



Northumberland Uplands Local Action Group



The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe Investing in Rural Areas

DRAFT NOTES AND ACTIONS Local Action Group Meeting

17.30 – Tuesday, 8th September 2009
The Ox Inn, Middleton

Northumberland Uplands Local Action Group (NULAG):

Roger Wilson
Anna Charlton
Anne Lowrie
Anthony Murray
Elisabeth Rowark
James Cookson
James Saunby
Johnny Wilson
Marion Penfold
Michael Nixon
Pat Beaumont
Vincent Milburn

Northumberland National Park Authority:

Director of Corporate Services
Local Action Group Co-ordinator
Local Action Group Administration Officer

Stuart Evans
Tom Burston
Sophie Lewington

Northumberland County Council:

One NorthEast:
Scottish Borders LAG:

Heather Smith
Michael Patterson
Billy McKissock

NULAG Apologies Received:

David Clubb
Elisabeth Stewart
Heather Hunter
Jennifer Hewitson
Mark Mather
Mike Murray
Marie Whitehead
Stuart Moss
Wendy Bond

- 1.0 **Welcome from the Chair**
- 1.1 Opening comments and Apologies
- 1.2 Welcome to new members

Roger welcomed new LAG members, Marion Penfold and Pat Beaumont. Jennifer Hewitson has also agreed to join also but had sent her apologies for the September meeting.

Roger also welcomed Billy McKissock, who is the LAG Co-ordinator in the Scottish Borders.

1.3 Update on Small Grants

The proposed application from David Haffey re Heritage Walks in Northumberland has been approved by sub committee, with a grant of £2,797.

Heather reported that revised draft and appraisal forms were both in the pipeline and that they hoped to pilot these forms with the Northumberland Uplands LAG.

To date, the LAG have committed money to nine projects, some £326,000 out of an allocation of £456,835 this financial year. Roger reported that tonight, the LAG have an opportunity to approve six projects up to a value of £156,000. Roger conveyed his thanks for all the work undertaken outwith the meetings and for the significant improvement in the quality of applications being considered.

2.0 Notes and Actions of the Previous Meeting

The Notes and Actions of the previous meeting, held on 7 July 2009, were agreed as a true and accurate record.

3.0 LAG Membership/Officer Roles

Election of Chair: One nomination for Roger Wilson for one year.
James Saunby proposed and this was seconded by Mark Mather.
Vote: unanimous.

Election of Vice Chair: One nomination: Heather Hunter.
Anne Lowrie proposed, Michael Nixon seconded
Vote: unanimous

Confirmation of other Exec Roles: Speaking on behalf of the Chair, Tom thanked Anthony Murray and Marie Whitehead for their efforts in the north and south, both of whom were now stepping down. Marie is leaving the LAG in December and Anthony had indicated that he was keen for someone else to have the opportunity. Thanks were also given to Mike Murray as communications champion and who was keen to stay on in role.

It was proposed that James Cookson be the southern representative, Mark Mather be the northern representative and Mike Murray continue as communications champion.
Vote: unanimous.

4.0 Project Applications

NUL012 - NULogs

The applicant gave a presentation on the project
Declared Interest: James Cookson declared an interest

Summary:

This project represents a new way of providing support to small operators in the wood fuel sector. Beyond the actual activities and direct benefits within the project, there is also an opportunity to share the project model. Lantra have already expressed interest in learning from this and the applicant has included provision for an external evaluation in the budget. This project is being run as a pilot, with the aim of sharing lessons. The project has been

designed so that a number of complementary activities take place. Direct training will be provided, as will one-on-one mentoring. That is supported by elements of marketing, raising local awareness and signposting clients to other support.

The Northumberland Upland Local Development Strategy has identified a huge opportunity to grow this economic sector. Comparatively within the north-east the Uplands has a large amount of forestry resources, a lot of it as under-managed woodland in private ownership. There are also high levels of households living in fuel poverty. While there is no direct relationship between the two analyses it certainly highlights an opportunity. The project also clearly supports the Forestry Commission's National Woodfuel Strategy.

Vote:

8 LAG members supported the idea (2 against)

No one wanted to fund the total amount requested (9 voted no)

The exact amount funded would have to be worked out after the meeting.

NUL066 - Humshaugh Community Shop

The applicants gave a presentation.

Declared Interest: None

Summary:

This project application is the result of a lot of hard work in the village of Humshaugh. Local people have formed a committee to take on the running of their own village shop as the present owners are coming up to retirement. They have consulted the local residents as well and got an overwhelming amount of support.

Whilst this project primarily focuses on a really important aspect of basic service delivery in a small Northumbrian village it has a lot of other strong features. Around 45 residents have indicated they would volunteer in the shop, one of the committee members has experience co-ordinating volunteers, the group have committed to stocking local produce as much as possible, they have received advice and guidance around the governance of the group from Social Enterprise Northumberland and the Plunkett Foundation and they have sourced other funding to complement their request to Leader.

In terms of the level of local support there appears to be a lot of support for this venture. Community ownership of the shop provides a great case study for the LAG to observe and see how it can be successful. It's difficult to find data about small food shops and how they are accessed but the State of the Countryside report highlights the fact that due to distances involved in rural areas, any closure of service outlets has a larger impact than in urban areas.

Vote:

10 members voted to support the idea (1 against).

8 members voted in favour of funding the total amount requested of £15,000 and making up the shortfall £7500 (3 members voted against).

NUL067 - Northumbria Basket Group

The applicant gave a

Declared Interest: None

Summary:

An unusual community project. This group wish to run training classes in a traditional craft skill. They also want to grow their own willow so the class has a sustainable supply.

The project has three distinct elements to it. Firstly, cultivating a sustainable local supply of willow. Secondly, the running of classes in willow weaving and basket making and thirdly, a research project looking at the history of basket making. Support would be provided to a local village hall through a regular rental agreement, any surplus willow might be used in educational projects in schools and willow cultivation will have some environmental impact as presently it's brought up from Somerset.

There appears to be a strong link with NULAGs community objective, particularly in terms of life-long learning and to some extent in promoting appreciation of the areas cultural and natural environment. There are suggestions that increased craft skills would allow some people going through these classes to earn small amounts of income from their own subsequent private basket making ventures.

Vote:

9 LAG members voted to support the idea (2 voted against) .

8 members voted to support the application for the whole amount (1 against).

NUL061 – Equestrian Pilates

The applicant gave a presentation.

Declared Interest: None

Summary:

This is an interesting way for a struggling new venture to look at alternative income. The applicant is looking for funding for a horse-box, which she will convert into a mobile pilates studio. This will help her give up the rent on a studio in Kielder and allow her to access more clients across the area, particularly around equestrian centres.

Responding to the pressures of the rural economy in Northumberland, this application seems to present an opportunity for a small business to continue trading by targeting a real niche market with a new technique. Pilates appears to be the exercise of choice for horse riders as it contributes to building core strength, which in turn improves riding posture.

Vote:

11 LAG members voted to support the idea.

11 LAG members voted to support the total amount requested.

NUL072 – Heatherslaw Light Railway

The applicant gave a presentation.

Declared Interest: None

Summary:

Support to an interesting tourism activity is proposed in this application. The applicant wants to complete the construction of a new steam engine, and 2 new passenger carriages.

The basic premise of this project is that it will support a tourism business, drawing more people to a small community in the north of the Uplands, and indirectly benefiting some 15 neighbouring businesses.

Some of the work has already begun, but was put on hold when the company founder and engineer died. The business plan makes the argument for completing the work and argues that it will help the business develop and grow.

Vote:

11 LAG members voted to support the idea (No one voted against)

11 LAG members voted to support the total amount.

NUL055 – Upland Micro Hydro

The application was unable to give a presentation due to work commitments.

Declared Interest: James Saunby

Summary:

This application is for feasibility work to look at the potential of micro-hydro power schemes to contribute to farm business electricity usage. The applicant group is interested in exploring how upland farms can reduce carbon emissions. Due to the low intensive nature of upland farming, how the businesses generate power is really important to look at if one is interested in reducing emissions.

This report would give management information to each farm business, allowing them to make a decision whether or not to invest in capital equipment. There could potentially be support for that available through Business Link. The report itself could be of interest to other land owning interests, such as the MOD, or indeed regional government, as studies would be conducted on different farms.

In terms of natural resources on upland farms there would appear to be at least an opportunity to look at micro-hydro in Northumberland! If feasible, using micro-hydro would potentially contribute to reducing costs, increasing income, assisting diversification and marketing farm products.

Vote:

9 LAG members voted to support the idea (1 against)

9 LAG members voted to support the total request.

Summary of Decisions

A summary of the decisions was read out.

5.0 Any Other Business

- The first Partner Support Meeting will take place on Thursday, 1st October 2009.
- Some representatives from DEFRA are coming up to visit One NorthEast on 25th September 2009 and would like to visit members of LAG and some projects.

Date, Time and Venue of the next Meeting

The date of the next meeting is 4th November 2009 at 17.30 hours at Whittingham or Glanton.