



The Old Rectory Country House: from heritage to hospitality, powering a resilient rural economy

SUMMARY

The Old Rectory Country House, located in Fenagh, Ireland, is a family-owned hospitality venue dating back to 1827, restored over the past 30 years to ensure its long-term use and relevance. Situated in a rural and economically peripheral area, the venue operates as a year-round hub for community and private events, contributing to local social and cultural life while attracting visitors to the region.

With support from the LEADER programme the business has expanded its capacity to host larger events and operate throughout the year. The initiative supports local businesses, boosts rural economic activity, preserves a historic property, and promotes sustainability.



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Themes: Tourism and heritage, Entrepreneurship, Rural revitalisation

Country: Ireland

Organisation:

> The Old Rectory Country House

Start & end date: 04/1994 - ongoing

Budget: EUR 700 000 – own funds

EUR 125 000 – LEADER funds in 2013

EUR 27 000 – LEADER funds in 2019

Funding sources:

Own funds and LEADER

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CONTEXT

Fenagh is a rural village in County Leitrim, Ireland, characterised by a dispersed population, limited local services, and its location in an economically peripheral region. Like many rural areas. Places like Fenagh face the need to remain attractive places to live, work and raise families, while preserving local heritage and the natural environment.

The initiative responds to these challenges by restoring and operating The Old Rectory Country House as a multifunctional venue that supports local economic activity, provides employment and creates a space for community events and social interaction.



OBJECTIVES

- > Restore and maintain a historic rural building to ensure its long-term use and preservation;
- > Provide a multifunctional venue that supports community events, social life and cultural activities;
- > Support local suppliers and businesses by creating demand for goods and services;
- > Integrate environmentally sustainable practices into the operation of the venue;
- > Contribute to the long-term resilience and continuity of the local community.



ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

The Old Rectory Country House has been developed and managed by the Curran Callaghan family since they moved into the property in March 1994. The initiative has unfolded through a series of structured investments and renovations, combining self-funding, public support through the LEADER programme and targeted grants.

Initial activities focused on full-scale renovation of the house, including the installation of ensuite bathrooms in each room, upgraded electricity and plumbing, heating systems, fire alarms, new stairs, a new kitchen, roofing and acquisition of antique furniture. These works were primarily self-funded and carried out by the family.

Parallel farm improvements included new drainage, construction of cattle sheds and stables, and fencing, partially supported by grants. In 2013, self-catering apartments were added in the courtyard, with costs split equally between the LEADER programme and the family's own funds.

In 2019, a marquee was constructed to expand event capacity, again funded equally by LEADER and private contributions. Renewable energy and sustainability measures were also introduced, including solar panels funded through the Irish government's Targeted Agriculture Modernisation Schemes (TAMS farm grant). Ongoing maintenance and minor upgrades continue to ensure the property's functionality, safety and heritage preservation.

The primary beneficiaries are the local community, visitors and rural suppliers engaged in hospitality services, with the wider rural area benefitting from increased social, cultural and economic activity.



RESULTS

- > **Local economic activity expanded** through year-round events, supporting local suppliers, tradespeople and service providers;
- > **Sustainable practices promoted**, including solar panels, rainwater harvesting, recycling, composting and pre-ordered catering to reduce waste;
- > **Heritage buildings and rural landscape preserved**, ensuring long-term viability of cultural and historical assets;
- > **Contributed to rural tourism**, attracting visitors to Fenagh and surrounding areas.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

- > **Long-term planning and careful project preparation** allowed large-scale restoration and development projects to be implemented efficiently and sustainably. Elements for major projects were identified and collected in advance, ensuring readiness before execution.
- > **Combining infrastructure upgrades with operational and organisational support** strengthened the overall impact. Improvements to buildings, farm facilities, self-catering apartments and event spaces were paired with business development, community engagement and sustainability measures.
- > **Respect for the local environment and heritage** guided decision-making, ensuring that interventions preserved historical assets while supporting modern use and functionality.
- > **Strategic use of grants and co-funding** (LEADER programme, TAMS farm grant) enabled targeted investment in areas with the greatest impact, including self-catering apartments, a marquee and solar panels.
- > **Sustainability practices**, such as rainwater harvesting, recycling, composting and energy efficiency, were embedded in operations, contributing to environmental resilience.



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