



# WLP COMPANY STRATEGY 2021 - 2024

## WATERFORD LEADER PARTNERSHIP

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# OVERVIEW OF COMPANY STRATEGIC POSITION



WLP Clg. acts as an Animator, Project Developer, Service Provider and Programme Bidder in the provision and administration of Rural Services and Rural Programmes. The Company has had to review the operational realities in developing a Company Strategy which reflects its increasingly action orientated role, while maintaining developmental expertise and this will be outlined below.

Strategically the Company has moved away from its early work in being a rural activist (ADM/Pobal) to Programme Management to being primarily a service provider focused on providing advice, implementing rural programmes, rural service provision and project management to rural communities (LEADER, LES, Tus).

Each of the current Programmes, for example, LEADER, LES, Tus, RSS, and Social Farming have their own individual strategies and in turn their strategies synchronize under the overall WLP strategic position.

In the coming years it is envisioned that programmes will change and maybe disappear, with new or radically different initiatives taking their place. Many of these new initiatives may be even more relevant than those they have replaced. This document will endeavour to provide a foundation from which to review the relevance of the actions, the services, and the programmes that the Company implements against its own Objectives and hence Strategy.

Ensuring that WLP Clg focuses on programmes whose objectives fit the overall strategic focus of the Company is vital for three reasons:

1. To avoid Mission Drift and keep a focus on relevant core activities which is its USP:
2. By focusing on the delivery of Core Activities, will ensure good project management, delivery of services and a sound financial position:
3. Ensure that the Company is within the legal framework under which it operates, i.e., the Charities Acts.

## **Context**

WLP Clg. was founded by Waterford Foods Plc, Teagasc, Waterford County Council, and three local villages in 1991 in response to three main factors:

- The dramatic change occurring in rural employment, and hence the viability of rural areas to hold population. Unemployment was at 13% nationally.
- The opportunities of the then new LEADER Programme coming from Europe.
- The creation of the Enterprise Trust by major Multinational Companies (Waterford Foods was a founder member along with Cadbury's) as a philanthropic organisation which would collect money in a tax efficient manner to invest in rural development on a 50/50 basis, i.e., the Trust would provide 50% investment from Corporate donations, and LEADER would provide 50% from E.U. Grants. In Waterford, the Coop as Waterford Foods Plc (Now Glanbia Plc) was known set up IRD West Waterford as the vehicle for such development. IRD West Waterford morphed into West Waterford Development Partnership Ltd which then became Waterford LEADER Partnership Ltd.

The actual response to the three main factors shaped both the culture and strategy of the Company, with an action focused approach based on evidence and practicality.

- From 1991 to 1995, the Company was funded under the Programme for Economic and Social Progress and was in fact funded and operating in the sphere of Social/Political Activism, while the Board had a different focus on Rural Action from its IRD West Waterford base. This caused operational tensions which took quite some time to resolve.
- The Rural Action focus of the Board as distinct from the Funder in the early days was on rural enterprise, e.g. Microchem (Now Lancaster Labs), Mariculture, Light Engineering, Geo Park, etc.

- The arrival of LEADER in 1996 facilitated a merging of the Board's Objectives with those of the Funder, i.e., The LEADER Programme, as they were compatible and that became the strategy for the Company.

In the last 14 years, the various Departments' have with the welcome embrace of the Company subcontracted programmes to the Company on a non-commercial basis for both parties. The process of awarding programmes on a non-competitive basis does appear to be current practice. Commissioning or strategic tendering is currently in vogue for development organisations. While competition provides downsides, the upside is that the Company does not have to accept or bid for programmes that do not directly benefit rural areas or fit the Company's strategy or both. This will reduce tensions between the implementer and funding bodies, as it will allow both the Funders and the Implementers some latitude in who they want to partner with.

While the Company needs to maintain these contracts to survive, it also needs to plot a purpose and a strategy to ensure its relevance and hence viability in Rural Waterford and thus attract investment.



# ORIGINAL PURPOSE OF WLP CLG.(PREVIOUSLY IRD WEST WATERFORD)

The Company was originally set up by the original Board to promote;

- Enterprise Creation through assisting the development of Enterprise, Tourism and Alternative Agriculture/Mariculture Businesses in West and Mid Waterford.
- Economic and Social Regeneration of Rural Villages
- Underpin the above through targeted training and animation.

The above purpose was to be achieved by engaging local actors, businesspeople, communities, and farmers to come up with either enterprise or community projects that they as local people were willing to own, drive, and invest in, with LEADER investing with them on a 50% basis.

The actions involved in pursuing this purpose involved stimulating on several levels various streams of local actors through one-to-one meetings, public meetings, and structured community facilitation.

From this process a structured approach to investing in Rural projects came into being. The approach has been successful. This success has introduced politicisation. While this creates challenges, rather than complain about the consequences of the politicisation, it points to the need for the company to have a strategy that recognises politics, democratic legitimacy, and works with politicians but ensures that the company remains totally apolitical in its actions and delivery of programmes and services.



## What WLP does now?

The Company has become a sub-contractor to various Government Departments for the delivery of the following programmes:

Programme	Department
<b>LEADER</b>	Department of Rural & Community Development / Waterford City & County Council
<b>LES</b>	Department of Social Protection
<b>TUS</b>	Department of Social Protection
<b>RSS</b>	Department of Social Protection
<b>Social Farming</b>	Department of Agriculture / Leitrim Development Company & Philanthropist

The programmes above have a very wide remit stretching from main-stream unemployment services (LES/Tus) to Community Projects, Enterprise, and Tourism, with no mariculture and some agri-diversification.

The above programmes pay 99% of the running costs of the Company which on one level provides some solidity on an annual level to the Board, but on another level due to political change, the continued inability to take a reserve for running any of the programmes, and the volatility of the contracts leaves the Board very exposed, and

service delivery to stake holders in some ways precarious, as the programmes can change tack from year to year.

## Strategic Analysis

WLP Clg. was established to work in collaboration with others and on its own when needed to promote and drive socio economic development in rural County Waterford so that there would be a resultant increase in jobs and local wealth, with a corresponding decrease in social exclusion and poverty, i.e., unemployment and isolation.



# PROVISION LANDSCAPE

When the organisation was founded back in 1991, the market or playing field that was rural development was very bare, with few institutional or NGO providers working on Rural Economic Development.

30 years on, the playing pitch for rural development has become very crowded, with State Agencies, NGO's etc all piling in to provide services and apply for RD funding. Since the last Strategic review was undertaken, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector has become very congested with players who previously would have received funding from a particular budget segment now being pushed through financial need/organizational opportunity to bidding into other sectors not really aligned to their core purpose. While the interest in all things rural must be welcomed, many gaps still appear and rural development opportunities are still not been grasped in a structured manner, with some of the proposed solutions rooted in the past, and with many of the newer players coming from an urban focus.

Four years on, the rural dweller still has a multiple choice of the same solution. The Strategy outlined below will endeavour to point to possible solutions within increasing the delivery playing field.

## **Rural Needs**

Economic and Social Need in rural areas is every bit as great as it is in urban areas. The biggest issue for rural areas is that the future in the eyes of the State, and its policy makers, is urban. The pandemic has raised the spectre of remote working and remote living. However commercial investment always seeks a good return on investment. Rural areas due to the lack of critical mass don't provide a solid base to attract commercial, hardheaded operators to invest at a sufficient scale to create high quality off farm employment.

Urban locations provide cost effective infrastructure, that leads to cost effective delivery of state services for citizens, that provides critical mass to large scale employers

who provide large scale job numbers to satiate policy demand for quick solutions to very serious issues such as unemployment.

To date Rural Areas are seen as sources of cheap food, and in peri-urban settings a place where the urbanites might obtain recreation on a weekend away.

The life blood of rural areas, its young, is being drained away at 19 years of age onwards to go to 3<sup>rd</sup> level education. Education is vital and going to 3<sup>rd</sup> level must be welcomed. The challenge in rural areas is to attract back those young people after college and a few years working elsewhere to return to the small villages and towns and develop both their own lives and the areas they live in to meet the opportunities and challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Rural villages are being decimated by technology and lack of local high-quality jobs as much as by young people not coming back to live in rural areas. No more than large town centres, e-commerce is changing how rural dwellers shop and live. In the 1960's, shop vans used to crisscross rural Ireland selling groceries to rural households and farms. Today, through online shopping, the Tesco Wagon or the Supervalu Wagon delivers the groceries that the rural dwellers have ordered online to the rural household. Online banking is now the norm, and a lot of the traditional commercial infrastructure in a village is now redundant due to technology. Counter intuitively, rural dwellers need to embrace technology.

Farming has become genuinely commercial. It will go from strength to strength, but with a much smaller cohort of larger farmers whose service needs can be addressed from large distances away, again due to critical mass. The farms employment needs will also reduce due to the massive steps occurring in agricultural technology, both in crops, livestock, and machinery.

Quality rural employment is a must for rural regeneration. One of the most vibrant areas in rural Europe is southern Germany. It is home to the Mittelstand or dynamic small family- owned businesses that are based in small towns and villages throughout Bavaria. They have developed from very rudimentary operations into world class

manufacturers and sub suppliers. Northern Italy has a similar tradition. These businesses have a tradition of putting the brightest apprentices into 3<sup>rd</sup> level and bringing them back into management positions in family-owned operations.

Universal broadband today is now what electricity was to rural dwellers in the 1940's and 1950's. This one piece of infrastructure could revolutionise rural economics and rural life.

## **Opportunity for Rural Areas**

While urban is the holy grail for policy makers, technology, education, communication, and the human need for community provides great opportunity for Rural Areas. Many large businesses now subcontract out work to smaller more focused enterprises that are delivery focused on specialised components.

The natural environment is now very important for both urban and rural dwellers, as are healthy short food supply chains, offering both food security and quality food. Activity tourism is a growth area.

Recent U.K. studies indicate that many urban dwellers are now looking at rural villages as an ideal location to live and work in (Subject to Broadband), as commuting becomes more difficult, takes longer, and property prices in prime urban locations escalate.



## The Opportunities are:

- Re-imagining rural areas, particularly villages as vibrant centres for a variety of economic activities that derive business as part of integrated supply chains for larger urban areas:
- Re-imagining the redevelopment of rural villages as places for younger people to settle in alongside older dwellers:
- Harnessing in a people centred manner the opportunities been presented through a clean environment and the need for clean energy:
- Embracing technology on farms, in local business, provision of services, housing and enterprise, be it traditional or green:
- Embracing opportunities for farm families to become suppliers of social and economic services, i.e., from Caring to Tourism:
- Embracing new financial models to fund development such as loans, equity and philanthropy:



# VISION FOR WATERFORD LEADER PARTNERSHIP CLG.

Our vision is to help create Communities that are economically, socially, culturally and environmentally sustainable in which all people can reach their full potential.

## Objectives

- The development of infrastructure, both hard and through soft supports (employment Counselling/Work Programmes) necessary for employment and sustainable living in Rural Waterford.
- To promote Business and Tourism through investment, particularly in the Circular Economy and Eco Tourism.
- To establish viable enterprises that utilize both the natural resources of the area and or embrace new technology that are wealth and job creating:
- To promote and source funding towards Culture/Language, Heritage, and Training that promotes local talent and new thinking to deal with contract working:
- To work contractually with Statutory and other investors to establish a variety of investment sources:

## Goals

- To identify and compete for sources of funding which help to achieve the company objectives, particularly in Soft Supports and Job Schemes.
- To develop a solid linkage with potential lenders/equity providers and philanthropy in terms of matched finance and investment in sustainable projects.
- Vibrant Villages: A programme to facilitate the growth of 12 sustainable villages within the county
- Engines of Growth: The development of a focused strategy for the economic development of selected areas (e.g. Blackwater Valley) where communities

and local business work together on an integrated plan to create new wealth, making the rural area a more attractive place to visit or live in.

- o Sectoral initiatives: Through Community Training, Facilitation and Scenario Planning, set up county wide organisations /structures that are ready and willing to work quickly at community level with national programmes so that the communities have action ready strategies ready to avail of State and EU Funding opportunities as they arise.

## **Actions to Underpin the Vision, Objectives, and Goals.**

**“Culture eats Strategy for breakfast every time.” – Peter Drucker**

While the core of this document outlines the Vision, Objectives and Goals of the organization, the strategy must be underpinned by the Company Culture, the actions, the targets, and the milestones.

The culture of the Company is led by the Board and grounded in a solid work ethic, openness, equal opportunity, and a drive for continuous improvement. As with every organization, the cultural values cannot be taken for granted and the company will endeavour to review and check on an annual basis its commitment in real terms to these four cultural cornerstones.



CONFERENCE MARCH 2018

# PROGRAMMES

The Company currently has a programme fee turnover of €1m p.a. In the next three years the Company will endeavour to double programme fee turnover to €2m p.a. This will improve the cost base and increase critical mass. This will be done by bidding for new and existing programmes that fit the objectives and goals of the Company and provide a median admin fee of 20%.

## Actions

- Subject to the current programmes, 1. Continuing to exist, and 2. Remaining financially and operationally feasible, the contracts would be maintained and if possible expanded.
- That new programmes, or existing national programmes not within the company's operation, but that are aligned to the Company's objectives and goals would be examined and applied for.
- That a concerted effort for philanthropic investment in the soft skills area would be sought.



## Outcomes

The strategy will lead to the Company providing the following outcomes:

- The Company will provide Soft Supports in terms of employment linkages, work experience and enterprise creation in a cost-effective manner.
- Be a regional provider of Caring Provision on Farms.

- Be a driver of Rural Economic Development Zones, i.e., Clusters of dynamic villages
- Be a driver of the Circular Economy and the Mittelstand culture
- Be a developer of practical Bio-diversity initiatives

## Outputs

- Provide Employment Services to 700 people per annum
- Provide on farm caring services to 360 people per annum throughout the Southeast.
- Deliver the Walks Scheme through 55 Farm Families
- Invest in three REDZ Initiatives
- Invest in the Circular Economy and Family businesses that are technologically driven to become mittelstand like businesses
- 2 large rewilding initiatives.

