



Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2024 – 2030

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SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2024– 2030 (LAP) has been prepared in accordance with the requirements and provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (hereafter referred to as ‘the Act’).

The LAP sets out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of Portlaoise, in the context of the Laois County Development Plan 2021 – 2027 and the Eastern and Midland Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy 2019 – 2031. The LAP has also been informed by Ministerial Guidelines issued pursuant to Section 28 of the Act, together with EU requirements regarding Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA).

The LAP comprises a written statement and accompanying maps. The written statement shall take precedence over the map should any discrepancy arise. In the full interpretation of all objectives for Portlaoise, it is essential that both the County Development Plan (CDP) and the Local Area Plan are read together. Where conflicting objectives arise between the two, the objectives of the former shall take precedence.

It should be noted that the general development management standards applicable to the plan area are included in the CDP, while policies and objectives that are specific to Portlaoise are included in the LAP.

1.2 Town Centre Action Plan

Since 2017, the Portlaoise Town Team has played a key role in the regeneration and redevelopment of Portlaoise Town. Over that period, the Town Team has advised, led and enabled multiple Tidy Town’s projects, initiatives with local business groups, business supports, Low Carbon Town projects, uncovering and telling the story of local history and heritage, street art and public realm enhancements. The work of the Town Team is dispersed to various sub-groups to deliver the objectives of the Portlaoise Town Team Action Plan.

The *Portlaoise Town Team Action Plan 2023-2026*, in existence since 2017 and revised in 2023, has been developed within the framework of the “Town Centre First” policy, published by the Government in February 2022. This policy is a key element of the Programme for Government as it recognises the importance of Towns as a focus for enabling the social, economic and environmental development of our communities and the input of a collaborative Town Team in achieving the actions set out.

The Town Team Action Plan is also substantially informed by *2040 And Beyond – A Vision for Portlaoise* which re-examines and provides a framework for re-purposing the Town Centre.

1.3. Funding

One of the key functions of this LAP is to provide a framework that will inform and support proposals and bids for funding and investment at regional and national level, in particular in relation to Urban Regeneration Development under the URDF Fund.

In doing this, the LAP will be supported by the Laois Local Economic and Community Plan 2023-2028 and the Laois LEADER Local Development Strategy.

There are many public national investment/funding programmes, a non-exhaustive summary of these is set out below, noting that that these may change or be updated over the lifetime of the LAP.

| Funding Programme |
|--|
| Town Centre First Funding |
| Croi Conaithe |
| European Regional Development Fund |
| Historic Towns Initiative |
| Historic Structures Fund |
| Built Heritage Capital Grant |
| Destination Towns Initiative |
| Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund |
| Serviced Sites Fund |
| Repair & Lease Scheme |
| Buy & Renew Scheme |
| Sustainable Mobility Investment Programme |
| Climate Action Fund |

SECTION 2. PLAN COMPOSITION

2.1 Legislative Requirements

Section 19 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) requires that a Local Area Plan be prepared in respect of an area which –

- (i) is designated as a town in the most recent census of population, other than a town designated as a suburb or environs in that census,
- (ii) has a population in excess of 5,000, and
- (iii) is situated within the functional area of a Planning Authority which is a County Council.

Census 2022 confirmed that Portlaoise has a total population of 23,494, an increase of 6.5% from Census 2016 when it was 22,050.

A Local Area Plan is therefore statutorily required for Portlaoise. Section 20 of the Act sets out the process for the making of a Local Area Plan as illustrated in the following diagram:

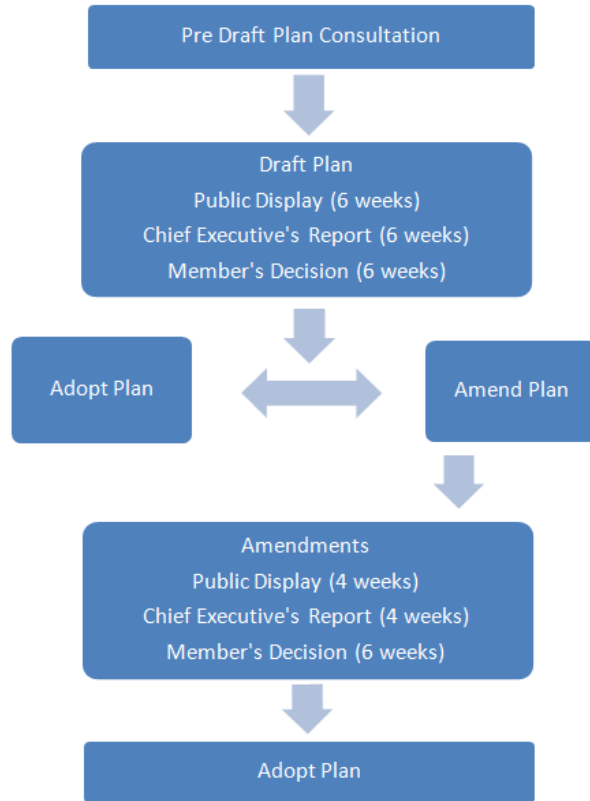


Figure 2.1: LAP Process

In accordance with Sections 19 and 28 of the Act, the LAP is subject to the following environmental considerations:

2.2 Strategic Environmental Assessment

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is required in accordance with the SEA Directive (DIR 2001/42/EC). SEA is a formal, systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan, policy or programme.

SEA is mandatory for plans for areas with a population of 5,000 or more and is therefore required for the LAP.

The kind of development that occurs in Portlaoise and where it occurs will be significantly determined by the implementation of the Local Area Plan. By anticipating the effects and avoiding areas in which growth cannot be sustainably accommodated and by directing development towards more compatible and robust receiving environments, real improvements in environmental management and planning can occur in the Town.

CAAS Limited Environmental Consultants have been appointed by Laois County Council to undertake the SEA as part of the preparation of the LAP. In this regard, an SEA Environmental Report has been prepared informing the likely environmental impacts of implementing the policies and objectives of the plan and integrating relevant environmental considerations into the plan.

The SEA Environmental Report (SEA ER) accompanies this LAP. Mitigation measures recommended in the SEA ER have been incorporated into the LAP. This report sets out the likely environmental consequences of decisions regarding the location and type of developments within the plan area, mitigation measures to offset potential adverse effects of the plan and monitoring proposals.

2.3 Appropriate Assessment

Appropriate Assessment (AA) is required in accordance with Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the EU Habitats Directive (DIR 92/43/EEC).

Appropriate Assessment is a focused and detailed impact assessment of the implications of the plan or project, alone and in combination with other plans and projects, on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site in view of its conservation objectives.

CAAS Limited Environmental Consultants have also been appointed by Laois County Council to undertake Appropriate Assessment as part of the preparation of the LAP.

2.4 Local Transport Plan

As part of the requirement for an evidence-based approach to planning, as set out in the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region, a Local Transport Plan (LTP) has been prepared to inform the drafting of the LAP.

The ABTA identifies the appropriate transport solutions for the Portlaoise urban area to ensure the integration of land use and transport planning and that policy for increasing public transport and active travel mode share are realised. This is included in Appendix C of this plan with the main findings incorporated by way of policy objectives.

2.5 Other Plans & Guidelines

The LAP has been prepared having regard to national, regional and local policy documents, in addition to Guidelines issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), including the following:

- Project Ireland 2040
- Climate Action Plan 2024
- National Adaption Framework 2024
- Laois Local Authority Climate Action Plan 2024 - 2029
- National Development Plan 2021-2030
- National Planning Framework 2018
- Eastern and Midland Region Spatial & Economic Strategy 2019-2031
- Laois County Development Plan 2021 – 2027
- Laois Local Economic and Community Plan 2023 – 2028
- Housing for All-a New Housing Plan for Ireland 2021
- Building on Recovery: Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2016 - 2021
- Laois Heritage and Biodiversity Strategy 2021 – 2026
- Town Centre First: A Policy Approach for Irish Towns 2022
- National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023 – 2030
- National Sustainable Mobility Policy 2022
- Smarter Travel Policy 2009 -2020 and/or recent updates
- National Cycle Policy Framework 2009 – 2020 and/or recent updates
- Government Road Safety Strategy 2021 –2030
- Get Ireland Active – National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland
- Healthy Ireland - A Healthy Weight For Ireland Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016 – 2025
- Our sustainable future –A Framework for Sustainable Development
- A Resource Opportunity – Waste Management Policy in Ireland 2012
- Local Area Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2013
- Manual for Local Area Plans 2013
- National Climate Change Adaptation Framework; Building Resilience to Climate Change 2012

- Our Sustainable Future, A Framework for Sustainable Development for Ireland 2012
- Government Policy Statement on the Strategic Importance of Transmission and Other Energy Infrastructure 2012
- Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2012
- National Broadband Plan 2012
- National Renewable Energy Action Plan 2010
- Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2009
- Smarter Travel, A Sustainable Transport Future 2009 - 2020
- National Energy Efficiency Action Plan 2009 - 2020
- National Cycle Policy Framework
- Water Services Strategic Plan, A Plan for the Future of Water Services
- Water Supply Project Eastern & Midlands Region
- Eastern and South-Eastern River Basin Management Plan 2009 - 2015
- Architectural Heritage Protection – Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2011
- Actions for Biodiversity – Ireland’s National Biodiversity Plan 2011-2016
- Framework and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage 1999
- Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities
- *‘Nature Based Management of Urban Rainwater and Urban Surface Water Discharges – A National Strategy’* by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, May 2024.
- *Water Action Plan 2024 (WAP) – A River Basin Management Plan for Ireland*

2.6 Local Area Plan Process

The Local Area Plan process, including timescales, are illustrated in Figure 2.2. The process involves consultation at three key stages with the public, prescribed bodies, and other stakeholders, as follows:

- 1) Pre-Draft,
- 2) Draft Plan, and
- 3) Proposed Amendments.

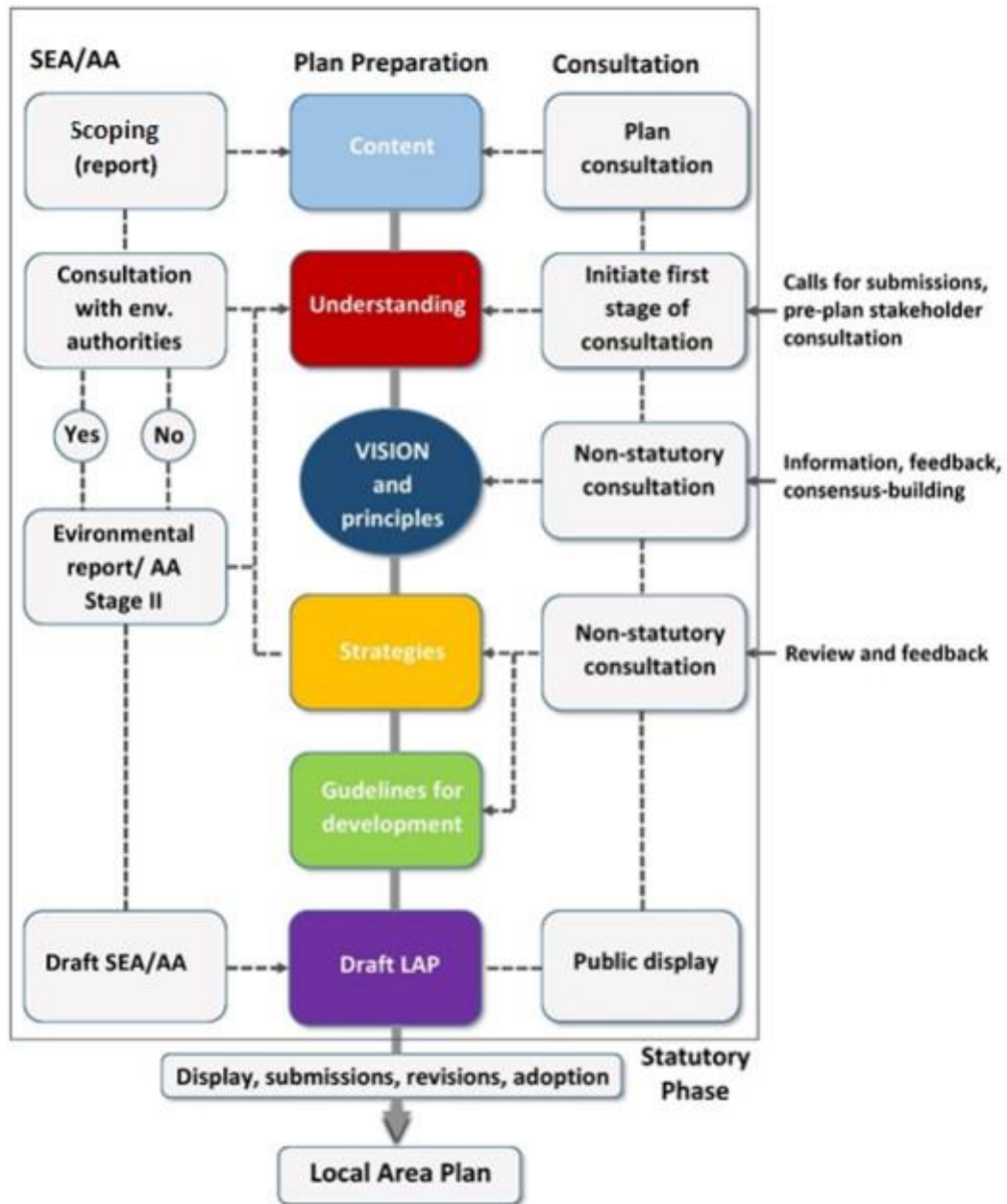


Figure 2.2: LAP Process

The plan was formally adopted by elected members on the 16th December 2024 and came into effect on the 5th February 2025.

SECTION 3. PORTLAOISE IN CONTEXT

3.1 Location

Portlaoise is the principal town and administrative centre for County Laois. Portlaoise is strategically located at a national, regional and local level. The town is located on the M7/M8 National Motorway Network which enables easy access to Cork, Limerick and Dublin including Dublin Airport and Dublin Port.

The N80 National Secondary route extends through Portlaoise and provides access to Carlow, Waterford and Rosslare in the south-east and Tullamore, Mullingar and Athlone in the north-west. Portlaoise is also located on the Dublin to Cork railway line, which provides a high degree of rail connectivity nationally.

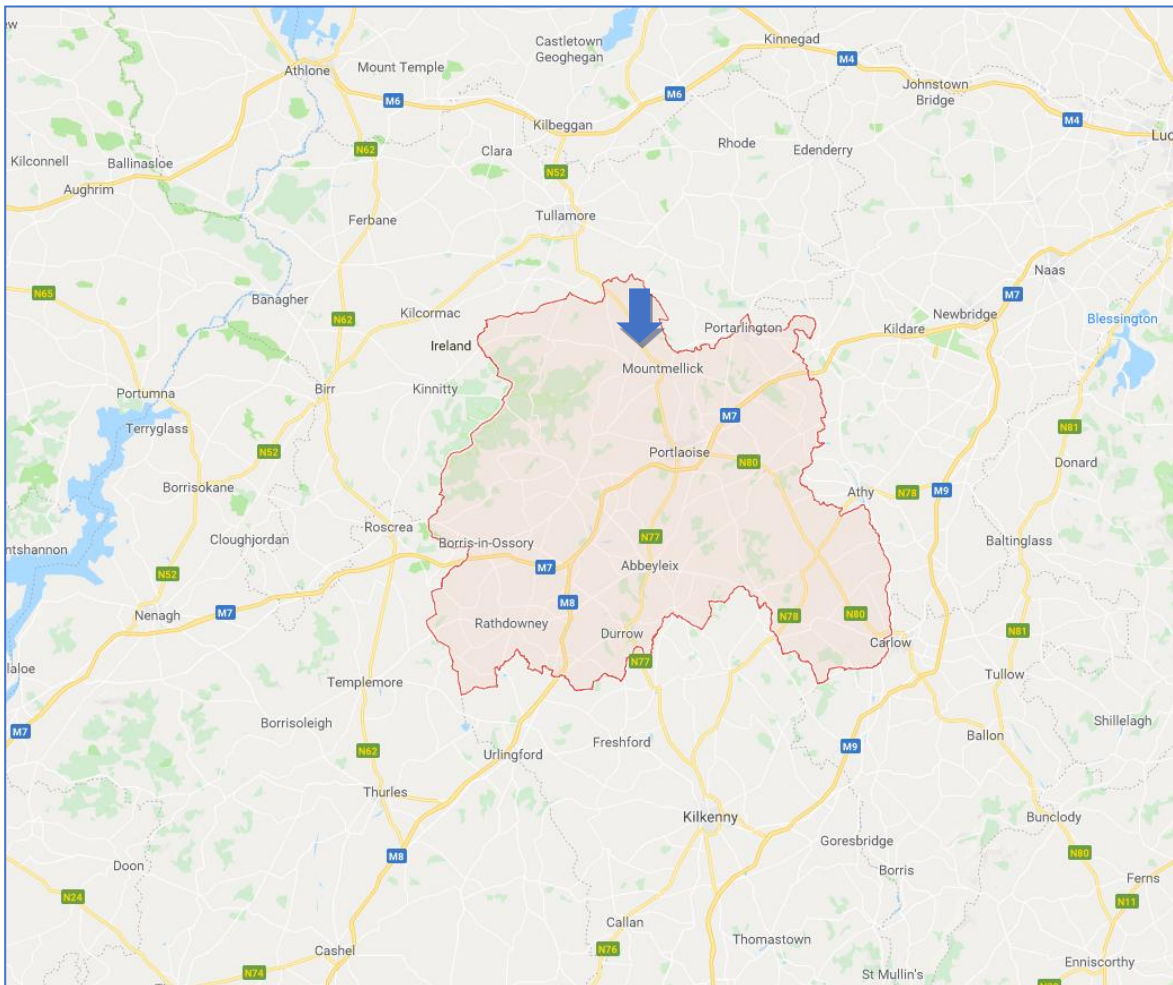


Figure 3.1: Portlaoise in county context

Portlaoise is the largest source of non-agricultural employment within the county and is dominated by the services sector with employment in central (Department of Agriculture) and local government, the E.S.B., Eir, An Post, education and the Health Service Executive.

The manufacturing sector has expanded in recent years, albeit from a relatively low base. This is particularly evident in the J17 National Enterprise Park, a 121 hectares Local Authority promoted enterprise zone at Togher in the southwestern outskirts of the town.

Due in part to its excellent communications and linkages to the Greater Dublin area, Portlaoise has experienced significant urbanisation and population growth since the late 1980s.

This has in turn placed an even greater demand on the town’s infrastructure, in particular education, housing, recreational amenities and services.

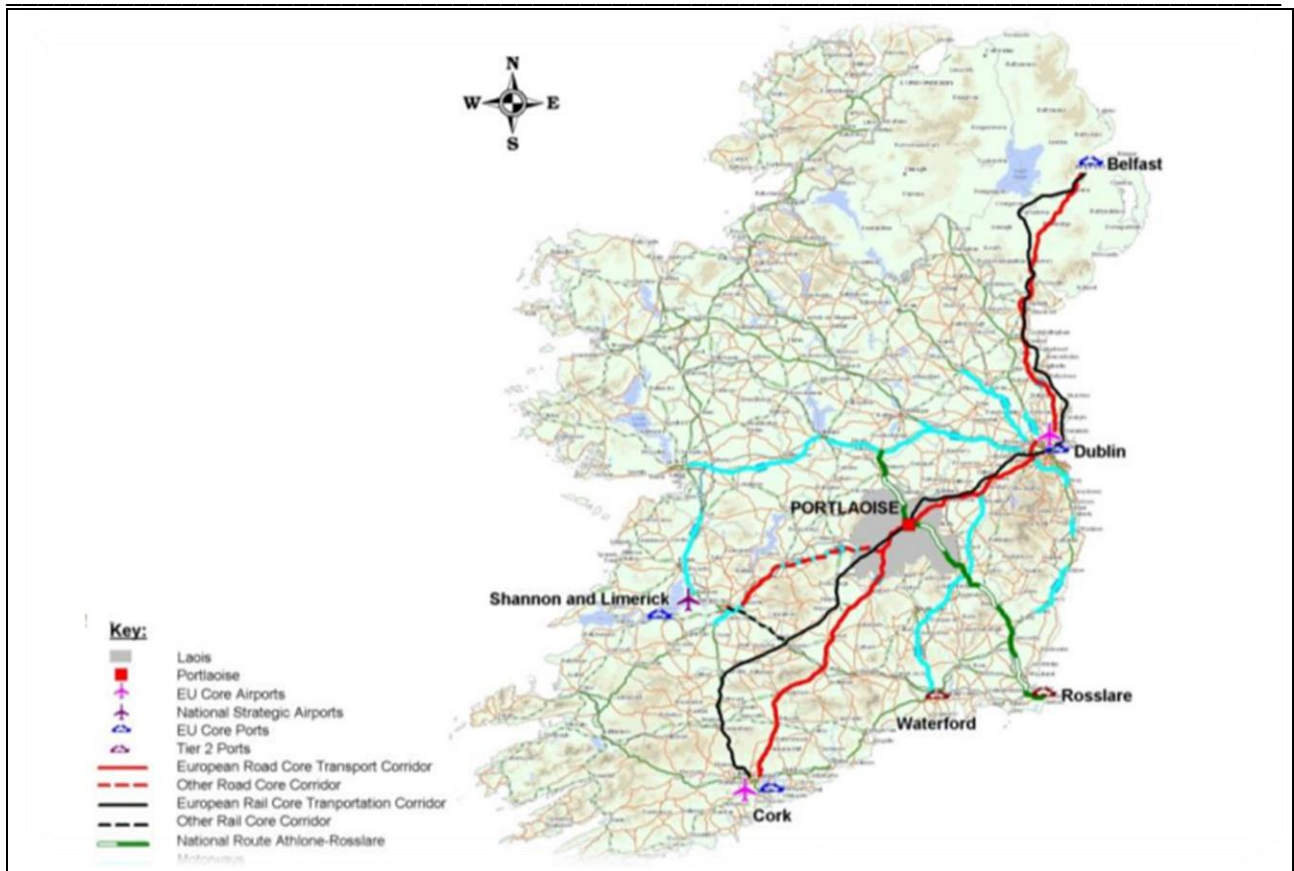


Figure 3.2: Portlaoise in regional and national context

3.2 History of Portlaoise

The present town grew around the old fort, the construction of which commenced in 1548 under the supervision of Lord Deputy Sir Edward Bellingham, who was anxious to fortify Leix following his

repression of the natives and the exiling of their chieftains earlier in the year. The fort was built primarily for military and political purposes. The fort is situated on rising ground southeast of the river Triogue and with the Esker ridge forming a natural defensive barricade to the east, made it of strategic military importance. In 1570 a charter of Queen Elizabeth I raised the town of Maryborough to the rank of Borough.

In 1922 the town was renamed Portlaoise.



Figure 3.3: Ordnance Survey First Edition, 1839

3.3 Urban Form

The urban form of the town is dominated by a linear Main Street, terminated on each end by a Square, Market Square to the west and Lower Square to the east. The construction of the inner relief road James Fintan Lalor Avenue facilitated the southern expansion and development of the town.

The opening of Portlaoise By-Pass in 1997 has had a significant effect on the physical environment and future development of the town with 65% of through traffic removed.

In addition, travel time to Dublin was reduced to less than an hour with the opening of the Heath-Mayfield section of motorway in 2004.

The historical core of the town is focused on a zone of archaeological interest around Church Street and Church Avenue wherein lies the Courthouse and the remaining portions of the Fort Protector.



Figure 3.4: Portlaoise town core

The town centre area contains a large number of Protected Structures and is designated as an Architectural Conservation Area, reflecting its special architectural interest.

The Built Heritage of the town is discussed in further detail in Chapter 13. Built Heritage and Chapter 14. Biodiversity & Natural Heritage of the LAP.

Portlaoise is constrained to the east and northeast by the Portlaoise Aquifer Protection Zone, which provides the public water supply for the greater Portlaoise and Mountmellick areas.

The motorway provides a physical boundary to the south-east and south. The Dublin/Cork Railway line intersects the town in a North/East-South/West direction.

3.4 Spatial Planning Policy

The Irish spatial planning hierarchy is set out in the following diagram:



Figure 3.5: Planning Hierarchy

3.5 Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework

“Project Ireland 2040” is the Government’s overarching policy initiative to make Ireland a better country for all of us, a country that reflects the best of who we are and what we aspire to be. Project Ireland 2040 is informed by the Programme for a Partnership Government 2016, which recognizes that economic and social progress go hand in hand and is made up of the *“Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework”* (NPF) and the *“National Development Plan 2018-2027”* (NDP).

The NPF in conjunction with the NDP is the Government’s plan to cater for the extra one million people that will be living in Ireland, the additional two thirds of a million people working in Ireland and the half a million extra homes needed in Ireland by 2040.

Project Ireland 2040 seeks to achieve ten strategic outcomes, building around the overarching themes of wellbeing, equality and opportunity. The ten shared National Strategic Outcomes and Priorities of the National Development Plan will ensure a consistent approach between planning objectives under the NPF and investment commitments under the NDP.

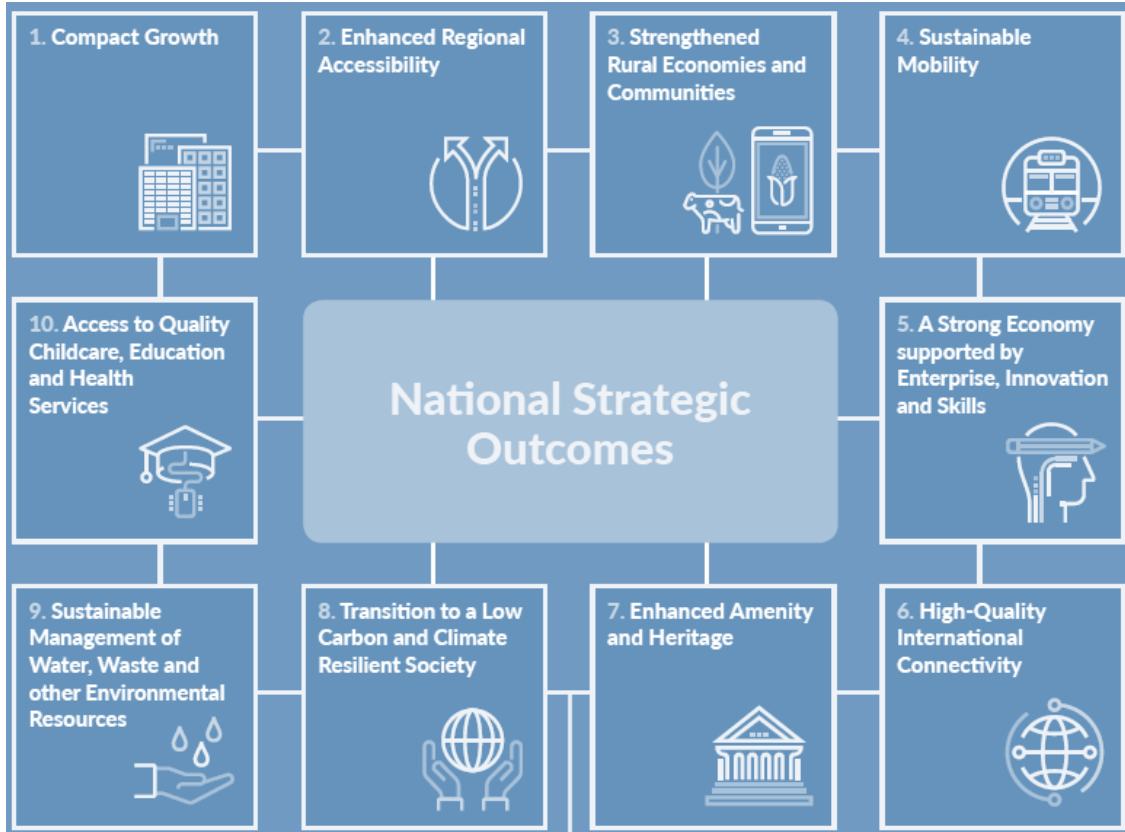


Figure 3.6: National Strategic Outcomes

As a strategic development framework “*Project Ireland 2040*” sets the long-term context for the country’s physical development and associated progress in economic, social and environmental terms and in an island, European and Global context. “*Project Ireland 2040*” will be followed and underpinned by supporting policies and actions at sectoral, regional and local levels.

3.5.1 Urban Regeneration and Development Fund

The URDF was established under **Project Ireland 2040** to support more compact and sustainable development, through the regeneration and rejuvenation of Irelands cities and large towns, in line with the objectives of the National Planning Framework and National Development Plan. This will enable a greater proportion of residential and mixed-use development to be delivered within the existing urban footprints ensuring they become attractive and vibrant places in which people choose to live and work, as well as to invest in and visit.

Launched as part of the NDP 2018-2027 and with an investment of €2 billion, the revised NDP, published in 2021, extended the fund to 2030.

Under the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, Portlaoise has received €18.06 million in funding for various Call 1 and Call 2 projects. In 2023, under Call 3, Laois County Council received funding of €2m for the reuse of vacant and derelict sites within Portlaoise Town Centre.

3.5.2 Regeneration Demonstration Project Portlaoise

The aim of this project was to focus on regenerating the original town centre and main street areas and how they related to the expanded town, with a view to creating more attractive, desirable places that people want to live and spend time in. The Demonstration Project, the NPF stated was to initiate community and locally led urban design and renewal initiative.

Under Call 1 and 2 of the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, investment was received to drive the development of the Cultural quarter and low carbon town initiatives in conjunction with the Portlaoise Town Team, wider community and local businesses.

This has implemented the vision for the centre of Portlaoise set out in **2040 And Beyond – A Vision for Portlaoise** and aligns with the project as outlined in the NPF, to show how quality planning, urban design and implementation can create a rejuvenated town.

3.5.3 Other Strategic Infrastructure Identified for Portlaoise

The following projects were outlined for investment in the National Development Plan:

Transport, Regional and Local Roads:

- Portlaoise Southern Distributor Road - **completed in 2020.**

Health:

- Mental Health project in Portlaoise for a 40 bed Residential Unit.

Courts Service:

- Provision of a new or refurbished Courthouse for Portlaoise - **A site has been selected and acquired.**

Prison Service:

- Modernisation or replacement of the historic E Block in Portlaoise Prison.

3.6 Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy

Laois forms part of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) along with eleven other counties. This area further comprises three Strategic Planning Areas with counties Offaly, Laois, Westmeath and Longford forming part of the Midland Strategic Planning Area.

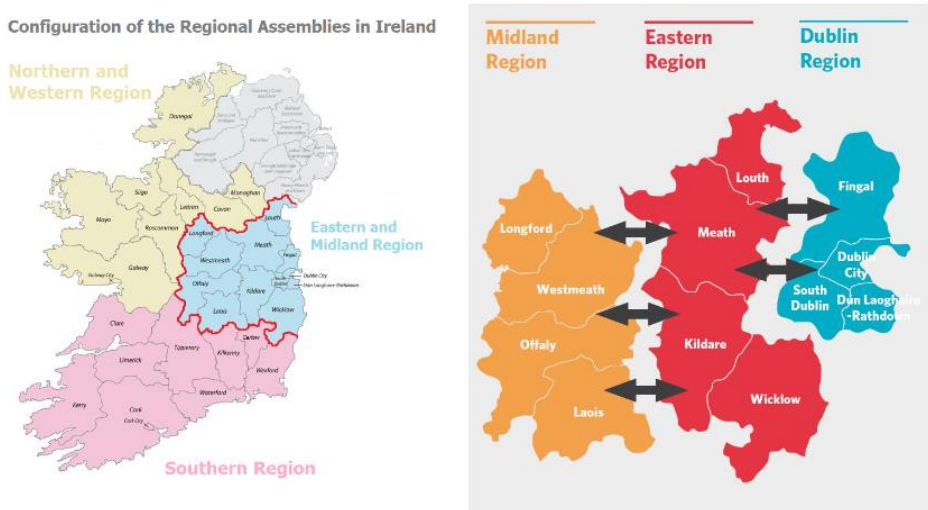


Figure 3.7: Eastern and Midland Region

EMRA adopted the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) in 2019 which identified the region’s key strategic assets, opportunities and challenges and sets out policy responses to ensure that people’s needs such as access to housing, jobs, ease of travel and overall well-being are met, up to 2030 and beyond.

At this strategic level it provides a framework for investment to better manage spatial planning and economic development throughout the Region.

Similar to the NPF, the RSES contains 16 Regional Strategic Outcomes and a suite of Regional Policy Objectives which are underpinned by the principles of Healthy Placemaking, Climate Action and Economic Opportunity, of which the Local Area Plan is statutorily required to be aligned with.

3.7 Integrating Climate Action into the Portlaoise LAP

Climate Action is now a key function of local government. Through its role in setting out the strategic spatial framework for the future development of the Town, the Local Area Plan supports wider local and central government actions in addressing maximum co-ordination between the County Development Plan and other climate related policies and programmes.

The LAP will be assessed against its impact on the receiving environment through the SEA and AA processes. The Plan aims to facilitate a holistic approach to ensuring Climate Action is at the forefront of all future development within the town, with policies and objectives in each chapter crafted in a manner which contributes significantly towards addressing climate change and reducing the towns carbon emissions in a meaningful and tangible way.

One of the cross-cutting principles of this LAP is to support a transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society, a necessary measure that is supported by the legislative and policy framework relating to climate action.

The LAP seeks to simultaneously address issues of climate change, energy supply and sustainability through the adoption and implementation of policy at a local level.

3.8 Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy “2040 And Beyond: A Vision for Portlaoise”

In addition to the above, the “Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy “2040 And Beyond: A Vision For Portlaoise” [referred to as the Public Realm Strategy hereafter] sets out the following vision for the future development of Portlaoise town centre.

“Portlaoise Town Centre will become a place for its people, where residents, workers and visitors alike will come to enjoy a place that is inclusive, accessible and truly sustainable from a social, economic and environmental perspective. It will be an exemplar town centre where businesses thrive and the pride of the population is reflected in public spaces.”

In order to deliver on this Vision for Portlaoise Town Centre, a number of key actions will be required to support the following outcomes:

- The Creation of a Low Carbon Town Centre
- The Delivery of a Walkable Town Centre
- The Greening of Portlaoise Town Centre
- Exposure of Cultural Heritage within Portlaoise Town Centre
- Exposure of the River Triogue as a Pedestrian / Cycling Route
- The Reconnection of the Old and New Town
- Accommodating Living in Portlaoise Town Centre
- Provision for Working in Portlaoise Town Centre.

The town has also been designated Ireland’s first low carbon town which is supported by RPO 4.72 of the RSES and which was designated as a decarbonisation zone in 2021.

The aim of the Low Carbon Town / decarbonisation zone is to reduce the impact of the car on the public realm, encourage a shift to more sustainable transport modes, improve the occupancy, mix and vitality of uses within the town centre and develop the Triogue River Blueway as a key environmental and amenity objective and increase biodiversity

The Council has supported the opening of a Low Carbon Centre of Excellence [the Cube], assisting in attracting and developing companies with a low Carbon focus.

The development of Portlaoise over the lifetime of this plan is primarily focused on the following:

- Consolidation and regeneration of the town centre,
- Active travel,
- Reduced car dependency,

- Protection of natural and built heritage assets,
- Expansion of community and social services and
- Employment retention, diversification and creation.

The overarching aim of the Public Realm Strategy is to formalise a shared vision to focus on public spaces, buildings and walkways in a way that acknowledges the unique characteristics and heritage assets that the Town possesses and provides the foundation for the future development of a thriving town centre.

This will be achieved through a number of interventions including:

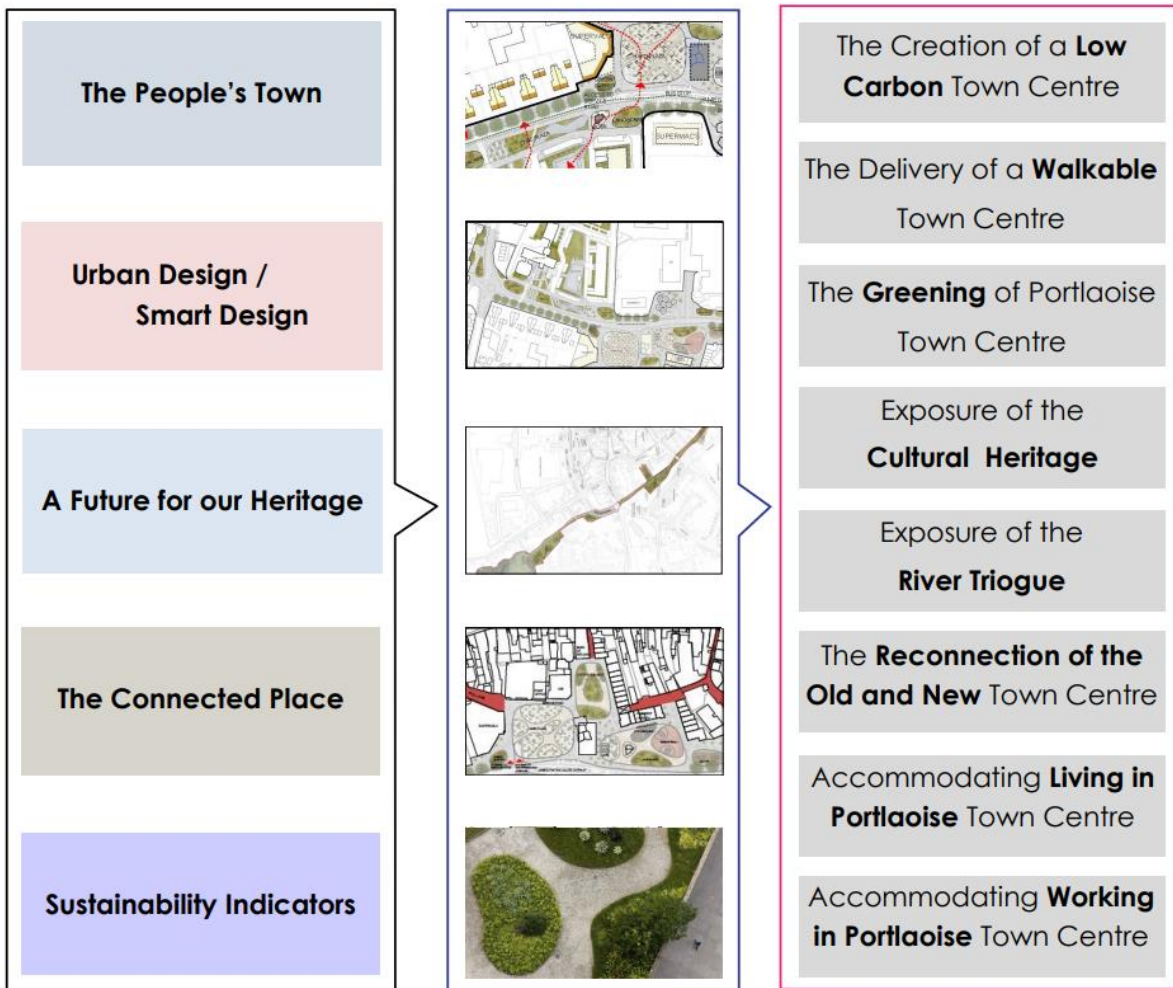


Figure 3.8: Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy 2040 And Beyond: A Vision for Portlaoise

3.9 Development Vision & Strategy

Strategic Vision:

“To fulfil the role as Key Town, by providing for low carbon, sustainable and consolidated growth in a coherent spatial manner, protecting and maximising opportunities presented by the unique natural and built environment for green and public modes of transport, recreation and employment opportunities, while delivering an exemplar quality of life for residents”.

The Local Area Plan for Portlaoise is underpinned by a strategic vision which is intended to guide the future growth of the town over the 6-year period 2024-2030. The objectives outlined below combine to form a coherent development strategy to 2030 and beyond. These goals cover economic, social, community and environmental dimensions.

The strategic vision recognises the potential of Portlaoise to align with the key growth objectives set out in higher order spatial plans and to take advantage of the strategic location of the town both regionally and nationally. Delivering on these objectives will result in an enhanced quality of life for all citizens.

Portlaoise will become a place where residents, workers and visitors alike will come to enjoy a place that is inclusive, accessible and sustainable from a social, economic and environmental perspective.

The LAP and overall vision for Portlaoise is underpinned by a number of interlinked strategic aims as illustrated in the diagram below. These interlinked strategic aims will be realised through the chapters of the plan.

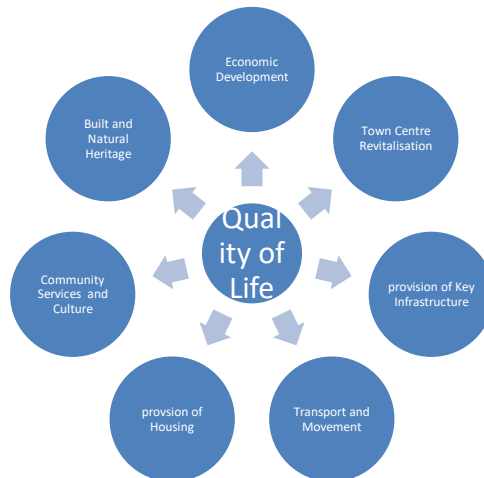


Figure 3.9: Strategic Aims

3.10 Policies

| Planning and Development Policies | |
|--|---|
| It is the policy of the Council to: | |
| PCP 1 | <i>Support the continued growth and sustainable development of Portlaoise to act as a growth driver in the region and to fulfil its role as a Key Town as outlined in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019;</i> |
| PCP 2 | <i>Direct population into the Key Town to ensure that population growth is appropriate in scale with its identified role in the Regional and County Settlement Hierarchy;</i> |
| PCP 3 | <i>Require sustainable, compact, sequential growth in Portlaoise by consolidating the built-up footprint with a focus on the redevelopment and regeneration of infill and brownfield sites;</i> |
| PCP 4 | <i>Apply increased residential densities where appropriate having regard to Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlement Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2024) and apply appropriate development management measures in ensuring growth is appropriate and in compliance with the RSES 2019;</i> |
| PCP 5 | <i>Implement the actions of the ‘Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy “2040 And Beyond: A Vision for Portlaoise’ to improve the character of the town of Portlaoise;</i> |
| PCP 6 | <i>Support and facilitate the transition of Portlaoise to a low carbon centre of excellence in accordance with RPO 4.72 of the RSES.</i> |
| PCP 7 | <i>Protect, conserve and enhance the built, natural and cultural environment, through promoting awareness, utilising relevant heritage legislation and promoting good quality urban design;</i> |
| PCP 8 | <i>Require the preparation and assessment of all planning applications in the plan area to have regard to the information, data and requirements of the Appropriate Assessment Natura Impact Report and SEA Environmental Report;</i> |
| PCP 9 | <i>Require projects to be fully informed by ecological and environmental constraints at the earliest stage of project planning and any necessary assessment to be undertaken, including assessments of disturbance to habitats and species, where required.</i> |

3.11 Objectives

| Planning and Development Objectives | |
|---|--|
| It is the objective of the Council to: | |
| PCO 1 | <i>To support and facilitate sustainable intensification and consolidation of the town centre and in established residential areas;</i> |
| PCO 2 | <i>To promote balanced economic development and employment ensuring a diverse range of economic sectors are developed and supported;</i> |
| PCO 3 | <i>To promote and support the development of an enterprise and employment campus at J17 National Enterprise Park. Development shall be plan led in accordance with the J17 National Enterprise Park Master Masterplan in Appendix B of this LAP.</i> |
| PCO 4 | <i>To support and facilitate development on zoned land based on the policies and objectives of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027;</i> |
| PCO 5 | <i>To focus new residential development into brownfield sites;</i> |
| PCO 6 | <i>To protect, conserve and enhance the built, natural and cultural environment, through promoting awareness, utilising relevant heritage legislation and promoting good quality urban design;</i> |
| PCO 7 | <i>To require the preparation and assessment of all planning applications in the plan area to have regard to the information, data and requirements of the Appropriate Assessment Natura Impact Report and SEA Environmental Report;</i> |
| PCO 8 | <i>To require projects to be fully informed by ecological and environmental constraints at the earliest stage of project planning and any necessary assessment to be undertaken, including assessments of disturbance to habitats and species, where required.</i> |

SECTION 4. COMPLIANCE WITH THE COUNTY CORE STRATEGY

Strategic Aim: Provide for the Growth of Portlaoise in Line with the National Planning Framework / Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) and Core Strategy for County Laois.

The Core Strategy for County Laois is set out under Section 2 of the Laois County Development Plan 2021 – 2027. Section 19 (2) of the Act requires that:

A Local Area Plan shall be consistent with the objectives of the Development Plan, its Core Strategy, and any Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy that apply to the area of the plan...”

4.1 Function, Population and Scale of Portlaoise

As set out under the Eastern & Midland Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and the Core Strategy of the Laois County Development Plan 2021 – 2027, Portlaoise is designated as a **Key Town** within the settlement hierarchy.

Key towns are defined as large economically active service and/or county towns that provide employment for their surrounding areas and with high-quality transport links and the capacity to act as growth drivers to complement the Regional Growth Centres.

In this regard, it is anticipated that Portlaoise will attract social, administrative functions and economic activity and will also act as a significant focus for future population growth.

| | Persons 2002 | Persons 2006 | Persons 2011 | Persons 2016 | Persons 2022 | % Change 2002-2022 |
|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| County Laois | 58,774 | 67,059 | 80,559 | 84,697 | 91,877 | 56% |
| Portlaoise | 12,127 | 14,613 | 20,145 | 22,050 | 23,494 | 94% |

Table 1: Population statistics for County Laois and Portlaoise between 2002 and 2022

County Laois has experienced dramatic population growth in the past two decades, growing by 56% over the twenty-year period between 2002 and 2022. In the same period, **Portlaoise experienced an even greater population growth rate of 94%; virtually doubling in size.** The proportion of the county’s population living within Portlaoise has also grown steadily over this period, rising from 21% in 2002 to 26% in 2022.

Portlaoise has a relatively young population, with 54.3% of the population below 35 years of age, compared to 47.1% elsewhere in the State. Portlaoise has a lower proportion of middle-aged and older residents, with just 16.1% of the population aged 55 or older, compared to 24% elsewhere in the State.

Portlaoise also benefits from an ethnically diverse population with 22% of its population now being non-Irish. Of particular note is that almost 15% of the population is made up of EU nationals excluding the UK.

| Age Cohorts | Numbers |
|-------------|-----------------------|
| 85 + | 174 |
| 80-84 | 236 |
| 75-79 | 419 |
| 70-74 | 613 |
| 65-69 | 779 |
| 60-64 | 943 |
| 55-59 | 1,188 |
| 50-54 | 1,436 |
| 45-49 | 1,768 |
| 40-44 | 2,277 |
| 35-39 | 2,324 |
| 30-34 | 1,702 |
| 25-29 | 1,294 |
| 20-24 | 1,253 |
| 15-19 | 1,580 |
| 10-14 | 2,084 |
| 5-9 | 1,876 |
| 0-4 | 1,548 |
| | Total = 23,494 |

Table 2: Population by Age Cohort, Census 2022

Census 2022 has revealed that the upward trajectory in population growth is continuing. The population of Portlaoise has now risen to 23,494 and that of the overall county to 91,877, an increase of 6.5% and 8.4% respectively on Census 2016. In terms of age cohort data, just under half [48%] of the population is aged below 35 years of age.

As well as increasing in size, the population of Portlaoise is becoming more diverse with many new arrivals from Eastern Europe [in particular from Poland and Lithuania], UK, Africa, India and Ukraine. According to Census 2022, 6,575 residents [27%] were born outside of Ireland. This is one of the highest non-national population percentages in the country.

4.2 Projected Population of Portlaoise

The ‘Core Strategy Table’ from the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 [and by extension the RSES] sets out the population projections and household allocations for Portlaoise and the other county settlements up to 2027.

The table provides details of the most recent population (2016), population projections, the housing allocation for 2021 – 2027 and for 2027 - 2031 for each settlement based on the Housing Strategy analysis, the number of housing units which must be delivered within the built-up footprint of each settlement and the quantum of land required for the delivery of the housing allocation based on a specific density for each settlement.

The targets provide for County Laois to grow to 94,700 by 2027 [an increase of 12% from the base year of 2016] and for Portlaoise to grow **to 26,366** [an even greater increase of nearly 20%] over the same plan period. For Portlaoise, this equates to a projected requirement for an additional **1,725 households** over the six-year period to 2027.

| | County Laois | Portlaoise |
|---|------------------|----------------|
| CSO Population 2016 | 84,697 | 22,050 |
| Projected Population 2027 | 94,700 | 26,366 |
| Projected Increase | 10,003 [+12%] | 4,316 [+19.6%] |
| Projected Increase in Households 2027 | 3,998 | 1,725 |
| Existing quantum of Residential zoned lands | 1,030.8 hectares | 383 hectares |
| Existing quantum of zoned lands that allow residential development | 571.6 hectares | 171 hectares |
| Area (ha.) zoned for Residential 2027* | 138 hectares | 64.2 hectares |

Table 3: Extract from Core Strategy Table of Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027

** Comprises Mixed Use lands [15.7 hectares], Brownfield lands [26.3 hectares] and Greenfield lands [22.2 hectares].*

The County Development Plan 2021-2027 identifies **a requirement for 64.2 hectares of land** in order to accommodate the planned growth of Portlaoise. There has been much activity in the residential sector in Portlaoise in recent times, notwithstanding the challenges initially caused by the Covid pandemic and more recently by the significant spike in building costs. Since the plan was adopted in 2022, approximately 550 units have been completed.

The following table summarises current residential development activity in the town. The statistics are inclusive of both conventional planning permissions and Part 8 Consents. A significant portion of the new builds is for the social housing market.

| Status | Numbers of Residential Units |
|--|------------------------------|
| Extant Permissions not yet commenced | 421 |
| Extant Permissions on appeal to An Bord Pleanala | 259 |
| Development Commenced on foot of Permissions | 383 |
| Development Complete or Substantially Complete | 625 |
| Total | 1,688 |

Table 4: Residential Development Activity in Portlaoise, 2023

4.3 Future Demand

The Core Strategy Table (Table 2.16) in the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 projects a population increase of **4,316** [from 22,050 to 26,366] for Portlaoise by 2027, and an associated housing allocation of **1,725 units**.

Applying the Core Strategy housing unit target figure of 1,725 units for Portlaoise to the LAP translates into a projected requirement for **2,039** units to be built over the life of the Plan (See Table 5).

As the 2024-2030 LAP period is 3 years beyond the 2021-2027 period of the current Laois County Development Plan, the overall unit requirement of **2,039** units has been calculated to take account of:

- The addition of a projected allocation of 864 additional units to cover the additional 3 years,
- This projected allocation is based on an average per annum calculation (1,725 units/6 years = 288 units per year).
- The subtraction of the estimated number of 550 units constructed since 2021.

| Portlaoise LAP area | Residential Units |
|--|-------------------|
| County Development Plan Core Strategy Allocation to 2027 | 1,725 |
| Plus 3-Year Projected Unit Allocation to 2030 | 864 |
| Less Units Constructed since 2021 | 550 |
| Portlaoise Total Unit Target to 2030 | 2,039 |

Table 5: Residential Unit Allocation to Portlaoise, 2023

Based on an indicative density of 35 units per hectare, the land requirement to accommodate 2,039 units in Portlaoise by target year 2030 is **58 hectares**. The remaining lands zoned in the County Development plan – **Map 2.2 “Portlaoise”**, Volume 2, Settlement Strategy, Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 [copy hereunder] and the land-use zoning matrix set out in **Table 13.3**, Volume 1, Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 provides sufficient zoning to accommodate these requirements.

The reason for the divergence from the 64.2 hectares flagged for Portlaoise in the Core Strategy is that a varying density figure was used then as against a standard across the board figure of 35 units per hectare now. In particular, the density figure was 24.7/hectare for Mixed Use lands, 34/hectare for Brownfield/Infill lands and 35.4 for Greenfield lands.

4.4 Zoning

Land use zoning for Portlaoise and Mountmellick Local Area Plan functional areas was carried out as part of the making of the overall Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 which was adopted in January 2022.

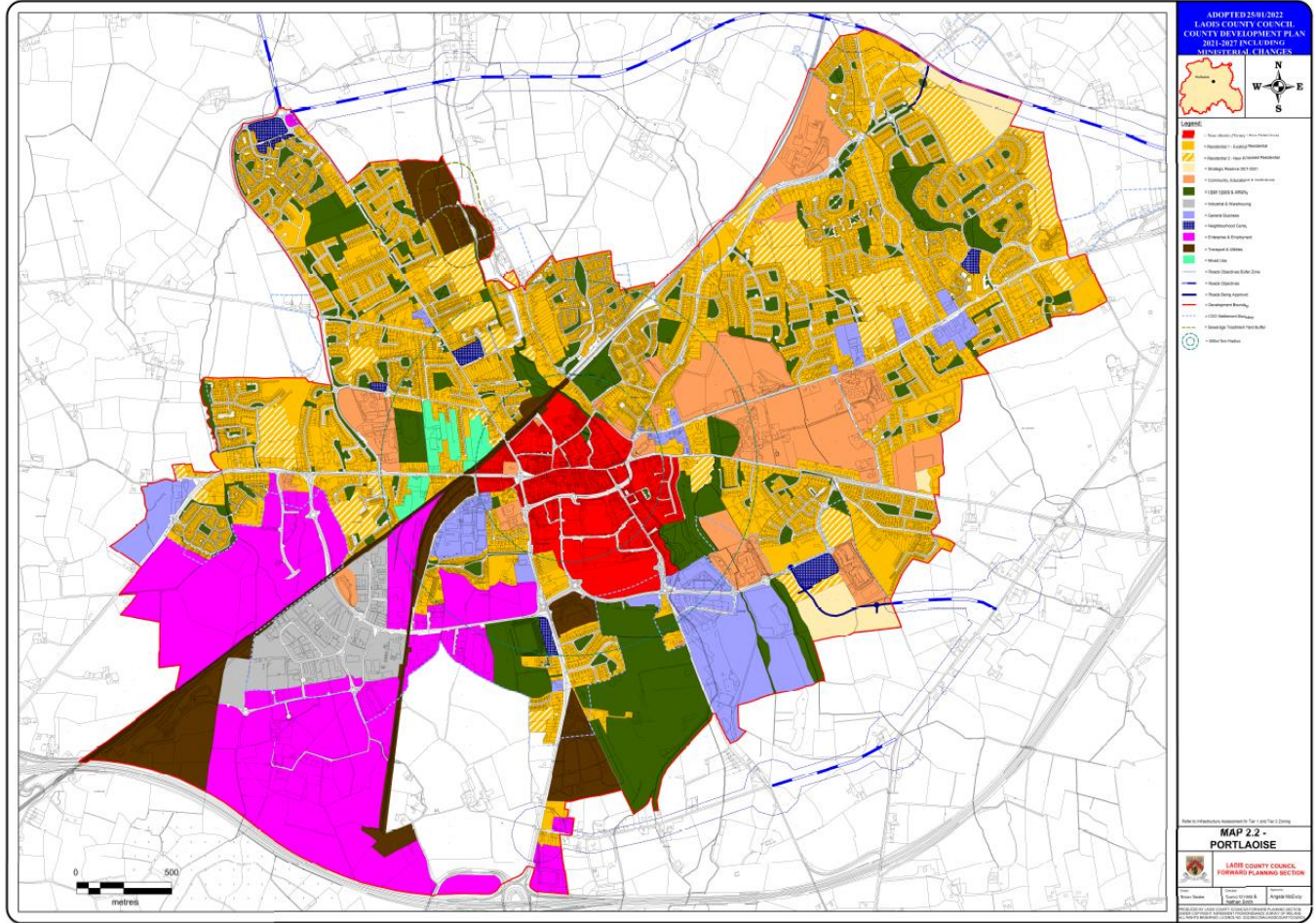


Figure 4.1: Zoning Map of Portlaoise LAP, adopted as Map 2.2 in Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027

4.5 Future Development Priorities

The future development priorities for Portlaoise Town are as follows:

- Healthy placemaking
- Town centre consolidation
- Creation of sustainable communities through the provision of mixed tenure housing for all sectors of society
- Development and support of Economic Development opportunities
- Enabling key infrastructure
- Creation of a cultural quarter through the implementation of built and natural heritage protection

4.5.1 Healthy Placemaking

Placemaking is an essential link between spatial planning and economic strategy, facilitating improvements to the public realm and people’s quality of life and playing an increasingly important role in attracting talent and investment. The creation of healthy and attractive places requires improvements to both physical and social infrastructure and prioritises the incorporation of physical activity in people’s daily lives.

Healthy placemaking, one of three key principles in the RSES, seeks to create vibrant urban centres with a diverse mix of retail, residential and commercial functions and high-quality public spaces that are accessible across all societal needs, ages and abilities. Placemaking is also underpinned by the integration of good planning and urban design principles, as set out in Departmental Guidelines ‘Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities’ and the ‘Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS)’.



Figure 4.2: Key components of healthy placemaking

The Public Realm Strategy sets out a vision for the future development of Portlaoise town centre. Improvements to the public realm through a program of infrastructural works will provide a safe, attractive, and comfortable place to live, work and visit. Infrastructural improvements will

prioritise pedestrians through measures such as traffic calming, street maintenance and traffic management in the historic town centre.

4.5.2 Town Centre Consolidation

The LAP has been prepared in the context of a longer-term vision for Portlaoise. The LAP identifies a number of opportunity sites to accommodate growth during the plan period. Site specific details for each site are set out under Chapter 6 Town Centre Revitalisation. A sequential approach will be taken to the development of the town, with lands closer to the town centre being developed prior to zoned lands on the periphery to avoid “leapfrogging”. Such an approach is essential to underpin the sustainable delivery of population, employment development and consolidation of the town centre over the plan period. This approach will adhere to the priority phasing outlined earlier in this chapter.

Consolidation, brownfield and infill development will also be promoted on appropriately zoned land within the plan area which accords with the policies and objectives set down in this plan.

4.5.3 Sustainable Communities

Housing development opportunities to be advanced during the plan period include the following landbanks, some of which have been identified as opportunity sites in Chapter 6 Town Centre Revitalisation.

- Convent Site, Church Avenue
- Stradbally Road Site (formerly Tyrrells)
- Centrepoint
- Portlaoise South-East

4.5.4 Economic Development

Economic development underpins all chapters in this LAP. The aim of the LAP is to capitalise on Portlaoise’s excellent location on the motorway and rail networks and proximity to the Greater Dublin Area.

Lands have been zoned for a variety of uses such as:

- General business [36.5 hectares],
- Enterprise and employment [125.2 hectares],
- Industry [5.17 hectares].

The land-use zoning matrix in **Table 13.3**, Volume 1, Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 sets out the uses that are considered appropriate within these zones. The zoning and servicing of land at J17 for a National Enterprise Park to attract enterprise, employment and industrial

uses, in the immediate vicinity of national strategic transport infrastructure, represents a unique opportunity to develop a cluster of complementary enterprises and more generally a larger, more robust and diverse economic basis for the town, county and region.

4.5.5 Key Infrastructure

Future development proposals are contingent on key infrastructure. Currently, capacity exists in the Foul Sewer Network, Waste-Water Treatment Plant and Public Water Supply.

In terms of transport, with the completion of the Southern Orbital Connector, additional car parking adjacent to the train station and active travel interventions on the N 77 Abbeyleix Road during the last LAP timeframe, the priorities for transport are now outlined in the Local Transport Plan (LTP) which accompanies this LAP (See **Appendix C**). The LTP includes objectives for the delivery of active travel measures throughout the town, a Northern Orbital Route and a number of key internal relief roads including links between:

- The Dublin Road [R445] and Borris Road [L2133],
- Rathleague and Meelick,
- The Stradbally Road [N80] and Dublin Road [R445] through St. Fintan's Hospital land.

4.5.6 Environment & Heritage Protection

The environmental sensitivities of the County identified in the SEA process for the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 have informed the Core Strategy and the role it identifies for Portlaoise.

The LAP responds to environmental factors, including wastewater infrastructure constraints, areas at risk of flooding etc. It also acknowledges the importance of built and natural heritage and green infrastructure [such as the Blueway, Town in a Garden concept, Biodiversity Action Plan and Stradbally Road Masterplan] as an environmental and economic (including tourism) resource and includes significant objectives for its conservation and enhancement. These are expanded on in Chapter 14. Biodiversity & Natural Heritage.

SECTION 5. CLIMATE CHANGE

Strategic Aim: *To reduce our carbon footprint by integrating climate action into the planning system in support of national targets for climate policy mitigation and adaptation objectives, as well as targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions.*

5.1 Introduction

It is the aim of the LAP to achieve an efficient use of land with a focus on key urban centres, and to achieve development densities that can support vibrant, compact, walkable places that prioritise pedestrian and cyclist movement.

The focus of the LAP on brownfield over greenfield development, supports an ecosystems approach, protects natural areas while also seeking to enhance existing green networks both within the natural and urban environment through the promotion and enhancement of existing pathways and green connections within the Town.



Figure 5.1: Key components for positive climate change

Both the NPF and the RSES focus on the transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society, recognising the role of natural capital and ecosystem services have in achieving this.

Figure 5.2. below outlines the climate strategy of the RSES.

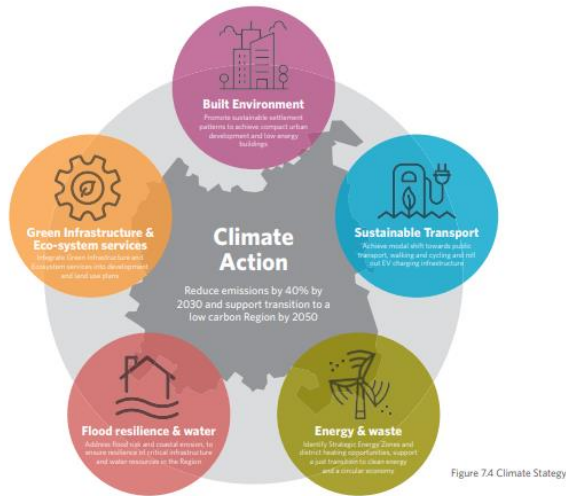


Figure 5.2. Climate Strategy of the RSES (Fig 7.4).

The potential for the delivery of energy efficient projects throughout the town is also facilitated through a more compact settlement from reducing costs and carbon emissions and guaranteeing energy resilience for the future. Creating a safe and climate resilient environment is essential in encouraging active modes of transport. Such environments can be created through a high-quality design and layout of buildings, appropriate mix of uses, densities, height and the sensitive integration of the natural and built environment. Creating a strong sense of place and enabling connections can be enhanced through a robust and resilient Green Infrastructure network employing nature-based solutions and contributing directly to climate action measures through carbon sequestration, water quality improvements and other measures. At the Neighbourhood level the plan aims to locate people in close proximity to their place of work, services, amenity and leisure facilities thereby reducing the need for car-based travel and cumulatively resulting in significant and measurable reductions in GHG emissions.

It also supports and encourages town centre development. For example, **over the last five years Laois County Council has approved 450 no. residential units [a population equivalent of >1,000] within a 1 kms radius of the town centre.** This is a mixture of public and private housing. To date c. 50% of the units have been developed.

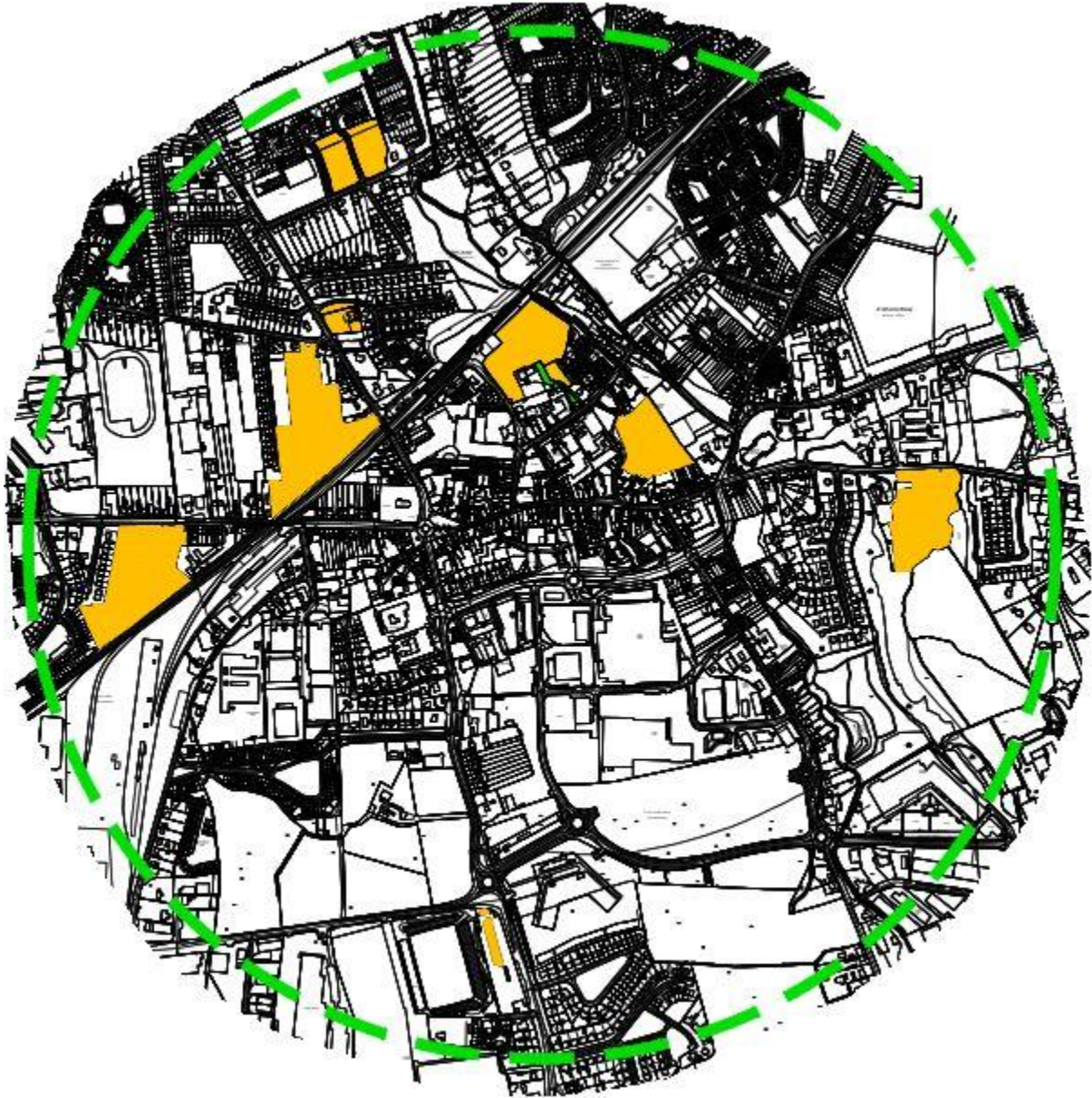


Figure 5.3: Built or Approved residential development within 1 km of Portlaoise town centre

This is clear evidence of the commitment of the Council to rejuvenating the traditional core of the town.



Plate 1: New housing development on former CBS lands, Portlaoise town centre



Plate 2: New housing development on former Granary site, Portlaoise town centre



Plate 3: CGI of new housing development on former Granary site, Portlaoise town centre

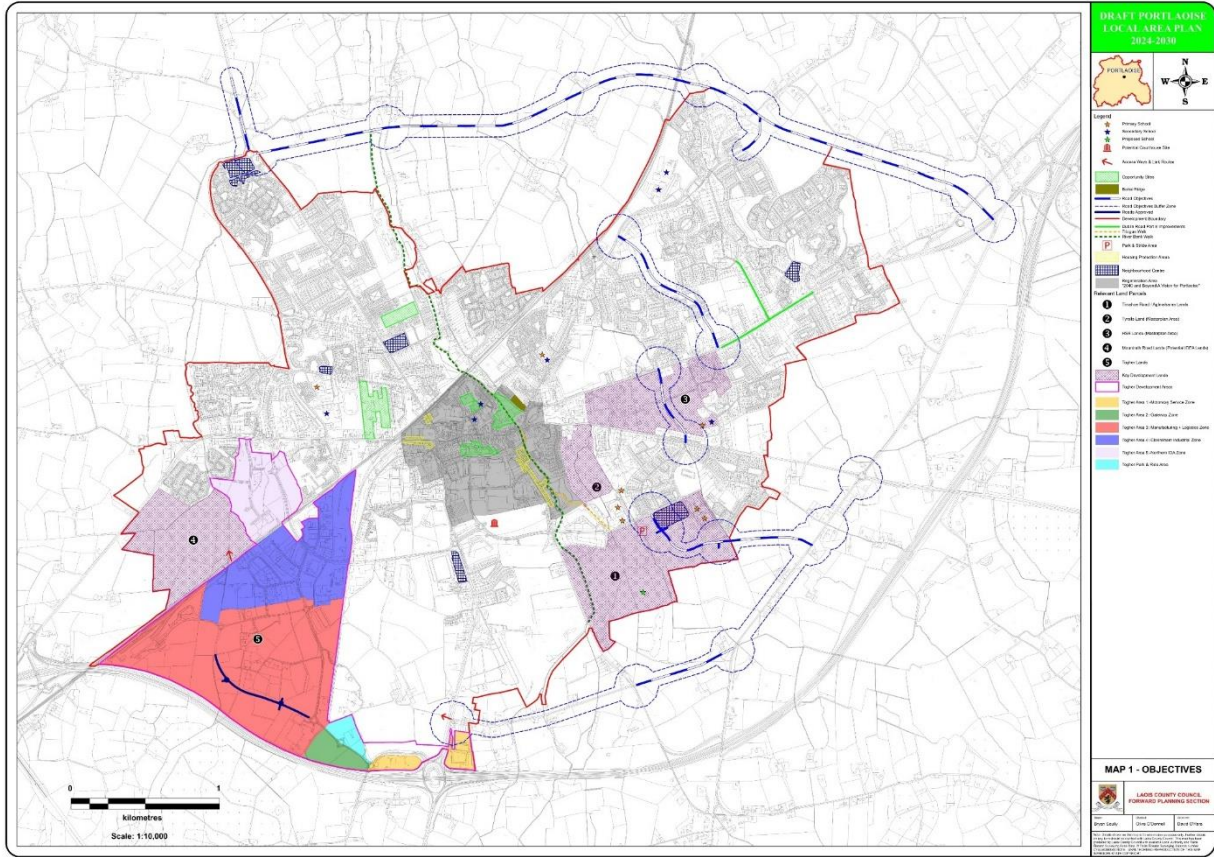


Figure 5.4: Objectives map for Portlaoise LAP

5.2 National Adaptation Framework 2024

Ireland's second statutory National Adaptation Framework (NAF) was published in June 2024 and replaces the first iteration of the framework published in 2018. The NAF outlines a whole of government and society approach to climate adaptation in Ireland. It also aims to improve the enabling environment for adaptation through ongoing engagement with civil society, the private sector, and the research community.

5.3 Laois County Council Climate Action Plan 2024 – 2029

In accordance with the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, Laois County Council is required to prepare a climate action plan for its administrative area. The Laois County Council Climate Action Plan 2024 – 2029 was adopted in January 2024. It sets out how the Local Authority aims to achieve its role within the National Climate Objective over the next 5 years and beyond toward 2050. The purpose of the Climate Action Plan is to:

To deliver on national obligations to achieve the National Climate Objective of becoming a Climate Resilient, Biodiversity Rich, Environmentally Sustainable and Carbon Neutral Economy by no later than the end of 2050.

To deliver and promote evidence-based and integrated climate action by way of adaptation and mitigation measures, centered around a strong understanding of the role and remit of the local authority on climate action.

The adopted Climate Action Plan therefore acts as key instrument to strengthen the links between national and international climate policy and the delivery of effective climate action at local level. It plays a significant role in reinforcing the commitment by local government to lead on place-based climate action

5.4 Portlaoise Decarbonisation Zone

Action 165 of the National Climate Action Plan 2019 sets Local Authorities the challenge of initially identifying and developing one Decarbonising Zone in each local authority in Ireland. A Decarbonising Zone (DZ) is defined as a spatial area in which a range of climate mitigation, adaptation and biodiversity measures and action owners are identified to address local low carbon energy, greenhouse gas emissions and climate needs to contribute to national climate action targets.

Laois County Council had been actively progressing the Portlaoise Low Carbon Town Project since the adoption of the 2040 and Beyond: A Vision for Portlaoise a Strategy for a Better Town Centre in 2017. This vision includes objectives to deliver a Low Carbon Town and a Walkable Town Centre. This proactive stance led to Portlaoise being recognised as a National Demonstration Project for Decarbonisation Zones. This along with several other key characteristics of the town resulted in the selection of Portlaoise as the Decarbonising Zone for County Laois.

It is important that Portlaoise progresses the following objectives as set out in the 2040 Vision Statement to transition to a low carbon Town:

- Remove the dominance of cars within the Portlaoise town centre,
- Address the poor pedestrian experience of the area,
- Adapt to lower emission vehicles,
- Retrofit homes and businesses.
- Increase Biodiversity throughout the town.

The Portlaoise DZ will focus on the town of Portlaoise or more particularly the geographic area covered by the statutory Portlaoise Local Area Plan.

The DZ covers circa 13.71 square kilometres represented in the map. The population consists of 23,494 inhabitants.

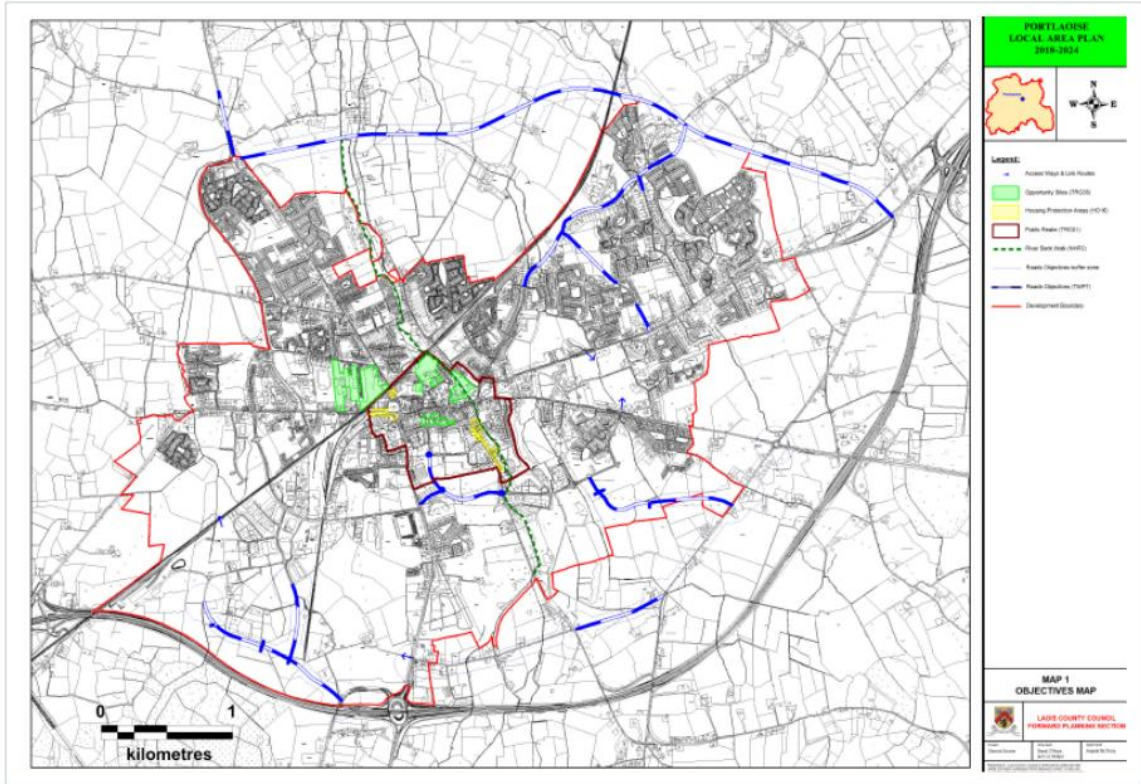


Figure 5.5: Portlaoise Decarbonisation Zone as outlined in red.

In addition to the specific policies and objectives contained in this specific chapter, other Chapters have included policies to address the subject of climate change, as follows:

| CHAPTER | HEADING | CONTRIBUTION TO CLIMATE ACTION |
|-----------|----------------------------|---|
| Chapter 5 | Town Centre Revitalisation | <i>champions compact brown field town centre development over its suburban counterpart</i> |
| Chapter 7 | Placemaking | <i>supports ‘active land management’ by making the regeneration and development of existing built-up areas as attractive and as viable as Greenfield development through investment in infrastructure where appropriate</i> |
| Chapter 8 | Housing | <i>promotes the reoccupation of vacant residential stock within Portlaoise Town Centre, including ‘Living Above the Shop’ units.</i> |
| Chapter 9 | Economic Development | <i>seeks an integrated transport approach linked to land use objectives which encourages a reduction in the need for travel, tackling traffic congestion and promoting public transport, cycling, walking as alternative means of travel to the use of car.</i> |

| CHAPTER | HEADING | CONTRIBUTION TO CLIMATE ACTION |
|------------|---|---|
| Chapter 10 | Infrastructure and Environmental Services | <i>requires all new developments to include proposals for Sustainable Drainage Systems</i> |
| Chapter 11 | Transport and Movement | <i>sets out the overall policy approach which is very much focused on achieving a modal shift to more sustainable modes of transport.</i> |
| Chapter 12 | Community Services | <i>ensure the provision and implementation of primary and secondary education facilities in concert with the planning and sustainable development of residential areas in order to maximise the opportunities for use of walking, cycling and use of public transport.</i> |
| Chapter 13 | Built Heritage | <i>positively consider proposals to improve, alter, extend or change the use of protected structures so as to render them viable for modern use, subject to consultation with suitably qualified Conservation Architects and / or other relevant experts, suitable design, materials and construction methods</i> |
| Chapter 14 | Biodiversity and Natural Heritage | <i>positively consider proposals to improve, alter, extend or change the use of protected structures so as to render them viable for modern use, subject to consultation with suitably qualified Conservation Architects and / or other relevant experts, suitable design, materials and construction methods</i> |

Table 6: Climate Action Measures

5.4 Policies

| Planning and Development Policies | |
|--|---|
| It is the policy of the Council to: | |
| CCP 1 | <i>Support the implementation of International and National objectives on climate action including the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Acts (and any amending legislation), the ‘Climate Action Plan 2021’ (and any updated Plans) and ensure that Laois County Councils Climate Change Action Plan and County Development Plan are suitably aligned.</i> |

5.5 Objectives

| Planning and Development Objectives | |
|--|--|
| It is the objective of the Council to: | |
| CMO 1 | <i>Support and facilitate the creation of a Decarbonisation Zone in the Key Town of Portlaoise in line with the objectives of the Laois Local Authority Climate Action Plan 2024 – 2029;</i> |
| CMO 2 | <i>Achieve more compact growth by promoting the development of infill and brownfield/ regeneration sites and the re-use of underutilised land including upper floors within and close to the existing built-up footprint in preference to edge of centre locations thereby encouraging a shift towards sustainable travel modes;</i> |
| CMO 3 | <i>Promote higher residential development densities at appropriate locations such as along public transport corridors, that are not located in areas sensitive to flooding, or will increase temperatures of urban areas;</i> |
| CMO 4 | <i>Support energy-efficient building design and Green Roof technology particularly on apartment, commercial, leisure and educational buildings;</i> |
| CMO 5 | <i>Support enhancement of flood resilience of buildings and promote the use of permeable surfaces to decrease run-off rates;</i> |
| CMO 6 | <i>Protect and enhance the towns floodplains subject to flooding as “green infrastructure” where appropriate and subject to compliance with the Habitats Directive;</i> |
| CMO 7 | <i>Require the use of SuDS in accordance with the Greater Dublin Regional Code of Practice for Drainage Works for new developments (including extensions);</i> |
| CMO 8 | <i>Support rainwater harvesting and grey-water recycling schemes that seek to decrease abstraction of potable surface water resources, thus reducing water stress during periods of low rainfall;</i> |
| CMO 9 | <i>Plant pollinator friendly, drought-resistant plants/trees in public amenity areas to provide shade and increase green infrastructure linkages</i> |
| CMO 10 | <i>Support the European Commission’s paper on Circular Economy Principles for Building Design and advance the reduce-reuse-recycle policy of the Circular Economy in relation to demolition of building stock;</i> |
| CMO 11 | <i>Support construction of green routes/cycleways/pedestrian routes throughout the town;</i> |
| CMO 12 | <i>Support and facilitate the integration of land use with transportation infrastructure,</i> |

| Planning and Development Objectives | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| | <i>through the development of sustainable compact settlements which are well served by public transport;</i> |
| CMO 13 | <i>Strengthen public transport linkages and promote their use;</i> |
| CMO 14 | <i>Support localisation of jobs/shops/services to minimise the need for most common travel patterns;</i> |
| CMO 15 | <i>Support the provision of electricity charging infrastructure for electrical vehicles throughout the town, both on street and in new developments, in accordance with car parking standards and best practice;</i> |
| CMO 16 | <i>Promote and support the provision of Park-and-Ride facilities which improve public transport accessibility without exacerbating road congestion, or which cause increased car travel distances, at appropriate locations within the town;</i> |
| CMO 17 | <i>Deliver, in conjunction with the National Transport Authority and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport a Public Transportation Hub in Portlaoise to accommodate national, commuter, regional and local bus services;</i> |
| CMO 18 | <i>Ensure that planning applications for new critical infrastructure demonstrate resilience to new climatic conditions.</i> |
| CMO 19 | <i>Ensure biodiversity assets are appropriately managed and safeguarded from potential adverse effects from development.</i> |
| CMO 20 | <i>Support the actions of the Laois Local Authority Climate Action Plan 2024 – 2029 to increase awareness of the Portlaoise Low Carbon Town and encourage greater participation of the wider community;</i> |
| CMO 21 | <i>Support the actions of the Laois Local Authority Climate Action Plan 2024 – 2029 to enhance public realm and conserve and enhance biodiversity;</i> |
| CMO 22 | <i>Support the actions of the Laois Local Authority Climate Action Plan 2024 – 2029 to facilitate the modal shift to active travel and sustainable mobility in Portlaoise;</i> |
| CMO 23 | <i>Support the actions of the Laois Local Authority Climate Action Plan 2024 – 2029 to identify decarbonisation pathways for Portlaoise to achieve 2030 targets and promote principles of circular economy;</i> |
| CMO 24 | <i>Encourage and support a transition to renewable energy sources in Portlaoise, subject to compliance with proper planning and environmental considerations;</i> |
| CMO 25 | <i>Support and promote the use of renewable energy technologies and supporting infrastructure at appropriate scales in residential, commercial and community</i> |

| Planning and Development Objectives | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| | <i>developments and support the principle of on-site energy generation for self-consumption;</i> |
| CMO 26 | <i>Support the Climate Action Team in the undertaking of an investigation of the feasibility of Shared or District Heating in Portlaoise;</i> |
| CMO 27 | <i>Support, in conjunction with key stakeholders, the implementation of the Laois County Council Climate Action Plan 2024 – 2029 and facilitate its role as a driver in the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions and climate change adaptation in Portlaoise, and the translation of national climate policy to local and community levels in the town;</i> |
| CMO 28 | <i>Promote measures to reduce vacancy and the underuse of existing building stock and support initiatives that promote the reuse, refurbishment and retrofitting of existing buildings within Portlaoise, in line with the ambitions of the National Residential Retrofit Plan;</i> |
| CMO 29 | <i>Support the sustainable management of waste and enable a significant reduction in the production of waste in Portlaoise, in line with the principles of the Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy (DECC, 2021);</i> |
| CMO 30 | <i>Promote circular economy principles and the incorporation of sustainable waste management measures within developments, in line with the “Best practice guidelines for the preparation of resource & waste management plans for construction & demolition projects” guidance;</i> |
| CMO 31 | <i>Promote high-quality, secure, and reliable digital connectivity in Portlaoise in line with the objectives of:</i> <i>The Dimension 2 of the ‘Harnessing Digital – the Digital Ireland Framework’ which supports the rollout of 5G, and</i> <i>National Strategic Objective 6 of The National Development Plan 2021-2023’s National Broadband Plan;</i> |

SECTION 6. TOWN CENTRE REVITALISATION

Strategic Aim: *To support the sustainable long-term growth of Portlaoise, in accordance with the Core and Retail Strategies of the Laois County Development Plan 2021 – 2027 and the Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy “2040 and Beyond: A Vision for Portlaoise: A Strategy for a Better Town Centre”.*

6.1 Introduction

The traditional town centre of Portlaoise has always been the focus for retail, commercial and residential development.

Market pressures since the 1980s have impacted on the town centre with retail and commercial leakage to an area south of the traditional core. While the two retail areas are relatively proximate, there is a real sense of disconnect especially for pedestrian traffic given their physical separation by the James Fintan Lawlor Avenue urban dual carriageway.

Under Call 2 of the Urban Regeneration Development Fund, the Council was successful in securing funding for the regeneration/ public realm improvements to the laneways, squares within the town centre from the Cultural Quarter in Fitzmaurice Place to the Portlaoise Shopping Centre. This involves the reimagining of JFL Avenue.

According to the Geodirectory Survey, the commercial vacancy rate in Portlaoise stood at 15.3% in Q2 2023 compared to 14.5% for County Laois, 12.8% for Leinster [excluding Dublin] and 14.1% nationally. Further afield, the Portlaoise rate compares favourably with competing towns such as Tullamore [19%], Carlow [18.2%], Thurles [18%] and Newbridge [15.6%]

While any high street vacancy is regrettable, there has been improvements in occupancy due to Local Authority business incentives and national policy changes to allow for residential change of use of commercial buildings.

The town centre has the capacity to stem this leakage through the development of key opportunity sites and by improving the attractiveness of the public realm. This plan seeks to redevelop the town centre as the focus of commercial, retail and residential development within the town.

The Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy in conjunction with a focus on consolidating the town centre will help revitalise the town and provide the framework for channelling development into brownfield sites.

6.2 Regeneration

The vacant commercial property incentive scheme is being introduced by Laois County Council to encourage the use of vacant commercial premises within the designated town centre of Portlaoise. The scheme incentivises new businesses to occupy vacant premises by lowering entry costs in the form of a range of grants and mentoring opportunities. The scheme is being introduced in association with Laois Chamber as a pilot scheme and aligns closely with the Government’s new Town Centre First policy.

The scheme is open to newly established retail businesses setting up within Portlaoise town centre, existing retail businesses relocating or expanding from outside Portlaoise or an existing retail business maintaining their current location and expanding into a new location within Portlaoise.

6.3 Active Land Management

Laois County Council is actively tackling dereliction and vacancy throughout the town through a combination of engagement with relevant parties and, where necessary, use of legislation under the Derelict Sites Act 1990 and Finance Act 2021 [which introduced the Residential Zoned Land Taxa and effectively superceded the vacant sites levy] as amended. A number of high-profile sites which were once derelict and vacant have been rejuvenated such as the former Midland Dairy property on Mountrath Road and Maltings Granary at Harpurs Lane both of which have been redeveloped for housing.



Plate 4: Active Land Management – Maltings Granary, Harpurs Lane – Before / After



Plate 5: Active Land Management – The Meadows, Mountrath Road – Before / After

6.4 URDF Call 3

The third round of URDF funding support, specifically was designed to address long term vacancy and dereliction across our URDF cities and towns and the acceleration of the provision of residential accommodation. Portlaoise was successful in having funding secured for addressing derelict and vacant sites.

6.5 Portlaoise Town Team Action Plan 2023-2026

Since 2017, the Portlaoise Town Team has played a key role in the regeneration and redevelopment of Portlaoise Town.

Over that period, the Town Team has advised, led and enabled multiple Tidy Towns projects, initiatives with local business groups, business supports, Low Carbon Town projects, uncovering and telling the story of local history and heritage, street art and public realm enhancements.

Portlaoise Town Team has now developed a new Action Plan, for the period 2023-2026. The key objectives of the Action Plan are as follows:

| <i>Action Plan Objectives</i> | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| All Committees | <i>To proactively pursue an occupancy level of 95% on all floors in the town centre maintaining commercial use at ground floor level and reusing upper floors as residential units.</i> |
| Retail & Services Mix | <i>To support a retail and services mix that will enhance Portlaoise’s reputation as a major retail and service destination.</i> |
| Marketing | <i>To appropriately brand Portlaoise.</i> |
| Festivals & Events | <i>To establish and support a programme of annual festivals and events in the town.</i> |
| All Committees | <i>To enhance the public realm and public transport network such that Portlaoise is permeable and accessible to all.</i> |
| Tidy Towns | <i>To continue the journey towards becoming the Tidiest Town in Ireland and transforming Portlaoise to a “Town in a Garden”.</i> |
| Heritage and Street Art | <i>To highlight, present and promote the history and heritage of Portlaoise.</i> |
| Public Safety | <i>To address issues which impact people’s safety and perceptions of safety in Portlaoise.</i> |

| Action Plan Objectives | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Climate Change | <i>To develop and implement climate friendly initiatives which will make Portlaoise an exemplar Low Carbon Town.</i> |

Table 7: Portlaoise Town Team Action Plan Objectives

6.6 Retail Strategy

The retail planning policy context for the LAP is informed by [a] the Guidelines for Planning Authorities: Retail Planning (2012), [b] the retail hierarchy identified for Laois in the RSES and [c] the Laois County Retail Strategy prepared as Appendix 4 of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027.

As set out in the Laois Retail Hierarchy, Portlaoise is identified as a Major Town Centre, for which it is an action to *“reinforce and grow high order retail functioning with particular emphasis on historic core defined by the Primary Retail Area. Enhance the retail appeal of Laois by strengthening retail functions of Portlaoise”*.

| Status under Retail Hierarchy for the Region (Table 6.1 RSES) | Town | Action |
|---|---------------|--|
| Level 1 | Dublin | |
| Level 2 – Major Town Centres and County Town Centres | Portlaoise | Reinforce and grow high-order retail functioning with particular emphasis on historic core defined by the Primary Retail Area. Enhance the retail appeal of Laois by strengthening retail functions of Portlaoise. |
| Level 3 – Town and/ or District Centres and Sub County Town Centres (Key service centres) | Portarlington | Encourage retail development commensurate with existing and anticipated growth, with particular emphasis on traditional core. |
| | Graigucullen | Provide for shopping, amenity, commercial and community facilities of a scale and type |

Figure 6.1: Laois County Retail Strategy. Appendix 4 of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027

The Core Retail Area is the focus and preferred location for retail development during the Plan period. This presents an opportunity to create diversity and distinctiveness in Portlaoise’s retail offer, as well as to provide attractive, pedestrian friendly connections between it and the new retail areas. In order to rebalance the traditional town centre as a viable and vibrant centre, the Main Street should be retained as the centre of commercial activity that delivers a range of services and functions.

The development strategy for the town centre recognizes the potential of the traditional town centre as a focus for employment generation, retail use and residential development where appropriate. The creation of an attractive urban environment is critical to attract new businesses to the town centre; this issue has been addressed through the publication of the Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy *“2040 And Beyond: A Vision for Portlaoise”* as outlined in the following chapter.

While Portlaoise has a vibrant retail core overall there is a notable deficiency in high-end, modern comparison retail floor plates.

The lack of high value comparison anchors in the town core has undoubtedly contributed to the growth of expenditure leakage from the towns catchment area as the retail profiles of competing centres have developed at a faster pace.

In order for Portlaoise to compete effectively with other urban centres of a similar scale, it is imperative that sufficient high-end comparison shopping is in place in the town core area.

It is essential in terms of the sustainable development of the town going forward that this high-end comparison-shopping provision is retained and substantially enhanced within the town core area and that leakage to the periphery is prevented.

It is also critical given the town’s position as a crucial urban anchor providing essential services in an otherwise predominantly rural county.



Plate 6: Main Street Portlaoise

A proactive approach to urban design will be taken and substantial redevelopment in the core area should utilise opportunities to facilitate attractive and vibrant environments designed at a human scale, with enhanced pedestrian permeability, visually engaging, secure and inviting public realms that promote and encourage passive and active recreation.

Improvements in the town centre public realm, specifically accessibility and integration, offers opportunities to create stronger nodes that provide a better experience and diversity of retail, as well as high quality food and drink and other complementary uses.

Residential development will also be encouraged in the town centre to contribute to the vitality of the core and to encourage economic development and further retail expansion.

Existing brownfield sites will be prioritised over more peripheral sites Innovative design and layout and a mix of tenure will be encouraged in all residential developments. These are highlighted under the opportunity sites in Section 6.9 of this chapter.

6.7 Sequential Approach

The Retail Planning Guidelines state that the order of priority for the sequential approach is to locate retail development in the town centre and only to allow retail development in edge-of centre or out-of-centre locations where all other options have been exhausted. All applications for retail developments at edge-of-centre or out-of-centre will be subject to the sequential test as outlined in the Retail Planning Guidelines.

6.8 Town Centre Revitalisation Policies

| Planning and Development Policies | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| It is the policy of the Council to: | |
| TCR P1 | <i>Encourage retail development within the existing town centre in line with the sequential approach to retail development as set out in the “Retail Planning - Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2012”. Proposals which would undermine the vitality and viability of the town centre will not be permitted.</i> |
| TCR P2 | <i>Promote the reuse of existing town centre buildings through appropriate design and adaptation</i> |
| TCR P3 | <i>Prohibit the proliferation of uses in the town centre which would detract from the amenities of the area or the vitality and viability of the town centre;</i> |
| TCR P4 | <i>Promote living over the shop and conversion of town centre buildings into housing units;</i> |
| TCR P5 | <i>Regenerate the town centre in accordance with “Portlaoise 2040 and Beyond A Vision For Portlaoise, A Strategy For A Better Town Centre”;</i> |

| Planning and Development Policies | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| TCR P6 | <i>Encourage the maintenance of original shopfronts, or the reinstatement of traditional shopfronts where poor replacements have been installed;</i> |
| TCR P7 | <i>Ensure new shopfronts have regard to existing shopfronts and complement the existing character particularly in the Architectural Conservation Area;</i> |
| TCR P8 | <i>Prohibit internally illuminated fascias or projecting box signs. Concealed strip or flood lighting of fascias and traditional hand painted signs lit by spotlight may be an acceptable alternative;</i> |
| TCR P9 | <i>Ensure all new developments have adequate refuse storage facilities.</i> |

6.9 Town Centre Revitalisation Objectives

| Planning and Development Objectives | |
|---|--|
| It is the objective of the Council to: | |
| TCR O1 | <i>Improve the quality, vitality and vibrancy of the town centre through the implementation of the Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy “2040 and Beyond: A Vision for Portlaoise: A Strategy for a Better Town Centre”</i> |
| TCR O2 | <i>Promote the town centre as a priority location for commercial, civic, social and cultural development and sustainable consolidation;</i> |
| TCR O3 | <i>Promote the consolidation of the town centre through the use of brownfield and backland sites without compromising streetscapes;</i> |
| TCR O4 | <i>Encourage and facilitate the reuse and regeneration of derelict and vacant sites and disused buildings, especially upper floors;</i> |
| TCR O5 | <i>Enable site assembly through wider use of Compulsory Purchase Orders;</i> |
| TCR O6 | <i>Facilitate the redevelopment of strategic sites within the town centre such as the Convent, CBS and Parish lands, Fort Protector lands, the Maltings Site, and Main Street for a mixture of uses that will contribute to vitality of the central core area;</i> |
| TCR O7 | <i>Renew, consolidate and develop the existing fabric of the town by achieving a high quality of design in new development and refurbishments;</i> |
| TCR O8 | <i>Ensure the type, quantum and location of future retail floor space is consistent with the requirements and recommendations of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027, relevant regional policy frameworks and national planning guidelines;</i> |
| TCR O9 | <i>Guide retail development, in accordance with the sequential approach to sustain and strengthen the town centre;</i> |
| TCR O10 | <i>Promote an appropriate mix of day and night-time uses;</i> |

Planning and Development Objectives

| | |
|---------------|---|
| TCR 11 | <i>Create attractive and secure pedestrian and cycling links.</i> |
|---------------|---|

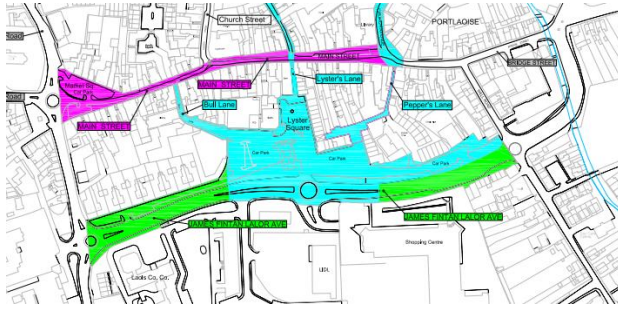
6.10 Opportunity Sites

A number of potential town centre opportunity sites for re-development have been identified which would contribute to the renewal, enhancement and regeneration of the particular areas of the town in which they are located. These areas have been identified for various reasons such as dereliction, under utilisation of land and lands that would be readily adaptable for new uses. The site areas or boundaries have not been identified definitively and can be modified to include other key sites. Additionally, other opportunity sites not listed can be presented for appraisal under similar criteria. Some of the sites may be owned by different parties and would require an element of site assembly for a coherent development strategy to progress. This approach to re-development will be encouraged over a piecemeal approach.

The importance of finding sustainable replacement uses and regenerating these sites will facilitate the continued growth of one of Ireland’s fastest growing town for future generations.

The development sites represent a significant opportunity to arrest the decline of the residential population while addressing other infrastructure deficiencies.

6.10.1 Opportunity Site 1: Lyster Square, JLR Avenue, Portlaoise



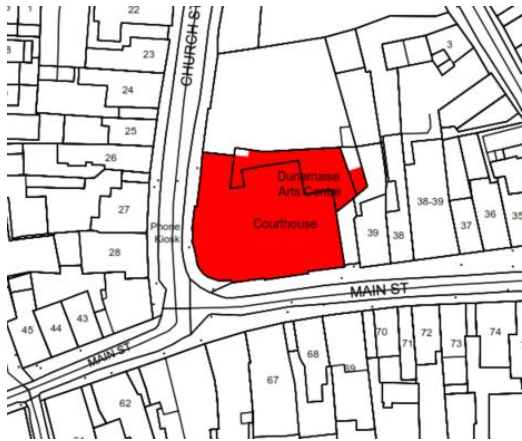
Zoning

The site is zoned “Town Centre” in the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027.

Comments

- *Brownfield public realm and mainly commercial / retail centre/ site;*
- *Large amount of surface car parking;*
- *Prime location for redevelopment of lands fronting onto James Fintan Lalor Avenue;*
- *Located within Portlaoise Architectural Conservation Area;*
- *No Protected Structures within the site;*
- *Located within Archaeological Zone;*
- *Public realm improvements would be beneficial and should be consistent with the Guiding Principles for Lyster Square as outlined in 2040 And Beyond: A Vision for Portlaoise;*
- *Landscaping proposals including tree planting and “greening” of the area;*
- *Development could be intensified to provide a key landmark or gateway building;*
- *Care should be taken that any building addresses the extensive street frontage available and be designed to an exceptional standard. Development shall comprise a high quality design, fine grained active frontage blocks providing a strong built edge to the surrounding public thoroughfare. New buildings should be permanent, timeless and contemporary structures. Car parking should be provided to the rear of the building or within the structure itself.*

6.10.2 Opportunity Site 2: Court House, Main Street



Zoning

The site is zoned “Town Centre” in the Portlaoise Zoning Map contained in the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027

Development Potential

- Prime location for re-development;
- Adjoining the Dunamase Arts Centre and cultural quarter
- Close proximity to multi-storey carpark;
- Located within an Architectural Conservation Area;
- Protected Structure Status;
- Fully serviced;
- Located within Archaeological Zone;
- Public realm improvements would be beneficial and should be consistent with the Guiding Principles for the area as outlined in 2040 And Beyond: A Vision for Portlaoise.

6.10.3 Opportunity Site 3: Formerly Parish Lands



Zoning

The site is zoned “Town Centre” in the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027.

Development Potential

- Prime location for development;
- Extensive Greenfield site;
- Frontage onto two key urban routes, R 445 and Ridge Road;
- Located within Architectural Conservation Area and Archaeological Zone;
- Protected Structure Status;
- Fully serviced;

SECTION 7. PLACEMAKING

Strategic Aim: To provide a green, well-connected town for all people within a compact, accessible urban environment which prioritises healthy placemaking, safe active travel and quality environments and creates a high-quality low-carbon environment for all.

7.1 The 15-Minute Neighbourhood Concept

The 15-minute neighbourhood is not a new idea but one with new significance, especially in response to Covid-19. The concept is about living more locally by giving people the ability to meet most of their daily needs within a 15-minute walk from home, with safe cycling and local transport options. It is about creating connected communities – understanding how our neighbourhoods work so that we can map out how a more compact and permeable urban form can provide high quality and safe links to public transport, shops, services, green spaces, cafes, doctors, childcare and to other neighbourhoods, reducing the need to travel.



Figure 7.1: Portlaoise 15-minute town

It brings together a number of policies and initiatives that are happening in relation to the following:

- Place making,
- Wellbeing,
- Empowering communities,
- Town Centre First Approach.

The ability to work locally is central to the 15-minute neighbourhood concept. The trend of working from home or from your neighbourhood is only likely to increase given the precedent set during the Covid-19 crisis and the government response 'Making Remote Work' National Remote Work Strategy. This change to work practices is for the better, it means less commuting, more time for family and leisure pursuits, and fewer transport greenhouse gas emissions. The Council will support measures or investment to facilitate this, including local work hubs.

The Council will also work with communities to retrofit existing neighbourhoods and ensure that new neighbourhoods are compact, mixed-use, green, liveable, accessible and permeable places. Reducing transport demand and encouraging modal shift away from private car use within local communities will be crucial to achieving the 15 minutes neighbourhood concept. According to the CSO for short journeys (less than two kilometres), over half [52%] of journeys were by car.

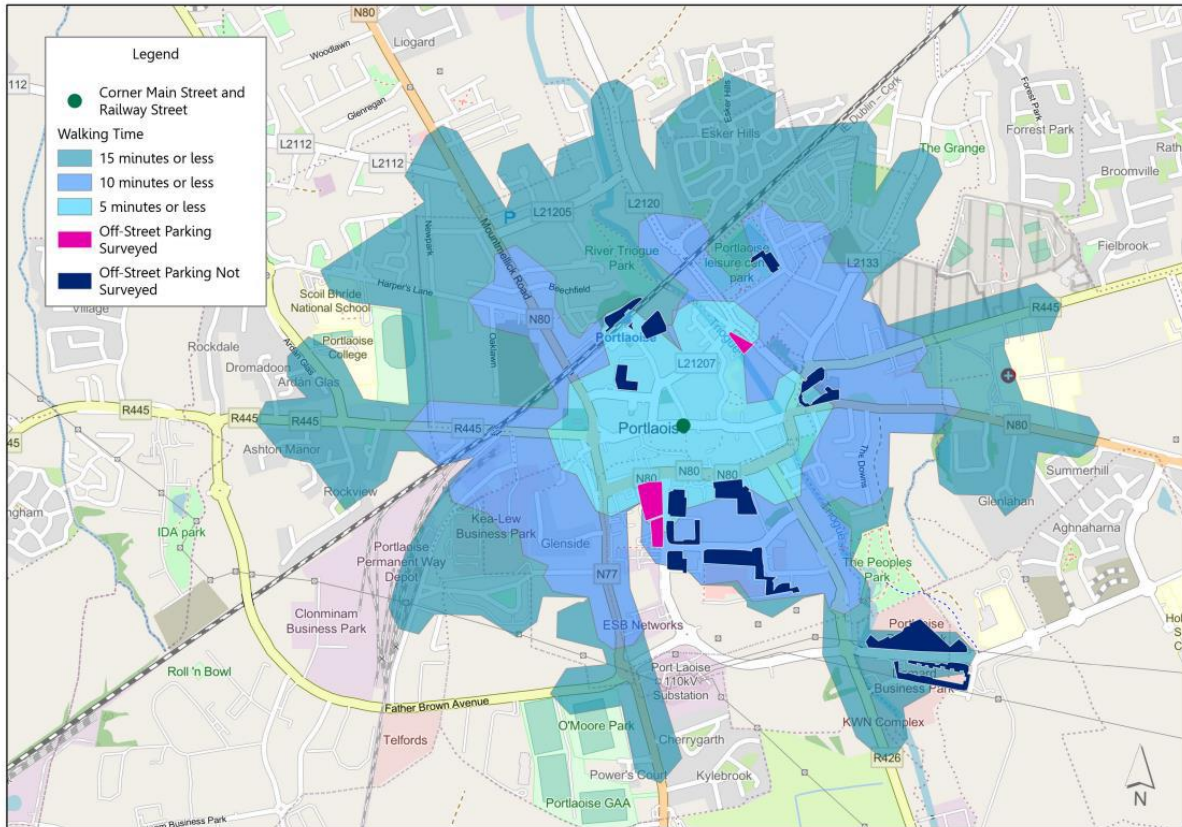


Figure 7.2: Walking times from the corner of Main St & Railway St.

7.2 Policies

| Planning and Development Policies | |
|--|--|
| It is the policy of the Council to: | |
| PM 01 | <i>Ensure that all development is of high-quality design with a focus on placemaking consistent with the National Planning Framework;</i> |
| PM 02 | <i>Promote the guidance principles set out in relevant Ministerial Guidelines especially the ‘Urban Design Manual – A Best Practice Guide’ (2009), and in the ‘Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets’ (2020) and Permeability Best Practice NTA (2015);</i> |
| PM 03 | <i>Provide for a high-quality public realm and public spaces by promoting quality urban design that accommodates creative patterns of use having regard to the physical, cultural, and social identities of individual settlements;</i> |
| PM 04 | <i>Ensure that development proposals are cognisant of the need for proper consideration of context, connectivity, inclusivity, variety, efficiency, distinctiveness, layout, public realm, adaptability, privacy and amenity, parking, way finding and detailed design</i> |
| PM 05 | <i>Provide for, protect and strengthen the vitality and viability of the town centre, through consolidating development, encouraging a mix of uses and maximising the use of land whilst promoting sympathetic reuse of structures. In considering development applications within the town centre there will be particular regard to the impact of the proposed development on the streetscape and urban layout in relation to compatibility of design, materials and use and the impact of the proposed development on existing amenities having regard to traffic and parking and the amenity and utility value of public and private spaces including open spaces;</i> |
| PM 6 | <i>Ensure all urban settlements develop in such a way as to provide a sustainable mix of local services such as commercial, community and cultural activities including provision for enterprise, residential, retail, commercial, tourism, and leisure and community facilities.</i> |
| PM 07 | The design and layout of new development shall have regard to crime prevention principles including legibility, permeability, active frontages, natural surveillance, visibility, street lighting, defensible space, and other measures. |

7.3 Objectives

| Planning and Development Objectives | |
|---|---|
| It is the objective of the Council to: | |
| PM 01 | <i>Identify obsolete and potential opportunity sites within the town and encourage and facilitate the re-use and regeneration of derelict land and buildings in the urban centre;</i> |
| PM 02 | <i>Use specific powers, such as the compulsory purchase orders (CPO's) and statutory powers under the Derelict Sites Act 1990 and the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015, as amended, to address issues of dereliction, vacancy and underutilisation of lands in the town;</i> |
| PM 03 | <i>Work with landowners and development interests to pursue the potential of suitable, available and viable land and buildings for appropriate development or renewal;</i> |
| PM 04 | <i>Support 'active land management' by making the regeneration and development of existing built-up areas as attractive and as viable as Greenfield development through investment in infrastructure where appropriate.</i> |

7.4. Opportunity Sites outside Town Centre

7.4.1 Opportunity Site 1: Centre Point, Mountrath Road, Portlaoise



Zoning

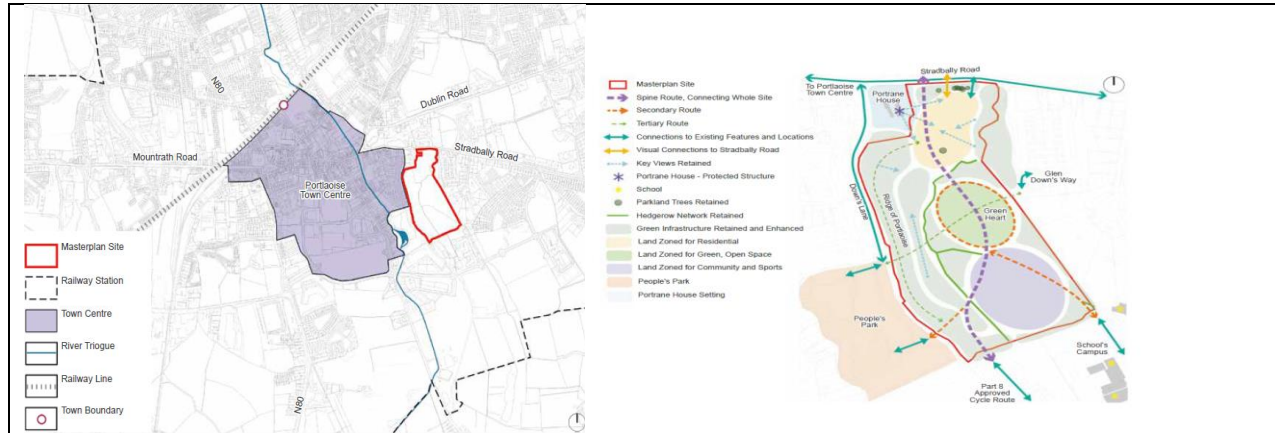
The site is zoned "Mixed Use" in the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027. It is adjacent to the Town Centre with access into two public roads, Mountrath Road R445 and Haripur's Lane L-21128.

Development Potential

- *Brownfield retail site located at Mountrath Road, with access also from Harpurs Lane;*
- *Extensive surface car park;*
- *Prime location for re-development;*
- *Not located within an Architectural Conservation Area;*
- *No Protected Structures within the site;*
- *Public realm improvements would be beneficial and should seek to maximise green and blue infrastructure through landscape design;*
- *Potential for active travel permeability;*
- *Development could be intensified to provide a key landmark or gateway building;*
- *Care should be taken that this building addresses the extensive street frontage available and be designed to an exceptional standard.*
- *Development shall comprise a high quality design, fine grained active frontage blocks providing a strong built edge to the surrounding public thoroughfare. New buildings should be permanent, timeless and contemporary structures. Car parking should be provided to the rear of the building or within the structure itself.*

Three masterplan development sites have been identified in the LAP which will contribute to the renewal, enhancement and regeneration of the particular areas of the town in which they are located.

7.4.2 Masterplan Site 1: Tyrrells Lands, Stradbally Road



Its current zoning is a mix of Residential, Open space and Amenity, Community, Education & Infrastructure

The site is located east of Portlaoise town centre, and south of Stradbally Road N 80. The west boundary runs outside the wooded esker ridge. The woodland appears to be broadly commensurate with the wider woodland surrounding Portlaoise Retail Park, the River Triogue and the People's Park, and residential development at The Downs.

Portrane House – a private residence and Registered Protected Structure – adjoins the northwest corner of the site. The eastern boundary is formed by a narrow watercourse and is abutted by private greenspace associated with the residential development at Glen Downs and Glenlahan. The recently built school adjoins the southern boundary. The Ridge of Portlaoise – the remnants of an esker ridge of sand or gravel deposited during the last ice age, which extends approximately north-south through Portlaoise, forms a linear feature through the west of the site.

The esker ridge is important for wildlife and is proposed for designation as a Natural Heritage Area (pNHA). It is also of importance for geology, social and cultural reasons.

The vision for Stradbally Road is to create a new sustainable residential community that meets the needs of local people whilst being resilient to economic, social and climate change. The new community shall be fully integrated with and connected to the existing town, surrounding residential areas as well as the existing landscape and open space.

This new sustainable community will be integrated into the landscape and will be a place where walking and cycling are part of people's daily routines.

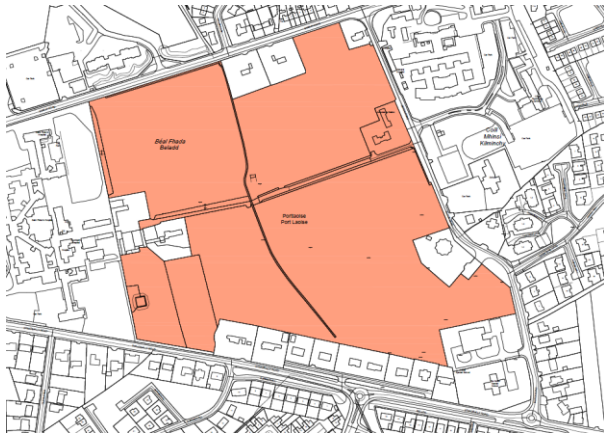
7.4.2.1 Masterplan Objectives

The key objectives are to:

- To provide for new residential development, residential services and community facilities. High quality residential areas of sensitive design, which are complimentary to their surroundings and do not adversely impact on the amenity of adjoining residents.
- To preserve, provide for and improve active and passive recreational open space.
- To protect and improve existing community, educational and institutional facilities and to safeguard their future provision.

The masterplan will also provide for local civic, religious, community, educational and other facilities ancillary to neighbourhood uses and services.

7.4.3 Masterplan Site 2: HSE lands between Stradbally Road, Block Road and Dublin Road.



Zoning

The site is zoned “Community Educational Institutional” in the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027.

Development Potential

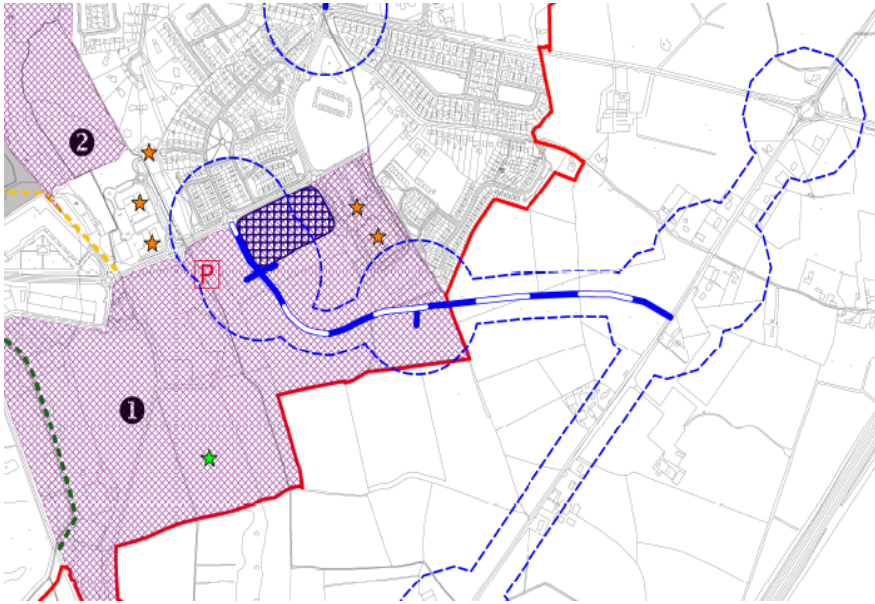
- Prime location for re-development for health care and related uses;
- Extensive Greenfield site;
- Frontage onto three key urban routes;
- Located outside Architectural Conservation Area and Archaeological Zone
- Within curtilage of Key Protected Structures;
- Fully serviced;
- Much potential for active travel permeability

7.4.3.1 Masterplan Objectives

The key objectives are to:

- To provide for new residential development, residential services and community facilities. High quality residential areas of sensitive design, which are complimentary to their built and natural surroundings.
- To preserve, provide for and improve active and passive recreational open space.

7.4.4 Masterplan Site 3: Aghnaharna Masterplan Area



Zoning

The western end of the site is zoned “General Business” in the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027. The eastern end is un-zoned.

Development Potential

- Prime location for development;
- Extensive Greenfield site adjacent to existing and developing residential areas, retail park and schools campuses.
- Part of site earmarked for schools campus;
- Frontage onto two key urban routes, R 426 and Southern Circular R 945;
- Located outside Architectural Conservation Area and Archaeological Zone;
- No Protected Structure Status;
- Fully serviced;
- Potential for link road running south-eastwards from Southern Orbital Route R945 to Strategic Regional Route R425.
- Much potential for active travel permeability including with Stradbally Road Masterplan lands.

7.4.4.1 Masterplan Objectives

The key objectives are to:

- Develop a new Link Road through the site that roughly aligns with the northern section of the proposed road link in the Portlaoise LAP. The new street would give access to Rathleague Road and Portlaoise GAA with permeability to Holy Family Schools and pedestrian and cycling infrastructure along the access road.
- delivery a Park and Stride along the Southern Circular Road to allow more children to incorporate active travel in their school journey and relieve motor traffic congestion.
- Provide a shared-used path linking the Triogue Way, multiple schools, residential areas, schools and the Tyrrell's land bank.

SECTION 8. HOUSING

Strategic Aim: *To make provision for good quality and age-friendly housing that meets the needs of a diverse population and facilitates the creation of sustainable and socially inclusive communities in a way that makes Portlaoise a good place to live now and into the future.*

8.1 Introduction

As the key town of the County, Portlaoise is required to cater for new housing to serve population growth and new household formation, in accordance with the population targets of the Eastern and Midland Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy and the **Core Strategy of the Laois County Development Plan 2021 – 2027**.

The targets provide for County Laois to grow to 94,700 by 2027 [an increase of 12% from the base year of 2016] and for Portlaoise to grow to **26,366** [an even greater increase of nearly 20%] over the same plan period. For Portlaoise, as outlined in Chapter 4, this equates to a projected requirement for an additional **1,725 households** over the six-year period to 2027 and **2039** households to 2030 taking account of delivery of housing from 2021-2024. This equates to a housing land **requirement of 64.2 hectares of land** up to 2027 (as per the Core Strategy in the Laois County Development Plan) in order to accommodate the planned growth of Portlaoise.

8.2 Housing For All

Housing for All - a New Housing Plan for Ireland' is the government's housing plan to 2030. It is a multi-annual, multi-billion euro plan launched in 2021 which aims to improve Ireland's housing system and deliver more homes of all types for people with different housing needs. The government's vision for the housing system over the longer term is to achieve a steady supply of housing in the right locations with economic, social and environmental sustainability built into the system.

It is estimated that Ireland will need an average of 33,000 new homes to be provided each year from 2021 to 2030.

The four key pathways for delivery of housing over the period 2022-2026 are:

- *Supporting Homeownership & Increasing Affordability,*
- *Eradicating Homelessness, Increasing Housing Delivery & Supporting Social Inclusion,*
- *Increasing New Housing Supply,*
- *Addressing Vacancy & Efficient Use of Existing Stock*

8.3 Housing Delivery in Portlaoise

Both the Housing Strategy and Housing Needs Demand Assessment has identified both an affordable and a social housing need in Portlaoise. The Council’s Housing Delivery Action Plan 2022-2026 projects that over 595 social housing units will be provided by target year 2026 the bulk of which through Approved Housing Body Capital Advance Leasing Facility.

It is the policy of the Council to implement the provisions of the Housing Strategy in accordance with Section 95 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). In accordance with the provisions of the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015, the Planning Authority will employ Site Activation Measures, as previously mentioned under the Regeneration Section including the Residential Zoned Land Tax, derelict sites legislation, and CPO provisions to bring forward vacant and/or underutilised sites in Portlaoise for the supply of all tenures of housing.

This plan places a strong emphasis on providing quality residential developments in the existing built envelope of the town. The Town Centre zone presents significant housing opportunities through redevelopment of brownfield, infill and backland type developments. Some of these sites have been identified as opportunity sites in Section 7 of this plan. Several key opportunity sites have been identified within/ adjacent to the town centre which are in close proximity to public transport infrastructure and are suitable for higher density developments.

However, these areas are insufficient in size to accommodate the total projected population growth. Therefore, greenfield sites have also been identified which are suitable for new high quality residential developments.



Plate 7: New housing at Maryborough Village, Mountrath Road

To ensure the delivery of high-quality housing in a sustainable manner, residential development will be required to:

- Be located in places that can support sustainable development, places which support growth, innovation and the efficient provision of infrastructure, are accessible to a range of local services, can encourage the use of public transport, walking and cycling, and help tackle climate change;
- Increase residential density through a range of measures including reductions in vacancy, re-use of existing buildings, infill development schemes, area or site-based regeneration and increased building heights;
- Be delivered where homes and the appropriate supporting services can be delivered more efficiently and effectively at least cost to the State in the long-run;
- Have an excellent standard of design, layout and finish;
- Provide an appropriate mix of tenure types;
- Compliment the character of Portlaoise.

8.3 Housing for Older People

According to Census 2022, 2,221 [9.4%] of the population of Portlaoise is aged 65 or over. This percentage is likely to increase in the future given national and international trends.

The demand for nursing homes, residential care homes and sheltered housing accommodation is continuing to grow and housing developments need to be adaptable to cater for the future changing needs of the aging population. The 'Age Friendly Ireland' Initiative is a key policy document that provides leadership and guidance in identifying the needs and opportunities of an ageing population.

Laois Age Friendly County Strategy 2023 - 2027 sets out key commitments for improvement to the areas of infrastructure, transportation, services and information.

A bespoke housing scheme for older persons comprising 40 units has been developed on the site of the former Maltings Granary adjacent to Portlaoise town centre.

The need for **Nursing Homes** and residential care homes in the town is anticipated to grow into the future and these facilities should be integrated wherever possible into the established or planned residential areas where residents can avail of reasonable access to local services. In determining planning applications for a change of use from a residential dwelling or other building to a nursing home the following will be considered:

- Whether such a use would not give rise to a traffic hazard and off-street car parking;
- The proximity to local services and facilities;
- Whether the size and scale are appropriate to the area.



Plate 8: New housing development on former Maltings site which incorporates both a nursing home and accommodation for people with disability and for over 55's within Portlaoise town centre

8.4 Housing for People with Disabilities.

People with disabilities and mobility impairment face particular physical barriers to access and movement. The Council will ensure that development of all types provide mobility and access for people with disabilities in order to remove barriers to involvement in community, having regard to the National Disability Authority's document 'Building for Everyone: A Universal Design Approach – Planning and Policy' (2012) and Laois Public Participation Network 'Access for All Report' (2019).

8.5 Traveller Community

The Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019 – 2024 for County Laois assessed the need for Traveller accommodation in the town and overall county. It sets out the Council's policy regarding the provision of Traveller accommodation. According to Census 2022, 285 members of the Travelling Community are living in Portlaoise. The bulk reside in local authority housing throughout the town with one extended family accommodated at the Oak Leaf halting site. The Council will endeavour to provide suitable accommodation for members of the Travelling Community.

8.6 Minority Groups

Portlaoise is becoming an increasingly diverse County. According to Census 2022, non-Irish nationals account for 27% of the population of the town, an increase of 5% from Census 2016. In this regard, service provision and community facilities in these areas should reflect the varying needs of the community.

8.8 Policies

| Planning and Development Policies | |
|--|---|
| It is the policy of the Council to: | |
| HP1 | <i>Ensure that sufficient zoned land is available at appropriate locations to cater for the envisaged population growth of the Core Strategy</i> |
| HP2 | <i>Require all new residential developments to be consistent with the Core Strategy of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 and the settlement strategy of this plan</i> |
| HP3 | <i>Promote and encourage the development of the critical mass of Portlaoise and to enhance its strategic location on the National and Regional road and rail network</i> |
| HP4 | <i>Facilitate the provision of housing in a range of locations to meet the needs of the population, with particular emphasis on facilitating access to housing to suit different household and tenure needs, in a sustainable manner</i> |
| HP5 | <p>To require the creation of sustainable, mixed and balanced communities and high-quality residential developments at appropriate locations with adequate amenities and facilities that meet the standards and guidance of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities, DEHG (2024) - Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments, Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2023) - Urban Development and Building Height Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DHPLG, 2018) - The Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets, DTTS and DECLG (2013) - The development management standards of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 |

8.9 Objectives

| Planning and Development Objectives | |
|---|--|
| It is the objective of the Council to: | |
| H 01 | <i>To ensure compliance with the provisions of Part V of the Act (as amended) and to integrate such housing so as to prevent social segregation within residential developments</i> |
| H 02 | <i>To utilise the provisions of the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 (Vacant Site Levy) to facilitate the appropriate development of vacant sites (residential zoned lands) that are in need of renewal or regeneration</i> |
| H 03 | <i>To encourage the sequential development of sustainable serviced residentially zoned lands in a sustainable manner subject to compliance with relevant Department Guidelines and Development Management Standards of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027</i> |
| H 04 | <i>To promote a higher density at appropriate locations, particularly close to the town centre and public transport facilities</i> |
| H 05 | <i>To encourage appropriate housing development on infill and brownfield sites subject to preservation of existing residential amenity, the provision of a high quality design respecting the established character, density and layout, compliance with all traffic safety, quantitative and qualitative standards of the Laois County Development Plan 2021 – 2027</i> |
| H 06 | <i>To promote the efficient use of vacant brownfield lands such as the Convent, Parish lands and Centrepoint</i> |
| H 07 | <i>To promote the reoccupation of vacant residential stock within Portlaoise Town Centre, including ‘Living Above the Shop’ units</i> |
| H 08 | <i>To increase the residential population of Portlaoise Town Centre in accordance with the objectives of the Public Realm Strategy</i> |
| H 09 | <i>To ensure an appropriate and sustainable mix of dwelling types, sizes and tenures to cater for all members of society, including homeless persons, the elderly, disabled and travellers</i> |

| Planning and Development Objectives | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| H O10 | <i>To ensure provision of lifetime adaptable homes that can accommodate the changing needs of a household over time</i> |
| H O11 | <i>To identify, acquire and provide suitable sites, accommodation and facilities for the housing and resettlement of travelling families</i> |
| H O12 | <i>To secure the provision of social infrastructure, community and recreational facilities in tandem with residential development</i> |

SECTION 9. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Strategic Aim: *To promote, facilitate and enable economic development and employment generation activities in appropriate locations and in a sustainable manner, to meet the needs of the local workforce and reduce excessive commuting.*

9.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the economic development of Portlaoise including developing a broader base of employment opportunities, inward investment, local entrepreneurship and town centre management. A sound local economy is fundamental to fostering sustainable communities and a good quality of life. This LAP seeks to create the conditions to support the sustainable economic development of Portlaoise during the Plan period 2024-2030 in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders.

Portlaoise is an expanding vibrant town with a skilled workforce and the required infrastructure to promote inward investment and the creation of more local employment. Laois County Council is committed to facilitating the creation of employment within the town and this plan provides the appropriate framework for development through the provision of adequately zoned lands and policies which support economic development. The zoning objectives for each of the land-use zones provide agility to respond to the demands from those looking to invest in Portlaoise. This plan sets the right conditions to secure inward investment and interest in Portlaoise as a business location and firmly embeds an economic development agenda into all other goals making their successful delivery more achievable.

Portlaoise is identified as the driver for economic development for the County, reflecting its designation as a **Key Town** and position at the top of the County Retail Hierarchy.

The Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 sets out the strategic context for economic development of the County as informed by the Laois Local Economic and Community Plan 2023-2028 which should be read in tandem with this chapter. The Local Enterprise Office and Laois Partnership Company seek to create job opportunities and support the Councils business and enterprise functions. They interact with a wide range of stakeholders to support employment opportunities including various government departments, the IDA, Enterprise Ireland, local and regional development agencies, existing and prospective businesses.



Figure 6.3. The Economic Strategy

Figure 9.1 illustrates the Economic Strategy of the RSES which has the five key principles including Smart Specialisation, Clustering, Orderly Growth, Placemaking and Future Proof and Risk Management (Fig 6.3).

The ‘Guiding Principles to Identify Locations for Strategic Employment Development’ are set out in Section 6.3 of the RSES (Figure 9.1 above) and these are:

- Planning to accommodate strategic employment growth at regional, metropolitan and local level should include consideration of:
- Location of Technology and Innovation Poles - Institutes of Technology (IoTs) and Universities, as key strategic sites for high-potential growth of economic activity.
- Current employment location, density of workers, land-take and resource/infrastructure dependency, including town centres, business parks, industrial estates and significant single enterprises.
- Locations for expansion of existing enterprises.
- Locations for new enterprises, based on the extent to which they are people intensive (i.e. employees/customers), space extensive (i.e. land), tied to resources, dependent on the availability of different types of infrastructure (e.g. telecoms, power, water, roads, airport, port etc.) or dependent on skills availability.
- Locations for potential relocation of enterprises that may be better suited to alternative locations and where such a move, if facilitated, would release urban land for more efficient purposes that would be of benefit to the regeneration and development of the urban area as a whole, particularly in metropolitan areas and large towns.
- Within large urban areas where significant job location can be catered for through infrastructure servicing and proximity to public transport corridors
- Having regard to the above, strategic employment sites identified in the study area include Clonminam and National Enterprise Park Togher, IDA Business Park on Mountrath Road as well as the hospitals and prisons on Dublin Road and the council offices and Dept. of Agriculture offices in the town centre.

9.2 Current Profile

According to Census 2022 the total labour force in Portlaoise is 11,137, an increase of 3.7% [401] from Census 2016 when it was 10,736. This represents approximately 26% of the county labour force of 43,106 persons.

The majority of the working population are employed in professional services [2,533], commerce and trade [2,302] and public administration [831] with the Irish Prison Service, Health Service Executive, Department of Agriculture, hospitals and the County Council being the largest employers. The Census indicates that the majority have professional, skilled trades and elementary occupations.

By contrast, employment levels in manufacturing industry [840] have been and are still relatively low though this situation has been improving somewhat in recent years with the opening of a number of

high-profile plants such as Glanbia Cheese EU, Greenfield Global and Limerick Brakes and others scheduled to open in the near future.

Employment levels in the Portlaoise labour force are broadly similar to the rest of the State, with 52% of residents in employment, compared to 54% nationally.

However, the proportion of the labour force either unemployed or seeking their first regular job is 15% which is significantly higher than the national rate of 8% and the county rate of 9%. This is linked to the ongoing decline of traditional local employment providers such as Bord na Mona.

The majority of workers commute to work by car (5,686 persons) and have a commute of under 15 minutes (4,908 persons), while 2,030 workers have a commute of at least 1 hour. Conversely, the numbers walking [750] or cycling [166] to work or using public transport [494] are much smaller.

The fostering of key services, community infrastructure and improvements to the public realm of the town centre will facilitate the attraction of employment generating activities to the town. In addition, Portlaoise's excellent road and rail links and proximity to the Greater Dublin Area is of major benefit in attracting economic development to the town.

9.3 National Enterprise Park Togher

Against this backdrop, Laois County Council has invested in and developed the National Enterprise Park at Junction 17, Portlaoise on an extensive landbank at **Togher** in the south-western outskirts of the town, to accommodate high-end enterprise, employment and industrial uses.



Plate 9: Cheese Processing Plant at National Enterprise Park Togher

The National Enterprise Park represents a massive opportunity, crucial to the well-being and prosperity of not only Portlaoise and County Laois but the entire Midland Region.

The Council prepared an updated Masterplan for the Togher landbank in 2017 that provided a framework for the most effective presentation in terms of layout and design, land management and traffic modelling associated with the site.

The purpose of the master plan is to ensure the integrated and coordinated development of the Togher and Clonminam areas for appropriate uses as indicated in this LAP and to maximise the beneficial return of public investment in the national transportation network by protecting the carrying capacity of such routes in the interest of public safety.

The vision for the masterplan is to deliver a viable economic zone, as a National Enterprise Park, focused in particular on heavy, light and ICT industry, trade warehousing, distribution, freight, logistics and other uses associated with the transport industry. This has the potential to be a major boost to the economy of Portlaoise and to contribute to the growth of the County and the Region as a whole.

The Masterplan has been designed to accommodate and attract a range of potential business and industries to the candidate sites while meeting the needs of existing employers to expand their business.

The Masterplan envisages the creation of a sustainable movement strategy for the National Enterprise Park Togher, facilitating links to Portlaoise Town and its existing residential neighbourhoods through softer modes of travel. In tandem with this vision, the masterplan is cognisant of the high importance of the M7 and strives towards minimizing impacts on the national road network.

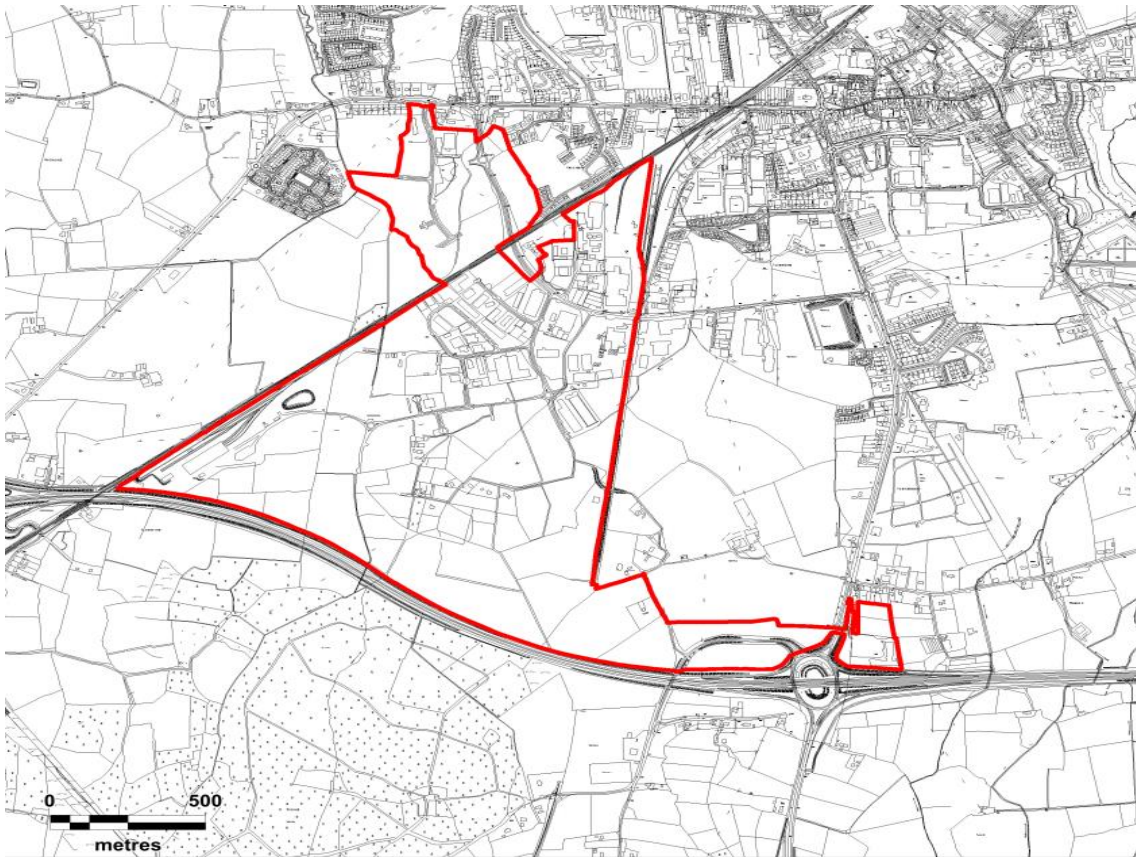


Figure 9.2: National Enterprise Park Masterplan

The masterplan aims to achieve the following goals and objectives, which are designed first and foremost to deliver the vision for the articulation of the lands as a National Enterprise Park.

- *To secure the town’s role as the regional location for economic growth in the Midlands Area;*
- *To contribute to the prosperity of Portlaoise by facilitating the provision of adequate land for enterprise, including sites at suitable locations for industrial, enterprise, commercial and where appropriate small business uses having regard to spatial planning, infrastructural, environmental and transportation requirements and compatibility with adjoining land uses;*
- *To maximise the beneficial return of public investment in the National road network by protecting the safety, carrying capacity and efficiency of such routes;*

- *To support and protect the existing economic base and seek to diversify the economy through inward investments at key growth areas within the town and the environs;*
- *To support the provision of complementary facilities and land uses to support the sustainable development potential of the J17 National Enterprise Park;*
- *To promote developments of high-quality that incorporates a sensitive approach to design while protecting and enhancing the surroundings;*
- *To ensure that the area is developed in an orderly and sustainable manner;*
- *To promote energy efficient and sustainable development patterns, land uses and buildings that incorporate LEED standards;*
- *To facilitate potential synergies in terms of energy, materials and logistics between the present and future uses in the area with a long-term aspiration to become an Eco Enterprise Park;*
- *To seek an integrated transport approach linked to land use objectives which encourages a reduction in the need for travel, tackling traffic congestion and promoting public transport, cycling, walking as alternative means of travel to the use of car;*
- *To provide for and promote multi-modal transportation for the delivery of goods, services and overall access to the area; and*
- *To provide a positive gateway into the National Enterprise Park and Portlaoise.*

Finally, the Masterplan is structured to provide direction and a framework for future development patterns in each area but also flexible enough to allow Laois County Council to respond to changing market conditions and developer interest.

9.4 Midland Connected Hubs

Midlands hubs is a network of remote working, co-working, incubation hubs and enterprise centres located throughout the Midlands region. *In Portlaoise the following spaces offer various working options and also options for educational pursuits.*

Remote Working Opportunities in Portlaoise



The Cube

Under Call 3 of the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) Laois County Council developed a Low Carbon Centre of Excellence based in Portlaoise. The Cube is a multi-point incubation hub which will develop as a Low Carbon Centre of Excellence, assisting in attracting and developing companies with a low carbon focus. The CUBE operates as a catalyst in supporting the adaptation and development of industry to meet the targets under “Climate Action 2040”. It encourages business and industry in the region to analyse their operations in a manner that will increase efficiency and ultimately lead to carbon neutrality.



Portlaoise Enterprise Centre

Established in 2007 and located in Clonminam Business Park, the Portlaoise Enterprise Centre supports start-up and growing businesses in Laois and operates with a community-focus in the not-for-profit sector.

The centre offers five designated desks, 16 office spaces, five light industrial units, and three meeting/training rooms. The designated desks are ideal for people who have started a business from home and are looking to make the next step.


| | |
|---|---|
|  | <p><i>Vision 85 Portlaoise</i></p> <p>Vision 85 is an independently owned Business and Co-Networking Hub Located in Clonminam Business Park, Portlaoise. It provides pod, office, training and podcast room hire and encourages a community of collaboration through its ethos of Create/Network/Grow.</p> |
|---|---|

Table 8: Remote Working Opportunities in Portlaoise

9.5 Tourism

The County is not widely thought of as a tourist destination for Irish or foreign tourists, due to a lack of developed tourist attractions along with a largely rural population base.

However, Portlaoise possesses a number of potential development opportunities. The town’s strategic location, excellent road and rail availability and proximity to major centres of population like Dublin, offer the potential for the development of a niche market promoting conferences and events. The Heritage Hotel, Killeshin Hotel and the Maldrón Hotel offer greater facilities for conferences and will ensure that Portlaoise can function as a conference/event centre in its own right.

There is also significant potential to develop Portlaoise as a base to visit tourist attractions in the County such as the Slieve Blooms, Rock of Dunamais and Emo Court.

The Dunamais Theatre and Centre for the Arts together with Laois School of Music and Outdoor events centre has an extensive programme showing the very best of contemporary and traditional theatre, music and dance.

9.6 Cultural Quarter

In cultural terms, Portlaoise is fast establishing a reputation as a centre for the Arts and has developed the Cultural Quarter in the historic core of the town.

Projects in the pipeline to develop the potential of Portlaoise as a tourism destination include the creation of a Heritage Visitor experience connected with the Rock of Dunamiase and an Outdoor performance space , both located in the Cultural Quarter, Portlaoise.



Figure 9.3: Portlaoise Cultural Quarter

Portlaoise retains a series of buildings related to the Town’s 16th century foundation. These include the Fort Protector, a military fort built in 1548 as part of the conquest of the area, the Old St Peter’s Church; the ‘Store House’ embedded in the later Presentation convent, the River Triogue and the Ridge Burial Ground.



Plate 10: St Peters Graveyard, within Portlaoise Cultural Quarter

These early ‘foundation sites’ influenced the development of the historic town which grew around them, with Portlaoise finding its current form in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The historic centre is a designated Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) and comprises:

- The foundation sites in the north of the Town Centre (above), around which a Catholic ecclesiastical quarter developed in the 19th century;
- Main Street, which began as a market place at the Lower Square, later extending to the east and to the west;
- Market Square at the western end of Main Street, with Cote Street, Grattan Street and later the Abbeyleix Road emanating outwards;
- Historic lanes extending south from Main Street, likely marking entrances to the early Town and now connecting to the modern area around James Fintan Lalor Avenue;
- The Ridge Burial Ground and the converging roads from Dublin and Stradbally, now dominated by the church of SS Peter and Paul.

The cultural heritage embodied in the ACA is a significant resource for the Town. The varied streetscape, punctuated by imposing buildings creates a distinctive architectural character.



Plate 11: Redeveloped Fitzmaurice Plaza in Portlaoise Cultural Quarter

9.7 Policies

| Planning and Development Policies | |
|--|---|
| It is the policy of the Council to: | |
| ED P1 | <i>Support strategic enterprise and employment opportunities at other appropriate locations in Portlaoise and environs, having regard to proper planning and sustainable development and relevant development control standards</i> |
| ED P2 | <i>Facilitate the continuity of and encourage the expansion of established enterprises and to promote start-up enterprises, having regard to the protection of the amenity value of neighbouring properties</i> |
| ED P3 | <i>Co-operate with IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, the Local Enterprise Office and other agencies, organisations and individuals in promoting enterprise in Portlaoise;</i> |
| ED P4 | <i>Support the further development of broadband in Portlaoise and to facilitate the development of Portlaoise as an E-Commerce centre</i> |
| ED P5 | <i>Encourage, in co-operation with the Local Enterprise Office and Laois Partnership, the development of further small to medium scale industries and services</i> |
| ED P6 | <i>Create an integrated and sustainable public and private transport system to move people and goods efficiently within and through Portlaoise</i> |
| ED P7 | <i>Develop high quality business infrastructure</i> |
| ED P8 | <i>Support the consolidation and expansion of the Cultural Quarter</i> |

9.8 Objectives

| Planning and Development Objectives | |
|---|--|
| It is the objective of the Council to: | |
| ED 01 | <i>Facilitate the future sustainable development of Portlaoise so as to optimise the benefits of its location, in accordance with the National Planning Framework and the Eastern and Midland Region Spatial and Economic Strategy</i> |
| ED 02 | <i>Promote balanced and sustainable economic development and employment, ensuring that a diverse range of economic sectors are developed and supported</i> |
| ED 03 | <i>Promote employment opportunities by facilitating development on appropriately zoned lands</i> |
| ED 04 | <i>Facilitate the provision and expansion of all services and infrastructure which would contribute positively to the attraction of the town to economic development</i> |
| ED 05 | <i>Develop Junction 17 National Enterprise Park (Togher) and Improve the existing built environment of the Togher/Clonminam Area; in line with the J17 National Enterprise Park Master Masterplan in Appendix B of this LAP</i> |
| ED 06 | <i>Facilitate the improvement and expansion of established enterprises and industries</i> |
| ED 07 | <i>Promote the use of the Connected Midland Hubs located in Portlaoise</i> |
| ED 08 | <i>Facilitate and promote the provision of incubator units for start up businesses and SMEs</i> |
| ED 09 | <i>Provide opportunities for an IT Ecosystem centred on the SIRO high speed broadband capacity</i> |
| ED 010 | <i>Accommodate small employment generating activities at first floor level and vacant ground floor commercial premises on the Main Street</i> |
| ED 011 | <i>Support the continued operation and reasonable expansion of non-conforming uses subject to maintenance of existing environmental, visual and residential amenity</i> |
| ED 012 | <i>Identify opportunities to improve the tourism product in cooperation with relevant statutory agencies, private providers and community groups</i> |
| ED 013 | <i>Facilitate the provision of standardized tourism signage and interpretation facilities for tourist attractions</i> |

| Planning and Development Objectives | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| ED 014 | <i>Promote Portlaoise as a tourist destination</i> |
| ED 015 | <i>Facilitate the development of a tourist centre in the Cultural quarter, reusing the Hapenny School</i> |

SECTION 10. INFRASTRUCTURE & ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Strategic Aim: *To enable development take place in line with the capacity of supporting infrastructure and to require the timely provision of infrastructure needed for the planned sustainable development of lands.*

Over the lifetime of this LAP, there will be continued investment in a sustainable network of physical strategic infrastructure and utilities to support sustainable socio-economic growth, and to protect the quality of the environment of Portlaoise. This will be achieved through the identification of required infrastructure in collaboration with infrastructure providers, and continued investment in the right locations, and at the right time.

The provision of high-quality infrastructure networks and environmental services is fundamental to ensuring the long-term physical, environmental, social and economic development of the town.

10.1 Uisce Eireann

Uisce Eireann is responsible for the provision and operation of public water and wastewater services across the country. Laois County Council delivers water services in accordance with a Service Level Agreement. The Water Services Strategic Plan (WSSP) was published in 2015 by the then Irish Water, which sets out strategic objectives for the delivery of water services over a 25 year period and a context for investment and implementation plans.

Uisce Eireann and Laois County Council will work jointly to identify the water services required to support planned development in line with national and regional planning policies for inclusion in the Uisce Eireann Capital Investment Plans.



Plate 12: Uisce Eireann Treatment Plant at Ridge Road

Sequential development in areas with existing water services infrastructure and spare capacity is encouraged. In assessing the infrastructure requirements to service a large area of land, it is preferable to have an overall development masterplan including phases of development and timelines so that an overall strategic water services plan for the lands can be developed.

An infrastructural assessment was carried out as part of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 process in assessing the appropriateness of zoning lands within Portlaoise and the capacity of infrastructure to service them.

Within the settlement of Portlaoise 6,912 households are connected to the public mains water supply and 6,887 households are connected to the public sewer system.

10.2 Water Supply & Network

According to Uisce Eireann, there is limited headroom available at present, infrastructure upgrades are being progressed at present, these will facilitate additional growth. Further upgrades may be required to accommodate the full projected growth indicated in the County Development Plan.

10.3 Wastewater Collection & Treatment

There is sufficient capacity at Portlaoise's wastewater treatment plant to provide for growth in line with the County Development Plan population targets.

The sewer network is constrained in areas and a Drainage Area Plan has been completed for Portlaoise, identifying risks and needs across the agglomeration relating to hydraulic, environmental, structural, operational and growth constraints. While hydraulic constraints exist in some areas of the network, it is envisaged that capacity is available to cater for the population targets within the lifetime of the plan, provided growth is planned in areas of the network where capacity is available. Local network upgrades may need to be delivered in some areas to provide capacity to individual sites, these can be customer driven/funded in accordance with the requirements of the Connections Charging Policy.

Uisce Eireann is currently progressing a project to upgrade the Borris Road pumping station and gravity sewers in the network leading up to it. This upgrade will deliver an additional 1400 PE capacity and will serve the areas to the East of the Pumping Station and the Kilminchy area.

Adequate storm water drainage and retention facilities are necessary to accommodate surface water run-off from existing and proposed developments. Sustainable Drainage Systems can contribute to surface water retention and a reduction in the potential for flooding by acting as natural drainage.

10.4 Surface Water Drainage & Green-Blue Infrastructure

Uisce Eireann encourages the inclusion of policies and objectives on the use of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems and Green-Blue Infrastructure in new developments including the public realm and retrofitted in existing developed areas, in line with NPO 57 of the National Planning Framework and the guiding principles for Sustainable Drainage Systems as set out in Section 10.2 of the RSES and 'Nature Based Management of Urban Rainwater and Urban Surface Water Discharges – A National Strategy' by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, May 2024.



Plate 13: SUDs in Kilminchy

These measures can provide a cost effective and sustainable means of managing stormwater and water pollution at source, keeping surface water out of combined sewers (thus increasing capacity for foul drainage from new developments), while providing multiple benefits for example, improved air quality, amenity and noise reduction.

In order to maximise the capacity of existing collection systems for foul water, the discharge of additional surface water to combined (foul and surface water) sewers is not permitted. The removal of stormwater from combined sewers as part of roads, public realm, residential or other developments is strongly encouraged; this is particularly relevant to the achievement of compact growth objectives.

In addition, and to support sustainable use of the available hydraulic capacity in Combined Sewers, Uisce Eireann welcomes the proposal in the recent County Development Plan to promote SUDs and in particular promotion of Nature based SUDs (NbSUDs).

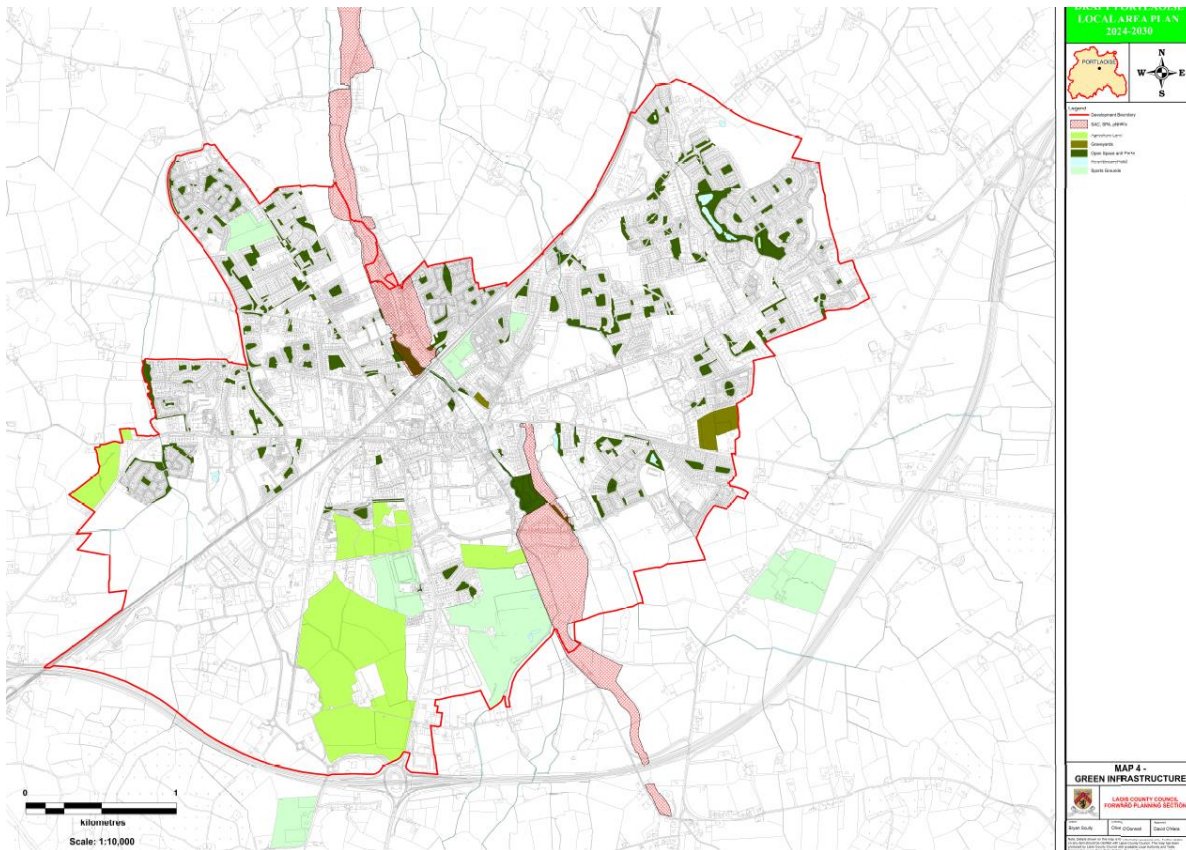


Figure 10.1. Existing Green Infrastructure in Portlaoise.

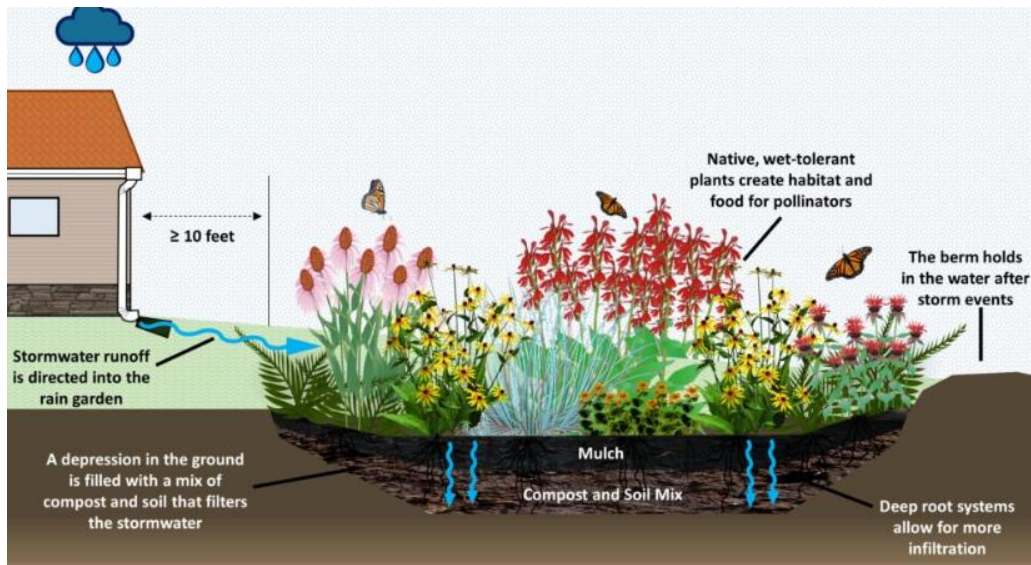


Figure 10.2: Urban rainwater garden

10.5 Electricity, Gas, Broadband & Renewables

Portlaoise is served by a high-capacity electricity system and gas network.

EU Directive 2009/29/EC on the Promotion of Renewable Energy Sources establishes a binding target of 20% of overall EU energy production from renewable resources by 2020, as well as a binding 10% minimum target for energy from renewable resources to account for 16% of total energy consumption by 2020. In line with these commitments, Ireland's target for electricity from renewable energy sources is 40% by 2020. Low carbon technologies present an economic opportunity and green technology development is emerging as a major field of innovation and growth. The Council recognize the importance of developing renewable energy resources in the interest of delivering the National Climate Change Adaptation Framework.

10.6 Broadband

Within the settlement 5,615 households have broadband internet services. The high-speed broadband network upgrade is being implemented by SIRO, which will give significant economic and social advantage to Portlaoise as a place to set up internet-based businesses.

10.7 WIFI in Public Spaces

Launched in 2022, free public Wifi is now available in parts of Portlaoise Town centre following the launch of a new European initiative which promotes free connectivity within public spaces. The project is funded through the EU, to promote access to Wifi connectivity in public spaces in municipalities throughout Europe, with matching funding provided by the Department of Rural and Community Development for Wifi installation. Free WIFI is designed to enhance the public realm in the town and encourage more people to visit and do business into the town centre.

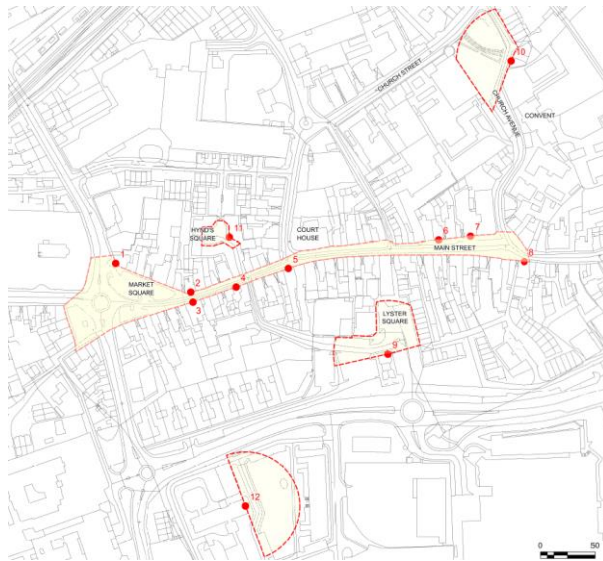


Figure 10.3: WiFi locations in Portlaoise

10.8 Policies

| Planning and Development Policies | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| It is the policy of the Council to: | |
| KI P1 | <i>Protect both ground and surface water resources and to work with Uisce Eireann to develop and implement Water Safety Plans to protect sources of public water supply and a their contributing catchment</i> |
| KI P2 | <i>Work with Uisce Eireann on developing and upgrading the water supply schemes so as to ensure an adequate, resilient, sustainable and economic supply of piped water</i> |
| KI P3 | <i>Work with Uisce Eireann on upgrading the wastewater treatment plant in line with the projected future growth of the settlement of Portlaoise</i> |
| KI P 4 | <i>Promote and support the implementation of Uisce Eireann’s Eastern and Midlands Region Water Supply Project</i> |

| Planning and Development Policies | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| KI P5 | <i>Assess all applications in the context of available and sufficient public infrastructural facilities, the protection of Surface Water and Groundwater Resources</i> |
| KI P6 | <i>Promote public awareness and involvement in water conservation measures by households, businesses and industries and supports the implementation of Energy Efficiency solutions in Water and Wastewater System</i> |
| KI P7 | <i>Promote and encourage the harvesting of rainwater to meet non-potable water needs</i> |
| KI P8 | <i>Co-operate with and facilitate the work of national telecommunications, broadband, electricity and gas network providers in the improvement, expansion and provision of energy and communication infrastructure subject to proper planning and sustainable development</i> |
| KI P9 | <i>Encourage the integration of 'soft' measures including SuDs, green space, Green Infrastructure and permeable surfaces in the design of drainage and sustainable water management of existing and future developments</i> |
| KI P10 | <i>Require the use of SuDS in public and private developments in urban areas, both within developments and within the public realm to minimise and limit the extent of hard surfacing and paving and require the use of sustainable drainage techniques for new development or for extensions to existing developments, in order to reduce the potential impact of existing and predicted flooding risks</i> |
| KI P11 | <i>Enhance biodiversity and amenity and ensure the protection of environmentally sensitive sites and habitats, including where flood risk management measures are planned</i> |
| Ki P12 | <i>encourage the use of Green Roofs where expansive roofs are proposed such as industrial, apartment, civic, commercial, leisure and educational buildings, and non-porous surfacing to create safe places</i> |

10.9 Objectives

| Planning and Development Objectives | |
|---|--|
| It is the objective of the Council to: | |
| KI 01 | <i>Facilitate economic and social development through the provision of infrastructure and optimise the return of infrastructure investment</i> |
| KI 02 | <i>Promote and encourage the development of the critical mass of Portlaoise and to enhance its strategic location on the National and Regional road and rail network</i> |
| KI 03 | <i>Phase growth in line with the capacity of supporting infrastructure</i> |
| KI 04 | <i>Facilitate Uisce Eireann in the maintenance, expansion and upgrading of wastewater disposal and water supply infrastructure</i> |
| KI 05 | <i>Ensure a good quality of life, through maintaining and improving wastewater treatment and water supplies and to minimise the adverse impacts of development on the environment, through policies for the management of wastes and emissions</i> |
| KI 06 | <i>Seek compliance with the standards and requirements of Uisce Eireann in relation to water and wastewater infrastructure</i> |
| KI 07 | <i>Protect both ground and surface water resources and to work with Uisce Eireann to develop and implement Water Safety Plans to protect sources of public water supply and their contributing catchments</i> |
| KI 08 | <i>Require all new developments to include proposals for Sustainable Drainage Systems</i> |
| KI 09 | <i>Maintain, improve and enhance the environmental and ecological quality of surface waters and groundwater in accordance with the National River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2021 (DHPLG) and associated Programme of Measures</i> |
| KI 010 | <i>Ensure developments will not adversely impact on the status of waterbodies in accordance with the Water Framework Directive and National River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2021 (DHPLG)</i> |
| KI 011 | <i>Facilitate, promote and encourage the expansion and improvement of telecommunications, broadband, electricity and gas networks infrastructure subject to proper planning and sustainable development</i> |

SECTION 11. TRANSPORT AND MOVEMENT

Strategic Aim: *To enable a modal shift change in transport modes, with greater numbers of residents, workers and visitors utilising active travel such as walking and cycling and public transport, more sustainable transport patterns.*

11.1 Introduction

Portlaoise is centrally located in the Midlands of Ireland and in close proximity to the Greater Dublin Area. It has strategic road links to the entire country via the M7 and M8 motorways, the N77, N78 and N80 National Secondary Roads and a network of regional and local roads. The town is also located on the railway line connecting the south and west to Dublin. National and local bus routes also provide services in the town. Portlaoise is therefore readily accessible to the Greater Dublin Area, Dublin City, the M50, national airports and ports. The accessibility of the town provides key advantages for the attraction of economic and residential development.

The Council will continue to provide for all components of the transportation system which are within its own remit and will encourage and facilitate the development of those other elements provided by external agencies, such as the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII). In addition, the strategy and objectives of this plan are required to be consistent with the transport strategy of the NTA.

The improvement of transport infrastructure in the town is a key element of sustainable development and achieving a low carbon economy. At present traffic congestion is an issue which needs to be addressed. Vehicles dominate many of Portlaoise's streets and largely unrestricted vehicle movement is detrimental to a vibrant and livable environment. This impacts negatively on the quality and type of activities that can be accommodated in the town centre and the attractiveness to and safety of pedestrians and cyclists.

11.2 Transport Modes

As indicated in Census 2022, private car transport is the predominant mode of travel to work [57%] and school [49%] in Portlaoise. By contrast walking and cycling rates are far lower.

The key to getting people out of their cars and into public transport is to have a reliable, convenient, frequent and fast public transport service available and opportunities for pedestrian and cycle linkages, that bring people to the places they want to go.

While Laois County Council is not itself a public transport provider and cannot force providers to deliver services in any particular area, this plan can put in place the necessary policy framework to encourage and facilitate the improvement of public transport. Limiting and/or removing vehicles at certain locations would benefit the public realm in terms of air quality and noise and make the town centre a more attractive place to work, live and visit.

In addition, there is an identified need for upgrades and new vehicular, pedestrian and cycle connections to improve accessibility to existing residential estates, the town centre and educational facilities.

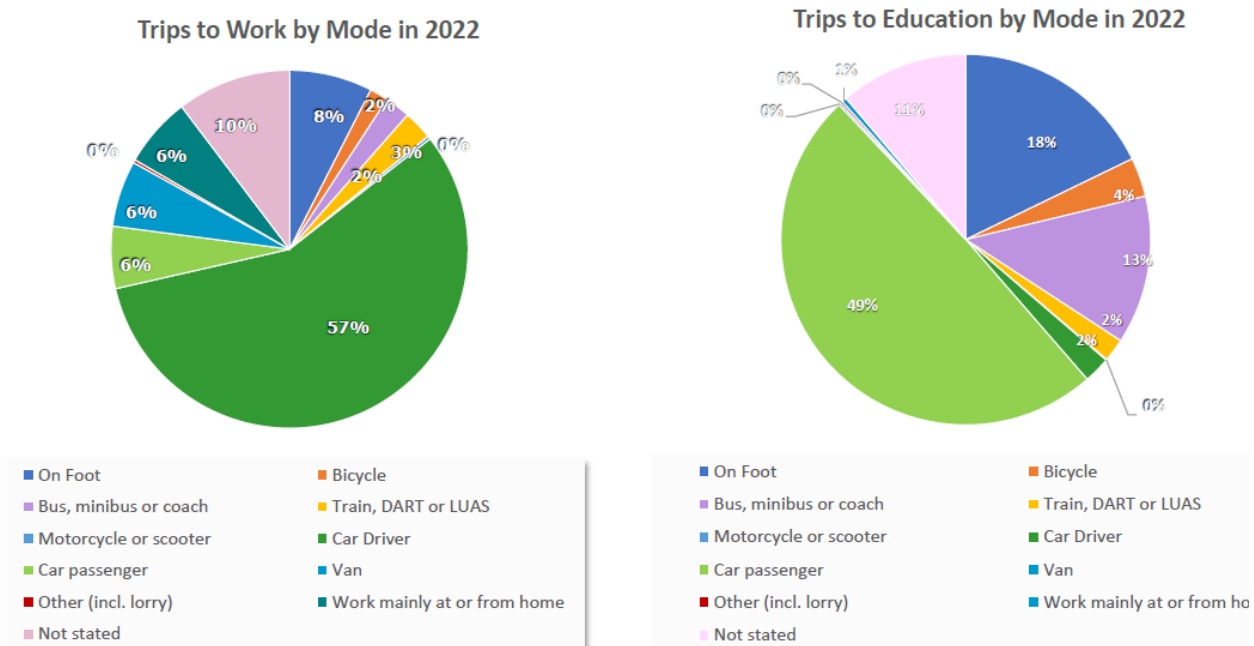


Figure 11.1: Commuting by means of travel to work, school or college (CSO 2022)

11.3 Smarter Travel

In order to achieve more sustainable travel patterns, a significant focus on reducing car dependency and increasing the permeability of the town is required. The benefits of reducing reliance on the car and improving the permeability of towns for cyclists and walkers, can be summarised as follows:

- Reduced dependency on fossil fuels, pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions;
- Increased levels of exercise with consequent health and fitness benefits;
- Builds social capital in neighbourhoods through increased social interaction;
- Higher numbers of pedestrians and cyclists increase levels of passive supervision making places safer;
- Reduced congestion on roads makes public transport more viable and
- Reduced expenditure leakage to larger towns benefits local businesses.

A key aim of this LAP is therefore to promote compact, connected neighbourhoods based on street patterns and forms of development that will make walking and cycling, especially for local trips, more attractive in line with national policy such as [a] *the National Sustainable Mobility Policy (DoT, 2022)*, which sets a strategic framework for public transport and active travel to 2030, [b] *the National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland [DoT, 2021]* which includes the road user modal hierarchy in Ireland as: 1. Active Travel (Walking & Cycling); 2. Public Transport; 3. Private Vehicles and the intervention hierarchy which is: 1. Maintain; 2. Optimise; 3. Improve; 4. New, [c] *'Smarter Travel, A Sustainable Transport Future'* (2009) and [d] *"Ireland's First National Cycle Policy Framework"* (2009) which promote sustainable travel movements and encourage people to find alternative ways to travel reducing car dependency.

11.4 Bus Services

Portlaoise is relatively well served by regional buses yet lacks a dedicated town bus service. Most bus services calling at Portlaoise are private services licensed by the National Transport Authority that connect Portlaoise to other environs. There is neither a central point for transfer between services in Portlaoise, nor transparent information around the services provided and the potential connections available due to the decentralised nature of publicly operated bus services.

The most frequent inter-urban service is Route 726, served by Big Green Bus, to the Red Cow Luas stop and Dublin Airport. It makes 24 trips daily on an hourly schedule.

After the 726 Bus, no. 830 is the next most frequent service. Operated by Slieve Bloom Coach Tours, it makes 7 trips from Portlaoise to Tullamore per day Monday to Friday (5 trips on Saturday) and 5 trips from Tullamore to Portlaoise from Monday to Saturday.

Route 73 is a Public Service Obligation funded route operated by Bus Eireann between Waterford and Athlone via Portlaoise that runs once or twice a day (depending on the day of the week).

Local Link Services provide connectivity 7 days a week from Portlaoise to Birr, Roscrea, and Thurles. Additional destinations, including Athlone TUS, Tullamore LOETB and Mount Lucas Training Centre, are

served by Demand Responsive Transit routes (DRT) that offer less frequent service based on demand (see Figure 2-6).

The first Local Link service often runs around 7am, the last is often around 8pm or 10pm, making it difficult for people with early morning or late evening travel needs to use the bus service to reach their destinations.

11.5 Rail Services

Portlaoise Railway Station is strategically located 350m north of the town centre. It is the busiest county town railway station in the Midlands Region with up to 36 trains to Dublin and 38 trains from Dublin per day. The number of trains stopping daily was recently increased in December 2023. Weekday morning service begins at 5.33am for trains to Dublin and 7.40am for trains to Cork and Limerick. The last train weekday departs at 9.40pm for Cork and 10.30pm for Dublin.

For both the bus and rail networks, the deficits in the pedestrian and cycling facilities within Portlaoise diminish the useability of the inter-urban bus services and high-frequency rail services from Portlaoise. The lack of first and last mile active travel connections makes it difficult for people to access public transport, decreasing the attractiveness of public transport.

11.6 Permeability

In accordance with the “**Permeability** Best Practice Guide” (NTA, 2015), the key principles for maintaining and providing permeability within the plan area for the lifetime of the plan are as follows:

- Origins and destinations, such as schools and shops, should be linked in the most direct manner possible for pedestrians and cyclists,
- Greater priority should be given to pedestrians and cyclists,
- The physical design of links should be fit for purpose in terms of capacity and security and
- Junctions in urban and suburban areas should cater for pedestrians and cyclists safely and conveniently.



Plate 14: Pedestrian access (1) Bridle Walk, Kilminchy, (2) Peoples Park (3) Goldencroft, Tower Hill

In delivering the objectives of Portlaoise 2040, a vehicle movement strategy was indicated as an important enabling mechanism of the Public Realm Strategy. The aim of this strategy is to reduce traffic in the town core, where possible, create a safe environment and serve pedestrian desire lines to and from key nodes, particularly the historic town centre, the shopping area at Kylekiproe, as well as open and civic spaces. Consideration has been given to the removal of on-street parking and the appropriateness of one-way systems to provide the safest possible environment for all users.

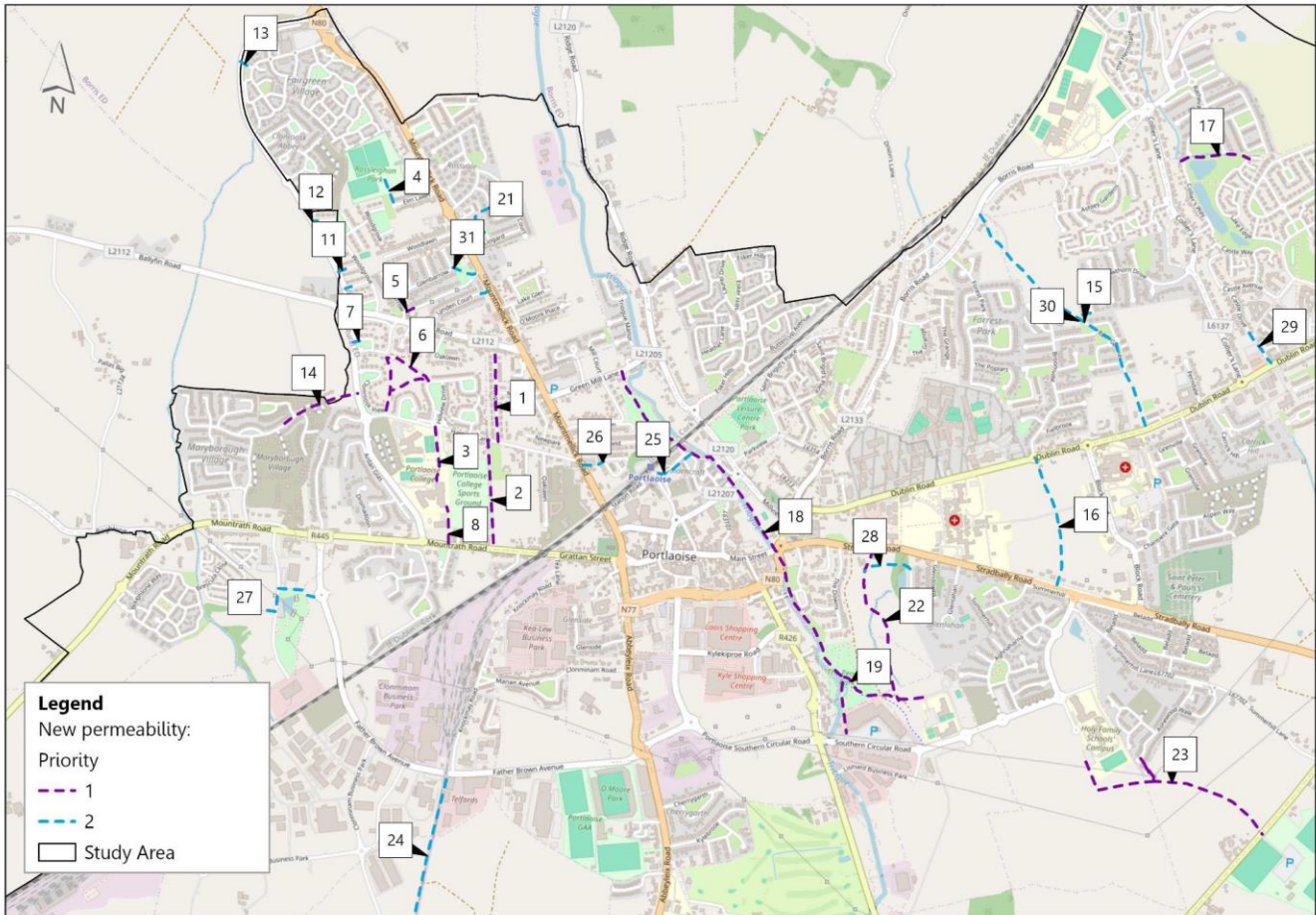


Figure 11.2: Possibilities for new / upgraded permeability connections (to be read in conjunction with Table 13-1 of the LTP)

11.7 Active Travel

Figure 11.2: Possibilities for new / upgraded permeability connections (to be read in conjunction with Table 13-1 of the LTP)

Active travel, i.e. walking, wheeling, cycling or scooting, is the most sustainable form of mobility, and can benefit both individuals and society in many different ways.

Land use planning and the design of the built environment are key determinants in someone choosing to cycle, walk or scoot. Where in the past car ownership propelled streets to be designed in a manner that prioritised the movement of cars, recent years have shown a willingness to re-examine the role our streets play as places that support cycling, scooting and walking.

Government investment in Active Travel has increased significantly in recent years, reflecting commitments made to move away from the private car towards more sustainable travel modes, as summarised in the National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland (NIFTI), the Climate Action Plan 2023 and the National Sustainable Mobility Policy.

This Local Transport Plan aims to prioritise active travel modes in Portlaoise. Continued investment in active travel modes will be guided by the speed at which they can be achieved, in accordance with prevailing government guidance.

The following are Measures by mode in line with the DMURS User Hierarchy. Recommendations are out for walking, cycling and permeability, followed by Public Transport (bus and rail), the Roads Network, Parking Management, and Supporting Measures.

[This should be read in conjunction with the Local Transport Plan].

MEASURE AT 1: LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL ACTIVE TRAVEL PROGRAMME

Laois County Council and the NTA will work in collaboration to successfully deliver the following Active Travel schemes by 2028:

- Dublin Road (Grenville Estate to Kilminchy roundabout)
- Stradbally Road (Southern Circular Road to Tyrells Site)
- Beladd Active Travel Scheme
- Triogue Way
- Father Brown Avenue Active Travel Scheme
- R445 Mountrath Road - Rapid Deployment Scheme
- Borris Road Scheme
- Safe Routes to School – Maryborough National School
- Southern Circular Road Active Travel Scheme

MEASURE JN 1: DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT OF JUNCTIONS

Laois County Council will adhere to the design standards and principles for junctions identified in the *Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets*, the *Cycle Design Manual*, and TII Publications, including the *Treatment of Transition Zones to Towns and Villages on National Roads*, and *DMURS Advice Note 6: Priority Junction Tightening Measures* to ensure pedestrian and cyclist priority at any new junctions in Portlaoise.

LCC will adhere to DoECLG's *Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidance for Planning Authorities* and limit the number of new entrances or junctions on national roads, thereby preserving their strategic transport function.

LTP Active Travel proposals that interact with the N80 and N77 will do so in a manner that prioritises safe active travel routes while maintaining the safe and efficient operation of the National Roads Network in accordance with the DoECLG *Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities*. Detailed design and implementation of such proposals shall be in compliance with TII Publications and proceed subject to the agreement of TII.

LCC will adhere to DoECLG's *Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidance for Planning Authorities* and avoid the creation of new accesses and the intensification of existing accesses to national roads where a speed limit greater than 50km/h applies ~~limit the number of new entrances or junctions on national roads,~~ thereby ~~preserving~~ maintaining their strategic transport function. LCC will also adhere to the requirements outlined in Section 2.7 of DoECLG's *Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidance for Planning Authorities*.

LTP Active Travel proposals that interact with the National Roads Network, including the N80 and N77, will do so in a manner that prioritises safe active travel routes while maintaining the safe and efficient operation of the National Roads Network in accordance with the DoECLG *Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities*.

MEASURE JN 2: EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH TO JUNCTION IMPROVEMENTS

The LTP has identified a series of junctions across the Study Area that require an upgrade to their design to align with DMURS standards and TII Publications, as appropriate.

LCC, with input from key stakeholders TII and NTA, will review these junctions and upgrade them in the short- to medium-term following the LTP's order of priority.

Junctions along roads with a history of dangerous collisions which will require upgrades include:

- Mountmellick Rd / Coote St (N80)
- Dublin Road (R445)
- Main Street
- James Fintan Lalor Ave (N80) & surrounds
- Timahoe Roundabout (James Fintan Lalor N80/Well Rd R426)
- Stradbally Road

These junctions will be upgraded as part of individual projects such as Safe Routes to School, cycling infrastructure projects or a standalone junction improvement package.

MEASURE JN 3: PLACEMAKING AT JUNCTIONS AND ROUNDABOUTS

The Portlaoise LTP recognises the important placemaking function that junctions can serve. Laois County Council will take a multi-disciplinary approach, as recommended in DMURS, to ensure that the place

making function of junctions is enhanced as they are upgraded, specifically Market Square. This includes seating opportunities, public art or landscaping.

MEASURE WK 1: PORTLAOISE 2040 & THE TOWN CENTRE PEDESTRIAN NETWORK

Laois County Council will work with relevant stakeholders, including the NTA, TII, National Disability Association (NDA), and local groups to improve the safety, accessibility, and attractiveness of the pedestrian environment of Portlaoise Town Centre through the delivery of the ambitious revitalisation programme, as set out in *Portlaoise 2040*.

This will include the implementation of the Strategy Objectives and Policies under ‘A Walkable Town Centre’ as part of *Portlaoise 2040 and beyond*, and the implementation of new speed limits of 30km/h.

MEASURE WK 2: STREET CLUTTER AUDIT

Laois County Council will work with relevant stakeholders to undertake a Street Clutter Audit, as recommended in DMURS, in the short-term across the Study Area. The audit will inform a programme to remove unnecessary street furniture that clutters the public realm and makes pedestrian wayfinding more difficult.

MEASURE WK 3: PORTLAOISE 2040 & PEDESTRIANISATION

Laois County Council will work with relevant stakeholders, including key stakeholders TII and NTA, to deliver the following, as set out in *Portlaoise 2040*:

Support the development of key public areas as pedestrian priority areas, and the eventual pedestrianisation of Lyster Sq. to connect with the retail areas south of James Fintan Lalor Avenue.

Support the pedestrianisation of Lower Sq. and Main St. during key hours to provide additional public space and a suitable setting for the new county library.

Investigate the pedestrianisation Bull Lane and enhancement of other laneways in Portlaoise town centre.

Improvement of pedestrian desire lines.

Improvement of pedestrian crossing facilities.

MEASURE WK 4: PORTLAOISE PEDESTRIAN NETWORK

Laois County Council will work with relevant stakeholders, including key stakeholders TII and NTA, to improve the safety, attractiveness, liveability, and active travel function provided by Portlaoise’s Arterial, Link & Local Streets. This will include:

Upgrading and retrofitting of existing footpaths

Providing new footpaths where necessary

Implementing new speed limits and traffic calming measures

Retrofitting cul-de-sac development and implementing filtered permeability measures

Implementing public realm improvements, such as soft landscaping, tree planting and filtered permeability measures.

| Cycle Connects | Street / Road | Label | Recommended Proposals |
|----------------|---|-------|--|
| Primary | *Mountmellick Road/ Coote Street (N80) | PC 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Add signalised pedestrian crossing points ▪ Remove street clutter, including pedestrian guardrails ▪ Redesign of Ballyfin junction ▪ Tighten junctions at: Greenview, Glenregan, Lakeglen, Newpark, Woodlawn Villas, Harpur's Lane, Elm Lawn |
| Primary | James Fintan Lalor (N80) | PC 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consider desire lines to deliver desired pedestrian crossings, increasing the number of potential crossing points ▪ Removal of pedestrian guard rails ▪ Provide pedestrian and cyclist crossing for Triogue Way ▪ Implement <i>Portlaoise 2040</i> measures |
| Primary | Stradbally Road (N80) | PC 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Removal of pedestrian guardrails at roundabout with Bridge Street ▪ Tighten junctions to residential estates at: Glendowns, Beladd Upper |
| Primary | *Ballyfin Road | PC 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve junction at Mountmellick Rd ▪ Provide pedestrian crossings at roundabout with Western Orbital Rd ▪ Tightened junctions at: Woodgrove, Glenbarrow |
| Primary | *Harpur's Lane | PC 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve junction at Mountmellick Rd ▪ Provide protected pedestrian crossing at Knockmay Roundabout |
| Primary | Ridge Road | PC 9 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Redesign of roundabout with Dublin Road and Borris Road to improve pedestrian access ▪ Removal of pedestrian guardrails ▪ Redesign of roundabout with Church Street ▪ Redesign of roundabout with Esker Hills ▪ Provide footpath on both sides of the carriageway ▪ Removal of pedestrian guardrails at Green Mill Lane |
| Primary | *Borris Road | PC 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Redesign of roundabout with R445 Dublin Road ▪ Tighten junction St. John's Square and Borris Rd |

| Cycle Connects | Street / Road | Label | Recommended Proposals |
|----------------|----------------------------|--------------|---|
| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Removal of traffic islands at Dr Murphy Place ▪ Redesign of roundabout at the Grange ▪ Redesign of roundabout at Ashley Gardens/ school campus--being addressed by Laois County Council scheme ▪ Remove pedestrian guard rails approaching school campus ▪ Removal of pedestrian guard rails ▪ Redesign of roundabout at Collier's Lane ▪ Provision of footpaths along Rathevan within urban footprint |
| Primary | Collier's Lane | PC 11 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provision of footpaths along both sides of the carriageway ▪ Removal of pedestrian guardrail at intersection with Dublin Road ▪ Redesign of Hawthorn Drive roundabout to improve pedestrian access ▪ Redesign of Rathevan Roundabout |
| Primary | Dublin Road | PC 12 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Redesign of roundabout with Borris Road ▪ Removal of pedestrian guardrails at pedestrian crossing outside SS Peter and Paul ▪ Tighten junction with residential streets at: Ferndale, Carrick Hill and the unnamed street west of Des Hughes Motors ▪ Redesign junction with Fielbrook to prioritise cyclists and pedestrians ▪ Remove pedestrian guardrails at crossings outside Midlands Regional Hospital ▪ Redesign of roundabout with Collier's Lane, removal of pedestrian guard rails ▪ Redesign of Kilminchy roundabout ▪ Provision of footpaths on both sides of road beyond Kilminchy roundabout within 60km/h zone as far as Higgs Lane |
| Primary | Block Road | PC 13 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide footpath on both sides of the carriageway |
| Primary | Father Brown Avenue | PC 8 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide footpaths and dipped kerbs as approved in Father Brown Part 8 application ▪ Redesign two roundabouts as planned in Maryborough N.S. SRTS |

| Cycle Connects | Street / Road | Label | Recommended Proposals |
|----------------|------------------------------------|--------------|--|
| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine necessity for pedestrian guardrails at Holy Family National Schools Removal of pedestrian guardrails outside Portlaoise Retail Park Provision of additional crossing points at location of pedestrian guard rails outside Portlaoise Retail Park |
| Primary | *Well Road/ New Road (R426) | PC 14 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide footpaths on eastern side of the road south of Southern Circular Road at Lismard Business Park to provide safe pedestrian access to the new location of Dunamase College |

Figure 11.3 Proposed Improvements to pedestrian infrastructure along primary routes in Portlaoise.



Figure 11.4: Pedestrian Network Improvement Proposals and Their Timeframes (Figure 11-8 from LTP)

MEASURE WK 5: WAYFINDING

Laois County Council will develop a consistent wayfinding system in Portlaoise along the lines of the Legible London system, in order to improve the legibility of the town and raise the profile of key destinations.

MEASURE WK 6: PUBLIC ART

Laois County Council will work with local community groups / artists to identify and assess the possibility of introducing colour and street art to the links between Main Street / Lower Square and Lyster Square and other areas around Portlaoise.

This will be carefully considered by LCC as buildings may be Protected Structures and / or within an Architectural Conservation Area.

MEASURE WK 7: WALKABILITY AUDIT

Laois County Council will continue regular walkability audits with a variety of stakeholders, including Age Friendly Ireland, Wheelchair Association and Vision Ireland. These will be undertaken at locations where demand for pedestrian activity is high, and where deficiencies in the network have been identified. This is to include continuous monitoring post-completion.

MEASURE WK 8: ACCESSIBILITY

Laois County Council will ensure that all streetscape and public realm improvements follow the principles of Universal Design and will ensure that active travel and public realm schemes are fully accessible for all through the following actions:

Creation of a stakeholder group with members of Age-Friendly Ireland, Portlaoise Town Team, disability groups, youth groups, Green-Schools and other stakeholder groups to improve the safety, accessibility, and attractiveness of the pedestrian environment of Portlaoise.

Design all active travel and public realm projects in line with the DMURS and other national guidance documents.

MEASURE WK 9: SAFETY IN PUBLIC SPACES

The Council will also consider the following elements to improve the safety of public space and ensure that all members of the community feel safe:

Good quality lighting

Active ground floor frontage

Legibility and wayfinding – provide clear sightlines through a space

Co-design with local community groups where possible

MEASURE CY 1: PORTLAOISE CYCLE NETWORK

Laois County Council will work in collaboration with the NTA, TII and other stakeholders to deliver the Portlaoise Cycle Network by 2042. This includes routes outlined in the NTA's CycleConnects Plan and TII's National Cycle Network and additional local improvements identified throughout the course of this LTP.

Short-medium term:

Development and completion of the Primary and Secondary Cycle Networks

Further implementation of the network in line with new development opportunities and traffic calming.

Long term:

Completion of Inter-urban and Greenway Cycle Networks

Ongoing maintenance and improvement of cycle infrastructure

Completion of all Active Travel Schemes

MEASURE CY 2: CYLECONNECTS

Laois County Council will work in collaboration with the NTA, TII and other stakeholders to deliver the *CycleConnects* plans for Portlaoise by 2042, including the greenway projects. Based on existing projects and prioritising delivering projects that support Safe Routes to School, it is expected that the following schemes will be completed by 2028 subject to availability of funding, compliance with NTA Project Approval Guidelines and all necessary environmental and planning processes:

Ballyfin Road (5 on map)

Harpur's Lane (6 on map)

Mountrath Rd/ Grattan Street (8 on map)

Borris Road (10 on map)

Collier's Lane (17 on map)

Father Browne Avenue (14 on map)

New Road/ Well Road (15 on map)

Beladd Cycle Scheme (16 on map)



Figure 11.5 NTA CycleConnects proposals for a cycling network in Portlaoise (Fig 12- from LTP)

| Category | Street / Road | Label | Recommended Measures |
|----------|--|-------|---|
| Primary | *Mountmellick Road/ Coote Street (N80) | PC 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examination of carriageway widths • Along the northern section where carriageway widths are wider, install cycle lanes or shared paths that would connect to a Quietway, the Triogue Way, railway station and town centre • Consider the use of a Quietway (see 12.7 Quietways) to provide a connection to the Triogue Way and create alternate cycle connectivity from the N80 to the railway station and town centre • Consider the installation of a shuttle system under railway line to improve cycling access to the train station and town centre • Long-term shift strategic traffic to Western Orbital Road allowing for further reduction in carriageway widths and provision of pedestrian and cycling infrastructure |

| Category | Street / Road | Label | Recommended Measures |
|----------|---|-------|---|
| Primary | Abbeyleix Road (N77) | PC 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install segregated cycle lanes between Abbeyleix Roundabout and Market Square |
| Primary | James Fintan Lalor (N80) | PC 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install cycling infrastructure so that cycle lanes are segregated from motorised vehicles, including buses • Ensure continuity of cycle lanes around bus stops • Provide pedestrian and cyclist crossing for the Triogue Way |
| Primary | Stradbally Road (N80) | PC 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide safe cycling provision along the length of the road |
| Primary | *Ballyfin Road (delivered as part of LCC's Triogue Way) | PC 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce cycle lanes or widen shared surface |
| Primary | *Harpur's Lane | PC 6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install shared path of 3 – 4 metres in width on the southern side of Harpur's Lane to be completed within the existing road widths. This will facilitate a safer route for children walking and cycling to schools, which are located on the southern side of Harpur's Lane. On the northern side, the boundary walls prevent the construction of an adequate footpath and / or cycle lane. |
| Primary | Green Mill Lane (western half delivered as part of LCC's Triogue Way) | PC 7 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide safe cycling provision |
| Primary | *Mountrath Road/Grattan Street | PC 8 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide protected cycle infrastructure under railway line through cycle lanes or shared paths • Shift car parking along Grattan Street so it provides a protected cycle lane |
| Primary | Ridge Road | PC 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine opportunities to reduce speed limits to 30 km/h or provide cycling lanes |
| Primary | *Borris Road | PC 11 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce safe cycling provision from roundabout with Dublin Road to Highfield Meadows • Investigate provision of alternative car parking arrangements to avoid on-street car parking |
| Primary | *Collier's Lane | PC 12 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete the delivery of cycle lanes on southern section of Collier's Lane as in LCC's scheme for Dublin Rd and Collier's Lane |

| Category | Street / Road | Label | Recommended Measures |
|----------|--|---------|---|
| Primary | Dublin Road | PC 13 A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete the delivery of cycle lanes on southern section of Collier's Lane as in LCC's scheme for Dublin Rd and Collier's Lane Towards SS Peter and Paul's Church, provide cycle lanes or extend the footpath to provide a shared surface that can accommodate cyclists Provide protection for existing cycle lanes using NTA's Rapid Build designs |
| Primary | Block Road | PC 14 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine feasibility of providing cycle lanes or shared paths along the length of Block Road. If carriageway widths do not allow cycle lanes on each side of the street, examine feasibility of providing two-way cycle lanes on eastern side nearest the hospital. |
| Primary | *Father Brown Avenue | PC 9 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete LCC's plans to deliver segregated cycle lanes along Father Brown Avenue that will provide continuity in the cycle network from the Mountrath Road to the school campuses on the Southern Circular Road |
| Primary | *Well Road/ New Road (R426) | PC 15 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine feasibility of providing cycle lanes or shared paths along Well Road/ New Road from just north of junction with Southern Circular Road and James Fintan Lalor Avenue Where road widths make it impossible to provide dedicated cycling infrastructure or shared paths, lower the speed limit to 30km/h and install traffic calming measures Construction of cycling infrastructure takes place in advance of Dunamase College opening at new location |
| Primary | *Beladd Cycle Connection | PC 16 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide connectivity between Stradbally Road and Dublin Road as part of development of HSE landbank, part of large masterplan project (see Chapter 15 – Road Network) Provide Safe Route to School to Summerhill schools from northwest Portlaoise, including Kilminchy |
| Primary | Borris Road to Dublin Road connectivity via Rath Galline | PC 17 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide connectivity between Borris Road and Dublin Road, improving accessibility for work and school trips |

Figure 11.6 Cycle connect improvements based on the NTA's draft CycleConnects for Portlaoise

MEASURE CY 3: NATIONAL CYCLE NETWORK

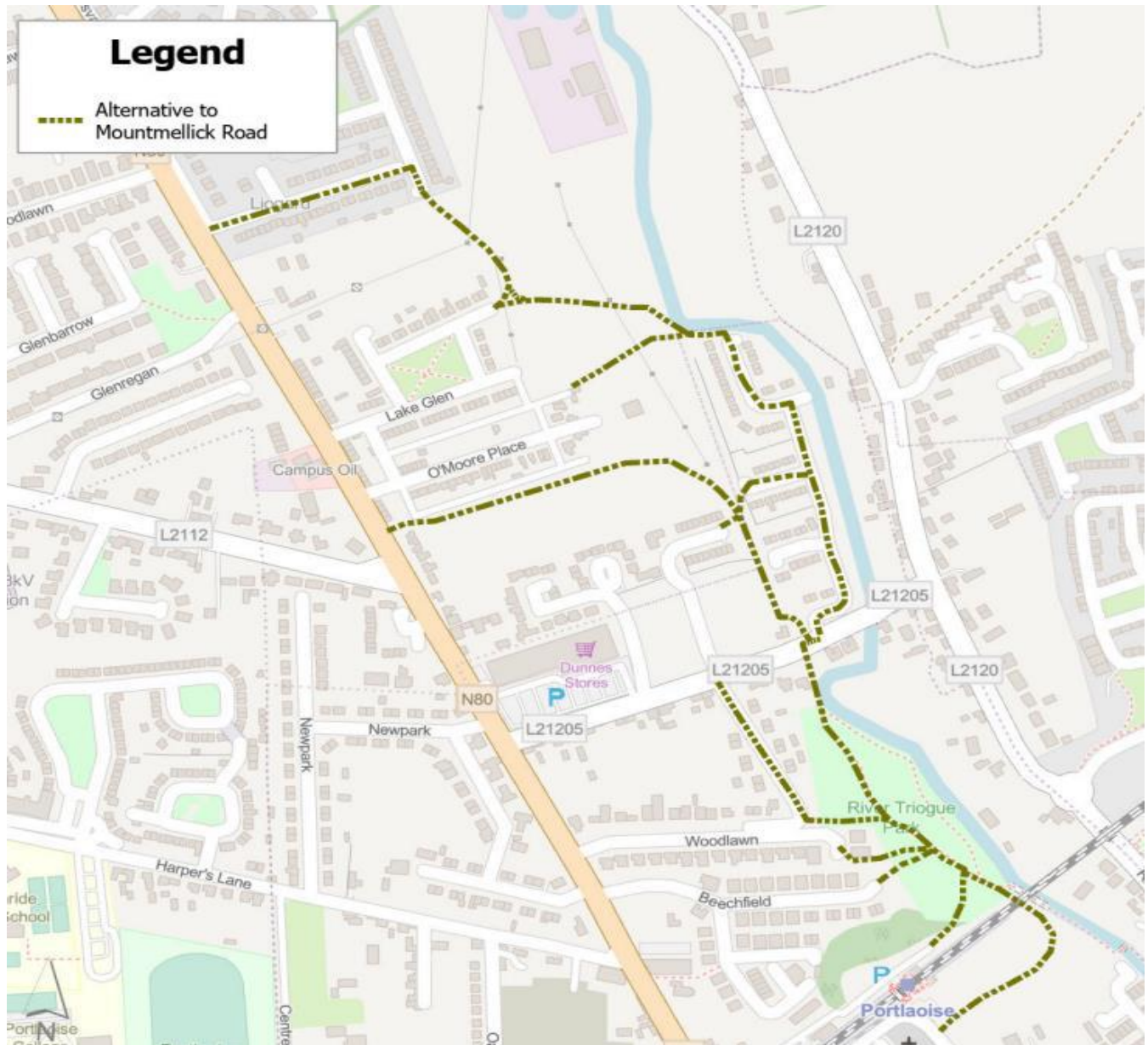
Laois County Council will work in collaboration with TII, the NTA and other stakeholders to deliver the *National Cycle Network* plans for Portlaoise by 2042. Laois County Council will work in collaboration with TII and the NTA to create connections between the urban cycling network in Portlaoise and the inter-urban network in the *National Cycle Network*.

MEASURE CY 4: QUIETWAYS

Working in conjunction with the NTA and other stakeholders, Laois County Council will identify a network of Quietways in the short to medium-term. These Quietways will improve pedestrian and cyclist accessibility throughout Portlaoise and help deliver the network of primary routes outlined in Cycle Connects. The LTP identifies options for a Quietway (pictured to the right) as an alternative route to the Urban Primary route proposed in *CycleConnects* along Mountmellick Road/Coote Street (N80)

Figure 11.7 proposed Quietway that could provide alternate connectivity for Mountmellick Road along Liogard, Lakeglen, O'Moore Place, Triogue Manor, CraydonCourt, and the Triogue Way to provide access to the Railway Station and Portlaoise Town Centre from the northern side of Portlaoise northern side of

Portlaoise.



MEASURE CY 5: CYCLE PARKING

Laois County Council will work with relevant stakeholders to carry out the following:

- Continue to support an uplift in both high-quality short-stay and long-stay public cycle parking throughout Portlaoise Town Centre and key destinations such as Lyster Square, People’s Park, Laois Shopping Centre, Lismard Business Park, Clonminam Business Park, Kylekiproe Industrial Estate, Portlaoise Retail Park, and the Railway Station, which is envisaged to play a significant role as a multi-modal interchange.
- Examine the feasibility of providing dedicated, high-quality cycle (e-scooter) parking hubs in key destinations such as the town centre and railway station.
- Ensure the provision of off-street, accessible cycle parking facilities as part of any significant new development.
- Consider innovative practices such as on-street bike hangers and the use of indoor vacant spaces for dedicated public off-street bike parking hubs that are secure, sheltered and easily accessed.
- Consider the colocation of cycle parking facilities with car clubs, bus stops and other forms of sustainable transport infrastructure through the development of Mobility Points.
- Develop a policy for the parking of shared bike service bicycles in advance of opening a scheme in Portlaoise.

MEASURE PY 1: PERMEABILITY IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS

Laois County Council will work with the NTA and other stakeholders to ensure that filtered permeability is secured in all new residential estates, providing safe and direct access to commercial developments and where possible, schools.

Laois County Council will aim to retrofit connectivity where possible.

| No. | Scheme | Rationale |
|-------|--|--|
| 1 | *New Park to Harpur's Lane | Connection to Scoil Bhríde and Portlaoise College |
| 2 | *Centrepoint Site (currently blocked off) | Connection to Scoil Bhríde and Portlaoise College |
| 3 | *Harpur's Lane to Portlaoise College | Connection to Portlaoise College |
| 4 | Elm Lawn to Rossleigh Park | Connection to sporting facilities |
| 5 | *Glenregan to Glenbarrow | Proximity to Scoil Bhríde and Portlaoise College |
| 6 | *Clonroosk View to Hillview | Proximity to Scoil Bhríde and Portlaoise College |
| 7 | Mountain View Square to Western Distributor Road | Connection to local bus service |
| 8 | *Portlaoise College to Mountrath Rd | Proximity to Portlaoise College |
| 9-12 | Woodgrove to Western Distributor Road | Connection to Proximity to local bus service |
| 13 | Cosby Avenue to Western Distributor Road | Connection to local bus service |
| 14 | *Maryborough Village to Western Distributor Road | Proximity to Scoil Bhríde and Portlaoise College |
| 15 | Dublin Rd to Borris Rd via Rath Galline | LAP and CycleConnects |
| 16 | Stradbally Rd to Dublin Rd via HSE lands | LAP and CycleConnects |
| 17 | *Colliers Way to Rathevan View to Lake Side Gardens | Connection to Scoil Chríost Rí, St Mary's CBS & employment centres |
| 18 | Triogue Way (Cycle Connects) | Provides pedestrian and cyclist connectivity throughout Portlaoise |
| 19 | *Summerhill School Campus to Triogue Way | Link between greenway and primary schools |
| 20-21 | Rossvale to Mountmellick Road and Liogard | Improved access to bus service along Mountmellick Rd |
| 22 | *Tyrrell's Land Masterplan Site (Cycle Connects) | Connection to Summerhill schools & future site Dunamase College |
| 23 | *Aghnaharna Trail (LAP) | Connection to schools, sporting facilities & town centre via Triogue Way |
| 24 | Togher Woods Greenway/Sustainable Transport Corridor | Connection to public amenity/ Abbeyleix Greenway |
| 25 | Railway Station to Triogue Way | Improved accessibility to railway station |
| 26 | Beechfield to Coote St. existing connection to be improved | Improved security |

| No. | Scheme | Rationale |
|-----|---|---|
| 27 | Clonkeen View to Old Knockmay Road | Improved connectivity to employment centres and schools |
| 28 | Glen Down's to Tyrrell's Land Masterplan site | Local connectivity to public amenity |
| 29 | Castle Drive to Dublin Road | Improved connectivity to public transport |
| 30 | Hawthorn Drive to Rath Galline | Improved connectivity to public transport |
| 31 | Glenbarrow to Glenregan/ | Improved connectivity to local bus service and schools |
| 32 | Lynden Ct to Mountmellick Rd | Improved connectivity to local bus service and schools |

Figure 11.7 Recommendation for Permeability across Portlaoise – items marked with an * are priority 2.

MEASURE PY 2: PERMEABILITY AND THE NEW PORTLAOISE TOWN BUS SERVICE

Laois County Council will work with the NTA and other Stakeholders to ensure that the users of the town bus service enjoy accessible and direct access to the bus service. This will include the use of filtered permeability measures to open up impermeable, cul-de-sac layouts and walled boundaries which are preventing the ease of movement between residential areas and future bus stop locations.

See also Measure PT 1 for the short, medium and long-term recommendations for the New Portlaoise Town Bus Service.

MEASURE PY3: PERMEABILITY TO SCHOOLS – SUPPLEMENTARY MEASURES

Laois County Council will work with the NTA, local schools and other stakeholders to ensure that filtered permeability is secured, providing safe and direct access to schools from surrounding areas, including:

- Supporting Safe Routes to School schemes
- Developing and completing the Primary and Secondary Cycle Networks enabling children and their parents or guardians to cycle safely to school.

MEASURE PY4: FILTERED PERMEABILITY

It is an objective of Laois County Council to create a fully permeable environment for pedestrians and cyclists across Portlaoise. Laois County Council will ensure that:

- Existing informal permeability points are formalized where possible.
- Existing formal permeability points are upgraded and retrofitted where possible.
- Filtered permeability is secured in all new residential estates, commercial developments and where possible, schools.

The safety and attractiveness of these connections for all ages and abilities will be an important consideration, including lighting, sightlines and passive surveillance.

MEASURE PT 1: NEW TOWN BUS NETWORK

Laois County Council will work with the Service Planning Team at the NTA, Bus operators, landowners, TII and other relevant stakeholders on the following:

Short-term:

- Deliver the New Town Bus Service for Portlaoise.

Medium-term:

- Examine the potential for an additional route (P3 Route) along the Southern Circular Road to enable more children to take the bus to school.

Long-term:

- Examine the potential for the town bus network to serve the J17 National Enterprise Park
- Investigate the reuse of the Togher Railway Line for sustainable transport
- Promote the use of public transport in the J17 Enterprise Park

MEASURE PT 2: REGIONAL BUS NETWORK

Laois County Council will work with the Service Planning Team at the NTA, Bus operators, landowners, and other relevant stakeholders to maintain and enhance regional bus networks in line with the Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan and will make further improvements to routes where demand is identified.

MEASURE PT 3: LOCAL LINK SERVICES

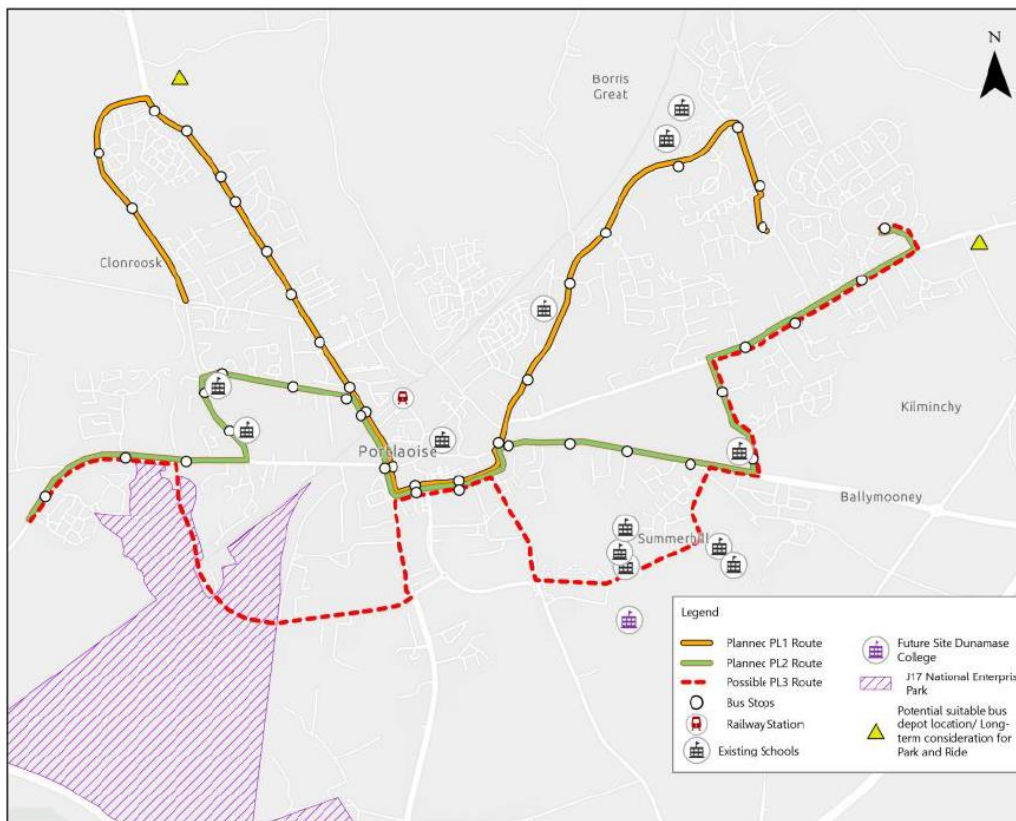
Laois County Council will work with the Service Planning Team at the NTA, Bus operators, and other relevant stakeholders to maintain and enhance Local Link services where required.

MEASURE PT 4: BUS STOPS AND SHELTERS

Laois County Council will work with the NTA to ensure that each bus shelter that accompanies the new Town Bus Service will be consistent and legible and will include the following:

- Real Time Information (RTI)
- Standardised bus stop sign, pole, and information panel
- Accessible Kerbing
- Seating and Lighting
- Landscaping where applicable

Laois County Council will ensure that permeability is secured between all existing and proposed bus stops with residential areas, schools, and key attractors.



The Proposed Town Bus Network in Portlaoise

Figure 11.8 The proposed Town Bus Network in Portlaoise.

MEASURE PT 5: PORTLAOISE RAILWAY STATION FACILITIES

Laois County Council will work with the NTA and Irish Rail, to improve the facilities available in Portlaoise Railway Station.

MEASURE PT 6: PEDESTRIAN AND CYCLING ACCESSIBILITY AT PORTLAOISE RAILWAY STATION

Laois County Council will work with relevant stakeholders, such as Irish Rail and the NTA, to improve the accessibility to Portlaoise Railway Station. At a minimum this will include:

- Increasing permeability to the Railway Station and Triogue Way from Beechfield and Woodlawn Villas.
- Improving the cycling infrastructure to the standards set out in CycleConnects for Urban Secondary Routes.
- Improving the pedestrian environment on Station Rd, Railway St, Ridge Rd & the entrance to the station on Coote St.

MEASURE PT 7: MULTI-MODAL INTERCHANGE HUB

Laois County Council will work with the NTA, Irish Rail and relevant stakeholders to progress Portlaoise Railway Station as a high-quality Multi-Modal Interchange Hub to enable seamless transfer between different modes and services.

This will include the provision of a bus stop outside the station (on Coote Street), a bike hire scheme, and bike lockers and parking.

OBJECTIVE PM 1: PARKING MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Laois County Council will develop a Parking Management Strategy that will manage the provision of car parking spaces in Portlaoise in accordance with the following broad principles:

- Reallocate road space to establish a hierarchy of parking need for on-street parking that will support ambitious public realm and civic space proposals in *Portlaoise 2040* and the Portlaoise LTP, taking care to ensure the continued provision of blue badge parking, delivery bays and a limited supply of short-stay car parking and discourage long-stay commuter parking.
- Maximise the efficiency of the existing car parking spaces, so that one space can serve multiple purposes, for example as a loading bay, taxi rank or public seating.
- Ensure that long-stay parking will largely take the form of consolidated off-street car parking on the periphery of places of high pedestrian activity to curtail movement of unproductive vehicular through traffic and elimination of search traffic movements.

- Manage the availability and cost of public car parking in the town centre core to encourage a higher turnover of spaces, aiming for an occupancy rate of 85% that represents a good use of the available land and reduces the amount of driving searching for parking.
- Consolidate some existing parking to the periphery of the town centre core at locations that are well connected by good quality walking, cycling and public transport networks.

OBJECTIVE PM 2: PARKING MANAGEMENT POLICY

Laois County Council will work with relevant stakeholders to implement maximum parking standards for new development and allow low or no private vehicle developments as per the *Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027*.

OBJECTIVE PM 3: PARK AND STRIDE

Laois County Council and relevant stakeholders will:

- Assess the capacity of private car parks to serve as Park and Stride locations to the town centre and the Summerhill School Campus.
- Promote the use of Park and Stride locations for journeys into Portlaoise Town Centre and the Summerhill School Campus through management of parking in the town centre and at school locations.

OBJECTIVE PM 4: PARK AND RIDE

Laois County Council will:

- examine the feasibility for Park and Ride facilities in Portlaoise in conjunction with the NTA, TII and other relevant stakeholders.
- Include EV charging facilities for cars and buses and PV generation in any planned Park and Rides.
- Promote the use of Park and Ride facilities through appropriate pricing of the Park and Ride and town centre parking and giving priority to public transport so that Park and Ride users can experience a reliable service.

MEASURE PM 5: MOBILITY HUBS

Laois County Council will undertake an assessment to determine the feasibility of Mobility Hubs, in terms of number of hubs, car parking capacity per hub, operations, management, funding, complementary uses and facilities, etc.

Laois County Council will consider Mobility Hubs in future development and forward planning.

MEASURE PM 6: MOBILITY POINTS

Laois County Council will identify locations within existing on-street parking to provide for mobility points (car club vehicle, hire bike scheme).

MEASURE RN 1: PRINCIPLES OF ROAD DEVELOPMENT

Laois County Council will work with NTA, TII and all other relevant stakeholders to:

- Balance the needs of road users so the roads in Portlaoise can perform their national, strategic transport function while promoting vibrancy, accessibility and lower emissions.
- Optimise the existing road and street network within Portlaoise to encourage more people to walk, cycle or take public transport for their everyday journeys.

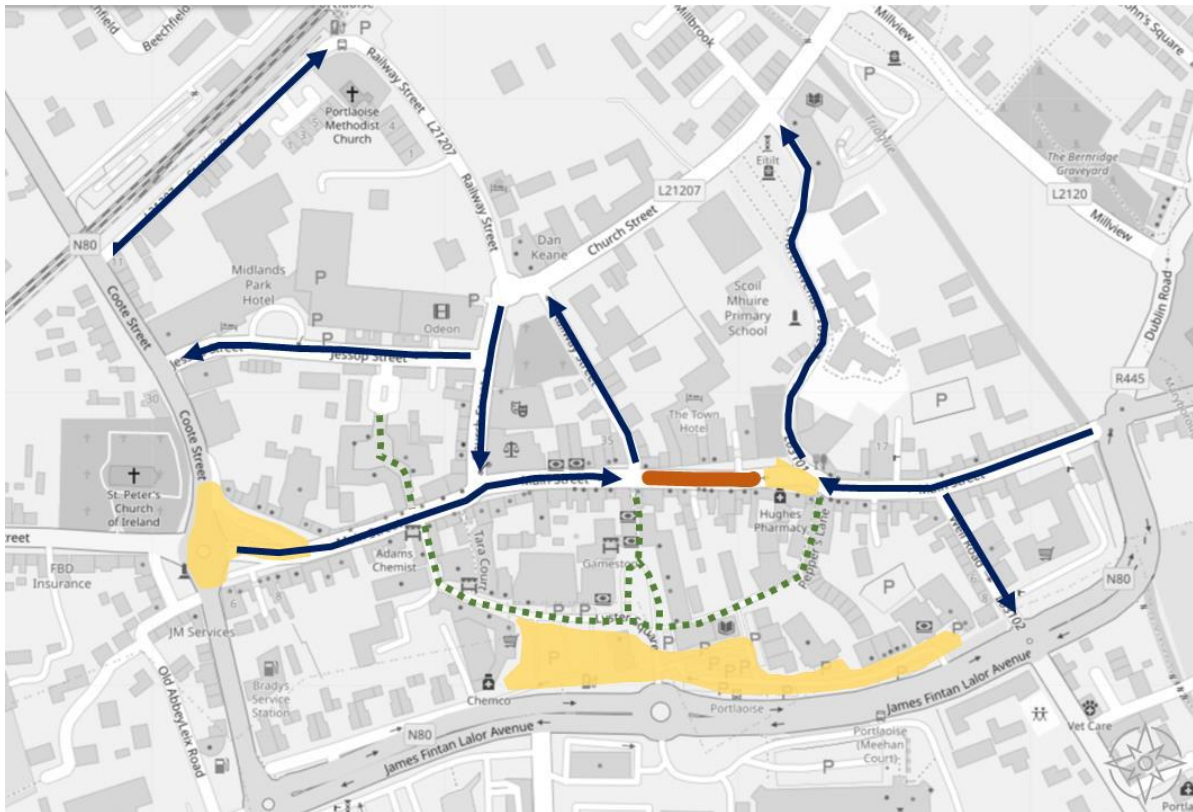


Figure 11.9: Street network changes in Portlaoise Town Centre. Oneway streets marked in navy, pedestrianisation of Main Street marked in orange, improved laneways marked in dotted green, revitalised public spaces at Market Square, Lyster Square and outside the county library marked in yellow.

MEASURE RN 2: NATIONAL ROADS REQUIREMENTS

Laois County Council will preserve the strategic function and safety of the National Roads Network in accordance with the DoECLG Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines and in compliance with TII Publications (Standards and Technical) and subject to the agreement of TII.

In particular, Laois County Council will:

- Continue to contain development within the existing built-up footprint, thereby minimising sprawl and reducing the distances of journeys and reliance on private vehicles and preserve the strategic function and safety of the M7, N80 and N77.
- Limit development with access onto the National Road network, preserving to maintain its safety and strategic transport function.
- Ensure that any LTP proposals that interact with the M7, N80 and N77 comply with TII Publications.

OBJECTIVE RN 3: NEW LOCAL ROADS

Laois County Council, the NTA and TII will:

- Design all new roads to be consistent with the Road Design Principles 1-7 outlined above.
- Subject all new road schemes to stringent feasibility and environmental assessment processes.
- Consider and design new roads to ensure consistency between their function, form and layout.
- Design new roads with appropriate urban speed limits and full provision for walking, cycling, and future public transportation use if required.

OBJECTIVE RN 4: REGIONAL ROADS AND SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL

Laois County Council will promote the use of the Regional Road Network for sustainable transport by:

- Working with relevant stakeholders to provide gateway treatments at the entrance to Portlaoise on Dublin Road (R445), Mountrath Road (R445) and Rathleague Road (R425) to mark the entrance to the urban environment and the start of the 50km/h speed limit zone.
- Working with relevant stakeholders to redesign junctions, roundabouts, and crossings on the Regional Road Network to better facilitate pedestrians and cyclists.
- Progressing plans to provide safe infrastructure for active travel for the entirety of the Regional Road Network within Portlaoise.
- Liaising with the NTA to design bus stops on the Regional Road Network to serve the new Portlaoise town bus service.

OBJECTIVE RN 5: LOCAL ROADS AND SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL

Laois County Council will prioritise the use of the Local Road Network (LRN) for sustainable transport by:

- Providing gateway treatments at the entrance to Portlaoise on Ridge Road at the Wastewater Treatment Plant and Rathevan Road where residential development starts to mark the entrance

to the urban environment and the start of the 50km/h speed limit zone. Working with relevant stakeholders to redesign junctions, roundabouts, and crossings on the Local Road Network to better facilitate pedestrians and cyclists as discussed in Chapter 10 of LTP– Junctions.

- Progressing plans to provide segregated cycle lanes along select Local Roads—Harpur’s Lane, Ballyfin Road, Borris Road—prioritising access to primary and secondary schools as discussed in Chapter 12 of LTP– Cycling.
- Liaising with the NTA and TII to design bus stops to serve the new Portlaoise town bus service.
- Providing SUDS and Green Infrastructure along the Local Road Network.
- Ensuring that new developments connect to the existing street grid at numerous points, providing permeability and avoiding cul de sacs.

OBJECTIVE RN 6: TOWN CENTRE STREETS

Laois County Council and relevant stakeholders will:

- Redesign Market Square roundabout into a signalised junction with the reallocation of space to serve the public realm (as recommended in Chapter 10 of LTP– Junctions).
- Pedestrianise Lower Main Street, providing a public area outside the new county library and removing Main Street’s function as a through route.
- Reverse the existing one-way system on Church Street, Church Avenue, Railway Street and Bridge Street.
- Reconfigure Lyster Square.
- Improve the laneways to enhance their security and attractiveness.
- Complete plans to introduce one-way flow for motor traffic on Station Road and construct a cycle lane.

OBJECTIVE RN 7: SPEED LIMIT REVIEW

Laois County Council will:

- Liaise with the Department of Transport to advance a review of all speed limits within Portlaoise and, where suggested, lower the existing speed limit.
- Prioritise the town centre, streets in front of schools and local streets for the delivery of 30km/h speed zones.
- Carry out a design review of streets on which the speed limit has been lowered to ensure that the design speed matches the posted speed limit.

MEASURE SM 1: MICROMOBILITY AND SHARED SCHEMES

Laois County Council will:

- Establish the feasibility of initiating an e-bike and e-scooter pilot scheme(s), once legislation permits.
- Proactively ensure careful siting of dedicated e-bike and e-scooter parking areas at key destinations that do not inhibit pedestrian movement (e.g., Town Centre and Train Station).
- Work with car club companies to investigate and develop car club facilities in Portlaoise.

MEASURE SM 2: GREEN SCHOOLS & ACTIVE SCHOOLS

Laois County Council will encourage all schools within the Portlaoise Study Area to undertake a Green Schools Audit on an ongoing basis to inform the detailed design of projects. At a minimum, this should include:

- Front of School Audits
- Gap analysis of existing infrastructure on-site e.g., sheltered and secure cycle or scooter parking
- Laois County Council will encourage all schools in Portlaoise to progress the continuation and expansion of the Active School Flag Programme.

MEASURE SM 3: SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

Laois County Council will aim to implement measures consistent with the Safe Routes to School Programmes throughout Portlaoise.

This includes targeted infrastructural improvements to facilitate initiatives such as the School Bike Buses, Walking Buses and Park & Stride drop-off areas within walking distance of schools.

| Schools | Strategy Indicative Recommendations |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaelscoil Phortlaoise • Portlaoise Educate Together • Maryborough N.S • (& future Dunamase College site). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Potential for a Park and Stride off the Southern Circular Road to cater for Portlaoise Educate Together, Gaelscoil Phortlaoise, Maryborough National School & Holy Family School Campus. ▪ Improve pedestrian environment along the Southern Circular Road ▪ Provide filtered permeability from the residential areas around Glenlahan and Aghnaharna, as well as from the People’s Park to the schools to increase walking and cycling ▪ Provide facilities for cycling between James Fintan Lalor Avenue and future site of Dunamase College either through reallocating road space (taking advantage of off-street parking for businesses and houses) or lowering speed limits |

| Schools | Strategy Indicative Recommendations |
|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve cycling and pedestrian environment at the roundabouts on the Southern Circular Road |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holy Family Junior & Senior Schools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve filtered permeability between surrounding residential areas such as Ashewood Walk and Beladd as part of Aghnaharna Masterplan Area. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portlaoise Further Education & Training Centre | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide pedestrian crossings adjacent to the new bus stops/entrance to the school. ▪ Improve cycling and pedestrian environment along Block Road, including footpaths on both sides of the road, cycle lanes and pedestrian crossings in accordance with DMURS. ▪ Improve connections with the Triogue Way |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scoil Bhríde National School • Portlaoise College | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Install shared path of 3 – 4 metres in width on the southern side of Harpur’s Lane to be completed within the existing road widths. ▪ Introduce School Street from Hillview Drive to Knockmay Roundabout ▪ Provide pedestrian crossings adjacent to the new bus stops/entrance to the school. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scoil Chríost Rí • St Mary’s CBS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Deliver 450m of protected cycle lanes along Borris Road, with works to be completed in 2024. ▪ Improve filtered permeability between surrounding residential areas such as the Hermitage estate, Rathevan View, Lake Drive into Rossdarragh Hill with the schools to increase walking and cycling. ▪ Redesign of roundabout at Ashley Gardens/ school campus – to be delivered as part of Borris Road Scheme. ▪ Remove pedestrian guard rails approaching school campus ▪ Redesign roundabout at Collier’s Lane for pedestrian and cyclists in accordance with DMURS. ▪ Provide pedestrian crossings adjacent to the new bus stops/entrance to the school. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kolbe Special School | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve cycling and pedestrian environment at the roundabout between Block Road and Dublin Road. ▪ Provide pedestrian crossings adjacent to the new bus stops/entrance to the school. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St Francis School | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide pedestrian crossings adjacent to the new bus stops/entrance to the school. |

Figure 11.10 Proposed improvements to school in Portlaoise to encourage pupils to walk and cycle to school

MEASURE SM 4: SCHOOL PLANNING AND DESIGN

Planning for new schools and the expansion of existing schools will prioritise access for pedestrians and cyclists. Detailed design shall maximise the priority for pedestrians and cyclists accessing the school.

MEASURE SM 5: PLAYFUL ACTIVE TRAVEL SCHOOL ZONES

Laois County Council will continue to work with service providers, schools and other relevant stakeholders to implement Playful Active Travel School Zones along school routes in Portlaoise.

MEASURE SM 6: PLAYFUL STREETS

Laois County Council will investigate the potential to implement Playful Street Schemes throughout neighbourhoods in Portlaoise and implement where possible.

MEASURE SM 7: HEALTHY STREETS

Laois County Council will work with relevant stakeholders to ensure that active travel and public realm projects in Portlaoise take into consideration the 10 indicators of the Healthy Streets Approach.

MEASURE SM 8: WORKPLACE TRAVEL/ MOBILITY MANAGEMENT PLANS

Laois County Council and the NTA will continue to expand workplace travel planning in Enterprise and Employment zoned land in Portlaoise. Laois County Council will work to identify appropriate employers suited to initiating Mobility Management Plans

MEASURE SM 9: SUDS & GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Laois County Council will work with relevant stakeholders to ensure that Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) and Green Infrastructure (GI) will be included along active travel schemes and as part of any future public realm projects in Portlaoise.

Figure 26: The proposed traffic cells of the Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy

11.5 Local Transport Plan

As part of the requirement for an evidence-based approach to planning, as set out in the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region, a Local Transport Plan [LTP] has been prepared to inform the drafting of the LAP. This is contained in **Appendix C**.

The LTP identifies appropriate transport solutions for the Portlaoise urban area to ensure the integration of land use and transport planning and realise policy for increasing public transport and active travel mode share.

The LTP is intended to underpin the future development of Portlaoise and ensure that the assessment of transport demand and its associated impact plays a central role in informing future development. The LTP will provide a shift to sustainable modes based on the road user hierarchy and will set a framework for investment in transport infrastructure within Portlaoise.

11.5.1 Key Objectives of the Portlaoise Local Transport Plan

Five key transport objectives have been identified as follows:

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Transport Objective 1 | Support the Compact Growth of Portlaoise through the careful integration of land use and transport planning. |
| Transport Objective 2 | Improve and prioritise access to local services by sustainable modes, in particular walking and cycling, with links to public transport for longer journeys. |
| Transport Objective 3 | Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public transport services in Portlaoise. |
| Transport Objective 4 | Maximise the potential of natural environment assets and the design and layout of the built environment to facilitate connectivity and safe and permeable walking and cycling networks. |
| Transport Objective 5 | Enhance the vibrancy, accessibility, liveability and safety of Portlaoise through improved public realm, place-making and a Healthy Streets approach. |

Table 9: Portlaoise Local Transport Plan Objectives

11.5.2 Key Principles of the Portlaoise Local Transport Plan

The **key principles** identified for Portlaoise include:

- Reimagining Portlaoise’s urban core as a more people-oriented town centre as envisaged by the Portlaoise 2040 vision document is proposed. This involves reducing vehicular traffic within Portlaoise town centre to facilitate a quieter, more attractive public realm for pedestrians and cyclists to navigate.

- Revitalising the town centre may include shared streets, along with traffic-calming measures such as speed reductions, and **prioritising movement by pedestrians and cyclists**. This has already been commenced in the reclamation of space on the Abbeyleix Road as indicated hereunder.



Plate 15: Provision of cycleway and reduction of road width on Abbeyleix Road N77.

- Improving **permeability** between schools and residential areas and implementing **Safe Routes to School (SRTS) measures** to encourage more children to walk and cycle to school.
- Improving **permeability** between main squares and roads by removing barriers and de-cluttering – among other actions – could further this process of reimagining Portlaoise’s town centre as a vibrant space in which people work, socialise and live.
- Providing a **dedicated cycle network** for Portlaoise town, following the cycle connections proposed for the town in the NTA’s National Cycle Network *Cycle Connects*.
- **Completing the Triogue Way greenway and** a new sustainable transport corridor leading to Togher Woods that would include attractive pedestrian and cycling infrastructure. These schemes emphasise ease of use for pedestrians and cyclists and a sense of safety and *security* when traversing greenways around Portlaoise, making it easy for people to walk or cycle to employment, education and leisure.

- **Maximising accessibility and connectivity of Portlaoise’s rail and bus network** by improving connectivity between places where people live, work, go to school and socialise. This includes the development of the **new town bus service** within Portlaoise, which will provide residents with a high-quality and accessible bus route connecting the town centre with the outskirts of Portlaoise.
- Upgrading Portlaoise Railway Station and its surroundings as an **intermodal transport hub**, serving not only Portlaoise and its neighbouring towns with sustainable public transport options, but further servicing the entire Midlands region and beyond as a core transport nexus situated directly in the centre of Ireland.
- Maximising the impact of the town bus service, by improving the permeability of the proposed **bus stops**, ensuring that it is as easy as possible to reach bus stops.
- **Developing Park-and-Ride** facilities near the bus depots on the town’s periphery could prevent large volumes of vehicular traffic from entering the town centre for commercial activities, while **Park-and-Stride** set-down locations could prevent potentially dangerous traffic volumes in and around Portlaoise’s school or commercial areas.

The LTP makes high-level suggestions for **Park-and-Ride** and **Park-and-Stride** locations that require further study by Laois County Council, the NTA and other stakeholders.

11.5.3 Portlaoise Active Travel

In 2023, the National Transport Authority (NTA) allocated €290 million in Active Travel Investment Grants to local authorities to enhance the delivery of hundreds of projects across the country.

In total, the investment will fund approximately 1,200 Active Travel projects, contributing to the development of almost 1,000km of new and improved walking and cycling infrastructure across the country by 2025. This includes the delivery of segregated cycle lanes, widened footpaths, new walking and cycling bridges, and new pedestrian crossings.

Laois County Council have been allocated over €3 million for a variety of Active Travel schemes. Schemes include junction tightening, the construction of new and the upgrading of existing cycle lanes, upgrading footpaths and pedestrian crossings, as well as a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) scheme.

The following are some of the projects which are included in the NTA funding:

| LOCATION | PROJECT |
|---|--|
| <i>Beladd</i> | This scheme, which is still at early stages, proposes a shared pedestrian/cycle track across HSE lands at Beladd, which will link the Stradbally Road and Dublin Road. The route is to begin at the N80/Southern Circular Rd junction up to the entrance of Fielbrook estate. |
| <i>Borris Road</i> | This is a rapid deployment scheme proposed to extend existing provision of segregated cycle infrastructure to circa 1.3km. Laois County Council also propose to include roundabout upgrade works at the two northern roundabouts which will see uncontrolled crossing points upgraded to controlled. |
| <i>Father Avenue Scheme</i> <i>Brown Cycling</i> | <p>The scheme proposes the removal of right turning lanes and central medians and reallocating the road space to cycling infrastructure. Part 8 approval was obtained in December 2022, and Laois County Council are now considering detailed design options.</p> <p>Delivery of this scheme is expected within 2-3 years, by 2025/2026. The project will be another step in ensuring continuity of segregated cycling infrastructure by removing gaps in the network.</p> |
| <i>Dublin Road</i> | <p>Part 1 of the scheme begins near the Grenville Estate and runs as far as the Kilminchy roundabout. The scheme proposes the removal of right turning lanes and central medians and reallocating the road space to cycling infrastructure. Detailed design has been completed following Part 8 approval.</p> <p>Part 2 of the scheme proposes the formalisation of the advisory cycle lanes on the Dublin Road from Grenville residential estate as far as St. Mary’s Hall, closer to town. Works are proposed to begin in 2024 and will provide a seamless route over its 2km length to the Town Centre.</p> |
| <i>Mountrath Road R445, Rapid Deployment Scheme, R445</i> | The scheme proposes the formalisation of the advisory cycle lanes on the Mountrath Road between the roundabouts at the Western Orbital Road to Knockmay Road. Laois County Council are assessing options, including the option of segregating cycle lanes from vehicular traffic by way of a raised cycle track. The scheme will ensure the continuity of off-road cycle facilities from the Western Orbital Road to Knockmay Road. |

| LOCATION | PROJECT |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <i>Rathleague</i> | A new footpath at Rathleague from Bloomfield Cross to Portlaoise GAA was completed in 2023. This saw the delivery of a 3m wide shared pedestrian /cycle track with additional public lighting installed. Other safety measures were introduced on the road to highlight the GAA entrance oncoming motorists. The purpose of the scheme is to help encourage increased walking/cycling to the GAA club. |
| <i>Stradbally Road</i> | A scheme to review the provision of cycling infrastructure on the Stradbally Road from its roundabout junction with the Southern Circular Road to the Tyrrells site is proposed by Laois County Council. Options for the Stradbally Road Scheme involve the delivery of dedicated cycle tracks or shared pedestrian/cycle tracks. Subject to approval, the works are planned to be delivered within 3 years. |
| <i>Triogue Way Phase 2 and 3</i> | Phase 1 runs from Lismard Roundabout into the People’s Park as a shared pedestrian and cycle path. This phase was delivered and completed in 2022. Phases 2 and 3 will run from the People’s Park along the route of the River Triogue, through the old Convent Lands and the Linear Park where it will meet Greenmill Lane. From here it leaves the Park and travels on-road along Greenmill Lane, onto the N80 Mountmellick Road, and onto the Ballyfin Road where it finishes at the Western Orbital Road. Phase 2 is the section from Greenmill Lane to the Western Orbital Road, and Part 8 for this phase is due to be published by |

Table 10: NTA funded Active Travel Projects

11.6 Policies

| Planning and Development Policies | |
|--|---|
| It is the policy of the Council to: | |
| TM P1 | Improve and provide pedestrian linkages, cycle networks and permeability including blueways and greenways throughout the town; ensure filtered permeability is secured in all new residential estates, providing direct access to commercial developments and schools. Retrofit connectivity including between established housing areas where possible |

| Planning and Development Policies | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| TM P2 | Examine the feasibility of introducing clear, direct pedestrian routes between the shopping areas, and provide pedestrian access across James Fintan Lalor Avenue and Lyster Square |
| TM P3 | Provide adequate, secure and dry bicycle parking facilities at appropriate locations |
| TM P4 | Ensure all footpaths provide access for disabled and mobility impaired persons |
| TM P5 | Facilitate and implement appropriate measures to reduce or manage traffic associated with schools to regularize vehicular movements and alleviate congestion |
| TM P6 | Reserve all lands for future relief roads free of development in conjunction with the requirements of the Road Authority |
| TM P7 | Complete the inner relief road system for Portlaoise including the Portlaoise Northern Orbital Route, links between the Dublin Road and the Borris Road, Rathleague and Meelick and the Stradbally and Dublin Road |
| TM P8 | Provide for improvements to the national road network, including reserving corridors for proposed routes, free of development, so as not to compromise future road schemes |
| TM P9 | Prevent inappropriate development on lands adjacent to the existing national road network, which would adversely affect the safety, current and future capacity and function of national roads and having regard to possible future upgrades of the national roads and junctions |
| TM P10 | Ensure that any development permitted along national roads is in accordance with the Spatial Planning and National Roads–Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DoECLG, 2012) or any updated version |
| TM P11 | Facilitate a limited level of new accesses or the intensified use of existing accesses to the national road network on the approaches to or exit to Portlaoise that are subject to a speed limit zone between 50 kmh and 60 kmh otherwise known as the transition zone. Such accesses will be considered where they facilitate orderly urban development and would not result in a proliferation of such entrances, leading to a diminution in the role of these transitional zones. The Council will have regard to the nature of the proposed development and the volume of traffic to be generated by it and the implications for the safety, capacity and efficient operation of the national road. A Road Safety Audit, prepared in accordance with TII publications shall be submitted where appropriate |

11.7 Objectives

| Planning and Development Objectives | |
|---|---|
| It is the objective of the Council to: | |
| TM 01 | To cooperate with NTA and other relevant transport planning bodies in the delivery of a high quality, integrated transport system. |
| TM 02 | Facilitate the economic and social development of the town through the provision and efficient use of transport infrastructure. |
| TM 03 | Work with the NTA, public transport operators including Irish Rail, Bus Éireann and Local Link to provide and facilitate improved public transport services and infrastructure. |
| TM 04 | To examine the feasibility for Park and Ride facilities in Portlaoise in conjunction with the NTA, TII and other relevant stakeholders. |
| TM 05 | To facilitate the provision of a “park and stride” adjacent to Lismard Business Park to serve the neighbouring school campuses. |
| TM 06 | To investigate the development of a transport interchange on James Fintan Lalor Avenue including bus stops and facilities in conjunction with the NTA. |
| TM 07 | Encourage, promote and facilitate a modal shift towards more sustainable forms of transport in all new developments. |
| TM 08 | Promote sustainable and compact forms of development which reduce reliance of private car-based transport. |
| TM 09 | Concentrate people intensive development in areas easily accessible to public transport. |
| TM 010 | Significantly reduce carbon emissions through traffic related interventions at James Fintan Lalor / Lyster Square. |
| TM 011 | Improve the pedestrian experience by reducing car dominance on James Fintan Lalor Avenue. |
| TM 012 | Improve pedestrian links, based on desire lines, from Main Street through Laneways and between the old and new shopping areas. |
| TM 013 | Seek a 40% increase in bicycle use by 2040. |

Planning and Development Objectives

| | |
|---------------|--|
| TM 014 | To investigate, in conjunction with Irish Rail, the reopening and reuse of the Togher train line from Portlaoise Railway Station as part of the overall development of the J17 National Enterprise Park. |
|---------------|--|

SECTION 12. COMMUNITY SERVICES

Strategic Aim: *To safeguard, provide and expand community services and facilities to meet the needs of the current and future population.*

12.1 Introduction

The creation of sustainable and vibrant communities requires the provision of and access to education, childcare, health and support services, recreation and leisure facilities and a good quality-built environment to create a sense of place. The Council is committed to the provision, upgrade and expansion of community facilities and social infrastructure in conjunction with private, public and voluntary organisations.

As well as dramatically increasing in size, the population of Portlaoise is becoming more diverse with many new arrivals from Eastern Europe [in particular from Poland and Lithuania], UK, Africa, India and Ukraine. According to Census 2022, 6,575 residents [27%] of Portlaoise were born outside of Ireland. This is one of the highest non-national town population percentages in the country.

12.2 Children and Young People

Census 2022 reveals that Portlaoise has a population of 7,088 aged under 19 years which represents 30% of the overall population of the town.

This has a bearing on the present and future need for facilities such as childcare, play areas for children, sports facilities, schools and safe walking and cycling routes in the County and the importance of bringing together key voluntary providers of services to children and young people such as Comhairle Na N-Og and Laois/Offaly Children and Young Peoples Services Committee.

12.3 Sport, Recreation and Play

Portlaoise has a wide range of sports, recreation and play facilities. These facilities are provided through a mix of public, private and community organisations.

The built and natural environment of Portlaoise, including its public roads and footpaths, open spaces, Pairc an Phobail, the River Triogue Linear Park and Togher Wood support an array of sports, recreation and play activities such as walking, jogging, cycling. These are supplemented by gyms and leisure facilities, such as the Leisure Centre and Saint Marys Hall.

Sports and recreation clubs in Portlaoise cater for GAA, soccer, golf, rugby, swimming, athletics and basketball amongst others. Some of the key sporting clubs and facilities include: Portlaoise GAA Club, Portlaoise Soccer Club, Portlaoise Panthers Basketball Club, Portlaoise Athletics Club, Portlaoise Rugby Club and Portlaoise Golf Club.

Laois Sports Partnerships are at the forefront of the development and promotion of these sporting and recreational activities. They work with clubs, schools, and community groups to ensure that structures are in place to enable participation for all community members.

12.4 New Communities

The Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) was established in 2014 by Laois County Council and performs a role in developing, coordinating and implementing a coherent and integrated approach to local and community development through the Local Economic and Community Plan 2023 - 2028 (LECP). The LECP is central to promoting economic and local community development in the county over a five-year period.

12.5 Community Resource Centre



Plate 16: Treo Nua Resource Centre, Harpurs Lane, Portlaoise

Treo Nua Community & Family Resource Centre on Harpurs Lane was opened in 2005. It provides a wide range of programmes, supports and services for families and individuals living in Portlaoise and environs. These include family support, early learning, youth work, community development, childrens play therapy, gambling therapy and counselling.

12.6 Education

The provision of good quality childcare and educational facilities is important to support the development of sustainable communities and to support economic development. There are approximately 25 no. preschool facilities in Portlaoise, including a variety of full day care facilities, sessional services, preschool, crèche facilities, Montessori and after school facilities. The requirement for additional preschool facilities will be based on the capacity of existing facilities and additional requirements arising from new residential development.



Plate 17: Schools Campus [Holy Family] at Aghnaharna

There are 7 no. primary schools and 4 no. secondary schools in Portlaoise. Much of the education infrastructure is of recent origin. The Council has sought and will continue to work with the Department of Education and Skills to identify and develop sites for new schools as necessary.

In this regard, the County Development Plan includes for the zoning of land for new schools and expansion of existing educational facilities. The requirement for additional primary and secondary educational facilities will be monitored having regard to the development of residential land during the lifetime of the Plan. The Council will facilitate and promote the development of third level educational facilities including outreach facilities in the town.

12.7 Age Friendly

Laois County Council adopted the “Laois Age Friendly County Strategy 2023-2027” .The strategy sets out a number of aims and actions so that the county will be where older people are supported to live independently in safe and secure homes and communities, suitable for their physical and social needs, with improved health and quality of life, where older people are enabled to participate in economic, social, political and community life and continue to grow, develop and contribute to society and build upon existing services and supports.

12.8 Library Services

A new state of the art public library opened on the site of the former Shaws retail outlet on lower Main Street in July 2023. As well as educational and cultural information, the library provides free digital access and community public space for the local community and visitors to the town. Occupying a central location, the library forms a significant element of The Cultural Quarter development in the historic core of Portlaoise showcasing and promoting the Fort Protector and Fitzmaurice Place.



Plate 18: Portlaoise County Library

12.9 Health Care

Portlaoise is the main centre of health care in the county. The Midland Regional Hospital and Saint Fintans Hospital are located on adjoining campuses in the town. There are a number of public, voluntary and private agencies responsible for the provision of healthcare facilities, with the Health Service Executive being the primary agency. There is an extensive landbank associated with the Saint Fintans Hospital campus and the Council will seek to engage with the HSE in drawing up a masterplan for the future development of such lands.



Plate 19: Saint Fintans Hospital Complex, Dublin Road, Portlaoise

12.10 Emergency Services

Portlaoise is served by various emergency services including An Garda Siochana, the Ambulance Service, the Fire Service and Civil Defence etc.

12.11 Policies

| Planning and Development Policies | |
|--|--|
| It is the policy of the Council to: | |
| CSC P1 | <i>Ensure provision of sufficient zoned lands to allow for expansion of existing and provision of new educational facilities,</i> |
| CSC P2 | <i>Facilitate the development of and expansion of services, amenities and facilities to cater for all society members, ages and community groups,</i> |
| CSC P3 | <i>Facilitate the development of primary, second-level, third-level outreach, vocational and lifelong learning facilities and digital capacity for distance learning including fourth level education, lifelong learning and up-skilling generally,</i> |
| CSC P4 | <i>Ensure the provision and implementation of primary and secondary education facilities in concert with the planning and sustainable development of residential areas in order to maximise the opportunities for use of walking, cycling and use of public transport,</i> |
| CSC P5 | <i>Facilitate the development of new and expansion of existing active and passive recreation, leisure and play facilities to cater for all society members, ages and community groups,</i> |

12.8 Objectives

| It is the objective of the Council to: | |
|--|--|
| CSC 01 | <i>Facilitate the provision of social infrastructure such as community, library and emergency service in appropriate locations and to provide access to new and existing community and social facilities</i> |
| CSC 02 | <i>Collaborate with the relevant stakeholders and facilitate the improvement and provision of educational, childcare and healthcare facilities in appropriate and accessible locations</i> |
| CSC 03 | <i>Facilitate implementation of the Laois Age Friendly County Strategy 2023-2027</i> |
| CSC 04 | <i>Promote the amenities and ensure the accessibility of arts and cultural facilities within the ownership of Laois County Council</i> |
| CSC 05 | <i>Facilitate the roll out of community policing and neighbourhood watch schemes</i> |
| CSC 06 | <i>Collaborate on a masterplan with the HSE for its extensive landbank in the town</i> |

SECTION 13. BUILT HERITAGE

Strategic Aim: *To protect, conserve and manage the built heritage of the town and to encourage sensitive and sustainable development so as to ensure its preservation for current and future generations.*

13.1 Historic Town Centre

The historic town centre is centred on the remnants of the Fort Protector on Church Street which dates from the mid sixteenth century. The town is characterized by features of architectural and archaeological interest.



Plate 20: Main Street, Portlaoise, c. 1910

The conservation of the architectural heritage of Portlaoise is a key guiding principle of the “2040 and Beyond A Vision for Portlaoise”. Improved design in the public realm will emphasise the historical form of the town. Historic routes such as Pepper Lane and Lyster Lane will be interpreted as entrances into the town. Emphasizing these narrow lanes will upgrade their importance and enrich the hierarchy of spaces in the town centre, as well as strengthening the connection between old and new. These routes connect into the Lower Square, notable as the original marketplace of the town, and will reinforce its primary importance in the public realm.

An ACA is a place, area, group of structures or townscape, taking account of building lines and heights that is of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest. Contemporary design should reinforce the historic character within the ACA and should take its cues from the historic setting in terms of scale and design. High quality architectural design will add to the built heritage and complement the receiving historic environment.

13.3 Record of Protected Structures

The Record of Protected Structures (RPS) is set out under Appendix 1 of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 and should be read in conjunction with this plan. The RPS includes structures of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest. A zone of archaeological significance has also been identified within the plan area.

13.4 Fort Protector

A Conservation Plan for the Fort Protector has been prepared by Laois Heritage Society which aims to create a policy framework to guide all future decisions on the development of the Fort to enable its eventual restoration as a heritage site. The proposal for an ‘Old Fort Quarter’ has the potential to promote understanding of the Fort and its historical significance and make it accessible to visitors.

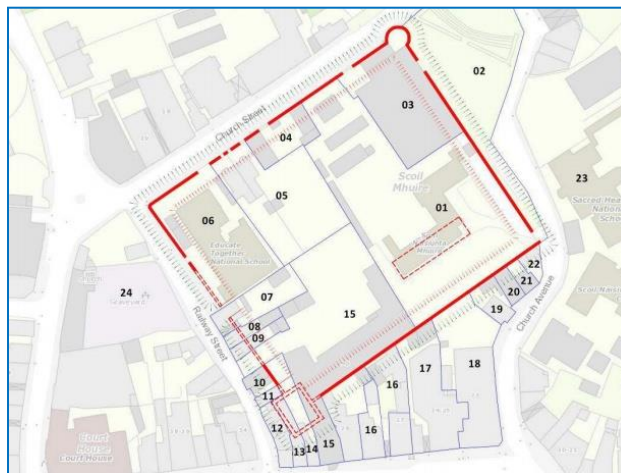


Figure 13.2: Overlay of Fort remains on contemporary map, (Fort Protector Conservation Plan Phase II)

13.5 Policies

| Planning and Development Policies | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| It is the policy of the Council to: | |
| BH P1 | Ensure heritage assets that are the focus for tourism development are appropriately managed and their special interest conserved from potential adverse effects from visitors or development in general and that best practice standards in relation for the environmental management of tourism enterprises are adhered to. |
| BH P2 | Support and promote, with the co-operation of landowners, public access (establishment of public rights of way, where necessary) to heritage sites and features at appropriate locations whilst ensuring heritage related development does not result in negative impacts on the fabric or setting of Laois’s heritage assets. |
| BH P3 | Support and promote, with the co-operation of key stakeholders, the development of the Fort of Maryborough in Portlaoise and ensure that any development will not result in negative impacts on the fabric or setting of the site. |
| BH P4 | Support the implementation of Ireland’s Ancient East by facilitating the provision of visitor information in line with the policies and objectives with respect to heritage sites, and integrating the objectives of Ireland’s Ancient East with transport programmes in the County. |
| BH P15 | Encourage and support the provision of foreign language interpretation interventions in order to ensure the appropriate interpretation and appreciation of the county’s heritage asset. |

13.6 Objectives

| Planning and Development Objectives | |
|--|--|
| It is the objective of the Council to: | |
| BH 01 | Protect, conserve and enhance the built environment, through promoting awareness, utilising relevant heritage legislation and promoting good quality urban design. |

| Planning and Development Objectives | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| BH 02 | Conserve, protect and enhance the built heritage of Portlaoise, including the Architectural Conservation Area, all Protected Structures and attendant grounds, Recorded Monuments and Places and the Zone of Archaeological Significance in accordance with best conservation practice. |
| BH 03 | Positively consider proposals to improve, alter, extend or change the use of protected structures so as to render them viable for modern use, subject to consultation with suitably qualified Conservation Architects and / or other relevant experts, suitable design, materials and construction methods. |
| BH 04 | Ensure all development works on or at the sites of protected structures, including any site works necessary, shall be carried out using best heritage practice for the protection and preservation of those aspects or features of the structures / site that render it worthy of protection. |
| BH 05 | Support the re-introduction of traditional features on protected structures where there is evidence that such features (e.g. window styles, finishes etc.) previously existed. |
| BH 06 | Strongly resist the demolition of protected structures, unless it can be demonstrated that exceptional circumstances exist. |
| BH 07 | Consider the change of use of protected structures, provided that it can be shown that the structure, character, appearance and setting will not be adversely affected or where it can be shown it is necessary to have an economic use to enable its upkeep. |
| BH 08 | Ensure the protection within Architectural Conservation Areas, of all those buildings, spaces, archaeological sites, trees, street furniture, views and other aspects of the environment which form an essential part of their character, as set out in their character appraisals. |
| BH 09 | Ensure the design of any development in Architectural Conservation Areas, including any changes of use of an existing building, should preserve and / or enhance the character and appearance of the Architectural Conservation Area as a whole. |

| Planning and Development Objectives | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| BH 010 | Promote schemes for the conservation and enhancement of the character and appearance of Architectural Conservation Areas. |
| BH 011 | No development in the vicinity of a feature included in the Record of Monuments & Places (RMP) will be permitted which seriously detracts from the setting of the feature or which is seriously injurious to its cultural or educational value. |
| BH 012 | Ensure archaeological assessment is carried out as required and promote 'preservation in situ' of archaeological remains and settings in developments that would impact upon archaeological sites and/or features. |
| BH 013 | Protect previously unknown archaeological sites and features, including underwater sites, where they are discovered during development works. |
| BH 014 | Facilitate public access to National Monuments in State or Local Authority care. |

SECTION 14. BIODIVERSITY AND NATURAL HERITAGE

Strategic Aim: *To protect the natural heritage and biodiversity assets of the town and enhance the public realm and green infrastructure network connectivity by introducing more greenways and cycleways.*

14.1 Natural Heritage

This chapter considers the natural heritage of Portlaoise which includes the Natural Environment, Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure. As is the case with Built Heritage, Natural Heritage is a key and distinctive asset which can also be used to promote a positive image of the town.



Plate 21: Linear Park in Portlaoise

With respect to the Natural Environment of Portlaoise there are no European designated (EU Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC) Special Areas of Conservation or Special Protection Areas located within the plan boundary. The Ridge of Portlaoise extends to the north and south of the town along the River Triogue. The main habitats and species comprise the esker ridge and disused gravel pits, ash and hazel woodlands with species rich grasslands and are protected under the Wildlife Amendment Act, 2000.

Green Infrastructure is the physical environment within and between towns and villages, comprising a network of multi-functional open spaces, including formal parks, gardens, woodlands, green corridors, waterways, trees and open space.

The River Triogue itself is a green corridor cutting right through the centre of the town. Natural corridors such as the Triogue are of huge importance to biodiversity in an urban situation. They provide shelter and foraging opportunities for many species of wildlife.

Another very important function is provision of linkages between green areas. An example of this is the Triogue providing a nature corridor between the People’s Park in the south of the town and the Linear Park in the north of the town. There are also several artificial ponds and lakes in Portlaoise, the majority of which are associated with housing developments. Some of the artificial water bodies have developed a good diversity of species.

Portlaoise has many old and new buildings as well as mature gardens which in themselves can be habitats for rare and threatened species. Playgrounds and outdoor gyms are located at People’s Park and Portlaoise Leisure Centre. There are also a number of walking tracks, sports grounds and clubs located in the town.

14.2 Portlaoise Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2028

The Portlaoise Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2028 developed by Portlaoise Tidy Towns aims to restore and protect nature in every area of the town, from housing estates to parks and from busy streets to main access roads, as well as paving the way to receive government funding. The plan builds on previous projects with Portlaoise Tidy Towns and Laois County Council, including the development of natural meadows along roads and in housing estates such as Kilminchy. Planting trees and re-establishing wetlands are also a major factor in the Biodiversity Plan.



Plate 22: Bee friendly roundabout on Southern Circular Route

14.3 Trees

Laois County Council recognises the benefits of trees in humanising spaces, enhancing the environment and minimising the impacts of climate change. They clean the air, provide natural flood defences, mask noise and promote a general sense of well-being. In addition, trees have considerable beneficial impacts on the lives of those who do not have immediate access to other more traditional types of open space. Trees, for example, can add colour, interest and beauty to our busy streets making the city a pleasant place in which to live, work and visit.

14.4 Community Gardens and Allotments

Community gardens and allotments utilise small spaces efficiently. They have a number of key benefits including:

- Providing physical activity to all age groups and different abilities.
- Quality of life, mental health and well-being benefits.
- Providing sustainable, locally grown food.
- Bringing vacant / idle lands into active use.
- Environmental, biodiversity and community benefits.

Laois County Council supports the provision of community gardens and allotments in Portlaoise.

14.5 Policies

| Planning and Development Policies | |
|--|---|
| It is the policy of the Council to: | |
| NH P1 | Ensure heritage assets that are the focus for tourism development are appropriately managed and their special interest conserved from potential adverse effects from visitors or development in general and that best practice standards in relation for the environmental management of tourism enterprises are adhered to |
| NH P2 | Develop a greenway/blueway walking and cycling route along the River Triogue |
| NH P3 | Support and promote, with the co-operation of landowners, public access to heritage sites and features at appropriate locations whilst ensuring heritage related development does not result in negative impacts on the fabric or setting of the town's heritage assets |
| NH P4 | Support the implementation of Ireland's Ancient East by facilitating the provision of visitor information– in line with the policies and objectives with respect to heritage |

| Planning and Development Policies | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| | sites; and integrating the objectives of Ireland’s Ancient East with transport programmes in the County |
| NH P5 | Protect environmental quality in Portlaoise through the implementation of European, National and Regional policy and legislation relating to air quality, greenhouse gases, climate change, light pollution, noise pollution and waste management |
| NH P6 | Adopt a pro-active and systematic good practice approach to tree management with the aim of promoting good tree health, condition, diversity, public amenity |
| NH P7 | Make Tree Preservation Orders as appropriate |
| NH P8 | Support the town in a garden concept through appropriate landscaping and tree planting in the planning and development of urban spaces, streets, roads and infrastructure projects |
| NH P9 | Promote a no net loss of biodiversity approach through strategies, planning, mitigation measures, appropriate offsetting and/or investment in Blue-Green infrastructure |
| NH P10 | Protect Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) from developments that would adversely affect their qualifying interests and conservation objectives. |

14.6 Objectives

| Planning and Development Objectives | |
|---|--|
| It is the objective of the Council to: | |
| NH 01 | Identify, protect and conserve natural heritage sites, nationally designated conservation sites and non-designated sites in co-operation and consultation with the relevant statutory authorities. |
| NH 02 | Seek integration of all elements of existing green infrastructure into new developments, prevent fragmentation and mitigate potential impacts on the existing green infrastructure network. |
| NH 03 | Require the preservation and maintenance of suitable mature trees, hedgerows and natural heritage features in new developments. |

| Planning and Development Objectives | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| NH 04 | Seek to preserve, protect and maintain trees of special amenity, conservation or landscape value. |
| NH 05 | Carry out and require the planting of native trees, hedgerows and vegetation in all new developments. |
| NH 06 | Open up visual and physical access via the River Triogue from People’s Park as a continuous pedestrian and cycle link through the town centre, and potentially through the Convent Lands having regard to ecological considerations including protected species and habitats. |
| NH 07 | Reconnect the Triogue Linear Park with the residential areas to the north of the Town Centre. |
| NH 08 | Identify, protect, conserve and enhance wherever possible, wildlife habitats, stepping stones, corridors and features. |
| NH 09 | Provide recreational amenities such as playgrounds and outdoor gym equipment within existing areas of open space. |
| NH 010 | Protect environmental quality and implement site appropriate mitigation measures with respect to air quality, greenhouse gases, climate change, light pollution, noise pollution and waste management. |
| NH 011 | Maintain riverbank vegetation along watercourses and ensure protection of a 10m riparian buffer zone on Greenfield sites and maintain free from development. |
| NH 012 | Facilitate the work of agencies including Laois County Council redressing the issue of terrestrial and aquatic invasive species. |
| NH 013 | Protect, conserve and enhance the natural habitats of the Burial Ridge. |
| NH 014 | Protect ancient and species rich hedgerows throughout the town. |
| NH 015 | Protect trees, groups of trees and hedgerows which act as wildlife corridors in accordance with Article 10 of the EU Habitats Directive. |
| NH 016 | Make a Tree Preservation Order to protect a significant tree group, which is important as a rookery and roost for rooks and jackdaws, at the Downs Portlaoise and Portlaoise Town Park |
| NH 017 | Support local community groups in the development of community gardens and allotments, subject to residential amenity and compliance with all planning and environmental considerations. |
| NH 018 | Protect Natural Heritage Areas (NHA) from developments that would adversely affect their special interests |

| Planning and Development Objectives | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| NH 019 | new developments shall identify, protect and enhance ecological features by making provision for local biodiversity (for example, through provision of swift boxes or bricks, bat roost boxes, green roofs, etc.) and improve the ecological coherence of wider green infrastructure. |
| NH 020 | It is an objective of the Council to protect existing swift roosts as identified in the County Swift Survey and as they relate to Portlaoise and ensure existing nest sites are not lost through inappropriate renovation or destruction. |
| NH 021 | In dealing with applications for new developments, the Planning Authority will have regard to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion of swift nesting opportunities in new buildings through use of swift brick or swift nest boxes where appropriate BNH 16 Work with relevant stakeholders such as the Office of Public Works (OPW) and local stakeholders to develop a Landscape Conservation Assessment in relation to the Heath and its attributes during the plan period. |
| NH 022 | Support local community groups in the development of community gardens and allotments, subject to residential amenity and compliance with all planning and environmental considerations. |

SECTION 15. IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

Strategic Aim. *To implement in conjunction with key stakeholders, the objectives of this Local Area Plan, with a particular focus on the key strategic objectives, and to monitor their implementation in a timely manner.*

15.1 Implementation Strategy

This Local Area Plan sets out a clear and strategic vision for the development of Portlaoise Town in the period from 2024 through 2030.

This vision is in accordance with the key role identified for Portlaoise at both county and regional levels and seeks to make the town a more attractive place in which to live, work, invest and visit while also functioning as the pre-eminent business, service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the wider community.

In order for the vision to be realised it is critical that the projected population growth is accompanied by the delivery of the necessary site servicing and social infrastructure requirements. The Council is fully committed to securing and monitoring the implementation of the strategies, policies and objectives of this Plan.

The Council will continue to occupy a leadership role to progress and secure the Plan policies and objectives to achieve the sustainable development of Portlaoise.

The successful implementation of a significant number of the policies and objectives of this Local Area Plan will necessitate on-going collaboration and a sense of good-will across a range of agencies and stakeholders. The implementation of this Plan will depend also on the economic climate, political support, Council funding and the availability of funding from other sources.

Implementation

The implementation of the LAP will be achieved in a number of different ways, including:

- The application of the policies, objectives, standards, and related provisions in the assessment of planning applications for permissions, including local authority development. In view of the cross-cutting and multi-faceted scope of many of the policies and objectives in the LAP, they

will contribute to the achievement of multiple Strategic Objectives in the Plan, which are themselves interconnected.

- The integration of the strategies, policies, and objectives of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 with the LAP.
- Investment in infrastructure and environmental services that underpin the policies and objectives of the LAP. The Strategic Objectives in the Plan, and the Core Strategy in the County Development Plan, establish the priorities for the provision and improvement of infrastructure and environmental services by Laois County Council, and by other agencies, subject to the availability of funding.
- The ongoing monitoring of the strategies, policies, and objectives in the LAP as appropriate.
- Identifying the need for any adjustments to strategies, policies, and objectives over the lifetime of the LAP, as appropriate, and in future reviews.

15.2 Stakeholders

This Local Area Plan outlines specific policies and objectives of Laois County Council with regard to Portlaoise Town.

The overarching policies and objectives of the Laois County Development Plan 2121-2027 also apply, specifically in terms of Land-Use Zoning and Development Management Standards.

As far as practicable, every effort has been made to formulate objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable and realistic. However, a number are set within a longer timeframe, thus they may not be fully implemented over the lifetime of this Plan.

The Planning Department of the Council is the main section responsible for monitoring and implementing the Plan, mainly through the development management function. However, it is important to note that this Plan coordinates the work and objectives of other key departments within Laois County Council, such as Local Economic Office (LEO), Environment and Water Services, Roads, Housing, Tourism, Regeneration, Local Community Development and the Municipal District.

The local authority will need to utilise its wide range of statutory powers and responsibilities to achieve the objectives of the Plan. In some cases, the body responsible for the implementation of certain Plan objectives may be external, such as Uisce Éireann, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Environmental Protection Agency.

The Council will also require developers to incorporate the objectives and development management standards of this plan into their development proposals. It is also intended that the various voluntary groups will be encouraged to participate whenever possible, in the implementation of the policies objectives of the plan.

15.3 Funding

Many of the policy objectives of the Local Area Plan, particularly the key infrastructural elements, will require government funding and support.

Where appropriate, the Council will seek financing from specified sources, both the public and private sector, as well as from EU programmes and grants.

The implementation of a plan may be constrained by a number of elements, namely, the economic climate, political support, allocated local authority funding and the availability of funding from other sources. Therefore, no funding of projects is guaranteed in advance nor is the implementation of all objectives contained within the plan.

The fulfilment of policies and objectives in the LAP, including strategies or projects, will be dependent on capital funding from the Government and other state agencies. The funds of Laois County Council are allocated and adopted under the annual budget for the local authority.

15.4 Development Contributions

Development contributions for the provision of infrastructure and services such as roads, footpaths, surface water drainage, amenity and open space provision, will be applied as appropriate to development proposals granted permission. The details and basis for the determination of the contributions are set out in the Development Contributions Scheme for Laois County Council, adopted in accordance with Section 48 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

15.5 Other Sources of Funding

Other sources of funding that will assist in the implementation of policies and objectives in the LAP include:

- Rural and Urban Regeneration Funds (RRDF and URDF): These funds arise from the National Development Plan in support of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and other national strategies and are available to support the implementation of local authority developments plans

and local economic and community plan objectives. The types of projects eligible for funding include measures to address building vacancy and refurbishment, public realm improvements, enabling infrastructure, and sustainable mobility.

- Climate Action Fund: This aims to support initiatives that contribute to the achievement of Ireland’s climate and energy targets.
- Smarter Travel and Active Travel Funding: Funding allocated by the National Transport Agency (NTA) to support area-based transport assessments, local transport plans, and sustainable transport projects.
- Uisce Éireann Capital Investment Funding: Funding for new and upgraded water and wastewater infrastructure e.g., wastewater treatment plants.
- Small Towns and Villages Growth Programme: Uisce Éireann funding to support growth in small towns and villages through upgrades to wastewater treatment plants.
- National Biodiversity Funding and Grant: Funding to support local authority biodiversity plans and projects.
- Public Private Partnership: Involves a partnership agreement between the public and private sectors for the delivery of specific projects relating to public services and infrastructure. Such approaches ensure a commitment to funding due to interlinked public and private assistance and aims at ensuring the most economically efficient manner of development

15.6 Development Management

Land use zoning for Portlaoise Local Area Plan functional area was carried out as part of the making of the overall Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 which was adopted in January 2022. Land use zoning objectives for Portlaoise are depicted on Map 2.2. of the County Development Plan, repeated as figure 12 of this LAP.”

Therefore, please refer to:

- [a] Chapter 13. General Location & Pattern of Development, Volume 1: Written Statement and
- [b] Portlaoise Zoning Map 2.2, Volume 2: Settlement Strategy.

15.7 Environmental Monitoring

Article 10 of the SEA Directive requires monitoring of the significant environmental effects of the implementation of this LAP in order to identify, at an early stage, unforeseen adverse effects and to enable appropriate remedial action to be undertaken. While the ongoing implementation of the policies and objectives of the LAP and the monitoring processes detailed above incorporates some monitoring

of environment related objectives, the full and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation assessment, required to be undertaken under Article 10 of the SEA Directive, is set out in the Strategic Environmental Assessment included in Appendix F.

It is the policy of Laois County Council to:

IM. P1: Implement in conjunction with key stakeholders, the policies and objectives of this Local Area Plan and to review the success or otherwise of the implementation of policies and objectives with reference to Section 10.3 of the Development Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2022), Section 6.5 of Local Area Plans Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2013) and Chapter 14 of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027.

15.8 Strategic Environmental Assessment

The SEA Directive requires that the significant environmental effects of the implementation of plans and programmes are monitored. Monitoring can both demonstrate the positive effects facilitated by the Plan and can enable, at an early stage, the identification of unforeseen adverse effects and the undertaking of appropriate remedial action.

The occurrence of significant adverse environmental effects not predicted and mitigated by this assessment, which are directly attributable to the implementation of the Plan, would necessitate consideration of these effects in the context of the Plan and potential remediation action(s) and/or review of part(s) of the Plan.

15.9 Indicators and Targets

Monitoring is based around indicators which allow quantitative measures of trends and progress over time relating to the Strategic Environmental Objectives identified in the SEA Environmental Report and used in the evaluation. Each indicator to be monitored is accompanied by the target(s) which were identified with regard to the relevant strategic actions.

Table 10.1 of the SEA Environmental Report shows the indicators and targets which have been selected for monitoring the likely significant environmental effects of implementing the Plan, if unmitigated. Monitoring is an ongoing process and the programme allows for flexibility and the further refinement of indicators and targets. The Monitoring Programme may be updated to deal with specific environmental issues – including unforeseen effects – as they arise. Many of the indicators relate to more than one of the freshwater and terrestrial environments.

15.10 Sources

The Plan will form part of the wider land use planning framework comprising a hierarchy of policies, plans, programmes, etc. This wider framework, including the National Planning Framework and the

Eastern and Midland RSES, is subject to its own SEA (and associated monitoring) requirements. At lower tiers of the hierarchy, Local Area Plans and individual projects will be subject to their own monitoring requirements as relevant.

In implementing the Monitoring Programme, the Council will take into account this hierarchy of planning and environmental monitoring. Sources for indicators may include existing monitoring databases (including those maintained by planning authorities and national/regional government departments and agencies) and the output of lower-tier environmental assessment and decision making (including a review of project approvals granted and associated documents and the output of any EIA monitoring programmes).

Internal monitoring of the environmental effects of grants of permission in the Council would provide monitoring of certain indicators on a grant of permission basis. Where significant adverse as the result of a development to be permitted are identified, such effects could be identified, recorded and used to inform monitoring evaluation.