



Media Release

Rural Stirling benefits from £1.7 million of LEADER funding

More than £1.7 million has been committed to 58 community and business projects in rural Stirling as part of the Forth Valley and Lomond LEADER programme.

The LEADER programme aims to help innovative, locally driven, bottom-up projects that will support the local community and develop the rural economy. Since 2015, Stirling Council has hosted the Forth Valley and Lomond LEADER Team who have been supporting a wide range of community organisations, businesses and farms to prepare projects and applications for funding.

As well as investing £1.76 million in rural projects in the area, the LEADER programme has also levered in an additional £3.23 million into the area. This created and safeguarded 95 jobs, directly supported 678 enterprises and created or improved 50 community facilities.

Convenor of the Finance and Economy Committee, Councillor Margaret Brisley said: "By supporting these grassroots projects and ideas, either for new start-ups or existing businesses taking a new direction, we have been able to empower our local communities, giving confidence to a community or business to make something happen which will benefit their wider area."

"We find that the most resilient, strongest and effective projects are those that have the community at their heart. The impact and benefits of these rural initiatives are wide-ranging; delivering confidence, mental health improvements, physical activity, improved income opportunities, access to services and support, friendship and so much more."

Vice Convenor Alison Laurie said: "There have been numerous benefits that have come through the LEADER funding, from creating and safeguarding jobs, to the setting up of businesses, new products and area-wide events, all of which will help rural areas prosper in future."

"A key part of LEADER is about learning and sharing learning, and the positive experiences that have already been achieved will help guide the development of future community and locally led projects.

"LEADER is an EU and Scottish Government funded programme which is part of the Scottish Rural Development Programme and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. Examples of project successes for Forth Valley and Lomond LEADER have included:

Creating resilient and Smart Communities

The Rural Food Hubs project led by Forth Environment Link

- Having already set up a 'Neighbourfood Hub' in the city centre, the project organised 'Click and Collect' local food hubs in Balfron and Killin to service rural South West and Highland Stirling, along with local hosts G63 and Scrumptious Garden.
- Both markets found their services were very much in demand during the Covid-19 lockdown, with 34 food producers supplying to customers in Balfron and 20 to the market in Killin. Satellite pick up points were also set up in Killearn, Aberfoyle and Drymen with volunteers also delivering to people who were shielding during lockdown.

Investing in sustainable economic actions

Fishing Around the Forth

The project has supported 20 fisheries in the FVL area.

- The project saw creation of a hub including website and online ticketing for wild fisheries to use. This allowed the fisheries to adapt to changing times during the pandemic.
- Fishing around the Forth has supported outdoor recreation by promoting fishing available along with tourism to the fisheries.
- Having resources during these times when many businesses did not save the 2020 fishing season.

Preparing climate actions

Loch Earn Railway Path Phase 4

- The completion of Phase 4 has enabled people to use 1.8km of route that was previously difficult to navigate, as an alternative option of travelling actively, instead of using the busy A85 trunk road.
- The new route allows for the comfortable navigation for path users while still accommodating for farm and estate use.
- Although one section does come off the old railway line, the path alignment is as direct as feasibly possible while ensuring an enjoyable, scenic route.

Fostering partnership working

Local Food and Drink Co-ordinator

- The project aimed to increase the range and number of local food production, processing and retail outlets and marketing opportunities in the area.
- The project saw production of the Alive with Local Food Strategy, a well-researched strategy focusing on support for the local food and drink economy.
- It supported the setting up of the Local Food Business Network to increase the visibility of local food businesses and facilitate better collaboration between businesses.
- It helped establish a Forth Valley Food Festival to become an annual promotional campaign to celebrate local food businesses and give visitors a chance to experience local food.

Social Inclusion and addressing inequalities.

Barrwood Camp Ground Extension Project

- The project aimed to develop facilities and paths, and enhance biodiversity to allow customers and members of the public to access a previously inaccessible area of the Barrwood.
- The infrastructure provided by this project has proved very attractive to customers of all ages and abilities, and has been well used over the last eighteen months.
- The Trust is experiencing increased residential use by youth groups, all of whom enjoy more active outdoor experiences when present.
- Increased day visitor numbers and more walkers passing through have also been noticed.

With a significant increase expected for postal votes amid the ongoing Coronavirus Pandemic, the deadline for postal vote registration has been brought forward to 6 April to allow the anticipated surge in applications to be processed in time for the vote count.

Carol Beattie, Constituency Returning Officer for Stirling and Stirling Council Chief Executive, said: "The process of voting in this year's election is going to look very different because of Covid.

"Significant changes will be made to polling stations and our vote count location to make sure everyone taking part in this year's election in whatever capacity can do so safely and in line with government restrictions.

"If you're 16 or over, it is time to start thinking about how this will affect you, especially if you want to use a postal vote. Our advice is to check if you're registered now and consider your options for voting in the weeks ahead.

"The Electoral Registration Office for Central Scotland is the key source of information on voter registration for residents in Stirling. Information on registering and methods of voting are available on its website and letters have already been sent to households across Stirling with the current voter registration status of occupants.

Pete Wildman the ERO for the Stirling Council area said: "I would encourage anyone who wishes to vote by post at this election to apply now for their postal vote.