

BRIEFING NOTE: HIGHLAND LEADER 2007-13

PURPOSE: To provide information on the **LEADER 2007-13** fund and its application in Highland.

Background

LEADER (Liaison Entre Action De Development De L'Economie Rurale or Links Between Actions for the Development of the Rural Economy) is the European Union Community Initiative aimed at promoting **economic and community development** within **rural** areas. Resources are targeted at those rural areas identified as most in need, based on basic qualifying criteria such as sparsity of population, but importantly addressing issues such as ageing population, rural depopulation and job losses.

The basic principles of LEADER are; local involvement, community benefit, equal opportunities, innovation, sustainable development, sharing lessons learned and working with other areas.

There have been 3 previous LEADER programmes (LEADER 1, 2 and LEADER +). The present programme (LEADER +) ran from 2001 to 2006, and is now closed. LEADER has now been mainstreamed and will operate under the Scottish Rural Development Programme which will run from 2007-2013 and be managed by Scottish Government Rural Directorate.

The Highland LEADER Bid

The Highland Council, on behalf of the Community Planning partnership for Highland, submitted a bid to run the next LEADER 2007-13 Programme.

The programme area includes all of the Highland Council area, except for the settlement development area for Inverness (as given in the local plan) and the part of the Highland Council area within the Cairngorms National Park.

A full socio-economic analysis of the area was undertaken to inform the business plan submitted to the Scottish Government – the strategy highlights a complex picture with wide variations between different parts of the programme area. *Copies of the Bid and previous supporting documents are available on the Council's web site. www.highland.gov.uk*

Target groups have been identified as:

- Young people
- Women
- The under-employed
- Young adults (up to 34)
- Older people (over 65)
- Micro-businesses

In addition, in areas where there are concentrated populations, projects will be developed to target the needs of migrant workers.

The aim of the Programme is:

To enable people in the Highlands to realise their ambitions to live in communities where they can fulfil their personal, social and economic potential

Under this aim, the main objectives are:

- to stabilise and grow population levels and the balance between age groups, particularly focusing on the retention and attraction of young adults

- to increase the benefits communities can derive from their natural and cultural heritage and from tourism
- to maximise the benefits of community assets
- to improve access to services in the community, particularly focusing on the needs of young people and those over 65
- to assist communities to create, update and implement development plans
- to increase the scope and range of training and learning opportunities available locally
- to support the development of social enterprise and micro-businesses.

A wide range of potential projects are identified to achieve these objectives (see Appendix 1)

STRUCTURE AND DECISION MAKING

All LEADER areas will have a local partnership; the partnership will have control over a budget and make decisions on LEADER project applications arising in their area. Local partnerships must be composed of 50% public sector and 50% private, community and voluntary sector reps; they are also expected to prepare local development plans for their areas.

The Highland LEADER Programme will be made up of a strategic Local Action Group (LAG) and a suite of local area partnerships. The strategic LAG will work with eleven local partnerships in the Highlands. The following groups have been identified, each at different stages of development:

- Caithness
- Sutherland
- Tain and Easter Ross
- Cromarty Firth
- Dingwall and Seaforth
- Black Isle
- Wester Ross
- Skye
- Lochaber
- Rural Inverness
- Nairn

Establishing these groups will be a priority in the first year of the Programme. Each local partnership will be expected to produce a local development plan for their area which will be submitted to the strategic LAG, once these are approved, a local allocation will be made, based on 2/3 population, 1/3 area (as per Scottish Government allocations). LEADER applications which relate to the local area will be considered by these partnerships. The aim of the LEADER Programme will be to delegate a significant proportion of the budget and as much day-to-day responsibility as possible to the local level.

FUNDING

To date the Programme has received a LEADER allocation of £6.63 million and is awaiting its Convergence allocation. Once the Convergence funds have been confirmed the Programme will be in a position to agree local allocations, grant rates and maximum project size.

In the meantime up to £10,000 has been made available to each of the local partnerships for initial development planning for their area. Each partnership is in the process of applying for this funding.

For more information please contact your local development officer – Debbie Maguire at: debbie.maguire@highland.gov.uk

Appendix 1

Development Planning and Community capacity building

Integral to the Highland LAG's LEADER Programme is the involvement of communities in defining their own needs. Using existing and developing local community planning structures the LAG will look to support the local development planning process. This will give a firm foundation for many LEADER projects across the different themes, as well as projects that might be taken forward through other routes.

In order to bring projects to fruition, communities need to be organised, representative and able to identify and articulate their own needs and opportunities and LEADER will look to support the capacity building process, including assisting communities to build robust and sustainable projects. A similar approach will be taken to sectoral partnerships and these will be encouraged to prepare plans which show an agreed and sustainable development path.

The types of project likely to come forward in this field will include:

- support for area partnerships to work with communities to prepare and update development plans
- support for sectoral partnerships to prepare and update development plans
- development plans for priority areas within local community planning partnerships
- projects which build the capacity of communities
- support for communities to develop individual projects
- feasibility studies
- support for sectoral based development planning
- crofting township and community land development plans
- projects promoting joint working between community groups

Culture and Heritage

The culture and heritage of the Highlands is important both to local people and to visitors. For local people there is pride in the Highland heritage, in traditional music, the contemporary arts and the Gaelic language. Visual arts and crafts are also strong in the area, with artists attracted by the light, the landscape and the local materials. Culture and the arts can be a strong force for community cohesion, reduce rural isolation, and provide employment and positive volunteering opportunities.

Umbrella organisations such as HI-Arts, Fèisean nan Gàidheal (which supports the development of community-based Gaelic arts tuition festivals), the Highlands and Islands Theatre Network (which supports performing arts companies) and the Promoters Arts Network (which supports a network of local promoters who use halls and other venues to bring performances to Highland communities) as well as geographic groupings such as the Caithness Arts Forum have firm development plans and provide a sound base for development of the sector. Highland 2007, the Year of Highland Culture, has led to a whole range of cultural developments over the year and LEADER will help communities to explore how the progress made in that time can be taken into the future in a way that can be sustained.

For visitors, Highland culture and heritage is an important motivation to come to the area and a memorable part of their trip. Many of the events and festivals in the Highlands are only possible because of the involvement of visitors to boost attendance figures; equally many visitors to the Highlands come because of the cultural events and festivals. This synergy is welcomed in bringing vibrancy to communities combined with real economic benefits.

The types of project likely to come forward in this field will include:

- projects which provide opportunities to acquire or use the Gaelic language
- heritage interpretation
- community based heritage projects
- projects which build the sustainability of the Highland 2007 legacy

- extending the range of arts events available locally
- projects which support the building of audiences
- projects which encourage involvement in music, the arts and creative activity
- projects which provide a showcase for locally produced arts and culture
- supporting community based cultural organisations to develop and co-operate
- projects which use IT to promote Highland culture and heritage

Training and learning opportunities

Training is an essential part of many of the projects that will come forward from the LAG's priority areas, whether to do with community capacity building, culture, the environment or renewables. There is a need however to do further work to take forward the network of local learning centres, to ensure that there are accurate and up to date pictures of local training needs and to ensure that local access to training is available. Transport costs and availability are a major disincentive to taking up vocational training and there is a need to address this issue to provide real opportunities for skills acquisition by young people and re-training for the under and unemployed.

Training for volunteers is also an issue, both in the training of volunteers to carry out work for voluntary groups and also in terms of using the existing skills base of the local population to pass skills to the wider community. Where appropriate learning opportunities will also involve migrant workers, both in helping them to integrate into local communities and in helping local communities learn about the different cultures coming to the area.

The types of project likely to come forward in this field will include:

- projects to carry out training needs analysis in communities or sectors
- projects extending the range of learning opportunities
- projects which deliver learning in remoter communities
- development of local learning cooperatives which draw upon the knowledge, experience and skills of their own members to organise and provide learning opportunities for people no longer in full time employment (the university of the third age)
- projects which develop volunteering opportunities through which people can use and extend their skills
- rural skills training
- training in horticulture
- projects which address the learning needs of migrant workers
- projects which help communities learn about other cultures

Access to activities, facilities and services

Strong communities require local access to services and facilities to address issues of isolation and rural deprivation. This is an issue that affects all the Programmes target groups. For example, the rising elderly population needs opportunities to socialise and to remain active and support to remain in their own homes; young people need local activities to engage with them and encourage healthy life choices; young adults will look at the local services and facilities in deciding whether to remain or relocate. Services such as childcare and daycare can be important in supporting the underemployed.

Many services will be delivered through partnerships with statutory agencies, such as the Council or the Health Services, but communities are also keen to build the capacity to deliver services they have designed themselves to meet their own needs. Access to services and facilities is important for communities facing reducing populations to allow them to retain and attract people to live there. It is also important for those predominantly rural communities which are being drawn into the Inverness commuter belt and as a result are facing increased development and pressure on the existing infrastructure.

The types of project likely to come forward in this field will include:

- support for village halls and other community facilities to extend the range of services available locally
- ICT and broadband initiatives
- childcare provision
- daycare provision
- projects to create, improve or extend community facilities
- improvements to playparks
- activities aimed at young people
- multi use sports areas
- recycling related projects
- rural and community transport initiatives

Land, environment and access to the countryside

The land and environment is a core part of the Highland way of life and economy. Every type of agricultural activity can be found in the Highland LAG area. Larger arable and mixed farms are generally found in the east with smaller croft holdings on the more marginal land in the west. Crofting is an integral part of rural life in the Highland LAG area, enabling people to occupy some of the most remote and geographically challenging landscapes. There are large estates throughout the area, many of them under crofting tenure. The work of crofters, farmers and other land managers creates the natural environment which features strongly in the motivation of tourists to come to the Highlands.

It creates the setting for a whole range of outdoor activities, whether general touring and sightseeing, walking, archaeological sites or viewing wildlife. We know that these are the bedrock of the Highland tourism industry and a major motivator for people to live in the area. Projects which enhance the landscape and improve access and understanding can do much to revitalise remote communities. Local consultations have taken place to develop core paths plans across the Highland LAG area, identifying those routes seen as of particular importance.

Local groups, such as in Broadford, have also developed plans to improve the local environment through a range of works, training and interpretation. With biodiversity, the Highland Biodiversity Partnership and its seven local biodiversity groups are responsible for delivering local action towards nationally agreed Habitat and Species Action Plans (HAPs and SAPs) as well as the seven Highland Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs). The North Highland and WHELK Leader+ Programmes contributed towards this work by funding the Highland BAP Implementation Programme, a grant scheme which supported 37 local biodiversity projects between 2004 and 2007.

The Highland Biodiversity Action Plan and its constituent Local Biodiversity Action Plans have identified a number of further project ideas, 24 of which are receiving funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. However, the local groups are heavily dependant on volunteers and in addition to further project funding, there is a need to build capacity within these groups to enable them to develop and run further projects that will contribute towards national and local BAP priorities.

The richness of the Highland landscape is enhanced by the archaeological record it contains. 1,227 Scheduled Ancient Monuments are listed by Historic Scotland in Highland. The Highland Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), lists all known archaeological and historical sites in Highland. It contains details of approximately 39,000 known sites of all types and periods, from the earliest human use of our landscape to the recent industrial past of the 20th Century.

The types of project likely to come forward in this field will include:

- development of crofting community and land access initiatives
- implementation of the core paths plans
- biodiversity related projects
- community archaeology projects

- environmental interpretation projects
- marketing support initiatives
- improvements to designated sites
- environmental education and facilities
- recreation facilities in the countryside or forest

Renewables

The Highland area already hosts considerable energy-related activity and renewables can deliver significant benefits to communities by producing cheaper energy locally, creating new revenue channels and providing opportunities for local employment. Community-owned projects currently vary from small-scale installations serving individual buildings to schemes that generate income from the sale of renewable electricity. Small-scale examples include renewable heat from ground source heat pumps, Wind-2-heat and solar hot water systems, and biomass boilers. These have a key role to play in reducing the running costs of facilities such as village halls and community centres, as well as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, adding to their viability and sustainability.

Larger scale projects often generate renewable electricity for local use and / or sale to the grid. The larger scale projects are likely to be outside the scope of LEADER, though support for initial feasibility work is likely to be important in the development of the sector. The Highlands and Islands Community Energy Company works with communities to help them implement renewable energy projects, but there is a need to do more to raise awareness of the possibilities and to help communities through regulatory hurdles. There are also opportunities for communities to benefit from renewable energy, for example through the production of woodchip or biomass fuels, and LEADER has a role in supporting the investigation of these possibilities and in helping communities to implement such schemes.

The types of project likely to come forward in this field will include:

- awareness raising
- projects which support communities to develop micro-renewable generation, and assist them to overcome barriers and challenges
- initial feasibility studies for larger community renewable schemes
- community owned renewable energy projects
- training and support in production of biomass (growing plants such as quick-rotation coppice) for energy production

Tourism

Tourism accounts for over 13% of employment in the Highlands, excluding the self employed. As such it is a key economic driver which has the capacity to benefit even the most remote and peripheral areas. The Highlands is one of the most important destinations in Scotland, especially for overseas visitors. Its attractions are firmly rooted in the landscape, environment and culture. Through tourism communities can also find the additional market to make local services, products and facilities more viable and so many projects throughout the Highland LAG's LEADER programme will have an impact for visitors. During the Programme period there is the need to build on Highland 2007, the Year of Highland Culture, and to grasp the special opportunities that will arise through the Year of Homecoming in 2009 and the preparations for the Commonwealth Games in 2014.

There are challenges, though, in factors such as low pay and the seasonality of employment. Visitor patterns are also changing, with a move towards shorter breaks and growth is being driven by activities and events and improvements to access. Across the Highland LAG area communities are focusing on their own particular strengths to stimulate tourism growth. For example, while Lochaber is promoting itself as the outdoor capital, Caithness has potential for archaeology and cultural tourism. Crofting communities (where there has been a land buy out and elsewhere) are exploring how they can diversify and create tourism products.

Events and activities based on the various strengths of the Highland LAG area, such as music and culture, food, genealogy, heritage, walking, mountain biking, golf and fishing are important to tourism growth. Infrastructure and training to support these growth areas is also needed and projects are anticipated, for example, to develop mountain bike trails and create wildlife viewing facilities.

The types of project likely to come forward in this field will include:

- sectoral and community based marketing initiatives
- development of niche tourism products
- development of tourism infrastructure
- promotion of web based customer interfaces

Social enterprise and micro-businesses

Social enterprise and micro-businesses are an important part of the Highland LAG area and often fit well with the pattern of self-employment and pluriactivity engaged in by many people in rural communities. It is not possible to make a living from crofting agriculture alone and crofting communities are multi-active, with most crofters involved in a number of activities contributing to their livelihood. Individual crofts are micro-businesses, and much of the activity round tourism, music and culture is also carried out by the smallest businesses or through social enterprise.

Communities which have bought estates, land or woodland need support to investigate and implement potential enterprises. Food producers are often operating as micro-businesses and they need support to add value to local produce and access markets, as do other local producers such as craftspeople.

Many of the key public services or community assets are managed as social businesses, including shops, transport links, affordable housing, care services, recycling initiatives and renewable energy companies. All of them can bring work and lead to people in remote areas finding work locally, staying in the community and adding to its revitalisation. HISEZ, the Highlands and Islands Social Enterprise Zone, works in the LAG area to promote and support the growth of social enterprise and LEADER will work with them and with organisations such as the Scottish Crofting Foundation and sectoral groups to bring forward projects to stimulate and help the sector realise its full potential.

The types of project likely to come forward in this field will include:

- development of producer groups
- projects which enable crofting communities to diversify and develop new markets and products
- projects which help social enterprises to be competitive
- projects developing enterprise from community woodland/community owned estates
- training in direct marketing and use of internet for marketing
- projects which look to add value to local produce and products
- projects looking at branding and the building of a brand
- projects which encourage self employment and the establishment of micro-businesses
- development of recycling businesses and enterprises
- projects which promote diversification of the Highland rural economy