

Speech for Minister Humphreys
Launch of the Innovating Communities –
Designing the Future LEADER Co-operation Project
Wednesday 17th February 2021

- Good afternoon everyone and thank you Gabriel for your opening address and kind welcome.
- As Minister for Rural and Community Development, I am delighted to be here with you all this afternoon, albeit virtually, to formally celebrate the Regional Launch of the *‘Innovating Communities’* LEADER Cooperation Project.
- In normal times, I would be addressing you in person and hearing first-hand your plans and indeed hopes for this LEADER initiative.
- But while that’s not possible due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, I really value the opportunity to engage with you all today because, as you know, LEADER is a Programme that I am very passionate about in my capacity as Minister and indeed a TD for the border region.

- Firstly, I want to commend you all for what you aim to achieve with '*Innovating Communities*', which I know is the first of its kind in this region and one that puts innovation to the core when it comes to Rural Development.
- I know you'll agree that while COVID-19 has presented unprecedented challenges for our rural communities, it also has thrown up so many opportunities that I want us to capitalise on together.
- I'm determined to ensure our rural communities are at the fore of our recovery post COVID-19.
- That's why I'm really looking forward to publishing the Government's strategy on Rural Ireland in the coming weeks, which will set out how our key stakeholders – including our LCDCs and Local Development Companies – can play a pivotal role in this recovery for rural Ireland.
- We all are partners in achieving a common goal for Rural Ireland; that is making our communities better places to live, work and do business in post-COVID.
- To achieve this, we have to have innovation, cooperation and hard work at the centre of our strategy.

- When we are talking about rural development, innovation is pivotal when it comes to assisting rural communities to be more active stakeholders in making our communities more sustainable.
- The LEADER Programme, which is now 30 years old in Ireland, seeks to build the capacity and skills of local communities so that we can build better places for our citizens.
- These common goals that I have mentioned certainly provide an ideal backdrop and indeed context to the '**Innovating Communities**' LEADER Co-operation project I have the pleasure of launching today.
- This project represents a total investment of over one million euro in LEADER grant aid, benefitting all corners of the region.
- This project is funded by my Department of Rural and Community Development under the dedicated €10 million LEADER Cooperation element of the €250 million LEADER 2014 – 2020 Programme.
- More importantly, it's a project that brings communities together, given that it involves partners from six Local Action Groups in the Border Region.

- The project itself is being led by Monaghan Integrated Development with Local Development Companies from Cavan, Louth, Leitrim, Sligo and Donegal also playing an integral part.
- I am sure you will agree that it represents a significant investment of LEADER Co-operation funding in the region.
- It is also a project that demonstrates how LEADER can work at scale and deliver for communities across so many towns and villages.
- I am told that the inspiration for this project came from LEADER colleagues across Europe, who, by sharing information and best practice, have highlighted the value and potential for learning within and across Europe.
- I understand that the training modules provided by this project will help the population of the border region deal with the current challenges they face.
- It will also build their capabilities to take advantage of future opportunities that may present themselves, by adopting new techniques so that they can do things better for the people and the communities they serve.

- The COVID-19 crisis has shown us that we can adapt to difficult situations, show innovation, and approach challenges in different and indeed more effective ways.
- It has given us an opportunity to reevaluate the importance of rural economies.
- And to re-imagine the potential for what Rural Ireland and its people can achieve.
- As I always say as Minister, there is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to Rural Ireland.
- Different places have different strengths and different needs.
- This project is very timely in supporting communities to build from the bottom up and respond to COVID-19 at a local level.
- It is great to know that all the LAG stakeholders involved in this project are committed to working with the wide range of rural stakeholders in the development and delivery of this project.
- I am pleased to learn too that community groups and individuals are invited to log their local challenges and opportunities online through a dedicated website and register to participate in the Design Training.

- I am delighted that *'Innovating Communities'* covers a wide range of areas including Biodiversity, Climate Action, Connectivity, Broadband, Smart Villages, and Social Enterprise.
- I look forward to seeing the impact this Project will have on the border region as it progresses.
- To conclude, I would like to commend the work of Monaghan Integrated Development who are acting as the lead, supported by its five partners in counties Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth and Sligo.
- Well done to you all for getting this impressive project underway, which I know, will benefit the people in the border region.
- I would also like to commend the six LCDC LAGs for supporting this project.
- Finally, I want to wish you every success with the implementation of this important project and I look forward to reading the end of project report.
- Thank you for your invitation once again and I look forward to continuing to work closely with you all into the future.