

Westmeath Local Community Development Committee

Rural Development Programme (LEADER)

= Draft =

Westmeath Local Development Strategy 2014 -2020

25th Sept 2015.



Contents

Contents	2
1. The LAG.....	6
1.1. Organisation Details	6
1.2. Primary Contact.....	6
1.3. Legal Description:	6
1.4. LAG Composition and Decision Making.....	6
1.5. LAG Roles and responsibilities.....	7
1.6. LAG's Financial Management	7
1.7. LEADER Staffing	8
1.8. Project Selection Procedures.....	9
1.9. Relevant Experience	9
1.9.1. Management/Leverage of Funding	10
2. LDS Area Profile	11
2.1. LDS Area.....	11
2.2 Population.....	11
2.3 Education	12
2.4 Employment.....	12
2.5 Live Register.....	13
2.6 Economic Activity.....	14
2.6.1 Tourism	14
2.6.2 Agriculture	15
2.6.3 Equine	16
2.6.4 Forestry.....	17
2.6.5 Food	17
2.6.6 Crafts.....	17
2.6.7 Cultural Assets	18
2.6.8 Rural Towns	18
2.6.9 Rural Economic Development Zones or REDZ	18
2.6.10 Information and Communication Technology.....	18
2.7 Hard to Reach Communities	19
2.7.1 Small Area Analysis	19
2.7.2 Priority Target Groups	19
2.7.3 Youth.....	19

2.8 Environment	20
2.8.1 Water Resources	20
2.8.2 Local Biodiversity	20
2.8.3 Renewable Energy	20
2.9 Review of Key Services/Programmes (Statutory)	21
2.9.1 Westmeath County Council (WCC)	21
2.9.2 Westmeath Local Enterprise Office (LEO).....	21
2.9.3 Enterprise Ireland	22
2.9.4 Failte Ireland	22
2.9.5 Waterways Ireland.....	22
2.9.6 Inland Fisheries Ireland.....	22
2.9.7 Teagasc.....	23
2.9.8 Forestry Service	23
2.9.9 Health Service Executive (HSE)	23
2.9.10 Tusla.....	23
2.9.11 Department of Social Protection – (DSP)	24
2.9.12 Longford Westmeath Education and Training Board (LWETB).....	24
2.9.13 National Learning Network.....	24
2.9.14 Citizens information Board.....	24
2.10 Review of Key Services/Programmes (Community & Voluntary).....	24
2.10.1 Westmeath Community Development.....	24
2.10.2 Congress Information and Development Centres	27
2.10.3 South Westmeath Education Employment and Training Services (SWEETS)	27
2.10.4 Mullingar Employment Action Group (MEAG)	27
2.10.5 Athlone Community Taskforce (ACT).....	27
2.10.6 Other Community Services Projects (CSPs)	27
2.10.7 Youth Services.....	28
2.10.8 Women’s Community Projects (WCP)	28
2.10.9 Age Friendly Alliance.....	28
2.10.10 Westmeath County Childcare Committee.....	28
2.10.11 Family Resource Centres	28
2.10.12 Longford Westmeath Community Transport	28
2.11 County Westmeath Area Needs Analysis	28

3.0	Participative Planning	31
3.1	Public Consultation	31
3.2	Summary of Outcomes from the Consultation Process.	32
3.3	SWOT Analysis	34
3.4	Agreeing Priorities and Objectives.....	36
3.5	Rationale for proposed Themes/Sub-Themes and Priorities	39
3.5.1	Rural Tourism.....	39
3.5.2	Enterprise Development.....	39
3.5.3	Rural Towns	39
3.5.4	Broadband.....	40
3.5.5	Services for Hard to Reach Communities	40
3.5.6	Rural Youth	40
3.5.7	Water Conservation.....	40
3.5.8	Local Biodiversity	41
3.5.9	Renewable Energy	41
4.0.	Westmeath LDS Action Plan	42
4.1	Vision	42
4.2	Theme/Sub Theme Budgets	42
5.0	Strategic Integration.....	78
5.1	Cross-Cutting Objectives.....	78
5.1.1	Innovation.....	78
5.1.2	Environment	79
5.1.3	Climate Change	79
5.2	Policy Context	79
5.2.1	FORFAS Sharing Our Future 2025	79
5.2.2	CEDRA Report.	80
5.2.3	Westmeath Local Economic and Community Plan.	80
5.2.4	Action Plan for Jobs Midlands Region.....	81
5.2.5	Ireland Ancient East – Failte Ireland Branding Strategy.	81
5.2.6	Food Wise 2025.	81
5.2.7	Westmeath Biodiversity Action Plan 2014-2020.	81
5.2.8	National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 – 2016.	82
5.2.9	The Renewable Energy Strategy for County Westmeath.	82

5.2.10 Social Inclusion and Activation Programme (SICAP).....	82
6.0 Networking and Cooperation	83
6.1 Networking	83
6.1.1 Public Participation Network	83
6.1.2 The Irish Local Development Network (ILDN)	83
6.1.3 ELARD (European LEADER Association for Rural Development)	84
6.1.4 City and County Managers Association.	84
6.1.5 Directors of Community and Enterprise Network.	84
6.1.6 Chief Officers Network.....	84
6.2. Cooperation.	85
6.2.1 Implementing Co-operation Projects	85
7.0 Monitoring and Review	86
Appendix 1: Process of Preparing the Local Development Strategy 2014-2020.....	87
Appendix 2: Westmeath Map - 2011 Deprivation Score by Small Area.....	90

1. The LAG

1.1.Organisation Details

Westmeath Local Community Development Committee,
C/o Westmeath County Council,
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Mullingar, Co Westmeath.
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1.2. Primary Contact

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1.3.Legal Description:

Committee of Westmeath Co Co. Westmeath LCDC was formally established in June 2014 in accordance with the Local Government Act 2001, as amended.

The LCDC is a committee of the Council and its primary role is to develop, co-ordinate and implement a coherent and integrated approach to local and community development. This involves:

- Co-ordination of local development spend.
- Oversight of local and community development programmes
- Greater citizen and community engagement in local and community development programmes
- Exploring and pursuing opportunities for additional funding resources.

1.4.LAG Composition and Decision Making.

In accordance with the legislation and Guidelines, 9 No. of the 17 No. LCDC Members are drawn from the non-statutory sector. This membership, and LCDC Standing Orders, will ensure that more than 50% of the votes in selection decisions are cast by Members which do not represent statutory agencies. The membership of the LCDC is outlined as follows:

Sector	Agency	Name
Statutory Agency	Westmeath Co. Council Elected Member	Cllr Tom Farrell
	Westmeath Co. Council Elected Member	Cllr Aengus O'Rourke
	Westmeath Co. Council Elected Member	Cllr. Avril Whitney
	Westmeath Co Council Chief Executive	Pat Gallagher
	Head of Local Enterprise	Christine Charlton
	Dept of Social Protection	Des Henry
	Education and Training Board	Christy Duffy
	Health Services Executive	Joe Whelan

Non Statutory Sector	PPN Community & Voluntary	Des Sheridan
	PPN Community & Voluntary	Bob Morrison
	PPN Social Inclusion	Hugh Maguire
	PPN Social Inclusion	Joyce Furlong
	PPN Environment	Dave Raftis
	Westmeath Community Development	Joe Potter
	Farming / Agriculture	Paddy Donnelly
	Business / Employers	Denis Hogan
	Trade Union	Denis Rohan

The Committee currently meets 6 times each year.
Frequency of meetings is under review.

1.5.LAG Roles and responsibilities

An agreement will be drawn up with Westmeath County Council in relation to its role as financial partner for the LEADER programme.

An agreement will be drawn up with Westmeath Community Development, the local development company for Co Westmeath in relation to its role as implementation partner for the LEADER Programme.

1.6.LAG's Financial Management

Westmeath Co Co, the financial partner, together with Westmeath Community Development, the implementation partner, will operate through the IT System being drawn nationally to manage the programme. The information and communications technology systems of both partners are seen as critical to the daily operations of the programme.

Procedures Manuals

Each partner will update its Procedures Manual to take account of the requirements of the LEADER programme 2014 – 2020. The purpose of the procedures manual is to comply with accreditation requirements as referenced in EU and Government Regulations and to guide employees and the employer on the procedures laid down by the Company in relation to the overall operation of programmes.

The accounting administration for programmes will be based on:

- Recognised accounting principles, which have been translated into clear practical procedures
- Public accountability
- EU and State funding conditions including EU Commission Regulations

The Procedures outlined in the manual are updated from time to time to reflect changing circumstances.

Procurement

From time to time the implementation partner, Westmeath Community Development, will seek the services of external providers to aid in delivering programmes.

In all instances of tendering, Westmeath Community Development adheres to the guidelines for Public Procurement. When appointing consultants, fees will be paid for a fixed amount for a specified period and task as set out in a signed contract. It is the policy of Westmeath

Community Development Ltd when entering into contracts for services, such as consultancy, training, services etc. to ensure that the contracts are fully adhered to.

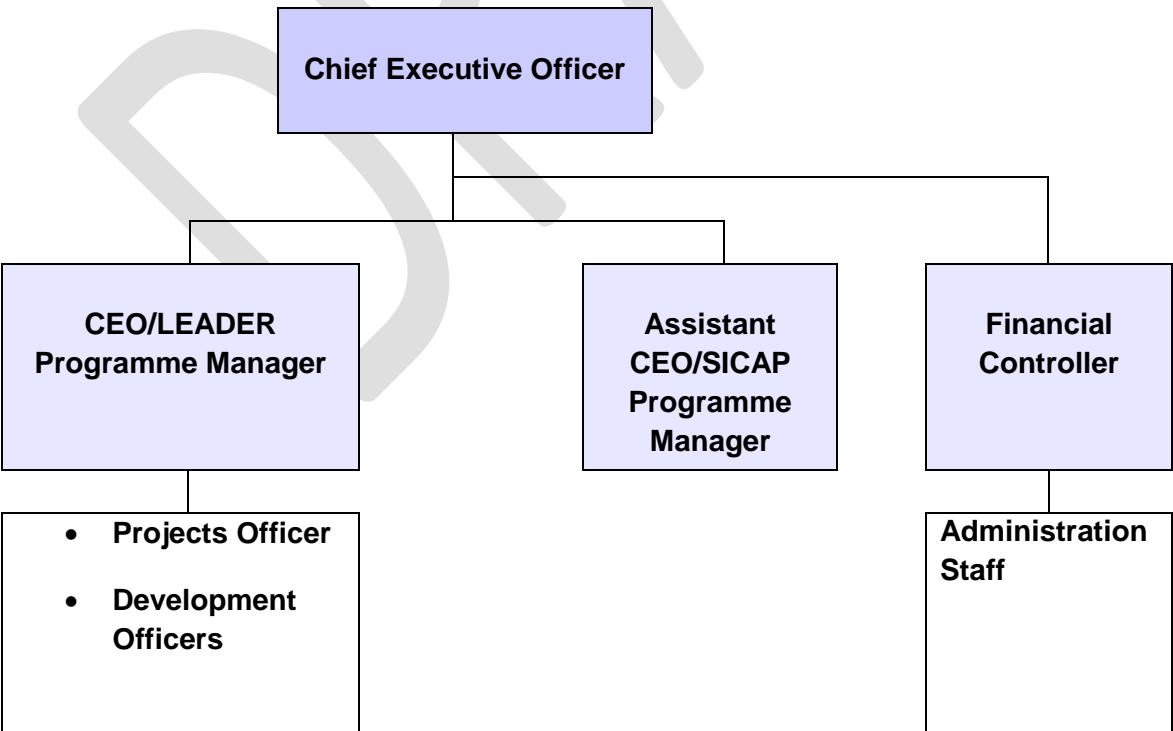
1.7.LEADER Staffing

Westmeath Co Co as financial partner will appoint competent administration staff to provide administration of the programme.

As regards the implementation partner, Westmeath Community Development, the CEO is responsible for the management of the company and all of its functions including the delivery of all programmes being implemented. Day to day management and co-ordination of programmes is carried out by programme managers, programme coordinators and supervisors as appropriate. Financial Control and Company Secretarial functions are the responsibility of the Financial Controller, who reports to the CEO. The contract for the Programme will be managed by the CEO, reporting to the Board. Financial Control of the programme will be the responsibility of the Financial Controller, who will be assisted by administration staff. For purposes of internal management, the overall Company has a Human Resources Committee, which is comprised exclusively of Board members, charged with responsibility for dealing with personnel procedures and issues. Full details in relation to all human resources issues including recruitment, grievance procedures, annual leave, maternity leave, sick leave etc. for Westmeath Community Development Ltd are set out within the Human Resource Manual. (Staff Handbook).

Implementation Partner Management Structure

The following is the management Structure of the implementation partner, Westmeath Community Development;



In addition to the Management Structure outlined above, the Company employs a total of approximately 50 staff (excluding trainees and people on employment schemes).

The Company will dedicate sufficient resources to the Rural Development Programme as will ensure that the programme meets its objectives, in terms of targeting, implementation, complementarity with other programmes, avoidance of duplication, administration and reporting. The Company's Development and Administration staff have gained considerable experience from implementation of LEADER Type programmes.

As the Company allocates costs across programmes this ensures efficient use of resources in implementing the RDP. In that context Community Development Officers working with Young people, Older people, Women's Groups and Unemployed people will also contribute to the programme

Job Descriptions

Job Descriptions for LEADER Staff members based on the priorities for the programme are included as an Appendix to the LDS.

1.8. Project Selection Procedures

LEADER Operating Rules dictate to a large extent the project selection procedures which apply to the LEADER programme. An agreement is being drawn up between the LAG and the implementation partner in relation to Procedures for managing the appraisal process, avoiding conflict of interest and decision making procedures at local level. This will include project selection criteria and rules with regard to calls for proposals.

The LAG confirms that 40% of the project budget will be allocated to time limited calls for proposals.

In as much as the LEADER Operating Rules apply to the work of the implementation partner, Westmeath Community Development will be governed by the LEADER Operating Rules in operation during the implementation of the Local Development Strategy in relation to carrying out its responsibilities.

1.9. Relevant Experience

WCD works with community groups and organisations including the PPN. It also has strong, vibrant and productive links to other agencies and strong partnership arrangements in addressing a range of issues. Using the Area Based approach, the company has successfully delivered the various LEADER Programmes implemented since 1995, the various Social inclusion programmes implemented since 1996 and also delivered a range of other community based programmes aimed at promoting social inclusion and reducing long term unemployment and disadvantage. In implementing the above programmes, WCD has worked with large sections of society in Co Westmeath including:

- Community And Voluntary Organisations throughout the county.
- The Farming Community
- Tourism Providers
- Arts And Culture Groups
- Enterprise And Business Support Organisations

- Small Business Owners
- Crafts Producers
- Specialist Food Producers
- Unemployed People
- Young People
- Immigrants
- Disability Organisations
- Rural Transport Groups

Outcomes and learning from this work and in particular learning from the implementation of the previous LEADER and Pobal funded Social Inclusion programmes formed a key part of the process carried out in preparing the LDS. The consultation process involved all of the above communities. The consultation process carried out in preparing the Social Inclusion and Activation fed into the LEADER Consultation process, particularly as it relates to disadvantaged areas and key target groups. During the preparation of the SICAP Strategy, Disadvantaged and Very Disadvantaged areas and target groups within those areas, were identified and are being targeted with special actions to alleviate long term unemployment in particular.

1.9.1. Management/Leverage of Funding

Westmeath Community Development was reconstituted in 1996 to become the Area Partnership for Co Westmeath and funding was secured for local development programmes concerned with social inclusion. The company was further reconstituted in 2008 in order to accommodate the cohesion process being put in place at that time and this allowed for the takeover of programmes, and projects, including staff under Transfer of Undertakings, first from Athlone Community Taskforce in 2009 and, later from Harmony Community Development in 2011. The company has leveraged and managed funding from Exchequer and EU Sources including;

- Department of Agriculture for LEADER programmes
- Department of Environment Community and Local Government for LEADER programmes
- Pobal for Social inclusion programmes
- Department of Social Protection/FAS for Employment Services
- Health Service Executive for Traveller and other programmes
- Department of Education for Early Childhood Education programmes
- Department of Children for Childcare Facilities
- Department of Justice for refugee resettlement
- EU Interreg Programme for EU funding.
- EU Intelligent Energy Programme for renewable energy programme
- Statutory Agencies at local level.

Calls for Proposals

Calls for proposals formed a significant part of the implementation of the company's programmes since its inception. This has applied to LEADER and Social inclusion programmes. Examples include Tidy Towns enhancement under the LEADER Programme and Community Grants under Social Inclusion programmes.

2. LDS Area Profile

This profile provides a strategic overview relating to demography, economic activity, education and social deprivation at county level, which will inform the proposed Local Development Strategy for the LEADER programme 2014 - 2020 in Westmeath which for the purposes of the RDP 2014-2020 is considered a rural area. The Geographical area concerned is the administrative area of County Westmeath including Athlone and Mullingar, all areas of which are considered rural for the purpose of this programme.

2.1. LDS Area

County Westmeath, known as the “Lake County”, is situated in the centre of Ireland. It has borders with counties Meath, Longford, Cavan, Roscommon and Offaly. The area of the county is 1,756 square kilometres. Mullingar, the principal town and administrative headquarters for the county is located on the River Brosna. Athlone is the largest town and is located on the River Shannon.

The Westmeath landscape comprises of rich pastureland with rolling hills, lakes, rivers, woodlands and bogs. The Royal Canal traverses the county encircling Mullingar. A section of the Esker Riada exists in Westmeath stretching from Kilbeggan to Tyrrellspass. The highest point of the county standing at 258m is located in Mullaghmeen Forest in the north of the county.

Westmeath has good road and rail networks which connect it with the rest of the country. The M4/N4 traverses the county in a north-westerly direction giving it close proximity to the greater Dublin area, with Dublin Airport just one hour's drive from Mullingar. The M6 runs from Kinnegad, through Athlone on to Galway and the west. An important national secondary route, the N52, connects the north east with the Munster region and also traverses the county. The Dublin-Sligo railway line serves Mullingar and the Dublin-Westport/Dublin-Galway line serves Athlone.

The two main towns of Mullingar and Athlone form the main population centres and provide much of the economic and commercial activity for the county. Other towns and population centres include Castlepollard, Moate, Kilbeggan, Kinnegad, Rochfortbridge, Killucan/Rathwire, Clonmellon and Tyrrellspass.

The county has three electoral areas, Mullingar-Coole, Mullingar-Kilbeggan and Athlone which in turn form the Mullingar and Athlone Municipal Districts through which many of the local services are delivered by Westmeath County Council.

2.2 Population

In the 2011 census Westmeath had a population of 86,164, consisting of 42,783 males, which equates to 49.6% of the overall population and 43,381 females (50.3%), which is consistent with national trends. It is both the largest county and most populated in the Midlands region, comprising 30% of the overall population of the Midlands in 2011, down from 31% in the 2006 census. Its population density is 49 inhabitant/km².

The population of the county has been increasing since 1991 as indicated in Figure 1. Since 1991 the population of the county has increased by 38%.

Between 2006 and 2011 the population of the county rose from 79,346 to 86,164 (38%) This increase in the population in the 2006 - 2011 intercensal period of 8.6% is above the state increase of 8.1% and below the Leinster increase of 9%. The Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) for the Midlands Region 2010-2022 contain regional population targets up to 2022 for the county of 109,623, of which 32,722 is for Mullingar and 26,203 for Athlone. It is envisaged that both towns will be the focus of the bulk of the Midlands Region target population up to 2022. **(Source: Westmeath County Council Development Plan 2014-2020).**

In 2011 there were 20,103 (23%) living in Mullingar and its environs. 15,596 people (18.1%) lived in Athlone Town. There were 30,739 private households in Westmeath in April 2011, of which 7,128 were single person households. There were 3,314 Lone Parent households in the county. The average number of children per family is the same as the national average of 1.4. Outside of the towns of Mullingar and Athlone, the most notable trend in population is the higher concentration of middle aged people residing in rural areas. There are fewer 25-29 year olds living in more rural areas compared to both Athlone (11%) and Mullingar (9%). This may be attributable to the lack of employment opportunities in the settlements and rural areas beyond the principal towns. Non-nationals accounted for 13% of the population which is broadly comparable with national trends. Polish (2,345 persons) were the largest group, followed by UK nationals (1,929 persons). There are 839 travellers in Westmeath, comprising 236 households, approximately 1% of the population of the county (CSO). 11,303 persons, or 13%, had a disability in April 2011, of whom 3,762, representing 33.3 per cent of the total, were aged 65 years and over.

2.3 Education

The Census 2011 highlighted that 16.6% of the population were educated to at most primary level only. As outlined above (Table 8), the rate increases significantly in the disadvantaged areas, which also reflects on the high levels of unemployment in these areas.

In 2012, there were 74 Primary Schools in the county with 10,851 pupils and an average class size of 24.5 pupils. There were 15 Secondary Schools with 8,629 pupils. There is one Third Level Institution, Athlone Institute of Technology. Of those over 15 years of age and over whose education had ceased, 16.6% were educated to at most primary level; a further 56.4 had attained second level while 27.0% were educated to third level. Westmeath has a slightly lower percentage of graduates than the national rate of 30%.

2.4 Employment

According to the 2011 census there were 40,956 people aged 15 years and over in the labour force and of these, 78.9% (32,319 persons) were at work. The labour force in the county has increased by 6% since the previous census. The district to the East of Mullingar is now part of the commuter belt serving the technology parks on the western side of Dublin proving popular with people who wish to work in the Dublin area.

Fig. 1 Distribution of the Working Population by Industry in Westmeath and the State

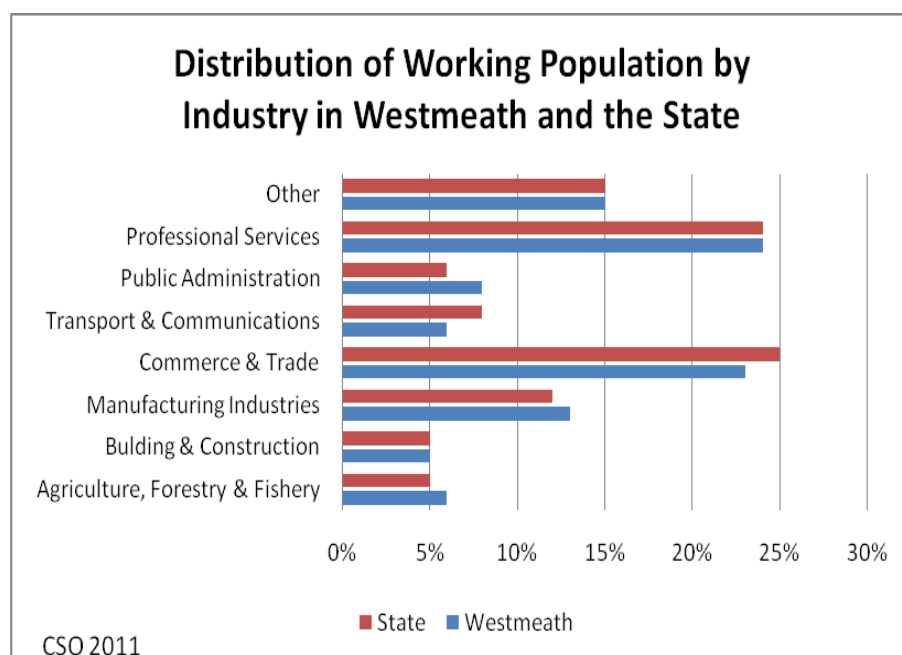
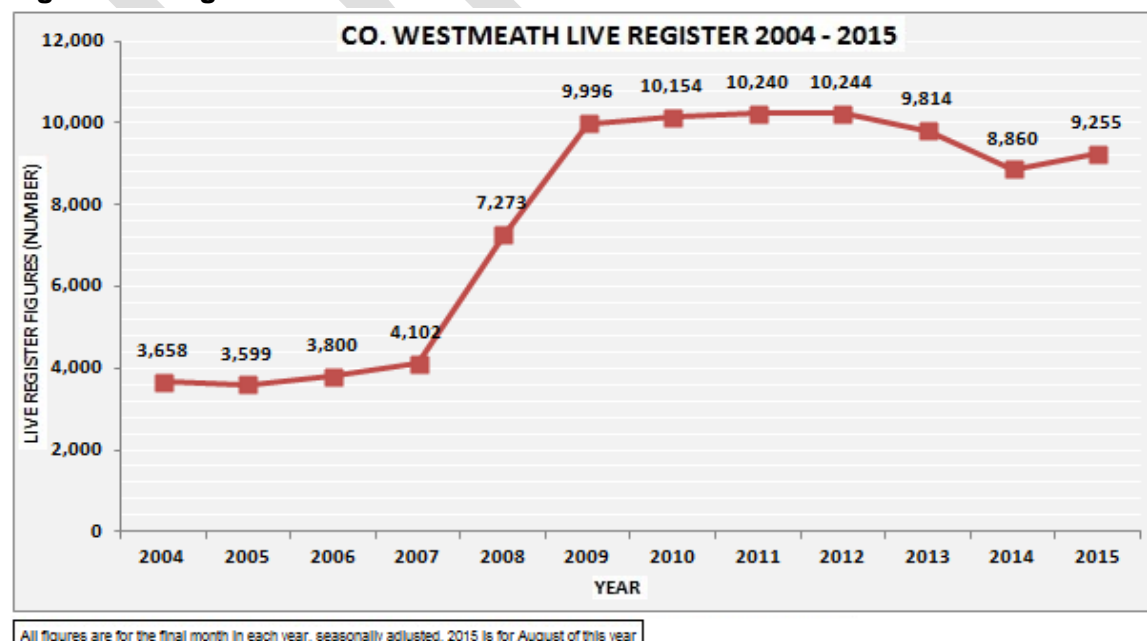


Fig. 1 illustrates the nature of employment of people at work in Westmeath and the State. The majority of workers in the county (24%) work in professional services, followed closely by 23% of workers employed in the commerce and trade sector. A higher proportion of the labour force in Westmeath is engaged in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery (6%) and manufacturing (13%) than in the state. Of the 32,319 workers enumerated in Westmeath, 7,320 worked outside the county. Numbers employed in the Building and Construction Sector has decreased to 1,696 in 2011 from 4,641 in 2006. This has contributed hugely to the current unemployment rate in the county.

2.5 Live Register

Fig. 2 Live Register Westmeath 2004-2015



There were **9255** people on the live register in Westmeath in August 2015, of which **1392** were young people under 25. This has fallen from **10035**, of which **1688** were under 25, for the corresponding month in 2014. However, there were only **4012** on the Live Register in 2006. **Source; DSP**

2.6 Economic Activity

Westmeath's economy traditionally depended on strong agricultural and manufacturing sectors. In recent times, the county's industrial base has broadened and diversified to host a diverse range of employment opportunities in sectors such as the knowledge economy, life sciences, logistics and distribution, internationally traded services, tourism and hospitality, professional services and retail.

2.6.1 Tourism

Tourism has become an increasingly important sector in the Westmeath economy. In 2013, overseas tourists generated 43m to the Economy in the county. Figures show that Westmeath is the most popular and profitable tourist destination of the four midland counties. 95,000 tourists visited the county in 2013; the majority were from Britain and mainland Europe with visitors from North America accounting for 20% of the total. In terms of domestic visitors for the same year regional figures, where Westmeath is amalgamated with neighbouring counties Roscommon and Longford, shows that there were 226,000 trips by Irish residents to the three counties accounting for 37m in expenditure to the region. **(Source: Failte Ireland Tourism Facts 2013)**

County Westmeath is rich in natural resources with many lakes, rivers, particularly the River Shannon, and the Royal Canal. The county's major lakes include Lough Ennell, Owel, Derravaragh, Lene, and Sheelin which have been traditionally popular for Angling. Lough Ree, also popular with anglers also attracts water sports enthusiasts as well as leisure cruiser traffic. Golf, Angling and Equestrian activities have traditionally been important pursuits for the visitor to the county and will continue to be important activities in the future as the county has a good product base in these categories.

Through not traditionally key activities for the visitor to Westmeath, there have been some developments in recent years to cater for the walking and cycling markets. These are growing markets for Ireland as over 1.2m overseas visitors were engaged in hiking/cross country walking in 2014, an increase of over 62% on the previous year's figure of 742k for these activities. **(Source: Failte Ireland Tourism Facts 2013 & 2014)**. The county has a waymarked way walking route known as the Westmeath Way, a 33km linear route from Kilbeggan to Mullingar. Through the National Cycle networks initiative Mullingar has been designated as a Cycling Hub and has two looped cycle routes of 30kms and 49kms in distances taking visitors through scenic parts of the County.

The increase in demand for walking and cycling activities has led to the development of Greenways in many parts of the country. A Greenway has been created along the tow path of the Royal Canal providing suitable terrain for cyclists and walkers. The Mullingar to Athlone

cycleway is due to open in autumn 2015 follows the line of the disused railway line and this section is a key part of the overall Dublin to Galway first national Greenway that is planned to be completed by 2020.

Westmeath is steeped in heritage and history and hosts significant visitor attractions in Belvedere House, Athlone Castle and Kilbeggan Distillery. It also contains important Heritage Sites such as Fore Abbey in the north of the county and Uisneach, one of the Royal sites which has great historical significance and is often considered the Centre of Celtic Ireland. The county's heritage offerings are well positioned to fit with Fáilte Ireland's branding initiative *Ireland's Ancient East* where there are 4 distinct pillars ie. Ancient Ireland, Early Christian Ireland and Anglo Ireland aimed at the *culturally curious* market.

The county also possesses other attractions in Dun na Si Heritage and Amenity Park in Moate which encompasses ecology, heritage, arts genealogy and folklore. Tullyally Castle and Gardens and Mullaghmeen Forest in the north of the county are also popular with visitors to the county.

Westmeath hosts a number of Festivals and Events which draw on the county's natural and cultural resources. These include drama and literary festivals, agricultural shows, music festivals, river and food festival, vintage shows etc. all of which contribute to the tourism offering in the county. Family fun days/field days are increasingly popular in most communities in the county playing a key role for local social interaction, celebrating a particular cultural and natural resource or as a fund-raising mechanism. Though fledgling in nature these events too have the potential to attract visitors outside of their immediate areas.

Westmeath's accommodation base is mainly in the hotel, B&B, self-catering and caravan and camping sectors. The majority of which is concentrated around the two main towns of Mullingar and Athlone with limited accommodation in smaller towns and villages or countryside. In all there are 16 hotel premises registered with Fáilte Ireland and 35 providers in the Guesthouse/B&B category.

2.6.2 Agriculture

County Westmeath is a largely rural county, with agriculture being the primary land use. According to the Census of Agriculture 2010, there are 3,459 farms in the county covering a total land area of 128,371 hectares, which equates to 70% of the total land area of the county. The average size of a farm in the county is 37.1 hectares, which is slightly larger than the national average. Table 8 below illustrates the general trend for fewer small farms of less than 10ha and an increasing number of larger farms in the county; in particular the county has 5% of farms greater than 100ha, compared to 3% in the state.

Fig 3. No of Farms in Westmeath and the State classified by farm size as a percentage of the total number of farms

Number of farms classified by farm size as percentage of total number of farms						
	County 1991	State 1991	County 2000	State 2000	County 2010	State 2010
Less than 10 ha	23%	25%	17%	20%	14%	18%
10 ha to less than 20 ha	25%	28%	22%	24%	22%	24%
20 ha to less than 30 ha	19%	18%	17%	18%	18%	18%
30 ha to less than 50 ha	18%	17%	22%	21%	23%	22%
50 ha to less than 100 ha	11%	9%	17%	14%	18%	15%
Greater than 100 ha	3%	2%	4%	3%	5%	3%
Total Farms	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Agriculture in Westmeath supports thousands of jobs in the rural economy, both directly in food & drink processing and also in the wider agri-industry, including input suppliers, agricultural contractors, jobs in auctioneering, transport and engineering and in accountancy, legal, veterinary and other advisory services. In 2014, the IFA estimated that the value of agricultural output in the county was €178.2m, and the value of agricultural exports arising from agricultural output in the county was €245.4m. The number of food and drink processing jobs supported by agricultural output of county is 1,260, which represents 31% of the food and drink processing jobs in the Midlands region.

Notwithstanding this high volume of agricultural activity, the 2011 census shows that only 6% of the working population in Westmeath are full-time employed in agriculture or forestry.

Although the agriculture sector is providing increasingly less employment over the years, it still remains a significant source of income and employment in rural areas. It is considered that this sector will be a crucial driver in restoring Ireland's economic growth and creating employment over the next number of years.

2.6.3 Equine

The Equine industry is important economically and culturally in Westmeath. According to the 'Directory of the Turf, there are 19 stud farms in the county. Bloodstock generates employment directly across many spectrums but also indirectly through other associated enterprises and sectors such as tourism. Kilbeggan Racecourse is Ireland's only all National Hunt Racecourse and it hosts eight race meetings each year, contributing significantly to the local economy. The Equine industry in the county has been significantly boosted under the previous LEADER programme with the development of a number of Equestrian Centres and training facilities throughout the county. This includes the development of a cross country trail in Athlone and the further development of riding schools and breeding facilities. Horse Sport Ireland, Teagasc, and

the RDS have produced a strategy document that clearly identifies pathways for the development of the industry.

2.6.4 Forestry

Westmeath has forestry coverage of approximately 6%, which is one of the lowest percentages of forest cover in the country. In 2012, County Westmeath had 13,874 ha of forestry of which 8,631 ha are in private ownership. The value of forestry output to the county in 2014 was €2.3m. The County possesses a significant stock of renewable energy resources including forestry products.

2.6.5 Food

There is a developing Artisan Food sector in the county. Research carried out by Westmeath Community Development under the EU Interreg funded Anatole project into the status of food producers in the county identified a number of areas for development. These include website development, collective branding, research visits and product research into more value added areas. Training has been completed in a range of topics including Business Planning, Funding Opportunities, Branding and Social Networking. Westmeath Food Network was established by WCD in 2007. It has a current membership of 18 and a dedicated website. The group has participated in collective mentoring, training and marketing including a number of high profile events with celebrity chefs. These events allowed the producers to showcase their produce and have led to many of the members gaining access to markets.

2.6.6 Crafts

Westmeath may not be as well known for craft as the more established counties in Ireland but with support over the past number of years by WCD through the Rural Development (LEADER) Programme it has made considerable progress in this area. There are now 43 Westmeath based craft persons registered with the Design and Craft Council of Ireland (DCCol), an increase of over 40% since 2010. Craft makers are working full or part time in a variety of disciplines including jewellery makers, textile and knitwear makers, ceramists and wood turners. An important factor of the sector is that it witnesses emerging new makers who move from being hobbyists to becoming employed on a part-time basis in their craft.

Contributing to the sectors development over the past 5 years has been the establishment of a network known as “Made in Westmeath” which has 25 members, almost 50% of which are in the jewellery, knitwear and textile category. The network has provided a platform for crafters to meet to discuss common issues. As the typical crafter tends to work in isolation and tend to be located in the more rural areas, the network has been valuable in counteracting this isolation. Over the past number of years, Made in Westmeath has focused on building a brand synonymous with quality handmade craft, marketing and promotion of their crafts well training and development for the members. Traditionally craft was sold through galleries locally and across the county, through studios and directly from crafters own workshops, many now also sell directly at craft fairs locally, nationally and internationally as well as on-line through various portals having required the necessary skills and business confidence to do so through the various training programmes provided by LEADER. Participation in collaborative and clustering initiatives with neighbouring crafters in County Offaly and with crafters in mid-Finland

has opened up additional possibilities for new product development and new markets for Westmeath craft.

There is a strong connection between craft and the tourism sector. Events such as “Experience Westmeath” and other craft related festivals are initiatives that build on this connection. The “story” of craft and its links with our culture and heritage are integral to the sector’s continued enhancement and holds potential for future development and growth.

2.6.7 Cultural Assets

Westmeath is a county with a wealth of creative people, cultural amenities and resources. There are many writers, artists, musicians and film makers now living in Westmeath and there is a new found interest by the people of the county in these areas. The county has attracted interest among these cohorts as a location for developing projects under the theme of culture. The county has association with important historical and literary figures. Folklore and mythology are also part of the cultural fabric of the county with many of the lakes forming the backdrop for well known legends such as the “Children of Lir”. Arts and Cultural venues in the county include the Mullingar Arts Centre, Aras an Muilleann, the Luain Gallery in Athlone, Tuar Ard Theatre in Moate and Dun Na Si Heritage Park, also in Moate.

2.6.8 Rural Towns

As stated earlier other towns and population centres outside the main population centres of Mullingar and Athlone include Castlepollard, Moate, Kilbeggan, Kinnegad, Rochfortbridge, Killucan/Rathwire, Clonmellon and Tyrrellspass. There is significant community activity in all of those towns which could be harnessed for development programmes.

2.6.9 Rural Economic Development Zones or REDZ

The evidence presented in the CEDRA report demonstrates that in general, there is a clear beneficial relationship between towns and the surrounding rural areas, i.e. the rural hinterland, and similarly between towns and larger towns and cities in close proximity. These hinterlands are local, i.e. with few exceptions they are smaller than counties, and they reflect Ireland’s actual economic geography. These areas are classified within the CEDRA report as **Rural Economic Development Zones or REDZ**. There are two such areas located in Westmeath. One is centred on Athlone and incorporates the south of the county and parts of County Roscommon and other counties. The other is centred on Mullingar and incorporates North Westmeath and small parts of Co Meath and other counties.

2.6.10 Information and Communication Technology

Achieving universal access to high speed broadband is a key target under the EU Digital Agenda for Europe which envisages that by 2020 all EU citizens will access to speeds of 30Mbps and that 50% of citizens will be subscribing to speeds of 100Mbps. The delivery of high speed broadband is challenging especially in rural areas due to population density. Ireland is one of the lowest in Europe at 67 people per km². In Westmeath the population density is 40.9 per km². There is significant Broadband infrastructure in the county which is provided by a number of commercial operators. The National Broadband Plan Ireland’s Broadband Intervention Strategy aims to deliver high speed broadband to all areas in Ireland not covered

by commercial investment. The ambition is to achieve 100% access to high speed broadband by 2020.

2.7 Hard to Reach Communities

Pobal Maps were used to carry out an Analysis of the area from the point of view of Hard to Reach Communities in disadvantaged areas and amongst specific target groups. Much of this information was collected and analysed in producing the Local Economic and community plan and also in developing the SICAP for Co Westmeath.

2.7.1 Small Area Analysis

Westmeath is divided into **337** small areas under the POBAL Maps. Of these **51** are classified as disadvantaged or very disadvantaged, having a 2011 Deprivation Score ranging from -10 to -26.60. 33 of the 51 areas are in the Athlone and Mullingar Electoral Districts. In the period 2006-2011 The 5 areas showing the greatest increase in deprivation are all rural areas – Kinnegad, Finea, Clonfad, Ballykilmore and Moate. There are a number of geographically disadvantaged communities outside of the Very Disadvantaged areas, particularly e.g Finea, Clonmellon, Rathowen, Lismacaffrey, Tang, and Rochfortbridge.

2.7.2 Priority Target Groups

- People with Disabilities - 11,303 persons, or 13%, had a disability in April 2011, Of those over 15 years, 4% were classified as unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability, thus 9% of people with a disability in the county are available for work.
- Lone Parents - Lone Parent families account for 10% of households in Westmeath. This rises significantly in the disadvantaged areas.
- New Communities - As per the Westmeath Integration and Diversity Strategy 2013-2017, there are 1,594 unemployed non-Irish nationals in County Westmeath, representing 18.6% of unemployed people.
- Travellers - There are 839 travellers in Westmeath, comprising 236 households, approximately 1% of the population of the county. Educational disadvantage is particularly acute among the Traveller community, with high rates of early school leaving and illiteracy.
- Older People – The County Westmeath Age Friendly Strategy 2013 highlights that 11,807 people in Westmeath are over 65 and this figure is increasing yearly.

2.7.3 Youth

In August 2015, there were 1688 people under 25 years of age on the live register in Westmeath. The Pathways to Work Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan 2014, highlights the fact that the youth unemployment rate, having averaged about 9% in 2005-2007, nevertheless rose sharply to reach a peak of 33% in mid-2012, before falling slightly. The national average Retention Rates for students from DEIS schools is 80.4%, which is 10% below the national average rate. (Source: Dept of Education and Science, 2014 Retention Rates Report). Based on the figures for Westmeath, 130 young people per year leave school early. The WCD/HSE/MRYS Suicide Prevention Strategy identifies access to work placement and

education/training options as a significant suicide prevention tool. WCD has identified the need to “work with children, young people and people with low educational levels to enable them to access SICAP and other services to enhance their Life Long Learning opportunities” and “Continued supports for Youth, in conjunction with youth service providers”. SICAP provides supports to children and young people from targets groups who are at risk of early school leaving and/or not in education, employment or training (NEETS).

2.8 Environment

Below is a brief analysis of the current situation in the county with regard to Water Resources, Local Biodiversity and Development of Renewable Energy.

2.8.1 Water Resources

Westmeath County Council produces an average of 33,000 m³ (7.5 million gallons) per day of drinking water from four water supply sources (Lough Owel, Lough Lene, the River Shannon and a borehole at Ballinderry in Moate) to serve the population in all of the major towns and villages in the County as well as a wide rural area through an extensive network of public water mains and public group water schemes. Westmeath County Council carries out regular monitoring of public water supplies and group water schemes, and sends these results to the Environmental Protection Agency each year.

2.8.2 Local Biodiversity

County Westmeath supports a wide range of diverse and species rich habitats including wetlands, eskers, peatlands, lakes canals, which are documented in the Westmeath Biodiversity Action Plan 2014-2020. Notwithstanding, there is comparatively little research and indeed knowledge of local biodiversity sites within the county. However, the Midlands Amenity Park Moate provides an excellent example of how the local community capitalised upon the potential of existing biodiversity in their locality. This plan led approach has ensured that a framework is in place for the protection of this resource for future generations.

Three quarters of food plants and flowers are insect pollinated, mainly by bees and also hoverflies. The estimated value of this work is €53 million annually in Ireland.

2.8.3 Renewable Energy

Demand is growing for renewable energy solutions and County Westmeath is now witnessing an increase in the number of potential producers and potential customers for renewable energy. Local groups and individuals are also taking an interest in their local environment with keen interest in recycling and reusing initiatives. Westmeath Community Development and a group of key stakeholders have produced a number of studies containing recommendations that will allow for the development of the Renewable Energy Sector. This has resulted in the publication of reports such as the ‘Bioregions action plan’ in 2012 and ‘Renewable energy in County Westmeath’ in 2009. This work has shown that County Westmeath has considerable natural resources built up by farmers investing in forestry and renewable energy crops such as miscanthus and willow. Of the 13,874 ha of forestry, 87ha of bioenergy/biomass crops in 2012. This is backed up by the fact that between March 2006 and May 2011, 215 biomass boilers were installed in the county.

2.9 Review of Key Services/Programmes (Statutory)

2.9.1 Westmeath County Council (WCC)

Westmeath County Council (WCC) is the statutory Local Authority for Co Westmeath. In addition to its core functions providing services in Planning, Housing, Roads and Transport, Environment, Water Services and Library Arts & Recreation, WCC has significant involvement in Economic Development including:

- Tourism
- Foreign Direct Investment
- The Local Enterprise Office

WCC provides appropriately zoned land for enterprise and employment uses to cater for the industrial, manufacturing, technological and service needs of the county. Collaborative working arrangements are in place with various enterprise agencies to encourage, support, promote and advance business and employment opportunities, enterprise creation, entrepreneurship and innovation. The County Council has provided a number of enterprise units and serviced sites in Mullingar, Athlone, Ballynacargy and other centres. Westmeath planning policy is set out in the County Development Plan and the various town and village plans.

Westmeath Co Co also has significant involvement in Community Development including:

- The Local Community Development Committee (LCDC)
- The Public Participation Network (PPN),
- Community Grants and Cathaoirleach Awards & Grants & Pride Of Place
- Comhairle na n-Og,
- The RAPID Programme
- The Age Friendly Strategy
- A Support Fund for Festivals and Events.

The Westmeath Heritage Forum is a key component in the Heritage Planning process. The Forum is a non-statutory group established by the Council which provides advice on the preparation and implementation of the County's Heritage Plan.

WCC is the designated financial partner for the Rural Development (LEADER) programme 2014 – 2020. A strong collaborative working arrangement exists between WCC and WCD in implementing rural development and social inclusion programmes.

2.9.2 Westmeath Local Enterprise Office (LEO)

Westmeath Local Enterprise Office provides entrepreneurs with advice on starting and growing small businesses, business training and financial support. Specifically:

- Start Your Own Business Guides and Workbooks are available from Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Westmeath
- Specific guides are available on setting up a Retail Business, Food Business, Coffee Shop / Restaurant or a Craft Business.

- Seminars are provided on Getting Started in Business; Tax Registration; Raising Finance; are held throughout the year.
- Business Advisors plan and develop business ideas and inform clients of all supports that are available.

Westmeath LEO is represented on the LCDC and the implementation partner, Westmeath Community Development, coordinates its work with the LEO under a Sectoral Agreement. SICAP and BTWEA Enterprise clients are referred to Westmeath LEO for SYOB Courses.

2.9.3 Enterprise Ireland

Enterprise Ireland is responsible for the development and growth of Irish enterprises in world markets. It works in partnership with Irish enterprises to help them start, grow, innovate and win export sales on global markets. The Midland's office for Enterprise Ireland is located in Athlone.

2.9.4 Fáilte Ireland

Fáilte Ireland is the National Tourism Development Authority. Its role is to support the tourism industry and work to sustain Ireland as a high-quality and competitive tourism destination. Fáilte Ireland provides a range of practical business supports to help tourism businesses better manage and market their products and services. It also works with other state agencies and representative bodies, at local and national levels, to implement and champion positive and practical strategies that will benefit Irish tourism and the Irish economy. It promotes Ireland as a holiday destination through their domestic marketing campaign (DiscoverIreland.ie) and manages a network of nationwide tourist information centres that provide help and advice for visitors to Ireland. Two of these centres are located in Westmeath one in Mullingar and the other in Athlone. Fáilte Ireland has developed an umbrella destination brand to market the East of the Country. It is called Ireland's Ancient East. Westmeath is part of this strategy.

2.9.5 Waterways Ireland

Waterways Ireland has responsibility for the management, maintenance, development and restoration of inland navigable waterways principally for recreational purposes. Two of the seven waterways under the remit of the body that are in or have connections to Westmeath are the Royal Canal and the Shannon Navigation system. Waterways Ireland has offices located at Thomastown, on the Royal Canal near Killucan and also in Athlone.

2.9.6 Inland Fisheries Ireland

Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) is the agency responsible for the conservation, protection, management, marketing, development and improvement of Ireland's inland fisheries and sea angling resources. In the Westmeath area IFI has responsibility for the management and development of some of the largest angling lakes in Ireland such as Sheelin, Derravaragh, Glore, Owel, Ennell and Lough Lene, and some of the best river channels in the country in the river Inny, Brosna and the Deel. IFI works closely with angling clubs and other interested groups in the Westmeath area to promote and develop the fisheries in the area.

2.9.7 Teagasc

Teagasc, the Agricultural and Food Development Authority in Ireland, provides further education in agriculture, food, horticulture, forestry and equine studies. Courses incorporate management practices and technologies on the home farm, supervised project work and discussion groups. Westmeath is in Teagasc's Regional Unit of Westmeath/Offaly/Cavan/Monaghan. A Teagasc options course will be delivered in one of the 4 counties annually. The Teagasc Options Programme is specifically designed to assist farm families in looking at all options for growing farm profit and other possibilities for the future. Teagasc advisers are trained to discuss all aspects of the farm business, succession, inheritance and lifestyle issues to ensure the long term viability of the household. Teagasc is setting up equine discussion groups within the County to assist promoters developing equine enterprises. There is currently no rural development or Artisan Food specialist covering the region. The newly established forestry producer group is facilitated by a Teagasc forestry specialist.

2.9.8 Forestry Service

The Department Of Agriculture Forestry Service is responsible for implementing Ireland's Forestry Programme 2014 -2020. The Strategic Goal of the programme is to develop an internationally competitive and sustainable forest sector that provides a full range of economic, environmental and social benefits to society and which accords with the Forest Europe definition of sustainable forest management. This includes optimising the environmental and social benefits of new and existing forests and providing support for forest holders to prepare management plans for their forest holdings. **(Source: Department of Agriculture Forestry Service: Ireland's Forestry Programme 2014 -2020).**

2.9.9 Health Service Executive (HSE)

Westmeath forms part of the HSE Midlands region. In addition to its core services, HSE provides support for a range of community initiatives in the county. Initiatives include: Funding for Traveller Health and Primary Care Strategy under which WCD employs a Development worker and two Traveller Health Workers who are members of the Traveller community and also 5 traveller women who implement the Primary Care Programme. Funding for Food and Health programme, a substantial food nutrition and health programme run in for disadvantaged communities. In 2014, 602 people attended 46 courses delivered under the programme in Longford and Westmeath.

Funding Midland Regional Drugs and Alcohol Taskforce. The Midlands Regional Drugs Taskforce is the agency with responsibility for alleviating substance misuse in the area. WCD works closely with the agency

The HSE participated strongly in developing the WCD Integration and Diversity Strategy, particularly in relation to the Roma community and has committed to further actions.

2.9.10 Tusla

The Child and Family Agency is now the dedicated State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children. The Child and Family Agency's services include a range of universal and targeted services including Child protection and Welfare services, Educational Welfare Services, Psychological Services, Family and Locally based Community Supports, Early Years Services and Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence Services. Tusla provides funding for the Community Mothers Programme and the Triple P parenting

programme in Longford and Westmeath which is implemented by WCD as well as the Triple P Parenting Programme.

2.9.11 Department of Social Protection – (DSP)

There are a number of DSP initiatives in relation to employment and job seeking. These include the new Intreo service, Job Initiative Projects, Tus, RSS, Community Employment Schemes, Business Development Programmes, Back to Work & Short Term Enterprise Allowance Schemes (BTEA/STEA) and the Jobs Clubs. Other DSP Job Seeking and Training Supports include Job Bridge, Skills to Work, Jobs Plus and the new Job Path and Youth Guarantee programmes.

2.9.12 Longford Westmeath Education and Training Board (LWETB)

The principal objective of LWETB is to promote the development of education, training and youth work in the region. It has a remit for second level and adult education and training services and runs a number of programmes including the VTOS Programme in Mullingar and Athlone, Youthreach Programmes and is responsible for the School Completion Programme. In addition to this, LWETB is also responsible for Local Training Initiatives in the region.

2.9.13 National Learning Network

National learning Network, with Centres in Athlone and Mullingar, provides a range of Flexible training courses for people who need specialist support including job seekers and people with an illness or disability.

2.9.14 Citizens information Board

Westmeath Citizens Information Services has two main centres in the County, in Athlone and Mullingar and also provides outreach services in Castlepollard and Kilbeggan.

2.10 Review of Key Services/Programmes (Community & Voluntary)

The following is a summary services being delivered by the Community and Voluntary Sector to address some of the issues identified above.

2.10.1 Westmeath Community Development

Westmeath Community Development is the Local development company for Co Westmeath. The company delivers a range of EU and Exchequer funded programmes addressing rural development and social inclusion issues.

LEADER

Westmeath Community Development implements the LEADER programme. The company has implemented three consecutive LEADER Programmes from 1995 to 2015 including LEADER II, National Rural Development Programme/LEADER + and the Rural Development (LEADER) Programme 2007-2013.

Other Rural Development Programmes

Westmeath Community Development implements other EU Programmes and initiatives. The company was the Irish partner on a “Bioregions Project”. The Bio-Regions consortium comprises of 13 partners from 10 European countries and was funded by Intelligent Energy Europe 2009. A Renewable Energy Strategy was produced with funding under this Programme in 2012. Support for the Artisan Food sector was provided by WCD through the Anatole (Atlantic Network Abilities for Towns to Organise Local Economy) an EU initiative with partners in France, Spain and Portugal.

SICAP

Westmeath Community Development delivers the ***Social Inclusion and Activation Programme (SICAP)*** in consultation with target communities, particularly in the 51 disadvantaged areas and in partnership with statutory agencies including WCC, DSP, HSE, and LWETB. The programme is delivered under the 3 Goals:

Goal 1 – Empowering Disadvantaged Communities. Actions being delivered under this Goal include:

- Early stage Pre- Development Work with target groups particularly in Disadvantaged and Very Disadvantaged areas
- Supporting inclusion of disadvantaged communities in Decision Making Structures.
- Development of Networks and Collaborations
- Supports for Older People

Goal 2 – Lifelong Learning. Actions being delivered under this Goal include:

- Education Supports
- Measures to Combat Early School Leaving
- Supports for young people who have left school early
- Supports for Primary School Aged Children

Goal 3 - Employment. Actions being delivered under this programme include

- Employability Services
- Self-Employment Supports for Unemployed People
- Labour market policy and delivery activities
- Promoting Social Enterprise

As part of the programme WCD works with:

- Unemployed people, including those not on the live register to enable them to access SICAP and other services to enhance their employment and educational opportunities.
- Individuals and groups representing people with disabilities to enable them to access SICAP and other services to enhance their employment and educational opportunities.
- Individuals and groups representing lone parents to enable them to access SICAP and other services to enhance their employment and educational opportunities.
- Individuals and groups representing new communities to enable them to access SICAP and other services to enhance their employment and educational opportunities
- Individuals and groups representing Travellers to enable them to access SICAP and other services to enhance their employment and educational opportunities.
- Organisations and groups representing Older People to enable them to access SICAP Goal 1 supports and other services.

Rural Social Scheme

Westmeath Community Development implements the ***Rural Social Scheme***, an income support programme for the farming community with 33 participants.

Labour Market Programmes include TUS, CE and JI

Approximately 200 people are placed in Co Westmeath by WCD under these programmes. Important training initiatives that provide assistance to unemployed persons are the *WCD*

Business Development Programme

The WCD Business Development Programme works with unemployed people; including those not on the live register, considering self-employment. The Business Development Programme is run over six months. Approximately 30 people complete this programme each year. Approximately 70% establish businesses during the programme. There is an objective to target people from disadvantaged areas to participate in this programme.

Back to Work & Short Term Enterprise Allowance (BTEA/STEa)

The BTEA/STEa schemes encourage people getting certain social welfare payments to become self-employed. WCD plays a role with the DSP in this scheme, meeting with, advising, assisting and registering people for these schemes. The company is currently targeting this service to disadvantaged areas.

Job Club

Job Clubs funded by DSP are part of WCD services for the unemployed, assisting job ready individuals to this service. WCD manages the Westmeath Job Club, providing services in Mullingar and Athlone. The company is currently targeting this service to disadvantaged areas.

Local Training Initiatives.

WCD is the delivery agency for two Local Training Initiative (LTI) programmes each year, the Horticulture programme in Belvedere, Mullingar, (in partnership with WCC) and the Training for Employment programme in Athlone. Delivered over a 10 month period, 35 people benefitted from these programmes in 2014.

Westmeath Volunteer Centre

The Westmeath Volunteer Centre is a county-wide project managed by WCD in partnership with a number of other organisations including WCC, the PPN, Westmeath Sports Partnership and the Citizens Information Service. The Centre plays a key role in mobilising volunteers in communities which ultimately benefits the implementation of rural development and social inclusion programmes.

Community Mothers Programme

WCD runs the Community Mothers Programme in Longford and Westmeath which is funded by TUSLA. Having trained in delivery of Triple P parenting programmes, WCD staff members regularly deliver Triple P courses.

Traveller Health Programme.

WCD employs a Development worker and two Traveller Health Workers who are members of the Traveller community and also 5 traveller women who implement the Primary Care Programme.

Integration and Diversity Strategy

WCD is committed to a number of actions from the Integration and Diversity Strategy published in 2013, particularly those related to unemployment. WCD also committed to carrying out pre-development work with the Roma Community.

Food and Health Programme

Funded by the HSE, WCD runs a substantial food nutrition and health programme for disadvantaged communities. In 2013, 622 people attended 46 courses delivered under the programme in Longford and Westmeath.

Childcare Facilities

WCD runs 7 community childcare centres in Westmeath, funded via CCSS, and 185 children are attending services currently.

2.10.2 Congress Information and Development Centres

Dr Stephens Centre Athlone and Mullingar Congress Information & Development Centre provide advocacy & information on a wide range of topics including, Social Welfare, Redundancy, Job Seekers/ Benefit Allowance and Back to Education Allowance.

2.10.3 South Westmeath Education Employment and Training Services (SWEETS)

South Westmeath Education Employment and Training Services (SWEETS) is a community based initiative providing support to unemployed people in the Kilbeggan and surrounding area.

2.10.4 Mullingar Employment Action Group (MEAG)

The Mullingar Employment Action Group is a support group for unemployed people in the Mullingar and surrounding areas. Their supports include a Business Advice Service, Incubation Units for Small Businesses, and a Recycling Project which is funded under the Community Services Programme (CSP). MEAG works closely with WCD and the Credit Unions in assisting clients to access funds under a Revolving Loan Scheme.

2.10.5 Athlone Community Taskforce (ACT)

Athlone Community Taskforce is a support group for unemployed people in Athlone and surrounding areas. Their supports include a Business Advice Service and Incubation Units for Small Businesses. ACT also works closely with WCD and the Credit Unions in assisting clients to access funds under a Revolving Loan Scheme.

2.10.6 Other Community Services Projects (CSPs)

There are twelve Community Services projects in total in the county, operating under the Community Services Programme, delivering a range of services and providing employment. There are opportunities for CSPs to progress to social enterprise.

2.10.7 Youth Services

The Midland Youth Service (MRYS) and Foroige are the two most active youth organisations in the area and operate clubs in Mullingar and in some rural areas. The SICAP supports this work in order to develop additional services for disadvantage young people in prioritised areas. The consultation process indicated a need to support young people in this way in more disadvantaged areas.

2.10.8 Women's Community Projects (WCP)

The Women's Community Projects, Mullingar is the most established womens groups in the area. This project delivers employment focused training to women and has also established a community enterprise. It provides extensive childcare facilities and personal development programmes. 350 – 400 people benefit from its supports each year.

2.10.9 Age Friendly Alliance

The Westmeath Age Friendly Strategy has been launched, having been developed under the National Age Friendly Cities & Counties Programme. WCD facilitates the Older Persons Forums and also provides a Care and Repair Service for Older People in association with Westmeath Volunteer Centre. 95 Older People in Westmeath availed of the Care & Repair service in 2012.

2.10.10 Westmeath County Childcare Committee

WCCC provides supports to Childcare Service providers who wish to avail of the government funding under the National Childhood Investment Programme, Community Childcare Subvention Scheme, Childcare Education & Training Support Scheme and the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme.

2.10.11 Family Resource Centres

There are two Family Resource centres in the county, Msgr McCarthy Centre in Battery Heights Athlone and also Cara Phort Family Resource Centre in Ballynacargy. Both Family Resource Centres provide a focal point for social activities as well as hosting training and support initiatives in those disadvantaged areas.

2.10.12 Longford Westmeath Community Transport

Longford Westmeath Community Transport Ltd is developing an effective sustainable and accessible rural transport service for rural dwellers in Co. Longford and Westmeath. LWCT operates 36 door-to-door weekly scheduled services between 9.30am and 2.30am and within school runs. Scheduled runs are used by people wishing to access essential services, such as shopping, pension collection, medical, banking and post office. LWCT provides transport for youth services, disability, pre-School, after school, and day care centres.

2.11 County Westmeath Area Needs Analysis

This Needs Analysis identifies and evaluates the rural development needs of the target population and possible solutions to the problems identified in meeting those needs.

- There is a need to create employment opportunities in the county through investment in job creation projects.

- There is a need to improve the visitor experience for tourists and to convert any benefits from this to increased income for tourism providers.
- The new Dublin Galway Greenway along with the recent improvements to the Royal Canal for walking and cycling provide an opportunity to work with communities and individuals along these routes.
- There is a need to support the development of loops or spurs off the main arteries such as the Way Marked Way which will ensure that the most rural parts of the county can attract visitors thus providing economic gain for more rural areas. There is a need to support projects which further enhance the visitor experience at sites such as Fore and Uisneach as well as a need to actively encourage communities and individuals to develop such projects.
- There is a need for tourist accommodation and activities/attractions in more rural areas to complement the variety of accommodation in the hotel, B&B and self-catering sectors, the majority of which is concentrated around the two main towns of Mullingar and Athlone with limited accommodation in smaller towns and villages or countryside.
- There is a need for coordinated destination marketing initiatives with tourism providers in marketing their businesses to foreign and domestic markets. Marketing initiatives need to be driven by the trade with support from the LEADER programme and the Local Authority.
- There is a need to respond to the decrease in farm incomes and the difficulties for the farming community stemming from this. This need is particularly acute in a county with a large farming community based on drystock farming. While diversification is an option for some people, there is no longer a dedicated advisory service available from Teagasc to address this need. In summary, there is a strong farming sector in the county with significant opportunities for growth and diversification but a need for strong support to develop the sector.
- Westmeath could use its biomass resources to help Ireland meet its 30% co-firing target in peat stations by 2015.
- The study carried out with Westmeath Food Network has shown that the small (artisan) food sector needs to be supported with Training on marketing, logistics, taxation, law, promotion and the branding of local food, showcasing products, networking and further research on best practice in the industry nationally and internationally
- The county now has a vibrant craft sector. As craft makers tend to work in isolation and are rurally based, they need continued support with networking, product development, collaborative marketing and encouragement of Innovation.
- The Arts and Culture Sector needs to be nurtured through teaching of the Arts, Culture and Heritage and the development of projects fashioned by entrepreneur's utilising their unique skills to create an economic market for this sector of enterprise.
- There is a need for special measures to develop the capacity of rural towns to develop aesthetically, socially and economically.
- Opportunities to develop micro enterprises based on remote working are dependent on broadband connectivity, and having economic and environmental benefits for the county, has been identified as a particular challenge for the business community. There is a need for ICT training for communities and businesses is required to enable all sectors to fully benefit from broadband roll out.
- The area profile highlights that, while disadvantage is spread throughout the county, there are areas that are more marginalised than others. The cumulative nature of

disadvantage in urban local authority housing estates and in some rural areas, suggests that targeted area-based strategies are required to tackle disadvantage, particularly in the 51 disadvantaged areas profiled and also remote rural areas. These issues are being addressed in the Social Inclusion and Activation Programme (SICAP) and also by other agencies such as the HSE and DSP. There is an opportunity to add value to this work. Transport services to and from disadvantaged areas need to be improved.

- There is a need to improve services available for young people to help them avail of education, training and employment opportunities.
- Local strategies to aid water conservation are necessary to assist the Local Authority through awareness of the value of conserving the resource.
- There is an important role for communities in conserving local biodiversity. Identifying local biodiversity areas will raise awareness, appreciation and enjoyment of the biodiversity in each locality. Planting native wildflowers and allowing wildflowers to grow along roadside verges across the country will help get native species back on track to recovery. Its preservation also offers a tourism opportunity.
- There is a need to support the region becoming active in the renewable energy sector. Further work needs to be done to encourage local consumers to increase their use of locally produced renewables.

3.0 Participative Planning

3.1 Public Consultation

In June/July/August 2015 as part of the consultation process:

- 2 workshops were held with the PPN, one in Athlone and the other in Mullingar. Approximately 120 people representing geographic and issue-based groups, including Youth Services participated in workshops.
- A call for submissions was also made in the local press inviting parties to make submissions under the three proposed Themes of the Programme. A total of 65 written submissions were received from groups and organisations throughout the county.
- Facilitated consultation and planning sessions were held with particular sectors including Tourism providers, craft and food producers.
- Workshops were organised with:
 - **Communities in North Westmeath**
Irish Rural Link facilitated a public workshop in order to elicit the views of people in that area on development priorities for the area. The report on the workshop and conclusions form part of the consultation process for the Local development strategy. The Report also forms part of the consultation process for the pilot project proposed for Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ).
 - **Community Sector Board Members of Westmeath Community Development** in relation to Rural Development issues from previous LEADER programmes.
- Individual consultations were held with:
 - **Westmeath Community Development** in relation to:
 - Social Inclusion and Activation Programme (SICAP).The consultation process carried out in preparing the Social Inclusion and Activation has informed the LEADER Consultation process, particularly as it relates to disadvantaged areas and key target groups.
 - Review of previous LEADER programmes
 - The Renewable Energy Strategy for County Westmeath commissioned by WCD
 - Strategies for Tourism, Food and Craft Sectors.
 - The Hill of Uisneach Feasibility Study commissioned and carried out in 2014/2015.
 - **Midland Regional Youth Services** to elicit their views on the role LEADER could play in working with rural youth and collaboration with youth services in this work. Difficulty in getting community leaders was identified as a significant issue.
 - **Mullingar and District Chamber of Commerce.** An individual submission was received from Mullingar and District Chamber of Commerce.
 - **Westmeath County Council** - Consultation with Westmeath Co Co was carried out through a series of meetings with Co Co Officials with regard to key rural

development priorities and opportunities for collaboration with the Local Authority and local communities including;

- Westmeath County Development Plan
- The North Westmeath Strategy, 2006
- Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ)
- Westmeath Biodiversity Plan 2014-2020
- **Failte Ireland** in relation to the following
 - Failte Ireland's Tourism Development Strategy, its strategies and plans for the region, identified gaps, and on key development work which could be carried out as part of the LEADER programme.
 - Failte Ireland's programmes especially its marketing plan for the Ireland's Ancient East
- **Waterways Ireland**
 - Initiatives on the Royal Canal and in the Athlone area
- **Inland Fisheries Ireland**
 - The conservation, protection, management, marketing, development and improvement of the county's fishing resources such as rivers and lakes.
- **Coillte**
 - Forest recreation
- **Teagasc**
 - Options Programme
 - Farm Diversification
 - Artisan Food production
- **Westmeath Local Enterprise Office**
 - Key rural development work which could be carried out in collaboration with the Local Enterprise Office under Sectoral Agreement.

3.2 Summary of Outcomes from the Consultation Process.

The development and marketing of **Rural Tourism** particularly in the areas of outdoor recreation such as walking, cycling and angling along with the enhancement of heritage attractions, support for marketing were seen as paramount for the future. The new Dublin Galway Greenway was seen as a very positive development in terms of potential spin-off for communities and individuals in its vicinity. The Greenway allows public access to the 40 km section which will connect cyclists and walkers to the urban centres of Mullingar, Moate and Athlone. The opportunity exists for small businesses in the area to benefit from this major piece of infrastructure including food businesses, activities such as cycle hire etc. and for communities in developing and enhancing their areas along the route. It was also felt that there were further opportunities to create spurs to facilitate linkages with existing attractions such as Uisneach and the creation of new ancillary services to support the users of the Greenway.

Recent improvements to the Royal Canal were also cited as positive and the potential of the canal to deliver additional economic benefits to communities and individuals along its corridor was recognised. Aside from capitalising on these developments community groups also mentioned the need for the further development of walking routes, town trails and cycling routes. The "Camino Way" from Fore to Mullingar and the rich monastic heritage associated

with the county was also considered as having potential for development. Signage in general was considered to be an issue with signage of heritage attractions mentioned in particular. It was felt that there is considerable scope to develop the lakes in the county for tourism. Small scale boat enterprises providing tours of the lakes, the development of water sports, the enhancement of the angling product and Amenity areas such as Portlick were cited as possibilities. Consultation with tourism providers and communities also highlighted the need to promote Westmeath as a tourism destination. There is potential to promote the county and its offerings to different market segments under culture, heritage, outdoor recreation etc. with area based cluster groups cited as a possible mechanism to carry out marketing activities.

The production of a guide to the historic sites and attractions of Westmeath, the maintenance of historical monuments, redevelopment of heritage buildings such as the Market House in Castlepollard were seen as initiatives that could contribute to the enhancement of the county's heritage. The restoration of old graveyards was also seen as activity which was highlighted by groups which could contribute to heritage and genealogy tourism.

General conclusions from these consultations were that more information was required around the setting up of new businesses particularly in the area of artisan food production, support for farmers markets as outlets for local producers, further development of the craft sector and the encouragement and provision of support for new entrants to these sectors were seen as potential job creation.

While there are education and training facilities located in the county, these facilities are not available to everybody, particularly people living in remote rural areas due to the location of these facilities in the major towns and lack of adequate transport to take people there.

The absence of **broadband** in rural areas was seen as having a negative impact on the lives of people living in rural areas. The potential to create rural enterprises as well as the ability to offer individuals the opportunity to work from home or local hubs was lacking due to the unavailability of broadband. While the National Broadband Scheme sets out to deliver HSB to all areas by 2020 there is a view that these targets may not be reached in relation to all households by this date. Whether or not this is achieved, communities are anxious to have the required ICT skills that will enable them to take full advantage of possibilities that can be opened up through the availability of broadband.

From the consultation process it is clear that communities across the county are very conscious about the surroundings in which they live. The availability of **basic services and facilities** was considered as vital for people living in rural areas. The importance of the work of the various tidy town groups across the county was recognised and continued support of this activity was cited as being essential going forward. The preparation of village plans and environmental plans was also considered a requirement in planning future tidy town's activity. Groups felt that there was scope for such committees to expand the areas they cover and also to look at engaging with younger people in areas through a Junior Tidy Towns initiative. Specific issues mentioned which are of concern include litter, illegal dumping, lack of litter bins in towns, unkempt estates and derelict houses and buildings. Some community groups do undertake regular clean ups but it was felt that these should be more frequent with individuals taking responsibility for cleaning up outside their own properties. The provision of recreational facilities

was also widely mentioned by community groups specifically around the need for children's playgrounds in certain areas, recreational infrastructure for older children such as skate parks. The provision of amenity areas with seating, bowls facilities for older people as well as other facilities such as outdoor gym equipment, walking tracks as well as indoor sporting and recreation facilities were also mentioned as requirements to meet the needs of rural communities.

There is also a need for the provision of adequate Community Centres for meeting facilities. Although most areas do have community halls, many are in a very poor condition and require upgrading. This lack of appropriate facilities is seen as being a reason for limited social and recreational activity in many areas.

It is also clear from the submissions that communities and individuals living in rural areas require **training** across a variety of topics which include committee skills training, leadership, fundraising, making funding applications, project management, enterprise development, training for young people to assist in getting employment and starting business, developing hobby crafts into businesses, community development, media skills training and becoming involved in programmes about local areas via local community radio, water conservation, IT training, volunteers training, festival and events training and management.

During consultation for the SICAP Strategy, Disadvantaged and Very Disadvantaged areas and target groups within those areas, were identified and are being targeted with special actions to alleviate long term unemployment in particular.

It was recognised that support was required for the development of facilities for **young people** such as youth cafe, provision of support and encouragement of volunteers to work with young people, encouraging them to get involved with community activities. Measures that could assist in creating employment locally for young people through the development of arts and culture activities.

Communities and the Local Authority are concerned about massive levels of pesticide use, the loss of habitats such as flower rich meadows and grassland and from excessive tidying up of wild areas in our landscape, areas like roadside verges or field margins. Recently both wild bees and commercial honey bees have suffered huge declines as a result.

Communities in North Westmeath expressed concern that there is a lack of accessibility to jobs because of the lack of creation of jobs in Mullingar and surrounding areas. Neither was it perceived as a destination for visitors to the county or to the country.

3.3 SWOT Analysis

An Analysis of the Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats was undertaken as part of the consultation process for the production of the Draft Local Economic and Community Plan. The results are outlined below:

SWOT Analysis

<p><u>STRENGTHS</u></p> <p>Excellent strategic location at centre of Ireland</p> <p>Proximity to Dublin</p> <p>Growing population</p> <p>High quality natural environment</p> <p>High quality education provision</p> <p>AIT/ Athlone R&D facility in Athlone</p> <p>Athlone FDI cluster</p> <p>Available workforce</p> <p>Strong PPN network</p> <p>Good recreation and amenity infrastructure</p> <p>Good Sports facilities</p> <p>Good road and rail links to main towns</p> <p>Well educated population</p> <p>Wide range of tourism attractions: outdoor pursuits, heritage and cultural attractions</p> <p>Good manufacturing base</p> <p>Well developed community infrastructure</p> <p>Good local networks among statutory, voluntary and community sectors</p>	<p><u>WEAKNESSES</u></p> <p>Failure to achieve potential of Gateway status in NSS.</p> <p>Current low level of household income</p> <p>Level of employment in Mullingar</p> <p>Level of Educational attainment</p> <p>Range of Rural Transport</p> <p>Level of unemployment</p> <p>Continued reliance on traditional industrial sectors</p> <p>Higher levels of youth unemployment</p> <p>Low levels of connectivity</p> <p>No change in numbers of local authority housing provided</p> <p>Continuing depopulation of rural areas</p> <p>Low levels of services in rural areas</p> <p>Poor transport services in rural areas</p> <p>Absence of broadband in rural areas</p> <p>Higher percentage of age dependent people in the county</p>
<p><u>OPPORTUNITIES</u></p> <p>Positive national economic trends</p> <p>Tourism development assets incl. unspoilt landscape and heritage</p> <p>Available Business and Technology Park in Mullingar</p> <p>Regional Action Plan for Jobs</p> <p>Waterways and water based recreation and tourism.</p> <p>Cooperation with Roscommon in respect of Athlone.</p> <p>Walking and cycling route development.</p> <p>Tourism potential of county</p> <p>Increasing education and skills levels of population</p> <p>Farm Diversification</p> <p>Alternative energies</p> <p>Recycling</p> <p>New business development</p> <p>Expansion of existing business base</p> <p>Enhancement of community and voluntary sector</p> <p>Village enhancement</p> <p>Artisan Foods</p>	<p><u>THREATS</u></p> <p>Services for increasing population</p> <p>Rationalisation of local services outside of Mullingar and Athlone.</p> <p>New national planning framework</p> <p>Continued decline in agriculture</p> <p>Population growth in number of towns and villages without supporting infrastructure</p> <p>Higher percentage of age dependent people in the county</p>

3.4 Agreeing Priorities and Objectives

Priorities and Objectives are based on:

- The Area Needs Analysis drawn from the Area Profile and including
 - Review of Existing Statutory Provision.
 - Review of Community Services Provision.
- Review of the following:
 - Midlands Planning Guidelines
 - FORFAS Sharing Our Future 2025
 - CEDRA Report
 - Westmeath LEO Enterprise Strategy
 - Westmeath Biodiversity Action Plan 2014-2020
 - The Renewable Energy Strategy for County Westmeath commissioned by WCD
 - National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 – 2016
 - Survey of Food Producers in Westmeath undertaken by WCD
 - Midlands Region Action Plan for Jobs
 - Solas/LWETB Training programmes
 - Food Wise 2025
 - Teagasc Programmes
 - Failte Ireland's programmes especially its marketing plan for the Irelands Ancient East
 - Enterprise Ireland Programmes
 - The Hill of Uisneach Feasibility Study commissioned and carried out in 2014/2015.
- Conclusions from Public Consultation with all stakeholders as outlined above.
- Review of relevant High Level Goals in the Draft LECP which were agreed following a consultation process carried out in 2014.
- Review of Opportunities for collaboration with the Social Inclusion and Activation Programme and other Social Inclusion initiatives. A number of the Measures and Actions are complementary to each other.
- SWOT Analysis
- Westmeath Draft Local Economic and Community Plan

The process followed in agreeing Priorities and Objectives is presented in the Table below.

Date	Stage completed	Participant (s)
June 2015	Working Group Meeting	Implementation Partner WCD /Financial Partner WCC
1 st July 2015 2 nd July 2015	Facilitated Workshop Mullingar completed Facilitated Workshop Athlone completed	Community Groups/General Public Community Groups/General Public
16 th July	Public Advertising To General Public Inviting interested parties to make submissions for inclusion in the draft LDS completed.	Working Group
30 th July 2015	In House Desk Research completed	Westmeath Community Development
17 th July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of Statutory Provision completed Review of Community and Voluntary Sector Provision completed 	Westmeath Community Development
26 th July 2015	Needs Analysis completed for inclusion in LDS completed.	Working group
30 th July 2015	Meetings with Statutory Sector organisations completed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Westmeath County Council Faillte Ireland Local Enterprise Office Teagasc Waterways Ireland Inland Fisheries Ireland Solas Ireland 	Agency Staff
30 th July 2015	Meetings with Community Sector organisations completed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Westmeath Community Development Mullingar Chamber of Mullingar Coillte Youth Organisations Westmeath Food Network Craft Network – Made in Westmeath Heritage Forum Tourism Providers 	Staff and Voluntary members

16 th August 2015	Public submissions received	General Public
30 th August 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public submissions collated Feedback received from PPN Meetings and Agency meetings collated Outcomes collated 	Working Group
10 th September	SWOT Analysis completed	Implementation Partner (WCD) Board members
	Review of relevant High Level Goals in the Draft LECP completed	
10 th Sept	Meeting to consider Draft set of objectives for the Plan and a series of Actions with Targets and Outputs	Board Members of Westmeath Community Development
15 th September	Draft set of objectives for the Plan and a series of Actions with Targets and Outputs completed	Working Group
25 th Sept 2015	Draft prepared and submitted to LCDC for approval	Working Group
2 nd October 2015	Comments and views requested in the Draft Local Development Strategy	LCDC
20 th October 2015	Comments and views received for the Local Development Strategy	General Public
25 th October	Final draft prepared and submitted to LCDC for approval	Working Group
5 th November 2015	Local Development Strategy finalised and approved for submission.	LCDC
10 th November 2015	Local Development Strategy submitted to DECLG	LCDC

3.5 Rationale for proposed Themes/Sub-Themes and Priorities

Westmeath LAG has agreed to set objectives under the 3 themes of the LEADER Programme based on priorities identified below:

3.5.1 Rural Tourism

Priority 1 is to make the county more attractive to tourists with a focus on improving the tourism product, marketing the product and improving the capacity of private providers and communities to develop and deliver tourism services.

Rural Tourism has been identified as the first priority for the programme. Objectives and actions are set in consultation with Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland and Inland Fisheries Ireland and also based on the views of tourism providers and local communities as outlined in the results of the consultation process shown above. The priority is to build on the county's existing tourism infrastructure as outlined in the Area Profile. The focus is on developing outdoor recreation along the county's lakes, rivers and the Royal Canal, promoting walking and cycling activities enhancing the county's rich heritage offerings, supporting new innovative promotion initiatives in local communities and the provision of training and marketing supports to the Tourism Sector. The LAG has agreed that this objective can be pursued under Theme 1: Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation. Sub-Theme: Rural Tourism.

3.2.2 Enterprise Development

Priority 2 is to develop and enhance the SME sector in consultation and collaboration with Westmeath LEO with a focus on the provision of capital and other supports to the artisan food and craft sectors and creative industries and supporting innovation including the development of the renewable energy sector and diversification into non-agricultural activities by farmers.

Westmeath LAG, in consultation with existing and potential producers, has identified a specific role for the LEADER programme in working with Farm Families, Craft producers, Artisan Food Producers as well as people involved in Art, Film, Music and Heritage Activities, using local resources to create enterprises. The focus is on enhancing these sectors through private and community enterprises that will create employment especially for young people. Previous LEADER Programmes have contributed very significantly to these areas and the LAG has prioritised it under Theme 1: Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation, Sub-Theme 2; Enterprise Development.

3.5.3 Rural Towns

Priority 3 is to improve the fabric of Rural Towns and villages and their hinterlands through improvements to streetscapes, creation of recreational spaces and the re-generation and upgrading of heritage and other buildings for the economic and social benefit of communities living in and around Rural Towns and villages.

Communities in towns and villages who took part in the consultation process confirmed their willingness in many cases to take part in Tidy Towns initiatives at local level. The LAG also believes that a pilot rural town stimulus programme could be implemented including support for the development of community capacity in community leadership, governance, community development planning and rural economic development. The objective would be to bring

together private enterprise and relevant public bodies to identify critical steps required to ensure that a rural town is an attractive place to invest in, visit and live. The LAG also believes it is important to continue to support the creation and development of community facilities. Theme 1: Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation. Sub-Theme; Rural Towns.

3.5.4 Broadband

Priority 4 is to assist the economic and social development of rural areas in the county through the provision of ICT training and other supports to communities and enterprises.

The requirement for continued IT Training was highlighted as a huge issue by rural communities during the consultation process. There is an opportunity to address this under Theme 1: Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation. Sub-Theme 3: Broadband

3.5.5 Services for Hard to Reach Communities

Priority 5 is to improve access to basic services for people living in disadvantaged and remote areas to counteract social exclusion through the provision of animation, capacity building, training supports and capital grant aid for community and recreational facilities.

Consultation processes for the SICAP Programme, the LECP and the LDS all point to the need to support marginalised groups and disadvantaged communities to engage with relevant local and national stakeholders in identifying and addressing social exclusion and equality issues. The more intensive work under SICAP is being carried out in the Very Disadvantaged areas. The LAG believes that the LEADER programme can add value to this process while avoiding duplication of service delivery. Theme 2: Social Inclusion Sub-Theme 1: Provision of Basic Services Targeted at Hard to Reach Communities

3.5.6 Rural Youth

Priority 6 is to improve the pathways for rural youth that will lead to employment, better access to services and an improved social structure for young people in the county.

As stated in the area profile, SICAP supports the work of youth organisations and Comhairle na nOg in order to develop additional services for disadvantage young people in prioritised areas. Adding value to this work is a priority for the LEADER programme under Theme 2: Social Inclusion Sub-Theme 2: Rural Youth

3.5.7 Water Conservation

Priority 7 is to promote the conservation of water and raise awareness of water conservation through a community led response that will improve the quality of water in the county.

One of the key strategic goals identified in the Local Economic and Community Plan is the creation and maintenance of critical physical infrastructure in place including energy, water, broadband, transportation and other necessary services to facilitate economic development. The LAG has identified the conservation of water resources as a priority for the LDS. Theme 3:

Rural Environment Sub-Theme: Protection and Sustainable use of Water Resources facilitates this.

3.5.8 Local Biodiversity

Priority 8 is to protect, maintain and enhance local biodiversity in Westmeath by encouraging, schools, community groups and volunteer bodies to prepare local biodiversity plans including habitat surveys for their respective areas.

County Westmeath supports a wide range of diverse and species rich habitats including wetlands, eskers, peatlands, lakes canals, which are documented in the Westmeath Biodiversity Action Plan 2014-2020. The Plan clearly identifies priorities and sets out clear timelines and duties for Westmeath Co Co and its partners. The LAG can be a partner in this under Theme 3: Rural Environment Sub-theme 2: Protection and Improvement of Local Biodiversity

3.5.9 Renewable Energy

Priority 9 is to promote the efficient and rationale use of energy and the use of renewable energy by both community groups and individuals.

As outlined in the Area profile, Westmeath possesses a significant stock of renewable energy resources including forestry products. At the same time demand is growing for renewable energy solutions and County Westmeath is now witnessing an increase in the number of potential producers and potential customers for renewable energy. Westmeath Community Development and its partners have already carried out work in both the private and community renewable energy sectors. The consultation process has identified strong public support for the development of this sector. The consultation process has also identified a number of entrepreneurs who wish to develop projects in this area. Theme 3: Rural Environment Sub-Theme 3: *Development of Renewable Energy*

4.0. Westmeath LDS Action Plan

4.1 Vision

The vision is of a county with an active and inclusive society, supported by strong communities and a vibrant economy, with equal access to basic services and an environment which is cherished and protected by everyone.

4.2 Theme/Sub Theme Budgets

The indicative budget for Co Westmeath is €7,384,205. The table below shows the Draft Budgets allocated to Actions after allowing for Animation and Administration Costs.

Theme	Sub Theme	Indicative Budget Allocation per Sub-theme (€)	Indicative Budget Allocation per Theme (€)
1. Economic Development, Enterprise Development & Job Creation	1.1 Rural Tourism	1,575,000	3,643,625
	1.2 Enterprise Development	575,000	
	1.3 Rural Towns	1,293,625	
	1.4 Broadband	200,000	
2. Social Inclusion	2.1 Basic Services for hard to Reach Communities	1,200,000	1,469,030
	2.2 Rural Youth	269,030	
3. Rural Environment	3.1 Protection and Sustainable use of Water Resources	50,000	400,000
	3.2 Protection and Improvement of Local Biodiversity	100,000	
	3.3 Development of Renewable Energy	250,000	
			5,512,655

<u>Local Objective 1.1</u>	
Title of Local Objective	To make the county more attractive to tourists with a focus on improving the tourism product, marketing the product and improving the capacity of private providers and communities to develop and deliver tourism services.
LEADER Theme/ Sub Theme	Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation Rural Tourism
<u>Brief Rationale for the Objective</u>	<p>County Westmeath is rich in natural resources with many lakes, rivers such as the River Shannon and the Royal Canal. This together with the county's terrain of rich pastureland and rolling hills makes it suitable for the development of water based tourism as well as outdoor recreation. The county already has a Way Marked Way Walking Route and a number of looped cycle routes in place which take in scenic views of the lakes and countryside. A major development taking place is the new Dublin-Galway National Cycle Route which traverses Co. Westmeath, with the Mullingar-Athlone section currently under construction along the disused railway line. This is a major tourism infrastructural project and the 1st National Cycle route to be developed in the country.</p> <p>The county possesses some rich heritage offerings in Fore Abbey, the Hill of Uisneach, Athlone Castle and Belvedere House. Fáilte Ireland's branding initiative Ireland's Ancient East which is supported by 4 distinct thematic pillars, namely Ancient Ireland, early Christian Ireland, Medieval Ireland and Anglo Ireland therefore holds potential for Westmeath's Heritage attractions. There is also potential to increase the range of tourist attractions and activities available in the rural environment of the county. This includes building on the potential of the 'Children of Lir Country' designation of the North Westmeath area by Europa Nostra as a focus for development of the tourism product. Consultation undertaken with the Tourism trade in the county has highlighted the need for more training and up-skilling for people and communities involved in Tourism in Westmeath. Critical to the future success of Tourism in the county will also be the Marketing of Westmeath and its Tourism products.</p>
Financial Allocation (€)	€1,575,000
No. of Strategic Actions for the Objective	5

<u>Strategic Action 1.1.1</u>	
Title of Strategic Action	Support for the development of water-based tourism along the Royal Canal.
<u>Brief Description of Strategic Action</u>	<p>This Strategic Action will support the development of economic activity along the Royal Canal. An Animation and Training Programme for canal communities will be carried out. Projects including the development of a Blue way along a stretch of the canal, improvements to infrastructure to allow access to the water at strategic locations and the upgrading of disused buildings for use by community for enterprise associated with the canal will be supported. Training Programmes around Environmental awareness associated with the canal and other water resources aimed primarily at young people will be developed. Canal communities will be encouraged to network and co-operate with Canal communities in other LAGs both within Ireland and outside for best practise and knowledge exchange.</p> <p>A study will also be undertaken with neighbouring LAG in Co. Offaly around the feasibility of creating a greenway linking the Royal and Grand Canals.</p>
Primary Target Group(s):	The primary target will be the communities and individuals adjacent to the Royal Canal to include tourism providers, local community groups and rural dwellers.
Geographic Area:	Communities and Individuals along or adjacent to the Royal Canal including Thomastown, Killucan, Mullingar, Coolnahay and Ballynacargy
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	WCD will collaborate with Waterways Ireland, Westmeath County Council, Failte Ireland, Offaly LDC.
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	Q2 2016-Q4 2020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	<p>1 Canal animation project with 10 persons</p> <p>1 environmental training project with 20 persons, 50% youth</p> <p>3 new recreational initiatives with capital investment</p> <p>6 part time jobs created</p> <p>5,000 visitors</p>

<u>Strategic Action 1.1.2</u>	
Title of Strategic Action :	Support for development of outdoor recreation activities and amenity areas capitalising on the County's wealth of natural resources.
<u>Brief</u> Description of Strategic Action:	<p>This strategic action will support the development of Angling and other outdoor recreational activities such as walking and Cycling. The enhancement of existing walking routes and the development of new looped walks will be supported. Community groups and individuals will be supported to develop projects that provide ancillary services along such routes. Animation and training programmes will be undertaken to support communities to develop projects adjacent to the Greenway which follows the disused railway line from Mullingar to Athlone.</p> <p>Local initiatives by aimed at improving the angling product on the River Shannon and the county's lakes through river enhancement schemes, enhancement of ghillie services, capital supports for jetties and slipways, boat hire, drying/tackle storage rooms and purchase of equipment will be supported. Training and animation in developing the sector will be provided. Collective marketing initiatives promoted by local entrepreneurs and the tourism trade will also be supported.</p> <p>The River Shannon and the county's lakes particularly those in the Mullingar and North Westmeath areas which include Loughs Ennell, Owel, Lene and Derravaragh have the potential to deliver additional tourism benefits to the area. A strategy will be devised to outline how such benefits will be delivered.</p>
Primary Target Group(s):	Communities, local entrepreneurs and existing tourism providers
Geographic Area:	The entire sub-region area of Westmeath
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	Failte Ireland, Inland Fisheries Ireland, Westmeath County Council
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	Q22016-Q42020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	<p>1 animation and training programme for 20 persons</p> <p>6 new outdoor recreational initiatives/6 existing supported</p> <p>6 FT and 8 PT jobs</p> <p>10,000 visitors</p>

<u>Strategic Action 1.1.3</u>	
Title of Strategic Action	Support for the development of Heritage Attractions and Facilities
<u>Brief Description of Strategic Action :</u>	<p>This strategic action will support the enhancement of County Westmeath's rich natural, built and cultural heritage. Support will be provided for the development of the visitor experience at the county's heritage attractions including Fore and Uisneach. Community groups and individuals will be supported to develop innovative projects around bringing heritage to life by capturing knowledge around the wealth of famous literary and historical that have connections with Westmeath. Community groups and individuals will be supported to further develop the Fore to Mullingar Pilgrim Camino Way and a Programme supporting the development of the rich monastic heritage associated with the county. Training and animation and information awareness will be carried out around the heritage and mythology associated with the county's lakes with a view to realising projects that will bring economic benefits for their surrounding communities</p>
Primary Target Group(s):	Local entrepreneurs and tourism providers
Geographic Area:	The entire sub-region area of Westmeath with a focus on Fore and Uisneach and their hinterlands
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	Westmeath County Council, Failte Ireland
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	Q22016-Q42020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	<p>4 new tourism heritage initiatives 10,000 visitors 3FT and 5 PT jobs created</p>

<u>Strategic Action 1.1.4</u>	
Title of Strategic Action :	Support for creation and expansion of new innovative community-led local area promotion initiatives.
<u>Brief</u> Description of Strategic Action :	This strategic action will support the creation and development of new and innovative community projects which showcase the work of local communities and entrepreneurs. It will also support projects which contribute to the expansion of such initiatives. Capital grant aid and marketing support will be provided to organisers on a one off basis to create and market new activities. Animation and training supports will be provided to community groups which undertake such initiatives. Networking events will be supported to undertake collaborative and collective actions.
Primary Target Group(s):	New and developing community groups and organising committees.
Geographic Area:	This action will cover the entire sub-regional area of County Westmeath.
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	Faillte Ireland, Westmeath County Council
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	Q22016-Q42020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	10 initiatives supported with capital and marketing 8,000 additional visitors

<u>Strategic Action 1.1.5</u>	
Title of Strategic Action :	Animation, training, mentoring and marketing supports to the Tourism Sector.
<u>Brief</u> Description of Strategic Action	This strategic action will support Training and Mentoring to the Tourism sector for both existing and new entrants. The latter will be provided with a specialised programme and mentoring support to getting started in Tourism. Animation and marketing support will also be provided to groups (geographic based or product based) who wish to come together to promote the area or their sector on a collective basis. Support will also be provided for business planning and feasibility studies for new ventures and the expansion of existing enterprises. Community groups and local entrepreneurs will also be supported to develop projects and expand their areas of tourism offerings especially in areas in key areas and locations that have significant heritage and tourism offerings e.g Fore, Uisneach as well as communities along the Greenway from Mullingar to Athlone.
Primary Target Group(s):	Existing and new entrants to the Tourism sector across all product sectors
Geographic Area:	The entire sub-regional area of County Westmeath
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	Faite Ireland, Westmeath County Council
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	Q22016-Q42020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	<p>2 tourism animation programmes – 1 for new entrants and 1 for existing providers</p> <p>4 training programmes with 40 persons with enhanced business skills</p> <p>2 collectives/groups of providers supported with funding for marketing campaigns</p>

<u>Local Objective 1.2</u>	
Title of Local Objective	To develop and enhance the SME sector in consultation and collaboration with Westmeath LEO with a focus on the provision of capital and other supports to the artisan food and craft sectors and creative industries and by supporting innovation including the development of the renewable energy sector and diversification into non-agricultural activities by farmers.
LEADER Theme/ Sub Theme	Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation Enterprise Development
<u>Brief</u> Rationale for the Objective	<p>Enhancing the SME sector in particular creating opportunities and supports for artisan craft and food producers, providing supports to farmers and farm families to enable them to diversify and through the provision of opportunities in the development of enterprises in the whole area of the Arts and Culture is a priority for the LEADER programme. There is a growing demand for Culture through arts, film, music and heritage in Westmeath. (It is a county steeped in history and mythology and the county has attracted interest among these cohorts as a venue for developing projects under the theme of culture.) There are many writers, artists, musicians and film makers now living in Westmeath and there is a new found interest by the people of the county in these areas. This needs to be nurtured through teaching of the Arts, Culture and Heritage and the development of projects fashioned by entrepreneur's utilising their unique skills to create an economic market for this sector of enterprise.</p> <p>Farmers and farm families need be assisted to diversify and look at opportunities to create enterprises using local resources. Communities also need assistance to develop community or social enterprises, including community cooperatives, that will create employment locally especially for rural youth.</p>
Financial Allocation (€)	€575,000
No. of Strategic Actions for the Objective	5

<u>Strategic Action 1.2.1</u>	
Title of Strategic Action	To further develop the artisan food sector in County Westmeath with a key focus on further expanding and developing the Westmeath Food Network both in terms of the product range and the capacity of its members.
<u>Brief</u> Description of Strategic Action	<p>It is planned to foster the interest that food producers have in producing locally traceable food and help them to make their businesses succeed through a range of actions that will make them more competitive.</p> <p>A detailed baseline study will be commissioned to document all County Westmeath's food producers' product ranges, size of businesses and future plans. New start up food businesses will be provided with information and advice that will help them make informed decisions on starting a food business. Capital grant aid will be available for existing and new food producers. There will be a focus be on further expanding and developing the Westmeath Food Network in terms of the product range, online presence, promotional events and the number and capacity of members.</p>
Primary Target Group(s):	All food producers and any potential food entrepreneurs including farmers who wish to develop value added food produce from their primary production of beef, sheep or milk.
Geographic Area:	The entire sub-regional area of County Westmeath
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	Westmeath County Council, the Local Enterprise Office and Teagasc.
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	Q2 2016-Q4 2020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A baseline database on all food producers established • 2 information meetings • 8 new food businesses will be established creating 8 new FT jobs • 5 new food businesses will be provided with capital grant aid • 20 food businesses will avail of training. • 30 jobs sustained in industry

<u>Strategic Action 1.2.2</u>	
Title of Strategic Action :	To increase the numbers of farm family members diversifying into non-agricultural activities.
<u>Brief</u> Description of Strategic Action :	The farming community will be made aware of opportunities for diversification through workshops, seminars and direct advice. WCD will contribute to the Teagasc options course. This course provides WCD with a platform to meet with farm family members who are interested in developing farm diversification projects. Farmers interested in diversification will be provided with advice, information and other supports either individually or in a group setting on the viability, cost, profitability etc. of the development of their proposed project. Financial support will be provided for viable projects.
Primary Target Group(s)	Farm Families
Geographic Area:	The entire sub-regional area of County Westmeath. .
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	Westmeath County Council, Teagasc and the Local Enterprise Office.
Time frame for Delivery of Action:	Q22016-Q42020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	2 annual information meetings on farm diversification 10 new diversification projects 20 new PT jobs created

<u>Strategic Action 1.2.3</u>	
Title of Strategic Action	To fund the development of renewable energy projects in the private sector.
<u>Brief Description of Strategic Action</u>	<p>The general public will be made aware of opportunities for development of businesses using locally available biomass resources through workshops, seminars and direct advice.</p> <p>Entrepreneurs planning to develop businesses will be provided with advice, information and other supports either individually or in a group setting on the viability, cost, profitability etc. of the development of their proposed project.</p> <p>Financial support will be provided for viable projects.</p>
Primary Target Group(s):	Local farmers and entrepreneurs with specialist skills in the renewable energy sector.
Geographic Area:	The entire sub-regional area of County Westmeath
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	Teagasc, and the Local Enterprise Office
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	Q2 2016-Q4 2020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	<p>2 Information seminars</p> <p>10 PT jobs created</p> <p>4 current jobs sustained</p>

<u>Strategic Action 1.2.4</u>	
Title of Strategic Action	Support for the development of the Craft sector in Westmeath
<u>Brief Description of Strategic Action</u>	Westmeath has a vibrant craft sector nurtured over the past years which has led to there now being 40 craft makers in the County and an active network “Made in Westmeath”. A comprehensive Business Development Training Programme taking cognisance of the different needs of craft producers within the sector from new entrants/hobbyists to established producers seeking new markets will be provided. Support will be provided for collaborative marketing initiatives and the creating of networking opportunities both within the territory and externally through inter-territorial and transnational co-operation. Market research and feasibility studies will be encouraged specifically around the establishment of collaborative testing hubs and in seeking new markets for craft products. Events such as the “Experience Westmeath” initiative which afforded locals and visitors alike to experience the wealth of craft on offer will be expanded. Craft road shows will also be piloted to include inter-territorial and trans-national partners.
Primary Target Group(s):	Existing Craft makers and local entrepreneurs interested in the sector
Geographic Area:	The entire sub-regional area of County Westmeath
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	Design and Craft Council of Ireland, Local Enterprise Office
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	Q22016-Q42020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	Sustaining of 40 PT jobs in the craft sector. 8 new PT jobs created 20 craft persons with enhanced business skills 2 craft roadshows/events with 1,000 visitors

<u>Strategic Action 1.2.5</u>	
Title of Strategic Action	Support for the development of the creative industries in Westmeath
<u>Brief</u> Description of Strategic Action	The LEADER programme will facilitate an integrated approach to cultural enterprise development. The new found interest in Culture through arts, film, music and heritage by the people of the county in these areas will be nurtured by encouraging the teaching of the Arts, Culture and Heritage and the development of projects fashioned by entrepreneur's utilising their unique skills to create an economic market for this sector of enterprise. The creative arts community will be made aware of opportunities for diversification through workshops seminars and direct advice. Potential promoters will be provided with advice, information and other supports either individually or in a group setting on the viability, cost, profitability etc. of the development of their proposed project. Financial support will be provided for viable projects
Primary Target Group(s):	Groups and individuals interested in developing enterprises in the creative industries
Geographic Area:	The entire sub-regional area of Westmeath
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	Craft Council of Ireland, Local Enterprise Office.
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	Q2 2016 – Q4 2020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	2 seminars with 20 persons and organisations engaged A Strategic Plan produced for the development of Cultural Enterprise 3 new initiatives resourced 6 PT jobs created

<u>Local Objective 1.3</u>	
Title of Local Objective	To improve the fabric of Rural Towns and their hinterlands through improvements to streetscapes, creation of recreational spaces and the re-generation and upgrading of heritage and other buildings for the economic and social benefit of communities living in and around Rural Towns and villages.
LEADER Theme/ Sub Theme	Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation <i>Rural Towns</i>
<u>Brief Rationale for the Objective</u>	<p>Significant work is being done by Tidy Towns Groups throughout the county in improving the landscape in towns and villages. The LEADER programme provides an opportunity to build on this work.</p> <p>During the consultation process communities expressed a willingness to take part in initiatives at local level facilitating a collective approach to identifying, valuing and building towns` resources and distinctiveness aimed at making towns and villages attractive and vibrant retail centres and economic hubs providing employment and a wide range of services to their hinterland.</p> <p>Huge developments have taken place in building and refurbishing community facilities, particularly community centres. This work needs to build on so that communities can build their capacity to provide more services in their respective areas.</p>
Financial Allocation (€)	€1,293,625
No. of Strategic Actions for the Objective	3

<u>Strategic Action 1.3.1</u>	
Title of Strategic Action	Support for Tidy Town/Village Enhancement Projects
<u>Brief</u> Description of Strategic Action	The LEADER programme will provide Animation, Capacity building, and development support to communities proposing to develop Village Enhancement/Tidy Towns projects. In order to ensure that this work is done on a planned basis, support will also be provided for development of Tidy Towns plans on which projects can be based. Grant aid will be provided for projects which have been identified as a result of local planning.
Primary Target Group(s):	Rural Towns/Villages in the sub-regional area with specific reference to smaller towns.
Geographic Area:	The entire sub-regional area of County Westmeath
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	Westmeath Co Co
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	Q22016-Q42020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	2 Tidy Towns Seminars with 25 groups each 10 Tidy Towns Plans completed 25 tidy towns projects completed

<u>Strategic Action 1.3.2</u>	
Title of Strategic Action	Support to stimulate action planning in Rural Towns.
<u>Brief</u> Description of Strategic Action	This action will be delivered by working with identified towns and raising awareness amongst communities of what is possible by organising seminars, meeting local stakeholders and organising study visits to other communities. Assistance will be provided to undertake local development plans including community audits. Assistance will also be provided for work identified as a result of the preparation of development plans.
Primary Target Group(s):	Rural Communities
Geographic Area:	The entire sub-regional area of County Westmeath
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	Westmeath Co Co
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	Q22016 – Q42020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	2 Towns animated 4 public meetings held 2 Audits of building completed 6 development projects completed

<u>Strategic Action 1.3.3</u>	
Title of Strategic Action	Support for improvement of community facilities for social economic, recreational and training activities
<u>Brief Description of Strategic Action</u>	<p>This action will be delivered through Animation work in communities throughout the county and building the capacity of community groups to undertake development projects. Grant Aid will be provided for improvement of facilities including community centres and other facilities which can be used for social, economic, recreational and training activities.</p> <p>Partnering and twinning programmes to enable the sharing of knowledge and skills through linkages with other communities with similar challenges both at home and abroad through interterritorial and trans-national linkages will be supported.</p>
Primary Target Group(s):	Rural Communities
Geographic Area:	The entire sub-regional area of County Westmeath
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	Westmeath Co Co
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	Q22016-Q42020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	<p>12 capacity building and training programmes completed</p> <p>20 projects completed.</p>

<u>Local Objective 1.4</u>	
Title of Local Objective	To assist the economic and social development of rural areas in the county through the provision of ICT training and other supports to communities and enterprises.
LEADER Theme/ Sub Theme	Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation <i>Broadband</i>
<u>Brief Rationale for the Objective</u>	<p>The vision for the delivery of high speed broadband to all will be a major challenge and the growing dependence on ICT not only for delivery of services but also affects how people can live and work in rural areas, increased access to high speed broadband is therefore vital for the economic and social development of rural areas and communities. This was highlighted strenuously during the public consultation process.</p> <p>The objective is to ensure that the people living in rural areas do not get left behind and that they can embrace the digital era where more and more public services, financial transactions and other aspects including social and leisure activities are dependent on on-line capabilities.</p>
Financial Allocation (€)	200,000
No. of Strategic Actions for the Objective	2

<u>Strategic Action 1.4.1</u>	
Title of Strategic Action	To assist in the provision of training in ICT for communities
<u>Brief</u> Description of Strategic Action	This strategic action will support a number of initiatives aimed at providing training in ICT for communities with a focus on engaging with communities in remote areas and targeting young people and elderly people. Animation and Training will be provided to communities to ensure that they are ready to embrace the digital era. For older people living in isolation communicating through technology is becoming increasingly important. Basic training in the use of the Internet, Email and Skype and other new forms of communication to ensure the people can stay connected with family and friends away from home is important for people living in remote areas. Facilitating and training people to have the ability to conduct financial transactions and purchase goods and services on line will be an important part of this initiative.
Primary Target Group(s):	Local Community with a special emphasis on elderly and young people living in remote areas
Geographic Area:	This action will cover the sub-region of Westmeath initially, with a focus on more remote areas for further training.
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	ETB/Solas, Westmeath County Council
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	Q22016-Q42020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	2 training programmes with 40 people with improved ICT skills, 50% of which will be youth/older people.

<u>Strategic Action 1.4.2</u>	
Title of Strategic Action	To assist in the provision of ICT supports for new and existing businesses
<u>Brief</u> Description of Strategic Action	This Strategic Action will assist new and existing businesses to establish, grow and access markets through ICT training programmes on developing on-line capabilities. The provision of capital grant aid to businesses for small scale equipment related to ICT will be provided. A feasibility study around examining the possibility of a pilot tele-working centre/hub for people to enable them to work from the area they live in as oppose to travelling to urban areas to work.
Primary Target Group(s):	New and existing rural businesses in County Westmeath
Geographic Area:	The entire sub-regional area of Westmeath
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	Westmeath County Council
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	Q22016-Q42020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	15 businesses with improved on-line capabilities 10 businesses with capital grant assistance 1 feasibility study

<u>Local Objective 2.1</u>	
Title of Local Objective	To improve access to basic services for people living in disadvantaged and remote areas to counteract social exclusion through the provision of animation, capacity building, training supports and capital grant aid for community and recreational facilities.
LEADER Theme/ Sub Theme	Social Inclusion Provision of Basic Services Targeted at Hard to Reach Communities
<u>Brief</u> Rationale for the Objective	<p>The SICAP programme focusses on Pre-development work in Disadvantaged and Very Disadvantaged areas. Animation, capacity building training for communities is required to help communities engage further in activity at local level.</p> <p>The provision of basic serves such as community facilities, recreational infrastructure (incl playgrounds), arts/culture activities and facilities are vital for people living in contribute to the alleviation of poverty and social exclusion. Provision of training on community involvement, committee skills project development and management an outreach basis enables people to participate and avail of opportunities for the improvement of their areas.</p>
Financial Allocation (€)	1,200,000
No. of Strategic Actions for the Objective	3

<u>Strategic Action 2.1.1</u>	
Title of Strategic Action	The provision of Animation, Capacity Building & Training supports for Hard to Reach Communities
<u>Brief Description of Strategic Action</u>	<p>This strategic action will support Animation, Capacity Building & Training aimed at assisting communities to engage in activity and develop projects to improve the economic and social fabric of their areas. A focus will be given to communities living in Very Disadvantaged areas, remote areas and communities on the periphery of the county.</p> <p>Building resilient communities that are capable of controlling the future sustainability of their areas will be key in going forward. Training Programmes that aim to empower people and give them the skills and confidence to get involved in their local areas will be undertaken.</p>
Primary Target Group(s):	Identified Geographically Hard to Reach communities in Very Disadvantaged areas and remote rural areas.
Geographic Area:	Disadvantaged areas identified in the Area profile and identified communities on the periphery of the county. e.g Disadvantaged areas in Mullingar, Athlone, Moate and Castlepollard and also rural areas including Finea, Clonmellon, Rathowen, Lismacaffrey, Tang, and Rochfortbridge.
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	Westmeath Co Co
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	Q22016-Q42020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	<p>3 community animation programmes</p> <p>3 community training programmes with 20 persons</p>

<u>Strategic Action 2.1.2</u>	
Title of Strategic Action	Support for the provision of sustainable community facilities and services in Hard to Reach Communities
<u>Brief</u> Description of Strategic Action	<p>This Strategic Action will support communities in the provision of essential facilities such as the upgrading and enhancement of community buildings with a focus on creating multi-functional spaces for community and other uses e.g enterprise/shared space arts/cultural uses or hubs for community activity on a shared basis with other neighbouring communities.</p> <p>Local communities will be supported to undertake Audits on the availability of suitable community facilities, usage and under or over capacity. They will also be supported through feasibility studies around co-location of organisations providing services such as local transport, credit union access, local health services, post office services, youth services, sports facilities, library services, shop etc. thus ensuring the overall sustainability of facilities and ensuring no duplication of facilities.</p>
Primary Target Group(s):	Disadvantaged areas identified in the Area profile and identified communities on the periphery of the county. e.g Disadvantaged areas in Mullingar, Athlone, Moate and Castlepollard and also rural areas including Finea, Clonmellon, Rathowen, Lismacaffrey, Tang, and Rochfortbridge.
Geographic Area:	The entire sub-regional area of County Westmeath
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	Westmeath County Council
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	Q22016-Q42020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	10 areas with improved community facilities

<u>Strategic Action 2.1.3</u>	
Title of Strategic Action	Support for the provision of recreational infrastructure and facilities for communities
<u>Brief</u> Description of Strategic Action	This strategic action will support the provision of leisure and recreational facilities for communities such as children's playgrounds, outdoor gym equipment and other infrastructural improvements aimed at enhancing the recreational infrastructure. The re-use of disused facilities will be encouraged.
Primary Target Group(s):	Disadvantaged areas identified in the Area profile and identified communities on the periphery of the county.
Geographic Area:	The entire sub-regional area of Westmeath.
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	Westmeath County Council
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	Q22016-Q42020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	7 communities with new recreational infrastructure

<u>Local Objective 2.2</u>	
Title of Local Objective	To improve the pathways for rural youth that will lead to employment, better access to services and an improved social structure for young people in the county.
LEADER Theme/Sub Theme	Social Inclusion Rural Youth
<u>Brief Rationale for the Objective</u>	Statistics show a significant level of Youth unemployment in all areas. The consultation process consistently raised the problems facing rural youth with regard to accessing employment and the lack of social and educational activities especially in hard to reach rural communities. In order to improve the life chances of rural youth in County Westmeath, a collaborative multi-agency approach is required in consultation with young people through forums such as Comhairle Na nOg and in collaboration with Youth Services providers.
Financial Allocation (€)	€269,029
No. of Strategic Actions for the Objective	2

<u>Strategic Action 2.2.1</u>	
Title of Strategic Action:	To target capital grant aid for the improvement of youth cafes/clubs involved in social, recreational and educational activities for youth.
<u>Brief</u> Description of Strategic Action :	Under this action, in collaboration with Comhairle Na nOg, and other youth services, youth groups and new and potential groups will be supported with capital funding that will help them to expand their facilities and services in order to assist more young people. Capital funding will allow them to expand their facilities.
Primary Target Group(s):	Rural Youth
Geographic Area:	All of County Westmeath but with a specific focus on hard to reach rural areas such as Delvin, Collinstown, Castlepollard and Clonmellon.
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	Westmeath County Council through Comhairle na nOg, Foroige and MRYS.
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	Q2 2016-Q4 2020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	5 existing groups will have accessed funding. 5 new groups will have accessed funding.

<u>Strategic Action 2.2.2</u>	
Title of Strategic Action :	Training animation and capacity building for young people
<u>Brief</u> Description of Strategic Action :	In collaboration with Comhairle na nOg and youth service providers, training, animation and capacity building work will be undertaken with young people with a focus on identifying and creating additional youth leaders.
Primary Target Group(s):	Rural Youth
Geographic Area:	The sub-regional area of the county but with a particular focus on County Westmeath especially in Hard to Reach rural areas.
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	Westmeath County Council through Comhairle na nOg, Foróige and MRYS.
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	Q2 2016-Q4 2020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	Leadership training in 10 selected rural areas

<u>Local Objective 3.1</u>	
Title of Local Objective	To promote and raise awareness of water conservation through a community led response that will improve the quality of water in the county.
LEADER Theme/Sub Theme	Rural Environment Protection and Sustainable Use of Water Resources
<u>Brief Rationale for the Objective</u>	One of the key strategic goals identified in the Local Economic and Community Plan is the creation and maintenance of critical physical infrastructure in place including energy, water, broadband, transportation and other necessary services to facilitate economic development. The LAG has identified the protection of water resources as a priority for the LDS on the basis that economic and community development requires that good quality water resources are available.
Financial Allocation (€)	€50,000
No. of Strategic Actions for the Objective	1

<u>Strategic Action 3.1.1</u>	
Title of Strategic Action	Support for Water Conservation Programmes.
<u>Brief</u> Description of Strategic Action	In order to build an appreciation and help maintain the quality of our water, the general public in County Westmeath will be made aware and educated on water conservation. Capacity building and general education on water recycling and septic tank maintenance will be commissioned and delivered. An awareness programme will be commissioned and designed with a local focus.
Primary Target Group(s):	The general public
Geographic Area:	The entire sub Regional area of County Westmeath
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	The LAG will collaborate with Waterways Ireland, Westmeath County Council, the farm organisations, Teagasc and Failte Ireland.
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	Q2 2016-Q4 2020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	Awareness raised in 15 communities.

<u>Strategic Action 3.1.2</u>	
Title of Strategic Action	Financial support for Water Conservation Projects
<u>Brief</u> Description of Strategic Action	In order to build an appreciation and help maintain the quality of our water, the general public in County Westmeath will be supported financially for the installation of Water conservation facilities.
Primary Target Group(s):	The general public
Geographic Area:	The entire sub-regional area of County Westmeath
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	Westmeath County Council, the farm organisations, Teagasc
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	Q2 2016-Q4 2020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	An awareness programme will be designed and delivered in 10 communities.

<u>Local Objective 3.2</u>	
Title of Local Objective	To protect, maintain and enhance local biodiversity in Westmeath by encouraging, schools, community groups and volunteer bodies to prepare local biodiversity plans including habitat surveys for their respective areas.
LEADER Theme/Sub Theme	Rural Environment Protection and improvement of local biodiversity
<u>Brief Rationale for the Objective</u>	<p>County Westmeath supports a wide range of diverse and species rich habitats including wetlands, eskers, peatlands, lakes canals. The Westmeath Biodiversity Action Plan 2014-2020 clearly identifies and outlines the measures for the protection of these habitats, plants and animals. It also emphasises the importance of the role of communities in conserving local biodiversity. The protection of local biodiversity is an issue that has proved very emotive among the residents of County Westmeath during our consultation process.</p> <p>The loss of biodiversity reduces an ecosystem's ability to recover from natural or human impacts and therefore needs to be conserved. Its preservation also offers a tourism opportunity.</p>
Financial Allocation (€)	€100,000
No. of Strategic Actions for the Objective	2

<u>Strategic Action 3.2.1</u>	
Title of Strategic Action	Delivery of Biodiversity Awareness Programme.
<u>Brief Description of Strategic Action</u>	An awareness campaign of important conservation issues such as hedgerow management, invasive species, herbicide use, including preparation of guidance notes in relation to best practice. The production of literature on the various local biodiversity habitats and the dissemination of the information on these publications will be the main focus of this action.
Primary Target Group(s):	Farmers, Landowners, Community Groups
Geographic Area:	The entire sub-regional area of County Westmeath
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	IFA, WCC
Timeframe for the delivery of the Action:	Q22016-Q42020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	12 projects supported

<u>Strategic Action 3.2.2</u>	
Title of Strategic Action	Promotion and support for Wildflower conservation
<u>Brief</u> Description of Strategic Action	Financial support for community/tidy towns groups to develop areas within parks, gardens and village areas for the growth of wild plants and flowering trees, in order to promote pollinator conservation such as planting a native wildflower meadow creating an ideal forage source for bees and other insects and allowing wildflowers to grow along roadside verges across the country which will help get native bee species back on track to recovery.
Primary Target Group(s):	Community groups with an interest in conserving and protecting local habitats.
Geographic Area:	The entire sub-regional area of County Westmeath
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	Westmeath Co Co
Timeframe for the delivery of the Action:	Q22016-Q42020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	20 projects supported

<u>Local Objective 3.3</u>	
Title of Local Objective	To promote the efficient and rationale use of energy and to increase the use of renewable energy by both community groups and individuals.
LEADER Theme/Sub Theme	Rural Environment Development of Renewable Energy
<u>Brief Rationale for the Objective</u>	<p>Westmeath Community Development and its partners have already carried out work in both the private and community renewable energy sectors.</p> <p>This has resulted in the publication of reports such as the 'Bioregions action plan' in 2012 and 'Renewable energy in County Westmeath' in 2009. The consultation process has identified strong public support in the development of this sector. This is backed up by the fact that between March 2006 and May 2011, 215 biomass boilers were installed in the county. The consultation process has also identified a number a number of entrepreneurs who wish to develop projects in this area. Further work needs to be done to encourage local consumers to increase their use of locally produced renewables and to help renewable energy producers access local markets.</p>
Financial Allocation (€)	€250,000
No. of Strategic Actions for the Objective	2

<u>Strategic Action 3.3.1</u>	
Title of Strategic Action :	To implement a Renewable Energy Education and Information Programme.
<u>Brief</u> Description of Strategic Action :	<p>This action will result in the provision of courses of education and information to community groups and individuals on renewable energy options and local sources of supplies.</p> <p>WCD will commission research to design a locally suitable course on the use of renewables in consultation with Westmeath County Councils' environmental section.</p> <p>An education curriculum will be delivered to local groups and individuals. It will deal with the benefits of using renewables, its cost benefit and how to access local sources of renewables.</p>
Primary Target Group(s):	Community groups and individuals who wish to benefit from the use of renewables.
Geographic Area:	All of County Westmeath but there will be more of a focus in areas with more mature forestry such as Ballynacargy, Rathowen and Streete
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	The LAG will collaborate with Teagasc, Westmeath County Council and the Local Enterprise Office
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	Q2 2016-Q4 2020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 courses on renewable energy for community groups • 3 seminars/information meetings for community groups • 3 information seminars with business sector

<u>Strategic Action 3.3.2</u>	
Title of Strategic Action :	Support for the improvement of community facilities through use of Renewable Energy
Brief Description of Strategic Action :	Capital grant aid will be provided to community groups to carry out retrofitting and other development work on community centres and facilities. Much of the work will be based on the results of energy audits that were carried out on community facilities under the previous Leader programme. This action will also create employment for local tradespeople. This project will help to create examples of good practice that should in turn help promote renewable energy.
Primary Target Group(s):	Community/voluntary groups.
Geographic Area:	The entire sub-regional area of County Westmeath
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	Westmeath LCDC/Westmeath Community Development
Any collaborating Organisations:	The LAG will collaborate with Westmeath County Council.
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	Q2 2016-Q4 2020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 community groups receiving advice on retrofitting • All new community centres advised on building in an energy efficient manner • 15 community centres receiving grant aid for retrofitting

5.0 Strategic Integration

The LAG has adopted promotes a CLLD approach that involves the participation of rural communities in developing responses to the key economic, environmental and social challenges present in Co Westmeath. The composition of the LAG is made up of public and private partners with representatives from the economic, social, cultural and environmental sectors. The Local Development Strategy (LDS) has identified the social, economic and environmental needs and potential of the area. The LDS has been designed through active consultation with the rural community. A series of local objectives and strategic actions have been developed to address these local priorities, solutions have been tailored accordingly and cross cutting objectives have been set out.

5.1 Cross-Cutting Objectives

This Section outlines how the Cross cutting objectives have been addressed in the Local Development Strategy and how actions proposed promote these objectives.

5.1.1 Innovation

In establishing priorities for the LDS the LAG has researched innovative solutions to identified needs and also innovative approaches to exploiting the potential of the area for social and economic development.

Taking a planned approach to tourism development with communities along the Royal Canal represents a new and innovative approach to utilising this important resource. Similarly, working with communities and individuals along the newly built Dublin Galway Greenway has not been attempted before in that kind of way. Marketing the county's heritage attractions are part of an innovative plan by Failte Ireland to create Ireland's Ancient East. Westmeath LAG will be a significant partner in this.

Utilising the creativity of artists and musicians in a planned and structured way represents a new and innovative approach to economic development. Westmeath LAG also proposes a Rural Towns Stimulus programme which is based on an innovative approach to the development of towns suggested in the CEDRA Report.

In proposing to improve access to basic services for people living in remote rural areas, The LAG proposes to work with the Social Inclusion and Activation Programme to add value to the work of that programme in collaboration with those communities. This is a new and innovative approach and a targeted intervention which is new to the county under the LEADER programme.

Community responses to environmental issues are rare and untried. Westmeath LAG is willing to be innovative in this regard and to engage with local communities to addresses issues such as water conservation, biodiversity and renewable energy. Supporting communities to preserve biodiversity by encouraging the creation of new habitats for birds and insects locally is particularly innovative.

5.1.2 Environment

Westmeath LAG is not only aware of the need to preserve the environment asset for future generations to enjoy but also of the opportunity to promote natural resources and heritage as a tourism opportunity. Natural resources in this context include rivers, lakes, the Royal Canal, and forests. In attempting to make the county more attractive to tourists the LAG is aware of the benefits that will accrue to tourism providers and rural communities but also aware of the need to ensure that natural resources are preserved and protected. Projects being supported will be evaluated on this basis.

Creating jobs through renewable energy represents a perfect opportunity use natural resources such as timber and once done in a controlled way this is a perfect environmentally sound way of creating economic value for timber producers and farmers.

Pilot projects aimed at stimulating rural towns and villages are a part of the Local Development Strategy. Improvements to streetscapes, creation of recreational spaces and the re-generation and upgrading of heritage and other buildings represents an environmentally sound approach to rural development.

In pursuing objectives under **Theme 3 Environment**, the LAG is committed to a series of Actions which promote community responses to environmental issues. Westmeath LAG is committing to engage with local communities to addresses issues such as water conservation, biodiversity and renewable energy. Supporting communities to preserve biodiversity by encouraging the creation of new habitats for birds and insects locally will contribute substantially to the Environment.

All projects being supported will be evaluated on the basis of the use of sustainable materials and best practice from an Environment point of view.

5.1.3 Climate Change

The LAG has taken a lead from The FORFÁS SHARING OUR FUTURE: IRELAND 2025 Report in relation to the issue of climate change. The Report states that climate change is one of the most significant changes affecting global and national economies and economic systems and that this is likely to accelerate further over the coming decades. Extremely demanding reductions of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions have been allocated to Ireland and foremost amongst the challenges from a rural development point of view is access to water and food security. The LAG is aware of this and of the business opportunities that may also arise from this in the areas of environmental and energy related goods and services. There are a number of actions in the Strategy, particularly under Theme 3 which will contribute to reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Under Theme 1 there are actions which are designed to create employment in the renewable energy sector.

5.2 Policy Context

In preparing the Local Development Strategy the LAG has studied and taken account of some relevant national, regional and local strategies and plans. These are outlined below.

5.2.1 FORFAS Sharing Our Future 2025

Westmeath LAG very much identifies with the fact that in developed countries quality of life is becoming a major driver of change as identified in the **FORFAS Sharing Our Future 2025**.

The report states that, in future, communities could be more physically and geographically concentrated with a greater emphasis on self-reliance and on using local resources such as energy, food and leisure to best effect. But there are signs that the changed pace of economic growth has placed demands on scarce resources and that the quality of life has suffered as a consequence, in particular in relation to commuting and access to amenities and public services. The priorities established for the Westmeath Local Development Strategy are very much aligned with addressing these issues by proposing to work with local communities, particularly more remote and hard to reach communities, building their capacity to address their own concerns and improving access to social and recreational facilities as well as supporting the creation of employment and enterprise.

5.2.2 CEDRA Report.

One of the key recommendations in the CEDRA Report is that rural economic development should also include support for the development of community capacity with initiatives that develop skills in community leadership, governance, community development planning and rural economic development in order to support the participation of all communities in the preparation of local strategic economic development plans using the Community Led Local Development Model (CLLD), the model being proposed in the LDS. The report also recommends the development of a Rural Town Stimulus Programme that focuses on rural towns/villages and their hinterlands as well as recommendations for the development of tourism, food, crafts, renewable energy and a broad range of creative industries. While the CEDRA Report recommends the coordination of enterprise support under one service provider, namely the Local Enterprise Office, it also recommends the development of a strategy for the Creative Industries and also for the food industry. In that context Westmeath LAG, in consultation with existing and potential producers, has identified a specific role for the LEADER programme in working with Farm Families, Craft producers, Artisan Food Producers as well as people involved in Art, Film, Music and Heritage Activities, using local resources to create economic value..

5.2.3 Westmeath Local Economic and Community Plan.

Westmeath Local Community Development Committee has agreed draft High Level Goals for the LECP (See Appendix) with strategies for:

1. Local Community Development.
2. Local Economic Development and Employment

The LECP strategy for **Local Community Development** has outlined goals for coordination of community services, avoidance of duplication in the provision of such services and specific measures to address the socially excluded and enabling their active public participation. It has also set out Goals for the creation of good quality social, recreational and amenity facilities, preservation of the natural environment and development of the county's heritage assets and services to facilitate rural development. The priorities established for the LDS are closely aligned with these Goals and the LAG through its implementation partner Westmeath Community Development is the agreed Lead Agency for the delivery of a number of the LECP Strategic Goals under Local Community Development.

The LECP Strategic Goals for **Local Economic Development and Employment** are concerned with training, job creation, entrepreneurship and micro enterprise, research, critical

infrastructure, tourism and town and village enhancement. These issues are also central to the Local Development Strategy for the LEADER programme and actions outlined clearly reflect this. Actions being implemented by the LAG will be delivered in cooperation and coordination with other agencies involved in similar rural development initiatives. For example, Strategic Goal 18 for the Westmeath LECP is for a thriving tourism sector that contributes significantly to the economic, social and cultural development of the county. Objectives and actions in the LDS are fully aligned with this.

5.2.4 Action Plan for Jobs Midlands Region.

The Government has launched the Midlands Action Plan for Jobs, aimed at delivering 10-15% employment growth in the region over the period 2015-2017. Co Westmeath is part of this region and the key sectors targeted in the plan include manufacturing, tourism, food and energy. New cycling, walking and other recreational trails along the waterways of the region are proposed as is a Regional Energy Hub for the Midlands. Actions in the LDS will support the strategy by animating rural communities to develop projects in those development areas.

The Action Plan proposes a series of actions to promote 25% more start-ups in the midlands, including extra funding, mentoring programmes and establishing new incubator spaces for entrepreneurs. Westmeath LAG proposes to coordinate its work in this area with other agencies involved in order to create synergy and avoid duplication.

5.2.5 Ireland Ancient East – Fáilte Ireland Branding Strategy.

Fáilte Ireland has developed an umbrella destination brand called Ireland's Ancient East, that offers visitors a compelling, motivating reason to visit the East of the Country. Westmeath is part of the area covered by this branding strategy. The purpose of the branding is to ensure that the area is presented in a cohesive and unified manner. Actions, particularly in the area of heritage tourism in the Westmeath Local Development Strategy are designed to contribute to this strategy. Development and marketing of particular sites such as Fore and Uisneach are part of common strategies in the respective development plans.

5.2.6 Food Wise 2025.

Food Wise 2025 identifies a number of areas that require strategic action if the industry is to capitalise on, deliver and maximise the growth opportunities in the years to 2025. In particular, it highlights the need for the attraction, retention and development of talent along the supply chain, a greater focus on market development that is consumer driven, productivity improvements that are driven by innovation and adding value to sustainably produced primary materials, which will support local employment growth, ensure the viability of local producers and protect the environment and natural resources. The Local Development Strategy highlights areas and proposes actions which will add further value to this work.

5.2.7 Westmeath Biodiversity Action Plan 2014-2020.

Westmeath Co Co has launched The Westmeath Biodiversity Action Plan 2014-2020. The Plan identifies the unique natural heritage that exists in the county and sets out an ambitious framework to protect and enhance the wide range of habitats, plants and animals in Westmeath. The plan recognises the importance of, and places an emphasis on, encouraging community involvement and raising awareness of the value of Westmeath's natural heritage

and the importance of biodiversity at a local level. It also proposes coordinating and initiating actions to ensure effective conservation and enhancement in the county and raising awareness of biodiversity in partnership with local communities. The LDS strategy for biodiversity as outlined is set in the context of this Plan in collaboration with the forward planning section of Westmeath Co Co.

5.2.8 National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 – 2016.

One of the High Level Goal of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 – 2016 is the building of viable and sustainable communities, improving the lives of people living in disadvantaged areas and building social capital. The Westmeath local development Strategy is very much aligned to the achievement of this goal across its themes, particularly with regard to its objectives for animation and capacity building amongst rural communities and also the inclusion of initiatives to support hard to reach communities.

5.2.9 The Renewable Energy Strategy for County Westmeath.

Westmeath Community Development and a group of key stakeholders produced an Action Plan for the development of the Renewable Energy Sector in the county under the Bioregions project funded by The EU Intelligent Energy Programme. A particular finding was that Westmeath could use its biomass resources to help Ireland meet its 30% co-firing target in peat stations by 2015. Among the recommendations in the Plan were that the LEADER programme should provide training courses to support the region becoming a leader in the renewable energy sector. The plan also proposes an information publication promoting the bioregions vision and bioenergy solutions and the distribution of this as part as part of an information campaign, supporting workshops on energy efficiency and supporting community initiatives that raise awareness and support engagement of rural communities on this issue. It also proposes capital grant aid for projects which support renewable energy solutions. Objectives set and Actions proposed reflect these recommendations.

5.2.10 Social Inclusion and Activation Programme (SICAP).

Under Goal 1 of the SICAP in Westmeath – **Empowering Disadvantaged Communities** – marginalised groups and disadvantaged communities are being supported and resourced to engage with relevant local and national stakeholders in identifying and addressing social exclusion and equality issues. The more intensive work under SICAP is being carried out in the Very Disadvantaged areas. It is proposed that the LEADER programme in Westmeath add value to this process while avoiding duplication of service delivery.

6.0 Networking and Cooperation

6.1 Networking

Westmeath Local Action Group will enhance its delivery of the LEADER programme by participating in local regional, national and international networking structures in order to share learning and good practice and influence rural development policy. The implementation partner, Westmeath Community Development participates in such networks as follows:

6.1.1 Public Participation Network

The composition of the Westmeath LCDC, which is outlined in Section 1, provides for a majority of private and community interests with strong links to the local community sector including the Public Participation Network (PPN). The PPN strengthens the capacity of communities to contribute to the areas in which they live, facilitates the participation and representation of communities on the Local Action Group (LAG) and other decision making structures. It also acts as a hub around which information is received and distributed. Westmeath Community Development (WCD), the implementation partner for the LEADER programme, also works with community groups and organisations including also through the PPN. The LAG has worked with the Westmeath PPN in the Public Consultation for the development of the LDS. This type of arrangement will continue during the implementation phase of the Strategy.

6.1.2 The Irish Local Development Network (ILDN)

The Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) is the representative body of Local Development Companies (LDCs) in Ireland. It operates within a legal co-operative framework, underpinned by a co-operative philosophy and mission. It's mission is to promote and support the work of the members in the areas of social inclusion and local and rural development. The membership currently stands at 49 companies with all members delivering the SICAP and in rural contexts, the LEADER Rural Development Programme. While these two programmes are the core programmes delivered by members, there are a range of other initiatives at national and European level that companies leverage funding from to support and enhance the development of their communities. ILDN supports its members to achieve this. Activities include:

- Monthly meetings, Organising Seminars on Topical issues effecting LAGS Exchange of Information and good practice,
- Representing members with the DECLG and European Commission on the guidelines and rollout of the LEADER.
- Representing LAGs on a number of Management / Monitoring Committees promoting the LEADER programme at National and International level.

ILDN also works through its regional structures in developing policies and programmes regionally including Cooperation Projects. Westmeath LAG is a member of the ILDN East Region.

6.1.3 ELARD (European LEADER Association for Rural Development)

ELARD consists of national, regional and local associations active in the LEADER method in the following 23 countries: Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Spain and United Kingdom (England, Wales, Scotland & N. Ireland). Presently ELARD represents 1075 Local Action Groups. Members of ELARD are usually the voluntary National or Regional Networks of LAGs; however, individual LAGs are also admitted where national networks haven't been established. The organisation works with representative networks of Local Action Groups and LEADER type organisations as well as any other entity that works in favour of the rural **development of their territory and that shares the objectives of ELARD.**

6.1.4 City and County Managers Association.

The Chief Executive of Westmeath County Council represents the LAG on this Association. It has an interest in the programme from the point of view of Local authorities being financial partners for the programme

6.1.5 Directors of Community and Enterprise Network.

Westmeath is represented on this network by the Director of Community and Enterprise who is responsible for the LCDC

6.1.6 Chief Officers Network.

The Westmeath Chief Officer who works with the LCDC and who is responsible for the LEADER programme participates in this Network

6.2. Cooperation.

6.2.1 Implementing Co-operation Projects

In prioritising areas for development under the LEADER programme the LAG has identified a number of areas where Co-Operation projects would help to achieve the objective. The implementation partner, Westmeath Community Development, has a significant track record in working with other Local Action Groups in the Republic of Ireland on Inter-territorial projects, Local Action Groups in Northern on Cross Border projects, and other Local Action Groups in Europe on Transnational dimensions which have added value to LEADER programme outcomes. In addition, Westmeath Community Development has worked with organisations in other countries on programmes which were concerned with rural development in areas such as Artisan food production and use of renewable energy with funding from other EU programmes including Interreg and the EU Intelligent Energy Programme. There are a number of areas in the LDS where Actions lend themselves to cooperation with other areas by building on previous achievements and using best practice learned.

- In terms of improving the tourism product, Lough Ree on the River Shannon has been profiled as a significant resource around which projects will be supported in order to raise its profile and provide opportunities for new and existing tourism providers to gain extra income. Westmeath Community Development has worked with the Local Action Groups in Longford and Roscommon in supporting the production of a research project examining the economic potential of the islands on Lough Ree. It is proposed to continue that relationship and to continue to support the development of that resource inter-territorially under the LEADER programme.
- As outlined in other sections of the Strategy a number of actions are proposed with a view to exploiting the potential of the Royal Canal for tourism purposes. Another possible dimension to this is a proposal to link the Royal and Grand Canals through a local greenway. This will be explored inter-territorially with Offaly LAG and possibly with other LAGs based along both canals. There may also be a transnational dimension with other canal communities in Europe.
- In developing the crafts sector to date considerable progress has been made and added value achieved by working inter-territorially with the LEADER programme in Co Offaly and also with colleagues in Finland. It is proposed to continue these working relationships as they have been extremely beneficial in terms of sharing best practice and expanding markets. Co Longford may also be included in future initiatives.
- In developing the Artisan food sector, a large amount of work in the area of policy development has been carried out in collaboration with colleague organisations in France, Spain, Portugal and the UK. These links will be maintained with a view to enhancing the outcomes from the LDS in this area.
- Similarly, with regard to Renewable Energy the implementation partner, Westmeath Community Development, has established links with other countries such as Germany Sweden and Austria in acquiring good practice. These links will be continued in order to share further good practice and learning.
- In working to improve the fabric of Rural Towns and taking account of the creation of Rural Economic development Zones which cross county boundaries, efforts will be made to encourage communities to work with neighbouring towns to develop facilities which may serve communities in entire areas. In doing this Westmeath LAG will work with other LAGs in surrounding areas and if possible create inter-territorial projects.

7.0 Monitoring and Review

The following are some elements of the Monitoring and review process which will be used by the LAG:

- The monitoring and review process begins with the production of the Local Development Strategy. Actions are proposed with Anticipated Outputs, Indicators and Targets and Timeframe for Delivery of each action.
- Once the Strategy is approved an Annual Plan is produced with Outputs, Indicators and Targets and Timeframe for Delivery of each action. This is repeated annually for the duration of the programme. Each Annual plan is approved by the LCDC and by Pobal/DECLG.
- Quarterly reports will be prepared in respect of achievement of output targets and also in relation to expenditure.
- An Annual Report will be produced at the end of each year.
- Monitoring and review of the programme will be the responsibility of the programme manager assigned by the implementation partner on commencement of the programme.
- An experienced member of staff from the implementation partner will be assigned to assemble and input data in the system
- The LAG will use performance indicators to provide meaningful information to internal and external stakeholders so that they better understand the work of the organisation and to ascertain whether it is delivering value for money.
- Performance Indicator documents will be drawn up for the programme and at the final stage of file completion information is then gathered from the file and inputted on these sheets. This is then readily available when Performance Indicators are required by the Stakeholder.
- The LAG will continue its system for internal ongoing evaluation.
- Case Studies will form part of the internal evaluation process.
- A mid- term independent review of the Programme will be undertaken and there will also be a final external independent evaluation.

Detailed monitoring and evaluation procedures will be included in the Agreement drawn up between the LAG and the Financial partner on the one hand and the LAG and the Implementation partner also.

A detailed plan for evaluation of the programme will be drawn up in advance of submitting the Local Development Strategy

Appendix 1: Process of Preparing the Local Development Strategy 2014-2020

Task	Task Implementation	Indicative Timeline
Process Commences	Working Group established to commence process of overseeing the Compilation of the Local Development Strategy 2014-2020.	June 2015
Consultation with the Public Participation Network (PPN)	Consultation with PPN Colleges of Community, Social Inclusion and Environmental, through facilitated sessions/workshops.	PPN Meetings 1 st and 2 nd July 2015 in Mullingar and Athlone respectively
Consultation with LCDC	Approval of proposed process of preparing Local Development Strategy	Meeting of LCDC 17 th July 2015
Consultation with Agencies and other relevant stakeholders 8 weeks	Face to Face interviews with relevant Agencies and stakeholders including but not exclusively: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westmeath County Council • Westmeath Community Development • Failte Ireland • Local Enterprise Office • Teagasc • Waterways Ireland • Inland Fisheries • ETB/Solas Ireland • Chambers of Commerce(Mullingar & Athlone) • Coillte • Youth organisations (Foroige, MRYS) • Westmeath Food Network • Craft network – Made in Westmeath • Heritage Forum • Other stakeholders as appropriate 	June/ July 2015
Consultation cont'd		July 2015
Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inviting interested parties to make 	

Advertising 3 weeks	submissions for inclusion in the draft LDS. To be undertaken by advertising in the local media and on relevant websites (westcd.ie and westmeathcoco.ie)	
In-house Desk Research 8 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a detailed Socio-Economic Profile of the Area • Conduct an analysis of current services being provided by statutory agencies • Conduct an analysis of the community sector and its contribution and future potential • Conduct a SWOT Analysis • Review progress under previous LEADER Programmes • Review of other programmes • Review of: • Westmeath Draft Local Economic and Community Plan • Westmeath County Development Plan • CEDRA Report • Failte Ireland's Tourism Development Strategy • Westmeath LEO Enterprise Strategy • National Development Plan • The Renewable Energy Strategy for County Westmeath commissioned by WCD • The North Westmeath Strategy, 2006 • Survey of Food Producers in Westmeath undertaken by WCD • The Hill of Uisneach Feasibility Study commissioned and carried out in 2014/2015. 	June-July 2015
Prepare Draft Local Development Strategy 6 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collate submissions received • Review feedback received from PPN Meetings and Agency meetings • Devise a set of objectives for the Plan and a series of Actions with Targets and Outputs 	August/September 2015

Approval of Draft LDS	Meeting of LCDC to consider Draft LDS	September 2015
Public Consultation on the Draft LDS 3 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comments and views requested in the Draft Local Development Strategy 	September 2015
Finalise Local Development Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final draft prepared and submitted to LCDC for approval 	October 2015
Approval of LDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting of LCDC to consider Final LDS 	October 2015
Submission of LDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Development Strategy submitted to DECLG 	October 2015

Appendix 2: Westmeath Map - 2011 Deprivation Score by Small Area

