

Highland LEADER 2014 – 2020 Programme
Inner Moray Firth North LAP Meeting
6.30 – 8.30pm, 8 February 2017, Alness Heritage Centre

Attendance:

Jennifer Barclay	(Public)
Helen Barton	(Private)
Val Cameron	(Private)
Tom Davis (Chair)	(Private)
Sheila Fletcher	(Private)
Angela MacLean	(Public)
Iain McCallum	(Public)
John McHardy	(Public)
Martin Rattray	(Public)
Franca Reid	(Private)
Helen Ross	Advisory

Laura Gray (Private) and Teanie Finnie (Private), from the Alness Youth Forum, accompanied by Youth Development Officer, Karla Urquhart.

Judith Wainwright, Highland LEADER Programme

Apologies

Apologies were received from Helen Barton, Alan Hasson, Betty Lochhead, Jillian Munro and Gordon Robertson.

Update on Action Points from last meeting

Judith has been unable to establish contact with Jodi to see if she still wishes to attend meetings in her own right and Karla agreed to speak to her.

Action:KU

Last remaining photos and narratives are still required. Judith circulated a paper showing information for the website that has already been provided. Members are asked to check their own personal details and provide any missing information.

Action:ALL

The Highland Council has now approved a Cashflow Loan facility for LEADER applicants.

All other actions were completed.

LAP Membership

KU left the room and her application to join the LAP was discussed and approved; the LAP currently has no representation in the 16-29 age group, Karla will be attending all meetings in any event to accompany the youth members and she had made a good contribution at the last meeting. The LAP agreed it would be happy for her to be a voting member; however Karla had previously expressed a concern that her line manager felt that this may result

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in a conflict of interest as she was attending meetings to support youth members. It was agreed that Judith and Karla will follow this up and in the meantime, Karla was welcomed back as an advisory member.

Two other pending applications were also discussed. One of the applicants (Alan Kerry) has since left the area and the other (Mary Macdonald) was from an area and age band that is already well/over represented, therefore it was agreed that there would be no further recruitment to the LAP at this stage.

Highland LEADER – Programme Update

Judith updated the meeting:

- 204 Expressions of Interest (EOIs) in total across Highland (22 IMFN, plus a further 7 RE/FD EOIs from IMFN)
- 5 live projects, of which 2 are from IMFN
- Posters and local magazine advertising have started to generate interest, especially in the Black Isle area, but more enquiries are needed. Judith proposed holding a number of surgeries and it was agreed that these should be held in Balintore/Port Mahommack, Tain, Invergordon, Alness, Dingwall and Muir of Ord.
- RE/FD – a total of 47 EOIs from across Highland. The Programme is not yet ready to launch, but there are plans to send questionnaires so that the LEADER Team can prioritise those projects that are ready to proceed (i.e. have a sound Business Plan, match funding in place etc.)
- Other LAPs have agreed to increase minimum grants, commensurate with workload/complexity of application and claims process.

Action: JW

LARCs Demonstration

Judith gave a brief overview of the LARCs system, which stimulated discussion. Key points noted:

- The application screens are not very user friendly
- The intention is that applicants input their applications directly onto LARCs, without the need for a paper application. At the moment in Highland, paper applications are being completed by applicants and information from these is being data input to LARCs – mostly by Development Officers to support applicants
- A request has been made to the Scottish Government for a print function so that applications can be printed from LARCs, although as yet, no commitment has been given.
- LARCs has been designed so that LAP members review applications on screen rather than on paper. There are no plans at the moment for Highland to change the current paper based process.
- Once a project is approved and goes 'live' on the system, the LEADER Team have no access to update, so applicants will have to input claims themselves
- Claims training will be offered to all applicants and the LEADER team will be available to provide support, although it will not be feasible for this to always be face to face
- It is anticipated that there will be a significant number of change requests, which need to be submitted by applicants; in addition to genuine changes for which a change request would be expected, these will be also required

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if actual claim figures do not exactly match forecast figures, and currently raising a change request provides the only mechanism for uploading essential documents to the system, once a project has gone live. This is likely to create a significant administrative burden as the Programme Manager is the only member of the LEADER team who has access to the change request functionality.

- LAP members expressed concern that the process using LARCs does not meet equalities criteria since not all applicants will have access to a computer and in some parts of Highland there is no Wi-Fi. Judith confirmed that this concern has already been expressed to the Scottish Government.
- A LARCs working group comprising members of 7 LAG areas, including Highland, is being established with the aim of reviewing and prioritising necessary system changes.

Applications in the Pipeline

A table of all EOIs and recent general enquiries from IMFN (see Appendix 1), was distributed and discussed. Projects highlighted are those that are likely to be presented to the LAP meeting in May.

Judith referred to the questionnaire that is being sent to rural enterprise/farm diversification applicants; if any applicants from IMFN are in a position to proceed (with full match funding and a complete Business Plan in place etc.) before that part of the LEADER Programme has been launched, the IMFN LAP will have the option to assess and support them from the LAP budget.

The meeting discussed how members could identify and facilitate projects coming forward. This resulted in two key initiatives:

Visitors to the area

It was felt that there was scope for a feasibility type project to look at how coach and cruise visitors to the area could be directed towards more local activities rather than being transported out of the area e.g. to Loch Ness, Inverness or further afield. The challenges posed by the Invergordon Port Authority were recognised, but it was still felt that there was scope to provide more locally based alternatives for visitors. Although it was felt to be too late to impact in 2017, the aim would be to start a project this year with the intention of making an impact in 2018. Martin agreed to start this process by arranging a meeting of interested parties. Anyone interested should let Martin know.

**Action:MR/
ALL**

Youth Projects

Judith advised that she has agreed to attend the Alness Youth Forum meeting next week and that the purpose of this will be discuss what projects young people would like to see coming forward. It was suggested that the 'washing line' that young LAP members had presented last year should be re-visited. Val referred to a project in Ullapool which had resulted in a meeting space for young people and asked the youth members to consider whether they felt there was adequate provision, including whether facilities currently available for use by young people are equipped for their interests/needs. Karla and Judith will report back to the next meeting.

**Action: KU/
JW**

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IMFN Local Area Action Plan (LAAP) Review

Local Priorities

After some discussion, the meeting agreed that the current priority outcomes should remain and it was not felt necessary to add any new ones, as the projects coming forward are generally consistent with the current top three outcomes.

Minimum Grant and Project Budget

Whilst the workload associated with applying for and administering a LEADER project was recognised and the fact that this is likely to discourage smaller projects, it was decided to keep the current limits, since the projects and enquiries currently coming forward are all for larger amounts. It was agreed that this position could be reviewed again if we start to see more interest in smaller projects.

Time did not permit a review of the Operating Guidelines so this will be carried forward to the next meeting.

Action: JW

Review of LAP Performance

Monitoring and evaluation of the Highland LEADER 2014-2020 Programme include ongoing review of the performance of decision making groups such as LAPs, on an annual basis. Judith distributed a Questionnaire which has been designed for self-assessment by LAP members and enquired as to how LAP members would like to implement this (e.g. anonymous/named returns to Judith, or to an independent party). It was agreed that LAP members would be happy to complete named questionnaires and return them then to Judith for collation; some were completed and returned at the end of the meeting. Members who have not yet done so are asked to complete and return them by 24 February.

**Action:
ALL if not
already
completed
and
returned**

Next Meetings

The next meeting will be held on 10 May, with subsequent meetings pencilled in for 16/8/17 and 15/11/17.