



Donegal Local  
Development CLG

Forbairt Áitiúil  
Dhún na nGall



# THE LEADER PROGRAMME

2023-2027

[www.dldc.org](http://www.dldc.org)



Rialtas  
na hÉireann  
Government  
of Ireland

Tionscadal Éireann  
Project Ireland  
**2040**

Arna chomhchistiú ag an Roinn Forbairt Tuaithe agus Pobail  
Co-funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development

Ár dTodhchaí  
Tuaithe  
Our Rural  
Future



Arna chomhchistiú ag  
an Aontas Eorpach  
Co-funded by  
the European Union



Comhairle um Fhorbairt Pobail Áitiúil  
Dhún na nGall  
Donegal Local Community Development  
Committee



Comhairle Contae  
Dhún na nGall  
Donegal County Council



# Welcome to The LEADER Programme

Welcome to the LEADER (Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Economie Rurale) programme, which has been at the heart of rural development in Ireland and EU Member States for over three decades.

The LEADER programme has been a steadfast force, originating as an experimental initiative in 1991 and blossoming into a pivotal programme in EU rural development policy.

Having traversed five successive programming periods, LEADER stands as a testament to its commitment to fostering innovation and sustainability.

This programme has been a catalyst for a myriad of projects, each contributing to the growth and vitality of rural communities across the EU. LEADER has played a crucial role in shaping a landscape marked by increased employment opportunities and a newfound vibrancy in rural life.

In the pages that follow, we invite you to explore the application process and what's involved, read the stories behind impactful projects, and the transformative influence that LEADER continues to exert on the economic and social fabric of County Donegal.



*Atlantic Northwest North, a sea kayaking company funded by LEADER*







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# About The LEADER programme

# LEADER

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## AT A GLANCE



Key things to consider when applying to LEADER whether you are a community group, social enterprise or private promoter.

### **Local Development Strategy (LDS)**

All projects funded under LEADER must be in line with the programme Operating Rules, Themes and Sub-Themes, and the LDS. The LDS was devised in consultation with local communities throughout Donegal and sets out a number of priority objectives and strategic actions for the delivery of the LEADER Programme in Donegal. Further information on the LDS objectives and strategic actions are available on request.

### **State Aid & De Minimis**

Has your group/organisation/enterprise received public funding in the past 3 years? This may deem you ineligible for LEADER funding. Under State Aid Rules, you cannot receive grant aid of more than €300,000 in a three year period if your project involves economic activity.

### **Displacement**

Take a look at your local community. Are there other similar projects in existence? Would your project take away from these projects/services or result in the closure or loss of business for another enterprise? Remember your product/service does not need to be identical to activities already in existence to result in displacement.

### **Deadweight**

Do you really need the funding? If you have the finance to fund the project yourself then you will not be eligible to apply for LEADER funding.

### **Innovation**

Projects should demonstrate new innovative ideas which show a degree of new thinking and originality to the community.

***CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE***



# LEADER

## AT A GLANCE (CONTINUED)

### Funding Ceilings and Grant Rates

Grants of up to €200,000 are available for capital projects with the exception of projects funded under the 'Rural Tourism' and 'Enterprise Development' objectives where the eligible grant amount is capped at €50,000. The grant rate for community applicants is 75%, while the grant rate for private applicants is 50%.

Grants of up to €30,000 are available for feasibility studies at a grant rate of 90% for both community and private applicants.

### Matching Funding

Can you source funding from a private or public source which is not an EU funding source e.g. County Council funding? Please note only community bodies can use match funding from a public source. 5% Rule – You must contribute at least 5% cash to the overall cost of the project.

### Bridging Finance

As grant aid is paid retrospectively, you will need to organise bridging finance for the project. This could be from a financial institution such as a Credit Union or Bank. Community bodies may apply to Clann Credo, Community Finance Ireland or Western Development Commission for bridging loans.

### Public Procurement

As LEADER is public funding, applicants to the LEADER programme will need to obtain quotes for the project costs in line with Public Procurement rules. Depending on the scale of your project, you may need to advertise the contract on the e-tenders website. A summary of the public procurement thresholds is available upon request.

### Planning Permission

Generally, planning permission is required for any development of land or property. Documentary evidence confirming that planning permission has been granted by Donegal County Council must be provided at Application Stage. If the development is exempt from planning permission, evidence of same must also be provided from Donegal County Council.

### Title Leasehold

If you are applying for funding for the development of land or property, you must provide proof of ownership. In the case of owned land/buildings – a recently certified copy (by solicitor) of the Folio/Stamped Deed of Conveyance and map, showing you as owner or a letter and map from your solicitor certifying ownership. In the case of Leasehold, certified signed documentation outlining lease details (at least 6 years) and appropriately witnessed must be provided.

### Catchment Areas

There are four Implementing Partners (IP) that administer the LEADER Programme in Donegal. Each IP operates within a specific geographic area as outlined below. You can apply to DLDC for funding if your project/business is located in our catchment area.

#### Implementing Partner

Donegal Local Development Company CLG (DLDC)

Inishowen Development Partnership (IDP)

Údarás na Gaeltachta

Comhair na nOileán Teo

#### Catchment Area

Donegal (ex. Inishowen, Gaeltacht & Islands)

Inishowen

Gaeltacht

Islands

# What type of project is eligible for funding?

All funding decisions are underpinned by the Local Development Strategy (LDS) objectives and priorities. For a project to be eligible for LEADER funding, it must be in line with at least one of the LDS objectives.

## Eligible Costs

- Construction or improvement of immovable property
- Purchase of machinery and equipment
- Feasibility Studies (consultancy fees)

## Ineligible Sectors & Activities

- Primary Agriculture
- Primary Horticulture (inc. bee-keeping)
- Fisheries
- Childcare
- Health Care & Health Care Equipment
- Nursing Homes
- Housing
- Conventional Retail Operations
- Operational/Running Costs
- Statutory & Legal Costs
- Work that falls with the remit of the Local Authority
- Residential Property including B&Bs that are part of a private residence
- All motor vehicles including trailers to transport vehicles
- Schools, Colleges, Montessori Schools, Creches
- Reclaimable VAT





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# **The LEADER programme Application Process**

# The Application Process

Engaging with the LEADER programmes involves a clear and straightforward process. See below for a step-by-step guide. Throughout the process, a Project Officer will be available to provide valuable support and guidance. **If you are collaborating or seeking funding with other agencies, it's crucial to declare this from the outset.**

## Expression of Interest Stage

To apply for LEADER funding, start with the Expression of Interest (EOI) form. The purpose of this is to determine if your project is deemed 'eligible in principle' for LEADER funding. If eligible, you will receive an invitation to submit a funding application. Get the EOI form by contacting a Project Officer (details on [www.dldc.org](http://www.dldc.org)).

## Application Stage

At this stage, you (the 'Promoter'), must fill out a detailed application form and submit along with all relevant supporting documentation.

## Evaluation Stage

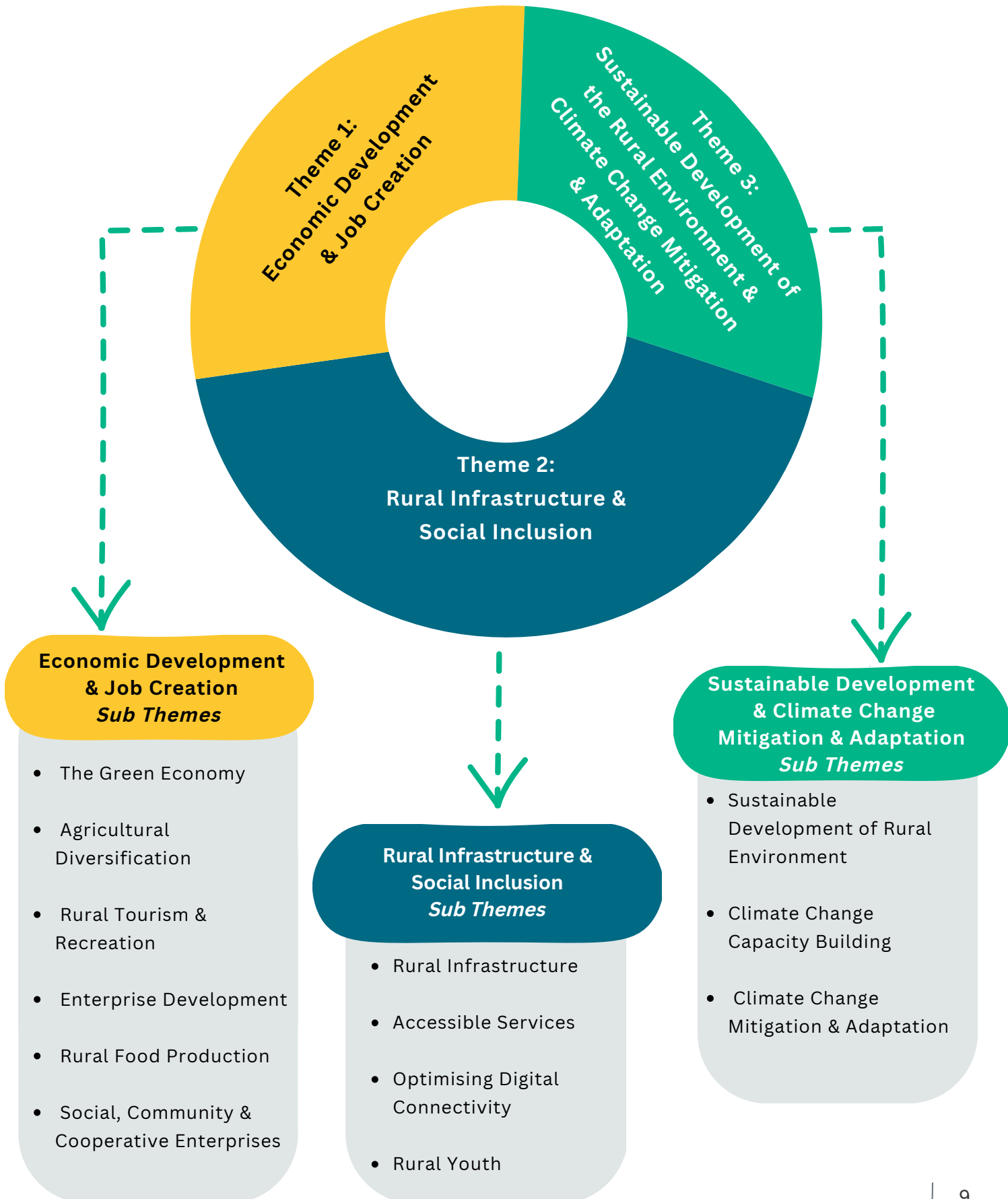
All applications for funding must be presented by the Project Officer to an Evaluation Committee and recommendations brought to, and approved by, the Donegal Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) before a Letter of Offer is issued. Project activity e.g. works/professional services prior to date of contract will not be eligible for grant assistance.

## Grant Drawdown Stage

Once you receive your Letter of Offer, sign and return to DLDC you may then commence your project. All paid invoices and supporting documents must be submitted to DLDC before grant payment is received.



# LEADER Themes & Sub Themes







*'The Walker' sculpture at Meendreen Wind Farm - funded under the last programme*



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**Success Stories  
from LEADER  
Funded  
Projects**



The Garage Project provides practical learning and hands-on experience, shaping a generation of responsible and safety-conscious drivers.

# Steering Young Drivers Toward Safety: The Garage Project

In a concerted effort to enhance road safety awareness among young drivers, The Garage Project has emerged as a transformative initiative that goes beyond traditional education methods. Over an 18-month period, this innovative project unfolded with the support of €88,000 in funding from the Donegal Local Development CLG's LEADER programme, leaving a lasting impact on 130 boys and girls aged 14 and above.

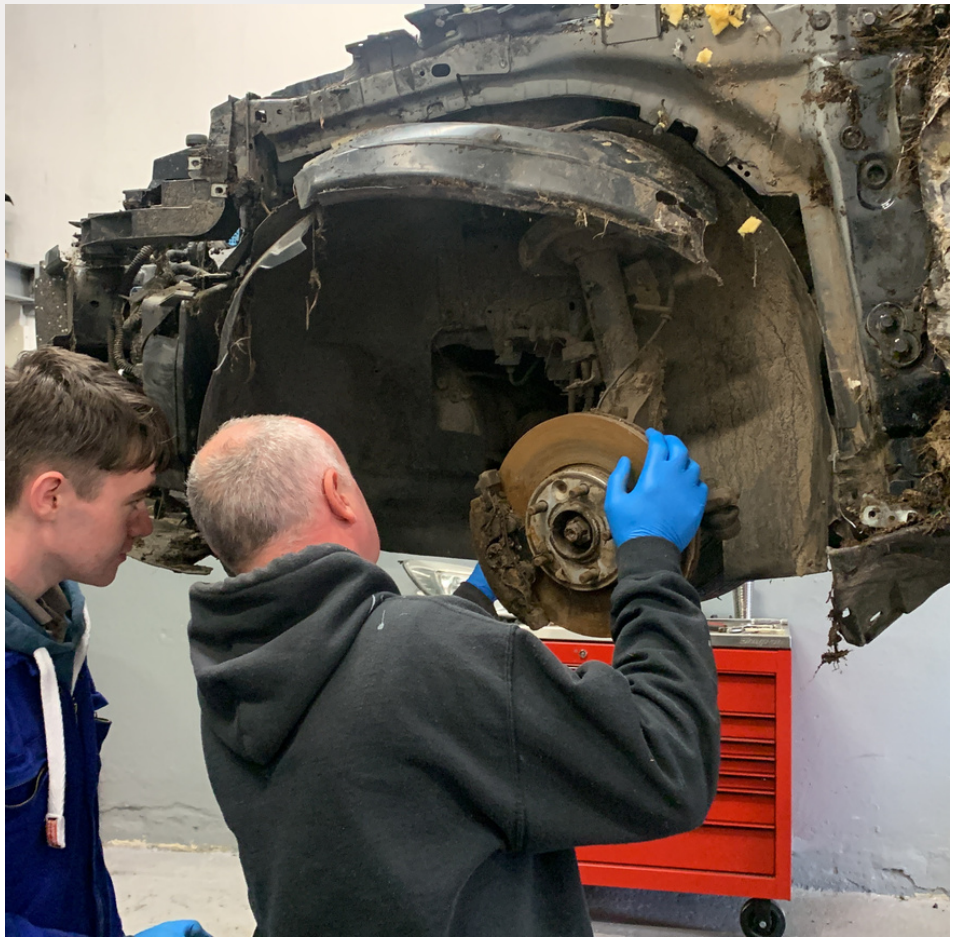
Conducted in the fully functional garage facilities located in Letterkenny, each five-week session of The Garage Project accommodated 10 enthusiastic participants. Under the expert guidance of skilled instructors such as Denis Ferry, Leslie O'Donnell, and members of the Donegal Youth Service, the programme provided hands-on experience, teaching mechanical and bodywork skills while emphasising the crucial aspects of road safety.



*Pictured: Tutor Leslie O'Donnell teaching young participant*

"This project channels the interest young people have in cars in the right direction, educating them on safety before they become a risk on the roads and ultimately save lives and prevent injury"

The overwhelming demand for The Garage Project underscores the significance of such initiatives in addressing the need for comprehensive road safety education for young drivers. With a focus on practical learning, the project aimed to equip participants with a deeper understanding of cars, fostering respect for these powerful machines and instilling a strong commitment to responsible driving behaviour.



Support for The Garage Project came from various quarters, including the Department of Rural & Community Development, Donegal Local Community Development Committee, Donegal Local Development CLG, and Donegal County Council. Grant aid under The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development in Ireland 2014-2022 further bolstered the initiative, reflecting a collective commitment to creating safer roads through proactive youth education.

Integral to the broader Pro Social Ireland Driving programme initiated in Donegal in 2012, The Garage Project has played a pivotal role in expanding the reach of this programme to multiple counties. The Pro Social Ireland Driving programme aims to challenge and reshape the thought patterns and attitudes of young drivers, fostering heightened awareness of their driving behaviour and its impact on road safety.

Aisling McGee, Project Officer, DLDC, commended the project, stating, "The Garage Project is an exemplary showcase of how LEADER funding can drive positive change in our

communities. It empowers our youth with invaluable skills and instils a strong commitment to road safety. We are proud to support initiatives like this that make a real difference in the lives of young people in Donegal."

Denis Ferry, a trainer on The Garage Project, emphasised the programme's objective to channel young people's passion for cars constructively. He stated, "The Garage Project aims to harness the passion young people have for cars in a constructive manner. It educates them about safety before they hit the road, reducing potential risks and ensuring they do not jeopardise lives."

Mick Quinlivan, Chairman of Pro Social Ireland, highlighted the programme's role in teaching young people to respect both cars and fellow road users.

As The Garage Project continues to make strides in promoting road safety education, its impact goes beyond the mechanical skills acquired, shaping a generation of responsible and safety-conscious drivers.

[www.prosocialireland.ie](http://www.prosocialireland.ie)



Killygordon and Crossroads Youth Club CLG creates a modern, inclusive space that serves as a vibrant community hub with a focus on youth focused initiatives.

# Reshaping Futures at Killygordon and Crossroads Youth Club CLG

In a significant boost for community development, Killygordon and Crossroads Youth Club CLG has undergone a remarkable transformation, thanks to a substantial €162,620 LEADER funding. The infusion of funds has paved the way for a comprehensive redevelopment of the club, fostering an environment that caters to the evolving needs of young people aged 6-18 in the Killygordon and Crossroads community.

The key highlight of this transformation is the complete renovation of a derelict and former RIC Barracks in Crossroads, Killygordon, culminating in the creation of a dynamic and modern facility. The

newly revamped space serves as a testament to the power of strategic funding in revitalising community assets.

Previously operating out of the local Church Hall, Killygordon and Crossroads Youth Club CLG faced challenges arising from inadequate facilities. The upgraded facility not only addresses these issues but also opens up new possibilities for diverse activities. The club now features three tailored activity rooms equipped with high-speed internet and Wi-Fi, providing dedicated spaces for



*Pictured: The Killygordon Youth Club before refurbishment*



"It has allowed us to create a modern, accessible, and inclusive space that will positively impact the lives of the young people we serve and the broader community"



training sessions, intergenerational activities, counselling, skills development, and peer mentoring.

Moreover, the extended access and opening hours of the club reflect a commitment to accommodating the busy schedules of its young members. This flexibility aims to enhance the club's impact by ensuring that it remains a hub of activity and support for the community's youth.



In line with contemporary concerns, the redevelopment project also places a strong emphasis on environmental and climate change initiatives. The restoration of the derelict building, the creation of a redesigned garden, and a community-wide recycling promotion showcase the club's commitment to sustainability and responsible practices.

The initiative goes beyond infrastructural development, aiming to generate income through room hire and contributing to local employment opportunities by hiring a part-time Hub Secretary/Manager.

Simon Canning, Project Officer, DLDC, expressed his enthusiasm for the transformative project, stating, "The Killygordon and Crossroads Youth Club CLG has shown exceptional dedication to the community's youth, and we are delighted to support their transformational project through LEADER funding. This initiative not only enhances the opportunities available to young people but also fosters a sense of community and sustainability that will benefit the

entire region."

Maggie Gilbert, Killygordon and Crossroads Youth Club CLG, acknowledged the impact of LEADER funding, stating, "It has allowed us to create a modern, accessible, and inclusive space that will positively impact the lives of the young people we serve and the broader community. The Killygordon and Crossroads Youth Club CLG extends its gratitude to the LEADER team for their generous support throughout the process, for seeing the potential of the project, and for supporting local youth in the area."

As the newly revitalised Killygordon and Crossroads Youth Club CLG takes its place as a vibrant community hub, the positive ripple effects of strategic funding and community collaboration are set to create lasting benefits for the youth and the broader region.



## Rathmullan's Napoleonic Gun Battery

undergoes conservation and restoration, aiming to become a major attraction along the Wild Atlantic Way.

# Funding Sparks Conservation Project at Historic Gun Battery

Rathmullan, a picturesque maritime settlement with a rich history strategically nestled along the Wild Atlantic Way, has embarked on a transformative journey to breathe new life into its historic Napoleonic Gun Battery. This landmark building holds significant tourism and educational potential, serving as a testament to the region's rich cultural heritage. Recognising the importance of preserving and showcasing this historic gem, Rathmullan - The Way Forward CLG successfully secured LEADER funding for essential conservation and restoration works.

The Napoleonic Gun Battery, situated within the historic core of Rathmullan, stands as a testament to a bygone era. With its construction dating back to 1813, the Battery has become a vital piece of Rathmullan's historical tapestry. However, recognising the need for preservation and restoration, Rathmullan The Way Forward CLG initiated a multi-phase project to revitalise the Battery.

In their pursuit of preserving this historical landmark, Rathmullan The Way Forward CLG



*Pictured: Aerial View of The Battery Rathmullan*



“LEADER has allowed us to embark on a journey to restore and showcase Rathmullan's historical gem, ensuring that it remains an enduring symbol of our past for future generations to appreciate.”

applied for LEADER funding to undertake Phase 1 of essential conservation and restoration works. This initial phase focused on repairing the building fabric and aimed to bring the Battery back into active use, with the overarching goal of enabling public access to the grounds and environs.

The ambitious project envisions the Napoleonic Gun Battery becoming a major attraction along the Wild Atlantic Way.



Planned in several distinct phases, the development aims to integrate the Battery into a broader network of attractions spanning from Portnamurray in the South to Kinnegar Strand in the North. This integration seeks to complement and support existing attractions while maintaining a profound respect for the Battery's historical significance.

Sinead McLaughlin, Rural Development Manager, Donegal Local Development CLG remarked, "LEADER's support has been instrumental in preserving Rathmullan's heritage and fostering community development. The Napoleonic Gun Battery restoration project exemplifies the positive impact that strategic funding can have on our cultural legacy and the local economy."

Similarly, representatives from the Rathmullan The Way Forward Committee extended their appreciation, stating, "We would like to extend our sincere thanks to LEADER for their invaluable support. This funding has allowed us to embark on a journey to restore and showcase

Rathmullan's historical gem, ensuring that it remains an enduring symbol of our past for future generations to appreciate." The conservation and restoration of Rathmullan's Napoleonic Gun Battery, made possible by LEADER funding, not only preserves a piece of history but also contributes to the cultural vibrancy and economic development of the region. As the project progresses through its phases, it stands as a testament to the collaborative efforts between local communities, organisations, and strategic funding initiatives in safeguarding our shared heritage.





Atlantic Coastal Cruises highlights the positive impact of collaborative efforts and funding initiatives on tourism, businesses, and communities.

# Atlantic Coastal Cruises Propelled into New Horizons

In the coastal town of Killybegs, a locally owned family-run business is rewriting the narrative of tourism along the Wild Atlantic Way. Established in 2019, Atlantic Luxury Cruises Ltd, trading as Atlantic Coastal Cruises, has been providing unique cruise tours of Killybegs Harbour and the awe-inspiring Sliabh Liag Cliffs, Europe's highest accessible sea cliffs towering at 600 meters. This success story is not just about breathtaking scenery but also about the transformative power of LEADER funding.

Atlantic Coastal Cruises embarked on its journey with a vision to offer unparalleled cruise experiences along the rugged coastline. Initially leasing a vessel to operate their tours, the company soon realised the need for a long-term, sustainable solution to propel their business forward. In a strategic move, Atlantic Coastal Cruises turned to Donegal Local Development CLG (DLDC) for LEADER funding, seeking support for the purchase of their own seagoing passenger vessel.



*Pictured: MV Slieve Liag Allure awaits visitors in Killybegs harbour*



“The funding has empowered us to provide a unique cruise experience, attracting visitors to Killybegs and creating employment opportunities. The Slieve Liag Allure stands as a symbol of the collaborative success between businesses and funding initiatives.”

With the assistance of LEADER, Atlantic Coastal Cruises acquired the Sliabh Liag Allure—a class 2A marine vessel licensed to carry 100 passengers and crew. The vessel was meticulously constructed to meet Irish Maritime law standards, equipped with state-of-the-art navigation and communication systems, life jackets, life rafts, a rescue boat, and a full range of safety equipment. The vessel's interior is designed to

accommodate passengers comfortably in Donegal's changeable weather.

Sinead McLaughlin, Rural Development Manager with Donegal Local Development CLG, stated, "The success of Atlantic Coastal Cruises is a testament to the transformative influence of strategic funding. LEADER's commitment to supporting innovative projects has not only enhanced tourism along the Wild Atlantic Way but has also contributed significantly to local economic development."

Acknowledging the pivotal role of LEADER in their journey, Johnny Gallagher, Atlantic Luxury Cruises, added, "We extend our heartfelt thanks to LEADER for making our dream a reality. The funding has empowered us to provide a unique cruise experience, attracting visitors to Killybegs and creating employment opportunities. The Sliabh Liag Allure stands as a symbol of the collaborative success between businesses and funding initiatives."

Atlantic Coastal Cruises has not only added value to the tourism offerings in the region but has also played a vital role in challenging perceptions of Killybegs as primarily an industrial location. By creating jobs and drawing visitors to the area, the company showcases the potential of strategic funding in revitalising local economies and cultural landscapes.

The journey of Atlantic Coastal Cruises, fuelled by LEADER funding, exemplifies how strategic financial support can catalyse growth and transform a vision into reality. As the Sliabh Liag Allure continues to sail along the Wild Atlantic Way, it serves as a tangible reminder of the positive impact that collaborative efforts and strategic funding initiatives can have on local businesses, communities, and the broader tourism industry.

[www.atlanticcoastalcruises.com](http://www.atlanticcoastalcruises.com)





# Whistle Stops and Wow Factors - Drumboe's Homecoming Tale

“Donegal Railway Heritage Museum extends its tourism season brought positive economic impacts to the local community, while preserving Donegal's past and paving the way for a vibrant future.”

The Donegal Railway Heritage Museum, supported by the LEADER programme, embarked on a journey to breathe new life into the last train that operated in County Donegal back in 1959 – the iconic Drumboe steam engine. Donegal Railway Heritage Museum has been a custodian of Irish railway history since its establishment in 1995. Comprising a museum, information centre, retail section, and a coffee shop, the Centre showcases original railway carriages, wagons, historical artefacts, working railway models, and captivating audio-visual presentations, creating an immersive experience for visitors.

"Niall McCaughan, Manager of Donegal Railway Heritage Museum, identified the need for a 'wow factor' to enhance the Centre's appeal. Recognising the significance of a steam engine in capturing the imagination of locals and tourists alike, McCaughan turned to LEADER for support," shares Simon Canning, Project Officer, DLDC.

Building on their successful 2017 LEADER project, which produced three publications on Donegal's Heritage Railways, the museum aimed to restore Drumboe and elevate its status as a centrepiece for the museum.



*Pictured: Drumboe arriving back in Donegal Town after a lengthy restoration*

“Donegal Railway Heritage Museum’s dedication to preserving history, coupled with LEADER’s commitment to rural development, has not only revived a piece of Donegal’s past but has also laid the tracks for a vibrant future”



The ambitious project had two main phases: the restoration of the Drumboe steam engine and the construction of a new presentation platform and canopy at the museum. Drumboe, having fallen into disrepair, underwent extensive restoration in Co. Antrim, thanks to LEADER funding. The Centre’s proactive approach involved setting up a dedicated committee, leveraging crowd-funding, and seeking donations to secure match funding.

On October 9, 2021, history was made as Drumboe, fully restored, returned to Donegal Town after decades.

"The restoration not only garnered significant local interest but also received extensive media coverage, boosting awareness of the Donegal Railway Heritage Museum. The 'Homecoming' in October extended the tourism season, bringing positive economic impacts to the local community," expresses Niall McCaughan, Manager of Donegal Donegal Railway Heritage Museum.

The restoration of Drumboe not only revitalised the steam engine but also transformed the museum into an exemplary tourist and heritage

destination. The upgraded museum facilities, presentation platform, canopy, landscaping, and feature lighting exemplify best practices in public engagement. "Donegal Railway Heritage Museum's dedication to preserving history, coupled with LEADER's commitment to rural development, has not only revived a piece of Donegal's past but has also laid the tracks for a vibrant future," concludes McCaughan, extending a heartfelt thank you to all who contributed to this historic project.

[www.donegalrailway.com](http://www.donegalrailway.com)



Donegal Railway locos 'Meenglas' and 'Drumboe' (behind) awaiting preservation at Strabane. 3.4.63. Photo: Roger Joanes.







Kevin Callaghan, expands his Donegal Craft Village studio enhancing capacity and incorporating cutting-edge equipment for unique, small-batch pottery production.

# LEADER Funding Helped Shape Kevin Callaghan Pottery's Expansion

Kevin Callaghan, the multi-award-winning artist, designer, and craftsman successfully secured LEADER funding for his craft studio in Donegal Craft Village in 2022.

Kevin, a graduate with a Masters degree from The Royal College of Art in London, has had his pottery shop and studio recognised with numerous awards. He makes contemporary slipware with beautiful gestural marks influenced by Asian abstract calligraphy and abstract expressionist painting.

The LEADER funding enabled Kevin to expand his

studio's capacity, incorporating a kiln, a sit-on potter's wheel, a pugmill, and a slab roller. This strategic upgrade allowed him to produce one-of-a-kind, small-batch pottery in Donegal.

"Through the LEADER programme, we were delighted to support Kevin Callaghan grow his creative offering, contributing to the economic vibrancy of the Donegal Craft Village and the broader community," stated Anne Marie Rodgers, Project Officer, DLDC.



*Pictured: A selection of Kevin Callaghan Pottery*



The investment has made the studio more attractive for tourists, drawing in visitors who are interested in the seeing the authentic crafting process — from clay to the final product, all crafted on-site.”

“With this funding, I was able to significantly elevate the creative offering of Kevin Callaghan Pottery. The support from the LEADER funding marked a pivotal step in the evolution of our studio, empowering us to amplify both the scale and scope of our artistic outputs.”

“It enabled us to push the boundaries further and harness the potential of cutting-edge equipment. We extend our thanks to the LEADER programme for recognising the potential within our craft and providing the means to bring our creative vision to fruition.”

“The investment has made the studio more attractive for tourists, drawing in visitors who are interested in the seeing the authentic crafting process — from clay to the final product, all crafted on-site.”

[www.kevincallaghanpottery.com](http://www.kevincallaghanpottery.com)





Smarty Pants, a revolutionary play centre in Letterkenny, introduces a 'Tiny Town' experience, prioritising inclusivity and enriching playtime for Donegal's children.

# Smarty Pants Introduced A Little Town For Big Imaginations

Smarty Pants, a one-of-a-kind child-led imaginative role-play based play centre, officially opened its doors in Letterkenny in 2022. This innovative venture set out to redefine the concept of children's play by combining entertainment and education in a unique and engaging manner.

Smarty Pants introduced a 'Tiny Town' theme, featuring distinct play areas such as a supermarket, Garda station, pizzeria, vets, construction zone, and a music area with teepees. Each section is meticulously equipped with specially selected toys and tools to enhance children's learning experiences. A standout feature

is the specially designed sensory room, providing a tranquil space for children to unwind.

Operating on a pre-bookable sessional basis, each lasting 1.5 hours, Smarty Pants encourages interactive exploration where parents can accompany their children through the various play areas. The centre incorporates counting activities and games throughout, fostering literacy and numeracy skills in an enjoyable environment. Parents can also relax in the café area, sipping coffee while observing their children at play.

This venture is not only a first for Donegal but





Their support has been instrumental in realising our vision and we're very appreciative of their commitment to community development and education."

stands out as a unique educational experience. Smarty Pants aligns with the Aistear curriculum, catering to children up to seven years old in schools and pre-schools. The centre incorporates the four Aistear themes - Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, and Exploring and Thinking - into every aspect of its offerings.

Recognising the diversity in children's developmental levels, Smarty Pants offers an adaptable environment to accommodate various groups of kids.

Additionally, the centre is committed to inclusivity, providing autism-friendly sessions.

Orlaith Masterson, founder of Smarty Pants, expressed her gratitude, saying, "We were thrilled to bring Smarty Pants to Donegal and offer a play experience that not only entertains but also nurtures children's development. We're very grateful for the support from the LEADER team, they really helped to bring Smarty Pants to life. Their support has been instrumental in realising our vision and

we're very appreciative of their commitment to community development and education."

Aisling McGee, Project Officer, DLDC, shared her thoughts on the project, stating, "LEADER is proud to support initiatives that contribute to the community's growth and well-being. Smarty Pants represents a creative and educational approach to children's play, seamlessly blending fun and education, providing a truly unique and enriching experience for children in Donegal."

[www.smartypantsletterkenny.ie](http://www.smartypantsletterkenny.ie)





No Barriers Foundation introduce inclusive fitness initiatives, including a groundbreaking Exoskeleton Bionic Rehabilitation Suit.

# Breaking Barriers with Inclusive Fitness Innovations in Donegal

No Barriers Foundation, a social enterprise supporting those with disabilities in Donegal, received a significant funding boost in 2018 with a 75% grant announced for the purchase of a ground-breaking Exoskeleton Bionic Rehabilitation Suit. This suit was the first of its kind in Donegal and one of only two in the country at the time of purchase.

The No Barriers Foundation is an inclusive health facility equipped with specialist neurological equipment allowing anyone with a disability to train and improve their current level of physical and mental health by targeting mobility, strength

and physical fitness regardless of their current baseline. It also runs group classes and personal training programmes for the general public, with profits being reinvested back into the social enterprise to further develop the fitness supports for those with physical and mental disabilities.

This LEADER funded Exoskeleton Bionic Rehabilitation Suit has empowered people living with disabilities in Donegal, providing them with an opportunity to engage in physical activities within their communities. The wearable "Exoskeleton Robotic Suit" boasts a 'one size fits all' design and a comprehensive gait therapy tool



*Pictured: Johnny and his team demonstrating the Exoskeleton in action*



“The Exoskeleton Bionic Rehabilitation Suit is not just a piece of equipment; it's a symbol of resilience and commitment to enhancing the lives of those who have long been excluded from certain opportunities”

which provides an unparalleled rehabilitation experience for patients and therapists alike. This machine, in certain circumstances, can help patients with spinal cord injuries to walk again whilst in the machine.

Johnny Loughrey, Founder of the No Barriers Foundation, highlighted the transformative impact this equipment has had on the lives of individuals. The suit is not just a piece of equipment;

it's a symbol of resilience and commitment to enhancing the lives of those who have long been excluded from certain opportunities. With the invaluable support from LEADER, we have been able to invest in a space where every individual, regardless of their abilities, can experience the joy of physical activity and take a more active part of their community."

Aisling McGee, Project Officer, DLDC,

acknowledged the support this funding has had on individuals with limited mobility or disabilities in Donegal. "This project was very targeted at hard-to-reach communities which aligns seamlessly with the goals of the LEADER programme. LEADER contributed €121,035 to the project at a grant rate of 75%, with the No Barriers Foundation committee contributing over €40,000 from their fundraising efforts. We're delighted the LEADER programme was able to support the purchase of the Exoskeleton Bionic Rehabilitation Suit and help the team at No Barriers make a significant stride towards a more inclusive and empowered community in Donegal."

The No Barriers Foundation CLG Committee, a voluntary group comprising experienced health professionals such as Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists, and GPs, manages the organisation. Based in Letterkenny, the foundation supports clients across Donegal.

[www.nobarriers.ie](http://www.nobarriers.ie)







The Slieve Liag Allure funded by LEADER







Donegal Local  
Development CLG

Forbairt Áitiúil  
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