



NORTHUMBERLAND UPLANDS LEADER LOCAL ACTION GROUP (LAG)

Thursday 15th December

Hexham Abbey

5.30pm - 8.00pm

Present: Terry Carroll (Chair), Steve Jopling, Barbara Sexon, Mike Murray, Tom Johnston, Dagmar Winter, Alistair Cochrane, Alan Sharp, David Baird, Gillian Cowell, Louise McCreery

1. Welcome and Apologies

TC welcomed everyone to the meeting

Apologies: Pat Beaumont, Kate Cairns, Andrew Poad, Louise Kirkwood, Ruth Dickinson

2. Declaration of Interest

BS advised the group she knows Alistair Hardie, father of applicant Tim Hardie. It was agreed there was no pecuniary interest so no need to leave during the discussion.

AC advised he has had a business relationship with the Hardies so will leave the room during the discussion

AS advised of an interest in Young & Sweet – will leave during the discussion

3. Draft LAG Minutes from meeting on 5 October 2016

TC confirmed that a letter was sent to the RPA regarding the Stuart Brodie appeal. It was sent later than planned as Heather Smith (NCC) asked to delay while she spoke to the RPA. When no further progress was made TC sent the letter. The RPA response was received on Friday 18th November with a favourable outcome.

MM commented that if there was to be a change of plans regarding agreed communication from the LAG to the RPA the whole LAG should be informed.

Minutes agreed as a true and accurate record

4. Matters Arising & Actions

GC advised that LAG that, now that the extra equipment for Stuart Brodie has been approved by the RPA, the LAG has to endorse the extra grant and the switch in measure from farm productivity to SME development.

Vote: unanimous approval

5. Programme Officer's Update

The LAG considered the RC&A budget. It was noted that there is an underspend on expenses as not all members are claiming mileage.

GC went through the funds committed to date. There is an overspend on farm productivity and rural tourism but an overall underspend of £46,348. The LAG were asked to consider moving the budgets from underspent areas to cover the over commitments. This should reduce the risk of the LAG losing out if funds cannot be carried over into next year.

It was clarified that the tables show committed expenditure, not actual spend.

Vote: unanimous approval to change budgets as per Table 3 of forecast.

6. Publicity

GC advised the LAG that the new website is up and running –

www.northumberland.gov.uk/uplands

GC and LM are working to switch url from old website to the new one.

GC passed round a draft 'business as usual' press release and communications calendar. GC to discuss further with LAG communication champion BS after the meeting.

MM advised that in the last programme the applicants wrote the first draft of press releases themselves as they have the in depth knowledge of the project. The LAG agreed this was a good idea and LAG members agreed to visit projects to help with this when appropriate.

TC suggested having a conference in 2017, perhaps jointly with Coast & Lowlands LAG. MM suggested it would be a good idea to invite LEADER LINNE and past projects to show long term effects of grants.

7. Full Application Presentations

Twice Brewed

The aim of the project is to build a micro-brewery attached to the existing public house. The project has been identified to benefit the existing business by adding an additional income stream, have synergies with staffing and increase visitor numbers over the year (particularly over the winter). A large number of pubs close each year but those offering something different are more likely to flourish. The new business will also actually supply the existing pub with beer. It is also proposed that brewery tours will become available as a visitors attraction and that brewery training courses may be offered

Presentation by Reuben Straker & Emma Kellie

R Straker bought and renovated the Twice Brewed Inn in June 2015. The project to add a microbrewery to safeguard and create jobs and enhance visitor experience. It will help the business to see through the lean months outside of the tourism season when occupancy and turnover drops. The opening of the Sill is a big opportunity but also a potential threat as they will provide competing accommodation and food options.

The brewery will be self-contained (connected to the pub by a glass corridor) and will include a function room with its own bar. There is a ready market for cask beer in the pub and the plan is to sell bottled beer to other outlets, including hopefully the Sill. R Kellie currently runs a brewery at Newcastle University teaching students how to brew and is also setting up her own brewery in Elsdon. There are plans to build in brew experiences and in depth tutoring sessions as well as brewery tours.

TC asked for the latest on the planning application. R Straker advised that there have been no negative comments on the portal and they are hoping for a decision by 16th January at the latest.

AS asked if the brewery would be fully open to visitors. R Kellie advised that the buildings have been designed so that, as well as formal tours, people will be able to see the brewers at work at all times.

MM asked if there was any chance of collaboration with other Northumberland breweries. R Kellie advised they would like to look at collective buying and would like to incorporate other breweries into their brewery tours. Possibly have a residential event to show the variety in Northumberland.

MM asked if they will produce non-alcoholic beer. R Kelly advised that this cannot be done with the equipment they are asking for.

The LAG discussed the project and was broadly supportive. It was felt that there was great enthusiasm from the brewer and the focus on education was very encouraging. It could also complement the larger Sill project very well.

Vote – 7 approve

1 abstain

Project approved on majority vote

Westfield Shepherd Huts

To complement existing farmhouse B&B provision at Westfield House Farm, NE65 7LB, the applicant wishes to purchase and install 5 Shepherds Huts (each with a septic tank) within the farm boundary. The applicant's intention is to expand the visitor offering in terms of accommodation type, meet existing demand, create 2.5 FTE jobs and following project completion increase annual turnover by £90k p.a.

Presentation by Tim & Emma Hardie

Have owned Westfield Farm B&B for three years. It is a small venue with two ensuite rooms. They currently have over 55% occupancy rates with over 400 overnight visitors per year and excellent customer feedback scores. There is a need for extra accommodation so looking at building five shepherds huts. These will be high specification accommodation with ensuite and kitchenette facilities. Forecasting 365 overnight visitors per year.

TC asked for the latest on the planning application. TH advised that they had been asked for an ecological survey which was completed and submitted yesterday. No other negative comments. Hoping for a decision in January 2017.

MM asked where the huts will be sourced from. The applicant advised that quotes were sought from Bellingham and Yorkshire. Yorkshire is currently the cheapest and therefore the preferred supplier.

The applicants confirmed the huts will be fully off grid.

GC clarified with the applicant that the full occupancy output should total 1825 not the 300 listed on the application form. The applicants agreed this.

The applicants confirmed they would be happy to do publicity with the LAG.

The LAG discussed the project. They felt the applicants were very enthusiastic and that their figures and approach to the project was very sensible.

Vote – unanimous approval

Kielder Imaging Observatory

To develop and expand Kielder Observatory through construction of a single storey building to provide a 'warm room' and accommodation for groups of up to 15 people.

The proposal is to construct a single storey building housing the new Observatory with a slide-off roof, an entrance porch, a 'warm room' and adjacent coffee servery. The size of the proposed building is 12m x 4.5m with space to accommodate groups of up to 15 people at any one time. The 'warm room' will also be used as a teaching space during bad weather.

The project will allow an increase in capacity within the observatory for an additional 3000 guests per year when the project is complete.

Presented by Gary Fildes and John Holmes

The demand for the services at the observatory has been unprecedented and the current facilities cannot satisfy this. The expansion will allow them to reach a wider area. This would include a permanent mounted telescope which would be the first of its kind in the North East. The area can also be used during the day for educational visits etc. and would not be as staff intensive as the current facility.

It is estimated that the expanded area could bring in 3-5,000 extra visitors per year and will enhance the visitor experience, offering a new experience for returning visitors.

TC questioned the capacity of the new building. Applicants advised that it will hold around 20 people depending on the event.

The LAG asked the applicants to elaborate on the job outputs. JH advised there are currently 8 employees plus volunteers. There is a planetarium that can be taken to schools and other sites and this programme could be expanded with an educational specialist. Would also look to employ an extra science presenter and facilities manager as numbers grow.

MM asked if they had looked at any other funding sources. GF advised that there is scientific funding available but these funders look for more control over the activities provided.

The LAG discussed the project. The members agreed that this is a very inspirational and innovative organisation. It is very encouraging to see the growth of the business over the course of the last two LEADER rounds.

Vote - unanimous approval

Young & Sweet

GC advised the LAG that the application is still with the RPA for quality checks. The LAG agreed to hold a special meeting onsite in January to consider the project. This can be part of the January Exec Meeting but all LAG members will be invited to attend. GC to organise dates.

8. Outline Applications

Monkridge Farm Meat Storage Unit

The project wishes to purchase a refrigerated storage unit, packaging equipment and develop a website to enable to creation of a Waghu beef sales and distribution facility at the owner's farm.

Looking to create 1 FTE job

The applicant is requesting a grant of £7,160 (40% of costs)

The LAG discussed the project. There were concerns about the previous business the applicant had but the LAG acknowledged that the project is good value for money and that the applicant has done a lot for the food industry in Northumberland.

Vote – 7 approve

1 abstain

Application approved on majority vote

Hesleyside Historic Walled Garden

Hesleyside Leisure is an enterprise including providing glamping and B&B accommodation, and with 9 part-time and full-time employees is now a major employer within the Bellingham area

The historically important walled garden at Hesleyside, set within Capability Brown designed landscape, is in a dangerous state and if left any longer will collapse beyond repair. It is currently unsafe and too dangerous for the public/community to visit and utilise this special heritage space.

The project is to restore the two acre walled garden at Hesleyside to thus saving an important heritage asset.

Looking to create 2 FTE jobs

The applicant is requesting a grant of £36,900 (100% of costs)

The LAG was not convinced that there is sufficient public benefit to justify the magnitude of the grant. There is a lack of evidence of demand from the public, community groups, schools and youth organisations for access to the walled garden. Correspondingly, there is little detail about the number or types of events and activities that are proposed. The applicants are not proposing to charge for public access and therefore there will be no additional income generated. This calls into question the prospects for creating and sustaining the employment that is projected.

The applicants have stated that alternative funding sources, such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, have been exhausted but there is no supporting evidence. The LAG believes that Charitable Trusts operating in the North East and beyond could support this project without Leader funding covering the costs in full.

Vote – unanimous rejection

Dalton Farm Equestrian Development

A new rural business start-up (employing a mother and daughter partnership) relates to the breeding, training and selling horses for show-jumping. Project activity includes building construction costs of a barn with internal stables, purchase of a horse walker, lunge pen, fencing, field shelters & jumps.

Looking to create 2 FTE jobs

The applicant is requesting a grant of £59,162.40 (40% of costs)

The LAG raised concerns around the expertise and experience of the applicants but agreed that the project has potential and would like to see more detail in the full application

Vote – unanimous approval

9. AOB

MM asked if the LEP are involved with the programme at all. TC confirmed that there is an established conduit to the LEP via NEFRAN which he attends. MM raised the idea of the LAG supporting unmanned fuel stations in the uplands. The LAG agreed the idea has merit but in order to support it they would need a business to make an application

MM asked if the exec minutes are circulated to the full LAG. GC confirmed they are sent with the full LAG meeting papers

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be Tuesday 7th February – tbc