

LEADER

Community-Led Local Development



National Rural Network

LEADER Newsletter No. 2 December 2018

Focus on the LEADER Programme 2014-2020

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The LEADER Programme 2014-2020

Welcome to the National Rural Network's second annual newsletter focusing on issues relating to the LEADER 2014-2020 Programme. LEADER programme activity has increased significantly during 2018, with the value of funding approved in 2018 more than double the amount approved in 2017. In total, 1,536 projects have now been approved for funding of over €51.6 million. This level of approvals represents 32% of the total project budget allocated to the Local Action Groups (LAGs) for the current Programme. When projects which have received provisional approval are also factored in, the level of approvals rises to over €58 million or approximately 36% of project funding. A further 386 project applications, requesting an additional €24 million, are at various stages in the approval process.

The highest number of LEADER project approvals are in the basic services targeted at hard to reach communities sub theme and the rural tourism sub theme. There is also very strong activity associated with enterprise development projects and the regeneration of rural towns.

The LEADER projects approved to date are supporting about 1,100 community organisations and 400 rural businesses. Over 1,000 of the projects involve investment in areas such as construction and renovation costs, or the purchase of equipment. The remainder involve training courses, marketing supports and funding for the analysis and development work that underpins new products, services and community supports.

The LEADER Food Initiative is also beginning to gain momentum with 12 projects approved in December for LEADER funding of approximately €560,000. The range of approved projects reflects the diversity of food businesses operating throughout rural Ireland and includes consumer food businesses in the bakery, confectionary, snack, meat and fish product sectors.

Project payments have also increased significantly in recent months, as approved works are completed and claims are submitted. Over €11 million of project expenditure has been incurred in 2018, compared to just under €700,000 in 2017.

Total expenditure on the LEADER programme since it commenced, effectively in 2016, has amounted to over €34 million. This includes project payments, administration costs of the Local Action Groups and the cost of their engagement with communities to generate projects.

The progress now being made by the Local Action Groups in approving projects is expected to result in a continued increase in project approvals and payments under the LEADER programme into 2019. This progress has been assisted by improvements made by the Department of Rural and Community Development to the applications and approvals process. These changes are made in consultation with the LAGs based on their experience in delivering the programme.



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Ireland's EU Structural and
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2014 - 2020

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An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
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The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development: Europe
investing in rural areas.



An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
Community Development



The LEADER Concept

The LEADER programme is based on the 'bottom-up' approach. A European Commission report entitled 'The LEADER Approach – A basic guide, represents the rationale behind LEADER in the following manner: 'the main concept behind the LEADER initiative is that, given the diversity of European rural areas, development strategies are more effective and efficient if decided and implemented at local level by local actors, accompanied by clear and transparent procedures, the support of the relevant public administrations and the necessary technical assistance for the transfer of good practice' (European Commission, 2006, p.8).

7 Key Principles of LEADER

The LEADER approach is based on 7 key principles – all of which must collaborate and positively interact for it to be successful. Indeed, it is important to consider these 7 principles as a toolkit, rather than as separate entities, that can work together to safeguard and build a brighter future for rural communities.



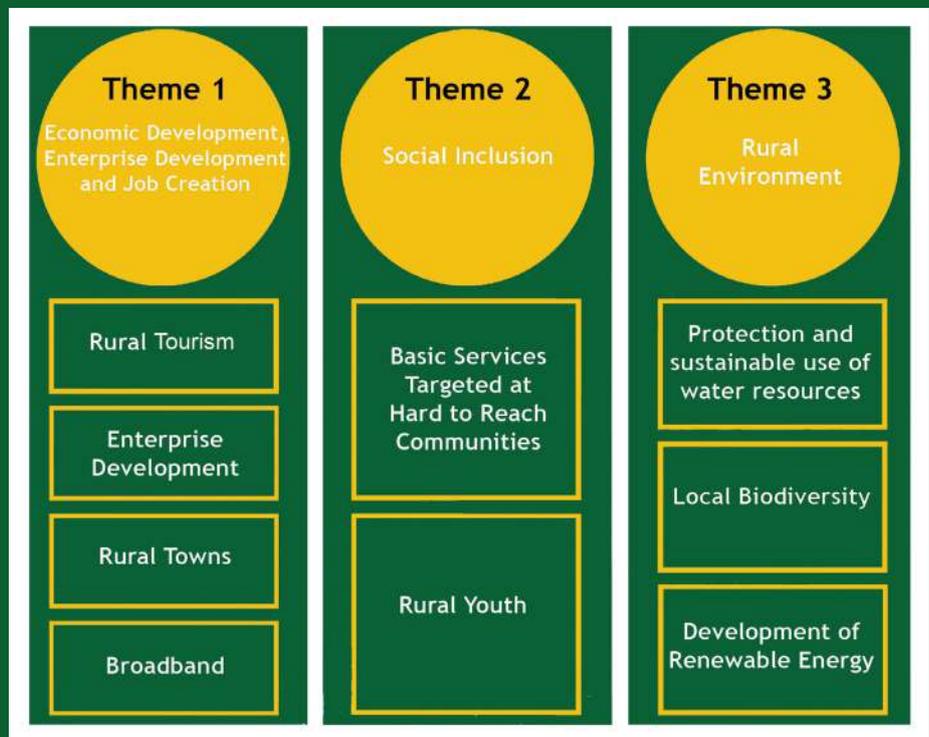
A detailed description of these 7 key principles of LEADER can be found here:
<https://tinyurl.com/y7mqg2z6>

LEADER 2014-2020 Themes and Sub-Themes

The current LEADER budget allocated to Ireland, funded through Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (RDP), provides €250 million in financial aid to promote social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural communities, up to the year 2020.

LEADER 2014-2020 includes themes that reflect the overarching needs of rural Ireland. Each theme contains a number of sub-themes which are considered the key areas in need of the greatest support and have the greatest potential to promote the sustainable development of rural communities in Ireland.

The diversity of projects funded to date under these three themes illustrates how LEADER funding can provide both private enterprise and community groups with the resources necessary to actively engage and direct the economic and social development of their particular area, through community-led local development.



Irish Local Action Groups (LAGs) and Implementing Partners (IPs)

Decisions on LEADER funding are made at a local level by a network of Local Action Groups (LAGs), through the framework of a community-led, Local Development Strategy (LDS). LAGs are made up of groups of people from the local community as well as both public and private partners from a defined geographical area. Currently, there are 29 LAGs who have contracts in place with the Department of Rural and Community Development to support the sustainable development of their sub-regional area. Within each of the LAGs, Implementing Partners (IPs) are responsible for the day to day management and co-ordination of the Rural Development Programme 'on the ground'. These companies provide rural communities and local businesses in the catchment area of the region they are located with various supports, such as advice, training and mentoring on behalf of the LAGs.

An interactive map featuring all Irish LAGs and IPs can be found in the LEADER section of the NRN website: <http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader-map>

This helpful 'one-stop-shop' map outlines the geographical boundaries of each of the 29 LAGs located throughout Ireland as well as an updated list of the Implementing Partners (IPs) located in each LAG region. This freely available database provides those interested in accessing funding under the LEADER Programme 2014-2020, with easy and convenient access to information about the Local Development Strategy

and geographical coverage of their LAGs. It also contains relevant contact details, as well as links to each of the LAGs and IPs websites and social media pages. A static version of this map, and a database list of all Irish LAGs and IPs have also been updated on the LEADER section of the NRN website.



Source: National Rural Network
Image Credit: National Rural Network

LEADER and the Rural Environment Workshop

Over 30 delegates attended the 'LEADER and the Rural Environment' workshop organised by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the NRN held in the Radisson Hotel, Athlone on the 20th of April 2018. The LEADER Programme plays an important role in maximising the potential of environmental actions that contribute to the sustainable development and protection of rural areas throughout Ireland and the EU.

The purpose of this workshop was to build capacity amongst members of the Local Action Groups and Implementing Partners under the 'Rural Environment' theme of the LEADER Programme 2014-2020. Workshop attendees' awareness and knowledge of the three sub-themes of this particular theme (Protection and Sustainable use of Water Resources; Local Biodiversity and Renewable Energy), were enhanced by the informative content presented by three key note speakers with expertise in each area, followed by examples of project initiatives funded under each sub-theme. Dr Fran Igoe, from the Waters and Communities Office, initially spoke about the role of LEADER and its function in the protection and sustainable use of water resources, while Rosemary Sweeney, presented the Inishowen Coastal Explorers Programme as a project example funded under this particular sub-theme. In relation to the potential of LEADER and the enhancement of local biodiversity, Dr Alex Copland, from BirdWatch Ireland provided attendees with an overview of this sub-theme, followed by an example of a project in Wicklow by Bryan Fennell, from County Wicklow Partnership. Phil Walker, Econcertive then spoke about the innovative nature of the LEADER Programme in relation to renewable energy development in rural areas. A talk by James Duffy, from Leitrim Development Company, about a project in this area in Co. Leitrim followed Phil's presentation.



Each sub-themed session was followed by a breakout session, where workshop delegates explored possible project ideas funded under the Rural Environment LEADER theme. Posters, produced by Dr Shane Conway and Dr Maura Farrell on behalf of the NRN, promoting 12 projects funded under this particular theme were also on display at this workshop.

Source: National Rural Network
Image Credit: National Rural Network

NRN LEADER Communication Strategies presented at ENRD Workshop

The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) held a NRN Communication workshop in Prague, Czech Republic, on the 1st of June, 2018. This workshop was organised back-to-back with the 11th NRN Meeting which took place on the 31st of May 2018 in the same venue. James Claffey, NRN Manager, and Dr Shane Conway, Researcher at NUI Galway and with the NRN attended both of these events on behalf of the NRN.

The ENRD NRN Communication workshop brought together over 70 Network Support Unit representatives dealing with rural development communication tasks from across the EU, to discuss ways of reinforcing networking opportunities, and to improve communication activities at both the national (NRN) and European (ENRD) levels. This event reflected the ever-increasing need for communication-related peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing that has emerged as a significant topic of interest for many NRNs.

Workshop participants exchanged the different practices of communication that they employ in their member state to reach their targeted audiences. This allowed delegates to learn from each other's past experiences in an interactive workshop setting, and also take stock of successful and inspiring examples that can easily be transferable to other NRNs. Dr Conway presented the Irish NRN's digital communication strategies and methods at this event.

Leaflets detailing the various communication efforts carried out by Ireland's NRN were also produced by the ENRD in advance of the Communication workshop and then distributed to those in attendance. These leaflets featured the Irish NRNs 'Interactive Map of Irish LAGs', the 'LEADER and the Rural environment Project Database' and our 'Young Trained Farmer Case Study'.

More information about this event can be found here:

<https://tinyurl.com/y9mbrdb4>

Source: ENRD & National Rural Network
Image Credit: ENRD



ENRD 'Smart Villages' Thematic Group

The NRN are currently participating in a Thematic Group on the 'Smart Villages' concept, coordinated by the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD). This group explores how rural services can be improved and made more sustainable and innovative through the deployment of ICT tools and/or by supporting community-led actions and projects. The LEADER Programme is well positioned to act as a key driver in achieving this 'smart' revolution of rural towns and villages through its bottom up, community-led local development (CLLD) framework. According to Phil Hogan, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development 'Smart villages are all about making different policies work together to find better, smarter ways to promote holistic rural development. It is about harnessing existing and emerging technologies and social innovations to add value to the lives of our citizens. It is about giving villages the tools to address their own challenges while also making a contribution to the bigger challenges facing society as a whole'. Six ENRD 'Smart Villages' Thematic Group meetings have taken place to date.



If you already have, or are planning to develop and implement a 'smart' and innovative project in your local community that provides basic services to rural citizens through the use of ICT, digital technologies and/or social innovation, please email shane.conway@nuigalway.ie and we can share this information with the ENRD Thematic Group. Your experience will benefit others with similar initiatives.

TELI2 (Transnational Education in LEADER Implementation)

Transnational Education in LEADER implementation (TELI2), funded by the ERASMUS+ Programme of the European Union, was a multi-actor transnational project which sought to develop and further enhance the knowledge, skills and competences of staff within Local Action Groups (LAGs) / Local Development Companies (LDCs). This was achieved through supporting neo-endogenous rural development initiatives vis-à-vis the LEADER programme within their respective administrative areas. The 30-month project commenced in September 2016 and it was coordinated by Limerick Institute of Technology. The project consortium also included another higher education institute, the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia. The LAGs /LDCs participating in the project included: Stowarzyszenie Lokalna Grupa Działania "Dolina Raby" – Poland; SECAD-South & East Cork Area Development – Ireland; Local Action Group Dobrogea Centrala - Romania; Razvojna agencija Kozjansko - Slovenia; Lokalna Akcijska Grupa 'Zeleni Bregi'- Croatia; Monte Desenvolvimento Alentejo Central, ACE – Portugal; Okalna Akcijska Grupa Zrinska Gora (TUROPOLJE) – Croatia; and ADRIMAG – Portugal.



While a common philosophy underlies the LEADER approach in all countries, it is delivered in a variety of different ways by the EU member states. The TELI2 project sought to explore the different approaches, thereby providing innovative insights into the most efficient and effective modes of implementation of the LEADER programme across Europe. Other objectives of the project were the up-skilling of LEADER delivery organisations through life-long learning; the enhancement of the possibility of LEADER staff mobility; and an increase in the number of transnational projects which may arise from the creation of networks and relationships. TELI2 was also a reflection of practical learning. While it clearly acknowledged the benefits of a theoretical foundation to understanding, it also recognised that learning in practice, learning together and learning from shared experience develops knowledge and understanding in a very special way. The international week-long workshops were, therefore, fundamental to the vision of the TELI2 project and to the nature of the learning which it was hoped would arise.

Overall, the learners who pursued the Certificate in LEADER Programme Management were very satisfied with the content and delivery structure. It provided ample opportunities for discussion on best practices; reflection on the fundamentals of LEADER and how it can be applied in participants' own LAGs; and application of theoretical concepts in practice.



The project initially entailed a research study on the delivery and implementation of the LEADER programme in each of the partner countries. This entailed outlining the modus operandi of LEADER programme delivery; key priorities for Local Development Strategies; benefits and challenges associated with the LEADER programme; and workforce requirements (knowledge / skills / competencies) for implementing the LEADER programme at LAG level. This information was utilised in designing a high quality accredited course (Certificate in LEADER Programme Management – special purpose award) by Limerick Institute of Technology. This course was delivered using a blended learning model with the incorporation of transnational workshops / field visits in Ireland, Portugal and Poland; and delivery of online content. For more information on the TELI2 project and the Certificate in LEADER Programme Management please see: <http://teli2.eu/>

The NRN were involved in the running of a TELI2 Project Seminar held in LIT Campus, Thurles on Wednesday the 29th of August 2018. This event, supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development, was organised by LIT in partnership with SECAD and the NRN. A great selection of photos taken at this event can be found on the NRN's Flickr account: <https://tinyurl.com/yal8mabf>

For expressions of interest with respect to pursuing the Certificate in LEADER Programme Management in September 2019, please contact Mr. Seamus Hoyne, Development and Public Engagement Manager, seamus.hoyne@lit.ie or **+353 (0)504 28114**

Dr. Shane O'Sullivan, Limerick Institute of Technology

Implementing the LEADER Approach: The Role of the Development Officer

Within each of the 29 Local Action Groups (LAGs) are Implementing Partners (IPs) who work on the ground with communities, businesses and other groups assisting them avail of opportunities to support the implementation of Local Development Strategies and delivery of the LEADER Programme under the Rural Development Programme 2014-20.

Development Officers are central personnel that play a varied role in the policy implementation process. For example, they provide information, advice and assistance with project planning and development, present projects to their Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), while also monitoring and reviewing project compliance.

We chatted to James Duffy, Development Officer at Leitrim Development Company about the role, some of the core skills needed, as well as rewards and challenges faced.

Projects as systems

James has worked as a Development Officer on the LEADER programme since 2005. With his background in Mechanical Engineering, Masters in Manufacturing Systems Engineering and previous work experience as a Technical Support Officer with the Northern Ireland Energy Agency he is well placed to have a specialist focus on energy-related projects.

James explains: "Although a world away from Rural Development, my educational background allows me to treat each project as a system. I can break a project into its constituent parts and simplify the process as much as possible for the promoter. Through my role with the Northern Ireland Energy Agency I developed my knowledge of the energy efficiency and renewable energy sectors, along with an in-depth understanding of multiple funding programmes".



James Duffy (right) at the launch of the Lovely Leitrim Restaurant Barge that traverses the Shannon-Erne waterway and docks en route. Image Credit: Leitrim Development Company

Bottom-up development working at the coal face

James' focus broadened to all project types for the LEADER 2007-13 programme and he continues to work on all project types with a specific interest in energy-related projects. The specialist knowledge James holds taps into an area of huge potential to support sustainable rural development: "I specialise in energy and the environment. Community energy production has the potential to be a game changer in rural Ireland as an alternative source of community income".

For James the core value and importance of the LEADER Programme is the bottom-up approach. Development Officers are embedded in communities and work with a programme that is developed in line with county-level needs. James mentions some of the key assets and benefits of the LEADER approach: "We have the opportunity to listen to the needs of the public and hopefully orientate a programme and delivery model to cater for their needs. Few other programmes are developed specifically on a county basis, very few have localised decision making and practically none offer local development officers to assist with project development".

Core skills

From time and project management, to strong interpersonal, communication and problem-solving skills, Development Officers must possess and put a diverse skillset into practice. James says: "LEADER is a heavy, paper-based programme. It is vital to be good at both time management and project management. It is important that the programme is maintained on tight timeframes and that there is a limited processing time of applications and claims".

Development Officers must also be responsive, providing tailored information and assistance to guide promoters through the LEADER system. "Most promoters are volunteers who are at a loss when it comes to the bureaucratic nuances of the programme. The project officer should not police the promoters work nor frighten them with lists of technical jargon. We should determine their capacity from early on and tailor the service we offer to suit their needs" according to James. A strong working relationship is crucial at a number of levels, such as with project promoters, the Department of Rural and Community Development, Pobal and the Local Authority.

Rewards and challenges

LEADER funding plays a vital role to assist rural communities and enterprises to grow and develop, meeting important local needs. James tells us Development Officers are often “the bearer of good news” which makes the role very rewarding. They are present right through from project development to completion and can “see the benefits projects bring to the promoters and wider communities” according to James.

One of the key challenges James highlights is when really good projects don't fit within the LEADER Operating Rules. James notes that rules are vital and must be stringent however drawbacks can also emerge: “With each iteration of the LEADER programme fewer innovative projects are proceeding as rule restrictions do not allow for outside the box thinking. I have great belief in the spirit of this programme and generally we have had good success working closely with the Department to break down barriers that restrict these projects. But more could always be done to simplify the process and promote innovation”.



James Duffy (right) at a study tour of gasification log systems across Fermanagh and Donegal. Image Credit: Leitrim Development Company



James Duffy (back right) at the Polish-Irish culinary night held at the Food Hub in Drumshanbo as part of a transnational project with two Polish LAGs. Image Credit: Leitrim Development Company

James tells us that he believes social and community enterprises need continued support and nurturing and have huge potential value to rural Ireland when developed. James explains: “True social and community enterprises not only provide a constant revenue stream for local communities but also provide much needed services locally and increase employment. The question over the rate of aid for these projects has had a detrimental effect on this priority in the current programme”.

Perceptions and public opinion

While there is a good level of public awareness of the LEADER Programme in Leitrim, another issue challenging implementation is people view the funding as difficult to access because of the work involved in preparing an application and the level of paperwork required. James says: “This is definitely true of the smaller projects which often generate more paperwork than the larger ones. Procurement has become a real point of contention within the programme especially for small construction related works”. James also notes this is a wider issue: “I think throughout Ireland it is unfortunately perceived as a bureaucratic monster. This to an extent is an unfair perception, however too often bad publicity has fed this public opinion”.

Case Study - SWEETS Community and Adult Education Centre: Supporting the Development of Rural Digital Skills

South Westmeath Employment Education and Training Services (SWEETS) is a social enterprise and community services project located in Kilbeggan, county Westmeath providing community adult education and training since 1997. SWEETS is an accredited FETAC QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) training centre and is registered with SOLAS as a training organisation. Alongside this, SWEETS acts as a community information centre and provides a wide range of other services to the community from event facilities for local groups to CV preparation, mock interview advice and practice.

IT training is a core activity of SWEETS. This LEADER project provided SWEETS with a grant of €6,655.68 supporting SWEETS to upgrade its laptop equipment. This LEADER grant provided for 75% of the cost of 16 new Dell Vostro laptops which included Microsoft Office software.

The equipment facilitates SWEETS to deliver higher quality IT courses in a more effective learning environment. Improvements in training delivery aids better student experiences, learning and confidence building. Martha McMahan, IT Tutor with SWEETS explains: "We can't be two steps behind and the new laptops help us to move forward. We couldn't proceed without the new laptops to provide training that is fair to all students. The upgraded equipment helps us provide training to students on a level playing field".



SWEETS location at the Crescent, Kilbeggan, Co. Westmeath.

Image Credit: NRN

The new equipment has also allowed SWEETS to accommodate bigger groups in computer classes. Small class sizes are important to SWEETS but classes that previously averaged around 8 people can now be increased to 10 or more.

SWEETS IT training is a vital service to the local rural community supporting access and engagement with the modern digital world, bringing social and economic benefits to the area. It instils confidence so that people can effectively engage with and benefit from digitisation. SWEETS QQI computer courses are a stepping stone for people returning to education and/or wishing to pursue further education and training, as well as those seeking their first time occupation, to advance/up-skill in their current job or change jobs.

For more information see: www.sweets.ie



IT course at SWEETS training centre.

Image Credit: SWEETS

The project also supports the continued professionalism and quality of computer training provided by SWEETS. Brendan McGough, Manager of SWEETS explains: "We have to be mindful of our reputation as a QQI training centre at all times. As an adult education and training centre it is important that we have modern, up to date equipment to ensure the best outcome for our clients". The current stock of laptops did not provide the capacity and quality needed by SWEETS. The age of the laptops created challenges for tutors such as technical issues arising during classes. Issues with slow laptops, different keyboard layouts or software versions is eliminated in classes using these machines.

LEADER Forum 2018

Dr Shane Conway (NUIG/NRN) presented the work carried out by the NRN in relation to communicating and promoting LEADER outcomes at the recent LEADER Forum held in the Tullamore Court Hotel, Tullamore, Co Offaly on Thursday the 13th of September 2018.

The purpose of this Forum, hosted by Michael Ring TD, Minister for Rural and Community Development, was to review progress to date under the current programme as well as to consult with LEADER Stakeholders on the content and delivery of the next LEADER Programme following the publication of the EU Commission's proposals for the 2017-2021 period.

Presentations from this event can be found on the Department of Rural and Community Development website:

<https://drcd.gov.ie/about/rural/rural-development/leader/guideline-documents-and-information-for-leader-2014-2020/>



Project Ireland 2040 'Creating Stronger Rural Economies and Communities'

Dr Maura Farrell, Lecturer in Rural Geography at NUI Galway, and Lead Researcher with the NRN, was an invited guest speaker at the Government of Ireland's Project Ireland 2040 'Creating Stronger Rural Economies and Communities' event held in Westport, Co. Mayo. on Friday the 13th of July 2018. Dr Farrell was included in the 'How do we create stronger rural communities?' session with An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar T.D. at this event, and highlighted the role of the LEADER Programme in leading rural Ireland forward over the next 20 years. Case studies and carried out by Dr Farrell and Dr Shane Conway as part of their work with the National Rural Network were also included in a Project Ireland 2040 report for rural Ireland launched at this event entitled 'Strengthening Rural Economies and Communities'.



New LEADER Theme 3 Project NRN Infographic and Storyboard



LEADER Programme 2014-2020

National Rural Network



Theme 3: Rural Environment - Project Examples



- 1 **Inch Island Wetland Biodiversity Project**
Local Action Group: Donegal LCDC
Implementing Partner: Inishowen Development Partnership
- 2 **River Tunnelling Project Training**
Local Action Group: Mayo LCDC
Implementing Partner: South West Mayo Development Company Ltd.
- 3 **Biomass Supply Chain Upgrade**
Local Action Group: Leitrim LCDC
Implementing Partner: Leitrim Development Company
- 4 **Installation of Heat Recovery Units at Hotel Doolin Events Barn**
Local Action Group: Clare Local Development Company
- 5 **Surveillance of Harmful Blue-green Algae in Lough Derg**
Local Action Group: Tipperary LCDC
Implementing Partner: North Tipperary LEADER
- 6 **Oola Tidy Towns Village Enhancement Plan**
Local Action Group: Limerick LCDC
Implementing Partner: Ballyhoura Development CLG

- 12 **Louth Village Biodiversity Plan**
Local Action Group: Louth LCDC
Implementing Partner: Louth LEADER Partnership
- 11 **Ballyboughal Environmental Workshop Series**
Local Action Group: Dublin Rural LEADER
Implementing Partner: Fingal LEADER Partnership
- 10 **Wicklow Way Partnership - Trails Inspection Template**
Local Action Group: Wicklow LCDC
Implementing Partner: County Wicklow Partnership
- 9 **Irish Wildlife Trust Laois/Offaly Branch - Meadow Maintenance**
Local Action Group: Laois LCDC
Implementing Partner: Laois Partnership Company
- 8 **Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF)**
Local Action Group: Kilkenny LEADER Partnership
- 7 **Glasha Hydro Project**
Local Action Group: Waterford LCDC
Implementing Partner: Waterford LEADER Partnership CLG



Brought to you by the Department of Rural and Community Development

LEADER has formed an integral part of the support framework for rural Ireland since it began in the early 1990's. The NRN team at NUIG have designed a new infographic promoting 12 inspiring project examples funded under Theme 3: Rural Environment of the LEADER Programme 2014-2020.

This informative infographic, as well as a new user-friendly interactive database highlighting these project examples, graphically displayed on a Storyboard platform, can be found on the LEADER section of the NRN website:

<https://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader>



Source: National Rural Network
Image Credit: National Rural Network



Join the NRN for Free

If you are Interested in issues related to the LEADER Programme, please sign up to the National Rural Network (NRN) on our website on www.nationalruralnetwork.ie. The NRN is part of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020.

Our ambition is to bring the RDP into the lives of as many people as possible by communicating its key opportunities and outputs to all relevant stakeholders.

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National Rural Network