**HIGHLAND LEADER 2014-2020 PROGRAMME**

**MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 27 January 2016**

**CR1 HQ Inverness**

PRESENT:

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| **Voting**  Ian Wilson(IW) | NFU | Private |
| Alistair Swanson(AS) | NFU | Private |
| David Richardson(DR) | FSB | Private |
| Frances Gunn(FG) | Third Sector Interface | Private |
| Sharon MacKay(SM) | Visit Inverness & Lochness | Private |
| Mhairi Wylie(MW) | Third Sector Interface | Private |
| Jon Hollingdale(JH) | Community Woodland Association | Private |
| Yvonne White(YW) | Scottish Crofting Federation | Private |
| Debbie Gray(DG) | UHI | Public |
| David Alston(DA) | THC | Public |
| Stewart Sandison(SS) | SNH | Public |
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| **Advisory** |  |  |
| Amy Prior(AP) | Visit Scotland |  |
| Nicole Wallace(NW) | THC |  |
| Fiona Cameron(FC) | LEADER |  |
| Martin Culbertson(MC) | LEADER |  |
| Liz Whiteford(LW) | LEADER |  |
| Wendy Anderson(WA) | LEADER |  |
| Joe MacMillan(JM) | LEADER |  |
| Paula Betts(PB) | LEADER |  |
| Fiona Daschofsky(FD) | LEADER |  |
|  |  |  |
| **LAP Reps.** |  |  |
| Meg Gillies(MG) | Skye |  |
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**1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

JH welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Robert Muir, Richard Wallace, Andy McCann, Catherine Bateson, Judith Wainwright and from LAP representatives Naill Smith/Pat Buchanan from Caithness and Anne Sutherland from Sutherland.

**The meeting was quorate.**

**2 MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING**

Matters Arising

**Confidentiality Clause**

AS stated that the Confidentiality Clause should also apply to LAG and LAP members.

**Rural Parliament**

JH confirmed that there was nothing to report at this stage.

**ERG**

The remit of the ERG to be discussed between FC and FD and the ERG group advised accordingly at the next ERG meeting.

**Minutes Agreed.**

**SLA Update**

FC advised the meeting that the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the Scottish Government (SG) and the Highland Council (HC) had been signed on the 7/1/16. An accompanying letter was sent detailing the outstanding issue of a formal dispute mechanism between the Accountable Body and the SG.

A new board is to be formed of representatives of all Accountable Bodies with a remit to authorise changes to SLA’s.

SG has advised COSLA that the SLA had been signed conditional on the issue of the following:-

* SG guidance which is not yet in place
* LARCs IT system which has a current go-live date of the 18/4/16

**3 LAG/LAP members code of conduct**

FC presented a version of a Code of Conduct for discussion.

No.13 to change from ‘are best’ to ‘must be’. Content approved in principle.

FC to revise accordingly and issue the revised version for approval at the next LAG meeting. **Action FC**

**4 Lochaber Local Area Action Plan (LAAP) for approval**

**LAP ASSESSMENT**

FC assessed the plan and recommended conditional approval to the LAG.

The Development Officer to notify LAP on decision with formal approval letter to follow. Completed assessment matrice can be found at Appendix 1.

DR made point that the LAP should consider the impact on existing local businesses when making any funding awards and ensure that any funding award doesn't adversely affect them. MC to include a statement to this effect in the LAP's operating guidelines.

JH advised the meeting that five LAAPs had now been approved with two still to be submitted, IMFN and IMFS. It is hoped to have these submitted for approval by the March LAG meeting.

**5 LOCAL AREA UPDATES**

LAPArea updates submitted prior to the meeting were discussed.

**Additional comments:**

**Skye -** Equalities training carried out at the meeting on the 21st.

**Caithness -** from the meeting last week there was an action for the DO to make contact

with the Chambers of Commerce and FSB.

**Sutherland -** at their meeting last week the group stated that they were

keen to get going.

**IMFS:** FD advised the meeting that only five applications had been received to-date as a result of the press releases/recruitment campaign. Concerns were raised that the required number of applications, to form the group, would not be achieved by the closing date of the 31/1/16. It was agreed that a plan ‘B’ should be put in place if not enough applications received. Suggestions for a plan ‘B’ were as follows:-

* extending closing deadline by 3wks
* new press release/recruitment campaign stressing the importance of applying
* target Community Councils
* requesting IMFN members to write a paragraph on what they do

**Development Officers:** It was agreed that it was not essential for Development Officers to attend LAG meetings once their LAAP had been signed off, unless they were presenting project assessments.

**Cashflow**: It is widely recognised within the LAP areas how important a resource the HC loan scheme was in the last programme. The impact of not having such a scheme for this programme has been identified to the HC at the highest level. Due to the current financial situation within the Council, it is unlikely that ddecisions will be taken on this during the currentround of committee meetings. Following the Council meeting on the 25th February there should be more certainty over budgets and discussions on the loan scheme can be progressed.

**6 Stage 1 application form, guidance and scoring**

FC presented the Highland LEADER pre-application form to the meeting and explained the reasons behind introducing an interim step to the application process.

After a lot of discussion it was agreed that Development Officers should not score the application but would assess the application on eligibility only. A revised version of the forms would be circulated for approval ahead of the next LAG meeting. **Action FC**

**7 Programme Launch**

FC advised the meeting that as the SLA had now been signed then the Highland programme could be launched. Prior to getting suggestions from the meeting as to when and how to launch the programme, three concerns were identified :-

1. **Final guidance not yet issued.**

Although final guidance had not yet been issued good draft versions have been issued for review.

1. **IT System not due to go live until 18/4/16 at the earliest.**

Paper based system to be made available by SG to allow applicants to proceed with projects. SG have indicated that no project claims would be allowed until the IT system was live although staff costs could be processed for payment. Small risk to the HC as the amount of project expenditure being forecasted in year 1 was very low.

1. **Cashflows.**

Due to budget constraints the availability of the HC loan scheme was a huge issue although it might become available at a later date. Applicants could apply for a social loan but they would have to absorb interest costs.

After a lot of discussion the preferred option seemed to be an initial soft launch prior to Easter holidays with a full networking launch after Easter. FC to present a final proposal for LAG approval at the next meeting. **Action FC**

DA queried whether the elections and purdah would have any effect on the date of the

programme launch. FC agreed to clarify this in advance of the next LAG meeting.

**8 European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) Update**

NW updated the meeting on the fisheries programme:

* EMFF Operational Programme was adopted by the European Commission on the 3/12/15
* Highland/Moray indicative budget was £1.006m
* EMFF opened for applications on the 18/1/16

It is proposed that the operational plan for the new Highland/Moray FLAG would be submitted to the LAG for review and approval at the February meeting.

The new FLAG have not yet launched and it is proposed that the launch would coincide with the Highland LEADER launch.

Unlike LEADER, all financial responsibility for the fisheries programme lies with Marine Scotland.

**9 ERG Update**

FD advised the meeting that there was not a lot to update on since the last LAG meeting. The sub-group are meeting on the 17/2/16 with a full ERG meeting scheduled to be held in March.

**10 Conference Update**

FD updated the meeting on the 2016 Scottish LEADER conference being held at the MacDonald Aviemore Resort on Thursday 10th to Saturday 12th March 2016. Highland has been offered up to twenty spaces and interest should be identified to FD as quickly as possible. Names in excess of the twenty spaces will be added to a reserve list.

Catherine Bateson, the Highland Youth Convenor has agreed to be a workshop speaker at the Youth Initiatives Workshop.

Three local Highland projects have been put forward for possible site visits, Rosemarkie Beachfront Cafe, Seaboard Memorial Hall and Kirkhill Centre Forward.

**11** **AOB**

* list of acronyms to be provided along with minutes
* closing time for meeting to be included on the agenda
* IW sought clarification with respect to the budget shares for farm diversification and rural enterprise. JH confirmed that these budget shares (10%) would be maintained but that the LAG was exploring what flrxibility there was, in the event of cuts, in the management of these allocations and those of the LAPs.

**12 Date of next meeting**

Wednesday 24th February 2016, venue and time TBC

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| Appendix 1:Local Area Action Plan Assessment Matrix for: **Lochaber** | | | | |
| **Criteria** | **Prompts** | **Yes** | **No** | **Comments/Actions** |
| Area covered by the strategy and population | | | | |
| Geography – complete coverage of area? | Is the area and population covered by the LAAP clearly defined? | **X** |  | Area is defined by data zone within the plan and matches the Highland LDS area. |
| Description and objectives of the strategy | | | | |
| Does the LAAP identify the development needs, opportunities and challenges of the area? | Results of SWOT analysis? | **X** |  | Full SWOT analysis based on findings from the community consultation and engagement work in 2014 has been included. Demographic information on the area has been provided. Further section of the plan goes on to note the key challenges/opportunities for the area taking account of both the SWOT and demographic analysis. |
| Does the LAAP identify local priorities in terms of themes and outcomes? | Does the plan fit with the Highland LDS? | **X** |  | Highland Programme themes have been prioritised locally; however, the plan notes that due to the interconnected nature of the themes the ranking is included only as a guide as it is expected that collectively projects in Lochaber will deliver against all four themes. The LAP has selected seven priority outcomes from the ten contained within the LDS and provided a rationale for the three that are not included. |
| Turning objectives into practical actions | | | | |
| Does the LAAP identify the project activities most likely to deliver against the prioritised outcomes? | Integration with other plans? Inclusive approach? Well thought through? Development needs/opportunities and characteristics of the area identified?  Eligibility fit with overall LDS? | **X** |  | There is a well established community planning structure in Lochaber with a local Community Development Plan that has been in existence since 1996. Reviews of the plan in the last 18 months have led to significant changes and rationalisation of the priorities contained within it. The focus of the plan now is on key actions that are not being addressed as part of the day to day work of community planning partner organisations. This plan, cross referenced with the specific LEADER consultations that have been undertaken, has been taken as a basis for establishing the priorities for LEADER funding in Lochaber. Project activities are clearly defined and provide a good guide to applicants as to the priorities doe funding locally.  The detail of the project activities should be reviewed once national guidance is available, particularly in relation to training and food marketing/processing activities. |
| **Criteria** | **Prompts** | **Yes** | **No** | **Comments/Actions** |
| Capacity of local group? | Experience, skills of group?  Can they deliver?  Training needs identified?  Right balance of public/private?  Has meeting frequency been detailed? | **X** |  | Training needs to be identified on an ongoing basis.  The LAP has 7 public and 7 private members and as such should seek to increase membership of private sector representatives.  Consolidated skills checklist has been included showing that the LAP cover the skills felt essential to the delivery of the prioritised outcomes although it is noted that no LAP members included knowledge of “websites”. The plan acknowledges this and has suggested it will be addressed at an early stage – potentially by seeking advisory input from the chamber of commerce. It should be a condition of approval that all LAP members, including agency representatives, should complete a skills checklist.  Geographic coverage of the area is well represented on the LAP.  The LAP does not identify how it will specifically seek to include the input of young people and a proposal for this should be a condition of approval of the plan. |
| LAP Operating Guidelines? | Are the operating guidelines of the LAP set out and are they consistent with Highland and National requirements? | **X** |  | The LAP will adopt the operating guidelines for the Strategic LAG. |
| LAP specific requirements? | Does the plan clearly detail any local variations to the following:   * Intervention rates * In principle offers * Minimum/maximum awards * Annual funding allocations | **X** |  | Section in plan that clearly details the individual requirements for the area. |
| Review Process | Does the LAAP clearly detail the process and timescale for reviewing priorities? | **X** |  | Initial review after two funding rounds to refine priorities followed by annual review thereafter. Also an initial ring-fencing of £200,000 for the first year which will be kept under review. |
| Process for engagement, preparation, implementation | | | | |
| Does the LAAP clearly detail the process followed to establish the local priorities? | What information, people, sectors has informed the selection of priorities? | **X** |  | Local priorities have been determined on the basis of the initial community consultation/engagement work in 2014 followed by the Locahber steering LAP refining these over a number of meetings with reference to the established Locahber Community Development Plan. |
| Is the process for forming the LAP open and transparent? | Has the skills matrix been used to identify gaps?  How will membership of the group be reviewed? | **X** |  | The process for forming the LAP followed the approach that was agreed by the Highland LAG. Agency representation was identified by the steering LAP in line with the identified priorities for the area. Members of the steering LAP were invited to put themselves forward to sit on the LAP and an open advertising process was undertaken to ensure sufficient community participation. |