



**Heart of Wessex Executive Committee Meeting**  
**Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> July 2017**

**Minutes**

**SSDC Offices, Churchfields, Wincanton, Somerset BA9 9AG**

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**Present:** Lizzy Ralph (LR), Susan Jonas (SJ), Gary Collinson (GC), Peter Wheelhouse (PW) Advisor, Colin Winder (CW), Andi Witcombe (AW), and Martin Woods (MW) Advisor

**In attendance:** Sarah Dyke (SD) – Programme Manager and Julian Head (JH) Wiltshire Council.

1. **Welcome and Introductions:** LR welcomed everyone to the meeting especially all new members of the Committee.

**1a) Apologies:** Received from Anne Carney (AC), Ali Morgan (AM), Simon Cullum (SC), Andy Fussell, Peter Quintana (PQ) and Naomi Kimber (NK).

**1b) Declarations of Interest:** None

**1c) Minutes of previous meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2017:** Approved and signed as an accurate record of the meeting

**1d) Matters Arising:** None

2. **Election of Chairman and Vice Chairman** - SD took the opportunity to thank LR for taking over the interim Chairmanship after the sad death of Michael Mounde. SD confirmed that currently only Lizzy Ralph had nominated herself for Chairman, and asked if anyone else present wished to nominate themselves. With no further members wishing to stand for election, at this point LR left the room. SD asked members if there were any comments, with none forthcoming she asked for a show of hands. All members voted in favour of electing LR as Chairman. LR returned to the room and SD congratulated LR on her appointment and LR commenced chairing the meeting. LR asked if any members wished to nominate themselves for Vice Chairman. Members declined, and LR asked in the absence of a VC that she could ask members to Chair meetings in her absence. All agreed.

3. **Project Applications**

- a) **The Chocolate Factory (Project Ref: 105616) Project Cost: £35,118.00 Grant Intervention Rate: 40% Grant Requested: £14,047.20** SD gave an overview of the project detailing how the applicant was applying for funding to purchase equipment associated with the production of hot chocolate and chocolate bonbons. The grant funding would support the purchase of a ganache mixer, caramaliser, hearting cabinet and dishwasher supporting the applicant to expand and move into new and exclusive markets.

**Discussion** – The following points were made during discussion:

**SJ** – Thought the finances looked wobbly, noting the other funding from Crown Funding, she thought that peer to peer funding was high risk. SJ also noted that the jobs created were low skilled. She was also concerned that the applicant had stated that they were carbon neutral and

how this was qualified. SJ was unclear if the chocolate flakes were just for the hot chocolate element of the project or if they were for the bonbons as well. Overall SJ was concerned that the applicant was trying to pull the wool over the LAGs eyes.

**GC** – Considered the project to be an excellent one, to get the level of funding the company had achieved from crowd funding was impressive as the criteria is tough. This makes the project a strong one in his view. He mentioned that there were no displacement issues.

**PW** – Skill levels are typical of the food processing sector, this project is creating a job that will receive training and will therefore become a skilled role. Overall this is exactly the type of project that the LAG should be supporting. Good job creation for the grant intervention.

**AW** – Felt the evidence for the bonbons element of the project was strong, but the hot chocolate element lacked, however as this was an innovative concept and therefore potentially difficult to qualify at this stage.

**AF** – Gave full support to this project as the company provides a great product and the machine would assist production and save labour.

**MW** – The applicant has given a good analysis of its customers and the sector. There is evidence for the potential for growth. It is a distinctive product. Jobs are what are required and it is mentioned in the application that training will be given.

**CW** – Generally many jobs in this area are low paid. They are providing job opportunities that will be paid over the minimum wage. The company seems to have grown out of very little and is expanding to its credit. He felt that the amount photovoltaic energy produced on the factory building would be adequate to be able to claim the company was carbon neutral.

**LR** – Impressed that such a small grant intervention, for the amount of R&R work that has gone into this project. The applicant has got the support of other funders and this should be to their credit. Although many similar businesses are London based the applicant sees being based in a rural area as an economic advantage.

**Decision:** All voting members voted unanimously to support the project. LR signed section B4 of the approval section on the Full Application Appraisal Form.

- b) Collaborative No-Till Drilling (Project Ref: 106181) Project Cost: £63,115.00 Grant Intervention Rate: 40% Grant Request: £25,246.00** SD gave information about the project detailing that the applicant was applying for grant funding to support the purchase of a No Till Drill. The drill would be shared by three neighbouring farms allowing improvements in soil and soil biology. The low cultivation drill would be used for establishing arable crops and reduce the number of field operations.

**Discussion** – The following points were raised during discussion:

**AW** – There is much scientific evidence that supports the use of no-till drills. Appraiser slightly concerned if farmers were going to be able to work collaboratively, but she felt that this is not an issue as farmers have always shared equipment and resources. She was concerned about the tight timeframes, as harvest is early this year and therefore drilling would be early as well. The match funding would be from the farms overdraft, but this is how farmers normally operate.

**PW** – no comment

**GC** – Collaboration should be encouraged and this project will see the reduction of inputs.

**SJ** – noted that the business is not registered with Companies House. SD confirmed that the applicant is a farm partnership and therefore not required to do so. SJ wanted to know the age

of the applicant. But keen to support the project as healthy soil is important to ensure sustainability.

**CW** – Interested in the collaborative element of the project as it is an expensive piece of equipment for sole use of one farm would not necessarily offer good value for money.

**MW** – This is an informal co-operation project. The drill will require a less powerful tractor and will reduce fuel costs. It will increase productivity and reliance on subsidies in future. These are all positive attributes.

**AW** – the local micro climate will probably dictate usage.

**Decision:** All voting members voted unanimously to support the project. LR signed section B4 of the Full Application Appraisal Form.

- c) Moo Meters (Project Ref: 106183) Project Cost: £31,810.00 Grant Intervention Rate: 40% Grant Request: £12,724.00** SD confirmed that the applicant wished to purchase cow collars with a transformer that has the capability of sending information of the cows current status in terms of rumen function and heat detection enabling the herdsman to constantly be in link with cows in their care. By improving the technology used in managing dairy cows, this will improve welfare and efficiency, allowing the herd to grow to 300/310 cows.

**Discussion** – The following points were made during discussion:

**AW** – Anything that can be done to improve the welfare and health of dairy cows ultimately mean increased yield and productivity for the farmer. Heat detection is also very important to farmers as a cow should calve down every 365 days, if a cow is out of calf for longer this costs the business money. Organic milk is always in demand and if they are marketing their own brand then even better.

**MW** – this business is supplying several local businesses so the indirect impact of this project will be positive. It is an excellent technology driven project, focussing on an industry sector that is distinctive to this geographical area.

**CW** – High tech product for a low tech animal! Wanted to know how secure the collars were around the cows neck.

**SJ** – This is a good project as it improves welfare whilst maintaining organic status. SJ hoped that the signal from the transformer would be able to adequate.

**GC** – this project has clear welfare benefits and it creates a job, this is a good investment

**PW** – there are reoccurring themes around increasing productivity. This project supports a multiplier effect, where a number of other businesses will benefit indirectly.

**JH** – asked how many monitors are being purchased. SD confirmed that there will be 260 for the herd and a further 60 units for maiden heifers total 320.

**LR** – no further comments so asked member to move to a vote

**Decision:** All voting members voted unanimously to support the project. LR signed section B4 of the Full Application Appraisal Form.

- d) Low Disturbance Drill (Project Ref: 106514) Project Cost: £482,499.00 Grant Intervention Rate: 40% Grant Request: £32,999.60** SD outlined to project. The objective is to purchase a drill that has the capability to be used as a zero till drill and also a non-inversion drill should the need arise.

SD explained that this project was submitted late, but encouraged to come forward to this meeting because of the need to have the equipment in place before autumn drilling. The applicant experienced an unexpected delay sourcing an important document and therefore the application could not be appraised. The application is now with the RPA for QC and is expected back shortly. SD recommended that members discussed the project and then formally approved the project by written procedures.

**LR** – Asked members if they were happy to discuss the project in principle and follow up with a decision using written procedures.

**Decision:** All voting members voted unanimously agreeing with the approach proposed

**Discussion** – The following points were made during discussion:

**PW** – The applicant is a LEAF demonstration farm so a larger number of businesses will benefit.

**LR** – The supplier of the equipment is also local.

**AW** – AHDB levy board is a non-biased scientific research based organisation. There are 15 monitor farms across the county.

**MW** – The positive principles are monitored from the previous no-till drill project discussed at this meeting.

**CW** – This looks to be a smaller unit that will be of benefit travelling down county lanes.

**JH** – In terms of costs there seems to be a large differential between the drill projects.

**LR** – pointed out that this had been discussed at previous meetings and explained that there were a range of issues that dictates the size and price of the drill that was being purchased, such as the availability of the match funding contribution, the size of the farm, the availability of appropriate tractors to operate the drill.

**SJ** – mentioned that this applicant has done a vast amount of research.

**LW** – Agreed and felt the applicant was clearly competent. LW then confirmed the SD will distribute the application papers via email and requested that members respond within the timeframe as this project needed to be delivered within a tight timeframe.

4. **Programme Update:** LR referred all to Paper B General Report which had been circulated prior to the meeting and asked if there were any questions. No questions were asked or issues raised.
5. **Programme Running Costs & Animation (RCA):** LR referred everyone to Paper C Financial Report circulated prior to the meeting and asked if there were any questions. No questions were asked or issues raised.
6. **Project Enquiries:** LR referred everyone to Paper D Project Pipeline Report circulated before the meeting. SD commented that the project pipeline was changing daily and the programme team were constantly receiving new project enquiries.
7. **Items requested by members:** LR highlighted that the next LAG Forum would be taking place on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> November in Tisbury and urged everyone to book their place.
8. **Any Other Business:**

LR confirmed that she attended the Regional RPA meeting in Exeter on 18<sup>th</sup> July. SD will circulate minutes of this meeting to members when they are available.

PW – asked if there was any flexibility of moving funds across the national priorities. SD confirmed that the RPA were now more concerned with spend and were therefore happy for LAGs to be flexible with investments. SD also commented that at the last LAG Forum meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> June in East Coker, a workshop looking at spend across priorities was held and some useful feedback was being collated and will be available for discussion at a future meeting.

LR confirmed that the HoW team will be exhibiting at a number of agricultural shows over the summer and asked anyone interested in supporting these shows to get in touch with EC and SD.

**9. Date of the next meeting:** Confirmed as Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2017.

LR thanked SSDC for the use of the Churchfields meeting room and SD and EC for their continued hard work. The meeting closed at 8.15pm

Approved as a correct record:

Signed:

Date:

LAG Executive Chairman



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