



Cheshire East LEADER Local Action Group Meeting	Initials/Actions
<p><b>Wyvern House, Winsford</b> <b>21<sup>st</sup> September 2016</b></p>	
<p><b>Members Present:</b></p>	
<p>Councillor Rachel Bailey (Chair) (Cheshire East Council)</p>	<p><b>CRB</b></p>
<p>John Heselwood (Cheshire Community Action)</p>	<p><b>JH</b></p>
<p>Andrew Jackson (Gate Farm Enterprises)</p>	<p><b>AJ</b></p>
<p>Councillor Jamie Macrae (Cheshire East Council)</p>	<p><b>CJM</b></p>
<p>Robert Parton (Aqueduct Marina)</p>	<p><b>RP</b></p>
<p>Philip Posnett (Haughton Hall)</p>	<p><b>PP</b></p>
<p>Tony Rimmer (Rostons)</p>	<p><b>TR</b></p>
<p>Lucy Rogers (Canal &amp; River Trust)</p>	<p><b>LR</b></p>
<p>Steve Wilkinson (Farmer)</p>	<p><b>SW</b></p>
<p>Mike Gorton (NFU)</p>	
<p><b>Officers/Advisors Present:</b></p>	
<p>Rachel Bolton (Skills &amp; Growth Company)</p>	<p><b>RB</b></p>
<p>Sean Bell (Cheshire West &amp; Chester Council)</p>	<p><b>SB</b></p>
<p>Brendan Flanagan (Cheshire East Council)</p>	<p><b>BF</b></p>
<p>Ellie Morris (Cheshire West &amp; Chester Council)</p>	<p><b>EM</b></p>
<p>Mandy Sibthorpe (Cheshire West &amp; Chester Council)</p>	<p><b>MS</b></p>
<p>Sheila Woolstencroft (Cheshire East Council)</p>	<p><b>ShW</b></p>
<p><b>Apologies:</b></p>	
<p>Joanna Douglass (Cheshire West &amp; Chester Council)</p>	
<p>Sharon Angus-Crawshaw (Cheshire East Council)</p>	
<p>Janet Maughan (Overwater Marina)</p>	
<p>Jake Thompson (Forestry Commission)</p>	
<p>Martin Varley (Cheshire Wildlife Trust)</p>	
<p>Stuart Yarwood (ChALC)</p>	
<p><b>1. Welcome</b></p>	
<p>EM, acknowledging that the LAG had not met since March, addressed LEADER's current situation following the UK's decision to leave the European Union:</p>	
<p>The LEADER team was held under purdah conditions prior to the EU referendum on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016, and this was maintained for a further two months beyond the referendum. The Rural Payments Agency then notified all LEADER groups that they could return to 'business as usual'. However, due to a large number of queries received from LEADER staff, it was then clarified that only projects with a Grant Funding Agreement signed prior to the Autumn Statement would be guaranteed funding, leaving LEADER's long-term future unclear. As such, this would be the time to consider lobbying and notifying MPs of the situation and the value of LEADER.</p>	
<p>BF advised that a briefing note has been written for MPs highlighting the importance of various EU funding streams, including LEADER as well as ESIF. As well as stalling LEADER's progress, the current situation has also resulted in the cancellation of an upcoming call for rural tourism projects in Autumn, forcing projects to find funding elsewhere.</p>	



JH queried whether it would be possible to liaise with other LEADER LAGs and do something on a national level as all EU funding programmes are currently paralysed?

CRB felt that we should lobby for a continued programme of this nature; to lose it now after all the work that has been put into it would be a tragedy, though it would be easier to allocate the money if the systems involved in the application were simpler.

RP commented that it seems a lack of resource is causing issues – there is no shortage of applications, just the manpower to adequately support them due to the complexity of the application process.

MS advised that the RPA have discussed developing a simplified application process for smaller grant requests, but the whole process needs looking at from the ground-up, rather than just removing extraneous sections.

BF commented that LEADER is important to the LEP also and it would be worth getting something in writing from them voicing their support.

CRB pointed out that LEADER also connects into many other Council priorities and growth aspirations. The LAG should explore whether a joint letter should be sent from both Cheshire LAGs, or if each LAG should write separately. The letter's target audience also needs to be thought through – local MPs are responsible for hearing the message and taking it elsewhere, but we need to make our case at the right people.

A consensus was confirmed that the possibility of a letter – whether joint or individual – is explored and sent within a week to ten days to explain the merits of the LEADER programme, and state clearly that it should be maintained and allowed to flourish. LAG members voted unanimously in favour, EM to discuss with West Cheshire & Warrington LAG Chair and liaise with CRB and Cheshire LEADER team.

EM, SB

## 2. Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest were declared.

## 3. Update in Lieu of 1<sup>st</sup> June 2016 Meeting

### 3.1 – Approval of Note from June 2016 Electronic Update

MS talked through the summary of the e-mail update and resulting actions that was sent out to LAG members and advisors after the June LAG meeting had to be cancelled.

No issues were raised; CRB signed the summary as an accurate record of the LAG's input.

### 3.2 – Matters Arising

None raised.

## 4. LEADER Update

### 4.1 – Draft Progress Report

This document had been produced to summarise the Cheshire LEADER team's progress since LEADER opened for business in November 2015. SB explained that a number of changes had already been made since the papers were sent out to the LAG; the opening statistics were changed to be more visual, and the 'Looking Forward' section was edited to contain a brief paragraph about potential outcomes should the LEADER programme be truncated due to the result of the EU referendum.

MS provided an update on the projects to be presented at the next Executive Board meeting:

- Bird feed producer looking to expand current operations through purchase of new production equipment; this project was recently presented to the Board, who voted to defer the application due to missing information rendering many of the project's costs ineligible for funding. The applicant then resubmitted their application, to be considered at the next Executive Board meeting.
- Microbrewery operating at capacity and looking to expand.
- Laser manufacturer looking to expand into export markets, creating five jobs.
- A farm diversification/tourism project, establishing two luxury shepherd's huts for 'off-grid' holiday accommodation.
- A canine hydrotherapy clinic, originally applied under the West Cheshire & Warrington LEADER LAG but has since changed location and now falls within Cheshire East.

MS and SB also presented a table summarising the Cheshire East LEADER Running Costs & Animation. The LAG noted the RCA spend seems high considering current progress, suggesting this makes another case for introducing a simplified application process. The LAG recognised that significant delays have occurred both in opening LEADER for business and the extended purdah period caused by the EU referendum.

### 4.2 – Project Reference 12051: Provision of Additional Facilities for Improved Manufacturing, Retail and General Sales Activities.

One of the chosen contractors for this project, which was approved by the Executive Board and contracted for LEADER grant funding, is now unable to start work until February 2017, and it is now too late to source a new contractor in a timely manner.

The applicant's landlord is a builder and has offered to do the work, minimising the time delay in delivering the project. However, the landlord is also putting up the match funding for the project and therefore the applicant could not claim grant funding for building works, but they can still claim for materials used. MS confirmed this with the RPA; other projects are in similar situations and have been allowed to progress as long as the LAG agrees to the changes..

All new quotes for the necessary materials will go through the standard process and be presented to the next Executive Board for consideration.



**5. Dates of future meetings**

It was discussed whether the meeting scheduled for the 21<sup>st</sup> of December should be pushed back to early February 2017, as the LEADER team will have produced a draft 2017/18 Delivery Plan which will need LAG approval. However, the LAG agreed that a meeting closer to the Autumn Statement, with an RPA representative present, would be appropriate.

SB will speak to the LEADER team’s RPA Relationship Manager about his availability from the 5<sup>th</sup> of December onwards, and feed back to CRB to secure a date.

**SB**

CRB asked the LAG if they are happy to consider meeting just twice annually, as suggested in the email update. SW reiterated his position that he believes the lines of communication will be lost; CRB agreed that due to LEADER’s current transient nature, quarterly meetings should be maintained at least for the time being.

**6. AOB**

RP enquired as to whether or not any potential new LAG members had been contacted, noting that one recent Executive Board meeting struggled to maintain quora. MS confirmed that the potential members will be contacted as soon as LEADER’s long-term future is made clear.

**MS**

**Signature** .....

**Name (Please print)** .....

**Date** .....