

March 2020

Ayrshire LEADER 2014-20 programme evaluation report



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There is the threat of a lack of funding continuity. This means staff, board members and momentum will be lost. With continuing rural deprivation and a need for jobs across Ayrshire there are some areas that have not accessed money. In future, we must target those with less skills to get funding and support them as some things take lots of time to organise and get going.

Jim Watson, Chair of Ayrshire LAG

Executive summary

Introduction

This is a final evaluation report for the Ayrshire LEADER programme 2014-20, part of the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) 2014-20. LEADER is a bottom-up method of increasing support to local rural community and business networks. It aims to build knowledge and skills, and encourage innovation and cooperation to tackle local development objectives.

The evaluation aims to test the intervention logic in the Ayrshire LEADER Local Development Strategy (LDS) and report on how effective it has been at bringing about positive change within rural areas of North, East and South Ayrshire. We followed a mixed method approach reviewing programme and project documents as well as assessing available monitoring data. The evaluation took place during the COVID-19 pandemic therefore we engaged with people remotely through 31 interviews and a survey of the 90 funded projects. We compiled five case studies of funded projects and at a workshop with Local Action Group (LAG) members we refined findings and outlined learning.

Efficiency, effectiveness and impact

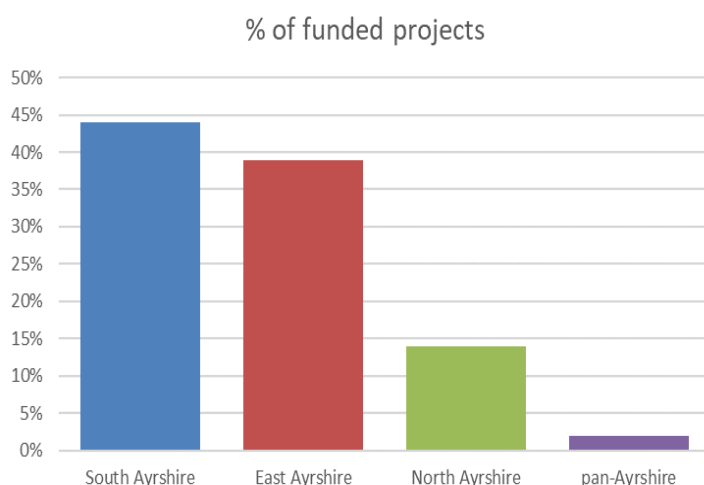


Figure 1: Funded projects by area (% of all projects)

Funding across the three local authority areas was allocated against three themes:

- Community
- SME development, and
- Farm Diversification.

There were 133 applications made for LEADER funding and, of these, 90 projects were approved.

North Ayrshire may have the largest overall population but it has the lowest rural population out of the three local authority areas¹. This is 16,075 (12% of its overall population), compared with 35,435 (22%) and 24,167 (29%) for East and South Ayrshire respectively. The proportion of projects supported by LEADER in each area broadly reflects this.

¹ Ekos, Rural Study report for South Ayrshire Council, 2013

Figure 2 Allocations and spending

£8,032,965	Total spend across three area including LEADER and match funding
£5.78m	Total LEADER allocation to the Ayrshire LAG
£778,136	Towards the administration costs (staff, animation, office overheads etc.).
£4,078,635	Allocated by the LAG to 90 projects from 133 applications
£578,273	10% of total budget allocated to co-operation and transnational activity
£289,364	Co-operation budget reduced to 5% of total however this was unused and was returned to the Scottish Government.

Progress towards the LDS objectives

Funded projects within the themes made progress towards the four LDS objectives. In the first, **Fostering Business and Enterprise** - 62% of the survey respondents said their project created employment opportunities for people in Ayrshire. People from rural populations benefited from improved services/infrastructures. Examples of projects that supported business and enterprise included milk vending equipment in a farm shop, creation of holiday accommodation, children's' nursery provision and events space development. Many projects successfully collaborated to help each other sell produce and services. The tourism offer, SME development even the farm diversification are often interwoven with the natural environment.

Another key objective of the LDS strategy was **Connecting People and Places**: physically; digitally; and socially. One community transport project helped isolated older people engage with activities.

“People are getting out of their houses and sometimes this is their only outing each week. It’s made a huge difference to them.”

Ochiltree Community Hub and The Portland, Galston are just two examples of clubs generating income and providing valuable local services. Programme monitoring data indicates that 44,317 people participated in LEADER projects. The pan-Ayrshire project *Enabling rural community groups* supported people with digital inclusion by providing laptops, printers and other equipment to rural groups and SMEs. This project became a timely intervention with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Providing tourism, culture and heritage – this is a key strength of the area identified by stakeholders. Many of the supported glamping sites and rental accommodation tied in with other tourism offers across Ayrshire. One project, Carrick Community Leisure Group used LEADER funding to restore a property in a conservation area of historic interest.

Many projects **Celebrate our natural environment** such as the Lime Tree Larder expansion that offers holiday lodges linking people with the countryside and local walks. The LEADER programme funded projects like the *Pant Farmhouse* and Events Space project which promotes nature trails, walks and cycle paths in the immediate area to visitors. But many SMEs, such as those developing climbing adventures in the trees within estates and farm diversification projects have also tied into and contributed to this objective of celebrating the natural environment.



Socio-economic impact

Many projects supported clubs and other activities to work with isolated, older people at risk of isolation; children and young people and youths and disadvantaged adults. Stakeholders reported that volunteers were engaged in activity including:

- Trustees developing and managing large-scale capital build projects,
- outreach activities during the Covid-19 pandemic, and
- supporting activities such as community clubs, trips, training and skills development.



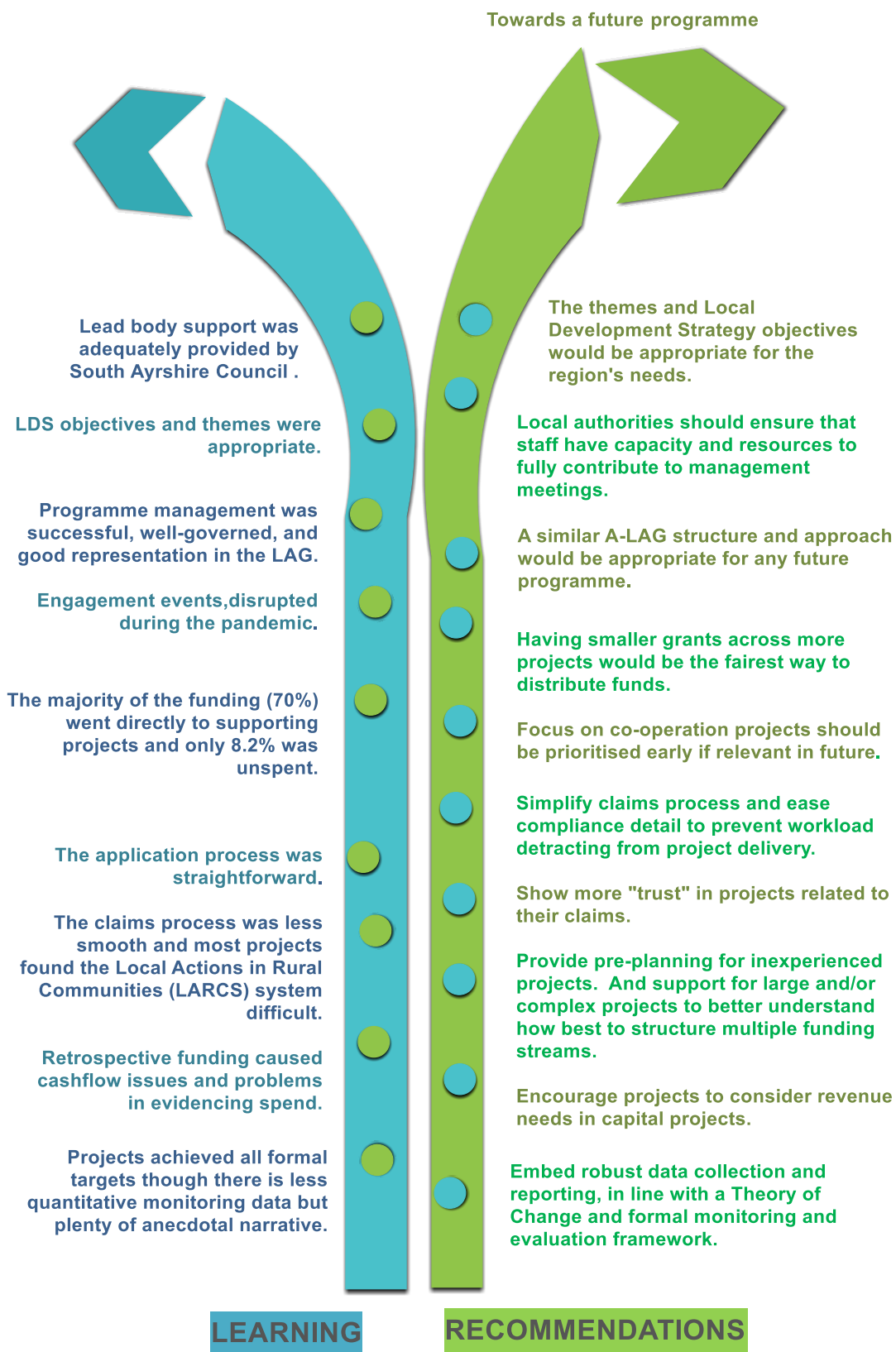
Co-operation and transnational activity

Support under the LEADER Cooperation sub-measure encourages and supports LAGs to undertake joint actions with another region, Member State, or even a third country. There was an allocated budget of £578,373 reduced to £289,364 in 2017-18 when it became apparent this would not be utilised in full and the balance was moved into the project budget. It was reported that due to staff turnover and pressure of supporting a programme with so many projects, no activity took place and these funds were returned to the Scottish Government.

Legacy

The LEADER programme left a legacy for Ayrshire including physical infrastructure and social capital. Businesses have been created, services are more accessible, buildings and centres have been built or refurbished to provide continuing services. Networks and partnerships have been established and the Ayrshire tourism offer has improved with people more connected to the natural environment.

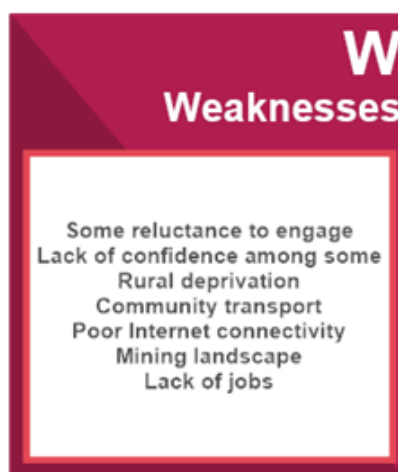
Progress and recommendations for improvements



Future funding programme

The UK Shared Prosperity Funds (UKSPF) will provide the equivalent funding that used to come from the European Union. The UKSPF is likely to have a budget to support Rural Development. The Scottish Government and the UK Government need to agree how to administer these funds. The Scottish Government has already outlined principles a future programme should adhere to. These principles include:

- Decisions should be made as closely as possible to the people, businesses and communities who will be impacted



- The themes will be Improving Places, Reducing Poverty, Increasing Skills, and Growing Business and Jobs to aid a just and green COVID recovery; and

- Enhancing wellbeing and responding to the climate change emergency.

If the funding can be found within good time, then many of the volunteer board members and staff can be kept on before they drift away. If possible closer alignment of the skill-set and experience within the LAG to the LDS objectives, particularly in relation to Fostering Business and Enterprise, would benefit the programme. This should be considered when recruiting members for the LAG or its

replacement. A future programme should address and could build on, the SWOT identified by stakeholders.

Ayrshire Local Acton Group (A-LAG) is in a good position now to support a new programme. However, any delays in agreeing a future programme will mean momentum and opportunity will be lost.

Background and approach

Introduction and background

Ayrshire has benefited from LEADER2 funding since 2000, as part of the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) 2014-20 and closely aligned with Scottish Government policy for rural development. It is a bottom-up method of increasing support to local rural community and business networks to build knowledge and skills and encourage innovation and cooperation to tackle local development objectives.

The Ayrshire LEADER Local Action Group (A-LAG) is part of the Ayrshire Community-led Local Development Strategy (CLLD). The Ayrshire LEADER business plan states the LAG will deliver a strategy for 2014-2020 grounded in the needs and wishes of people who live and work in Rural Ayrshire. Covering the whole of Ayrshire, apart from the main urban settlements, the strategy aims to support employment, sustainable places, resilient communities and partnerships.

This evaluation report for the Ayrshire LEADER programme 2014-20 aims to test the intervention logic and report on how effective it has been at bringing about positive change in rural communities. Our evaluation focused solely on the LEADER programme and our approach followed EU guidance and evaluation good practice^{3/4} to produce an evaluation that is proportionate, practical and useful. Our aim is to provide the partners with useful learning to report back to the community and to

help with the design of future programmes, however they are funded.

The programme's intervention logic links the area's needs with funding for projects that deliver against its objectives. The objectives for the programme within the Local Development Strategy (LDS) include:

Fostering Business & Enterprise - By 2020, rural Ayrshire will realise its full economic potential with more and better employment opportunities for its people.

Connecting People and Places – By 2020, people living and working in rural Ayrshire will be better connected physically, digitally and socially and can access the amenities and services they need.

Promoting Tourism, Culture & Heritage – By 2020 rural Ayrshire's people will better capitalise on the area's cultural, historical, recreational and natural assets.

Celebrate Our Natural Environment – By 2020, rural Ayrshire's people will have increased awareness, knowledge and enthusiasm to reap the social, economic and environmental benefits of the area's abundant natural assets.

Supporting Coastal Communities – By 2020, key rural coastal communities in Ayrshire will be sustainable through diversifying their local economies (this element of the programme was not

² *Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale* – loose translation: Liaison between those working in rural development

³

https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/evaluation_publications/twg-03-leader_clld-aug2017.pdf

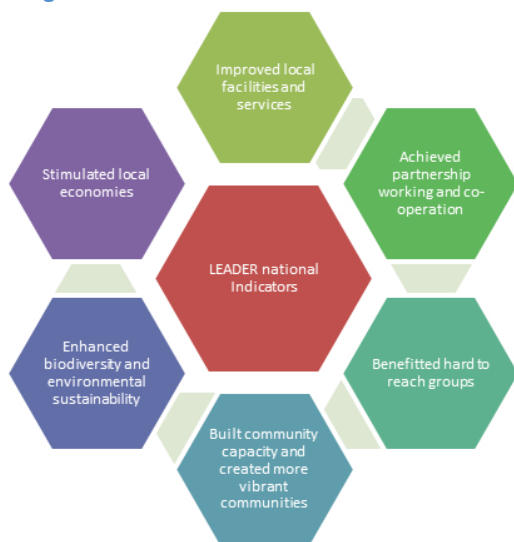
⁴

https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/cms/famet2/library/guide/evaluation-clld-handbook-lags-and-flags_en

considered within this evaluation because as requested in the initial brief).

In addition, the programme was expected to make progress at delivering against the LEADER national indicators highlighted in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3 Leader national indicators



Method and approach

We used a mixed method approach and had positive support from the LEADER programme staff, even although they were in the midst of closing down the programme, dealing with significant changes and without a full staff complement. We agreed an evaluation approach in discussion with the Programme Manager and the LAG chair and identified contact details and how we would approach projects, and also agreed access to programme documents and the LARCS system. The Local Actions in Rural Communities (LARCS) system streamlines the process of both applying for LEADER funding, and the completing of claim forms in order to draw down funds. It holds information useful for the evaluation.

Research plan: We developed a matrix of key research questions and this is included in the Technical Appendix.

From this, we developed research tools such as interview and survey questions.

Desk research: We reviewed funding applications and programme documents to understand who applied across the region, what projects they applied for, and gather any internal reviews. We gathered:

- several project final reports
- LAG minutes
- Application form guidance
- LEADER Business Plan
- LEADER national process evaluation
- LEADER Claims procedure
- Finance details
- Targets and output data, and
- Information from LARCS.

There was only partial monitoring data available from the programme and collected within LARCS. The lack of a programme monitoring and evaluation framework is covered in a later section.

Online survey: we distributed the survey through Ayrshire programme staff to all funded and non-funded projects. We had 19 responses (21% of funded projects) though three of these were incomplete and this is reflected in the responder counts shown on charts throughout this report. The aim of the survey was to gather information on what projects delivered and related outcomes.

Interviews: We received a full list of all LAG, stakeholder and project lead contacts with email addresses and telephone numbers from the programme team. We interviewed 10 staff and LAG members and 19 project staff contacts representing 29 projects (32%) split across the themes as below:

- Community 13
- Farm Diversification 5
- SME 11

We interviewed people from all three areas:

- East Ayrshire 14
- North Ayrshire 2
- South Ayrshire 12
- Pan Ayrshire 1

Case studies: we produced five one-page case studies, and these are attached as an appendix. These projects were chosen as a representative spread across areas and themes. They showcase good practice and illustrate approaches and achievements specific to the individual project types.

We used telephone or online Teams video calls to engage with people and this was successful. We received 19 survey responses and, after more than three follow-up reminders, closed the survey to allow us to analyse responses. Between the project leads interviewed and those completing the survey, we engaged with 27 individuals (37 projects) which represents 41% of all funded projects.

The Ayrshire programme operated across the three local authority areas of North Ayrshire, South Ayrshire and East Ayrshire under three themes of:

- Community Development
- Farm diversification
- Rural Small-Medium Enterprises (SME)

We tried to balance interviews and case studies as much as possible across the themes and each area. However, we were reliant on people who responded.

Full interview and survey questions are included in the Technical Appendix.

Issues and challenges

There were no significant issues in carrying out the evaluation, aside from the lack of reliable and comprehensive

monitoring data from the LARCS system. Limited robust outputs data prevented us from being able to fully analyse the impact LEADER funding had on communities, although we did have anecdotal information from projects we interviewed.

There were a few challenges around getting hold of project staff as many projects made their final claim some years ago. These projects now have other priorities and many either didn't respond to our approach or weren't interested in taking part in the evaluation.

Most of our discussions with projects took part between November 2020 and January 2021 and so were affected by Covid-19 travel and contact restrictions. This meant we were unable to meet face-to-face with project leads or visit any projects. Although it would have been useful to visit some projects, the need to conduct the evaluation remotely did not have a negative impact, or present a particular challenge, on our research.

It is important, however, to recognise the role played by the Covid-19 pandemic and how this impacted on support for projects (staff absence, project staff could not visit the LEADER office) and processing claims (delays with getting quotes, carrying out capital works, receiving invoices, processing claims). Many issues raised by projects during the interviews were caused or exacerbated by pandemic restrictions and hopefully not likely to repeat in any future funding programmes.

Evaluation findings: Systems and Processes

Programme management

South Ayrshire Council (SAC) performed the role of accountable body and provided the necessary financial administration and human resource support covering:

- financial accountability of the Programme
- ensuring Programme compliance and systems management
- employment and line management of Programme staff on behalf of the A-LAG
- Approval and recording of all transactions
- reconciliation of project claims (following checking by LDS delivery team)
- preparation of financial reports and internal auditing
- human resource management and the provision of training for staff; and
- legal services support where appropriate including office lease.

The local authority allocated resources to support this activity.

LAG members reported the programme was managed well under the circumstances and most felt there was a knowledgeable and competent management team. However, LEADER staff had no authority to be flexible around the appraisal and claims systems and had to follow LEADER technical guidance. LAG members reported there was too much paperwork and staff were often unfairly blamed by struggling projects for the burden of claims and invoicing paperwork..

There was however an underspend (as outlined in the later finance section). This may have contributed to programme underspend. It was felt the turnover of staff and LAG members may have contributed to a slight lack of ambition as people were busy getting up to speed and keeping on top of the programme. Projects also recognised the issue with staff turnover and were latterly told that 1:1 support was limited due to staff shortages.

It was a strength of the Ayrshire LEADER that several LAG members had experience from the previous programmes. The previous Chair, Chris Savage, continued into the 2014-20 programme. Jim Watson took over as Chair when Chris retired in 2019. Staff from the Lead body (SAC) helped support the LAG but there were also changes of SAC lead body representatives over the years. There was good support from the Chief Internal Auditor at SAC. As will be highlighted in the claims section of this report, the LARCS system does not have a good reporting function. The system has no test function which means that if errors are made then the values must all be deleted and reinserted. This was described as the "bane of our lives" by staff.

Scottish Government requirements around programme management and claims monitoring of the LEADER system was felt to be complex and not straightforward to use. Our understanding from work with previous LEADER areas is that this is a common complaint.

Appraisal and selection process

More than 60% of survey respondents reported that they already knew about the programme and around another 20% of respondents heard by word of mouth.

The Ayrshire LEADER business plan outlined the assessment criteria, project selection criteria and approval levels of funding (Seed Fund, Action Fund or Venture Fund).

The process began with an Expression of Interest considered by a Project officer. All projects were assessed for both their eligibility and strategic fit with the Local Development Strategy. Applicants were then invited to apply to stage 2 and the project was then assessed by the co-ordinator, on technical aspects such as location, organisational capacity and the match funding element. After satisfactorily passing this stage, the submission was summarised and passed by the programme manager to the LAG for consideration. Any conflict of interest within the LAG was stated at that time.

In previous programmes, the applicant had an opportunity to present their project to the LAG. This was welcomed by projects and LAG members. However, the increased number of applications in this programme led to time-constraints so assessments were completed without presentations.

To deal with many applications the LAG split the applications into sub-groups for appraisal by theme. This was felt to be effective and less arduous for members, but then the loss of LAG members over the years – members reduced from 30 to 13 – made it difficult to stay quorate and assess the bids using this thematic approach.

“A tighter more focused group would have been very valuable. Thematic consideration would have given LAG members an opportunity to be more closely involved with projects of interest and build relationships with applicants.”

The LAG reverted to considering all projects as one group. The LAG considered the project around issues such as the fit with theme and target groups, using its collective knowledge to decide whether a project met local needs and demands. They followed a clear set of criteria set out in the Business Plan and guidance notes, scoring each project against the agreed criteria and reaching decisions by consensus. LAG members reported meetings were professionally delivered, with discussion during meetings, and everyone felt their voice was listened to.

No feedback was given to unsuccessful projects due to programme staff workload issues. There was rarely any dispute about the LAG decisions. Successful projects were then offered a grant on condition they attend a claims induction workshop.

For monitoring data and claims, the programme team put guidance together. They had identified that project volunteers found it difficult to use LARCS. Project contacts reported these workshops were helpful and provided an opportunity for project staff and volunteers to network. There were also opportunities for projects to get 1:1 support from LEADER programme staff, which continued remotely during the pandemic lockdowns. Once all conditions were satisfied, projects were given a start date.

Projects we interviewed reported few problems with the application process but several experienced issues with

making claims. These were largely around use of the LARCS system, with just a few issues arising due to the claims process outside of LARCS, such as delays and the time-consuming nature of uploading evidence paperwork.

In minutes from LAG meetings and diary inserts we noted the project staff sought to encourage applications through animation (social media publicity, information sessions and events, wider publicity). As outlined in Figure 5.

Figure 5 Stimulating and supporting projects

	By Nov 2017	By July 2019
Events	23	2
Project support meetings had taken place	67	51
Claims workshops	24	20
In-situ visits	20	29
Subscribers to the LEADER mailing list	402	N/A
Followers across social media	960	N/A

Application and claims processes

Two thirds of the projects surveyed 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' the application process was straightforward, and the same proportion of those interviewed said they found the process simple. Some described the level of information required as 'onerous', but others felt it appropriate for the funding amount received.

“Questions seemed relevant and were actually helpful in business planning.”

One of the two unsuccessful projects interviewed described the application

process as “complex and confusing”. Both unsuccessful projects interviewed felt they had received little or no support during the application process.

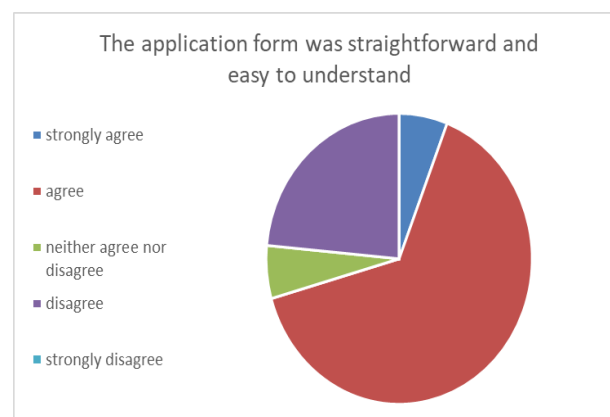


Figure 4: Survey responses (17 projects responding)

One unsuccessful applicant had no previous experience of applying for funding and could not put together a robust application. The other was rejected but not given feedback so does not know why the application failed.

“I couldn’t have done it without the funding – a relatively painful process but it’s great, it’s tremendous, it’s worth it!”

For claims, all 17 successful projects we interviewed described the LARCS system as frustrating, complicated, difficult to use and/or overly time-consuming. Additionally, we asked surveyed projects whether they found the LARCS claims process easy to understand. The majority (just over half) said it was not easy to understand, a quarter saying it was easy, and just under 20% of survey respondents cited no strong feelings either way.

“The LARCS system does terrify people and that’s probably the only downfall of LEADER.”

Several projects interviewed commented on the printing, signing, and scanning of supporting documents, which “generated screeds and screeds of paper” and was “finicky”. This was the case for projects that bought smaller value items, where the amount of paperwork generated by multiple small invoices made the claims process arduous. These were often projects with small (or no) staff team, and the claims process detracted significantly from actual project delivery.

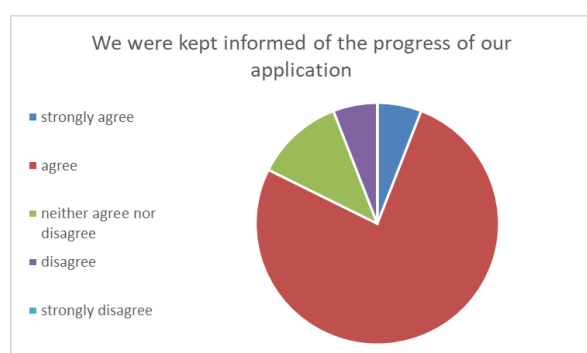


Figure 7: Survey responses (17 projects responding)

Support for projects

Of the projects interviewed, 82% felt they had been well supported by LEADER staff and described the team as ‘excellent’, ‘very supportive’, ‘responsive’ and ‘exceptional’.

“Very useful being able to plan the project with LEADER team – helped us bring it down to earth.”

Those who felt less supported, said a high turnover of LEADER team staff had negatively impacted on their ability to form a relationship with their case officer and/or access support.

Support received by projects included, for some, help around planning the project and with the LARCS system during claims. Projects mainly found the induction training session and guidance

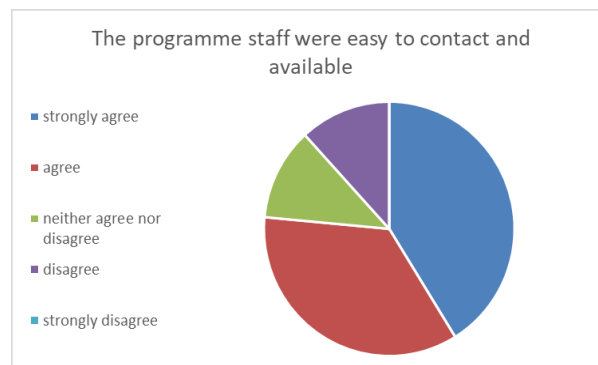


Figure 6: Survey responses (17 projects responding)

documents useful but the gap between training and putting in the first claim meant they forgot much of what they learned.

Latterly in the programme, after March 2020, Covid-19 issues made support more difficult to access and caused some of the longer delays between claims – both because of LEADER staff shortages and difficulties in delivering elements of the projects, particularly for capital builds.

“LEADER programme staff were very stretched and struggled to find the time to provide support when requested.”

Some projects attended networking events (pre-Covid) with other similar funded projects and reported having found these useful – in some cases, the connections made lasted through delivery of the project and beyond.

Projects interviewed were asked what they liked or disliked about the LEADER funding programme. Many appreciated the support from project staff and having a local team that was easy to reach and whose staff understood the area. Some cited the flexible nature of the funding as a positive – in terms of who could apply, what could be funded, and the flexible intervention rates allowed. For small SME projects, the funding was “fantastic”, “a major boost to the business” and one said it had

allowed an idea to be developed two years earlier than would otherwise have been the case.

“Having capped funding is fairer – spreads the money out across the community.”

Dislikes included the LARCS system (which was universally disliked), the retrospective nature of the funding (which caused cashflow issues for several large projects), and the burden of claims-evidencing paperwork and process. For some projects, the tendering compliance required for capital projects was seen as “over-zealous”, and the requirement for three

quotes for every equipment purchase as “inflexible” and “time-consuming”.

“Very complicated system of claiming compared to other funders.”

One large capital build project described as “onerous” having to go through a ‘notification of change’ process to move a significant underspend in one area of their budget to another area. Several larger projects using multiple funding pots, compared system and processes for claiming LEADER unfavourably against other funders (such as Trusts and Lottery) who funded in advance and required far less evidencing of spend.

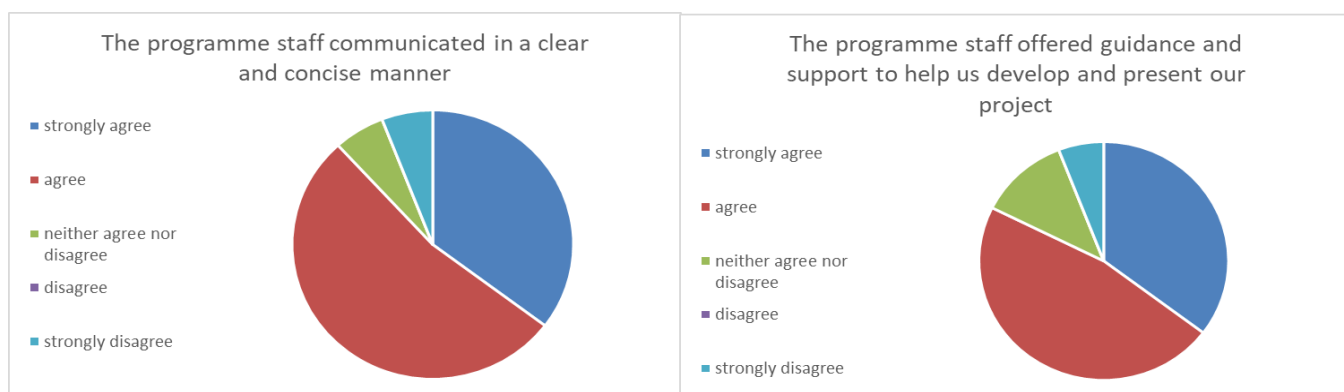


Figure 8: Survey responses (17 projects responding)

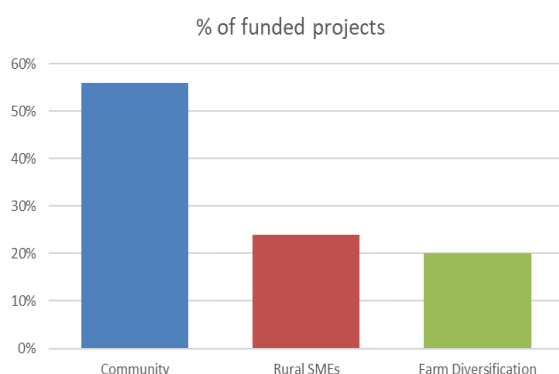
Evaluation findings: Programme efficiency, effectiveness, and impact

Finance, spend, and outputs

The Ayrshire LEADER programme was allocated a total of £5.78m⁵ which included £778,136 towards the administration costs (staff, animation, office overheads etc). There was also an allocated budget of £578,373 for a co-operation element. This was reduced to £289,364 in 2017-18 when it became apparent that this would not be utilised in full and the balance was moved into the project budget. However, the reduced budget for co-operation did not get used and so those funds were returned to the Scottish Government. This is discussed on page 26 (Transnational and co-operation section).

There were 133 applications made for LEADER funding and, of these, 90 projects were approved, representing a 68% approval rate across all areas and themes.

Figure 9: Funding by theme



⁵ There is a 25% maximum that can be spent on admin and animation. LAG. LAG minutes 12.11.2015

Figure 10 Projects approved by theme and area

THEME	All	Approved	Rejected		
Community	72	50	69%	22	31%
Farm Div.	26	18	69%	8	31%
SME	35	22	63%	13	37%
AREA	All	Approved	Rejected		
East	57	34	60%	23	40%
North	22	14	64%	8	36%
South	50	40	80%	10	20%
Pan	4	2	50%	2	50%

The percentage of applications approved was well-balanced across themes, at between 63-69%. Across areas, South Ayrshire had a notably higher approval score of 80% of applications. This is most likely explained by the longer period that South Ayrshire has been delivering LEADER programmes, leading to a more competent support infrastructure and level of experience around those applying for funding.

LEADER allocated £4,078,635.92 of funding to support projects with a total cost of £8,032,965, representing around 51% of the overall investment. However, total project costs are skewed by one large project (Ochiltree Hub, £1.7m) and if this is taken out of the calculations, the LEADER investment percentage rises to 65% of total project costs. Funding was

allocated against themes and local authority areas. In Ayrshire the population⁶ in total is:

- N Ayrshire 134,740
- E Ayrshire 122,010
- S Ayrshire 112,610

For rural areas however, according to a recent report, North Ayrshire may have the largest overall population but it has the lowest rural population out of the three local authority areas⁷. This is 16,075 (12% of its overall population), compared with 35,435 (22%) and 24,167 (29%) for East and South Ayrshire

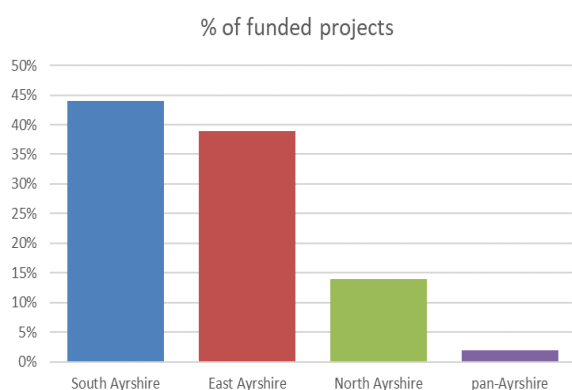


Figure 11: Funded projects by area (% of all projects)

respectively. The proportion of projects supported by LEADER in each area broadly reflects this.

The amount of LEADER funding allocated to each area was:

Area	No. projects	£ approved
East Ayrshire	34	£1,836,762
North Ayrshire	14	£808,123
South Ayrshire	40	£1,205,832
Pan-Ayrshire	2	£227,919

⁶ Statistics.gov.uk, 2019

The average grant was £45,318.18 against an average project cost of £89,255.17 (£70k when adjusted to take account of the large Ochiltree project).

A total of 90 projects (61 organisations) were supported by LEADER over the funding period. Just over half were Community projects (56%), with the remainder split between Farm Diversification (20%) and SMEs (24%).

Figure 12 Allocations by theme

Theme	No. projects	£ approved
Community	50	£2.89m
Farm Divers.	18	£612k
SME	22	£572k

The lowest intervention rate was 7.8% with the highest 100%. Just over half of projects had an intervention rate of 76% and over, and around a third had their projects funded up to 50% by LEADER.

Intervention rate (all themes, all areas)	No. of projects	% of all projects
76-100% of project	46	51%
51-75% of project	15	17%
26-50% of project	23	26%
25% or less of project	6	7%

Figure 13: Intervention rate - all projects (90 projects)

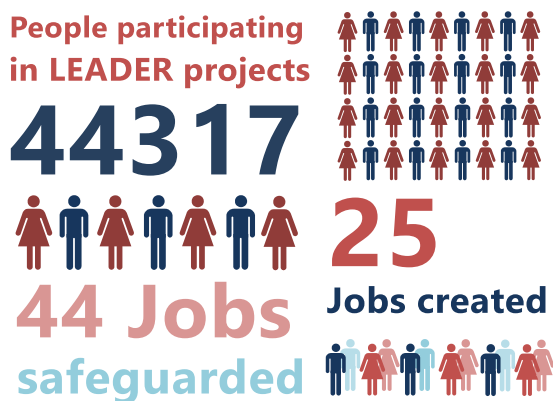
Outputs data collected by LEADER shows all project output targets were met. However, there is no data to show where projects over-achieved. Interviews with projects suggest some targets have been exceeded – for example, 'young people benefiting from new learning, recreation or job opportunities'. The youth training programme at The Knowe Garden Centre for example, has created 285 job placement opportunities since start-up.

⁷ Ekos, Rural Study report for South Ayrshire Council, 2013

“LEADER funding was a small but important element of a larger funding mix.... it crucially demonstrated to other funders, especially those being asked to make significant contribution, that there was wide support for the project.”

Progress towards LDS objectives

The A-LAG approved projects that contributed to one or more LDS objectives. Within the LAG team, 4.4 FTE jobs were created and across the programme 5329 people were trained/gained new skills. The bulk of these are people who gained skills within the Makerspace project.



Fostering Business and Enterprise

This objective was to create more and better jobs for people. And 62% of the survey respondents said their project created employment opportunities for people in Ayrshire. There was no collected programme data available to enable us to analyse the number of businesses created, supported and sustained.

People from rural populations benefited from improved services/infrastructures with the overall target figure of 200



Figure 14: Auchinbay Milk Vending project

people (across all projects) met according to data provided by the LEADER team.

Farm Diversification projects made up 20% of all projects supported, sharing 15% of the funding budget with an average grant of £34k each. Five farm diversification projects were interviewed, as well as two farm-based SME projects. Of these, four are delivering holiday accommodation, resulting in greater capacity to attract and accommodate visitors, promoting the rural Ayrshire environment and bringing income to the local community. The other three projects are new business ventures supplying milk, flowers, and children's nursery provision to the community.

“The funding was life-changing for our business.”



Figure 15: Pant Farmhouse & Events Space

A successful farm diversification project is Pant Farmhouse and Events Space with the creation of holiday accommodation and an events space (indoor and outdoor). The project collaborated with small neighbouring businesses to maximise usage and activities offered at the site for visitors and locals alike.



Figure 16: Cattle at Pant Farmhouse & Events Space

Projects collaborated together including a catering business (provides food for events and holds catering classes in the

LEADER funded space), a wedding business (using the project for overspill accommodation and party space), a hawk training/demonstration business which rents outdoor space for activities, a local gym running ‘farm fitness’ sessions, and a neighbouring dairy farmer selling Ayrshire produce in the events space.

“All of these projects are bringing more people to the area, improving the local economy.”

The Lime Tree Cabin project created employment for local craftsmen and supported other local suppliers when purchasing materials. It provided training opportunities for young people to learn new skills, including a trainee architect and joiner’s labourer.

Connecting people and places

The objective was to connect people physically, digitally and socially. The Rural Connect project developed a rural bus service and wheelchair accessible minibus hire scheme that helped isolated older members across a wide rural area engage with activities such as lunch clubs and trips outside the area (pre-pandemic) as well as providing a much-needed regular bus service to towns and shops. Rural Connect runs a minibus hire project which provides a shuttle bus service for outside visitors to events such as local food and cultural festivals.

“People are getting out of their houses and sometimes this is their only outing each week. It’s made a huge difference to them.”

Community centres funded by LEADER are bringing new or improved services

and activities to their communities. Some examples are outlined below.

Ochiltree Community Hub has provided local residents with a cinema for the first time in 40-50 years, along with dancing groups and various indoor exercise and sport activities. Its café is well supported by the community (pre-pandemic) to such an extent that the initial anticipated turnover was tripled.



Figure 17: The Portland community hub
Another community centre, The Portland, in Galston, runs an after-school club for children which is generating an income and providing a valuable service for working parents which did not previously exist in the town.

“The pub lay derelict for 3 years, it was vandalised and boarded up – the external façade was restored and it’s no longer an eyesore, people comment on how much of an improvement it is.”

In addition to this, they have developed a further income stream by letting five rooms out to commercial users, bringing new businesses to the town that were not there before

(physiotherapist, architect, nail salon, beauty salon and financial services). They also reinstated a pensioner’s club which had last been active in the town for 4 years when its old location closed down. Pre-Covid this club was being attended by around 20 local older



Figure 18: Auchinleck Community Growing & Resource Garden/The Knowe Garden Centre

person residents each week.



One pan-Ayrshire project – Enabling Rural Community Groups – supported people with digital inclusion by providing laptops, printers and other equipment to rural groups and SMEs.

This project became a timely intervention with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Small charitable organisations could communicate with beneficiaries using equipment provided, and SMEs could update employees’ equipment with new laptops and Microsoft Office subscriptions to help them work from home.

The Maybole Regeneration Project has enabled community celebration, education and training opportunities, and encouraged and supported the participation of the community. This large-scale project has helped grow cohesion and capacity.

Promoting Tourism, Culture & Heritage

Many projects helped capitalise on the areas cultural, historical and recreational assets. Some farm diversification SME successes have not only supported business but promoted tourism.

The Lime Tree Larder offered classes alongside selling their produce locally. They have had great success with intergenerational classes for families. In conjunction with their other project – The Lime Tree Cabin – they can offer this same experience to holidaying visitors from outside the area.

Carrick Community Leisure Group used LEADER funding to restore a property in a conservation area of historic interest. The building had been dilapidated but is now restored with the 1930s façade retained.

Celebrate Our Natural Environment

Programme monitoring data indicates that 240 people gained knowledge and skills relating to preserving and enhancing the landscape, wildlife, and natural environment. We interviewed a number of projects who had capitalised on the natural assets to reap social, economic and environmental benefits.

The Pant Farmhouse and Events Space project promotes nature trails, walks and cycle paths in the immediate area to its visitors. It plans to incorporate environmental interpretation activities into the tourism offer. There is a windmill and biomass plant at the farm and a



Figure 19: Auchinleck Garden Centre

desire to promote environmental practice and healthy lifestyle activities to the local area and its visitors.

The Lime Tree Larder expansion project received LEADER funding to develop a holiday lodge where visitors can enjoy local countryside and walks. This will make the farm more of a destination, reconnecting people with nature and letting them enjoy quality Scottish produce (it is a beef cattle working farm).

Craigengillan Pods provides its holiday makers with the opportunity of stable space, so they can bring their own horse on holiday and enjoy the local bridle paths and trails through the Ayrshire countryside. This is a new business venture based on the Craigengillan Country Estate with lovely walks and local attractions. Future plans include guided hacks, planned routes and, in collaboration with Paths for All, accessible walking paths.

A community garden project – Auchinleck Community Growing &

Resource Garden – developed a diverse offer for its local community by turning a brownfield site into a social enterprise garden centre, horticultural training centre and community garden. The garden centre has been successful, its commercial income rose from £7-8k per year to £24k, reducing the need for external funding and contributing towards sustainability.

The community garden has a social area with BBQ and seating is used by various groups for learning activities. They include schools, older people and other local groups, as well as being free to use by the whole community. The training area offers 'roots & shoots' and 'plant science' activities to schools, working collaboratively with them to help secure grant funding to pay for the sessions.

“The garden centre is now a proper commercial enterprise with its own website, staffed by two paid posts and a team of volunteers. The community garden and social area are free to use for the whole community.”

Socio-economic impact

As well as helping achieve the LDS objectives, many projects delivered services to support their communities. Community projects offered clubs and other activities to:

- older people at risk of isolation (pensioner club, bus trips, shopping service, gardening activities, health & wellbeing activities)
- children and young people (after-school clubs, sport and fitness activities, youth clubs), and

- youths and adults (employability support, skills training, women returners, club for disabled).

A successful example, Knowe Garden Centre, engaged with the Kickstarter scheme and created 285 job placements since it opened. This project is now supporting youths to apply for Young Start funding as part of the Auchinleck Community Action Plan co-developed with the community.

SME projects also worked with groups to deliver activities such as cooking classes, and chocolate-making classes. Cook Ayrshire collaborated with local schools, youth groups and a community kitchen to promote local food suppliers and create links between what the children were learning and what is sold in their local shops. The aim is to raise awareness of the food cycle in the local area.

“An artisan baker delivered a pizza masterclass to a group of schoolkids and adults and a local bee-keeper gave a demonstration and tasting for adults and the whole school was also invited. The demonstrators had done sessions like this before but not specifically with these groups.”

Adventure Carrick is an SME offering outdoor educational activities for children, families and adults, and provides trainee opportunities for young unemployed people where they learn to be outdoor instructors. One trainee progressed to study for a degree and is now a teacher.

Intergenerational activities arise from older people volunteering with the outdoor activities, giving participating children and young people the opportunity to develop friendships and

mix with different age groups. Children and young people taking part in the centre's activities develop confidence and better communication and finance skills, helping them to become more employable.

The project has a mix of income streams – commercial income raised from outdoor activities offered to paying visitors, and revenue grant funding for some staff roles and specific community activities. Diverse income streams allow a larger section of the community to enjoy and benefit from the project than would be the case with a purely commercial venture.

Volunteers played a large role in helping community LEADER projects set up and develop activities. Volunteer activity included:

- Trustees developing and managing large-scale capital build projects,
- working with other community organisations on outreach activities such as delivering food parcels and prescriptions during the Covid-19 pandemic, and
- supporting paid project staff to deliver activities such as community clubs, trips, training and skills development, marketing and promotion, and the general running of community halls and projects.

However, no programme data was available to quantify how many volunteers have been involved in LEADER projects.

“A greater degree of understanding is required from LEADER on the capacity of volunteers.”

Which groups did your project support?	Projects	
General community	16	100%
Children & Young People	8	50%
Underqualified & unemployed	3	19%
People with disabilities	5	31%
Older people aged 50 and over	6	38%
Low-income groups	3	19%
Other* Tourism/visitors (2), SMEs (1)	3	19%
What local issues did/does your project address?	Projects	
Created employment opportunities	10	63%
Created training opportunities for employees/volunteers	7	44%
Created volunteering opportunities	6	38%
Helped diversify the local economy	4	25%
Helped connect people with family, friends, and the wider community	8	50%
Helped increase digital inclusion	3	19%
Empowered local people to engage with local decision-making across Ayrshire	2	13%
People from harder-to-reach groups to feel more valued	2	13%
Helped to reduce child poverty	0	0%
Helped to reduce the carbon footprint	2	13%
Increased health & wellbeing of people who live and work in Ayrshire	4	31%
Helped to raise awareness about environmental issues and Ayrshire's biodiversity	4	25%
Helped to enhance and protect Ayrshire natural assets	3	19%
Other*	2	13%
*Helped to preserve and promote the heritage and culture of South Ayrshire *Increased tourism to a deprived area		

Figure 20: Survey responses (16 projects responding)

LEADER funding for community-build and renovation projects supported projects to reach disabled groups by creating more accessible spaces. Several community projects either replaced or renovated old buildings that had previously been used for community activities but were inaccessible for people with mobility issues.

“Accessibility [of the new building] has helped engage people who couldn’t access the previous community centre.”

Craigengillan Pods, a farm-based SME, designed one of the holiday pods to be fully accessible and hopes, in the future, to work with relevant organisations who can fund or subsidise this for disabled people and their families to hire for holiday breaks.



Figure 21: Crofthead of Glee Flower Farm

The Makerspaces in Rural Communities project supported women returners and people from harder-to-reach groups to develop craft-related microbusinesses. This community project provided equipment such as sewing machines, which could be borrowed to help with starting an enterprise, and also offered digital skills training. As the project

developed, participants reported enjoying the socialising and networking with others, which had a positive effect on wellbeing and mental health, so the project was re-focused to one of bringing people together, building confidence and self-esteem and developing skills.

“The project was driven by the community and morphed into more of a social cohesion project that used the hook of crafts to bring people together.”

The Dalry Scout Hall build has created a space that can be used by the wider community. One of the rooms has been let to the local Community Wind Farms for public use and the main hall is being used as a distribution hub for food aid parcels at Christmas.



Figure 22: Craighead County Nursery School

Future ideas (put on hold because of the Covid-19 pandemic) include cookery training programmes and access for job clubs.

Crofthead of Gree Flower Farm began two years ago as a sole trader growing flowers and selling to local flower shops and has since created a volunteer trainee position and is planning an online service.

“I was able to provide a volunteering position one day a week to an individual with mental health issues. Working in

the polytunnel and planting outside provided a sense of wellbeing for the volunteer.”

The flower farm grows local flowers, promoting and showcasing Ayrshire's natural environment and encouraging flower shops and direct customers to buy locally for its environmental benefits.

Carrick Community Leisure Group project addresses child poverty by running a fundraiser to make sure every child/family receives gifts at Christmas. They have also partnered with a prestigious catering company who will rent the space and once a month hold a 'soup kitchen' with high quality food. Access will be for families referred from relevant local agencies.

The community group also supported the local rural area during the first Covid outbreak, working with 150 volunteers to collect food for local organisations to make up into food parcels. This activity revealed a far higher number of local people living in food poverty than had been previously known. They surveyed the people identified to find out what they needed/wanted and have successfully applied for other funding to deliver activities. Identified needs included community transport (in partnership with a local transport group) to bring rural people into town, computer training and support with online shopping.

They have now launched a drug and alcohol rehab services, in partnership with another local organisation. This was not possible before the LEADER funded project as their previous building was an old social club and 'felt too much like a pub'.

Craighead County Nursery School is located on a working farm and opened

in 2015 with five children attending and now has over 100 children enrolled. The nursery is open to all families in the area and has a school garden where children grow their own vegetables which are then made into healthy meals for the children each day. The project has provided a new income stream for the farm and a new service for the local community.



Figure 23: Dalry Scout Hall build project

Transnational/co-operation activity

Support under the LEADER Cooperation sub-measure encourages and supports LAGs to undertake joint actions with other LAGs, or with a group taking a similar approach, in another region, Member State, or even a third country. Two main types of cooperation are noted by the European Commission in the "EC Guidance for implementation of LEADER Cooperation activities in Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020". These are:

Inter-territorial cooperation - This refers to cooperation between different territories within a Member State. Cooperation within a Member State concerns at least one LAG selected under the LEADER measure and may be open to other groups of local public and private partners implementing a local

development strategy (in a rural, urban or coastal area); and

Transnational cooperation - which is defined as cooperation between different rural areas from at least two Member States or with territories in third countries. Transnational cooperation covers at least one LAG selected under the LEADER measure and additional partners could include other groups of local public and private partners implementing a local development strategy.

Ayrshire traditionally has a good record of co-operation between its borders. Ayrshire LEADER is itself an example of this cooperation. Initially, £578,373 was allocated to cooperation projects but this was reduced to £289,364 in 2017-18 as it became likely it would not be utilised in full. However, no formal cooperation projects were organised or carried out during the whole of the 2014-20 programme, so the unused funds (£289k) were returned to the Scottish Government.

The Ayrshire LEADER programme had some contact with other Scottish LAGs through the chairs of LAGS meetings (attended by representatives).

Cooperation projects had been discussed at several LAG meetings. The LAG had agreed to encourage organisations to come forward with project ideas and had produced a template to capture these (Nov 2017). Again, in November 2018, the LEADER team were asked to remind projects the LAG wanted project ideas.⁸ However no projects were suggested or developed.

There was some travel for LAG members and project applicants within the Farm Diversification theme, but this was to a Farm show in England and not part of the cooperation activities. It was

reported that 'no activity occurred' as no one took control and managed this due to staff turnover and staff shortages. Under pressure of supporting a programme with so many projects, the staff team said they had no spare capacity. They were focused on getting funds to local projects. Some LAG members felt this was regrettable and that staff should have committed more to this activity rather than prioritise other actions. However, there is no evidence of any pressure being brought to bear to actively encourage or move this forward.



Figure 24: Rural Connect, community transport

In addition, it was reported that even if cooperation visits had been proposed, volunteers did not have the time to travel. As well as the loss of networking and learning opportunities for LAG members, community members and staff, the funds allocated to this activity were lost.

Programme legacy

The LEADER programme left a longer-term legacy for Ayrshire, including physical infrastructure and social capital.

⁸ Approved LAG minutes Annual Review Meeting, November 2018

As outlined in the evaluation findings section above, businesses have been created, services are more accessible, buildings and community centres have been developed in refurbished and new buildings. Networks and partnerships have been established, the Ayrshire tourism offer has been enhanced, and local people and visitors are more connected to the natural environment.

Community projects such as Ochiltree Community Hub, Dalry Scout Hall, Portland Community Building, Auchinleck Community Growing & Resource Centre, Dalmellington Community Centre have left lasting legacies through the refurbishment, build and development of community buildings that are more accessible, energy efficient, and attractive and offer a wider range of activities than were available previously.

Other community projects, such as Rural Connect and Makerspaces in Rural Communities are providing vital services that were previously missing, reducing isolation and enabling more people in rural areas to access and engage with local activities and services.

However, whilst some of these projects do have sustainable activity strands, generating an income to help cover costs, their legacy is very much dependent on continued revenue funding and it is important both at the planning stage and throughout the development of community projects that onward revenue funding and sustainability are effectively considered, so the legacy is protected.

“Some amazing projects... would not have been possible to do without the fund. The communities of Ayrshire are better off as a result.”

The legacy of many SME projects is an enhanced tourism offer for Ayrshire, with projects such as Kelburn Glamping, Craigengillan Pods, Elsay May Lodges and Adventure Carrick developing new or expanded accommodation and/or outdoor activities.

Other SME projects such as the Knowe Garden Centre and Craighead Country Nursery School have added unique, valuable and sustainable services and activities for their local communities, drawing on and enhancing, the natural environment and creating jobs and training opportunities for local people.

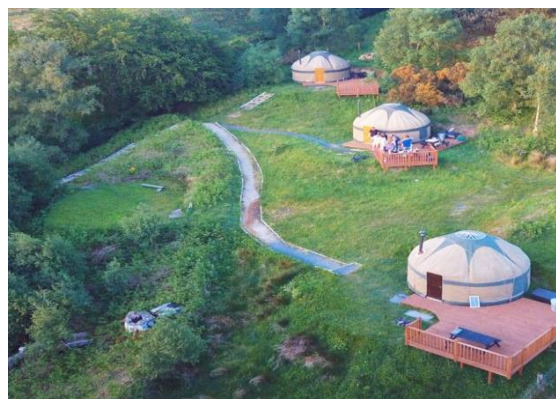


Figure 25: Kelburn Glamping

Lessons and learning for future programmes

System and process learning

A key learning issue from survey and interviews centred around the LARCS system which most projects found complex and difficult, exacerbated by the time between claims. There were several project leads who felt the amount of printing, signing and scanning of claims paperwork was time-consuming, not environmentally friendly, and detracted from delivering project activities.

“Every chopping board, every spatula, needed three quotes!”

Some projects, particularly larger ones with expensive items/contractors, found the retrospective funding problematic. The time lag between spend and claim caused cashflow issues, particularly where there were delays due to LEADER team staff shortages and latterly Covid-19 impacts. In some cases, the issue with cashflow caused significant stress and a need to juggle other funding pots to “borrow from Peter to pay Paul”.

For one project, the combination of juggling multiple funding streams, LEADER’s retrospective funding process, and a failure with the project’s own internal systems led to an overspend which could not then be claimed back. This was a significant amount of money (albeit only a small portion of a large project) that the organisation had to find from its own resources.

“We clicked a wrong button and couldn’t go back so we ended up losing money and in a long appeals process.”

Prior to March 2020, some projects had attended networking events with other similar projects, but Covid-19 restrictions brought an end to in-person networking. Several projects felt some form of online networking (such as Facebook groups) would have been useful for sharing ideas, resolving common problems, and could have taken some strain off LEADER staff in answering common questions about claims/LARCS. One project said it had been a struggle to find time for the in-person networking (pre-Covid) as meetings tended to be several hours long and having an online group would have been more useful all round.

“Fortunate to have within the board an accountant and Trustees with business experience. Others may not and would find the financial forecasting and cost breakdowns challenging – training and guidance would be beneficial.”

Key challenges for projects

Covid-19 pandemic

Covid-19 impacted on projects across the board, causing delays with applications and approval, getting quotes for equipment and building works, project delivery, and making claims. Many projects have lost months to inactivity. Community halls already up

and running had to pause activities, those mid-build incurred long delays to completion, tourism-related projects lost a whole summer season and projects relying on older volunteers struggled to deliver throughout as team members needed to shield.

Despite the issues caused by Covid-19, most projects interviewed felt positive that once the pandemic is over, their project will recover and restart. Some community projects have provided vital support in their area between and during lockdowns – an excellent example of this is a project which got involved in the resilience operation, distributing food parcels to rural residents, and as a result identified many isolated vulnerable members of the community previously not reached by local services. They connected 36 of these residents with a village store to get their groceries delivered weekly.

“Not everything is based in the community centre, there’s a lot of outreach going on. Finding around 40-50 isolated people who weren’t previously on anybody’s radar is a good outcome of the Covid crisis.”

Capacity and Expertise

One capital build community project struggled with a lack of internal experience for such a large project. They later managed to recruit a Trustee with relevant experience, who then managed the contractors and was “a very useful source of expertise”. Several community-build projects interviewed reflected on what they wished they’d known/sourced at the beginning – such as better expertise in the planning stage (for example conservation and project management expertise), more support and advice on allocating spend of

multiple funding pots at the planning stage (such as how to avoid major cashflow issues with retrospective funding pots being used to pay building contractors etc).

“Construction projects take a long time and invoices don’t go in until the end of the project – it’s a risk.”

Several projects interviewed had not anticipated the level of paperwork required for claims and the complexity of the LARCS system, meaning they could not pass the task over to admin staff (where they had them) and this administration workload then took time away from delivery of project activities.

One project interviewed found it difficult to recruit for roles in a rural area. Poor public transport services and the part-time nature of the role made it less appealing and they needed to go out a second time to finally recruit into the posts. This exemplifies the issues facing recruitment in a rural area generally. It also means that more pressure is put on existing volunteers who are in danger of “burning out”.

Pre-application planning

Some projects had individual issues that could have been better anticipated with more research and guidance at the planning stage. These included an outdoor project that had not anticipated the impact on activities of poor weather in the area, resulting in an application for further funding to bring activities undercover and a significant delay in start-up. Another project had connectivity issues and needed to install a mast to connect to a satellite internet service provided by a community windfarm organisation.

A third project had not budgeted for – or anticipated the timescale of – promoting

their service. They were relying on word of mouth and notices in shops and local organisations to inform the community that the service existed. The delay in building up customers impacted on income and it took several months to reach target numbers and begin to cover their costs.

“We found it much harder than expected to get the word out... we hadn’t expected people to be so slow off the mark or suspicious, but they were”.

Continuation revenue funding

Several community build/refurbishment projects had only sourced short-term revenue funding (from LEADER or elsewhere) and are reaching a point where new funding needs to be found or some activities cannot continue.

The contribution of LEADER funding to these capital projects leaves a long-term legacy in the community, but it is a challenge for the organisations running them to regularly replace revenue funding to keep them open. Support to take a broader and longer-term view at the project planning stage could help these organisations better balance capital and revenue funding, to give them more time to embed post-build before needing replacement funds.

Support around sustainability planning in the early stages of project development might also help lower the need for ongoing funding and ensure that capital-build projects become a sustainable legacy for communities.

Case studies: Good practice

Throughout this report we have identified examples of projects that delivered valuable services against each of the LDS objectives and LEADER themes.

We considered several funded projects in more detail and identified learning. These include:

Ochiltree Community Hub used local contractors for their build, who in turn used local subcontractors. The hub has welcomed visiting organisations from outside the area to come and learn about the best practice in building and developing a successful community hub.

Auchinleck Community Garden won UK Community Garden of the Year Award and received extensive positive media coverage. They have also linked in with other community gardens from other areas and have delivered presentations on the community garden and on transferring community assets.



Figure 26: Dalry Makerspace

Makerspaces in Rural Communities has left a legacy with volunteers who have improved digital skills and improved mental health. Due to the project, the Council is now more focused on child

poverty and food provision. They have produced a final report which highlights the importance of building resilience in communities. A key issue identified is that the Council struggles to find local organisations to take up and develop ideas – groups need time to be nurtured and developed, which needs reflecting in funding decisions.

Enabling Rural Community Groups, who provided small organisations and groups with IT equipment and software, created a simple process for any constituted

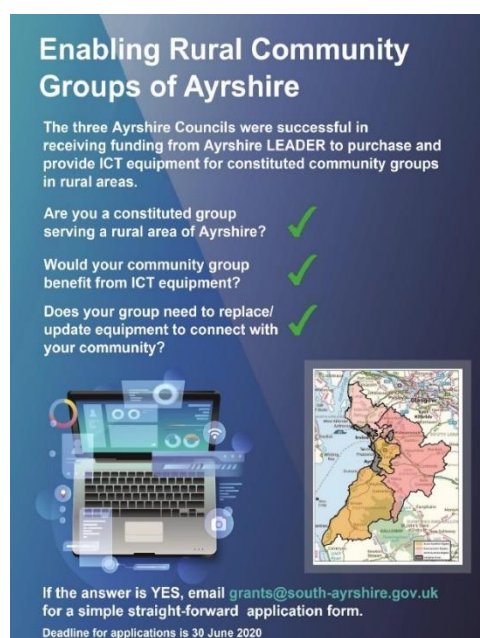


Figure 27: Enabling Rural Community Groups

group to apply for equipment – a simple two-page application – and choose items from a 'shopping list' of laptops, printers, tablets, screens etc). In the first round, all applicants received what they had asked for. In the second round, there was a selection process as it was over-subscribed. There was no formal support for applicants but quite a lot of informal help and advice was given to projects that asked for it.

In the Auchinbay Milk Vending project the project contact reported that other projects could learn from them by:

- Recognising that local suppliers can sell local produce from vending machines in community hubs
- ensuring the budget is adequate for the full cost of the project to prevent shortfall
- keeping lines of communication open with all their partners
- testing and piloting before opening to resolve technical issues, and
- opening only when the project is finished and ready.

One-page case studies of these projects are included in the Appendix.

Key issues for consideration for a future funding programme

We identified key issues for consideration related to any future programme from our discussions with staff and project leads. The area has strengths that a new programme could build on and some identified weaknesses that would need to be considered and potentially addressed. There are opportunities, which could influence the eligibility and objectives in a future programme, and some threats relating to the area and the capacity within communities that a new programme would need to recognise.

These are highlighted in the SWOT analysis

Figure 28 overleaf.

Figure 28: SWOT – as reported by projects surveyed and interviewed



Clearly additional funding is required to deliver interventions to support Community Led Local Development (CLLD).

Post-Brexit, the UK Government created the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)

to replace European Structural and Investment Funds. Through the Internal Market Bill, the Westminster government stated (15 January 2021) they would direct an equivalent amount of funding into communities that had previously come from the EU. It is likely

this will be dispersed through local authorities and there will be a sum set aside for rural development.

Ayrshire LEADER has sought guidance on this for some time.⁹ The Scottish Government had set out their thinking on how a Shared Prosperity Fund in Scotland could be directed, shaped, and governed. They stated:

- Funding should address their own policy aims and objectives;
- The programme would align with the Scottish Government's established "inclusive growth"^[4] approach together with a focus on Covid recovery; and
- The programme will be multiannual.

If a future programme were available, then learning from this programme would be helpful. Linking into other strategic plans would also be beneficial, including tying into the Ayrshire Growth Deal vision¹⁰ and Ayrshire Tourism Strategy. There may be opportunities in the Community Wealth Building Fund to complement interventions with LEADER funding.

Networking with others was seen by several projects as useful. Several projects have since kept in touch and pre-pandemic were meeting at LEADER offices to share experience and information on things like planning applications. Other suggestions were for a Facebook page (or similar), where projects could share issues and find solutions together – it was also suggested that this might help the LEADER team as common claims

problems could be answered to a group rather than to each individual project.

“Farming in particular is lonely and so networking is really helpful.”

Advice around allocating funds was mentioned in interviews with projects. One project said that, on reflection, they would have used the LEADER funding for different things to make the claims process smoother and wouldn't have spread the funding across multiple elements as this made things complicated. It would have been easier to just use LEADER for a smaller number of elements instead and advice at the planning stage could help support projects with this.

One of the unsuccessful projects interviewed was under the impression that they were not able to re-apply. They felt the system benefited those who had done it before and suggested a simpler application process with more support and better guidance for those unskilled in making applications for funds.

A suggestion from one project for a future programme was to have simplified “fast-track” processes for smaller grants, to relieve some of the administrative burden of making claims. Several small projects did not have a dedicated staff team and were often working alone, so the administrative workload impacted significantly at times on delivery of activities.

Some of the multi-funding stream projects felt other funders' requirements made the process of applying and claiming easier. Several projects mentioned how the retrospective nature of the LEADER funding stream had

⁹ A LEADER meeting on 12th December 2018 with Mike Russell, “Mark Baker will be in attendance and will ask about the future of grant-based funding in Scotland by 2021” LAG minutes 15. 1.2018.

¹⁰ a vibrant, outward looking, confident region, attractive to investors and visitors, making a major contribution to Scotland's growth and local well-being, and leading the implementation of digital technologies and the next generation of manufacturing.

caused additional workload, stress and difficulties (primarily with cashflow but also with the burden of evidence paperwork and the delay in receiving claims because of this). For some projects, retrospective funding caused significant cashflow issues.

“Other funding processes were so much easier – there was just a bit more trust.”

One project, a business start-up with one staff member, incurred cashflow issues when there was an issue with a missing funder logo on equipment purchased. The error was on the part of the project, but the retrospective nature of funding meant a delay to claiming back money for the equipment and a risk that the claim wouldn't be approved. The issue took some time (and additional cost) to resolve, leaving them several thousand pounds out of pocket for three months.

“[Paying for things up front] It's a big leap of faith and causes a lot of stress.”

Evidencing claims, where invoices could be 24 pages long – with each page needing to be printed, signed and re-scanned for upload – was time-consuming and not considered to be environmentally friendly. Several projects commented that this level of evidencing wasn't asked of them by other major funders and a future programme could “alleviate these pressures by having a bit more trust in projects”. One project gave the example of having to print digital original invoices, sign them and re-scan for upload, which seemed “a bit of red tape you don't need” as the original documents were in digital form and could have just been uploaded.

Several projects interviewed would have liked more guidance at application stage

to better understand costs, VAT, and project planning. Specific support for building and farm diversification projects to help them include conservation and environmental considerations was also a suggestion. Some other large funders such as Princes' Trust, Robinsons Trust and National Lottery Community Fund, provided advisors to support projects with specialist areas and, particularly for community projects where there isn't always the experience and expertise, these advisors were viewed as extremely valuable in helping projects design and deliver the best version of their project, efficiently and effectively.

“If funders want to encourage rural enterprise, business planning and strategic support to develop ideas would help engage people to try a rural business.”

A future programme could provide specialist and generalist advisors or actively signpost applicants to useful sources of information at the planning stage.

There is a need for infrastructure support for rural projects – such as broadband and public transport – and the recommendation for a future programme is that infrastructure needs be considered when planning a funding stream, to ensure that the impact of funding isn't lessened by poor internet connectivity or an inability to recruit staff and volunteers because of local transport issues.

Another recommendation made by a project for future funding is to have a faster and simpler process for underspend and to remove the need to complete 'notifications of change' for minor issues.

“All decisions had to go back to the LAG which sometimes wasn’t quorate, so decisions couldn’t be made.”

One East Ayrshire project suggested a future funding focus on environmental projects, particularly as rural and outdoor activities support the health of communities – outdoor gyms, getting people out into rural communities, learning where food comes from, supporting local produce are potential areas for consideration.

The Data Collection and Monitoring process would need to be improved in a future programme and this is something already acknowledged by the LAG team in our conversations with them.

To measure improvement there needs to be a baseline against which projects and the programme can then report change and Key Performance Indicators that are clear, unambiguous and understood by all. Without a Theory of Change or evaluation framework for this programme, the opportunity was missed to fully capture the outputs and impact of this funding.

Projects did set some targets within their application – around jobs, training, and other outputs – but did not always include results in their final report or monitoring returns to the programme staff. This does not appear to have been chased up by programme staff. Without this qualitative information on progress towards short- or medium-term outcomes, it is difficult for both projects and programme stakeholders to understand whether the fund is achieving an impact.

In larger projects, recognition of the impact or outcome of funding is generally evident only after the capital expenditure is completed and the claim process finished, as this is when the

project begins delivering its activities and services. Several community hubs developed with the support of LEADER funding that we interviewed fell into this category. From our conversations with them, it is clear they are having a positive impact on the community, have created jobs and volunteering opportunities and, in some cases, developed sustainable strands of activity which continue to progress and expand beyond the funding period. Not capturing the quantitative data around these achievements – or even a projection of what they might be against baseline – is a missed opportunity to better understand medium-term impact of the funding.

Some projects collected feedback from beneficiaries formally but many we spoke to did not. There was anecdotal narrative around impact but without a requirement for formal collection, this potential stream of impact evidence is lost to the funder.

A future programme would need to consider asking projects to formally report on observations and collect quantitative data to identify the difference they are making. A balance is needed – particularly with smaller projects – between collecting useful data and not overburdening projects in its collection. However, a future programme that addresses the issues raised in this evaluation of time-consuming claims paperwork/evidencing processes, would be in a stronger position to then demand greater monitoring of progress towards KPIs and reporting on impact from projects.

Conclusion and recommendations

This evaluation aims to assess the Ayrshire LEADER programme's overall impact and success against the aims and objectives of the Local Development Strategy and business plan, to answer the question:

How successful has LEADER been in achieving its aims and objectives and creating positive change for communities throughout Ayrshire?

To do this, we explored programme management, finances, systems and processes, outputs, progress towards objectives, and social impact. We spoke with members of the Ayrshire LEADER team and the LAG, as well as project leads from all thematic and geographical areas.

Has this programme delivered?

Lead body support was adequately provided by South Ayrshire Council and two other local authorities were represented on the LAG.

Recommendation: local authorities should ensure that staff have the capacity and resources to fully contribute to management meetings.

Programme management was successful, well-governed, and benefited from good representation in the LAG. Programme staff ran some events, though this was disrupted during the pandemic, and supported projects 1:1 with applications and claims. This support was appreciated by projects we surveyed and interviewed, though it was

noted that there was a high staff turnover and this, combined with the restrictions of Covid-19, led to support being slightly less consistent in later years of the programme.

Recommendation: a similar structure and approach would be appropriate for any future programme. And an early decision is needed on any future funding programme to prevent further loss of an experienced and competent team

Financial spend was allocated against three themes and three geographical areas. The majority of the funding (70%) went directly to supporting projects and only 8.2% was unspent and returned to the Scottish Government (largely made up of the transnational/cooperation budget).

The themes and Local Development Strategy objectives were appropriate and chimed with the needs of the area. Projects surveyed and interviewed felt that having smaller grants across a wide number of projects was the fairest way to distribute funds. Projects who were asked what objectives a future programme should address, largely echoed the objectives of this programme will be – particularly around rural businesses, combatting exclusion and isolation, and enhancing the natural environment and building on cultural heritage to boost tourism.

Recommendation: consider future funding programme in conjunction with infrastructure (transport, internet connectivity) needs in the area, to give

projects the best chance of success (and so maximise the investment)

Systems and processes for applications and claims were successful in some respects and less so in others. The application process was straightforward, easily understood by projects and fair, with a clear set of scoring criteria applied by LAG members. Both large and small projects felt the amount of information requested was proportionate to the type and amount of funding being provided.

The claims process was a less smooth experience, for LEADER staff and projects alike. All projects found the LARCS system difficult, and evidencing claims was an arduous and time-consuming process for many.

Retrospective funding had a negative impact for some projects, causing cashflow issues and problems in correctly evidencing spend. Small projects, in particular, found the burden of evidencing spend at times disproportionate to the funds involved.

Recommendation: consider simplifying claims process, particularly for small projects, and easing compliance detail to prevent the claims paperwork and workload detracting from project delivery. This would free up time for formal impact measurement and reporting.

Recommendation: consider providing enhanced support at application stage so that large and/or complex projects better understand the potential impact of retrospective funding and how best to structure multiple funding streams effectively for their individual project.

the funding achieved all formal targets, but it appears that once the targets were

hit, the reporting stopped, and so there is no evidence to show Outputs reported by projects show that where projects have over-achieved, though there is plenty of anecdotal narrative to suggest many did.

Recommendation: more robust data collection and reporting, in line with a Theory of Change and formal monitoring and evaluation framework.

Progress towards LDS objectives was good, with projects achieving against all four key objectives in all three areas. This progress continues beyond the lifetime of the funding programme, with project activities growing and continue to deliver against these same objectives well beyond the point of their final claim.

Recommendation: as above, more robust data reporting against a formal evaluation framework including pre-funding baseline.

Positive Social Impact is seen across all areas and themes, with many examples of successful and inspiring achievements covered earlier in this report. The lack of a formal monitoring framework makes it impossible to quantitatively evidence impact and, for some capital build projects, the full impact won't be seen until after the final claim. Interviews with several community hub projects whose final claims were 1+ years ago, showed continued and positively progressing impact in their communities because of that initial LEADER-funded project.

Recommendation: as above, measure social impact against a formal framework and support projects to capture 'stories' and case studies, which is useful both for them and the funder in understanding, communicating, and capitalising on success.

Future funding programme

The Scottish Government has already outlined principles a future programme should adhere to. Principles include:

- Decisions should be made as closely as possible to the people, businesses and communities who will be impacted;
- The themes will be Improving Places, Reducing Poverty, Increasing Skills, and Growing Business and Jobs to aid a just and green recovery from the COVID pandemic;
- Enhancing wellbeing and responding to the climate change emergency; and
- LEADER will be considered as part of the Scottish programme but this can only happen subject to funds for this being made available by UK Government.

Through this evaluation we can identify:

- A rural development programme is needed in Ayrshire (93% of survey respondents said yes)
- a similar structure and approach of Ayrshire LEADER would be appropriate
- the 2014-20 priorities and themes are still relevant to Ayrshire, and
- Tourism has the potential to bring social and economic benefits to rural Ayrshire.

A proactive strategy for animation and engagement is required. Larger/more able organisations and communities will respond more rapidly and effectively to opportunities without much effort. The key need is to support more fragile communities and rural businesses that are too busy surviving to pursue complex and unfamiliar funding streams.

Survey respondents stated a key priority should be building business and

enterprise (86%) followed by supporting the natural environment (69%).

To improve delivery of a more effective programme there should be:

- Link with Scottish Government strategic objectives
- Application guidance sessions
- Targeted 1:1 project planning support
- Simplified small grant applications and claims
- Less requirement for physical evidence of invoices and claims (more digital uploads accepted)
- Signpost projects to good practice and expert guidance, and
- More online and peer group networking.

If the funding can be found within good time, then many of the volunteer board members and staff can be kept on before they drift away. If possible closer alignment of the skill-set and experience within the LAG to the LDS objectives, particularly in relation to Fostering Business and Enterprise, would benefit the programme and should be taken into consideration when recruiting in future for LAG members or its replacement.

A-LAG is in a good position now to support a new programme. However, any delays in agreeing a future programme will mean momentum and opportunity will be lost.

Technical Appendix A - Research Plan

Aim of the research	Research Question	Objectives
<p>Assess the LEADER programme's overall impact and success for communities throughout Ayrshire in terms of the aims and objectives outlined in the Local Development Strategy/Business Plan.</p>	<p>How successful has the LEADER Local Development Strategy been in achieving its aims and objectives, and creating positive change for communities throughout Ayrshire?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate the socio-economic impact of funded projects • Assess the added value and legacy of the LEADER programme • Evaluate the efficiency, effectiveness and transparency of the management, delivery systems, structures and procedures of the programme. • Assess whether LDS has met the indicators set out (especially those mandatory SRDP) – 20% of budget on Rural Enterprise/Farm diversification, 5% of budget on cooperation, 25% of the budget on administration/animation • Explore how well the programme has delivered against specific SG priority areas. • Explore the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to the strategy • Assess the ROI of the programme • Assess how COVID may have impacted on the programme • Explore what could be done differently in a subsequent programme

	Desk Research	Project Survey	Stakeholder Interviews	Project Interviews
Evaluating process, delivery, management				
To what extent does the LDS and the programme interventions reflect the needs of the local community? Is it still relevant?	✓	✓		
To what extent are the management, delivery, structures and procedures of the programme effective, efficient and transparent?		✓	✓	
What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to the strategy?	✓		✓	
What examples of best practice exist that could influence future programmes?	✓		✓	
To what extent has the programme added value, and created a legacy for Ayrshire communities?	✓		✓	
Has programme met the indicators set out (especially those mandatory SRDP) – 20% of budget on Rural Enterprise/Farm diversification, 5% of budget on cooperation, 25% of the budget on administration/animation	✓			

	Desk Research	Project Survey	Stakeholder Interviews	Project Interviews
Evaluating impact				
OBJECTIVE 1 - To what extent has rural Ayrshire realised its full economic potential with more and better employment opportunities for its people through creating or enhancing small rural enterprises, creating new jobs and skills base?				
a) Including start-ups and entrepreneurial initiatives? To what extent have initiatives created more and better employment opportunities for people?	✓			✓
b) To what extent have funded initiatives been able to access new markets for products and services?		✓		✓
c) To what extent have initiatives facilitated and supported farm diversification?	✓			✓
d) To what extent have funded initiatives contributed to reducing child poverty in the local communities?		✓		✓

OBJECTIVE 2 To what extent are people living and working in rural Ayrshire better connected physically, digitally and socially and are able to access the amenities and services they need?				
a) To what extent have initiatives contributed to improving local facilities and services? (accessibility, transport solutions, community hubs)	✓			✓
b) To what extent have initiatives contributed to creating positive change for harder-to-reach groups?		✓		✓
c) To what extent have initiatives contributed to reducing social isolation through intergenerational activities?		✓		✓
d) To what extent have funded initiatives enhanced social and human capital? (empowerment, local decision making, capacity, skills)		✓		
OBJECTIVE 3 - To what extent have the people of rural Ayrshire been able to better capitalize on the areas cultural, historical, recreational and natural assets to improve the visitor experience, visitor numbers and spend, and local skills and employment in tourism?				
a) In what ways has the strategy created connections between sectors through knowledge exchange, networking and collaboration?		✓	✓	✓
b) To what extent have initiatives promoted and showcased Ayrshire assets (physical infrastructure, natural environment, cultural heritage)?			✓	✓

c) To what extent have initiatives contributed to skills development in tourism related activities?	✓	✓		
d) To what extent have initiatives contributed to improving the visitor experience and visitor infrastructure?	✓		✓	
OBJECTIVE 4 - To what extent do the people of rural Ayrshire have an increased awareness, knowledge and enthusiasm to reap the social, economic and environmental benefits of the area's abundant natural assets?				
a) To what extent have initiatives increased awareness of and interest in the area's biodiversity?		✓		
b) To what extent have initiatives enhanced and protected the area's natural heritage?		✓		✓
c) To what extent have initiatives reduced the local carbon footprint through actions on climate change?	✓		✓	
d) To what extent have initiatives improved access to the natural environment?	✓			

Research topic	Desk research & data analysis	Survey - projects	Stakeholder interviews	Project interviews	Findings and learning workshop
Socio-economic impact	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Programme legacy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Process evaluation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Good practice		✓	✓	✓	✓
Compliance with EU/SRDP indicators	✓				
Contribution to national LEADER objectives	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Contribution to national outcomes	✓		✓		✓
Learning & recommendations for future programmes		✓	✓	✓	✓

Appendix B - Interview schedules

Interviews with programme staff, LAG members and key stakeholders

We'd like to tap into your knowledge and experience of the challenges and achievements of the programme. The interview will take around 40 minutes. We won't share your responses or identify your views. We'll send you a write up of the interview to check accuracy (if we are on Teams we will ask if you are happy we record the interview). Are you happy to take part in the interview? (Not all questions will be relevant for each interviewee.) We expect to cover:

- Participation of LAG Members in decision-making/meetings
 - Satisfaction of LAG Members with operational issues,
 - Efficacy of the application/project assessment process, and
 - Results, achievements, and outcomes as well as thoughts to improve future programmes.
1. Would you tell me about your role with the LAG and your involvement with the programme?
 2. Can you identify examples of good practice from this programme or elsewhere that could influence future programmes? (Projects that you know)
 3. In what ways, if any, has the programme added value, and created a legacy for Ayrshire communities?
 4. Did you feel the objectives of the LDS, reflected the needs of the local community?
 5. Are the same strategic objectives still relevant? Was there any key weakness?
 6. How effectively was the programme managed and delivered? (What worked and what didn't?)
 7. Do you feel that your voice was listened to in decision making within the LAG?
 8. What do you think was not done that should have been done during this programme period?
 9. If a new strategy was to be developed for a new programme can you give examples of SWOT that should be considered?
 10. Is there anything else that you would like to add? (*perhaps around how COVID has impacted*)

Project interviews

We'd like to tap into your knowledge and experience of the challenges and achievements of delivering projects. The interview will take around 40 minutes. We won't share your responses or identify your views. We'll send you a write up of the interview to check accuracy (if we are on Teams we will ask if you are happy we record the interview). Are you happy to take part?

Not all questions will be relevant to each interviewee.

1. Would you tell me about your role and your experience with LEADER and the LAG?
2. How easy or difficult was it for you to get funding from the programme?
3. How well were you supported by the programme staff?
4. Was there anything you liked or disliked about the whole process?
5. What were the key challenges you faced when delivering your project?
6. Has your project been able to access new markets for products and services? What are they?
7. Did your project support farm diversification? If so, what did this look like?
8. Did your project help to reduce child poverty in the local communities? If so, how and will this continue in future?
9. Did your project improve local facilities and services? (such as improved accessibility, better transport solutions, enhanced community hubs). What ones and where?
10. Did your project engage with hard to reach groups (long term unemployed, minority ethnic, young people,) and how did they participate?
11. Did your project include intergenerational activities and if so what did you do?
12. In what ways, if any, have you created better connections between people and organisations? What helped this?
13. Can you give any examples where your project has showcased Ayrshire assets (like the natural environment, cultural or heritage)?
14. If there was a future similar programme then what would this look like to best help you?
15. Is there anything else that you would like to add? (perhaps around how COVID has impacted)

Appendix C - Survey questions

Survey questions for all projects

1. Organisation name

2. Project name

3. Project Reference _____

4. What area does your project target? Tick one of the relevant boxes

North Ayrshire	South Ayrshire	East Ayrshire	Pan Ayrshire
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5. How did you find out about the funding programme? (Tick all that apply)

Word of mouth	Online search	Newsletter
Social media	Other (please specify)	

Application process

6. Please read the following statements and state how much you agree or disagree with them.

Scale – Strongly agree / Agree / Neither agree or disagree / Disagree / Strongly disagree

- The application form was straightforward and easy to understand

- The programme staff were easy to contact and available
- The programme staff communicated in a clear and concise manner.
- The programme staff offered guidance and support to help us develop and present our project
- We were kept informed of the progress of our application.
- A funding decision was reached in a reasonable amount of time.

7. How could the application process be improved for future programmes?

Open answer

8. Was your application for LEADER funding successful?

YES/NO

Answer yes – go to Projects who received funding

Answer no – go to Projects who didn't receive funding

Projects who received funding

About your project

1. The LEADER strategy focused on funding activities in key thematic areas. Which of the following themes does your project best fit? Tick all that apply.

Community	Farm Diversification	Rural enterprise
-----------	----------------------	------------------

2. Which groups of people does your project target? Tick all that apply.

General population	Older people aged 50 and over	Children and young people
Under-qualified and unemployed groups	People with disabilities	Low income groups
Other (please specify)		

3. What local issue did/does your project address? Tick all that apply.

Has your project:

- Created employment opportunities for people in Ayrshire?
- Created training opportunities for employees and volunteers to learn new skills?
- Created volunteering opportunities for people in Ayrshire?
- Helped to diversify the local economy?
- Helped to connect people with family, friends and the wider community?
- Helped to increase digital inclusion?
- Empowered local people to engage with local decision making across Ayrshire?
- Enabled people from hard to reach groups to feel more valued in the community?
- Helped to reduce child poverty in Ayrshire?
- Helped to reduce the carbon footprint and tackle climate change?
- Increased health and wellbeing of people who live and work in Ayrshire?
- Helped to raise awareness about environmental issues and Ayrshires biodiversity?
- Helped to enhance and protect Ayrshire natural assets?
- Any other please specify _____

4. What activities did your project carry out to address these issues?

Open answer

5. Did you collaborate with other organisations to support the development and/or the delivery of your project?

YES/NO/DON'T KNOW

- If yes, what benefits did your project/organisation gain from this?
- If no, why not?

Text box – open answer

Claims process

6. Please read the following statements and state how much you agree or disagree with them.

Scale – Strongly agree / Agree / Neither agree or disagree / Disagree / Strongly disagree

- The process was straightforward
- The claims processed through LARCS were easy to understand
- Support was available to help me complete the claims through LARCS.
- Guidance was clear and easily available
- Other, please state _____

Text box – open answer

Impact

7. We want to find out a bit more about the difference your project has made to the local community, as a result of the LEADER funding. Please tell us your key achievements.

Text box – open answer

The future

1. Is there a need for a similar programme to LEADER in future (2021 – 2027) Y/N/DK

2. What are the future needs of the area and the people who live and work in rural Ayrshire. (On a scale of 1-5 where 5 is highest priority)

- Building business and enterprise
- Improving transport, connectivity and access to services
- Building stronger tourism, culture and heritage services
- Supporting and sustaining the natural environment
- Other, please specify _____

3. Any comments to shape a future programme?

Text box – open answer

4. If necessary, would you be happy for us to call you for a further interview? Yes/no

If yes, what is your telephone number? _____

Projects who did not receive funding

1. Would feedback on the funding decision have been useful to you?

YES/NO/DON'T KNOW

2. What difference did lack of funding by LEADER make to you?

Text box – open answer

The future

1. Is there a need for a similar programme to LEADER in future (2021 – 2027) Y/N/DK

2. What are the future needs of the area and the people who live and work in rural Ayrshire. (On a scale of 1-5 where 5 is highest priority)

- Building business and enterprise
- Improving transport, connectivity and access to services
- Building stronger tourism, culture and heritage services
- Supporting and sustaining the natural environment
- Other, please specify _____

3. Any comments to shape a future programme?

Text box – open answer

4. If necessary, would you be happy for us to call you for a further interview? Yes/no

If yes, what is your telephone number? _____

Case studies

We selected five projects, across themes and geographic areas, to illustrate as case studies. These are:

1. Auchinbay Milk Vending
2. Enabling Communities
3. Into the trees
4. Makerspaces in rural communities
5. Ochiltree Community Hub

These case studies are appended to the end of this report.

Ayrshire LEADER 2014-20 programme evaluation

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2014- 2020 Farm Diversification Case Study

Auchinbay Vending Machines

The project is located in Cumnock, KA18 2QE, East Ayrshire on a B (Mauchline) road.

Funding

The total cost of the project was £68,808. Part of this was a bank loan and the project received a maximum intervention of £45,000 (68% intervention).

Project objectives

The project started in August 2019. The farm shop and Pasteurisation room were developed in a calve shed. Morton's Milk opened on the 1st February 2020. The partners aimed to:

- Have a successful farm diversification project
- Open a Farm Shop that supports local producers and reduces food miles.
- To Launch a Milk Brand and produce and pasteurise whole and semi skimmed milk
- Provide a service at a reasonable cost to the local community, and
- Provide employment long term for the community.

Outline of intervention and approach

The concept stemmed from an approach on a farm in England. The family researched the market, initially internet-based and visiting farm diversification projects. The project explored the lock-box vending machine to compliment the milk vending machine, turning the project into a farm shop. This can provide fresh milk (with permission of producer) and local produce to the community. Branding and execution of the brand was a vital stage of the project. Time was spent ensuring brand positioning was correct and message clear to consumers. following a Facebook campaign to raise awareness. 1500 leaflets were delivered to surrounding villages and towns and newspaper articles published.

What was achieved?

8-9 other local suppliers have an outlet for their produce. Since the opening sales and footfall to the shop has increased. Due to the COVID -19 lockdown a delivery service of milk and farm shop goods was started. Support from the community is positive.

What were the outcomes?

As a result of the investment:

- The range has increased (Bread, Ice Cream, Meat, Fresh Strawberries and New Season Fruit Local Tomatoes and Ayrshire potatoes. Also, a large selection of cheese and dairy produce, cheesecakes and pizza's.
- Launch of Morton's Milk Flavoured Milks in Nov 2020, available in 330ml bottles with 4 delicious flavours.
- Increased sales and new produce outlets
- 4 Part time jobs created

Learning and innovation

- Local suppliers can sell local produce from vending machines in community hubs
- Ensure the budget is adequate for the full cost of the project
- Keep lines of communication open with all partners
- Open only when the project is finished completely and test and pilot before this to resolve technical issues.

Any other results

Sales increased during the pandemic as people can safely select and buy produce.

☎ 07739039655

✉ enquiries@mortonsmilk.co.uk

🌐 www.mortonsmilk.co.uk



2014- 2020 Pan-Ayrshire Community Case Study

Enabling Rural Communities

This project was stimulated by the LAG who wished to help people in rural communities, across Ayrshire, benefit from improved services and infrastructure.

The idea was to buy and then provide ICT equipment, such as laptops, printers, projectors and screens to those constituted groups that applied for support.

Funding

The project started in March 2020 and will run until the end of January 2021.

Approved costs were £200,000 and the LAG agreed a 100% intervention rate, led by South Ayrshire Council and supported by North Ayrshire Council and East Ayrshire Council.

Project objectives

The partners aimed to:

- Target organisations from across all three council areas
- Purchase and deliver equipment for communities
- Support digital inclusion
- Ensure better connected community hubs, and
- Encourage intergenerational projects.

Outline of intervention and approach

The three councils collaborated to assist local resident groups and community organisations. They wished to provide ICT equipment to those in need. The councils are increasing connectivity to the public through enhanced provision in schools, libraries and public buildings.

The ICT provided will help these organisations maximise that connectivity. Replacing old equipment or providing additional equipment to groups will help stimulate small and micro-business. And the improved connectivity will ensure people are better connected digitally and socially and can more easily access services they need.

What was achieved?

The project linked with and helped deliver two elements (Fostering Business and Enterprise and Accessible Ayrshire) of the five themes from the Local Development Strategy.

What were the outcomes?

As a result of the investment:

- More connected communities
- Make better use of networks being installed by councils
- Community groups can increase what they do with

more people using appropriate equipment.

- Through the support provided organisations can provide more/improved support to target groups (young people, long term unemployed)
- With software packages communicate in new ways online (Microsoft Teams).

Learning and innovation

- The small grant provision for ICT equipment tied into the community engagement resources in each council area
- Council purchasing processes can be cumbersome
- This provided a simple way to support local groups from a programme that can be technically difficult to access

Any other results

During the COVID period new equipment allowed people to work more easily from home or facilitate meetings online.

Ayrshire Cancer Support, for example, could communicate more easily with beneficiaries.

For further info contact: Anne-Marie.Steele@south-ayrshire.gov.uk



2014- 2020 SME Case Study

Into the Trees

This project supported the development of an Ayrshire SME to improve its tourism offer and sustain employment locally.

Funding

The total cost of the project was £100,000 with a maximum 45% intervention offered by LEADER.

Project objectives

The partners aimed to:

- Attract investment to create an outdoor adventure offer
- Build a more viable tourism enterprise
- Complement other activities to widen visitor appeal

Outline of intervention and approach

This project is part of the development of Craufurdland Estate as a leisure and tourism asset. The concept adds to the activities available on the estate.

The project concept was inspired in consultation with Go-Ape another Scottish outdoor experience. Contractors were invited to discuss options and provide quotes and concept designs. A preliminary budget of £100k had been estimated.

Once these provisional quotes were received, the formal application to Ayrshire LEADER was made. Three tenders were sought and a successful contractor selected.

What was achieved?

The selected contractor, *High Low Ropes* surveyed the woods accompanied by an arboriculturist to allow more detailed design of the course. Build took place the following summer (2019) and took 12 weeks. Training of 5 members of staff (one Director, one Manager, two part-time staff and one new part-time instructor member of staff) was carried out for Course instruction, and rescue skills.

The project marketed the new facility through press coverage, social media, roadside signage, and direct email invitations.

The project outcome has been better than expected, and the design of the course, the structuring of the different zones has led to an experience which can take participants more than 3 hours.

What were the outcomes?

As a result of the investment:

- Four people gained new skills

- A tourist opportunity has extended their operation and improved visitor satisfaction
- Increased footfall pushed additional income towards the estate café.

Learning and innovation

- Having a single contractor to do all the work minimises the financial paperwork involved
- Ensure full costs are considered prior to commencement (ground clearance and signage for example)
- Link tourism offer with other local attractions

Any other results

This project has been “a real game changer” that has improved the viability and future sustainability of the enterprise. More people view the state as a destination.

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2014- 2020 Community Project Case Study

Makerspaces in rural communities

This was a community-based project led by North Ayrshire Council. A makerspace is a physical location where people gather to co-create, share resources and knowledge, work on projects, network, and build. They help intermediate and advanced users develop their skills and creativity. Their activity promotes development of skills needed for prosperity and social mobility. Makerspaces in libraries featured strongly in the [UK Digital Strategy](#) in recognition of their value and impact. North Ayrshire provided exciting space where activities take place from traditional crafts, like knitting and jewellery making, to newer technologies like 3D printing, coding and animation. People could book out equipment and use this to start up income-generating projects.

Funding

The total cost of the project was £200,000 with an increased 90% intervention (£180,000) offered by LEADER. The applicant found this money easy to get and the match funding attractive.

Project objectives

The partners aimed to:

- Support micro-business development in rural areas

- Target women returners to build their enterprise skills, and
- Give people in rural areas an opportunity to earn additional income.

Outline of intervention and approach

The project put investment into the Garnock valley. The project worked across 3 locations (Beith, Dalry and Kilbirnie). The project purchased equipment such as sewing machines, 3D printers and other items. A 3d mosaic is displayed in Dalry and learning about local heritage was brought into this. Makerspaces in libraries offer the opportunity for the local community to learn new skills at libraries, with free access to tuition and equipment.

What was achieved?

The project though was driven by the community and it moved away from the micro-enterprise development model. It morphed into more of a social cohesion project that used the hook of crafts to bring people together. The community was less keen to start a business but keener to use the facilities and the project to network and get together. Participants were women returners and harder to reach people. The project, tangentially, enhanced community facilities. The project provided equipment

to libraries that otherwise they would not have. Current projects include coding, interactive electronics, games design and robotics.

What were the outcomes?

As a result of the investment:

- More intergenerational activities were supported
- People are more digitally included
- Volunteers have improved skills and knowledge
- People had increased confidence and self-esteem
- People have improved mental health

Learning and innovation

- It is crucial to build community resilience
- The council struggle to find competent and motivated groups to take up ideas
- Groups within communities need time and targeted resources to deliver results

Any other results

Due to this project the Council is now more focused on child poverty and food provision. For further info contact:

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2014- 2020 Community Case Study

Ochiltree Community Hub

This community hub delivers services and activities in Ochiltree, an East Ayrshire village with a population of just over 1000.

Funding

Total costs of the developing this community asset project were £1.755m, with £1.55m match funding, leaving LEADER to contribute £200,000.

Project objectives and approach

Ochiltree Community Hub is a charity with 13 local residents on its Board of Trustees. A 2013 village survey, arranged after East Ayrshire Council announced plans to close the centre and library (built in the 1960s), demonstrated overwhelming demand (93%) for a rebuild or refurbishment of the facilities.

East Ayrshire Council, the National Lottery Community Fund and the Scottish Land Fund supported the asset transfer process. A dedicated community group was formed in 2014 to establish a new community-owned facility. The existing facilities were demolished in 2016, and the land was purchased by the community.

The new Hub provides a community café, five versatile spaces for community events, disabled access, WiFi & AV, training and volunteering opportunities, and social activities including cinema nights, indoor sports and dances. Activities targeted the general community; young people and older people.

It has successfully re-energised village life, and the wider Ochiltree and Skares rural area has been brought into the orbit of the hub. The partners aimed to provide social inclusion and combat poverty through meaningful community projects.

What was achieved?

The Hub is described as, “a catalyst for change in the community”. It demonstrated tangible evidence of growing community spirit increasing the wellbeing of the inhabitants of the village and surrounding areas.

The Hub has a low carbon footprint, maximum flexibility and adaptability. The board has maximised the skills and resources available to establish a Hub that has revived a previously declining environment.

What were the outcomes?

The project felt LEADER supported them. As a result of the planning and interventions the project:

- Created training and employment opportunities
- Increased volunteering
- Supported digital inclusion, and
- Improved health and wellbeing.

Learning and innovation

It is important:

- To have skilled and experienced board members
- That the community work together
- That the project team listen to the community, reevaluating their needs and identifying opportunities.

Any other results

Soon after opening the cafe turnover and lets to groups were above expectation. Flu vaccinations were given from the Hub. For info contact:

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