



	Initials/Actions
<p>West Cheshire & Warrington LEADER Executive Board 20th July 2016, 11:15am Pavilion Café, Ashton Hayes</p>	
<p>Board Members present: David Felix (All-Saints Church, Daresbury) Chris Brown-Bolton (Chris Brown-Bolton Assoc.) Nicola Said (Marketing Cheshire) Andrew Hull (Sandstone Ridge Trust) Stuart Roberts (SFR Farming Ltd.) Joanne Butterill (Natwest Bank) John Heselwood (Cheshire Community Action) Lizzie Aldridge (Warrington Borough Council) Chris McGloin (Mersey Forest)</p>	<p>DF CBB NS AH SR JB JH LA CM</p>
<p>Advisors/Officers present: Annette McDonald (Reaseheath College) Ellie Morris (Programme Manager, Rural – Cheshire West & Chester Council) Joanna Douglass (LEADER Programme Manager, West Cheshire & Warrington – Cheshire West and Chester Council) Sean Bell (LEADER Support Officer – Cheshire West and Chester Council) (minutes)</p>	<p>AM EM JD SB</p>
<p>1. Welcome and Apologies SB read out the list of apologies; apologies were received from Charlotte Harris (Cheshire Wildlife Trust) Martin Ledson (Trafford Council) and Mandy Sibthorpe (Cheshire East LEADER Programme Manager; Cheshire West & Chester Council)</p>	
<p>2. Minutes of Previous Meeting DF confirmed with the Executive Board that the previous minutes are true and correct. Board agreed, minutes were signed.</p>	
<p>3. Conflicts of Interest DF asked the Board if they had any conflicts of interest to declare; none were declared.</p>	
<p>4. Executive Board Membership JD: Due to restructuring changes at Trafford Council, Hazel Kimmitt has now been seconded into a new role and Martin Ledson would resume his position as the LAG’s representative for the Dunham Massey area. This is an interim arrangement until a permanent replacement is found.</p>	
<p>Action: ML to confirm arrangements and membership for Trafford Council</p>	<p>ML</p>
<p>5. EU Referendum JD: The Rural Payments Agency have maintained purdah restrictions on the LEADER programme after the referendum; though LEADER Executive Boards are free to meet and make decisions on funding, those decisions cannot be communicated to the applicants until purdah restrictions are lifted.</p>	



The LEADER Communications Plan will be updated, and a press release has been drafted discussing the first wave of approved projects. There was a lull in enquiries from potential applicants shortly before the referendum, but this has now picked up again, which is highly encouraging.

SR asked if the pot of money for LEADER already sits with the RPA, and suggested that surely it cannot be taken back if so. CBB explained that such transfers tend to take place through bank credit notes rather than actual BACS transfers.

EM reminded the Board that in the short-term, LEADER is continuing to operate as usual.

6. LEADER Update

JD introduced the table detailing the West Cheshire & Warrington LAG's progress. She was hopeful that we'd have a few more applications for assessment at the next Executive meeting, but these are still in the pipeline; a number of them have come from consultants who were busy dealing with Single Farm Payments. The LEADER team is maintaining contact with all in-progress applicants.

One project has withdrawn due to securing funding elsewhere. Meanwhile, another project that previously withdrew their application has now resubmitted it, and JD is now in a better position to advise them having had more experience with the application process. Support for Farm Diversification and Small/Micro Enterprises is still the most popular LEADER theme, but there is also one tourism project in the pipeline, and the LEADER team have received enquiries for projects that would fit into the Culture & Heritage and Rural Services themes.

7 or 8 projects are currently due to submit for the October Board meeting, but JD expects just 3 or 4 of these to submit their Full Application. However, it is external circumstances delaying the applicants, rather than LEADER processes.

JD also mentioned that she is liaising with Cheshire West & Chester Council's Planning department regarding incoming projects.

JD introduced the paper for item 6.2 – Project Eligibility. She had received an enquiry about a project that would fit the Culture and Heritage theme, but the Magic mapping utility shows that the project site is just outside of the LEADER-eligible area. The applicant is keen to encourage younger visitors and wishes to add a play area, which will link to the adjacent rural area and create two jobs. JD has enquired about this with the RPA, and the RPA has said the Board can make a decision on how to proceed.

CBB was in favour of considering the project as eligible, noting that creating two jobs within the Culture & Heritage theme for just £18,000 represents incredibly good value for money. JH added that despite its location it is still servicing the rural area, NS concurred. JD agreed that we can definitely demonstrate the site's linkage to the rural area which would satisfy the requirements for the RPA to consider the project eligible providing we had the support of the LAG.

DF held a vote; all members present voted in favour of considering the project eligible.

SB introduced a series of photographs taken at the site of the LAG's first contracted project, Bradley Barns Nursery. SB has been visiting the site and documenting progress for evidence/marketing purposes and also with the aim of producing a case study. The photographs show a clear progression already, with much of the barn's interior being cleared out, and the roof being entirely replaced.

7. Project for Consideration – Forwarding Tractor and Logging Trailer

JD met the applicant at a Cheshire & Warrington Growth Hub event. The applicant has twenty years' experience in forestry management, and has identified that there are a great number of woodlands that are currently undermanaged due to being relatively inaccessible, and the equipment he is seeking funding for would allow him to manage these areas.

The RPA has stipulated that the machinery would need to adhere to forestry health and safety standards, and the applicant would need to consider the additional purchase of forestry guard caging for the forwarding tractor.

In doing so, the price of the project has increased since the Full Application was submitted and appraised. JD explained that she is therefore only seeking for the LAG to make a provisional decision on the application, as the applicant now needs to find more match funding for the project as well as three competitive quotes for the guard caging; the applicant has already indicated that he would still like to proceed despite the extra cost. The addition of the caging adds roughly £3,000 to the requested grant amount, bringing it to around £13,000, which still represents excellent value for money for a project within the Forestry Productivity theme.

JB asked if current business is viable, JD confirmed that the accounts submitted with the Full Application showed that the business is profitable.

CM explained that the applicant's business mainly acts as a waste and renewables advisor to the agricultural sector, and the forestry activities themselves are a new branch for the business. There are lots of small pockets of undermanaged woodland that are considered inaccessible, but the tractor the applicant wishes to buy is considered an alpine tractor and would allow access to these areas so that the applicant can extract the timber and market it to larger contractors. There could be some profit to the landowner, or at the very least they would get the woodland managed for free, and the applicant would profit from the sale of the timber.

JD explained that the applicant had trouble getting quotes for the required items, as many European companies will not currently guarantee quotes due to the referendum situation. JD would therefore like approval in principle to commit to funding at the higher level, including the guard caging, pending further work with the applicant to secure quotes. The LEADER team will then seek a final decision from the LAG by e-mail.

DF asked if the guarding cage could perhaps this be considered specialist, making it unfair to expect three competitive quotes. SR agreed that it is highly specialist equipment.

JD added that the RPA do acknowledge that not all applicants can get three competitive quotes for certain items, and valid reasons for being unable to do so will be accepted.

DF noted that the safety of operators is also important. Will the equipment do the job the applicant claims?

CM believed so, stating that the applicant has opted for suitable machinery, though he may later need additional equipment, such as a winch, depending on roadside access to the woodlands. CM also added that the equipment is already being used elsewhere in the country.

JB agreed we should support this kind of business, but had concerns about sustainability. Could the applicant purchase the required items and then find that not enough contracts are available?

JD responded that the applicant has provided a full cashflow report, and this is covered in the appraisal document.

SR added that as a farmer, he would want to see a management plan and fully understand how he might benefit from the applicant's services.

CM explained that any work the applicant does would be under Forestry Commission remits; he could only 'thin' the woodlands rather than clearing them entirely. CM is currently working with Stobart who are setting up a forestry operation off the back of their Widnes biomass project, targeting undermanaged woodlands on a large scale. The applicant may have the opportunity to be contracted to them and manage small, more difficult woodlands. A similar business exists in Garstang who 'mop up' after larger forestry companies – large-scale forestry equipment is often less efficient, and can leave behind timber that a small company can manage. Therefore, it may well suit the applicant to continue to operate on a small scale.

DF asked how big the potential market is, CM explained that this is for the applicant to explore, and comes down to the willingness of landowners. Getting permission to survey woodland is relatively easy, but getting an actual offer and permission to manage it is another issue entirely. However, CM believes there is enough woodland for the applicant to succeed; companies are currently bringing timber in from Wales because they cannot get it locally.

JD explained that the applicant has demonstrated interest from businesses in his application, and has existing contracts for woodland management, hence the urgency of the application.

DF stated that he is comfortable with asking the applicant to continue with his application, and for the LEADER team to come up with a suitable recommendation. The Board had been advised this is the right equipment for the job, there is a potential market and the business could develop, the Board is happy that the increased price is related to health and safety requirements and is therefore acceptable. Some risk is involved, but this is inherent to entrepreneurial endeavours. The Board agreed.

JD agreed to go back to the applicant and see if other quotes can be sourced, and the applicant would need to submit a revised cash flow and proof of increased amount of match funding.

JD

The Board agreed to the revised application being sent via email upon which a decision via email would also be made.

8. AOB

No other business was raised.



9. Dates of Future Meetings

The next Executive Board meeting is scheduled for the 19th of October 2016, venue to be confirmed.

I confirm these minutes are a true and accurate record,

Signature:

Name (please print):

Date: