



	ACTIONS
<p>West Cheshire & Warrington LEADER Executive Board Meeting 4th May 2016, 2:30pm Wyvern House, Winsford, CW7 1AH</p>	
<p>Board Members Present: Rev. Canon David Felix (Chair), All-Saints Church, Daresbury Chris Brown-Bolton (Vice-Chair), Development Enabling Nicola Said, Marketing Cheshire Cllr. Harry Tonge, Cheshire West & Chester Council Charlotte Harris, Cheshire Wildlife Trust John Heselwood, Cheshire Community Action Hazel Kimmitt, Trafford Council Chris McGloin, Mersey Forest Andrew Hull, Sandstone Ridge Trust</p>	<p>DF CBB NS HT CH JH HK CM AH</p>
<p>Advisors/Officers Present: Craig Bradley, Rural Payments Agency Carol Vella, Cheshire West & Chester Council Susan Woodward-Moor, Cheshire West & Chester Council Joanna Douglass, Cheshire West & Chester Council Mandy Sibthorpe, Cheshire West & Chester Council Sean Bell, Cheshire West & Chester Council</p>	<p>CB CV SWM JD MS SB</p>
<p>1. Welcome, Introductions & Apologies</p>	
<p>1.1. Introductions Introductions took place around the table; CV attended this meeting as she jointly appraised the project being assessed by the Executive Board. SWM stood in for Ellie Morris (Programme Manager – Rural, Cheshire West & Chester Council) due to a family emergency.</p>	
<p>1.2. Apologies Received Apologies were received from Cllr. Louise Gittins, Joanne Butterill, Danielle Lea-Smith and Lizzie Aldridge.</p>	
<p>2. Minutes of Previous Meeting</p>	
<p>2.1. Approval of Minutes DF introduced minutes of previous meeting, no complaints or queries about the minutes were raised, minutes were signed by DF as a true record.</p>	
<p>2.2. Matters Arising None.</p>	
<p>3. Conflicts of Interest DF asked Board members to declare conflicts of interest, none were declared.</p>	

4. LEADER Update

4.1. Programme Outputs and Reporting

JD introduced a table produced by the LEADER team to update LAG members on current programme progress. Points included:

- As expected, most projects currently fit into the Support for Farm Diversification & Small/Micro Enterprises theme.
- A number of applicants have pulled out, mostly due to the application process or sensitive project timescales.
- The LEADER team is recording the reasons cited by applicants for project withdrawal; these are shared with the RPA via the DORA content management system.

JD then asked the Board for comments on the layout or content of the tables, as it will be used to keep the LAG informed on the programme's progress.

NS asked if the number of received Outline Applications could be included, SB agreed that this could be done. JD agreed that this could give a clearer picture of the amount of interest in LEADER. She added that no while Outline Applications have been ineligible as such, but some have missed key details or failed to fully explain the project. In these cases, the LEADER team ask the applicant to resubmit their application.

SB

DF asked if the LEADER team are expecting more applications by the next meeting, JD explained there are currently seven applicants who are due to submit Full Applications by the next meeting, and she is working with them to develop their applications.

CBB asked if the LEADER team are confident that the number of applications coming in will allow the LAG to hit its output targets. JD explained that this is covered in the new Delivery Plan, and that we have agreed to review our position after LEADER has been open for a full calendar year; we may yet reallocate our target outputs among the different LEADER themes subject to approval from the RPA.

4.2. LAG Information Packs

SB introduced the sample LAG member pack; each LAG member will receive one, and it is intended to serve as a resource that LAG members can keep with them either for their own information, or if they're ever planning to meet potential applicants. LAG members will be sent updated versions of documents in the pack as they become available. SB will distribute the packs at the next Executive Board meeting.

SB

5. Delivery Plan Review and Sign-Off

JD introduced the Delivery Plan that has already been circulated to LAG members via e-mail, and asked the Board if they had any further comments or questions before the Delivery Plan is signed by the Chair. No comments were raised, DF signed the plan.

6. Appraisal Overview Update

JD talked through the accompanying document, which briefly explains the appraisal process. DF asked for questions, none were raised.

7. Project Appraisal

JD gave a brief overview of the project – the applicant runs a dairy farm near Malpas which has been in operation since 1958, and they're a father and son who rely on contractors. The dairy has undertaken huge modernisation, which has left an old barn vacant. They've looked at various uses, but due to the location there is no possibility of installing a high-speed broadband internet connection, making it unsuitable for many businesses. However, another family member is keen to open a children's nursery, and this fits with the strengths of the building. The total project costs are stated as £165,960, eligible LEADER grant would be £58,984. The applicant is initially looking to take on 30 children at the nursery, creating 10 FTE jobs as a minimum, and plan to grow to take on 40 children, creating a total of 21 FTE jobs. The applicant has undertaken extensive research and believes the farm building represents a unique offer, as it gives the children attending the nursery the opportunity to spend time with the farm animals.

MS, who undertook appraisal, explained that the project would provide excellent value for money. In the Farm Diversification & Small/Micro Enterprises theme, we are expecting to spend an average of £12,002 per full-time job created; this project asks for £2,808 of grant funding per full-time job created.

MS and CV confirmed in the appraisal that there is a lack of childcare options in the area, and the applicant has sought written declarations of support from local parents which have been included in the Full Application.

MS mentioned that the farm accounts showed a loss for the previous financial year, suggesting that the applicant will be looking to leave dairy farming entirely. The nursery project itself, however, appears to be incredibly strong.

CH asked if the applicant owns the farm, MS confirmed that they do, however the new nursery will be a separate business with the same directors, and will rent the barn from the farm. AH picked up on the project's job creation, asking if the project 21 FTE positions is perhaps optimistic. MS confirmed this number of employees is actually an OFSTED requirement.

JH asked if the project could instead be counted under the Support for Rural Services LEADER theme, MS explained that it is primarily a farm diversification and as such fits under Support for Farm Diversification and Small/Micro Enterprises. JH asks if project outputs can be split across different themes, MS says this has been done in the past but can be incredibly complex.

CB said there is nothing to stop us collecting outputs relevant to different themes within one project; MS asked if DORA would support this, and CB confirmed it is unlikely. CV suggested that perhaps once the LAG has reached its funding capacity in one theme, there may be a greater case to move projects between themes. CB confirmed that this can be done.

CBB referred back to the farm's financial performance, suggesting that if the nursery had applied on its own then the farm's finances wouldn't be a concern. MS explains that LEADER requires us to take all linked businesses into account.

DF expressed his concern about the project's financial risk. If the farm shares directors with the nursery and the farm found itself unable to pay its debts – bearing in mind that the farm is making a loss – could those debts be chased through the nursery? CBB said it simply depends how the business is set up, suggesting that if the nursery business was an LLP then this would limit the amount of money that could be chased. DF said that in any case, there should be a lease between the property owners and tenant. CBB agrees – the document does not need to be exhaustive, but the lease does need to be in writing.

MS explained that as the directors of both companies are all part of one family, there is currently no lease in place.

CBB reiterates that it is vital that the new business is not able to be chased for the farm's debts, as chains of businesses have fallen in similar circumstances and this puts public money at risk. DF agreed, stating that we have a duty to protect the public purse. HT agrees.

DF refers to the project appraisers' recommendations in section 2.12 of the appraisal document, and suggested that we should recommend that the farm building should be leased, MS agrees.

SWM asked if there is a need to be concerned about the applicant using the wrong type of lease – CV suggested that Cheshire West & Chester Council have an advisor who can help. SWM said this would be useful, adding that it is always helpful to give applicants tools alongside conditions.

CV

DF asked if there were any issues with the project's planning permission. JD explained that Change of Use permission was sought and granted, on the condition that the applicant needs to include a passing place for vehicles coming in and out of the nursery, and that the farm's dairy production has to cease for the children's safety due to the vehicles that would be in use around the farm.

There is the possibility of adding a second track for farming vehicles, but the applicant will need to apply to speak to the Planning Department again in order to restart dairy operations in the future.

DF asked if these conditions would also form part of the Grant Funding Agreement, JD confirms they would, adding that the LEADER team will continue to work with applicants throughout and offer support regarding conditions.

DF asks the Executive Board if they are happy to approve the project for LEADER funding. The Board agrees unanimously, and the project is approved.

8. AOB

No other business was raised.

9. Dates of Future Meetings

The next LEADER Executive Board meeting will take place at Ashton Heyes Community Hall on the 20th July at 11:15am, immediately following the Rural Growth Board meeting.



Signature

Name (Please print)

Date