

MERSEY RURAL LEADER LAG EXECUTIVE MEETING

Monday 25th April 2016, 2:30pm

Location: Liverpool LEP Office, 12 Princes Parade, Liverpool, L3 1BG

Chairperson: David Shaw (University of Liverpool)

In attendance: Craig Bradley (Rural Payments Agency)
Andrew Carey (Rural Leader Project Officer)
Ross Clark (Private business)
Vicky Corcoran (Private business)
Frank Egerton (Sefton Council)
Olly Harrison (Private business)
Ann-Louise Hartley (Private business)
Jonathan Jackson (Rural Leader Project Manager)
Irene Johnson (Knowsley Council)
Juggy Landay (Wirral Council)
Ian Lawrence (Private business)
John Quirk (St Helens Council)
John Sephton (Merseytravel)
Richard Shacklady (Private business)
Dorothy Sumner (Private business)
Helen Sweeney (Private business)
Louise Vaudrey (Halton Council)

Apologies: Helen Wainwright (NFU)
Danielle Lea-Smith (Forestry Commission)
Keith Hackett (Private business)

Agenda:

- Minutes of the last meeting
- Matters arising
- New LAG Exec members
- Declaration of Interests
- Defra/RPA update
- Delivery Plan sign-off
- Outline Applications
- Full Applications
- Any other business
- Next LAG Exec meeting

Minutes of the last meeting

JJ sent out the minutes of the previous meeting on 15th April 2016 and DS suggests that the minutes are approved.

Conclusion: Members unanimously approve the minutes of the previous LAG Exec meeting held on 7th March 2016.

Actions to be taken:

- Minutes of meeting held on 25th April to be sent out to all members with invitation of June's LAG Exec meeting - AC

Matters arising

Vice-Chair: It was noted that a Vice Chair needs to be appointed. DS nominated Helen Sweeney to continue as Vice-Chair of the LAG Exec. The nomination was approved unanimously.

Rural Growth Fund: An update was provided on the £340k Rural Growth Fund. This will be managed by the Rural Payments Agency and the call for the fund will be shaped by the ESIF (European Structural Investment Fund) Committee (of which DS is a member). An initial set of papers outline the calls focus was agreed at the last ESIF meeting with a focus on high skilled rural growth. The final Call for Proposals is in development and ideally is due to be released in early summer, although might be delayed until the autumn. The minimum grant for the fund will be £40k so that this will not conflict with the LEADER Programme and the maximum will be up to the £200k de minimis threshold. DS reiterates that the aim of this Fund should be to deliver growth and jobs. Although the LAG will have no influence how the money is spent, Local Authority representatives on the LAG Executive will be in a position to influence the ESIF Committees decisions, and it will be important that the LAG provides information to potential applicants.

EU referendum purdah: DS confirms that the EU referendum purdah (the period during which all public authorities are prevented from publishing any promotional material that could influence the outcome) will run from 27th May until the vote itself on 23rd June. The activities will continue, but no formal publicity or decision making process can take place during this period. Therefore, the scheduled LAG meeting initially planned for 20th June will have to be rescheduled.

Concerns were raised on how a 'NO' vote in the referendum would affect EU funding and in particular the LEADER programme. DS tried to allay such fears by suggesting that if there was a no vote, there would still be a delay of about two years before the exit could be negotiated and he was assuming that the current programmes would continue up to that point (if it happened) these by confirming that due to how long negotiations will take to if the UK were to leave the EU, it will have no affect on this current programme.

Conclusion:

- The LAG unanimously approved Helen Sweeney as Vice-Chair of the LAG Executive
- LAG Exec agrees to reschedule the June LAG meeting.

Actions to be taken:

- Documents detailing the main aims and objectives of the Rural Growth Fund to be sent out to members – JJ.

New LAG Exec Members

DS welcomes all new members to the LAG and thanks them for attending. They are:

- Ross Clark
- Vicky Corcoran
- Ian Lawrence
- Richard Shacklady
- Dorothy Sumner

Frank Egerton has also replaced Paula Lowrey as Sefton Council's representative.

Actions to be taken:

- Data protection policy documents to be sent out to all new members - AC

Declaration of Interests

DS reminds the LAG that any members with a conflict of interest involving any proposal must declare this before the appraisal of each application.

An updated list of the Register of Interests (RoI) was submitted to Defra and approved. New members will also have to complete this and declare their interests.

Actions to be taken:

- RoI to be sent to all new members for completion – AC
- Updated RoI to be sent to Defra for approval - AC

Defra/RPA update

CB confirms that he was going to provide an update on the Rural Growth Fund and the referendum purdah but has nothing further to add to what had already been discussed during the 'Matters Arising' item.

Delivery Plan sign-off

JJ sent out the Delivery Plan to all members on 15th April outlining the expected levels of activity under the coming scheme.

CB asks if the Terms of Reference have been completed and signed by the LAG Chair and the Accountable Body. JJ confirms that these have now been finalised and will be sent to DS and Merseytravel for signing.

Conclusion:

- The LAG unanimously endorses the Delivery Plan.

Actions to be taken:

- ToRs to be sent to DS and Merseytravel for signature before June LAG meeting- JJ.

Outline Applications

There are five Outline Applications to be evaluated.

In response to the volume of material sent by email, JJ announced that the Accountable Body was looking into creating an extranet for the all members to access documents relating to each proposal in order to facilitate communication. More details on this will be provided at the next meeting.

Outline Application: Brookview Tearoom (Mr Anthony Jones)

Priority Area 3: Rural Tourism

This project involves the opening of a tea room and also a learning facility for young children to visit and understand the process of food and where it comes from. Brookview is situated adjacent to a public footpath which leads directly to Widnes and also "The Dream" which is a local beauty spot. There is good potential for footfall and 3 new jobs would be created.

The following concerns are raised by the Executive:

- It was noted that planning permission is yet to be obtained;
- The timeframe needs to be updated to reflect both this and if the works are to be contracted out;
- If a construction company is to carry out the work, a full breakdown of costs together with quotations will need to be provided.
- If the work was undertaken by the then this would have implications for the eligible costs

Conclusion: In principle the Executive unanimously supports the proposal to continue to Full Application stage with the above concerns needing to be noted.

Outline Application: Carrot and Sprout Processing (Mr Stephen Cook)

Priority Area 1 : Increasing Farm Productivity

The applicant had been previously supported under the previous programme. The applicant would now like to purchase a new generation polisher for the carrots, to upgrade the software on their Odenberg sorting machine and to smarten up their pack houses and improve the hygiene so they are able to compete more effectively in tendering for contracts with major retailers. Finally a roller inspection table is needed on the main sprout sorting line to ensure quality is of the highest level. The total project cost is £90,000 with a grant request of £36,000 and an aim of creating 2-3 jobs. The following concerns are raised by the Executive:

- The LAG is uncertain whether £90,000 would be the full cost of the project. More clarity is needed on whether there will be other costs involved and the exact size of the project;
- A more detailed timeline will need to be submitted with realistic milestones and outputs.

Conclusion: In principle the Executive unanimously supports the proposal to continuing to Full Application stage. The applicant needs to be mindful of the concerns raised above.

Outline Application: Hope Farm Microbrewery (Mr Jon Brindle)

Priority Area 2: Support for SMEs (non-agricultural) and farm diversification

The proposal includes the erection of a building to be used as a microbrewery as well as the refurbishment of an existing barn-office. The applicant is looking to produce a premium quality lager which is more involved than brewing ale due to the temperature control and filtering requirements (drawing on previous process control experience). Whilst erecting the brewery building they are looking to refurbish an existing barn-office next to the proposed microbrewery building with a view to using approx. 30% of the space in connection with the brewery and the other 70% as a rental initially, with that space also being used in connection with the brewery as it expands. The following concerns are raised by the Executive:

- The maximum grant allowed under the LEADER scheme is £40,000. The grant requested on the Outline Application must be reduced for the Full Application stage;
- The LAG proposes that the request for funding is based solely on the microbrewery and not jointly with the barn refurbishment. This would offer the scheme better value for

money;

- More details need to be provided on the employment opportunities that will be created together with realistic timelines on when these jobs will become available.

Conclusion: The Executive unanimously supports the proposal to continue to Full Application stage with the above concerns addressed, including the reduction in the grant proposal to the maximum amount under the LEADER scheme.

Outline Application: Peel Hey Function Suite (Mr Ken Graves)

Priority Area 3: Rural Tourism

The proposal involves the creation of a sun room annex suitable to seat 60 people and will have two associated toilets. The project is designed to increase the profitability of the business by providing for a permanent addition to the current facilities rather than simply a temporary structure used at the moment, thereby offering the opportunity continuous growth and new initiatives that will not only benefit the business but will also help the tourism industry and local area. Planning permission has been obtained and the grant request is £50,000. The following concerns are raised by the Executive:

- The maximum grant allowed under the LEADER scheme is £40,000. The grant requested on the Outline Application must be reduced for the Full Application stage;
- Clarification is required as to whether this project will add value to the current business and whether it will create new and additional jobs rather than sustaining existing ones;
- More details need to be provided on how this project could benefit the local area.

Conclusion: The Executive supports the proposal to continue to Full Application stage as long as the above concerns can be properly addressed.

Outline Application: The Moss (Mr Simon Haley – Agent)

Priority Area 1 : Increasing Farm Productivity

The project will be making improvements to livestock housing through the use of a LED lighting system - with specific benefits for animal welfare and energy efficiency. In addition, a borehole is planned to be installed. Both elements would improve the efficiency of the use of energy and water on farm. The applicant argued these investments will improve staff safety, improve business performance and profitability, and ensure sustainability for the farm business over its next stage of growth and development, thereby protecting jobs. The following concerns were raised by the Executive:

- This project does not align itself to the strategic priorities of the LDS nor will not contribute any of the outputs as set out in the Merseyside LEADER LDS;
- This proposal will also not contribute to sustainable agriculture.

Conclusion: The Executive unanimously decides to reject this proposal based on not fulfilling the eligibility criteria and requests that other sources of funding be advised such as the Countryside Productivity funding scheme.

Action to be taken:

- Letters to be sent out to successful applicants notifying them of the LAG executives endorsement for them to proceed to Full Application stage, with a breakdown of concerns to be addressed and deadlines for submission – AC;
- Rejection letter to be sent out to unsuccessful applicant – AC.

Full Applications

A total of 10 proposals have now been considered and can proceed to Full Application stage. It was reported that the majority of these should be submitted in time for the next meeting in June.

Actions to be taken:

- Visits to applicants currently completing their Full Applications will be undertaken to check their current status and to offer any guidance – JJ / AC.

AOB

Expenses – JJ confirms that the Accountable Body will reimburse LAG members for any reasonable expense, including mileage, parking costs or public transport journeys while attending meetings during the year.

Action to be taken:

- All members to keep their receipts/tickets etc. for submission at the end of the financial year.

Next Meeting

As the planned meeting on the 20th June would take place during the EU referendum purdah period, DS proposes postponing the date to 27th June. The venue for the meeting is (to be confirmed) as Thornton Manor on the Wirral. Juggy Landay proposes an earlier start time in order to include a short tour of the hotels' marquee (funded under the previous LEADER programme).

Actions to be taken:

- Thornton Manor to be contacted to finalise the details of the meeting with a small tour and light lunch to be discussed – AC.