



NORTHUMBERLAND UPLANDS LEADER

LOCAL ACTION GROUP (LAG)

Thursday 8th February 2018

Hexham Golf Club

5.30pm - 9.00pm

Present: Steve Jopling, Mike Murray, Barbara Sexon, Alan Sharp, Louise Kirkwood, Nicola Bell, Anthony Murray, Andrew Poad, David Baird (NCC), Gillian Cowell (Programme Officer), Louise McCreery (Admin Officer)

1. **Apologies:** Terry Carroll, Tom Johnston, Alistair Cochrane, Sally Shortall, Ruth Dickinson (NNPA)

2. **Declaration of Interest**

SJ declared an interest in Jack's Fast Track Fitness, and agreed to leave during the discussion. BS to chair

AM, BS and LK declared an interest in JT Murray and agreed to leave during the discussion.

3. **Draft LAG Minutes from meeting on 6 December 2017**

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record

4. **Matters Arising & Actions**

Minutes from the Executive Group Meeting

BS clarified her comments regarding discussion of the full applications. She felt that the problem was that there was no time for any discussion at all of the applications at the last meeting, not that there was not enough time. GC advised that more time has been left in the agenda for discussion at this meeting

The LAG discussed the best way to expedite approval of applications now that the programme is drawing closer to the end and timescales are becoming more important. SJ proposed that authority is delegated to the Executive Group to approve applications to reduce delays for projects which have missed meeting dates.

The LAG agreed this proposal with a number of conditions:

- LAG members will be invited to attend Executive Group meeting where project decisions are made
- Approval can only be delegated to one stage of the process - if an EOI is approved by the Executive Group then the decision at full application stage must be made by the full LAG and vice versa
- If the EOI is approved by the Executive Group then the applicant should be asked to present the project to the full LAG at full application stage

5. Programme Officer's Update

GC updated the LAG on funds committed to date. If all projects to be discussed at the meeting are approved the LAG will be overcommitted by £10,000.

There is no further update on programme extensions or future arrangements.

Nationally there is an underspend within the programme but there has been no update on the last RPA position that only LAGs with 90% commitment would be allowed to bid for additional funds. The RPA is due to revalue the programme based on current exchange rates which may provide more funds for the LAG

The LAG have currently created 40 jobs against a target of 65. There are a further 30 jobs within the current project pipeline. 92% of project funds have been allocated to projects that directly create jobs

Update on Projects in Development

Ingram Venison - FA is in development and is on target to be submitted by the deadline

Bays Leap Dairy - no update on progress. GC will contact applicant. The applicant also has applied to the Growth Programme and Countryside Productivity

Ciunam - the FA has been submitted but cannot go into appraisal as planning permission has not been granted yet

Halls of Heddon - submission deadline extended to 31/03/18

Robert Laverick Joinery - applicant requested a deadline extension until January 2018 but there has been no further contact. The LAG asked for a final deadline to be given of 28/02/18

Black Bull at Etal - FA has been received

West Moneylaws Workshop - FA is in development

Redesdale Equestrian - FA is in development

Chirdon Head (CYVP) - FA has been received

Hay Farm Heavies - delays due to illness of applicant. BS agreed to visit to offer support

Turn About Pegasus - FA in development and due to be submitted very soon. GC to visit

GoGilsland - draft FA submitted based on two vehicles. GC to visit applicant to discuss as LAG had suggested only 1 vehicle would be supported

Wooler Fountain - FA received. The bid to HLF for match funding has been rejected so further information will be needed before the project can be fully appraised

Woodland Thinnings - applicant not sure whether project will proceed. GC to follow up

Karen's Kottages - applicant has withdrawn as the procurement process was too onerous

6. Review and Decide on Outline Applications

Jack's Fast Track Fitness

The applicant has a L3 Personal Trainer qualification as well as a BSc (Hons) from Newcastle University. The enterprise he wants to set up will look to overcome some of the barriers to exercise found in rural Northumberland such as transport and the discomfort felt by some in using a public gym.

The applicant is looking for funding to purchase a van and exercise equipment so that he can offer personal trainer services in a 20 mile radius of his current base in Bellingham. This would mean that he can cater to client's timetables and develop a full fitness plan in a place where the client feels comfortable. The applicant is looking to offer a variety of services including: 1 to 1 sessions, private group sessions, after school clubs and GP referrals

Looking to create 1 FTE job

The applicant is requesting a grant of £16,406.80 (80% of costs)

The applicant confirmed that he has budgeted for repair and eventual replacement of the vehicle. The main income will come from the 1 to 1 and group sessions, allowing the applicant to set accessible prices for activities like after school clubs. The applicant did a lot of research during his dissertation which indicates a high level of demand for the service he proposes.

The LAG felt that this would be a valuable service for the area and the application was well thought through. It was felt the applicant would benefit from some business advice as there was some doubt as to whether the applicant could be awarded the grant at 80%

The strategic fit score was agreed

Vote - unanimous approval with advice

Nightfold Eco Pods

The applicant moved into the property in 2016. It is a 1,000 acre farm with 700 head of sheep and includes a camping barn, holiday let and campsite. The applicants are looking for funding to install two eco pods and build a shower block and toilet facilities. The site currently has a dilapidated toilet block but no showers. It is hoped the facilities will attract new visitors and encourage existing clients to stay for longer. They estimate that with a 100 night per year occupancy rate in the pods this will lead to a £10,000 increase in revenue per year.

Looking to create 0.5 FTE jobs

The applicant is requesting a grant of £16,000 (40% of costs)

The applicant advised that the preferred supplier of the pods has not been chosen yet but all the suppliers they are currently looking at are based in the north of England. PLanning has not been applied for yet and the final citing of the shower block and pods will depend on planner recommendations.

The applicant clarified that job would be for administration, cleaning and maintenance of the site and would be undertaken by the applicant.

The site is currently run on a generator and the applicants are looking to ensure the pods are as energy efficient as possible so there will be no need to increase capacity.

The LAG was supportive of the project as it enhances the sustainability of an uplands farm. It was agreed that any full application would need to look carefully at the demands on utilities such as electricity and water supply. The applicants will also need to be made aware of timescales and a planning application will need to be submitted very quickly for the project to complete within the programme deadline.

The strategic fit score was agreed

Vote:

7 approve

1 abstain

Project approved on majority vote

Grindon Farm Bale Packer

The applicant is a small bale producer who is looking to automate their current process to increase efficiency. A new bale packer could allow one person to do the same work in an hour that ten people would do in a manual system. It is also becoming harder to find employees willing to do the manual labour roles.

The applicant currently produces around 13,000 small bales of straw per year and always sells out so knows there is demand for the product. He has also had some interest from neighbouring farms to undertake contract services for them.

As far as the applicant has been able to find out, there is no other farm with this machine north of York.

There is a possibility that if the contracting side takes off extra jobs will be created but this is uncertain at the moment.

Looking to create 0.13 FTE jobs

The applicant is requesting a grant of £25,800 (40% of costs)

The LAG were broadly supportive of the project but there was a question of whether the equipment is eligible. The RPA class bale packers as standard equipment so the LAG and applicant will have to prove it is not standard to this area before the project can be approved

The strategic fit score was agreed

Vote:

7 approve

1 abstain

Project approved on majority vote

7. Full Applications

Redeswood Forestry

The aim of the project is to invest in new equipment to allow the applicant, Redeswood Farm - a local forestry contractor, the chance to enter new markets for customers.

Grant is sought to purchase a small excavator, forestry guarding, harvesting head and forestry tractor that will convert the excavator into a small specialist harvester/processor. This will enable the applicant to provide a service to small woodland owners which are inaccessible for existing large machinery to thin woodland, source fuel and harvest timber allowing 1 FTE to be created.

Looking to create 1 FTE job

The applicant is requesting a grant of £40,460 (40% of costs)

The LAG noted that the appraiser has raised questions regarding the financial sustainability of the business but still recommends approval. It was agreed that there is definite demand for the services as there are not many local contractors who can undertake this type of work

Vote - unanimous approval

East Todholes Barn

The aim of the project is to convert a derelict stone barn on the farm into a fully furnished 1-bedroom holiday cottage that can sleep 2-4 people (with a sofa-bed in the sitting room).

The cottage will create supplementary income to support the family and the farming business. The day to day running of the cottage will provide work and there will also be benefits locally with the additional footfall the completed project will bring.

The barn will need substantial works carrying out, stripping out all internal walls and floors, rebuilding walls affected by subsidence, replacing lintels and sills, the roof will be to strip and re-slate, roof timbers repaired and renewed as necessary, construction of new insulated floors, installing windows and doors, plastering, skimming, and fully fitting out internal joinery, plumbing and electrics, decorating and furnishing. Perimeter walls and landscaping works will be carried out to the outside to include a paved yard area and a garden.

Looking to create 1 FTE job

The applicant is requesting a grant of £28,768 (40% of costs)

LK advised that she was impressed with the applicants when she visited the project. The LAG felt that the idea of allowing visitors to engage with the farming side of the business was also a good selling point

Vote:

7 - approve

1 - abstain

Approved on majority vote

JT Murray

This project will install an automatic sheep handling system, capable of weighing , clamping and drafting via EID individual sheep selected criteria, not just weight. We already performance record but are limited to manual drafting by weight or criteria established by eye. The sheep auto drafter can automatically read EIDs, weigh and then draft , without an operator having to control it. Criteria can be preprogrammed so that animal groups can be managed differently. This could include things such as the division into different groups by weight , or the drafting out of ewes that have had multiple pregnancies or whose lambs are not growing at the required growth rate etc. The equipment will also facilitate safer handling of ewes (from an animal and operator perspective) for cowing , injecting and dosing through the ability to clamp securely and safely, the ewe in place.

Looking to create 0.25 FTE jobs

The applicant is requesting a grant of £6,992.80 (40% of costs)

GC advised the LAG that the job declared on the EOI will not count as a direct job as it will be a contracted position rather than a direct employee. The agreed that the applicant should be asked to bring forward the project start date to ensure the project is delivered by programme end

Vote - unanimous approval

C White Tree Surgery

The aim of the project is to invest in a remote controlled robotic forestry mulcher. This machine can thin woodland areas otherwise hard to access on steep hills, mulch small thinnings not worth harvesting, control rhododendrons and be used for scrub clearance.

Grant is sought to purchase the machine and develop marketing materials and a new website that will increase capacity allowing the business to create 2 new jobs.

Looking to create 2 FTE jobs

The applicant is requesting a grant of £17,664 (40% of costs)

The LAG expressed concern that the applicant has frequently been unresponsive throughout the process to the extent that the project was appraised with incomplete information.

There were also questions about whether the benefit of the new equipment would be felt in Northumberland as the business does a lot of contracting in other areas.

Vote - unanimous approval with the conditions that stringent timescales are set for claim dates

8. AOB

LK and MM requested that maps showing project location are sent out. LM to action this.

BS advised she has written to Anne Marie Trevelyan MP and mentioned the publicity received at the Girsonton event. She also highlighted the projects that have been funded in her area and queried whether any thoughts have been given to programmes after Brexit

The LAG agreed the variation for the First & Last brewery which is due to the delay upgrading the electricity supply on the site.

Reserve List

It was agreed that the applications by Mr and Mrs Forward are removed on the basis that they offer poor value for money and there is not sufficient budget in this priority. Projects should be signposted to the Growth Programme.

The EOI by Gateways into the Community failed appraisal as there was not enough eligible expenditure. GC and MM visited earlier in the day and the applicant will submit a new application to fit out their new kitchen.

The LAG agreed to bring forward EOIs for Churnsike Lodge, Sound Touch, Shielling Meats, Stuart Johnson and E & SW Henderson

The LAG confirmed that they would like to hold a celebration event towards the end of the programme. Due to the failed attempt to hold a joint event last year, it was

decided that this would be a NULAG event rather than one in collaboration with the Coast & Lowlands LAG

9. **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting has been changed to Thursday 8th March. Venue to be confirmed