



	Actions
<p>Cheshire LEADER East Cheshire Local Action Group Meeting 14 September 2015 13:00-15.00 Wyvern House, Winsford</p>	
<p>Present Cllr. Rachel Bailey (Cheshire East Council) Rachel Bolton (Cheshire East Council) John Heselwood (Cheshire Community Action) Robert Parton (Aqueduct Marina) Rebecca Wainwright (Marketing Cheshire) Sharon Angus-Crawshaw (Cheshire East Council) Lucy Rogers (Canal & Rivers Trust) Steve Wilkinson (Private Sector Representative) Janet Maughan (Audlem Marina) Philip Posnett (Haughton Hall) Sheila Woolstencroft (Cheshire East Council) Mandy Sibthorpe (Cheshire West and Chester Council) Joanna Douglass (Cheshire West and Chester Council) Sean Bell (Cheshire West and Chester Council) Ellie Morris (Cheshire West and Chester Council) Mike Baker (Rural Payments Agency) Francis Lee (Cheshire & Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership)</p>	<p>CRB RB JH RP RW SAC LR SW JM PP SW MS JD SB EM MB FL</p>
<p>Apologies Paul Nolan (Mersey Forest) Jake Thompson (Forestry Commission) Stuart Yarwood (National Farmers Union) Tony Rimmer (Rostons) Craig Bradley (Rural Payments Agency)</p>	
<p>1 Welcome and Introductions Introductions took place around the table.</p> <p>1.1 Apologies Apologies were given.</p> <p>1.2 New LAG Members It was noted that there are three new LAG members: Mike Gorton, Stuart Yarwood, Tony Rimmer.</p> <p>1.3 New LEADER Team and Associated Staff MS, JD, SB, RB and EM gave a brief overview of their professional backgrounds and current roles.</p>	
<p>2 Conflicts of Interest A Register of Interest form was circulated to LAG Members a number of weeks ago, and MS asked that members who hadn't yet completed it could please do so today, as it is an RPA requirement of the Programme to hold this information on file.</p>	

SAC asked what happens when a conflict of interest arises during a meeting, MS explained that the LAG member would have to declare it at the meeting and leave the room for the duration of that section of the meeting. JD mentioned that the Accountable Body's LEADER team will hold the full Register of Interests so that conflicts could be monitored.

3 Minutes of Previous Meeting

3.1 Approval of Minutes

Minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2015 were agreed and signed.

3.2 Matters Arising

MS advised that a number of business enquiries were received at the Nantwich Show along with some good contacts made from local business consultants and advisors.

SAC mentioned that we cannot actively solicit interest in the Programme, but the Nantwich Show was a good starting point for flagging up the Programme's existence.

4 LEADER Update

4.1 Draft LAG Partnership Agreement

MS explained that the document is still in draft format, and that it sets out the purpose and obligations of the LAG, as well as the roles of the Accountable Body, Executive Board, and what is expected of LAG members.

Every LAG member will be asked to sign up to the code of conduct within the agreement, but that it is not a legally binding document, but a partnership agreement. MS asked LAG members to review the document so that when the final version is available, LAG members would be ready to sign it quickly and return it to the LEADER team. RP asked how significant the changes in the final version of the document are likely to be, JD confirmed they will only be slight. CRB explained that once the document is ready, she is keen to have it signed so that LEADER can launch as soon as possible. She suggested that LAG members can raise concerns after the meeting if necessary. EM agreed, and explained that the draft was being circulated now so that there are no surprises when the final version arrives.

4.2 Offer Contract

MS explained that the LEADER team has received the Offer Contract for the Programme but they are waiting for responses to a number of queries and expects an answer within the next week. The LEADER team's Set-Up Evaluation Check with Craig Bradley (RPA) recently took place, and went smoothly. JD added that the LEADER team was told that they are well advanced in setting up the Programme.

RP asked if the programme budget is in Sterling or Euros, MS and JD confirmed it is in Euros but with a fixed exchange rate of €0.80 per £1.

CRB and MS confirmed that as soon as progress is made on the Contract, the LAG will be informed. CRB added that she appreciates the LAG's patience during the Programme set-up period.

4.3 Delivery Plan

MS explained that two Delivery Plans were produced – one for the East LAG and one for the West. The East Plan has been signed by CRB, forwarded to the RPA who have also approved it. The Plan will be embedded as part of the Partnership Agreement. CRB asked all members to confirm they

are happy with the Plan and no concerns were raised.

4.4 Applicant Handbook

MS explained that there are elements of the Handbook we can customise, and we have produced one Handbook for both Cheshire LAGs to avoid confusing applicants. MS requested LAG members' comments to the draft text the LEADER team has produced.

JM commented that the text needs to be written in plain English and felt phrases like "capitalise on synergies" would be meaningless to potential applicants. PP agreed that it must be inviting and understandable to applicants. MS will re-write the text and circulate it to LAG members for their comments and approval. SW praised the fact that only one handbook is being produced for both LAGs. MS added that the LEADER team is limited in its ability to edit the booklet due to the RPA's need to make the handbook consistent nationwide.

MS

4.5 Expressions of Interest

MS explained that a considerable number of enquiries have come through but she cannot yet give details of projects prior to programme launch due to data protection concerns; however she noted that farm diversification and tourism projects are currently the most popular. SW asked if this tips the balance in terms of LEADER objectives, MS said this is something to be actively monitored as applications come through, and mentioned that the LEADER Team will be attending a task group meeting with Mersey Forest and Forestry Commission to see where LEADER may help in the forestry sector.

RB felt the main struggle is that many businesses seem happy to wait for LEADER to launch instead of responding to other relevant European Structural & Investment Fund (ESIF) calls. JM asked for an explanation of ESIF and CRB clarified that it is another rural funding scheme, and suggested that future LAG meetings could feature updates on other funding streams. MS agreed to include this as a regular agenda item. MS asked if applicants' reticence to apply for funding outside of LEADER is because they see LEADER as a much quicker scheme, despite the fact that lead times are likely to be long. RB agreed this may well be the case. CRB added that many rural businesses see project timelines as crucial due to the seasonal nature of their business.

MS/SB

JH mentioned a document presented at a previous meeting outlining all rural funding streams (attached), saying that it has been incredibly helpful. RB felt that it is a little over-simplified. RB is now working on a live funding factsheet for businesses featuring all details on funding streams, and she is looking to have it completed by the end of the following week.

4.6 Operational Manual

MS explained that the LEADER Operations Manual has just been made available on the DORA CRM site. The manual is made up of a large number of documents which will require digesting before being presented to the LAG.

4.7 Application Process

JD explained the LEADER team's grant application process, as approved by the RPA.

In the East Cheshire area, MS will work with applicants to develop projects, guiding them through the Outline Application stage, then inviting them to Full Application if successful at Outline. This process means that any projects that are presented to the LAG should be fully eligible for LEADER, and the LAG will be judging projects in terms of value for money and alignment with LEADER themes. The feedback received from recent RPA training is that deferring an application is not an

option; all applications would be either approved or rejected. JD and RB will also assist the process to maintain division of duties where necessary.

JM asked where application forms come from, JD confirmed the RPA had produced them. JM asked who will explain the forms to applicants and JD reiterated that MS will work alongside applicants to develop their projects and talk them through any paperwork. MB advised the language in the forms is intentionally basic and standardised across other funding schemes.

JH asked about the timescale from application to project delivery. JD explained that once a Full Application is received, there is a 40 working day deadline for the Executive Board to issue a decision. Deadlines will be set for applicants to make sure they align with upcoming Executive Board meetings.

RP asked how often the Executive Board is proposing to meet. MS explained that the dates for meetings will be set first and the Full Application deadlines will be set according to those dates. CRB asked SW how other rural funding programmes have worked, SW confirmed they held meetings every two months.

5 Election of Deputy Chair

CRB asked the LAG how the Deputy Chair is to be nominated, and suggested a volunteer process. She mentioned the balance of support required from both public and private sectors, bearing in mind that she is part of Cheshire East Council. No volunteers or nominations were forthcoming and CRB advised that she will discuss the matter with LAG members outside of the meeting and an election will be included on the next meeting agenda.

CRB/MS/SB

6 Election of Executive Board

MS explained the function of the Executive Board which is to make final decisions on whether applications receive funding, and the importance of making sure all LEADER themes are represented as well as the necessary public/private balance among Board Members. MS asked LAG members if they would be interested in being part of the Executive Board. RP asked about quorum, SW explained that 51% of the members must be from the private sector, and that she would be happy to sit on the Board. RW said she would also welcome the opportunity, and MS advised that Jake Thompson (Forestry Commission) had said he would like to sit on the Board. RP and JH also put their names forward. CRB asked if the Chair and Deputy Chair are required to sit on the Board, MS confirmed that it would be helpful if one of the two did sit on the Board, but that it was the LAG's decision as to how the Executive Board should be represented.

CRB asked if there is a time pressure on the election of the Executive Board, MS said that ideally it should be in place by the end of March 2016 so that the first project approvals can take place. CRB asked if this could be an agenda item for the next meeting to give LAG members time to consider, everyone agrees.

MS/SB

7 LEP – Alignment With Other Funding Streams

FL explained other calls for funding that have gone out and tabled a paper detailing the available funding opportunities. **[ATTACH]**

FL mentioned that David Hunter (RPA) has produced useful overviews of funding opportunities and there are also links from the LEP website to current funding calls.

FL talked through ERDF calls; £8 million for research & innovation, £8 million for businesses

<p>outgrowing their current facilities, £3.2 million for low-carbon products. Links to calls can be found on the LEP website, and work with local authorities has taken place to raise awareness. MS will forward the link to LAG Members.</p>	<p>MS</p>
<p>8 Communications Plan</p> <p>8.1 Cheshire Ploughing Match</p> <p>MS explained that the Cheshire Ploughing Match on 30 September 2015 was intended to be the Cheshire LEADER launch event, but due to programme delays it will now be called a pre-launch. However, there is still hope that LEADER will have launched by the time of the Ploughing Match which will take place in Frodsham and LAG Members are welcome to attend.</p> <p>JD explained that we will be using the event to talk with potential applicants, and that LAG involvement would be much appreciated. JH asked if we can actively solicit interest if we've launched by the time of the event and JD confirmed we can. SAC asked MS explained the format of the day. There will be two tables so that JD and MS can meet a prospective applicant each and the team will be offering pre-booked time slots. Other key figures such as RB and SW have been invited so that the event can benefit from additional LEADER priority-related expertise.</p> <p>8.2 Website</p> <p>MS mentioned that it is live and that more information will be added as time goes on, including the official launch date once it is available. The website address will be circulated to the LAG as soon as the Programme is launched.</p> <p>8.3 Website</p> <p>MS advised that we have pop-up stands for use at events, plus maps currently being produced that will allow us to assess eligibility when talking to applicants. We will also have bullet-point sheets outlining key points relating to LEADER funding.</p>	
<p>CRB mentioned interest from town and parish councils regarding LEADER, JH advised he will be seeing roughly 150 councillors through events with ChALC. CRB suggested we make contact with Councillors to increase their awareness of the programme. EM agreed this will be a priority once we have launched.</p>	<p>MS/JD</p>
<p>8.4 Sharepoint</p> <p>SAC mentioned that Cheshire East Council has a Sharepoint site for Town and Parish Councils and is happy to put LEADER materials on there when appropriate.</p>	<p>MS/SAC</p>
<p>9 Future Meetings</p> <p>MS advised the next meeting would normally be held in December and asked for opinions from the LAG as to whether this should be moved. SW suggested that the meeting is brought forward to November due to the imminent programme launch, which was agreed. MS asked if the LAG would be happy for the LEADER team to set dates for the rest of the year which was also agreed.</p>	<p>MS/SB</p>
<p>10 Any Other Business</p> <p>None.</p> <p>CRB thanked everyone for their attendance.</p>	