

## **SCOTTISH NATIONAL RURAL NETWORK (SNRN) REGIONAL EVENT**

### **WELCOME ADDRESS**

**COUNCILLOR PETER ARGYLE, ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL**

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“Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. In my capacity as Chairman of Aberdeenshire Council’s Infrastructure Services Committee, I am delighted to welcome you to the first of a series of Scottish National Rural Network Regional Events to be held throughout rural Scotland.

“As Aberdeenshire is a large rural local authority area it is very fitting that the inaugural SNRN regional event is located here at Lochter Activity Centre in the midst of Aberdeenshire’s rural heartland. The event aims to stimulate discussion and to develop links and networks across the myriad of rural entrepreneurs, businesses, organisations and communities from all sectors with an interest in sustainable rural development.

“Thriving rural communities are core to the Council’s Strategic Priorities which have evolved around the five Community Planning themes of Community Wellbeing, Jobs and the Economy, Lifelong Learning, Sustainable Environment and Developing Our Partnerships.

“I believe the Community Planning themes dovetail very well with the two overarching themes in the Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER Strategy, namely Revitalising Communities and Progressive Rural Economy.

“The Council undertakes a proactive approach through its Service Plans towards community development and supporting rural industry sectors. Therefore, when the Council was advised of the award by the Scottish Government of £3.36 million LEADER funds to the Rural Aberdeenshire Local Action Group (LAG) in 2008, this was fully welcomed.

“As Lead Partner in Aberdeenshire LEADER LAG the Council is aware of the successful progress of the LEADER programme since it’s launch a year and half ago. This progress is documented in the LAG Annual Report, a copy of which is in your welcome packs.

“It is clearly evident to see the positive impact LEADER projects are having within our communities across the Shire. It is particularly heartening to see LEADER project managers here today, promoting their projects and willing to share experiences of best practice with those considering new activities in the future.

“The Council’s Infrastructure Services Committee has taken a keen interest in the innovative approach of LEADER and considers the partnership delivery and local decision making process through the LAG is contributing to the success of the programme.

“In a challenging economic period where budget constraints, securing funding and delivering value for money are key challenges, its is very enlightening to see community groups working with public sector partners to bring forward projects that can stimulate local economies and provide community benefit. This is particularly relevant for Aberdeenshire Council where different Services such as Transportation & Infrastructure, Education, Learning & Leisure and Planning & Environmental Services are engaging in community projects through LEADER.

“Such is the strength within the LAG partnership that organisations, for example, Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Enterprise and NHS Scotland are involved in and contributing to LEADER projects.

“The broad spectrum of community interests, community needs and aspirations combined with partner co-operation reflects the very essence of rural development in the broadest sense.

“Today’s event is an innovative approach of promoting the potential of community engagement across rural Scotland. With interest groups across the sectors comprising community, voluntary, business, environment and enterprise representatives, I hope the discussion that ensues is the catalyst for future initiatives involving cross co-operation.

“If one of the key messages as an outcome of today’s event is identification of needs and delivering solutions for rural communities through social, economic and environmental actions, facilitated through sharing resources and expertise, then this will be a definite step forward and I think will meet the aims and objectives of the Scottish National Rural Network.

“My thanks go to Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) for organising the event on behalf of SNRN.

“Without further ado, I hope you enjoy what will be a very interesting and informative day in which there will be a range of presentations and case studies followed by opportunity to network and share your positive experiences relative to your own rural development projects.

Thank you.