

Community planning to pave the way for funding streams

TWENTY communities around the county have benefited from a Leader-funded community planning programme, which Clare Local Development Company (CLDC) has been operating for the past 12 months.

On Thursday, January 31 at 7pm, an event will be held at the Hotel Woodstock in Ennis to celebrate and showcase the programme.

At the outset of the new Leader programme in 2016, the board of CLDC set ambitious targets for the delivery of comprehensive community plans to 50 community groups by 2020.

Gloria Callinan, Leader programme coordinator with CLDC, explained, "When we researched the needs of com-

munities around the county in the lead-up to the current programme, we realised that every community had said to us that they need more development support.

"Some communities are at more advanced stages of development in their structure, their formation and their identified aims than others and while some communities have a development plan, the fact was, at that stage, that most communities did not have their own researched and documented plans.

"There are so many groups active in nearly all communities around the county but they often do not work together, through no fault of their own.

"They all do fantastic work but sometimes that work can coincide, so you can have a situation where a sports group, for example, is fundraising for a field while at the same time and in the same small area, the hall committee is fundraising for renovations.

"There should be no reason that with a good plan, that fundraising for the next three-year period, for example, could not be agreed by all parties in advance and the burden possibly even shared."

In late 2017, CLDC obtained Leader funding to commission Neil Haran and Sue Target to work with the communities of New Quay, Liscannor, Lahinch, Ballyvaughan and Kilfenora in

North Clare and Flagmount, Tuamgraney, Tulla, Mountshannon and Feakle in the east of the county.

"In early 2018, further Leader grant aid was obtained by CLDC to commission eTownz and Gearóid Fitzgibbon to work with Killaloe, O'Briensbridge, Bunratty, Quin in the south of the county; with Kilkee, Carrigaholt, Miltown Malbay, Liscasey and Kilmihil in West Clare and, subsequently, with Lisdoonvarna.

"Considerable work has been undertaken in conjunction with the appointed community development facilitators by communities, involving countless volunteer hours in planning and in drafting and distributing com-

munity surveys, in the collating of findings and in the delivery of action and development plans.

"The process has taken 12 months and most plans are either completed or at an advanced stage," outlined Neil Haran, freelance community development facilitator.

CEO of CLDC, Dóirín Graham said, "In these times of unprecedented public funding becoming available at relatively short notice, it is vital that communities have well-developed community plans, which incorporate almost 'shovel-ready' capital projects, with a solid evidence base, showing need and identifying target groups and potential users.

"It is our intention that these

plans will be used by community groups to access and leverage all kinds of funding streams, not just Leader.

"Awareness of timelines and advance preparation can assist in meeting the criteria of applications but can often become barriers to accessing funds by communities.

"The area-based planning programme has meant that communities are ready to apply as funds are announced."

CLDC is seeking expressions of interest for participation in the 2019 round of community plans, with the same team of facilitators appointed again for this year, after a tender process, offering consistency and continuity. The deadline for express-

ing interest is this Friday.

The community event next week will showcase the stories of some of the communities who participated last year.

All communities are encouraged to send representatives to the event, which will give opportunities for meeting with support and funding agencies along with networking with other communities, while enjoying refreshments on the night.

The Wheel's Vincent Carragher and Johnny Sheehan will act as keynote speakers, giving an overview of the sector and helping to make communities aware of the range of services offers to members, including the Spark Change in Your Community initiative.