

FORTH VALLEY & LOMOND LEADER LOCAL ACTION GROUP MEETING

Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park Headquarters

28 September 2016

10am - 12.30pm

Minutes

Present:

<i>Peter Sunderland</i>	<i>Business and Community, Stirlingshire</i>
<i>Lynn Hamilton</i>	<i>VisitScotland</i>
<i>Janet Beveridge</i>	<i>Land Management, West Dunbartonshire</i>
<i>Mike Ewart</i>	<i>Land Management, Central Scotland Green Network Trust</i>
<i>Celia Burn</i>	<i>Community, West Dunbartonshire</i>
<i>Isla Campbell</i>	<i>Scottish Natural Heritage</i>
<i>Bridget Clark</i>	<i>Community, Stirlingshire</i>
<i>Carolyn McGill</i>	<i>Clackmannanshire Council</i>
<i>Susan Brooks</i>	<i>Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park Authority</i>
<i>Janice Kennedy</i>	<i>Scottish Enterprise</i>
<i>Ian Mathieson</i>	<i>Community, Clackmannanshire</i>
<i>Douglas Johnston</i>	<i>Community, Stirlingshire</i>

Apologies:

<i>Jason Clark</i>	<i>Business, Stirling Enterprise Park</i>
<i>John Armstrong</i>	<i>Community, Stirlingshire</i>
<i>Mike Strachan</i>	<i>Forestry Commission Scotland</i>
<i>Tony Teasdale</i>	<i>Community, Rural Stirling Housing Association</i>
<i>Brian McColgan</i>	<i>West Dunbartonshire Council</i>
<i>Kyle Barrie</i>	<i>Stirling Council</i>

In Attendance:

<i>Anne-Michelle Ketteridge</i>	<i>Programme Manager</i>
<i>Sarah Phillips</i>	<i>Development Officer</i>
<i>Ashley Robinson</i>	<i>Development Officer</i>
<i>Irene Watterson</i>	<i>Claims Officer and Minute Taker</i>

Item		Actions
1	<p><u>Welcome, Sederunt and Minutes of last Meeting</u></p> <p><i>Apologies from JC, TT, JA, MS, KB and BMcC were noted.</i></p> <p><i>The accuracy of the last Minute was reviewed by Members and found to have no errors or omissions. It was proposed by IC and seconded by CMcG. PS asked the Members that if they found any inaccuracies within the Minutes at the time they are e-mailed to them that these inaccuracies should be brought to the LAG Team's attention prior to the meeting.</i></p> <p><u>Matters Arising</u></p> <p><i>AMK advised the Members that the Balmaha Pontoon project, which was approved back in March, is now past the six month point of not starting due to part of the legalities of the lease not being in place yet which has proved to be a very lengthy process. AMK asked the Members if they were keen to continue their support for this Project to have an extension on the six month rule in order for the legal work to continue. The LAG agreed with LH proposing BC seconding this decision.</i></p>	BALMAHA PONTOON PROJECT EXTENSION APPROVED
2	<p><u>Brexit Impact</u></p> <p><i>PS started the discussion highlighting that most recent advice from Scottish Government was that funds are only currently guaranteed until 23 November which is the date of the Autumn Statement.</i></p> <p><i>Applications need to be approved and contracts agreed, signed and returned by both the LAG and the Applicant prior to the Chancellor's Autumn Statement on 23 November. SG has also confirmed that Projects approved prior to the Autumn Statement that are scheduled to go beyond the point of exit from the EU will also be honoured. AMK confirmed that an extra LAG meeting has been scheduled for 9 November to give applicants as much opportunity as possible to apply for LEADER funds. AMK advised that SG has told some areas that all conditions to any offer of grant MUST also be met by 23 November.</i></p> <p><i>PS added that extra staffing hours have been put in place for AR and SP to work with Applicants to have projects ready to be discussed and assessed on 9 November.</i></p>	

AMK advised that after the Autumn Statement on 23 November, Applications can only be approved if Stirling Council, our Accountable Body agrees to underwrite any offer of grant the LAG commits to. This would be risky as SG may not pay any reimbursement.

AMK advised that any Applicants who will not meet the 9 November LAG Meeting are now being made aware that the LAG can only give an 'intention to fund' decision at their LAG Meetings until further advice comes from SG, which should be early in 2017. SG need some time after the Autumn Statement to fully understand the implications on the LEADER budget and LEADER allocations.

The Members discussed this and talked about exploring setting up some mechanism to ensure funding is still available in the future and how feasible it would be for the LAG to create another scheme similar to the Sustainable Tourism Scheme from the last Programme to commit funding to community applicants up to 2020.

IM alerted Members to the funding portal that SCVO runs which provides information on different funding options and can also run workshops. One advantage of this is that it is dedicated to funds in Scotland only.

The Members asked about the feasibility of doing co-operation projects. SP informed the Members that at the moment, LARCs is unable to recognise co-operation projects but this is being worked upon by SG and guidance is due to be issued.

JK asked what other areas are doing. AMK advised that some LEADER areas are doing different things such as raising intervention rates up to 90%, however as the LAG decided that our intervention rate would mainly stay at 50%, to raise this now could become an equity issue for previous projects approved. She advised that her understanding was that SG are still assuming LEADER will continue after the Autumn Statement with projects potentially completing prior to the UK leaving the EU.

Projects for discussion and decision

AMK informed the Members of conflicts of interest in the projects due for consideration today.

Stirling Council declared a conflict of interest with the Balquhidder Community Broadband project, however KB was not at this meeting today anyway. JB said she would remove herself from the discussion on the Arnprior Glamping and Pool project as she was friendly with the Applicant.

3.1

Balquhidder Community Broadband

AR presented this project which is looking for funding for a Project Manager/Scheduler to oversee the infrastructure to deliver scalable, super-fast broadband to Balquhidder Glen, with the community digging and laying the fibre from the road to the residences and businesses. AR advised that to date, there are 60 volunteers to dig and more than 100 residents/businesses signing up for the broadband. AR explained that the Project Manager/Scheduler's post is to support and answer to BCB directors to achieve the Broadband infrastructure build and organise the community dig and laying of the fibre. She explained this is not a full project management post as the project plan, schedule etc will continue to be led by the Directors and is a project that has been 10 years in the making.

She explained that Balquhidder is designated as a 'white post code' area which means that the area will not benefit from the current BT roll-out.

The proposed broadband would be 300 times faster than what is currently in the Glen. This would ensure a competitive, future-proof broadband service, which would create excellent economic and community uplift, increase the quality of life, connectivity and opportunities for residents and improve the efficiency of businesses in Balquhidder Glen. The Group is being advised by Community Broadband Scotland and Stirling Council's broadband manager.

PS thanked AR and asked if Members had questions/comments.

The Members agreed that having super-fast broadband would retain staff in the local businesses and raise employment in the area and liked this project very much as it was a very strong fit with the LDS. Ideally, there would be more specific and more quantified detail on the economic benefit – although the LAG could see that this would be significant.

<p>3.2</p>	<p><i>The LAG discussed having a report from Balquhidder Community Broadband CIC post project with the report being quantifying the impact this Project has made to Balquhidder.</i></p> <p><i>The LAG unanimously approved this project on condition that formal match funding was approved from Stirling Council. The LAG also agreed that the contract for the Project Manager/Scheduler is to be advertised on Public Contract Scotland and that agreement sought that the Applicant would provide ongoing information on the quantifiable impact of the project in the future.</i></p> <p><u>Dunblane Stomping Ground</u></p> <p><i>SP presented this project which is looking for funding to create safe and attractive grounds for all abilities at the Dunblane Centre to encourage inter-generational play and educational activities.</i></p> <p><i>SP displayed a photo of the site and a map where the Centre is situated together with images of what the project will be like once completed.</i></p> <p><i>She went on to explain that this Application is looking to install an orchard, a seating area and children's den, small allotments for grow your own workshops, improving existing outdoor café space for play and relaxation, improve accessibility of woodland adventure area, install some outdoor workshop space, a sensory garden and improve the overall aesthetic of the space at the back of the centre to make it more useable.</i></p> <p><i>The LAG asked if there was any job creation with this project. SP explained that there is no job creation at the moment but once the work was complete, sessional work would increase as a result of more people using the Centre.</i></p> <p><i>SP added that no planning permission is required and that match funding has been confirmed.</i></p> <p><i>The LAG discussed the suitability of gravel for an accessible for all site and agreed a whindust path - or similar material - would be much better for improving accessibility for all abilities as opposed to gravel.</i></p>	<p>PROJECT UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS</p>
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<p>3.3</p>	<p><i>The LAG thought the project a good fit with the LDS and particularly the Sustainable Communities objective. They also particularly liked the inter-generation aspect.</i></p> <p><i>The Members noted that the Centre had done an excellent job building up from scratch and unanimously approved this Project on condition that whindust or other access friendly path surface (not gravel) was used and that the Dunblane Centre agreed to provide post evaluation statistics of the usage of the Centre and café. They also noted that the quotes already received had been scored with a 'local' criteria which was in breach of procurement rules, so would be better if the contract was advertised more widely.</i></p> <p><i>The LAG also agreed that if this material to construct an access friendly path surface was more expensive, it would be prepared to paying the additional cost if needed (at 100% of increased cost).</i></p> <p><u>Arnprior Glamping & Pool</u></p> <p><i>JB left the room</i></p> <p><i>AR presented this farm diversification project to the LAG which is looking for funding to install heated glamping pods and an 8m x 4m heated indoor pool where flushing toilets, showers/changing rooms and a small kitchen would be co-located. The heating of the pods and pool room would come from the excess renewable energy from their biomass boiler already on site. The aim is to have the pool available for glamping site guests together with a schedule where private pool hire for the local community could be used. AR showed images of some pods on screen.</i></p> <p><i>AR advised that the Applicants are aiming to have three smaller pods to sleep up to 4 people and one larger pod to sleep up to 6 people. All of the pods will come with a barbeque which can be taken out and the pods will be double-glazed. AR advised that the Applicants had visited several glamping sites as part of their business research</i></p> <p><i>AR advised the Members that Arnprior Farm has already diversified with highly successful 'farm experiences' of pumpkin patch (pick your own) and a lambing experience. As the pumpkin patch was so popular last year, they have increased the pumpkin patch this year and are including a dig-your-own potato and turnip patch too and have grown a 'kale maze' for the children. Their desire is to be a profitable, resilient, diversified farm which is not reliant on subsidies.</i></p>	<p>PROJECT UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS</p>
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PS thanked AR and invited the LAG to discuss the Project.

The location of Arnprior Farm is very close to the Kings Highway which has been identified on the LAG's Strategic Map as having potential to be developed between Stirling and Buchlyvie. The LAG all agreed that installing pods and a pool together makes this project innovative and noted that there is a gap in the market in this area with no private hire pool facilities – high heat or otherwise. They also noted that there could be job creation in the future for pool maintenance and the potential for employing more staff for the glamping as the enterprise becomes more successful.

The funding package was discussed and the need for the LEADER funding as it was noted that a proportionally large bank loan was required and the LAG discussed considering the proposal as two farm diversifications, thereby attracting £50K rather than the £25K normally allowed. There was clear evidence of need for the LEADER funding and the LAG agreed that as it would be such a good project for the area, and given that Scottish Government were only guaranteeing the funds until the end of November, it made a lot of sense to do this at this time. This would require a revised application form to reflect the increased grant, but the LAG authorised the LEADER team to issue the offer on this basis.

The LAG unanimously approved this Application on condition that confirmation from their bank for a bank loan/increased overdraft facility is received. The LAG also want to see all statutory consents being in place. The LAG agreed that the Applicants should be invited to submit a revised application for up to £50K for the two aspects of the Pods and the Pool. The LAG raised the importance of a Child Protection Policy should be in place prior to opening for business and they should also discuss the pool proposal with SEPA.

JB returned to the meeting room.

LARCS Presentation (For LAG to Use in Future)

SP showed some screen-shots on screen of what LARCs looks like to assist the LAG familiarise themselves with what they will be required to use to view Applications in the future. SP advised that IW is currently working on back-capturing the projects that have already been approved and she will be in touch very soon with each Member to allocate a login to gain access to LARCs.

PROJECT
UNANIMOUSLY
APPROVED WITH
CONDITIONS

<p>5</p> <p>5.1</p> <p>5.2</p>	<p><i>All application documents will be on LARCs in the future and Members are encouraged to explore the new LARCs system once they have access, which will be more meaningful once a few projects have been back-captured.</i></p> <p><i>Key messages were already “don’t double click” and “don’t use Home button in your own browser”. AMK asked the LAG if they would be comfortable to use the new system for the next round. PS suggested a bedding in period over the next two rounds to allow the Members to get used to the system.</i></p> <p><u>Feedback from Subgroups</u></p> <p><u>Strategic Activity – Eols + Proposed LAG led project activity</u></p> <p><i>AMK advised that 57 Expressions of Interest had now been received with a large proportion being about sustainable tourism.</i></p> <p><i>AMK advised the Members that the group had been discussing setting up a crowd funding portal as it is quite effective in other LEADER areas. It may be that the FVL website could house a link to it. There is a fee for doing this which is paid to Crowdfunder UK so the subgroup has agreed to deliberate on this further.</i></p> <p><i>She went on to say that there is a lot of disparate work going on in the area regarding Food and Drink and the Strategic Activity Sub-Group is developing a LAG-led Food and Drink Coordination project with a view to an application coming to the November LAG Meeting. The LAG were keen to see this come forward as this is a priority area for the LAG. A campsite and glamping toolkit project was also being explored with LLTTNPA.</i></p> <p><i>SP informed the Members that the Strategic Paths Sub-Group met on Monday (26 September). She displayed the map on screen that IC had updated with more information of public transport.</i></p> <p><i>SP advised the Group would like the LAG’s agreement for the maps to be put on the FVL website for external use, with caveats emphasising the “aspirational” nature of the routes and encouraging future applicants to refer to the maps in their applications. This Sub-Group is also proposing to look into a cycling tourism project and requested that any other LAG Member with an interest in cycling tourism and marketing join the group to assist their efforts. LH said she would chat to colleagues at VisitScotland to see if someone there could assist.</i></p>	<p>ACTION: STRATEGIC ACTIVITY GROUP</p> <p>ACTION: STRATEGIC PATHS GROUP</p> <p>ACTION: LH</p>
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5.3	<p>AR advised that The Farm Diversification & Rural Enterprise Sub-Group has agreed to have the LAG represented at the Clackmannanshire Business Week and STEP Rural Roadshow but will hold off further events until after the clarification from SG is received following the Autumn Statement as attendance at events takes a significant proportion of time away from working directly with applicants. AR advised she had attended the Doune and Dunblane Show with BC and the Killin Agricultural Show and was pleased that some Expressions of Interest had come through from people attending these events.</p>	ACTION: LAG TEAM STAFF
5.4	<p>Vice Chairs + Chair - PS advised that he is pursuing the issue of pre-assessment checks with SG and the wider Chairs group. He advised he would keep the Members informed. The Group had also reflected on how to convert more EOIs to actual applications and also how to ensure the area does not lose out as a result of the announcement about the Autumn Statement.</p>	
6	<p><u>Update from Scottish Government/Co-ordinators Meeting/LAG Chairs</u></p> <p>AMK updated the Members advising that SG has indicated that LAGs cannot commit to projects after 23 November when the Autumn Statement is aired until early in 2017 as the SG will need time to digest the information contained in the Autumn Statement. She said that the only way for projects to continue to be approved during this time is for the accountable bodies to underwrite these projects. This would be a significant risk for accountable bodies but this subject will be raised with Stirling Council's Chief Executive, Stewart Carruth when PS, LH and DJ meet with him on 3 October 2016.</p> <p>AMK informed the Members that communication from SG has been very limited since the referendum result. A revised version of the technical guidance is long overdue as well as guidance for co-operation projects which is having a particular impact on National Park-wide projects. This is causing frustration and means co-operation projects cannot benefit from the Chancellor's current guarantee of funding.</p> <p>The Members asked about staffing and what implications Brexit had on the staff. AMK advised that staff have contracts to the end of 2020 and SG has not intimated anything immediate to worry about at the moment, although the situation may change once Article 50 has been initiated.</p>	

7	<p><u>Project Allocations Update</u></p> <p><i>AMK displayed the Project Allocation spreadsheet showing what has been spent to date and what monies had been allocated to projects so far. The live projects were highlighted in blue.</i></p> <p><i>AMK advised the Members that the Crianlarich to Tyndrum Cycle Link Project will involve some environmental disruption and so the timing for this project to begin may be problematic as their SNH match funding has been referred to Scottish Ministers for confirmation, which has been held up with no date given.</i></p>	
8	<p><u>AOCB</u></p> <p><i>There was no other competent business. PS thanked everyone's attendance and looked forward to seeing everyone again at the next meeting</i></p>	
9	<p><u>Date of Next Meeting</u></p> <p><i>The next meeting is to be held in Stirling Council Chambers, Old Viewforth from 10am to 12.30pm on 9 November 2016.</i></p>	