

Administrative Body Monmouthshire County Council

Vale of Usk Local Action Group

Meeting Title	Vale of Usk Virtual LAG Meeting (due to Covid19)	Meeting Date	21 st October 2021
Venue	Remote video access	Meeting Time	2 pm – 4 pm
LAG Attendees	Pamela Mason (PM), Mark McLoughlin (MM), Sharran Lloyd (SL), Jason Hughes (JH), Lynne Richards (LR), Andrew David (AD), Ruth Waycott (RW), Elaine Blanchard (EB), John Davies (JD), Alastair Robertson (AR)		
Apologies	Adam Taylor, Claire Brown, Gareth Baker, John Harris, Nicola Bradbear, Phil Powell, Alan Michie		
MCC	Mike Powell (MP), Deserie Mansfield (DM), Adam Greenwood (AG1), Alison Grimson (AG), Mark Lloyd (ML), Zara Bligh (ZB)		
Guests	Endaf Griffiths (EG), Sarah Griffiths		
Meeting Description	AGM and Fourth Meeting of Vale of Usk LAG Meeting for 2021		

2 pm Welcome – Pam Mason, Chair. Meeting is quorate, no conflicts of interest declared. **(meeting was not quorate, the LAG has been informed; however no other decisions apart from officer election required voting by the LAG)**

1. Apologies for absence: see above.
2. Approval and Matters Arising from Minutes 22nd July 2021 – PM – Des Mansfield requested that the July minutes showing £10,000 to re-allocate in support of the Monmouthshire Community Fridges be amended to reflect the approved decision made by the LAG in July.
3. Membership Election – there were no new nominations, the existing Chair and Vice Chairs agreed to stand again.
Pam Mason – agreed by members. Ruth Waycott – agreed by members, Alastair Robertson – agreed by members. **(This item has been referred to the LAG as the meeting was not quorate as thought at the meeting)**
4. Financial Update and Update on Lead Body – AG. (See attached.)
5. Project Report. (See attached.)

AR – Bigsweir Bridge – who is going to pay for it – it is for the Forest of Dean/MCC to sort out. Monmouth to Chepstow railway track is an option – this is not for RDP. MP - The Levelling Up Fund is for infrastructure and looking at the Chepstow and the Bigsweir Bridges for capital monies to do the work, it is at the Under Secretary of State's office, Cardiff, the English side of the bridge could be funded from the Shared Prosperity Fund

AR – we are not very good at supporting micro businesses. MP – State Aid issues were not allowed within the LEADER programme until April 2021, now we have the opportunity to work with micro businesses.

DM – would like to give a presentation on food sector development and data analysis at the next meeting in January 2022. MP – it is being developed initially on food supply chains, but there are opportunities for other business sectors, like energy, which are as important, so we're hoping to get extra funding. DM – Engaged with farmers, which was looking at veggie boxes and CSA, DM has a report which can be sent out.

Lynne Richards – Be Community project has been very successful with volunteers, the Wavehill findings are that training communities and engaging with communities is crucial; in Newport we certainly need some help. ML -

the GAVO LEADER project didn't end well, they had a number of problems including recruitment and there is a report on it, covering lessons learned. LR – addressing the Wavehill findings, we could put the Be Community in charge of training volunteers, if agreed by the LAG and funds are available.

SL – Building on what Lynne said about the community program, it would be a good time for the LAG to consider a new project that builds some resilience within that community - the LAG should share the knowledge gained.

ACTION Mark Lloyd discuss providing extra funds to this project.

AR - A related issue is waste management. A lot of projects don't address this issue, and that as a rural community it is very important, as there are vast amounts of agricultural waste, for example, chicken farm pollution into the Wye River. MP - this is being captured by Dwr Cymru (Welsh Water), NRW and MonCC Climate Change personnel. It is a very difficult, but vital to be addressed.

ACTION Mark Lloyd – a meeting with Alastair, Mike and Pam will follow to address Alastair's queries.

6. LEADER Extension, Staff Employment after RDP and Update on Funding. MP – a project has been submitted to Cardiff Capital Region for Controlled Environmental Agriculture, being a three-year project worth £2.6 million. The UK Community Renewal Fund is considering nine different Monmouthshire projects. We have applied for a research fund through UKRI, a project that will look at heritage crops; a three-year program worth £3 million. We are looking towards widening the Gwent Digital Project which deals with the IoT and Independent Living and are considering applying for £250,000 which will benefit Newport and other local authorities in Gwent. We are looking to extend the data analysis program by submitting a bid to Welsh Government Foundational Economy team. A Job Description is being prepared for a Sustainable Food Places partnership coordinator.

The new funding is an option for the RDP staff and whether we have an extension, which is yet to be determined.

7. Miller Research – MP – will put the bullet points for the study in the “chat”. Miller is doing research on Monmouthshire County Councils assets, focussing on one farm, which is a 120-acre farm in Llanfair Discoed, with the tenancy being released in February 2022. The principal recommendation was not to sell it. Initially they looked at several tenants with a small number of horticultural type businesses. So we can start looking at opportunities to supply in bulk by utilising vertical farming techniques. Miller has ten principle recommendations - the report will be available soon and will be circulated to the LAG.

AD – I was at the meeting with the farmer, he was very helpful, informative with a great passion for his land. I am not a great fan of MCC spending RDP money but I think this would be worthy of consideration.

8. Any Other Business. ML – The Carbon Literacy programme for communities will be rolling out the training to towns, community buildings, residents, etc. The brief was uploaded onto Sell2Wales to select a training provider, and nine companies have expressed an interest so far.
9. Wavehill, Endaf Griffiths – Draft Wales-wide Evaluation. Thank you to everyone who contributed (see attached). This is a Q&A session. There are 16 recommendations to the Welsh Government.

DM – I have a real interest in European issues and with us leaving Europe, how are we going to capture information? EG - We've had a LEADER programme since 1991 in Wales delivering a wealth of experience, there have been 700 projects in this programme, a massive amount of learning and there's a big risk now that momentum is lost.

JH - Looking at projects there is a concern about how the legacy happens and we make it sustainable. Climate change - how do we know who takes priority, who shares that information and how do we share it? EG - I would agree with that point. Another point is that LEADER or CLLD should be looked at as an approach (a way of working) and not just as a stand-alone scheme.

MP - Questioned who is going to be the powerhouse in the future, will it be through Government, or will they take the lead potentially through Defra? The Shared Prosperity Fund - this is planned for April 2022, but they are three or four months behind. Asked for ideas about this? EG - it's unfortunate that the rural development work is packaged that way, realising that 80% of Wales is rural with pockets of urban centres. Suggested talking about LEADER as part of a Rural Development Programme where a rural intervention can be counterproductive. LEADER is helping to deliver each element of the RDP for governments and does match up of with the five ways of working within the Well-being of Future Generations Act. This addresses partnership and engaging with local people and is applicable to all activities in Wales, not just 'rural'.

LR - There is criticism that we're not engaging in diversity, in particular youth and minority engagements, and it was suggested that we might engage in different ways. Is there a best practice or other examples you've seen somewhere else? EG - no there isn't a method within LEADER but with the benefit of hindsight and recognising that whilst it's not an easy thing to do, the programme should be about new and innovative thinking. If you have a young person on the LAG representing young people, give them a budget. Or empower that group to look after their part of the community and keep their interest on specific issues.

MP – Is there a wider remit being discussed with Welsh Government, on the future way forward? EG – not with Welsh Government, but we've had discussions about evaluation with various departments within the Welsh Government and they have encouraged us to go out and speak to the people in the community teams, not just talking to our people.

MP – Suggested the LEADER principles and the ethos of local development has been stolen from us. EG – Suggested the right phrase would be “they borrowed from best practice”. I think more could be done to link CLLD to Wellbeing for Generations Act because I think public sector organisations can struggle with the five themes of working. I think LAG has a lot to offer.

ML – State Aid was allowed in April 2021, is it one of your recommendations? EG – yes, the State Aid was a mistake but the report can see why it occurred but was rectified to let the LAG cover State Aid, this year.

EG – any further comment, please use my email - endaf.griffiths@wavehill.com

10. Pam thanked everyone for their focus and time given to the Vale of Usk LAG. The next meeting is on 20th January 2022 at 10 am. She closed the meeting at 4 pm.

We have contacted the LAG members by email and we now have a quorate vote for the Chair and Vice Chairs and they will remain as last year, Pam Mason, Chair and Ruth Waycott and Alastair Robertson as the Vice Chairs.

