

Kildare LEADER



Kildare Rural Development Programme 2023 – 2027 Local Development Strategy



Comhairle Contae Chill Dara
Kildare County Council



Ár dToghchaí
Tuaithe
Our Rural
Future



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ABBREVIATIONS

AIRO	All-Island Research Observatory – Maynooth University	EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy	ESB	Electricity Supply Board
CKLP	County Kildare LEADER Partnership CLG	ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
CLG	Company Limited by Guarantee	FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
CLLD	Community Led Local Development	OECD	The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
CSO	Central Statistics Office	POWSCAR	Place of Work, School, or College - Census of Anonymised Records
CYPSC	Children and Young People Services Committee	SME	Small to Medium Enterprise
DCU	Dublin City University	SPG	Strategic policy group
ED	Electoral Division		
ENRD	The European Network for Rural Development		
EOI	Expression of Interest		
EU	European Union		
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation		
IEC	Independent Evaluation Committee		
IFA	Irish Farmers Association		
IP	Implementing Partner		
KCC	Kildare County Council		
LAG	Local Action Group		
LCDC	Local Community Development Committee		
LDS	Local Development Strategy		
LEADER	“Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l’Économie Rurale”. (Links between activities for the development of rural economy)		
LECP	Local Economic and Community Plan		
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual and other sexual identities, and orientations.		
LEO	Local Enterprise Office		
MD	Municipal District		
NPF	National Planning Framework		
PPN	Public Participation Network		
RDP	Rural Development Programme		
RSES	Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy		
SA	Small Area		
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals		
SICAP	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme		
SHERPA	Sustainable Hub to Engage into Rural Policies with Actors		
SWOT	Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats		
WHO	World Health Organisation		
DEIS	Delivering Equality In Schools		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Kildare LEADER Local Development Strategy (LDS) 2023 – 2027 outlines how individuals and communities can be supported by the LEADER programme to develop initiatives to address the challenges that they face. The strategy is rooted in a philosophy of community-led local development (CLLD) and in the belief that local communities are best placed to develop ways to improve their economic, social, and environmental conditions, through innovative, sustainable solutions and digital technologies. However, the strategy acknowledges that CLLD requires continual effort and that some communities do lag behind and may require assistance to create local actions and improve their access to decision-making bodies. It seeks therefore not just to deliver initiatives, but also to enable rural communities to develop the necessary skills and resilience to respond to transition and adversity.

Kildare 2027:

A vision for stronger, more resilient, better connected, and more prosperous rural communities.

The vision for the Kildare LDS is of a more inclusive and vibrant county which creates both a positive sense of place, and the conditions for all citizens, young and old, to fully participate in the civic, economic, social, and cultural life of their communities.

Two Enabling Factors and Five Focus Areas

From the start of the planning process the LAG identified two key overall structural goals for the 2023 – 2027 period.

These were:

- a) To ensure that the LEADER Programme works in a strategic way, coordinating with other programmes in the county, avoiding duplication and ensuring that there is value added because of the work.
- b) To build the capacity of local communities so that community-led local development becomes a reality in the county, and that this is reflected in governing structures.

These became the two Enabling Factors for the success of the LDS.

- a) Develop integrated structures and a coordinated strategic approach to rural revitalisation. This ensures that the LEADER programme is not seen as a stand-alone process but works alongside and complements other strategies in the county, particularly the County Development Plan 2023 – 2029 and the Kildare Economic Development Strategy. To achieve this, the LDS has been written alongside the preparation for the new Kildare Local Economic and Community Plan and seeks to harmonize with this and the new SICAP (Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme) Plan, the county Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, and other plans.
- b) Develop Full and Active Citizenship by building the capacity of communities and providing them with the necessary skills and knowledge to participate in local structures and develop innovative projects. This will strengthen the development of multi-level and inclusive governance structures where the voices of local communities, women, young people, and marginalized groups can be directly heard and become influential.



These Enabling Factors underpin the 5 Focus Areas out of which the Objectives and Actions foster the development of vibrant rural communities. Rooted in a community-led local development (CLLD) ethos, the first two Focus Areas are aimed at People: building the capacity and resilience of local communities. The next three Focus Areas look to the future with innovation and sustainability at the centre, supporting the development of smart projects and initiatives.

1. Develop Social Capital

Local communities are the key actors for change. Develop the capacity of communities, develop leadership skills, and empower them to act.

2. Develop Social Cohesion

Develop community identity, inclusivity, and resilience to enable communities to thrive in an environment characterised by change and unpredictability.

3. Develop Social Infrastructure

The social infrastructure of rural communities is of particular importance when considering economic and social issues, ensuring that our communities are pleasant places both to live and to work, for all ages.

4. Develop Social Innovation

Supporting local communities and individuals to develop SMART solutions to the challenges they face, and to take their future into their own hands, often but not exclusively with the help of digital technologies and developing innovative ideas to meet social needs.

5. Develop Sustainable climate resilience

Supporting communities and individuals around Kildare to follow climate resilient pathways that reduce climate change impacts and promote sustainable development through training and targeted projects.



Objectives and actions:

Following a detailed analysis of the current socio-economic context of the county and a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process, these Focus Areas gave rise to carefully chosen Objectives and Actions which respond in a targeted way to the needs and areas where there will be a greater added value of using the LEADER approach.

OBJECTIVE 1 SUPPORT THE DIVERSIFICATION OF FARM ACTIVITIES.	
1.1	Farm diversification and eco-tourism
1.2	Farm diversification and farm-to-fork
OBJECTIVE 2 SUPPORT REGENERATIVE, SLOW ECO-TOURISM AND RECREATION	
2.1	Support the development of tourism and recreation
2.2	Support the development of the Barrow Blueway and the canal Greenways
2.3	Support festivals, pilgrim trails and tourism related to Brigid and other heroes and legends
2.4	Support the development of lower cost accommodation options especially associated with the Blueway, peatlands, and walking trails
OBJECTIVE 3 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF GREEN AND INNOVATIVE RURAL SME BUSINESS	
3.1	Support rural enterprise development
OBJECTIVE 4 SUPPORT THE EXPANSION OF THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE SECTOR TO RESPOND TO GAPS IN SERVICES	
3.2	Social Enterprise Development
OBJECTIVE 5 DEVELOP SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE	
5.1	Supporting the development or refurbishment of rural community facilities
OBJECTIVE 6 SUPPORT GREATER SOCIAL INCLUSION ACROSS KILDARE	
6.1	Supports to new, hard to reach and disadvantaged communities
6.2	Improve access to services
6.3	Rural Women
6.4	Support the work of frontline social inclusion services
OBJECTIVE 7 DEVELOP SOCIAL CAPITAL AND THE CAPACITY OF COMMUNITIES ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO HAVE NOT ENGAGED WITH LEADER	
7.1	SMART capacity building for rural communities
OBJECTIVE 8 DEVELOPING FACILITIES IN RESPONSE TO POPULATION GROWTH.	
8.1	Family Friendly Kildare
OBJECTIVE 9 IMPROVE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION	
9.1	Environmental protection
9.2	Peatland Protection
OBJECTIVE 10 CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION AND ADAPTATION	
10.1	Town Teams
10.2	Communities for Climate Action

The Kildare LDS is overseen by a Local Action Group (LAG) composed of a wide variety of stakeholders, in a partnership model between public and private sectors. It is implemented by County Kildare Leader Partnership. The budget available to implement the strategy is €5,440,470. This is to provide grant aid to approved projects and for the administration of the programme. The full version of the LDS provides a detailed account of the profile of Co. Kildare at the outset of the 2023 – 2027 LEADER programme, an overview of the governing structures that will support the rollout of the programme, and a discussion of the relevance of other policies and strategies in relation to the LDS. The full version of the LDS also addresses the consultation process that informed the development of the LDS and budgeting for the objectives that have been identified.

Section 1

The Local Action Group Governance Model (LAG)



This Local Development Strategy is built on the extremely strong and effective partnership and working relationship developed since 2014 between the Kildare LCDC (Local Community Development Committee), Kildare County Council and County Kildare Leader Partnership and on the efficient structures and procedures which have been put in place. The Kildare LAG (Local Action Group) is an excellent example of place-based, multi-level governance and community-led local development, and informs its work by the 7 guiding principles of the LEADER approach. Kildare LAG is committed to deepening its representative nature and building the capacity of local communities to integrate their knowledge and skills more fully into policymaking. Kildare LAG also seeks to integrate the LEADER programme more fully into county-wide and regional policies.

1.1 KILDARE LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

1.1.1 ORGANISATION DETAILS

Organisation Detail & Legal Description

Name of LAG	Kildare Local Community Development Committee
Contact Name	Marian Higgins
Position	Chief Officer
Postal Address	Level 7, Aras Chill Dara, Devoy Park, Naas, Co. Kildare W91 X77F
Telephone No:	045 980 800
Email Address	mhiggins@kildarecoco.ie
Website	www.kildarelcdc.ie
Date of Establishment	May 16th, 2014
Legal Structure	Committee created by statute law.
CRO	Not applicable
TCAN	465926
TRN	0440571C

1.1.2 LEGAL FORMATION

Kildare LCDC was established on May 16th, 2014, by resolution of Kildare County Council under Part 6 of the Local Government Reform Act “for the purposes of developing, co-ordinating and implementing a coherent and integrated approach to local and community development”. Its key function is to provide a strategic, joined-up approach to local and community development within the county, including the development in 2023 of the second Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP). Kildare LCDC is the LAG for the current LEADER 2014-2023 programme.

1.2 THE COMPOSITION OF THE LOCAL ACTION GROUP

Kildare LCDC as LAG is the core forum at the heart of the LEADER process for the exchange of ideas at county level among a wide variety of stakeholders, using a partnership model between public and private sectors. It corresponds with the European Parliament’s call for local community-based actions to make rural areas stronger, more connected, resilient, and prosperous by 2040¹. Since its inception, it has worked hard to ensure that it maintains a balanced and broad representation, from across all sectors of the county, representing both public and private local socio-economic interests, and ensuring that no single interest group controls the decision-making, in line with the EU Commission Regulation (2022/1475).

This broad representation ensures that the LDS Objectives and Actions avoids duplication and ensures that the resources in the county are maximized in their response to the needs of communities. It is also linked to a **first key enabling factor**² for the success of this LDS, namely **a focus on people** and the development of social capital and multi-level participative structures³ in the county through which all stakeholders, including local communities, can identify challenges and share the good practices required to overcome them. Multi-level governance processes are essential for ensuring that EU, national and local policies are sufficiently integrated in local communities⁴ and that innovative responses to challenges and needs are based on local knowledge and skills. The LAG is committed to the full application of the seven key principles of LEADER, although this is challenging, as it believes that herein lies the main source of LEADER’s added value⁵. This commitment rests on the EU Long-term Vision for the EU’s Rural Areas’s Rural Pact which seeks to “amplify rural voices and bring them higher on the political agenda” and to structure and enable “networking, collaboration & mutual learning.”. It also echoes the 2022 finding of the EU Court of Auditors which stated that the main characteristic of LEADER is the involvement of local people and communities not just in the development of projects, but also on decision-making structures.

Kildare LAG is based on a nineteen-member committee with ten non-statutory representatives and nine statutory outlined below. The LAG membership and areas of expertise are outlined as follows.

PUBLIC REPRESENTATION (STATUTORY)		
Name	Organisation	Areas of Expertise
<i>Cllr. Suzanne Doyle</i> (Chairperson)	Kildare County Council – Public Representative	Cllr Doyle has been an elected representative for over 20 years with a particular interest in education and health where calibrating services for a fast-growing county such as Kildare is a key challenge.
<i>Cllr. Tracey O’Dwyer</i>	Kildare County Council – Public Representative	Cllr. O’Dwyer has been an elected representative since 2019. She has a keen interest in community, accessibility and education.
<i>Cllr. Aidan Farrelly</i>	Kildare County Council – Public Representative	Cllr. Farrelly has been an elected representative since 2019. He is a professional youth and community worker and is employed as a lecturer in Maynooth University.

1. European Commission, Long=Term Vision for Rural Areas: for stronger, connected, resilient, prosperous EU rural areas.

2. ENRD, 2022, Enabling factors for rural revitalisation & a self-assessment tool for policy design.

3. Moodie, J., Salle, E., Zomer, B., Vilcu, R., Laurent, I. (2023) Empowering rural areas in multi-level governance processes. SHERPA Discussion Paper.

4. Ibid.

5. European Court of Auditors (2022) LEADER and community-led local development facilitates local engagement but additional benefits still not sufficiently demonstrated.

PUBLIC REPRESENTATION (STATUTORY)		
Name	Organisation	Areas of Expertise
<i>Sonya Kavanagh</i>	Chief Executive, Kildare County Council	Sonya Kavanagh has been Chief Executive of KCC since 2021. She was previously Director of Services in KCC and held the position of LCDC Chief Officer since 2017 when the LEADER Programme commenced in Kildare.
<i>Jacqui McNabb</i>	Head of Local Enterprise Office, Kildare County Council	Jacqui McNabb has been Head of the Kildare Local Enterprise Office since 2017 and has significant experience in the management of projects from a strategic, operational and efficiency perspective.
<i>Margaret McQuillan</i>	Head of Health and Wellbeing, CHO7, HSE	Margaret McQuillan has worked in the Health Services sector for over 30 years working in Community, Acute and National sectors in both clinical and management roles. Margaret is particularly passionate about the potential of health services to address health inequalities, promote healthy behaviour choices and support people with chronic diseases. She managed the COVID 19 response in CHO7.
<i>Audrey Warren</i>	Area Manager, Dublin Southwest/ Kildare West Wicklow, Tusla	Audrey Warren has worked with Tusla for over 10 years. Audrey is Chairperson of Kildare CYPSC and MAPF (Multi Agency Planning Forum). As Area Manager Audrey is accountable for the delivery of integrated services provided by Tusla in the area and oversees Child Protection and Welfare services, alternative care services and the Partnership, Prevention and Family Support Programme within the area.
<i>Ruth Langan</i>	Area Manager Kildare, Dept. of Employment Af- fairs & Social Protection	Ruth has been working as Assistant Principal with the Department of Social Protection (DSP) in Newbridge since 2019. Initially she held responsibility for all Department operations in Kildare and West Wicklow area. Since a restructuring of the Department in early 2022, she has managed the delivery of Employment Services in Kildare, West Wicklow, Tallaght and Clondalkin. She also has previous experience in managing other central operational and support areas of DSP including Illness Benefit and Facilities Management.
<i>Ken Seery</i>	Director of Further Education & Training, KWETB	Ken Seery has worked as a Director with KWETB for three years. Ken's area of expertise is learning and adult education.

PRIVATE MEMBERSHIP (NON-STATUTORY)		
Name	Organisation	Areas of Expertise
<i>Francis Doherty</i>	CEO, Peter McVerry Trust	Francis Doherty was appointed as Chief Executive of the McVerry Trust in June 2023. Francis was previously Director of Services with Responsibility for Housing Development and Communication with the Trust and has a background in political, international project management, research and communications.
<i>Tom Malone</i>	IFA	Tom Malone is an active farmer and lifetime member of the IFA. Tom sits on the KCC SPC on Climate Action and was a previous member of the SPC on Environment and Water. Tom is also Chairperson of an Arable Farmers Group under Teagasc supervision.
<i>Lisa Baggott</i>	Co-ordinator, South Western Regional Drugs & Alcohol Task Force	Lisa Baggott has worked as Co-ordinator of the Task Force since 2007 and has a long history of working in drugs services nationally.
<i>Mary O' Connor</i>	County Kildare LEADER Partnership	Mary O'Connor is a board member of County Kildare LEADER Partnership and has extensive HR experience. Mary worked in all aspects of the HR Management Function in KARE for 18 years.
<i>Sinead Ronan</i>	County Kildare Chamber of Commerce	Sinead Ronan is the Public Affairs Manager for County Kildare Chamber, the business voice in Kildare with a membership of 400 companies that in turn employ 38,000 in Kildare. Sinead has over 10 years of experience working in the corporate and political professions alike.
<i>Evonne Boland</i>	PPN, Community Development	Evonne Boland is an active and experienced community activator interested particularly in the area of community resilience and sustainable development, food sovereignty and climate action.
<i>Pat Balfe</i>	PPN, Community Development	Pat Balfe has a wealth of experience volunteering with groups and organisations providing supports and services to young people. In a professional capacity, he is the Manager of the Kildare Town Youth Hub.
<i>Alan Kerry</i>	PPN, Social Inclusion	Alan Kerry has been the General Manager of TFI Local Link Kildare since 2014 having a Masters in Sustainable Transport. Alan has extensive knowledge and experience in the role that transport, and mobility can play in both social inclusion and economic development particularly in rural areas.
<i>Vacant seat (April 2023)</i>	PPN, Social Inclusion	
<i>Vacant seat (May 2023)</i>	PPN, Environment	

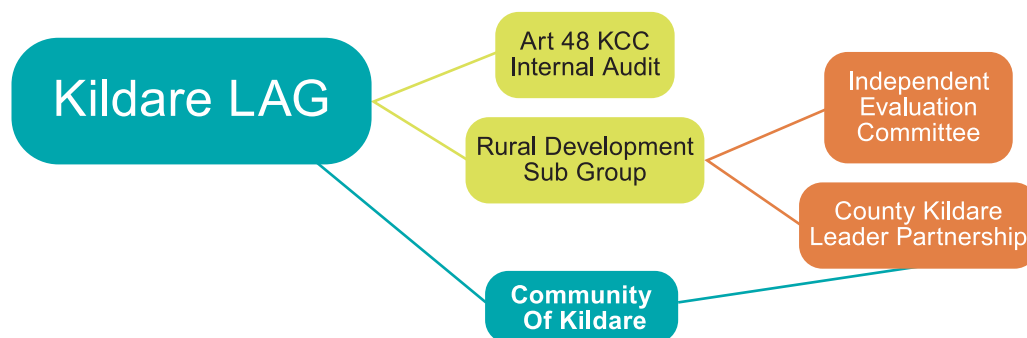
Kildare LAG has consistently maintained a particular focus on inclusion and gender balance.

- Eleven of the nineteen LAG members are women, with both the Chairperson and Chief Officer female. Gender balance has been a key focus of the LAG since its' inception.
- The non statutory sector has the majority representation of ten members (53%). This is composed of – County Kildare LEADER Partnership, five PPN reps (two social inclusion, two community and one environmental), Peter McVerry Trust, Southwestern Regional Drugs and Alcohol Task Force, the Irish Farmers Association and County Kildare Chamber of Commerce.
- The LAG is well represented by agencies linked to marginalised and disadvantaged communities – The Peter McVerry Trust, one of the largest national voluntary organisations working with homeless people, who are a key provider of homeless services in Kildare in addition to their work in the county to respond to the needs of the Ukrainian community and those with substance abuse issues. The South Western Regional Drugs and Alcohol Task Force respond to addiction and substance abuse issues across the county, Tusla who work with the most vulnerable children and young people in the county, Department of Social Protection and the PPN representatives who work within disadvantaged communities on a day to day basis. The elected representatives also work closely with excluded groups and communities and are very actively engaged on a day-to-day basis with the most excluded.
- Kildare LAG wishes to build on and deepen this representation especially given the young demographic of the county, and to continue to develop better representation from more disadvantaged communities, especially those not currently engaged with the LEADER process. It commits to, over the lifespan of this Programme to strengthen the community's ability to coordinate and collaborate by:
 - a) Reviewing the membership of the LAG rural development subgroup to ensure continued compliance with the LEADER Guidelines and Operating Rules.
 - b) Working with Kildare PPN to deepen and enhance existing relationships to engage with, empower and inform the LEADER programme as it is implemented.
 - c) Developing a more structured approach to working with Comhairle na nÓg, the forum of young people in the county composed of County-wide and localised networks, including rural areas.

The membership of the LAG is based on the governance arrangements of the LCDC as outlined in statute. In recent months LAG membership has been rotated with:

- The outgoing CEO of McVerry Trust being replaced by the incoming CEO
- Three new PPN representatives commencing in May 2023. This enhances representation from Local Link the key provider of transport across rural Kildare, youth interests in Monasterevin a key target area in South Kildare and community interests more generally.
- Two additional PPN seats representing social inclusion and environmental issues will be filled in the coming months.
- The local elections, scheduled for 2024 will result in a nomination process for three elected members to the LAG
- The rotation of other relevant non statutory interests will occur in line with the guidelines throughout the lifetime of the programme

It is intended that County Kildare LEADER Partnership (CKLP), will remain as Implementing partner for the next programme and that KCC will play the role of financial partner. A diagram of the structure based on the success of our programme 2014-2023 is outlined below. It is intended to review membership and develop updated terms of reference on commencement of the new programme in line with the agreed plan and operating rules. The final decision making on all aspects of LEADER 2023-2027 rests with the LAG.



1.2.1 SELECTION OF MEMBERS AND ROTATION

The Chief Officer, in consultation with the Chairperson, will review the membership of the LAG at least once every three years to ensure the membership is relevant and representative of the work of the LAG, its aims and objectives. This will ensure that new members are nominated to the LAG, while also trying to retain an appropriate continuity of membership. The nomination and selection of new members will allow the LAG to evolve and adopt new perspectives and viewpoints on a regular basis. In accordance with Section 127 of the 2001 Local Government Act, the LAG accepts nominations from the PPN as the stated nominating structure for five non statutory seats within the three colleges to the LAG.

1.3 KILDARE STRUCTURE AND ROLES

Since 2016 on approval of the 2014-2023 programme, the LEADER Programme in Kildare has been delivered by an extremely strong and effective partnership and working relationship between the LCDC, Kildare County Council and County Kildare Leader Partnership. This partnership has delivered significant benefits in terms of networking, collaboration and synergy between actions and agencies in the county. This partnership is linked to a **second key enabling factor**⁶ in the successful achievement of the LDS, namely a focus on structures - integrated strategies at county level built on political leadership and co-ordination between different policies and responses to rural issues, in response to needs and key priorities as identified by the community across the entire sub-regional area. This is one of the 10 shared goals of the EU Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas, namely, to engage in “multi-level and place-based governance, developing integrated strategies using collaborative and participatory approaches”. In harmony with this the Kildare working model partnership will continue and be strengthened in the 2023 – 2027 Programme, by putting an integrated policy approach in place and working to coordinate the county strategy on rural revitalisation and development.

Kildare Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) will be the Local Action Group (LAG) for the delivery of the RDP (Rural Development Programme) LEADER Programme 2023-2027. As the LAG, it is responsible for developing and monitoring the LEADER Local Development Strategy (LDS), making decisions on actions funded through the LDS, financial management and managing the funding allocated to the LDS.

⁶ ENRD, 2022, Enabling factors for rural revitalisation & a self-assessment tool for policy design.

In association with the overall role of the LAG, County Kildare LEADER Partnership (CKLP) is the Implementing Partner for the Programme and will deliver the project and animation-related actions associated with the implementation of the LDS, from the issuing of calls for proposals, up to and including, the final submission of project recommendations to the Evaluation Committee and the LAG. It operates under a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the LAG.

Kildare County Council is the lead Financial Partner and has administrative and monetary responsibility for the implementation of the LDS and the management of LAG operations.

1.3.1 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Kildare LAG will be responsible for:

1	Setting the overall strategic direction for the LDS, and agreeing the strategic priorities, budgets, and objectives.
2	Delegation to the Implementing Partner the responsibility for the roles in line with the SLA.
3	Establishing a LAG subgroup to prepare for LAG meetings
4	Establishing an Independent Evaluation Committee to evaluate project proposals
5	Delegation to the Financial Partner the responsibility for Article 48 checks, payment of funds, and indemnification of the LAG and, to an appropriate level, the Implementing Partner.
6	Agreeing calls for targeted proposals.
7	Considering projects for final approval.
8	Ensuring non-discriminatory and transparent selection procedure and criteria, as per Article 33(3) (b) CPR 2021/1060.
9	Final decisions on project allocation, approval, or rejection. All contract documentation will issue under name of the Kildare LAG.
10	Responding with decisions in a timely manner to avoid delays in the project approval process.
11	Issuing contracts to Project Promoters.
12	Monitoring and reviewing performance of the Implementer as defined by the SLA.
13	Addressing any potential conflict of interest in an open and transparent way, as per Operating Rules.
14	Reporting to the DCRD or its agents as required.

1.3.2 IMPLEMENTING PARTNER

County Kildare LEADER Partnership CLG (CKLP) is a registered company limited by guarantee, with registration number 450048. The Company was incorporated on 30 November 2007, as part of the process of restructuring the local development sector nationally. The process, referred to as cohesion, was aimed at merging the activities of Area Partnerships and LEADER companies within one Local Development Company at county level. The Company has Charitable Status from the Revenue Commissioners – CHY 17981 and is fully compliant with the Governance Code of the Charities Regulator.

CKLP has significant experience of implementing broad-based community development and social inclusion programmes in different forms over the last 25 years, as well as delivering successful LEADER

programmes in Kildare since its inception in the county. It was responsible for the delivery of LEADER I, LEADER II, LEADER+ and the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013, and of working closely with the Kildare LAG and KCC on the 2014–2020 Programme and the 2021–2022 Transitional Programme. The CKLP team has extensive experience in managing the LEADER process, with staff members involved since the first Programme in 1995, as well as having skills in the areas of community animation, social enterprise development, and environmental sustainability, and experience in the implementation of EU and national-level policy programmes.

Building on this experience and the successful working relationship developed with KCC and the LAG, the key roles and responsibilities of CKLP in the 2023 – 2027 Programme are to:

1	Work collaboratively to draw up the LDS, in an integrated strategic approach with the new LECP, ensuring maximum engagement across the sub-regional area, through an in-depth consultative process.
2	Manage open-call project application processes.
3	Implement, manage, and coordinate animation activity in the LAG area, particularly focused on those communities which have not engaged with the LEADER Programme in the past.
4	Develop and manage calls for EOIs (Expression of Interest) in line with LAG decisions.
5	Process EOIs.
6	Develop funding proposals with project promoters.
7	Receive and process funding applications.
8	Prepare and collate documentation for Article 48 checks.
9	Organise, provide all information required and administrative support to the Independent Evaluation Committee
10	Submit files for Article 48 checks.
11	Project development, management, and monitoring work with project promoters.
12	Develop Implementer-led in-house and strategic projects.
13	Submission of projects to the LAG Evaluation Committee.
14	Recommend applications to the LAG for final approval, rejection, or referral, on behalf of the IEC.
15	Attend the LAG Subgroup Meeting to update on progress
16	Prepare contracts with project promoters on behalf of the LAG.
17	Report on activity to the LAG.
18	File management, audit compliance and administration related to the above actions.

The structure of CKLP has evolved over the past two decades and conforms with the requirements of the funding bodies and agencies with whom the organisation works in partnership. It is dedicated to a bottom-up approach to local development. The Board of CKLP has its foundations in the consensus model that was developed in the early years of the Partnership process (1991-1995). Since its inception, the Board

has been made up of representatives from statutory services, social partners, community, and voluntary sector activists, as well as elected members. Since 2019, the Board has undergone a governance review and is now smaller and more skills based, in line with current best practice.

The CKLP Board is committed to gender equality and representation from the community and minority groups. Six of the 12 Board members are female. In addition to representation from Kildare County Council, Maynooth University, the IFA, and County Kildare Chamber of Commerce the remaining Board positions are recruited publicly with community and voluntary participation representative of geographic and interest-based groups.

1.3.2.1 RISK MANAGEMENT

County Kildare LEADER Partnership CLG., is committed to managing risk to ensure the achievement of local objectives under the LDS in partnership with Kildare LAG and Kildare County Council. The Board of Directors have overall responsibility for the management of risk within the Company in line with the Risk Management policy. A Company Risk Register is maintained by the company recording risk description, likelihood, impact, current controls, further action required and date of review. The Board of Directors has a Finance and Governance Committee which meets between Board meetings and advises the Board on risk management. The day-to-day risk management is overseen by the CEO who liaises with programme managers on a daily basis. The Rural Development Programme Manager will inform the CEO and programme partners of any anticipated or emerging risks as they arise and agree additional controls or further action required through the LAG structure and CKLP Board Finance and Governance committee.

The CEO is responsible for ensuring risk is managed across all activities & is required to create an environment where the management of risk is accepted as the personal responsibility of all employees, volunteers, and contractors. The CEO is responsible for the development and provision of risk awareness training as well as specific training and education programmes throughout County Kildare LEADER Partnership C.L.G. This training and education are to address the needs of all directors, employees and contractors including senior management.

1.3.3 IMPLEMENTING PARTNER BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Name	Organisation	Areas of Expertise
<i>Colm Ó Gógáin</i> (Chair)	Community	BE, CEng, FIEI. Graduated UCD 1974. 42 years' experience in various roles within Bord na Móna working across a wide range of midland communities. Held various senior management roles including Chief Executive Bord na Móna Fuels Ltd, Executive Director Infrastructure Development and an employee elected Board Director.
<i>Syl Merrins</i> (Vice Chair)	Kildare Sports Partnership	Coordinator of the Sports Partnership Programme in Kildare County Council. Board member of the Kildare Volunteer Centre. Syl has been involved in community activity for many years including the GAA where he has represented Kildare on various provincial and national committees. He was Chairperson of Kildare GAA from 2004-09 and Treasurer of Leinster GAA from 2014-17.

Name	Organisation	Areas of Expertise
<i>Edel Murphy</i> (Company Secretary)	Community	Risk and compliance manager with over 20 years' experience in managerial roles including people management, project and change management, and key strategy definition and delivery. M.Sc. Strategic Management & Planning, M.Sc. Design Innovation and Advanced Diploma Corporate, White-Collar and Regulatory Crime
<i>Ann Connolly</i>	Kildare County Council – Public Representative	Cllr. Connolly has been an elected representative since 2019. She is a member of the County Joint Policing Committee, SPG for Transportation, Safety and Emergency Services. Ann has been involved in community activities for over 40 years, Community Rep on Curragh Community College, Chairperson of Bun Scoil Bhride Rathangan, Chairperson of Rathangan Day Care Centre, Secretary of Rathangan Sheltered Housing Association.
<i>Ann Breen</i>	Kildare County Council – Public Representative	Cllr. Breen has been an elected representative since 2019. She is a member of Coiste Gaeilge, Environmental Services and Water SPC, Kildare Sports and Leisure Facilities Ltd, Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee, Regional Health Forum - Dublin Mid Leinster.
<i>Dan O' Loughlin</i>	IFA	Actively farming a mixed farm outside Mountrice, Monasterevin.
<i>Noel Dempsey</i>	County Kildare Chamber of Commerce	Commercial Business Development Manager, Dooley Insurance. Advisor to the SME and Corporate Sector for companies and business professionals. Management Consultant, Quinn Group Insurance. Business Development Executive, Royal Sun Alliance
<i>Hilary Tierney</i>	Maynooth University	Lecturer Department of Applied Social Studies in the areas of youth work theory, policy and practice, supervision, professional skills development and research theory and practice.

Name	Organisation	Areas of Expertise
<i>Mary O Connor</i>	Community	<p>M.A. and Post Graduate Diploma in Adult & Community Education (NUI Maynooth). National Diploma in Personnel Management (National College of Ireland, Dublin).</p> <p>Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (FCIPD) and the Irish Institute of Training & Development (FIITD)</p> <p>18 years as Human Resources Manager with KARE, Human Resources roles in Pfizer and P&G Manufacturing, Newbridge, Donnelly Mirrors, Naas, and Black & Decker. Manager of Skillnet Project for the Irish Pharmaceutical & Chemical Manufacturers Federation (a division within IBEC).</p> <p>Board Member Kildare LESN 1995-2000. National President Irish Institute of Training & Development 2006 to 2008.</p>
<i>Zoryana Pshyk</i>	Integration Network	<p>MA Philology. Higher Diploma in Further Education; Masters in Adult and Community Education from Maynooth University. Community Connector with College Connect, Maynooth University Access Programme. Chairperson Kildare Integration Network.</p>
<i>Pat Kidney</i>	Community	<p>Chartered Engineer and a member of the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET). Past Chairperson of the IET Ireland network. Scout Leader Sallins Scout Group. Board of Sporting Ireland. Chairperson May 2021.</p>
<i>Ray Stapleton</i>	Community	<p>BA History. 25 years' experience Manager Social Enterprise. Lullymore Heritage & Discovery Park</p> <p>2017 Winner of Best Environment Tourism Innovation, Irish Tourism Awards.</p>

1.3.4 LEAD FINANCIAL PARTNER

Kildare County Council will be the Lead Financial Partner to the LAG. It has significant professional competence of managing and implementing programmes funded by the EU and by the State, and currently manages an annual budget of more than €406 million. It has extensive experience of financially managing specific community-based programmes such as SICAP (budget 2023 €1,465,474), LEADER, Healthy Ireland, Sláintecare Healthy Communities, Community Support Funds etc. It has been involved in the fiscal management of the current LEADER Programme and carries out the Art. 48 checks for all projects apart from In-House projects. KCC are familiar with the control and reporting requirements of the Programme, and all related regulation and legislation. It must be noted that the budget for Kildare 2014-2023 was allocated within the agreed national timeframe, and that there are effective financial systems in place to ensure that all claims are paid within the nationally required period.

Accordingly, KCC will carry out the following administrative tasks:

1	Provide advance administration and animation funding to CKLP.
2	Conduct Article 48 checks.
3	Make payments to promoters on behalf of the LAG.
4	Submit monthly returns.
5	Request quarterly drawdown of monies from the Department of Community and Rural Development (DRCD).

1.4 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

1.4.1 FINANCIAL AND BUDGETARY CONTROLS ALONG WITH MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES FOR THE LEADER PROGRAMME

Kildare County Council as financial partner in the LEADER Programme implements robust governance and control practices to ensure good management, performance, stakeholder engagement and outcomes. This is achieved in ways that are consistent with legal, regulatory and government policy obligations.

The LAG and the LAG Subgroup, in its oversight role include governance and compliance as a standing agenda item at all LAG and Subgroup meetings.

1.4.2 FINANCIAL AND BUDGETARY CONTROLS

An effective financial management system was established by KCC for the LEADER Programme 2014-2023 and will continue to be in place for the new LEADER Programme. A separate LEADER code on KCC's Financial Management System is in place and any financial risks on the LEADER Programme are mitigated by KCC's Segregation of Duties policies.

A monthly reconciliation of LEADER budgets is carried out by the LCDC Administrator and then reviewed with the LCDC Co-ordinator. Any issues or concerns are highlighted to the LCDC Chief Officer/KCC Director of Service and if there are any serious financial concerns these are escalated to KCC's Head of Finance and the Department of Rural and Community Development if deemed necessary.

Article 48 checks are carried out on all LEADER applications and project claims to ensure that all the LEADER Operating Rules requirements are adhered to.

1.4.3 MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

Kildare County Council has robust systems and controls in place to ensure good financial management and decision making. This is best demonstrated through the annual audit planning process where the risks are identified as part of an audit needs assessment and meetings with Directors of Services and their senior staff are mapped against the Corporate Plan, Departmental Risk Registers, the Audit Report, and key spend areas.

Alongside Kildare County Council's Internal Audit process, the Local Government Auditor carries out an annual audit of Kildare County Council's Financial Statements. In addition, Monthly Management Accounts are reviewed by each Director of Service (In the case of LEADER - Chief Officer LCDC/Director of Service Climate, Community, Water and Environment) and Kildare County Council's Chief Executive reports on the Financial Accounts to Council (KCC's Board of Management) monthly.

1.4.4 ADHERENCE TO PUBLIC PROCUREMENT REQUIREMENTS

Kildare County Council's Internal Audit Department carries out Procurement Audits where they test a sample of tender competitions and review the current Policy for alignment with the latest public procurement requirements. See Kildare County Council's Corporate Procurement Plan 2022-2026 in Appendix 1.

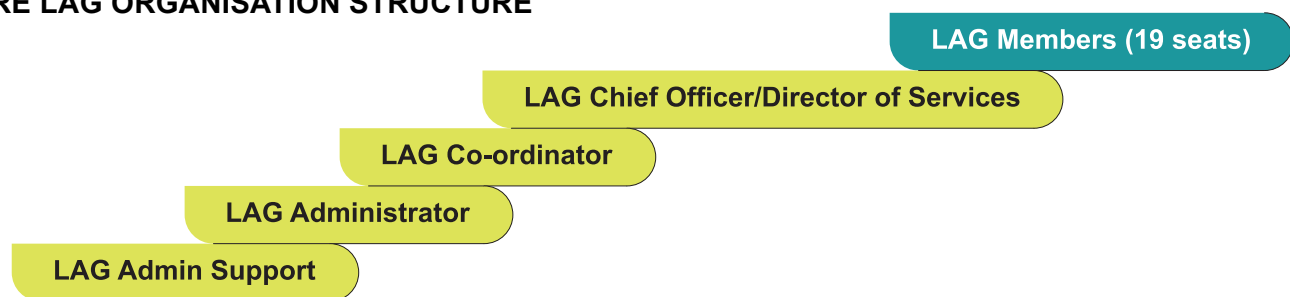
1.5 LEADER STAFFING

LCDC/LAG	Role	Qualifications/Experience
<i>Marian Higgins</i>	LCDC Chief Officer Director of Service Climate, Community, Water and Environment Kildare County Council	BA in Economics and Applied Mathematics (Hons). HDip in Library and Information Studies. Procurement experience in national tenders. KCC are the lead authority on the Eastern Midlands Climate Action Regional Office (CARO) which Marian has responsibility for. A key action for CARO in 2023 is to develop Kildare's Climate Action Plan. Energy Performance Officer for Kildare County Council which is a statutory role. Marian ensures that the LAG runs effectively and efficiently in line with statutory requirements on behalf of KCC. She has been Chief Officer since 2021.
<i>Paula O'Brien</i>	Senior Executive Officer, Community Section, Kildare County Council	BBLS - Business and Legal Studies Hons MACC - Master of Accounting Hons FCA - Fellow Chartered Accountant. National and international procurement experience. Currently involved in Climate and Biodiversity projects as part of the Brigid 1500 programme in Kildare.
<i>Susan Bookle</i>	LCDC Co-Ordinator - LECP	MBS Organisational Development (Hons). HDip Community Work (Hons). B Social Science (Hons). Susan is currently overseeing and developing the LECP for Kildare and works to support the overall running of the LCDC/LAG. She has been in post since the establishment of the LCDC in 2014 and has a background in collaborative working and social inclusion.
<i>Marie Kane</i>	LCDC A/Co-ordinator	BBS Accounting and Finance (Hons). Marie is currently co-ordinating the overall work of the LCDC/LAG. She has been in post since the establishment of the LCDC in 2014 and has a background in project management.
<i>Terrie Devlin</i>	LCDC Administration	BBS Recreation & Sport Management (Hons). Terrie compiles the LAG minutes and provides administration support to the LAG. She has experience in the procurement process of environmental software and various technology procurement processes

LCDC/LAG	Role	Qualifications/Experience
<i>Anita Clarke</i>	LCDC Administration	Diploma in Local Government Studies, IPA Diploma in HR Management Practice, CIPD Diploma in HR Practice. Anita works to compile and submit the monthly administration returns, provides administration support to the rural development subgroup, and prepares administrative processes to ensure that claims and administration transfers are in order. Anita has worked in her role with the LAG since 2018 and has 23 years' extensive experience in Local Government.

Kildare County Council	Role	Qualifications/Experience
<i>Paul Quinn</i>	Head of Internal Audit	Chartered Accountant with experience of auditing procurement in both An Post and Bord na Mona. Paul oversees the Article 48 checking process.
<i>Laura O'Neill</i>	Internal Audit	Laura carries out the Article 48 checks on projects for approval and claims.

KILDARE LAG ORGANISATION STRUCTURE



CKLP		
<i>Pat Leogue</i>	Chief Executive Officer	BA in Community Studies. Senior manager with 30 year's experience in local and community development. Responsible for the development and implementation of successive strategic plans. ESB Project Manager with local communities and previous experience as an International Expert for OECD projects.
<i>Karl Duffy</i>	Deputy CEO/RDP Manager	Masters in Psychology; BA Psychology. BA Philosophy; Adjunct Lecturer in Psychology Webster University Saint Louis/Geneva. IBEC Diploma in Leadership. CEO Action South Kildare. Change Management Facilitator Health Services National Partnership Forum.
<i>Lorraine Lynch</i>	RDP Financial Administrator	22 years' experience in all aspects of accounting and payroll, including projects requiring Irish and European funding. CKLP Assistant Financial Administrator /Data Controller/Compliance Officer. Financial and management accounting, financial transactions and managing costs and taxation.
<i>Brian Kelly</i>	RDP Project Officer	BA Hotel and Catering Management . MSc Business Studies (Travel and Tourism) . Experienced LEADER Project Officer having been with LEADER in the county since KELT started in 1995. Extensive experience of LEADER programmes, LEADER +, and of different regulatory formats. Animation and support of social enterprises.

CKLP		
<i>Helen Mulhall</i>	RDP Project Officer	Bachelor of Civil Law, Solicitor, Masters of Regional and Urban Planning with 12 years' experience in the Community & Voluntary Sector including Social Inclusion (SICAP Monitoring & Evaluation, Ukrainian Emergency Response Coordination) and Rural Development having managed several strategic LEADER projects during 2014-2022 programme and animation of social farming, social inclusion, and outdoor recreation projects.
<i>Meabhdh Ní Eochaidh</i>	RDP Project Officer	Bachelor's degree in European Studies. MSc in Ecological Economics. Currently finishing a PhD in DCU on "Local Government Implementation of Climate Action Policy in Ireland"

1.6 PROJECT SELECTION PROCEDURES

1.6.1 EVALUATION COMMITTEE

Building on the experience gained under the 2014 – 2020 Programme and the Transitional Programme 2021 – 2022, the LAG will continue to use the independence and expertise of an Independent Evaluation Committee (IEC). New members will be added who will possess requisite skills, knowledge and experience under the strategic areas which are the focus of the LDS.

This independent group is a core committee of the LAG and will be responsible for evaluating applications and making recommendation for funding to the LAG. Evaluation committee members will not be members of the LAG. Members will have experience in Public Administration, Private Enterprise, Banking, Public Administration and Voluntary Community Activity, across the LDS priority areas, thus ensuring the expertise in community, social, economic, and environmental areas necessary for the evaluation of projects. Additional members with specific areas of expertise may be invited onto the committee where relevant, especially if assessing projects following targeted calls under specific themes.

CURRENT EVALUATION COMMITTEE		
Name	Role	Background
<i>Emma Berney</i>	Joint Chair	Coordinator, Kildare Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC)
<i>Bridget Loughlin</i>	Joint Chair	Heritage Officer, Kildare County Council
<i>Paddy Gleeson</i>	Ordinary Committee Member	Ex-Teagasc. Graduated in Horticulture from the National Botanic Gardens and UCD. Teagasc national nursery stock advisor for over 25 years
<i>Karen Gorey</i>	Ordinary Committee Member	Owner Robertstown Holiday Village Self- Catering Accommodation
<i>John Burke</i>	Ordinary Committee Member	John P Burke & Company Accountants
<i>Tadhg McDonnell</i>	Ordinary Committee Member	Former Director of Services, Kildare County Council
<i>Robert Mehigan</i>	Ordinary Committee Member	Director, Kealy Mehigan Accountants. Former President of Naas Chamber of Commerce and representative on KCC Economic and Social Planning Sub-Committee

This committee will adhere to the rules of the LEADER programme as required by the Department of Community and Rural Development. Evaluation committee members will declare any conflicts of interest and absent themselves from any deliberations where such a declaration is made. This will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting. All Department Circulars and Operational Rules will be fully communicated and outlined to this committee.

1.6.2 EVALUATION SCORING

Evaluation will be undertaken against a standard score card, based on the one used in the previous Programme. This will be completed, signed, and dated by the Chair of the Evaluation Committee. A project must score a minimum of 65% of the total marks to be recommended for approval by the Evaluation Committee to the LAG⁷. Where there is a targeted call for applications, projects will be ranked in order of highest to lowest as per the scoring record.

1.6.3 EVALUATION RECORD

When projects are evaluated, a file capturing all the required information outlined in the Operating Rules will be maintained. The Minutes of the meeting and a Template will detail the rationale for the recommendation made by the Evaluation Committee. The Template will also outline the rate of aid and grant ceiling if being recommended and contain all relevant conditions discussed and recommended by the committee.

1.6.4 LAG RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME SUBGROUP

The recommendation is then sent to the RDP sub-group. Building on the experience of the 2014-2023 Programme, the LAG Rural Development Programme Subgroup will continue to work on behalf of and report into Kildare LAG to ensure that the LAG meetings are run in an effective, efficient manner and to support the LAG in their governance role. The role of the Subgroup is to:

1	Ensure that the LEADER programme is delivered on behalf of the county based on the LDS.
2	Monitor progress of implementation.
3	Provide feedback to the Implementing Partner on the delivery of the LDS.
4	Work with the Implementing Partner to agree new/emerging areas of opportunity or concern.
5	Review the financial aspects of the programme for both administration and project budgets.
6	Ensure that all reporting requirements are fully adhered to.
7	Review the recommendations of the IEC and report into the LAG.

Representation of the LAG with extensive experience of working to promote and support development within the themes of the LDS will represent the Kildare LAG on the Subgroup. As stated above, during the lifespan of the 2023 – 2027 Programme the composition of the Subgroup will be expanded and increased, to include representative from former promoters, community representatives, social enterprises and members of marginalised communities. The RDP Subgroup will become the link between the LAG and the ongoing CCLD process in the county. The development of the capacity of communities proposed in Objective 7 of this LDS will feed into the composition of the Subgroup gradually over the lifespan of the Plan.

1.6.5 LAG DECISION-MAKING

The recommendation, following successful Article 48 checks, with or without comment, will be sent to the LAG who will consider the recommendation.

⁷ Subject to any variations that may be contained in the programme Operating Rules.

The LAG has four options:

1. Accept the recommendation.
2. Accept the recommendation but with conditions.
3. Reject the recommendation.
4. The LAG may seek further information on the project before reaching a decision.

The LAG is the overall decision-making body for the LEADER Programme and will ensure:

1	That a quorum of 50% (rounded up to the nearest person) must be present for a meeting of the LAG to take place
2	That voting takes place on the basis that at least 50% of those voting on a decision are non-public sector partners
3	That decisions are carried by a majority vote.
4	That procedures are non-discriminatory and transparent.
5	That procedures and decisions are in line with Operational Rules/Circulars.
6	That where there is a tied vote, a motion is deemed not to be carried. The chairperson does not have a casting vote.

The LAG may ask the Evaluation Committee to reconsider its recommendation or seek further information on the project before reaching a decision.

The LAG will formally instruct CKLP to contact the applicant and inform them as to the outcome of their application. If accepted, a standard Letter of Offer will issue within two weeks. If rejected, a letter outlining the reason(s) will issue, also within two weeks.

1.6.6 LETTER OF OFFER

The Implementing Partner will draw up a draft Letter of Offer as per the LAG decision. The Chairperson of Kildare LAG will approve and sign-off the Letter of Offer on LAG headed paper and this will subsequently be issued by CKLP. The Applicant will have 15 working days to accept or reject the offer.

1.6.7 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

CKLP staff will work with the project promoter to monitor implementation within the contract period. Contract extensions may be offered in exceptional circumstance subject to LAG approval. CKLP staff will maintain the project file and prepare these for Article 48 Checks.

1.7 RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

CKLP has vast experience in working with marginalised communities and with communities or groups who are furthest away from funding or other opportunities.

Over the past three years, CKLP has managed National and EU Programmes with an expenditure of €9.98 million.

County Kildare LEADER Partnership (CKLP) has been responsible for the delivery of the Rural Development Programme (2007-2013) and was the Implementing Partner for the 2014 – 2022 Programme. County Kildare LEADER Partnership was formed as a result of the Cohesion Process and includes staff who transferred from the original LEADER company - KELT- which managed the LEADER programme in County Kildare since LEADER 1 in 1995. This expertise and experience has been invaluable in the delivery of the current programme. In the last Programme CKLP has developed a very efficient working relationship with the LAG and with Kildare County Council, the financial partner. Under the RDP 2007–2013, 232 projects were supported with €8.2m in LEADER grant aid and 91 Projects in 2014 – 2022 with grant aid of €5,065,486. CKLP has considerable experience in managing the administrative aspect of the LEADER Programme, including all aspects of working with Promoters and with both rolling and targeted calls.

Since its establishment in 2009, CKLP has been responsible for the management of successive social inclusion programmes on behalf of the Irish Government and since the establishment of the LCDC has been contracted as Implementing Partner for the **Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme** for the 2015-2017 and 2018 - 2023 programme contract periods. Under both SICAP programmes CKLP has consistently exceeded the SICAP key performance targets. In working with individuals and groups SICAP complements the Rural Development / LEADER Programme and the synergies from cross programme work is evident for example in the growth in the number of social enterprises.

CKLP is also responsible for the management of several other programmes on behalf of Government Departments:

TÚS Programme: CKLP is the Implementing Body for the Tus Programme in County Kildare, CKLP is responsible for the placement of 200 unemployed individuals with a range of community and voluntary groups, groups working with disadvantaged communities and local organisations that normally would not have access to employment schemes. Each individual is employed by CKLP on a fixed term contract for a maximum period of twelve months and is supported with an exit programme to progress on to alternative employment opportunities at the end of their contract. Team Leaders are employed to supervise the schemes in various locations around the county.

Rural Social Scheme is the Implementing Body for the Rural Social Scheme in County Kildare. The scheme is a labour market programme for individuals who are in receipt of a Farm Assist payment and who hold a herd number. The scheme employs 27 participants and a supervisor, providing support to Community Groups throughout the county.

DARA Project: The DARA Project is the only drug-free programme in County Kildare for adults who are in rehabilitation from drug and alcohol misuse. The project operates as a Community Employment Scheme with three CE Supervisors based in Athy and Kildare Town. The project provides a range of soft skills training and accredited education and training and is funded by the Department of Social Protection. The project has a capacity for 30 CE participants.

Enterprise Skills Programme: The Enterprise Skills Programme is a CE scheme which provides a 14 week start your own business course for unemployed individuals in receipt of a welfare payment. Three groups of participants are catered for each year and on successful completion participants can progress onto the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme or Short-Term Enterprise Allowance if they are eligible. This CE scheme also runs the Kildare Small Jobs Service which carries out small maintenance tasks for older people aged 65 and over. A total of 41 participants are allocated to this scheme.

Heads Up Programme: CKLP manages the Heads-Up Programme which provides wellness, recovery and life skills supports for men who are in distress. The project is funded by HSE and a range of local organisations including CKLP through SICAP. To date the programme has run 23 successful men's programmes and has expanded in 2023 to run its first programme for women.

Older Voices Kildare: CKLP manages the Older Voices Kildare Project which has a vision of creating a Kildare where older people are included and empowered within a vibrant community. The HSE is the primary funder for Older Voices Kildare, which benefits from the active involvement of a pool of volunteers who assist with the Befriending service. Older Voices also hosts the Dementia Cafe for the county.

Asylum and Migrant Integration Fund (AMIF)

The Kildare Integration Project is funded by the Department of Justice under the Asylum Migration & Integration Fund. The AMIF Integration Project Worker engages asylum seekers and refugees including the Ukrainian community to build their capacity to live and integrate in society in County Kildare. The project also supports practical integration through a range of targeted programmes.

Roma Employment Programme

The Kildare Roma Employment Support Programme has been funded by the Department of Justice and Equality and aims to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion of Roma people in County Kildare. CKLP employs a Support Worker who engages with the Roma community throughout County Kildare to offer opportunities for training, and pre-employment supports.

Roma Health Support: CKLP employs a Roma Health Support Worker to assist Roma families in County Kildare. Funding for this post is provided by HSE.

Slaintecare Healthy Communities Programme: Under the Slaintecare Healthy Communities Programme CKLP is funded for:

- The employment of a Social Prescribing Links Worker to engage with individuals referred primarily by health services and to source social opportunities for the individuals referred
- The employment of a Healthy Food Made Easy Coordinator to deliver Healthy Food Made Easy programmes
- The employment of a Community Food and Nutrition Worker
- The delivery of We Can Quit programmes for smoking cessation

The Slaintecare Healthy Communities Programme is focused on the Athy Municipal District.

Empowering Communities Programme: The Empowering Communities Programme is a new initiative launched by the Department of Rural and Community Development in 2022 to engage with local communities in very disadvantaged areas. A Community Engagement Worker is employed and working with a number of housing estates in the Athy West Urban Area.

Hosting Role:

CKLP acts as host organisation for the employment of staff for the following projects:

- **Kildare Sports Partnership** funded by Dormant Accounts Fund through Kildare County Council.
- **Kildare Public Participation Network (PPN)** funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development through Kildare County Council.
- **Individual Placement Service** funded by HSE

Monitoring and Evaluation procedures will be implemented at two key levels, namely project level and LAG level. Monitoring and evaluation procedures will be informed by the LDS guidelines, LEADER Monitoring framework and result indicators and outlined in the LAG procedures manual.

Data collection on behalf of the Data Controller (DCRD) will be in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and Regulation (EU) 2016/679, the EU General Data Protection Regulation. A copy of the LAG GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) policy has been included in Appendix 2.

In addition to the measures outlined below, the LAG will observe the ongoing requirement to support the assessment of compliance through both the control framework and ongoing audit and review to be outlined in the Operating Rules.

1.8.1 PROJECT LEVEL MONITORING & EVALUATION

PROJECT STAGE	MONITORING/EVALUATION MEASURES	IMPLEMENT	QUALITY CHECK	OVERSIGHT
Expression of Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project theme/subtheme identified. 	CKLP	LAG	Pobal DCRD
Application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data collection on form entered on ICT system as per monitoring framework. 	CKLP	KCC	LCDC Pobal DCRD
Project Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project theme/subtheme confirmed. LDS Local Objective Identified. Compatibility with LDS assessed. Project indicators selected*. 	CKLP IEC LAG	KCC (A48)	Pobal DCRD
IEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compatibility with LDS evaluated and scored. 	IEC	LAG	Pobal DCRD
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Article 48 checks 	KCC Pobal		
LAG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review scoring of IEC on compatibility with LDS. 	LAG		Pobal DCRD
Project Approval & Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contract special conditions, general terms & conditions communicated to promoter. Contract expiry dates monitored at 90/60/30 day intervals via ICT system views. 	CKLP	LAG	Pobal DCRD
Claim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data collection for relevant indicators as per OR for the project type, and evidence of compliance with any special conditions. Qualitative data collection on added value - project outcome and impacts, as well as testimonial on promoter's experience. Pre-payment Department Inspection. 	CKLP DCRD	KCC (A48) Pobal (A48)	Pobal DCRD
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project stage payment 	KCC		

OUTPUT INDICATORS

Output indicators measure activities directly realised within programmes. Indicators provided in the LDS guidance document have been applied in the action plan. The LAG wishes to ensure that its Objectives are SMART and will utilise output indicators which can be rolled up nationally for programme measurement. Subject to the monitoring requirements to be outlined in the operating rules, the quantitative outputs to be measured may include:

- The total number of individuals receiving directly support, broken down by man, woman, non-binary or prefer not to say
- The total number of supported off-farm productive investment operations for which a grant was given.
- The number of rural businesses receiving support for start-up or expansion
- The number of tourism businesses receiving support for start-up or expansion
- The number of supported training, advice, and awareness actions.

- The number of Community facilities receiving support for restoration, building or expansion
- The number of advice actions, knowledge exchange and dissemination of information regarding EU and national policies on Just Transition and Climate issues

1.8.2 LAG LEVEL MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The LAG will complete an **Annual Implementation Plan** reflecting on animation strategies for each objective, and the intended focus for the coming year. It will reflect on how projects are meeting objectives, project outputs, how objectives are meeting stated outcomes, and how the objectives are contributing to the programme themes and subthemes.

The Annual Implementation Plan will be reviewed by the LAG Rural Development sub-group at their meetings which take place six times per year. Their review findings will be reported to the LAG for further consideration and action if necessary.

The review will be informed by:

- Budget updates on funds allocated and drawn down at each meeting interval.
- Programme implementation report including project pipeline, applications in process, and project delivery updates.

The LAG will prepare an **Annual Progress Report** highlighting key LDS achievements and challenges for the previous year including qualitative and quantitative outputs and outcomes and case studies.

The Programme Implementer will provide information to support this including:

- Case Studies highlighting project impacts, outcomes, and outputs as well as added value and learning.
- Map of projects by location and type to ensure coverage throughout the areas and in target area for comparison against the geographic areas identified in the LDS annually.
- Analysis of monitoring data extracted from the ICT system on Expressions of Interest and approved projects will be presented annually to the LAG.

The LAG will commission a **Mid-term Evaluation** of programme implementation to measure overall progress against the Local Development Strategy, and the effectiveness of the structures and strategies engaged to achieve objectives.

When: The LAG believes that the appropriate time to conduct an evaluation is mid-term, as data for review from implementation will be available for consideration, and there is still a substantial period for formative evaluation and to implement recommendations for the remainder of the programme.

What: The evaluation will consider what has been achieved by examining performance to date as against the LDS objectives and programme objectives, themes, and sub themes. The tender process will invite methodologies that facilitate participation and are designed to capture qualitative data such as added value and impact as well as qualitative data.

Why: The evaluation will review up to date sources of data including local census data to review findings from the LDS area profile analysis. It will analyse any unforeseen internal or external factors which may alter the focus or anticipated outcomes and establish whether the context informing the LDS objectives is still relevant.

How: The evaluation will examine how the strategy is being implemented. It will explore the processes adopted to implement the LDS including, LAG composition, operation, and implementation processes and how they measure up to national and EU programme guidance. It will evaluate whether the strategy is being implemented effectively and efficiently and delivering value for money and propose recommendations for improvement.

Who: The evaluation will be conducted independently by an external contractor to ensure objectivity and prevent staffing resources being drawn away from day-to-day implementation. The LAG will appoint a steering committee of members to oversee the brief, procurement, and delivery of the evaluation in line with the brief and a service agreement. The evaluator will be facilitated by the LAG and Implementing Partner to access any data or contact information or other resources required to complete the evaluation.

The LAG will contribute to any national programme-level evaluation of LEADER and/or Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan, which is undertaken by Government or the EU.

Section 2.

Area Profile

The Local Development Strategy
(LDS) in Context

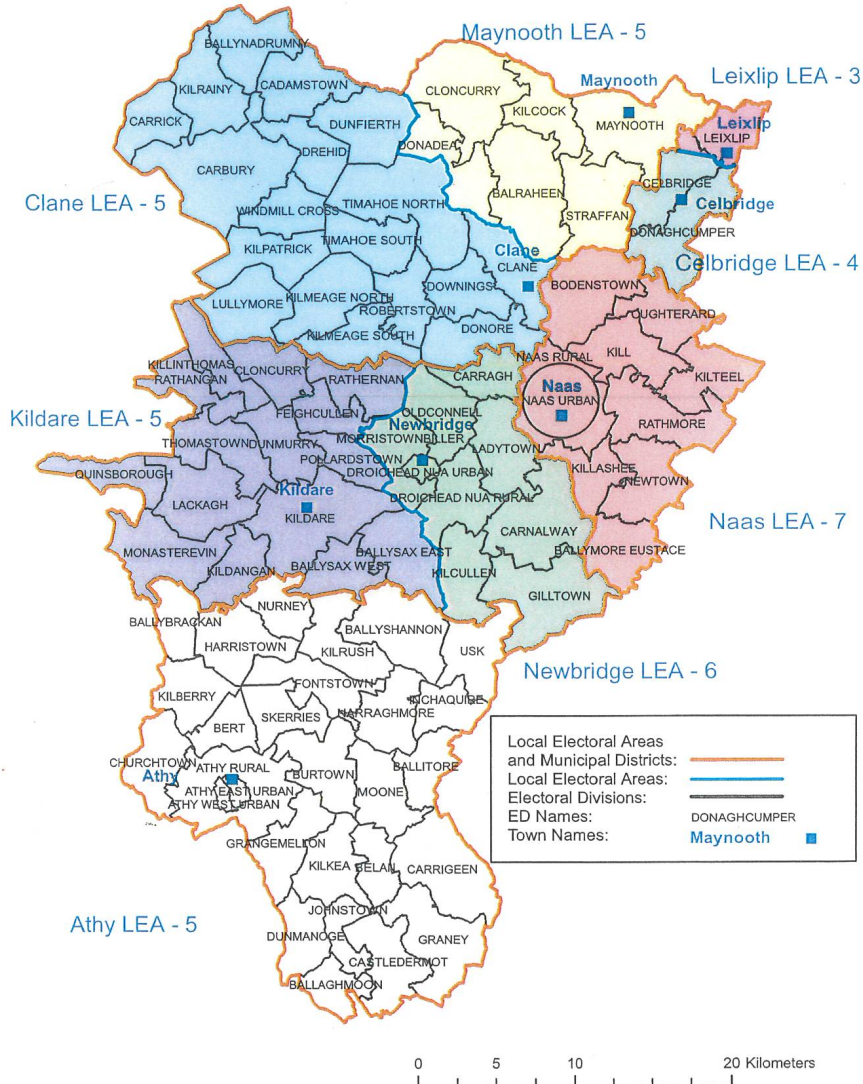


Kildare is a county of rich natural beauty with significant potential in recreational and eco-tourism. The county shows continued rapid growth and is the fifth most populous county in the state. This growth presents opportunities in terms of skills and energy, but creates many challenges in terms of infrastructure, services, integration, and social cohesion.

The area targeted by this LDS is County Kildare, located in the Eastern and Midlands Region. The county is 1,964km₂ in area. Kildare has five Municipal Districts, which are shown in Appendix 3 along with their Electoral Divisions. It is part of the Eastern and Midlands Region.

Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee No. 1 Report 2018

County Kildare



This Area Profile is based on the up-to-date profile and socio-economic baseline report of the county produced by the All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO) in Maynooth University for the preparation of the LECP and which has been freely made available for the preparation of the LDS. Their profile is derived from the most recently available sources, including the Census of Population (2016 and 2022), other Central Statistics Office (CSO) publications and public bodies. It must be noted, however, that the data sets are largely based on Census 2016 as detailed Census 2022 information is not yet available. **It is also written alongside the fuller economic profile contained in the Kildare 2025 Economic Strategy, focusing only on those elements relevant to the LEADER Programme.**

The Objectives and actions of the LDS are rooted in unique geographical and heritage features of the county and the ways these impact the economic and social life of the communities. The relevant features are outlined under the following five headings: Place, People, Economy, Social and Environment, themes which align closely with the high-level goals in the LECP.

2.1 THE LDS IN CONTEXT: PLACE

2.1.1 PEATLANDS

“24,300ha of land in Kildare is covered by bogs, which accounts for 14% of the total land cover, mainly in the west of the county.”

The peatlands in Kildare are some of Ireland’s most important habitats, recognised as internationally significant landscapes. Healthy peatlands provide a home for unique flora and fauna and deliver a range of ecosystem services, including carbon sequestration and flood mitigation, and cultural services such as access to nature and recreation. Most of the bogs are found in the northwest and southwest of the county, including Red and Mouds Bog, which are Special Areas of Conservation. Kildare County Council commissioned the Local Just Transition Plan for West Kildare 2022 to cover the peatland areas in the west of the county.

The Irish Peatland Conservation Council operates the Bog of Allen Nature Centre as an international centre for peatland education and research. They also conserve two nearby bogs: the Lodge Bog which is a raised bog of immense biodiversity value, supporting bog habitat and the associated wildlife, and Lullymore West Bog which has over 300 species of birds, plants, insects, and animals. Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park, located in the Bog of Allen, offers visitors a unique insight into the role the peatlands played in the social and economic life of nearby towns and villages. In 2022, Kildare County Council commissioned the Local Just Transition Plan for West Kildare to cover the peatland areas in the west of the county.

The LDS recognises significant potential in the development of peatland areas for recreation, education, and eco-tourism as well as their contribution to climate action and biodiversity sectors.

2.1.2 THE CURRAGH PLAINS

The **Curragh** is the largest area of unenclosed natural grassland commonage in Ireland and a significant archaeological landscape, encompassing approximately 5,000 acres. Its unique nature has influenced the development of the equine industry in Kildare. The county’s three racecourses - the Curragh, Naas, and Punchestown – hosted 63 race meetings or festivals in 2022, and there are 744 breeders and 76 trainers, alongside a large concentration of high-quality stud farms and world-class training facilities, especially around the Curragh area. It is also the headquarters of Horse Racing Ireland. A May 2023 study by Deloitte found that the overall Irish horse Racing industry, including breeding, training, racing, and ancillary activities, delivered €2.46bn to the Irish economy in direct and stimulated expenditure in 2022, up 34%

from 2016, and supports a total of 30,350 jobs, an increase of 1,450 from 2016. The Curragh Racecourse, which covers 1,500 acres, is the epicentre of this industry and supports 1,176 jobs with a direct and indirect economic impact valued in 2021 at €99.6m⁸.



The LDS recognizes the potential for spin-off recreational and tourism projects associated with the equine tradition in the county.

2.1.3 WATERWAYS

“Collectively, the waterways of Kildare provide important environmental and landscape features and present significant potential for the LEADER programme to support future development of eco-tourism and water-based activities, as well as contributing significantly to the biodiversity of the county.”

The north-east of Kildare is drained by the river Liffey and its tributary, the Rye. A small area in the north of the county is drained by the Boyne and its tributaries. The largest of the catchment areas is drained by the **River Barrow** and its tributaries.

The **Grand Canal** sits above the valley of the River Barrow as far as Monasterevin and crosses some of its tributaries by short aqueducts. It has ranches which extend to Naas, Corbally, and Milltown, taking walkers through some of Kildare’s most scenic small towns and villages, like Ardclough and Sallins. The canal supports important habitats such as tall herbs, calcareous grassland,

reef fringe and woodland and diverse species use it, including Annex II species such as otter and white-clawed crayfish.

The Barrow Line - the canal spur off the Grand Canal - is currently being developed by Kildare County Council, in partnership with Waterways Ireland and Laois County Council, as the **Barrow Blueway** using the existing towpath, which is a National Waymarked Way, from Lowtown through Monasterevin, briefly into Laois and on to Athy. The LEADER programme funded the Barrow Blueway Economic Plan in 2020 and in 2023 the Barrow Placemaking Plan for the development of facilities along the route.

The **Royal Canal** Way follows grassy towpaths and gravel canal-side roads from Dublin to Cloondara in Longford. The Royal Canal Greenway is a 130 km long-distance, off-road walking and cycling trail, starting at Maynooth harbour through Kilcock to Longford.

2.1.4 WOODLANDS

Coillte manage several forest walks and trails across County Kildare, including Mullaghreelan, Donadea, Killinthomas and Moore Abbey Woods. There is significant potential for enhanced connectivity between woodlands and other trails to promote the tourism offering in the county.


2.1.5 NATURAL HERITAGE

Kildare has many natural heritage sites which are accessible to the public, some of which are designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA) and/ or Natural Heritage Areas (NHA): These include the significant sensitive peatland areas located to the north-west of the county, including Ballynafagh, Red Bog and Mouds Bog which are Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), while Carbury Bog and Hodgestown Bog are Natural Heritage Areas. Some of Kildare’s waterways are SAC’s, including the Barrow River, as part of the River Barrow and River Nore SAC, and the Rye River between Maynooth and Leixlip which has several rare, threatened plant and insect species. Parts of the Grand Canal have been proposed for National Heritage Area (pNHA) status. Ballynafagh Lake is also a SAC,

⁸ Jim Power Economics, 2021, Summary of the Economic & Financial contribution of racehorse activities in the Curragh.

as is Pollardstown Fen, the largest remaining calcareous fen in Ireland, which is a designated nature reserve, and a Ramsar Wetland Site. The Royal and Grand Canals are also proposed Natural Heritage Areas.

Other riverbanks have preserved patches of natural vegetation, such as the Rye River in the Carton Demesne which has two rare flora species and at Osberstown and Athgarvan, both of which are among the 23 designated or proposed Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) in the county




The rich heritage of the waterways and peatlands offer significant potential for the development of eco-based recreation and tourism.

2.1.6 BUILT HERITAGE

These natural resources are complemented by the monastic heritage in the county, from the Cathedral and Abbey remains in Kildare town, and the monastic remains of Erc, bishop of Lillcach (Lullymore), to the Celtic crosses of Moone and Castledermot, as well as large estate houses, such as Carton House. Industrial-related structures such as the small canal bridges - of considerable historical and social significance in the canal network development in Ireland - as well as the associated mill buildings and warehouses, are also widespread.

2.1.7 ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE


There are significant archaeological heritage remains throughout the county, including almost 200 archaeological monuments on the Curragh alone, showing continuity of burial activity in the Bronze Age and Iron Age. The Curragh itself is part of a wider landscape centring on the 'royal' enclosure of Dún Ailinne near Kilcullen.



The built and archaeological heritage can be focal attractions for those visitors to the county who walk the Blueway, Greenway or pilgrim trails.

2.1.8 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Curragh also plays a part in the cultural heritage of the county which includes the stories and places connected with Brigid of Kildare. Kildare town and the Curragh is the spiritual home of St. Brigid in Ireland. It was here that she founded her monastery and where she was first laid to rest. Many of the miracles attributed to St. Brigid took place near Kildare town, and it, and the wells associated with her, were important places of pilgrimage from the Early Medieval Period. Other parts of the county also have associations with Brigid, such as Umeras which claims (alongside Faughert, Louth) to be the place of her birth.



Pilgrim paths and the 11 Wells associated with Brigid offer the potential for the development of walkways in the county, as does the development of the Turas Columbanus in the north of the county along former peatland areas which could link the canals.

2.2 THE LDS IN CONTEXT: PEOPLE

2.2.1 POPULATION GROWTH

“The rapid growth is putting severe pressure on public service delivery in the county, on access to services such as GP’s, leading to gaps in social infrastructure and presents challenges for integration and social cohesion.”

Over the last two decades, Kildare has experienced the second fastest rate of population growth in the country. It is now the fourth highest populated county in Ireland, after counties Dublin, Cork, and Galway. It is the fifth largest Local Authority, after Dublin City, Cork County, Fingal, and South Dublin. Already in 2016, Kildare had a larger population than other familiar urban centres such as Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Limerick and Waterford City and County.

Up-to-date figures show that the county has a population of 246,977, 4.8% of the total in the country. This marks another 11% rise since 2016, (of 24,473), a level of growth above the State average at 7.6%. It is significant to note that this growth is higher than the total population of Kilkenny City, Sligo town or Waterford. 9 ED’s have had

over 20% growth. The cause is divided equally between natural increase (49.2%) and inward migration into the county (50.8%)⁹ **The demographic trend indicates that the county has grown by more than 71% in the last 20 years.**

The most significant areas of increase in population within the county in the last few years (more than 25%) are Naas Rural and around Kilcock. Census 2022 figures show that Naas is now the 9th largest town in Ireland and the largest town in Kildare, with a population of 26,180, having grown by 22.4% since 2016. Newbridge now has 24,366 inhabitants and Kildare town 10,312. The MD with the most accelerated level of growth is the Clane-Maynooth MD, which has grown by 243.3% since 1991, compared with a national average of 145.3%.

This growth is expected to continue in the next 20 years, with a projected growth of 18.6%¹⁰.

The Transitional Regional and County Population Projections to 2031 as provided in the NPF Roadmap and the RSES, are in the following table. Taking the higher range for each growth band, the county population is thus projected to increase by 31,500 persons to 2026 with an additional 12,500 to the year 2031.

This increase is extremely high by Irish and particularly by EU standards.

COUNTY	2016	2022	2026	2031
Kildare	222,500	246,977	249,000 - 254,000	259,000 - 266,500

Demographic trends indicate that Co. Kildare population has grown by more than 71% in the past 20 years.

2.2.2 POPULATION AGE PROFILE

At 36.6%, Kildare has the highest proportion of young people aged 0 – 24 in the State. **In fact, the number of young people under 25 years in Co. Kildare is higher than the total population of each of the following counties: Offaly, Cavan, Sligo, Roscommon, Monaghan, Carlow, Longford, and Leitrim.** This rate is higher than the State average (33.2%), EMRA (33.5%) and marginally higher than the Eastern SPA average of 35.8%, and has implications in terms of current services, school places and childcare provision. For example, primary schools in Athy are nearing capacity and it is calculated that an

⁹ AIRO, Kildare Socio-Economic Profile, 2023, p.9

¹⁰ Ibid., p.10. This is ahead of the projected national growth of 12.6%

additional 254 student spaces are required over the period 2021 – 2027 equating to 10 classrooms of 26 pupils each.¹¹ The same figures show Kildare to have a Youth Dependency Rate of 36.5% which is higher than the EMRA rate of 31.6%¹². Given the size and significance of Kildare’s existing population cohorts in the 0-4, 5- 12 and 13-17 age ranges, it is evident that the county’s population has not yet peaked, and **that there is likely to be an increased demand for children’s and young people’s services over the next decade, as shown by the County Development Plan and the CYPSC Plan.**

The next most significant trend is that the number of persons aged 65+ is expected to double, from 28,010 to 59,016, which has significant implications in terms of future services to be provided.

2.2.3 KEY TOWNS AND POPULATION DISTRIBUTION

The Kildare County Development Plan 2023 – 2029 uses a classification for each town and village, as follows:

Key Towns: Large economically active service and/or county towns: Naas and Maynooth These provide employment for their surrounding areas and with high-quality transport links and the capacity to act as growth drivers to complement the Regional Growth Centres.

Self-Sustaining Growth Towns: Towns with a moderate level of jobs and services – includes sub-county market towns and commuter towns with good transport links and capacity for continued commensurate growth to become more self-sustaining: Newbridge, Leixlip, Kildare Town and Athy.

Self-Sustaining Towns: Towns with elevated levels of population growth and a weak employment base which are reliant on other areas for employment and/or services and which require targeted ‘catch up’ investment to become more self-sustaining: Celbridge, Kilcock, Monasterevin and Clane.

Towns and Villages: Settlements with local service and employment functions. Towns include Castledermot, Kilcullen, Derrinturn, Kill, Prosperous, Rathangan and Sallins, while examples of villages are Athgarvan, Allenwood, Ballitore (793), Ballymore Eustace, Caragh Suncroft and Narraghmore.

Rural areas: Smaller villages and the wider rural region. These contain the rural nodes of Cadamstown, Carbury, Castlemitchell, Clongorey/Blacktrench, Killina, Kilshanroe, Maddenstown, Newtown, Rathmore/Eadestown, Ticknevin, Timahoe, Tirmoghan, and villages such as Maganey, Two Mile House, Brannockstown and Kilkea.

In terms where most of the county population resided in 2016, 72.6% lived in large or medium towns as opposed to 27.4% in rural areas. 50.7% lived in the 7 bigger towns of Newbridge (10.2%), Naas (9.6%), Celbridge (9.1%), Leixlip (7%), Maynooth (6.6%), Athy (4.3%) and Kildare Town (3.9%). Significant housing development has been carried out in recent years in Naas, Kildare Town, Newbridge, Kilcock and Monasterevin and this is reflected in the 2022 Census figures. In terms of land mass, over 60% of the county’s population live in the ten largest towns which cover only 5% of the county’s land mass. Given the changing work environment and increased remote working since the pandemic it will be interesting to see if commuting patterns and transport use remains as high when the analysis of Census 2022 is complete.

Thus, “urban Kildare” has a high number and diverse range of towns primarily in the North-East corridor. “Rural Kildare” is a regionally important agricultural base with dispersed populations and settlement patterns, primarily in the South and Southwest of the County. **These smaller rural towns and villages, such as Nurney, Narraghmore Suncroft, Carbury and Coill Dubh which account for 95% of Kildare’s land mass, support more, dispersed rural populations and retain a more rural feel.** Only 0.27% of the population live in areas classified as highly rural or remote.

¹¹ Kildare County Council, Athy Local Area Plan 2021-2027

¹² The Youth Dependency Rate (0-14) is calculated by taking the population aged 0 to 14 and calculating it as a proportion of the population aged 15 to 64.

2.3 THE LDS IN CONTEXT: ECONOMY

The latest CSO data indicates that the economic output of Kildare in 2019 was 10.4 billion, representing a growth rate of 6.2% compared to the previous year. This growth was driven by the service sector which accounts for the greater part of the county's economic activity, while the construction sector expanded by 18.3% in 2019. Kildare's economy is performing better relative to other parts of Ireland. Participation in the labour force and workforce is higher than national and regional levels. The median gross household income in Co. Kildare is higher than national levels of €45,256, but costs in the whole county for items such as childcare, housing and rent are among the highest in the State. There are some income variations within the county with Athy (€42,054) and Kildare/ Newbridge (€50,433) MDs lower than county and regional levels.

2.3.1 ECONOMIC SECTORS

The Kildare 2025 Economic Development Strategy identified eight key areas for the economic development of the county. These are Indigenous Industry/ SMEs, Foreign Direct Investment, the knowledge economy, the Equine Industry, the Agri food Sector, Sustainable Tourism, Hospitality & Leisure, the Retail sector, and the Green Economy. The same plan supports the objective of promoting the town of Athy as a Food, Drink and Skills Innovation Hub. Kildare has the second-highest rate of FDI nationally and this has contributed immensely to the strong economic profile.

The SME and the micro-Enterprise sector represents approximately 92% of all active business in Kildare, while a second significant feature of the Kildare economic scene is the fact that the county has the second-highest rate of Foreign Direct Investment nationally and its ability to attract and retain FDI is seen as crucial in its economic stability and success. The key FDI sectors in the county include technology, financial services and pharmaceuticals with Intel, Hewlett Packard, Pfizer, P&G, and IFS State Street locating in the county.

An important aim for the economic development of the county is the development of two main economic clusters in the east of the county: the Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) Economic Cluster in northeast Kildare - Maynooth, Leixlip, Celbridge and Kilcock - and the Sallins-Naas-Newbridge Cluster which also incorporates the proposed Naas to Newbridge Strategic Economic and Employment Zone.

2.3.2 EMPLOYMENT

In 2016, the Kildare labour force was 106,849 persons, with economic activity divided across several sectors. 26.6% were employed in commerce and trade, while 22.8% worked in professional services. 11.8% worked in manufacturing, 8.6% in transport and communications, 6.4% in public administration, 6.1% in construction and 3.3 in Agriculture, forestry and fishing. Of the key employment settlements in Kildare, Naas (10,999) has the largest concentration of jobs, which accounts for 17.5% of all jobs in Kildare. Of this number, 8,115 persons commute into Naas, making it a key commuting destination in the county. Newbridge (6,526) has the second highest number of jobs followed by Leixlip (5,825).

2.3.3 COMMUTING PATTERNS

A significant feature of working life for Kildare residents is the high number of residents who commute to work, with 39.1% (37,193) of the 95,345 workers residing in Kildare commuting to areas outside the county. **33% of Kildare's resident workers are employed in the Dublin Metropolitan Area**, with Leixlip (71%) and Naas (40%) having the highest numbers. The highest rates are primarily located in the north-east of the county proximate to the towns of Naas, Sallins, Celbridge, Leixlip and Maynooth, where many parts have more than 50% of workers commuting into the Dublin.

The high numbers commuting to work impacts upon the sense of place, identity, and social cohesion of communities. The consultation process has highlighted this as a challenge in developing a common focus or purpose and maintaining vibrant town centres.

2.3.4 TRANSPORT

Census 2016 POWSCAR data shows that Kildare commuters rely heavily on motorised private transport. More than 50% of those commuting to locations outside the county travelled by car, rising to 64% of the Leixlip and 80% of the Naas commuters. While trips to Dublin are well catered for by both bus and rail services, most of the county's workforce (64%) live and work within the county. It is acknowledged that the public transport provision across the county is inadequate, with one participant in the consultations pointing out that it was quicker to travel by public transport to Dublin and get to Naas from there rather than get from the north of the county to Naas. The poor transport system impacts particularly more disadvantaged communities as they seek to avail of work or training opportunities or access health or mental health supports.

The establishment of Kildare South Dublin Local Link as a Transport Coordination Unit in 2014 has seen the development of new high frequency bus services linking urban areas within County Kildare and serving a wider hinterland which had not previously had access to any public transport services. Key issues in the further development of rural transport services in Kildare include the provision of bus stops, connectivity to mainline bus and train services, the development of flexible and sustainable transport options such as electric vehicles, and the use of technology to provide information for the public to encourage greater use of public transport by local communities.

2.3.5 AGRICULTURE

“The transition to sustainable food systems is a huge economic opportunity for the county as consumers' expectations are evolving and driving significant change in the food market.”

All regions across the EU, including Ireland, are undergoing long-term structural change in farming. The number of farms across the 27 EU member states declined by 32% between 2003 and 2016, from around 15 to 10.3 million, and this decline concerned mainly small to medium sized holdings. While the number of farms in the EU has been in steep decline, the amount of land used for production has remained steady, which means that there is a tendency toward bigger and bigger farms.

This trend is similar in Kildare. From 1991 to 2010, the number of farms in the county reduced from 3,251 to 2,578. This represents a reduction of 20% compared to a 17% reduction for the state.


However, the average farm size in Co. Kildare is above the national average especially in the South of the county. Census 2016 shows that just 3.3% (3,190 persons) of the labour force of County Kildare is now engaged in the agriculture, fishing, and forestry occupational group, with about 113,449 hectares farmed. Analysis of the types of farming in the county shows that 42.7% of farming activity is in specialist beef production, an activity that potentially could come under pressure due to climate change mitigation measures. The second highest area of activity is specialist tillage. The Teagasc National Farm Survey 2019 shows that over half (52%) of all farm households have some form of off-farm income.

There are significant challenges facing agriculture in the next decades due to climate change and the changes requires to adapt to it and to the threats upon biodiversity. Research has shown some correlation between intensive agriculture and the climate crisis, and the worldwide food system is a primary driver of biodiversity loss. The COVID pandemic revealed a desire among consumers for local products and localised food production is also a key to ensuring food security, while also reducing the carbon footprint. It also underlined the importance of a robust and resilient food system that functions in all circumstances and can ensure access to a sufficient supply of affordable food for citizens.

One feature of the changing employment pattern in agriculture is the growing number of part time farmers. A key area for future development is the agri-food sector. The agricultural industry is also important to the future of Kildare in the significant role it plays in preserving and improving the natural environment. The LDS recognises the potential for farm diversification projects in these areas to support the farm income.

2.3.6 TOURISM

Co. Kildare has emphasised its proximity to Dublin, and its attractiveness for heritage, golf, horse racing and equine-related products. Boutique and character hotels offering an ‘accommodation plus’ product, such as selected sports, also feature. This strategy looks east, positioning Kildare within the Greater Dublin Area. The county also sits within the ‘Ireland’s Ancient East’ regional experience brand, which in 2019 was worth €1.7bn to the regional economy, supporting approximately 55,000 jobs. One brand developed in the 1990’s was that of the “Thoroughbred County” emphasising the “excellence” of its tourism offering - “nature, activity, heritage and hospitality on Dublin’s Doorstep”. However, despite these strong selling points, there is a consensus that Kildare has underperformed in tourism¹³.



The LDS seeks to support the complimentary development of eco-based recreational tourism to strengthen Kildare’s attractiveness for visitors. Fáilte Ireland recognises sustainable eco-tourism as a future growth area for Ireland.

1. The development of the Barrow Blueway has immense potential to bring visitors to the county and increase the awareness of the county as an eco-tourist destination.

The LEADER-funded Barrow Blueway economic plan estimates an increase of visitors of up to 40,000 in the first year of opening¹⁴. These figures are based on similar attractions around the country and the increase in walking seen during the pandemic. However, the Barrow Blueway has advantages over other areas in that it is more accessible from Dublin, with public transport arriving in Athy and Monasterevin and attractive towns and villages along the way at achievable distances averaging 10 km. The expected visitors have the potential to benefit those towns, in the southwest and northwest of the county.

2. To meet market trends, there is a need to increase the availability and range of competitively priced bed night opportunities which would enhance the attractiveness of the west of the county as a tourism destination. This has the potential to significantly add value to other tourism initiatives in the county.

3. Kildare also has further potential to develop low carbon impact, agri-eco based experiences through the rehabilitation of former industrial peatlands in West Kildare and integrating these with developments along the Canals and the Blueway. There is potential for a number of long distance looped peatways that traverse the Bog of Allen utilising former industrial peat railway tracks and lines at the following locations: From Ticknevin Bridge (Grand Canal) to Rathangan; Enfield (Royal Canal)/Kilshancoe (Raven’s Cross)/Killyon/Doogary through Timahoe Bog to Allenwood Community Development Association Ltd. and onto the Grand Canal and from there through Lullymore East and onto Rathangan.

A National Peatlands Park is an objective of the County Development Plan as is the use of 70% of former peatlands for an eco-tourism aim. This has the potential to benefit the communities traditionally associated with peat production, stimulate further visitor experiences to complement Kildare current offering.

4. The development of other trails and pilgrim paths, linked to local towns and villages also has the potential to heighten Kildare’s places as a destination for walking-based tourism. The celebrations connected with Brigid1500, a programme of events to celebrate St. Brigid on the 1500 anniversary of her death have the potential to increase an awareness of the county. This would build on the acknowledged assets of Kildare town as the key tourism destination of County and link into the heritage and environmental aspects of the surrounding area, including the Curragh.

The themes associated with Brigid, and other figures such as Columbanus and Shackleton, such as a concern for the environment, support the development of a regenerative tourism model for the west of the county.

¹³ Kildare County Council, Kildare 2025 Economic Strategy

¹⁴ Barrow Blueway Economic Plan, 2022, p.34.

2.3.7 SOCIAL ENTERPRISES


Over the last ten years there has been a steady growth in the number of social enterprises in County Kildare. CKLP commissioned a report in 2012: 'CKLP Profile of Social Enterprises in County Kildare and Outline for A Social Enterprise Entrepreneurship Strategy'. This report identified sixty-seven social enterprises including credit unions, housing associations and co-operatives. The largest sectors were credit unions, childcare providers, and housing providers. The report also noted that many community and voluntary organisations were operating as social enterprises without recognition or awareness. This included community halls, community employment schemes and some sporting and recreational groups.

It was noted that there was potential for social enterprises in environment related projects, tourism related projects, education services and services for the elderly or those with disabilities. No energy related projects, equine based projects were identified, and a shortage of food related social enterprises was noted. The report also highlighted opportunities for cooperation between Kildare County Council, HSE and other state bodies to identify potential social enterprises to meet local needs and provide services for disadvantaged groups e.g older people and people with disabilities.

In response CKLP through the RDP/ LEADER Programme (2014 – 2020) developed and delivered a Bespoke Training Programme for social enterprises. This training programme supported the development of new social enterprises in the county including community shops as well as prompting applications for grant aid support. Some of these, such as the Old Hardware in Narraghmore provided significant support to the community during the pandemic and have continued to respond to a gap of services in that part of the county.

Collaboration between SICAP and LEADER in recent years has led to securing Dormant Accounts Fund support for capital grants, training and mentoring and the establishment of a brand for social enterprises in County Kildare through a network which has been supported and encouraged by CKLP staff. A social enterprise strategy is planned for 2023 and this strategy will focus on the development of social enterprises and support for social entrepreneurs in sectors where deficits in local services like environment and energy related projects persist.

Consultation with the Social Enterprise Network highlighted some of the challenges faced by social enterprises, including attracting and maintaining staff, accessing business support comparable to private enterprise, insufficient profit for staff development and escalating operating costs. The declining number of volunteers experience all across the community sector in Kildare also impacts upon both the operation and board membership of social enterprises.



Social enterprises are drivers of innovation, ecological transition and have the potential to respond to gaps in services especially in rural communities, to build social cohesion and strengthen democracy.

SOCIAL INCLUSION: GEOGRAPHICAL

2.4.1 RELATIVE DEPRIVATION

“There is a clear spatial divide in disadvantage in the county with the most affluent areas near Naas and in the Maynooth-Celbridge area and the most disadvantaged parts of the county in the peripheral west and south of the county in areas close to Athy - the most disadvantaged SA in the county.”

Although the overall county Deprivation score for Kildare is marginally above average, - 3.2, on the Pobal HP Deprivation Index – a closer analysis of the spatial distribution of deprivation in the county reveals challenges related to poverty and inter-generational disadvantage.

If one draws a line from Rathangan to Ballymore Eustace one finds that there is no ED south of that line that is classified as “affluent” on the Pobal Index. This accounts for 75% of the county.

Furthermore, some areas within Athy, Kildare, Newbridge and Naas are classified as “disadvantaged”, ‘very disadvantaged.’ and one area classified as “extremely disadvantaged”

The county average may be 9.5% disadvantaged, but this rises to 20.8% in Athy and to 12.5% in the Newbridge-Kildare MD. In total there are 20,592 people living in the county who are deemed to be disadvantaged, very disadvantaged or extremely disadvantaged, which represents 9.25% of the total population. Please see Appendix 3 for map and list of disadvantaged areas.

On the Pobal Index of Deprivation, most of Athy is designated as disadvantaged, with the Athy West Urban Area described as “extremely disadvantaged” and one of the most deprived areas in the whole of Ireland. Athy West has a male unemployment rate of 48.65% while the female rate is 38.46%, a lone parent ratio of 57%, and 52% of the population there did not progress beyond Primary Level education. In some parts of the town up to 40% of the population have only primary school or no formal education. In Kildare Town, three small areas are classified as “very disadvantaged, with one area having male unemployment registered at 52.70 and female unemployment at 48.44. In Newbridge, 4 small areas are classified as “very disadvantaged”, with Index scores of -24.34, -23.34, -20.73 and -22.69. Male unemployment rates in these areas vary from 29.63% to 41.82%.

It is important to note that even within some of Kildare’s more affluent towns, such as Naas and Celbridge, there are distinct concentrated pockets of disadvantage. For example, the Saint Evins Park estate in Monasterevin has a Deprivation Index score of -25.85, with 47% of residents having only primary school education and over 33% unemployed. Smaller and more rural towns also have prominent levels of disadvantage. Parts of Rathangan have a deprivation index score of -21.27 “very disadvantaged”, while an area of Derrinturn has a score of – 22.33, with an unemployment rate of just under 40%. This is correlated with the fact that Derrinturn is the rural town with the highest percentage of primary education only - at 19.9% - while the highest rating village is Coill Dubh - 19.6% - which also has the lowest level of progression to third level education at 14.6% (The State average is 33.5%). Other small rural towns, such as Castledermot (-15.34) are also classified as disadvantaged, as are the villages of Robertstown (-14.91) Ballitore (-14.22), Suncroft (-14.04) and Allenwood (-10.94).

Rural areas typically contain many challenges which are hard to measure, such as an older population, higher rates of part-time employment, lower median incomes, greater distance from everyday services and higher poverty rates than the national average, and it is acknowledged that the Deprivation Index is less successful at capturing these. Despite this, parts of rural Kildare are classified as “disadvantaged,” such as Kilberry with a score -19.53, reflecting its traditional association with turf production. This area falls within the EU Just Transition area as does Athy Rural with an index score of – 13.38. Rural areas such as Kilpatrick also are classified as disadvantaged at -14.20.



The evidence in the county points to the need for precise interventions which respond to intergenerational challenges and seek strategic ways to address ingrained social exclusion.

2.4.2 JUST TRANSITION COMMUNITIES

Significant parts of west Kildare are peatland areas and the life of communities living there has been marked by this association. Kilberry bog was one of the first bogs developed in Ireland in 1936, and a briquette factory opened in Lullymore in the same year. During World War II the “Kildare Scheme” was launched, where workers were brought in from all over Ireland. Fourteen residential camps, each with a capacity for 500 workers, were built by the Turf Development Board in the northwest of the county at Killinthomas and Shean near Rathangan, Lullymore, Allenwood, Corduff near Coill Dubh, Robertstown, Newbridge, and Edenderry. As a result of this Scheme, Kildare experienced significant in-migration to predominantly rural areas.

Bord na Móna, which has its headquarters in Newbridge, announced the cessation of peat extraction in January 2021, ending practices which have marked the economic life of the communities affected for almost 100 years and social practices for significantly longer. Both Bord na Móna and the ESB have been key sources of employment in these communities and there has been an inter-generational history of employment linked not only to employment in the semi state companies but also in other enterprises and trades linked to the extraction of peat e.g., private turf cutting and harvesting, engineering and metal fabrication businesses etc. As many older workers left school at an early age to take up the abundant employment in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs these individuals are now at risk of long-term unemployment. On a wider scale local communities are at risk with the closure of services affected by the ending of peat extraction and the absence of initiatives to re-skilling and employment initiatives for the labour force.



The LDS recognises the need to support the transition in employment practices for those who have traditionally been involved in turf cutting or similar activities as well as the need to preserve traditional skills which have existed for centuries.

The EU Regulation 2021/1056 which established the Just Transition Fund responds to the social, economic and environmental impacts of the EU’s transition towards its 2030 targets for energy and climate and a climate-neutral economy of the European Union by 2050. Two of the Kildare MD’s – Clane/Maynooth and Athy – are part of the EU Just Transition areas and eligible for funding under that scheme. However, this designation fails to cover significant peatland community areas such as around Umeras near Monasterevin and areas around Rathangan.

Kildare County Council commissioned a Local Just Transition Plan for West Kildare 2022 and included the third MD of Kildare/Newbridge in a more accurate capturing of the communities with a historical relationship to peatland activity. These communities are predominantly rural and have a higher risk of poverty, a high unemployment rate and a lower Gross Value Added per person than the national average. There are low levels of third level education completion rates in communities such as Coill Dubh and Derrinturn. A key action in the Local Just Transition Plan is to “encourage new community development groups to emerge” and “to grow the capacity for communities to help themselves [in order to] enhance the ability of communities to access funding opportunities and skills training”.¹⁵

¹⁵ Kildare County Council, 2022, Local Just Transition Plan for West Kildare.

The LDS recognises that green and digital transitions, which will be necessary to meet the European Union’s ambition of climate neutrality by 2050, both create opportunities for sustainable prosperity and pose several significant challenges for members of traditional peatland communities. The LEADER Programme can develop the capacity of these Just Transition communities and respond to initiatives from the Kildare/Newbridge MD which is not eligible under the EU Just Transition funds.

The Kildare County Development Plan 2023 – 2029 supports the “development of a National Peatlands Park” which is also an objective of the Local Just Transition Plan for West Kildare. and the National Peatlands Strategy Mid-Term review 2021. Kildare County Council also plans to “promote and support the development and operation of a number of long-distance peatways that traverse the Bog of Allen utilising former industrial peat railway tracks.” This proposal would provide looped walks linking former peatland areas such as Timahoe, Allenwood, Lullymore East and Rathangan.

There is significant potential in the development of a Peatland Park and/or peatlands routes to attract environmentally friendly tourism to the west of the county.

2.4.3 AREAS WHICH HAVE NOT RECEIVED LEADER FUNDING.

Over the 25 years of LEADER operations in County Kildare there are few areas that have not been touched by funding, either through individual promoters receiving grant aid, communities applying for support or in-house initiatives which moved across community boundaries. However, it is possible – through the work of LEADER Development Officers on the ground or through the experience of Kildare County Council Community Department or through an analysis of the take-up of other funding initiatives - to identify some geographical areas which in recent years have been slower to identify common projects which mobilize the community or respond to gaps in services.

In general, the communities in the northwest and southwest of the county have been slow to apply for funding in recent years or have been identified as needing support to participate in community-led processes. These include **Johnstown Bridge, Clogherinkoe, Derrinturn, Coill Dubh, Prosperous, Timoghan, Rathangan, Robertstown, Kilberry, Castlemitchell, Levitstown, and Nurney**. Several rural projects have been supported where the local GAA club has been the driver behind the initiative, rather than a broad-based community group. This was the case in Ardclough, Rathcoffey, Newtown and Staplestown/Donadea. In many of these cases the GAA facility is the main or only facility used by the community in the area. Several projects were supported to assist new or weaker groups build momentum through the successful completion of a project which they identified. This was the case with Robertstown and with Carbury.

Several small communities will be supported to develop integrated plans for their community to identify their needs and access funding opportunities including, but not limited to, LEADER and Just Transition Funds.

SOCIAL INCLUSION: THEMATIC

2.4.4 YOUNG PEOPLE


Kildare has the highest rate of young people aged 0 to 24 years in the State. The population aged 0 to 24 years in Kildare was 81,517 and represents 36.6% of the total population (Census 2016). Kildare has more young people than the total population of some neighbouring counties such as Offaly and Carlow. Kildare has the 4th highest rate of 0–4 year-olds, and the 2nd highest rate of 5–12-year-olds, in the State¹⁶.

¹⁶ Kildare LECP 2016 - 2021

The breakdown of these figures was as follows:

- **8% of the County's population were of pre-school age (0-4 years old).**
- **13% were of primary school-going age (between 5-12 years old).**
- **7% were of secondary school going age (13-17 years old).**
- **8% were of third-level age (18-24 years old).**

Approximately 30% of the population of the county are under 25 and thus are a target group of the LDP under the Rural Youth subtheme. The LDS bases itself on the new CYPSC plan for the county which has been written after extensive consultation and is to be published soon. To this is added information from the consultation process which has highlighted an overall lack of social infrastructure in almost all the towns in the county. For children, this can be seen in the need for more childcare places, playgrounds, and in teenagers the need for safe spaces for teenagers to gather and hangout. Further insights come from a research project, based on thorough consultation¹⁷ carried out in Celbridge showed that teenagers sought safe sheltered places to gather with Wi-Fi access, away from sight, but connected to people for safety. This need for safe places for teenagers to gather and the need to create healthy safe teenager-friendly spaces in all towns and villages was repeated across the county. The provision of skateboard parks such as the one in Newbridge has been requested for Kilcock, Kildare Town and Monasterevin, and while they attract a niche user group, they provide an age-appropriate space to meet. Basketball courts are also seen as another formal space which allows young people to gather and could be combined with shelters, seating and WIFI access. Models such as the Teenscape programme in South Dublin, where spaces were created for activities such as parkour and for performing and music were seen as worthy of replication.



The LDS recognises the need to develop social infrastructure in towns and villages that recognizes the recreational and social needs of children and teenagers and the need to develop teenage friendly spaces in communities.

2.4.5 OLDER PEOPLE

Almost 10% of the Kildare population were aged 65 or over in 2016 and this number is projected to rise over the coming years, going from 28,010 in 2016 to 59,016 in 2040. Research carried out by Age Friendly Kildare for their County Strategy 2023 – 2027 found that access to health services is a huge challenge for older person and that there is considerable concern about the move of public services onto online access only. Many older persons reported isolation and loneliness on a regular basis as well as having to choose between heating or eating in the current cost of living and fuel crisis. Many also stated that there was a lack of information on services such as how to access meals on wheels. While geographical isolation can be more acute in rural areas, loneliness is not an exclusively rural issue. Many older persons living in the towns around Kildare also reported elevated levels of loneliness and isolation.

2.4.6 WOMEN

Economic gender inequality issues requiring systemic change have been highlighted by the National Women's Council of Ireland in their 2024 budget submission, stating that the cost-of-living crisis, austerity, and the pandemic have all hit women harder than men. Women have lower incomes, less wealth, and more unpaid care responsibilities. They note that single parents, the vast majority of whom are women, are particularly affected by these inequalities, as are many other marginalised women including Traveller women, migrant women, and disabled women.

¹⁷ Barron, Tolland and Emmet (2022) "Somewhere to Hang Out" Teenagers Outdoor Recreational Needs in Celbridge: A Partnership Perspective. Dublin, DCU

Recent figures from Teach Tearmainn Domestic Violence refuge shows domestic violence services have struggled to meet demand by women locally. In 2020, Teach Tearmainn supported 326 women, up 7% from 2019, while the refuge accommodated 28 women, 62 children and 3 dependent adults in its four units in 2020, an increase of 34.5% from 2019. Support calls by 275% in the same period and they were unable to meet requests for refuge in Kildare for 159 women, 177 children and two dependent adults in 2020.

In 2019 the female rate of self-harm was 21% higher than the male rate (National Suicide Research Foundation) and the local response was to introduce a specific women's mental health programme through "Heads Up" outlined in the section 2.4.7.

Equally, women have been to the forefront in enterprise, social enterprise, and charity sectors as drivers of social change, with Karen Leigh, founder of "Sensational Kids," a charity in Kildare listed as one of Europe's' top 100 Social Entrepreneurs. Kildare's volunteers are mostly female. In 2022, 66% of volunteers registered with Kildare Volunteer Centre were female. However, although women play a crucial role for the development and economic growth of rural communities, their key role is too often 'invisible'. The EU has made a commitment to improving the situation, notably through the EU Rural Action Plan, by supporting the uptake of female entrepreneurship, women's participation in decision-making and the provision of adequate services in rural areas.

Older Voices Kildare has highlighted the cumulative impact in older age of gender-based discrimination in areas such as employment and opportunities such as greater financial insecurity, lower pay, and lower pensions. Other issues of concern include long term care due to unaddressed health needs and continuing care responsibilities. In terms of isolation, two thirds of older people living alone are women and fewer older women drive so transport is a greater challenge. The success of Women's Sheds proves the need for social, community-based supports.

2.4.7 HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH

The significant increase in population in Kildare over the last decades has meant that health services in the county have not kept pace with the increasing demand. A report by the ESRI in July 2019 found that Co. Kildare has at least a 10% per cent lower supply than the national average for all 8 non-acute community and primary care services, which includes GPs, Psychologists, Public Health Nurses and Occupational Therapists, amongst others. The report highlights this inequality which cannot be explained on any need's basis. Social inequalities in the county exacerbate this finding - research carried out by the WHO (World Health Organisation) shows that social determinant of health, such as where a person lives, and their socio-economic status, can be more important than health care or lifestyle choices, when looking at an individual's health.

Since the pandemic mental health has emerged as a key priority area across all National and regional strategies. The lack of services in this area was flagged by the Kildare CYPSC and the LCDC in a 2020 document entitled Redressing the balance: The Business Case for Investment in Integrated Youth Mental Health Service Provision in Kildare West Wicklow. CYPSC argue that the scale of mental health need in Kildare and West Wicklow is not adequately reflected in resource allocation. Worryingly, as Kildare has the highest proportion of young people in Ireland, the growing demand for mental health supports for young people which this has caused has not been matched by a parallel growth in service provision. The undersupply of Psychologists and Primary Care Social Workers has a serious impact on service access for young people, in terms of direct delivery of early intervention and preventative mental health supports. Precise figures are hard to get, but there are significant waiting lists for Kildare Youth Services Counselling Service and due to limits on their capacity there are a number of towns with substantial numbers of young people in which that service cannot be provided, such as Kildare Town, Maynooth, Monasterevin, Castledermot, Clane, Prosperous, Sallins and Kilcock. The Jigsaw Programme, which is Jigsaw is the only primary care youth mental health service provider in Ireland for young people aged 12-25, is in Dublin Southwest and in Laois/Offaly but not in Kildare. Similarly, there is no large national voluntary counselling than service such as Pieta House in the county.

Heads Up has successfully run an evidence-based programme for men in the county since 2015. Initially funded by the National Office of Suicide Prevention, it is currently completing its 23rd programme and received a constant stream of referrals from GPs, and the HSE. It ran its first mental health programme for Women in April 2023 and received over 120 referrals for the 16 available places. Their participants include women aged 20-67:

- With mental health problems and chronic physical health conditions.
- Bereaved by suicide.
- Facing homelessness or living with 'no fixed abode'.
- Dealing with addiction or substance misuse.
- Who have previously self-harmed.
- Victims of domestic violence and other forms of abuse.

Children's mental health issues have increased during and since the end of the recent pandemic. For example, Sensational Kids, a social enterprise that helps children with special or additional needs, such as those with autism, down syndrome, ADHD, dyslexia, and dyspraxia have noted much more complex presentations of clients with greater degrees of anxiety. They currently have a waiting list of over 800 for their services. The significant gap in services means that whether a young person gets the help they need depends on where in the county they happen to live.

According to the SONC (State of the Nation's Children), in 2020 Kildare had the 6th highest rate in the country of children registered with an intellectual disability.

Social Farming emerged as a response to the mental health needs of people with disabilities rising from zero social farms in the County in 2018 to seven in 2023.

2.4.8 ACCOMMODATION, FOOD AND FUEL POVERTY

The most consistent impact of deprivation currently expressed in the consultation process concerns the cost of accommodation, food and fuel.

The cost of houses and rental accommodation in Kildare are among the highest in the State. In December 2022 the average property price was €374,359 compared to €359,529 nationally. There are regional variations with the east of the county significantly higher than the south. Similarly, a rental rate comparison in 2022 shows that rent in Co. Kildare is the third highest after Dublin and Galway City (average €1,395). While there are internal variations, rental costs in Athy, the lowest in the county (€1,046) are higher than the average for 19 other counties including Waterford City (€908). Further indications of the challenges facing individuals can be seen in the HAP figures, which show levels of poverty even in the larger towns. In the county overall, 20.7% of RTB Property tenants get HAP assistance. It is unsurprising that this rises in Athy to 36.5%, and in Kildare Town to 29.2%. However, what shows the widespread extent of challenges facing people in the housing market even in more affluent towns are the figures of 22.5% in Celbridge, 21.1% in Clane, 12.2 % in Leixlip and 11.2% in Maynooth. In a related area, further insight can be gained by noting the number of rent supplement supported tenancies, which amounted to 586 in 2021, which is the third highest in the State.

Food poverty refers to the situation where households cannot afford to buy or access nutritious food. It is of particular concern for vulnerable groups such as the elderly, children, and low-income families. Safefood estimate that this affects 10% of families in Ireland and it has been exacerbated by the pandemic and the cost-of-living price increases and the increase in fuel costs. A CSO survey of food prices in January 2023 found inflation running at 13% compared to prices in the same month last year and this trend has continued, with current figures being estimated at 16.4%.¹⁸

¹⁸ KANTAR market research, March 2023.

Research carried out by Age Friendly in Kildare has found that many elderly people, especially in rural areas, report that they have had to make choices between having food or turning on the heating in the winter months. This “eat or heat” dilemma can become a “eat, heat or treat” dilemma, according to Older Voices Kildare, in cases where the older person must pay for transport costs to attend treatment in hospitals or clinics.

Sláintecare Community Nutrition Athy, have analysed food poverty issues in the town. They report an overreliance on the meals provided in DEIS Schools, with many parents counting on these to provide the main source of nutrition during the day. Many households struggle to feed children properly during the holiday periods and there was a significant take up of programmes during the Easter holidays which included the provision of lunch.

There is one Food bank in Athy, and the Family Resource Centre in Kildare, Teach Dara, distributes food parcels every week to families.

Lower income households are more exposed to price increases as they spend a greater proportion of their income on food and energy and are less likely to have savings.¹⁹ CSO SILC (Survey of Income and Living Conditions) data highlights the concentration of individuals who are unemployed, long-term ill or disabled, living alone, and single parents in the bottom two deciles of the income distribution.²⁰

2.4.9 SOCIAL COHESION, INTEGRATION, AND DISCONTENT

Social cohesion implies a sense of togetherness, resilience, and orientation towards a common good. Traditionally, communities used to sustain a psychological, social, and political togetherness. However, the consultation process has indicated an undermining of these types of cohesion, a process related to in-migration into the county, the large proportion of inhabitants who commute to their places of work, the influx of new cultures and ethnicities, the decline of the traditional containers which gave a shared identity, and the rise of identities shaped by social media.

According to Census 2022, only 33.9% of all Kildare residents were born in the county. This is the second lowest in Ireland. 47.6 % of current Kildare residents were born elsewhere in Ireland while 18.6% were born outside of Ireland.

The commuting patterns outlined above mean that many members of those communities are not present during the working week. The consultation process has highlighted the challenges this brings in terms of creating a shared identity for communities living in those towns and areas.

The Economic instability has given provoked by the war in Ukraine has seen many people struggle to maintain what is perceived as a reasonable standard of living. The uncertainty provoked by this gives rise to a sense of fear, which can be exacerbated by alarm around climate change and a perception of inequality and uneven development with unequal spatial impacts. These fears can sometimes be directed at members of other cultures who have moved onto the county and who are perceived as competing for scarce resources. There has also been a rise in a narrative of discontent since the COVID pandemic and the emergence of modern media is a crucial tool in channelling this, leading to an erosion of trust and creating alternative realities.

All these elements create challenges for the maintenance of a keen sense of community and social cohesion in the county. Social cohesion implies a sense of togetherness, resilience, and orientation towards a common good.

The LDS recognises that social cohesion does not happen automatically and there is a need to develop initiatives to strengthen it across the county.

¹⁹ Social Justice Matters Economic Review 2023, Social Justice Ireland.

²⁰ See SILC 2022 Table 3.2.

2.4.10 NATIONALITIES, ETHNICITY, AND INTEGRATION

The 2022 Census shows that 18.6% of Kildare residents were born outside of Ireland. In the 2016 Census, the population identifying as non-Irish Nationals was 10.6% of the total population, which was then lower than the State average (11.4%) and EMRA (12.8%) averages but marginally higher than the Eastern SPA average of 10.1%. Most of them (20,429) live in urban centres, with only 2868 living in areas classified as rural. The larger concentrations are found in Sallins, Naas, Newbridge and Maynooth. However, numbers are evenly spread across Leixlip, Clane, Celbridge, Kilcock, Monasterevin and Athy.

CSO data on the number and location of arrivals from Ukraine shows 9,471 PPSN allocations in Co. Kildare across the 8 Electoral Divisions. Six of the eight divisions had over 1,000 registrations each. The highest number was 1,994 in Maynooth and lowest was 345 in Leixlip. Approximately 1,221 Ukrainians are accommodated in emergency or serviced accommodation in Athy, Ballymore Eustace, Newbridge, and Kill and Naas.

There are three Direct Provision Centres in the county, one in Newbridge and one in Monasterevin, both of which have been operating for several years, and Celbridge opened more recently.

Kildare has also an increase in emergency accommodation centres for International Protection Applicants. Current accommodation centres are operating in Celbridge, Naas and Athy with plans for additional space in Maynooth University during the summer months. It is very fluid situation with demand outstripping accommodation supply and pressure to provide an elevated level of support and integration services with limited resources or lead in time.

2.4.11 TRAVELLER AND ROMA COMMUNITY

The number of Traveller families in Kildare is 360, a rise from 242 in 2016, 0.3% of the population, and among the lowest of any Local Authority in the State. There are two main concentrations – Athy and Newbridge - with other pockets around the county, close to Maynooth, Kildare and Kilmeague. Approximately 70% of families live in standard housing. Currently, CKLP hosts the coordinator of Kildare Traveller Action Group (KTA).

The precise number of Roma families in the county is hard to quantify, and there are different nationalities among the Roma in the county, which means that it is not always helpful to consider them as one homogenous group. Several families are concentrated in the Naas and Newbridge areas. However, discussions with the Roma Support Worker in the County reveals that they all face similar challenges in terms of difficulties and discrimination when trying to access employment, and challenges in getting housing. There are also cultural factors in the Roma communities which lead to parents not placing a value on keeping their children in school after the Junior Cert, as young males prefer to seek work and young females traditionally marry at what would be considered an early age in the wider Irish context.

2.4.12 PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

According to the 2016 census, there are 27,768 people in Kildare with a disability, the sixth highest in the state. This was an increase of 13% from the 2011 census. Of those with a disability, the most common were 'chronic illness' (17.1%), substantial physical limitation (13.1%), difficulty in going outside home (9.4%) and difficulty in participating in activities (12.1%).

Disability participation and awareness is an equality issue. The importance of creating inclusive spaces for all members of the community to gather was highlighted in the consultation process, ensuring that especially the elderly and persons with disabilities have access to all the services in the county.

2.4.13 LONE PARENTS

In 2016, there were 4,795 lone-parent families in Kildare with children aged under 15 years of age, which equates to 16.9% of families with young people in the county. Within the county the figure rises to 31.6% in Suncroft, 31.2% in Athy, 31.1% in Ballitore, 30.2% in Kilmeague, 27.4% in Castledermot, and 24.8% in Derrinturn. In recent months, the profile of lone parents has changed significantly due to the in-migration of Ukrainians, many of whom parenting alone, having been separated from their partner or spouse and extended family by war.

2.4.14 SUPPORT FOR FRONTLINE SOCIAL INCLUSION ORGANISATIONS

The past two decades have seen challenging times for the community and voluntary sector. The 2008 recession saw significant funding cuts with a 31% reduction in workers in the sector between 2008 – 2015. Local Development funding has fallen by 37% and funding of Voluntary Youth Organisation has been reduced by 19% in the years 2008-2023. These organisations are at the forefront of the responses to poverty and marginalisation. In recent years, due to the COVID and inward migration their services have been stretched even more to meet increasing demand.²¹ A key part of the Kildare LEADER Programme 2014 – 2022 has been to support front line social inclusion organizations in the county and this LDS intends to continue that support from 2023 – 2027.

2.5 THE LDS IN CONTEXT: ENVIRONMENT

2.5.1 AIR QUALITY

Air pollution is a major environmental risk to human health, and can increase the risk of stroke, heart disease, lung cancer, and respiratory diseases, including asthma.²² While air quality in Ireland is generally good, it is nevertheless estimated that 1,300 people die prematurely each year due to poor air quality associated with Particulate Matter_{2.5} which comes mainly from burning solid fuels such as coal, peat, and wood for home heating.²³ Nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) affects the lungs and breathing and makes pre-existing conditions like asthma worse. The primary source of NO₂ is petrol and diesel engines. In a local context, concentration of NO₂ would be at the highest in our larger towns when traffic is at its heaviest. As well as negatively impacting human health, air pollution is also associated with biodiversity and ecosystem loss.

There are two zones in Kildare for air quality monitoring purposes, as per the Clean Air for Europe Directive and the Air Quality Standards Regulations (2011). Zone C includes the larger towns of Naas, Newbridge, Celbridge, and Leixlip. The rest of the county falls within Zone D, the designation for rural areas.

2.5.2 WATER QUALITY

Water quality in Ireland overall is declining, with the number of water bodies that are classed as being in satisfactory condition decreasing in recent years²⁴. The integrity of water habitats is damaged by run-off of nutrients, sediments and pesticides associated with agriculture; land drainage, dredging, and physical barriers such as dams; discharges of poorly treated sewage from domestic and urban treatment systems, and storm water overflows; and the run-off of nutrients and sediments from forestry.

The concentration of nitrate (NO₃) in rivers is an indicator of nutrient enrichment, which is associated with intensive farming and urban wastewater discharges. There has been an increase in the proportion of river

²¹ Brian Harvey, Social Researcher, Volunteer Conference, Galway 25th April 2023.

²² World Health Organisation, How Air Pollution is Destroying our Health, <https://www.who.int/news-room/spotlight/how-air-pollution-is-destroying-our-health>

²³ EPA, Air Quality in Ireland. Report 2021

²⁴ EPA Water Quality Report 2016 - 2021.

sites nationally with increasing nitrate concentrations, with the east of the county being one of the regions that is most affected, owing to freely draining soil and intensive agriculture. 43% of river sites nationally have unsatisfactory nitrate concentrations, with the River Lerr in Co. Kildare being found to have the fourth highest concentration nationally, with a three-year average of 37.6 mg/l NO₃. The Barrow catchment is one of seven catchments nationally with the highest number of river sites that have an upward trend in nitrogen concentration in recent years.

Similarly, high phosphorous concentrations are associated with nutrient pollution and harm to ecosystems. 30% of river sites nationally have unsatisfactory phosphorus concentrations, greater than 0.035mg/l P. River sites in the Liffey and Dublin Bay catchment, which includes parts of Co. Kildare, are associated with higher phosphorous concentrations.

The EPA categorise canals as artificial water bodies. They form part of a wider network which includes the feeder streams that supply them with water. These feeder streams can be a source of pollution entering canals. Both the Grand Canal and the Royal Canal were both recently assessed as having achieved “good ecological potential” by the EPA. Despite this, there are some issues with sporadically high faecal coliform and nutrient levels coming from the Athy Drain that feeds the Grand Canal Barrow Line which requires monitoring.

2.5.3 CLIMATE CHANGE VULNERABILITIES

Average global temperature has increased by at least 1.1°C since 1880 and the past nine years have been the warmest since modern record keeping began²⁵. Ireland’s climate is changing in line with global trends. Kildare is projected to experience warmer and drier summers (with associated potential for water shortages) and warmer and wetter winters, and increased risk of fluvial flooding. In recent years, Kildare has experienced windstorms that damaged buildings and forestry and led to issues with safe drinking water (Storm Darwin, 2014), heaving snowfall that disrupted transport networks, businesses, and schools (Storm Emma, 2018), and dry summers which impacted the availability of food and water for livestock and the equine sector.

In June 2019, all elected members of Kildare County Council passed a motion to declare a climate and biodiversity emergency. The Kildare Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019 – 2024 details how the local authority is responding to climate change.

Implementation of the climate and biodiversity aspects of the LDS will build on synergies with local government efforts to tackle climate change.

2.5.4 BIODIVERSITY

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Global Assessment report 2019 showed that the rate of species extinction is accelerating worldwide at unprecedented rates and that the health of ecosystems is deteriorating rapidly. The report stresses that transformative change is required at all levels to conserve, restore, and use natural resources sustainably. Significant knowledge gaps exist about biodiversity and how it is changing in Ireland. Of the 31,000 species that are known to occur in Ireland, a tenth have been assessed. Of these, one in five are threatened with extinction in Ireland.

The 2014 – 2022 LEADER Programme ran a community biodiversity programme which built the capacity of community groups and led to ten towns or villages drawing up Biodiversity Action Plans for their areas. This work has been built upon and there are now 23 Biodiversity Plans in the county.

²⁵ <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/world-of-change/global-temperatures>

2.6 SUMMARY OF AREA NEEDS ANALYSIS:

The rapid population growth intertwined with a spatial social and economic divide have given rise to distinct features for economic, social, and environmental needs that vary according to location.

ECONOMIC

- The relative disadvantage in Western and Southern parts of Co. Kildare calls for action on local economic diversification, lessening reliance on traditional sectors such as monoculture, and peatland extraction. Sustainable tourism, the Green Economy, Farm Diversification and SMART responses including social enterprise can support the needs of these areas.
- In the more affluent areas, concentrated pockets of disadvantage are hidden and the rising cost of living for households is of real concern.

SOCIAL

- The pattern of inward migration has been challenging across all parts of Co. Kildare. Social cohesion is challenging where new communities are forming or temporarily accommodated. Commuting patterns, rural isolation, service, and facilities gaps are acute needs as is additional frontline social inclusion and integration support capacity.
- In the larger towns, outdoor recreation, cultural and community facilities and basic services are far below the required capacity to cater for the population growth.
- Kildare is the county with the highest proportion of young people in Ireland. There is a lack of facilities for young people and teenagers in our towns and villages and a severe lack of support services including health and mental health for all ages.

ENVIRONMENTAL

- Capacity building on the demands and benefits of climate action is required all across the county, in urban, peri-urban and rural communities.
- Certain communities, particularly in the west of the county, require support to develop community processes, innovation at local level and to access LEADER and other funding. Proximate and active animation is required to involve participants, who would otherwise not participate. These communities include but are not limited to Just Transition areas.
- Rapid population growth raises challenges for environmental quality including air and water quality, biodiversity loss and the reliance on private car transport for commuting to employment outside of the county is a key challenge.

Section 3

Community Led Local Development and Participative Planning



This Kildare Local Development Strategy is built on the principles of community-led local development (CLLD), a bottom-up approach to policy development that is rooted in the Local Action Group (LAG). CLLD is derived from the approach first used in LEADER and aims to foster a place-based and bottom-up partnership. CLLD has two aims – to design actions tailored to specific territorial needs and to involve local stakeholders in decision making.

OVERVIEW

In preparing the LDS, the LAG chose a multi-faceted approach to determine the key priorities for 2023 – 2027. This included a review of the 2014 – 2022 period to understand what was successful and what needed to be built on in the coming years. It also involved detailed consideration at LAG level as to what the priorities in the county were, taking into consideration what was emerging through the processes of developing the LECP, the Age Friendly Strategy, the CYPSC Strategy, and direct and targeted engagement with members of the Kildare community through public meetings, interviews, and focus groups.

At the outset, the LAG considered the parameters of the strategy and chose methodologies based on the principles of CLLD, participative planning, and best practice as set out in the *Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making* (Department of Rural and Community Development, February 2023). The process was also guided by EU documents such as SHERPA (2022), *Foresight Exercise: Alternative Rural Futures: How to Get there?*²⁶ A comprehensive process of engagement was agreed, involving a wide variety of stakeholders, and using different methods, to ensure maximum engagement, particularly among groups and individuals that had not engaged with the LEADER programme to date. This section outlines the steps taken to plan, implement and review the engagement process.

The prioritisation of themes and sub-themes was based on the evidence which emerged from the engagement process. In addition, the development of the LDS was guided by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, and in particular, the articles under Title III, Equality, ensuring gender equality and the rights of young people, the elderly, and persons with disability.

3.1 METHODOLOGY

On January 25th, 2023, the LAG carried out a detailed review, mapping exercise, and analysis of the implementation of the LEADER Programme 2014 – 2022. This review drew attention to the geographic areas and the communities of interest that had benefitted most from LEADER funding in that period. The areas which had not engaged with the LEADER process or with other funding sources were also noted. It was agreed that the 2023 – 2027 LDS should build on work already commenced in the previous programme as well as develop ways to build the capacity of those areas and communities which had not engaged to date. The two enabling factors (integrated structures and full and active citizenship) for the 2023 – 2027 were also confirmed and high-level areas of focus were outlined.

²⁶ Arcuri, S., Brunori, G., (2022). Foresight exercise alternative rural futures : how to get there? SHERPA Discussion Paper. 10.5281/zenodo.7256934

At a meeting on March 29th, the LAG approved the plan for the engagement processes across the county. It was agreed that the process should be tightly focused and informed by the themes and sub-themes of the new programme. It was also noted that the information provided, and consultation methods used, would be purposeful, accessible, and accountable. The LAG committed to ensuring that the LDS would be based on a comprehensive process in which members of local communities, and especially members of disadvantaged communities, would be enabled to contribute, despite a limited time scale.

3.1.1 THE OVERALL FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROCESS WAS AGREED AS FOLLOWS:

- To include widespread consultative processes while also drawing on relevant secondary research.
- To be meaningful, relevant, and proportionate to the level of decision-making influence possible for those participating.
- Not to be tokenistic, particularly when considering the inclusion of minorities or marginalised groups.
- To create opportunities to ensure that communities could influence the process.

To ensure that the process was successful, it was guided by these four elements:

1. Firstly, as stated in the Expression of Interest, the LAG considered the development of the LDS as “the first stage... in an ongoing development of the Kildare rural voice” which would “continue through the work of the LEADER Programme itself, leading eventually to a **Rural Forum** which will feed into policy-making bodies in the county.”
2. To ensure strategic integration and co-ordination among key stakeholders, the LAG consulted **recent research** to obtain a greater understanding of the key issues and priorities for county Kildare. These included the Childrens & Young Persons Services Committee Plan (CYPSC), the new Age Friendly Strategic Plan for Kildare, and the Climate Action Plan 2023. The high-level goals within the emerging Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) were also considered. In this way, the LDS is deliberate in its intention to be one element in a co-ordinated strategy to respond to the needs of the county.
3. The LAG adopted a participative approach based on the International Association for Public Participation’s Spectrum of Public Participation, using the five levels of public participation in decision-making on a continuum of increasing community influence. The five modes are: informing, consulting, involving, collaborating, and empowering. All levels of the spectrum, from information through consultation, up to full collaboration, were used in the development of the LDS, with methods as appropriate to stakeholders’ capacity and level. This process ensured a bottom-up approach that is consistent with the principles of CLLD.
4. To ensure constructive engagement with **marginalised groups**, new communities and rural youth, existing linkages with key partners and stakeholders proved highly valuable in the consultative process. Specific methodologies including focus groups and workshops were designed to ensure accessibility and to encourage as many groups and individuals as possible to participate and input into the design of the LDS, moving through “*consultation*” and “*involvement*” to “*collaboration*.”

Please refer to Appendix 4 for details of participants in the LDS planning process

SUMMARY OF ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Level of Participation	Engagement Method	Feb	March	April	May	Participants
Inform	Publicity Campaign					Unknown
Consult	Public Survey - County-wide					106
Consult	Public Workshops x 5 Municipal Districts					61
Involve	Youth					541
Involve	Ukrainian Community Advocates					10
Involve	Creative Cluster & Food Network					80
Involve	Social Enterprise Network					8
Involve	West Kildare Smart Rural Alliance					4
Involve	Local Enterprise Office					3
Collaborate	Semi Structured Interviews incl. Roma, Travellers, Family Resource Centres, Disability Services, Youth Services.					25+
Collaborate & Empower	Promoter and Community Activists Working Group					5
Collaborate & Empower	LAG					20

3.2 INFORMATION

The engagement process was underpinned by a robust publicity campaign. The campaign informed people of the ways in which they could have an input and the numerous opportunities for individuals and communities to feed into and shape the LDS. The following outlets were used as the key channels to get the word out across the county.

- Local radio (KFM) and newspapers.
- CKLP (County Kildare LEADER Partnership) website.
- Promotion through Kildare LAG Membership, CKLP Board & Members of the Independent Evaluation Committee.
- Social media (Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram).
- Email to existing databases (CKLP).
- Kildare Public Participation Network.
- Community events - Coill Dubh “Know Your Community” day and Kildare County Council’s “Lá Sláinte Bride”.
- Posters with QR codes as a smart solution for access to the survey (local libraries, community buildings, etc.).

3.3 CONSULTATION

3.3.1 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOPS

Five public workshops were hosted in partnership with the Public Participation Network; one in each Municipal District, with participants representing 61 distinct groups, businesses, and associations in total. Each session followed a similar structure with welcome refreshments, a LEADER presentation on the process so far, interactive area-based SWOT analysis and follow-up details on the survey and staff contact information. These in-person sessions were held in accessible community buildings, with daytime and evening time slots to encourage maximum participation.

Each consultation session commenced with the provision of information on the programme and an outline of the consultation process detailing the many ways to engage with the design of the LDS. Participants were given the opportunity to identify key challenges and opportunities to inform the development of an area-based SWOT analysis. Participants wrote their responses on sticky notes and attached them to posters on each aspect of the SWOT analysis around the room. The LEADER team then facilitated discussions on the responses to draw out additional context and develop themes and categorise into a SWOT framework in each area.

To ensure inclusivity for all, there was an opportunity for individual meeting after these workshops.

WORKSHOP LOCATIONS & DATES

Building Vibrant Rural Communities workshop participants
Allenwood Community Development Association, Allenwood, 27/04/23 (Evening Session)
Kildare Community Development Centre, 27/04/23 (Lunchtime Session)
Leixlip Youth & Community Centre, 25/04/23 (Evening Session)
Teach Diarmada Community Center, Castledermot, 24/02/23 (Evening)
McAuley Place, Naas, 19/04/23 (Evening)

3.3.2 WORKSHOP CONSULTATION FINDINGS

Key areas of need identified through this consultation process include:

- A decline in the sense of community and social cohesion.
- A lack of community spaces for people to gather.
- The lack of life in rural communities due to closing down of small shops and Kildare communities becoming increasingly commuter towns for Dublin.
- A need for youth-specific spaces, especially for teenagers, with concerns that the lack of these could lead to the development of unhealthy behaviours.
- Similarly, a concern that some children of primary school age are still feeling the effects of school closures during the pandemic and have not developed coping mechanisms for everyday stressors. A need to reach these children through community development work which LEADER can support.
- A need for continued investment and support for social enterprises
- The potential for rural tourism and associated benefits for small communities along the Barrow Blueway.

- The potential for rural communities to improve services through digital innovation.
- The need for better services for older persons, and safe and warm community spaces for them to gather, and an overall concern about isolation and loneliness.
- Concern about mental health needs and services across the county.

3.3.3 PUBLIC SURVEY

The smart survey was publicised widely via posters with a QR code, hosted on CKLP website (google translate enabled) with data collection in real time. People were invited people to take part if active on smartphones. Alternative ways to engage included completing the survey in person or on the phone with a member of the LEADER team to overcome any barriers to participation.

To ensure the process was clear and that the data would be reliable, we selected a sample size of 100 minimum. Based on the County's estimated population of 246,977 (Census 2022) his volume of responses would have a confidence interval of +/- 9.8 and confidence level of 95%. The survey was disseminated and open for a two-month period from 30th March to the 30th of May 2023.

A total of 106 responses were collected and analysed. A total of 106 responses were collected and analysed, through which the following key analysis and findings emerged. To review the full results and analysis see the link below.²⁷

3.3.4 SURVEY FINDINGS

The survey captured a variety of respondent types:

- Businesses (30%)
- Community Groups (25%)
- Club (11%)
- Other incl LCDC, Statutory Agency, IEC (34%)

Interestingly, of all those who participated, a high percentage at 42% have not engaged in any capacity with the LEADER Programme to-date, indicating that the participative process reached this targeted cohort of individuals, businesses, and groups. Only 22% of respondents view LEADER in an environmental context, while 27% of respondents view the programme as primarily working with grant aid for farmers for agriculture (27%) This highlights a need for additional awareness raising and animation of the potential within the Environmental theme in the new programme.

In terms of respondents understanding and perception about the programme, the following analysis was gathered:

What the LEADER Programme was understood to be: (Top 5)

- Development Programme for Communities 83%
- Helps Local Groups Promote Equality & Social Inclusion 70%
- Helps support Vibrant Rural Communities 80%
- Provides Training & Support for Social Enterprise 68%
- Provides funding for Tourism Attractions to Expand and Develop 60%

²⁷ https://www.surveymonkey.com/stories/SM-ymchmnedWJqg5LRrQOG_2Bug_3D_3D/
Password KildareLDS2327

To obtain a sense of areas of greatest need across the three themes, respondents were asked to rank in order of priority. Theme 2. Rural Infrastructure and Social Inclusion ranked highest in terms of priority needs for the county:

Ranking of LEADER Themes (Weighted Scores)

1. Social Inclusion (2.34)
2. Economic Development (1.97)
3. Environment & Climate Change (1.69)

Ranking of Subthemes (Weighted Scores)

Local Sub Theme Descriptor (15 options were too many for survey purposes)	Score
Enterprise Development	7.49
Social Enterprise	7.14
Social Inclusion Supports & Services	6.95
Opportunities to Live and Work in a Rural Area	6.91
Youth Leadership and Activities	5.49
Environmental resources protection (water, biodiversity, and energy)	5.19
Climate Change Awareness	4.23
Climate Change Initiatives	4.00
Artisan Food	3.88
Digital Skills	3.70

Respondents were asked to provide information on anticipated project types, budgets, and periods for delivery. Only 22 respondents indicated that their proposed project could be implemented within a 12-month period. Capital projects were expected to take 18-24 months to implement. The longer time frame for capital projects is echoed in the LEADER team's experience of implementing the programme, and the many requests for contract extensions that were received under the previous programme.

Interest in seeking LEADER funding in the 2023-2027 period is high, with many respondents indicating that they would be interested in pursuing more than one project type. Overwhelmingly, the demand for capital works is high (61%), followed by the purchase of equipment (44%). Some estimated project costs exceeded the current max bands for LEADER grant aid. A sizeable percentage (55%) indicated that they do not have access to private match funding.

The survey demonstrated that respondents were interested in applying for funding for projects within a broad range of budgets, as summarised below:

- Under 5,000 5
- 5,000 – 100,000 39
- 100,200 22
- Greater than 200k 16

Respondents' proposals for projects were spread across all MDs as detailed below, with some spread across more than one MD and some County-wide. The lowest level of proposed projects is in the Celbridge/Leixlip MD, indicating a need for greater investment in animation and project development support in this densely populated part of the county.

- Athy MD 20%
- Celbridge/Leixlip 9%

- Clane Maynooth 26%
- Kildare/Newbridge 37%
- Naas 25%
- Other (incl. County-wide actions) 26%

Respondents were asked about the types of supports needed that they would need to deliver a LEADER-funded project in 2023-2027. The following supports were identified as being important:

Top 5 Supports

- One-to-one project development support
- Application workshops
- Professional services including procurement advice, and technical support from engineers, quantity surveyors and architects.
- Business plan development support.
- Online forms & programme guidebook.

Overall, the survey findings indicated a need for targeted investment in project animation and capacity building supports for projects. They also indicate a need for close collaboration with partners in the environmental sphere and the Local Enterprise Office.

3.4 INVOLVEMENT

3.4.1 UKRAINIAN COMMUNITY ADVOCATES

Consultation was undertaken with the community translator and volunteers who were part of the pilot mental wellbeing and trauma support programme operated in Kildare from January to March 2023 called “Sanctuary at Soearth”. The programme was part of the County-wide Ukrainian emergency response under an interagency steering group, supported by SICAP. Participants completed feedback on their experience in Ireland to date and identified support needs, which were translated and included in the data report. In addition, to hear the voices of new communities, a series of one-to one interviews were conducted with the Ukrainian support workers across the county followed by informal engagements and discussions with 30+ Ukrainian families hosted at Bert House.

3.4.2 CREATIVE CLUSTER & FOOD NETWORK

During the previous LEADER programme, CKLP implemented training programmes in partnership with the Kildare Local Enterprise Office for the development of a Craft Network and Food Network. The Local Enterprise Office has continued to support these important networks and carried out further needs analysis with their members. A key priority identified by the creative sector is the need for a dedicated hub.

Kildare's creative cluster is in the preliminary stages of a feasibility study working towards a dedicated creative hub premises. Engagement with this cluster will continue throughout the programme. It was also identified as a priority under enterprise and social enterprise within the survey findings.

A total of 58 semi-structured interviews with local agencies, businesses, and individuals were carried out. A summary showing the interviewees and key findings is included in Appendix 4. The semi-structured interviews were beneficial in helping to identify and address emerging gaps in the reach of the engagement process and overcome barriers to participation for marginalised communities. They also helped to identify strategic opportunities for collaboration and offered an opportunity to calibrate and interpret survey findings. The findings from the survey, focus groups and semi-structured interview were collated and presented to the LAG for SWOT and consideration in next stage of LDS development.

3.5.1 YOUTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Through collaboration with Kildare County Council and the Kildare CYPSC Committee, the LDS engagement process reviewed the new CYPSC Plan and the findings²⁸ investigating what types of outdoor youth facilities teenagers living in Celbridge, Co. Kildare wanted and their preferred locations for such facilities within the town. The data was collected over 2 months across primary and secondary schools and various youth groups in Celbridge. A total of 541 teenagers in Celbridge between the ages of 11 – 19 years took part in the study, accounting for approximately 22% percent of teenagers in Celbridge. This included 19 participatory consultation workshops with 350 teenagers lasting 40 – 80 minutes, an online survey with 191 teenagers, and two go-along interviews with four teenagers.

Teenagers overwhelmingly requested a space to hang out. To facilitate this, seating was suggested as the most important aspect of an outdoor youth facility, which was followed by the need for sheltered or covered areas. Teenagers requested other features for the outdoor youth facility, such as outdoor gym equipment, charging ports, WIFI, and zip lines. Other than hang-out spaces, skateparks, ball parks, and teen playgrounds were the most requested types of facilities by teenagers.

In addition, one-to-one interviews were conducted with the CYPSC Coordinator and the Senior Executive Parks Superintendent at KCC to determine the emerging needs within outdoor planning for young people across the county.

3.5.2 SOCIAL ENTERPRISE NETWORK

A focus group session with the Social Enterprise Network was held to determine current needs and opportunities. The need for ongoing mentoring and tailored one-to-one training was emphasised as well as the desire for a “floating” panel of experts in areas such as HR or law who could be accessed when a group was facing particular questions. Ongoing needs for capital and expansion projects were also highlighted.

The network also drew attention to the current challenges in finding Board members or volunteers, and that these challenges have been exacerbated since COVID-19. It was stated that social enterprises needed ongoing support with operational costs and that many were finding the current operating climate quite difficult.

²⁸ Barron, C., Tolland, K., Emmett, M.J., (2022) "Somewhere to hang out" Teenagers Outdoor Recreational Needs in Celbridge: A Partnership approach. DCU

3.5.3 WEST KILDARE SMART RURAL ALLIANCE

A meeting with members of the West Kildare Smart Rural Alliance was held in the context of Just Transition planning. This focused on the challenges in the delivery of a Just Transition and a collaborative approach to realise the potential for peatlands tourism.

3.5.4. LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE

A meeting was held with the Head of Enterprise and Economic Development at the Local Enterprise Office and her team to explore ways to ensure synergies between the work of the LEO and the LDS. Particular attention was paid to the Green Economy and support for female entrepreneurs in the county. A Service Level Agreement will be drawn up to cover areas of collaboration, referrals and to ensure non-duplication of work.

3.5.5 TOWN TEAMS

An online meeting with the national co-ordinator and staff of the national Town Centre First office of the LGMA (Local Government Management Agency) and LEADER team was held to discuss the development of Town Centre First Plans in 26 pilot locations across the country and the setting up of Town Teams to empower communities to shape the future direction of their town/village in a positive way. The discussion centred around the opportunities for the National Town Centre First office to work with Local Development Companies in terms of capacity building for Town Teams and communities, and the potential for a pilot programme in Co. Kildare, which has been developed into a strategic action.

3.6 EMPOWERMENT

3.6.1 RURAL DEVELOPMENT AD HOC WORKING GROUP

A Rural Development Ad Hoc Working group, facilitated by CKLP, was formed to guide the development of the Local Development Strategy. This group comprised of past promoters and community activists in the areas of enterprise development, service provision, social inclusion and environment who had hands-on experience of engaging with the LEADER programme and leading private and community initiatives in the county. The motivation for establishing the group was to support citizen power, collaboration, and accountability in each step of developing the Local Development Strategy, from feedback on the previous programme, to input on survey design, through to data analysis and to strategy development. Building on the principles of CLLD, the formation of this group also provided an opportunity to encourage networking between people who had the shared experience of obtaining LEADER funding and delivering projects locally.

Mid-way through the surveying period, the group recommended additional contacts for semi-structured interviews with farming organisations to draw out further information for farm families whom they felt were under-represented in the survey responses thus far. The group drew together a series of recommendations as a prelude to strategic actions leading to additional semi structured interviews and LAG discussions. Towards the end of the consultation period, the group were facilitated to collate recommended themes and sub themes based on the analysis and findings from the participative planning process to be considered by the LAG for inclusion in the strategy.

3.6.2 LOCAL ACTION GROUP (LAG)

The LAG held two meetings and one workshop focusing exclusively on consideration of the consultation findings. Alongside these, regular briefings and updates were presented to the LAG and RDP (Rural Development Programme) subgroup of the LAG.

- 30/11/2022 Focused session with full LAG on the themes of the EOI and the implications for LAG membership and broad themes of the Programme.
- 25/01/2023 Focused session with full LAG on review of the 2014 – 2022 Programme, implications for continuity and sub-themes and Enabling Factors.
- 17/04/2023 Workshop on themes, sub-themes and actions for LAG and Rural Development Subgroup.
- 29/04/2023 LAG workshop on vision, needs and priorities, and emerging actions.
- 24/05/2023 LAG presentation and update on consultation process and proposed themes and sub-themes.
- 22/06/2023 RDP Sub-group review of draft strategy including objectives and actions.
- 05/07/2023 Final draft plan submitted to LAG for approval.

3.7 STRENGTHS WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

To ensure that the SWOT analysis was evidence-based and that it was in line with the principles of CLLD, it was developed by drawing on the findings from the public and stakeholder engagement process and workshops held with the LAG and RDP sub-group.

The following four prompts, from the Asset Based Community Development model and the foresight planning model used by SHERPA were the tools used in the public workshops and the one-to-one interviews to ensure that the process linked into an overall vision for vibrant rural communities, maintained a future-orientated focus and did not get stuck in a consideration of current deficiencies.

- What are the assets in your local area? Strengths
- What are the needs in your local area? Weaknesses/Threats
- Where would you like your area to be in 2027? Opportunities
- How could LEADER help? Opportunities

The LAG oversaw the merging of area-based responses from the public workshops in each MD, with the survey responses and notes from the semi-structured interviews. This process ensured that SWOT is inclusion of all perspectives.

SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE COUNTY

LOCATION			
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>Proximity to Dublin for markets and transport.</p> <p>Motorway and rail infrastructure.</p>	<p>Tourists leapfrog the county.</p> <p>Dublin dwellers seek further away for weekends.</p>	<p>Potential for eco-tourism short breaks proximate to Dublin with good train connections.</p>	<p>Numbers commuting outside the county for work high levels of long commutes.</p> <p>Increasing in-migration due to proximity to Dublin economic hub.</p> <p>Resource pressures due to expansion of Greater Dublin Area.</p>

DEMOGRAPHICS			
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>Youngest County in Ireland with a rapidly growing population.</p> <p>High levels of participation in the workforce.</p>	<p>Population growth not matched by services/ infrastructure.</p>	<p>Young, educated population.</p>	<p>Age dependency pressure on working age population and families.</p> <p>Slow integration of new foreign nationals into existing communities</p>

ECONOMICS			
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>High labour force participation rate.</p> <p>Strong FDI base offering high quality employment.</p> <p>Above national average disposable income.</p> <p>Strong SME sector.</p>	<p>Economic imbalance in County.</p> <p>Lack of affordable visitor accommodation.</p> <p>Rural areas lag behind urban and peri-urban areas in digital connectivity.</p>	<p>Development of the Barrow Blueway and the Greenway.</p> <p>Just Transition.</p> <p>Development of remote working in pandemic leading to greater awareness of possibilities for rural communities.</p>	<p>Cost of living pressures.</p> <p>Low education levels in parts of county.</p> <p>Poor transport infrastructure.</p> <p>Low awareness of Just transition measures.</p> <p>Cost of housing and rent.</p>

SOCIAL			
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>Thriving social enterprise sector.</p> <p>Good community groups</p> <p>New people moving in who would love to get involved.</p>	<p>Lack of community facilities and spaces for children and older people.</p> <p>Lack of sport and healthy recreation activities in rural areas.</p> <p>Gaps in services including GPs, and closures of rural banks and post offices.</p>	<p>Post COVID increase in interest in wellness, walking, eco-friendly recreation, and renewed attention to rural areas.</p>	<p>Large in- migration.</p> <p>Lack of sense of community.</p> <p>Rise in a feeling of discontent and anti-immigration sentiment.</p> <p>Declining pool of volunteers.</p>

ENVIRONMENT			
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>Heritage – buildings, canals towpaths, peatlands</p> <p>Biodiversity – rivers, canals, and the</p> <p>Curragh - Equine identity.</p> <p>Biodiversity training and Action Plans.</p>	<p>Commuting patterns are a challenge for rural transport especially in west of County North/South.</p>	<p>Lots of energy in the green/environment sphere including Just Transition.</p> <p>Greater awareness of environmental issues.</p>	<p>Climate Change, loss of biodiversity.</p> <p>Town expansion due to house building, creating pressure on land.</p> <p>High levels of car-dependency making alternative eco-friendly travel difficult.</p> <p>Urban expansion threatening rural community identity and way of life.</p>

3.8 AGREED SUBTHEMES

3.8.1 PRIORITISING THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

The multi-faceted stakeholder engagement programme was designed to link into both public and private elements, while acknowledging that the voices of the most marginalised communities need to be nurtured and strengthened. 42% of respondents to the survey have not engaged with the LEADER process before, and members of marginalised groups such as the Ukrainian community, Roma community, Traveller community, and those challenged by homelessness and substance abuse were consulted either directly or through the agencies or individuals working directly with them.

The LAG acknowledges that this engagement work needs to continue through the lifetime of the next programme and that animation and capacity-building work with marginalized geographical and thematic communities should be one of the essential aspects of the Programme. The development of a type of Rural Forum, whose members feed into the RDP subgroup of the LAG, will be a feature of the work over the next 5 years. This will ensure that the work of the LEADER programme will have ownership in local communities and groups. The need for capacity building in local communities is one of the main priorities identified through the public and stakeholder engagement process, especially within the Rural Environment theme. This is reinforced by the vast experience within CKLP as the Implementing Partner working on the ground with communities and businesses.

Bringing together the findings from the area profile, consultation processes, and analysis of the promoter and rural development subgroups, CKLP Board and LAG feedback, the selection of sub-themes is summarised below. In choosing which sub-themes to support, the LAG has sought to ensure that there is constructive collaboration between its work and other agencies in the county and that duplication is avoided. The LAG is also aware of the limited funds that are available and wishes to ensure that there is impact in some key targeted areas. Overall, the choice of sub-themes as well as the proposed objectives and actions reflect the key challenges and opportunities facing the county. Similarly, pursuing these sub-themes offers the best roadmap for Kildare to promote the development of vibrant rural communities and to stimulate smart innovative solutions to the challenges in our county.

THEME 1 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND JOB CREATION			
No.	Subtheme	Included	Rationale
1a	The Green Economy	No	In the light of a limited budget, the LAG considered that the main research on the circular economy will be the domain of research institutes, universities and Teagasc. The Green economy is a cross cutting horizontal theme which will underpin all economic development ideas and as such Green economy projects will be animated and considered as a project type under sub-theme 1d as enterprise projects.
1b	Agricultural Diversification	Yes	Enterprise, tourism, and leisure development ideas through farm diversification will be supported to promote the development of the Barrow Blue and Just transition regenerative tourism objective. Social farming will be supported to address the pressures on farm families to sustain a farm holding and balance off-farm employment, as well as to respond to mental health needs. These are driven by the area profile of ageing farmers, part time farming and growth in demand for community involvement in agriculture and rise in demand for social farming coming through in consultations.
1c	Rural Tourism & Recreation	Yes	The opportunities presented by development of Greenways, Blueways and Just Transition for sustainable slow tourism and recreation have been identified in the SWOT as important assets for Rural Development in Co. Kildare. This is supported by the Barrow Blueway Economic Plan and Just Transition Plan. Further consultation identified potential for festivals and events such as Brigid 1500 or other local “Heroes & Legends” e.g., Shackleton, and the urgent need for lower cost tourism accommodation.

THEME 1 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND JOB CREATION			
No.	Subtheme	Included	Rationale
1d	Enterprise Development	Yes	This sub theme will encompass all eligible project and promoter types including social enterprise, food, creative & media sector, and innovative rural enterprises. It will also support ideas and projects under the Green Economy as seen in 1a above.
1e	Rural Food Production	No	Food projects will be considered under sub-theme 1d and under a protocol with Kildare Local Enterprise Office to avoid duplication and build on the Food Network training and development of the County-wide network which took place in the previous LEADER programme.
1f	Social, Community & Cooperative Enterprises	Yes	Social, Community and Cooperative Enterprises are to be supported through capacity building and capital supports. This builds upon the work done in the 2014 – 2022 Programme, the gaps in services and social infrastructure revealed in consultations and the ideas expressed by the Social Enterprise Network Focus Group.

THEME 2 RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE & SOCIAL INCLUSION			
No.	Subtheme	Included	Rationale
2a	Rural Infrastructure	Yes	Both the area profile and consultations highlighted a lack of social infrastructure and a shortage of suitable community spaces or all types, both indoor and outdoor for community activity. The SWOT identified a need for healthy warm spaces for older people's activities across the county, as well as a need for community integration and ways to address a sense of disconnect.
2b	Accessible Services	Yes	The survey, SWOT and stakeholder interviews highlighted the need to support social inclusion as one of the primary demands of LEADER in the next programme. This is one of the ways in which LEADER can ensure it is accommodating the needs of new communities those who are marginalised or socially excluded or lack the capacity to make direct applications to benefit their community of interest. The theme of food poverty came through from the consultation process. This could take the form of capacity building and direct supports to frontline social inclusion organisations to ensure they have adequate resources to meet the needs of a growing population. Accessibility to services by older persons was also highlighted in the consultation process.

THEME 2 RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE & SOCIAL INCLUSION			
No.	Subtheme	Included	Rationale
2c	Optimising Digital Connectivity	No	Digital connectivity is considered part of the rural infrastructure and access to services required to counteract rural isolation. It was the least prioritised sub theme in the survey. Drawing on this finding, and on the experience of the 2014 – 2022 Programme the consensus of the Rural Development working group was that reliable high-speed broadband is still an issue for many areas in Co. Kildare. As broadband is excluded from the LEADER programme and digital skills ranked as a low-priority from the survey and consultation sessions, the LAG considered that there were worthy alternative supports for digital skills in the county, such as those offered by KWETB, and that any potential community organisations who may wish to apply for funding for such an initiative could do so under 2a or 2b.
2d	Rural Youth	Yes	Kildare has the highest youth population the State. While youth programmes are well supported, there is an explicit need for inclusive sporting, recreational or cultural facilities to accommodate fast growing youth population. This is evident from the Celbridge research and input from Youth Organisations on the Local Development Strategy. Significant concerns were expressed about the lack of spaces for young people leading to the development of unhealthy behaviours.

THEME 3 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RURAL ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION AND ADAPTATION			
No.	Subtheme	Included	Rationale
3a	Sustainable Development of the Rural Environment	Yes	This subtheme will support projects which are focused on environmental protection as their primary outcome. Consultations indicated demand for support of analysis and development such as Environmental Impact Assessment, as well as capital supports.
3b	Climate Change Capacity Building	Yes	Arising from collaboration with CARO, and Just Transition, LEADER can support other strategic priorities across the County by developing and supporting capacity building projects, such as capacity building for Town Teams to support the Town Centre First policy. These projects are usually more labour intensive, requiring in-house project development and management over 1-2 years, with lower project cost but greater development hours than external applicant capital projects.
3c	Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation	No	All projects should meet cross cutting themes of climate change mitigation and adaptation. If a project is directly aimed at environmental protection, it can be considered under 3a, and other projects designed to build skills, knowledge or awareness will come under 3b.

Section 4.

Strategic Integration



The Kildare LDS sees the LEADER programme not as a stand-alone Programme but linked to and complementing the objectives of the County Development Plan 2023 – 2029 and the LECP and is reflective of other local and regional plans. The objectives of the LDS in the next five years are aligned with the objectives of the “EU Long-term vision for rural areas” and the National Policy “Our Rural Future.” The LDS will contribute to the development of an integrated strategic approach in Kildare to rural revitalisation and development.

The Kildare LAG sees the LEADER Programme in Co. Kildare as a developmental and funding programme and has developed its strategy informed by key national and EU frameworks as well as objective research, networking, and stakeholder engagement. **The LDS is a tailored response to specific needs in County Kildare, responding to local challenges and opportunities, while always conscious of not duplicating other initiatives in the county.** It strategically focuses on initiatives and projects to build stronger, more connected, resilient, and prosperous rural communities by 2027. The LDS characterises the role of the Rural Development Programme in the county as offering a mechanism for the local-level application of EU and national policy objectives, while at the same time becoming a vehicle for feedback from local communities into policy development through the LAG. The LAG is aware of the multi-faceted dimensions of rural development and of the relationship between different policy tiers and conscious places the LDS in the context of these policies as well as in constructive collaboration with the different responses at local level, especially the LECP and the SICAP Programme.

From the beginning of the development of the LDS, the LAG has identified two key enabling factors to ensure the success of the Strategy.

- a) Integrated structures and a coordinated strategic approach in the county to rural revitalisation.
- b) Full and active citizenship by building social capital through animation and skill development.

Strategic foundation 1. Integrated strategy and coordination at county level.

This foundation rests on one of the 10 shared goals of the **EU Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas**, namely, to engage in “multi-level and place-based governance, developing integrated strategies using collaborative and participatory approaches”. The composition of the Kildare LAG is the starting point of this foundation, as the core forum for exchange of ideas, the development of synergies and the avoidance of duplication between different agencies and strategies in the county. Building on this, the LDS has also consciously situated itself in line with EU and National policies and alongside other plans in the county, as one element in the economic and tourism development and in the rural revitalization of the county. It has been written alongside the development of the LECP in the county and the Rural Development Manager of the Implementing Partner is a member of the LECP Advisory Steering Group to ensure a close constructive collaboration between the Plans. Both the LDS and the LECP are built on a shared socio-economic profile of the county developed by AIRO on behalf on Kildare County Council.

Strategy foundation 2: Local empowerment, capacity building and innovation.

This foundation rests on one of the objectives of the **Rural Pact** which is an initiative of the EU Long-term Vision for the EU’s Rural Areas, namely to “amplify “rural voices and bring them higher on the political agenda” and to structure and enable “networking, collaboration & mutual learning.” The energy and creativity that exists in local communities has been evident through the period of the last programme, and we wish to build upon that and work with communities to make the “most of their potential and support

them in facing up to their own unique set of issues, from demographic change to connectivity, the risk of poverty and limited access to services.” In response to these we wish to enable community-led innovation in response to the challenges that face the county, presently and in the coming years. Based on these two strategic foundations or enabling factors, the LDS seeks to implement a Strategy informed by a policy context developed at Global, EU and National levels.

4.1 GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE GOALS

In recent years, the awareness of the overarching challenges facing the planet has become more acute, alongside the understanding that even local development in Kildare has a global and supranational dimension. The United Nations 2020 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2015, has therefore become the blueprint for all development on the planet, now and into the future. At the heart of the agenda are the 17 **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, which are a call for action by all countries in a global partnership, aimed at ending poverty and reducing inequality, while improving health and education – all the while tackling climate change. Sustainable development is a core principle of the Treaty on European Union and a priority objective for the EU’s internal and external policies and have been called the EU’s “compass” to guide its work.²⁹ The EU’s statistics agency - Eurostat - monitors the EU contributions to the realization of the SDG’s, and the Irish Government has committed to implementing them, as measures national progress under each of the Goals, using EU targets and indicators³⁰ Thus, the SDS’s are the overarching global framework in which the Kildare LDS is situated and provide an overall reference point on which the LDS can be measured. Their *realization* requires a multi-faceted response to the issues which face countries and regions and an understanding that even local issues require geographical, sectoral, and institutional collaboration. **The Kildare LDS is therefore underpinned by an intra-county collaborative approach to enable it to realise a more sustainable development, improve socio-economic outcomes for its citizens while at the same time protecting natural resources.**



²⁹ Paolo Gentiloni, European Commissioner for Economy

³⁰ <https://irelandsdg.geohive.ie/>

4.2 POLICY ALIGNMENT: EU POLICIES AND FRAMEWORKS

4.2.1 The LDS takes as its foundation Specific Objective 8 - Article 6(h) of **CAP Strategic Plan** Regulation 2021/2115: namely, to “promote employment, growth, gender equality, including the participation of women in farming, social inclusion and local development in rural areas, including the circular *bioeconomy*.” It is a targeted and focused intervention - involving different levels of governance and building the capacity of all rural stakeholders - to create an enabling environment that will empower people all around the county to develop innovative green, digital and social solutions for their communities, **thus responding to the Objective in terms of growth, participation of women, social inclusion and local development**. The LDS also links in with the **2022 Management Plan** from the **EU Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development**, and *especially Specific Objective 12* to “*promote employment, growth, social inclusion and local development in rural areas*”.

4.2.2 The LDS also seeks to contribute to the aims and objectives of the **European Green Deal** which was published by the European Commission in December 2019 and is the centrepiece of European policy for the near future. It seeks to incentivise all sectors of the economy to be more ambitious in achieving climate neutrality and energy transition, while protecting and restoring biodiversity and promoting farm to fork initiatives. It also encourages the development of sustainable urban strategies, including improving the quality of urban green spaces and the development of community gardens and urban-rural food initiatives. **Through the LEADER Programme, the LAG seeks to encourage innovative and imaginative local responses to local needs and to the long-term challenges identified by the Green Deal.** Citizen participation and engagement in decision-making processes are also encouraged and in line with this the development of community capacity and social capital is a key Objective of the LDS.

4.2.3 The LDS also seeks to align itself with the **EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030** which aims to put Europe’s biodiversity on a path to recovery by 2030, roughly the time period of the LDS. It contains a proposal for a Nature Restoration Law, which is the first continent-wide, comprehensive law of its kind and could have implications for the peatland restoration in the county. It also looks to the **Circular Economy Action Plan** and its encouragement **to reuse** and recycle products to help slow down the use of natural resources, reduce landscape and habitat disruption and help to limit biodiversity loss. The EU Regulation 2021/1056 which established the **Just Transition Fund** is also clearly instrumental in the LDS emphasis on Just Transition communities and the eco-tourism possibilities for former Peatland areas. This Fund is part of the EU’s transition towards its 2030 targets for energy and climate and a climate-neutral economy of the European Union by 2050. Finally, the **EU Farm to Fork Strategy** is at the heart of the Green Deal, looking to establish sustainable food systems and *recognizing* the links between healthy people, healthy societies and a healthy planet.

4.2.4 Smart Villages initiatives are actively recommended as part of the CAP Strategic Plans and the Green Deal as they are seen as playing a crucial role in enabling rural communities to make a just transition to a greener Europe. The efficient use of innovative technologies means that a vast range of economic activities, which up to now were in urban areas, can now be carried out from rural areas³¹. The Europe Green Deal requires a significant response from rural Europe. and one solution is through the encouragement of “climate smart” villages and towns. The Kildare LDS believes that smart village approaches can help its communities turn some of the challenges that they face – some of which are global, and some have emerged through the stakeholder consultation – such as decarbonisation, climate measures, generational change, and the integration of new members - into opportunities, through digitalisation and social innovations. Smart Villages bring together ideas about bottom-up development and social innovation that have underpinned LEADER policy for many years and combine this with smart information and communication technology to provide a platform for innovation, emphasising the potential

³¹ World Social Report 2021, “Rethinking Rural Development,”

of bringing major improvements in the well-being of communities. **The LAG seeks to embed smart village principles in the county throughout the period of the LEADER plan, especially through its capacity building initiative with local communities.**

4.2.5 The LDS is also influenced by the **EU Long Term Vision for Rural Areas**, – *Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040*, including the 10 Shared Goals, EU Rural Action Plan, and the commitment to a Rural Pact. The development of the Long-Term Vision was done through a participatory approach which mirrored the ‘bottom-up’ philosophy of the LEADER method. The Vision seeks to respond to the challenges and concerns facing rural areas by building on the emerging opportunities of the EU’s green and digital transitions and on the lessons learnt from the COVID 19 pandemic, and by identifying means to improve rural quality of life, achieve balanced territorial development and stimulate economic growth in rural areas. **The LDS seeks to contribute to these goals in Kildare through economic support for tourism activities especially in the West of the county, thus promoting a more balanced development and ensuring that our rural communities continue to be attractive places to live and work.** The LAG itself will embody the idea of a Rural Pact by continuing to develop itself as a forum and framework for cooperation among authorities and all stakeholders. It is committed to the Objectives of the Pact, name, to amplify rural voices and bring them higher on the political agenda and to structuring and enabling networking, collaboration & mutual learning. Some of the LDS is influenced by policy documents produced by the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD), especially the ENRD Thematic Group on Rural Revitalization.

4.2.6 In December 2021, the European Commission published **The Social Economy Action Plan**, with the aim of enhancing social investment, supporting social economy actors and social enterprises to start-up, scale-up, innovate and create jobs. The LDS seeks to support local social enterprises and actors in a similar manner in Kildare.

4.2.7 The LDS also seeks to support the aims of the **EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020 – 2025** which seeks to end gender-based violence; challenge gender stereotypes; close gender gaps in the labour market and achieve equal participation across different sectors of the economy. This includes the rural economy where women play a crucial role in the development and economic growth of rural communities, and yet their key role is too often invisible. The EU is committed to improving the situation, notably through the EU Rural Action Plan, by supporting the uptake of female entrepreneurship, women’s participation in decision-making and the provision of adequate services in rural areas. The LAG also noted the 2019 EU research document **The Professional Status of rural women in the EU** which noted the role of local authorities to provide the necessary social and physical infrastructure that enables rural women’s participation in projects and activities.

4.2.8 Finally, the LAG took note of the 2022 findings of the **European Court of Auditors** on the LEADER approach to rural development. This report noted that the main characteristic of the LEADER approach is the application of participatory and bottom-up methods to involve local communities in both project development and decision-making processes. The LAG paid particular attention to the Auditors findings that the added-value aspect of the LEADER programme needs to be clearly shown in terms of social capital, improved local governance and enhanced results from projects. It also notes the observation that there is room for improvement towards ensuring that the LAG’s are inclusive and that young people, women and less advantaged groups participate in the decision-making process and has designed the LDS with this as one of the key outcomes. It also considered the European Evaluation Helpdesk’s very useful 2017 document, **Guidelines for the Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD** and especially the definitions of added value found therein.

4.3 POLICY ALIGNMENT: NATIONAL POLICIES AND FRAMEWORKS

4.3.1 Project Ireland 2040, the National Planning Framework is the overarching policy and planning framework for the social, economic, and cultural development of the country. Alongside the National Development Plan, it set the context for the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly to develop its Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies while taking account of and co-ordinating the County Development Plans in a manner that will ensure national, regional, and local plans align. **The preparation of the LDS has been done in the light of the County Development Plan and alongside the preparatory work for the LECP.**

4.3.2 In 2021, prompted by the unprecedented crisis due to the pandemic, the Government developed a **National Recovery and Resilience Plan** to respond to the urgent need of fostering a strong recovery and making Ireland future ready. The Plan has three overarching priorities, namely Advancing the Green Transition, Accelerating and Expanding Digital Reforms and Transformation and Social and Economic Recovery and Job Creation. It also committed itself to progressing the implementation of Slaintecare, which is present in Kildare in Athy. **The LAG recognises these priorities and seeks to reflect them in the Objectives and Actions of the LDS.**

4.3.3 Ireland's **Climate Action Plan 2021**, Annex of Actions and the associated legislation provides a detailed plan for taking decisive action to achieve a 51% reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and setting us on a path to reach net-zero emissions by no later than 2050, as committed to in the Programme for Government and set out in the Climate Act 2021. This is a significant challenge for all communities in Kildare and will have far reaching implications for all sectors of society. **The LAG recognizes that significant work still must be done to embed these commitments and those around the Just Transition process in the lives of people all around the county and therefore sees the work of the LDS as helping to develop understanding and skills at local level.** It especially sees the need to focus on children and the young people, to ensure a link between the green transition and the next generation. It sees this work as being parallel with the County Development Plan and Local Area Plans which influence spatial planning, land-use, transportation, and impact upon place making.

The Climate Action Plan is associated with other policies which impact upon Kildare and the LDS, especially National Peatlands Strategy 2015 and National Peatlands Strategy Mid-Term Review and Implementation Plan 2021.

Biodiversity and environmental aspects of the LDS also link in with the **National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017–2021**.

4.3.4 The Kildare LDS is also informed by the National Policy, **Our Rural Future – Ireland's Rural Development Policy 2021 – 2025**. Our Rural Future provides the framework for achieving a vision of transforming the quality of life and opportunity for people living in rural areas. The policy highlights the significant contribution of rural based businesses to the national economy especially in indigenous enterprises within the agri-food and tourism sectors and acknowledges that rural areas hold much of Ireland's natural resources, heritage sites, biodiversity, and visitor attractions. The LDS wishes to build on this in its support for the development for recreational eco-based tourism in the county. The policy also highlights the significant contribution of rural based businesses to the national economy especially in indigenous enterprises within the agri-food and tourism sectors. The LAG especially wishes to mirror the three principles in the Policy, namely People, Place and Possibilities. **Over the lifespan of the Plan 2023 – 2027 it seeks to develop the social capital of the people of Kildare, improve social cohesion and a sense of place in communities, and respond to the challenges which face all areas through the possibility offered by digital technologies and social innovation.**

Our Rural Future statements regarding heritage-based tourism and the creative economy particularly resonate with the findings of the Stakeholder Engagement process and the direction of the LDS. The policy

also notes the need to bring life back into town and village centres and compliments the work of **Town Centres First**. It strongly encourages investment in capacity building which is a key focus of this LDS.

4.3.5 Our Rural Future is close to other policies including **Making Remote Work: National Remote Work Strategy**, which seeks to embed some of the work-life balance and resilience lessons learnt during the pandemic, as well as breathing life into rural communities. **Town Centres First** outlines a policy approach to vibrant town centres as the lifeblood of local economies and sustainable development patterns to support economic and population growth. This is environmentally and socially relevant in the local context due to pressures of urbanisation in the West and just transition in the east of the county. **People, Place and Policy- Growing Tourism to 2025** positions tourism as a key element of the national economic strategy, and acknowledges the importance of protecting Ireland's natural, built, and cultural heritage environment in the process. It also refers to the importance of maintaining and improving the quality of both our inland waterways and coastal locations, the protection of native biodiversity, soil quality and geology, and air quality. **The LAG sees the LDS as supporting the direction of these policies.**

4.3.6. Farm diversification projects in the areas of agri food or Farm to Fork link in with the 2022 Bord Bia policy document, Nurturing a Thriving Future.

4.3.7. The development of eco-based tourism use of the former peatlands areas in the west of the county is influenced by the **National Peatland Strategy 2015** as well as the recently launched **Embracing Ireland's Outdoors - National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027** which has the tagline '*Ireland's outdoors, a world of activities for all*', provides a framework to work towards sustainable growth of the outdoor recreation sector. The document highlights how outdoor recreation has grown over the last number of years - partly accelerated by COVID-19 – with one survey showing that 55% of respondents spent more time outdoors than they did before the pandemic³². **The LDS is basing its emphasis on the development of eco-based recreational tourism along the Barrow Blueway and Just Transition areas on the recommendations of this document.**

4.3.8 This Objective is associated with other policies which impact upon tourism in Kildare, especially **Ireland's Ancient East Regional Tourism Development Strategy**. Fáilte Ireland aims to make IAE the most engaging cultural destination in Ireland and Europe, by harnessing the authentic character of Ireland's living culture, rich landscape, built heritage and hidden history. The focus is on visitor awareness, engagement, and experiences, supported by strong stakeholder and community engagement. It is also related to the themes in the July 2018 **Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways**.

4.3.9 The heritage aspects of the tourism objectives in the LDS, including the promotion of architectural and archaeological heritage in the county for those who use the Barrow Blueway link into the Governments Blueprint for heritage, **Heritage Ireland 2030**, published in February 2022. The LDS supports the view in this plan that alongside the intrinsic value of heritage, there are significant "economic, social, cultural and environmental values" contributing "to jobs, including in heritage skills, construction and tourism"³³

4.3.10 Our Rural Future complements other community-oriented policies, including the **National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland and Our Communities: Framework Policy for Local Community Development in Ireland** and the June 2023 **Social Enterprises in Ireland: A Baseline Data Collection Exercise** Social Enterprises are gaining recognition as a component of the overall entrepreneurial ecosystem, and this policy seeks to build greater awareness of their work, to strengthen them and to support them in through coordinated policies. Collectively these two policies note the importance of supporting volunteerism and citizen engagement in decision-making in urban and rural contexts. **The LAG sees these aspects as being crucial to the development of vibrant communities and has placed them at the heart of the LDS objectives for 2023- 2027**

³² CSO 'Our Lives Outdoors Survey' Spring 2022

³³ Heritage Ireland 2030, p. 33.

4.3.11 Mental health is a crucial priority across national and regional strategies. **Connecting for Life 2015 – 2020** is Ireland's national strategy for reducing suicide and self-harm, focusing on the population at large and on specific target groups, such as persons with addiction issues, members of the LGBTQ+ community, Travellers, refugees, and asylum seekers. **Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone** (June 2020) outlines a framework for mental health provision in Ireland over the next 10 years to promote psychological wellbeing across the population and places a major emphasis on early intervention and prevention.

4.4 REGIONAL POLICIES

The **Eastern and Midland Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2031** (RSES) is a settlement and economic growth strategy that seeks to realise the National Planning Framework at a regional level. The Strategy is based on 3 key principles: *Healthy Placemaking, Climate Action and Economic Opportunity*. The idea of placemaking – making our communities vibrant, attractive, and safe places to gather and live – is core to the social infrastructure and social cohesion aspects of the LDS.

The LDS seeks to support the RSES healthy placemaking vision which seeks to enhance the unique identity of places and to facilitate improvements to human wellbeing and the quality of life that comes from the interaction of people and their environment.

4.5 COMPLEMENTARITY: LOCAL POLICIES AND FRAMEWORKS

The LAG sees the LDS as a strategy which complements and adds value to other strategies in the county, which aiming to achieve a targeted and focused set of actions. It has been developed to work closely with the Kildare County Development Plan 2023 – 2029 and the Kildare 2025 Economic Development Strategy and has been developed alongside the preparations for the second LECP. The LAG also sees it working alongside the SICAP programme in the county, and the new SICAP plan to be developed later this year. There are several other key local strategies which have influenced the development of the Objectives and Actions in the LDS.

4.5.1. The objectives around regenerative and eco-based recreational tourism in the west of the county link into Kildare County Council's **Brigid1500 Plan**, and the **Kildare Economic Development Strategy, Kildare 2025**, the **Local Just Transition Plan for West Kildare 2022**, **Barrow Blueway Economic Plan 2021**, the **Kildare Sports Partnership Strategic Plan 2021 – 2022**, the **Healthy Kildare Plan 2022 - 2026** and Kildare County Council's **Open Space and Outdoor Recreation Policy 2021 – 2031**. This latter seeks to "maintain, upgrade and facilitate the delivery of quality public open spaces in a sustainable manner throughout County Kildare" and it acknowledges the potential for the "development of amenity access and/or a linear park network" along the different waterways in the county. It also recognizes the potential for the development of long-distance walking routes or peatways in peatland areas using former Bord na Mona railway lines and access laneways. **The LDS supports these aspirations as well as the development of a National Peatlands Park, outlined in the County Development Plan.**

4.5.2. The tourism aspects of the LDS link in with Into Kildare's **Strategic Plan for Tourism in Kildare 2022-2027**, which is based on a principle of sustainable and regenerative tourism. One of the objectives of this Plan is to "strengthen Kildare's tourism offering of Blueways, Peatways, and Greenways", which is supported by the LDS.

4.5.3. The objectives around developing teen friendly spaces for young people link into the **CYPSC (Children & Young People's Services Committee) 2023 Plan**, currently being finalised, the **Kildare Play Strategy 2018-2028**, Kildare County Council's **Open Space and Outdoor Recreation Policy 2021 – 2031** and the report from the Celbridge pilot initiative, **Barron, Tolland and Emmet (2022)**

“Somewhere to Hang Out” Teenagers Outdoor Recreational Needs in Celbridge: A Partnership Perspective. Dublin, DCU.

4.5.4. The environmental objectives and actions link in with the **Kildare Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2019-2024** as well as the work of the County Kildare Heritage Forum and the **County Kildare Heritage Plan 2019 - 2025**, and the 10 Kildare Town or Village Biodiversity Plans funded under the 2014 – 20-22 LEADER Programme.

4.5.5. Objectives and actions for older persons are informed by the **Kildare Age Friendly Strategy 2023** as well as the **County Kildare Access Strategy – a Universal Access Approach, 2020-2022**.

4.5.6. Capacity building for local communities using a Smart Village model is informed by the **Kildare Digital Strategy 2022 – 2025** and the **Kildare Hub Strategy 2020 - 2025**.

4.5.7. Other objectives and actions responding to social inclusion needs in the county are informed by the **Connecting for Life Kildare and West Wicklow Plan, 2018 – 2020** which is currently being updated, the **Kildare Integration Strategy 2020 – 2026** and the **Kildare Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy 2020 – 2025**. Health and mental health actions are linked to the *“Reducing Health Inequalities”* theme of the **Healthy Kildare Plan 2022 – 2026**, and also the perspective of the Kildare CYPSC in their 2020 paper **Redressing the balance: The Business Case for Investment in Integrated Youth Mental Health Service Provision in Kildare West Wicklow**.

4.6 CO-OPERATION PROJECTS

The area profile and SWOT analysis indicate that projects centred around environmental assets, trails and recreation are suited to co-operation across county borders. Rivers, Canals, Peatlands and Mountains are regions which cross county borders and would benefit from cooperation for environmental protection, tourism and recreational development. These project types would also benefit from international co-operation projects to share learning in areas where outdoor recreation and trails are more developed.

Potential Projects may include:

- To support local communities and enterprise to provide amenities and facilities linked to the development of the Barrow Blueway. Partners: Laois LAG and Laois County Council.
- To support local communities and enterprise to provide amenities and facilities linked to the development of the Turas Columbanus. Partner LAGs: Carlow and Meath.
- To support the development of eco-tourism recreational activities connected to the development of Peatland walkways. Partners s: LAGs and County Councils in Offaly and Laois.
- To support the development of a National Peatlands Park. Partners: LAGs and County Councils in Offaly and Laois.
- To support the development of the long-distance pilgrim way, Brigid’s Way. Partners LAGs: Meath and Louth.
- To support cross county development of mountain areas with Co. Wicklow Partners – Wicklow Local Development.
- International cooperation projects that offer a valuable opportunity for learning about projects that could be rolled out in a comparable manner in Kildare.
- Membership of the EU Rural Pact Community and seminars/workshops associated with the Rural Pact will be supported.

Section 5. Action Plan



The proposed actions seek to progress the 5 focus areas, building social capital, social infrastructure, social innovation, social cohesion, and sustainable climate resilience through a series of targeted interventions. Notwithstanding this, because the LEADER Programme is guided by the principles of Community-Led Local Development, which enshrines a bottom-up approach to rural development, the Actions are not intended to be overly prescriptive or rigid. The Programme will remain open to the ingenuity and innovation that is present in the county and will be responsive to emerging needs and interests of project promoters.

In drawing up the Objectives and Actions under each the Themes and subthemes, the LAG, fully cognisant of the small budget available, wished to ensure that its future work is precisely targeted, avoids duplication, adds value, contributes to economic, social and environmental sustainability and has clear output indicators. The impact of the LDS is understood as all the changes which are expected to happen due to the implementation and application of the Objectives and Actions in the Plan.

5.1 ADDED VALUE

The European Evaluation Helpdesk (2021) define the added value of LEADER/CLLD as “the benefits that are obtained thanks to the proper application of the LEADER method, compared to those benefits, which would have been obtained without applying this method”. It goes on to see this desired added value in three areas, namely, improved social capital, improved governance and enhanced results or impacts of programme/strategy implementation.

As stated above, the LAG has grounded the actions of the LDS on two enabling features, namely “Developing a coordinated strategy at county level for rural revitalisation” and “Developing full and active citizenship” through capacity building of local communities. These two factors, which have been at the forefront of the LAG focus since the submission of the EOI, will ensure that added value is achieved in the areas of “improved social capital” and “improved governance”. From these the LAG is convinced that we will see changes in peoples’ behaviour leading to the improvement of social capital and local governance and consequently, enhanced impacts in rural communities over the term of the LDS.

5.2 SUSTAINABILITY

Despite the limited budget, the LAG is convinced that the actions in the LDS will lead to sustainable development in social, economic and environmental domains in the county.

Social Sustainability:

The LAG is strongly convinced of the value of the CLLD approach which underpins the LEADER process. However, it also acknowledges that a number of factors have led to a weakening of this process in the county over the last 10 years. The impact of the COVID pandemic continues to be felt, with lower number of volunteers in local groups and efforts, and less participation in community events, especially by older people. The huge growth in population and significant in-migration has led to a weakened community identity in towns and villages. Finally, there is a small but vocal presence opposed to recent additions to the county caused by the Ukraine war or International Protection obligations. The strong emphasis on administrative elements of the past programme has also allowed less time to be devoted by Development Officers to working on the ground with communities, especially those in most need.

For this reason, the LAG has placed the development of community capacity, social capital and social cohesion at the center of this LDS. This is intended to produce future results in the areas of identifying and nurturing potential innovative ideas, building the capacity of communities to innovate; and stimulating enabling environments for innovation.

Economic Sustainability:

The LDS focuses on economic and tourism development in the west of the county.

This is based on a strong belief that the development of the Barrow Blueway, and associated Greenway developments, gives rise to significant tourism and economic possibilities. The LEADER funded Barrow Blueway Economic Plan projects increased visitor numbers of up to 80,000 once the Blueway is fully opened and this will have knock-on effects on the wider economic life of local communities.

Just Transition funding has the potential to dovetail with this and increase the potential for jobs in the tourism, accommodation and service sectors.

Environmental sustainability:

The Kildare LEADER partners are proud of their achievements under the Environmental Theme of the previous programme. Early on in that programme the Implementing Partner noticed a lack of interest or potential projects from communities in the environmental area. To respond to this, a Development Officer was recruited with the explicit focus on developing the capacity of communities in environmental matters to see a subsequent increase in applications. The Development Officer was recruited in early 2019 and put together a highly successful training programme entitled “Community 4 Climate Action”. This Programme was adapted by a few LEADER groups around the county and reported on at European level. It led to several projects being submitted by community groups. One of these, a Polytunnel project in Kilcullen saw the installation of a polytunnel and hot composters which will supply all the plants required for the Kilcullen Tidy Towns efforts in the village as well as waste recycling. A second project saw the running of a sustainable festival in Monasterevin. The Development Officer then went on to develop, in conjunction with the Kildare Heritage Office, Biodiversity training for ten towns or villages in the county. This has been replicated by Kildare County Council so that now 23 towns or villages have Biodiversity plans.

The LAG wishes to build on this work in the 2023 – 2027 and continue to build the capacity of groups around the county to enable them to develop community-led responses to climate issues.

The Development Officer is in the process of completing a Doctorate in Environmental studies with DCU which focuses on local government responses to Climate issues and thus is in a very strong position to anchor these efforts over the term of the LDS.

5.3 THE OBJECTIVES BASED ON THE AREA PROFILE, STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND EU AND NATIONAL STRATEGIES.

The Area Profile of Kildare shows a number of key issues. These are:

- The significant increase in population
- The high proportion of young people in the county.
- The spatial divide in disadvantage in the county
- The pressures on infrastructure, services and social cohesion due to the increased population.

The stakeholder engagement highlighted a number of other factors:

- The loss of community sense due to in-migration and patterns of commuting
- Pressures due to the cost-of-living crisis
- Isolation and lack of access to services for older persons

- Lack of facilities and spaces for young people, especially recreational spaces and facilities for teenagers.
- Lack of awareness of climate action and just transition implications at community level
- Awareness of potential for communities of the development of the Barrow Blueway

EU and national strategies support several strategic directions:

- Sustainable goals
- Farm to fork
- Climate action and Just Transition
- Equality and participation of women
- Remote working
- SMART villages model

Based on these findings and policies the LAG has identified its Local Objectives:

1. Support the diversification of farm activities
2. Support Regenerative Tourism and Recreation
3. Sustainable development of Green and Innovative SME Rural Business
4. Support the development of the Social Enterprise sector in Co. Kildare to address local needs.
5. Develop Social Infrastructure, including facilities for teenagers.
6. Support greater Social Inclusion across Co. Kildare
7. Develop the social capital and capacity of communities, especially those who have not engaged with LEADER.
8. SMART capacity building for Rural Communities.
9. Improve Environmental Protection
10. Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Awareness.

The 10 Objectives are broken down into actions targeted to achieve these objectives.

THEME 1: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & JOB CREATION	
Local Objective 1	Support the diversification of farm activities
Financial Allocation (€)	325,000
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	2
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	<p>Analysis of farm family structures and patterns indicates an ageing population of full-time farmers with younger farm families. Consultation suggested that the younger cohort are struggling to balance commuting outside of the county for full time work, maintaining the holding, and family life.</p> <p>This local objective aligns strategically with the development of outdoor recreational opportunities, Just Transition and the rise in Social Farming demand and provision. These opportunities, if supported, offer viable alternatives for a more sustainable pattern economically, socially, and environmentally.</p>
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	1b. Agricultural Diversification

STRATEGIC ACTION 1.1	Farm Diversification and eco-tourism
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>This action will support farm families, and in particular, female entrepreneurs of farm families to secure alternative income streams or transition from traditional intensive or unsustainable farming models. The action will include animation, developmental support, and grant aid for projects which support farm families to venture into diversified sustainable approaches involving eco-tourism or the development of activities which develop the tourism offering of the county, especially associated with the Barrow Blueway and walking routes.</p> <p>The intended outcome is for a more innovative and sustainable biodiversity-friendly, agricultural economic model.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Farm families
Geographic Area	County-wide with particular emphasis on the western side of Co. Kildare including Just Transition areas, and communities along the Barrow Blueway and Greenways.
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Kildare LEADER Partnership CLG as Implementing Partner on behalf of Kildare LAG
Collaborating Organisations	Kildare LAG, Kildare County Council, INTO Kildare, Teagasc (Options) and IFA (Farm Families).
Timeframe for Delivery	2023-2027
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators	<p>The anticipated outcome is improved quality of life, economic and environmental resilience for farm families and social connectivity for rural communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R37 Growth and jobs in rural areas: 1 Job • R39 Developing the rural economy
Anticipated Number of Projects	1

STRATEGIC ACTION 1.2	Farm Diversification and farm to fork
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>This action will support farm families, and in particular, female entrepreneurs to tap into the new opportunities being provided by shifts in consumer patterns and the development of a new green business model. The COVID pandemic underlined the importance of a robust and resilient food system that functions in all circumstances and can ensure access to a sufficient supply of affordable food for citizens. It also made us aware of the interrelations between our health, ecosystems, supply chains and consumption patterns.</p> <p>The Farm to Fork Strategy is at the heart of the EU Green Deal. The EU's goals are to reduce the environmental and climate footprint of the food system and strengthen its resilience, ensure food security in the face of climate change and lead a global transition towards competitive sustainability from farm to fork.</p> <p>Board Bia highlights that 2021 – 2031 will be the decade of expertise and specialism, rather than generalisation in food production and innovation, predicting that producers will have to tailor their offering to ever more demanding consumer cohorts.</p> <p>The action will include animation, developmental support, and grant aid for projects which support farm families to venture into diversified sustainable approaches including shortened supply chains, agri-food ideas or other innovative approaches to rural food production and income generation.</p> <p>The intended outcome is for a more innovative and sustainable agricultural economic model.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Farm families
Geographic Area	County-wide with particular emphasis on the western side of Co. Kildare including Just Transition areas.
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Kildare LEADER Partnership CLG as Implementing Partner on behalf of Kildare LAG.
Collaborating Organisations	Kildare LAG, Kildare County Council, INTO Kildare, Teagasc (Options) and IFA (Farm Families).
Timeframe for Delivery	2023-2027
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators	<p>The anticipated outcome is improved quality of life, economic and environmental resilience for farm families and social connectivity for rural communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R37 Growth and jobs in rural areas: 2 Jobs • R39 Developing the rural economy
Anticipated Number of Projects	1

THEME 1: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & JOB CREATION	
Local Objective 2	Support Regenerative Eco-Tourism and Recreation
Financial Allocation (€)	436,118
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	4
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	<p>The overall aim of this Objective is to develop tourism and the tourism product (accommodation, facilities and activities) as a key economic and employment generator for Kildare.</p> <p>“Driving Climate Action” is one of the key focus areas for Fáilte Ireland’s tourism strategy in 2023, as they work with tourism providers to develop an action plan to support the reduction of their carbon footprint while also making changes in areas like Energy, Food, Water and Waste.</p> <p>The development of Greenways, Blueways and Just Transition initiatives create opportunities for sustainable and slow tourism and recreation. These have been identified in the SWOT as important assets for Rural Development in Co. Kildare. This is supported by the Barrow Blueway Economic Plan, Just Transition and County Development Plan.</p> <p>Further consultation identified potential for festivals and events such as Brigid 1500 or other local “Heroes & Legends” e.g., Shackleton, Columbanus and the urgent need for lower cost tourism accommodation coupled with experiences.</p>
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	1c. Rural Tourism & Recreation
STRATEGIC ACTION 2.1	
Support the development of Tourism & Recreation	
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>Animation, developmental support, and grant aid to advance opportunities for private and social/community enterprise to improve the diverse offerings of outdoor recreation and tourism facilities.</p> <p>This action encompasses both slow and active tourism, historical places, heritage assets, cultural and recreational activities and public realm improvements that enrich the local community and economy, serve local needs, and create a sense of place for the benefit of the local population as well as visitors from within Ireland and overseas.</p> <p>The intended outcome is for an overall improved level of outdoor recreational infrastructure and facilities, benefiting both the local economy and improving quality of life.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Local enterprises and community organisations
Geographic Area	County-wide, with particular emphasis on the western side of Co. Kildare including Just Transition areas, and communities along the Barrow Blueway and Greenways. The action will also consider the need to develop new areas (rivers, hills, and mountains) and the potential for co-operation projects across county borders.
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Kildare LEADER Partnership CLG as Implementing Partner on behalf of Kildare LAG.
Collaborating Organisations	Kildare LAG, Kildare Local Enterprise Office, INTO Kildare, Climate Action Regional Office, Department of Rural and Community Development (Rural Walks), Waterways Ireland, Fáilte Ireland (Ireland’s Ancient East), and LCDCs/ implementing partners of bordering counties.
Timeframe for Delivery	2023-2027
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators	<p>Number of projects supported, increased number of additional bed spaces available for visitor accommodation and increased number of visitors to Co. Kildare LEADER-funded attractions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R37 Growth and jobs in rural areas: 2 Jobs • R39 Developing the rural economy
Anticipated Number of Projects	4

STRATEGIC ACTION 2.2	Support Development of the Barrow Blueway and the Greenways
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>Animation, developmental support, and grant aid to advance opportunities for private and social/community enterprise to improve the Barrow Blueway and Greenway experience for tourists.</p> <p>This action encompasses both slow and active tourism, linked historical places and heritage assets, cultural and recreational activities and public realm improvements that create a heightened visitor experience for those who use the Blueway and Greenways.</p> <p>The intended outcome is for an overall improved level of outdoor recreational infrastructure and facilities, improving attractiveness of Kildare as a tourism destination.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Local enterprises and community organisations
Geographic Area	The western side of Co. Kildare including Just Transition areas, and communities along the Barrow Blueway and Greenways.
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Kildare LEADER Partnership CLG as Implementing Partner on behalf of Kildare LAG.
Collaborating Organisations	Kildare LAG, Kildare Local Enterprise Office, INTO Kildare, Climate Action Regional Office, Department of Rural and Community Development (Rural Walks), Waterways Ireland, Fáilte Ireland (Ireland's Ancient East), and LCDCs/ implementing partners of bordering counties.
Timeframe for Delivery	2023-2027
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators	<p>Number of projects supported, increased number of additional bed spaces available for visitor accommodation and increased number of visitors to Co. Kildare LEADER-funded attractions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R37 Growth and jobs in rural areas: 3 Jobs • R39 Developing the rural economy
Anticipated Number of Projects	1
STRATEGIC ACTION 2.3	Support festivals, pilgrim trails and development of tourism related to Brigid and other heroes
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>Animation, developmental support, and grant aid to advance opportunities for private and social/community enterprise to develop activities, trails, walks and festivals associated with the figures of Brigid - stimulated by the Brigid1500 celebrations- Columbanus, other monastic figures, and other notable local figures.</p> <p>This action encompasses both slow and active tourism, walking trails, historical places, heritage assets, festivals, cultural and recreational activities and public realm improvements that enrich the local community and economy, serve local needs, and create a sense of place for the benefit of the local population as well as visitors from within Ireland and overseas.</p> <p>The intended outcome is for an overall improved level of outdoor recreational infrastructure and facilities, benefiting both the local economy and improving quality of life.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Local enterprises and community organisations
Geographic Area	County-wide, with particular emphasis on the western side of Co. Kildare including Just Transition areas, and communities along the Barrow Blueway and Greenways. The action will also consider co-operation projects across county borders.
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Kildare LEADER Partnership CLG as Implementing Partner on behalf of Kildare LAG.

Collaborating Organisations	Kildare LAG, Kildare Local Enterprise Office, INTO Kildare, Climate Action Regional Office, Department of Rural and Community Development (Rural Walks), Waterways Ireland, Fáilte Ireland (Ireland's Ancient East), and LCDCs/ implementing partners of bordering counties.
Timeframe for Delivery	2023-2027
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators	Number of projects supported, increased number of additional bed spaces available for visitor accommodation and increased number of visitors to Co. Kildare LEADER-funded attractions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> R37 Growth and jobs in rural areas: 1 Job R39 Developing the rural economy
Anticipated Number of Projects	1
STRATEGIC ACTION 2.4	Support the development of lower cost accommodation options especially associated with the Blueway, peatlands and walking trails.
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>Animation, developmental support, and grant aid to advance opportunities for private and social/community enterprise to develop lower cost accommodation options such as camping, hostels, glamping, bed and breakfasts etc.</p> <p>This action is aimed at supporting both slow and active tourism, and public realm improvements that enrich the local community and economy and create a sense of place for the benefit of the local population as well as visitors from within Ireland and overseas.</p> <p>The intended outcome is for an overall improved level of outdoor recreational infrastructure and facilities, benefiting both the local economy and improving quality of life.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Local enterprises and community organisations
Geographic Area	County-wide, with particular emphasis on the western side of Co. Kildare including Just Transition areas, and communities along the Barrow Blueway and Greenways.
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Kildare LEADER Partnership CLG as Implementing Partner on behalf of Kildare LAG.
Collaborating Organisations	Kildare LAG, Kildare Local Enterprise Office, INTO Kildare, Climate Action Regional Office, Department of Rural and Community Development (Rural Walks), Waterways Ireland, Fáilte Ireland (Ireland's Ancient East), and LCDCs/ implementing partners of bordering counties.
Timeframe for Delivery	2023-2027
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators	Number of projects supported, increased number of additional bed spaces available for visitor accommodation and increased number of visitors to Co. Kildare LEADER-funded attractions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> R37 Growth and jobs in rural areas: 2 Jobs R39 Developing the rural economy
Anticipated Number of Projects	1

THEME 1: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & JOB CREATION	
Local Objective 3	Sustainable development of Green and Innovative SME rural business
Financial Allocation (€)	425,000
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	1
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	<p>Supporting local enterprises to adapt to emerging challenges is a foundational theme of LEADER to ensure resilient rural communities. This includes unlocking the digital potential of Kildare's rural areas to support the future of rural businesses. This objective will support cooperation, innovation, rural entrepreneurship and knowledge transfer on the Green economy as well as support for new business ideas, as well as small scale expansions.</p> <p>Enterprise development was ranked the subtheme of highest importance to participants in the consultation survey.</p> <p>Collaboration with Kildare Local Enterprise Office during the 2014-2022 programme has identified a niche for LEADER to provide supports through training, capacity building, capital and marketing supports for micro, small and medium enterprises. At a strategic level, support to advance the development of Athy as a food & drink skills and innovation hub has been identified in the consultation process as a need.</p>
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	1d. Enterprise Development
STRATEGIC ACTION 3.1	SUPPORT RURAL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>This action will support micro, small and medium sized enterprises to generate economic activity in rural communities. It will encourage entrepreneurship at all stages from new start-ups to established enterprises, through a range of community based and private projects and targeted and sector specific based initiatives and collaborative actions</p> <p>Projects will be considered within the eligibility criteria and will be focused on the LEADER Sub Themes of the Green Economy, Food (including artisan food, skills, and innovation), SMART innovations, Creative and Media Sector and innovative rural business such as ancillary services to primary agriculture, equine industry, forestry or farming. The aim is to support the development of the knowledge and skills base, to pursue best practice and to improve incomes.</p> <p>The anticipated outcome of this action is to increase the diversity of enterprises, improve local economic resilience, and to contribute towards more socially and environmentally friendly local employment opportunities.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Micro, small, and medium sized enterprises
Geographic Area	County-wide, with an emphasis on Athy for Food & Drink Skills and Innovation Hub support.
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Kildare LEADER Partnership CLG As Implementing Partner on behalf of Kildare LAG
Collaborating Organisations	Kildare Local Enterprise Office, Kildare Chamber
Timeframe for Delivery	2023-2027
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R37 Growth and jobs in rural areas: 4 Jobs R39 Developing the rural economy
Anticipated Number of Projects	6

THEME 1: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & JOB CREATION	
Local Objective 4	Support the development of the Social Enterprise Sector in Co. Kildare to address local needs.
Financial Allocation (€)	175,000
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	1
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	<p>Across the EU, the social economy is seen as a driver of innovation, ecological transition and sustainable growth. It strengthens social cohesion and democracy. It does so by showing a “third way” to solve the challenges facing our communities that the market and, in some areas, the state cannot address. The EU Social Economy Action Plan (2021) and the National Social Enterprise plan for Ireland outline the framework for the development of the sector. As a signatory to the 2020 Toledo Declaration on the Social and Solidarity Economy¹³ Ireland is committed to promoting the “role of social economy in an inclusive and fair post-COVID 19 recovery”.</p> <p>Consultation with the Kildare Social Enterprise Network identified a need for services and social infrastructure in rural Kildare that can be well served by the social enterprise sector. The CKLP report on social enterprise (2013) identified gaps in services and potential opportunities for social enterprises that have not been met to date.</p> <p>This action has two specific objectives: 1. to support existing social enterprises with mentoring, training and capital supports. 2. to stimulate new social enterprises especially in Just Transition areas through support for social entrepreneurs and community groups.</p>
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	1f. Social, Community & Cooperative Enterprises
STRATEGIC ACTION 4.1	
SOCIAL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT	
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>This action will support existing social enterprises as well as acting as a catalyst for new and innovative projects.</p> <p>Existing social enterprises will be supported to consolidate their existing business and further develop their enterprise to meet local needs. Capacity building supports, mentorships and targeted training will be provided under the banner of Kildare Social Enterprise Network.</p> <p>New social enterprises will be encouraged by engaging potential social entrepreneurs and community and voluntary groups. The potential for consortium-based approaches to new social enterprises will be explored especially in Just Transition areas by bringing statutory and voluntary partners together to develop social enterprises to improve the viability of disadvantaged rural areas. Support will include assistance with feasibility and business planning, capital supports and training and mentoring.</p> <p>The intended outcome of this project is that the number and range of social enterprises in County Kildare will expand and that existing social enterprises will be consolidated and more sustainable by 2027.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Disadvantaged Communities
Geographic Area	County-wide
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Kildare LEADER Partnership CLG as Implementing Partner on behalf of Kildare LAG.
Collaborating Organisations	Kildare LAG, SICAP (Social Enterprise Support Programme), Kildare Local Enterprise Office.
Timeframe for Delivery	2023-2027

Anticipated Outputs/Indicators	The anticipated outputs for this action will be the number of projects supported, the number of service users of social/community/co-operative enterprises supported, and the number of trainees attending capacity building workshops/training programmes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R.37 Growth and jobs in rural areas: 1 Job • R39 Developing the rural economy • R.41 Connecting rural Europe • R.42 Promoting social inclusion
Anticipated Number of Projects	6

THEME 2: RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Local Objective 5	Develop Social Infrastructure
Financial Allocation (€)	600,000
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	1
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	Following from needs identified through consultation and the area profile, communities - particularly those who have not previously benefited from LEADER - will be supported to enhance or refurbish their facilities, expand, or adapt to meet demand through all eligible project types including analysis and development as well as capital investment. Both the area profile and consultations highlighted a lack of the social infrastructure needed to maintain social cohesion and provide spaces for old and young to gather and a shortage of suitable community spaces of all types, both indoor and outdoor, for community activity. The SWOT identified a need for healthy warm spaces for older people's activities across the county, as well as a need for community integration and ways to address a sense of disconnect.
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	2a. Rural infrastructure

STRATEGIC ACTION 5.1	SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OR REFURBISHMENT OF RURAL COMMUNITY FACILITIES
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	This action will provide support to community groups and other organisations to develop or renovate facilities in their areas to respond to the needs of their communities, especially the most marginalised groups, to support social cohesion and respond to mental health needs.
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Disadvantaged Communities, new communities, marginalised groups
Geographic Area	County-wide, but primarily in the west of the county
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Kildare LEADER Partnership CLG as Implementing Partner on behalf of Kildare LAG.
Collaborating Organisations	Kildare LAG Social Inclusion subgroup, SICAP, Family Resource Centres, Kildare PPN.
Timeframe for Delivery	2023-2027
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators	The key outputs of this action will be the number of projects supported and the population benefiting from social inclusion projects/supports. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R.41 Connecting Rural Europe • R42 Promoting Social Inclusion: 1 Community Facility
Anticipated Number of Projects	5

THEME 2: RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND SOCIAL INCLUSION	
Local Objective 6	Support greater Social Inclusion across Kildare
Financial Allocation (€)	260,118
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	4
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	<p>One of the primary aims of Specific Objective 8 of the CAP Strategic Plan is to promote social inclusion in rural areas.</p> <p>This aim was echoed in the survey, SWOT and stakeholder interviews which highlighted the need to support social inclusion in the next LEADER programme.</p> <p>The overall aim of this Objective is to promote social inclusion, reduce exclusion and improve the quality of life and access to services for people living in Kildare, through actions tailored to meet the needs of communities and individuals within those communities in both an urban and rural context.</p> <p>Two thirds of the population in County Kildare were not born in the county and 20% of the population was not born in Ireland according to the recent Census statistics. Disadvantage is spread across the county according to the Housing Assistance Payment statistics.</p> <p>The theme of food poverty came through from the consultation process and is currently supported by family resource centres and local voluntary groups or social inclusion programmes. Accessibility to services by older persons was also highlighted in the consultation process.</p>
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	2 b Accessible Services
STRATEGIC ACTION 6.1	
SUPPORTS TO NEW, HARD-TO-REACH AND DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES	
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>This action will be delivered through collaboration with the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP).</p> <p>Outreach work through SICAP in disadvantaged areas will identify gaps in services that may be supported by LEADER. The action will support them to develop their services, enhance or refurbish their facilities, expand, or adapt to meet demand through all eligible project types including analysis and development as well as capital investment.</p> <p>The intended outcome is that disadvantaged communities will be better served with local social inclusion supports and that the voluntary organisations they rely on will be better equipped to meet growing demands on their services.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Disadvantaged Communities, new communities, marginalised groups
Geographic Area	County-wide with particular focus on disadvantaged communities.
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Kildare LEADER Partnership CLG as Implementing Partner on behalf of Kildare LAG.
Collaborating Organisations	Children & Young People's Services Committee, Kildare LAG Social Inclusion subgroup, SICAP, Family Resource Centres, Kildare PPN.
Timeframe for Delivery	2023-2027
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators	<p>The key outputs of this action will be the number of projects supported and the population benefiting from social inclusion projects/supports.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R.41 Connecting Rural Europe • R42 Promoting Social Inclusion: 2 Communities
Anticipated Number of Projects	2

STRATEGIC ACTION 6.2	IMPROVE ACCESS TO SERVICES
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	This action will use the developments in digital technology to support greater access to information and services across all communities, with particular focus on new communities, marginalised communities and groups and older people. It will maximise the potential of the digital economy in communities, including through skills development and building awareness and usage of available remote working facilities.
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Disadvantaged Communities, new communities, marginalised groups
Geographic Area	County-wide
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Kildare LEADER Partnership. CLG as Implementing Partner on behalf of Kildare LAG
Collaborating Organisations	Children & Young People's Services Committee, Kildare LAG Social Inclusion subgroup, SICAP, Family Resource Centres, Kildare PPN.
Timeframe for Delivery	2023-2027
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators	The key outputs of this action will be the number of projects supported and the population benefiting from social inclusion projects/supports. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R.41 Connecting Rural Europe • R42 Promoting Social Inclusion: 4 Communities
Anticipated Number of Projects	1

STRATEGIC ACTION 6.3	RURAL WOMEN
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>This action will support initiatives that seek to address gender inequality and in particular, the disproportionate effect of financial inequality for women and level of caring responsibilities.</p> <p>The area analysis shows that it is often women who provide supports to these issues through volunteering, community organisations, local groups, and social enterprises. Whether they are advocating for social change or simply providing a social outlet for friendship and support, these are essential supports to women. This action is designed to lend support to those initiatives such as women's sheds, mental health supports, older people's groups, wellbeing, and family supports in the community and domestic violence services.</p> <p>This action will support initiatives for front line supports, and to develop the capacity of the groups and organisations that support women experiencing inequality and disadvantage in any form across the generations.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Older Women, Disadvantaged Women, Women in Rural Areas and women active in Social Enterprise and Community organisations.
Geographic Area	County-wide
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Kildare LEADER Partnership CLG as Programme Implementer on behalf of Kildare LAG
Collaborating Organisations	Women's groups, clubs, social enterprises, and local social inclusion programmes.
Timeframe for Delivery	2023-2027
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators	The key outputs will be the number of women participating in or benefiting from projects, and the number of projects supported. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R. 41 Connecting Rural Europe • R. 42 Promoting Social Inclusion: 2 Womens Groups
Anticipated Number of Projects	1

STRATEGIC ACTION 6.4		SUPPORT FRONTLINE SOCIAL INCLUSION SERVICES	
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>This action will provide supports to frontline social inclusion organisations and local community organisations.</p> <p>It will support them to develop their services, enhance or refurbish their facilities, expand or adapt to meet demand through all eligible project types including analysis and development as well as capital investment. The intended outcome is that disadvantaged communities will be better served with social inclusion supports and that the voluntary organisations they rely on will be better equipped to meet growing demands on their services.</p>		
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Disadvantaged Communities, new communities, marginalised groups		
Geographic Area	County-wide		
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Kildare LEADER Partnership CLG as Implementing Partner on behalf of Kildare LAG.		
Collaborating Organisations	Children & Young People's Services Committee, Kildare LAG Social Inclusion subgroup, SICAP, Family Resource Centres, Kildare PPN.		
Timeframe for Delivery	2023-2027		
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators	<p>The key outputs of this action will be the number of projects supported and the population benefiting from social inclusion projects/supports.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R.41 Connecting Rural Europe • R42 Promoting Social Inclusion: 1 Organisation 		
Anticipated Number of Projects	1		

THEME 2: RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND SOCIAL INCLUSION	
Local Objective 7	Develop social capital and the capacity of communities, especially those who have not engaged with LEADER
Financial Allocation (€)	200,000
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	1
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	<p>The LEADER programme is founded on the principle of Community Led Local Development. This LDS seeks to develop the voices of rural communities, in order understand the different rural contexts for targeting action, and to connect the ideas, energies and enthusiasm that exists in communities around the county with the policy-making structures in the county. The LDS is committed to the development of a more integrated response to rural regeneration in Kildare.</p> <p>However, in order to be involved, communities must be empowered, and their capacity developed. Furthermore, unlocking the digital potential of rural areas is vital for the future of rural communities in Kildare</p> <p>The development of the voices of rural communities, especially those who have not engaged much with LEADER or other funding programmes is a key part of this LDS. This will feed into the development of a Rural Forum which will feed into policy-making bodies in the county.</p>
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	2 b Access to Services

STRATEGIC ACTION 7.1		SMART CAPACITY BUILDING FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES	
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>A capacity building programme for communities who have been identified during the consultation process and area profile as having not previously benefitted from LEADER investment.</p> <p>A bespoke programme will be developed to empower local communities to come together in a voluntary capacity and identify their needs in line with the principles of community-led local development. Participants will be upskilled to pursue further projects.</p> <p>This action will respond to needs of areas with low uptake of LEADER support who are part of the Just Transition area (Rathangan and Coill Dubh), or in the case of Kilberry and Nurney, excluded from the Just Transition area but experiencing the same challenges. Other areas near county borders (Levitstown, Rathmore, Broadstone) require animation work to develop their sense of identity and establish community structures. The unique character of the Curragh makes it a challenging area to develop actions.</p> <p>The intended outcome is to facilitate an integrated community planning process in 12 communities in the county; reflecting the different social and economic profiles.</p>		
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Disadvantaged communities, including rural settlements that are characterised by Pobal as being marginally below average in terms of deprivation.		
Geographic Area	Johnstownbridge, Clogherinka, Carbury/Derrinturin, Coill Dubh, Prosperous, Timoghan, Rathangan, Robertstown Kilberry, Castlemitchell, Nurney, Levitstown		
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Kildare LEADER Partnership. CLG as Implementing Partner on behalf of Kildare LAG		
Collaborating Organisations	Kildare PPN (social inclusion), SICAP, Local Community Organisations and Family Resource Centres. Neighbouring Partnerships will be invited to collaborate on co-operation measures in border areas.		
Timeframe for Delivery	2023-2027		
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R40 Smart Transition of the Rural Economy: 12 Communities 		
Anticipated Number of Projects	1		

THEME 2: RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Local Objective 8	Develop inclusive sporting, recreational or cultural or social facilities to accommodate the fast-growing youth population and create spaces for multi-generational community gatherings		
Financial Allocation (€)	300,000		
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	1		
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	<p>Kildare has experienced significant population growth, but our consultations indicated that local towns and villages have experienced development pressures, and the provision of local infrastructure has not risen to meet the increased demand.</p> <p>Co. Kildare has the highest youth population the State.</p> <p>There is an explicit need for inclusive sporting, recreational or cultural facilities to accommodate the fast-growing youth population. This is evident from the Celbridge research and input from Youth Organisations on the Local Development Strategy. Significant concerns were expressed about the lack of spaces for young people leading to the development of unhealthy behaviours.</p> <p>The age dependency profile and commuting patterns indicate that these pressures are acutely felt by those in mid-life, supporting younger and older generations where services and supports are limited in capacity.</p>		

THEME 2: RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Local Objective 8	Develop inclusive sporting, recreational or cultural or social facilities to accommodate the fast-growing youth population and create spaces for multi-generational community gatherings
Financial Allocation (€)	300,000
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	2d Rural Youth

STRATEGIC ACTION 8.1 FAMILY FRIENDLY KILDARE

Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>This action will provide support for local community organisations, enterprises, clubs, and groups to provide services and activities for children and young people.</p> <p>It will enable them to deliver activities and facilities that support positive physical, mental, social, and cultural outcomes and develop collaborative actions to address needs of the local youth population and those who care for them.</p> <p>Projects that support accessible child and teen/young adult friendly spaces, activities and facilities that are accessible for families, the wider community, multi-generational and inclusive or targeted for the specific needs of young adult or other disadvantaged groups will be encouraged to access funding and developmental supports.</p> <p>These could be works projects to develop or enhance indoor or outdoor spaces, programmes of activity or equipment that support community-based activities such as youth groups, sports or cultural clubs, informal education, or social clubs. The intended outcome is that vulnerable age groups will have better access to services and infrastructure.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Children, Rural Youth, and families and Older People
Geographic Area	County-wide, including rural towns with larger populations and rural settlements with limited facilities.
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Kildare LEADER Partnership CLG As Implementing Partner on behalf of Kildare LAG
Collaborating Organisations	Kildare Young People's Services Committee, In Sync Youth Services, Kildare Wicklow Education and Training Board, Kildare Sports Partnership, Kildare PPN (Social Inclusion)
Timeframe for Delivery	2023-2027
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators	<p>The key outputs will be the number of projects supported, and the population benefiting from them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R41 Connecting Rural Europe • R42 Promoting Social Inclusion Projects: 2 Project
Anticipated Number of Projects	4

THEME 3: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION & ADAPTATION

Local Objective 9	Improve Environmental Protection
Financial Allocation (€)	759,100
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	2

THEME 3: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION & ADAPTATION

Local Objective 9	Improve Environmental Protection
Financial Allocation (€)	759,100
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	<p>Environmental protection and climate change mitigation and adaptation are cross cutting themes across all LEADER actions.</p> <p>The purpose of this action is to specifically drive projects and initiatives that are designed to address environmental protection as their primary outcome.</p> <p>Considering strategic alignment (Section 4) it is evident that low prioritisation in consultation is an indication that there is a need for a concerted effort to advance the environmental objectives locally and collaboratively particularly considering the transition from fossil fuels in western parts of Co. Kildare and population growth and suburbanisation in eastern Co. Kildare.</p>
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	3a Sustainable Development of the Rural Environment

STRATEGIC ACTION 9.1	ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>This action will support community and enterprise initiatives that have environmental protection as their primary objective.</p> <p>This includes supports for studies that can be used to prompt further action to address environmental issues (including waste, water, air, soil and biodiversity etc.), protection of natural heritage, environmental impact assessments, green economy initiatives, and capital supports.</p> <p>For analysis and development-type projects and training projects, the intended outcome is that communities will be empowered with specific technical and environmental information to better understand and deliver appropriate environmental protection measures in their area.</p> <p>For capital projects, potential outputs could include specialist equipment to address environmental protection and management.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Rural Youth/Children/Older People
Geographic Area	County-wide, and in Just Transition areas
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Kildare LEADER Partnership CLG as Implementing Partner on behalf of Kildare LAG
Collaborating Organisations	Local Authority Waters Programme, the Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office, Kildare County Council, local peatlands groups, local nature conservation groups, Tidy Towns groups, and community gardens.
Timeframe for Delivery	2023-2027
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators	<p>The key output will be the number of projects supported to address environmental protection.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R38 LEADER Coverage • R40 Smart transition of the rural economy: 2 Capital and 2 Analysis • R41 Connecting rural Europe
Anticipated Number of Projects	5
STRATEGIC ACTION 9.2	PEATLANDS PROTECTION
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>Capacity building and grant aid to raise awareness of the environmental value of peatlands and to support the unique ecology of peatlands through sustainable activities.</p> <p>This will include actions that support the development of peatland parklands, visitor experiences and education initiatives on peatlands and biodiversity. It will also support efforts to restore and regenerate peatlands that have formerly been harvested for fuel and horticulture purposes.</p> <p>It can encompass regenerative tourism and outdoor recreation, provided that environmental protection is the primary goal. For example, smart alternatives to industrialised peatland use that build social cohesion and create opportunities for the local community.</p> <p>Potential tourism and recreation aspects of this action should be eco-based, regenerative, and sensitive to peatlands as unique ecological and heritage assets. Projects should enrich the local community, serve local needs, and create a sense of place for the benefit of the local population and visitors alike.</p> <p>It supports the development of long distance looped peatways across the Bog of Allen utilising former industrial peat railway tracks.</p> <p>It also supports the potential of a National Peatlands Park on former industrial cutaway bogs.</p> <p>The LAG is aware that actions in this area are dependent on different stakeholders and on the constant evolution in EU and National policy.</p>

Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Disadvantaged Communities
Geographic Area	3 MDs and Just Transition areas, Northwest and West Kildare, particularly Kildare/Newbridge MD
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Kildare LEADER Partnership as Implementing Partner on behalf of Kildare LAG.
Collaborating Organisations	Local social enterprises and community organisations
Timeframe for Delivery	2023-2027
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators	The anticipated outcome is protection of the peatlands, with improved conservation outcomes e.g., regeneration as unique habitats and protection of biodiversity. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R.38 LEADER Coverage • R.40 SMART transition of the Rural Economy: 1 Project • R.41 Connecting Rural Europe
Anticipated Number of Projects	2

THEME 3: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION & ADAPTATION

Local Objective 10	Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Awareness
Financial Allocation (€)	600,017
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	2
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	<p>The consultation process revealed two distinct strands of thought. On the one hand, the survey indicated a limited demand for funding and limited project ideas that addressed climate change specifically. On the other hand, smaller focus groups and one-to-one semi-structured interviews and the strategic review highlighted the need to prioritise the environmental theme of LEADER, particularly for the benefit of disadvantaged communities and vulnerable target groups, including future generations.</p> <p>LEADER can address climate change mitigation and adaptation by developing and supporting capacity building projects; both in-house and led by external promoters. The Kildare LEADER programme is experienced in this area, having run the Communities for Climate Action training project, which was emulated in other counties, and supported promoter-led training initiatives.</p> <p>In-house training projects, such as those required under this sub-theme, are labour intensive and typically require sustained project management over 1-2 years. Projects of this kind typically have mid-range direct costs but greater resourcing costs for staff, in comparison to external promoters seeking funding for capital projects, for example.</p>
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	3b. Climate Change and Capacity Building

STRATEGIC ACTION 10.1	TOWN TEAMS
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>A Pilot Project to support the capacity building of Town Teams to implement Town Centre First policy in their local area. This policy identifies towns and villages as central to balanced regional development, providing economic, administrative, social, community and recreational functions, and tackling the challenges of vacant and derelict properties. It also identifies towns as having a critical role to play in the climate emergency in terms of the embodied energy of buildings, mobility and active travel, and community resilience in the context of extreme weather events.</p> <p>The project will bring local community groups and enterprises together under the guidance of a skilled facilitator to develop their skills as a team to identify opportunities, lever funding and manage projects aimed at the regeneration and sustainable development of their town centre.</p> <p>The intended outcome is that communities will be empowered to develop smart approaches to building vibrant and sustainable communities and enhancing the vitality of rural towns.</p> <p>Animation and development of the project proposal will commence in 2023, and an in-house application will be prepared in early 2024.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Rural Towns
Geographic Area	Town(s) to be identified by Kildare County Council for Town Centre first team.
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Kildare LEADER Partnership CLG As Implementing Partner on behalf of Kildare LAG
Collaborating Organisations	Kildare County Council Local Government Management Agency (Town Centre First Office)
Timeframe for Delivery	2024-2025
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators	<p>The key output will be the number of participants and facilitated training hours completed by participants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R.38 LEADER coverage • R.40 Smart transition of the rural economy • R.41 Connecting rural Europe: 1 Town
Anticipated Number of Projects	3

STRATEGIC ACTION 10.2	COMMUNITIES FOR CLIMATE ACTION
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>As a follow on to the success of the capacity building programme “Communities for Climate Action” in the 2014-2022 programme, additional in-house initiatives and supports for projects will be continued under the 2023-2027 programme.</p> <p>This will include supports for Tidy Towns groups, community farms/ gardens, sensory gardens and educational projects that support an appreciation and understanding of the value of environmental protection, and climate change mitigation and adaptation measures at local level.</p> <p>The intended outcome is that this action will empower communities to become local actors for environmental protection, who take pride in their local environment and lead their own climate action initiatives.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Disadvantaged Communities
Geographic Area	County-wide.
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Kildare LEADER Partnership CLG As Implementing Partner on behalf of Kildare LAG
Collaborating Organisations	Climate Action Regional Office Kildare Public Participation Network
Timeframe for Delivery	2024-2026
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R.38 LEADER Coverage • R.41 Connecting Rural Europe: 2 Training Projects
Anticipated Number of Projects	3

SECTION 6. FINANCIAL PLAN:



The Financial Plan is intended to support the strategic Objectives and Actions outlined in Section five. The full Financial Plan is attached as a separate document using the template supplied.

However, the LAG, KCC as financial partner and CKLP as Implementing Partner want to highlight that the experience of managing and implementing the LEADER programme 2014-2023 with the budget available was exceptionally challenging. This has been highlighted and discussed with DRCD.

While we are very keen to continue to replicate, develop and enhance the work to date through this new LEADER programme 2023-2029, we are very concerned about the available budget. We anticipate that significant challenges will emerge in responding to the requests for funding from eligible projects and in resourcing the administrative costs associated with running this important programme to the highest professional standard. We are all exceptionally proud of the work to date in delivering the LEADER programme collectively in Kildare. This was challenging with the budget constraints experienced and in the current context of rapidly increasing costs, the budget available for the new programme 2023-2029 will pose even more challenges. The letter issued by Minister Humphreys to ILDN on June 15th, outlines a commitment to ensuring that the LEADER programme is fully funded. This provides some assurance given the budgetary restrictions we encounter.



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