ARIA Fund LAG (A-LAG) MEETING
22nd March 2023
09:30 – 12:30
South Ayrshire Council County Buildings, Girvan Room

Attendees

LAG Members			
Non- Public Sector	**Attended**	**Public Sector**	**Attended**
Jean Brown (JB)	X	Eddie Bulik (EB)	X
Kevin Brown (KB)	X until 11.05	Bruce Davidson (BD)	X
Barbara Conner (BC)	X	Emma McMullen (EM)	
Chris Campbell (CC)	X	Jamie Tait (JT)	
Claire Donaldson (CD)			
Holly Fitzsimmons (HF)	X arrived at 9:50		
Angela McWhinnie (AM)			
Jim Watson (JW)	X		
LAG Advisors			
		Mhairi Paterson (MP)	
		Sarah Smillie (SS)	
Lead Partner Representative(s)			
		Kevin Anderson (KA)	
		Mike Newall (MN)	

LAG Staff	Attended
Angela Lamont (AL)	X

Apologies
Claire Donaldson (CD)
Angela McWhinnie (AM)

Acronyms
CLLD   Community Led Local Development
CWB   Community Wealth Building
EAC   East Ayrshire Council
NAC   North Ayrshire Council
NFUS   National Farmers' Union of Scotland
SAC   South Ayrshire Council
SG   Scottish Government
SRUC   Scotland's Rural College

	Actions
Welcome JW welcomed everyone to the meeting. **Quorum** The meeting started with 7 LAG Members so was quorate with at least 50% of the 12 standing members. This comprised 5 non-public sector and 2 public sector, fulfilling the minimum 51%:49% non-public: public requirement. 1 member joined at 09:50 and 1 left at 11:05 (both non-public sector) but the meeting remained quorate throughout for decisions made. **Register of Interests** No changes to the standing register of interests were noted. **Conflicts of Interest**	

No conflicts of interest for agenda items were noted. **Minutes of Last Meeting** The meeting minutes of previous, 7th Feb 23 LAG meeting were approved. AL ran through the actions: **Continued** - AL to pursue LAG Advisor representation for new priority themes, disability groups and groups from areas of deprivation from autumn 22. **Continued – to be actioned Q1/2 of 23/24. Recent resignations/the new strategy establishment give this greater impetus.** - KB/MN/JW to establish MoU/amend constitution in short life working group with deadline of mid-Sept 22. Internal Audit action that the constitution and MoU are in place prior to allocation of grants. **Actioned, Group Protocol and now in place, MoU to be signed by SAC.** - LP representative's non-voting role on LAG to be made clear in constitution/MoU. **Completed.** **New** - AL to seek information on potential LAG Member Alistair Henry's affiliation with Ayrshire orgs and feed back. **Completed – to be presented at meeting.** - AL to inform all projects of decision and where relevant, conditions. **Completed.** - AL to recontact SG for clarity on 23/24 allocation and guidance on revenue funding. **Completed - information pending**. - AL to send key invites to KA to familiarise with Lead Partner role. **Completed.** - AL to circulate dates of monitoring visits once established. **Completed.** **LAG Member Updates/Lead Partner Changes** - Marie Oliver, VASA CEO had ceased duties as ARIA Project Officer and had requested to rejoin the LAG, replacing AM. This was approved. - The Lead Partner representative would change from MN to KA (SAC Service Lead for Policy, Performance and Community Planning, People Directorate) from 1st Apr 23. - There had been two resignations from East Ayrshire, Neil McKenna and BD. AL expressed regret at this, especially BD who had been a long-standing member. She said this and the new strategy highlighted the need for a formal LAG refresh which would take place Q1/2 of 23/24. She also asked for suggestions on East Ayrshire representatives to replace; none were forthcoming. - Possible new LAG Member Alistair Henry (AH). AL reminded attendees ex-SG LEADER/CLLD AH had requested to join the LAG as raised at the previous (7th Feb 23) LAG meeting. She reported having liaised with JW/CC on CC's question about organisation affiliations, and CC stated he was more comfortable with members joining without an affiliation as the Group Protocol wording had been chosen to reflect. All members approved, AL to inform AH. **Thanks** AL took time to thank the LAG Members who had assisted with monitoring visits, particularly those who had done multiple, but extended this to the whole LAG for their time/patience with the many decisions required by email over the past months. She also thanked MN for his assistance in 22/23 in setting ARIA up before he hands over.	AL to inform AH his request to join LAG had been successful.
Project Decision – Dunlop Dairy Cheese Shop and Tasting Room (ARIA 0013) A decision on this project had been attempted by email the day prior to the meeting but members had expressed a preference to discuss.	

The project had been approved late, in late Nov 22 due to a requested rework by the LAG, and was awarded the final monies from the initial capital pot. £25,377.31 was awarded, 52.29% of the £49,532 costs with the following conditions:

- Confirmation from EAC that the planning approval or exemption letter (both dated 2016) given with the application remain valid.
- Building Warrant provision, to back up the Buildings Standard register information provided.
- Evidence of building works completion. This should come in the form of principal architect's sign off and walk round with Quantity Surveyor ARIA LAG Vice Chair.

By mid-Feb 23 it was apparent that the project would not complete by the 28th Feb 23 fund deadline due to weather related issues (including hard frosts in Dec 22/Feb 23). KB, a Quantity Surveyor, was in touch with the applicant/builder and had visited on a number of occasions verifying this and that work was progressing. A letter had been provided from the contractor stating it was their intention to have completed by 31st Mar 23; KB verified this would be achieved.

Re: Building Warrant/Planning conditions, the applicant had provided the former, and re: the latter had contacted EAC Planning dept to obtain confirmation on the exemption, who responded instead regarding other works. No response was given on the exemption. The LAG Vice Chair had evidenced the Planning dept visiting, unconcerned about the cheese shop/tasting room works. In addition, he stated seeking confirmation on the continued validity of the 2016 exemption letter had been a mistake of the LAG in Nov 22 and could confirm the nature of the works did not require planning according to EAC's Planning Policy.

The attendees were therefore asked approve/otherwise payment based on the following items:

- The delay in the project to 31st March 23;
- The provision of the Building Warrant;
- The applicant's inability to provide confirmation on the 2016 Planning exemption, and subsequent report from the LAG Vice Chair that this was not necessary;
- The contractor's letter, with wording on intention to complete.

A final decision was made to award a grant based on costs incurred to that point, provided to the ARIA Co-ordinator by 20th Mar 23. AL reported the grant based on this to be c. £23k, but returned to the LAG via email post-meeting to report the c. £21.5k figure (below). The decision remained unchanged.

Final costs/grant profile:

	Approved	Final
Costs	£48,532.00	£41,255.39
Intervention Rate	52.29%	52.29%
Grant	£25,377.31	£21,572.38

This decision was made by all members present at the time (8, 6 non-public: 2 public) apart from KB who wished to award the full grant at a higher intervention rate.

Evidence of completion: principal architect's sign off and/or evidence of submission of application for Completion Certificate (from ARIA 22/23 guidance) would be sought following 31st Mar 23 but no longer form a condition of grant.

Chair/Vice Chair Re-Elections

AL informed attendees it had been 3 years since the last Chair/Vice Chair elections, and in keeping with the Group Protocol it was time to renew. JW and KB were both happy to re-stand in these positions and this was approved by all members.	
Group Protocol Signing AL presented the new Group Protocol as had been circulated and asked members to sign. All present did. AL to seek other signatures by email	AL to seek remainder of Group Protocol signatures by email.
Management Support Group AL reported the fund had been operating with an informal management group since Nov 22, but in alignment with the Group Protocol requested to formalise this into the Management Support Group (MSG). The group would: • Oversee operational aspects of the fund, precluding the need for such regular full LAG contact. • Meet approximately every 6 weeks, precluding the need for such regular LAG meetings. • Have the potential to make decisions, though only if quorate and with the required non-public: public split at that time. It presently held members JW, KB, BC, BD and EM, and AL opened the group up to members present to join, especially with the pending loss of BD. AL finished by reporting KA would automatically become a member and said she would circulate dates for the 1st MSG meeting. KB requested at this point dates for upcoming meetings in 23/24. AL said she would be able to advise following the next LAG meeting at which the new fund dates would be decided.	AL to set date of 1st MSG meeting. AL to advise on LAG meeting dates for 23/24 following next LAG meeting.
Projects/Budget Update **1. Crag Community Arts Payment** AL initiated this item with the request for a decision on this project, 'Carrick Remade', Crag Community Arts, ARIA 0016. On a recent monitoring visit, AL noted the applicant's premises were not fully open/ready to accommodate the classes/workshops described in the application. AL suggested the LAG make the final 50% payment, £2,666.73 from the 23/24 budget and had received SG approval on this. There was concern expressed by LAG Members on this, largely due to it reducing the 23/24 budget for other projects. Discussion ensued and it was finally decided to award the grant now on the basis that the items had been purchased/evidenced and some project related activity was taking place. This was approved by 4 of the 7 members in attendance, 2 rejecting and 1 abstaining. AL was asked to seek information on activity: no./type of classes/workshops (over and above that happening already), no. attendees etc. **2. Successes** AL presented a slide on highlighting the successes of 22/23 with main fund and extra capital fund projects. CC raised using this as the basis for case studies/good news stories, and mooted a bonus fund for applicants who had performed well could have access to. **Budget Update** AL presented the following table for budget spend in 22/23:	AL to make payment to Crag Community Arts and seek information on classes/workshops.

	Budget	Approved	Actual	
Capital - Main Fund	£160,081.20	£160,081.20	£159,384.40	
Capital - Extra Fund	£57,535.51	£47,455.35	£46,712.70	
Revenue - Projects	£315,987.29	£115,379.80	£107,279.30	£199,754.16
Revenue - Internal		NA	£92,474.86	
TOTALS	**£533,604.00**	**£322,916.35**	**£405,851.26**	

She stated Ayrshire was the fourth largest area in Scotland for allocation but has had the poorest staffing so it might equate that it had not been possible to allocate the full funding complement. Areas such as Highland had a team dedicated to CLLD and other funds, and were able to stagger closing dates and pull resources to individual funds as/when needed.

AL also reminder LAG Members of the truncated deadline the transfer of SAC's payment system had imposed – 24th Mar instead of 31st Mar 23. She reported all payments should be able to go through apart from the final payment for Ekos's monitoring and evaluation work (£5,987.50). The work would be completed week commencing 27th Mar 23.

Fund Updates

Staffing
AL explained there had been delays with SAC's recruitment for the ARIA Co-ordinator post and the job advert had not yet gone out. She stated this would have a knock-on effect on recruitment for a second post because, funding for only 23/24 having been approved, less than a year's contract would be offered which may be less appealing to applicants. She/JW also explained SG had committed to only 15% of allocation for staffing again, threatening the ability of ARIA to recruit a second post, but this was absolutely necessary for operation of the fund in 23/24 (/beyond).

CC stated ARIA should only commit to allocating monies with 2 staff in place; there was general agreement with this.

JW led approval on the present Co-ordinator's costs being covered on the contractual basis of 22/23 until recruitment was complete with SAC. This was approved.

Internal Audit
AL reported SAC Internal Audit had begun and would be complete by 31st Mar 23. This was paid by internal transfer so the 24th Mar 23 payments deadline would not apply.

Scottish Government Updates
AL ran through information obtained from SG a recent Scottish CLLD Staff Group (SCSG) meeting, on the continuation of the fund:
- Contrary to the 2 year (23/24 & 25/25) funding reported to have been secured in Dec 22, it was reported that only 23/24 had been approved; 24/25 was awaiting confirmation.
- A continuation of existing staff contracts had been confirmed, but the 15% of allocation staff costs would remain for 23/24. Ayrshire having no employed staff at present and the difficulties of 22/23 had been raised; SG said they would consider this/other area issues on a case-by-case basis. JW/AL were in touch with the CLLD team on this. NB: CC statement under Fund Updates, Staffing.

- Utilising tranched delivering as in 22/23 with a partner had yet to be decided; results of the 22/23 evaluation would be considered re: this. - Guidance on the revenue definition/capitalisation thresholds was yet to be received. - An update of the Community Led Vision is required and this needs approval from SG before monies can be allocated. - Management of other funds and utilising these along with CLLD funding (as is happening across many areas of Scotland) is highly encouraged to ensure longevity. - An online platform for funds management from 23/24 is being investigated. - A networking/ideas share conference has been planned for 17th/18th April in Aviemore, invitations extending to co-ordinators, LAG Chairs & Vice Chair. AL requested approval for this/resultant spend: this was granted.	
New Fund Strategy AL ran through the new fund priorities as recommended by Hall Aitken, for summary purposes and for members who had not made the presentation meeting. She stated the strategy produced would be translated into the exact business for ARIA in the forthcoming Community Led Vision refresh. The priorities were: - Community Wealth Building - Rural Jobs - Rural Enterprise including Community Enterprise - Net Zero, covering Wider Climate Change She then highlighted the recommended delivery approach which she had thought powerful: **Short-Term (23/24 / year-on-year)** - Further develop the light touch fund (application/claims) processes. This would among other benefits allow focus on animation. - Disperse funding in alignment with the new priorities. **Longer Term (next 5 years, to 27/28)** - Develop a **pipeline of projects** to mutual ARIA/community benefit, through**:** - Partnership with fellow funders. - Increased animation be ARIA fund staff (/LAG). - Fund central or local development officers to build capacity and develop projects/funding applications. resulting in communities ready to react to funding as it arises and ARIA with a ready stream of projects, year-on-year. Discussion arose on the following: - Difficulties of partnering with other funders, Shared Prosperity Fund in particular. JW explained the emphasis would be to find out which funders were funding capital projects and proposing ARIA come in for revenue costs. - Development Officers was a good suggestion, there is a recognised need for this. - Use the LAG as a basis, much of the partnership development is there already.	
23/24 Proposals • **Assets Management** KB had raised this proposal which was covered by AL/JW in the meeting. It was regarding buildings transferred to communities through Community Assets Transfer (CAT), and a maintenance register which is required by law but which few buildings have. This logs the condition of the building/work required, and aims to prevent larger scale works being needed at a later date. In best practice it is accompanied by a sinking fund to fund the works.	AL/Members to work up proposals (assets

KB had advised the cost would be individual to each building but would be in the region of £5k/building. The proposal was to fund this for each building (1 cost, 3 quotes) plus give an upfront £1/£2k grant for the sinking fund, to kick-start/augment. JW raised seeking top-line quotes and having a framework of suppliers (to reduce applicant/staff assessment work) but it was felt this may favour a few larger firms and may not be equitable among South, East and North Ayrshire. The proposal was met with enthusiasm from members present who were keen to progress. AL suggested a ring-fenced budget of c. £100k • **Ayrshire 21 Refresh - Implementation of Community Action Plans** JW presented this proposal, which had resulted from the idea of a refresh of the Ayrshire 21 project, which was conducted in the early 2010's and saw action plans developed for 21 communities. Since then, many action plans had been developed but many lay without being realised. The proposal would be to fund support, eg: a central and/or local development officer(s) to develop projects, funding applications and build capacity within groups. It would form part of the longer-term delivery approach described above. Again this proposal was met with enthusiasm from members present. Points of communities being onto second/third generation action plans, and the Local Outcome Improvement Plans (LOIPs) of North Ayrshire not being truly community led were raised. JW also stated the idea would align with the ambition of ARIA becoming an Ayrshire hub for rural funding/support. • **Video Training/Applications Project** Members present were reminded of this project, conceived in the Test of Change year and re-introduced in the 22/23 Community Led Vision. It would bring video training to groups across Ayrshire, improving digital skills/employment prospects (video skills had continued to be the most sought after CV skill in 2022), and the groups would then have the chance to make a short video application for a small (£2k/£3k) upfront grant. JW added Fife had run a similar scheme with Young Farmers and lessons could be transferred. Again members were enthused at this idea. AL stated it could be a way of bringing in young people to the LAG as described in the 2022/23 Community Led Vision - ARIA were relatively behind on this, a number of areas having dedicated youth LAGs. CC mentioned the main LAG might not be the best forum for young people, but the possibility of bringing in a delivery partner to run a rural youth forum (becoming a youth LAG) was discussed. A pilot could be considered for each of South, East and North Ayrshire. This would be a follow on from the main project, a consideration for 24/25.	management/community action plans/video project) for 23/24.
AOCB & Next Meeting AL suggested the date of the next meeting as early May to allow time for the 23/24 Community Led Vision to be drawn up/approved and ideas crystallised. AL to circulate suggested dates. The meeting would be in person again.	AL to circulated suggested dates for May 23 LAG meeting.

Actions
Continued
- AL to pursue LAG Advisor representation for new priority themes, disability groups and groups from areas of deprivation from autumn 22. **Continued – to be actioned Q1/2 of 23/24. Recent resignations/the new strategy establishment give this greater impetus.**
- KB/MN/JW to establish MoU/amend constitution in short life working group with deadline of mid-Sept 22. Internal Audit action that the constitution and MoU are in place prior to allocation of grants**. Actioned, Group Protocol and now in place, MoU to be signed by SAC.**

New
- AL to inform AH his request to join LAG had been successful.
- AL to seek remainder of Group Protocol signatures by email.
- AL to set date of 1st MSG meeting.
- AL to advise on LAG meeting dates for 23/24 following next LAG meeting.
- AL to make payment to Crag Community Arts and seek information on classes/workshops.
- AL/LAG Members to work up proposals (assets management/community action plans/video project) for 23/24.
- AL to circulated suggested dates for May 23 LAG meeting.

James Watson

Jim Watson
ARIA LAG Chair

10th May 2023