

Vale of Usk Local Action Group

Langstone Village Hall, Thursday 16th January 2020

MINUTES

Members Present:	Elaine Blanchard Ruth Waycott Lynne Richards Andrew David John Davies Alan Michie (Chair) Phil Powell Alastair Robertson Sharran Lloyd Mandy Moore John Harris Juliet Michael Claire Brown	Officers:	Mike Powell Zara Bligh Alison Howard Deserie Mansfield Mark Lloyd Lucinda James
		Apologies:	Gareth Baker Nicola Bradbear
		Guests:	John Davies (WRN) Owen Wilce Connor Leacock

Introduction. The Chair welcomed members, Juliet Michael the NRW representative and John Davies from Wales Rural Network (WRN) to the twenty second meeting and wished all a happy New Year. At this meeting it was agreed that LAG's prime purpose is to consider that projects funding is being used effectively to support both the rural economy and the local community.

The meeting was quorate (4 private; 3 voluntary; 6 public).

No declarations of interest reported and members were reminded that they must declare any interest (as and when). Introductions were made around the table.

Wales Rural Network : John Davies outlined his new role. He has now resumed this responsibility for looking after the LAGs throughout Wales until the end of the programme. However, Katy Watkin will be the main point of contact.

1. **Minutes of the last meeting 17th October 2019.** Accurate and approved.

Matters arising:

- a) Nature isn't Neat - later on agenda.
- b) Rural Stress Project – The introduction is proving more complex than first thought. Officers are still assessing the use of a refurbished exhibition trailer to be sited at the livestock market.
- c) Claire Brown remains as a LAG member.

2. **Financial Update – MP.** Financial spreadsheet to be circulated with minutes. Currently 40 approved projects with 27 completed, 16% have been studies, 88% spent including committed expenditure and pipeline projects. Alison Grimson has practically completed the evaluation of the whole programme and has now taken on extra responsibilities in respect of the Caldicot regeneration scheme.

Finance questions: JD reported some concern that the Cooperation budget is running around 60% behind profile. All other budget headings are well on target. MP to look further into this.

In answer to member questions about additional funding JD reported there is a current consultation paper with further consultation planned to determine the future of community led local development. It also depends on position adopted at a central government level.

3. **RDP Project Updates and Marketing**

Updates - See previous attachment. **Items of note:**

Social Media Campaign – RW reported that ambassadors have switched direction to producing films. Two examples were shown. They have relished learning these new skills and the work is to an excellent standard.

Tourism Information – Coach travel element is still ongoing with around four months left to run.

Canal Boat Project – Progressing well with strong potential to support education and tourism. In time it is hoped to hold a LAG meeting on the boat. The Be Community Programme has supported boatman training which will allow more people to be taken on-board. Plans for being Wi-Fi enabled. Links are being made with Newport schools. The project has been awarded additional funding under Section 106. Sarah Coakham was thanked for all her efforts in helping to make this project a success.

Gilwern Schools Educational Programme – EB provided an interesting update on this worthwhile project. Four schools are now engaged over a 12 week period involving 120 pupils working on projects and coming back with their own ideas. Very much children led.

Fully Charged –Charging points will be shortly installed throughout Gwent in some council owned public car parks. This is being funded by OLEV (Office for Low Emission Vehicles) and council core budgets.

Village Halls Energy Make Over – LED lighting installation due to take place shortly at a number of halls.

Llanover Halls Cluster – LJ provided an update on the wide range of courses which have been well received.

Members to notify the RDP team if they have ideas for other suitable courses.

Rogiet Community Shop & Café – MP regretfully informed the LAG that the project is to be suspended due to the community council's decision to withdraw their offer of a lease on the parcel of land earmarked for the planned community shop and café. A further meeting to be arranged with the representatives of the community shop.

IOT and Independent Living – MP explained that 25 students with expertise in IOT are developing a number of technological solutions to address issues on loneliness, social isolation and safe independent living. Members have now formed a steering group which includes representation from social services and occupational health.

Marketing - Volunteers from the Our View Project have produced short films of exemplar Leader projects that have made a difference over the last 15 – 20yrs. The two energy films were shown at the meeting and the links will be circulated to members. These will be shown to the SE Wales LAGS and it is hoped that this will raise the profile of the successful work being carried out by The Vale of Usk LAG.

4. **Possible New Projects**

Community Halls Sharing –This project aims to support halls to work collaboratively on a range of initiatives including cooperative energy purchase, broadband provision, sharing of good practice etc.

5. **New Application Form**

To encourage members to vote more speedily on projects AD advocated the use of a new shortened application form which concentrates on what the project is about, the benefits etc. There is also a new financial section which is more definitive on costings within specific budget headings.

Nature isn't Neat – AH provided a detailed update on the BEES project which finished in July (the evaluation is available shortly).

Nature isn't Neat has been successful at creating mentors. It is about protecting the needs of pollinators, not just bees, and addressing the threats they face. A group has been formed of like-minded people and experts. Activities include regular monthly talks and there is a considerable social media presence. LAG members are encouraged to like and share the Facebook page. Work has gone on with Monmouthshire Housing Association and it is hoped to extend this to more targeted areas. The educational aspect is important, talks and workshops have been held at three participating schools. Resources are being produced such as posters, a seasonal booklet, town map, bee hotel etc. Most encouraging has been the production of a grounds maintenance training manual which has been regarded as an exemplar and is being shared with other areas.

In answer to member queries, AH sighted the training element and working with groups on site as the most pleasing outcome. Although based on Monmouth town much of the material is generic and can be used in other areas with LR pointing out that there is potential to add value within the area covered by the living levels project. AH is now looking towards working with the management of industrial/trading estates in respect of helping pollinators.

6. **Be Community**

The project coordinator Owen Wilce provided an interesting update on the programme which has been running successfully for around three years and is now able to evidence impact. In close association with partners such as Coleg Gwent and GAVO, the programme continues to provide a suite of training opportunities, but it goes much further in the work undertaken with individuals/groups, creating networks etc.

OW outlined some impressive statistics including 298 people trained and 112 referrals. The work last year included regular large-scale networking events: for example the attendance at Monmouth was 150 and Chepstow was 50. The mailing list is now approximately 500. Finally, support is being given to LAG projects such as the canal boat group. The presentation will be made available via the LAG website. AD thought this could be a good vehicle for delivering carbon literacy training. John Davies offered an opportunity to promote the programme further through the extensive channels of the Wales Rural Network.

7. **AOB**

1. Interest from Newport in respect of Be Community (LR/JD).
2. JM found first meeting useful, in particular the projects around adapting to climate change.
3. JH interested in Northern Star road mapping as mentioned earlier.
4. PP thinks we should be looking to mitigate effects of climate change.
5. JD (WRN) pleased with number and quality of projects. Asked for links of completed films. Members referred to Wales Rural Network website as useful to know what is being done in other areas. Projects shown on interactive map. Link to be circulated.

Thank you to Guests - the Chair thanked Owen Wilce and Connor Leacock for coming to talk to the LAG members, and a special thanks to John Davies for coming along to listen to the LAG's activity and the successful projects being carried out in the area.

The meeting closed at 12.15pm.

Actions

- 1) Film links plus other project information to be sent to LAG members, Wales Rural Network
- 2) Wales Rural Network project link to be sent to members
- 3) MP to review the Cooperative Budget running behind target.
- 4) MP to organise a meeting with Rogiet Community Shop representatives.
- 5) AH Evaluation of the BEES Project

Next LAG Meeting: Thursday 23rd April 2020 at 2pm (venue to be confirmed)