



2014 - 2020
**LEADER
PROGRAMME
IMPACT
REPORT**

**COUNTY KILDARE
LEADER PARTNERSHIP**

**ENTERPRISE. TOURISM. SOCIAL INCLUSION.
COMMUNITY. ENVIRONMENT**



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investing in rural areas.



Kildare County Council
Comhairle Contae Chill Dara





MAKING A REAL DIFFERENCE

The LEADER Initiative (Liaisons entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale - Links between actions of rural development) was established by the European Commission in 1991 and is a method of mobilising and delivering rural development in local rural communities. The development of rural areas in the EU seeks to address a wide range of economic, social and environmental challenges. As this Impact Report shows, LEADER can and does make a real difference to the daily lives of people in rural areas.

In Kildare, LEADER has spent more than 25 years supporting innovative communities to respond to gaps in their society, economy and services. Seeing a community project to completion requires a vision, determination, a lot of patience and hard work. At the end of 2019 we were very pleased to present the Contract for Grant Aid to the **Castledermot Amenity Group** as support towards the first part of the development of a community playground at the Fairgreen, in conjunction with Kildare County Council. The work has progressed well in 2020 and this great addition to the town will soon be completed.





A PLACE-BASED APPROACH

BALANCING GLOBAL WITH LOCAL

The LEADER Programme is based on a principle of community-led local development, using a 'bottom-up' or community-led approach to rural development. The strength of this territorial approach is that it takes account of local geographical and governance conditions, resources and potential. It enables citizen participation, strengthens social capital, and cultivates local leadership.

It understands that local communities all around Kildare are best placed to identify their needs and address their challenges. We have seen this in the pride of the **Saint Mary's Brass and Reed Band** in Maynooth, seeking new uniforms to represent Ireland in an International competition, the culmination of many years work with young and old in the community.



LOCAL SUPPORT WHERE IT'S NEEDED

BLENDING LOCAL WITH NATIONAL

Over the past 25 years communities all around Kildare have shown huge creativity and energy in identifying ways to improve the living and working environment for their members. LEADER has sought to support this creativity and energy to drive social progress, and to enable groups to embrace social innovation and changemaking. In this way, LEADER sees that successful community groups are like problem solvers who translate their vision for their areas into reality.

The experience of 2020 has made everyone realize even more strongly the key role that the local community plays in responding to the needs of its members. We have seen that, in the face of major uncertainty, a government response by itself is not enough. Neither are individuals. We have needed local collective impact and local solutions - individuals, voluntary groups, agencies and businesses - stepping up and playing their part in providing services and caring for vulnerable members, such as in the community shop "**The Old Hardware**" in Narraghmore, which participated in the LEADER Social Enterprise Programme in 2018.



**ENTERPRISE. TOURISM.
COMMUNITY. ENVIRONMENT.**



1. SUPPORTING ENTERPRISE IDEAS

DIVERSIFYING THE RURAL ECONOMY

Rural areas make a major contribution to Ireland's overall economic success and development. One of the objectives of rural development policy, and therefore of the LEADER Programme, is to support the development of the local rural economy, improve the quality of life in rural areas, and to diversify the ways in which individuals can work there. It is clear that rural areas face particular challenges as regards growth, jobs and sustainability. One way to respond to this challenge is the creation of employment opportunities in rural areas in non-agricultural activities and services.

One small enterprise supported by the LEADER Programme is **Farm TV**, a television channel for Irish farmers and rural communities, producing video content - from social media videos to high end HD broadcast quality production.

DIVERSIFYING THE RURAL ECONOMY

REDHILLS STUD is set in 80 acres about 1.5 kms from Kildare town and is run by Karl and Jenny Heffernan. They decided to move their farm from its traditional arable and grassland use to build and run a top class, purpose-built livery yard and training centre incorporating the best design features and management practices they had garnered over years involved with horses in Ireland and on the Continent. In 2012, with LEADER assistance, they officially opened their doors for business for the first time, providing housing/livery for horses whose owners do not have space to house their animals but who wish to ride their horses in the evenings and at weekends.

The premises also developed an arena which holds successful eventing training and shows. They received further LEADER funding in this Programme to kit out a state-of-the-art therapeutic unit for sick and injured horses, with the ultimate goal of developing one of the best equestrian facilities in the country. The facility is unique in the service it offers to horse owners, whose horses may require up to six months rest and recovery after an injury. The boxes are designed in such a way as to allow horses extra space in their confinement which reduces stress and the possibility of injury.

This means that owners can care for sick horses in a way that was not possible before and, in many cases, provides a recovery pathway for horses which may not have had that option.



DIVERSIFYING THE RURAL ECONOMY



Stephen Morrison is a full-time farmer with a busy family farm at Hartwell, outside Kill, where he has an 80 cow suckler herd, taking all progeny to finish. He also has a tillage and forestry enterprise in place. He is not organic but is transitioning away from inputs and has worked hard in recent years to ensure that he farms in a balanced way, with increasing biodiversity and with low impact on the wildlife that share the land there. He has planted native woodland and a forest garden and links in with schools to spread awareness of ecological issues. His wife Heidi is a Visual Artist and Art Psychotherapist and this combination of creativity, therapy, mental wellbeing and a love for nature have all come together in the way they have diversified the use of the land to support creativity and mental health.

The **CREATIVE RETREAT CENTRE**, supported by LEADER, is their brainchild, a place close to nature for holistic and creative retreats. It is extremely timely in 2020 with the presence of COVID, as being in nature has significant beneficial effects on wellness, health, and overall mood. It is an excellent example as to how rural areas offer real opportunities in terms of their potential for growth in new sectors, and their role as a reservoir of natural resources.



2. SUPPORTING RURAL TOURISM

Tourism is a major growth sector in many rural areas, as it creates new employment opportunities and increases the overall attractiveness of an area. Rural development policy actively encourages tourism activities, through supporting small-scale infrastructure such as sign posting of tourist sites, recreational infrastructure, small capacity self-catering accommodation and the marketing of tourism products. The Kildare Local Development Strategy, developed in 2016, looked to stimulate creating new jobs in non-agricultural tourism activities.

An example of this can be seen in the **Redhills Adventure** established in 2014, set on what was once an old working farm only a few kilometers from Kildare town. It goes from strength to strength, and was featured in Outsider.ie as one of the top 50 Best Families Activities in Ireland.

SUPPORTING RURAL TOURISM

Another small tourism enterprise supported by the LEADER Programme is the **Kildare Maze**, located near Prosperous. The Kildare Maze is Leinster's largest hedge maze. It was grown to mark the Millennium and is designed in the shape of a St. Brigid's Cross. The fully grown hedge maze covers approximately 1.5 acres with more than 1.5 miles of paths, with hedges over 6 feet high. They opened in 2000 and are constantly developing and improving their efforts to provide a challenging and exciting day out for families at an affordable price. Out in the fresh air, families from all over Leinster and further afield come to enjoy a day together.

Funding received under this programme enhanced the existing tourism attraction by adding a new automated coffee machine, site furniture (picnic benches), a new information board, ice cream machine, branding and web design. The importance of small tourism products like this to the overall offering which the county offers cannot be over-estimated. Furthermore, local activities took on a heightened value in the county lockdowns which were seen in Kildare, and increased the spend of families who wished to enjoy themselves in their own county.



SUPPORTING RURAL TOURISM

Like other sections of society, the tourism and hospitality sector shows great imagination and creativity in the way it responds to the changing requirements of the market. This was evident in the LEADER supported **Santa's Magical Trail** in the Clonard Court Hotel, **Athy**. Last Christmas it gave employment to over 60 people during the festive period including the enthusiastic team of Willy Wonka with the Oompa Loompas, welcomingly increasing the visitor numbers to the south of the county through the families who stayed overnight in the hotel afterwards. They have had to modify the event this year, but, as in many other businesses, the show must go on.

This is just one of the new ways of engaging with the public which have had to be developed this year and the LEADER Programme will be one of the key supports going forward as this part of the rural economy bounces back and implements the lessons learnt from the Pandemic. The LEADER-supported strategic initiatives - the **Craft Network development and Training, Food Network development and Training** - will all have a key role to play as tourism adapts to the new circumstances and creates new ways of getting their products to the public.





3. SOCIAL INCLUSION : SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES

Rural Ireland contains some of our most vibrant and culturally distinctive communities. But there is no doubt that rural communities are under pressure and Ireland has seen a significant urban drift in the last 25 years. Rural areas across Ireland are undergoing rapid change, and a major focus of national government is to make rural Ireland a better place in which to live and work by revitalising towns and villages and improving the infrastructure necessary to make rural areas better places to live in. This is supported by the work of voluntary groups such as the **Maynooth Kilcock Lions Club** who received funding to install much needed Defibrillators in towns and villages in the north of the county.

The LEADER Programme can provide capital funding to communities to enhance facilities in disadvantaged and remote areas.

DEVELOPING COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Rural communities have rich traditions but cannot stay stuck in the past if they want to remain attractive places to live. This makes it necessary to look for new forms of presence and sharing for different services, such as retail, postal, school, and social. All around Kildare groups wish to maintain this balance between maintaining traditions and delivering up-to-date services.



One group which received support in this effort was the **Ballymore Eustace Concert Band**, founded in 1875 as the Wolfe Tone Brass and Reed Band. The concert band currently has 50 members of all ages, with another 30 in the junior band. LEADER funding helped the group to install a new heating system, and insulate and redecorate the Bandhall, making it a comfortable place to rehearse for old and young alike. As a result, both the band and the Hall has seen increased numbers and usage and the space can now play a greater role all year round in making the community a better place to live.



DEVELOPING COMMUNITY FACILITIES



In many rural areas it is the local sports club that is the focal point for many activities and a meeting place for most of the events that occur in the area. They are much more than just a place for professional athletes to gather. It is here that young and old meet for leisure, educational and community activities, and this has an important impact on the social and cultural life of the area, as well as on physical and mental health.

Rathcoffey walking track

The importance of mental health seriously came to the fore in the COVID pandemic in 2020, as did the need for community facilities which supported it in the local area. Rathcoffey GAA recognized this even before the onset of the pandemic and in 2019 installed a walking track with lighting supported by LEADER to allow members of the community exercise in the dark winter nights. This has turned out to be a lifesaver, especially during the lockdown and the emphasis on exercising close to home. The words of chairman John Cleary proved very true: *"LEADER funding enabled us to help promote healthier living and regular exercise to all in our community"*



DEVELOPING COMMUNITY FACILITIES



Sport is generally recognized as being central to the life of parish communities in Ireland, and we have seen growth in the number and types of facilities available in rural areas. This is normally due to the hard work of the volunteers associated with a club, and this was certainly evident in the work of **Clane Athletic club** and their drive to install a state of the art running club in the village.

It is very important to develop modern services and facilities in rural communities as a lack of services to the population hampers the development of rural areas, making them less attractive and encourages people, and economic activity, to leave.

Without LEADER support the Clane development would not have been possible. This was emphasised by the Chair of the club, John Finn: [LEADER funding] *"played a significant role in the development of the club and the delivery of this new track for the community"*



SUPPORTING GREATER INCLUSION



Priority 6 of the EU Rural Development policy is focused on "promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas". As part of this effort, the Kildare LEADER Programme is proud to have supported, even in a small way, the equipment needed for the **Sensational Kids** Hippotherapy service in Naas. Hippotherapy - from the Greek word hippos meaning horse - sees specially-trained occupational therapists apply the movement, rhythm, and repetition of the horse and the equestrian environment as a treatment strategy to help children achieve their individual therapeutic goals.

The sessions are run at JAG Equestrian Centre and have received great feedback from parents: *"Our little girl has developed a rapport with a horse that delights her while she is doing occupational therapy. Her confidence, and her attention span in school is soaring, now she is doing things that she would never do....I can only thank Sensational Kids from the bottom of my heart. I feel very positive and happy about her future. I know there are endless possibilities"*

Sensational Kids

Realising Potential Together





4. SUPPORTING THE ENVIRONMENT

Rural areas have a special role to play in the transition to a green and sustainable Europe, by mitigating climate change, providing alternatives to fossil fuels and developing the circular economy. A priority of EU policy is the promotion of resource efficiency and supporting the shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy in agriculture, food and forestry sectors. The Kildare LEADER Programme has supported these efforts locally, such as in the repair works to the hydroelectricity Infrastructure at **Celbridge Mill** under the Renewable Energy sub-theme of the Programme. The Mill will now be able to more efficiently create its own green and sustainable energy, generating electricity to be fed into the national grid, creating income which allows the Community Centre provide services for the whole community.

SUPPORTING RENEWABLE ENERGY



Renewable energy is energy generated from renewable, non-fossil based energy sources which are replenished in a human lifetime. Using more energy from these sources is crucial to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and our dependence on fossil fuels and imported energy and thus contribute to the security of our energy supply. Moreover, renewable energy can play an important role as a driver of sustainable development in rural areas.

Strawchip Ltd., a farming business run by three brothers, Francis, Diarmuid and Gavin Owens near Athy, is a good example of this philosophy. The brothers grow a range of cereal crops and produce a range of straw-based products. They received LEADER funding in May 2019 to allow them develop the value-added story of straw for their company, which is developing pellets for biomass heating appliances in the domestic and commercial sector. Getting into this market requires serious investment in the form of a large-scale pelleting machine. By getting LEADER grant aid to purchase this machine, some of the financial risk for the company was taken away which has allowed them to focus on what they do best – innovate with straw.

This project is a unique offering in the market and a nice example of funding across LEADER themes - supporting a small business, promoting farm diversification and developing a cleaner environment.

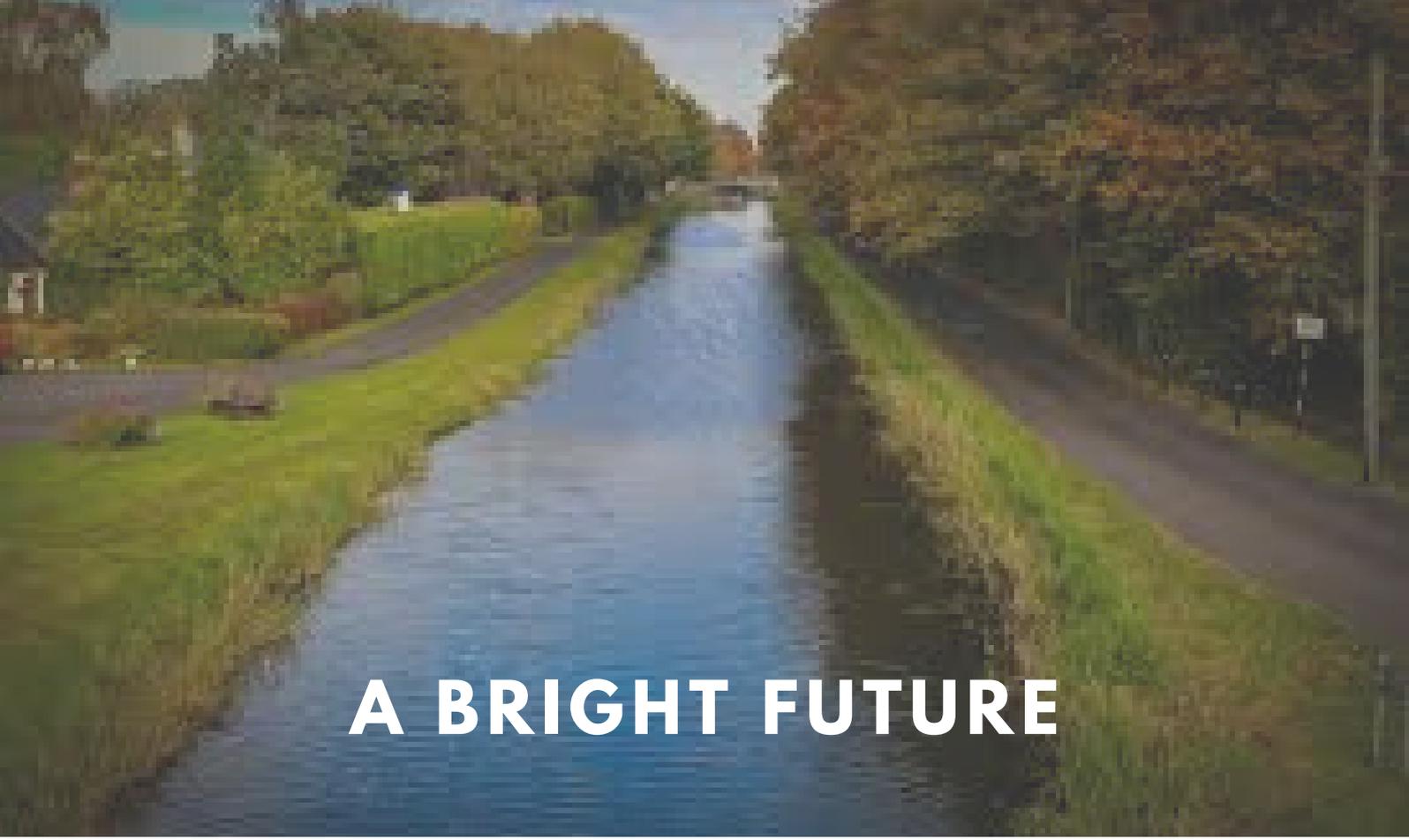
SUPPORTING CLIMATE ACTION



Sustainable development is a key European policy priority and also a prime concern for National Government with the publication of the Climate Action Plan in 2019, and the cross-party report by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action entitled, 'Climate Change: A Cross- Party Consensus for Action'. Therefore a key role for the LEADER Programme is building the capacity of communities to be able to make this policy a reality in local areas, and one way this was done was through a training project called **Communities 4 Climate Action**.

Fifty-six people registered for the programme and it kicked off in September 2019 with a full day session in Solas Bhríde in Kildare town. It then continued weekly in Athy for a 3-hour session on different aspects of climate action, including Sustainable Production and Consumption, Managing Energy and Transport, and Sustainable Land Use. After the course finished up, four workshops were organised for the course participants on how to source LEADER funding for their ideas





A BRIGHT FUTURE

LEADER STRATEGIC NETWORKS

More than just grant giving, the LEADER Programme is a developmental programme and one of the key ways it does this is through networking and cooperation. A key goal of LEADER is to interact with a variety of different stakeholders and actors from different sectors and to exchange best practises with organisations working in the field of rural development. In Kildare, LEADER has built strategic networks and strong working relationships with Kildare County Council, the LEO, the Sports Partnership, Waterways Ireland, and CARO, amongst others.

Another way that this aim is achieved is through increasing the capacity of those involved in different sectors. Since 2016 this can be seen in the number of training programmes and strategies developed: the *Social Enterprise Programme 2018*, the *Climate Change & Community Programme "Communities 4 Climate Action" 2019*, *Digital Readiness Training 2019*, *Craft Network development and Training 2019*, *Biodiversity Training 2020*, *Food Network development and Training 2020*, and the *Barrow Blueway Economic Strategy and Plan 2020*.



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COUNTY KILDARE LEADER PROGRAMME 2014 - 2020



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Committee