Strengthening Rural Economies and Communities

Prepared by the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine and the Department of Rural and Community Development
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Strengthening Rural Economies and Communities
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Strengthening Rural Economies and Communities is central to this Government’s ambitions under Project Ireland 2040. I believe that this plan can be a catalyst for change and can put us on a path to a better future. Investment under Project 2040 can lead to new jobs, new exports and new and diverse opportunities for rural communities.

I am particularly pleased to launch this aspect of the Project Ireland 2040 plan along with my colleague in the Department of Rural and Community Development, Minister Ring. Cross-Government collaboration will be central to its success.

None of the goals in Project 2040 will happen without our rural communities and the people in them. As Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, I have a responsibility to assist the development of the agri-food sector and its contribution to rural Ireland. The farmers, fishermen, forest owners and small business owners throughout the country who live and work in rural areas contribute enormously to them not only in terms of economic activity and environmental goods but also in terms of community engagement.

My Department’s policies have embedded within them initiatives which focus on community welfare and positive social outcomes. The Social Farming Initiative, the European Innovation Partnership projects which are locally-designed and led and the Neighbourwood scheme are great examples of these types of support.

The agri-food and forestry sectors continue to play an integral part in Ireland’s economy and is our largest indigenous industry, contributing 173,000 in direct jobs. Foodwise 2025 set out a strategic plan for the development of these sectors with growth projections including 23,000 additional direct jobs. This strategy aligns with the Project Ireland 2040 planning framework.

As somebody born and bred in rural Ireland, I passionately believe in its future. I want to see our Communities continue to strengthen and our young people to recognise the opportunities which our rural economy offers them. This Project 2040 investment is key to helping rural Ireland realise its full potential and I, and this Government, are fully committed to its full implementation. Working together we can achieve this. Ní neart go chur le cheile.

Michael Creed, T.D.
Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine
MINISTER RING’S FOREWORD

I am delighted, together with my colleague, Minister Creed, to be able to share in this publication a very comprehensive picture of what we are achieving for rural Ireland and our plans for our rural economies and communities into the future.

Rural Ireland is an essential part of our national identity, our economy and our cultural heritage and must be supported.

As a key pillar of Project Ireland 2040, the National Planning Framework will place a major focus on:

- planning for the future growth and development of rural areas, with a special focus on activating the potential for the regeneration and development of smaller towns and villages;
- strengthening Ireland’s rural fabric and supporting the communities who live there;
- enhancing the competitiveness of rural areas and supporting a sustainable and economically efficient agri-food sector;
- putting in place policies to support job creation in rural economies, including diversification into new sectors and alternative on-farm and off-farm activities;
- addressing connectivity gaps; and
- better coordination of existing investment programmes.

The Government’s commitment to allocate €1 billion to a new Rural Regeneration and Development Fund as part of Project Ireland 2040 is the most comprehensive investment decision any Government has ever made to support economic and social development in small towns, villages and outlying areas throughout rural Ireland. The type of initiatives the Fund will support include addressing infrastructural deficits in towns and villages, encouraging entrepreneurship, and enhancing heritage and community assets in rural areas.

We want to make rural Ireland an even better place in which to live and work by creating new opportunities, improving connectivity between rural and urban areas, and by protecting and enhancing services in the community. The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund will allow us to do that and to build on our existing schemes to achieve better outcomes for all of those who live in rural areas.

Michael Ring T.D.
Minister for Rural and Community Development
2. INTRODUCTION

Project Ireland 2040 sets out Government’s ambition for the long-term development of Ireland. The realisation of Project Ireland 2040 rests on twin pillars – the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan (NDP), published simultaneously in February 2018.

By 2040 the population of Ireland is expected to grow by over 1 million to 5.7 million people. The spatial planning approach set out in the National Planning Framework will support this growth. Its successful delivery will be critical to securing Ireland’s economic, social and environmental sustainability over the next two decades.

This National Development Plan sets out the significant level of investment, almost €116 billion, which will underpin the NPF and drive its implementation over the next ten years. This funding has the potential to transform the experience of all of our daily lives over the coming years. Whether we realise this potential will depend on our commitment to deliver on the ten National Strategic Outcomes detailed in the National Planning Framework.

National Strategic Objective 3: Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities focuses on balancing regional growth and investment in rural regeneration. The NPF recognises that three quarters of new growth will be outside Dublin, with 50% of the projected population growth planned for our towns, villages and rural areas. Project Ireland 2040 is building on the progress already achieved through implementation of the following Government strategies:

- **Realising Our Rural Potential. Action Plan for Rural Development**, which focuses on supporting enterprise and employment in rural areas, improving infrastructure and connectivity, and supporting sustainable rural communities;
- **The Government’s Tourism Policy, People, Place and Policy Growing Tourism to 2025 and subsequent Tourism Action Plan 2016-2018**, which recognise the important contribution of tourism to the economy, and the significant investment in the development of tourism projects and attractions through Fáilte Ireland’s Tourism Development & Innovation. A Strategy for Investment 2016-2022, including investment in the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland’s Ancient East;
- **Our Communities: A Framework Policy for Local and Community Development in Ireland** which sets out a vision of building vibrant, sustainable self-determining communities; and
- Investment in the agri-food sector, including in schemes operated through the Rural Development Programme, Seafood Development Programme and Forestry Programme, which will empower rural communities and underpin the sustainable growth of the agri-food sector as set out in **Food Wise 2025: A 10-year Vision for the Irish Agri-Food Industry**.

A new Rural Regeneration and Development Fund has also been established under the Department of Rural and Community Development, to invest an additional €1 billion over the next ten years to promote rural renewal in order to enable towns, villages and outlying rural areas to grow sustainably and support delivery of the strategic objectives of the NPF.
3. OVERVIEW OF INVESTMENT

Project Ireland 2040 clearly places the objective of achieving Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities as critical in ensuring that our towns, villages and rural areas are attractive and sustainable places for people to live and work in.

Project Ireland 2040 recognises the important role the agri-food sector continues to play in Ireland’s economy and in particular, in rural areas due to the dispersed nature of the sector. The future development of the agri-food sector, as set out in Food Wise 2025, is closely aligned with the overall vision for Ireland in 2040.

Carefully planned investment, as the economy continues to improve, will ensure that rural Ireland takes its proper place at the heart of Ireland’s social and economic regeneration. The National Development Plan 2018-2027, sets out the Government’s plans for significant investment on a phased basis over the next decade.

This investment will support a modern and dynamic rural Ireland that is an integral part of our identity and economy.

### INVESTING IN RURAL IRELAND

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<tr>
<th>Rural Regeneration and Development</th>
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<td>Agriculture</td>
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<td>Forestry</td>
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<td>Tourism</td>
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<td>National Broadband Plan</td>
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<td>Regional and local roads</td>
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<td>State Owned Enterprises (Coillte, Bord na Móna)</td>
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### Rural Regeneration and Development Fund

As part of Project Ireland 2040, the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund is a 10-year commitment from Government to invest €1 billion to support job creation in rural areas, address depopulation of rural communities and support improvements in our towns, villages and their hinterlands that enhance the quality of life of communities and enhance their attractiveness for families who want to live and work there.

The overall objective of this fund is to deliver the strategic outcomes of Project Ireland 2040, and in particular to strengthen rural economies and rural communities by rejuvenating smaller towns and villages, helping to diversify employment opportunities in rural areas, supporting the development of rural communities and improving their quality of life. The fund will target towns with a population of less than 10,000 people, as well as villages and outlying rural areas.
The first call for proposals under the fund was announced in early July 2018. The fund will encourage collaborative approaches between Departments, agencies, Local Authorities and other public bodies, philanthropic funders and the private sector, where appropriate, to pool their assets and work with communities to transform our rural towns and villages and their outlying areas. Proposals will be expected to be consistent with the NPF objectives and provide a strategic integrated approach which is consistent with regional and local plans for the area.

Projects must demonstrate a capacity to add value to other public investments. There will be a requirement for a co-funding contribution from other public or private sources of at least 25%. "The first phase will also allow for technical supports for preparatory groundwork for future phase investments, through Local Authorities and other locally based organisations."

**Action Plan for Rural Development**

Realising our Rural Potential, the Government’s Action Plan for Rural Development was launched in January 2017. The Action Plan contains 277 actions for delivery across Government, State agencies and other bodies over a three year period to support the economic and social progress of rural Ireland.

The actions are broken down across 5 thematic Pillars as follows:

- **Pillar 1**: Supporting Sustainable Communities
- **Pillar 2**: Supporting Enterprise and Employment
- **Pillar 3**: Maximising our Rural Tourism and Recreation Potential
- **Pillar 4**: Fostering Culture and Creativity in rural communities
- **Pillar 5**: Improving Rural Infrastructure and Connectivity

Each action has been assigned to a lead body which is responsible for implementation of the action. Progress on the implementation of the actions is overseen by a Monitoring Committee which includes senior representatives of relevant Government Departments and key rural stakeholder interests.
Food Wise 2025, sets out a ten year plan for the agri-food sector. The sub-title of Food Wise is "Local Roots, Global Reach", reflecting the importance of gaining a deep understanding of what consumers, often in distant markets, really want, and communicating those messages back to Irish farmers and food companies. Equally important is to communicate key messages about what makes Irish food unique to the international market. Food Wise 2025 identifies ambitious and challenging growth projections for the industry over the next ten years including:

- 85% increase in exports to €19 billion;
- 70% increase in value added to €13 billion
- 60% increase in primary production to €10 billion and
- The creation of 23,000 additional jobs all along the supply chain from producer level to high end value added product development.

People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025 highlights the fact that employment in tourism encompasses a wide range of roles, qualifications and skills, and is regionally dispersed. Almost €108 million will be allocated to Fáilte Ireland for capital investment over the period 2018 to 2021. Fáilte Ireland will continue to invest in the priority areas that will deliver sustainable growth in the Irish tourism sector resulting in higher revenue and more jobs.
**2014-2020 Rural Development Programme**

The 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme (RDP) will provide €4 billion of support to rural communities over the duration of the programme including significant capital investment in rural Ireland.

It is a priority to influence the development of a new Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) in order to secure a meaningful co-funded CAP Strategic Plan beyond 2020.
European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) 2014-2020

The €240 million European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) Operational Programme is the principal source of development funding for the seafood industry over the seven year period 2014 to 2020. The Programme is co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union and aims to support the development needs of the seafood sector through a 3-pronged strategy:

- **Knowledge** - Fostering Innovation, New Product Development, Training, Skills, Knowledge Transfer, and awareness.
- **Sustainability** - Reducing the impact of the seafood sector on the marine environment and fostering sustainable communities.
- **Growth** - Growing Output, Value and Employment.

It is delivered through a suite of 18 schemes which are delivered by a number of Departments and agencies. Bord Iascaigh Mhara delivers 12 schemes supporting the fisheries, aquaculture and seafood processing sectors, with a budget of €21 million in 2018. These include the Fisheries Local Area Development Scheme, which is providing €12 million to be dispersed through the 7 Fisheries Local Action Groups under a community led local development initiative for coastal communities, a Sustainable Aquaculture Scheme supporting growth of aquaculture SMEs, a Sustainable Fisheries Scheme providing grants to fishing vessels and a suite of support schemes for seafood processing SMEs.
Rural Innovation and Development Fund (RIDF)

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine established the Rural Innovation and Development Fund (RIDF) to address some of the issues in the report of the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA).

The RIDF supports proposals that promote and develop projects which stimulate and energise the rural economy and communities by the facilitation of locally run economic operations, the development of a strong sense of community involvement and purpose, and by the injection of capital into the local community.
4. STRENGTHENING RURAL COMMUNITIES

Rural areas contain some of our most vibrant and culturally distinctive communities. However, our rural communities are also facing challenges and the Government’s approach to these challenges is set out in the Action Plan for Rural Ireland.

The Action Plan for Rural Development includes the following key objectives, amongst others, under Pillar 1: Supporting Sustainable Communities:

- Make rural Ireland a better place in which to live and work by revitalising our town and village centres through the implementation of a range of initiatives and measures to support people to live in town centres.
- Empower local communities through the development and support of the Public Participation Network and Local Community Development Committees.
- Build better communities by supporting vulnerable rural communities through continued investment in the LEADER Programme and the Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs).
- Other supports such as the Locally Led European Innovation Partnerships and the Burren Programme, the Social Farming initiative and the NeighbourWood (NBR) scheme contribute towards the social sustainability of our rural communities.

Community Enhancement Programme

The Community Enhancement Programme (CEP) replaced and builds on two former schemes; namely the Communities Facilities Scheme and RAPID. Combining the schemes will make for a more flexible, streamlined and targeted approach to providing funding to those communities most in need.

The Programme will provide capital funding to communities across Ireland to enhance facilities in disadvantaged areas. Typical enhancements under the programme could include the renovation of community centres, community amenities, improvements to town parks, common areas and spaces, CCTV equipment and energy efficiency-type projects. Some funding is ring-fenced for smaller projects, from lawnmowers and IT equipment to minor renovations to buildings.

In 2018, an increased level of funding (relative to 2017) has been provided to each local authority area for these type of supports.
Senior Alerts Scheme

The objective of the Seniors Alert Scheme (SAS) is to encourage community support for vulnerable older people in our communities through the provision of personal monitored alarms to enable older persons, of limited means, to continue to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind.

Funding is available under the scheme towards the purchase of equipment (i.e. personal alarm and pendant with one year’s monitoring) by a registered organisation. The subsequent associated monitoring and service charges must be paid by the participant. The equipment is funded by Pobal on behalf of the Department of Rural and Community Development and made available through community, voluntary and not-for-profit organisations registered with Pobal under the SAS.
Public Libraries

Public libraries are attractive and welcoming spaces where all members of the community can access knowledge, ideas and information, and where people can reflect, connect and learn. They provide access to a large collection of free online resources, with more than 400 e-learning courses, 80 online language courses, 17,000 e-book, 7,000 e-audio books, 300 international magazine titles and 1,300 accessible newspapers.

The public library service is a civic resource rooted in our communities. The library supports community life and individual self-development. The library service has identified a set of values that form the foundation of the public library service.

“Our Public Libraries 2022 – Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities” is an ambitious strategy to develop the public library service over the next five years. Building on technological and service innovations of recent years, it focuses on improving access, use and visibility of the public library and establishing it as the go-to place for a range of sustainable, integrated public services.
VISION FOR OUR PUBLIC LIBRARIES 2022

- A bright, attractive, trusted, welcoming, civic space
- Friendy, skilled staff, actively supporting and guiding users throughout the library
- Self-service with extended opening hours
- Attracting users of all ages in large numbers
- Centrally located, accessible and visible
- A wide range of resources and services for work, leisure, learning and creativity, online and in-library
- Leading edge digital technologies to enhance the service and available for users with support from staff
- A meeting place, informally and formally
- A focal point for all public services
- Workstation facilities for hot-desking
- Free service, no fines or lending charges
- The go-to place locally, with national reach
- Valued by and essential to communities
- Attracting and benefiting local residents and users
- Places for creativity and culture
My Open Library

My Open Library offers extended opening hours to library members on a self-service basis outside normal opening hours, seven days a week, from 8am to 10pm, 365 days a year. My Open Library is currently available in Banagher and Tullamore Libraries in Offaly and Tubbercurry Library in Sligo. A full range of services are available including book borrowing, meeting facilities, study spaces and ICT facilities. Users have access to the library at times that suit them best and the library is strengthened as a focal point for community engagement. The library is fully staffed outside My Open Library hours.

Since the first full year of service in Offaly in 2015, visits during My Open Library hours increased by 183% in Banagher Library and 76% in Tullamore Library.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)

The new SICAP commenced on 1 January 2018 and will run until the end of 2022. The largest social inclusion intervention of its kind in the State, it is being supported through an allocation of €43.2m in 2018.

SICAP aims to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion and equality. It does this through SICAP Programme Implementers that work with the most disadvantaged and the hardest to reach in communities.

The Programme has two goals that focus on supporting communities and individuals. They are:

- To support communities and target groups to engage with relevant stakeholders in identifying and addressing social exclusion and equality issues developing the capacity of local community groups and creating more sustainable communities.
- To support disadvantaged individuals to improve the quality of their lives through the provision of lifelong learning and labour market supports.
SICAP – CASE STUDY:
West Cork Bike Programmes

In the summer of 2017, West Cork Development Partnership (WCDP) ran two bike projects in four disadvantaged estates in West Cork (in Clonakilty, Dunmanway and Bantry). Both bike projects were national Cycling Ireland programmes – ‘Sprocket Rocket’ and ‘Bike for Life’ – and 85 children, 13 teenagers and one parent took part.

The project brought great interaction between residents and children and taught participants valuable bike skills such as how to ride a bike and the basics of road safety over a four week period. It was also a good example of different organisations coming together locally to make something happen to improve a community and create more opportunities for local kids.

West Cork Development Partnership provided almost €23,000 in funding through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP). Cork County Council allocated €3,000 to provide recreational and play areas and Cycling Ireland paid for the bike schemes. The actual bike training was delivered by Cycle Sense – a local cycle safety group which delivers bike skills in schools and local partnerships.

In the Convent Way/Convent Court estate, 15 children signed up to the Sprocket Rocket (aged 6 to 11) and 14 people took part in the Bike for Life programme. These programmes were repeated in four other estates with almost 100 individuals getting involved in total. As a result of the success of these programmes, the Partnership has developed a follow on scheme called Earn a Bike. Initially a call went out through the media asking people to donate their old bikes. The response was very generous and 40 bikes were donated, of which a number were given to children in Convent Way/Convent Court as part of a follow-up bike repair workshop in April 2018.

The bikes went to children who do not already own a bike and who had participated in Sprocket Rocket or Bike for Life. The Earn a Bike workshop was run by a local social enterprise and showed the kids how to maintain the bike and gave a refresher course in road safety.
TidyTowns

The national SuperValu TidyTowns competition is an annual contest which involves participating areas being rated on all aspects of their local environment, with prizes awarded to the best under many different categories. The overall winner is awarded “Ireland’s Tidiest Town” which is announced at a national ceremony every year in September.

With progress monitored and detailed feedback provided year on year, most participants initially enter the competition to generate interest about the environment in their community and create a solid platform on which to raise issues with the relevant authorities. Over time, the areas attain a standard where competing for major prizes is within reach. As such, it is very much a development programme for towns and villages across Ireland.

CLÁR

The CLÁR programme (Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais) is a targeted investment programme which provides funding for small scale infrastructural projects in rural areas that have suffered the greatest levels of population decline. The aim of CLÁR is to support the sustainable development of identified CLÁR areas by encouraging people to live and work there. The funding works in conjunction with local funding and on the basis of locally identified priorities.

The type of measures funded under CLÁR include safety measures in the vicinity of schools and community facilities, the provision of play areas, the upgrading of community infrastructure, and support for First Responders in rural areas. Over 1,000 projects have been approved for funding under CLÁR since the programme was re-launched in the second half of 2016.

Local Improvement Scheme

The Local Improvement Scheme was re-launched in September 2017 to support the improvement of non-public rural roads. To date €28.2m has been allocated to local authorities for rural roads not covered under normal roads maintenance. Often these roads lead to multiple residences, parcels of land that support agricultural activity or to amenities such as lakes, rivers or beaches.

Over 1,100 roads have benefitted from the scheme since it was re-launched in 2017 by the Minister for Rural and Community Development.
RDP - European Innovation Partnership

European Innovation Partnerships (EIP) Projects are developed by Operational Groups which are funded by DAFM under Ireland’s Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020. A budget of €59m is set aside for these projects. The EIP initiative includes:

- EIP Open Call for proposals
- Hen Harrier Project
- Freshwater Pearl Mussel

In 2017, the first 12 successful projects under the open call were announced and are being funded by DAFM. These exciting projects will deliver novel solutions to challenges facing the Irish agri-food sector and the rural economy. They align well with our RDP and national priorities particularly on environmental sustainability. The exciting range of projects selected will address challenges such as biodiversity, profitability and sustainability, and will harness the creativity and resourcefulness which is the hallmark of Ireland’s rural sector. The majority of the projects are bottom-up, led by farmers who are passionate about the future of farming and the environment in their own communities.
RDP: Burren Programme

There is a long tradition of farming in the Burren which began over 6000 years ago and the Burren Programme is, with DAFM’s support, now working to ensure that that tradition continues into the future and that the unique biodiversity of the Burren will be protected for generations to come. The Burren LIFE project was a winner of a prestigious EU LIFE Nature award in Brussels, following a public vote in 2017. The Project was victorious in the Nature and Biodiversity category.

The Burren Programme is a locally-led measure funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, with an overall budget of €15 million. It is an agri-environmental measure focussed specifically at the conservation of the unique farming landscape of the Burren in counties Clare and Galway. It aims to promote a particular farming model that couples traditional farming practices with scientific assessment of environmental health at field level. The Burren Programme rewards those farmers who deliver the highest environmental outputs (results-based) and provides a complementary capital investment programme for individual site enhancement works designed to improve the environmental dividend delivered by the farm holding. There are currently over 320 farmers in the Burren Programme.
RIDF: Social Farming

Social farming initiative, funded by DAFM under the Rural Innovation and Development Fund, is the practice of offering, on a voluntary basis, farming and horticultural participation in a farming environment as a choice to people who avail of a range of therapeutic day support services. These operations are run in a number of settings ranging from working family farms, local community initiatives through to more institutional frameworks.

The total funding provided for social farming in 2017 amounted to €717,000. The contract with Leitrim Development Company for the design, development and implementation of a Social Farming Network across Ireland was extended until October 2018 with associated funding of €350,000.

In addition, following a competitive public procurement procedure, three social farming projects were awarded funding of €367,000 to develop a social farming model project. These contracts which are ongoing include:

- Leitrim Integrated Development Company for a ‘Social Farming Best Practice Model’
- South Kerry Development Partnership for the ‘Kerry Social Farming Project’
- Down Syndrome Ireland Cork Branch for phase 2 of the ‘Field of Dreams’ project

Funding of €200,000 is being provided for Social Farming in 2018.

RIDF CASE STUDY: Down Syndrome Ireland – Cork Branch

In February 2017, Down Syndrome Cork started to transform a three acre rural space in Curraheen, Co Cork into horticultural-based training facility, the Field of Dreams, built to meet the specific needs of adults with Down syndrome. Funding from the Rural Innovation and Development Fund allowed for the opening of the facility for their first intake of participants in September 2017.
**EMFF: Fisheries Local Action Group**

The Fisheries Local Area Development Scheme funded by DAFM, under the Seafood Development Programme 2014-2020, is providing €12 million to be dispersed through the 7 Fisheries Local Action Groups under a community led local development initiative for coastal communities. Grant aid of €1.7 million was paid out in 2017, with €2.8 million to be dispersed in 2018. The grants are supporting micro enterprises, community groups and individuals in the areas of seafood enterprise, marine tourism, marine leisure, heritage, skills and local infrastructure.
Forestry Programme 2014-2020: NeighbourWood (NBR) scheme

The NeighbourWood (NBR) scheme under the Forestry Programme 2014-2020 supports the development of attractive close-to-home woodland amenities (or ‘neighbourwoods’) for public use and enjoyment. It is available to both public and private landowners, working in partnership with local communities and local authorities.

FORESTRY PROGRAMME CASE STUDY: Roundwood Neighbourwood Project

The Roundwood and District Community Council (RDCC), a volunteer organisation had been working, since 2015, to restore over 20km of the trails around the Vartry Reservoirs, many of which were overgrown and in need of maintenance. The project to enhance and further develop this woodland was supported with funding from the NeighbourWood Scheme. These 20km of walks are the perfect facility for getting outdoors and enjoying the best of what Irish forests have to offer. The amenity is testament to the dedication of the local community and is an example of partnership funding by the State to bring real benefit to rural Ireland. NeighbourWoods deliver a wide range of benefits to local communities and wider society by providing opportunities for exercise, recreation and relaxation, creating important wildlife habitats, mitigating noise pollution, promoting air quality and improving the visual landscape.
5. STRENGTHENING RURAL ECONOMIES

Rural areas make a major contribution to Ireland’s overall economic success and development. The agri-food and tourism sectors, which are particularly important for rural economies, employ in excess of 363,000 people (18% of the national workforce). Rural communities, and particularly those engaged in farming, operate as custodians of the landscape by undertaking agricultural land management at varying scales. However, the viability of many landholdings is such that around half of farm families now depend on off-farm employment, much of which is focused on urban settlements. Alternative land uses such as forestry and renewable energy related development are also becoming more prevalent.

The loss of traditional industries and employment, emigration and poor connectivity has been challenging for rural economies in recent years. However, the emergence of new technologies and improved infrastructural connectivity provide opportunities for diversification inside and outside the farm gate and into new employment sectors and to build on the success of many Irish and foreign-owned companies supporting employment in rural areas.

The Action Plan for Rural Development includes a range of measures to support enterprise and employment in rural areas, including through the following key objectives:

- Support sectoral growth through the continued development of the agri-food sector through the implementation of Food Wise 2025.
- Support farm and fishing incomes through CAP payments, the Rural Development Programme, the Seafood Development Programme and other Government supports such as the Rural Innovation and Development and investment in our Fishery Harbour Centres.
- Grow and attract enterprise and jobs through the implementation of the eight regional Action Plans for Jobs and the development of an Atlantic Economic Corridor to promote balanced regional development.
- Support rural jobseekers through initiatives such as the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme, Community Employment and the economic development theme under the LEADER Programme.
**Food Wise 2025**

Food Wise 2025 sets out a ten year plan for the agri-food sector and identifies ambitious and challenging growth projections for the industry including an 85% increase in exports to €19bn; and the creation of 23,000 additional jobs.

The sub-title of Food Wise is "Local Roots, Global Reach", reflecting the importance of gaining a deep understanding of what consumers, often in distant markets, really want, and communicating those messages back to Irish farmers and food companies.

The implementation of Food Wise is driven by a High Level Implementation Committee (HLIC), which the Minister of Agriculture, Food and the Marine chairs. It involves the CEOs of the relevant State agencies and senior officials from relevant Departments ensuring joined-up Government action.

‘Steps to Success 2018’ progress report outlines that 74% of the actions that were due to commence in 2015-2018 under FW2025 have been achieved or substantial action has been undertaken, whilst 26% of the actions have commenced and are progressing.

**RIDF: Female Rural Entrepreneurs**

ACORNS is a six month part time development programme for aspiring rural female entrepreneurs. The programme is aimed at providing early stage female entrepreneurs living in rural Ireland with the knowledge, support and networking opportunities to advance the development of their businesses. The programme addresses the skills, enterprise and capability gaps of rural start up female entrepreneurs. It provides participants with the knowledge, support and networking opportunities to meet and even exceed their business goals. The demand for the programme was very strong with over 150 participants in the past three years.

The 2016 and 2017 programmes also included a further development phase for those who successfully completed the programmes. Funding of €200,000 is being provided for the initiative in 2018 and a new procurement process has recently commenced.
CASE STUDY: 
Bean and Goose

Beans and Goose make chocolate at Last Tree Farm based in the Wexford countryside. They participated in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine’s ACORNS programme which supports female entrepreneurs in rural areas. They create a range of chocolate bars, seasonal and Irish whiskey truffles, sharing slabs of chocolate and seasonal, gifting products. Their chocolate is made using the complex and rich flavours of single origin chocolate paired with flavours and ingredients that reflect and celebrate the Irish seasons.

Beans and Goose work with artisan food producers and also work in collaboration with designers, illustrators and other brands to bring different elements to their distinct products.

They are passionate about the products that they create and are committed to bringing their customers the very best in Irish chocolate e.g. their milk chocolate bar is topped with smoked Irish sea-salt and cocoa nibs while their dark chocolate has Wexford honey roasted hazelnuts, Irish sea-salt and chilli.
Regional Action Plan for Jobs

The Regional Action Plans for Jobs are crucial in meeting the Government’s ambition to create an additional 200,000 jobs, of which 135,000 are outside the Dublin region, by 2020.

Employment increased in almost every region of the country in 2017. Employment outside of the Dublin region increased by 56,200, accounting for 84% of the overall national increase in employment.

In 2017, 65% of new jobs created by Enterprise Ireland supported companies, and over half of those created by IDA supported companies, were outside Dublin.

In May 2017, Enterprise Ireland launched the first phase of the €60 million Regional Enterprise Development Fund, designed to support the ambition, goals and implementation of the Regional Action Plans for Jobs. A further phase of the Fund was launched in the first half of 2018.

National Broadband Plan

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) is a Government policy initiative which aims to deliver high speed broadband to every citizen and business in Ireland. The initiative is led by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. The National Broadband Plan’s ambition is to achieve 100% coverage of high speed broadband across Ireland. This will be achieved through a combination of accelerated commercial investment by telecoms operators, together with a State intervention to deliver access to high speed broadband to those parts of the country where there is no certainty that the commercial sector will invest.

Through ongoing commercial investment, most of our cities and towns will benefit from high speed broadband over the coming years. The areas that are not covered by commercial investment are the target for the State funded investment.

As a result of the commercial investment stimulated by the NBP, over 1.6m or 7 in 10 of all premises can access high speed broadband services.
The NBP’s ambition is to achieve 100% coverage across Ireland. This will be achieved through a combination of commercial investment and the State-led intervention. The profile of the area expected to be addressed by the intervention strategy includes:

- c. 540,000 postal addresses
- 990,000 citizens (21% of national population)
- 381,000 members of labour force (21% of national total)
- 52,057 farms (61% of national total of farms)
- 47,096 SMEs, primarily micro
- 437 schools (13% of total)
- 310 business parks (4% of national total)

The Department of Rural and Community Development provides funding for an officer with specific responsibility for broadband and mobile services in each local authority. The Broadband Officer acts as a single point of contact within the local authorities for engagement with telecommunications providers and assists with the preparation for the roll out of the National Broadband Plan.
### High Speed Broadband Map
#### County Coverage Statistics Q1 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County Name</th>
<th>Total Number of Premises</th>
<th>AMBER Premises Intervention Area</th>
<th>BLUE Premises Commercial Operators</th>
<th>LIGHT BLUE Premises Planned Rural Deployment*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlow</td>
<td>27,825</td>
<td>7,343</td>
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<td>Cavan</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,362,258</strong></td>
<td><strong>539,636</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,662,526</strong></td>
<td><strong>169,696</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*These figures represent planned rural deployment and will reduce once premises are passed.*
Town and Village Renewal Scheme

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme was introduced in the second half of 2016 to support the revitalisation of rural towns and villages in order to improve their living and working environment and increase their potential to support increased economic activity. The scheme is specifically focused on rural towns and villages with populations under 10,000.

Since 2016, the Department of Rural and Community Development has invested €31.6 million in over 450 projects in rural towns and villages across rural Ireland. Successful projects include activities which have clear positive economic impact on their town or village. These projects demonstrate close collaboration between local communities and business interests in their design and delivery and must have the support of the relevant Local Authority.

A further funding round was launched in April 2018 with an allocation of at least €15 million.
TOWN & VILLAGE RENEWAL SCHEME – CASE STUDY: The Ludgate Hub

The Ludgate Hub in Skibbereen, Co Cork, is a great example of what can be achieved to support entrepreneurship in rural areas through a collaborative approach across the business and wider community. The Hub provides users with 1 gigabyte per second connectivity, transforming Skibereen’s ability to communicate and compete with urban hubs.

The aim of the project is to develop an innovation cluster in West Cork, focusing on the acceleration and incubation of early stage companies. This will be done by creating a Ludgate Innovation Centre of Excellence within the Ludgate Hub housing 46 entrepreneurs developing new companies and accommodating up to 16 start-up companies. It will also create 22 indirect jobs as well as supporting local services (accountants, solicitors, banks, designers and other services).

In 2017 the Ludgate Hub was awarded €150,000 under the Town and Village Renewal programme for further development.
Community Services Programme (CSP)

The CSP supports community businesses to provide local services and create employment opportunities for disadvantaged people. It provides funding support to community companies and co-operatives. It focuses on communities where public and private sector services are lacking, either through geographical or social isolation or because demand levels are not sufficient. The Programme also enables the benefit of other public investment to be realised (as in the case of investment in community centres and resources).

In general, applicants must be not-for-profit social enterprises or community businesses with sufficient capacity to undertake service delivery and the management of staff. They must also have sufficient financial resources and opportunity to generate revenue to maintain the proposed service, and where necessary, prepare a business plan acceptable to the Programme.

There are 3 main types of project funded under the Programme:

- Community services for disadvantaged people, for example: home insulation; disability transport; meals-on-wheels and centre-based day care and social activities; personal security and visitation services; community radio and other forms of community media.
- Community enterprises employing people with disabilities, Travellers, recovering drug misusers and/or ex-prisoners. The employing company or co-op must operate as a social enterprise and demonstrate some form of progression of the workers.
- Community halls and facilities available for community use which enable the day-to-day operation of community infrastructure.
COMMUNITY SERVICES PROGRAMME – CASE STUDY:
The National 1798 Centre

The National 1798 Centre is a historical tourist attraction in Enniscorthy, County Wexford. The centre, also incorporating the nearby Enniscorthy Castle, is one of the main local attractions and is responsible for drawing in large numbers of outside visitors to the town. The Centre receives funding under the Community Services Programme, managed and administer by Pobal for three full time equivalent workers and a manager, allowing both the centre and the castle to be in a position to open 7 days a week. Without CSP funding it is likely the centre would only operate during the summer months.
Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme

The Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme is part of the Government’s Action Plan for Rural Development and provides funding for the development of new outdoor recreational infrastructure or the necessary maintenance, enhancement or promotion of existing outdoor recreational infrastructure in rural areas across Ireland.

Over €20 million has been allocated to 370 projects under this scheme since 2016 to improve walking trails, greenways and other recreational amenities. This investment helps to attract additional visitor numbers and opens new employment opportunities for local people. Facilities such as the Great Western Greenway in Mayo the Boardwalk at Acres Lake in Drumshambo are proving increasingly popular with local users and visitors alike.
CASE STUDY:  
**Waterford Greenway**

The 46km Waterford Greenway route, which travels from Dungarvan to Waterford City, has proven to be a hugely successful enterprise for the local community.

During its first nine months of operating, 850,000 people visited the greenway. Over 70% of users are locals that visited the greenway on a frequent basis.

The greenway’s draw to tourists has proven to be a boon for the local economy with four out of five visitors from outside the county staying in paid accommodation, spending more than €100 per night, while 41 percent spent money while using the trail, and of those who spent on food and drink, the average spend was €28.50.
The Walks Scheme

The Walks Scheme was launched on 4th March 2008 and has since been rolled out to cover 39 trails. This is a national scheme involving all landholders on National Waymarked Ways, Looped Walking Routes and Heritage Routes, along with other trails that have been approved by the National Trails Office. The scheme will only operate where there is agreement on the entire walk and is not available for part of a walk.

The scheme ensures that National Waymarked Ways and priority walks that traverse public and private lands are maintained and accessible. Participants in the Walks Scheme undertake to complete the enhancement and maintenance of the trails.

12 Rural Recreation Officers (RROs) are employed with Local Development Companies and implement the Walks Scheme which is administered by Local Development Companies on behalf of this Department of Rural and Community Development. The National Trails Office at the Irish Sports Council, Fáilte Ireland, Coillte, local walking management committees and Local Authorities, have also assisted the Department in the roll out of the scheme.
THE WALKS SCHEME – CASE STUDY:
Croagh Patrick Heritage Trail

Extending 61 km from the town of Balla in central Mayo to the village of Murrisk at the base of Croagh Patrick, the Croagh Patrick Heritage Trail is a shining example of what consistent yearly funding can help communities to achieve in terms of amenities in rural Ireland. Since 2010, the Trail has been awarded a total of approximately €300,000 under the Walks Scheme. This funding has helped locals and tourists alike to enjoy the safely accessible deciduous woodland, rolling fields and raised bog of the Mayo countryside. With approximately 100,000 people climbing Croagh Patrick each year, the trail brings visitors into the villages of Clogher, Killavally, Aghagower and surrounding villages, where they can avail of accommodation, food and travel services.
RDP: LEADER Programme

LEADER is a multi-annual programme co-funded by the EU to support rural development. A total of €250 million will be provided to rural communities under the LEADER programme over the period 2014-2020.

The programme funding is allocated to 28 sub-regional areas and administered by Local Action Groups (LAGs). These are partnerships of both public and private entities from a defined geographical area. They are responsible for selecting and approving projects in their respective areas in accordance with local development strategies developed specifically for their area.

Grant aid is provided to projects under the following themes:

- Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation.
- Social Inclusion.
- Rural Environment.

By July 2018, more than 1,100 local development projects had been approved for LEADER funding of over €33 m towards enterprise development, job creation and the development of sustainable community infrastructure across rural Ireland.
LEADER PROGRAMME – CASE STUDY: Glasha Hydro Project

In November 2017, the Glasha Hydro Project was awarded €200,000 through Leader 2014-2020.

The project will construct a small hydroelectrical power (SHEP) scheme on the Glasha River in Kilsheelan Co. Waterford, which is on the northern side of the Comeragh Mountains and feeds into the River Suir.

Hydro power can be described as electricity generation from the potential energy retained in water. The proposed installation is known as a high head, run-of-the-river hydroelectrical system, which will extract and return water to the Glasha River through a pipeline at a high vertical drop intake to a turbine further downstream. The height difference and water volume allow sufficient power to be achieved.
RDP: LEADER Food Initiative

The Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine and the Department of Rural and Community Development jointly launched a call under the LEADER Food Initiative (For Artisan, Micro and Small Food Producers) Funded under the 2014 – 2020 Rural Development Programme (RDP on 1st May 2018.)

The indicative budget for this initiative is €5 million per annum until 2020. The initiative will complement existing supports for artisan and small food businesses provided by DAFM and State agencies, including Food Works, developed by Bord Bia, Teagasc and Enterprise Ireland for start-up food entrepreneurs; and retailer programmes, for example Supervalu's Food Academy. The specific funding is to support capital investment and the purchasing of processing equipment in addition to addressing emerging challenges through investment in areas such as market development, competitiveness and innovation. The Scheme also includes the beverages sector.

The process of application will use the LEADER methodology, with applications evaluated and proposed by Local Action Groups (LAGS).
CASE STUDY: Diversifying the Family Farm

Coolanowle Country House and Organic Farm is a model of success for many other farm families looking for an excellent example of farm diversification. Traditionally a dairy farm, Bernadine and Jimmy Mulhalls, made the decision in the early 2000s, to enhance their farm and improve their chances of viability by converting the family home into a guest house, converting the 100 hectares farm to organics, and to build a specialised processing unit on-site, which now employs three butchers for slaughtering at the farm.

Although still dealing mainly in meat, Bernadine explains that an ever growing demand for their produce has pushed them to invest heavily in a new dairy system, with grant aid from the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS). Initial success in a local organic retail trade was assisted by Laois LEADER (now Laois Partnership) when they granted the Mulhalls a LEADER grant to purchase a custom built mobile unit. Following on from that success, Jimmy and Bernadine now sell Coolanowle Organic Meat on-line, nation-wide and at Coolanowle Farm.
RIDF: Agri food tourism

The agri-food tourism initiative, under the Rural Innovation and Development Fund, supports farm and local community diversification and help farmers connect with the wider community.

Following a competitive public procurement procedure in 2017, the following projects were awarded contracts with combined funding of €277,393:

- Kilkenny County Council – Phase 2 of 'Taste Kilkenny': This project supports the further expansion of #TasteKilkenny;
- Donegal County Council – 'ISLE Tourism': ISLE (Islands Sustainable Living & Education Tourism) tourism project is an innovative sustainable tourism and education project focused on the Donegal Islands and coastal areas and which link in as a unique element of the Wild Atlantic Way journey;
- O'Connell Marketing Sales and Communications – Co. Wexford Agri-Food Tourism: The project involves the expansion of the agri-food tourism offering in Co. Wexford through the development and promotion of events and activities linked with the County Wexford Food Tourism Strategy;
- Astec Global Consultancy – Agri-Food Tourism Experiences – Bringing Visitors Home: The project involves the provision of opportunities for local agricultural communities and families to offer unique culinary experience direct to the tourist;
- Carlow County Council – Carlow Food Trail Development Project: This initiative involves Agri-Food Tourism Cluster Development programmes that will provide mentoring for food business with promotional activities and training to showcase and develop food talent in Carlow;
- Waterford County Council – “Food, The Waterford Way”: This project aims to expand and develop the Food Tourism proposition in County Waterford through the development of connections between the Waterford Way food trail and farmers markets.

An allocation of €419,000 is available for 2018 as part of a funding framework and will provide funding for approx 9 projects. The 2018 allocation aims to develop and expand capacity for agri-food tourism and build on the projects and learning from 2017. A competitive public procurement procedure under the 2018 Rural Innovation and Development Fund for Agri-Food Tourism Initiatives has just been announced.
Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC)

The Atlantic Economic Corridor is an important component of the Action Plan for Rural Development. The aim of the Atlantic Economic Corridor is to deliver effective national development by creating sufficient scale in the west of Ireland, through an Atlantic Economic Corridor to match other areas of the country in developing infrastructure, attracting Irish and multinational investment, and growing jobs and wealth in vibrant local communities.

A multi-stakeholder taskforce, involving the business community, Government Departments, the Regional Assemblies, the County and City Management Association, other public bodies and community interests is chaired by the Minister of State at the Department for Rural and Community Development to progress the proposal and develop a clearly articulated roadmap for delivery of the AEC objectives.

The Atlantic Economic Corridor Task Force progressed areas of work relating to enterprise space, infrastructure, EU funding and communications. In March 2018, co-funding was announced for each of the 10 City and County Councils along the corridor to support the designation of Atlantic Economic Corridor Officers who will support the work of the Taskforce.
RDP: On-farm investment - Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS)

The Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme is an initiative of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine under Ireland’s Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. It provides support for on-farm investment and has been in operation since mid-2015 and has generated significant interest in rural farming communities with over 19,000 applications received to date.

The TAMS Scheme has an overall budget of €395 million over the lifetime of the current Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. The TAMS Scheme ensures that all farmers have access to the most up-to-date technology to bring the highest quality product to market. On-farm investment strengthens the competitiveness of rural economies. The Scheme is supporting generational renewal on Irish farms by allowing Young Farmers to avail of a higher grant rate of 60% (with a standard grant rate of 40% available to all other applicants).
RDP CASE STUDY: 
Young Trained Farmer

Supporting young farmers wishing to enter the agricultural sector or improve their farm holdings is a key priority of Ireland’s Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020. 28-year-old Leo Morrissey, from Garrafine, Ballymacward, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway, is one such young farmer.Leo explained that the exceptional foundation laid down by his parents assisted him and his brother greatly in establishing their own independent farm enterprises. Leo explains that ‘towards the end of 2015 when I first began farming independently I had zero stock of my own, no sheds or machinery and minimal fencing. When TAMS II was announced I applied under the Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme for around 4000 meters of sheep fencing along with associated gateways. I qualify for a 60% grant aid on this project and feel it is going to set a solid foundation for my enterprise going forward. Although it is a huge capital outlay, especially factoring in the fact I have had to purchase all stock from the outset, I still think after doing the maths and weighing up the Benefits that setting up as young trained farmer is an excellent opportunity seized’.
RDP: Knowledge Transfer

Under the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme, the Knowledge Transfer initiative is a significant investment in high quality training and upskilling of farmers so that they are equipped to deal with the range of challenges and opportunities arising in the agri-food sector.

The KT Programme launched in summer 2016 and over 19,000 farmer participants have now been approved to participate in some 1200 KT Groups across six farming sectors. Farmers are required to attend Group meetings. These meetings also allow the farmers in each KT Group to interact with and learn from each other. Farmers also have to complete a Farm Improvement Plan, covering a range of issues from farm safety to grassland management.
CASE STUDY: 
Organic Farming

The project at Glen Keen was inspired some years ago by a visit by the owner Catherine, who was at the time based in the USA, to Knottsbury Farm, California, USA. The seed was sown in Catherine’s mind for a farm based business, in order to diversify, and add some increased economic viability, to her family’s sheep farm back home in Ireland.

Glen Keen Farm and Visitor Centre now includes a craft shop, large restaurant, exhibition area and on farm demonstrations. Glen Keen employs a staff of 4 full time and 12 part-time employees.

Glen Keen Farm have participated in a range of RDP schemes such as Areas facing Natural Constraints, Knowledge Transfer Groups, the agri-environment scheme GLAS and the Sheep Welfare Scheme.
Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Capital Programme

The six Fishery Harbour Centres which are owned and managed by DAFM are located at Castletownbere, Dingle, Dunmore East, Howth, Killybegs and Ros An Mhíl. These mainly rural marine infrastructures are strategically important from a National perspective and underpin Government’s strategy to further develop a modern offshore Irish fishing fleet, attract the large offshore fishing vessels of other Member States to increasingly land into our Fishery Harbour Centres and drive the development of a modern on shore processing industry. In addition to the Fisheries and Seafood Production industries, the Centres are accommodating ever increasing amounts of diverse commercial business including, commercial cargo traffic, cruise liners, restaurants and other leisure, tourism and social activities.

A capital investment programme of up to €180m across all six FHCs, encompassing ongoing safety and maintenance and necessary new developments, is envisaged in the National Development Plan. A total of €27.9m has been set aside for the 2018 Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Capital Programme, €2m of which is earmarked for the Local Authority element of the programme.

2018 Programme Flagship Project: Castletownbere FHC – Dinish Wharf Development

The Flagship project under the 2018 Programme includes a further €19m quay extension at Castletownbere FHC. Castletownbere is the largest white fish port in the state. The new development encompasses a further 200m extension to the existing quay and two breakwaters at the southern end of the harbour, see photo montage below.

The development will future proof the infrastructure for the seafood sector in Castletownbere. It will facilitate possible future expansions into other commercial activities. This development will also help alleviate vessel and traffic congestion experienced following the original pier extension, and cater for future increases in landings particularly of non-Irish EU vessels operating in waters off the west coast of Ireland, allowing faster turn-around times for these vessels.
Local Authority Programme

The objective of the Local Authority programme is to assist coastal Local Authorities in carrying out small scale projects for the development and repair of piers, harbours and slipways, owned by them, focusing on priority projects and a broad geographical spread.

The main terms of the scheme is that the funding provided by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine will be 75% of the total approved project cost for the year and the total cost of the project cannot exceed €150,000. To be eligible under the Programme the projects must be associated with harbour developments or marine leisure and comprise of actual works that are clearly associated with shore based infrastructure such as quays, piers, slipways, floating pontoons and other associated equipment.

Between 2011 and 2017, in excess of €26.4m has been granted to Local Authorities for work undertaken on 504 projects at remote rural coastal locations, bringing much needed economic and social benefits to these rural areas. In 2018, €2m has been allocated under the Programme to assist 13 Coastal Local Authorities undertake and complete 52 projects on harbours and slipways owned by them.
EMFF CASE STUDY:
Donegal Oceandeep Oysters - Construction of an oyster handling facility

Donegal Oceandeep Oysters employs 20 people in rural Donegal and produces special high-quality oysters, which are in great demand in France, The Netherlands, and Belgium. In addition to these markets, China has opened up and it is quickly becoming an additional core market. To produce the oysters to the high quality requires careful grading and sorting to ensure that only the very best make it through. An EMFF grant of €323,821 towards this €809,553 project allowed the company to build a facility to handle the oysters and special graders to help sort and pack them. Choosing a sheltered low-lying site means the building has low visual impact and being close to the shore will reduce transport time for the oysters and reduce environmental impact of diesel consumption of vehicles by 20%.
Forestry Programme

The Forestry Programme 2014-2020 includes a number of measures to support the sustainable development of forestry. Forestry is an integral part of our landscape, a significant contributor to the economy, the environment and society and it also serves as a means to support and assist policy initiatives in other areas.

Among the benefits of forestry is the economic value of forestry for employment, exports and farm income. In that context, the forest sector is playing an increasingly important role in rural development, not only through the diversification of farm income from the payment of annual forestry premiums and income from timber sales, both from thinning and at clearfell, but also through the provision of sustainable rural-based employment. The economic activity of the forest sector is spread through every region of the State and makes an important contribution to regional development and the rural economy.

The Government has set afforestation targets for Ireland under the National Forestry Programme 2014-2020. These were reaffirmed in the Mid-Term review of the Programme published in February 2018. These figures set annual planting targets rising incrementally from 7,205ha in 2018 to 8,290 in 2020. These are ambitious in the context of current demand but nonetheless DAFM is committed to doing everything possible to meet them and is engaged in intensive promotion campaign.

There is a commitment in the National Development Plan for a publicly funded Forestry Programmes in the 10 year period of the NDP to support climate change mitigation and provide a vital economic, social and recreational resource.