

Ballyhoura Country Story 1989-2015

The Ballyhoura Model of Community Based Local Development

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Disclaimer

While every effort has been taken to ensure accuracy of the contents of this report Ballyhoura Development Ltd, the Minister and Department of Environment, Community and Local Government cannot accept responsibility for any omissions or inaccuracies contained herein.

Section 1

The Ballyhoura Model of Community Based Local Development ¹

Introduction

Ballyhoura Country

Ballyhoura Country, named after a local mountain range, is an inland, predominantly rural area in the mid-west of Ireland. It has a population of 86,292² widely dispersed over 54 local communities. The district, which has its headquarters at Kilfinane, straddles two administrative areas – South and East Limerick and North East Cork – including two towns with a population of between 3,000 and 4,000 (Charleville and Mitchelstown), four with a population of 1,000 and 2,500, and a large number of smaller towns and villages. The nearest large urban centres are the cities of Limerick and Cork which are approximately 40 km and 60 km respectively from Kilfinane.

Ballyhoura Development Limited (BDL) has been actively engaged in the socio-economic development of this area for twenty six years. Structured as a non-profit company, with charitable status, BDL is a partnership of the community and voluntary sector, social partners, Local Government and statutory agencies. It defines its mission as working *in partnership to develop empowered and inclusive communities that inspire and embrace new opportunities, drive positive sustainable social and economic change and reduce inequalities thereby making the Ballyhoura area an attractive location in which to live, do business and visit*. This is achieved through a programme of activities that are aimed at sustaining the local economy, through diversification of economic activity, and improving the quality of life of citizens. The model of local development which BDL has developed is regarded as strikingly successful in delivering sustainable

¹ The authors would like to acknowledge the contribution of Aisling Moroney to the early sections of this report.

² Census of Population, 2011.

³ BDL and many of its initiatives it have been used as models of good practice in local development over the years by, for example, OECD; European Commission; European Parliament; LEADER European Observatory; Irish Local Development Network (ILDN); and the National Rural Network (NRN). BDL has been invited to make presentations on their work at countless international seminars.

⁴ Throughout the report the term local development is used to encompass local/rural development as it is a more generic term and was the term used in the earlier OECD report. Ballyhoura Country is predominantly rural so that, in practice, the terms local and rural can be used interchangeably in the Ballyhoura case. Where it makes more sense to do so, the term rural is used.

Map of Ballyhoura Area

economic and social development in its operational area. It received international recognition by being included as a model of good practice in the OECD report *Best Practices in Local Development*, published in 2001³.

The purpose of this report is to extend and update the 2001 OECD case study by capturing the local⁴ development strategies implemented in Ballyhoura and what these have achieved over the twenty six years



of its operation. There is a particular focus on the key principles and methodologies which frame the company's approach to development, the results achieved and the lessons learned. A further objective is to identify aspects of the approach that have wider applicability and that can add to the national and international understanding of local development practice.

The report is organised into six sections. The next section is a description of the wider socio-economic, policy and institutional context in which BDL operates, focusing particularly on the impact of the economic bust and boom. Section 3 is an outline of the current structure of BDL. In Section 4 we set out the history of how the organisation was established and the evolution of its approach to locally based rural development both through its management and delivery of various national and EU programmes and in locally developed initiatives and projects. In Section 5, we discuss the Ballyhoura model of rural development focusing in particular on the methodological approach to rural development that has evolved. In the final section, we identify the principles and practice associated with the Ballyhoura model as a blueprint for sustainable rural development.

Our analysis is based on an examination of the extensive documentation provided by the organisation and on interviews with management, staff and Board members of BDL and selected stakeholders⁵.

⁵ Direct quotes from interviewees in the text are in italics but are not attributed.

Section 2

Ballyhoura Country The Context

The Context

Ballyhoura Country

Economy and Society

The Ballyhoura area has many of the characteristics typical of rural regions in the developed world and operates in a national and European environment which is shaped by economic conditions and by evolving policy discourse and practice⁶. Its economic profile is strongly linked to its rural character and to regional and national trends. Agriculture and food production predominate and are an intrinsic part of the economy and life of the Ballyhoura area. At the time of the OECD case study undertaken in the late 1990s⁷, it was estimated that as much as 67% of the workforce was directly or indirectly dependent on the agricultural sector, mainly in dairying and beef enterprises and their associated food processing industries. However, from 2000, the numbers employed in the agri-food sector declined due to restructuring of industrial production which led to job losses in agri-processing and in other traditional manufacturing industries also. The area lost in the region of 1,200 jobs between 2000 and 2008, due mainly to this restructuring, but also through a decline in the numbers of full-time farmers and a growth in part-time farming. The number of milk suppliers in the area, for example, reduced from 2,260 to 1,640 between 2000 and 2008. The boom in the construction, retail and services sectors of the economy from the late mid-1990s onwards went some way towards moderating the impact of these structural adjustments, particularly for part-time farmers. Overall, unemployment rates in the Ballyhoura area fell

⁶ See O'Hara and Commins (2006) for a discussion of policy discourse in rural development.

⁷ The OECD study, published in 2001, was based on research carried out in the late 1990s, so, the term rural is used.

⁸ Towns and environs with populations of greater than 1,000 but not cities or suburbs, CSO SILC (2011).

⁹ Loughrey et al. (2012).

considerably between 1991 and 2006.

The collapse of the national economy and the shock of the recession were more severely felt in rural Ireland. The strongest impacts of the downturn were evident in smaller towns, as job losses in construction and locally traded services were very significant. Small enterprises were badly hit as can be seen in the numbers of closed premises, the depressed property prices and derelict buildings in many Irish towns. Poverty rates too are higher in small and medium sized towns⁸ which also have the highest proportions of working age households with no member working.

The Ballyhoura experience of recession has been typical and revealed underlying and persistent weaknesses and disadvantage across the area. This was evident in higher than average unemployment rates, increased out-migration levels and more business closures. The male employment rate in the Ballyhoura area fell from 63.1 per cent in 2006 to just 46.7 per cent in 2011. Average household disposable income, in the Ballyhoura area, dropped by 12% during the same period and poverty rates increased. When coupled with reduced service levels in the public and private sectors, this resulted in greater stresses on families⁹.

The impact of the recession varied spatially throughout the Ballyhoura area. Those locations closer to Limerick City suffered the least income declines, while certain areas, particularly those further south, were more seriously affected. For instance, in just one Social Welfare Office serving the area (Kilmallock), the numbers registered as unemployed rose from 811 in 2006 to 2756 in 2011 – representing a 240% increase. Moreover, Ballyhoura also has pockets of concentrated inter-generational disadvantage in some housing estates as well as hidden social exclusion in more spatially dispersed rural areas.

To some extent, the period of economic growth and boom merely

masked the underlying structural weaknesses typical of rural economies across Europe. These include demographic imbalance, lack of economic diversification and inadequate infrastructure – all of which continue to provide challenges for the Ballyhoura area. However, it is important to recognise, as was noted in the OECD case study on Ballyhoura, that the BDL area is less peripheral than other rural regions in Ireland particularly those in the west and north west. Moreover, the area has considerable human and natural resources and a history of using them to promote economic and social development.

Policy and Institutional Context - International and EU Trends

The policy and institutional context in which Ballyhoura Development operates is multi-layered, being influenced by international and national perspectives on rural development policy and practice, European systems of support to rural and disadvantaged areas, and national, regional and local institutional policy and practice. The emergence and early development of Ballyhoura Development corresponded with an international shift in thinking about rural development theory and practice, from the 1980s onwards. This was based on the realisation that top-down, national policy-led approaches to the development of rural regions are largely ineffective and that a more endogenous, place-based approach which emphasises local resource endowments – climate, land fertility, and environmental quality – and the specific characteristics of human, cultural and social capital, can provide the fundamental conditions for long-term and more sustainable rural development. The term ‘Integrated Rural Development’ or IRD is often used to capture this overall approach.

More recent thinking has stressed that ‘bottom up’ approaches are most effective when complemented by strong relationships and institutional links between local areas and their wider political, institutional, trading

¹⁰ See Shucksmith (2012).

¹¹ OECD (2006).

¹² OECD (2013).

¹³ *Liaisons entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale.*

and national environments¹⁰. The OECD's influential New Rural Paradigm¹¹, published in 2006, encapsulates much of this thinking. It emphasises the importance of local specificities and capacities, but also of integrating sectoral policies at regional and local levels and improving co-ordination between them by central government. It also emphasises the value of partnerships between public, private and voluntary sectors in the development and implementation of local and regional policies.

More recent studies from the OECD provide compelling evidence that rural regions can make a strong contribution to national growth¹². Analyses of growth patterns, and of higher and lower income regions across the OECD, have shown that predominantly rural regions, on average, enjoyed faster growth than intermediate or predominantly urban regions over the period 1995-2007. Lagging regions can contribute significantly to economic growth, as long as their assets are nurtured. Place-based policies are both efficient, and have the capacity to create a more inclusive and fairer society, through their ability to mobilise local actors and ensure that they are involved and engaged in the development process.

EU approaches to supporting rural and regional development over the past few decades have been influenced by these insights into the dynamics of growth in lagging regions. The various reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy and the Structural and Cohesion Funds have involved a shift to a more territorial approach and an emphasis on concepts such as multi-functional agriculture, integrated, multi-sectoral development, partnership, participation and solidarity. Successive LEADER¹³ programmes and the mainstreaming of the LEADER approach have given prominence to the role of local people in identifying and implementing solutions in their own areas and have recognised the effectiveness of the partnership approach to getting things done.

The influence of the European Union funding programmes on rural

and local development has been notably strong in Ireland. Indeed, EU norms and expectations regarding the administration and disbursement of regional and local development funds (including LEADER) have played a significant role in encouraging more endogenous and integrated approaches to development. EU requirements for programme delivery, particularly the insistence on partnership structures have had a significant influence on the establishment and evolution of locally based development partnerships such as Ballyhoura Development. The challenge of implementing complex development programmes and the need to respond to detailed European funding requirements have professionalised the operations of local development companies and created the conditions for more inclusive and multi-level (state, regional and local actors) decision-making and multi-stakeholder involvement (formal and informal political institutions and non-governmental actors)¹⁴.

The most recent CAP Programme (2014-2020) significantly places the LEADER method at the centre of rural and local development efforts. The LEADER approach will be used as the common approach for community-led local development (CLLD) by the European Structural and Investment Funds such as the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

Thus, in Ireland, Local Development Partnerships (LDCs), such as BDL, have been significant adopters of place based approaches to local development and have successfully demonstrated their effectiveness. This has influenced the orientation and content of European programmes, is being supported by European Funds, and has been shown to have a proven effectiveness by the OECD.

The National Policy and Institutional Context

Ballyhoura Development operates within a national policy and institutional context which is influenced by a number of factors: international economic and technological conditions; EU regulations; national interests and the way these are responded to centrally and articulated locally. In Ireland during the boom years, employment growth and exchequer buoyancy, from the mid-1990s to 2008, meant that there were increased resources for public investment, which provided the capacity and space to begin to address entrenched regional disparities and some of the issues specific to rural areas. A White Paper on Rural Development was published in 1999 and, for the first time, balanced regional development became a key national objective as set out in successive National Development Plans (2000-2006 and 2007-2013). The National Spatial Strategy (2002) provided a framework for spatial development to 2020, aimed at achieving a better balance of social, economic and physical development across Ireland through more effective and integrated planning. However, the economic ‘crash’ brought this momentum to an abrupt end, both in terms of its direct socio-economic impact and the associated effect of the downturn in the public finances on the availability of monies for public investment.

The downturn in the Irish economy post-2008, and the measures to curb public spending implemented since then, form the backdrop for local development efforts since 2008, including those of BDL. As a result of the recession, many services provided in the local development sector were increasingly in demand. For example, the Ballyhoura Jobs Club saw a rise of 56% in its caseload of people seeking support between 2006 and 2010. This is not surprising given that, in 2011, towns such as Croom and Mitchelstown recorded unemployment rates of 32% and 23% respectively, compared with a national average rate of 19%. At the same time there have been significant cuts in funding to the community and

¹⁵ Harvey (2012).

¹⁶ The Community Service Programme (CSP) provides grants to community businesses that deliver services and create employment for people from disadvantaged groups.

¹⁷ Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (2012).

¹⁸ The Local Enterprise Office replaced the county and city enterprise boards in 2013. They are intended to provide a First Stop Shop for anyone seeking information and support on starting or growing a business in Ireland.

voluntary sector including to the programmes managed by BDL. One estimate put the reduction in government supports for the community and voluntary sector at 48% between 2008 and 2012¹⁵. Over this period funding to the Community Services Programme (CSP)¹⁶ fell by €10m, a decrease of 18%. The Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP) had a reduction of 35%, while the social housing budget for the sector declined by 54%. Moreover, the crisis stimulated more intense scrutiny of the impact of state funded programmes and an emphasis on greater efficiency and value. Public service reform seeks to reduce costs and achieve better value for money by a restructuring of public procurement processes and it is expected that more and more public services will be supplied by means of tendering in the coming years.

Local Government Reform

In 2012 *Putting People First*¹⁷ a major programme for fundamental reform of local government was published by the Government, and given legal effect in the Local Government Reform Act 2014. Based on a vision of local government as the main vehicle of governance and public service at local level, the changes involved are quite far reaching and have led to a substantial reduction in the number of regional and local authorities. While the county or city continues to be the core element of local government, municipal districts based on towns and their hinterlands will be the main sub-county units for local spatial and community planning. Local authorities also have a stronger role in enterprise development and business support through Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs)¹⁸.

The reforms provide for a closer alignment between community and local development activities and local government with a view to improving local service delivery to citizens, achieving greater efficiency and effectiveness and enhancing the role of local authorities in the delivery of local and community development programmes

¹⁹ There is more than one LCDC in some local authority areas.

²⁰ Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (2014).

²¹ Callanan (2003)

and functions. To give effect to this, Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) are now established in each local authority area¹⁹. Each LCDC brings together local authority members and officials, State agencies and people actively working with local development, community development, and economic, cultural and environmental organisations to implement a joined-up, cross-sectoral approach to local and community development programming. LCDCs are expected to coordinate, plan and oversee local and community development funding; pursue a more integrated approach to service provision; involve communities in local and community development programmes; drive efficient use of resources; pursue additional funds; and focus on learning and feedback from programme implementation²⁰.

Prior to this reform process, local government authorities in Ireland had relatively few powers²¹. The limited presence and power of local government, particularly at a sub-county level, provided an opportunity for the emergence of locally-based approaches to addressing socio-economic problems and an associated range of multi-level governance arrangements. The administrative and funding requirements of EU programmes which required subsidiarity and partnership combined with local volunteerism and community leadership meant that civil society organisations assumed a lead role in the formation of local development structures.

These structures became responsible for the management of EU funded programmes such as LEADER in rural areas, and successive national social inclusion programmes such as SICAP (Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme 2015 – 2017) and the Local and Community Development Programme 2010 – 2014 (and prior to these, the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP)), as well as employment support programmes such as the Rural Social Scheme, and employment activation programmes such as the Tús Work Placement

²² BDL's operation of these programmes is explained and referred to later in this publication.

²³ Prior to this, LDCs prepared and submitted Business Plans to Pobal, the body responsible for managing funding programmes, such as the LCDP, on behalf of the Irish Government, or directly to government departments, as in the case of LEADER to date.

Programme²². This is in contrast to many other European countries where local development groups have tended to be driven by, or more closely linked with, relevant local authority structures.

The Irish local government reforms are an attempt to address the perceived disconnect between local development and local government and a consequent need to streamline and simplify the delivery of state-funded services locally by bringing local development funding programmes and associated activities within the governance of the local authority. Community and local development activities are intended to be more closely aligned with local government with a view to improving local service delivery to citizens, achieving greater efficiency and effectiveness and enhancing the role of local authorities in the delivery of local and community development programmes and functions. Local Authorities are required to prepare integrated Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs) comprising economic and community elements. The economic elements of the LECP will be developed by the Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) for Economic Development and Enterprise while the LCDCs will develop the community elements. The final LECP, incorporating both elements – economic and community – will be formally adopted by the local authority.

A further challenge for local development companies is the introduction of public procurement processes that require them to become involved in a competitive tender for the delivery of programmes that they have hitherto delivered on a contractual basis without such a process²³. For instance, BDL has successfully delivered successive government social inclusion programmes since 1996. The social inclusion programme 2015-2017, Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), required local development companies and other interested bodies to engage in a two-stage process. Stage One (pre-qualification) required groups to indicate their interest, capability and eligibility

to deliver SICAP. BDL, having being approved for Stage One, then submitted an application for Stage Two of the application process. The second stage of the application process was overseen by the respective LCDCs. Ballyhoura Development were successful in their two tenders, 1) To deliver the SICAP in the Ballyhoura area of North Cork and 2) To deliver the SICAP in the Ballyhoura area of South and East Limerick. The SICAP procurement process covers the three years from 2015-2017.

For the LEADER programme 2014-2020, a two-stage process was deployed. This included a pre-qualification/expression of interest stage to assess the capacity and eligibility of entities who express an interest in submitting an LDS (Local Development Strategy). A second stage invited those entities that succeed in Stage One to develop and submit a LDS. Should more than one entity for an area be successful in both stages, efforts will be made to facilitate collaboration/cooperation with the view to the submission of a single strategy for that area. Where that may not be achievable, competing strategies will be evaluated and one selected.

Ballyhoura Development collaborated with two other LDC's in North Cork and the North Cork LCDC to submit one overall strategy for North Cork. The new structure will have the North Cork LCDC as the LAG with the three existing LDC's as implementation partners in their respective areas. In Limerick, Ballyhoura Development have also successfully collaborated with the other LDC and the Limerick LCDC to submit one overall strategy for Limerick, with the LCDC as the LAG and the two LDC's as implementation partners in their respective areas.

It is anticipated that the 2014-2020 LEADER programme will move to implementation stage in early 2016. The programme is worth €250m in Ireland and is much reduced in size, from the €425 million that was allocated to the 2007-2014 programme. From the discussion above, it is clear that from an international development and EU perspective, local development partnerships such as BDL are key actors in an approach to

rural and local development which is regarded as having a proven value and effectiveness. However, it remains to be seen as to whether changes and reforms in the national policy and institutional context will have a positive impact and contribute to stronger local government or could potentially undermine, the efficacy of the integrated local development process as developed and refined by BDL and other LDCs over more than two decades. It will require commitment and capacity from both sides, as well as principled support from national institutions, to ensure that local government reform will bring about more effective local service delivery and result in better quality of life for citizens.

Section 3

Ballyhoura Development Current Structure and Main Activities

Current Structure and Main Activities

Ballyhoura Development

²⁴ Hospital,
Kilfinane, Bruff,
Kilmallock, Doneraile,
Mitchelstown.

Ballyhoura Development Ltd operates from its headquarters in Kilfinane, Co. Limerick. Covering 54 rural communities, it has divided its operational areas into five districts and, in addition to its operational headquarters in Kilfinane, operates four District Service Centres at Charleville, Mitchelstown, Kilmallock and Caherconlish. Management, finance, HR and expert specialist staff are located in the central office with the District Service Centres staffed by Community, Enterprise, and Employment Development Officers, Team Leaders and staff on labour activation schemes. In addition, Local Training Initiatives (LTI) operate from Training Centres in six locations²⁴ which are staffed by a Coordinator and Assistant Coordinator. BDL also manages two Community Houses in Cappamore and Mitchelstown in partnership with local residents and the Local Authorities. The Community Houses operate as community service facilities, primarily but not exclusively, for the residents of the housing estates in which they are located. These are staffed by volunteers, labour activation scheme participants and sub-contractors. Ballyhoura Development also manages two food units that facilitate and support start-up micro food businesses to establish and grow locally.

Given the rural, dispersed nature of the area, low population density and its poor public transport provision, this spatially diverse service delivery model is a critical mechanism to ensure access by BDL's target client groups, especially disadvantaged communities and citizens.

BDL's resources are based on its management of a number of EU and National programmes. Its delivery model is based on the integrated delivery of core programmes (see below and Figure 2) and other projects managed and leveraged by the company.

Programmes 2015

The core programmes managed by Ballyhoura Development in 2015 can be summarised as follows:

Rural Development Programme - LEADER:

The RDP targets resources to support improvements to the quality of life in rural areas and the diversification and development of the rural economy.

Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP):

The three strategic goals of SICAP are: Community Development; Education and Training; and Employment/self-employment. SICAP will focus on social inclusion through empowering communities to work collaboratively with relevant stakeholders, engage those most disadvantaged and excluded in society and effectively contribute to citizen engagement.

Team AR Denny
tackle the Assaroola
River Abseil,
Galty Mountains,
Anglesboro,
Co.Limerick

Photo -
Gordon Thomson



²⁵ These might include maintaining and enhancing way-marked ways, agreed walks and bog roads; energy conservation for older people and the less well off, village and countryside enhancement, social care, environmental maintenance, etc.

²⁶ Ballyhoura Architectural Survey LTI - FETAC Level 3 Employability Award (Hospital, Co. Limerick).

Ballyhoura Outdoor Recreation LTI - FETAC Level 5 Outdoor Recreation Award (Kilfinane, Co. Limerick).

Ballyhoura Antiques & Furniture Restoration LTI - FETAC Level 5 Furniture Design & Making Award (Doneraile, Co. Cork).

Ballyhoura Logistics LTI - FETAC Level 5 Logistics & Distribution Award (Mitchelstown, Co. Cork).

Ballyhoura Catering LTI - FETAC Level 4 Catering Support Award (Bruff, Co. Limerick).

Ballyhoura Retail LTI - FETAC Level 4 Retail Skills Award (Kilmallock, Co. Limerick).

Rural Social Scheme (RSS):

The RSS provides income support for farmers and fisherpersons in receipt of specified Social Welfare payments, while providing services of benefit to rural communities²⁵.

TUS Programme:

The Tús Community Work Placement Programme is an activation measure, provides short-term quality and suitable working opportunities for people who are unemployed, thereby improving their work readiness, while at the same time carrying out beneficial work within communities.

Jobs Club:

The Jobs Club supports unemployed and underemployed citizens to develop their job seeking skills and to progress to employment through Job Skills Workshops, which offer assistance with preparing CV's and covering letters, interview skills and identifying possible job, training and career opportunities.

Ballyhoura Local Training Initiatives (LTIs):

BDL manages six LTI's which are targeted primarily at people under 35 years of age, with no formal qualifications or incomplete secondary level qualifications. Participants are provided with skills specific training to achieve progression in terms of employment and/or further education/training. Each LTI covers core and elective training modules to enable learners achieve a Major QQI Award. BDL initiated and manages six LTI's²⁶.

BDL manages a number of additional projects and initiatives including:

Towards Occupation enables people who are distanced from the labour market as a result of mental ill health/distress to develop the skills and confidence, through capacity building and training, to move

into employment, self-employment, education, training or volunteering;

Ballyhoura Family Support Initiatives offer integrated and targeted supports to specific areas of communities e.g. estates, which have high levels of deprivation and needs, and where a lifecycle approach to the delivery of supports is provided;

Ballyhoura Enterprise Start supports people to explore their potential for self-employment by providing courses and mentoring; the project is focussed on supporting clients who are long-term unemployed.

Ballyhoura Development has also managed, led and participated in a range of other programmes throughout the past twenty six years. These include previous EU EQUAL programmes, the Equality for Women Measure, EU Horizon Programme, the EU pilot Local Social Capital Programme, the Millennium Fund, and the Limerick Volunteer Centre. Many of these involved local, national and transnational partnerships with local government, statutory agencies, social partners and community groups.

Funding through these the various programmes is also linked to delivery of the company's strategies in various sectors which are discussed further below. Over the years a number of spin-off companies, many of which are social enterprises, have emerged which include Ballyhoura Heritage and Environment; Ballyhoura Fáilte; Ballyhoura Food Centre Hospital; Mitchelstown Food Centre; Forest Holiday Developments; Bruree Foods; Ballyhoura Rural Services, Hospital Family Resource Centre; Croom Family Resource Centre; CareBright; Rural Bus; Mobile IT.

The Operating structure of BDL is illustrated in Figure 2 below.



The Board of Ballyhoura Development

The Board of BDL includes 20 Directors from four distinct groups – four social partners (farming, trade unions, and employers); four local government (three elected members and an official); four statutory agencies (education, farming and food, forestry and Gardai). The remaining largest representative group of eight are community representatives. Five of these are elected through the five District Fora, two from the Social Inclusion Advisory Council, and one from the Social Enterprise Advisory Council. Each Director serves a three year term.

The Board is supported by a number of sub-committees in economic development, community development, environment and agriculture, audit finance and governance, human resources and strategy as outlined in Fig 3 below. Directors select which sub-committee (s) they wish to participate in, with each sub-committee discussing strategies, initiatives and projects relevant to their theme and making recommendations to the Board. The sub-committees are in a position to advise and guide the plans and strategies of BDL. They also lead the development, implementation and monitoring of strategies.

A set of parallel advisory councils allows BDL to tap into outside expertise and competencies beyond the Board. They act as consultative fora and consist of non-Board members. The Social Inclusion Advisory Council provides a forum for social inclusion stakeholders to identify needs and issues of concern and potential projects in a structured way; to make requests for support to the relevant Sub-Committee; to receive information on progress, developments and initiatives of BDL. Membership is limited to representatives from the social inclusion stakeholders within the Ballyhoura Development area. The Projects Advisory Council (PAC) assesses project funding applications and makes recommendations on them to the Board. The Project working groups are convened as needed for specific projects or sectors.

These structures are illustrated in Figure 3 below.



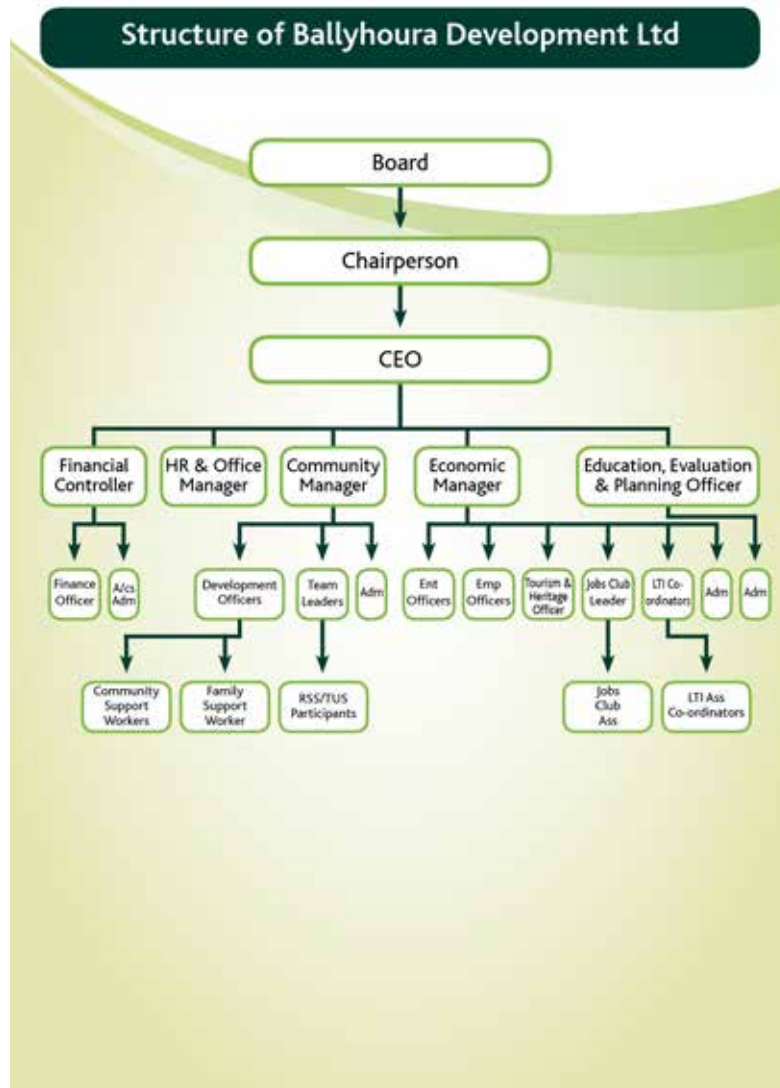
Organisational Structure

The organisation is led by a CEO and a senior team of five comprising:

- Community Development Manager
- Economic Development Manager
- Financial Controller
- Human Resource & Office Manager
- Research and Evaluation Officer

In December 2015 BDL employed a staff of 41.4 (full-time equivalents - FTE) which involved a total of 44 staff. The funding for these staff comes primarily from the RDP and SICAP (16.9 FTE); TUS Team Leaders (7 FTE – currently one vacancy) RSS Supervisors (2 FTE); Local Training Initiatives (12 FTE); Job Club (2 FTE) with the remainder accounted for by TO Programme and DSP funded Community Support Worker. In December 2015 BDL managed 207 participants in the Rural Social Scheme and TUS work experience programmes.





Section 4

Ballyhoura Development History and Evolution

History and Evolution of

Ballyhoura Development

This section contains an outline of how BDL was initiated and has developed. The narrative of the origins and evolution of the organisation in chronological order demonstrates how the organisation emerged organically. It also shows the way in which its foundations and capacity grew stronger through an iterative process where new projects build on what is already achieved, and how activities are planned and executed within a wider strategic framework. As well as demonstrating the factors that account for its success, a narrative approach allows key aspects of the Ballyhoura methodology to be put in context for analysis and discussion in later sections.

Beginnings

The Ballyhoura area has a tradition of cooperative community involvement reaching back to the nineteenth century. The first dairy co-operative in Ireland was set up locally in Dromcollogher and Muintir na Tire was founded in Co. Tipperary nearby²⁸. The formation of a development association in the village of Kilfinane in 1964 can be seen as part of this tradition and stimulated the beginning of BDL. The original founders recognised the need to diversify the local economy to address decline, and considered that tourism development offered considerable potential.

In Ireland, since entry to the then Common Market in 1973, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was the main support to the rural

²⁹ ACOT (an acronym for An Comhairle Oiliuna Talamhaiochta) was at that time the body responsible for agricultural education and advice which are now part of the remit of Teagasc. Macra na Feirme is the main organisation for young farmers.

³⁰ The concept of rural and agri-tourism was at that time being promoted in other European countries such as Austria, France and the UK.

economy. The CAP had a narrow agricultural focus and was directed at farm income and commodity price support. However, the need to reform the CAP in the mid-1980s and to address rural decline and peripherality led to a new focus on the non-farm economy in rural regions of Europe, and an acceptance that rural development needed to encompass the non-farm sector. Concepts widely used in the developing world such as integrated, multi-sectoral, 'bottom-up' development were being applied to the development of Europe's rural areas.

In 1986 the Kilfinane group set up Ballyhoura Fáilte Society, with support from ACOT and Macra na Feirme²⁹, as a tourism cooperative to promote tourism in the area³⁰. They began by offering agricultural study tours and student homestays and quickly realised that while there was considerable tourism potential locally, there was a need to widen the area of operation, and to invest in infrastructure and product development in order to attract sufficient numbers of visitors. Furthermore, they recognised that diversifying the rural economy would require them to extend their focus beyond tourism. This led to the process of preparing the first Integrated Development Plan.

In 1988 a sub-committee of Ballyhoura Fáilte Society – Ballyhoura Development Board (BDB) – was formed to prepare the first integrated development plan for the area for the period 1988-93. This group comprised members from the community, public and private sectors and included a broad range of expertise and experience. The plan included an integrated five year plan with one-year achievable targets. Tourism development was the core objective with the goal of increasing annual tourism revenue tenfold by 1993. Towards the end of 1988, state funding was secured to allow the appointment of a full-time manager. By this time, the Chairperson had made a strong voluntary contribution to developing the Kilfinane group, and had acquired a strong skills set, particularly in area-based development. The first Manager had

²⁸ Muintir na Tire, was established in 1937 in County Tipperary to promote community development and social improvement - social, economic, cultural and recreational – based on the participation of people themselves in advancing the welfare of their community.

considerable expertise in agri-tourism in her professional career before taking up the position.

Partnership and planning, resources, professionalisation

Three aspects of the Ballyhoura approach were evident from these early days: the coming together of a partnership of community, private and public sectors to develop a strategic plan; the group's ability to broker resources in order to get established; and their recognition of the need for a professional approach to local development. These elements were to be built on and strengthened over the ensuing decades and become Ballyhoura hallmarks.

EU structural funding was accessed for the development of the Ballyhoura Mountain Park and training courses were organised to respond to identified needs. Ballyhoura's area of operation was expanded to sixteen communities with a focus on broadening the tourism infrastructure to accommodate special interest holidays. A central reservation system was put in place and a programme of product development undertaken involving upgrading accommodation, visitor farms, signposting, walks, and tracks, picnic areas and other supports for outdoor activities and educational tours. BFS was also active in promoting the idea of rural tourism nationally and of co-operation among rural tourism interests, and was one of the founder members of a promotional body for this purpose, the National Rural Tourism Co-operative.

In 1990, a Community Consultative Committee (CCC) was formed involving representatives from each of the groups affiliated to BFS

in order to provide a community base and a mechanism by which community interests could be represented and responded to. In its early years the CCC focused mainly on building engagement with communities by creating networks and exchanging ideas. It has subsequently evolved into the District Forum and is the primary mechanism by which communities are represented on the board of BDL. This is discussed further below and described in more detail in the Case Study on the Ballyhoura District Forum in Section 2.

Programmes – Consolidation and Development of the Model

LEADER I

By the time the EU LEADER I Programme was launched in 1991, BDB had already developed a successful model of local development and was gaining recognition for its innovative approach to tourism development among policy makers and practitioners. The key elements of this – *a strategic approach which was market-led and quality focused; clear participation and consultative structures; and a good working relationship with statutory agencies driven by the idea of partnership* – were by then being recognised as key success factors for locally based development in rural areas. The main constraint to further development for BDB was lack of resources, so that participation in LEADER I – the EU's first programmes to support locally based development in rural areas – offered a timely opportunity to build on the gains already achieved.

To comply with the requirements for LEADER funding and be designated as a Local Action Group (LAG), a legal non-profit entity Ballyhoura Development Limited (BDL) was formed from BDB together with representatives of thirty community groups, seven statutory bodies and the two major food processors in the area. BDL made a successful

application for the LEADER I programme, by producing the required business plan setting out objectives for tourism development through enterprise, human resource development and new technology, while also aiming to further diversify the local economy through promotion and supports (both hard and soft) for the establishment of small businesses, craft enterprises and supporting the development of local services.

Ballyhoura Fáilte Board Members with Staff and European Award.



Designation as a LAG under LEADER I enabled BDL to achieve many of its objectives particularly in relation to tourism development, with income from tourism activities doubling over the period 1991-1994. The other strands of its multi-sectoral plan – those concerned with business development and the agri-food sector – proved to be more challenging. A pilot project to support would-be entrepreneurs with technical support, practical training and expert advice and mentoring – Small Enterprise Entrepreneurship Development Programme (SEED) – realised five new enterprises and two expansions.

A second pilot project The Taste of Ballyhoura³¹ focused on creating an awareness of the variety and quality of the area's dining-out experience and involved the provision of training and capital grants to existing and aspiring restaurateurs. A pilot programme in seed potato growing to investigate its viability as a supplementary income for farmers was eventually abandoned due to changes in market conditions³².

³¹ This project has evolved considerably and this is detailed in the Taste of Ballyhoura Case Study in Section 2.

³² This is one of the few, or perhaps only, example of a project which begun in Ballyhoura which was eventually abandoned and, like all the projects undertaken, BDL are very conscious of the lessons learned.

Strengthening the basic elements and building capacity

Participation in LEADER I also allowed BDL to consolidate and build on its structures and to broaden its ambitions. The partnership model of the LAG ensured buy-in from stakeholders and facilitated targeting a wider range of sectors through the multi-sectoral plan. Perhaps of most significance to BDL's subsequent evolution was that it allowed recognition of the importance of animation and capacity building as key elements of sustainable locally based development. In LEADER I, this involved providing the financial and human resources to support communities and individuals to take a project from concept to conclusion and, in the process, learn to understand strategic and innovative thinking, utilise technical expertise, and to work with a range of stakeholders. This delivered an enhanced level of planning competence in the whole community and was reflected in the quality of both collective and individual projects developed over the period.

LEADER II

BDL built on the lessons from its operation of LEADER I so that its Integrated Development Plan 1994-1999 for LEADER II was considerably more ambitious, specifying ten rural innovation programmes for animation, marketing, quality, rural renewal, industry/services, natural resources, food, rural tourism, town and village renewal, and coordination/facilitation.

Refining the methodology

As mentioned above, one of the lessons of BDL's experience with LEADER I was the value of animation as a catalyst for action. In line with their recognition that the initiation, development and activation of projects, whether at individual or community level, is a process that must be actively stimulated and supported by a process of engagement and encouragement, they allocated 20% of LEADER II resources to animation for development and capacity building. This intervention was underpinned by a model of project development that offered technical support and assistance to ensure effective planning and a focus on quality.

These priorities demonstrated BDL's way of addressing the wider strategic objective of improving the capacity of communities to intervene effectively to bring about change, regardless of whether the ultimate outcome was business establishment or quality of life enhancement. This is one of the hallmarks of the Ballyhoura model – the focus on community capacity building to achieve change and its support through the allocation of resources.

Animation work³³ was not confined to communities but extended right across the private and public sector leading to the progression/management of, and support to 250, projects during 1995-1999. More than 40 of these were major actions which did not receive LEADER grant aid but were enabled to access other sources of funding, and significant further investment potential was identified.

Reviews of the operation of LEADER II in 1997 and 1998 led to a sharpening of the focus on economic development and on making the area more attractive for inward investment. Actions included the

³³ Animation and capacity building (ACB) is understood as engagement, advice, support, guidance and training to both individuals and community groups.

³⁴ West Limerick Resources; IRD Duhallow Development Company; Blackwater Resources Ltd.

establishment of a Tourism Task Force to target investment and up-scaling of the rural tourism business; investment in enterprise units to encourage entrepreneurs to locate in the area; a partnership with three other LAGs³⁴ to develop social enterprise initiatives; the development of a rural regeneration strategy; and a renewed focus on building the Ballyhoura brand.

Linking animation and training

The animation activity which was the fundamental building block in LEADER II activity was reinforced by the integration of training into all sectors. Designed to underpin enterprise activity, training was delivered in a sequence of enterprise awareness training seminars, followed by issues courses and/or specific skills training to complement capital investment and reinforce the quality market-led focus. This emphasis on training and the recognition that skills enhancement is an essential part of the development process has been maintained and built on in subsequent years.

The Small Enterprise Development Programme (SEED) for business firms, delivered significant job gains and investments. Piloted in LEADER I, SEED had a dramatic impact, not alone on new jobs created by participating businesses, but also in new jobs created in the district in which the programme was held. The performance of SEED II implemented in 1996/97, and SEED III implemented in 1998/99, reflect the original outcome. Employment increased from 26% to 50% in the ten participating firms and from 18% to 38% in the nine participating firms in the respective programmes. Fewer than 25% of the firms received other LEADER grant aid.

Enterprise development focused on the craft sector (wood and engineering), food service, development of social enterprises, teleworking and enterprise units. Over the period of the LEADER II programme more than 40 new SMEs were supported to establish and the value of the food service market in the area doubled. BDL spearheaded a partnership of state agencies, Limerick County Council, the private sector and University College Cork to form a Food Group which managed to attract investment funding for a Food Centre which provided a quality food industry facility and formed the basis for a subsequent Food-Tourism strategy which is discussed further below.

A training programme in community development, delivered by UCC, led to the development of a pilot rural transport project which was subsequently extended and mainstreamed nationally. Working in conjunction with University College Dublin³⁵, Ballyhoura developed a community planning methodology, also on a pilot basis, which has become a fundamental part of the Ballyhoura methodology and is discussed in more detail in Section 5.

BDL's focus on rural tourism in LEADER II was directed at consolidating its existing relatively strong base of quality accommodation and activity products along with co-operative marketing. QUEST³⁶ was designed to improve the standard, scale, pace and quality of the tourism product. The results of the tourism strategy were exceptional, with performances greatly exceeding targets³⁷ and growth of tourism in the area was four times the national average. An independent review in 1998 attributed this success to the following factors:

- The existence of a coherent tourism development, marketing and training strategy supported by statutory tourism and training partners and local authorities within the BDL partnership;
- Integrated support to the sector from these partners, and from other state agencies;

- Ballyhoura Fáilte's effectiveness as a central marketing organisation;
- Increased tourism investment resulting in substantial growth in accommodation, visitor attractions and food service provision; and
- A supportive environment and resources from LEADER II and national policy.

Transnational learning and collaboration

BDL's strategy of identifying the best international experience and transferring models of good practice was evident from its early years. In 1999 Ballyhoura Development built relationships with an Italian LAG in the Treviso region of Italy, who had expertise on outsourcing, while the Italian partner sought Ballyhoura's experience on rural tourism. This initial transnational experience resulted in the nucleation of three new businesses from the parent indigenous wood/furniture manufacturer locally in Ballyhoura.

During LEADER II, personnel from Ballyhoura accessed experience in distribution of food products (UK), co-ordinated public/voluntary investment (Fermanagh), models of good practice in natural resource development (France), food enterprise development (across Europe), community development (UK), community housing (Northern Ireland), new opportunities for women (Belgium), qualifications for rural development workers (Greece), and Territorial Employment Pacts (Finland).

In return BDL has evolved an open door policy of sharing its experience. Numerous study groups from all over the world visit each year.

³⁵ The ADOPT Community Action Planning Model was developed by Dr, Pat Gibbons in UCD in conjunction with BDL and is discussed in detail later.

³⁶ Quality, uniqueness, enhancement strategic planning and training in management.

³⁷ A 1998 evaluation of the impact of tourism in Ballyhoura Country revealed that the 1999 target was actually exceeded in 1997 and that the target for 2005 was almost reached in 1998.

Transnational Example - Partners in Learning (PiL)

In 2005, three communities from the Ballyhoura Development area participated in a 'community linking' project. They visited communities in the Tororo District in Uganda where they shared their experiences on community planning, health, education, farming and microfinance. This concept, developed through UCD, BDL and Plan Ireland, and implemented by the communities in Mbula in Uganda and Mitchelstown in Ireland, was new in that it concentrated on sharing the documented plans developed in each community. A more developed method of building links was found to be necessary in order to create bridges across different parts of a community, e.g. to link schools or businesses directly. Out of this Partners in Learning emerged – a development approach that links localities actively involved in community development to share experiences and learning towards mutual gain. A manual has been developed to support the transfer of PiL to other LAG's and communities.

³⁸ Rural Community Care Network (RCCN), now rebranded as CareBright

Although LEADER was a hugely significant resource for its work, from its earliest days BDL also recognised that the capacity of its animation and community planning processes, that were integral to its operation of the LEADER programmes, could act as a catalyst for projects other than those funded by LEADER. An example of this was when fourteen agencies in Limerick and North Cork, initiated a project, with support from the EU Article 6 Programme, focusing on opportunities in rural areas. A pilot home care service for older persons and people with disabilities was initiated by Ballyhoura Development and incorporated as RCCN³⁸ (Ballyhoura) Ltd. This project, which was a response to lack

of services and jobs in remote rural areas, has evolved into a major social enterprise in the ensuing years.

³⁹ The case study of Croom Civic Centre is an example of how BDL communities have developed economic and social infrastructure.

Communities building economic and social infrastructure³⁹

The climate for private investment in Ballyhoura was doubly negative – firstly by virtue of the area's rurality and secondly, because tax incentives existed elsewhere. The potential for communities to address this market failure became evident in LEADER I. During LEADER II communities were animated and exposed to successful models. This led to the development of enterprise units in small rural communities in previously derelict buildings or sites.

One LEADER II flagship development was the restoration of a derelict mill as enterprise units. Another community completed a development comprising six units, and others developed smaller sites.

Eight communities undertook residential housing developments (providing housing for the elderly, marginalised young families, and people with disability), and the provision of serviced sites at affordable prices was undertaken in eight further communities. Many had the added value of replacing dereliction e.g. by developing on the sites of disused buildings. Complementary developments of day care centres and respite centres were undertaken in four communities.

Provision of sports facilities was traditionally the domain of voluntary sports organisations. Community group provision of recreational facilities resulted in one community completing a

multipurpose indoor sports complex (having received LEADER grant aid) and planning for a further two leisure complexes. Communities invested 3.5 million in the projects listed above.

The Local Development Programme – Tackling Social Exclusion

The need to address marginalised and socially excluded communities and individuals, which had been identified by BDL during LEADER I, became a key element of its second Integrated Plan 1994-1999. In 1992, EU Structural Funds provided funding to support an Irish programme of locally based development initiatives involving a partnership approach and specifically targeted at social exclusion and community development. In its initial stages, this programme applied only to certain designated disadvantaged rural areas. BDL facilitated four district partnerships in the Ballyhoura area to prepare a development plan for funding and managed the resulting Local Development Programme (LDP) during 1996-1999 along with the LEADER programme. The LDP, and its successors the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP), the Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP) and the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) were subsequently mainstreamed and each has been operated by BDL to date.



Strategies for addressing social exclusion

This first LDP managed by BDL greatly exceeded its targets of job numbers and participation in education and training initiatives. Of more long term significance was the building of awareness of social inclusion issues and recognition of the importance of tackling disadvantage as a part of an integrated development strategy. Activation and training activity among disadvantaged groups led to improved confidence and the emergence of local leaders and facilitators, and a focus on problem solving and project development strengthened linkages between state agencies, local government, social partners and community groups. This spirit of experimentation and innovation, of taking the opportunity to try out new ideas which characterised some of the actions at this time has been maintained and strengthened as a fundamental part of the Ballyhoura approach.

The Rural Social Scheme

The Rural Social Scheme (RSS) was introduced just over a decade ago at the height of Ireland's economic performance and at a time of record employment levels, and BDL was one of the forerunner Local Development Companies involved in its pilot implementation. Despite the buoyant economic climate, the policy objectives of the Scheme provided an acknowledgement of continuing employment challenges in certain sectors and the ongoing need to invest in rural development. The Scheme's objectives were and are primarily:

1. To provide income support to qualifying farmers and those involved in the fisheries sector;
2. To harness available skills at a local level; and

3. To free up Community Employment places.

The Scheme provides an income support to people in rural occupations – typically operating small farm holdings or small fishing vessels – that are economically unsustainable, in the broader context of social cohesion. It is not designed as an employment activation scheme and was not set up to help people into sustainable employment, however given the significant decrease in the viability of farm incomes in the last decade, participation on the Scheme has become an important means of ensuring a living wage for smallholder farmers in the Ballyhoura area.

Tús

In late 2010, an activation initiative for people who are long-term unemployed and in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance – the Tús Community Work Placement Programme was launched. BDL delivers the Programme in the Ballyhoura area, growing from 40 staff participants and 2 Team Leaders in 2011 to 160 staff participants, 7 Team Leaders and a Coordinating Supervisor by 2014. The Programme was launched when unemployment was at its peak of 14.7%, with the objective of providing participants with an opportunity to gain the benefits from being in work, and affording community and voluntary organisations the opportunity to benefit from their skills and experience.

While conceived as a short-term labour activation measure, the increasing reliance of local community and voluntary organisations on the support provided by Tús staff is likely to present significant challenges to the sustainable delivery of local voluntary services, if the scale of the Programme is reduced, particularly in light of diminished and decreasing resources available elsewhere.

Joining the Dots – Integrating Community Development and Economic Development

For the funding period 2000-2006, when Ireland was in the midst of an economic boom, BDL set out twin aims for the development of the region – community development and economic development. During that period it delivered the LEADER+ programme and the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP). The community development objectives were aimed at promoting: the development of support structures and networks; the social inclusion agenda; rural renewal; protection and enhancement of the built landscape; and greater participation in cultural activities. Parallel economic objectives involved supporting the development of: non-tourism rural enterprise; the enterprise infrastructure; Ballyhoura Country as a rural tourism destination; and improvement of the capacity of unemployed and underemployed people. The complementarity between both sets of aims is notable – both include social inclusion and employability objectives, so that the social agenda is not disconnected from the economic.

Community Development

In implementing these objectives at a time of significant labour market buoyancy associated with rapid economic growth, Ballyhoura was able to turn its attention to issues that might not be tackled in times of more pressing social and economic circumstances. Thus they developed and refined a model of community development that had as its core the aim of addressing social exclusion and building community capacity by empowering communities and facilitating progression. Fundamental to this empowerment was the development of support structures and networks, supported by an ethos of information and knowledge sharing, and an outreach model of delivery.

Communities in the region based on five geographic districts, each

containing 9-14 communities met and networked through the District Forum (DF), with each forum supported by a designated Development Officer. The DF comprises a collection of nominees of all the community groups within the district. The DF elects a Chairperson and the Chair subsequently becomes a Board member of Ballyhoura Development. Meetings of each of the District Fora take place every second month and address issues which impact on the communities such as volunteering, governance, planning, and tourism. Information is disseminated through them so that communities also have access to information, supports and learning from other communities, which supports and enables the development of broad-based community development plans, projects and initiatives. During 2000-2006, these fora engaged in a wide range of issues including a Landscape Architecture Project and other



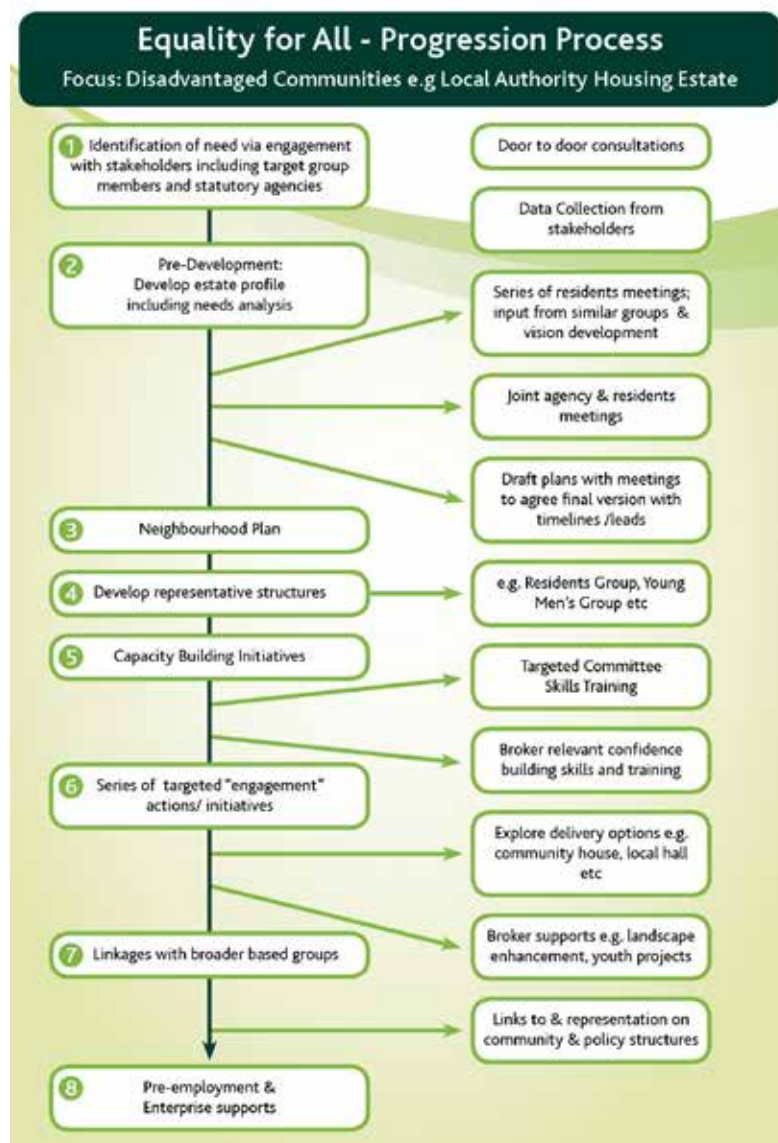
built heritage, landscape and rural renewal projects.

BDL, in partnership with a number of statutory agencies, also initiated and implemented District Coordinating Networks in 2007/2008, in each of its geographic districts, with a specific focus on advancing the social inclusion agenda in each district. The objective of these Networks is to provide a structured forum for statutory and community groups which work in, or are focussed on, the field of social inclusion, to network, share information and to work together to identify, coordinate and deliver multi-agency responses to key social inclusion issues at a local level.

Engagement as a strategy of social inclusion and progression

An example of the way in which the model of integrating social inclusion and economic development objectives operates in practice is the process of community engagement. This is facilitated by BDL staff and involves assessment and analysis of all socially excluded groups. Community engagement is achieved by encouraging groups to become involved in mainstream activities such as tidy town projects, landscaping and drama. This can begin with a simple initiative linked to the Tidy Towns (e.g. planting flower beds) which will be used to build relationships and trust and encourage wider civic engagement. Estate management training is a key strategy of social inclusion with a specific target on Local Authority Estates in the larger towns within the Ballyhoura region.

The initial step in encouraging engagement is to initiate a specific project on an estate e.g. a clean-up evening. This brings estate residents together and the BDL staff work with them to articulate common concerns/issues. Specific targeted training is provided in order to enhance the competence and confidence of the residents and a formal working group will be encouraged to form. This working group will then be linked/introduced to relevant other local voluntary organisations and statutory agencies in order to encourage improved understanding and communications within each stakeholder. This process which is represented diagrammatically in Fig 5 below is clearly focused on empowerment and progression.



What action planning and engagement can deliver – Community Houses

Arising from the neighbourhood action planning process (steps 2 and 3 in the previous example on page 28), and the strongly identified need for a community training and social space, BDL negotiated with the local authority to lease a vacant unit for use by the residents of a housing estate, in two communities, for use as a Community House. The Community House provides a base, coordinated by the residents, with support from BDL, from which educational and recreational activities for all sectors of the community are provided. As well as the provision of meeting spaces, the house contains a fully fitted-out training room, with nine computers. The training room enables courses to be delivered in the house to members of the target groups from the local and surrounding areas.

A partnership approach with all agencies and stakeholders working in the area has enabled the provision of a wide range of services in the Community House, particularly the Education and Training Board, HSE, County Council, An Garda Síochána and Foróige. These services include a youth drop-in service, a homework club, cookery workshops, citizen's information clinics, horticulture training, computer training, personal development skills courses, Towards Occupation courses, employment clinics and Start Your Own Business Courses.

Initially much of the work was focused on relationship building between BDL and the community both the residents on the estates and the wider community. Going door-to-door gathering information, collating a community profile and delivering

initiatives to address needs and service gaps is crucial to this early relationship building process.

However, buy in from statutory agencies, the youth, community and voluntary sectors and the wider community was equally important. By all of the groups working in partnership appropriate responses tailored to the needs to each community was put in place.

The work has focused on empowering the community to engage various statutory agencies, youth organisations, schools and local community groups using a community development approach. This has proved successful in terms of working with the community as a whole. Further to this work and possibility as a result some individuals accessed their own skill levels and returned to education; a result of engaging people through soft skills, building relationships and building confidence in the community.

Economic Development

The model of economic development adopted during 2000-2006 built on all that had gone before by supporting enterprises, particularly small firms, craft enterprises and ICT businesses, while continuing to develop the rural tourism product, address the lack of enterprise space and support unemployed and underemployed people. Enterprise development measures included direct support, mentoring, network establishment and training. Enterprise infrastructure was developed through supporting the provision of enterprise space and through research and animation. This linked local communities to the opportunities afforded by the national Community Enterprise Centre

⁴⁰ Community Enterprise Centres provide space in a supportive environment for budding entrepreneurs and serve to help the development of entrepreneurship locally in urban and rural locations. Since the launch of the first Community Enterprise Centre scheme in 1989, 110 Centres have been completed nationally.

⁴¹ See Case Study in Section 2.

programme run by Enterprise Ireland⁴⁰. Support for employability came from the operation of the Jobs Club and the first Local Training Initiative. These latter two initiatives also leveraged funding from other agencies and programmes.

Tourism development continued and involved investment in visitor attractions, accommodation, development and maintenance of walk trails, and heritage products. In a typical innovative initiative, BDL researched the potential for commercial activity appropriate to the local mountains and animated and supported partnerships to develop Ireland's first Mountain Bike Centre as detailed in the Case Studies in Section 2.

Over this period (2000-2006), the pilot social enterprise project begun in the last programme period, and referenced above as Rural Community Care Network (RCCN), also developed into a significant business providing homecare primarily to older people in their own homes throughout rural Limerick and North East Cork and employing more than 200 people. This enterprise has now become a substantial home care provider and was rebranded in 2012 as CareBright⁴¹.

Ballyhoura Model in Action 2007-2014

The Local and Community Development Programme

BDL's delivery of the national Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP, formerly LDSIP) to 2014 involved providing a wide range of services to disadvantaged families, unemployed and underemployed, children and young people in: (i) areas with concentrated levels of disadvantage e.g. local authority estates and private estates with high proportions of rent supplement tenants; and (ii) dispersed areas of rural disadvantage. Their approach drew on their experience from previous programmes by being client focused with a strong emphasis on partnership, collaboration and brokerage of

additional resources to provide targeted responses.

BDL's strategy, as outlined in Figure 5 above, is based on the idea of progressing clients along a continuum from initial engagement through personal development, education, training, employment and enterprise supports to full community and civic engagement and participation and to employment/self-employment. Services provided include: targeted pre-development work; community drop-in services; information provision and dissemination; linkages and signposting to relevant services; engagement and enterprise clinics; coaching and mentoring; capacity-building; facilitation of participative neighbourhood and community action planning; support for District Fora; brokerage, facilitation and training and social inclusion networks.

GROW (ME UP)

GROW was a modular self-empowerment course, under the LCDP, that supported individuals to realise their potential, power and possibilities. GROW was the first of three modules, followed by Module 2 – ME and Module 3 – UP. Each module took ten weeks to complete and was directed at members of target groups living in specific low-income housing estates. The programme was designed to provide the learner with the skills required to identify the areas in their lives to which they needed to give attention. This allowed realistic goals to be clarified and actioned as the course progressed. The approach was to encourage self-reflection and enable participants to examine their current life circumstances (personal, professional, financial, social) and to identify areas of their life which they would like to work on, in order to improve their quality of life. It also provided an opportunity for participants (residents) to form a network, thereby building

social capital and enhancing community cohesion. Each learner availed of one to one life coaching session to identify their goals in a trusting and open environment. Module 1 GROW, focused on Module 2 – ME – focused on developing Self Esteem and Confidence and Module 3 – UP – focused on personal and interpersonal communication and development.

The Rural Development Programme

When it submitted its application for the funding under the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2007-2013, BDL had been in existence for two decades and had evolved into an integrated rural development organisation with fully aligned structures for the delivery of multiple programmes. Ten core measures and associated actions built on and consolidated the approach adopted in LEADER I, LEADER II and LEADER+. These ten measures were grouped under two key headings – Economic Diversification and Quality of Life, in line with the RDP requirements. Economic Diversification aims to facilitate the development of the enterprise, food and tourism sectors and stimulate employment so as to optimise their sustainable contribution to the rural economy. This aim was met through four measures: Enterprise, Food, Employment and Rural and Agri-Tourism. Quality of Life aims to facilitate all those living and working in the area to realize their social, cultural, environmental and recreational expectations. This was delivered through six measures: Community Services and Facilities; Active Citizenship; Socio-Economic Planning; Recreation; Heritage & Culture and Environment. These ten core measures were supported by cross-cutting measures which encompass key aspects of the BDL methodology for locally based rural development, such as activation and engagement, networking, branding, research, training, inter-territorial

and transnational co-operation.

Giving effect to this involved the delivery of a huge range of supports and services throughout Ballyhoura country. Like its approach to community development described above, what is distinctive about the BDL approach to economic development is the process of researching an idea, facilitating buy-in, linking appropriate stakeholders and providing ongoing and appropriate support to project promoters as long as needed. As is evident from the discussion so far, this has led to numerous distinctive and innovative enterprise initiatives of which the following are notable recent examples.

⁴² This is outlined in more detail in the Taste of Ballyhoura Case Study in Section 2.

Connecting food and tourism

From the beginning, tourism and food business development were integral to BDL's enterprise development strategy. Having created enterprise spaces for existing and potential niche food businesses BDL progressed to championing these local products, reviving local food heritage and building a food tourism strategy for the region.

The Taste of Ballyhoura, originally piloted as part of the LEADER I programme, had by 2012 evolved into A Taste of Ballyhoura Country⁴². This is a regional branding initiative and trading group which currently involves nine local food and drink producers. The objective is to assist them to add scale and volume to their output through linking them with relevant state agencies and creating an appropriate support structure. During 2013, and the early part of 2014, BDL facilitated, resourced and supported this group to meet on a monthly basis and formally establish their own code of practice associated with the Ballyhoura brand. Development

of a brand image for Ballyhoura Country offers a visual reference for a coordinated promotion of the products and services and a guarantee of quality.

BDL also ensured that the food enterprises were linked to major Ballyhoura Country tourism events such as the 2014 European Mountain Bike Championship, and local festivals. Brand awareness was increased through the publication of recipe books using the produce of the member producers. Producers were supported to develop national and international profiles through the resourcing of an extensive PR and marketing campaign which included links to national and international media and attendance at trade fairs. These producers have been able to grow their businesses significantly and to promote the Ballyhoura brand within and outside the region.

Making the local environment work for local people

The research and development of Ireland's first mountain bike centre demonstrates the innovative and strong brokerage role that BDL plays through engaging in research, building partnerships and securing resources. The origins of the Ballyhoura Mountain Bike Centre go back to 1989 when BDL initiated, facilitated and supported the partnership of local landowners, communities and statutory agencies to develop recreational infrastructure. The initial project was the establishment of the Ballyhoura Way (a long distance walking route of 90km, a series of shorter way marked walking loops and running/orientation routes).

In 2003 a study of tourism potential of the Ballyhoura Mountain range led to the development of the Ballyhoura Recreation Initiative with a focus on mountain biking. BDL supported and fostered a partnership between local, regional and national (statutory and voluntary) stakeholders including: Coillte, Ballyhoura Fáilte, Cork and Limerick County Councils, Shannon Development and Fáilte Ireland. The result was an initial investment of €1.3 million to create a world class mountain bike trail which offers 97 km of mountain biking inclusive of car parking, bike washing, and showering facilities. A further investment in 2013, of €450,000 to develop more technical trails supported international recognition of this world-class facility. It hosted the European Elite Mountain Bike Marathon Championships in 2014 and the European Adventure Race Final in 2015.

Ballyhoura Trails



⁴³ Ireland Reaching Out is a not for profit company which offers a reverse genealogy programme free to voluntary groups/communities.

Localising ‘The Gathering’ in Ballyhoura

BDL has become adept at creating bespoke local versions of national initiatives and using them creatively to achieve their strategic objectives. This is evident in how they combined the resources available under the RDP 2017-2013 Heritage and Cultural Strategy with The Gathering, a national initiative in 2013 aimed at encouraging the Irish diaspora to return to Ireland to participate in a range of locally hosted events.

Eight local communities participated in a localised community-based heritage training programme ‘My People, My Place, My Heritage’ which was a national reverse genealogy programme delivered by Ireland Reaching Out⁴³. The premise of the Ireland Reaching Out project was that instead of waiting for people of Irish descent to return to Ireland to “trace their roots” local communities, largely through volunteer effort, would be enabled to proactively engage with their Diaspora. Reverse genealogy entails the tracing and recording of all the people who left a local area and the proactive engagement with their living descendents worldwide. The objective of this training was to become skilled in genealogical research at a local level, build awareness of local archaeology and heritage and enable participants to understand and interpret their local landscape and their local stories. Engagement in the training programme prepared volunteers to deal with visitors and gain a much greater understanding of genealogy, and genealogy resources, nationally and locally. IT training to enable use of the Ireland Reaching Out website led to the creation of a virtual online community that could market local areas on an international platform.

⁴⁴ This is described in more detail in a Case Study in Section 2.

The second stage of this project was local training on the recording of gravestones⁴⁴. Such was the local interest in this that it resulted in extensive recording of 17 local graveyards (102 by 2015). BDL availed of the JobBridge programme to employ two community archaeologists and delivered specific training on grave recording to a number of unemployed individuals through a TUS Scheme. This ability to combine social inclusion measures with economic development by training local unemployed people and volunteers in a skill set deemed necessary for local tourism development is one of the distinctive features of the BDL approach.

Animation, training and capacity building at the community level were complemented by networking and partnership building at the regional and national level. BDL participated in a national Ireland Reaching Out conference and liaised with heritage officers, conservations officers and archaeologists in Limerick and Cork County Councils to shape the regional tourism and heritage strategies to better incorporate the BDL local area strategy. At a national and international level, BDL works with Fáilte Ireland, the Heritage Council and two other transnational partners to enhance the branding and promotional capacity of the heritage initiatives.



⁴⁵ This project is part of a government pilot programme to support the development of Rural Economic Development Zones defined as functional rather than administrative geographic areas that reflect the spatial patterns of local economic activities and development processes.

Talking Towns

BDL's capacity to respond innovatively to challenging socio economic issues is typified by the Ballyhoura Market Town Initiative. Launched in 2014, this BDL's creative and response to the impact of the economic downturn on the region's country towns. As a pilot project, it involves a working partnership between BDL, Kilmallock Town Traders, Kilmallock Partnership and the internationally renowned, London based, and New Economics Foundation (NEF). In order to build community awareness of the initiative a number of open community information and training events were organised by partnership including the "Plugging the Leaks" and "Re-imagine the Town Centre" seminars. These brought local business and community members together to examine (a) how money could be retained in the local economy and (b) the development of a ten-year plan of sustainable development for the town of Kilmallock. The initial success of these seminars is reflected in the establishment of a number of town teams that are now committed to delivering actions in the following areas: Design/Appearance, Local Economy, Heritage, Festivals and Events, Services, Marketing and Promotion. The local enthusiasm and expertise for engaging in the commercial future of the town was a critical factor in the successful design, development and implementation of the Charleville Kilmallock Rural Economic Development Zone pilot project in 2015⁴⁵.

The following is a summary of BDL's achievements 2009-2015.

Ballyhoura Development Activity 2009-2015

Governance and Management

- Compliant with the Code of Practice for Good Governance of Community, Voluntary and Charitable Organisations in Ireland.
- Q Mark Accreditation.
- Charity Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) implemented in 2014.
- Managed investment of €28m across 24 different community and economic programmes.

Enhancing community capacity and optimising local assets

- Supported 248 community and voluntary organisations across 55 communities
- 37 communities developed Community Action Plans
- 1,599 projects supported across community, economic and environmental development.

Numbers supported in community cohesion and social inclusion projects

- 1,340 families; 3,350 children and young people
- 7,502 individuals trained across community and enterprise
- 783 people directly supported into employment

Enterprises supported in tourism, artisan food, creative sector, manufacturing and social enterprises

- 642 enterprises; 752 jobs

⁴⁶ Discover Primary Science and Maths has a network of Discover Centres offering accredited workshops and outreach programmes for Primary schools on a range of themes encompassing Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths and Space. The Centres support schools in engaging in science education outside of the classroom in a curriculum relevant and inquiry based way and provides opportunities to meet scientists and engineers from a range of disciplines.

Community service

- Ballyhoura Rural Services – one to one visitation to over 250 elderly
- Ballyhoura Helping Hands – 600 home improvement and security jobs undertaken for the elderly since 2012

World class recreation facilities and sporting events

- Ballyhoura Mountain Bike Trail network extended
- World Single Speed Championships; European Elite Mountain Bike Marathon Championships and European Adventure Race Championships Final

Interpretation of heritage and added value

- Lough Gur Visitor Centre re-vamped
- 102 historic graveyards surveyed and digitalised
- 42 local tour guides trained

Enhancement and conservation of the environment

- 38 villages and towns participating in the Tidy Towns Competition
- 4 renewable energy projects developed
- 3 outdoor classrooms, accredited Discover Primary Science and Maths Centres⁴⁶.

Increased visitors numbers to the area

- 24,198 additional overnight visitors
- 300,350 additional day visitors

Development of key community and economic infrastructure including

- Abbington Enterprise Centre
- Ballylanders Town Park and Playground
- Ballyhoura Mountain Bike Trail

- Digitisation of Historic Graveyards
- Charleville E-Centre
- 35 Nationally Approved Loop Walking Routes
- Coote Hall Resource Centre Kilmallock
- Croom Civic Centre and Town Park
- 517 community work placements.
- Kilbehenny Community Centre
- Mitchelstown Enterprise Centre
- Mitchelstown Leisure Centre
- Autograss Racing Track
- St. Josephs Equestrian Centre in Liskennett
- The Millennium Centre Caherconlish

Establishment and consolidation of Ballyhoura brands

- Ballyhoura Country, Simply Different, and Taste of Ballyhoura.



Section 5

The Ballyhoura Model of Local Development Key Elements

Key Elements

The Ballyhoura Model of Local Development

At the heart of the Ballyhoura model of sustainable local development is a dynamic process by which BDL facilitates community and citizen development through an iterative process of animation, capacity building, engagement, partnership, planning, review and evaluation. This model has been refined and developed over more than two decades and is based on a distinctive set of principles. These are represented diagrammatically in Figure 6 and 7 .



Figure 6.



It is supported by robust partnership structures including the BDL board and sub-committees, the District Fora and District Coordinating Fora as well as various operational groupings that emerge from socio-economic thematic action planning, and that are initiated or facilitated by BDL to give effect to its various initiatives. This structure puts the citizen (communities, businesses and individuals) at the centre of the

Figure 7.



organisation stressing the creation and enhancement of opportunities by working in socio-economic partnerships and fostering participation.

BDL has developed its structures and methodology while delivering the EU LEADER and national social inclusion programmes, by integrating the delivery of supports available to communities through labour activation measures such as Tús, as well as leveraging considerable additional public and private resources into its operational area of 54 communities. Its actions have driven the development of tourism, agri-food, private and social enterprise, while giving equal attention to addressing social inclusion needs, adjusting its services effectively when the Irish economy went from boom to bust. Its client focus and

particular strategies for community and economic development – animation, capacity building and participation in community socio-economic planning – are the key characteristics of its approach. We consider these in more detail in this section.

The narrative account of its evolution to date also demonstrated several other significant elements of BDL's operation which are notable and distinctive, not just for their innovative aspect but for the way in which they have become markers of the Ballyhoura model. These include:

- Being citizen and area, rather than programme driven – proficiency in tailoring programmes to local needs rather than vice versa;
- Brokering resources for local projects, identified through the animation process, from mainstream eu and national exchequer funds, as well from as philanthropic, local and other sources;
- Finding efficient and effective ways of using resources so as to minimise paper work and administrative burdens on community-based projects;
- Putting in place pilot initiatives to test ideas emerging from planning consultation and review;
- Being knowledge-driven and recognising the value of research and data to provide convincing evidence of need and viability of project proposals;
- Identifying models of best practice elsewhere and replicating customised versions locally;
- Working cooperatively with other lags, whether at home or trans-nationally to facilitate scale and exchange of best practice.

These points are discussed further in Section 6.

Focus of Development Work-Communities and Individuals

A key principle of the BDL method is an unwavering commitment to the idea that everything they do should be clearly focused on the betterment of communities and the citizens in the area who need their services. This is articulated in their mission and vision statements, and in Ballyhoura documents, but is also very evident both, in the projects they undertake and in the way staff talk about their work in terms of a client-focused model. This focus is underpinned by an organisational ethos based on respect for 'clients' (whether individuals, communities or enterprises) and an understanding that the role of BDL is about building trust, empowering and facilitating, and brokering resources, so that the projects that result can actively support sustainable community development. There are two major operational methodologies that BDL employs to give effect to this focus – the ADOPT model and Animation and Capacity Building (ACB).

Participative Community Based Socio-Economic Action Planning – the ADOPT Model

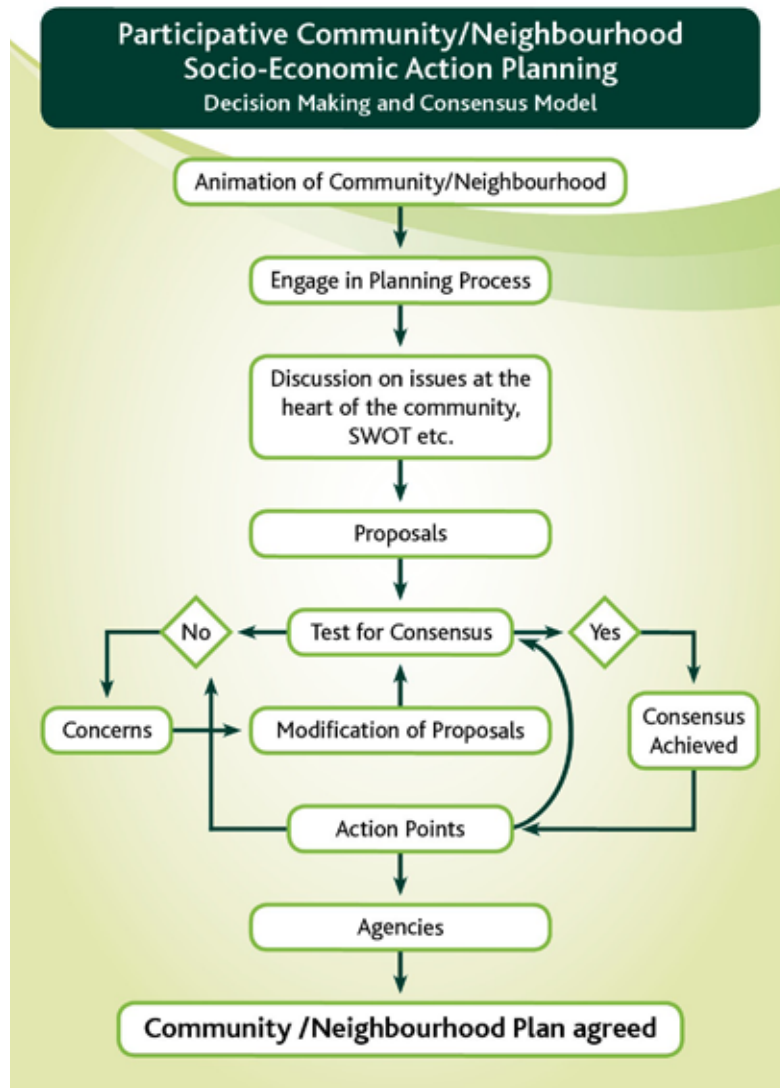
Central to BDL's efforts to give communities a greater involvement in decisions and actions that impact on their areas is the development of a socio-economic action plan for neighbourhoods (this can be an estate, a community, town and its hinterland). This involves a well-defined process known as ADOPT (an acronym for Audit, District, Organisation, Planning and Training), which brings together a community to develop consensus about community priorities, capacity to engage with public bodies and other agencies, and agreement on a community plan containing a set of actions that will enhance the quality of community life. BDL regard the process by which community plans are created as an essential tool of community development so, as noted above, they collaborated with University College Dublin (UCD) to develop the

ADOPT model.

The ADOPT model began as an action research project in delivering community-targeted training and was initially piloted in nine local communities. It was subsequently refined and transferred across the region by the BDL staff who were trained in the methodology.

ADOPT is based on five basic concepts: audit the area, select districts, encourage networking between relevant organisations and enhancement of organisation structures, facilitate a horizontal consultative planning process and provide training to enhance local capacity. As discussed below, animation of citizens /groups to participate, including target groups and socially excluded groups is a key element. The approach entails an initial local audit exercise in a particular area/community in order to identify key local resources. The next stage is to divide the area into a number of districts based on service centre settlements. The encouragement and/or strengthening of organisational networks within each area follows and then a community-based socio-economic planning process is carried out within each district; an analysis of the socio-economic data for the area is also undertaken. A recurring feature of this methodology in particular, but also of the BDL approach in general, is the ongoing provision of relevant and targeted training/education to community members/leaders with the primary objective of enhancing their competence, confidence and capacity to engage with, and influence, other key stakeholders (such as public bodies and statutory agencies) in the design and implementation of local action plans.

The implementation of the ADOPT model of decision-making and consensus achievement is illustrated in Figure 8 below. There is with a further, more detailed representation of the model in Appendix 1.



Mayor Sheahan and Amanda Slattery with representatives from the winning committees



In practical terms, the ADOPT model is implemented through a pre-development animation phase (based on ACB methodology detailed below) and a series of approximately five community/public consultation meetings. At the first two meeting the community are introduced to the process, familiarised with data on their community and encouraged to participate in local workshops and SWOT analysis exercises. This helps them to identify and agree on development goals. Following a third meeting to reach a community consensus on these development goals, a number of voluntary and representative working groups are established and, with BDL support, these groups connect with relevant local voluntary and statutory organisations. BDL facilitates the consultative process, which involves a fourth meeting between these representative working-groups and relevant organisations in order to prepare a draft local community development plan. The purpose of the fifth, and final, community meeting is to communicate the draft plan and finalise it.

⁴⁷ BDL has facilitated the development of socio-economic action planning in five towns and their hinterlands, 36 communities and six estates 2009-2014.

⁴⁸ See Limerick Institute of Technology (2014) for detailed description of the ADOPT process; www.ballyhoura.development.com.

⁴⁹ O'Riordain and Associates (2011).

There are many outcomes of this process and the most significant include: the establishment of community/sectoral specific groups; strengthening of existing groups; the preparation of a series of locally owned community plans (which ultimately inform the strategic planning process of BDL and other statutory agencies such as the local authorities); the promotion of greater levels of local trust; a sense of self-confidence; and reinforcing embedded stores of local self-reliance⁴⁷

The ADOPT model also reflects BDL's vision of development and the ethos that permeates the organisation. Central to this is the facilitation and arrangement of: strategic horizontal networking among relevant partners, genuine local public consultative meetings and the organisation of productive meetings between the community representative and relevant statutory organisations. All of these actions serve to build resourceful alliances in order to realise and sustain realistic community development objectives.

A 2011 review of the BDL community socio-economic action planning process in two communities in an action research environment found that given the specificities of each community and the challenges involved in the process, it was unlikely that either plan would have been completed without the support, specific skills set and local focus of the BDL development officers⁴⁸. A study commissioned by Ballyhoura has demonstrated how innovative approaches to participative community based socio-economic planning, such as the ADOPT model, could be successfully integrated with local authority public planning processes at local municipal level⁴⁹.

⁵⁰ Moulaert and Nussbaumer (2005).

The ADOPT model can be described as a form of process innovation. Through its approach of facilitating an agreed articulation of needs and aspirations, encouragement of local support networks, and the promotion of a participative, collective community action-planning process BDL contributes to changes in the dynamics of social relations, including power relations, new forms of civic involvement, participation and democratisation⁵⁰.

Animation and Capacity Building (ACB) – Enhancing Citizens Power to Participate

The second major strategy used by BDL to engage with clients is referred to as animation. This is essentially a methodology of citizen engagement to provide coaching, guidance and support to individuals and groups so as to enhance their potential contribution to the development of their area. It is reinforced by capacity-building which primarily involves training, but also targeted inputs that enhance and support community development. ACB is staff intensive and its success is hugely dependent on the calibre, motivation, and professional competence of staff, as well as how their work is organised. Complementary and central to initiation of the ADOPT model which provides the overall framework for community planning, BDL has perfected a range of ACB methodologies. These range from strategies for one to one consultation and referral, to processes of organisation and facilitation that are part of the community planning process. Training is a core element and can range from the provision of awareness raising seminars, to the delivery of issue courses and/or specific skills training.

A key strength of the ACB methodology is the ability and willingness of BDL through its staff to adopt a variety of roles appropriate to the specific needs and capabilities of the community. This involvement can vary from facilitation, encouragement, advocacy, research and analysis to becoming a project partner in order to realise the ambitions of the

local citizen/community. Staff are flexible and adapt their methods of working according to the needs/demands of the community – operating at various levels from the individual, the housing estate, the community organisational structure through to the statutory agency. Central to this approach is the conviction that the citizen need is the most important element in the process. Staff lead, direct, encourage, challenge, facilitate, and eventually take a step back to shadow the community group(s) when the animation process has been successful. Although the methodologies and strategies adopted by the staff of BDL are innovative, it is important to recognise that they are only effective because of the staffs' ability to listen to the client or community and, in turn, be reactive, flexible, resourceful and responsive to what they hear.

The ACB methodology is evident in the ADOPT model with its emphasis on pre-development, training, animation, local capacity building and strategic networking to ensure practical and measurable outcomes. It allows BDL to address the weak local development structures and/or analytical capacities that can often mitigate against genuine local participatory development. Training and the targeting of social exclusion, is central to all initiatives undertaken by BDL and serves many purposes. From a social inclusion perspective, it is fundamental to enhancing the capacity of marginalised people living in disadvantaged areas to take an active part in local development. Participation in training courses – whether as part of the Local Training Initiatives, such as the Ballyhoura Architectural Survey, or shorter inputs under the Towards Occupation, or Ballyhoura Enterprise Start projects, or project-related skills enhancement – also facilitates the creation of solidarity and a sense of common purpose around a project or plan.

Having looked at the key elements of the BDL local development model, in the final section we identify some of its distinctive aspects which have wider applicability for the practice of place-based responses in local (or rural) development.

Section 6

The Ballyhoura Experience Lessons for Local Development Practice

Lessons for Local Development Practice

The Ballyhoura Experience

BDL's achievements to date are considerable and the organisation is a dynamic and innovative leader of community based local socio-economic development. Its approach is in line with best international practice and is highly regarded both nationally and internationally. In this section we draw out some of the key elements that make BDL so distinctive and innovative on the basis of our discussions with directors, staff and stakeholders, our observations of their work and the evidence of its impact. The principles identified here are fundamental to the BDL approach and, when taken together, can be seen as a possible blueprint for local development practice in other places.

Effective principle-centred leadership

The leadership of BDL as an organisation is proactive and is based on unambiguous principles and values. BDL's stated vision is to make Ballyhoura: an area with empowered inclusive communities and a diversified economy.

Clarity about what the organisation is about, and what it wants to achieve, is underpinned by a strategy which reflects the structures and methodology that BDL has developed over the years.

BDL identifies eight elements in its strategy⁵¹:

- A partnership approach promoting transparency, openness and accountability;

⁵² County Development Boards were local authority structures which have now been replaced by LCDCs as described earlier.

- Provision of outreach services to improve accessibility to information on opportunities and options;
- Ongoing activation, animation and mobilisation of individuals and groups to bring about their own development and participate in the development of their own community;
- Strategic planning, review and evaluation at community, committee and Board levels as well as active participation in the County Development Boards⁵²
- Brokerage of resources from statutory agencies and private sources;
- Piloting of initiatives with a view to mainstreaming innovative, sustainable solutions;
- Targeting of significant groups such as young people, women and farm families;
- Influencing policy development and implementation.

Each of these elements is very evident in the day to day work of the organisation. The Board and senior management have a clear sense of direction and a strategic orientation which is explicit, unambiguous and clearly related to practice. The Ballyhoura approach is now so embedded that it has become second nature to those leading and managing the organisation. In addition to strategy, the organisational ethos and culture is thus very evident to staff, and those in senior positions are said by the staff to lead by example. This means that management convey a clear sense of direction and set of values that creates a distinctive organisational culture in which the citizen and area come first, high standards are expected and delivered and new ideas and creativity are encouraged and supported.

The governance structures – Board and Sub-committees – are also effective in leading the organisation due to the calibre of the members and the robustness of the structures themselves. There is an

⁵¹ Vision, Mission and Strategy as stated in Ballyhoura Employee Handbook 2013. Emphasis in original.

understanding that members act in the interests of BDL on the Board and that boundaries are clear and procedures fair and transparent. Board members are very engaged with the work of BDL and see its work as being critical to the social and economic life opportunities of citizens and the sustainability of communities. Many of them are from the local area which has a strong tradition of community-based self-help activity that is rooted in the co-operative movement, Muintir naTire and Macra na Feirme.

Quality focus and exceptional staff

BDL has evolved into a highly professional organisation with strong governance structures, policies and procedures, and which is committed to continuous improvement and quality through ongoing review and evaluation. The organisation has a relatively flat structure with 44 core staff in December 2015 led by the CEO and a senior team of five (see chart p.) with 207 staff participants in the Rural Social Scheme and TUS work placement programmes. Staff work in teams but also have considerable individual scope. All programmes are interdependent and workers have clear goals while also having the possibility to work creatively and respond innovatively to communities and citizens. They are actively encouraged to identify challenges, come up with innovative solutions, and to be on the lookout for opportunities. They are expected to be skilful in adapting to changing conditions and anticipating trends, and to be able to identify funding opportunities and come up with project proposals. The fact that these competencies have been built up in the organisation over decades is one of the reasons that BDL has been so successful in leveraging funds from various sources, identifying innovative projects, and in adapting project ideas from elsewhere to local conditions.

Staff have a notable commitment to and conviction about their work, and empathy for their clients. This commitment is reinforced through

⁵³ Policies include: client support when staff members are on leave, customer services policy and client support in Ballyhoura area (Employee Handbook, 2013).

specific client support and customer services policies which have been developed by the organisation⁵³. BDL human resource policy is to recruit staff with a diversity of academic and professional backgrounds and skills. The objective of this is two-fold. The first is to avoid the domination of any one discipline or approach within the organisation thus allowing staff to work seamlessly as they have a great deal of respect for one another's work. The second objective is more strategic. Recruitment of staff with varied skill sets enables BDL to build capacity in a number of work areas including youth, enterprise, employment and community development.

Each staff member works as part of multi-disciplinary teams which meet each quarter. Monthly meetings facilitate regular updates and exchanges of information and ideas. Staff work toward unambiguous goals and are encouraged not to fear failure, which in turn encourages innovation. There are clear systems of communication within the organisation and staff are encouraged to highlight issues and challenges before they become problematic. Annual formal performance and development reviews are viewed as essential for ensuring continuous improvements in the work of the organisation

Integrated outreach to achieve engagement and deliver support

BDL's deployment of Area Implementation Teams in District Service Centres to deliver targeted and appropriate supports provides an integrated outreach system. In each DSC, development officers can respond to community needs and access particular expertise from their colleagues who work across the organisation and have a more specific focus, in for example, heritage, tourism, enterprise or employment. Development officers and others work closely with partners in various networks and structures, and as they identify issues or spot trends they can alert the local community to potential opportunities. This extends

to accessing external support and assistance to explore projects ideas in detail, to firm up new projects or mentor at an early stage. All the time you are looking forward, looking realistically at what you are doing and asking: what is the best response?

Use of the ADOPT methodology helps to ensure that community planning and development takes place in a professional strategic manner, minimising duplication and avoiding gaps in development activities. It facilitates a genuine process of participatory development, builds stores of social capital and encourages a more efficient use of statutory and community resources. The District Fora and other community structures are crucial avenues of engagement with citizens and provide a mechanism to roll out various initiatives on a district basis. They are an important avenue for the promotion of BDL activities such as initiatives/actions, funding opportunities, and education/training opportunities.

One of the ways BDL encourages strong communication and engagement at local level is evident from how the five District Service Centres are staffed. Frontline staff in each of these centres are local participants in labour activation schemes, such as TUS or RSS, and have a strong familiarity with the local community and their needs. They are not directly employed by BDL but would have been trained and given job titles by BDL and are hugely valuable to us because they are dealing with their own peers so they understand disadvantage and exclusion. Thus, BDL's outreach approach is underpinned by local knowledge and this builds trust and reinforces engagement with the organisation in each centre.

BDL has never made strong distinctions between core staff and those that are employed as part of 'schemes'. Job titles are allocated according to the task description rather than the funding source. It is about focusing people on the job that needs to be done. In practice they have been able to access an impressive range of skills and competencies

through the various labour activation measures and they have used them creatively to further their socio-economic goals.

Ability to deliver BDL development methodology

The discussion of the various methodologies employed by BDL has underlined their clarity and effectiveness while emphasising their resource intensity and the staff competencies needed to implement them. The BDL methodology is fundamentally dependent on human resource capacity to deliver it in all its complexity and this requires staff input which is exceptional.

BDL employees are highly motivated, mission-driven and committed to the clients and the organisation. This is evident in how they describe what they do, but also in practical ways such as in their willingness to multi-task and work unsocial hours, and is underpinned by their identification with the needs of the clients and communities they serve. The fact that the core staff have wide range of academic and practical training reflects a recruitment policy which can bring important synergies and complementarities. It also means that no one academic perspective dominates and that the organisation benefits from the range of social science, business and technical competencies and experience found among the staff. Staff turnover has been relatively low in recent years so the expertise and experience in the organisation is retained and built upon.

Management capitalise on this diversity by encouraging and supporting employees' particular development interests and skills, and their ideas for community and economic development. They are encouraged to 'think outside the box' and 'mad notions' are listened to and considered. This willingness to take new ideas seriously and to give staff leeway is one of the ways that the organisation maintains its dynamism and flexibility.

Staff, on the other hand are also aware that they are required to balance an innovative outlook with an ear for problems and challenges and bring them to the attention of management. Staff feel affirmed and trusted and that enables them to be committed, effective and willing to adapt to changing conditions.

BDL's commitment to giving equal weight to social inclusion and integrating this under the wider umbrella of economic and community development is not easily achieved in practice. The work with some of the most marginalised communities in local authority housing estates and in more rural pockets of dispersed disadvantage is distinctive in a rural development context. It is driven by BDL's unwavering commitment to reaching communities by whatever means they can, so as to respond to their needs. This means targeting and engaging with them and ultimately empowering them to act collectively and/or progress as individuals. BDL has a strong focus on progression and staff are skilled at customising supports and training to maximise the chances of success.

Understanding and use of knowledge

Recognition and appreciation of the value of knowledge is one of the hallmarks of the BDL approach. Research and information gathering is built into all project cycles typically by a data gathering process to scope and support project proposals and, when projects are up and running, is integral to monitoring and evaluation. However, apart from the connection to projects, BDL commissions and supports research to support or test ideas and strategies for development, or to evaluate aspects of their operations. The ADOPT model was developed in conjunction with UCD and they have extensive involvement with other third level institutions, notably the universities in Limerick and Cork⁵⁴, and Limerick Institute of Technology. They are key providers themselves of targeted, innovative and relevant training/educational programmes to staff, and citizens involved in development projects. The organisation

⁵⁴ For instance, since 1996 BDL has supported almost 100 local community representatives to participate in the National University of Ireland BSc/Diploma in Rural Development by Distance Learning in conjunction with University College Cork.

⁵⁵ In addition to those already cited see, for example, Robinson and O'Connor (2013).

has also been the subject of a considerable number of research studies⁵⁵ and BDL actively engages with knowledge centres and uses research knowledge to strengthen its operation and advocacy for a community based approach to local and rural development.

Effectiveness in accessing and managing resources

As is evident from previous sections, the organisation has been strikingly successful in accessing and leveraging funding. This is undoubtedly part of their leadership and strategic capacity referred to above and has been strengthened over the years – the idea that: there are masses of resources out there and we can use them really well for communities – that is (our) objective. At this stage BDL skills in accessing funds have been finely honed. Apart from being adept at writing and submitting funding proposals they make sure to have a portfolio of projects in their pipeline so that when funding is announced or released they (communities, businesses or individuals) are ready to go ahead with projects.

What is particularly notable however, and important from a local development perspective, is the way in which BDL uses and deploys funds. Recognising early on that promoters of small projects, depending on public funding, would have cash flow problems, and that the paper work for small project applications would be inefficient and off-putting, BDL has developed two key responses.

Firstly, it acts as the applicant on behalf of project groups or offshoot companies to the programmes that it administers e.g. RDP and LCDP. This simplifies the process and addresses groups' cash flow problem through providing up front funding from BDL's own small cash fund built up over the years, which is recouped from programme funds later. It enables communities to undertake or participate in projects through the development of a common funding initiative by BDL. In this way

potential applicants for support are facilitated to complete their projects by innovative measures. Dealing with the process of funding small projects any other way would be very time-consuming and resource intensive.

Secondly, BDL is very strategic and effective in sourcing funds from other public and private sector sources. This involves either identifying and accessing funding sources for projects or identifying other service providers who can provide funds and/or lead on particular initiatives. The capacity to identify such providers is facilitated by contacts built up through extensive and effective networking, as described below, or the experience of other joint projects. It often means that BDL adds value to public fund expenditure by facilitation of projects that would not have happened otherwise or that are greatly enhanced by BDL support.

Intrinsic to the success of these approaches is the integrated delivery model practised by BDL. In practice, this means that key frontline delivery staff do not work on specific programmes, but across all key programmes; this ensures that clients are not supported according to a specific area of expertise of a staff member, but according to what is deemed most suitable for them, all of which is made possible by core staff working across and thereby being aware of broad-based rural development supports such as LEADER, as well as more focussed supports, such as those provided through the SICAP Programme.

Networking for impact and influence

BDL's leadership strength is also evident in its recognition of the value of effective networking and in its ability to engage with an extensive range of bodies in the private and public sector at all levels. Relationships with state agencies and business interests have been deliberately cultivated over the years so that they are feeding to you and you to them through effective two-way communication channels. From the agencies'

perspective, familiarity with the BDL approach, and experience of working with the staff, has fostered mutual trust and respect. This is a considerable asset in facilitating joint projects or other collaboration. BDL do not present as a threat, but rather as facilitators who are willing to take risks and be constructive about engaging in joint actions. The strong client commitment which drives the organisation means that BDL are not precious about who provides a service as long as they can work with relevant service providers to respond to a citizen or area need. They are very clear that their purpose is to develop communities and this is evident both in how they explain what they do, the actions they pursue and their approach. Other bodies recognise this and trust them accordingly.

At local level BDL staff participate in, take leadership roles and facilitate a range of structures through the District Coordinating Fora, (comprising the operational staff of service providers from the state and community and voluntary sectors) so as to ensure coordination and avoid duplication of services. In what is effectively a brokerage role, BDL officers are expected to identify and address gaps (which may be at an individual or whole town level) and facilitate appropriate responses, whether led by another agency or BDL. Maintaining the links with, and between, those bodies involved in service delivery is considered a central part of the development officer's job. If you want to do something you have to bring the stakeholders together. It might be just a small project locally or something bigger, but relevant stakeholders must be got around the table. The relationships built up between Ballyhoura staff and service providers through this method of working are regarded as fundamental to delivering good service for communities, and are very effective.

In this context it is worth noting that a 2013 study of the impact of the LEADER Programme in Ireland found that one of the significant factors



⁵⁶ See Exodia Consulting (2013).

⁵⁷ See Pot and Vaas (2008); Moulaert et al. (2005).

that impacts on the effectiveness of Local Action Groups (LAGs) in influencing policy is the personal relationships that key individuals in the LAGs develop with other state organisations and agencies, especially local authorities⁵⁶.

In BDL's case networking extends to national policy institutions, the EU Commission and local rural development groups throughout Europe. This enables the organisation to engage with policy-makers and officials and to advocate for, and share, the results of its work. This means that it has access to the latest developments in policy and practice which it uses to good effect in methodologies, plans and projects at home. This deliberate openness to new ideas and commitment to exploring and learning from good practice elsewhere is deeply embedded in the organisational culture and is led by the CEO.

These strategies – encouraging networking between actors and agencies and between agencies themselves; working smartly in a brokerage role; enhancing skills and competencies among citizens and integrating the various domains of economy, education and training, local democracy and culture illustrate the distinctive social innovations that characterise the BDL methodology of territorial-based endogenous rural development⁵⁷.

Time and patience

Over the past twenty six years BDL has built and nurtured an approach to development which is based on a passionate belief in the value of development interventions for communities and individuals. Guided by its Board and CEO, it has developed a robust methodological framework for its work and has been remarkably creative in aligning its objectives for communities with the goals and requirements of EU and national programmes and in leveraging resources for community socio-economic development. It has positioned itself as a very effective bridge or broker between the citizen and the community and the wider institutional landscape of the state and other service providers. The outcome for residents of the Ballyhoura area is an enhanced quality of citizenship which is distinctive and may be unmatched in any other part of Ireland. For those involved in understanding, promoting, or practicing locally based development, the Ballyhoura story reveals both the nature of the challenges involved, and what can be achieved when these are addressed with commitment, skill, creativity and respect for citizens.



Section 7

Selected Case Studies

Selected Case Studies

Ballyhoura District Forum

Context

The District Forum (DF) provides an opportunity for groups in a district to meet and share experiences. The Forum facilitates the transfer of learning from one community to another and provides an opportunity to identify and progress common issues, as well as providing an effective means of ensuring a two way communication flow between communities and the Board of Ballyhoura Development.

Actions

A voluntary Chair, Secretary and two community representatives from each community in a District constitute the District Forum. Each Community Council or equivalent group are invited to nominate two persons to attend District Forum meetings on behalf of their community. It is the responsibility of Community Representatives to represent their individual communities on the various District Fora in the Ballyhoura area. Community Councils or equivalent groups are also asked to nominate a Chairperson and Secretary for the DF. Only nominated community representatives can vote on the election of Chairperson and Secretary, and while District Forum meetings are open to all community groups and organisations, only nominated community representatives can vote at these meetings, when a situation requiring a vote arises.

Ideally the two Community Representatives nominated should attend

each meeting to ensure that they update the wider forum on events/ issues happening in their own community and, in turn, feedback issues and information from the forum meeting to their community, including raising awareness of services and facilities in the area for vulnerable groups.

District Fora meetings take place approximately five times a year and take the form of a committee meeting, at which the Chair, Secretary and two community representatives of the District discuss issues affecting their communities, and the district as a whole. These meetings are often followed by a seminar where guest speakers are invited to speak on topics requested by the Chair, Secretary, Community Representatives or community members. As well as input from the guest speaker, current funding and training opportunities are highlighted as well as issues and events happening in the wider Ballyhoura Area. The aim is to give communities the opportunity to identify and articulate their own needs, and the kinds of actions required to address these needs, to: (1) other communities in their district; and (2) Board of Ballyhoura Development Ltd for consideration in planning future activities and to (3) other bodies as relevant..

Impact

Community Representatives are encouraged to help identify gaps in needs and service provision at district level and are invited to suggest possible solutions/actions. They also have responsibility for publicising/ sharing information on upcoming District Fora meetings, information on grants and BDL's activities. Through participation in the District Forum, they become more informed and empowered which facilitates them to participate more actively in their own communities and in decision-making processes more widely. The District Fora meetings also ensure an increased knowledge of the activities and interventions being implemented and considered by Ballyhoura Development.

Historic Graveyards Initiative

Context

The Historic Graveyards Initiative was designed, developed and delivered in parallel to the Ballyhoura Ireland Reaching Out Initiative. The aim was to optimise the legacy to the Ballyhoura area from The Gathering Ireland 2013, a series of events and festivals to celebrate Irish culture, history and genealogy. Ballyhoura Development recognised the need to engage with people across communities and with the Diaspora from those communities overseas. The Historic Graveyards Initiative was identified as a form of community engagement and action.

Connecting with the Diaspora is dependent on local information to help Diaspora and volunteers conduct genealogy research. Historic parish graveyards are deemed a very important primary resource. Ballyhoura Development engaged with Eachtra Archaeological Services to devise a community archaeology training programme in the recording and digitalisation of historic graveyards. The training was delivered for three months and aimed to build a genealogy repository of information for the area. The information gathered was used to underpin Diaspora information requests coming through the Ireland Reaching Out online message board facility.

Actions

The process involved animation of local communities within the region to become active in the recording and digitalisation of historic graveyards. The focus on animating community groups lay with the existing communities engaged with the Ireland Reaching Out Initiative, given the synergies across both initiatives. In addition historical societies and graveyard committees were also engaged to participate in the training. An initial information session was held to an audience of 78 community volunteers. The County Archaeologist for Limerick Local Authority also attended. Every attendee was subsequently contacted

and an initial list of 28 historic graveyards to be surveyed was compiled. Identifying pilot training graveyards across the five districts in the Ballyhoura Development area ensured that all volunteers interested in the training had relatively near access to the training in their own area. Training was delivered in each graveyard for two days per week over a two-week period.

Community members were trained to record and publish historic grave memorials. Participants on the training learned how to number markers and read inscriptions, transcribe using record sheets, GPS photograph memorials and later publish online. The training survey data was immediately uploaded to the web based database where the information was fully searchable on the historic graves website, www.historicgraves.ie. Short multimedia recordings were also made of the graveyards and graves, including recordings of local people telling local stories. The volunteers themselves engaged fully in the process and many continued to attend training sessions in other parish training graveyards, such was the level of engagement and interest.

Eighty volunteers were trained across a three month training period. The training yielded 18 historic graveyard surveys, recorded and digitalised online for researchers. The work was of crucial importance to compile original genealogical information that was invaluable to community groups participating in the Ireland Reaching Out Initiative. The information enabled many additional local and Diaspora connections to be established.

The demand and interest post the three month training period resulted in the creation of two positions for Community Archaeologists as part of the JobBridge internship scheme, one of whom was later employed full time as a TUS Team Leader focusing on heritage. The Community Archaeologists enabled further survey training to be conducted for an additional year across communities in the Ballyhoura area. The volume

of work required the creation of three TUS placements with Ballyhoura Development to transcribe the data online. The Historic Graves Survey continues with the goal of completing a survey for every Parish in the Ballyhoura area. By December 2015, 110 historic graveyards were surveyed and transcribed with over 200 volunteers trained.



Impact

The training and recording element of the Historic Graveyards Initiative has been important for capturing each piece of information from memorials. Through the training, volunteers have learnt about the appropriate care and conservation of historic graveyards. The genealogical information obtained from the memorials is a huge resource for people tracing their roots online and contributed greatly to increased tourism visits through Ireland Reaching Out. Use of GPS co-ordinates has allowed visitors to drive directly to the graveyard where their ancestors are buried. The recruitment of the Community Archaeologists enabled the continuation of the project. The Historic Graveyards Initiative is a key enabler of community participation in local heritage and culture and has potential to continue across the communities who request it to ensure total completion of survey work across the Ballyhoura Development area. The linkage to the national online resource of the Historic Graveyards Survey enabled a platform for local community information to reach out to an international audience. Information that is accessible to the Diaspora will increase tourism visitors to Ireland.

A Taste of Ballyhoura Country

Context

The Ballyhoura area is at the heart of the Golden Vale and has traditionally had a very strong food culture and heritage. The area boasts a thriving agricultural sector which for decades sold produce directly to large food processing operators. Changes due to increased competition, globalisation, increased processing costs, falling prices in world food markets & CAP reform resulted in restructuring and rationalisation in the agriculture and food processing sectors. These changes had a large impact on the Ballyhoura Development area with the numbers employed in agriculture and food processing decreasing across the 1990s and 2000s.

As a result of the redundancies there were a lot of unemployed people in the area with expertise and skills in the food sector. In the mid 2000's niche markets emerged for direct sales to consumers and for quality, speciality local food. There was an increase in the number of people in the area considering self-employment.

Actions

A key aspect of the BDL food strategy was the development of a cluster food brand that would enable small producer's access marketing and markets. In looking towards the long term goal of developing a Ballyhoura Food Brand, a considerable amount of pre-development work and animation of the sector needed to take place. As a starting point in 2008, a number of Food Enterprise Information Sessions were advertised and rolled out across the Ballyhoura area. These workshops provided those interested in starting up or developing an existing food business with information on supports available.

The beginnings of the Ballyhoura Country food producer database were developed from contact details gathered at these workshops. From here the next steps in developing the sector included a number of parallel

activities delivered by the Ballyhoura Development Enterprise Officer including: advice for individual clients; development and delivery of relevant Food Training courses; business mentoring; funding to develop food enterprise; supports for Farmers Markets and food festivals.

By 2009, with a number of well-established food producers as well as several start-up producers engaging regularly with Ballyhoura Development, a Food Brand Committee was established and a series of planning meetings were held throughout 2009 and 2010. A Code of Practice for the brand was developed along with a code of practice training programme for all potential brand members. Potential members felt strongly that the new brand had to be built upon solid foundations of a strict brand code to ensure only the finest locally produced food would carry the brand label.

The brand values were further developed with the industry and a brand name was agreed A Taste of Ballyhoura Country. A marketing plan and logo were then developed to support the brand. Work began on generating producer profiles, product information, photography, video footage, recipe development, integrating the logo on packaging/websites etc. The brand was launched at the Ballyhoura Food Fair, Kilmallock in May 2012 and the launch was covered by the national station RTÉ on the 'Nationwide' programme. A Taste of Ballyhoura Country website and social media sites were launched and linked to the individual producer's websites. In 2013, a branded recipe book was developed and 50,000 copies distributed through national newspapers

Other initiatives to build brand awareness of A Taste of Ballyhoura Country have included attendance at exhibitions and shows; in-store brand promotions; and Ballyhoura Master Chef – Schools Cook-Off Competition at the Ballyhoura Food Fair 2014.

Impact

The A Taste of Ballyhoura Country was created to adequately reflect the quality and excellence of local food producers. The brand Code of Practice ensured the quality and significant investment channelled into targeted training programmes enabled producers to be the best they can be. The integrated marketing campaign built awareness of the brand and encouraged new enterprises to join the group. It has also positioned the brand as a trading group within the food sector and assisted companies in expanding their route to market. Many of the producers are trading successfully in established markets already and the brand built on this and added scale and volume for all the participating companies to build a sustainable future for this sector in the Ballyhoura area

Croom Civic Centre

Context

Croom Community Development Association Ltd (CDDA) was established in 1988 to encourage, promote, co-ordinate, participate and assist in the social, environmental and cultural development of Croom and its environs; and to encourage, promote, co-ordinate and participate in sporting activities for the development of youth. The CDDA has representatives from all strata of the community and this ensures constant engagement with the community. There are six sub committees of CDDA representing – Enterprise Park, Community Centre, Tidy Towns, FÁS, Heritage, Civic Centre/Town Park.

Overtime, through a series of fundraising efforts and grant applications, the group raised money to build and equip the local Community Hall as a sports and recreation venue. Following a survey conducted by CDDA in April 2009, to investigate the potential for regeneration of the Community Centre as a multipurpose community facility, this was not considered practical to accommodate all of the activities and potential uses identified. Following this analysis, and as no other existing

buildings proved suitable, the group then purchased a local field to develop a town park for the community. The plan was to develop the site, approximately 13 acres zoned for planning purposes as 'open space', overtime to incorporate with a, civic centre, car park, playground and walkways for the community.

The area provided an ideal location for facilities that were identified as needed in the community, such as a civic centre, a children's playground and car park. These could be built on less than 1 acre of land with the remaining 12 acres being transformed into a town park to include walkways and exercise circuits, a wildlife sanctuary, fishing terraces, picnic stations, landscaping as well as the enhancement and preservation of the Mass rock and holy well. The group then participated in the Ballyhoura Development Community Facilities Initiative to support development of the facilities.

Actions

The group developed the 13 acre greenfield site in Croom town with the construction of a new two-storey, 625 sq.m civic centre, incorporating community facilities which include a 180 seat function room, a 48 seat Tea Room, an Adult Education Centre, library, tourism/information point, and other ancillary services. A new 56 space car park with landscaping was also incorporated into the development to remove cars from the street and provide safe access. The group have leased out the operation of the tea room to a private operator and this approach has increased the footfall to the centre and the take up of other services. The CCDA continues to work closely with Ballyhoura Development and a range of other stakeholders to continue to develop the range of services and facilities available at the centre and park.

Impact

Provision of a civic centre as a cultural and community facility to respond to identified needs has greatly improved equality of access

to information, training and education and technological and communication facilities in the community. The capacity of local people and organisations has been strengthened, through capacity building activities and training and the perception of community development as a pan-community activity have been enhanced. Overall the confidence and cohesion within the community has increased and improved. The CCDA, working with other local groups and stakeholders have the ambition to build on achievements to date continuing to improve the quality of facilities and levels of services within the town and increase the knowledge of and uptake of these.

Parks and Playgrounds Initiative

Context

The Community Parks and Playgrounds Initiative was created to provide communities in the Ballyhoura area with the background knowledge, research and supports required to enable them to plan for the provision of village parks and playgrounds as recreational amenities in their local communities.

The aim was to facilitate communities to provide active and passive recreation spaces for children, teenagers, and adults which would be used and useful. Communities with existing parks would also be supported to upgrade and revitalise their communal spaces. The process of animating and supporting local communities to develop and apply for funding for quality local recreational spaces highlighted a number of key support needs:

- exposure to models of best practice in parks and playgrounds development to help identify the specific recreational needs of their local communities;
- facilitating communities to meet professionals – architects, playground suppliers, etc. – so as to be able to draw on expertise and

- experience in drawing up their own plans;
- resolution of insurance, maintenance and supervision arrangements, in partnership with Local Authorities.

Actions

Eighteen projects were supported by €1,056,951.39 grant aid.

A two-pronged approach on the part of BDL was central to this initiative,

1. Assisting communities on the ground with tangible supports and
2. Negotiating and liaising with Limerick and Cork Local Authorities around the issues of planning permission, insurance for parks and playgrounds and agreed procedures for maintenance and supervision of the facilities.

The supports offered to communities commenced with the facilitation and organisation of a study trip for targeted communities within the area to travel to visit two community parks in Co Waterford – Waterford town and Lismore – and to meet there with Local Authority officials and other key stakeholders involved in the development of these parks, to discuss their experiences in planning for their respective parks. Following this learning, Ballyhoura Development developed and disseminated a step-by-step guide for communities, outlining the key steps required to bring a project plan for a park/ playground to fruition.

Ballyhoura Development also facilitated a consultation and information evening for targeted communities. An architect with experience in designing village parks, was invited to share experiences and provide guidance on how to examine the profile of the community, the potential sites available to them and how best to meet the recreational needs of the community. Two playground equipment providers were also invited to provide technical information on site excavation, surfacing and the various types of play equipment available and steps and issues to think about prior to starting a project. Representatives from communities

within the Ballyhoura area which had previously developed community parks and playgrounds shared their experiences.

Following the learning visits and information sessions. On behalf of communities in the Ballyhoura area, BDL took part in discussion with Cork and Limerick County Councils on the issues of insurance, supervision of facilities, maintenance of facilities, leasing of local authority owned land. Communities then had confidence to proceed with these issues clarified.

Impact

The development of a Step by Step Guide for communities planning to develop a park or playground in their locality proved very useful in avoiding pitfalls in design, development and maintenance. The guide has been used as a reference point for many communities through each stage of the project development. The successful completion of a number of high quality community parks and playgrounds in the region provides much needed facilities for families with young children and teenagers, open spaces for residents to relax in their communities and strengthen the tourism product base for visiting families.

St. Johns Church, Knockainey

Context

In 2006, Ballyhoura Development Ltd took part in a transnational project entitled The Villages of Tradition. In practical terms this sought to establish the unique selling point of rural villages across Europe and market this to a wider audience. Key linkages were made with the Westerkwartier region of the Netherlands and the lessons learned there were transferred to the Ballyhoura and Blackwater area regions.

One of the rural villages that took part from an early stage was Knockainey in County Limerick. This village, like many others, had a small population, no mainstay retail or other business and was served

mainly by its local town of Hospital, Co. Limerick. A core group of committed people in Knockainey had an interest in preserving local heritage and in particular a deconsecrated Church of Ireland Church – St. John’s. This church had a focal position in the community but was out of use for almost 10 years due to a declining congregation. This building was identified as a resource very early on by the group, due to its history and heritage spanning hundreds of years and its potential for development within the village.

Actions

There were a number of crucial steps taken by the group, with BDL playing a lead role prior to any capital work being undertaken. Steps included:

- Linking with the wider Villages of Tradition network.
- Working with the facilitator of the network to identify the “Knockainey project”.
- Establishing a voluntary group for St. John’s- Knockainey Historical and Conservation Society.
- Securing a lease on St. John’s Church from the Representative Church Body in 2006 on the basis that the church would be used as a musical venue, an arts centre, with performers of a standard that would do justice to a unique setting and superb acoustics.
- Key contacts were identified very early on, particularly the local authority Heritage Officer and Conservation Officer who became, and remain key supporters of the project. With support from BDL and Limerick County Council, the refurbishment of St. John’s in 2007 included specialist renovation and painting in accordance with the Listed Buildings Act under the constant supervision of the Conservation Officer.

Impact

The development of a unique cultural centre and performance space which attracts high profile artists throughout the year provides an important focal point in the community. The success of the project has increased local community self- help capacity and improved the social capital of the area. This capacity and engagement is reflected in the development of additional local projects ranging from a community office, participation in the Ballyhoura Reaching Out and Historic Graves Initiatives and new Festivals and Events.

Care Bright

Context

A review of the European Commission white paper on growth, competitiveness and employment in 1994 prompted the Board of Ballyhoura Development Limited to pilot the development of a home care service. This was undertaken in response to two key issues, one was the lack of services in rural areas and the second was the difficulty in finding jobs locally, especially in remote rural areas.

Actions

CareBright was established in 1998 with the aim of:

- Finding innovative solutions to employment creation.
- Improving the quality of life for the less advantaged.
- Developing a range of services available to older people and adults with disabilities.
- Building a partnership framework among statutory, non statutory and voluntary bodies toward the identification and delivery of essential services to older people.

The aims were chosen in response to the needs identified in the area, which suffered from youth outmigration and an aging population.

Due to the dispersed and remote nature of much of the area there were limited homecare services available locally and the gaps in service provision were best addressed by a community based organisation responding to local knowledge and utilising skills that were previously under employed. This had the dual result of enhancing services to vulnerable target groups and increasing employment opportunities for those living in the rural areas.

CareBright provides care for the elderly, people with disabilities, post surgery, people who require specialised services or general support in the home throughout rural Limerick, north Cork and west Tipperary. The service enables older people to live independently in their own home amongst their surroundings despite their medical condition. This allows an older person to have a good quality of life in their latter years. CareBright also provides chiropody services to the elderly and accredited training to FETAC Level 5 Care of the Elderly.

CareBright is founded on the principle of participation, partnership and the development of strategic alliances to achieve goals. This ensures a coordinated and integrated service delivery and taking a client centres approach to maximise resources while avoiding duplication. As the company has evolved these partnerships have played a key role in the development of the service, identifying needs and proving financial resources to address them.

CareBright has put in place exceptional resources of highly trained care professionals to deliver quality services and the company has maintained its focus and vision since its foundation and directs resources to the fulfilment of its aims.

Impact

Currently, CareBright employ 250 carers (180 Full-time equivalents) managed and supported by a team of six Care Managers who are all qualified nurses with many years experience. The Care Managers work

closely with carers, clients, families, Public Health and Community nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, GP and other members of the Multi-Disciplinary team to ensure person centered care is delivered in the home. The majority of the carers come from rural areas, who in many cases may not have alternative employment opportunities. This Social Economy Business, which is but one in the area, clearly demonstrates the potential for social economy businesses to provide services in remote rural areas and provide valued jobs.

Ballyhoura Mountain Biking- World Class Recreation Initiative

Context

Since 1989 Ballyhoura Development has worked in partnership with local landowners, communities and agencies to develop a range of recreation infrastructure. The Ballyhoura Way, a long distance walking route of 90 km, has been successfully followed by development of a broad range of short way-marked walking loops, fell running, orienteering courses, nature walks, equestrian trails and 4x4 trails. Quality infrastructure for recreation across the rural countryside was a key strategy for economic and social development.

Initial studies to identify opportunities within the area identified the main block of the Ballyhoura Mountains as having world-class potential for outdoor recreation. In 2003 an integrated Tourism Cluster Study for Ballyhoura led to the development of the Ballyhoura Recreation Initiative. Mountain Biking was identified as a key product to attract increased visits and generate economic, environmental and social benefits for residents.

Actions

Since 2004, a partnership animated by Ballyhoura Development with Coillte, Ballyhoura Fáilte, Cork and Limerick Co. Co, Shannon

Development and Fáilte Ireland has designed and build a world class mountain bike trail centre in Ballyhoura Forest.

The mountain bike trails development in the Ballyhoura Forest was the first such development in Ireland. The initial feasibility for the project led the partners from Ireland to learn from the Welsh experience in trail design and construction and from how communities adapted to servicing visitors to the trails. This provided an in-depth understanding of the opportunities and challenges in approaching mountain bike design and opening up the working forests for such activity.

Today the Ballyhoura Forest offers in excess of 100 kilometres of mountain-biking trails serviced by car-parking, toilets, showers and bike wash facilities. To date a total of 1.7 million has been invested in the trail infrastructure and supporting services.

Upon completion of the trail development, a number of local entrepreneurs visited Scotland to experience service delivery to the MTB market. The learning resulted in a bike hire and guiding business being set up and a number existing tourism providers adding facilities and services for mountain bikers to their business. In the intervening years a number of entrepreneurs have commenced operations in the Ballyhoura area forming a strong cluster of outdoor activities.

Ballyhoura Fáilte, the rural tourism group promoting the area, with the support of Ballyhoura Development and Fáilte Ireland, continue to develop, promote and attract events to the trails. Community engagement has also been central to the success of the trail with newly established mountain bike clubs, newly opened mountain bike sale, rental and tutor businesses and accredited outdoor recreation educational course managed by Ballyhoura Development all combining to create innovative events and increase visitor numbers.

Impacts

In 2011, the Single Speed World Championships attracted 650 people from overseas investing an estimated 1.5 million euro's in direct and indirect spend to the Irish economy. In 2014, the trails hosted the Elite European Mountain Bike Marathon Championships attracting the world's best mountain bikers to the area and this was following in 2015 when the Ballyhoura Beast Adventure Race was the European Adventure Race Final. In 2014 the Ballyhoura Mountain Bike Trails attracted 70,000 visitors. These visitors delivered economic impacts across a variety of local service and facilities through visitor spend to the trails and events and festivals arising as a direct result of the trail investment and related targeted promotion. The economic and social impact of the trails is continuing to develop, offering year round opportunities to existing and new businesses across the rural area to grow.

Landscape Architecture Planning Initiative

Context

So often in our rural villages and towns unsightly spaces can really detract from the environs and the confidence of the community. The Ballyhoura landscape architecture planning initiative was borne out of key animation work targeted at 2 main groupings, (1) Tidy Towns Groups and (2) Resident Groups in Local Authority Housing Estates.

For Tidy Towns groups, landscaping or aesthetics of unsightly or underutilised space is always an issue identified by both adjudicators and local committee members. From a competition perspective landscaping, wildlife and natural amenities are key areas for improvement. When animating Tidy Towns groups, Ballyhoura Development place a focus on having the groups think ahead and plan wisely so any investment of time and resources into development that the group undertakes has the potential to deliver additional improved marks across a number of categories within the competition. Integrating the environment into all

developments is central to this thinking.

Engagement and animation of individuals and groups resident in local authority housing estates to take pride in their local area is often a good starting point for further development. Residents Groups become more proactive about working on key problem areas such as untidiness, inadequate play areas for children and poor estate infrastructure which leads to their subsequent interest in further social, environmental and economic developments.

The goal of the Landscape Architecture Planning Initiative is to assist community groups in rural villages or residents groups in Local Authority estates to look at unsightly or underutilised space in their respective areas and through consultation within the community and with the Local Authority, and the work with/by a landscape architect to develop a detailed and quantified plan, giving them a blueprint for implementation.

Actions

The initiative incorporated the following set of activities:

- Consultation with groups on problem areas. Prior to developing an Initiative of this nature, groups need to be listened to on what issues they face. The project needs to be borne from an obvious need.
- Analysis of the needs identified.
- Consultation with potential partners including the local authorities and consult with relevant officers of the Local Authority.
- Formation of a small Initiative Steering Group, inclusive of stakeholders.
- Development of the initiative aimed at the 2 target groupings and agree criteria.
- Animation of interest among target groups.

- The areas decided upon led to a specification for tender and quotations from skilled and qualified architects and landscape architects to develop plans for unsightly areas.
- The Final Plans, signed off by both stakeholders i.e. the group and Local Authority, were at a stage where they could go for planning, if needed, or be given to a contractor(s) for pricing.
- The plans formed the basis for any further application for funding from RDP/LEADER or Local Authority for implementation.

Impacts

The process was all about animation and consultation. Ballyhoura Development animated the communities and groups to engage in the process with the goal of improving the physical appearance and layout of their area. The architect contractor took his lead from the needs of the group, though detailed and indepth consultations, for each space. This enabled further consultations with the needs identified by the local authority who in most cases were the owners of the spaces. The consultation process enabled groups to build key relationships and trust with both the Local Authority and the Ballyhoura Development. The result has been the development of plans for 9 spaces in the pilot phase the implementation of these plans over time. This has increased engagement, confidence and in many cases the ambition across the communities taking part in the initiative.

Mitchelstown Healthy Towns Project

Context

In 2005 a socio-economic plan was devised for Mitchelstown and its hinterland through a public consultation process commissioned by Ballyhoura Development Ltd. The purpose was to provide a robust, coherent and integrated action and implementation document that would provide a framework for the physical, economic and social

development of the town and its hinterland. An outcome of the plan was the development of an umbrella group representing both economic and social development, the Mitchelstown Community Forum Ltd.

In 2009, the plan was revisited and Mitchelstown collaborated with Cork County Council and the Cork County Development Board, to place the town on the agenda of the County Development Board as a priority area. This decision led to 'pilot' priority status being assigned to the town and the implementation of the plan, supported through inter-agency co-operation and local community support. The process led to the identification of four priority actions for the town and its hinterland, one of which was Health Development and the exploration of Mitchelstown becoming a "Healthy Town", simply meaning Mitchelstown has a plan for health Development.

Actions

In 2010, a consultation project with local community groups was conducted by Ballyhoura Development Ltd to explore the needs of Mitchelstown as a 'healthy town'. Based on the Social Determinants of Health, a desk based community health profile for Mitchelstown was completed by the Health Service Executive in March 2011. A central part of health needs assessment was gathering information on people's views of their health needs and resources. The expertise and knowledge of local people, in particular on what assets exist, the factors that influence their health, what is most important, local health beliefs and solutions to problems have formed the basis of this community health needs assessment. A steering group was also established of local key people and statutory representatives to steer the project.

To complete the health profile thirteen community representatives completed Community Health Advocate Training, delivered by the Health Promotion Department of the HSE in March 2011. The training was designed to build capacity within the community of Mitchelstown

to increase awareness of the key determinants of health and to develop a resource within the community to address key areas of health for themselves. With the support of Ballyhoura Development and the HSE, those who attended the training (Community Health Advocates) then carried out health needs assessment with their local groups. Each group consulted outlined the Strengths, Weakness, Challenges and Threats to the community of Mitchelstown, which allowed for group discussion to take place and highlighted the needs in relation to health.

Fifteen consultations have been completed with a variety of groups from, women, heritage, youth, community, recreation and education. Results of the needs assessment were analysed by the Community Health Advocates in July 2011. Initial action planning in July highlighted that two key areas of initial action in 2011 / 2012 to promote community health emerged for the residents of Mitchelstown were (1) a community allotment and (2) the development of safe walking routes in the town. Following this focus, questionnaires to collect more information on potential allotment users and potential walkers were distributed at (a) a community open day, (b) a childcare facility, (c) the Living Health Centre, (d) St Fanahans Horticulture course, (e) Tesco Foyer and (f) advertised on Line through survey monkey-an online questionnaire facility.

Other activities included community allotments up and running, walking group meeting weekly with 4 local people trained as walk leaders, walking to school Wednesdays established with the local schools, engagement with UCC in the Lifestyle survey of 9 year children in Urban and Rural schools and a positive mental health information seminar with 150 people, followed up with two "caring for our wellbeing" courses.

Impacts

By the local of people in Mitchelstown identifying their own health needs and the generation of local responses to meet these needs local

ownership was strengthened. The project empowered and educated people on how the social determinants of health affect health status and encouraged people to take responsibility for their health choices in a supportive community setting. Mitchelstown Healthy Towns requested designated status through the National Healthy Cities Network and this allowed the group to gain the status without the 5,000 status fee through the WHO. In 2012 the Healthy Towns Initiative was nominated and won an award through Cork Sports Partnership Sporting awards under the category “Community Health through Sporting Activity”.

Socio Economic Action Planning Case Study

Context

Communities on a national basis are experiencing changes and many communities do not have a forum to facilitate the overarching co-ordination of activities or a structure where new issues or difficulties are taken on board. Our evidence confirms that regeneration and revitalisation is more sustainable and effective when the community come together to develop a plan for their area, take a lead role in making their plans in partnership with agencies and have an inclusive community structure to oversee implementation of actions and monitoring of their plan.

Actions

Socio-Economic Action Planning provides a facilitated process where the community/geographic area creates a vision for the community with specific realistic actions to achieve the vision which are based on available resources, from within the community and brokered from other agencies.

The Community Socio Economic Planning process offers the opportunity to:

- Building a sense of community: The process of working together and

of achieving clear results creates a sense of community.

- National and local governments do not have sufficient resources to solve problems in all areas: The available resources and brokerage of resources are optimised if communities know their priorities.
- Accessing funding: Many grant giving sources require community consultation and committed community involvement before offering assistance. A community planning process is the blueprint from which communities can apply for funding assistance.
- More appropriate results: Actions that are developed and designed with community involvement reflect what is needed and wanted in an area.
- Build social capital; the process harnesses new energy in an area enabling positive solutions to emerge at a speedier pace than waiting for someone else to come in and do something for the community.
- Feed into Local Area Plans(LAP): This is the most effective where the socio-economic action plan takes place 12-18months before the LAP
- Ballyhoura Development has facilitated the development of socio-economic action planning in 5 Towns and their hinterlands, 36 communities and 6 estates. The communities own and lead the implementation of the plans.

The process has a number of steps including: (1) Pre-development animation (2) Pre-planning meeting (3) A series of three facilitated planning meetings to build participation and input into the plan (4) Agency Night (5) Final Meeting. A Presentation of draft plan to the community, discussion and agreement is presented on the final night.

Ballyhoura Development personnel facilitate each community planning process. The process can differ slightly given the nature or size of each community. Development Officers are the lead facilitators of the process and other staff within the company co-facilitate the process with other

staff attending the Agency Night if specific supports are required e.g. tourism, enterprise, employment.

Impacts

Each community that participates in the Community Socio-Economic Planning process receive hard copies of their plan which includes a profile of the community and the actions to be undertaken. This ensures that all are aware of a co-ordinated approach to managing the future growth of their communities and a strategic plan is in place. The process speeds up the pace and scale of development in addressing community based social inclusion, socio-economic, social and environmental issues. Provision of training in response to needs and other supports, including the strengthening of community structures is also undertaken by Ballyhoura Development; this supports implementation of actions by the community.

The Towards Occupation Programme

Context

Since 2006, the Toward Occupation programme is dedicated to enabling people to develop the skills and confidence to achieve occupational fulfilment through moving into employment, self-employment, education, training or volunteering. The programme targets those who are long term unemployed who have lost their confidence or may have suffered mental ill health in the past but are now in recovery.

Actions

The programme targets those who are isolated in the community with training held in community based facilities. The course targets people that may be attending local day hospitals or day centres, so coffee mornings are held in these centres in partnership with the HSE. Coffee mornings and information sessions are also held in the catchment areas of the course. Every participant is met in a one to one setting before

training begins and a training needs analysis is done in an informal way to garner learner's needs.

The course ethos is Learner Centred Learning based on a community education model 'A living curriculum'. The programme offers a modular course of learning with participants deciding the modules that they would like to complete following an initial two core modules, Digital Literacy and Personal Development to provide an opportunity to acquire basic skills and help group formation. The course is run two mornings a week from 10am-1pm.

When the basic learning sessions are completed a series of consultation sessions are held to identify what the participants themselves would like to learn. In previous years the groups have elected horticulture, furniture restoration, confidence building skills, life coaching, digital photography and arts and crafts. If there are other request for information guest speakers are called in, in the past the group have elected for alternative therapies, how to volunteer, supports for farm families, Information on benefits to name a few. The participants are also offered the opportunity to develop a WRAP® (Wellness and Recovery Action Plan). The WRAP improves coping skills and help sets goals for the future.

Impacts

The participants gain newly formed skills that they have achieved at their own pace and in their own terms. They also have a greater awareness of their own wellness. The participants also gain the tools for self-advocacy and personal responsibility. They are further linked in with local supports and have a greater awareness of services available to them in their area.

Partnership with local agencies is key to the roll out and support of this programme. This project is supported by the Department of Social Protection, HSE Mid West, Cork and

Limerick Education and Training Boards's and the LCDP. Ballyhoura Development is part of a consortium (The Towards Occupation Partnership) of 5 Local Development Companies located in Cork and Limerick rolling out these training programmes (SECAD, West Limerick Resources, IRD Duhallow & Avondhu Blackwater Partnership).

Within Ballyhoura Development there is the support of the other staff and projects for the participants. This can be taken up during the programme for example a qualified counsellor is available to participants and this continues after the programme ends with progression or information options. The constant links and supports provided through the programme are the important. The participants can call the coordinator when there are any issues or concerns. The course coordinator works one to one with each participant to work on their plan for the future.

The progression of individuals has led to further education opportunities, volunteering and paid employment. The one thing that is common feedback from participants is the social aspect and the improved socialisation skills of people who participate in the programme.

This project targets those who are marginalised and isolated in our community and provides an opportunity where one previously didn't exist. It is the approach and support for participants that sets it apart from other training programmes. It is an original concept that is simple and effective.

The Cappamore Estates Project

Context

The Cappamore Estates project supports the residents of four estates in the Cappamore area of east Limerick, where there is a mix of housing types. Pre-development work was the focus of activity for Ballyhoura Development in Cappamore for 2008. Various research was undertaken and exploratory meetings with communities and stakeholders were held to inform the priorities, these were identified as (1) General Information provision and creating links between community & statutory agencies, (2) Provision of information, educational recreational supports for young people, (3) Securing a community space in order to make this work happen, (4) Provision of education and training to adults and (5) Estate management.

Actions

Initially much of the work was focused on relationship building between Ballyhoura Development and the community both the residents on the estates and the wider community. Going door-to-door gathering information, collating a community profile and delivering initiatives to address needs and service gaps was crucial to this early relationship building process.

In the last quarter of 2008 Ballyhoura Development negotiated a lease on a local authority house in Mullally Lawn from Limerick County Council for a nominal amount. Following this the local Community Employment Scheme (CE) granted a Community Employment participant to the house that progressed through training and involvement with the women's group from maintenance to taking bookings and being a link for training courses, local publicity, estate management, the homework club, the Foroige Drop In, fund raising activities, as well as taking part in the Cappamore Family Coordinating group meetings, the East County Limerick Traveller Sub Committee group and the Cappamore Estate

Management group.

To promote dialogue between funders, providers and local communities and develop strategies to both improve access to services and better coordinate local services a Family Co-ordinating Group for the Cappamore area was established. The buy in from statutory agencies, the youth, community and voluntary sectors and the wider community was important. All of the groups working in partnership enabled appropriate responses tailored to the needs of the community be put in place. An example of this was the Citizens Information Service commencing an outreach service in the Community House and also delivery of a range of informal training programmes including Basic Computers, Toward Occupation, Horticulture, Operating Horticultural Equipment and Committee Skills Training.

In 2010, the Cappamore Estates Group were invited to make a presentation on their work to date to (1) other residents groups in County Limerick and (2) the Housing Section of Limerick County Council at a Resident's day facilitated by Limerick County Council in County Hall. At this meeting, a Local Authority Residents Forum was established. The Cappamore Estates Group nominated two representatives onto this countywide forum.

Impacts

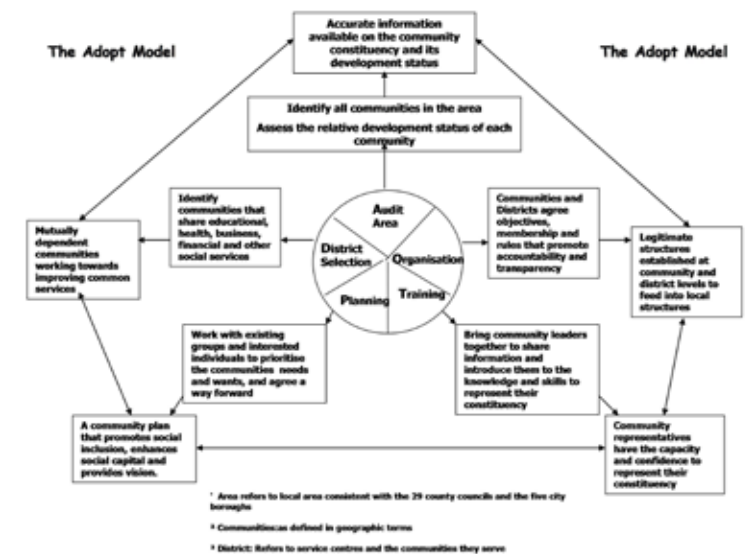
Cappamore Estates Committee has been empowered to take on the responsibility of maintenance & upkeep of the estates green areas. They have also completed a landscaping plan with Ballyhoura Development and were the overall winners of 2011's Pride of Place competition. The group were also runners up in the Limerick in Bloom Competition. The level of community pride in the area is very evident as a result.

To date much of the work has focused on empowering the community to engage various statutory agencies, youth organisations, schools and

local community groups using a community development approach. This has been a very successful approach in terms of working with the community as a whole. Further to this work and possibility as a result some individuals have been accessing their own skill levels and have returned to education; a result of engaging people through soft skills, building relationships and building confidence in the community.

Research highlighted that engagement with formal education had largely been a negative experience for many residents. The negativity associated with education was tackled, initially through provision of informal training requested by residents and progressing to engagement with formal accredited training and has gone some way in breaking a cycle of educational disadvantage amongst adults in the community. The provision of training in the community house has promoted positive engagement with the wider community, as individuals from outside of the aforementioned estates also enrolled for training.

The ADOPT Model



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