



	Actions
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Cheshire LEADER West Cheshire and Warrington Local Action Group meeting 8<sup>th</sup> of July 2015 9.30am Wyvern House, Winsford</b></p> <p><b><u>Present</u></b>            Rev. Canon David Felix (All Saints Vicarage, Daresbury)            Ellie Morris (CWaC)            Joanna Douglass (CWaC)            Mandy Sibthorpe (CWaC)            Susan Woodward-Moor (CWaC)            Lizzie Aldridge (Warrington Borough Council)            Sean Bell (CWaC)            Andrew Hull (Sandstone Ridge Trust)            Charlotte Harris (Cheshire Wildlife Trust)            Chris Brown Bolton (Development Enabling)            Cllr. Louise Gittins (CWaC)            Cllr. Michael Young (Trafford Borough Council)            Craig Bradley (Rural Payments Agency)            Danielle Lea Smith (Forestry Commission)            Doug Haynes (Former Chair, Northern Marches LEADER)            Heather Hayes (Blue Orchid)            Iain Paton (CWaC)            Martin Ledson (Trafford Borough Council)            Matthew Morris (Bolesworth Estate)            Stuart Roberts (SFR Farming)            Katrina Michel (Marketing Cheshire)</p> <p><b><u>Apologies</u></b>            John Heselwood (Cheshire Community Action)            Annette McDonald (Reaseheath College)            Joanne Butterill (NatWest Bank)</p>	

## Welcome and Introductions

DF calls the beginning of the meeting and welcomes everyone to the second LAG meeting.

Introductions take place around the table, DF announces appointment of the new LEADER team, invites team to explain their professional backgrounds.

JD, MS and SB each give brief accounts of their careers.

DF explains that SWM has been working on LEADER for the last year while EM was on maternity leave, and is now handing over to EM.

DF offers thanks to SWM for her hard work managing the project in the interim.

DF introduces CB's training session.

## [TRAINING SESSION - PRESENTATION ATTACHED]

During delivery of training session, CB asks about decision-making structure. SWM confirms that everyone in the LAG is formalised as Executive Board members in year one; subsequent years may have a larger LAG but smaller board, adding that the programme's needs will become clearer once projects start coming in. CB mentions that the delivery plan (and, therefore, LAG/executive board make-up) can change each year with the approval of the RPA.

CB asks if there are any questions on the training given.

SR asks if applicants can challenge LAG decisions, CB confirms they can, and JD adds that applicants are always welcome to reapply. SWM mentions that when rejecting an application, the LEADER team should direct applicants towards other funding streams where applicable.

KT asks how pan-Cheshire projects work; can we ensure harmony between LAGs? What happens if the East LAG approves a project that the West LAG rejects? SWM mentions that both project managers (JD and MS) will be working closely to ensure effective collaborative working, plus we may yet need to collaborate with other LAGs (e.g. Merseyside). CB says cross-border work is to be encouraged and judged on a case by case basis.

CB clarifies that projects cannot be 'deferred' - they are either approved, or rejected and must reapply at a later date. This prevents projects sitting in limbo and helps applicants get a definitive answer in a timely manner.

MM asks if this incurs greater admin costs, CB says it depends on the project, and will actually save time (and money) in many instances.

MS mentions that she or JD will return to applicants if information is missing or suggests ineligibility; LAG members should not be presented with incomplete or ineligible projects.. CB concurs that projects should be clear and complete before reaching the LAG.



DH raises issue with technology; can non-council employees guarantee they will receive information in a format that will make sense to them without council systems? CB suggests that the Accountable Body will be there to assist with such matters. SWM agrees that language around local authorities and Euro funding in particular can be confusing, and asks that LAG members let the LEADER team know if they encounter any problems. DF suggests that digital documents should be in PDF format where possible to prevent tampering, and that a glossary of terms/acronyms might be useful. CB mentions all RPA documents are in Microsoft Excel or Word format, but locked so that only certain elements can be edited. CB also explains that an extra level of checks now take place to make sure forms are easy to understand to those outside of the RPA.

SB/JD/MS

MY and ML, delayed en route to the meeting due to traffic, enter the room and offer apologies.

IP is keen to make sure communication is clear to applicants, mentioning that similar programmes make sure applicants have 12-hour consultations with business advisors which actually save time in the long run.

SR questions the quarterly funding schedule, asking what happens if we have too many applicants in one particular quarter that would cause us to exceed our planned spend for that period. JD explains that the LEADER team will be setting application windows for applicants to make sure they apply in sync with upcoming LAG meetings.

DF confirms no more questions and introduces MY and ML, asks them to explain Trafford involvement. ML explains that the LAG area includes Dunham Massey. SWM adds that this was at the request of RPA/DEFRA as LAGS are encouraged to 'adopt' rural parts of nearby urban areas. CB also adds that many residents in the vicinity of Dunham feel a greater affinity with Cheshire than Trafford.

LG asks about the Wirral area, CB confirms it is covered by its own LAG.

DF calls for a break.

**BREAK**

DF shows the group financial tables from the LDS, updated to take into account the actual funding allocations now confirmed by DEFRA. SWM mentions that LAG members have been sent this information after the previous LAG meeting in March in the Powerpoint presentation, and that LAG members will all be provided with an information pack in due course.

JD/MS

HH asks if funding table includes Cheshire East, SWM confirms it only covers Cheshire West and Warrington.

SWM mentions the shown table is a little out of date; the delayed programme launch makes it unlikely we'll have any project expenditure at all in the first year. CB mentions that Accountable Bodies can adjust spending profiles each year if necessary. JD explains that actual project spend tends to come fairly late in the programme, so the spend forecast is back-loaded, with the bulk of the spend occurring in years two, three and four.

DF introduces next agenda item, LEADER update.





SWM mentions that LAG Partnership Agreement has been delayed, and that it will be sent out to members to avoid having to arrange another meeting. LAG members will be invited to come and discuss the agreement with the LEADER team at agreed drop in dates once it is available.

JD mentions that each LAG member has been given a Register of Interests form in their pack and asks that they fill it out and return to the LEADER team today; it is a requirement so that we can monitor conflicts of interest going forward.

LAG

JD discusses ongoing work on delivery plan and talks LAG through the grant application process for Cheshire West [SEE ATTACHED]. The delivery plan will need to be submitted to Rural Payments Agency by the end of July and will need the approval of the LAG. The delivery plan will therefore need to be e-mailed to all LAG members for their approval to meet required deadlines.

SB/JD

JD then talks through claims process [SEE ATTACHED]

JD discusses how work on the delivery plan has progressed.  
DF asks how many more meetings the LAG should commit to this financial year, SWM says it is very much up to the LAG; the late start means we may not have many projects to discuss this financial year, and suggests one meeting in Autumn and one at the end of the financial year.  
DF agrees.

MY and ML leave early.

JD mentions that in the next financial year, meetings will be more regular and set up in advance to allow us to meet 40-day deadline for applicants. DF asks if the group required to approve projects will be smaller; SWM confirms that in subsequent years this may well be the case. JD mentions the importance of making sure the correct balance of representation across public/private and the LEADER themes is achieved at each meeting.

DF mentions that he prefers regular meetings and expresses concern about lengthy group e-mail conversations, asking that people only respond to people they need to rather than the whole group.

MS mentions that deadlines will be set when seeking approval from the LAG by e-mail; a failure to respond will be taken as consent.

SR mentions concerns about the Accountable Body having trouble working to LAG meeting dates, suggesting that the LAG should be more flexible. JD explains we are creating a schedule where projects arrive in flurries in order to necessitate fewer LAG meetings; maybe as the executive board gets smaller further into the programme, we can schedule more frequent meetings.

CBB asks how far along will projects be when they are presented to the LAG; he suggests it may be worth the LAG seeing projects not necessarily ready for full application, as their expertise may help with project development. JD agrees, saying she would like to share everything that comes in regardless of progress, though the LAG will only make decisions on applications that are fully complete.

MS gives a brief summary of informal expressions of interest received so far, but is unable to give details until the programme has officially launched due to data protection.



CB mentions that he would expect us to discuss in-progress applications with the LAG at various stages. CBB once again stresses the importance of this, CB agrees. CBB suggests that the LAG should be just as involved in project development as the Accountable Body. JD agrees, but wants to make sure LAG members are saved from having to look through reams of applications.

SWM reminds everyone that IP's team will be looking at applicants' business plans, and that funding opportunities go beyond LEADER; we will be keen to find whatever funding is available for applicants.

SR asks what is our remit is with intervention rates, JD explains that LEADER intervention rate is typically 40% of project costs, with the rest of the money having to come from private funding. MS mentions that we are flexible; applicants don't have to ask for the full 40%. CB mentions that LAG is able to choose a lower maximum intervention rate if they wish.

HH mentions that we must be careful how we ration out the funds each year, as we should avoid having to turn applicants away because we've spent too much. CB agrees, and says that standard State Aid limits should be fine for most LEADER projects. SWM mentions that we're limited to the allocations by theme outlined in the Local Development Strategy, CB concurs.

EM asks if we could review our intervention rates in subsequent years, CB says yes. SWM mentions we have assumed an average of £50k grant per project. CBB understands that we need to abide by the average spend, but we may have projects that offer incredible value for money and give high outputs, so we need to be flexible. He adds that of course we can avoid giving the full 40% where possible to stretch the funding further.

KM asks if we have an expression of interest form, MS confirms that we do not yet have one and cannot issue until the programme launches, KM asks if the board can be sent the form when it is ready, other LAG members agree they would like to see it.

JD/MS/SB

SR asks if we can give recommendations, i.e. if a project asks for 40% funding and it is clear that the project will fail without the full 40%. MS and CB agree; any changes to the intervention rate should be agreed with the applicant during the development stage. MM suggests we standardise intervention rate in the first year for simplicity's sake and look at varying it in later years. MS mentions that applicants do have to prove what they need for the project to succeed.

DF introduces matrix of rural funding available [ATTACH], SWM asks if CB would like to present it.

CB talks through matrix. Points of interest include: EAFRD has some thematic overlap with LEADER, but tends to fund larger projects due to its £35k grant minimum. There have been discussions about introducing a £50k minimum, with LEADER handling all sub-£50k grants and EAFRD taking anything £50k and above.

MS asks what sorts of activities are expected from the Tourism theme, CB says LEP are still deciding and must do so before autumn.

CB mentions that matrix only suggests themes that a funding stream could potentially support; it is unlikely, for example, that EAFRD would provide business advice. CB then reminds everyone that LEADER is intended as funding of last resort, and that it makes sense to redirect applicants to other streams where possible to make the best use of the available funds.



IP mentions that there is a new diagram currently being produced that shows all available funding streams, and is happy to present it at a later date.

IP

SR asks if agents are getting involved in LEADER to direct potential applicants to us, MS confirms we have had interest from several agents already and they will be kept informed about programme launch.

DF expresses concern that those with 'sharpest elbows' will end up taking large amounts of funding, and is keen to support smaller projects and make the money go further. HH agrees that we could immediately get four strong applications for £50k each and blow first year's funding immediately. MM mentions the need to average-out grants, MS agrees.

DF mentions some explanation of key leader themes may be needed, suggesting that terms such as 'farm productivity' seem vague.

DH brings up the fact that the matrix shows some themes as being 'partially' supported and asks what exactly that means. CB explains that the funding stream supports the theme, but would not directly fund it. MS points out that LEADER 'partially' supports renewable energy; CB explains it is not a LEADER theme but it is absolutely something that would add value to projects.

DF returns to the matter of governance, and mentions the need to appoint a Vice Chair. He asks for confirmation that position of Chair is annual, SWM confirms that it can be revised each year if the LAG chooses.

DF asks if there's anything in the Local Development Strategy about delegation of authority to the Vice Chair, and does the Chair make decisions outside of meetings? CB says no, main function of Chair is to rule on even votes and conflicts of interest etc, only in meetings. DF mentions needs for the chair to understand the LAG and each member's strengths, weaknesses and interests. SWM mentions that it is a business requirement for someone to substitute DF when required, DF asks for people to step forward. LG nominates CBB, DF confirms that everyone concurs, no objections are raised. CBB will be the Vice Chair going forward.

DF asks everyone to approve minutes of last meeting, no objections are raised.

EM brings us onto the communications plan, mentioning that LEADER cannot be formally launched until the RPA give the go ahead. The LEADER team will have a soft presence at Nantwich Show, with the RPA also having a presence at the evening show to highlight rural funding opportunities. EM emphasises that we are awareness-raising at the show, and we are *not* to call it a launch.

Officers attended the Cheshire Show to raise awareness of LEADER as part of the Soft Launch approach.

Following the Nantwich Show, the LEADER team intends to be at the ploughing match towards the end of September; this will be the formal launch as everything should be in place by then. IP mentions that there is a business events programme in place that the LEADER team is welcome to look at. SWM stated that LEADER will be promoted across numerous events once launched.



SWM mentions that we've drafted a website with communications team, but we are only allowed a holding page until launch; CB says that we can now unveil the website as long as we're not generating business through it until launch. SWM says that we will complete the website text, circulate the website URL and open it within the next few weeks.

**SB/JD/MS**

SWM suggests setting up a Sharepoint for the LAG so that they have a private area to share documents, one for each LAG. She asks the board how they feel about using Sharepoint, no objections are raised, SB will set up.

**SB**

JD mentions date of next meeting. DF asks if it should be run separately or alongside the Rural Regen Board. LG suggests it should be separate as meeting is likely to be long, DF agrees, nobody objects.

DF suggests using Doodle Poll method to determine the date of the next LAG meeting. EM asks if it should be before or after the Ploughing Match; having it after the match will allow us to reflect on the launch. All agree that having the meeting after the match if preferable; EM suggests middle of October, everyone agrees.

**SB**

DF thanks everyone for attending, meeting ends.