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**What is LEADER?**

LEADER is a long established programme for rural development, across the European Union, which by its nature is “bottom-up” and community lead. The central element of the LEADER approach is that communities are the key decision makers when it comes to deciding how funding should support their own areas. This is founded on the belief that people who live and work in rural communities are best placed to decide what support is needed to facilitate the development of their communities.

Wexford Local Development (WLD), and its predecessor W.O.R.D., has a proven track record in the delivery of the LEADER programme in County Wexford over the past 24 years. During the lifetime of the last LEADER Programme (2007-2013), WLD strategically invested over €5m into communities. This was achieved through the successful planning and delivery of 182 individual community group projects. Similarly, €4.5m was invested into the development of 206 rural enterprises throughout the county.

**What is changing?**

In line with recent local government reform, the new Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) based in Wexford County Council, will have overall responsibility for the delivery of the next LEADER Programme in the county. The key implementation partner will be Wexford Local Development. The LCDC vision for County Wexford is *“a place where citizens and communities have a better social and economic quality of life made possible by improving their opportunities for employment and successfully addressing inequality”*.

For the period 2015-2020, a national budget of €250m has been approved. This is part funded from the EU (€157m) and the Irish exchequer (€93m). Co Wexford has been allocated €9.8m. In order to secure this funding allocation, Wexford LCDC must now prepare a high quality local development strategy (LDS) that reflects the needs of businesses and communities in the County.

With this in mind WLD, in partnership with Wexford LCDC, are now commencing a wide-ranging consultation process which will inform and direct the drafting of the LDS for Co. Wexford.

**What is a Local Development Strategy (LDS)?**

In the context of LEADER, the LDS is a plan designed by local people to support the sustainable development of their own areas. The completed LDS will be the roadmap for rural development in County Wexford from now until 2020. Your cooperation will ensure that the LDS will:

* be a realistic reflection of how LEADER funding might be best used to support the sustainable development of County Wexford
* be designed using the “bottom-up” process i.e. through facilitating participation by members of local communities
* take full consideration of not just local needs but also future local potential
* be complementary to the overall planning processes and outcomes developed by Wexford County Council in line with the Government’s commitment to a more integrated approach to local development

**What are the priorities under this new LEADER Programme?**

The Department of Environment, Community & Local Government has confirmed that the LEADER measure of the new EU Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 will be programmed under Priority 6 – detailed as follows:

***“Promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas”***

In keeping with this focus, the followingare the suggested themes that can be considered when preparing the LDS**:**

* **Economic Development, Enterprise Development & Job Creation:**
  + *Rural tourism (feasibility studies, marketing, infrastructure, adventure/eco tourism)*
  + *Enterprise development (Artisan foods, social enterprises, creative industries, marine, renewable energy, sector specific training)*
  + *Broadband (Basic ICT Training, small scale equipment, skills development, community feasibility studies)*
  + *Rural towns (business themed renewal schemes, community buildings, development & promotion of unique events/activities)*
* **Social Inclusion:**
* *Basic services for hard to reach communities (establish or improve services e.g.: facilities, education/training, social/cultural, recreational, retail & finance, personal support)*
* *Rural youth(Promotion & training in youth entrepreneurship, social infrastructure including youth clubs/cafes, sports/recreation activities, arts projects, youth development programmes)*
* **Rural Environment:**
  + *Protection and sustainable use of water resources (water conservation awareness, conservations/studies, community rainwater harvesting programmes)*
  + *Protection & improvement of Local Biodiversity (Training, studies/action plans for large scale projects, upgrading parks, river walks, establishment of nature corridors, habitat creation & planting native species)*
  + *Development of renewable energy (green technology awareness training/studies, capacity building on installation/use of renewable technologies, capital funding for sustainable energy alternatives)*
* **Support for Food Producers**:
* *Support for regional product development*
* *Marketing and processing support for strategically identified sectors*