

Response to the PEACE PLUS Programme 2021-2027 Consultation by the County Monaghan Public Participation Network (PPN) Response

This document contains County Monaghan Public Participation Network's (PPN) response to the consultation on the proposed PEACE PLUS programme 2021-2027. The PPN appreciates the opportunity to input to this consultation and is happy to provide clarification or further detail should this be needed.

County Monaghan Public Participation Network

The County Monaghan Public Participation Network (PPN) was set up under the Local Government Act 2014 to facilitate the engagement of Monaghan County Council with the community and voluntary sector across the county, when consulting on new policies, strategies and plans. There are currently 580 groups registered with the PPN representing the Social Inclusion Pillar, Environment Pillar and Community Pillar. These groups themselves involve thousands of volunteers who in turn engage with many more thousands within the communities across the County.

Developing our Response to this Consultation

From time to time, the PPN makes submissions to consultations carried out by other organisations where we feel that the issue(s) concerned will impact our wider membership. The community sector here is vast and represents a wide spectrum of interests, views and needs. For this reason, Monaghan PPN held a focus group session with representatives of the PPN to discuss the PEACE PLUS programme content consultation. Young people, whose futures our current actions will influence, were also represented at the focus group through participation of those from Monaghan Comhairle na nÓg and Fóroige.

(Monaghan Comhairle na nÓg are a youth council, which give children and young people the opportunity to be involved in the development of local services and policies. The core programme of Comhairle na nÓg centres on young people identifying, prioritising and progressing topics important to them. The voice of young people is therefore represented throughout our submission. Fóroige is the leading youth organisation in Ireland and has been working with young people since 1952. It's purpose is to enable young people to involve themselves consciously and actively in their own development and in the development of society.)

In 2020, Monaghan PPN adopted a Community Wellbeing Vision Statement developed by our membership and setting out what they want to see achieved here. At the core of this is the belief that "diversity is celebrated, and everyone is equally valued, can live well and build a future" (p.4).

Our Vision is set out across six headings:

- Health (mental and physical)
- Participation, Democracy and Good Governance
- Social and Community Development
- Work, Economy and Resources
- Culture, Values and Meaning
- Environment and Sustainability.

Many of these headings clearly correspond to one or more of the PEACE PLUS themes or investment areas and the content of the Vision sets the backdrop to the response presented here. We attach our Vision document and where there are clear and specific links to this Vision in our response to the consultation, we have included references to these.

The feedback from the focus group has been compiled under each theme and heading, corresponding to the structure of the consultation document, and represents a position of consensus amongst our members. Those participating in the focus group session were polled in order that we could present an accurate picture of the range of responses to the questions posed in the consultation.

Please note: many of the observations contained here are relevant to more than one theme and multiple investment areas since these are not necessarily distinct and much value will be added if maximum synergies are developed between them. While this document may return feedback in relation to a specific theme or investment area, we would ask that consideration be given to the relevance of each piece of feedback across all the proposed elements of the Programme.

CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Theme 1: Building Peaceful and Thriving Communities

The PPN wishes to achieve a situation where all citizens actively participate in a robust, transparent and effective local democracy, where they have real influence in decisions that affect them (*PPN Vision 4.0, p.8*). This theme can support such a partnership approach to building and strengthening our community.

% Focus Group Agreement/ Disagreement with proposed Investment Areas in Theme 1

<u>Investment Area</u>	strongly agree	agree	neither agree or disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
• Co-Designed Local Community PEACE Action Plans	62	32	6	-	-
• Empowering Communities	69	39	-	-	-
• Building Positive Relations	56	44	-	-	-
• Re-imagining Communities	78	22	-	-	-

Co-Designed Local Community PEACE Action Plans

The PPN feels that the proposed Local Action Plan for each local authority area is a positive approach and could also be used as a mechanism to provide support and assistance for applications from within the relevant area. This has proved challenging in the past, particularly for smaller projects. Having a county-wide perspective could increase the potential benefits of individual projects through enabling greater connections and collaboration between initiatives.

It is suggested that SEUPB consider how such Local Action Plans might be able to facilitate advance payments at the initiation of projects, particularly in the community and voluntary sector where start-up capital for new initiatives is not generally available.

Empowering Communities

The PPN aspires to a situation where “We respect one another, and everyone is valued and has a voice. We understand and celebrate the rich diversity in our community, and we ensure that all of us are involved and fully part of the community.” (*PPN Vision 1.1, p.5*) All our citizens need to be treated equally.

In relation to this theme, PPN members see it as important for resources to be targeted particularly towards those in underprivileged communities (*PPN Vision, 6.6 p.10*). There is significant need for increased housing and a variety of housing options to retain people in the County and give stability to our communities.

It is important that we enable all our citizens to live fulfilling lives and to thrive. Resources under this theme need to be directed to support people, and their families, within our communities to overcome challenges and be all that they wish to be whether children or adults with learning difficulties, those experiencing long term unemployment, those who have caring commitments, people recovering from addiction, or those who are older.

Supporting childcare and families is recognised by the PPN as vital to foster a positive and stable community.

Building Positive Relations

The PPN is aware that the diversity within our communities must be recognised, understood and seen as a valued source of richness. It is hoped that this theme and investment area will address the inclusion of Travellers, new communities, those who have a disabilities, and so forth, drawing in and involving all marginalised groups.

Dismantling direct provision is also an imperative if we are to move towards an inclusive and equal society.

Part of building positive relations requires also that we address racism through proactive education and relationship building initiatives.

Re-imagining Communities

Our Vision Statement makes repeated reference to the importance of high quality, flexible, and tailored spaces, facilities and services within the community as essential foundations to support strong and positive community activity (*PPN Vision 1.5-p.5, 5.2-p.9, 6.2-p.10*). The PPN sees this investment area as supporting provision of these critical resources for a stable and thriving society. It is welcome and extremely important.

Theme 2: Delivering Economic Regeneration and Transformation

Monaghan PPNs members have a vision where everyone enjoys a high quality of life and where “Monaghan is an attractive place to live, work and invest, where we actively work to maintain our vibrant local economy and community. We have a resilient, sustainable, local economy with strong indigenous business and agri-food sectors, well-served with excellent and integrated communications and transports infrastructure. There are easily accessible supports available for new and existing enterprises, both social and commercial, to thrive. Employment conditions are good, and facilities are in place to support workers and the self-employed. Excellent training and education programmes support those seeking work, those upskilling and employers’ needs.” (PPN Vision 6.0, p.10) This Theme provides a framework which supports this and is welcomed by the PPN.

% Focus Group Agreement/ Disagreement with proposed Investment Areas in Theme 2

<u>Investment Area</u>	strongly agree	agree	neither agree or disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
• SME Development & Transition	50	44	6	-	-
• Innovation Challenge Fund	39	61	-	-	-
• Programme Area Skills Development	56	39	5	-	-
• Smart Towns & Villages	61	39	-	-	-

There is general support for the investment areas set out under this theme. In particular, there would be advantage to providing increased third level education opportunities and enhanced training and skills development in order to support development and use of new technologies and new industries/ economic activities in the region.

A link with Theme 6 is identified, whereby availability of reliable supplies of potable water are needed to support development.

The PPN would like to point to the importance of tourism, particularly in a post-Covid situation, and the need to generate increased footfall within rural areas such as County Monaghan, where people can enjoy wonderful natural amenities, benefitting themselves and vulnerable local economies. The potential for greenway development is recognised and seen as a positive initiative in which to engage farmers and generate multiple benefits for the community, environment and economy.



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Theme 3: Empowering and Investing in our Young People

% Focus Group Agreement/ Disagreement with proposed Investment Areas in Theme 3

<u>Investment Area</u>	strongly agree	agree	neither agree or disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
• Shared Learning Together Education Programmes	62	32	6	-	-
• PEACE PLUS for Youth Programme	50	44	6	-	-
• Youth Mental health & Wellbeing	78	17	6	-	-

Under the previous PEACE funding, set requirements of youth programmes (for example, of duration and contact hours) meant that these tended to take on a uniform style and delivery format which limited how responsive and impactful they could be. This situation was seen to lead to programmes being focused on outputs rather than on outcomes for the young people involved, inhibiting the work that might have been done to most effectively support them. This was not felt to be an appropriate measure of success as the number engaged is not necessarily a reflection of the best possible outcomes for the individuals involved. Each young person is different and initiatives to support them should be flexible and able to meet their specific needs. The PPN would ask that the new Programme be structured in such a way that it provides for flexibility and responsiveness in design and delivery of youth programmes, with a clear focus on securing the best possible outcomes for the individual young people that are involved. A shift in emphasis to make indicators and reporting of projects more focused on quality, set out in relation to reducing the administrative burden for applicants, is seen as very welcome and an important change.

It is also important to recognise that the experience of conflict that young people have varies considerably with location across the region; these experiences are different for those in the border counties than those living in Belfast for example. In the border counties, the conflict encountered in young peoples' daily lives involve their dealings with other people, and in relation to their personal, social development, at home, with family, in school and at work. Where the previous PEACE funding focused on conflict resolution, now young people are facing challenges around leaving school early and being able to access employment. The supports that are provided to young people need to be relevant to their lived experience and so specific to their locality.



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Additional support for non-academic skills training, apprenticeships and the development of trades is needed. It is hoped that local businesses can be brought on board with initiatives to provide these opportunities. (*PPN Vision, 6.3, p.10*)

Monaghan, along with Cavan, has the highest suicide rate of all counties in Ireland and supports for good mental health are crucial. Effective supports for youth mental health are inadequate and in need of significant resourcing. Provision of timely access to age-appropriate services as close to need as possible is recognised as hugely important and is a goal set out in the PPN's Community Wellbeing Vision (3.3, p.7). While there may be a lack of awareness of the services available, it is clear that these services are currently insufficient and not sufficiently tailored to address the needs of young people.

Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing

Young people in rural areas have access to fewer opportunities than their urban counterparts, often experiencing significant isolation and associated challenges. This is certainly exacerbated by the limited transport options available. This reality should be recognised and addressed under this theme. There also needs to be a real focus on active travel initiatives to facilitate young people to cycle to meet family, friends and attend social events.

Linked to this is the clear need for young people to have safe places in which to meet. The PPN has identified the importance of having "excellent recreational activities and venues for our young people who are supported to play an important and active part in our community" (*PPN Vision, 5.4, p.9*).

The PPN hopes that the new PEACE PLUS Programme will fund initiatives to support the LGBT community, to address bullying, cyber bullying, internet safety and social media issues, particularly as they impact on young people. Education for parents to enable them to provide effective support for young people is also seen as important.

The PPN expressed general support for an approach that recognises that locally agreed solutions are more likely to be effective as they are informed by local circumstances.

Theme 4: Healthy and Inclusive Communities

Monaghan PPN sees a need for all citizens to understand the importance of good mental and physical health and how they can maintain this throughout their lives. There is a need for co-ordinated agency and community-led services and activities to support people to be able to do this, that are available locally and responsive to need (*PPN Vision 3.1-3.5, p.7*).

In addition, the PPN wants to see supports for physical and mental health that are tailored to meet specific needs or the needs of specific groups within the community. (*PPN Vision, 3.1 & 3.2, p.7*)

% Focus Group Agreement/ Disagreement with proposed Investment Areas in Theme 4

<u>Investment Area</u>	strongly agree	agree	neither agree or disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
• Collaborative Health & Social Care	61	39	0	-	-
• Rural Regeneration & Social Care	61	39	0	-	-
• Victims & Survivors	33	50	17	-	-

Collaborative Health and Social Care

The PPN supports a future with collaborative health and social care where “we have excellent mental and physical health services that meet the needs of all members of our community. [and] These work in partnership with proactive, community-led supports and initiatives.” (*PPN Vision, 3.0, p.7*).

At present, the serious lack of local GPs (General Practitioners) in County Monaghan is likely to be further exacerbated given the aging profile of local doctors and an apparent reluctance of younger GPs to take up practice in smaller towns and rural areas. Planning for health service provision should ensure local primary health care services and adequate GPs to meet community needs. (*PPN Vision, 3.4, p.7*) These basic health care provisions are necessary to support existing communities and the sustainability of the area; people and businesses will be disinclined to locate to an area without them. It is frustrating for those living in the area not to be able to access GP care and for very sick people, the situation causes real insecurity and fear.

Health service provision for new communities in the region also needs to be addressed. The needs of these groups are more likely to go unmet if primary health care and local GP services are unavailable. Current challenges emerging in delivering Covid vaccinations to communities with no engagement with health services serve to illustrate this point.



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Rural Regeneration and Social Care

Rural regeneration needs to include a focus on encouraging people to live in our local towns. In addition, there needs to be greater provision for older people. There is a strong age-awareness in County Monaghan but additional practical supports are needed, such as transport provision to enable greater social inclusion, independence and activity.

The PPN identifies a need for a wide range of sport and leisure amenities in all areas to cater for diverse groups and enable participation and engagement across our communities. (*PPN Vision, 5.4, p.9*). Rural areas can benefit from playing a significant role in provision of such amenities.

Victims and Survivors

The PPN recognises a need to ensure that there are adequate and informed, trauma counselling services available for asylum seekers and refugees within our communities.

The PPN has identified a need for an inter-agency response to prevent domestic abuse and appropriate therapeutic responses to help children and families heal following trauma (*PPN Vision 3.5, p7*). We wish to see effective supports to ensure that everyone is safe within their home and their community. Action is needed to actively combat inequality and abuse must not be tolerated (*PPN Vision 5.7, p.9*).

It is anticipated that the Covid pandemic will leave a range of impacts for the mental and physical health of many people. Coping with illness, bereavement, anxiety and being able to feel safe will make demands on our health care systems and require community supports. It is hoped that projects to deliver this will be included within this theme.

Theme 5: Support a Sustainable and Better-Connected Future

Monaghan PPN's member groups wish to achieve a situation where we live sustainably, in all aspects of our lives (*PPN Vision, 2.0, p.6*). It is important that this theme takes a holistic approach to securing sustainable futures; looking at best practice and innovations in relation to waste, energy, transport, climate change, biodiversity, natural resource management and education and opportunities for all citizens to actively contribute.

% Focus Group Agreement/ Disagreement with proposed Investment Areas in Theme 5

<u>Investment Area</u>	strongly agree	agree	neither agree or disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
• Biodiversity, Nature Recovery & Resilience	35	59	-	6	-
• Marine & Coastal Management	24	47	29	-	-
• Water Quality & Catchment Management	59	29	12	-	-
• Water Quality Improvement Programme	59	41	-	-	-
• Geothermal Energy Demonstration Programme	12	53	6	-	-
• Enhanced Sustainable Travel Connectivity	35	47	18	-	-

Biodiversity, Nature Recovery and Resilience

The proposed investment in biodiversity, nature recovery and resilience is welcomed. It is recognised that there is a change needed for everyone to become more aware of biodiversity and its importance. (*PPN Vision, 2.6, p.6*)

It was suggested that media campaigns be considered under this investment area to encourage positive actions for biodiversity, such as limiting hedge and grass cutting in ways that will support wildlife.

Water quality and catchment management & Water quality improvement programme

In Monaghan, where there are many intensive agricultural operations, projects that support sustainable farming operations are identified as very important by the PPN.

A number of issues arise in relation to agriculture in addition to energy use; waste production, and negative impacts on water quality in particular. The proposed investments in catchment



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management and water quality are welcomed and it is understood that agriculture has an important role to play here. Supports for positive action by farmers to protect water bodies and assist in securing water quality are important for environmental and social reasons. Sustainable agricultural production is the ambition for Monaghan (*PPN Vision, 2.5, p.6*).

There are multiple catchments that fall within, or partially within, County Monaghan and this needs to be considered so that all areas can reap the benefits of effective catchment management. These two investment areas focused on water point to the need for networking and co-operation between farmers on both sides of the border and also between the different agencies in both jurisdictions with responsibilities for water.

Geothermal Energy Demonstration Programme

The PPN questions the funding for alternative, sustainable and low carbon energy sources being allocated solely for a geothermal demonstration programme. The absence of any attention being given to energy efficiency, or other innovations, such as solar energy systems is unfortunate, and it is hoped that this investment area can be widened to include other renewable or low-carbon energy sources and demonstrations of energy efficient homes. (Geothermal is not presently a fully renewable energy source; requiring some energy to drive the system.)

As a combined INTERREG and PEACE programme, PEACE PLUS should take a more comprehensive approach to initiatives that help secure a low carbon future for this region. The PPN is in favour of using locally generated, renewable energy sources that are affordable and efficient (*PPN Vision 2.3, p.6*) and this will require exploration of all options, as well as securing maximum energy efficiency.

Actions to address high energy use in intensive agricultural operations in Monaghan also need to be eligible under this heading.

Enhanced Sustainable Travel Connectivity

Monaghan PPN is seeking a future where “we rely on low carbon energy transport networks and infrastructure, including good public transport that serves rural areas well, and there is provision for safe cycling and walking throughout the County.” (*PPN Vision 2.2, p.6*) We see this as equally critical to support communities, reduce isolation and enable active and healthy lifestyles (*PPN Vision, 3.0-p.7, 5.3 -p.9*) as it is for a successful and flexible economy; “... well connected through efficient and high-quality communications and transport infrastructure. [where] Excellent local transport services throughout the County support travel for work, education, and amenities.” (*PPN Vision. 6.1, p.10*) The PPN wishes to see Monaghan “well connected through efficient and high-quality communications and transport infrastructure. Excellent local transport services throughout the County support[ing] travel for work, education, and amenities.” (*PPN Vision, 6.1, p.10*)

This investment area is seen as important in enabling people to interact, to mind their physical and mental health, reduce isolation, as well as achieve desired reductions in carbon emissions and associated benefits for our economy and environment



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Theme 6: Building and Embedding Partnership and Collaboration

% Focus Group Agreement/ Disagreement with proposed Investment Areas in Theme 6

<u>Investment Area</u>	strongly agree	agree	neither agree or disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
• Strategic Planning & Engagement	37	63	-	-	-
• Maintaining & Forging Relationships between Citizens	53	47	-	-	-

Strategic Planning and Engagement

As under Theme 2, the PPN sees considerable potential in partnership and collaboration to provide for learning and skills development in County Monaghan, for example through exploring the opportunities that could be provided in association with Dundalk Institute of Technology.

Meaningful and effective collaboration between agencies, as well as engaging with communities is seen as essential for real progress to be achieved. This requires joined-up thinking and planning, as well as in the implementation of actions (*PPN Vision 4.1, 4.2, p.8*)

It is hoped that SEUPB will ensure that the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals be integrated into the Programme so that all initiatives ensure they consider how they can deliver in relation to these, and maximum benefit can be achieved in all cases.

Maintaining and Forging Relationships between Citizens

Support for cohesive and strong communities in which all people are engaged and valued is critical for our society (*PPN Vision 1.0, p.5*).

The provision of bespoke training for agencies about violence against women, working with the Safe Homes Safe Communities, and focusing on the impact of violence in the home and on the wider community is identified as important to help create a more peaceful and stable society.

It is hoped that PEACE PLUS will enable talking amongst communities and across borders, with a focus on sharing of people's lived experience to allow healing and recovery, while supporting the region to become increasingly peaceful, stable and prosperous.



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Indicative Budget Allocation

% Focus Group Agreement/ Disagreement with Indicative Budget Allocation

<u>Indicative Budget</u>	strongly agree	agree	neither agree or disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
Theme 1: Building Peaceful & Thriving Communities (€210m)	17	72	11	-	-
Theme 2: Delivering Economic Regeneration & Transformation (€143m)	28	56	27	-	-
Theme 3: Empowering & Investing in our Young People (€110m)	39	61	-	-	-
Theme 4: Healthy and Inclusive Communities (€155m)	56	39	-	-	-
Theme 5: Supporting a Sustainable & Better Connected Future (€265m)	33	50	17	-	-
Theme 6: Building & Embedding Partnership & Collaboration (€47m)	28	67	6	-	-

(A range of reasons informed different opinions on the indicative budget. Time constraints did not allow sufficient time for detailed discussion and analysis of the results set out above.)

Proposals to Help Reduce the Administrative Burden for Applicants to the New Programme

The PPN member groups are very familiar with the challenges involved in meeting governance and administration requirements and these have been significant in relation to PEACE funding to date. This burden can and does hamper the valuable work of community and voluntary organisations and inhibit them from initiative excellent projects. It is in everyone's interests to streamline and minimise requirements and so the proposals contained in PEACE PLUS Programme to reduce the administrative load for groups that access PEACE funding is positive.

% Focus Group Agreement/ Disagreement with Proposals to Help Reduce Administrative Burden for Applicants

<u>Proposals to reduce administrative burden</u>	strongly agree	agree	neither agree or disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
• Increase project development support	37	53	11	-	-
• Introduce more participation & flexibility in calls for applications	53	42	-	5	-
• Simplify the application process	63	26	5	5	-
• Increase training opportunities for project partners	42	47	11	-	-
• Make the monitoring system more user friendly	47	53	-	-	-
• Simplified cost options	47	47	5	-	-
• Increase flexibility in project management	47	47	5	-	-
• Make indicators & reporting more focused on quality	32	68	-	-	-

The PPN is clear that the administrative burden involved in accessing PEACE funding has been incredibly challenging for small groups. It is hoped that the County-based Local Community PEACE Action Plans may provide a structure that can act as an intermediary to help smaller groups co-operate and draw down resources. It was noted that dealing with SEUPB has been somewhat intimidating for smaller community groups to date.

Support for project development and increased flexibility in calls for applications were welcomed. A simpler application process would assist community groups. However, it is very important that this should not mislead applicants as to extent of the requirements which must be met to actually draw down funds. This administrative aspect of project management has been significant and onerous for community groups. Unless there is equivalent simplification of this aspect of administration, the extent of work involved in this should be made very clear to applicants.



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PPN member groups feel strongly that there is inadequate recognition of the contribution of volunteers to the success of community projects. This work has enabled the delivery of the PEACE programme and it's benefits to be felt as widely as they have, and it will continue to be a fundamental element of the achievements to be made through PEACE PLUS. It represents extraordinary added value which is not sufficiently acknowledged. The PPN asks that SEUPB consider how the role and the immense value of the work contributed by these essential volunteers can be recognised within the new Programme (*PPN Vision 4.3- p.8, 5.6 – p.9*).

Equality Screening Findings for PEACE PLUS Programme

There was general appreciation that this screening is a necessary and appropriate requirement for the promotion of equality and positive relations in the operation of the PEACE PLUS Programme. It is hoped that this in turn will be reflected in the projects that receive funding.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the PEACE PLUS Programme

The importance of assessing the environmental consequences of the PEACE PLUS Programme was recognised as an important step in ensuring the Programme delivers sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

Monaghan PPN would like to thank SEUPB for the opportunity to input into the new PEACE PLUS programme. The community sector appreciates the difficult task which the SEUPB will have to balance the needs of all stakeholders. However, our very diverse membership has invested time in putting together their considered response and consensus position with the aim of adding value to what is proposed in the new PEACE PLUS Programme. We trust that our views will be considered and know that they can enhance the programme as it is presently set out.

Community groups across County Monaghan appreciate the need for a stable, peaceful and thriving community. We wish to contribute to all efforts aimed at achieving this and continue to devote enormous voluntary effort towards this goal.

We look forward to seeing the final PEACE PLUS Programme and to working in partnership across our communities to deliver projects and initiatives that make this region the best that it can be.

Kind Regards,

Leona Keenan

Manager of Monaghan Public Participation Network



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Putting Community at the Heart of Decision-Making