



Cheshire East LEADER Executive Board Meeting	Initials/Actions
<p><b>Westfields, Sandbach</b> <b>1<sup>st</sup> August 2016, 15:00</b></p>	
<p><b>Board Members Present:</b></p>	
<p>Cllr. Rachel Bailey (Leader – Cheshire East Council) <b>(present for item 6.3)</b></p>	<p><b>CRB</b></p>
<p>Mike Gorton (NFU)</p>	<p><b>MG</b></p>
<p>Robert Parton (Aqueduct Marina)</p>	<p><b>RP</b></p>
<p>Steve Wilkinson (Farmer) (Chair)</p>	<p><b>SW</b></p>
<p><b>Advisors/Officers Present:</b></p>	
<p>Sharon Angus-Crawshaw (Community Strategy Manager – Cheshire East Council)</p>	<p><b>SAC</b></p>
<p>Sean Bell (LEADER Support Officer – Cheshire West &amp; Chester Council)</p>	<p><b>SB</b></p>
<p>Joanna Douglass (LEADER Programme Manager, West – Cheshire West &amp; Chester Council)</p>	<p><b>JD</b></p>
<p>Brendan Flanagan (Tatton Park and Visitor Economy Manager – Cheshire East Council)</p>	<p><b>BF</b></p>
<p>Mandy Sibthorpe (LEADER Programme Manager, East – Cheshire West &amp; Chester Council)</p>	<p><b>MS</b></p>
<p>Sheila Woolstencroft (Health Promotion and Improvement Manager – Cheshire East Council)</p>	<p><b>ShW</b></p>
<p><b>1. Welcome and Apologies</b></p>	
<p>Apologies received:</p>	
<p>Janet Maughan (Overwater Marina)</p>	<p><b>JM</b></p>
<p>Ellie Morris (Programme Manager, Rural – Cheshire West &amp; Chester Council)</p>	<p><b>EM</b></p>
<p>Philip Posnett (Houghton Hall)</p>	<p><b>PP</b></p>
<p>Nicola Said (Marketing Cheshire)</p>	<p><b>NS</b></p>
<p>Jake Thompson (Forestry Commission)</p>	<p><b>JT</b></p>
<p><b>2. Minutes of Previous meeting</b></p>	
<p>Minutes of the meeting held on 11 May 2016 were agreed as a true and accurate record.</p>	
<p><b>3. Conflicts of interest</b></p>	
<p>RP declared a conflict of interest relating to Item 6.3 on the agenda.</p>	
<p><b>4. EU Referendum</b></p>	
<p>MS advised that following the EU referendum, the LEADER programme is subject to certain purdah restrictions. LEADER Local Action Groups can continue to promote LEADER, hold meetings and make decisions on projects coming forward, but they cannot yet communicate those decisions to applicants.</p>	
<p>The Cheshire LEADER Team have more recently been advised by the RPA that they are allowed to communicate decisions in the case of a rejection or deferral, but concern has been expressed over this approach due to the possibility that applicants may communicate with one another and potentially discern that if they have not received a decision, then their application must have been approved.</p>	
<p>MS added that EM has spoken with the RPA and was advised that a ministerial meeting has been held, but cannot yet advise on the outcome of the meeting. The situation is worse for a number of other LAGs, having held Executive Board meetings weeks ago and facing the possibility of projects collapsing if they do not receive a decision soon.</p>	

SW expressed his disappointment at the situation, noting that the application process puts an emphasis on applicants planning their project milestones and adhering to timescales, but now LEADER itself is jeopardising them.

BF suggested that the LEADER Team should be as ready as possible to contact applicants as soon as purdah is lifted; MS agreed, adding that any necessary Grant Funding Agreements will be drafted immediately, ready to send out as soon as permission is given from the RPA.

MG asked what happens if an applicant says the decision has come too late, for example if a Farm Productivity project has critical timescales due to the seasonal nature of their business. MS explained that they would have the option to delay the project by one year, or withdraw their application.

MS also added that the Cheshire LEADER Communications Plan will be updated once LEADER's future is known. A draft press release has been prepared that promotes the first wave of approved LEADER projects, but RB explained that managing expectations is key, and Cheshire East Council do not feel it is appropriate to do a media release until LEADER's future becomes clear.

MS advised that the LEADER Risk Register will also be updated, as well as the forecast grant expenditure. If all current active applications are successful in receiving funding, the Cheshire East LAG will have allocated more grant funding than was originally forecast for the year 2016-17; the RPA have confirmed that this would be acceptable.

## 5. LEADER update

There are currently 12 active applications across the various stages of the process; two were approved for funding at the last Executive Board meeting, and an additional Outline Application has been received since the papers for this meeting were sent out to the Board. The Cheshire LEADER Team expect to receive another three Outline Applications over the next few weeks.

SW drew the LAG's attention to the lack of Forestry Productivity applications. MS explained that enquiries have been received from potential projects which seem promising but are all at very early stages of development and are not ready to apply for funding.

## 6. Projects for Consideration

### 6.1 Project Reference 103586

MS: This application was received from two brothers who run a dairy farm in Prestbury. They currently manage a herd of 195 cows and raise their own replacement heifers; across the whole business they have 380 cows in total. Their current milking parlour is outdated and inefficient, therefore they are seeking funding to modernise and enhance the parlour to include a variable speed milk controller, vacuum on demand pump and auto teat-dipping system. The applicants also wanted to include an automated plant wash and auto recognition feeders, but the RPA advised that these items were ineligible for LEADER funding on the grounds that they are considered standard equipment, therefore these have been removed from the application, reducing the grant request from £26,166 to £14,120. The project was originally looking to create 0.5 FTE jobs, but due to some of the items being deemed ineligible, the applicants now feel they cannot guarantee this. However, it is still possible that they will create the 0.5 FTE job within the next three years and this could still be claimed as an output should it occur.

The project will make use of three new techniques as a result of the enhanced equipment, which will be claimed as outputs.

RB noted that the project's proposed start date is 7/8/16, and expressed concern about how we can manage this due to the current purdah situation. MG added that these projects tends to be undertaken before winter housing for livestock takes place, so it will be vital that the project completes before October. MS concurred, adding that if there are any significant delays then the project will likely have to go ahead without funding and therefore without many of the planned enhancements. The applicant is also currently hiring a temporary milking parlour which is costly, therefore they will want the project to commence as soon as possible.

MG asked if a project's proposed timescales are set in stone; MS explained that she can work with applicants and give them some flexibility with regards to timescales. Outside influences are common, and this is acknowledged in the LEADER process.

RP questioned the ineligibility of the automated plant wash and auto recognition feeders, asking if they are truly considered 'standard' equipment. MG agreed that he would not consider them standard, but MS and JD explained that they have discussed this extensively with the RPA, and they were firm about the decision.

The project was unanimously approved, as per the appraiser's recommendation.

## **6.2 Project Reference 102227**

The applicant runs a dairy farm with some arable, and they are seeking grant funding to assist with the purchase of a slurry spreading instrument known as a dribble bar. They currently use an umbilical system with a splash plate which is less effective; the purchase of the dribble bar would reduce the amount of fertilizer used, as well as the amount of ammonia released into the atmosphere. The applicant has not selected the cheapest available quote in their application, but the appraiser felt that the reasons for this were poorly justified and has therefore recommended funding the project at a lower amount, in line with the cheapest quote.

The proposed project outputs are the reduction in ammonia and one new technique, but no jobs will be created. JD explained that the appraisal score is low due to the RPA appraisal criteria; as LEADER is highly focused on job creation and any project that does not create jobs will score poorly, but this does not necessarily mean the project is not worthwhile. MS added that it is highly unlikely that projects in the Increasing Farm Productivity theme will create jobs.

SW questioned the proposed figures for ammonia reduction, and asked how the applicant has arrived at the figures supplied in the application. MG explained that papers exist detailing how the dribble bar minimises the surface area of slurry exposed to air and therefore reduces ammonia loss.

RP suggested that the Board might support the applicant's request to use the higher quote, as it would make sense that the applicant would want to ensure compatibility with their existing equipment which is also made by the same supplier. MG agreed, adding that the difference in the grant amount is only £800, which appears reasonable.

The project was approved unanimously at the higher cost quoted by the preferred supplier.

### 6.3 Project Reference 103585

A vote in favour of CRB becoming a stand-in member of the Executive Board was undertaken and approved unanimously. CRB joined the meeting.

RP vacated the room.

The application comes from a marina in Audlem, looking to extend their existing five caravan pitches to 15 with associated infrastructure, as well as establishing bases for four holiday lodges. The applicant has undertaken extensive market research and identified a need for high quality tourism accommodation, including evidence of demand for more caravan pitches. The appraisal noted that a number of the applicant's preferred quotations were not the cheapest and the applicant has not been able to justify this, therefore the appraisal recommendation to reduce the grant amount in line with the cheapest quotes. The project seeks to create 2.5 FTE jobs, representing good value for money.

CRB noted that the project seemed to be a complementary expansion to an existing business, while SW agreed that the market research and evidence provided by the applicant was comprehensive. BF also added that there is a healthy demand for this type of accommodation.

The project was unanimously approved as per the appraiser's recommendation.

Having concluded the assessment of the project, CRB vacated the meeting and RP returned.

### 7. AOB

MS advised that Craig Bradley has moved on to another role within the RPA and will no longer work on the LEADER Programme; Mike Baker will be the Cheshire LEADER Team's RPA contact and will be invited to the next full LAG meeting.

### 8. Dates of Future meetings

An additional Executive Board meeting has been added for the 7<sup>th</sup> September 2016 as there were three time-sensitive projects that MS has been working with. Two of these are not able to come forward to this meeting due to planning timeframes, therefore there is one project that has submitted a Full Application. SW declared a conflict of interest and SB will contact PP to confirm if he can chair the September meeting.

SB

Full LAG meetings have also been scheduled for 21<sup>st</sup> September and 21<sup>st</sup> December; MS asked if the Board wished to consider cancelling either of the meetings as the wider LAG recently voted to reduce the number of annual LAG meetings to two. All agreed that the September meeting should remain, as the full LAG has not met since early March. JD suggested deferring the December meeting to January rather than cancelling it, as the LEADER team will need to present the 2017-18 Delivery Plan to the LAG for approval in late January. This will be discussed with the full LAG on 21<sup>st</sup> September.



**Signature** .....

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

**Date** .....

