**HIGHLAND LEADER 2014-2020 PROGRAMME**

**MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 2 December 2015**

**SNH, Great Glen House, Inverness**

PRESENT:

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| **Voting** |  |  |
| Alistair Swanson | NFU | Private |
| David Richardson | FSB | Private |
| Frances Gunn | Third Sector Interface | Private |
| Sharon MacKay | Visit Inverness & Lochness | Private |
| Ian Donald | Third Sector Interface | Private |
| Jon Hollingdale | Community Woodland Association | Private |
| Yvonne White | Scottish Crofting Federation | Private |
| Jemma Lowell | UHI | Public |
| Robert Muir | HIE | Public |
| Cattie Anderson | SNH | Public |
|  |  |  |
| **Advisory** |  |  |
| Andy McCann | The Highland Council | Public |
| Fiona Cameron | LEADER | Public |
| Martin Culbertson | LEADER | Public |
| Liz Whiteford | LEADER | Public |
| Wendy Anderson | LEADER | Public |
| Judith Wainwright | LEADER | Public |
| Paula Betts | LEADER | Public |
| Fiona Daschofsky | LEADER | Public |

**1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

Jon welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Debbie Gray, Mhairi Wylie, Catherine Bateson, Scott Armstrong, Ian Wilson, David Alston, Richard Wallace, Stewart Sandison and Nicole Wallace.

**2 MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING**

Matters Arising

Update from Co-ordinators meeting

The last co-ordinators meeting was held on 25 & 26 November. Alistair Prior, SG is still involved with LEADER at the moment but will be moving to Rural Network in the near future. Alistair’s replacement is Gillian MacDonald.

Timescales

The applicant guidance is expected to be issued by SG by 4th December, with LAG guidance following in January 2016. The IT system is still on target to be live by end of April.

**RDOC**

This action has been postponed as SG will not make any financial changes to the SRDP this year as timescale for submission is 31 December. Financial changes will be highlighted early 2016. JH will collaborate with LAG Chairs once more details are available.

**LAG Composition & Membership**

There was discussion over the tone of the minute and the context of the previous difficulties in securing a quorum. It was noted there was a good turnout for this meeting.

**Confidentiality Clause**

It was confirmned the Highland Council policy covers staff for conflicts of interest whereby any conflicts would be noted prior to any involvement in projects.

**Sutherland LAP**

The approval letter has been held until SLA has been signed but the LAP have been told the plan has been approved.

**LAPs**

This action to be amended to read JH/FC to speak to DO’s about involving young people on the LAPs and not write to LAPs/Steering LAPs.

**IMFS**

Inner Moray Firth South Steering Group to meet in December. JH/FC to supply a response from the LAG regarding the points the steering group highlighted about the admin budget.

**IMFN**

The recruitment process is now complete with a number of applications received. No assessment panel was needed due to the correct number of applications being received.

**FLAG**

Currently waiting for response from SG regarding the combination of Highland and Moray FLAG areas.

**Loan Arrangement**

Minutes to be amended to read AM tasked to investiage and not formally write to HC.

There had been a letter received from Niall Smith, Caithness LAP requesting similar arrangements for the new programme.

The officer, previously tasked with managing the loan fund is no longer with the Council and therefore will need support in future, likely in the form of an accountant.

The Council are currently reviewing position of council balances, which has an impact on Revenue Budgets and therefore the loan fund may not be possible in the new programme.

The LAG will be looking for support from Partners with providing possible combined loan financing as it is getting increasingly harder for public funds to be released in advance of evidence of expenditure.

The Development Officers will need to discuss cashflow with applicants prior to applying for LEADER funding.

At present HIE cannot release funds in terms of need but can release in terms of evidence.

**Rural Parliament**

The action plan drawn up last year, including initiatives to help communities overcome cashflow issues, was not discussed at the previous weeks meeting.

Action: JH to enquire as to any progress made to date.

Minutes agreed.

**3 SRDP BUDGET UPDATE**

No updated detail to date given at the previous weeks Co-ordinators meeting but LEADER budgets across Scotland likely to be affected. The final details will be issued in the New Year. Discussion on LAGs indicative allocations to take place between LAGs following any decisions.

It was noted that Co-operation is an EU requirement but the 10% minimum allocation is an SG requirement.

**4 SLA UPDATE**

Discussions with SG have taken place and it is recommended the Highland Council sign the SLA. Once the SLA has been signed there were be a contractual requirement to deliver the outcomes as detailed in the LDS.

AM to go work through process with Director of Finance before Highland Council will be willing to accept the risk.

**5 LAAP ASSESSMENTS**

The Development Officers are to notify LAPs on decisions with formal approval letters to follow. Completed assessment matrices can be found at Appendix 1.

Caithness

No obvious business connection on LAP. Difficult getting business sector members due to time constraints.

Alistair Swanson to be changed to a private member.

Caithness plan approved with recommendations as shown in assessment matrix

Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh (WRSL)

Reference to the agreed maximum intervention rate of 50% aligning with the Highland LAG should be amended to remove reference to the Highland LAG which has not yet set a maximum intervention rate.

Wester Ross plan approved with recommendations in the assessment matrix

Skye

It was noted that the themes are very broad but LAAP states there will be an early review to assess projects coming forward.

**7 EQUALITIES REFERENCE GROUP UPDATE**

The Equalities Reference Group met on 23/12/15. There was a disappointing turn out with only 9 people turning up. A number of people are waiting until the remit of the group is determined along with information of how the group will operate before deciding whether they would like to be involved.

Kat Bateson, Youth Convenor, was appointed as interim Chair until group have been set up with Ron Johnston, Crossroads, Skye and Lochalsh as Vice Chair.

Discussions regarding physical access dominated parts of the discussion. Several members of the LAG emphasised that the agreed remit of the group is to ensure that all of the protected characteristics under Equality Act are considered. This will be a key role for the Chair.

The ERG felt strongly that they were to look at all Stage 1 Applications. There was a discussion as to how this was going to be managed. This will be handled electronically initially. The ERG agreed this will be reviewed on an ongoing basis specifically as this will create a large workload for the ERG. The LAG agreed it is important that this level of work for the ERG doesn’t result in delays in the application process. It was agreed that the ERG would need to keep this way of working under review and be prepared to consider an alternative if it doesn’t prove workable

Training was also discussed at the ERG Meeting. The ERG requested that Rosemary Mackinnon, HC be invited to attend the next ERG Meeting in February to deliver Equalities Training to the group.

The LEADER Team are to revise the Equalities Impact Assessment form following feedback at the ERG. The form will be used by all applicants at Stage 1 and needs to capture sufficient information to allow the ERG to review an application to provide feedback/guidance to the LAG, LAPs and Rural Enterprise Group.

The LEADER Team will be developing Equalities Guidance for applicants. Those attending the ERG meeting in November agreed to be part of a working group that will meet in January to discuss the guidance documents and the Equalities Impact Assessment form.

The whole ERG will meet in February. At this meeting, the remit of the group will be discussed.

There was a suggestion from the LAG that the ERG focus on projects most relevant to reduce burden on the ERG, workload on development officers and delay in approval of any projects.

It was agreed that the LAG should set the remit for the ERG.

JH/FC to discuss with FD about the remit of the group in order that a response from the LAG can be made.

**8 INSPIRATIONAL PROJECTS**

A list of 7 projects had been issued to the LAG to select one from. The project will be put forward, along with projects from all other LAGs where 3-4 will be chosen to be used as part of a short film to showcase at the LEADER conference in March 2016.

After a discussion, it was agreed Elphin was the project chosen with Lochaline Shore Facilities as reserve.

The conference has been organised for March but the programme has not being finalised as yet. Highland LAG will have 20 places available. Draft programme to be issued and LAG/LAP members were requested to volunteer to attend on days which they found relevant.

**9 AOCB**

LEADER Facebook page went live on 1 December. This will be used to keep people updated on the progress and launch. Over next few weeks, the LEADER Facebook page will be promoted.

**Rural Enterprise & Farm Diversification**

No update received to date and it is unlikely to be included in any of the guidance at the moment.

**10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Wednesday 27th January 2015, Venue and time TBC.

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| Local Area Action Plan Assessment Matrix for: **Caithness** | | | | |
| **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** |  | Full area of Caithness as defined by the Highland LDS has been covered by the plan. |
| 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 included along with a more detailed section on key challenges and opportunities for the area resulting from the SWOT and also analysis of the demographic profile of the area. |
| Does the LAAP identify local priorities in terms of themes and outcomes? | Does the plan fit with the Highland LDS? | **X** |  | Plan shows a local ranking of the Highland LDS themes and prioritises four of the Highland wide outcomes. By exception and as detailed in the plan, projects that contribute to any of the Highland LDS outcomes can be considered as eligible.  Section on cross cutting themes should clarify that there is a requirement to meet the first three and the other two will be expected to be met where it is relevant for the project. |
| 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** |  | Detailed project activity has been suggested in the plan showing how it will impact on the prioritised outcomes. Development needs of the area are clearly identified and the plan shows how LEADER funding may be able to impact on these.  Once national guidance is available the project activities should be reviewed to ensure that they remain eligible, particularly in relation to training and food processing/marketing. |
| **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** |  | Consolidated results from the skills checklist are shown in the plan and demonstrate that the LAP covers the skills that have been deemed essential to ensure delivery of the LAAP. Plan also notes that the LAP consider that the membership of the LAP ensures reasonable geographic coverage of the area; however, the detail on this is not supplied.  Plan should state that training needs will be identified on an ongoing basis.  The LAP complies with the requirements around public/private membership. |
| LAP Operating Guidelines? | Are the operating guidelines of the LAP set out and are they consistent with Highland and National requirements? | **X** |  | The Caithness LAP will use the operating guidelines of 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** |  | The plan details the local variations to grant sizes, intervention rates and in principle offers. The duration of in principle offers should be reviewed once national guidance is available. |
| Review Process | Does the LAAP clearly detail the process and timescale for reviewing priorities? | **X** |  | Initial review after two funding rounds followed by annual review thereafter. |
| Process for engagement, preparation, implementation | | | | |
| Does the LAAP clearly detail the process followed to establish the local priorities? | What information, people, sectors have informed the selection of priorities? | **X** |  | Initially based on the results of the community consultation/engagement in 2014 and refined by the steering LAP. Significant effort was made to expand the membership of the steering group to ensure that there was good representation from the private/community/voluntary sector and also to specifically include the views of young people. The priorities were considered in workshop sessions and further refined over a number of steering group meetings. |
| 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 that the group followed was as per the approach agreed by the strategic LAG. |

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| Local Area Action Plan Assessment Matrix for: **Skye** | | | | |
| **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** |  | The area covered by the LAAP is defined by datazone and covers the area required by the Highland LDS |
| Description and objectives of the strategy | | | | |
| Does the LAAP identify the development needs, opportunities and challenges of the area? | Results of SWOT analysis? | **X** |  | The plan contains statistical information on the demography of the area along with a full SWOT analysis and a more detailed section on the key challenges and opportunities that have been identified. |
| Does the LAAP identify local priorities in terms of themes and outcomes? | Does the plan fit with the Highland LDS? | **X** |  | Five priority outcomes have been selected from the ten outcomes in the overall LDS although the LAAP notes that projects can be funded under any of the Highland wide outcomes providing projects can evidence substantial community impact/legacy/benefit **including employment opportunities.** |
| 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** |  | The plan notes that the LAP will welcome applications that fit with existing local economic development/growth plans. The plan covers three CAM areas and this has been noted along with the existence if their local plans.  Priorities identified at this stage area still fairly broad but this is balanced by the planned early review and refinement of priorities after two funding rounds.  Plan also notes the need to check whether projects could be delivered by other SRDP funds.  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.  Public/private required split has been met.  Consolidated skills checklist has been included showing that the LAP cover the skills felt essential to the delivery of the prioritised outcomes. There is a good demographic mix of people including the older and younger age groups that are felt to be priorities within Skye, although there are no members of the group in the under 16 age category..  Geographically the area is well represented. |
| 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 use the Strategic LAG operating guidelines. |
| 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.  More detail should be added once the scoring criteria has been set nationally/highland wide as to how the LAP will assess the level of financial support from applicants and the requirement for an exit strategy for a staff post should be built in to the assessment.  Plan notes that the grant intervention rates will be 50% in line with the strategic LAG; however, as this rate has not yet been confirmed the plan should be amended to reflect this. |
| 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. |
| Process for engagement, preparation, implementation | | | | |
| Does the LAAP clearly detail the process followed to establish the local priorities? | What information, people, sectors have 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 WRSL steering LAP refining these over a number of meetings. The plan also details specific actions taken to ensure the contribution of young people to the selection of priorities. |
| 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 of forming the LAP followed the approach that was agreed by the Highland Strategic LAG. |

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| Local Area Action Plan Assessment Matrix for: **Wester Ross, Strathpeffer, Lochalsh** | | | | |
| **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 datazone 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** |  | Five priority outcomes have been selected from the ten outcomes in the overall LDS although the LAAP notes that projects can be funded under any of the Highland wide outcomes providing projects can evidence substantial community impact/legacy/benefit **including potential employment opportunities.** |
| 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** |  | Good account has been taken of other community development work in the area when looking at potential development opportunities for the area and the plan notes that the group will welcome applications that fit with existing economic/community development growth plans. Priorities identified at this stage area still fairly broad but this is balanced by the planned early review and refinement of priorities after two funding rounds.  Plan also notes the need to check whether projects could be delivered by other SRDP funds.  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? |  |  | Training needs to be identified on an ongoing basis.  Public/private required split has been met.  Consolidated skills checklist has been included showing that the LAP cover the skills felt essential to the delivery of the prioritised outcomes. There is a good demographic mix of people including the older and younger age groups that are felt to be priorities within WRSL.  Geographically the area is well represented and the plan notes the need to look for a replacement member to represent the Strathpeffer area. |
| 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.  More detail should be added once the scoring criteria has been set nationally/highland wide as to how the LAP will assess the level of financial support from applicants and the requirement for an exit strategy for a staff post should be built in to the assessment.  Plan notes that the grant intervention rates will be 50% in line with the strategic LAG; however, as this rate has not yet been confirmed the plan should be amended to reflect this. |
| 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. |
| Process for engagement, preparation, implementation | | | | |
| Does the LAAP clearly detail the process followed to establish the local priorities? | What information, people, sectors have 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 WRSL steering LAP refining these over a number of meetings. The plan also details specific actions taken to ensure the contribution of young people to the selection of priorities. |
| 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. |