

What is LEADER?

The LEADER Programme has been operating in Ireland and across all EU member states since 1991. LEADER follows a community led local development approach that involves the participation of local people in developing responses to key economic, environmental and social challenges that exist in their areas. This approach ensures that communities are the key decision makers regarding funding to support their own areas. This is based on the belief that people who live and work in rural communities are best placed to decide what support is needed to facilitate development in their areas.

Wexford Local Development (WLD) have been involved in the delivery of the LEADER programme in County Wexford for the past 32 years. During the lifetime of the recently concluded LEADER Programme (2016-2022), WLD in partnership with Wexford Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) strategically invested almost €10m of LEADER funding across the county. Grant recipients include 164 community group projects as well as 116 niche enterprises. This has led to substantial job creation and a significant improvement in community facilities throughout the county.

What is happening now?

A new LEADER Programme co-funded by the EU & Irish exchequer will commence in late 2023 and operate until 2027. For this period, County Wexford has been allocated €7.3 million from an overall national budget of €180m. In order to secure this funding allocation, WLD with the cooperation of Wexford County Council & Wexford LCDC must now prepare a robust, high quality and representative Local Development Strategy (LDS). This is a detailed plan outlining how the money can be used for effective sustainable development in the county.

WLD are now commencing a wide-ranging consultation process that will inform and direct the drafting of the plan for Co. Wexford. This will ensure that the delivery of the next LEADER programme reflects the current and anticipated developmental needs of the county.

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 communities. The completed LDS will be the roadmap for rural development in County Wexford from now until 2027.

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 by the “bottom-up” process facilitating participation by members of local communities
- Take full consideration of not just local needs but also local potential.
- Be aligned to the overall planning processes and outcomes developed by Wexford County Council through the Local Economic & Community Plan (LECP) guiding the sustainable economic and community development of County Wexford.

What are the themes under this new LEADER Programme?

The Department of Environment, Community & Local Government has suggested the following themes for consideration when preparing the LDS:

- **Theme 1: Economic Development & Job Creation:**
 - **The Green Economy** (circular and bio-economy)
 - **Agricultural Diversification** (non-agricultural use such as recreational activities etc.)
 - **Rural tourism and Recreation** (outdoor adventure/eco-tourism, culture, heritage, festivals etc.)
 - **Enterprise Development** (with a specific focus on female entrepreneurs)
 - **Rural Food Production** (Artisan, micro, small & medium food producers)
 - **Social, Community & Cooperative Enterprises**
- **Theme 2: Rural Infrastructure & Social Inclusion:**
 - **Rural Infrastructure** (measures to develop and/or enhance rural infrastructures, in order to provide opportunities for more people to live and work in their rural communities)
 - **Accessible Services:** Improve access to services and increase social inclusion for people living in remote areas and groups at risk of social exclusion i.e.; hard to reach and new communities)
 - **Optimising Digital Connectivity** (IT infrastructure, digital skills and digital literacy)
 - **Rural Youth** (development of leadership skills, youth initiatives- excluding sport)
- **Theme 3: Sustainable Development of the Rural Environment and Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation (A cross-cutting issue for all LEADER funded projects):**
 - **Sustainable Development of the Rural Environment** (water resources, biodiversity, renewable energy)
 - **Climate Change Capacity Building**
 - **Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation**