



Ceredigion LAG Study visit to Dumfries and Galloway

24-26th September 2015

Feedback report

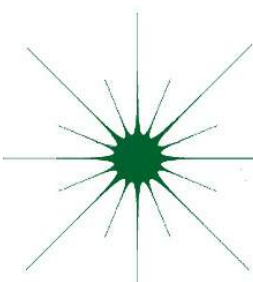




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Executive Summary

Ceredigion and Cairngorm Local Action Groups (LAG) visited the Dumfries and Galloway LAG on 24-26th September 2015. The purpose of the study visit was for LAG members and officers to learn from one another about their respective approaches and achievements. The study visit was proposed as the areas were thought to have much in common, and that learning between different parts of the UK would be mutually beneficial.

The visit was timed so that it maximised learning potential from the 2007-14 programme, with respect to planning for the new 2015-2020 programmes.

- Representatives from the two visiting groups were given an overview of the LAG's activities through a site visit tour of example projects, which also offered the opportunity to meet project partners and to hear the beneficiary stories.

The visit commenced with a joint meeting of all 3 LAGs, where all participants introduced themselves and stated their expectations of the visit. Dumfries and Galloway introduced their work in more detail, in particular the projects to be visited on the tour.

The tour included visits to the D&G LAG's biggest projects, firstly the "Window on Wildlife" visitor centre at the WWT reserve at Caerlaverock on the Solway Firth. Another highlight of the tour was the visit to Eskdalemuir, in order to gain insight into the flagship multi-year community focused project, "Day of the The Region".

The study visit has led to a number of short term outcomes:

- Plans for further bilateral visits in the Autumn of 2015 and Spring of 2016;
- Focused learning about particular projects, e.g., Ceredigion's enterprise support, the Day of the Region, Biosphere collaboration and Social Return on Investment are all likely topics for further discussion.

In the longer term, the LAGs are looking to further their engagement and the possibility exists to develop joint projects in areas of common interest.

For more information contact:

Dumfries & Galloway LAG - Nicola.hill@dumgal.gov.uk

Cairngorm LAG - AliceMayne@cairngorms.co.uk;

Ceredigion LAG - meleri.richards@ceredigion.gov.uk;

Catalys (facilitator) - ian@catalys.org



1. Introduction

- This report sets out the main conclusions from the study visit undertaken by Ceredigion and Cairngorm LAGs to Dumfries and Galloway LAG on 24-26 September 2015.
- The report draws on the conclusions from all three groups and has been written in order to be shared between all three groups.

2. Organisation

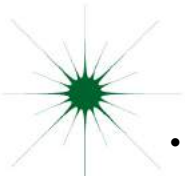
- A programme was developed in consultation between Ceredigion and Dumfries and Galloway LAGs, with Cairngorm LAG joining later in the process of development. Dumfries and Galloway LAG hosted the visit, and while costs were kept as low as possible, they were shared between the LAGs. The programme is in the annex.
- The study tour was facilitated by Catalys on behalf of the three LAGs.

3. Programme

- The programme was designed to provide a comprehensive introduction to the work of the Dumfries and Galloway LAG, both through briefing and through visiting the area and viewing some example projects.
- In addition to this briefing on the work of the D&G LAG, opportunity was provided for wider discussion between the 3 LAGs regarding opportunities for further collaboration.
- The visit was timed to coincide with one of Dumfries and Galloway LEADER's flagship projects, "Day of the Region". Participants had the opportunity to take part in the launch of this community-based project in Eskdalemuir. The study tour also took in a visit to the site of D&G LAG's largest single project from the previous programme, the "Window on Wildlife" development at Caerlaverock Nature Reserve (run by WWT – Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust).
- The programme is at Annex 3.

4. LAG self assessment

- Initial impressions are that the visit was a good opportunity for the three LAGs to share experiences and to recognise the similarities in the challenges that each of the LAGs face in their respective areas. Each group were asked a set of assessment questions to feed into the final report. These were:



- *What were the main benefits for you and your group*
- *What do you intend to do, as a result of contacts or conversations you have undertaken on this visit*
- *Are there any other intangible benefits*

Regarding the event organisation itself:

- *What worked particularly well*
- *What could have been done better*
- *Do you have any suggestions for future events or activities*

The purpose of this report is to present agreed conclusions for communication purposes to provide a platform for next steps.

5. Issues discussed

- The visit focused to a significant extent on the Dumfries and Galloway LAG, as it was the location for the visit. Issues discussed included the strategy, management and organisation of the LAG. In addition to which visit took in direct experience of two of D&G's main projects, Day of the Region and Window on Wildlife (see above).

The issues discussed included:

- Gaining and maintaining community involvement and representation
- Managing public sector representation
- Engaging youth, including a youth LAG
- Structure of the LAG - i.e., its sub-groups are each equally important and no hierarchy exists between the groups.
- Staffing
- Commitment to LAG refresh in 2017/18
- LAG member development and training

6. Issues for further discussion

- The pre-visit briefing identified a wider range of issues for discussion and time simply did not allow for full discussion of all possible areas of mutual interest. Issues that might be on the agenda for further discussion include:
 - Biosphere coordination and collaboration
 - Engagement of the university sector

7. Rationale for the visit

- There are a number of parallels between Ceredigion and Dumfries and Galloway that led to the suggestion that a meeting between the two LAGs might be beneficial. These include:



7.1 Geographical similarities

- Coastal location – both areas have long coastlines giving onto the Irish Sea
- Important farming areas, with a strong grassland/livestock component.
- Generally small scale fishery (although Kirkcudbright is the one exception, with a significant scallop industry, which makes it the 20th largest port by value in the UK.)
- Widely dispersed rural population
- Biggest urban centres & administrative centres are also University Towns
- Rural research capabilities, e.g., IBERS, SRUC

7.2 Long standing LEADER programmes – similarities & differences

- Management/Lead body arrangements
- LAG structures
- Welsh and Scottish Government approaches
- FLAG both areas have FLAG programmes

7.3 Other designations

- Biosphere Reserves – both include large areas designated under the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme
- Interestingly, neither area is designated National Park, although both include stunning mountain and coastal scenery

8. Conclusions

- The learning visit proved useful to all involved and it is pleasing that it has led to a number of ideas for future information sharing and future collaboration. This was the original intention. It was also intended that these ideas should emerge naturally from the conversations that took place around the visit; LEADER colleagues stimulating and sparking off one another.
- Ideas and initiatives that have emerged include:
- **Reciprocal visits** – possibly timed so that LAG representatives can be involved in LAG activities, e.g., the Rural Awards in Dumfries and Galloway.
- **Projects of interest for further “study”** – e.g., D&G would like to know more about Ysgol y Fenter and Caringorm are interested in discovering more about SROI, universities collaboration.
- There were plenty of issues to discuss and the fact that the discussion got onto some and not others was a factor of time. One gap noted by more than one



person was the fact that the visit didn't explore the biosphere reserve issues more. This reflects the fact that it was not an issue of interest to everyone, although informal discussion did take place, a more formal exploration by the whole group or by a sub-group would have been helpful. External facilitation was also thought helpful, in that it made sure that organisation and momentum for the visit wasn't lost in the day to day business of running the LAGs.

Three important things emerged.

1. The visit functioned as an opportunity to learn, on the basis that "seeing is believing". The examples were relevant and the participants saw a good cross section.
2. LAG representatives recognised what the LAGs had in common and laid the basis for future collaboration. N.B - It was particularly important to have LAG members represented on the visit.
3. Finally and probably most importantly, people from the 3 LAGs got to know one another, it is at the human level that collaboration works. The ideas and case studies help on the one hand, but mutual trust is the most important single ingredient.

Each group has provided their reflections on the visit separately and the responses are in Annex 2.

Dumfries & Galloway and Ceredigion LAG Chairs - Peter Ross and John Davies





Annex 1

Attendees

Ceredigion

John Davies – Aberystwyth University – IBERS (Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences)

Teleri Davies – Ceredigion Association of Voluntary Organisations

Linda Ashton – Natural Resources Wales

Eirlys Lloyd Community Partnerships Manager / Ceredigion County Council – FLAG & LEADER Programme Manager.

Meleri Richards Rural Communities Coordinator – LEADER Programme Coordinator.

Alison Kinsey Rural Communities Officer (Animateur)

Marie Evans Rural Communities Coordinator (Animateur)

Dumfries & Galloway

Nicola Hill – LEADER Programme Manager

Simone Tyrie – LEADER Finance Coordinator

Derek Hextall – LEADER Project Officer

Gary Davidson – LEADER Programme Support Officer

Peter Ross (LAG Interim Chair)

Sharon Glendinning (LAG Rural Enterprise Sub Group member)

Eva Milroy (LAG Rural Enterprise Sub Group member)

Barry Dunne (LAG Strategic Management Group – Scottish Natural Heritage)

Caroline Graham-Brown (LAG Strategic Management Group)

Karen Ward-Boyd (LAG Strategic Management Group)

Heather Brash (LAG LEADER Sub Group member)

Norman Burns (LAG LEADER Sub Group member)

Clair McFarlan (LAG LEADER Sub Group member)

Jenny Wilson (LAG LEADER Sub Group member)

Judith Johnson (LAG Rural Enterprise Sub Group member)

Cairngorms

Alice Mayne – Cairngorms Leader Programme Manager

Sam Masson – Leader Project Development Officer

Roger Clegg – Chair, Cairngorms Local Action Group

Catalys

Ian Baker – Facilitator



Annex 2

Group comments

Cairngorms Comments on D&G Visit

What were the main benefits for you and your group

- We all really appreciated the opportunity to meet people from other areas, visit projects and find out more about how things are done elsewhere. It was reassuring to hear that others are facing similar challenges but also to gather new ideas for ways of overcoming them. We were particularly interested in hearing about the Day of the Region initiative from both the D&G LAG and the community participants. We were also interested in the Enterprise Bursary and Small Grants programmes initiated in Ceredigion.

What do you intend to do, as a result of contacts or conversations you have undertaken on this visit

- We are now considering the following ideas and are keen to continue collaborating with D&G and Ceredigion:
 - Entrepreneur bursary scheme
 - Small grants for business
 - Day of the Region (possible co-operation with D&G and Ceredigion)
 - Collaborative work with UHI
 - SROI – setting some parameters early in the programme to enable review and evaluation
 - Possible collaboration with others on ‘hard to reach’
- We have also set up a reciprocal visit from D&G to Cairngorms to follow up on some of the ideas discussed on the visit and share some of the D&G expertise with the Cairngorms LAG.

Are there any other intangible benefits

- It was very useful to hear about the level of engagement of the D&G LAG, this has started a series of discussions in Cairngorms about how to better release the skills and expertise of the LAG as a resource for communities and applicants.

What worked particularly well

- The joint LAG meeting on the first day was very useful as it gave us a chance to hear how different LAGs operate and gather ideas to share with the Cairngorms LAG.



What could have been done better

- It would have been useful to have the briefing notes a bit earlier so that we could prepare better for the visit. It would also have been useful to have a talk about the 'Day of the Region' Project before attending the events so that we understood a bit more about the practical delivery of the project from the LAG and staff perspective.

Do you have any suggestions for future events (whether this might involve external facilitation or not).

- It is useful to have an external facilitator as there is a lot of work involved and increasingly LEADER teams and LAGs will be tied up with the programme. These kinds of visits are really valuable but often fall by the way side as people get busy. It is therefore sensible to commit to them early in the programme and ensure follow ups are scheduled so they happen.





Dumfries and Galloway

What were the main benefits for you and your group

- The opportunity to meet with a LAG from a different part of the UK but with very similar issues/challenges to our own. Good to get an understanding of how programmes are being delivered across the UK. Cross pollination of ideas/knowledge exchange and plans for reciprocal visits.

What do you intend to do, as a result of contacts or conversations you have undertaken on this visit:

- Already planning to visit with Cairngorms LEADER in November and plans to visit with Ceredigion in the Spring 2016. Information shared about Micro enterprise funding scheme will inform the discussions around how we support rural enterprise in the new programme.

Are there any other intangible benefits

- There is always value in getting together in a room and chatting – what develops out of that might take weeks/months/years to come to fruition but often it is being exposed to new people and ideas that help to keep the LEADER programme fresh and innovative.

Regarding the event organisation itself:

What worked particularly well

- Getting LAG members involved in the visit – they really benefit from being exposed to new areas and ideas – being encouraged to think outside the box and remember we are part of a much wider LEADER network. The LAG are responsible for driving the programme and by getting them involved as much as possible the team can then be given that direction as opposed to the team feeling like they are dragging the LAG along with them.

What could have been done better

- Logistics are always a challenge with these types of visits but on the whole I think the programme worked pretty well.

Do you have any suggestions for future events (whether this might involve external facilitation or not).

- Reciprocal visits are already in the pipeline but always happy to share and learn! We plan to deliver the Rural Awards again during this programme – there could be an opportunity to involve our new contacts in the judging panel etc.



Ceredigion (Individual comments brought together)

What were the main benefits for you and your group?

- To get a feel for the sorts of projects they have been funded before.
- To see if there was any innovative programmes that could be tested in Ceredigion and generally to get a better feel for LEADER and RDP generally as a learning activity.
- To have the opportunity to be submerged in a topic for 3 intensive days.
- Being able to speak to different people involved in the Programme and to gain different perspectives. It also helped to manage expectations of LEADER and appreciate the difference between Scotland and Wales i.e. Capital Funding.
- Highlighted that we have done good work in Ceredigion and that models we have used can be replicated elsewhere i.e. Ysgol Fenter y Cardi. Many similar types of projects had been supported across the areas.
- To get an understanding of another area, which could lead to the laying of the foundations for possible cooperation activity.

What do you intend to do, as a result of contacts or conversations you have undertaken on this visit?

- Linda Ashton:

"I have already made contact with the Chair of the LAG and obtained web information that may be of use to the Biosphere in regard to an area I am funding research into. Looking at the Dumfries and Galloway model will be very useful. I have also shared that contact with Andy Rowland.

For me it was a valuable learning experience, that will help me in my role as LAG member. As I have agreed to lead in NRW for N&M communication of LAGs the lessons can also be shared with internal colleagues."

- Exploring the possibility of LAG Members taking on a mentoring role to support project development.
- Forward the report to the Wales Rural Network so that it can be used as a case study for others.
- The Visit has highlighted that there is a need for LAG Members to 'see' projects in action and regular LAG visits will be held (both Ceredigion based projects and further afield).



Are there any other intangible benefits?

- The importance of understanding specific factors that mean a project may succeed in one area, but may well fail in another. E.g. the link with the Buddhist Temple that helped maintain volunteers and the use of the community café and hub benefitting the smaller wider community and visitors.

What worked particularly well?

- Once we arrived, the event was organised for the group and the organiser / guide/ Driver knew the area well and gave good background information as we travelled the area. That left us free to absorb the information being imparted without getting lost.
- Spending time listening and talking privately with other LAG members and Project managers was really useful because you could tease and drill down to questions you wouldn't ask in a seminar situation.
- Having the added dimension of the Cairngorms LAG officers and members was a good addition as it added other perspectives.

What could have been done better?

- A couple of different types of additional projects (if there were any) would have been good to see, but time was constrained.
- Maybe could have had a more focused session or smaller breakout sessions so that those issues that weren't covered e.g. Biosphere, aspects of animation could have been discussed.

Do you have any suggestions for future events (whether this might involve external facilitation or not).

- To see some really challenging innovative projects that could really give us as LAG members and the Animators a catalyst for ideas for Ceredigion from which to approach and encourage new partnerships to develop.
- A proposed return visit in Spring 2016 with the possibility of staff shadowing.



Annex 4

Study visit programme

Thursday 24th Sept		
	9:30am	Depart: Train from Aberystwyth
	14.59pm	Arrive Carlisle
	15:15 – 16:00	Travel by hire car to Dumfries – via route to start familiarisation.
		Check in
	16:30 – 18:45 (approx.)	Short tour of Glenkens, Castle Douglas and Kirkcudbright.
	19:00	Dinner at Cairndale Hotel
	8pm	Informal drinks in Lounge Bar Cairndale Hotel, English Street, Dumfries
Friday 25th Sept		
	9.30am for 10am start	Joint LAG Meeting Room 2 Council HQ English Street Dumfries (Teas & coffees from 9.30am)
	12.30	Travel to WWT Caerlaverock
	1pm	Lunch WWT Caerlaverock – project site visit with Brian Morrell, Centre Manager
	4pm	Travel to Langholm
	5.45pm	Eskdale Hotel, Langholm
	7pm prompt	Travel to Eskdalemuir
	7.30pm	Day of the Region Launch event
Saturday 26th Sept		
	9.45am	Travel to Eskdalemuir
	10.15am	Day of the Region Celebrations Presentation/discussion – Nick Jennings Upper Eskdale Development Group
	Lunch	Community Café at the Hub will be open to purchase food
	2.00pm	Depart for Carlisle
	4:08	Depart train from Carlisle
	21:19	Arrive Aberystwyth



Annex 5

Images from Visit

