

IRELAND

Interterritorial cooperation

Location
Kilkenny

Programming period
2014 – 2020

Priority
P6 – Social inclusion & local
development

Measure
M19 – LEADER/CLLD

Funding (EUR)
Total budget 499 593
EAFRD 285 557
National/Regional 169 151
Private 44 885

Project duration
2017 – 2021

Project promoter
The Nore Vision

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An interterritorial cooperation project that brought together stakeholders with an interest in protecting nature along the river Nore and its catchment area.

Summary

The River Nore is one of the principal rivers in the South-East of Ireland. It has a 140 km-long course that drains a land area of approximately 2 530 km² and sustains a population of 110 000.



The river is of considerable environmental, heritage and social value and is a key component of the region's green infrastructure. It is also recognised in its Natura 2000 designation. The Nore Vision is a project, initiated by Kilkenny Local Action Group (LAG) in collaboration with three other LEADER LAGs based in Laois, North Tipperary South Tipperary, Ireland, which brings together representatives of all sectors with an interest in the Nore river and its catchment. Through an extensive consultation process, the project has enabled diverse yet complementary experiences and views to be shared, as well as mutual interests and synergies to be identified and developed. This has resulted in an overarching agreement, a shared vision and a coherent developmental framework through which multiple stakeholders manage and protect the river's assets and potential.

Results

The consultation process and its supporting development activities were successful in creating priority themes which collectively comprise the Nore Vision.

The Nore Vision can now be understood as the "voice of the river system", advocating on its behalf, and helping to secure its future for current and future generations.

The Nore Vision can serve as a blueprint, informing and supporting compatible action across and even beyond the catchment. This approach is endorsed by LAWPRO, the shared service of 31 Local Authorities in Ireland, which regards the Vision as a model exercise in stakeholder consultation, replicable in other catchment areas.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ The understanding that the river and its catchment area represent a coherent natural area of development that transcends governance and administrative boundaries. This necessitates extensive multi-party collaboration and dialogue.
- ❑ A coherent vision adopted by stakeholders helps shape policy, strategy and intervention actions and enables greater access to resources.
- ❑ Multi-party and multi-disciplinary project development requires a longer term perspective.
- ❑ Open communication between all stakeholders is essential to build trust and strengthen relationships.

Context

The River Nore is one of the principal rivers in the South-East of Ireland; its 140 km-long course drains a land area of approximately 2 530 km² and sustains a population of 110 000. The river is of considerable environmental, heritage and social value and is a key component of the region's green infrastructure as is recognised in its Natura 2000 designation. It has been classified as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The river and its catchment host a diversity of landscape features, habitats and plant types which in turn support a diversity of animal and avian species. The river is also important for commercial and leisure fishery, particularly for brown trout and salmon, although stocks of the latter have declined.

The river is an important cultural and heritage resource with many antiquities and monuments whose preservation is a matter of national importance by reason of the historical, architectural, traditional, or archaeological interest. The river's original function as a trade artery has passed on an important legacy. It continues to have significant economic value with commercial agriculture a notable feature in which mixed farming, dairying, tillage and bloodstock are prominent. More recently, the river and its catchment have become popular as a leisure, recreation and amenity resource. The river's multiple uses, allied to the fact that its catchment, tributaries and key upland headwaters traverse county and provincial boundaries, necessitates active multi party collaboration for its protection, management and stewardship.

The Kilkenny Local Development Strategy (2014-2020) established a framework of development support relevant to the sensitive stewardship of the river. These include biodiversity and water resource education and awareness, amenity and recreation development as well as the enhancement and restoration of cultural heritage and environmental assets.

Objectives

The project's aim was to engage in an extensive consultation process in which stakeholders drawn from the statutory, sectoral interest and community sectors would be encouraged to:

- Share their experiences and views;
- Identify their interests;
- Explore how and where a preferred future for the river and its hinterland could be identified;

- Create a shared understanding that would inform development actions by stakeholders within the catchment;
- Agree the core principles and actions and set out these within a shared vision;
- Actively collaborate to deliver elements of the Vision; and
- Align developments and resources with the Vision and its overarching principles and themes.

Activities

Between 2017 and 2018, an extensive programme of consultation engaged over 200 people. Their active participation was enabled by parallel streams for statutory agencies and policy makers, themed interest groups and sectoral initiatives as well as for wider community interests. The process, which was guided by a representative steering group, was open to all stakeholders with interests in water quality, environmental resources, land use management, development, heritage and education. Twenty national and regional agencies, authorities and bodies were identified as having an interest in water quality, environmental resources, land management, heritage and education, and were actively engaged with the process. In addition, 36 themed interest groups and sectoral initiatives also participated. Plans and priorities were discussed, and issues and suggested actions identified were compared to those of other stakeholders to assess the degree of shared interests, concerns and plans or 'vision' across the entire stakeholder consultation.

Workshops for community interests were held in 10 locations throughout the project area to ensure that diversity of perspective, need and expectation could be accommodated. The workshops were fully interactive comprising a mix of discussions and presentations and established participant's interests and concerns as their vision for the river and the steps needed to achieve this. Outputs from the 10 community consultations, as well as additional submissions received, were combined and 'issue maps' created for (a) the interests and concerns of participants and also for (b) their visions and related steps. In essence the draft Vision that emerged was a composite of inputs from all the workshops. To ensure ownership and consensus, this was further refined and elaborated upon in an iterative process of review and feedback with solutions actively sought to issues identified.

The consultation process revealed that, while varied perspectives and priorities existed, there was much common ground for a shared vision. Consensus was achieved on priorities for better water quality; conservation of natural heritage and sustainable floodplains; improved access to and amenity value of built and natural heritage; greater public awareness and pride in local rivers; and authentic engagement with communities. This was done through participatory planning methodologies plus appropriately designed and administered support for community-based, volunteer-run projects.

In tandem with the consultation process and the creation of the shared Vision, the following objectives were established: raising awareness; building competency and understanding; enhancing the environment; animating communities; building capacity to manage trust and education. To advance these an extensive programme of LEADER-supported development activities was scheduled throughout 2020 and 2021. These include:

- An Oral History initiative to engage people across the catchment to record their memories and personal commentaries of historical significance across a variety of themes including mining, education, personal livelihoods, farming, recreation, pollution/degradation, industry and energy;
- Scheduled Community Clean-Ups by volunteers to address litter and waste in the areas surrounding the river;
- An Outreach Education Programme to connect young people to their local landscape and empower them to become future guardians of the River Nore;
- Working with landowners to develop positive farming, hedgerow and woodland practices and pathways to positive land management and create momentum for environmentally friendly farming as well as results-based payments systems;
- Two phases of an Invasive Species Management Programme delivered online and onsite in six locations (60 participants);
- Two phases of a Citizen Science Programme comprised of six 2.5-hour sessions delivered in six locations (60 Participants); and
- An online programme conference scheduled over three days in April 2021 at which experiences and perspectives were shared, and plans for further development of the initiative were announced. The closing address to the conference was made by the Minister of State for Heritage, Malcolm Noonan TD.



Main results

The consultation process and its supporting development activities were successful in creating five priority themes which collectively comprise the Nore Vision. In summary, these are:

1. **Governance, Partnership, Planning, Management and Maintenance** to enable a partnership approach characterised by cooperation and coordination of objectives and action by agencies, communities, enterprises, and individuals.
2. **Water Quality** that is free from pollution, safe to drink and of high ecological status.
3. **Natural Heritage and Floodplains** that conserve biodiversity and develop sustainable flood mitigation measures.
4. **Cultural Heritage, Access, Amenity and Tourism** in which the cultural and built heritage is recorded, shared and conserved and its amenity assets are sensitively managed for tourism and leisure.
5. **Public Education, Engagement and Empowerment** to raise awareness and empower all age groups through locally informed and delivered educational programmes and citizen science.

Thus elaborated, the Nore Vision can now be understood as the “voice of the river system”, advocating on its behalf, and helping to secure its future for current and future generations. It remains open to any agency or individual with an interest in the river or its catchment to sign up to it. One of the clear aspirations of the stakeholders is that the Nore Vision should serve as a blueprint, informing and supporting compatible action across and even beyond the catchment. The approach is endorsed by LAWPRO, the shared service of 31 Local Authorities, which regards the vision as a model exercise in stakeholder consultation, replicable to other catchments.

Currently, the partner LEADER LAGs are working to develop a structure to support the initiative into the future, whilst also working to resource new development initiatives. Throughout 2021, advocates for the Nore Vision have also been proactive in seeking to engage with and inform policy and strategy at regional, county-based and local level, for the medium term.

Key lessons

The success of the Nore Vision initiative and its capacity to serve as a catalyst for significant future development has been founded on an understanding of number of key issues:

- The understanding that the river and its catchment represent a coherent natural area of development that transcends governance and administrative boundaries. This necessitates extensive multi-party collaboration and dialogue.
- The synergies, interdependencies and mutual interests that exist amongst all stakeholders can be shaped within a coherent, easily understood vision.
- A coherent vision adopted by stakeholders helps shape policy, strategy and intervention measures and enables greater access to resources.
- The understanding of the unique inter-relationships that exist between urban settlements and rural areas.
- The alignment of regional goals and objectives with emerging EU cohesion policy objectives will be enhanced by incorporating a catchment-based perspective.
- Multi-party and multi-disciplinary project development requires a longer term perspective.
- Open communication between all stakeholders is essential to build trust and strengthen relationships.



Additional sources of information

<https://consult.kilkenny.ie/ga/node/2404>

www.facebook.com/TheNoreVision/