



<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Cheshire LEADER East Cheshire Local Action Group Meeting 2nd March 2016 Room G1, Wyvern House, Winsford</b></p> <p><b>Present</b></p> <p>Sharon Angus-Crawshaw – Cheshire East Council Sean Bell - Cheshire West &amp; Chester Council (LEADER Support Officer) Rachel Bolton – Cheshire East Council Craig Bradley – Rural Payments Agency Joanna Douglass – Cheshire West &amp; Chester Council (LEADER Programme Manager – West) Brendan Flanagan – Cheshire East Council Cllr. Sam Gardner – Cheshire East Council Mike Gorton – National Farmers Union John Heselwood – Cheshire Community Action Janet Maughan – Overwater Marina (Vice-Chair) Ellie Morris – Cheshire West &amp; Chester Council Robert Parton – Aqueduct Marina Philip Posnett – Haughton Hall/CLA Lucy Rogers – Canal &amp; River Trust Rebecca Wainwright – Marketing Cheshire Mandy Sibthorpe – Cheshire East Council (LEADER Programme Manager – East) Martin Varley – Cheshire Wildlife Trust Steve Wilkinson - Farmer Sheila Woolstencroft – Cheshire East Council Stuart Yarwood – Cheshire Association of Local Councils</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Initials</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">SAC SB RB CB JD BF SG MG JH JM EM RP PP LR RW MS MV SW ShW SY</p>
<p><b>1. Welcome &amp; Apologies</b> JM welcomed the LAG, acting as Chair as Cllr. Bailey was unable to attend the meeting.</p> <p>Apologies have been received from the following LAG members: Cllr. Rachel Bailey – Cheshire East Council (Chair) Andrew Jackson – Gate Farm Enterprises Paul Nolan – Mersey Forest Tony Rimmer – Rostons Jake Thompson – Forestry Commission</p> <p><b>2. Conflicts of Interest</b> No conflicts of interest to declare.</p> <p><b>3. Minutes of Previous Meeting</b> Minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2015 were approved by the LAG and signed by JM.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Actions</b></p>

#### 4. Partnership Agreement

MS introduced the final version of the LAG Partnership Agreement, adding that a draft was previously circulated. The Agreement has been vetted by both Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester's legal departments, and encompasses a code of conduct for LAG members relating to commercially-sensitive information. It is not a legally-binding document and LAG members will not be held responsible for funding decisions. JM asked if LAG members are all willing to sign and no objections were raised therefore the document was passed around and signed by all LAG members present.

#### 5. LEADER Update

##### 5.1 – Cheshire LEADER Website

MS informed the LAG that the Outline Application form and associated guidance document have been updated and are available on the Cheshire LEADER website. The RPA are currently updating the Applicant Handbook; as soon as this is ready it will be tailored for the Cheshire LEADER programme and uploaded to the website.

##### 5.2 – Programme Outputs and Grant Amounts

A document was tabled detailing the funding available and target outputs per LAG and priority; it is intended as a quick reference document for LAG members relating to budget and jobs creation outputs per priority, along with the average grant amount per full-time job created.

JD added that a condensed version is available on the back of the current LEADER fact sheet for applicants in order to help manage their expectations and understand job creation requirements when applying.

##### 5.3 – Annual Attestation

MS introduced the annual attestation process. The annual attestation document confirms that the Accountable Body has carried out its function correctly, and gives them an opportunity to update the delivery plan for each LAG. It must be submitted to the RPA by 15<sup>th</sup> April, and any changes will need to be approved by the LAG. However, no major changes are expected as we would not consider moving funds between priorities or amending current projected outputs for the first year of the programme.

SW asked if the new Delivery Plan could be approved electronically, JM confirmed that this would be possible.

##### 5.4 – Priority 1: Support for Farming Productivity

JD outlined LEADER Priority 1 (Support for Farm Productivity). MS & JD attended an Area Network meeting in February, and concerns were raised about this funding priority as an increase in farm productivity is likely to reduce labour requirements rather than increasing them. Sub-measures for this priority now include farm productivity, animal welfare and health, food processing and reservoirs and water.

CB questioned the value of the reservoirs and water sub-measure in the North as these types of projects are likely to be expensive with no job creation, therefore the LAG could decide to remove it as it was not included in the Cheshire East Local Development Strategy.

SW felt that irrigation projects could potentially create jobs. JM asked if we can keep it in for now, see if it has any value then remove it later if necessary. CB confirmed we can, adding that it comes down to whether or not the LAG would like it to appear in their Applicant Handbook.

MG added that heavy rainfall this year may inspire rainwater harvesting; after dairy farming costs, water is the second-biggest cost to farmers.

It was decided that all of the sub-measures under Priority 1 should remain open to potential applicants for the first year of the programme, and review the situation thereafter to consider reducing the current projected outputs and remove of sub-measures if necessary.

### 5.5 – LAG Information Packs

SB introduced the prototype LAG member pack, a folder that each LAG member will have a copy of for reference regarding the LEADER programme, including materials such as application forms and guidance, the LEADER fact sheet, LAG Partnership Agreement, and other relevant documents.

The LAG approved of the content of the pack, RB asked if a contact sheet for all LAG members and the LEADER team could also be included. SB to produce member packs with LAG contact details ready for the next Executive and LAG meetings.

**SB**

## 6. Outline Applications

MS summarised the applications received so far; eight Outline Applications have been received, four of these have been invited to Full Application, one has withdrawn due to the work involved in providing quotations for all expenditure. CB added that the withdrawn application was fairly unique, as the applicant wanted to do most of the project's construction work himself.

One application is for an equine project; the Full Application is expected on 4/3/16, and will be presented at the first Executive Board meeting. The project aims to create four jobs, and is asking for £55,000 of grant funding.

Another equine business has applied and was invited to Full Application, but has incurred planning delays and is unlikely to meet the submission deadline. If this is the case, then the invitation to submit a full application will have to be withdrawn, however the applicant will be able to reapply at a later date. This project would create three jobs with a grant request of £27,000.

One application came from a micro-brewery and has been invited to full application, creating 1.5 jobs for grant funding of £19,000. As it was only invited to full application recently, it is unlikely to meet the deadline for the May Executive Board.

Two Outline Applications were submitted through an agricultural consultancy, but were considered incomplete – the LEADER team have asked the applicants for more information. MS asked CB if there is a process for this, or if we just wait to see if the applicant replies.

CB advised that the process is to agree resubmission dates and keep in contact with applicants wherever possible, as many may fail to resubmit without being reminded.

Two applications had only just been received and have not been checked for eligibility and completeness yet; one involves the purchase of a dribble bar slurry spreader, and the other involves the conversion of a farm building into an equine shop. The total grant request across all applications currently sits at £158,500.

RP mentioned that he has spoken to consultants regarding the LEADER programme and they often simply roll their eyes; applying for a LEADER grant is widely considered a turgid and lengthy process and does not often provide vast amounts of money for the work involved. He added that it is disappointing that we can't support smaller projects; we should seek to make the application process as easy as possible. CB agreed that it is a complex process and he would like to bring in a simplified application process for smaller grants, but this is not in place yet.

Referring to the brewery application, BF asked whether the LEADER application process allows a business to explain that their project timescale is critical. MS explained that she has visited the brewery and talked through their project timelines, in this case the LEADER timescale does actually fit with their plans, but the LEADER team do try and work with applicants regarding timelines wherever possible.

BF asked if there is a procedure in place if an applicant can make a case that timeline is critical and not in line with LAG decision-making dates – CB explained that we can approve projects by letter/e-mail if necessary, but this is considered a last resort.

BF asked what happens when an applicant's grant request exceeds the calculated average grant amount. JD explained that there is room to go up or down as long as the equivalent outputs are achieved. Ultimately, the decision is with the LAG. There is currently no grant maximum, although this may come into play later on in the programme once funds start to become depleted.

## 7. Visitor Economy Strategy Review

BF introduced the strategy document. Cheshire East adopted the strategy review back in 2011, with a view to gaining an understanding of the visitor economy within Cheshire East, and understanding the Council's role.

Points raised included:

- From 2009 to 2014, Cheshire East's visitor economy has seen a growth of 43%, with a worth of £807m, and supporting around 10,500 jobs;
- A large part of this economy is based in rural areas and market towns;
- Adds to Cheshire's attraction as a place to live, but also to invest;
- Roughly 70% of Cheshire East weddings involve couples from outside the county, and often in rural areas;
- The Visitor Economy Forum was created in order to establish themes and priorities with local businesses. Strategic elements, such as infrastructure (i.e. HS2) may have an impact going forward – availability of hotel and meeting accommodation in Crewe is already seeing an impact;
- BF is presenting now to inform the LAG of work that is being done and to provide support when assessing tourism and culture & heritage projects.

**BF**

When the strategy is finalised, it will be circulated and presented to the LAG; BF is keen for any feedback the LAG may have.

SW mentioned the importance of rural broadband, BF concurred it is increasingly important for visitors as well as businesses. Bids are being made in addition to Connecting Cheshire, not specifically for visitor economy purposes but the visitor economy will benefit regardless.

RP added that people now often book holidays as large family groups, and accommodation now needs to hold as many as 20 residents. He has also lost customers specifically due to problems on the M6 – many consider it unsafe, and subject to frequent delays.

BF agreed that this is not a problem specific to the visitor economy, but it is certainly affected by it. The ongoing introduction of smart motorways in future may help.

SW asked if BF is in talks with Manchester Airport. BF confirmed that he is; Chinese tourism groups in particular have been expanding, and as this justifies more frequent flights this has a knock-on effect to the area.

SG picked up on the 'far side' of the strategy, noting how this can help residents particularly in terms of the younger demographic who may leave Cheshire East but return to visit friends, relatives, etc. and make use of Cheshire East's tourism offer during their visit.

BF noted that if Cheshire East is trying to develop a distinctive rural offer, simply adding more accommodation won't necessarily help – it's how the accommodation is implemented that makes the difference, and there are ways for it to feed into other local activities.

SG added that self-catering B&Bs don't create jobs, which is a potential issue for LEADER.

## 8. Appraisal Overview

JD advised that the LEADER team have received appraisal training, and introduced the appraisal summary document. The appraisal process is extremely thorough, and Cheshire East LAG applicants will be guided through the full application process by MS.

Once a Full Application is received, the LEADER team check that all necessary documents are present, then the appraisal process begins. Things considered include accounts, business plan, value for money, sustainability, environmental and social impact, delivery, and risks. The LAG will receive a six-page summary of the appraisal, and the application's appraiser will give a recommendation to approve, reject, or defer the application, but the LAG will have the final decision.

RPA will also conduct a quality check on all applications, so LAG members will not be presented with any applications that are ineligible for LEADER funding.

PP asked if JD and MS will do the appraisals. JD confirmed they will, but with JD covering East Cheshire projects, and MS covering West Cheshire & Warrington projects.

ShW mentioned that the Visitor Economy Strategy and the appraisal document both mention accessibility and closing of the wealth gap, and asked if there is any scope to inform applicants about issues to consider in their area.

MS explained that if the LAG wishes, we could add this information when inviting applicants to FA. ShW said this would be useful, as there is plenty of intelligent data on the subject, searchable by area. MS said it would be helpful if we could have access to this, ShW concurred.

**MS/ShW/SB**

SY mentioned that as many applicants are equine based, have the applicants done research to show that the demand exists? JD answered that this is part of the Full Application form; applicants are asked to identify local competitors and explain how they are different and not displacing other businesses, and the appraiser will look into this also.

BF asked if there is any difference in the process for joint-LAG projects. JD advised that we are currently awaiting guidance on co-operation projects; CB added that a joint project could go ahead now, but discussions would need to take place regarding which LAG is leading on it and how the funds would be split.

## 9. Alignment With Other Funding Streams

CB gave an overview of the progress of other available funding streams. Points included:

- First round of the Growth Programme was over-subscribed, with a good number and range of applications;
- There is unlikely to be another call for Growth Programme applications until July, and Countryside Productivity is also unlikely to open until autumn, so applicants may divert to LEADER in the meantime;
- There's considerable potential for duplication of tourism projects between LEADER and the Growth Programme; LEPs may be asked to consider funding limits between both programmes to reduce duplication and make it clearer to applicants where to go.

## 10. Dates of Future Meetings

### East LAG:

**1<sup>st</sup> June 2016**

**21<sup>st</sup> September 2016**

**21<sup>st</sup> December 2016**

### East Executive Board:

**11<sup>th</sup> May 2016**

**1<sup>st</sup> September 2016**

**1<sup>st</sup> December 2016**

SB will send out list of all meetings and required attendees.

**SB**

JM mentioned that although the Executive Board has 'main' and 'sub' members, for the first meeting we would like as many members present as possible. First Executive Board meeting will be held in Macclesfield.

MS and SB will look at holding future meetings at various locations as parking at Wyvern House is limited.

**SB/MS**



**11. AOB**

BF mentioned that the Tour of Britain cycle race visits Cheshire East on September 6<sup>th</sup> this year, with a stage that runs from Congleton to Tatton Park; this may be an opportunity for cycle-friendly businesses. The impact of similar events has been huge in the past, such as the Tour de France in Yorkshire last year.

SAC mentioned the upcoming Cheshire East Rural Summit 7 on 16<sup>th</sup> March, which will focus on Rural Tourism and Connectivity. This summit is a pilot, as it is being organised by graduate trainees as part of their development. It is free of charge, and all LAG members are welcome. SB will circulate information to LAG members who have not already received it.

No other business was raised, and the meeting concluded.

**SB**