

Approved Minute of SALAG Meeting  
Tuesday, 21 June 2016 at 1.00pm  
The Bothie, Allendale Gardens, Kintore, Inverurie

**Present**

Liam Smyth	Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce (Chair) (Private)
Jo Robinson	Visit Scotland (Public)
Isla Martin	Scottish Natural Heritage (Public)
Ian Cowe	Forestry Commission Scotland (Public)
Gina Ford	Scottish Enterprise (Public)
Jean Henretty	Marr Rural Partnership (Private)
Belinda Miller	Aberdeenshire Council (Public)
Dawn Tuckwood	NHS Grampian (Public)
Catriona Dougherty	Garioch Community Councils (Private)
Gerald Banks	National Farmers' Union Scotland (Private)

**Officers in Attendance**

Martin Brebner	Team Manager – European Policy & Programmes
Alasdair Cunningham	European Programmes Co-ordinator (South)
June Jaffrey	European Programmes Claims Officer (South)

**Apologies**

Joy Aiken	North East Scotland College (Public)
Simon Blackett	Scottish Land and Estates (Private)
Anne Simpson	Garioch Rural Partnership (Private)
Elaine Sinclair	Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action (Private)
Kyrsten Black	Scotland's Rural College (Public)

**1. Welcome & Apologies**

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed those present and for the benefit of new members; round the table introductions were made.
- 1.2 Apologies were noted as above.

**2. New members**

- 2.1 Visit Aberdeenshire LAG membership was considered and unanimously approved for membership (pending notification of a named individual). It was noted a rep for North is in place.

**3. Declarations of Interest**

3.1 The following LAG members have an indirect interest in, although not directly involved with the following projects and as such will be permitted to take part in project discussions.

- Isla Martin - SALAG/2016/R1/003 - Nature Kindergarten (Mucky Boots)
- Ian Cowe - SALAG/2016/R1/006 - Ringlink Internship
- Belinda Miller - SALAG/2016/R1/006 - Ringlink Internship

3.2 The following LAG member has a specific interest in the following project and as such will not be permitted to take part in project discussions.

- Jean Henretty - SALAG/2016/R1/003 - Nature Kindergarten (Mucky Boots)

#### **4. Minute of Meeting 22 March 2016**

4.1. The minute of the LAG meeting held on 22 March 2016 was approved as an accurate record. Proposed by Belinda Miller and seconded by Jean Henretty.

#### **5. Project Assessment Committee (PAC) Minutes 24 May 2016**

5.1. The minutes of the PAC meeting of 24 May 2016 were noted and will be approved at the next PAC meeting.

#### **6. LAG Progress reports**

6.1. The Co-ordinator provided the LAG members with a report advising that one project was approved in the earlier round with a value of £100k for Strathorn Riding School, the Scottish Govt. have now issued the formal contract for the new LEADER programme and therefore the official grant letter can now be issued to the applicant.

Alasdair advised that we are off target in terms of the spend that would be expected per budget lines, this is due to the slow release of the programme at Scottish Govt. level.

6.2. Alasdair further advised that the quality of Expressions of Interest (Eols) which had been received were of poor quality with issues. Around 80 have been received to date and challenges are faced in bringing these up to an acceptable level for formal application stage. In order for Alasdair to sift out Eols other than those who do not fit the LDS, the LAG would be required to empower the Co-ordinator to make a decision on removing the poorer quality applications prior to them going to the Project Assessment Committee (PAC) for consideration.

The Chair indicated it may be that individual LAG members use their specific skills to assist applicants prior to Eol and formal project application stages i.e. a LAG member with a financial background may be of assistance scrutinising thoroughly a project which has provided poor financial supporting evidence.

- 6.3. The chair advised that several tele-conferences have been held between the Chair, Officers and Scottish Govt. Officers to try to bottom out some of the programme issues encountered i.e. the LAG status, lack of LARCS system and the signing authority and liability LAG members could potentially face. As an update was received today, therefore this point will be picked up under AOCB.
- 6.4. It was highlighted that few applicants have come through the Rural Partnerships and that there may be avenues to assist applicants by doing so. Jean advised that the Partnerships are sitting on a large number of projects which they have already filtered but have not yet come through to LEADER and that Businesses and farmers appear to be coming direct to LEADER but would benefit from earlier discussions. This point will further be discussed under AOCB.

## 7. PROJECTS

- 7.1. It was noted that the meeting was not quorate therefore all recommendations will be ratified by circulating the business discussions by off-line procedure to the absentees.
- 7.2. For the benefit of the new LAG members the co-ordinator outlined the voting options which are;
- **Approve** – support the application as it is presented and issue a grant award
  - **Reject** – the LAG reject the project meaning the applicant cannot resubmit the application to our self or any other SRDP programme without making substantial changes to the application
  - **Defer** – the LAG are in support of the project concept but it would require refinement before it could be considered for approval. There is an additional step in this decision whereby LAG members can offer their support to the application by helping to polish up the application before re-submission in a future round. If a LAG member offers and provides support then it is classed as a Declaration of Interest (DOI) for the next meeting. The LAG must vote in favour of the Member becoming involved.

### 7.3. SALAG/2016/R2/011 - Logie Coldstone

This application was not discussed as the project application was withdrawn by the applicant.

### 7.4. SALAG/2016/R2/012 - Finzean Estate Farm Shop

The project is an extension to Finzean Estate Farm Shop, with the proposal providing additional facilities and capability in order to increase the shop turnover, enhancing their meals on wheels provision and providing additional employment for local people along with providing a post office counter in the future. The car parking and provision of cycle parking is also included in the extension plans. The grant requested is £85,087, which is 50% of the project costs.

This project has been applied under the “Developing Key Economic Sectors” priority; subset “Improving Priority Sector Competitiveness and Co-Operation”.

The PAC were supportive of this application and thought the concept was good in terms of a community hub, the scoring was 23 with the comments for additional information to be supplied were; Partnership working – demonstrate how the applicant will work with local organisations i.e. the crafters who exhibit/sell in the shop, Car parking – clarification on parking was required, in relation to the size of development also clarify will there be the provision of cycle parking, Equality – outlining how the disabled/person of limited ability will access the proposed development - how will it be accessible to all? Environment – clarify the environmental sustainability of the project re food waste and recycling. These queries were answered comprehensively by the applicant prior to the LAG meeting.

The project was put to vote and the outcome recorded as follows:

<b>Recommend Agreement</b>	<b>Reject</b>	<b>Abstain</b>
Ian Cowe (Public)		Liam Smyth (Chair) (Private)
Gina Ford (Public)		
Jean Henretty (Private)		
Belinda Miller (Public)		
Dawn Tuckwood (Public)		
Isla Martin (Public)		
Catrina Docherty (Private)		
Jo Robinson (Public)		

**THE INTERIM LAG RECOMMENDATION IS A GRANT AWARD UP TO £85,087 BE APPROVED.**

**SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS;**

- **INSTALLATION OF CYCLE RACKS**
- **POST OFFICE PROVISION (TO BE MADE AVAILABLE FOR A MINIMUM 3 YEAR PERIOD – WHICH MUST BE PASSED ON SHOULD THE BUSINESS CHANGE OWNERSHIP).**

**7.5. SALAG/2016/R2/013 Project Development Officer, SensationALL**

This application was not discussed as the project application was withdrawn by the applicant.

**7.6. SALAG/2016/R2/014 - Glen Dye Arts Centre**

This application was not discussed as the project application was withdrawn by the applicant.

**7.7. SALAG/2016/R2/015 - The Cottage, Braes**

This application was not discussed as the project application was withdrawn by the applicant.

**7.8. SALAG/2016/R2/016 - Dunbennan Farm Experience**

This application was not discussed as the project application was withdrawn by the applicant.

#### 7.9. **SALAG/2016/R2/017 - Building Up The Bothie**

This application was not discussed as the project application was withdrawn by the applicant.

#### 7.10. **SALAG/2016/R1/003 - Nature Kindergarten (Mucky Boots)**

DOI - Jean Henretty confirmed she did not receive financial remuneration in her dealings with the project applicant.

This project application had been deferred from Round one.

This project has been applied under the “Promoting and Protecting the Environment” priority; subset “Protecting, exploring & enhancing the natural environment”.

The applicant, Dawn Ewan proposes that Mucky Boots will operate an outdoor nursery during school term time, offering Early Learning and Childcare provision for young children. The grant requested is £96,267, which is 50% of the project costs.

The PAC were supportive of this project application with the scoring at 27.5 with the comments for additional information requested being; Local Authority funded childcare places – confirmation that Education & Children’s Services are endorsing/authorising funded childcare places, operational periods – clarification on the periods of operation i.e. being term-time only.

As an outcome of PAC queries the applicant provided the necessary responses and also created a YouTube video which was shown to the LAG to strengthen their application and provide background to the project.

It was recognised that a high staff to child ration was required therefore limiting the number of places available therefore creating a fundamental issue with costs as staff salary costs were high causing uncertainty in the LAG as to how the project could go forward in future years with an income gap. Concerns were raised on the sustainability of the project over time as there appears to be no apparent growth creating a difficult position after the grant funding ends.

The project was put to vote and the outcome recorded as follows:

<b>Agree</b>	<b>Reject</b>	<b>Abstain</b>
	Ian Cowe (Public)	Liam Smyth (Chair) (Private)
	Gina Ford (Public)	
	Jean Henretty (Private)	
	Belinda Miller (Public)	
	Dawn Tuckwood (Public)	
	Isla Martin (Public)	
	Catriona Docherty (Private)	
	Jo Robinson (Public)	

The LAG thought the concept was good and that thanks be forwarded to the applicant for their time and effort with the application.

**THE INTERIM LAG RECOMMENDATION IS A GRANT AWARD BE REJECTED.**

**THE APPLICATION BE RECOMMENDED TO LOOK AT THE BUSINESS MODEL FOR EARTHTIME FOR ALL, ELGIN AS A GOOD BUSINESS EXAMPLE.**

#### 7.11. SALAG/2016/R1/006 - Ringlink Internship

DOI – Ian Cowe confirmed he had worked with the applicants before on other schemes but was not directly involved with this project application, likewise Belinda Miller confirmed she had previous knowledge of the applicants but was not directly involved with this project application.

This project application had been deferred from Round one.

The project has been applied under the “Developing Key Economic Sectors” priority; subset “Improving Priority Sector Competitiveness & Co-Operation”.

The internship project seeks funding to ensure progression from an earlier successful pilot project to a long term financially sustainable training programme, serving the future interests of the land-based sector by offering a hands-on skills placement in a farm or rural enterprise to young people. The aim is to create a sustainable internship programme and fill a short-fall in skills in the school-age leavers demographic. The applicant intends to appoint a Project Officer and have applied for funding for an initial one year period. The application has been re-worked so that the Development Worker role is more focused in developing the future programme, therefore the funding applied for is considerably reduced from the application from Round one, albeit the fundamentals remain. Aberdeenshire Council supported the initial funding for the Internship programme; which was very successful with positive feedback for both the intern and the host.

The grant requested is £40,387, which is 50% of the project costs.

The PAC were supportive of this project application with the scoring at 26.5 and the following queries being; Course accreditation – to clarify and strengthen this aspect of the application, Accreditation costs – justification of the costs was required, Admin costs – required benchmarking, Project costs – justification of the costs were required and KTIF application – written confirmation from SRDP on the outcome and eligibility was required. These queries were responded to sufficiently in order to strengthen the application to the LAG.

It was confirmed that future project applications would be in the form of Co-operation projects in years 2 and 3 which would extend the area for interns coming from across the wider Aberdeenshire area and beyond.

The project was put to vote and the outcome recorded as follows:

<b>Recommend Agreement</b>	<b>Reject</b>	<b>Abstain</b>
Ian Cowe (Public)		Liam Smyth (Chair) (Private)
Gina Ford (Public)		
Jean Henretty (Private)		
Belinda Miller (Public)		
Dawn Tuckwood (Public)		
Isla Martin (Public)		
Catriona Docherty (Private)		
Jo Robinson (Public)		

**THE INTERIM LAG RECOMMENDATION IS A GRANT AWARD UP TO £40,387 BE APPROVED.**

**SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS;**

- **THIS BE A ONE YEAR PROJECT**
- **A FINAL BENCH-MARKING REPORT BE PROVIDED ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE GRANT AWARD DATE.**

## **8. Application Assessment Revised procedures**

- 8.1. The Co-ordinator proposed that the number of application rounds held each year be reduced from 4 rounds to 3 rounds to allow the Co-ordinator more time to spend on the projects and Eols in the earlier stages of the process.
- 8.2. The Co-ordinator recommends greater focus be put on the Eols and project applications which SALAG would see as a priority in the area. This would be done by the addition of a “draft application deadline” whereby the Co-ordinator can feedback to applicants by assisting and developing projects. It may benefit applicants by engaging with Rural Partnerships, AVA etc. in improving their application; LAG members are welcomed to become directly involved with applications. Going back to applicants with technical feedback before an application goes to the PAC may resolve some minor issues therefore freeing up the PAC time.

Jean advised that Marr Area Partnerships propose offering training to local groups on the basics by offering training in business and project planning in the Marr area.

The Eol standard response email can have additional information added i.e. signposting for community groups to contact the Rural Partnerships; Business would be signposted differently.

- 8.3. In order for the Co-ordinator to have a better sense of the content of applications it is proposed to build in a “draft application assessment” deadline where early feedback can be provided to applicants. Alasdair will scrutinise the applications with outcomes being supported or challenged by the LAG Chair or Vice Chairs.
- 8.4. The Co-ordinator outlined several issues with EOLs and applications which had been received, advising that some were of poor quality and not at a sufficiently developed standard to be ready for assessment by the PAC and LAG. It is also proposed, where necessary that the Co-ordinator be empowered to defer incomplete applications to the next LEADER round.

It was noted that the Round 2 projects which withdrew did so after the PAC meeting rather than be rejected by the LAG.

- 8.5. A revised scoring framework has been developed which sees the criteria reduced to five (based on the Government's own template). The PAC felt the current format is too laborious; consideration is sought from the LAG on the adoption of the revised scoring framework.
- 8.6. The Co-ordinator proposed PAC members score the applications prior to the PAC meeting. When applications are to be made through LARCS the scoring will be completed by the full LAG where an average score will be reported. This will become clearer when the LARCS system is operational.
- 8.7. **The LAG agreed:**
  - 8.7.1 To reduce the number of application rounds from 4 to 3 rounds per annum.
  - 8.7.2 To accept or reject EOI's to allow resource to be used more efficiently in developing projects.
  - 8.7.3 Build in the optional 'draft application assessment' step and 'expression of interest deadline' step into the application process.
  - 8.7.4 Empowers the Co-ordinator to defer applications which are incomplete from going to the PAC and LAG.
  - 8.7.5 The revised application scoring framework with the five scoring criteria.
  - 8.7.6 PAC members should bring their completed individual scoring sheets to PAC meetings and use these at PAC discussions to collectively agree a PAC score for each project.

**Actions;**

- Circulate a list of Eols to LAG members (LAG members to then pick one and talk directly).
- Hold themed event/workshops for applicants who have submitted EOIs prior to submission of their formal project application to match with mentors from the Partnerships.
- Add a statement to the SALAG website encouraging potential applicants to contact the Partnerships (for working up applications).

**9. Business Structure**

- 9.1. Secretariat review; As part of Scottish Govt. guidance on LAG staff, they are required to spend 100% of contracted hours on LEADER; but this was not how the Aberdeenshire model was structured. A derogation was sought and obtained from the government to allow the Team Manager (Martin Brebner) to spend a portion of his time on CLLD activity. Under this condition a review is required on the staffing model. The review is proposed over the next six months to see how things are working in discussion with stakeholders i.e. LAG members, community partners, project applicants and sponsors, staff and the Scottish Govt. Martin advised an on-line consultation through a survey, running from June to August with the results being presented to the LAG at its meeting in September will discuss such issues as capacity building, animation etc. and identify how resources can be best used. A formal report on discussions after the LAG meeting will be put to the LAG for decision at a joint



meeting in December. The review will be carried out by Martin along with Roddy Mathieson (Service Manager, Industry Sectors) to avoid conflict. As this is a shared secretariat the review will apply to NALAG and NESFLAG also. Martin sought the recommendation of the LAG to proceed.

- 9.2. Liability; There had been an assumption at the last LAG meeting that a formal offer of grant letter would be issued, once the template was issued it became apparent that the agreement would be between the LAG and the applicant. This raised questions on the liability for LAG members in creating unrealistic legal exposure for LAG members.

A letter was written to the Scottish Govt. highlighting this concern along with concerns regarding the programme delays i.e. offer of grant letter etc. A conference call with the Scottish Govt., Martin, the LAG Chairs and Aberdeenshire's Legal team was held to overcome these issues. It was mooted to constitute the group as a limited company but this would have created unrecoverable VAT issues for staffing and other costs.

Martin then spoke to other LAG areas and it was identified that the best way forward is to have the Accountable Body/Lead Partner model (i.e. Aberdeenshire Council) as the contracting party whereby we require the Council to make the final decision to comply with statutes. The LAG were asked to appoint and agree Aberdeenshire Council as lead partner for the Local Action Group. The Council would then make the final decisions on applications in consideration with the LAG; if there was any disagreement between the LAG and Council then it would be referred to the Scottish Govt. The Scottish Govt. are happy with this proposal. This would be the least costly but more straightforward procedure. Martin advised that Aberdeenshire Council Committee approval would now be required so a report will be put forward by Martin at the earliest opportunity.

**9.3. The LAG agreed:**

9.3.1. The LAG endorses the process for the review of the LAG Secretariat.

9.3.2 To mandate the LAG chair and Accountable Body (Aberdeenshire Council) to develop a solution to the liability issue and present a proposal to the LAG.

**10. AOCB**

10.1 Animation; the Co-ordinator proposed a sub-group of LAG members to look at and plan a strategy to generate ideas to promote we can offer; therefore volunteers was sought. The Chair is happy to host a meeting to canvas the wider LAG.

10.2 Interventions; as some applications have submitted videos and additional, material to support their applications it was felt that consideration be given on whether this was appropriate or whether there was no longer a level playing field. All applications have the opportunity to present their applications and supplementary information to the PAC in any manner. The LAG discussed an "Elevator" style pitch short video.

The LAG agreed that applicants have the opportunity to present additional material which would be uploaded to the Member's area of the website for perusal as part of the application information pack out with the LAG meetings. LAG members would be encouraged to "site" visit projects if they felt it appropriate.

10.3 Media on approved applications; publicity/media announcements are not allowed during the Purdah period. Martin advised that there had been a wait on the formal letters but that there would be no barrier in doing so after the European Referendum election.

**Actions;**

- The Co-ordinator will set a date for a canvassing meeting and will circulate to the LAG.

The Chairman thanked members for their time and valuable input.

<b>ACTION</b>	<b>RESPONSIBLE</b>
Circulate the Eols which have yet to submit a formal application	AC
Hold themed events for applicants who have submitted EOIs prior to submission of formal project application	AC
Add a statement to the SALAG website encouraging potential applicants to contact the Partnerships (for working up applications)	AC
A date be set for a canvassing meeting.	AC

Minute Taker - June Jaffrey, European Programmes Claims Officer  
24/06/16



The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: **Europe investing in rural areas**