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Community LEADER 2014-2020 Programme



Scottish Rural  
Development  
Programme



## Minutes: LEADER Programme 2014-2020.

### Local Action Group Meeting.

**16 November 2016 (11:00) at D & I Room 1, Council Offices, School Place, Kirkwall**

Present: LAG Members (Public) - Francesca Couperwhite (Chair), Phyllis Harvey (Vice Chair), Barbara Foulkes, Morag Robertson, Issy Grieve

LAG Members (Private) - Edgar Balfour, Brian Cromarty, Dawn Flett, Hannah Ker, Steve Ray, Paul Ross, Nic Thake

LEADER Team: Amy Esslemont (LEADER Development Officer), Julie Murphy (Assistant Project Officer) – minutes.

The Chair checked that the meeting was quorate, per the LAG's Constitution formally adopted at the LAG Meeting held on 3 December 2015. The Chair also checked that the public/private minimum 49/50 split was met.

### 1. Welcome

Francesca Couperwhite, the Chair, welcomed the LAG members. She also welcomed Dawn Flett, to her first meeting since being recently appointed as a LAG member, representing the Orkney Tourism Group. Francesca thanked members for their attendance and explained the importance of attendance, whenever possible, to enable meetings to be quorate, and to ensure that the public/private split is met.

### 2. Apologies

The Chair advised that apologies had been received from Kerry Spence, Keith Dobney, Mark Hull, Susan Pirie, Sarah Sankey and Amy Thomson.

### 3. Update on implications of BREXIT

The Chair asked Amy to give an update on the implications of BREXIT. Amy advised the LAG that following the guarantees from HM Treasury, the Scottish Government had now confirmed, via a press release, that this guarantee would be passed on, however, the Scottish Government had still not been able to give full clarity on the timeframes this guarantee would cover for the LEADER 2014-2020 programme. Phyllis Harvey, Vice Chair, advised that before the BREXIT decision it had been hoped that the timeframe for the programme could be extended to 2021 or 2022. Phyllis added that at a recent Accountable Body meeting, which she had attended, the question of timeframes was raised and, although there had been no clear answers regarding the situation, it was hoped that programme would be able to continue up to December 2020. She explained that for revenue projects, in

particular, the timeframe would need to be made clear, as these projects could span 3 or 4 years. Phyllis said the current situation was that approved projects which had contracts signed before BREXIT would be honoured, but the uncertainty regarding timescales was not helpful.

#### **4. Dates of Next Meetings**

Francesca advised that as this special meeting was for the assessment of projects only, and the LAG would not be checking the Draft Minutes from the LAG's last meeting held on 22 September 2016; this would be done at the LAG's next scheduled meeting.

The Chair asked members to make a note of the amended proposed dates for the next meetings for Round 4 (8 February 2016) and Round 5 (17 May 2017), and asked that members respond promptly regarding their attendance when requested.

Phyllis explained that it had been necessary to extend the time between the deadlines for applications and the LAG meetings, to allow sufficient time for the Scottish Government to carry out potential pre-approval checks (which could take up to 10 working days) and to allow time for any issues raised to be resolved, prior to submission of applications to LAG members.

#### **10. AOCB**

The Chair asked if any of the LAG members had any other competent business they wished to discuss. No items were put forward for discussion.

#### **11. Assessment of Round 3 Projects:**

The Chair explained that there were declarations of interest for the project applications, those that had a declaration of interest left the room for the decisions as follows:

- Westray Circular Growers: Reducing food miles and increasing food smiles – Francesca Couperwhite (due to Highlands & Islands Enterprise being a match funder)
- Orkney Boat Haven/Museum Feasibility Study – all Orkney Islands Council (OIC) staff (due to OIC's Community Development Funding)
- Ness of Brodgar Development Project - all OIC staff (due to applicant being OIC)
- Orkney Digital Media – all OIC staff (due to applicant being OIC) and Francesca Couperwhite (due to Highlands & Islands Enterprise being a match funder). Barbara Foulkes, Dawn Flett and Edgar Balfour who declared an interest.

Barbara Foulkes asked if she should declare an interest in the Orkney Boat Haven/Museum Feasibility Study and Ness of Brodgar Development Project, as she had provided letters of support for these applications. Phyllis confirmed that it had been decided previously that LAG members who provided letters of support for projects could be involved in the assessment process, if they wished, as in a small community the LAG could find themselves in a situation where several or even all of them had provided letters of support for a project. Barbara decided to stay for the assessment of these applications.

All the following project applications were assessed using the scoring criteria previously agreed by the LAG (13 criteria with a total of 39 marks available, and a

pass rate of 26), and against the following, current LAG and Applicant Guidance versions:

- LEADER General Guidance for Applicants, Version 2.0, dated 7 March 2016
- LAG Project Assessment Guidance, Version 1, dated 7 March 2016

The projects were assessed in the following order:

### **1. Westray Circular Growers: Reducing food miles and increasing food smiles 14/P00003**

At this point Francesca Couperwhite left the meeting. Phyllis Harvey took the Chair.

Amy presented a summary of the project to the group, explaining that this project was a 1<sup>st</sup> Phase, and the applicant's intention was to proceed to a larger scale 2<sup>nd</sup> Phase, if the initial project proved successful. The LAG was invited to discuss and ask questions.

Phyllis explained the scoring procedure for the benefit of LAG members who had not yet been through the process.

Phyllis confirmed that the Reasonableness of Costs Declaration for the project had been confirmed by an independent third party. The LAG agreed the costs were reasonable.

The LAG felt that the project applied for would have benefits for the local area, with the potential of wider reaching benefits in the future. They believed that the project's contribution to the aims of the LEADER Programme was proportionate to the funding being requested, and noted it was an experimental/trial project which would create two jobs.

The LAG agreed that the project engaged community involvement at a high level and facilitated social cohesion. They felt the objectives and milestones were both appropriate and achievable. The LAG felt that a wide range of potential barriers/risks had been identified, and there were detailed plans to address these.

It was noted by the LAG that the project was innovative, in that it was an experimental project, and one member added that the use of hydroponics at this scale was most probably new to Orkney.

With a total score of 31, the LAG **approved** the project; with a grant awarded of up to £45,995.66 (49.54% of the approved eligible costs exclusive of VAT).

### **2. Orkney Boat Haven/Museum feasibility Study – 14/P00012**

At this point Phyllis Harvey, Morag Robertson and Issy Grieve left the meeting and Francesca Couperwhite returned to the meeting, and returned to the Chair.

Amy presented a summary of the project to the group; advising that as a result of the feasibility study the applicant hoped was to ultimately create an accredited boat museum in Stromness. Amy explained that the application could have been fast-tracked, as the amount being requested was below £10,000, but as a LAG meeting was pending, it was decided to present the application at the meeting. The LAG was invited to discuss and ask questions.

The Chair advised that the Reasonableness of Costs Declaration for the project had been confirmed by an independent third party. The LAG agreed the costs were reasonable.

The point was made by a member of the LAG that feasibility studies were almost impossible to score using the current LAG assessment criterion. Another member confirmed that this had also proved to be a difficulty in the previous LEADER programme; resulting in the LAG deciding to take into consideration the possible, eventual project when scoring the feasibility study.

There was further discussion on the difficulties of scoring this type of project and various suggestions made as to the way forward.

Amy advised that it would not be possible to create a separate list of criterion for solely for feasibility studies.

Francesca requested that a guidance note be produced for using the present criterion for any future feasibility studies, so that they could all be scored consistently.

A member remarked that the project start date was optimistic, and Amy explained that the project had already received quotes, and selected their preferred bidder, but to conform to the requirements of LEADER, no contract had been entered into. The LAG agreed whilst carrying out the scoring process, that some criterion could be scored on the feasibility study, but others could only be scored on the project concept.

The LAG felt the project concept could have huge potential to build capacity through broad community involvement. The costs, timeframes and deliverables of the feasibility study were clearly identified and realistic. They noted that the project had identified some potential risks/barriers, but it was felt that plans to address these could have been expanded. The LAG agreed that the project concept would definitely enhance the sustainability of the community, with strong social, environmental and economic linkages. They felt that a boat haven/museum in Stromness was innovative and new to the local area. The LAG noted that the environmental impact of project concept would be a positive one; given that a redundant building would be brought back into use.

With a total score of 32, the project was **approved**; with a grant awarded of up to £4180.00 (47.5% of the approved eligible costs inclusive of VAT).

### **3. Ness of Brodgar Development Project – 14/P00014**

Amy presented a summary of the project to the group, explaining that as a result of the success of the site the project wanted to employ a full-time Manager, and a part-time Project Officer, and invest in website development, in order to develop the site further as a major visitor attraction in Orkney.

Amy advised the LAG that the Scottish Government had carried out a pre-approval check on this project. She also advised that all LEADER applications made by Orkney Islands Council would be checked by the Scottish Government before the project could be submitted to the LAG for consideration. Amy confirmed that a small percentage of all other LEADER applications would also be selected randomly for pre-approval checks.

The Chair advised that feedback would be provided to the LAG, at future meetings, regarding any comments received on projects, from Scottish Government, as a result of their pre-approval checks.

Amy read out the following comments which were made by the Scottish Government on the project:

“This looks like an interesting project, that will create jobs and show a large increase in tourism for Orkney. Projects supporting Heritage aspects are very important to both the local community and Scotland, but also impacting on the wider market in and out of the EU.

The applicant has well-structured Milestones and costs, demonstrating a good understanding of project planning. The Project plan is comprehensive and demonstrates the skills and knowledge required to monitor and manage the project well. The jobs created will support these skills”.

The LAG was invited to discuss and ask questions.

The Chair confirmed that the Reasonableness of Costs Declaration for the project had been confirmed by an independent third party. The LAG agreed the costs were reasonable.

A LAG member asked if the Ness of Brodgar Trust would be the employer of the new posts. Amy advised that the employer would be Orkney Islands Council (Orkney College), who was the applicant for the project.

A member of the LAG queried if it was necessary to employ someone at such a senior level, for the site. Another LAG member suggested that because of the significance of the site, it was appropriate to employ someone at this level, as it would be important to select the right person for the post.

Another LAG member queried how the posts would be filled and Amy advised that both posts would have to be openly advertised, and the Council’s recruitment procedure would be followed.

One LAG member expressed disappointment at the project’s lack of imagination with regards to innovation. Amy explained that although this detail was not specifically asked for on the application form, she did ask all applicants to include information on innovation within their applications.

The LAG agreed that the project met the aims of the Orkney LEADER programme and had significant benefits to both local and programme areas.

The LAG members noted that although a high level of funding was being requested this was considered to be proportionate to the project’s contribution to the aims of the Orkney LEADER Programme.

The members agreed that there was clear and significant evidence of community need for the project, and that there was already good community involvement in the site; which they envisaged being enhanced further by the project.

The LAG felt there were strong social, environmental and economic linkages which would contribute to the sustainability of the community.

With a total score of 32, the project was **approved**; with a grant awarded of up to £72,010.51 (50% of approved eligible costs exclusive of VAT).

#### **4. Digital Media Orkney – 14/P00010**

The Chair proposed that for the sake of consistency, Steve Ray should Chair this project assessment, as he had done so at the last LAG meeting; the LAG agreed this would be appropriate.

One LAG member asked if, before leaving the meeting, they could hear the comments made by the Scottish Government in their pre-approval check of the project. Amy explained that this would be inappropriate.

A LAG member mentioned that other areas allowed applicants to be present at meetings in order to answer questions about their project applications, and asked if this would be possible in future. Amy stated that she was aware of this procedure in some other areas, but advised that, at this stage in the programme, introducing such a change would be quite difficult as previous applicants had not been given this opportunity.

Francesca Couperwhite, Edgar Balfour, Dawn Flett and Barbara Foulkes then left the meeting.

Amy presented a summary of the project to the group, explaining that the project aims were to develop and transition Orkney's collective marketing activity to fulfil an increasing requirement for digital media and content.

As requested by a LAG member, Amy read out the following comments on the project, which were made by the Scottish Government, in their pre-approval check:

"Innovative project, that would greatly benefit Orkney. Milestones and Costs well-structured and comprehensive."

The Chair advised the LAG that they would, review the previous scores given, however, only the four criteria raised as requiring further information at the last meeting would be re-scored. These were, as follows:

How well does the project engage community involvement?  
Are the objectives and milestones appropriate and realistic?  
How innovative is the project in its focus or methodology?  
Does the project link with or complement other projects or strategies?

The Chair read out the project assessment scores and comments, as agreed during the LAG meeting held on 22 September 2016.

The LAG was invited to discuss and ask questions.

A LAG member pointed out that the project mentioned engagement with Community Councils, and not with Development Trusts. Amy read out extracts from the revised project plan which referred to engagement with Development Trusts, and the keen desire to continue the Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Development Trusts relationship, with proposed regular forum meetings throughout the project.

The LAG agreed that the applicant had identified linkages with the community and Development Trusts, and noted that these would be actioned during the project period.

Concern was expressed over the explanation given by the applicant as to why the objectives were set at an achievable level. Amy explained that projects had to set milestones delivery dates, and the achievement of these had to be evidenced prior to payment of any claims.

The LAG agreed that the milestones had been clearly identified but felt the objectives were still lacking in ambition.

A LAG member suggested that the project could have been more innovative by including a commitment to explore and embrace emerging digital platforms.

A LAG member commented that part of the project appeared to include the exploration of new opportunities, and that local businesses needed and would ultimately benefit from this type of project.

After some discussion, the LAG agreed that the applicant should be advised that the LAG would like to see the project explore and embrace emerging opportunities in digital communications.

The LAG noted that the project had identified linkages to other strategies, and had pledged to work with communities throughout Orkney.

With a total score of 29, the project was **approved**; with a grant awarded of up to £174,000 (50% of approved eligible costs exclusive of VAT).

The meeting closed at 12:45.