LAOIS DIGITAL STRATEGY

2020-2024

Laois County Council
Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise, Co. Laois

Laois County Council

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INTRODUCTION

Why a Digital Strategy?

Digital Technology and Connectivity is more influential now more than ever before in how we communicate with each other, how we access information, how we educate ourselves, how we utilise services and its use in our professional lives.

The recent Public Health Pandemic in relation to COVID 19 which was declared in March 2020 has recalibrated how we live, work and socialise now and into the future.

The positive impact of advances in digital technology in our everyday lives continues to grow with the growth of Remote working, Homeschooling, Internet of Things (IoT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI). Digital technology and infrastructure can result in positive and transformative change for citizens and business:

- Save time
- Improve efficiency in delivery of services
- Increased access to services
- Attract jobs

This document presents County Laois first Digital Strategy and sets out a vision to advance our broadband and digital infrastructure, advance our citizen's engagement and digital skills, further develop our Counties digital economy and digitally transform the services the local authority provides.

The digital era can provide significant socio-economic benefits in our home and workplaces and to our overall quality of life and Laois County Council is positioned to monitor and engage with those responsible to ensure delivery whether in accessing services digitally or facilitating the rollout of infrastructure.

The opportunities afforded by digital technology are considered as powerful enabler of the citizen and community in the transition to a low carbon society and economy. The role of digital technologies will be a key driver of new economic and employment

opportunities for all regions in Ireland which will have the potential to make a positive impact on our emissions by for example reducing commuting and affording people the opportunity to work or be educated from home.

In order to fully appreciate the importance of having a digital strategy for Co Laois, it is important to identify some of the key advantages of transforming to a digitally engaged society which has become even more evident during the ongoing Pandemic:

Social interaction and connectivity with people

- Enables families to stay connected when apart through apps such as Skype, WhatsApp , Zoom, etc ;
- Enables businesses to have meetings without the need to travel ;
- Allows large numbers of people to available of online seminars which would not be possible in a physical setting;
- Allows people to pursue hobbies and interests , a source of entertainment through Gaming apps, you tube etc;

Transport
- Allows people to book on line to maximise efficiency

Health
- Allows for applications to monitor health virtually from health institutions – blood pressure, temperature control, etc

Crime
- Enables communities and businesses to protect their properties through CCTV and remote alarms etc;

Education
- Enable home schooling to take full advantage of staying in touch with primary and post primary schools;
- Avail of online courses , which allows for more people to connect with education that may not be able to afford to live within the centres of education;

Economic Interactions

- Enable local businesses to take full advantage of e-commerce (trading online) and the 'digital economy' and create an attractive investment and start-up environment;
- Avail of goods and services online, reduce your travel, no queuing, and make more informed purchasing decisions online;
- Smart Farming in a rural county

Climate Change

- Enable "remote working solutions" at Digital hubs located throughout the county thereby reducing the need to travel;
- Enables warning systems to be put in place to monitor water quality, flood warning systems, etc
- Enables the public to pursue alternative sources of energy through solar, wind, etc
- Enables the public to move away from internal combustion vehicle engine vehicles to Electric Vehicles

What is a Digital Strategy?

This digital strategy will set out Laois County Council ambitions to meet the needs and aspirations of the people of County Laois in enabling them to benefit from digital technologies and infrastructures throughout the county.

The digital strategy is about enabling the citizens of Laois to be better informed and skilled, to be able to carry out their business in a more resilient manner, access all aspects of life –education, public services and entertainment, whilst offering a better experience to visitors coming into the County.

Another key goal of the digital strategy as a local authority is to identify areas for consideration:
- Identify and address Digital weaknesses and digital inequality ;
- Promote the benefits and improve the use of digital technology ;
- Upskill the citizen to partake in the digital economy in a safe way;
- Support Digital education and training and develop smart communities to enhance socio economic development;
- Raise awareness of the risks and benefits for citizens using digital technology.

Digital Strategy Policy Context

This strategy is framed having regard to a number of policy documents such as

- European Commission – 'A Digital Agenda for Europe';
- Doing more with Digital – National Digital Strategy for Ireland(2013);
- Delivering a Connected Society- A National Broadband Plan for Ireland (2014); and
- Irelands Broadband Intervention Strategy – Connecting Communities (2015).

The digital agenda is one of 7 flagship initiatives under the Europe 2020 Strategy. It focuses on modern technologies and online services that will allow Europe to create

jobs and promote economic prosperity. It aims to improve the daily lives of EU citizens and businesses in a variety of ways.

The main focus of the National Digital Strategy is on <u>Doing more with Digital</u>. It is a foundation step to help Ireland to reap the full rewards of a digitally enabled society. The Strategy sets out a vision and a number of practical actions and steps to encourage and assist more citizens and small businesses to get on line. Phase 1 focuses on Business & Enterprise, Citizen Training and Schools & Education.

In County Laois, significant improvements have been made to digital infrastructure throughout the County in the past number of years by commercial operators. The creation of the Broadband Officer (BBO) role in 2017 in Laois County Council has helped to coordinate infrastructural development and delivered initiatives to develop connectivity throughout the County.

County Laois – A Socio Economic Profile

The population of the county in 2016 according to the Central Statistics Offices, CSO was 84,732. The population in Laois continues to be one of the fastest growing county populations in Ireland, having seen a 5.2% increase in population from 2011 to 2016. Table 1 shows the population changes in County Laois from 2002- 2016. Figure 1 shows the population change from 2006-2016 geographically in the County. This shows where the concentrations of population are and gives an indication of where infrastructure needs to be put in place to sustain that population.
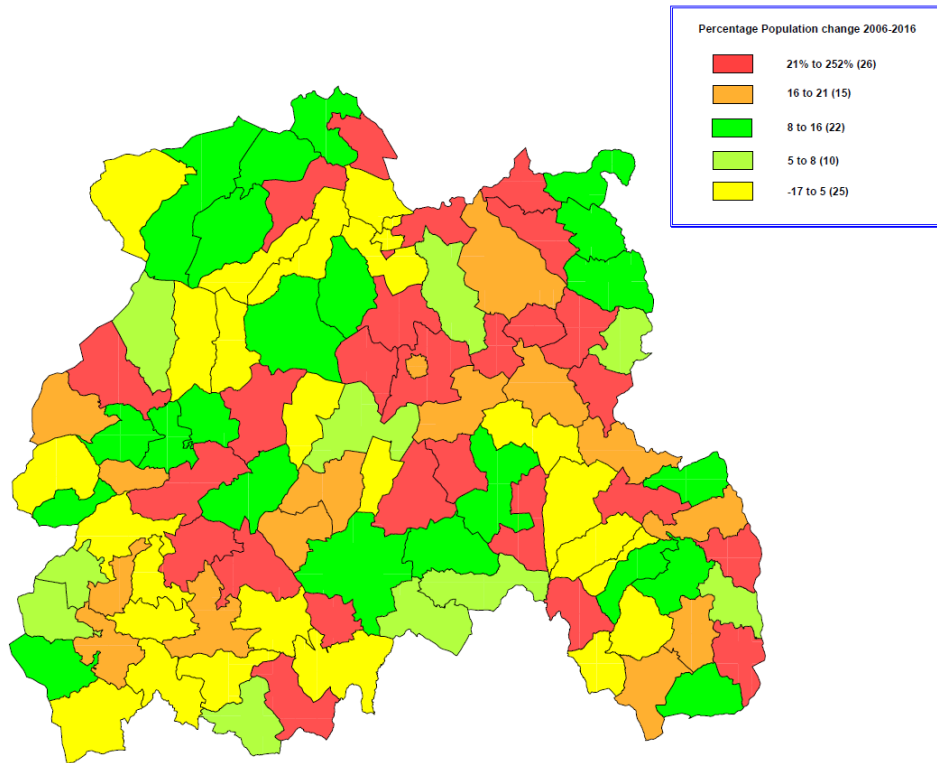
Table1: Population increase in County Laois 2002 to 2016, CSO.

Year	2002	2006	2011	2016
Population	58,774	67,059	80,559	84,732

County Laois has a balanced rural/urban population. It is becoming more urbanised but rural life and the rural economy remain important. The urban population increased slightly in census 2016 from 47% to 48%, with the rural population down 1% to 52%. Average farm sizes and farm incomes in County Laois are higher than the Midlands or State average. This indicates that rural areas also need to be serviced in terms of infrastructure to allow for the move towards more efficient farming methods and to allow for greater rural diversification connecting agribusiness with the national and international markets.

Figure 1: A snap shot of Laois, Source: Central Statistics Office, 2018, based on CSO information from Census 2016.

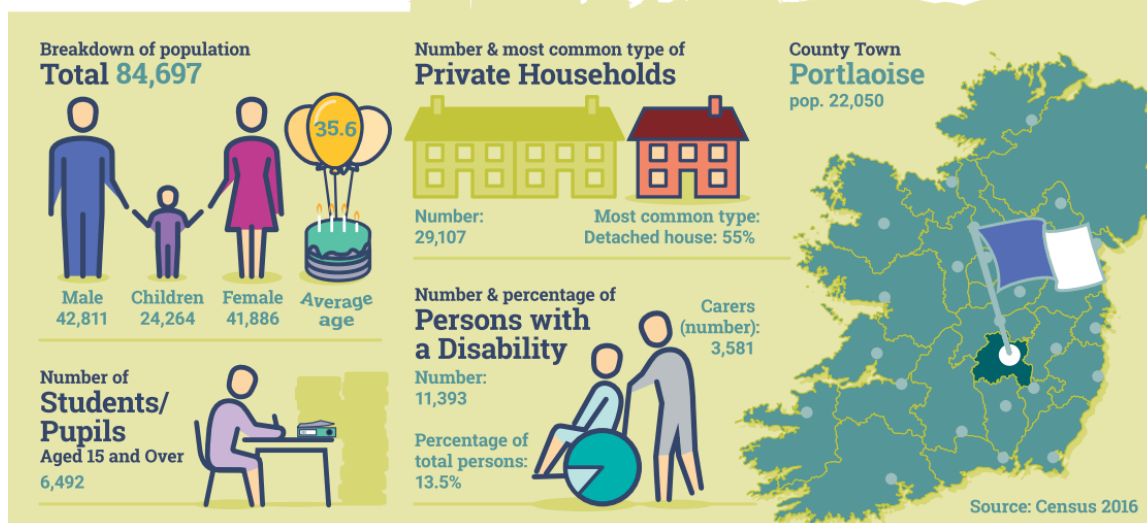In terms of the current statistics relating to Education, the 2016 Census showed that, of those aged 15 years and over whose full-time education had ceased, 14.1% were educated to at most primary level only, while 35.3% were educated to third level. Among those who had completed their full-time education in April 2016, younger people were significantly better educated than their older counterparts, illustrating the on-going gains in educational attainment.

The educational attainment of Laois residents is likely influenced by the profile of available job opportunities. For employment reasons, many Laois-born residents may choose to live elsewhere after completing their higher education. Educational attainment is greater in the eastern part of Laois that experiences a high level of out-of-county commuting and lower is western areas that are associated with in-county working.

A high number of people living in the eastern half of the county have third–level qualifications compared to the western half. A higher number of people, living in the eastern half of the county, commute out-of-county to work in adjoining counties and the greater Dublin Area.

Employment, Workers by Industry

Unemployment in 2016 in County Laois was 15.3% down from 21.4% in 2011. County Laois has a growing services sector, especially in the retail and wholesale area. The public sector is an important employer in Laois. Employment levels related to manufacturing are low in Laois relative to the Midlands or the State. Manufacturing employment is falling in Laois in line with wider employment trends in this sector, while agriculture still remains an important sector in the county. IT activities (computer programming, consultancy and related services) showed the largest increase nationally but only 1% of workers in Laois work in computer and information services (CSO, 2016). This was followed by residential care and social work activities which showed a 24 per cent rise nationally, 5.6% of Laois workers are employed in this sector.
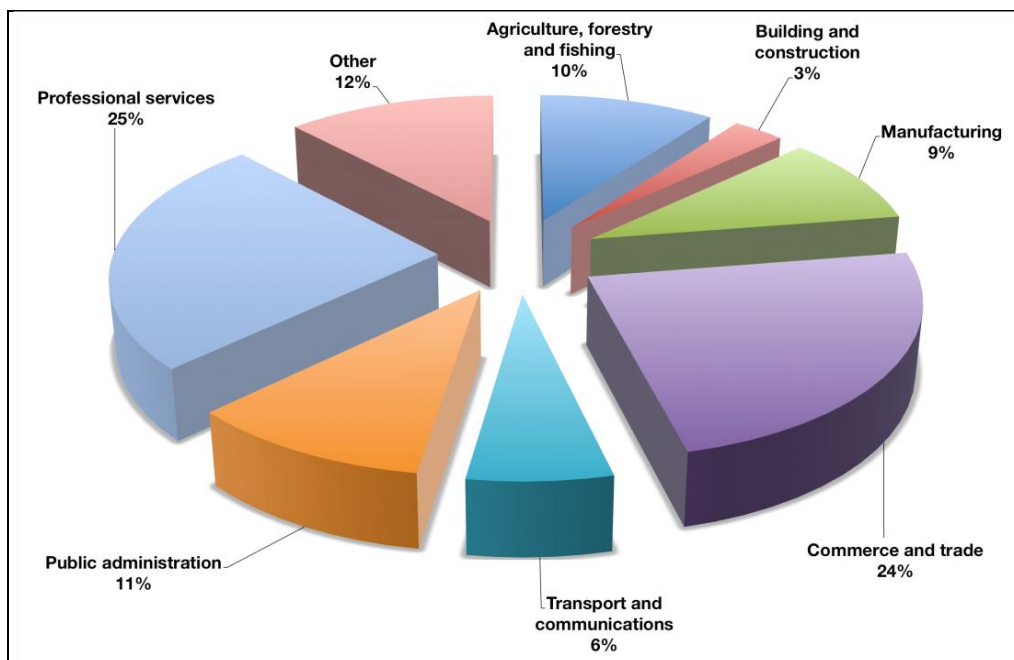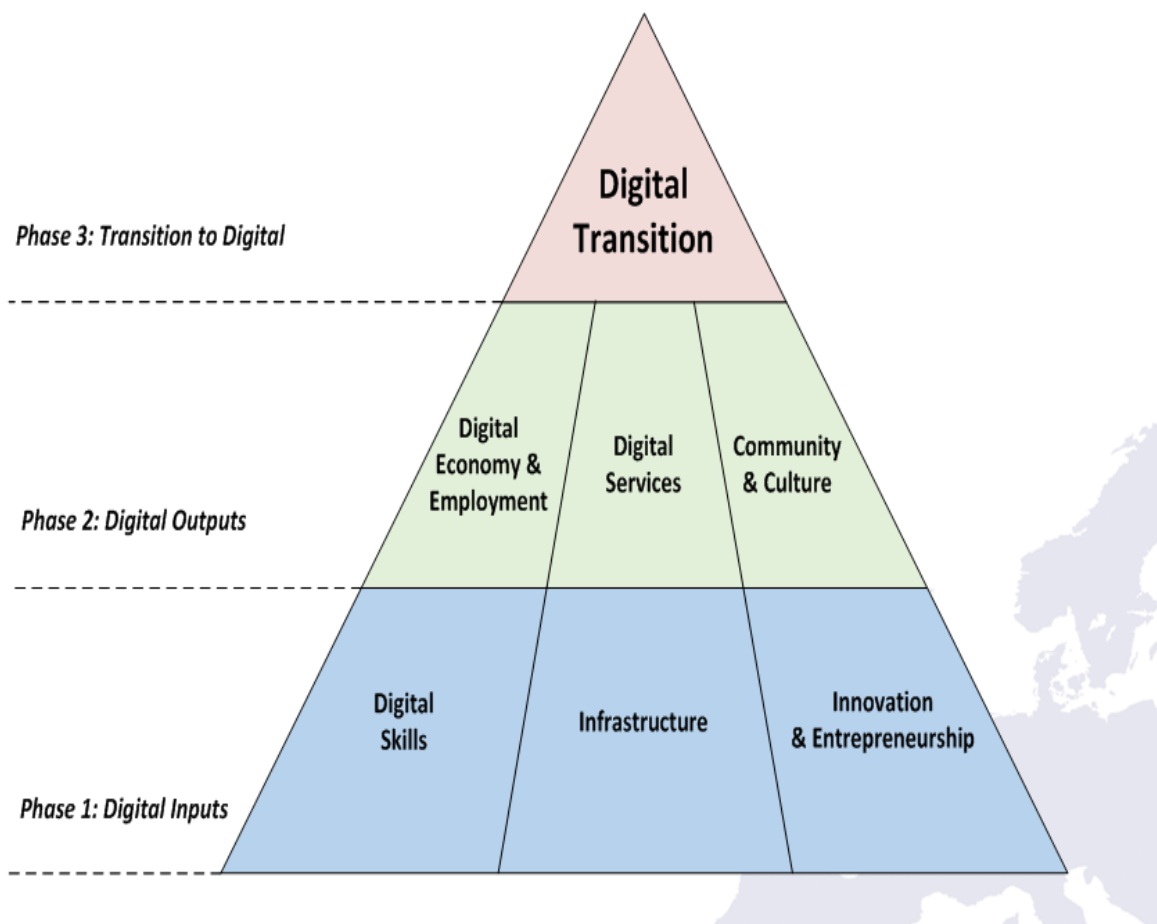

Figure xx Employment by sector in County Laois, CSO.

County Laois has the highest rate of outbound commuters in the Midlands, with Dublin and Kildare being the most popular destination. The average travel time to work in Laois is 31.9 minutes, CSO 2016. The development of a robust digital network will allow residents to work from home or from locations within the   county which in turn will

improve both the health and well being of the population as well as the environmental standards within the county in terms of reducing the impacts of travelling.

LAOIS - Digital Readiness Assessment

A Digital Readiness Assessment for County Laois was undertaken in 2018 by specialist consultants commissioned by Department of Rural and Community Development. This assessment measured digital maturity of households, business and the local authority across seven pillars. It compared County Laois against international best practice, the national average and a peer group of Counties which share similar characteristics.

The assessment was carried out across seven pillars of digital, with results given under five levels.

Phase 3: Transition to Digital

Digital Transition

Phase 2: Digital Outputs

Digital Economy & Employment

Digital Services

Community & Culture

Phase 1: Digital Inputs

Digital Skills

Infrastructure

Innovation & Entrepreneurship

The summary results of the seven Pillars of digital maturity are shown below with the full Digital Readiness Assessment.
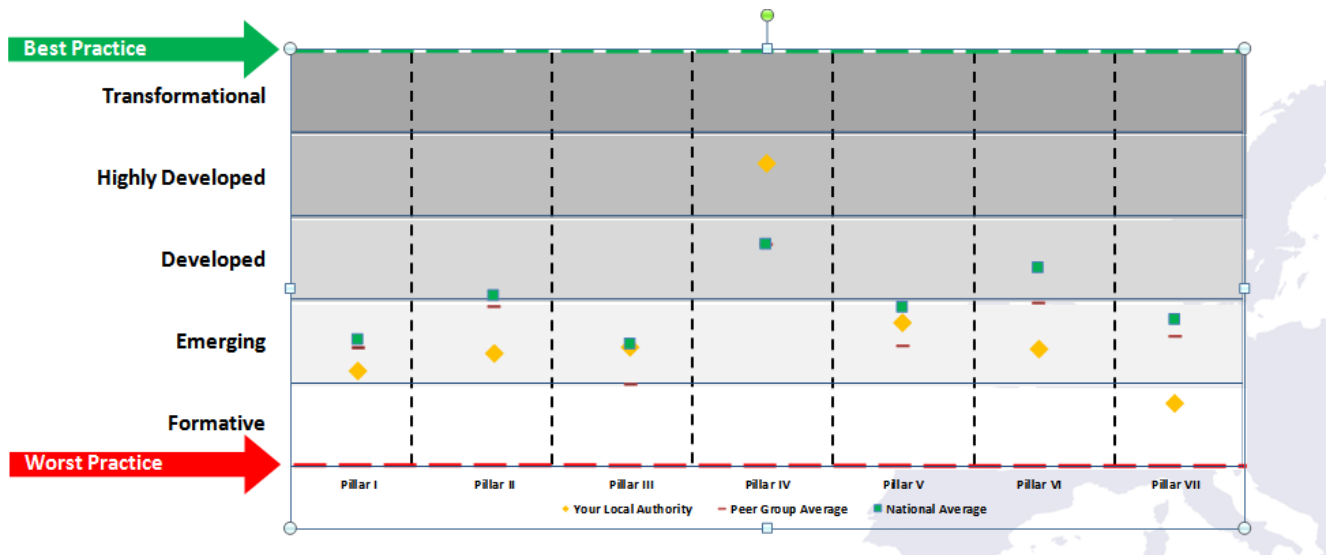
Laois performed well under Pillar IV (Digital Services). Further progress is possible in Laois across other Pillars, including in relation to Pillar I (Transition to Digital)

The Digital Readiness Assessment pillars and related results highlighted where our strategy needs to focus and acts as a starting point for developing a pathway. However stakeholder consultation and the recent world events such as the COVID 19 Pandemic and the responses to same have informed this Digital Strategy and what needs to be put in place to be effective.

A SWOT analysis gives further local context to this strategy and gives a reason and justification for developing the overall direction and implementation actions of the Strategy.

LAOIS – SWOT Analysis

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats Analysis (SWOT)

Strengths

Higher than average Young population with string poulation growth;

attractive business setting with good quality of life within the County;

Commited Stakeholders to the delivery of education and awareness- LOETB, LEO. LAOIS Partnership companies , Laois Education centre, NLN;

Online digtal supports available for business - through LEO ;

Infrastructure development within the county

Weaknessess

Infrastructure (Broadband);

No third Level institution within the county ;

Take up of didgital support a weakness;

Lack of awareness and benefits of Bradband and Digital

Opportunities

Third Level- Carlow IT , Proximity to the colleges and univeristies within 1 hr of Portlaoise;

Enhanced digital rool out through the implementation of the National Broadband Plan;

Vibrant Community Sector and willing citizens to engage with digital ;

The development of e working hubs within the county ;

Improved internal work flow processes and productivity for businesses and public sector

Threats

Pull of the Dublin MASP and established tech industry business for tech industry start ups;

Acess to broadband ;

Access to equipment - home PC's;

COST ;

Literacy;

Trust : online safety;

GDPR;

impact on Health

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Working Group Collaboration

Laois County Council has carried out a number of consultations in relation to the production of this Local Digital Strategy. This process involved a number of measures, including analysis of relevant policy and documents, steering group, public and business group consultation and surveys with our citizens, not for profit organisations, Comhairle na nÓg, the business community within the county. The following was used to inform the Strategy:-

Working group collaboration;
- Laois County Development Plan 2017 – 2023;
- Local Economic and Community Plan,2017-2023;
- Laois County Council – Corporate Plan 2019-2024;
- Consultation with Comhairle na nÓg;
- Business group consultation;
- One-to-one meetings.

The formation of the steering group within the Council was the first step to ascertain the digital readiness of the various sections within the Council and externally.

A stakeholder engagement and consultation process was undertaken in order to gain impactful collaboration and capture and include actions by a wide array of stakeholders. The engagement process included the following main elements of engagement:

Community Groups	
Comhairle na nÓg **Age Friendly alliance** **Laois PPN** **LCDC**	• Numerous mobile coverage blackspot issues throughout Co. Laois (calls, texts & data) • Not possible to work from home due to lack of coverage and/or poor telecoms infrastructure • Digital skills of older persons limiting their ability to digitally communicate and engage • Poor broadband infrastructure issues in rural areas resulting in low internet speeds • Certain estates or local areas in larger villages and

	towns have very low internet speeds/ lacking high speed broadband infrastructure • **Lack of access to communities for quality high speed broadband** • **Lack of knowledge of what services and supports that already exist online** • **Online services are not user friendly** • **Lack of follow up engagement of Council when queries/ issues raised** • **Lack of progress with the NBP to deliver high speed broadband to communities** • **Digital skills of older persons limiting their interaction with digital services and supports** • **Fibre network build-out is disrupting citizen timely movement/ transportation, especially in more urban areas** • **Preference of some citizens to use paper over digital technology when interacting, accessing information, services etc.**
Business Groups	Summary Findings from Business Findings from Focus
Laois Chamber **Portlaoise Town Team** **Laois Tourism** **LEO** **Downtown Portlaoise** **Laois Partnership** **Portlaoise / Portarlington Enterprise Centre**	• **Industrial zoned areas are being poorly served with fibre network investment, especially on the outskirts of urban areas** • **Main streets of several large towns poorly served with high speed broadband** • **Lack of progress with the NBP** • **Need to increase content creation on our website for tourism attraction** • **Lack of engagement of LA & telecoms industry to try address broadband services to commercial properties** • **Fibre network build-out is disrupting and causing delays for daily business, especially in more urban areas** • **Lack of knowledge of how to get the best available broadband service for their premises** • **Lack of knowledge of how to get the best broadband speed in their home**

Telecoms Consultation

Consultation with telecoms industry to establish their commercial investment plans in Co Laois and to preempt concerns for local communities and businesses and issues that would delay a timely, effective and efficient role out of telecoms infrastructure for both fixed line networks and mobile networks

Telecoms meetings	Dates
SIRO	March 2018, Mar – Oct 2019, Jan 2020
ENET	Nov 2018
CIGNAL	Nov 2018 to date
VIRGIN MEDIA	Mar 2018 to date
VODAPHONE	Oct 2018 – Oct 2019
MAGNET	Feb 2019
NOVAGEN	Feb – Aug 2019

Digital survey

Digital Surveys were circulated to the following from the **6th January** during the County Development Plan Public Consultations (Killeshin, Abbeyleix and Clonaslee) and made available in Libraries across the County to ascertain the views of:

1. Citizens
2. Non Profit Organisations

An online Survey was concluded on the **28th February 2020.**

Record(s): 298 | 🔗
Citizen Broadband Survey
by laoisgis

Record(s): 55 | 🔗
Non profit organisations
by laoisgis
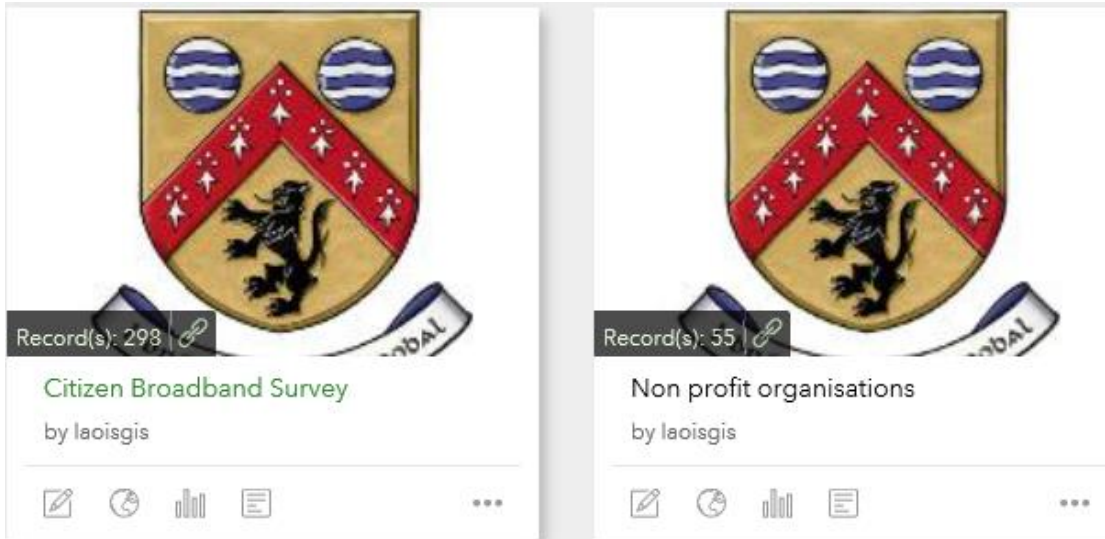
The survey focused on citizen broadband connectivity, internet and digital technology use, online services and remote working.

Mapping out the key findings and feedback from our respondents highlighted the key area for focus: Broadband. Infrastructure and access to high speed broadband is the main requirement and was singled out as the key focus area for improvement across the county.

| Citizen Survey	Survey Responses
Where do you use the Internet?	• **Fast fibre optic broadband connection to all Co Laois homes, urban and rural** • **More training for older people**
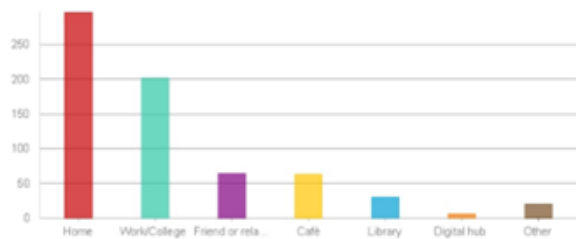
- digital hub for remote working to improve work/life balance
- More security initiatives for kids to deal with the risks of being on line
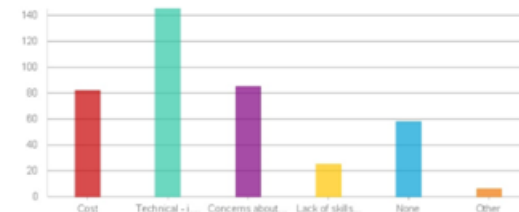- WiFi access in the major towns

How often do you use the Internet?

- Never
- More than once ...
- Everyday
- Once a week
- Less than once ...
- Once a month

- Identify broadband blackspots
- More online service from the local authority to replace downloading forms
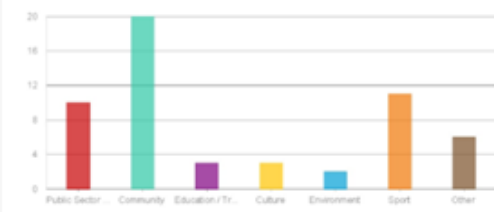
Why do you use the Internet?
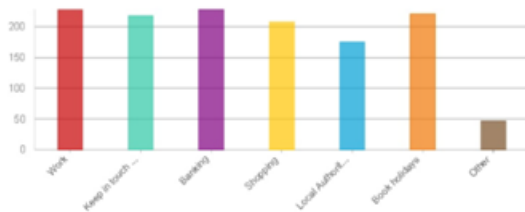
Why don't you use the Internet?

Not-For-Profit OrganisationSurvey

In what type of organization do you work?

- Better coverage
- More accessible in rural areas
- Provision of maps to show availability of Broadband in Laois
- Cheaper broadband for community groups to support an online

Does your organization have access to high speed broadband?

- Communication is the core of social change and a digital communications plan could promote learning
- Digital media training for community groups

A paper survey of 60 students was also carried out through the Comhairle na nÓg network, which asked questions of the secondary school students on how they engage with Digital Technology, their level of service at home and at school, their training and education in relation to same. The main findings of this cohort of population (13-18 years) were as follows:

1. The main purpose digital technology was used for in school was homework, projects, presentation, research, e-learning, etc
2. Main engagement with IT technology – 100% mobile phones, 53% Laptops with less than 50% using PC's, Tablets and Gaming consoles.
3. 96% said they were confident using Technology / IT, while the 4% who were not noted it was due to lack of experience.
4. 81% use Technology / IT during class and for homework mainly for Presentations / Research/ Assignments/ Projects / e-learning.
5. 73% said there was broadband available in their schools.
6. 78% said there was good IT services in their school with the main things being – Computer Room / Tech graph room/ Printers.
7. 54% said there was an opportunity within their school to educate them on Technology.
8. 8% said they had daily IT training in school with 38% weekly and 21% in TY only the rest was noted as self thought / common Knowledge.
9. 35% of students have been involved in IT / Technology projects in school mainly Presentations and DCG projects.
10. 32% said they would like to pursue IT Technology as a career.
11. 32% are aware of IT technology outside of school and 20% take part in IT Technology outside of school mainly – Coding / Gaming.

The students also as part of improvements they would welcome better Broadband, IT Technology as a school subject, update equipment, security and training/coding.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The National Broadband Plan (NBP)

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) was launched in November 2019, and is the Governments plan to deliver high speed Broadband services to all businesses, farms, and households in.

The Government has signed the Contract for delivering the NBP with National Broadband Ireland (NBI) securing equal access for every person in Ireland to opportunities which will transform their lives.

Work will begin on bringing high speed broadband to 1.1 million people. Over the next 4 – 7 years, more than 90% of premises in the state will have access to services, opening up opportunities in health, agriculture, education, rural development and tourism.

Laois Overview

There are 12,385 premises to date in Co. Laois without access to High Speed Broadband. This figure is 32% of all premises within the County.

The Government will invest €49m in Co. Laois to support the plan.NBI will build out from regional exchanges that have access to a core high speed national backbone.

The Digital Readiness Assessment identifies that Laois faces a number of structural challenges regarding digital infrastructure, challenges which may in part be addressed through the National Broadband Plan. The area is currently ranked at 'Emerging' in terms of digital infrastructure and 20.6% of households in Laois County have no access to the internet. The latest DCCAE Broadband Map illustrates that premises in Co Laois that are currently have access to high speed broadband.

High Speed Broadband Map
Laois
Q1 2019

National Broadband Plan
County

Roinn Cumarsáide, Gníomhaithe ar son na hAeráide & Comhshaoil
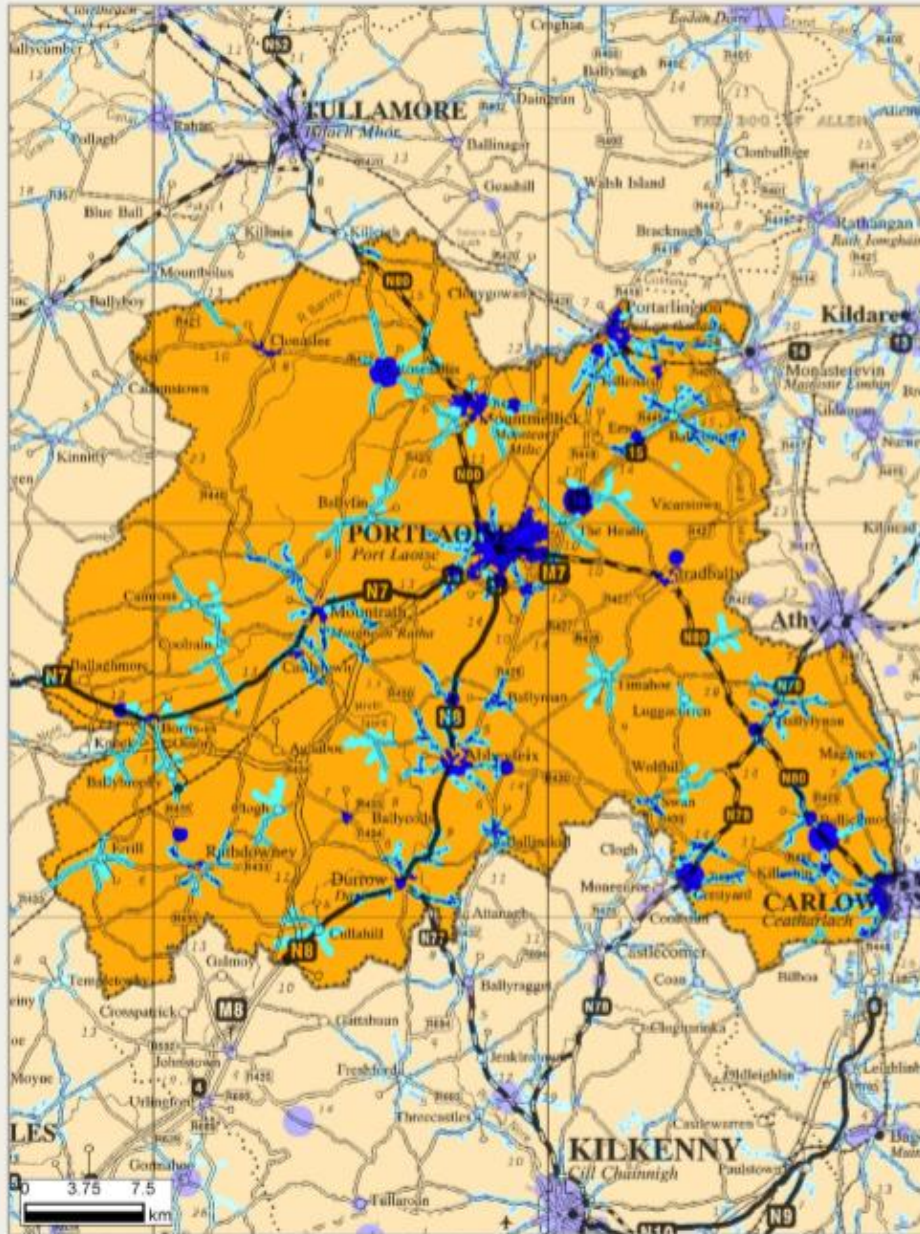Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment

Produced by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, 2019. Ordnance Survey Licence No. EN 0047219 © Ordnance Survey Ireland/Government of Ireland. Published June 2019

Total Number of Premises in Laois	39,300
State Intervention Area	33%
Commercial Deployment	62%
Commercial Planned Deployment	5%

www.broadband.gov.ie

European Union
European Regional Development Fund

Townlands around Portlaoise, Carlow and Roscrea will be surveyed later in 2020.   The survey will provide a detailed plan for every premise in the area. Build in these 3 areas will be completed in 2021.

NBI will connect regional exchanges in Portlaoise, Carlow and Roscrea to the core National backbone network (green dots on the map.).
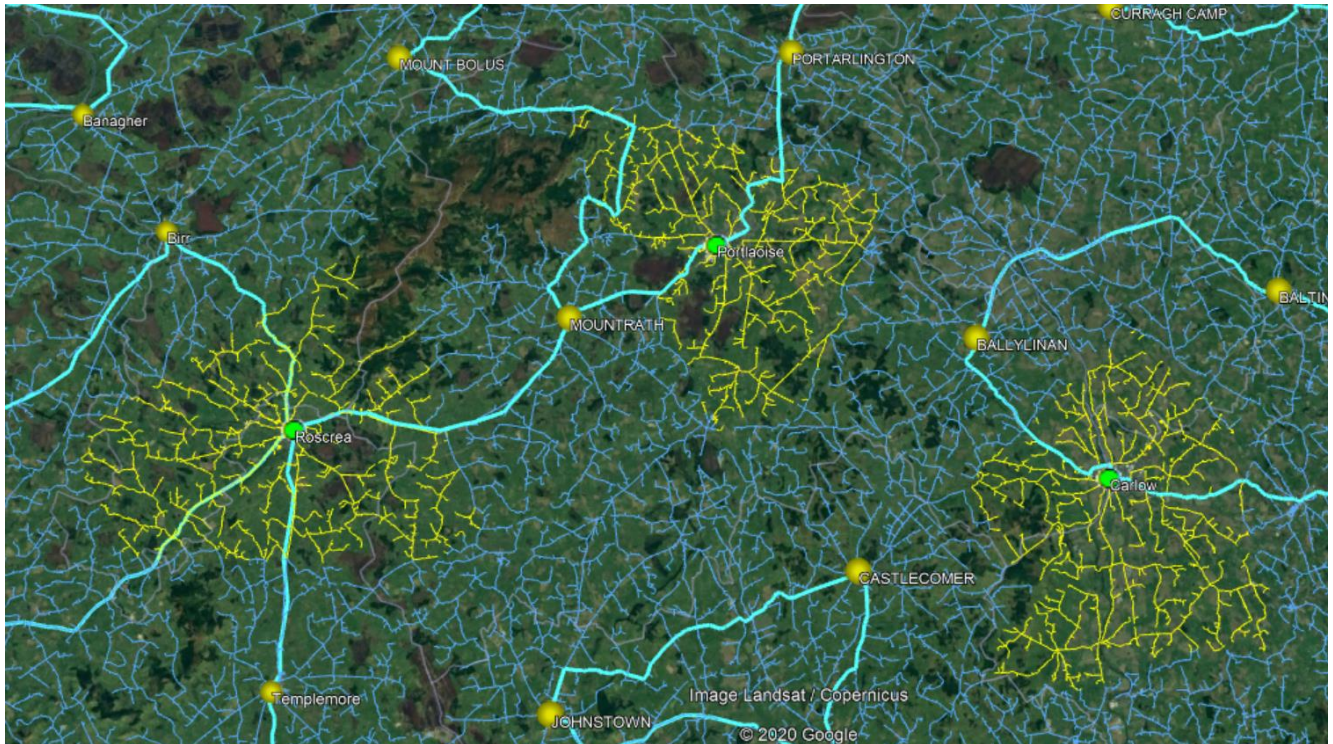

NBI will build the network out from these locations to townlands ~20km in radius. Additional exchanges will be located at other sites in the county with each servicing the premises in townlands up to 20km from these points.

Broadband Connection Points in Co Laois

Extensive consultation has already been carried out by the Dept to determine intervention areas that will be connected. Nearly 300 Broadband Connection Points (BCP's) will be provided in Year 1 which will provide free WIFI in local communities supporting digital work hubs in every county.

In County Laois 11 such BCP's have been identified as per the map below
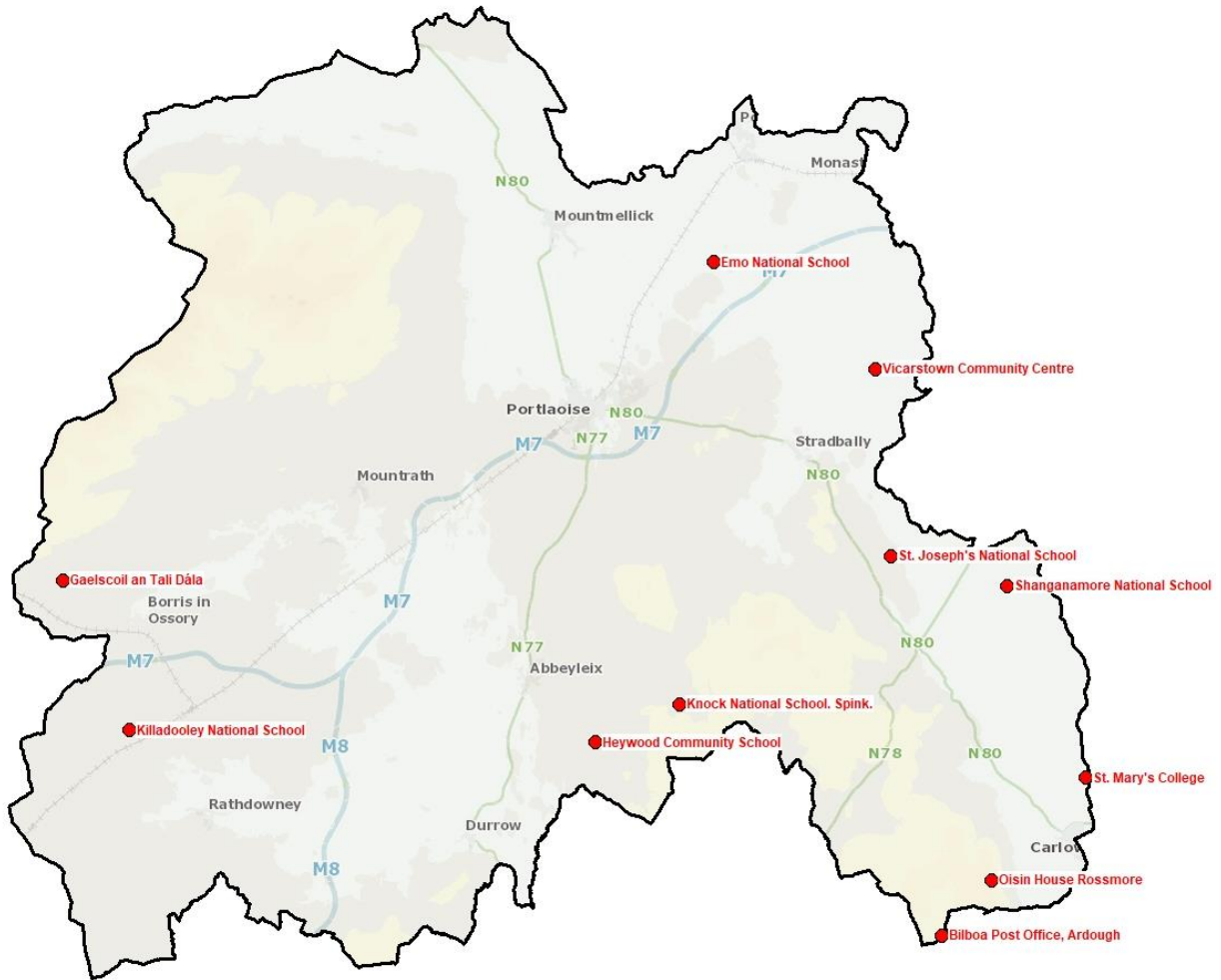
CASE STUDY – EMO Broadband Connection Point (BCP)

Emo National School was chosen as a BCP location; however, the school has secured a direct wireless connection from the Dept. of Education which provides adequate broadband speeds.

The building was fully refurbished and opened in 2019. It consists of 3 rooms one of which is being used as a play school to 22 children -5 days / week with outdoor activity space, the remaining rooms are meeting rooms.

The following groups use the Community Centre on a weekly basis:
- The Youth Club.
- Active Retirement Group.
- Irish Dancing Classes.
- The Legion of Mary; including Regional meetings every 3 months.

The following groups use the Community Centre on an ongoing basis:
- Tidy Towns – this is their Head Quarters.
- GAA – Football and Hurling clubs.
- Gun Club.
- Political Parties.
- Community Alert Committee.
- Art Group / classes.

The above groups are from the Village and surrounding areas. The Community Centre has kitchen facilities and is fully wheelchair accessible and has its own carpark. This Centre is the Hub of the area and with vital Broadband services provided by a BCP this would really enhance and utilize the Centre so much more and give the community the opportunity to run courses, have a remote working hub, a study hub as well as facilitating all of the above mentioned groups.

WIFI4EU in Co Laois.

The European commission also wishes to promote free WIFI connectivity for its citizens and visitors in public spaces. To support this, the WIFI4EU initiative matched by the Department of Rural and Community Development funding will provide the equipment and installation costs of internet access points across the County.

Laois County Council has been successful in securing 4 such vouchers under WIFI4EU which will roll out during 2020/ 2021 in 4 public locations within the county. This will provide free public WIFI in urban centres and at locations with increased visitor numbers.

Supporting Infrastructure development

Laois County Council has developed clear procedures and policies for the development of infrastructure in roads and public areas. Laois County Council continues to work proactively to support the continued role out of commercial and public investment in wired broadband infrastructure.

Laois currently has the 7th highest high speed broadband connectivity in Ireland. It is paramount that Laois remains one of the fastest and most connected counties in Ireland to ensure both the citizen is served, to enable job creation. Laois County Council will continue to work with infrastructure providers to ensure the continued role out of the fibre networks across the county.

The Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023 sets out the planning policy in relation to the provision and roll out of Broadband in County Laois
It is the policy of the Council to:

TELE1 Encourage and facilitate the coordinated development and extension of broadband infrastructure throughout the county, by state or private operators as a means for improving economic competitiveness and social inclusion subject to

compliance with normal planning and environmental criteria and the development management standards contained in Section 8;

TELE2 Support the rollout of the National Broadband Scheme and the Rural Broadband Scheme in conjunction with the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources;

TELE3 Support and work with Laois Partnership in the Laois Broadband Partnership in developing future broadband networks;

TELE4 Ensure that ducting for broadband fibre connections is provided during the installation of services, in all new commercial and housing schemes and during the carrying out of any work to roads or rail lines;

TELE5 Encourage the provision of WiFi zones in public buildings.

Laois County Council will continue to support open access networks in all new developments. This will include the development of shared duct and chamber networks in new housing and commercial developments to minimize the cost of infrastructure development and provide the maximum connectivity opportunities for both residents and commercial entities.

"Laois County Council will continue to support open access networks in all new housing developments."

Target Areas & Solutions deployed

1. Stradbally
2. Garran
3. Errill
4. Killenard
5. Portarlington
6. Durrow
7. Mountmellick
8. Portlaoise
9. Sheffield Cross
10. Knockardagannon
11. Ballylynan

To support the NBP public investment in infrastructure, Lois County Council will seek to minimize the administrative costs of the project by providing streamlined road opening licence processing and will facilitate municipal district T2 licence applications.

CASE STUDY: J17 National Enterprise Park

JUNCTION 17 NATIONAL ENTERPRISE PARK –Infrastructural works
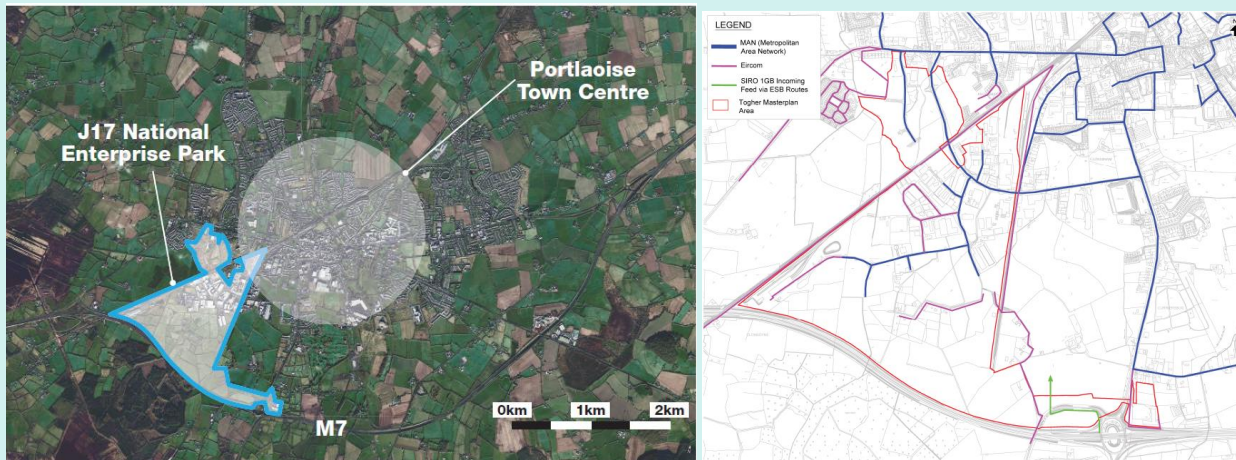
Portlaoise currently has a Metropolitan Area Network (MAN) running around the town which provides high capacity bandwidth over a fibre optic network. This MAN was constructed as a result of a submission from Laois County Council under the government led regional broadband programme. The MAN's are state-owned telecoms networks which consist of carrier neutral telecoms duct and fiber optic cable rings linking the main commercial and public buildings to co-location centres. Telecommunications operators locate their equipment in these co-location centres and access the MAN's network/ The MAN's were co-financed by central government and Local Authorities and the EU's European Regional Development Fund.

The Junction 17 National Enterprise Park is an area of land zoned for enterprise and employment south of Portlaoise Town adjacent to the M7 motorway at Junction 17. Laois County Council commenced its infrastructural works i.e. laying of distributor roads and water services in 2018/ 2019. Provision was made to ensure that ducting is available to provide for broadband services in this area.

CITIZEN SMART / DIGITAL COUNCIL

Increased digitalization's have a very significant impact on the way people live, work and relax. The past decade has seen global digital brands such as Google, Facebook, Twitter, eBay, Netflix become household names. How we go about our lives has been dramatically changed in so far as access to products all over the world is now at our fingertips, educational courses and business can be done from our homes and entertainment now is accessible to all and connects us with others all over the world.

This has had impact on a number of industries and businesses both negatively and positively. Some have withstood the change of direction, some have suffered greatly.

The EU has championed creating digital conditions to allow its citizens to access services in this regard. Among the initiatives being championed are eHealth and Smart Cities and better access to public information on line for all citizens.

Digital technology and connectivity has changed and advanced the way we communicate and engage with one another, in our local communities. In addition, the continued development of on line supports and public services is vital to resolve core social, infrastructural and development issues more efficiently and effectively. Digital technologies can bring efficiencies and increased productivity to the council through better ways of working.

It allows for better citizen engagement through the use of digital technologies.

Improving the skills of the Councils workforce is an important factor in ensuring that the service is continuously provided. This is supported by the Local government ICT Strategy 2017-2022 with the digital first approach to government services.

Laois County Council are committed to making as many services as possible available in the homes of our citizens to allow people to
  ➢ Pay for services on line;
  ➢ Access application forms/ grants;
  ➢ Be consulted on policy documents;

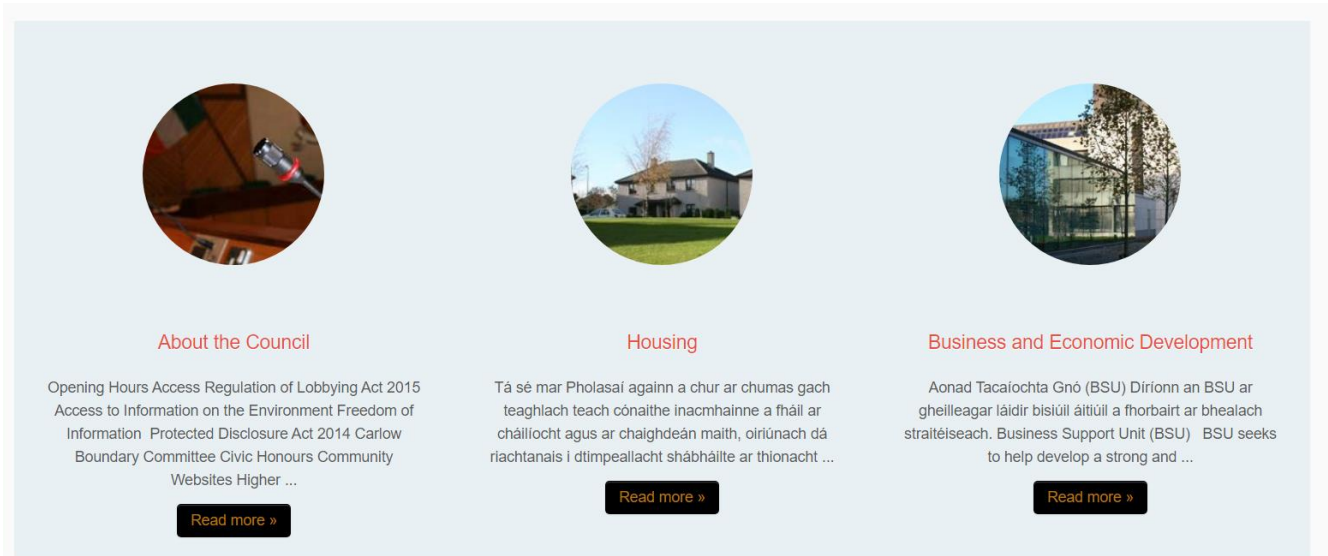> ➢ Access to the web via our infrastructure in Libraries , etc

The Annual Service Plan for Laois Council identifies the following areas

To provide Management and Staff with modern information systems to them in providing quality services to Customers and elected members

Provide a resilient and standardized Information systems infrastructure for the organizations which will facilitate the cost effective and efficient provision of services to customers

Back office transformation through the digitization of business processes to deliver efficiencies to staff and customers

The Councils online engagement with the public is via their website www.laois.ie. This is the portal for information relating to the activities and services of Laois County Council and provides information and online services for the public 24/7.

About the Council	Housing	Business and Economic Development
Opening Hours Access Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 Access to Information on the Environment Freedom of Information Protected Disclosure Act 2014 Carlow Boundary Committee Civic Honours Community Websites Higher ...	Tá sé mar Pholasaí againn a chur ar chumas gach teaghlach teach cónaithe inacmhainne a fháil ar cháilíocht agus ar chaighdeán maith, oiriúnach dá riachtanais i dtimpeallacht shábháilte ar thionacht ...	Aonad Tacaíochta Gnó (BSU) Díríonn an BSU ar gheilleagar láidir bisiúil áitiúil a fhorbairt ar bhealach straitéiseach. Business Support Unit (BSU) BSU seeks to help develop a strong and ...
Read more »	Read more »	Read more »

Online services for taking payments is facilitated by the website where anytime of the day or night the public can access the payment of services at a time appropriate to their needs.

DIGITAL COUNCIL

Local government ICT Strategy 2017-2022

This ICT Strategy is aligned with the Public Service ICT Strategy and has been designed to align with five strategic themes. It covers the period 2017 to 2022. The strategic themes define the broad business, data and technology areas that Local Government will use to achieve their corporate plans.

The 'Digital First' approach

Laois county Council recognizes the importance of utilizing the available technologies to better improve the access to council services for the citizens of Laois. This is through the digitization of the services we provide so that citizens can access information when needed but also to improve the efficiency with which the staff of Laois County Council operate in the providing of those services. These gains can be realized through appropriate technology and Laois County Council commits to the digitization of back office processes in automate where possible and improve efficiency through the reduction of paper based processes.

CASE STUDY: Housing Process Digitization

PROCESS DIGITIZATION –

Housing Maintenance

Laois County Council will implement a Business
Process Management IT system that will allow
the digitisation of existing internal processes
through the use of workflows and electronic
forms for mobile and office based workforce.

It is expected that the initial digitisation of the Housing Maintenance and Housing Inspection processes will allow better communication and real-time capture of information between office based Housing staff, mobile council staff and contractors to result in an improved service to the citizens of Laois.

This will allow the staff of the Housing section to electronically record housing inspections and repairs via a web form on their mobile device and for that information to pass to Housing staff internally in real time.

Service Provision within Libraries

The Library Services of Laois has been a part of digital transformation in the county over the last twenty years. All ten libraries in the county operate a fully automated system and are part of the National Public Library lending system. This national system allows library users to request and return library items to any branch in the county and to request items online and collect in their local library. This system gives readers and user access to a full national catalogue and database of books and other items delivered to their local library. It is planned that all branch libraries will have self check kiosks in full operation by the end of 2020 which allows library users to check in and out their own items.

Digital literacy is an increasingly vital skill for navigating modern life. IT facilities are available in all of the Laois County Library branch libraries. Providing access to internet services for the library customers has become a key service and has changed the way the public interacts with the library service in the past decade with many libraries located in rural areas offering access to broadband for the rural community.

Libraries now provide access to a host of high quality eResources free of charge to all members. These include eBooks and Audio books, eMagazines, language learning, Universal Class an eLearning portal with over 500 online educational courses, online newspapers both national and international daily newspapers. These resources are easy to access in an easy to read format on readers IPADs/tablets, Smartphone's or home computer.

Free WIFI and scanning is available in all of the County Laois Branch libraries. The development of technology spaces in our main libraries is facilitating the expansion of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths) activities and fostering in young people a desire for more skills in this area. Portlaoise New library on the main street will have a media suite with 3D printing, VR equipment and eLearning equipment.

Providing access to internet services for the library customers has become a key service and has changed the way the public interacts with the library service in the past decade.

CASE STUDY: Library Services adapting to COVID 19

During March 2020 Laois County Library Service closed all public libraries in Laois as a precautionary measure following public health advice relating to the Covid-19 outbreak**.**

The Library Services adapted and continued to operate with the online Library services supported by staff on a remote basis. . The library now is promoting and supporting the public to access all of our online material. This includes -EBooks which has seen an increase of 200% in the first weeks of COVID 19, online newspapers, online magazines and language learning. The overall usage has seen a massive increase with now over 1500 new remote users during this period and a massive increase of over 500% for this period.

In addition to the online resources , Library Section moved all of the events and activities to an online program and staff produced live videos featuring story time and crafts for younger users, literature and local history talks. The Library continued to promote wellbeing, culture and positive mental health throughout Facebook; posting and sharing links from HSE, Healthy Ireland and other local pages.

During this period the library Section has seen increased engagement on social media. The public have engaged; commenting and looking for library resources though the social media messaging services.

This growth and usage of the library content on a virtual basis demonstrates how public libraries are a valued provider of literacy, information and culture in the virtual community**.**

ePLANNING project

The National e-Planning Portal Project will enable online submission of planning applications to Local Authorities throughout Ireland. Planning applications submitted electronically will continue to be processed electronically, with subsequent communications and requests for further information to be sent via email. The system will enable Part 8 submissions by public and prescribed bodies in a single system.

Consultation Portal

Increasing the accessibility to knowledge and open information about governance of the local authority will allow people to engage better with the structures of the local authority.

It is an objective of Laois County Council to deploy an online consultation portal which will allow easier consultation in relation to various services within the Local authority particularly Planning, Community and Enterprise and Corporate decision making.

Connect2Laois Website

CONNECT 2 LAOIS

Welcome to Laois. Laois boasts an unrivalled central location with excellent infrastructure and public transport links, making all other major cities in Ireland instantly accessible. With over 87% of the population within 90 mins reach of Laois and an employment rate of 92%, along with state-of-the-art conference facilities and the capacity to host large scale outdoor events, such as Electric Picnic, Laois offers the perfect work-life balance for companies and people choosing to locate here.

Climate Action: Digital Response

With the greater focus on responding to Climate Change the Laois Digital strategy is a mechanism for making real impact to meet our obligations.

Evaluation of multiple opportunities within Laois County Council is currently underway where Technology can respond to the challenges of climate change while also helping to reduce our carbon footprint and inform citizens. These include measures such as -

1. **A Flood management portal**: Bespoke to Mountrath, Mountmellick and Portarlington with all details of Flood Emergency plan, contacts, and water levels etc. Investigate an app for the alerting of residents in these areas when water levels are of concern.

2. **A Real-Time co2 monitor**: Real-time air quality monitor in Portlaoise Town with online visibility of the data as it is collected

3. **Data on Carbon Footprint**: Make data from Carbon footprint measurements in Portlaoise available online

4. **Realtime availability of EV Charge Points**: Maps and real-time data available online and on the app. Linking in with a national app for available points.

5. **Weather Stations:** Introduction of weather stations in Fire stations across the county to collect data

Smart CCTV Cameras to Enable Safer Communities

The roll out of Fibre based broadband across the county, including in particular to rural areas, will provide the potential in the future for Community Based CCTV schemes to link directly to cloud storage and to rationalize their local data storage infrastructure.

DIGITAL SKILLS

In order to move further towards a digital society that works for all participants it is vital that all citizens acquire the digital skills needed to fully engage with the digital economy or digital society for the benefit of all.

This requires attention to those that do not have the skills needed but also those with a basic level of digital proficiency to ensure they have the knowledge to benefit. As more and more services for citizens are moving online and most jobs now requiring a level of digital knowledge it is increasing important to make sure those yet to acquire digital skills are given the opportunity and not left behind.
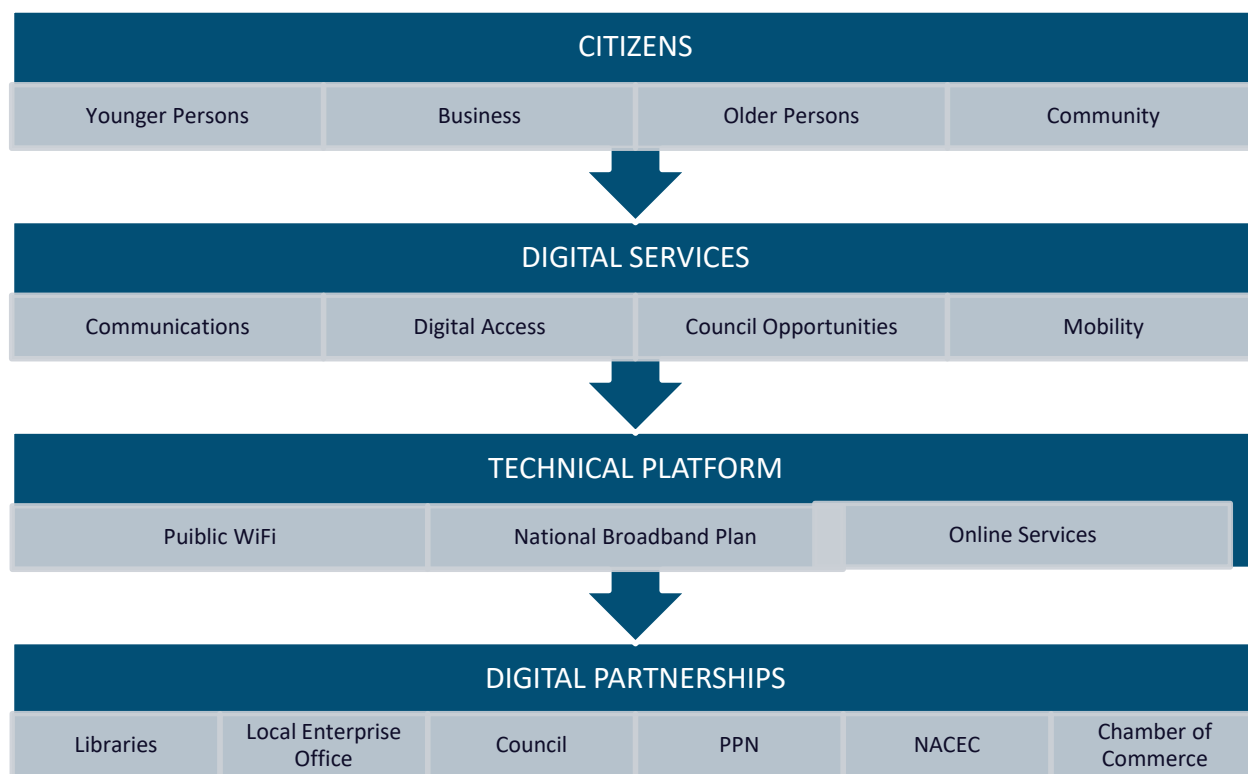
It is important in looking at the skills gaps that an analysis of the demographics in the area is undertaken to citizen profile and the opportunities for digital training. This training will then most effectively add benefit for citizens, business and service providers such as the County Council to all members of society.

Our Digital Readiness Assessment has indicated that
- 2.7% of Laois County population has a computer science degree compared to an average of 3.4% and a peer group of 2.8%
- 0.9% of the population of Laois have a recent 3rd level qualification in computer use

The take up of digital services can be limited in a number of ways which will be considered in this digital strategy:
- **Access** - availability of the technology to access digital services in a way that is appropriate to the citizen e.g. at home, work or on the move.
- **Skills** – ensuring the citizen has the digital training a skills to take advantage of digital services to benefit their life
- **Opportunity** – ensuring the services are available and ensuring citizen awareness in relation to the benefits of a digital society.

CITIZENS			
Younger Persons	Business	Older Persons	Community

DIGITAL SERVICES			
Communications	Digital Access	Council Opportunities	Mobility

TECHNICAL PLATFORM		
Puiblic WiFi	National Broadband Plan	Online Services

DIGITAL PARTNERSHIPS					
Libraries	Local Enterprise Office	Council	PPN	NACEC	Chamber of Commerce

Given that % of homes in some rural areas lack access to broadband, the county cannot achieve its objectives without improved connectivity and access to digital equipment to enable people to upskill.

LAOIS County council in collaboration with numerous stakeholders such as LOETB, Laois Partnership, Laois Age Friendly Alliance, Laois PPN and other voluntary organizations will support the development and promote the use of BCP's and other digital hubs such as the enterprise centres dotted around the county in Portlaoise, Portarlington, Mountmellick, Mountrath, Killeshin etc.

Digital Skills development provides great opportunities of all ages and abilities. Laois County Library Services provides accessibility and improved access to technologies for use by its members. The library service will continue to improve on its provision of technology for all levels and the development of IT learning centres across the county.
Laois County Council already provides digital training and access to training opportunities to citizens and business via the Library service and the Local Enterprise Office.

The council is also looking at digital partnerships with business and organizations to add benefit to society through digital innovation and the skills required by our citizens to take advantage of those avenues is critical to the digital strategy.

It is proposed as part of the digital strategy to further develop the part Libraries play in the digital skills transformation and especially continuing to position libraries at the heart of digital inclusion. A renewed focus on digital literacy and building capabilities within the Library service, in terms of Access to technology and to support citizens in understanding the benefits of the internet and online services, is required.

There are over 400 free online courses are now available to registered library users. You can learn in your own time, at your own pace! With over 400 courses, Universal Class provides free and high quality online training. The courses involve real instructors to guide our learning, video-based lessons and certificates of achievement. Universal Class offers courses in Exercise and Fitness, Entrepreneurship, Arts and Music, Home and Garden Care, Cooking, Computers and Technology, Health and Medicine, Homeschooling, Job Assistance, Law and Legal, Parenting and Family, Pet and Animal Care…plus hundreds more.

UPSKILLING THE CITIZENS OF LAOIS

From surveys conducted and discussions with both the public and the providers of courses the following observations were made:-
- People want to learn how to communicate via social media or simply book things on line;
- Learners like small classes because the information is technical;
- Want to know how to use their smart phones or tablets / I-pads;
- Need to refresh their skills.

There are several initiatives to upskill and improve the digital literacy of all sectors of society such as the
- Digital Skills for citizens programme;
- Peer 2 peer;

- Schools digital champion programme.

Laois Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB) provide multiple programmes related to digital / technology. Their courses aim to take the fear out of Information Technology (IT) and embrace the future. They offer
- Beginner IT courses from non-accredited provision though to accredited programmes from NFQ Levels 1 to 3. These courses cover content including general I.T Skills, MS Office, Excel, Spreadsheets and Word Processing;
- Full time and part time programmes in Office Skills and Business Administration, both of which have a large volume of IT content;
- Non Accredited provision includes Smart Phone / iPad Courses for Beginners;
- Online support programmes and assistive technologies in TTRS (Touch Typing Reading & Spelling, Driver Theory Testing and BKSB (online English and math's skills development and assessment tool).

LOETB also work with communities such as – the active retired, men's sheds, long term unemployed and specialist groups to provide targeted IT / Mobile Device Courses.

Laois County Council in conjunction with Laois Partnership supported the development at Portarlington Enterprise Centre which has enabled "MARKER SPACE".

CASE STUDY: Makerspace in Portarlington

The MakerSpace in Portarlington Enterprise Centre piloted a Summer Camp in 2019 which provided for the following camps:

3D Software Game Development (Unity)

Dungeons & Dragons – DM & Players

Intro to Electronics (using BBC Micro: Bit)

Intro to Photography

Video Editing and Publishing

Make & Do Summer Camp

It is the intention of the Management of Portarlington Enterprise Centre to see how they can achieve optimum usage if the maker space whilst working with schools as an in-house / outreach service for the TY students and primary students also. This venue is also available to specialist digital requirements and this too is being explored.

Credit Portarlington Enterprise Centre and Innovation Hub

While the roles that maker spaces play are in innovation and learning I think that we should look at the wider roles that maker spaces could play in public life. The maker space is a communal facility in an openly accessible space, giving access to resources including digital fabrication and electronics but they could have broader benefits including wellbeing and entrepreneurship.

While researching Maker spaces and FabLabs I have found that all the spaces act as a publicly accessible workshop supporting the maker culture. These spaces all house digital fabrication equipment, electronics facilities, a fabric/textile workshop and an events space with some even having a "dirty" workshop for manufacturing. They operate as both a provider of commercial digital fabrication services and as a community effort aiming to broaden access to these facilities.

DIGITAL ECONOMY

The importance of the digital economy is continuing to grow and is seen as one of the most important areas for future sustainability and regional development, especially in terms of attracting new enterprise. The roll out of high speed broadband infrastructure across the County can improve the economic prospects and the possibility of enhanced diversification of regional employment.

This is underpinned in the actions and policy outcomes in the National Planning Framework (NPF) and Project 2040, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (2019) and the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan (2019) and more locally in the Laois County Development Plan and the Local Economic and Community Plan (2016).

Within Project Ireland 2040- National Planning Framework, National Strategy Outcome (NSO) 6 seeks to achieve a Strong Economy supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills which they say will be achieved through -
- o Supporting entrepreneurialism and building competitive clusters;
- o Sustaining talent and boosting human capital in all regions; and
- o Digital and data innovation.

The Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan builds on the success of the Midlands Regional Action Plan for Jobs (2015–2017) to ensure that it remains effective and that it continues to deliver jobs across the Midlands region and can be robust to address the challenges we face, including Brexit.

Strategic Objective No 4 – Enhance the collective offering of the Midlands as a place to live, visit and invest in

This strategic objective has a particular emphasis on growing the digital connection across the region. In seeking to achieve this objective actions relating to

1. Developing, resourcing and delivering a digital marketing strategy for the region, building on the work already undertaken to develop MidlandsIreland.ie
   This will encompass website, social media and audio-visual material for use domestically and internationally highlighting the attractiveness of the Midlands as a place to live, work, study and invest.

2. Developing a regional networks of remote working hubs
3. Developing County and Regional data sets to support value proposition for the Region
4. Double the number of participants on the EXPLORE programme over the 2018 figure. The EXPLORE programme is designed to address the need for enhanced digital skills among older workers in manufacturing sectors within the Region.

In order to promote and implement the overarching goals and objectives as identified in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (2019), the Local Digital Strategy aims to develop the digital economy in the following areas:

- Supporting Digital Hubs within the County
- Support Businesses – new and established – to have an enhance on line presence through the use of online retail and digital marketing;
- Make more efficient use out of digital technologies to actively promote the County as a visitor destination from a tourist perspective;

Digital Hubs

As enterprise is one of the pillars of the National Digital Strategy, the provision of facilities needs to be examined to help support growth in innovative local enterprises and provide technology enabled working spaces, whilst also focusing on supporting local industries.

Throughout County Laois there has been increased investment in the development of remote working sites and co working spaces in both community settings and on a private level. Spaces such as Portlaoise Enterprise Centre, Vision 85, Portarlington Enterprise Centre, BloomHQ Mountrath, and the Beale Centre Mountmellick are providing such facilities within connected workplaces.

The National Association of Community enterprise Centers NACEC is established across 120 communities and is the representative organization for the community centers within Ireland. Each center provides space within the community to support entrepreneurs in their development and growth providing a one stop shop for services.

- The NACEC is a member guided Association that is committed to promoting enterprise and representing the views and needs of Community Enterprise Centers.
- The NACEC acts as a representative body for Community Enterprise Centers, working to fulfill its members' needs to contribute to, and influence enterprise policy at national level and represent the concerns and issues of its members at local, regional and national level. It is committed to cooperation among its members by sharing of information, good practice and communication of the work of the sector.

LAOIS HUB Collective

The Laois Hub Collective has been established to present co-working and collaborative spaces that are available within county Laois. The collective will focus on new initiatives to promote the facilities in the various hubs throughout the county.

BEAT THE COMMUTE WITH OUR STATE OF THE ART SMART WORKING FACILITIES

Bloom HQ Mountrath

Webmill Mountmellick

Heritage House Abbeyleix

Landing Space
FDI clients can begin operating in the Midlands Region quickly using our turnkey collaborative work enterprise hubs

6 State of Art Collaborative Working Digital Hubs

Board room facilities
Kitchen facilities
Flexible terms
Secure access

Unlimited Broadband Use
Unlimited use of 1000mbps fibre broadband Connectivity

92 dedicated hot desks across the county ranging from €10-€20 per day

Vision 85 Portlaoise

Portlaoise Enterprise Centre

Portarlington Enterprise Centre

TOURISM AND HERITAGE

Tourism and heritage are a vital part of the economy of Laois and the digital strategy aims to support this through more effective digital marketing and enhanced content creation, to reach a wider online market and support key tourism sites.

Laois Tourism Strategy 2018-2023 acknowledges that the visitor journey starts with planning and examination of destination possibilities. The absence of a strong online destination presence through to the delivery of a quality visitor experience throughout the county must be at the forefront of future tourism development. The recommended marketing programme should address the one strategy required to develop the destination and develop the market profile of Laois as a tourism destination.

The development of SMART interpretation installations at sites of interest across the county such as at The Rock of Dunamaise, Round Tower Timahoe is needed. Work has already begun in this regard with the development on heritage applications by Arbarta developed apps for various heritage sites across the county.

Digital Heritage
Actions 3 and 4 of the Laois Heritage Plan 2014 – 2019 promote the importance of the use of digital technology in the promotion and interpretation of heritage sites.

Digital technology is also widely used in the recording and interpretation of heritage sites and in digitally documenting heritage and culture, focusing on finding the best method of digitally recording a heritage site or artifact while presenting it to the public in an accessible way.

Digital Heritage projects in Laois include geophysical surveys at the Rock of Dunamaise to identify the presence of sub-surface archaeological remains, digital scanning of the wall of the medieval Fort Protector in Portlaoise, to create a digital reconstruction of the Fort, photogrammetry and laser scanning of the bell tower of Old St Peter's Church Portlaoise to allow detailed planning for masonry conservation, digital scanning of carved stones at monastic sites to allow presentation of the detail of carvings to a

wider audience, and the digital archive being created by Laois Library Service to store and display the archive of maps, photographs and other archive material and bring these to a wide audience while protecting the original fragile material.

Online digital mapping is also now widely used as a tool for conservation of heritage by professionals and amateurs alike, with the Heritage Council's Heritage Maps website (heritagemaps.ie) being used to store and display data for Laois surveys on topics such as mills, bridges, thatched houses, protected structures, geology and habitats

CASE STUDY: Laois Heritage Trail App

As part of the Irelands Ancient East programme, and with grant aid from Fáilte Ireland, Laois County Council have released a free Laois heritage Trails smartphone app with photo, maps and multilingual audio guides to the Laois Heritage Trail and Laois Monastic Trail. The app is available in both android and iPhone format and can be downloaded from the relevant app store.

Some progress has been made in awareness-raising using digital technology, with the launch in 2016 of Laois Heritage Trails smartphone app. This app, which is available on the Google play store and the App store, contains interactive maps, audio guides, and video showcasing to Laois heritage sites in 7 languages and has been downloaded 7,444 times in 46 countries.

CASE STUDY: Donaghmore Museum / Denseair

In 2019 Dense Air Ireland undertook a visual survey of Donaghmore Museum and surrounding area to verify the possibility of providing a Wireless Fibre Extension solution to the Donaghmore Workhouse and Famine Museum, Co. Laois.

This report has been undertaken to show the locations of eNodeB radio's and backhaul radios that are required to deliver this service. Deployment of stable internet connectivity would allow for increased services to be offered to visitors and the local community. The old Dining hall is currently used for a variety of local events including book launches, community meetings and events.

All of the above could benefit from stable connectivity and possible enhancements could be brought about by an internet café style service providing further services to the local community, whom cannot be currently serviced by other providers.

This project also included free 12 month connectivity to 5 premises in the local area allowing the occupants to:

✓   Run a successful Agri Contracting Business.

✓   Work successfully from home.

✓   IT requirements of primary secondary and 3rd level student.

✓   Household and Social activities of family life.

ONLINE RETAIL AND DIGITAL BUSINESS SUPPORTS

An online presence can help small and micro businesses to gain efficiencies, drive innovation, expand and grow. To promote and build resilience in local retail there is a need to have more business people trained in the specific skills to exploit the digital economy and the further development and growth of online business in County Laois.

For many Laois businesses, the question is not whether to trade online, it's how to start. Designed to assist small businesses, the Government's Trading Online Voucher Scheme was launched in July 2014 and is a key action under the National Digital Strategy. Operated locally through Local Enterprise Office Laois, the scheme offers eligible businesses a financial incentive of up to €2,500 to develop their trading online capacity along with training, mentoring and networking support.

Its aims to support small businesses in Co. Laois to fully exploit the growth of the digital economy to grow their business, find new international markets, reduce operational costs and create jobs.

Since 2014 when the scheme was initiated over 4,000 businesses nationally have successfully applied for a trading online voucher. On average, businesses have seen:

- Sales increased by an average of 21%
- 84% saw an increase in customer enquiries/sales leads
- 73% said new business was additional and did not displace existing sales.
- 60% began to export for the first time
- 89% said the trading online component of their business will become more important within the next six months

CASE STUDY: Trading Online Voucher Scheme

'Eat Well and Be Well' is the mantra that the Scully family live by and it was this philosophy that inspired Kevin and Jenny to produce premium organic, gluten free products on their family farm in Vicarstown, Co. Laois. They work in harmony with nature contributing to a chemical free ecosystem. These products not only feed the body and nourish the soul but are sustainable, amazingly tasty and best of all have no negative impact on the environment.

The business needed to generate sales in the online market as Kevin and Jenny knew their competitors were already in this space. They heard about the Trading Online Voucher Scheme from the Local Enterprise Office and successfully applied for support to develop their ecommerce website which built brand awareness, generated new sales and showcased their products.

The website has opened up new opportunities to interact and engage with their customers. They can now reach a much larger customer base with the option to deliver worldwide. They are also using their website to promote the local availability of their products through signposting their stockists. www.themerrymill.ie

"We've had a huge amount of support from the LEO from day one. They've supported us throughout this journey. They really care about helping us grow"

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

In order to address the weaknesses and opportunities identified in this Local Digital Strategy, the following implementation plan is being put in place to ensure measurable targets in relation to each of the following areas are set :-

- Infrastructure
- Citizen Smart
- Digital Skills
- Digital Economy

This plan is underpinned and supported by various plans such as

- Laois County Council Corporate Plan 2019;
- Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023;
- Laois Climate Action Plan 2019
- Laois Community and Enterprise Plan 2016
- Laois Heritage Plan

In ensuring that the objectives and actions are achievable and realistic, they have proofed against all of the plans mentioned above.

Strategy Timelines

The digital Laois Strategy is broken down into 3 distinct timescales

1. Short term actions – Immediate to 2 years

2. Medium Term Actions – 2-4 years

3. Long Term Actions – beyond 4 years

In addition to this project scheduling and planning, there will be a set of activities that are "ongoing" and will need to progress throughout the lifetime of the strategy. Each of these timescales is indicated in the summary implementation table below.

Short tern activity

In the first year of the implementation digital Laois will be required to show results from early actions. This will help to build confidence and motivate the partners as well as to ensure that the strategy is on track in terms of its project management.

Some of the short term actions and projects are designated as such because of their readiness or ease of planning and execution. Others are identified as short term due to the priority or the urgency of the action. In each case the initial and early actions will set the standard and expectation for the strategy in its entirety.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Strategic Aim:	Facilitate development of high speed Broadband and digital infrastructure across County Laois				
	Actions	**Lead**	**Timescale**	**KPI**	**Monitoring Body**
Objective 1 :-Facilitate a robust and proficient high speed Broadband infrastructure and network					
OB1a	Continue to work with Telecommunications Providers to deliver high speed Broadband to every premises	LCC, Various Providers	Ongoing up to 2027	Increase in No of premises with high speed broadband	LCC/ DCCAE
OB1b	Monitor all new build developments , including public housing developments carried out by LCC or Approved Housing Bodies at planning stage to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is provided	Broadband Officer LCC / Planning Department	Ongoing	Increase in No of premises with high speed broadband	LCC
OB1c	Continue to engage and survey communities and providers for black spot identification and solutions	Broadband Officer LCC / PPN	Ongoing	Increase in No of premises with high speed broadband	LCC/ DCCAE
Objective 2:- Enhanced Access to Broadband					
OB2a	Continue to work with the DCCAE to identify funding mechanisms to improve public access to high speed broadband	Broadband Officer LCC / DCCAE	Ongoing		
OB2b	Provide free WIFI in urban centers and at Public locations	Broadband Officer LCC / DCCAE	2022	4 public locations providing free WiFi	LCC/DCCAE
OB2c	Develop Broadband Connection Points (BCP) across County Laois	Broadband Officer LCC / DCCAE/ Various schools across the county	Q4 2020	9 BCPs providing access in the County	LCC /DCCAE/
OB2d	Support the roll out of the national broadband	Broadband officer / NBI	2020 - 2027	No of homes connected pa	NBI / DOAHRA

	plan which will deliver high speed broadband to every home in County Laois				

CITIZEN SMART

Strategic Aim :	Increase the availability of on line services to businesses, other organizations and citizens				
	Actions	Lead	Timescale	KPI	Monitoring Body
Objective 3 :- To deliver an efficient and accessible customer service through enhanced digital communications platforms					
OB3a	Increase the availability of online services to business, organizations and citizens	LCC, Head of Information Systems and various departments	Ongoing	Deliver at least 1 additional online service per annum	LCC/ DCCAE
OB3b	Roll out ePlanning project to the public to allow the public to make planning applications on line	IT and Planning Department	END OF 2021	ePlanning available to the public Q2 2021	Department of planning , housing and local government / LCC planning section
OB3c	Develop a Consultation portal to allow people to engage with various projects such as ✓ Corporate policy documents ✓ Land use plans, ✓ Local Authority developments	LCC, Head of Information Systems and various departments	Q2 2020	Consultation Portal Established by Q2 2020	LCC
OB3d	A mobile app to report locations of invasive species and map all reported locations	Heritage Officer / IT Section		App active	LCC
OB3e	Continue with the digitialisation of the archives through the library services	Laois Libraries	By 2023		
OB3f	Investigate a Flood Management Portal/app for the alerting of residents in flood risk areas when water levels are of concern.	LCC	2021	Digital response system in place for flood warnings	LCC
OB3g	Real-time air quality and carbon footprint monitors	LCC		Real time online	LCC

				availability of data	
OB3h	Mapping of Electric Vehicle Charge Points and their availability in real time	**LCC**		**Maps and real-time data available online and on the app**	**LCC**
OB3i	Introduction of weather stations in Fire stations across the county	**LCC/ Fire Service**		**Weather stations installed and data collected**	**LCC**
OB3j	Back office transformation through the digitisation of business processes to deliver efficiencies to staff and customers.	LCC	Ongoing	Annual addition of process digitisation	LCC
Objective 4:-Support the development of Smart communities to enhance social economic development within the County.					
OB4a	Work with PPN to develop social media training programmes for communities	**Broadband Officer LCC / PPN**	**Ongoing**	No of training courses held	PPN/ LCC
OB4b	Support the Set up a portal to provide links to all villages and parish websites	**Broadband Officer LCC / PPN**	**2021**	**Portal Established**	**LCC**
OB4c	Promote events through Laois Tourism website or Connect2Laois website	**Broadband Officer LCC / Laois Tourism and BSU**	Q4 2020	**Events area on Tourism and Connect2Laois website**	**LCC**

DIGITAL SKILLS AND AWARENESS

Strategic Aim :	Promote the benefits of being connected digitally to the world and support our citizens in acquiring the skills they need to do so.				
	Actions	**Lead**	**Timescale**	**KPI**	**Monitoring Body**
Objective 3 :- Identify areas of digital literacy issues across the County					
OB5a	**Work with Public Participation network (PPN) to identify issues and target resources to improve digital literacy**	**LCC, Laois PPN, LOETB**	**Ongoing**		**LCC/ LOETB**
OB5b	**Survey Library users to establish citizen needs on digital services**	**Laois Libraries**	**Q3 2020**		**Laois Libraries**
OB5c	**Engage with diverse communities to assess their needs and tailor programmes to their abilities and requirements**	**Broadband Officer LCC / PPN / Laois Partnership**	**Q4 2020**		**LCC/Laois Partnership**
Objective 4:- Support Digital Learning and training					
OB6a	**Collaborate with training bodies to identify programs and courses to up skill people of all ages across County Laois**	**Broadband Officer LCC / LOETB/ Laois Partnership**	**Ongoing**	**No of courses / programmes delivered on an annual basis**	**LCC**
OB6b	**Explore funding to improve digital training such as Makerspace in Portarlington for targeted specialisms**	**Broadband Officer LCC / Portarlington Enterprise Centre**	**2022**		**LCC/DCCAE**
OB6c	**Develop a "Centre of excellence" for digital skills in Portlaoise**	**Broadband Officer LCC / DCCAE/ Various schools across the county**	**2023**	**Space to be secured**	**LCC /DCCAE**
Objective 5- Raise awareness of benefits and risks to citizens					
OB7a	**Partake in a awareness campaign to promote the benefits of being digitally connected to online services**	**LCC / PPN/ Teachers Training Centre and LOETB**	ANNUALLY	**No of measures completed Events held Training provided**	**LCC**
OB7b	**Promote measures to increase online safety in**	**LCC / PPN/ Teachers**	**ANUALLY**	**Hold at least one event in**	**LCC /DCCAE**

line with best practice models and legislation as adopted Safe internet Day	Training Centre and LOETB		2020	

DIGITAL ECONOMY

Strategic Aim :	Promote the digital economy to stimulate economic opportunity and grow the tourism and Heritage product of County Laois				
	Actions	**Lead**	**Timescale**	**KPI**	**Monitoring Body**
Objective 3 :- Facilitate and support the E working experience of County Laois					
	Engage with midlands Local Authorities in accessing NEXT2MET funding for regional collaborative digital project	**Local Authorities / EMRA**	**2027**	**funding accessed to develop Regional scheme to promote digital tourism**	**EMRA**
	Engage with NACEC for opportunities to develop remote working throughout the region	**LEO/ Local Authorities and NACEC**			
OB8a	**Support the development of remote working in various locations throughout the county**	**LCC, LEO, Laois Hub Collective, Laois Chamber of Commerce**	**Ongoing**	**No of people working within E working spaces within the County** • **Portlaoise** • **Portarlington** • **Mountrath** • **Mountmellick** • Rathdowney	**LCC/ The Hub Collective**
OB8b	**Support applications for funding for digital hub provision to ensure sustainable and suitable workspaces are provided for remote workers, co working and business's looking to relocate and / or expand in County Laois.**	**Broadband Officer LCC / Laois Partnership / LCDC/ LEO / Enterprise Centers**	**2027**	**Amount of new space funded / no of new desks funded**	**LCC – Business Support Unit**
Objective 9:- Promote and develop businesses to engage with the digital economy for their betterment					
OB9a	**Further enhance the www.connect2Laois.ie and www.laois.ie portal and provide supports for updating content**	**BSU LCC**	**Q2 2022**	Updated website	**LCC**
OB9b	**Support small business to enhance their online trading through the trading online voucher scheme**	**Laois LEO**	**Ongoing**	**Number of On line Vouchers given on an annual basis**	**Laois LEO / Enterprise Ireland**

OB9c	Provide various courses to empower businesses to benefit from digital technology	Laois LEO, BSU, Laois Chamber of Commerce	Annually	No of course held	Laois LEO / Enterprise Ireland
Ob9 d	Provide Digital Marketing Clinics and hold a Digital Technology Seminar relevant to micro enterprise	Laois LEO Laois Chamber of Commerce	2022	Event held	Laois LEO Enterprise Ireland
OB9e	Support the development of "online for local shopping" within Laois	Portlaoise Town Team Laois LEO Laois Chamber of Commerce	2022		BSU
Objective 10:- Use digital technology to improve the tourist experience in the county					
OB10a	Develop SMART interpretation installations at sites of interest across the county such as at The Rock of Dunamaise, Round Tower Timahoe etc.	LCC/ Laois Tourism / Laois Heritage Officer / OPW	2025	No of sites with smart installations	LCC
OB10b	Promote the use of digital technology to record and interpret heritage sites so that they can be presented to the public in an accessible way.	Laois Heritage Officer / OPW	Ongoing		LCC
OB10c	Support the installation of Digital Visitor Points at sites such as Fort Protector Portlaoise , Rock of Dunamaise	Laois Heritage Officer / OPW	2021	Digital Visitor Information Points installed	LCC
OB10d	Further enhance the laoistourism.ie website to engage with more visitors to the county	Laois Tourism Officer / OPW	Ongoing	Digital Visitor Information Points installed	LCC

Appendix A

Digital Strategy Steering Group

      John Mulholland Chief Executive
      Donal Brennan Director of Services
      Antoinette Brennan Broadband Officer
      Pat Grassick Head of Information Systems
      Angela McEvoy Senior Planner
      Evelyn Reddin Head of Enterprise LEO

Workshop with Indecon.

      Antoinette Brennan Broadband Officer
      Pat Grassick Head of Information Systems
      Angela McEvoy Senior Planner
      Evelyn Reddin Head of Enterprise LEO
      Bernie Foran Chief Librarian
      Georgina Ireland Community and Enterprise
      Claire McIntyre Community and Enterprise
      David O'Hara Planning
      Jake Lawler Business Support Unit
      Suzanne O'Connor PPN

APPENDIX B

Laois County Council
Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise, Co. Laois

connect Laois

Digital Strategy Citizen Questionnaire

*This questionnaire is aimed at individual people who **may or may not be** internet users.*

Information will be kept confidential and only be used in aggregate as part of our analysis.

1. **What age range do you belong to?**
   - ☐ 16-24
   - ☐ 25-44
   - ☐ 45-64
   - ☐ 65+

2. **Are you male or female?**
   - ☐ Male
   - ☐ Female

3. **Where are your home located? (Townland/Eircode)** _____

4. **How often do you use the internet?**
   - ☐ Never [Skip to Q15– Non-web Users]
   - ☐ Less than once a month
   - ☐ Once a month
   - ☐ Once a week
   - ☐ Everyday
   - ☐ More than once a day

5. **What do you use the web/internet for?**
   - ☐ Work
   - ☐ Local Authority Services
   - ☐ Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat)
   - ☐ Web browsing
   - ☐ Shopping online
   - ☐ Internet TV
   - ☐ Listening to music (e.g. iTunes, YouTube)
   - ☐ Gaming
   - ☐ Banking
   - ☐ Other (specify) _____

6. **Do you work from home / remote working?**
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No
   - ☐ If remote working was available, I would
   - ☐ Other

7. **Where do you use the internet?**
   - ☐ Home
   - ☐ Work/College
   - ☐ Café
   - ☐ Library
   - ☐ Friend or relative's house
   - ☐ Digital hub
   - ☐ Other (specify) _____

8. **What type of connectivity method do you use to access the internet from home?**

☐ DSL (over telephone line)   ☐ Wireless connection/Mobile Broadband
☐ Fiber connection   ☐ Don't know
☐ Satellite broadband   ☐ No Internet access at home
☐ Other (specify) _____

9. To what extent has digital technologies impacted on your life (e.g. in terms of changed behaviour, greater reliance on the internet)?

☐ Little   ☐ Major impact

☐ Moderate impact   ☐ No impact

10. Overall what do you consider to be the barriers you face in benefitting more from the use of digital technologies?

☐ Cost   ☐ Concerns about internet security

☐ Technical – i.e. broadband availability ☐ None

☐ Lack of skills to use internet and other technologies   ☐ Other (specify) _____

11. If there were no barriers, what would you use digital technologies for?

☐ Work   ☐ Keep in touch with family

☐ Banking   ☐ Local Authority services
                            ☐ Shopping
☐ Book holidays   ☐ Other (specify) _____

12. Are there any organisations that you deal with where transactions would be easier if they made more use of digital technologies? If yes, please explain.

13. Is there anything you would like to see in *Laois Digital Strategy* to make it easier to use digital technologies more?

Non-web Users only

14. Have you availed of training to allow you use digital technology? If yes please explain
_____

15. What is the primary reason you don't use the internet / web?

☐ I have no wish to use the internet

☐ I don't know how to access the internet / world wide web

☐ I don't own a device that connects to the internet (e.g. computer, smart-phone)

☐ Connectivity problems – e.g. I don't have access to adequate broadband

☐ I am concerned about security on the internet

☐ Other (specify) _____

16. If you were offered training on using the internet /web how interested would you be in participating in it?

☐ **Little or no interest**

☐ **High level of interest**

☐ **Moderate interest**

APPENDIX C – Glossary

BSU   **Business Support Unit**

BCP   **Broadband Connection Point**

DCCAE   **Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment**

DRA   **Digital Readiness Assessment**

DRCD   **Department of Rural and Community Development**

EU   **European Union**

HSB   **High Speed Broadband**

LCC   **Laois County Council**

LOETB   **Laois Offaly Education and Training Board**

LEO   **LOCAL Enterprise Office**

PPN   **Public Participate Network**

NBI   **National Broadband Ireland**

NBP   **National Broadband Plan**

NDS   **National Digital Strategy**