ▶ HDT leads on project management, local skills development, archaeology and alternative technology;
- ▶ Huntly Mental Health Association leads dry stone walling, community gardening and the promotion of mental health;
- ▶ Huntly Youth Forum (Aberdeenshire Council) leads youth music development and exchange; and
- ▶ Huntly Nordic Ski Club leads on shelter building

Participants, volunteers and staff who are currently involved in these strands described a range of impacts of the activities. Some felt that for the participants the cross cultural exchange afforded not only an opportunity to learn from each other's cultures but also to reflect on their own rich Scottish culture which created a greater sense of pride in their community, its people, culture and heritage.

'My dad and grandad did stone dyking so that got me interested in it... We'll be teaching others so it's not just a Scottish thing' (Participant)

Representatives from the lead organisations explained that being able to travel abroad is rare for some participants and that this adventure broadens their horizons and gives them a sense of achievement and self-confidence.

***'I didn't think I'd be able to do something like that.'*(Participant)**

Participants saw YesCommAct as fostering a sense of community and support. By having a 'Team Huntly' made up of a diverse group of all ages and many different interests and skills, they felt that this contributes to community cohesion.



Stonewalling project with participants

Looking to the future

Huntly community members are keen to build on the improved partnership working within their own community that has resulted from the project and to explore possibilities for further collaboration with Finland and elsewhere in the future.

9 MacRobert Hall development project

Total project costs: £316,511 LEADER funding: £100,000



Organisation overview

Tarland is a village in the Marr area of Aberdeenshire with a population of 600. The Tarland Welfare Trust is responsible for the MacRobert Memorial Hall, which is the only public hall in the village.

The hall was completed in 1955 and is managed on behalf of the community by seven locally elected trustees.

Project overview

The hall was previously in poor decorative order, was cold, hard to heat and had only limited facilities. A community survey in 2007 identified that only 10% of respondents felt the hall was currently central to the community but that 80% felt that it should be central to the community. Respondents identified a number of redevelopments in the hall that were needed to make it more welcoming and useable, for current and future needs.

LEADER funded the structural elements of an extensive development and upgrading of the hall. The project was initiated in March 2007 and the newly refurbished hall opened in May 2012.

A planning group was formed to oversee the hall development project, which included trustees, representatives from all the regular user groups and other community volunteers interested in the development of the hall.

The hall developments included:

- ▶ Structural adaptations
- ▶ Improving energy efficiency through insulation, relining some walls and some new windows
- ▶ Adapting certain areas to be better equipped for regular groups, e.g. understage storage for indoor bowling carpets, and rewiring for sound and projection
- ▶ Redecoration
- ▶ Upgrade of kitchen and servery
- ▶ New WCs
- ▶ Stage lighting and sound system
- ▶ New heating installation



Band performing in the Main Hall

The hall opening day saw 300 people enjoying a local pipe band, tours of the hall, free teas and a dance in the evening.

Challenges of delivering the project

One learning point for trustees from the experience was the time it takes to carry out a redevelopment project like this, as it took five years from start to hall re-opening. Significant elements of this were building the involvement and commitment of the community and securing the funding package.

Although all options for aspects of the redevelopment were thoroughly considered, the infra red heating system recommended for the main hall was ineffective for some circumstances, including when the outside temperature is well below zero. This will be changed.

Impacts

The hall improvements have made it a far more comfortable and user-friendly space.

'It is fantastic now – warm and comfortable' (Hall user)

Hall usage has increased dramatically since the refurbishments were carried out. The hall was previously used by a small number of regular groups and there are now 13 groups using it (including youth cinema, amateur dramatics and art club).

These regular groups include those that promote and facilitate health and exercise (such as badminton sessions) as well as those that develop skills (e.g. amateur dramatics). A suitable space, as provided by this hall, is crucial to the existence of these groups. With more such groups available to residents this will contribute towards there being a better-skilled and healthier population in the area.

A community volunteer who supports the youth cinema group that runs in the upper hall, spoke of developments that have customised the hall to the needs of this group by permanently installing wires and systems to accommodate a film projector. She felt that 'the kids see this as their space' and that this contributes to the success of the project in facilitating young people to gain independence (through attending this alone), socialise and get involved in community activism and becoming active citizens by running the project themselves.

There are also now many one-off events. The trustees, in the business plan set targets for future utilisation of the hall – most of which have been exceeded. These included concerts,

ceilidhs, christening and birthday parties and a funeral, as well as seasonal events such as a farmers' market and the flower show. This range shows that the hall plays a part in a variety of areas of community and personal life and a trustee saw the hall as providing 'A centre and focus to the community'.

Trustees felt that the hall contributes to economic prosperity of the area, as the hall developments contribute to the assets of the village and mean that more people are coming in and using local services. Furthermore, the work on this building was undertaken largely by local trades people, contributing in this way also to the local economy.

Trustees also felt that the success of this project is inspiring others in the village and giving them the confidence to apply for other grants. People involved in the development project have advised other similar hall redevelopment projects in Aberdeenshire on the processes involved, so will contribute to developing more halls in the area.



Trustees in the Upper Hall

Looking to the future

The hall upgrades will benefit the community for years to come. Further improvements are being considered by trustees including installing wi-fi as it could provide a service to those who do not have it in their homes, as well as enhancing the venue and possibly allowing teaching of IT skills to take place in the hall.

10 Mearns FM – community radio for the southern Mearns

Total project costs: £7,919 LEADER funding: £3,959



Organisation overview

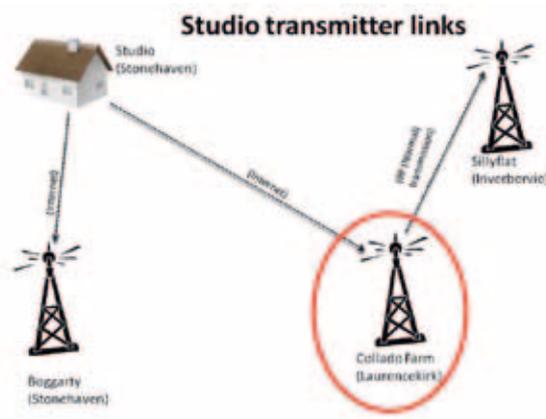
Mearns FM is a community radio station that serves Stonehaven, Inverbervie, Laurencekirk and the towns and villages within the Mearns area. Established in 2009, it was the first community radio station in the area. A team of about 40 volunteers broadcast music, specialist programmes, news and local community information 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The station also provides live events broadcasting and roadshows. The station has two studios – the main one in Stonehaven Town Hall, and a second in Mackie Academy. Volunteers range from teenage students to retired people and include groups from a local mental health support group, the Mearns Youth Forum and a number of local schools. Local churches also supply services for broadcast. People within a 15 mile radius can listen over the air. There also listeners from across the country and from abroad who listen online at www.mearnsfm.org.uk and regularly contact presenters by e-mail.

LEADER-funded project overview

LEADER provided funding to undertake work on the transmitter mast and radio station on Collardo Farm Garvock, Laurencekirk. The stay wires on the mast had corroded to such an extent that it was no longer useable. A temporary short transmitter mast was in place, but this was not suitable for the exposed location. The work on the mast involved replacing the corroded stays, treating the main

mast, moving the transmission aerial from the temporary mast to the top of the repaired mast and servicing to Ofcom standards. LEADER funding also supported the renovation of a portacabin which provides secure shelter and equipment storage at the foot of the mast.

The signal from the renovated permanent transmitter mast is also rebroadcast by the Inverbervie transmitter and the two transmitters service an area of 250km². Without the functioning mast only a third of the present transmission area would receive Mearns FM.



Challenges of delivering the project

Mearns FM experienced some challenges relating to carrying out the work on the mast. Severe winter weather meant that they were unable to conduct the work at the planned time and they therefore had to request an extension on the project from LEADER. This was granted relatively easily and the work was carried out once the weather improved.

Reaching all parts of the community presents a further challenge because some areas such as Johnshaven are located amongst hills which physically restrict the signal.

Estimating listener numbers is a further challenge because the station does not have the resources to regularly poll residents in the coverage area. As a result it is unable to capture the location and volume of listeners and therefore the understanding of impact and reach.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of the radio station as there are no paid staff. They present and provide all the technical support. However, there are challenges with using volunteers. Presenters sometimes experience personal challenges that affect their ability to present shows. For example, one volunteer's home has been flooded, ruining equipment he needs to transmit his shows. Furthermore, it can be challenging to manage communication between such a large number of volunteers who are rarely in the studio at the same time.

Impacts

Beneficiaries include the volunteer presenters who come from a wide range of backgrounds. For those who may have experienced periods of isolation, unemployment or ill health, the experience of being a presenter can offer a constructive activity that gives them confidence and feelings of pride and self worth. For instance, a man who was 14 years unemployed and having difficulty coping described volunteering at the station as providing a meaning and focus to his life, and making him feel proud of himself. A 78 year old retired engineer described the sense of satisfaction that being a volunteer presenter at Mearns FM gives him and that when people mention they have heard his show, 'It gives you that lift'.

The new transmitter allows coverage of a far wider area, so people in the new areas are able to benefit from the station activity. Listeners communicate with presenters and each other through social media as well as by telephone and e-mail. In this way the station can be seen as an 'on air community', in some cases helping to reduce isolation.

The impact of Mearns FM also extends to the wider community, and was perceived as giving the area an increased feeling of identity, which has suffered from county border changes:

'I think it is making us all a little more likely to think Mearns. It is a distinct, rich, cultural area and the station enjoys celebrating it.'
(Ex-Convener of Mearns FM)

The ex-Convener of Mearns FM also felt that the radio contributes to a feeling of community spirit, through publicising events and developing local talents and interests.



Presenters in the studio

Looking to the future

The committee and presenters estimate that the transmitter mast will last for the next 20 years, allowing the transmission of Mearns FM programmes to the surrounding areas and enabling individuals in those areas to benefit.

Committee members hope to upgrade its equipment in the future with updated headphones, mixing tables and training on how to use them. They may also apply to Ofcom for permission to increase transmission power levels in order to further improve reception.

11 New Deer on the up and up

Total project costs: £26,055 LEADER funding: £10,366

Organisation overview

New Deer is a parish that covers 51.5km². The New Deer Community Association was formed in 1953. It owns and maintains the Public Hall and the Pleasure Park. It comprises four trustees and a committee of representatives from 27 local organisations and six private members.

The hall committee is responsible for managing the public hall. The community association employs a hall keeper to maintain the hall and a village orderly to maintain the local community area.

LEADER funded project overview

The public hall has always been used for a wide range of activities by a variety of groups for regular and one-off meetings and performances. Parent and toddlers, sewing groups, touring professional theatre groups and private functions are regular uses.



Committee members by new WC

A recent community consultation identified that the hall needed a number of improvements for the hall to be used to its full potential. The consultation identified the following improvements were needed:

- ▶ building a multi-use accessible toilet upstairs;

- ▶ new chairs;
- ▶ improving and modernising the upstairs small hall; and
- ▶ demountable audience tiering.



Tiering unassembled

Challenges of delivering the project

Despite careful research by the committee into the most appropriate tiering, there are some inevitable unanticipated issues. In particular these relate to the time it takes to assemble and take down, and also the space it takes up in the main hall when assembled

Impacts

The new equipment and improvements have resulted in benefits for a range of people. Firstly, people who are directly involved in the organisation and delivery of events and theatre performances are able to do this with greater ease. For instance, the tiered seating means that children can now view theatre shows easily. The new chairs are far easier to set up and clear away, and are more comfortable. People no longer need to bring along their personal cushions to sit on. As one person who has used them regularly explained:

‘The old chairs were hard to heave about and were really uncomfortable. Now people can enjoy sitting on them and people help to clear them at the end.’ (Community Association Committee Member)

Furthermore, the theatre companies use the revamped small hall as a changing area making for a pleasant experience for them and they then return to the venue on a regular basis.

Better facilities and equipment make the hall a more professional and versatile facility, meaning that groups from across the area should continue to use the facility.

Secondly, the improvements impact on people’s experiences of their surroundings. As one user explained:

‘[The small hall] is now lighter, brighter, cleaner. It feels bigger and more pleasant.’ (Community Association Committee Member)

The third area of impact is on the wider New Deer community. Better facilities enable the hall to be a continued focal point for the community, through regular groups and theatre performances and events, which helps to bring people of all ages together to enjoy events and groups.

“The hall brings people together and is used by the village” (Community Association Chair)

The new disabled access WC allows people who previously were prevented from using the hall to use it. For example, a group of elderly people from a local care home is now able to attend the whist drives held in the upstairs hall, in which young people from local schools are also involved.

Lastly, the improvements also lead to economic impacts as the hall is now more appropriate as a reception venue, for example for weddings and other celebrations. It is also more suitable for professional use, for example the NHS have used it as a meeting venue. These types of users utilise local businesses (caterers etc) and thereby contribute to the local economy.

Looking to the future

The legacy of this grant should be long-lasting, as the chairs, small hall, tiering and WC will be used for years to come.



New chairs in use

12 Portsoy Salmon Bothy Manager

Total project cost: £57,137 LEADER funding: £23,934

Organisation overview

Scottish Traditional Boat Festival (STBF) is a charity that organises and runs the annual Scottish Traditional Boat Festival in Portsoy (see www.stbfportsoy.com). In 2008, STBF bought the Portsoy Salmon Bothy from Aberdeenshire Council.

The Portsoy Salmon Bothy is a building with considerable heritage value and interest. It houses a museum in what were the ice chambers, displaying artefacts and information about Portsoy's harbours, the industry and trade, and the salmon fishing operations. It has a large meeting space for groups and events, and has a 'Wee Bothy': the sleeping quarters of the salmon fishermen (which remain complete with bunk beds). A separate LEADER grant supported the restoration of the Bothy, a listed building.



Portsoy Salmon Bothy

In 2011, STBF acquired the Portsoy Caravan Site, and has recently been gifted the neighbouring Portsoy Maritime Heritage boat house and 14 boats. It is currently in discussions with NESPT (North East Scotland Preservation Trust) about becoming the operator for a potential development into a bunkhouse of derelict cottages on a neighbouring site (see Back Green Options Appraisal case study).

Project overview

This LEADER-funded project included the appointment of a full-time manager for the Bothy with responsibility for: all aspects of running the facility and training the volunteer team; marketing and promoting the facility both online through the website (see www.salmonbothy.org.uk) and other social media, and offline through word-of-mouth, and securing accreditation from Museums Galleries Scotland for the Bothy Museum.

A small proportion of the funding was used to purchase items to enable to Bothy to host events (e.g. flip chart stands and a projector), external signage and the restoration of a boundary wall.

Challenges of delivering the project

The main challenge to delivering the project was that the Bothy Manager went on maternity leave part way through the project. However, an interim manager was able to be appointed to continue the day-to-day management of the building, volunteers and bookings.

An early challenge for the Bothy Manager was going through the process of securing museum accreditation through Museums Galleries Scotland because of the level of work involved, and because the manager had never been through this process before. She met this challenge in part through boosting her knowledge, e.g. of museum curation, by attending training courses.

Recruiting and keeping volunteers engaged was another challenge for the Bothy Manager, as the Bothy is almost entirely run and staffed by volunteers. Holding monthly volunteer events was one way the Manager kept volunteers engaged.

Impacts

The funding of the Bothy Manager was to ensure that the Bothy became a heavily used facility, which has happened:

***‘The use of the facility has been a huge success... the catalyst for this was the Manager having the overview of all elements.’
(STBF Chair)***

These ‘elements’ included setting up management systems and processes; volunteer recruitment and management; marketing, and going through the process of gaining museum accreditation.

The Bothy has a full calendar of activities, 25 volunteers on the books and a rich programme of events and activities: from monthly traditional music session ‘Folk at the Bothy’, to teaching school children traditional boat building skills, to the volunteer family historian working from the ‘Wee Bothy’, which also houses a growing resource bank about family history with books and resources available to browse or borrow on request. The voluntary genealogist gets people enquiring about their ancestry from all over the world via the Bothy website.

The funding for the Bothy Manager has finished and the former manager is now employed on a part-time basis through STBF to manage the marketing of the Bothy. The Bothy is run by volunteers, whose expertise and commitment is critical for the Bothy to function and be the vibrant community and educational resource that it is.

The impact of volunteering on the volunteers themselves cannot be underestimated. One volunteer described her participation in a range of Bothy activities – from the knitting club to boatbuilding – as ‘making life worth living’ and said that it ‘keeps me young’.



Bothy knitting club

Looking to the future

Funding for the Salmon Bothy Manager has ensured that this community facility has achieved museum accreditation, established a core team of volunteers, promoted the Bothy both on- and offline, and established financial and administrative systems for managing the Bothy. Whilst the post is no longer funded, these systems endure and the Bothy continues to be a heavily-used community facility, and the former-manager now works part time for the Bothy on marketing and promotion.

The Chair of STBF is clear that the Bothy is a community facility and available to hire at low cost. This means that he does not anticipate the Bothy becoming profitable. However, the fact that it is owned and managed by STBF which owns other businesses (e.g. the Caravan Park) and which looks set for further potential expansion (e.g. the management of a potential bunkhouse at the nearby site of Back Green) mean that they should be able to continue.

13 Strategic mink control in northern Scotland

Total costs: £919,295 Aberdeenshire LEADER funding: £63,029

Other LEADER LAG funding: £165,957

Project overview

Launched in Aberdeenshire in May 2011, the Scottish Mink Initiative is a community based initiative which aims to protect native wildlife by removing breeding American mink from North Scotland and the Highlands. Mink are an invasive species that is an aggressive opportunistic predator of a wide range of native species such as water vole, Atlantic salmon and grouse.

This initiative covers an area of 30,000km² in LEADER areas of Cairngorms, Moray, Tayside, Aberdeenshire and Highland and receives funding from all five LAGs.

The project is lead by Rivers and Fisheries Trusts of Scotland (RAFTS), an umbrella organisation representing Scotland's national network of 25 rivers and fisheries Trusts and Foundations. RAFTS' core objective is the 'conservation and enhancement of native freshwater fish and their environments in Scotland'²⁰.

There are 18 partner delivery organisations who put themselves forward to contribute to the project, including:

- ▶ University of Aberdeen;
- ▶ Cairngorms National Park Authority;
- ▶ Scottish Natural Heritage; and
- ▶ Scottish Wildlife Trust.

The main staff comprise a Project Development Manager, a Project Co-ordinator and three Mink Control Officers.

The initiative uses local volunteers to manage more than 1020 rafts and traps across Scotland. The wooden rafts are situated in areas in rivers and lakes where mink are likely to be

found. They have a clay pad under wooden tunnel. Curious mink will walk into the tunnel to investigate and in so doing will leave their tracks in the clay. The volunteer checks their raft at a minimum of once a week and reports any mink tracks or other tracks that they find in the clay. Volunteers are also responsible for traps which are designed to trap mink. There are over 550 volunteers involved across Scotland. In Aberdeenshire there are 180 volunteers and one Mink Control Officer.

Challenges in delivering the project

Staff reported that keeping volunteers engaged is challenging, especially because as the initiative progresses and is successful in removing most mink there are then only occasional mink sightings and trappings. This means that there is little activity and volunteers can become demotivated. The initiative is using this as an opportunity to explore ways of keeping volunteers engaged and staff are conducting research to this effect with Aberdeen University.



A raft

²⁰ www.rafts.org.uk/about-us/

To prevent other animals, such as otters, being caught in the traps by mistake, “otter guards” are fixed to the traps issued to the volunteers. Capture of non target animals is very rare.

Impacts

Since the initiative began, in Aberdeenshire in January 2011, preliminary results indicate that resident mink have been removed in up to two thirds of catchments including Aberdeenshire and significantly reduced in the remaining area (NB removal of all mink in catchments bordering areas with active mink populations is very difficult because of emigration from those areas). It is hoped that this is having a positive impact on native wildlife and game. Fewer mink in the area will allow native species to flourish, and one volunteer had noticed an increase in animals such as water voles since the initiative began in his area. However, staff were more cautious, as they felt it is not possible to measure changes over such a short period of time – recovery of populations is often a medium to long-term process. As such they felt that after a three year period impacts on wildlife might be measured. The Project Development Manager explained that, should the initiative be successful, it could impact positively on the local economy, as industries such as ecotourism rely on ground nesting birds, including sea bird colonies that would be preyed on by mink.



A trap

Volunteer involvement often makes use of land-based workers' existing skills (for example some volunteers are farmers and gamekeepers). The involvement of other volunteers also develops their knowledge and skills, particularly of animal tracks, as any tracks they find in their rafts need to be reported back to the co-ordinators.

The need to regularly check traps and rafts provides a positive activity for volunteers that gets them outside and exercising, which has health and wellbeing benefits. It also affords them the opportunity to get out and appreciate nature in the area in which they live, which can be enjoyable and rewarding. As one volunteer illustrated, on a recent inspection of his traps:

‘I saw a roe deer getting born. It was amazing’ (Volunteer)

Looking to the future

Bringing organisations together has the potential for assisting with conflict resolution through their involvement in the mink initiative. Some partner organisations are known to sometimes have tense relations with each other, and the Project Development Manager felt that their joint efforts in the successful control of mink may well have positive impacts on their working relations, leading to more partnership working in the future between different types of organisations.

In August 2013 the LEADER funding will cease but staff have developed alternative ways of working to allow the initiative to continue with reduced funding. This includes the building of volunteer networks where volunteers support each other, thereby reducing the involvement of paid staff. They are aiming to embed the initiative in nine local rivers and fisheries Trusts through use of a guide to good practice, handover process and national online reporting system.

The project has learnt a number of key lessons and demonstrated successful control on a landscape scale. RAFTS and its project partners are working to use this model of tackling mink for other invasive animals and plants, such as aquatic and riparian plants, in the future.

14 Turriff Haughs Exhibition Hall

Total project cost: £180,736 LEADER funding: £66,000

Organisation overview

Turriff is a small market town of just over 4,000 people in the north of Aberdeenshire. The Turriff Haughs Showground ('The Haughs') is a site on the outskirts of the town used as a town park, a showground and an events venue.

Turriff District Agricultural Association (TDAA) aims to promote and support the development of agriculture, agricultural science and associated trades. TDAA has been running the Turriff Show since 1864 – the largest annual event to be held in Aberdeenshire and the largest two-day Show in Scotland, attracting over 30,000 visitors each year. The Show takes place on The Haughs and is regarded as the main 'shop window' for the promotion of agriculture and the food industry in the north east of Scotland reflecting the culture and farming heritage of the area.

Project overview

Two independent reports (in 2003 and 2008) identified the lack of toilet facilities as weaknesses threatening the development of The Haughs as a public space for leisure activities, community events and the economic prosperity of Turriff.

This LEADER-funded project contributed to the construction of a new indoor exhibition hall/display area plus a suite of permanent toilet facilities at The Haughs. The main use of the exhibition hall was to accommodate indoor trade stand space during Turriff Show which, prior to the hall development, were 100% booked with a waiting list on an annual basis. By improving facilities at the Haughs, TDAA also aimed to enable more events to be undertaken throughout the year and to improve the appearance of the site.

Work was undertaken on the Exhibition Hall which was opened at the 2010 Turriff Show by Scotland's First Minister, the Rt Hon Alex Salmond MSP.



Plaque commemorating the opening of the Exhibition Hall

Challenges of delivering the project

There were several practical and logistical challenges to completing the project. The project start date was delayed due to a delay in securing planning permission. Further issues caused by flooding at Turriff Haughs delayed contractors on site. The site is susceptible to flooding and this impacted on building costs because a significant flood made it apparent that the Exhibition Hall floor level needed to be increased by 15cm following the floods.

The TDAA has formal responsibility for managing the hall and has to ensure that someone is available to open and close the hall, clean it, ensure it complies with health and safety standards, and the raft of other tasks and responsibilities that are part of managing community facilities. This is an ongoing challenge for the TDAA:

'They could do their own risk assessment of the premises – the Young Farmers did this but you can't expect small groups to do it. Who carries it out?' (TDAA Chair).

Making the hall available for community groups to use comes at a cost. This led the Chair of TDAA questioned how to finance community involvement:

‘How do you finance community involvement? We’d think about this before making another LEADER application. We accepted the cost as we like to work with the community.’ (TDAA Chair).

Impacts

The development of the Turriff Haughs Exhibition Hall has had wide-ranging impacts.

The main impact has been to facilitate the smooth running and expansion of the Turriff Show. There is now a suitable space to store space for the TDAA’s equipment in between the annual event.



Show stands in storage in the Exhibition Hall

The TDAA has been able to scale up the Turriff Show as the covered hall can be used for cookery and butchery demonstrations and the WCs mean the site is properly equipped to receive a large number of visitors, and save the TDAA the cost of hiring portaloos (which are in short supply in this part of Scotland) and a marquee.

The success of the Show is significant and in 2013, the Turriff District Agricultural Association was awarded the Farmers Guardian Show Business Award for 2013. The prestige and success of the Show, which was in turn aided through the new Exhibition Hall, helped to lever in donations from across local community businesses and groups for £100,000 for a new road over the field that links to the main show ground. This field was for sale at the same time as the Hall, and the TDAA would not have been able to buy both without the LEADER funding.

Besides facilitating the Turriff Show, the Turriff Haughs Show Ground has hosted a range of large-scale events, including Turriff Motorfest (c. 10,000 attendees), National Pipe Competition (c. 5,000 attendees) and Relay for Life sponsored walk (c. 2,000 attendees). The national Bluefaced Leicester Sheep Show was hosted at the site last year and they requested to return this year. This event brings people from all over the UK. These events and the associated economic benefits to the local area of having visitors would not have been possible without the LEADER-funded covered Exhibition Hall and WCs. Small community groups such as the parents and toddler group and the Scouts also use the Hall.

Finally, the aesthetic impact of the Hall development is important as the previous building was dilapidated and the roof was falling in. The development has therefore improved the appearance of an unsightly site in a prime tourism area.

Looking to the future

In addition to continuing to host large-scale events, and attracting new audiences from across the UK, the TDAA has no plans for further expansion or development of the site: the Chair is satisfied that the building is fulfilling the purpose for which it was developed.



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