

FORTH VALLEY & LOMOND LEADER LOCAL ACTION GROUP MEETING

Wallace Room, Viewforth, Stirling

14 December 2016

10am - 12.30pm

Minutes

Present:

<i>John Armstrong</i>	<i>Community, Stirlingshire</i>
<i>Kyle Barrie</i>	<i>Stirling Council</i>
<i>Susan Brooks</i>	<i>Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park Authority</i>
<i>Bridget Clark</i>	<i>Community, Stirlingshire</i>
<i>Jason Clark</i>	<i>Business, Stirling Enterprise Park</i>
<i>Mike Ewart</i>	<i>Land Management, Central Scotland Green Network Trust</i>
<i>Lynn Hamilton</i>	<i>VisitScotland (Chairing the Meeting)</i>
<i>Janice Kennedy</i>	<i>Scottish Enterprise</i>
<i>Brian McColgan</i>	<i>West Dunbartonshire Council</i>
<i>Carolyn McGill</i>	<i>Clackmannanshire Council</i>
<i>Mike Strachan</i>	<i>Forestry Commission Scotland</i>

Apologies:

<i>Janet Beveridge</i>	<i>Land Management, West Dunbartonshire</i>
<i>Celia Burn</i>	<i>Community, West Dunbartonshire</i>
<i>Isla Campbell</i>	<i>Scottish Natural Heritage</i>
<i>Douglas Johnston</i>	<i>Community, Stirlingshire</i>
<i>Ian Mathieson</i>	<i>Community, Clackmannanshire</i>
<i>Peter Sunderland</i>	<i>Business and Community, Stirlingshire</i>
<i>Tony Teasdale</i>	<i>Community, Rural Stirling Housing Association</i>
<i>Colin Tennant</i>	<i>Historic Environment Scotland</i>

In Attendance:

<i>Lynne Cooper</i>	<i>Scottish Enterprise</i>
<i>Anne-Michelle Ketteridge</i>	<i>LEADER Programme Manager</i>
<i>Sarah Phillips</i>	<i>LEADER Development Officer</i>
<i>Ashley Robinson</i>	<i>LEADER Development Officer</i>
<i>Irene Watterson</i>	<i>LEADER Claims Officer</i>

	ACTIONS
<p>1. Welcome, Sederunt and Minutes of last meeting</p> <p>As PS was not attending today, LH chaired the meeting and thanked everyone for coming. LH noted apologies from JB, CB, IC, DJ, IM, PS, TT and CT.</p> <p>LH informed the LAG that Lynne Cooper from Scottish Enterprise was in attendance today with JK. Lynne will be taking over JK's position on the KVF LEADER LAG and will deputise for JK in her absence on the FVL LAG. LH asked everyone to do a round table introduction for Lynne's benefit.</p> <p>KB arrived at the meeting</p> <p>2. Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising</p> <p>LH asked if anyone had any issues in relation to the accuracy of the Minutes of the meeting in November. No-one had any issues and these were proposed by JC and seconded by CMcG. AMK reminded the LAG that as the Meeting held on 9 November was specifically for assessing projects prior to the Autumn Statement being announced, the matters arising from the September meeting had been carried forward to this meeting.</p> <p>The Balmaha Pontoon project which was approved to extend is still working on the lease with LLTTNPA which has been complicated by the need for a lease with Montrose Estates and a lease with the National Park Authority. This has been further complicated by the original lease with Stirling Council, so this is taking time to correct through the respective legal departments. She asked if the LAG members were happy to further extend the time being given to The Oak Tree Inn to deliver their project. The LAG approved this extension.</p> <p>AMK advised that since the last LAG Meeting, none of the sub-groups had met although the Strategic Activity Group is meeting the next day. With having the extra LAG meeting prior to the Autumn Statement in November, along with working with Applicants, the last few months have been focussed on getting projects ready for the LAG.</p> <p>AMK acknowledged that there were outstanding jobs which were discussed at the last two meetings, such as the strategic route maps to be uploaded onto the FVL website for external use. SP will address this on her return to the office after the Christmas break.</p>	<p>Extension approved by the LAG</p> <p>ACTION: SP</p>

The Group had also proposed looking into a cycling tourism project at the September LAG Meeting and LH agreed to discuss with colleagues at VisitScotland.

ACTION SP & LH

The Farm Diversification & Rural Enterprise Sub-Group had suggested holding off from attending more events until after the Autumn Statement as they took up a lot of staff time. AMK advised that so many Expressions of Interest have been received to work through at the moment, she felt that staff should hold off attending more events other than in West Dunbartonshire where there had been limited opportunity to promote LEADER to date. This was agreed by the LAG.

ACTION: LAG
TEAM STAFF

3. “Hungary to Collaborate” (presentation by MS from recent LEADER event in Hungary)

MS told the Members that he had attended a networking event in Hungary in September which included all EU member states, with six delegates from Scotland (0 from England and 0 from Wales). MS advised that various topics were discussed at the event such as environmental projects in Finland, developing tourism and skills development in Romania and a well-established wine industry in Moldova. MS advised the next event is being held in Luxembourg in May 2017 and suggested that more LAG members should ‘sign up’ to attend the event as there is definite potential benefits to the Programme in doing so.

4. Projects for discussion and decision

AMK advised that there is a higher ratio of Agency Members to Community Members at this meeting today. A new procedure was proposed for now and for future, whereby if there were ever too many agency Members present to vote on a project, one or more would step back from voting.

Procedure
Approved
Unanimously

AMK advised that there was one conflict of interest in today’s applications which was PS, however he isn’t at this meeting today.

4.1 Brenachoile Pier - Deferred Project from previous LAG.

JK agreed not to vote on this Project to ensure the community majority.

SP refreshed the LAG’s memory as this project was deferred at the last meeting.

She reminded the LAG that they liked the project but wanted the applicant to provide evidence of the economic benefit and evidence of the demand for this Pier along with a business plan.

At the November LAG meeting, it was noted that the Trust were working with Business Gateway to produce a business plan and at that time, the LAG voted unanimously to defer the project until the applicant could produce stronger evidence for the project.

SP informed the Members that since the November meeting, the Trust had undertaken an on-line visitor survey over an 8-day period amongst a sample of visitors contacted via Facebook and Twitter and during this short period, 65 responses had been received. Together with this, they had received several letters of support of this project. SP confirmed that the match funding is now in place.

It was noted that a planning permission application had not yet been submitted (nor for their other Eco-Pods project), but AMK noted that this seems to be the way projects are coming to LEADER in this Programme. She said the applicants seem to want to have the outcome of the LAG meeting prior to further expense for permissions, etc. A question was asked about who owned the land. SP replied that this was Scottish Water who had leased the land to them for 99 years. It was felt that written permission from Scottish Water should also be sought.

LH thanks SP. The LAG discussed this project and agreed that their previous concerns had been addressed and decided to approve this project on condition that the planning permission is confirmed, the applicant is to re-profile the cash-flow forecast to show minimum 10% costs in the final claim the applicant is to provide the LAG with the business strategy document once it is produced. Compliance with procurement rules and land owner permission would also be conditions.

4.2 Fordhead Tea Plantation

CMcG agreed not to vote on this Project to ensure the community majority.

AR explained that this Project is a farm diversification project for a tea plantation at Fordhead Farm near Kippen where they have identified an emerging market for Scottish high-end, high quality loose leaf tea for selling to premium buyers. AR further explained that between 2012 and 2014, sales for speciality tea had increased by 15%, while 'regular' tea had decreased.

Project APPROVED
WITH SPECIFIC
CONDITIONS

AR explained to the Members that tea can grow and survive in Scotland up to -11 °C. The Applicant would have guaranteed sales along with an established support network.

AR explained that the Applicant has long-term goals for tea tourism (tea tours like whisky tours), potential local retail outlets and wants to develop their own brand and processing techniques to sell direct from their farm in the future. This enterprise would allow their son to draw a wage entirely from tea enterprise by the third year.

AR went on to explain the key players in this emerging Scottish tea industry and the shared support through a Scottish Tea Growers Association which has peer support, guidance and networking and which negotiates as a group for bulk resources, prices and making the members of this group stronger by pooling resources and growing the overall market.

AR advised that this farm diversification project has low initial start-up costs, it's innovative - unique in the FVL area, is a good use of biomass excess heat and rainwater collection, has guaranteed sales together with direct selling and is good value for money.

LH thanked AR. It was asked if Fordhead Farm will automatically become members of the Scottish Tea Growers Association. AR advised that they are already members of the Association. Another question related to whether a soil analysis had been undertaken and what the pH of the soil was.

The LAG discussed and agreed that it was highly innovative and would be a new 'added value' product for the area and so fitted perfectly with the LDS and decided to approve their application on condition that confirmation of match funding is received and that a soil analysis should be undertaken of the site where tea will be grown. The LAG also would like Fordhead Farm to make contact with Business Gateway for business support when it is ready to develop the tourism plans and explore business start-up training opportunities.

Project APPROVED
WITH SPECIFIC
CONDITIONS.

4.3 Dounans Outdoor Centre Renewal

MS agreed not to vote on this Project to ensure the community majority.

SP presented this project to the Members explaining that the Scottish Outdoor Education Centre is a charity and social enterprise which delivers a range of outdoor education programmes to young people and the wider community.

SP went on to say that Dounans has received very little investment historically and the accommodation facilities no longer meet the needs of their customers who are nonetheless satisfied with the service Dounans supplies.

The Applicant is determined to refurbish the facilities, so that they can maintain their current customers, extend the tourism season, meet the demand for their services and generate income for future development.

SP said that this refurbishment would enable sufficient surplus to be reinvested in the activities, buildings and facilities in future years for the Centre to be sustainable. It would generate around £120,000 in the local community from customers and overseas visitors spending a conservative £10 per adult and would lead to the employment of a staff team of around 40.

LH thanked SP.

The LAG discussed this application and noted the great economic impact it would have and agreed that this project was good value for money and agreed that the refurbishment was very much needed. Innovation was discussed and it was noted that the innovation lay in what the facilities would be used for and the organisation's commitment to reach new markets and young people who might not normally benefit from outdoor activity centres such as their autism programme, which was where the innovation was. It was welcomed that once the refurbishment is complete, the Project will be able to employ more staff for more hours over a longer period, and particularly, the out of season period identified as a priority in the local development strategy. Two organisation numbers were noted and asked that this be checked.

The LAG approved this Project on condition that planning permission and match funding are confirmed.

Project APPROVED
WITH SPECIFIC
CONDITIONS

The LAG would also like confirmation that the Scot Govt has passed their pre-approval check on the project prior to an offer of grant being made.

4.4 Craigmore Centre Project

SB agreed not to vote on this Project to ensure community majority.

AR presented this project to the Members advising that this project is to support a new post of Programme Director for an activity week project, located at Gartmore House, south of Aberfoyle.

The Craigmore Centre is operated as part of Gartmore House, a centre open all year round which can accommodate groups of up to 120 in bunk-bed accommodation.

AR explained that most of Craigmore's bookings are on weekends and so there is a desire to expand to weekday groups and increase low season visitor numbers.

The Programme Director would be responsible for constructing and marketing a new programme for children between the age of 10 - 15 years to discover and sustain healthy lifestyle choices which will lead to an improved, healthier lifestyle in later life. For example, young people will have to plan, budget and purchase ingredients from the local shop in order to complete the food based tasks.

LH thanked AR.

The LAG discussed this project in depth and agreed that it complimented well the Dounans Project as the activities mentioned were quite different. However, it would be beneficial for the LAG to have more details on the activities to be included in the Craigmore programme and Members would like to see a draft programme. The LAG also agreed that they would like to have details of any upgrading to the building for this programme to be delivered - especially the kitchen area as it was unclear whether this would need to be extended or upgraded for the cooking classes. The Members agreed that a risk assessment should be undertaken for the outdoor activities part of the programme, noting that this has been done for the indoor activities only. The LAG wanted to know how the project will be monitored and evaluated, and clarification on the costs in a cash-flow forecast.

The Members asked if there were any letters of support from local partners and operators, as this would be important for a successful delivery.

The LAG agreed that the ideas were good but several points were still unclear on this Project, and they would wait until this information came in before making their decision. However, they agreed that this information could be circulated by email for approval and not have to wait until the next LAG meeting.

The information required by the LAG:

- (a) More detail provided on the activities to be included in the programme
- (b) Copy of the draft programme to be provided
- (c) Detail being provided on any upgrading to the building required to deliver the programme
- (d) Risk assessments being undertaken for the outdoor activities part of the programme
- (e) Detail being provided on how the project will be monitored and evaluated
- (f) Letters of support being provided by local partners and operators
- (g) Confirmation of match funding detailing amount
- (h) Clarification of costs in cash-flow forecast

5. Project Allocations Update

AMK first displayed the FVL Business Plan expected annual allocations up to the end of the Programme, reminding the Members of the figures in the Business Plan.

AMK followed this by displaying the actual Project Allocations to date where the live projects were shown in blue. AMK explained that the original amount for allocating was £1,224,527 and to date, excluding the Projects at this LAG Meeting, the LAG had allocated £397,788, leaving £1,668,516 still to allocate.

So far, £259,813 has been committed to Community Projects, £81,101 committed to Rural Enterprise Projects and £50,000 committed to Farm Diversification Projects. Nothing so far has been committed to Co-Operation Projects as Scot Govt has not given the go ahead for Co-Operation Projects as yet. In terms of expected allocations compared to our own business plan projections, with today's approvals, we were well ahead of schedule.

Project DEFERRED

6. LARCS Experience

AMK advised the Members that a new version of the LARCS Guidance for projects and LAGs had just been circulated by Scot Govt. All the guidance documents were now available on the LARCS system under the Help section.

As this was the first meeting where Members had used LARCS, AMK asked how everyone found navigating the LARCS system for assessing the Applications. The Members said that despite some frustration with the system timing out and not being able to access the site with a tablet, they had managed to get all the relevant information from the system. AMK asked the Members if they thought it would be useful to have an online scoring sheet on the FVL website like the last Programme, or are they content to have the scoring sheets emailed to them.

The LAG asked if an online scoring sheet could be set up as it would be easier.

7. AOCB

There was none

8. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting is Wednesday 22 March at 10am till 12.30pm. If we keep to holding a meeting in each of the Council areas, the next meeting should be held in the Clackmannanshire area however CMcG said that meeting space is incredibly difficult to organise at the moment. The Members would be informed of the location nearer the time.

ACTION: LEADER
Team