

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE LAOISE
LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL
CORPORATE PLAN 2019 - 2024
ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT, JANUARY 2023



Principal Activities and Functions of the Council

Laois County Council is a service provider, responsible for a multiplicity of services which impact upon the lives of every citizen in the County. These services range across a broad spectrum including Housing, Roads, Water, Waste Management and Planning Control.

Laois County Council Corporate Plan 2019 - 2024

This Corporate Plan provides the framework for the implementation of a coherent strategy for the development of our County for the period 2019 – 2024.

The strategies and objectives outlined in the Plan will enable Laois County Council’s Elected Members and Employees to continue to provide leadership in the promotion and development of the social, economic and cultural life of the County.

Laois County Council’s Corporate Objectives

(1) To enhance the social, cultural and economic lives of the people of Laois

Corporate Affairs

Laois County Council continued to meet on a monthly basis during the year. In 2022, meetings were held in the Council Chamber with remote access also being made available. Monthly Management Reports continued to be provided to the Members for consideration at their monthly meetings.

The Municipal Districts - Graiguecullen-Portarlinton, Borris In Ossory-Mountmellick and Portlaoise also continued to meet on a monthly basis.

The Strategic Policy Committees, the details of which are as follows continued to meet in 2022:-

- Housing, Regeneration and Planning,
- Climate Action and Community
- Transport, Environment and Emergency Services,
- Enterprise, Economic Development and Tourism

The Annual Report for 2021 was published in line with statutory requirements.

The Audit Committee Charter & Annual Work Programme for 2023 were agreed by the Members at their meeting held on the 12th December 2022. The Internal Audit Work Programme for 2023 will proceed in accordance with the agreed programme, taking account of Management Team inputs as necessary.

County Promotion:

Tourism

In 2022 Laois County Council continued to promote the County of Laois by supporting a range of initiatives and by working with state agencies. Laois Chamber of Commerce and Laois Tourism amalgamated to form Laois Chamber Alliance. The Council continued to support Laois Chamber Alliance with their work promoting Laois. Work, also, commenced on a Tourism Promotional Brochure. O'Connell Marketing Consultants, who were contracted by Laois Tourism, continued with the marketing and promotion of the County. A strong online presence exists through the Tourism Website and Social Media channels actively promoting the County and what it has to offer. The Council also continued to work with Fáilte Ireland promoting Laois as a destination in Ireland's Ancient East Region

Work continued on the Tourism Destination Town Project for Portlaoise. This included finalising with the design consultants the proposals for the script, planning and design of wayfinding and interpretation signage for the town. The directional signage, informative and interpretation panels are currently being manufactured. The installation of new lights as part of this project have been completed on Peppers Lane, Lyster Lane and Bull Lane.

Tenders were received for the Conservation and upgrading of the Community-run Heritage Centre in the former Church of Ireland in Timahoe. The tender documents have been evaluated and it is proposed to award the contract for these works in early January 2023. The works include repairs to the vestry roof and external doors, painting, a new kitchenette and reception area, heating system and floor coverings.

Coillte, in association with Laois and Offaly County Councils continued to work on the development of the Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trail Project. In 2022 the focus has been on the development of a trailhead building which will be located in Baunreagh. The proposed trailhead building was redesigned in 2022 and an application for planning permission was submitted on the 8/12/2022. A decision is due in early 2023.

Work on the Barrow Blueway steadily progressed in 2022. The Laois section is complete. Consultants have been commissioned to prepare a 'Placemaking Plan' to provide consistency in terms of a wayfinding approach to facilities, amenities and access. Visitor monitoring counters were installed in 5 locations (Lowtown (Robertstown), Rathangan, Monasterevin, Vicarstown and Athy). Early usage numbers are positive.

The World & National Ploughing Championships returned to Ratheniska in 2022. The total attendance figure came to 277,000 visitors, with over 1,700 exhibitors. Laois County Council provided a marquee for 24 local exhibitors who showcased their

businesses/services. These included food and drink providers, craft producers and information providers.

Stage 3 of Rás na mBan, the International Ladies Cycle Race, took place on Friday 9th September 2022. There was a ceremonial start of the 120 cyclists from Aras an Chontae. The Race started in Portlaoise, passing through Abbeyleix, Mountrath, Mountmellick, Rosenallis, Clonaslee and Kinnity where the cyclists climbed the Wolftrap Mountain and finished at the top of the Cut. This stage of the race was won by Lieke Van Zeelst from Greemount Cycling Academy. The race was covered by TG4 and reported on by RTE. Laois County Council provided Tourism Grants for festivals and events in the County in 2022. These included The Old Forte Festival Portlaoise, Scarecrow Festival Durrow, The Folly Festival Cullohill, National Steam Rally Stradbally, Twin Trees Festival Ballinakill, Shine in Emo, The Gordon Bennett Classic Car Festival, The Leinster Fleadh, Laois Pride, Tri Laois. Laois County Council also supported Christmas Festivals/Lights in a number of locations around the County.

Community Development Section

Laois Local Community Development Committee was established in September 2014 for the purposes of developing, co-ordinating and improving a coherent and strategic approach to Local and Community Development. The LCDC is supported by the Community Department of Laois County Council and oversees the implementation of:

- Social Inclusion Community Action Programme (SICAP). Laois LCDC continued to oversee implementation of the SICAP Programme 2018-2023 and administered the annual budget of €694,860 for 2022. The contract implementer is Laois Partnership Company.
- Community objectives in the Local Economic & Community Plan.
- Review of the LECP 2016-2021 took place in 2022 with preparation for the new LECP commencing in 2023.
- Laois Local Development Strategy operated under the LEADER Programme 2014 – 2020 and the Transitional Programme 2021/2022, in partnership between the local authority (financial partner) and local development company (implementing partner).
- LEADER Programme 2014–2020 – this concluded on the 31st March 2021 for which the Laois Local Action Group (LAG) approved 134 projects to the value of €5,557,492.21. However the Transitional LEADER programme 2021/2022 commenced on the 1st April 2021 with Laois LAG being awarded the amount of €1,092,976 for projects. As of 31st December 2022, 47 projects were approved by the LAG to the value of €1,982,597.66. This amount is to be reduced by de committals and LEADER cooperation/Food projects, leaving a project balance of €0.02 as of 31.12.2022
- LEADER EURI funding allocation of €485,767. As of 31st December 2022, 13 projects were approved by the LAG to the value of €484,302.56, leaving a project balance of €1,592.48
- Healthy Ireland Programme–Round 3- Grant in the sum of €353,851.00 in total was received from the Department of Health. This included additional allocation of €92,801.00 to cover a variety of local health focussed projects/initiatives which

were extended to 31st March 2022 due to COVID-19. Round 4- Grant in the sum of €40,000 was allocated to continue to support prioritised health focussed projects/initiatives and to support the preparation of a Healthy Laois Strategy 2023-2025.

Community Activities Fund

Community Activities Fund – An amount of € €273,048 was allocated to 132 groups (€106,185 in capital funding and €166,863 in current funding)

Laois Connects 2022 - Promoting Positive Mental Health & Wellbeing

Laois Connects 2022 took place from the 1st to the 31st October 2022. This was the second consecutive year that it ran for the whole month. The programme featured online programmes as well as indoor and outdoor programmes and events. Durrow comedian Bernard O Shea and Irish International & Leinster Rugby star James Lowe contributed videos in support of and promoting mental health awareness as part of our promotion. The initiative also featured an interview with Michelle McCormick of GROW, which highlighted her own personal mental health journey.

Laois Comhairle na nÓg

In 2022, Youth Work Ireland Laois were the successful tenderer to run the Laois Comhairle na nÓg programme for 2023 and 2024. In 2022 Laois Comhairle na nÓg had 35 members and held 31 meetings. Their project for 2022 was a Colour Fun Run event on the 13th of May, which had just under 500 participants from all around Laois including a football club from Kildare.

The Comhairle members also took part in several consultations and events. One of these events was the launch of the travel card in Dublin. 2 members of Comhairle na nÓg took part in the Tedx talks in Dun Laoghaire. The AGM was held in the Midlands Park Hotel on 25th October and was attended by all secondary schools in Laois as well as Youth Reach, Family Resource Centres, St Francis School and Vicarstown Youth Club.

Educational Partnership

The Schools Business Partnership “ ‘World of Work’ programme is aimed at 2nd year students. This intervention has been shown to be more effective in addressing/averting the issue of early school leavers. The programme is run in conjunction with Portlaoise College and involves an introductory session, company overview, a ‘Day in the Life’ where students meet members of Council staff with varying work and education backgrounds, a site visit and a wrap session. The programme is run by the national Schools Business Partnership and the Dept of Education and Skills.

Youth Supports

Other supports for young people in Laois were continued throughout 2022. The Council is represented on both Garda Youth Diversion Projects in Portlaoise and Portarlinton and Laois/Offaly Children & Young Peoples Services Committee.

Laois Age Friendly Programme

The Age Friendly Alliance and the Older Peoples Council (OPC) Executive both met 5 times in 2022. The focus for the year was in preparing a new Age Friendly Strategy for 2023-2027. A strategy workshop involving all stakeholders took place in March 2022- subsequent surveys took place both in hard copy and through our consultation portal- representative views of 155 people were received. The preliminary findings were presented at an Age Friendly Consultation event in Bloom HQ, Mountrath on the 26th July 2022, where 100 people were in attendance. This took the format of facilitated round table discussions on the 8 World Health Organisation Themes. Each table then presented a brief synopsis of the issues discussed and the actions sought on each theme. Feedback from each table was analysed and a draft strategy was prepared. It is envisaged that the new strategy will be ready to launch in quarter 1 of 2023.

The OPC convention took place for the first time since 2019 in Meath in May 2022. This proved to be a very positive and informative event which was attended by the Age Friendly Programme Manager and two members of the OPC.



Age Friendly Strategy Consultation at Bloom HQ, Mountrath

Laois Africa Day

Africa Day took place on Saturday the 28th May, 2022, on the grounds of the Laois Leisure Centre in Portlaoise. It was well attended on what was a beautiful day. It featured & showcased the sights, sounds, crafts and food of Africa and celebrated the contribution of the African community to Laois. It was very well attended, with something for all the family.

The event was attended by the Ambassadors for Poland & Brazil, Mrs Anna Sochanska & Mr Marcel Fortuna Biato, who addressed the large crowd. Cathaoirleach Conor Bergin and Chief Executive of Laois County Council, Mr John Mulholland, Deputy Charlie Flanagan & Minister Sean Fleming were also in attendance. The wonderful Cllr Yemi Adenuga, from Meath County Council and also star of Gogglebox, who was the first elected black female representative elected in Ireland, also spoke on the day.



Laois Africa Day 2022

Collaborative Projects/Social Inclusion

Laois County Council partnered with stakeholders in respect of projects during 2022, to include:

- Community Coaching Programme
- Laois Sports Partnership Social Inclusion Disability Programme
- Laois Integration Network
- Laois Africa Day
- Integration supports for new communities
- CYPSC
- Make Way Day



Laois Public Participation Network (PPN)

Laois PPN was established in March 2015 and is the main link through which the Local Authority connects with the Community and Voluntary, Social Inclusion and Environmental groups within County Laois. The PPN facilitates groups to nominate PPN representatives to decision and policy making bodies in the county such as the LCDC, SPCs and the JPC. Laois PPN continues to grow its network with 660 groups currently registered.

Laois PPN in collaboration with Laois County Council welcomed hundreds of nominated delegates from 31 PPNs representing 18,000 PPN member groups from across Ireland for the National PPN Conference 2022. The conference took place in the Midlands Park Hotel from Friday the 21st until Saturday the 22nd of October. The event was supported by the DRCD with Minister Joe O' Brien addressing the conference, highlighting the important work of the PPNs in supporting communities throughout the Covid 19 Pandemic. Delegates attended a variety of excursions which showcased the fantastic work of Laois PPN member groups. This was the first time Laois hosted the PPN National Conference and was the first PPN National Conference to be held since pre Covid.

Laois PPN worked in collaboration with Laois County Council on several initiatives and projects that supported Communities in Laois such as – The Ukrainian Community Response Forum, Heritage Week, Fire Safety Week, Community and Voluntary Awards and Laois Connects. Laois PPN supported PPN Member groups in 2022 through a variety of well attended training and capacity building events and as an information hub on funding opportunities and public consultations.

County Laois Joint Policing Committee (JPC)

The County Laois JPC met 4 times in 2022. The JPC Strategic Plan 2022-2027 was adopted at the September 2022 Laois County Joint Policing Committee meeting held on 12th September, 2022. Joint Policing Committee Working Group meetings per Municipal District continue to take place each quarter.

Community & Voluntary Awards

The 2022 Community & Voluntary Awards Ceremony was held on the 28th October, 2022 in the Midlands Park Hotel, Portlaoise, hosted by Laois County Council in association with Laois PPN and sponsored by the People First Credit Union. Nominees were honoured in 7 categories for their contribution to community life in Laois, including an individual Unsung Hero Award and a newly established Junior Volunteer of the Year Award. The Awards showcase annually the great work that is being carried out locally by the community/voluntary, social inclusion and environmental sectors in County Laois.

Pride of Place

Pride of Place recognises initiatives taken by local communities to create pride in their area and celebrates the vital contribution that community groups make to society. Laois was represented in the 2022 All Island Pride of Place competition by Ballinakill in the 300 to 1000 citizens population category. During 2022 Abbeyleix were announced as winners of the Pride of Place 2021 competition in their population category.

Community Projects (Elected Members) Fund 2022

Over 101 community groups/projects were funded under the Community Projects (Elected Members) Fund in 2022 totalling €102,256.

Disability Participation and Awareness Fund

In 2021, Laois County Council were Successful in an application under the Disability Participation and Awareness Fund and awarded €75,000 for the delivery of a suite of projects that continued to be delivered in 2022. Works included accessibility works at Portlaoise Leisure Centre, Sightless Cinema Initiative, an Access for All/Social Inclusion Week and Disability Awareness training for staff.

Town & Village Renewal Scheme

In 2022, €794,552 in funding was awarded under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2021 benefitting 5 projects at 5 locations in County Laois. Of these, 2 projects are nearing completion with the remaining 3 due for completion during 2023. In late 2022, €917,496 in funding was awarded under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2022 benefitting 5 projects at 4 locations in County Laois. All projects under the 2019 Town and Village Renewal Scheme are now complete with 2 remaining projects under the 2020 scheme due for completion in Quarter 2 2023.

Rural Regeneration Development Fund (RRDF)

Borris In Ossory Courthouse RRDF project - RRDF (Category 2) funding in the amount of €212,332 was awarded in 2022 and an integrated design team was appointed by Laois County Council in Quarter 4 of 2022. This project will develop plans for the renovation and re-use of the historic courthouse building in Borris in Ossory. The project aims to provide remote working and community facilities and regenerate a prominent vacant building for the benefit of the local community.

Durrow Community Enterprise Hub - RRDF (Category 1) funding in the amount of €1,456,983.00 was announced in 2022 this project. The project will see the redevelopment of the former Methodist Chapel and Hall into an Enterprise Centre with co-working space as well as a cultural / gallery and exhibition space.

ARTS SECTION

Laois County Council Arts Service is committed to developing sustainable and progressive arts programmes that are supportive of artistic ambition. Key pillars of the arts programme include: - Youth Arts, Visual arts, the Laois Arthouse Stradbally, the Literary Arts, the Dunamais Arts Centre, The Creative Ireland Laois Programme, Public Art and supports for music education and development through our partnerships with the LOETB, and networking with artists and communities to develop the sector. The aim is to create an environment which supports the artist and artistic ambition and increase socially inclusive participation in all artistic programmes, and to support and

develop artistic infrastructure, including the Laois Arthouse, Dunamaise Arts Centre, Laois Music Centre and other artistic facilities in the County.

Socially inclusive activities and events hosted included:

Laois Arthouse, Stradbally – workshops and events took place as part of the 10th anniversary show. An invitation was received by President Michael D Higgins to visit Áras an Uachtaráin to mark the 10th anniversary of the Laois Arthouse. There were two exhibitions in the Laois Arthouse.

Summer Series of professional art workshops - The annual Adult Summer Art course with artist Tom Mc Lean was held in the Malthouse, Stradbally to allow for safe distancing and safety of participants.

Laois Youth Theatre - Workshops were adapted to include a series of online and outdoor workshops. Independent youth theatre programmes, in Mountrath and Portarlinton, continued to be supported.

Laois Culture Night – This event proceeded on Friday 23rd of September 2022 and included a wide variety of free live and online events.



'Protectour,' by James Hayes, launch on Culture Night 2022

Dunamaise Arts Centre - Laois County Council continues to support the Dunamaise Arts Centre as one of the main arts venues in Laois. The Laois Arts Office worked collaboratively with the Dunamaise Arts Centre on numerous programmes during the year.

The Artists in Schools Scheme - 10 schools participated in this scheme in 2022. The scheme allows students to have an in-depth experience with the professional artist and gives them the opportunity to experience different art mediums.

Leaves Festival of Literature - The Leaves Festival 2022 brought the best of Irish literature and music to Laois in November. The festival welcomed Booker Prize shortlisted Claire Keegan as its 1st festival length writer in residence. Claire joined the festival for a public

event with novelist and broadcaster Edel Coffey as well as a series of workshops for students, in libraries, the prison and in the Dunamais Arts Centre. There were two screenings of the award-winning film *An Cailín Ciúin* based on Claire Keegan's story *Foster*. The festival also celebrated 40 years of Salmon Publishing with a music and poetry event while it welcomed native poet Pat Boran and chef Rory O'Connell (in conversation with Katy McGuinness).

There was plenty of music too with Harpanno, Alannah Murray and The Messages amongst others. Another event saw host Ronán Hession in conversation with broadcaster Clare O'Brien and there was also an afternoon open mic event of poetry and music. *The World of Words*, a collection of short stories by new Irish writers that is the culmination of a creative writing journey started almost a year ago in the aftermath of lockdown, was also launched.

Local Live Performance Scheme Phase 3&4 - Funded by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media and administered by the Arts Office the LLPS supports the arts and culture sectors through the provision of live performance, by engaging the services of professional artists, musicians, producers, crew and other staff. Once again, Laois has used the opportunity to support performers and highlight some of the cultural riches of the county. The Finns marked National Famine Commemoration Day in the very apt setting of Donaghmore Workhouse and Museum. The performance was recorded and premiered to a national and international audience through Facebook Live. Molly Donnery and Cathal Crowley gave an intimate concert in the Library at Roundwood House and the Lost Messiahs and Tadhg Duffin performed at the stunning Timahoe Heritage Centre. Cua with Brian Lalor and Jack Doherty also performed at Timahoe Heritage Centre, to a highly appreciative audience. Portarlinton band Fear of Folk, brought their unique sound to their hometown and used the event to launch their music video 'How it Used to Be', which was directed, filmed & edited by Darren Warren. The stunning video was filmed at Derryounce Lakes, Portarlinton.

Concerts at the Square Bar, Portlaoise were funded, a screening of 'Night of the Living Dead' with a live score on the grounds of Emo Court, A dance performance of 'Time to flow, time to dance' was performed by Ohr Dance Company alongside a dance photography exhibition. There was a performance from all aspects of the music school and Music Generation marking 21st anniversary of Laois Music Centre (LSM) inception and showcasing the newly renovated Laois Music Centre. It was also an opportunity to showcase alumni of the LSM, many of whom have gone on to carve out professional careers in music.

In addition to the concerts, a number of musical events and concerts were held in community settings. Ollie Plunkett brought Golden Egg Sound Meditation, an immersive experience using sound and meditation to evoke calm and a sense of well-being in participants to Droimnin Nursing Home and also to the Midlands Prison. Cua also performed in two concerts at Midlands Prison.

LSM and Music Generation Laois now under the management of Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB), continue to be supported and promoted by the

Arts Office. The rollout of a comprehensive Creative Ireland Laois Programme continued in 2022.

LIBRARY SERVICES

Laois Library services continue to deliver a range of online and in person services through its networks of library branches in the County. In addition, the Library continued to support art exhibits in Abbeyleix and Mountmellick Libraries as well as a range of presentations and events in the libraries.

SPORT and LEISURE SECTION

The Sport & Leisure Section delivered the following programmes and services:

- Ongoing management and maintenance of Play Facilities, with emphasis on accessibility and biodiversity enhancement of play facilities.
- Assisted communities with the development of new playgrounds in Borris in Ossory –(LEADER funded) and Trumera and Ballyfin (CLÁR funded).
- Successful Grant Application to Department of Children & Youth Affairs - €15,000 for accessibility enhancement to Portarlington playground.
- Assisting with preparation and delivery of successful Green Flag Award for Páirc an Phobal, Portlaoise and People’s Park, Portarlington.
- Delivery of essential repairs and upgrading works to Laois Leisure Portlaoise & Portarlington and sourcing of funding for further upgrades.
- Delivery of Healthy Ireland Programmes – Active Parks & Playful Spaces.
- Partnerships with National Governing Bodies of sport to deliver sports social inclusion programmes countywide.
- Preparation of Community groups, schools and clubs for Grant/Funding Applications which included the delivery of workshops.
- Co-ordination and delivery of national programmes and events such as Bike Week & European Mobility Week, National Play Day and National Recreation Week.
- Facilitation and ongoing support of SVT (Stradbally, Vicarstown and Timahoe) and Rathdowney/Errill Active Community Hubs.
- Preparation of TVRS, ORIS and CLÁR funding applications and overseeing the delivery of same in partnership with communities.

(2) To foster and promote sustainable environmental initiatives and practices in the County/Region

Continuing on the excellent partnership with elected representatives, local communities, schools and agencies, we arranged the following supports, initiatives and Projects:

- Ongoing support of the Laois Federation of Tidy Towns through online workshops, seminars and awards, and advice by in-house experts and staff in a range of disciplines. The Laois Federation of Tidy Towns Awards were held in 2022 for the first time since 2017.
- There are 75 schools in County Laois registered with the Green Schools Programme. Laois County Council supports their efforts

through the provision of themed workshops, teacher seminars and advice. 8 schools received Green Flag awards in 2022.

- 2GoCup Reusable Coffee cup pilot initiative to dramatically reduce single-use coffee cups in Laois. The businesses taking part in the pilot project are The Pantry, Café Latte, The Bay Tree, Supervalu, Chocolate Brown and Square Coffee. This campaign is being supported by the Laois County Council and Portlaoise Tidy Towns.
- An Choil Beag LEAF:- Mini woodlands have been planted in Portlaoise by LEAF funded by LBAF in each primary school campus and the Laois Education Centre for teachers. Choill Bheags are a small, dense, biodiverse native woodland habitat on the school grounds. Choill Bheags are outdoor living classrooms, with space created with seating for classes to spend time learning outside. As An Choill Bheag matures, nature trails can be developed and students can learn the necessary skills to maintain, monitor and study this essential and beautiful ecosystem in their school grounds.
- Composting in Schools Programme teachers from 10 schools across the county attended, sponsored by Laois Education Centre over 3 weeks. Each school will receive €250 worth of composting equipment and two visits each to conduct a food waste audit and set up a bespoke composting system.
- Play it Again Musical Instrument Recycling Scheme piloted in May in partnership with Music Generation Laois, however donations are still ongoing. The public donate broken or used musical Instruments and they are repaired and given to those who will benefit.

Applications for funding support were invited from interested bodies, groups, committees and organisations who intended to engage in environmental/amenity works. These included:

Community Grant Scheme (Environmental)

Grants were awarded to groups based on amenity works which included landscaping, development of open spaces (planting trees & shrubs, flowerbeds etc) and/or purchase of equipment to maintain/improve/clean up areas/open spaces. 95 groups countywide received funding of €31,066 in 2022.

Tidy Towns Grant Scheme

Applications for funding support were invited from Tidy Town groups in line with the following themes:

- Community – Your Planning and Involvement
- Green Spaces and Landscaping
- Sustainability – doing more with less
- Residential Streets and Housing Areas
- Community Climate Action
- Streetscape and Public Places
- Nature and Biodiversity in your locality
- Tidiness and Litter Control
- Approach Roads, Streets and Lanes

During 2022, €33,929 was allocated in grants to 23 groups under this scheme.

Climate Change

During 2022, a wide variety of projects were undertaken, in pursuance of these objectives. Key initiatives include:

- Laois County Council has long been a forerunner in terms of energy efficiency and decarbonisation. A cross sectoral Climate Action Team meets on a monthly basis.
- Laois County Council co-ordinates a Low Carbon Implementation Group which is comprised of a range of stakeholders including those who are collectively working towards the common goal of reducing the carbon footprint of Portlaoise Town. This work continued in 2022 and a competition was held to design a Low Carbon Town Logo for Portlaoise.
- Sustainable Energy Communities: Durrow SEC and Portarlinton Business Association SEC have both commenced work on their Energy Master Plans (EMP) from SEAI. Portlaoise 2040 SEC have been approved for their EMP and have gone out to tender for consultants.
- A School Sustainable Travel Study for Portlaoise to identify benefits and barriers to the development of a cycling culture in school aged children was completed by An Taisce in 2022. Many of the measures identified in this report are being actioned in 2023.
- Climate Literacy Courses for Transition Year students has been delivered to all 10 secondary schools in County Laois. This incorporates a teacher training element over 8 weekly action based learning modules.
- The Council achieved an estimated efficiency increase of 46.8% which far exceeds the national target for 33% for 2020 and is not too far off the 50% target for 2030.
- Codema Home Energy Saving Kits are available in all our libraries branches. This kit allows you to get a better understanding of the energy usage in your home, problem areas that may need your attention and ways to improve energy efficiency. The kits are available in Portlaoise, Portarlinton, Mountmellick, Abbeyleix, Mountrath, Rathdowney and Durrow libraries.

(3) To facilitate and promote sustainable development of the Council including the delivery of key infrastructural projects subject to compliance with good environmental standards and practice

Roads & Transportation Department 2022

In 2022, the Roads Department received road grants and budget funding of over €27 million for the year and additional funds have been received over and above what was adopted in the roadworks scheme bringing the figure to €28m. The 2022 Roadworks Programme was progressed across all three Municipal Districts and is complete.

Additional Funding;

Significant additional funding was received this year from August onwards from the Department of Rural and Cultural Development under Local Improvements Scheme. Works were completed on the schemes in October 2022.

Graigucullen-Portarlington Municipal District (Eastern Area)

In the Eastern Area, there was a total road surfacing length of 13 km completed by Restoration Improvements Works (Strengthening) in 2022.

There was also a total road surfacing length of 16.6 km completed by Restoration Maintenance Works (Surface Dressing) in 2022.

Bridge rehabilitation works were carried out on several bridges in 2022, most notably –

- Inch/Curraclone Bridge (L7950): Structural repair and replacement of the stone abutments and pitched flooring of the western arch of the Inch Bridge on L7950 across the Stradbally River:
- Gales Bridge (L3978): This involved the removal and re-construction of a section of damaged parapet / wingwall at the Castletown side of the bridge.
- Clogh Road Bridge (R426): Reconstruction of length of stone masonry wing wall.
- Sallys Bridge Bridge (R430) : The scope of works included the removal of a length of damaged parapet on both sides of the bridge and re-construction in traditional stone masonry:
- Luggacurren Bridge (L7853): Re-construction of arch and parapet walls in traditional stone masonry.

Safety Improvement Works were completed in Newtown/Doonane. These works involved the removal of a length of hedging that was obstructing sightlines on the R430. Speed radars were also procured for Pound Cross near Ballybrittas. Safety improvement works were also carried out at Molloy's Crossroads at the junction of the R430 and R431.

Under the Local Improvement Scheme (LIS), the following lengths of roadway were surfaced;

- Whitebog, Ballylinan
- Ballykillen, Ballickmoyler
- Rossena, Ballickmoyler
- Ballyadding, Ballybrittas
- The Strand, Ballickmoyler
- Dunbrin Lower
- Ballyhide
- Gurteen, Ballilckmoyler

Significant road drainage works were carried out across the Municipal District in 2022 including;

- Tennisrath; installation of road gullies and drainage pipework outfalling to nearby watercourse (to resolve property flooding issue)
- Dunbrin; installation of road gullies and drainage pipework outfalling to soakaway
- Skehana; installation of road gullies and drainage pipework outfalling to nearby river (to resolve road flooding issue)
- Arles; installation of manhole and collector channel to resolve flooding on N80
- Fossey; installation of road gullies and significant length of drainage pipework/infilling of open drain and widening of roadway
- Clogh Road, the Swan; installation of road gullies and drainage pipework to resolve water ponding on roadway

- Timahoe; installation of road gullies and drainage pipework outfalling to adjacent river to resolve water ponding on roadway adjacent to the playground
- Moores Cross; installation of road gullies and construction of manholes to resolve road drainage issue/road subsidence

Keeloge, Killeshin; installation of road gullies, connection to existing culvert, to remove excess water flowing on the R430.

Under the 'Towns & Villages Renewal Scheme', new seating, litter bins, planters and a tourist information board were installed in Stradbally. New seating, footpath bollards, planters and tourist information board were installed in Portarlinton. New footpaths were constructed in the People's park in Portarlinton and significant planting was carried out along the Link Road in Portarlinton.

In consultation with Portarlinton Tidy Towns committee, 11 new solar compactor bins were also installed in Portarlinton:

A range of traffic calming and road safety measures were also installed across the Municipal District in 2022. These included:

- speed ramps, speed radars, pedestrian crossings, new parking spaces, new wheelchair parking spaces, new pedestrian crossings, roadside drainage works, fencing works, localised road surfacing repair works, road signage, road markings, emptying of litter bins, street sweeping, hedgecutting and a range of landscaping works in the public realm.

A 5-year River Maintenance Programme was developed in 2020 for Barrow Drainage District works. In 2022, the following river maintenance works were completed under this Programme:

- River Douglas; 2.5km of River Douglas between Gales Bridge and Ballynagar, works ongoing and will be completed in Oct 2022:
- Ballymanus Bridge; Removal of silt islands in Stradbally River just upstream of canal aquaduct and silt removal works completed in July 2022.
- Stradbally River (Stradbally to Garrans); Vegetation removal works on 3.2km of the Stradbally River from Stradbally Town to Garrans. Tree/vegetation removal were completed in August 2022.

Carried out a degree of silt removal works at the N80 Maidenhead culvert

Footpath repair and construction works were completed across the Graiguecullen/Portarlinton Municipal District in 2022. These are some of the larger footpath projects:

- Main Street (both sides) from Bank of Ireland to Market Square
Enabling works were carried out along footpaths on Portarlinton Main Street to facilitate the ESB installation of underground cables and removal of the overhead lines. The ESB removed their overhead lines and poles at the end of November 2022. New street lights were installed and switched on along the length of the Main Street and on Foxcroft Street.
 - Canal Road Footpath and Cycleway
 - Canal Road (adjacent to Clanmalire estate)

- Station Road
- Edenderry Road, Portarlington
- Saint Abban's Terrace, Coolanagh
- Main Street, Stradbally (opposite church)
- Foxcroft Street, Portarlington
- Derrymore, Portarlington
- Crann Nua, Portarlington

Portlaoise Municipal District (Central Area)

In the Central Area, a total road length of 8.5Km was improved under Restoration Improvement Works (Strengthening) Schemes.

A total road length of 8.2km was resealed and had skid resistance improved under Restoration Maintenance Works (Surface Dressing) Schemes.

Footpath Programme including Urban Renewal

Over €195,00 of footpath works were carried in the towns of Portlaoise, Abbeyleix and Ballyroan in 2022.

Portlaoise Town Planting

This Municipal District maintains containers, beds and hanging baskets at over 300 locations around Portlaoise Town. These locations are planted with winter bedding in November and with summer bedding in May each year.

The Municipal District Office also works closely with Portlaoise Tidy Towns with the planting and maintenance of these hanging baskets in the Main Street and Lyster Square in the town. The hanging baskets are on display from June to October each year.

Portlaoise Biodiversity Projects

The Portlaoise Municipal District Office manage 36,000m² of annual cut and short cut meadows in Portlaoise town environs. A Bluebell Meadow was established on JFL Avenue near the Bridge Street Centre.

In conjunction with Portlaoise Tidy Towns the "Portlaoise – A Town in a Garden" Roundabout Strategy was developed on 2021. In 2022, the Market Square Roundabout and Father Browne Avenue Roundabout were upgraded with the provision of lighting, sculptures and pollinator friendly planting.

In conjunction with LEADER and Portlaoise Tidy Towns, the Spring Bulb Planting Programme for Portlaoise commenced in 2022 on JFL Avenue at Bridge Street and Credit union, Dublin Road, Stradbally Road and Mountmellick Road.

A beautiful hand painted nature-based mural was put in place on the Rankins Wood Entrance to Pairc an Phobail in Summer 2022.

Climate Action

The 10,000 Trees for Portlaoise Project in conjunction with Trees on the Land, Portlaoise Tidy Towns and Climate Action Plan was progressed in 2022. Planting locations for over 3,000 new whips & trees were identified in 2022, with planting scheduled for Spring 2023.

Outdoor Dining

New canopies and planting were installed in the outdoor dining area at Hynes Square 2022. Landscaping and planting works were carried out on Jessop Street at the entrance to Hynds Square and Main Street.

Durrow Outdoor Dining Canopy



Hynds Square Outdoor Dining



Community Involvement Schemes

Road surfacing, footpaths and drainage works were carried out on the L-81109, adjacent to Jimmy Maher Park on the Carlow Road Abbeyleix.

Road Drainage Works programme

Drainage works were carried out at the following locations:

- Byrnes Lane
- Jimmy Maher Park Lane
- Clonad

- Ironmills
- Cashel Ballyroan
- Rear Lane Abbeyleix Road
- Bartells Bridge
- Knock

Climate Change Adaptation Schemes & Drainage programme

Drainage works were carried out at the following locations:

- Clontycoe drainage
- Clonboyne Drainage Advance Works
- Clonadacasey
- Mountmellick Road
- Crutt Graignahown
- Woodgrove Portlaoise
- Cashel Ballyroan
- Tullore Ballyroan
- Ballyroan Rd Abbeyleix
- Rathmoyle Abbeyleix

The type of works involved replacing undersized drains with new culverts, high quality soakaways and open water courses and improving the road drainage network.

Road Safety Schemes & Junction Improvement Works

Works to enhance road safety to enhance visibility and driver safety were carried out at:-

- Ballypickas
- Lauragh / Knightstown
- Nolan's Cross at Pass / Ballyheyland
- Kyletalesha
- Cappoley Portlaoise
- Ralphs Grove
- Sheffield Cross

Clár Safety Scheme

Pedestrian crossing and associated footpath works were carried out in Raheen at Tobar an Leinn NS.

Local Improvement Schemes

Road improvement works were carried out at the following locations;

- Eyne Portlaoise
- Moate Ballinakill
- Graiguenahoun Abbeyleix

Bridge Rehabilitation Works

Bridge replacement works were completed at Bridge Street Bridge, Portlaoise.

Traffic Calming

Traffic calming works were carried out at various locations in the Portlaoise Municipal District Area. The majority of these works, related to the installation of traffic calming ramps in residential areas including:

- Esker Hills, Glenbarrow, The Hermitage, Ratheven, Kilminchy, Hillview Drive & Raheen.

Green Flag Award

The Green Flag Award scheme recognises and rewards well managed parks and green spaces, setting the benchmark standard for the management of recreational outdoor spaces across Europe and around the world.

Pairc an Phobail Portlaoise was awarded a green flag again in 2022.

2022 IBAL Anti-Litter League

Portlaoise achieved 20th place out of 40 towns that were assessed as part of the Irish Business Against Litter League (Round 1). Portlaoise achieved second place overall in the final round of judging. Portlaoise achieved the status of “Clean to European Norms”.

River Works

Ecological Surveys were carried out on the River Triogue and Glendownes Portlaoise in 2022 in preparation for river works planned for 2023.

Other Works

The Portlaoise Municipal District Road Office also carries out other tasks on an annual basis such as;

- Maintenance and developments of Pairc an Phobail and the Triogue Linear Park
- Street cleaning and litter collection
- Renewal of road markings
- Drainage maintenance, cleaning and repairs
- Verge trimming at junctions on regional roads
- Control of invasive plant species in public areas
- Grass cutting and weed control in Portlaoise town centre
- Tree Surgery works in public areas
- Road surface repairs
- General maintenance of infrastructure such as railings and barriers.
- Service of Hedge cutting notices
- Issuing of Public Notices (including hazards on the road such as debris and soil)

The office also works with groups such as Tidy Towns, Downtown Traders, Farmers Market, Christmas Market and Christmas Lights Committees on an annual basis.

Borris-in-Ossory / Mountmellick Municipal District ('Western Area')

Road Maintenance

In the Western Area, a total road surfacing length of 19km was completed by Restoration Improvements Works (Strengthening). A total road surfacing length of 19km was completed by Restoration Maintenance Works (Surface Dressing).

Community Involvement Schemes

Road surfacing, footpaths and drainage works were carried out at:

- Tentore, Ballacolla
- Whitefields, Camross
- Cappagh Lane, Rosenallis
- Grantstown, Ballacolla
- Rathphelan, Mountrath
- Twomey Park, Mountmellick

Local Improvement Schemes

Road surfacing and drainage works were carried out at:

- Ballykealy, Durrrow
- Meelick, Rosenallis
- The Derries, Errill
- Lisduff, Errill
- Coolagh, Clonaslee
- Monnagh, Coolrain
- Newtown, Castletown
- Ballyquiade, Ballybrophy
- Glenall Camross
- Shanboe, Borris-in-Ossory
- Kyle, Rathdowney

River Drainage

River maintenance works were completed at the following locations:

- Vegetation removal on the River Barrow between Portnahich Bridge and Garryhinch Bridge.
- Vegetation removal on the River Nore between Derryduff Bridge and Danganroe Bridge.
- Siltation removal works were completed on the River Erkina at Donaghmore Bridge.
- Removal of gravel bars beneath Irishtown Bridge in Mountmellick.
- Vegetation removal on the Drummond drain, tributary of the River Barrow.
- Drainage maintenance on the water courses in Mountmellick Town.

Bridge Rehabilitation Works

Poormans Bridge, Shanahoe

A 3 tonne weight restriction had been imposed on the bridge since 2011. The works consisted primarily of taking down sections of the piers and cutwaters in order to remove tree stumps and rebuilding of the piers and cutwaters. Other works carried out include the installation of tie bars, repointing, masonry repair works, providing rubbing strips to both sides of the carriageway and resurfacing the road.

R421 Tinnahinch Bridge, Clonaslee

Tinnahinch Bridge had been struck by a vehicle and approximately half of the southern parapet wall was damaged. The staff in the Borris-in-Ossory/Mountmellick staff demolished the remaining portion of the parapet wall and reconstructed the parapet wall using rubble stone (existing material), with cut stone coping. The stonework was constructed using lime mortar.

Rushin Bridge, Mountrath

Single-arch bridge over tributary of the Whitehorse River. Arch barrel extended/widened by 4ft to north side to accommodate road-widening scheme.

Meelick Bridge, Rosenallis

Replacement of existing masonry arch culvert with pre-cast concrete box culverts. Temporary diversion of services to facilitate the works. Re-alignment of the existing stream upstream and downstream of culvert. New parapet walls, pavement works and accommodation works.

In addition to bridges mentioned above, Council staff also repaired several other bridges including Turfarney Bridge, Rathdowney and Plucks Bridge, Camross.

Drainage Programme

Drainage Schemes were delivered at a number of locations around the Municipal District in 2022 including:

- Moran's Cross, Durrow
- Health Centre, Durrow
- O'Moore's Forest, Mountmellick
- Drinagh, Mountmellick

The type of works involved replacing undersized drains with new culverts, high quality soakaways and open water courses all with the intention of keeping the road network clear of surface water.

Climate Change Adaptation Grant

The following schemes were funded under the Climate Change Adaptation Grant:

- Drainage and embankment stabilisation works on the L-1005 The Cut to Clonaslee.
- Road raising at Ballybooden, Ballacolla

NTA Public Realm Improvement Project – O'Connell Square, Mountmellick

The NTA provided funding for a public realm enhancement scheme for the historic centre of Mountmellick Town. The objective of the project was to create a safe and pleasant square and generally enhance the public realm in the core of the town. This was achieved by the provision of limestone kerbs and channels in combination with high quality pavement slabs and cobble lock. The public lighting scheme incorporated traditional feature lighting

Footpath Works

Footpath improvement works were undertaken during 2022 at the following locations:

- The Green, Clonaslee
- Rosenallis Rd., Clonaslee
- Forest, Mountrath
- The Rock
- Rosenallis Village
- Errill Village
- R445 Portlaoise Rd., Mountrath
- O'Moore Street, Mountmellick
- Rathdowney Rd., Borris-in-Ossory
- Shanboe, Borris-in-Ossory
- Ballacolla Village

Active Travel/NTA Projects

Laois County Council received an allocation of €3m which rose to €4.7m during 2022 from the National Transport Authority for the delivery of Active Travel projects. Active Travel is utilising modes of transport where we must use physical energy, such as walking or cycling. Delivery of Active Travel projects largely centres around walking and cycling improvements.

In 2022 Laois County Council delivered of a number of active travel projects:

Rathleague Footpath, Portlaoise

- New 3m wide footpath from Bloomfield Cross to Portlaoise GAA
- 580m in length
- Additional public lighting provided

Ballyroan Footpath

- New 2m wide footpath in Ballyroan from the national school to GAA Club
- 450m in length
- Additional public lighting provided
- New footbridge provided over stream

Ballinakill Footpath

- New footpath serving Ballinakill outdoor swimming pool from Church Street
- 150m in length
- New public lighting and boundary treatment provided

Lyster Square Public Realm Improvement – Phase 1

- New pedestrian facilities providing a safe route from the bus stop on JFL Ave to shops on Lyster Square
- Improvements to existing pedestrian facilities
- New raised pedestrian crossing points
- New bus shelter provided on JFL Avenue

Junction Tightening Works

Junction tightening schemes involve the narrowing of wide crossing points at estate entrances or other minor roads. Such schemes can see reductions in crossing widths from 20m down to 7m. Crossing points are also reconstructed as raised crossings. These measures bring about a safer environment for all road users, particularly pedestrians and those with mobility or visual impairments.

In 2022 junction tightening works took place at:

- Ballymorris Manor, Portarlington
- Rose Court, Portarlington
- Millbrook Manor, Portarlington
- Beechfield, Portlaoise
- Liogard, Portlaoise

Portlaoise Local Transport Plan (LTP)

The preparation of Portlaoise Local Transport Plan (LTP) commenced in Q3 2022 following the appointment of engineering consultants.

A LTP is a short to medium-term plan that sets out the town's transport strategy for the period to 2030 to coincide with the period of the Portlaoise Local Area Plan (2024-2030). It will also consider longer term proposals as contained in documents such as Portlaoise 2040 And Beyond.

The LTP will be required to examine all transport modes and how they interact both in the town centre and throughout its environs.

Safe Routes to Schools Programme

Led by An Taisce, the SRTS Programme was developed in response to ongoing issues of safety and congestion at the school gate and on routes to school. The programme aims to support active travel to school (walking and cycling). Plans to carry out improvements to front of school locations were advanced in 2022 in conjunction with An Taisce and the NTA. Draft measures have been prepared and these will be assessed and agreed with a view for implementation in 2023.

The three Round 1 schools are:

- Maryborough NS, Portlaoise
- Scoil Phadraig Naofa, Mountmellick
- Scoil Mhuire, Abbeyleix

Other Schemes

Other multi-annual projects which saw further advancement with design and planning in 2022 were

- Active Travel Scheme - Father Brown Avenue, Portlaoise
- Part 8 approval received in december 2022
- Active Travel Scheme – Dublin Road, Portlaoise
- Triogue Way, Portlaoise

Road Design

Laois County Council completed a large number of maintenance and improvement schemes in 2022 which included, the completion of the N80 Kyletalesha to Mountmellick Phase 1 Pavement Asset Repair and Renewal and the HD 28 pavement surface improvement works, enhancements to signage, line markings, capital pavement works together with installation of bollards, public lighting, and junction improvement works. The following outlines the works completed and associated funding.

Capital Maintenance Killyganard N78 – Expenditure €200,000

500 meters of surface reinstatement on the N78, North of Ballylinan close to the Kildare border.

HD28 Pavement Resurfacing Sites – Expenditure €1,000,000.00

The following works were carried out under this scheme this year:

- N80 Graiguecullen
- N80 Garrough
- N80 JFL Avenue
- Stradbally, Windy Gap.

N77 Abbeyleix Road Rehabilitation and Enhancement Scheme

The Part VIII was approved by the elected members at the May 2022 council meeting, detailed design is complete and are currently in the process of appointing a contractor for the works.

N80 Kyletalesha to Mountmellick Phase 1 Pavement Asset Repair and Renewal – Expenditure €2.4 Million

2022 saw the completion of the N80 Kyletalesha to Mountmellick Phase 1 Pavement Asset Repair, by Roadstone Ltd. The works which began in June 2022 and concluded in December 2022 with the completion of the planing out and restoration and strengthening of 2.5 km of roadway.

Capital Kyletalesha to Derrycloney Phase 2 – Expenditure €450,000

Detailed design was progressed for this section of the N80 and works are expected to start on this section of road in the summer of 2023.

N77 Deer Pilot Scheme - Expenditure €70,000

Significant vegetation clearance work was undertaken on the N77 south of Abbeyleix to improve visibility for motorists travelling along that section of road. This work was carried out at this location due to the high level of deer crossing at this location.

Public Lighting

There are total 9,500 lights in Laois. 65% lights are now upgraded to LED in county.

Winter Maintenance

Call-out operations were carried out on 45 occasions during the 2021/2022 winter season treating 458km of the salted network in Laois. So far there has been 40 call-outs during the 2021/2022 winter season.

Water Services

Uisce Éireann

The Department for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, published the Framework for the Future Delivery of Water Services in June 2022 and it sets out the next phase in the transformation of the water sector in Ireland. Irish Water will be known as Uisce Éireann from January 2023 and will assume full responsibility for the delivery of all public water services in Ireland on a phased basis during the year.

Irish Water Capital Investment Plan 2019 to 2024.

Irish Water continues to fund all Water Services Capital Projects. Laois County Council in conjunction with Irish Water has completed various schemes to support the socio-economic development of the County.

In relation to the Portlaoise Water Supply improvement Scheme, borewell PW09 at Coolbanagher has recently been developed and is currently on standby to be used when required.

Irish Water are also developing Well PW07 and Well PW08 at Coolbanagher. Two borewells at Doolough have been brought into production to serve the Portarlinton Water Supply. Further progress was made on the borewell at Fermoy WTP to provide water in Durrow.

Networks and Water Conservation.

First fix, find and fix and lead replacement work continued throughout the county in 2022. Significant progress was made in leakage management in Portarlinton following back yard service works in St. Michael's Park.

Replacement of watermain on the Swan network is now complete.

Mains rehabilitation works were also carried out in Abbeyleix and Stradbally in 2022, which will provide a safer, more secure water supply by minimising the frequency of bursts and improving the resilience of the network.

Programmes

Disinfection/PH control programme – Civil works progressing in Meelick, Derryguile, Kyle, Five Wells, Derrymoyle and Lough WTPs. MEICA works progressed at the Strand, Knocks, Derryguile, Lough, Kyle, Five Wells, Clonin Hill, Derrymoyle, Ballyroan and Meelick WTP. Process proving now complete at the Knocks, Kyle and Ballyroan WTPs. ESB supply upgrade currently being progressed for Five Wells. Power switchover at Lough WTP now complete. Design for Kilminchy WTP and Fermoyale WTP currently being progressed by CWL/IW.

Inlet Works Storm and Sludge Program – Castletown WwTP - New Storm Tank installation is complete. Training for LCC operational staff now complete. Snagging list has been issued by IW to EPS.

Ballyroan WwTP Upgrade – A laser scan survey of the plant and an asbestos survey are being progressed/carried out. Catchment questionnaire completed by LCC for IW. Onsite works now expected to be progressed in 2023 by Conway Engineering.

Water Services Laboratory

Laois County Council's Water Services Laboratory is an INAB accredited facility certified under the international standard ISO 17025:2017. The Laboratory retained its accreditation status following an annual INAB assessment on 5th April 2022. The Laboratory was originally granted accreditation in 26th October 2016 by INAB. The sample throughput in 2022 was 4,068 which is similar to the 2021 figure of 4,076.

Our customers include Irish Water for all public water supplies and wastewater schemes in Laois, Offaly County Council for private water supplies in Offaly, LAWPRO Regional Offices in Kilkenny, Clonmel & Tullamore for river and lake catchment projects. In addition, the Laboratory undertakes sampling and testing programmes for both the Water Services Department and Environment Department within Laois County Council.

There is ongoing engagement with WSTO, the Water Committee of the CCMA and the DPHLG to finalise the Business Plan for the implementation of the Network of Accredited Local Authority Laboratories Shared Service. Under this Plan the Laboratory will develop into a regional scale facility providing services to neighbouring local authorities. It is projected the sample throughput in the Laboratory will increase in the short-term from the current figure of 4,076 to 9,000. There is continued efforts to enhance our accreditation status by extending our accreditation scope and investing in modern instrumentation which will allow greater analytical capacity.

Multi Annual Rural Water Programme 2019 to 2021

The strategic objective of the Rural Water Programme is to improve quality, reliability and efficiency of water services to rural dwellers where Irish Water services are not available. Work continued to support the Group Water Scheme Sector in conjunction with the DPHLG and with the support of the National Federation of Group Water Schemes financially, administratively and technically to ensure that a safe, dependable and adequate water supply is provided to the rural population and farming community in Laois in compliance with the European Union (Drinking Water) Regulations, 2014, as amended, thus protecting the public health of the people of Laois and supporting the socio-economic development of the agricultural sector.

Some works were delayed due to the COVID 19 restrictions. Water conservation and network upgrade works were completed on a no. of schemes in 2022. Grants totaling €107,130 were paid to Ballacolla GWS, the Heath GWS and Barrowhouse GWSS in respect of these upgrade works.

Irish Water confirmed that The Rock GWS was taken in charge by them on 7th of December 2022 and work is progressing on transitioning of Moyadd GWS to Irish Water and this scheme will be taken in charge in 2023.

Works on Wastewater Community Connection project at Goodwin Estate will commence early in 2023 and will be complete by end of April 2023.

Application and Feasibility Studies for Vicarstown and Cullohill were submitted to the Department on the 15th of September for funding under Measure, A8 (Waste Water Collection and Treatment Needs for Villages and Settlements without access to Public Waste Water Services). These applications are being reviewed and adjudicated upon by the Department.

Group Water Schemes Annual Subsidy Payments: Subsidy payments of €509,152 was paid to a number of Group Water Schemes in the county towards the running costs of their water supply schemes.

Well Grant Applications: There were 65 applications received for grant aid assistance to improve private water supplies to domestic households and the sum of €139,944 was paid out to 39 applicants in respect of well grants in 2022.

Monthly Management Reports continue to be provided to Members of Laois County Council for consideration at their monthly meetings.

Dangerous Structure and Places.

A Register of Dangerous Places/Structures is maintained by the local authority and there are 9 open files on the register in Co. Laois at 31st December 2022. All files are being monitored & progressed.

Many of these files are in a position to be closed and are just awaiting their final report and memo.

Welfare Units

Laois County Council and Irish Water implemented a pilot programme in 2020 to provide welfare units for staff. Each accessible unit contains office space, kitchen space, a changing room and a bathroom with shower. During the year eight welfare units were provided.

Environment Department

Environment

Area of Activity	Objectives	2022 Progress Update
Environmental Protection	<p>To improve, protect, enhance and promote the natural and built environment in the interests of present and future generations</p> <p>Improve water status in all water bodies</p> <p>To protect public health and to improve & maintain air quality and to protect against noise pollution</p>	<p>In 2022, the Environmental Protection Team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased the level of effective environmental protection inspections and enforcement Investigated water quality, air and noise complaints referred by members of the public, Elected Members, the EPA and LAWPRO/Inland Fisheries Ireland Reviewed, inspected and enforced Discharge Licenses Assisted LAWPRO in referrals for Prioritised Areas for Action Carried out investigation and sampling for the Kilminchy Area Project Carried out farm inspections in the River Douglas Catchment Area Carried out inspections and maintenance of the EPA's Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Programme (AAMP) stations in Laois. (Portlaoise and Mountrath). Carried out assessments, inspections and reports on planning applications.
Waste Management & Enforcement	<p>To improve, protect, enhance and promote the natural and built environment in the interests of present and future generations</p> <p>The protection of human health and the environment against harmful effects that may be caused by the generation, collection,</p>	<p>In 2022, the Environmental Waste Management & Enforcement Team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased the level of effective waste management inspections and enforcement in the County. Investigated waste management, illegal dumping and waste infrastructure complaints referred by members of the public, Elected Members, the EPA and other bodies Continued to comply with the requirements of the Eastern Midlands Waste Management Plan.

Area of Activity	Objectives	2022 Progress Update
	transport, treatment, storage and disposal of waste.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaged with the Eastern Midlands Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authority (WERLA). Prioritised the National Waste Enforcement Priorities. • Continued to monitor and inspect permitted waste facility and certificate of registration sites • Arranged for the removal of significant quantities of illegally dumped waste from numerous sites around the county • Carried out household waste inspections in Portlaoise, Portarlinton, Mountrath, Mountmellick, Ballylinan, Crettyard and Clonaslee for compliance with the Waste Bye-Laws. • Completed two projects under the Anti-Dumping Initiative (ADI) funded by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCA). • Carried out assessments, inspections and reports on planning applications.
Litter Management	<p>To prevent, control & manage litter</p> <p>To encourage & promote public awareness</p> <p>Provision of Waste Facilities</p> <p>Partnership with Communities & Business</p> <p>Enforcement of the Litter Pollution Acts</p>	<p>In 2022, the Litter Management Team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issued Fixed Penalty Notices for offences under the Litter Pollution Act. Two Section 9 Notices issued to property owners requesting that the litter be removed from their premises. • Continued to provide support to local communities and businesses. • Assisted the voluntary/community groups by collecting and disposing of the collected waste etc. • Clean Up Laois Week returned to Co Laois after a two year break and ran from 18th to 22nd April 2022. • Continued working with Tidy Towns groups to provide Mutt Mitt Dispensers along popular walking routes. • Continued to promote the Anti-Dog Fouling campaign. • Continued to manage and operate the Civic Amenity Site in Portlaoise.

Fire Services

The Fire Service continued to provide a quality service in the areas of Fire Prevention, Fire Brigade Operations, Community Fire Safety Awareness and Major Emergency Planning.

Fire Service Operations

In 2022, Laois County Fire & Rescue Service attended **795** emergency incidents consisting of **306** fires, **355** special service incidents & **134** false alarms.

A new Class B fire appliance and a new water tanker were both delivered in 2022, funded by the National Directorate for Fire & Emergency Management.

To enhance equipment standards the programme for replacement and updating of equipment was continued in 2022. New breathing apparatus sets & cylinders, ladders & specialist rescue equipment was provided.

To enhance Safety, Health and Welfare for fire crews the Standard Operational Guidelines program to implement a set of for fire brigade operations continued in 2022. In addition, our Health, Safety & Welfare Management Programme was approved by Senior Management and was reviewed 30 times throughout the year.

Fire Prevention & Community Fire Safety

Laois County Fire and Rescue Service processed **62** fire safety certificate applications and **55** District and Circuit Court licensing applications in 2022. **25** premises were inspected under the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003 and **44** during performance inspections were carried out on premises throughout the County. (During Performance Inspections are fire safety assessments of public assembly type premises when they are open to the public and including large occupancy venues, bingo halls, public houses, night clubs, outdoor events etc)

Laois County Fire and Rescue Service participated in **168** fire safety consultations with members of the public and fire safety consultants throughout 2022. In addition, planning & liaison meetings and site visits were carried out on several licensed and unlicensed outdoor events including the Electric Picnic Music Festival and the National Ploughing Championships. During performance inspections were also carried out during these outdoor events.

Laois County Fire and Rescue Service carried out the following work under Part III of the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003.

- a) Served **5** immediate Closure Notices under Section 20A of the Act on potentially dangerous buildings throughout the County,
- b) Served **1** Fire Safety Notice under Section 20 of the Act,
- c) Requested **5** number Fire Safety Assessments, permitted under Section 18(6) of the Act, to be carried out on premises where fire safety deficiencies were observed but did not necessitate immediate action as per items a and b above,
- d) Fire Authority provided fire safety advice letters, permitted under Section 18 (4) and 18 (5) of the Act, on **57** premises throughout the County.

The Fire Safety Primary Schools Programme was carried throughout the County between October and December 2022. All eight fire stations were involved with this programme. Fire safety information was received by over **1800** 3rd class primary students.

Laois County Fire and Rescue Service personnel, in all eight fire stations, provided presentations on fire safety in the home throughout the County for National Fire Safety Week (17th - 23rd October 2022). The presentations were aimed specifically at our most at risk demographic i.e. over 65's. Laois Community Fire Safety Group (group members include Laois County Council Fire and Rescue Service, TFI Local Link Laois Offaly, Laois Public Participation Network and Age Friendly Laois), ran a smoke detector in the home competition in local newspapers, radio, facebook , twitter and on our www.laois.ie page. Fire Service personnel, from all eight stations, are currently installing smoke detectors in the winning entrants homes throughout the County . Smoke detectors have been installed in over 500 homes throughout the County since this annual competition commenced in 2018. Additionally, the Community Fire Safety Group actively delivered fire safety messages to communities in order to target our most at-risk demographic during Fire Safety Week and at Halloween. The Group used text ,WhatsApp messages, local newspapers and social media to deliver fire safety messages and this new programme included correspondence to all **650+** community groups available through the Laois Public Participation Network.

Major Emergency Management

All Major Emergency Management facilities were maintained, with all relevant plans, sub-plans and procedures were updated throughout the year.

Laois Civil Defence

Laois Civil Defence continued to provide support to the Local Authority, Primary Response Agencies, and the community.

In 2022 Laois Civil Defence attended **114** duties and operations which included: **12** Local Authority requests, **16** missing person searches, **10** COVID-19 related supports, **13** Ukrainian Crisis Supports, and **65** Community Events. The unit also carried out joint training sessions with the Gardaí and Ambulance Services.

In 2021 a new post was created for an Assistant Civil Defence Officer while in 2022 a new Civil Defence Officer was appointed following the retirement of Mr. Liam Preston who had been in the post for the previous 20 years.

The unit had **34** Active volunteers in 2022 with **1** volunteer leaving due to promotion as Assistant Civil Defence Officer with Kildare County Council. In December 2022 **9** additional volunteers joined and completed their induction with their basic training scheduled to start on the 30th January 2023.

Weekly training sessions for volunteers continued with volunteers completing additional courses such as Severe Weather & Off-Road Driving, Missing Person Instructor, Communication Instructor and Casualty Instructor which will be expanded on in 2023.

Vehicle and equipment maintenance schedules have been put in place and ongoing upgrades are taking place in our facility to ensure compliance.

During 2022 plans were progressed for a new Civil Defence Headquarters in Portlaoise and a part VIII planning notice was advertised in December 2022. This is due to progress to design stage in 2023.

Enterprise & Economic Development

The Council continued to promote enterprise and economic development in the County through the Business Support Unit, which incorporates the Local Enterprise Office, in line with the **Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP)** 2016 – 2021. The BSU forms a central point of contact for existing and prospective businesses. It aims to nurture a pro-business environment which supports enterprise and promotes Laois nationally and globally as a location of choice for business and investment.

A priority for the Unit in 2022 was supporting businesses and enterprises as they continued to adapt to and recover from the challenging economic environment and impact of Brexit, Covid 19 and the ongoing Ukrainian crisis.

Demand continued to be high for supports from businesses across all sectors. Businesses from all sectors, regardless of size, continued to engage and presented with similar challenges, the main ones being recruitment/retention of staff and high energy costs.

2022 was a very productive year, some highlights include:

- €319,514 approved in grant aid to 14 businesses with potential to create 51 new jobs
- €14,054 approved in TAME grants to support business to develop their export journey
- 34 Trading online approved to the value of €€71,870.
- 260 Laois businesses availed of mentoring with over 300 one- to-one business advise sessions delivered throughout the year.
- 85 training courses were delivered with 979 participants of which 135 potential start-ups participated in Start Your Own Business Courses
- 8 companies participated in the Lean for Micro Programme
- 10 Laois Companies took part in Midlands Management Development Programme along with 8 businesses from Offaly.
- 11 Laois businesses took part in a six week Grow your business programme
- 31 companies took part in the Green for Micro programme
- Supported 10 Laois companies in making applications to Micro Finance Ireland
- 7 secondary schools in Laois took part in the Student Enterprise Awards Programme
- Over 100 businesses attended Local Enterprise Week took place in March 2022.

In 2023 the BSU/LEO will focus on:

- Supporting businesses and enterprises as they continue to adapt to and recover from the challenging economic environment and impact of Brexit, Covid-19 and the ongoing Ukrainian crisis.

- Supporting businesses as they face up to the challenges of climate change and adopt new technologies and practices to become more environmentally sustainable and resource efficient.
- Supporting new projects through the provision of direct financial assistance.
- Co-ordinating training and mentoring support for businesses.
- Continuing to co-ordinate a wide range of initiatives designed to foster a culture of enterprise including the Student Enterprise Programme, business networks, promotional campaigns, etc.
- Continuing to promote the Business Incentive Scheme, Shopfront Grant Scheme, Town and Village Streetscape Enhancement etc., to help revitalise the County's main commercial centres.
- Extend the Vacant Commercial Property Incentive Scheme to Portarlington which was piloted in Portlaoise in 2022
- Support the delivery of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme in Killeslin
- Oversee the delivery of the marketing scheme in respect of Laois Hub Collective
- Support the activities of Downtown Portlaoise business group through the Portlaoise Town Team
- Ongoing promotion of the county as a viable and attractive location for investment.
- Implementing actions designed to help deliver future economic growth which are outlined in the Local Economic and Community Plan and the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan.

(4) To promote and support socially inclusive communities

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO REFUGEES FLEEING UKRAINIAN CONFLICT

In March 2022, correspondence from the Department of An Taoiseach to the City and County Managers Association (CCMA) highlighted the imminent arrival of a significant number of displaced Ukrainians to Ireland. As part of the overall national response to this humanitarian crisis, there were a number of immediate asks of the Council, which were complied with:

- To identify suitable available accommodation options within the county and to assist the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) with the accommodation of a number of the new arrivals into Ireland
- To establish and lead a “Ukrainian Crisis Multi Agency Response Forum” along the lines of and largely similar to the Covid-19 Community Response Forum which sat in 2020 and 2021.
- To assemble lists of suitable vacant premises in the county that could be considered to accommodate refugees, so to develop short and long term responses that meet our country's obligations under the Temporary Protection Directive.
- To provide details of suitable sites for consideration for medium to long term accommodation solutions.

The Irish State implemented its response in accordance with Directive 2001/55/EC, which established that the duration of temporary protection afforded by EU states to Ukrainian citizens fleeing the conflict, was for an initial period of one year ie to March 2023, with the possibility of extension. In October 2022 it was announced at a European Council meeting that the Commission had decided that the period of temporary protection should be extended for a further period of one year ie to March 2024.

To support the proposed rapid provision of emergency accommodation the Government also put in place a separate Planning regulation, which came into effect on 23 June 2022. This provided that certain classes of temporary development, including residential accommodation, undertaken by or on behalf of a State authority, to provide protection to displaced persons from Ukraine, will be exempt from the provisions of the Planning and Development Act (other than environmental considerations) for an initial period of 1 year with a maximum extended total period of 3 years from 4 March 2022.

A dedicated Ukrainian Response Team was established within the Council to provide the necessary supports and address the challenges arising, effective from 1st July 2022.

Laois County Council leads and coordinates the delivery of local services and supports via the “**Laois Ukrainian Community Response Forum**”. The Forum, consisting of 23 member groups/agencies, was established in March 2022, convened 11 times during 2022, and continues to meet on a monthly basis. All efforts are supported by An Garda Síochána, Dept of Social Protection, the HSE, Civil Defence, the Local Development Company, LOETB, TUSLA and various local voluntary groups, and community organisations.

As they arrived into the county throughout the year, Ukrainian citizens were hosted at IPAS contracted centres in Durrow, Abbeyleix, Portlaoise, Mountmellick, and Clonaslee. Others had made private arrangements, staying with friends or relatives, residing with host families, accommodated via the various parishes and also in private rented accommodation.

Effective from mid July 2022, the Council’s Ukrainian Response Team took over the management of the Irish Red Cross pledged accommodation list, and worked to relocate local Ukrainian families to vacant pledged properties and to shared accommodation arrangements with local host families.

A new national call for vacant properties, the ‘Offer A Home’ Scheme, was launched in November 2022, and the matching of Ukrainian families to suitable properties in Laois under this scheme commenced.

Following site investigations in late 2022, a site in Rathdowney has been deemed suitable for a modular homes development. Municipal District members were briefed and the 42 home project is being managed by the Office of Public Works in conjunction with DCEDIY, who are progressing a local public engagement process.

In December 2022 there were 789 displaced Ukrainian citizens in County Laois. Approximately 300 of these were in the accommodation centres detailed above, with the remainder in privately sourced or pledged accommodation. These numbers are increasing and the influx is predicted to continue. Accordingly, the Council will continue to meet its

obligations and support the humanitarian response effort into 2023 and for as long as is deemed necessary by Government.

PLANNING

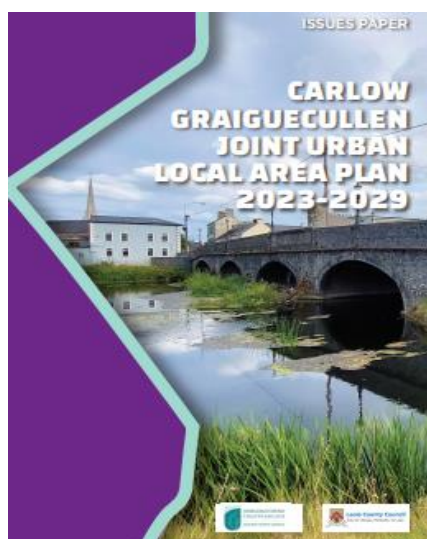
Forward Planning plays a pivotal role in the physical, economic and social development of County Laois. The Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023 and Local Area Plans for Portlaoise (2018-2024), Portarlinton (2018-2024), Mountmellick (2018-2024) and Graiguecullen (2013-2018 provides the strategic framework and policy context within which the Local Authority makes its planning decisions.

Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027

The *Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027* was adopted on the 25th January 2022 and came into effect on the 8th March 2022. The County Development Plan is a statutory document prepared by the Planning Authority in accordance with the requirements of the Planning & Development Act 2000 (as amended) and the Planning & Development Regulations 2001 (as amended). Zoning Maps contained in Volume 2 of this Plan will inform the LAPs for Portlaoise and Mountmellick.

The Minister issued a Section 31 draft Direction issued to Laois County Council on 7th March 2022 in relation to a number of aspects of the plan relating to energy targets, policy on building heights and zonings. The Minister concluded the process and issued the Direction with Minor amendments on the 28th September 2022.

LOCAL AREA PLANNING



Laois County Council in conjunction with Carlow County Council commenced the process of reviewing the Joint Local Area Plan for the Carlow / Graiguecullen Area. An issues paper was put on Public Display in September – October 2022 inviting submissions from the public. A public Consultation day was held in the Talbot Hotel Graiguecullen on the 6th October 2022. A chief Executives report was prepared which considered the 13

submissions received in 2022. It is envisaged that a Draft plan will be on public display April – May 2023.



Laois County Council commenced the process of reviewing the Portlaoise Local Area Plan in November 2022. An issues paper was put on Public Display in November – December 2022 inviting submissions from the public. A Public information day was held on the 1st December 2022. It is envisaged that a Draft plan will be on public display April – May 2023.

Rathdowney Town Centre First PLAN

Laois County Council received funding in 2022 to carry out a Town Centre First Plan. The Town Centre First initiative aims to create town centres that function as viable, vibrant and attractive locations for people to live, work and visit, while also functioning as the service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community.

Rathdowney was chosen as the town for this project, towns such as Rathdowney are facing significant challenges and opportunities that require a coordinated and comprehensive response. The plan will be underpinned by a clear diagnosis of local strengths and challenges.

KPMG Consultants were engaged by Laois County Council to prepare this plan and held consultations in the town on the 23rd November 2022 and 26th November 2022. It is proposed to establish a **Town Team** which will be supported by the Local Authority to deliver the actions of the Town Centre First Plan. It is envisaged that the plan will be completed by April 2023.



Consultants were engaged to prepare a masterplan for the Tyrrell Landbank at Stradbally Road, Portlaoise to address housing, recreation and amenity and connectivity with surrounding land uses.

The Masterplan was noted at the March Municipal District Meeting of the Portlaoise Area. The next step is to engage a Design teams for the Housing elements of the masterplan in 2023 and bring the scheme to Part VIII.

RESIDENTIAL ZONED LAND TAX

The Government's *Housing For All – A New Housing Plan for Ireland* proposed a new tax to activate vacant land for residential purposes as a part of the Pathway to Increasing New Housing Supply. The **Residential Zoned Land Tax** was introduced in the *Finance Act 2021*. The process to identify land to which the tax applies is now underway and the tax will be payable from 2024.

Laois County Council has prepared a draft map of the land considered to be in scope for the RZLT as of October 1, 2022. Any interested individuals or parties were invited to make submissions in respect of land on the draft map up to 1st January 2023. 20 submissions were received during this consultation period.

A supplemental map will be published on 1 May 2023 identifying additional land considered to be in scope as a result of a change of zoning, servicing or where the local authority becomes aware of the fact that land, which didn't appear on the draft map, may meet the criteria for being in scope, such as where this has been identified during submissions.

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

The number of planning applications received in 2022 was 840. However, it should be noted that 225 of the total applications received were invalid and required the applicant to submit a new application. The main reasons for invalidation of planning files were public notices being out of date, or not erected on site, previous permissions expired, agents name omitted from maps/drawings, no north point shown on maps and distances not shown on site layouts. Invalidation of planning files was increased as a result of the introduction of the EPlanning project in 2022.

2022 PERFORMANCE

EPlanning went live in the planning section in December 2022. The ePlanning Project is an online system through which planning applications can be made and through which applicants will be kept updated on the progress of their application. The project aims to improve efficiency, reduce the potential for invalid applications, and deliver on the government strategy to move more public services online.

The following table gives a breakdown of valid planning applications received and decisions made during 2022:

Total No of Planning Applications	840
Number of valid applications received:	618
Invalid applications returned to applicant:	225 (36%) *
Number of decisions made:	626
Number of applications granted:	582
Number of applications refused:	44
Referrals to Area Offices (working days):	within 14 days achieved
No of applications appealed to An Bord Pleanála in 2022	24
Pre-planning meetings held in 2022	352

Large Residential Developments (LRD)

One formal pre application consultation or LRD meeting was held with a perspective applicant for a development of 249 dwelling units, a creche and 1200 sqm of commercial floor space on the Centrepont site in Portlaoise.

LICENSING OF OUTDOOR EVENTS

An outdoor event is defined as a public performance which takes place wholly or mainly in the open air or in a structure with no roof or a partial, temporary or retractable roof, a tent or similar temporary structure and which consists of music, dancing, displays of public entertainment or any activity of a like kind. The organisers of such events are required to obtain a licence from the Planning Authority where the audience comprises of 5,000 or more people.

One such outdoor events occurred in County Laois in 2022 – the annual “Electric Picnic” music festival returned to Stradbally attracting over 70,000 people in September 2022.

Statutory Pre-planning meetings were held in 2022 for 2 licenced events in Laois to take place in 2023 – Electric Picnic And Forest Fest in Emo.

LOCAL AUTHORITY DEVELOPMENT (PART 8 PROJECTS)

Planning reports were prepared for the following Part 8 Local Authority projects and were approved by the Council during 2021:

1. Stradbally Fire Station (January 2022)
2. **Fort Protector Outdoor Performance and Event Space** (May 2022)

3. **Housing Development at Hepburn Court “Radharc Darach” (June 2022)**
4. Housing Development at Clonrooske View (September 2022)
5. Fr Browne Avenue Cycle Infrastructure Upgrade Works (December 2022)

PLANNING ENFORCEMENT

The Planning Authority, in accordance with the statutory requirements under the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended, seeks to ensure compliance with planning permissions and also to prevent unauthorised development.

Work was continued in 2022 by the Enforcement team to ensure that any breaches of planning law were investigated and followed up. In 2022, Council Staff attended Court 61 times in respect of enforcement prosecutions and while some cases are still ongoing, 11 cases have been successfully resolved during 2022.

The Planning Authority served 83 enforcement notices, 435 warning letters and investigated 122 new complaints all of which highlight the active pursuit of planning non-compliance and unauthorised development by our Enforcement Section.

€8,912.95 Enforcement costs recouped

€51,962.70 fees received through valid retention applications received relating to enforcement action.

BUILDING CONTROL

The Building Control Section deal with all commencement notices received, and carries out inspections on the buildings to ensure they comply with the various Building Control regulations. In 2022, a total of **533 New Buildings** were notified to Building Control. A total of **77** no. buildings were inspected (at varying stages of construction) - an inspection rate of **14.4 %**

UNFINISHED HOUSING ESTATES

Laois County Council is responsible for the taking in charge of estates. In 2022, 7 no. estates were taken in charge which is listed in the table below. Traditionally this occurred when a request was received from the developer of the estate and/or the owners of the houses within the estate. However, in recent years, where the developer has failed to complete the estate, Laois County Council has intervened to complete the estate and this work, where possible, is funded from the bond. This policy of actively pursuing the developer and Bond holder will continue in 2022.

The following estates were taken in charge in 2022 –

1. Tommy Murphy Park Graiguecullen
2. Heathfields, Portlaoise
3. Broomville, Portlaoise
4. Broomville Close, Portlaoise
5. Broomville, Lawns, Portlaoise
6. Fieldbrook Court, Portlaoise
7. Heathfield, Portlaoise

The Planning Department endeavour to liaise with the residents of unfinished estates to keep them fully informed of progress in relation to their estates.

DERELICT SITES

The Council is implementing its powers under the Derelict Sites Act 1990 targeting those properties that are on the Derelict Sites Register. Working with the owners of those properties, the outstanding issues are being dealt with and those properties that are no longer deemed 'derelict' are then removed from the Derelict Sites Register.

Total Number of Files opened for 2022: 43

Total Number of Files closed as a result of Dereliction being addressed in 2022: 15

Total Number of Files: 93

Total No of sites on the derelict sites register – 13

VACANT SITES

There were 10 sites entered onto the Vacant Sites register at the 1st January 2022. These related to sites within Portlaoise, Portarlinton, Mountmellick and Graiguecullen. Valuations have been received in relation to the sites.

One site in Portlaoise has paid a levy of €52,500. One site in Graiguecullen was the subject of a valuation tribunal hearing in September 2022.

3 sites were noted to have commenced construction during 2022 and will be removed from the register.

5 sites changed ownership and no levy could be charged during 2022.

Location of Sites	No of sites on the VSL register
Portlaoise	6
Portarlinton	3
Graiguecullen	1
Total	10

SHORT TERM LETTING

As part of the measures to help address pressures in the private housing rental market, new planning legislative reforms to regulate the short-term letting sector - as provided for in the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019 and supplementary regulations made by the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government entitled the Planning and Development Act 2000 (Exempted Development) (No. 2) Regulations 2019 - came into effect on 1st July 2019.

This applies to properties with Rent Pressure Zones. The following numbers relate to those reported in 2022:-

Form 15 (2020 onwards)	Annual Notification. This form should be returned no later than 4 weeks of the start of each year for existing uses or 2 weeks prior to the first instance of the proposed change of use for new uses	7
Form 16	This form is only required to be completed if the 90-day cap is reached during the year. It should be returned no later than 2 weeks after the event.	0
Form 17	End of year notification. It shall be returned no later than 4 weeks after the end of each calendar year.	5

HERITAGE

Actions of the County Heritage Plan

The following projects from the Laois Heritage Plan were undertaken with the support of the Heritage Council during 2022.

Heritage Awareness events

Heritage Awareness programmes were organized for Biodiversity Week and Heritage Week. At the National Heritage Week Awards in October 2022, Teddy Fennelly, Laois Heritage Society was selected as the Heritage Council's Heritage Hero for 2022. The Bats about Rooks Event organised in partnership with BirdWatch Ireland and the Kildare Bat Group in Portlaoise won the national Biodiversity Award, and Errill Tidy Towns won the Laois County Heritage Week Award for their project to mark the 175th anniversary of the great famine in Errill, by erecting a commemorative plaque and limestone seat, near the site of what was once a soup kitchen, to feed desperate people of the town during the famine. The Heritage Offices of Laois and Offaly County Councils supported a new BirdWatch Ireland podcast "In Your Nature" about birds and other wildlife, which has now been downloaded over 40,000 times.

Two short films were made about the history of the Gordon Bennett Motor Race in Laois in 1903. Made with the support from the Heritage Council and the Heritage offices of Laois, Carlow and Kildare County Councils, the films tell the story of how the race came to be in Ireland, and why the eyes of the racing world were turned to Ireland for this one event, this momentous but largely forgotten race that, still today, is thought to be the largest outdoor sporting event in Irish history. The films are published on the Laois County Council website.

Connecting Communities

Portlaoise Plane and Col Fitzmaurice Commemoration

The Laois Festival of Flight was held in April 2022, with very good attendance at all events, good feedback from schools flight workshops and good press coverage. The Portlaoise Plane also featured as part of the Gordon Bennett event launch at the June Bank Holiday Weekend.

Timahoe

Continued engagement with the local community is very important for this site and Laois County Council supported children's archaeology workshops by The Bog Dig at the Timahoe Heritage Festival held on the June Bank Holiday weekend in 2022, which was well received and attended. Vegetation Management continued for the year at Timahoe, to improve the site for access and biodiversity..

Publications

Publications for 2022 included:

Fort Protector Conservation Plan

The Fort Protector Conservation Plan - a Partnership of Laois Heritage Society and Laois County Council, supported by the Heritage Council was launched in Portlaoise in June 2022. The Plan will guide the conservation and presentation of the 16th Century Fort Protector at the heart of Portlaoise and was led by Conservation Architect Richard McLoughlin in association with archaeologist Eoin Sullivan and Historian Diarmuid Wheeler.



Fort Protector Plan Launch

Angela McEvoy, Director of Service Laois County Council, Richard McLoughlin, Lotts Architecture, Cllr Conor Bergin Cathaoirleach, Laois County Council and Teddy Fennelly, Laois Heritage Society,

Photo Credit – Alf Harvey

THE HIGH FORTRESS: A Guide to the Rock of Dunamase

A publication on the Rock of Dunamase “THE HIGH FORTRESS: A Guide to the Rock of Dunamase” was launched in November 2022 in Portlaoise.

The book - an initiative of Laois County Council with the support of the Heritage Council – is published by Wordwell Books, edited by Peigín Doyle, with contributions from archaeologists Brian Hodkinson and Dr Sharon Greene, early medieval historian Dr Matthew Stout and geologist and ecologist Dr John Feehan.

The Gardening for Biodiversity Book and colouring book have been reprinted and distribution is ongoing with high demand again from schools and groups nationwide

Establish and promote the best practice in heritage management and conservation.

National Biodiversity Action Plan Projects

Local Biodiversity Action Fund Wetland Survey

The Laois Wetland Survey Phase II is complete and reports on Phase I (2021) and Phase II (2022) are available on the Laois County Council website. A public event at the Ridge of Capard was held during Heritage Week.

Local Biodiversity Action Fund Timahoe

Additional funding was made available for a project to enhance biodiversity at Timahoe in partnership with the Irish Wildlife Trust Laois Offaly Branch. Bird nest boxes, bat roost boxes and wildlife interpretation were installed at the site.

Just Transition Fund Project

The JTF project linking conservation of medieval heritage and biodiversity which commenced in 2021 continued through 2022. The 3 Graveyard sites in Co Laois are as follows :-

Kilmanman (Laois)	Conservation complete	Plan	Masonry conservation and management for pollinators will continue in 2023
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DysartGallen (Laois)	Conservation complete	Plan	Masonry conservation and management for pollinators complete in 2022.
Clopoock (Laois)	Conservation complete	Plan	Masonry conservation and management for pollinators complete in 2022.

The Design Team is led by Howley Hayes Cooney Architects and including Colm Flynn Archaeologist, Fiona MacGowan Ecologist, Tina Aughney Bat Specialist, CORA Structural Engineers

Crannóg Media has recorded progress with the project at each site including community contacts on film for communication about the project

Regeneration Projects

The Heritage Office worked in collaboration with other sections in Laois County Council and in the community, on the following regeneration projects in 2022:

Timahoe (Town and Village Renewal Scheme)

The conservation and refurbishment of the former Church of Ireland was planned throughout 2022 and will be completed in 2023, to enhance facilities for visitors to the site and the local community.

Stradbally TVRS

Bridge conservation works were completed. Swift boxes installed and biodiversity planting plan was completed, in collaboration with Stradbally Development Association

Community Monuments Fund

This national scheme aimed at conservation of archaeological monuments continued in 2022, with 5 projects submitted to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage receiving funding under the scheme in 2022 and completed successfully.

Structure	Project	Amount
Dysart Enos Church	Conservation work to windows and chancel arch	€34,556
Ballylynan Church	Masonry conservation to church walls	€85,000
Ballyadams Castle	Conservation Plan	€29,784
Clonreher Castle	Conservation Plan	€29,108
Baunaghra Church	Conservation Plan	€12,093
		€190,541

Raise awareness of and promote enjoyment of the heritage of County Laois

Colonel Fitzmaurice Flag

The Fitzmaurice flag - the US Flag which was given to Colonel James Fitzmaurice during his travels in America after that first flight from Ireland to America - was generously donated by Mr. Ross Mac Mahon to Laois County Council on the 20th August 2022. This adds to the wealth of priceless artefacts which contributes to the history of flight and exploration.

Colonel Fitzmaurice Flag Presentation



Cllr Willie Aird, Laois County Council, Mr Teddy Fennelly, Laois Heritage Society, Mr Ross McMahon at the Fitzmaurice Flag Presentation event during Heritage Week, August 2022

Photo Credit – Alf Harvey

Creative Ireland Projects

Heritage and Landscape Training “Know your Locality”

A second blended online course on researching your local heritage was completed during March 2022, with a field excursion to the Rock of Dunamase, supported by Creative Ireland Laois.

Laois Festival of flight

The first ever Festival of Flight was held to celebrate the rich history of aviation and exploration in Laois. This event which ran from April 7th to 10th included school and family science and arts workshops, a music and poetry event, aircraft technical networking events, tours, films and a commemoration ceremony and drew visitors to the county from across Ireland. The Festival of Flight was run by the Col Fitzmaurice Commemoration Committee in partnership with Laois County Council, Laois Heritage Society, Music Generation Laois, the Dunamase Arts Centre and Midlands Science, supported by the Heritage Council, Creative Ireland Laois as part of the Creative Ireland Programme 2017-2022, The Decade of Centenaries Programme of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.



Music Generation concert as part of Culture Night 2022

Festival of Flight Commemoration Ceremony



Catherine Casey, Heritage Officer , Louise Fennelly, Michael Parsons, Laois Heritage Society, Teddy Fennelly, Alan Phelan , Rosa Flannery Music Generation Laois, Sean Murray Laois Heritage Society at the Festival of Flight in Portlaoise, April 2022

Photo Credit – Alf Harvey

“Mountmellick Mural

A Mural was installed in Mountmellick to celebrate the importance of the town for Swifts, a threatened urban bird, in partnership with BirdWatch Ireland. Artist James Kirwan created the mural which was unveiled on Culture night.



CONSERVATION

Two separate architectural heritage conservation grant schemes (for Protected Structures) were run by Laois County Council in 2022, with funding from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

BUILT HERITAGE INVESTMENT SCHEME 2022

The Built Heritage Investment Scheme is for smaller scale, labour intensive projects to conserve and maintain protected structures. A total of 11 projects were awarded funding

Project Ref No	Name & Address of Structure	Grant
BHIS/02	O,Connell House, O'Connell Square, Mountmellick	€7,180.00
BHIS/03	Lea Church of Ireland, Killenard, Portarlinton	€15,000.00
BHIS/04	Preston House Boutique Ltd, Main Street, Abbeyleix,,Co. Laois	€10,060.00
BHIS/05	Protrane House, Stradbally Rd, Portlaoise Co. Laois	€11,296.00
BHIS/06	St. Paul's Church, "The French Church", French Church Street, Portarlinton, Co. Laois	€10,500.00
BHIS/07	Tenakill House Tinnakill, Raheen, Portlaoise	€15,000.00

BHIS/09	Dwelling House Gorteen Ballacolla, Co. Laois	€11,750.00
BHIS10	Thatched House Rathleague	€9,114.00
BHIS11	Thatched House, Shanbeg, Rosenallis, Co. Laois	€5,650.00
BHIS12	Thatched Farmhouse, Raheenleigh, Cullahill	€450.00

Historic Structures Fund 2022

The Historic Structures fund is for larger scale projects and buildings of community importance. Funding was successfully sourced for the following projects in 2022

Project Ref No	Name & Address of Structure	Grant
1	Abbeyleix Old Church,	€50,000
2	Midland House Portlaoise	€20,000
3	Cuffesborough House, Ballacolla	€44,590
4	Old Forge Jamestown	€10,000

SECTION 57 DECLARATIONS

A total of 13 no. Section 57 Declarations in relation to works to Protected Structures at various locations throughout County Laois were processed in 2022.

BROADBAND

The following projects from the Laois Digital Strategy 2020-2024 were undertaken with the support of Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD). The Broadband officer continues to utilise Government initiatives to maximise the potential of having broadband connectivity available throughout the county.



Pat OToole NBI, Deputy Sean Fleming, Minister for State, Antoinette Brennan Broadband Officer LCC

NBI ROLLOUT

Surveying is almost complete in the County with rollout of new infrastructure and Fibre now taking place. Over 200 Customers have connected to the with the 1st customer connecting in Monevea Crettyard in June 2022. All updates for premises can be found using an Eircode on the NBI website.



Antoinette Brennan Broadband Officer LCC and Dermot Bannon

Vodafone recorded an advertisement in association with Dermot Bannon Architect in Donaghmore BCP showcasing connectivity in Rural Ireland , this is available on their Website.

WiFi4EU

WiFi4EU is a project developed by the European Union that intended to bring free WiFi to local communities. Municipalities that applied got a grant to set up hotspots in commonly frequented indoor and outdoor locations, such as public squares, cultural institutions, municipal buildings, or health facilities. The aim of WiFi4EU initiative is to bring high-quality free WiFi access to places where it is not yet available but would provide value for the community.



Free public WiFi has been rolled out in 10 towns in Laois with 46 connection points at a total cost of €115,000. The following Municipal districts are being served in Laois with this service

PORTLAOISE TOWN	Free Public WiFi is available in Top Square, Main Street, Hynd Square, Fitzmaurice Square, Lyster Square and LCC Plaza.
Borris in Ossory / Mountmellick Municipal District	Free Public WiFi is available in the following areas - Mountmellick , Mountrath, Camross and Borris in Ossory.
PORTLAOISE MUNICIPAL DISTRICT	Free Public WiFi is available in the following areas - Abbeyleix, Ballinakill and Ballyroan.
PORTARLINGTON/ GRAIUGUECULLEN MUNICIPAL DISTRICT	Free Public WiFi is available in the following areas - Portarlington, Stradbally

Broadband Connection Points (BCP's)

As part of the roll out of the National Broadband Plan, Laois County Council continued to roll out **Broadband Connection Points (BCPs)** in rural Laois with the addition of the following locations: -

1. Shanganamore Community Centre Barrowhouse
2. Ballyroan Community Centre

These are public locations which have been selected to receive high-speed connectivity in the first year of the National Broadband Plan and are available to work or study within. These are part of the Connected Communities initiative.



Broadband Connection Point Oisin House , Killeslin

Get Connected.

Working closely with Laois County Council and local communities, Cellnex has installed new infrastructure in Ballyfin, Castletown and Vicarstown that has transformed previous blackspots and delivered world-class mobile communications in the target rural areas. Vodafone have connected to the infrastructure and it is hoped 3(network provider) will connect shortly.



BALLYFIN

CASTLETOWN

VICARSTOWN

HOUSING

2022 saw the commencement of the Housing Capital Programme under the *Housing for All* programme launched in September 2021, a 5-year plan to increase housing supply and address other housing related issues nationally.

Laois County Council published the **Housing Delivery Action Plan** in relation to the provision of social and affordable housing in Laois for the period 2022-2026 in early 2022.

This set out the annual new build social housing delivery targets under Housing for All over the next 5 years as follows :-

Annual Social Housing Delivery Targets 2022-2026

Year	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Total
Units	200	79	80	87	88	534

Laois County Council Housing Department are currently working on proposals to deliver the following numbers of social housing over the Housing For All plan period :-

Year	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Total
Units	254	365	175	66	40	*900

By the end of 2022, 313 households were housed / nominated to be housed by various means, as shown below :

	Relets	LCC Acquisitions	LCC Construct/TK	Voids	AHB Delivery	Leasing	Totals
2016	70	16		12	32	14	144
2017	65	47	1	4	50	47	214
2018	45	24	33	2	88	6	198
2019	50	42	7	5	26	8	138
2020	62	20	20	5	95	15	217
2021	56	14	46	0	102	34	252
2022	74	5	59	0	157	18	313

Note A: Figures relating to those housed in 2022 include acquisition and leasing of properties, which are not included in the new build figures below.

Note B: Figures include those properties that are due to be tenanted in the coming weeks. Allocations/nominations to some properties completed in 2022 and listed were made in 2023.

The total number of units delivered in 2022 was 216. These were provided via local authority direct construction, Part V, turnkey projects and in cooperation with Approved Housing Bodies.



Droughill Lawns Portarlinton - 26 House Development - Tuath Housing (AHB)



Roselawn, Portlaoise – 15 House Development - Cluid Housing (AHB)



Sean Doire Durrow – 22 house development – Laois County Council Construction

22 direct build and turnkey capital schemes are currently in progress in Stradbally, Durrow, Rathdowney, Errill, Mountmellick, Ballyroan, Borris-in-Ossory, Killeen, Ballylinan, Doonane, Mountrath, Portarlinton, Portlaoise and are being progressed through the Department's Capital Stage Approval process.



St Kierans Park Errill - Sod Turning – September 2022

Affordable Housing

The Affordable Housing Act 2021 and associated Regulations sets out the mechanism for delivery of affordable and cost rental housing. The Dept of Housing has set a minimum target of 38 affordable units to be delivered by 2026. Laois County Council is currently exploring a number of options in this regard.

Vacant Homes

A full time Vacant Homes Office was established in Laois County Council in 2022. Some of the key functions of the Vacant Homes Office are as follows:

- Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant under the Croí Cónaithe (Towns) Fund
- Repair & Leasing Scheme
- Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) of vacant properties to secure future residential use
- Vacancy Surveys

Vacancy Surveys were carried out in Mountmellick and Mountrath in 2022. The Council is endeavouring to contact the owners of residential properties identified as being vacant in the surveys to outline options available to return these properties to use for housing purposes. Where ownership cannot be established we will proceed to make local enquiries in relation to ownership, vacancy history, etc. and consider use of the CPO process to acquire properties deemed to be suitable for social housing where all other means of returning the properties to use have been exhausted.

Croí Conaithe (Towns) Fund Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant

A grant of up to a maximum of €30,000, including VAT, will be available for the refurbishment of vacant properties for occupation as a principal private residence, including the conversion of a property which has not been used as residential heretofore.

The scheme was previously limited to properties located in towns or villages but has recently been expanded to include all properties per DHLGH Circular 43/2022.

Croí Conaithe (Towns) Fund Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant since July 2022

No of Applications to end of year	25
No refused	3
No approved in principle	2
No finally approved	2
No under consideration	18

Housing Management and Maintenance

In 2022, Laois County Council progressed 4,846 maintenance work orders and retrofitted 165 of our housing stock as part of the Midlands Retrofit Programme. Retrofitting works commenced in O'Moore Place, Portlaoise and will continue through 2023 Budget approval has been granted for the retrofitting of an additional 47 homes through the County in 2023.

We also carried out re-letting works to 74 of our properties that were surrendered during 2022.

Housing Needs Assessment

At 31st December 2022, there were 1,805 applicants on the Council's waiting list for social housing support.

In 2022, the Dept of Housing advised of an increase in the income threshold in respect of eligibility for social housing from €25,000 to €30,000 with effect from 1st October 2022. That threshold was subsequently increased to €35,000 with effect from 1st January 2023.

Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)

HAP commenced in Laois on 1st December 2016. There were 865 tenancies active by 31st December 2022, with 332 of these having transferred from rent supplement. All HAP properties must be inspected within 8 months from the time that the first HAP payment is made to the landlord. A total of 540 inspections were made in 2022.

The Homeless HAP Place Finder supports homeless households in securing a HAP tenancy. In 2022, 48 homeless households were accommodated through homeless HAP.

Traveller Accommodation

Laois County Council's Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019-2024 set a target for the delivery of 37 No. units of standard local authority housing. To date Laois County Council has provided 61 No. standard local authority houses. The Programme also provided a target for the refurbishment of Oak Park Halting Site, with the provision of three additional bays. Construction works are ongoing at the site.

Estate Management

Estate management remains a key function for the Housing Section. The Housing Section provided a range of supports to various resident groups, including grants and a painting programme.

In 2022, the five estates in Knockmay engaged with the Estate Management Section of Laois County Council and in cooperation with the Treo Nua Centre, carried out extensive enhancement works to the area.

Laois County Council held a Best Kept Garden Competition in the area and an award ceremony was held in November in County Hall.



Awards ceremony for Knockmay Best Kept Garden 2022

Laois County Council's Strategic Plan for People with Disabilities 2021 – 2026

Laois County Council's Strategic Plan for People with Disabilities 2021 – 2026 was adopted in December 2021. The Strategy forms an integral part of the Housing Service Delivery Plans and will promote and support the delivery of accommodation for people with disabilities using all appropriate housing supply mechanisms.

In 2022, 67 households with a person(s) with a disability were allocated housing with Laois County Council and the various Approved Housing Bodies in the county. This figure accounts for 31.16% of the total allocations by Laois County Council in 2022.

Homeless Services/Emergency Accommodation

Laois County Council continued in 2022 to provide emergency accommodation, where appropriate, to households presenting as homeless. All housing supply mechanisms are utilised in seeking to accommodate those who are assessed as homeless.

In 2022, 244 households presented as homeless (24 repeats), that is 69 families and 175 single persons.

Laois County Council booked 89 households into emergency B&B in 2022, that is 63 single persons and 26 families and 63 households were allocated housing from homelessness, 44 families and 19 single persons. This figure accounts for 29.30% of Laois County Council's total allocations in 2022.

Laois County Council also prevented 48 households from entering homelessness due to the intervention of the HAP Place Finder.

Accommodation and supports are provided by Laois County Council to homeless individuals with complex needs, in accordance with the Housing First National Implementation Plan 2022 – 2026. A target for the provision of 35 units of accommodation over five years is included in this plan, that is, 7 per year. In 2022, Laois County Council exceeded this target by providing 8 Housing First units for 8 single persons in cooperation with the Peter Mc Verry Trust.

Loans and Grants

The **Local Authority Home Loan (LAHL)** Scheme is available nationwide. It came into existence on the 4th January 2022 and replaced the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme.

Applications are for the purchase of new or second-hand residential properties and for self-builds. It also includes purchase of homes through State schemes such as the Tenant Purchase Scheme and Affordable Housing Scheme. In the year 2022, 28 Home Loans were approved and 21 were declined.

Private Grants

In 2022, Private Grants totalling €1,244,990 were paid to out for Housing Adaptation Grant Schemes for Older People and People with a Disability.

Disabled Persons Grants

Works to the value of €747,716.22 were carried out to assist tenants of 57 properties. This number included the construction of 3 extensions.

Private Rented Inspections

Laois County Council carried out 1,160 Private rented inspections for 2022. Laois County Council were in the top 10 Local Authorities for delivering the 25% target under Housing for All.

(5) To continue to develop and improve the quality of customer services

Corporate Affairs

Laois County Council's web site, Twitter & Facebook Social Media sites continued to be updated on a regular basis to ensure that the most up to date information was available. The Council continued to implement the policy in relation to Acceptable Customer Behaviour and the Customer Complaints Policy continued to be monitored in 2022.

Regarding the National Performance Indicators, the statistical report in respect of 2021 which was published in November 2022 showed that Laois County Council improved its performance across a range of indicators despite Covid-19 challenges and while providing additional innovations and services during the pandemic. Laois County Council made advances, in particular, in the areas of Housing, Energy efficiency, Planning and Fire Services. Essential services were delivered throughout 2021, even as Laois County Council played a vital role in the national response to the pandemic.

The local authority provided a range of new supports and grants to the public and businesses during the pandemic, including resilience and wellbeing community supports and changes to the public realm in the interests of public health and safety and local businesses.

Covid-19 placed a considerable burden on the Council, with a reduction in revenues and strained resources. However, essential services were delivered throughout the pandemic while Laois County Council played a vital role in the national response to Covid-19.

E-mail and text messaging continue to be used, wherever possible, for correspondence, to reduce cost and resource use. Reports and publications are made available electronically via the www.laois.ie websites, which reduces cost as well as being more environmentally sustainable.

With regard to the Register of Electors, the Electoral Reform Act 2022 was signed into law by the President on the 25th July 2022. As part of the phase of commencements of this Act, certain provisions were commenced with effect from the 13th October 2022 including Part 3 – Franchise and the Registration of Electors. This Part of the Act sets out the legislative framework for the modernisation of the electoral registration process, including the move to a rolling or continuous register and the standardisation and simplification of the registration process. Electors are now be able to apply to be included on the Rolling Register or to update their details at any time using a single on line application via www.checktheregister.ie or alternatively through a paper form. The Register in force at the commencement of Part 3 continues in force and is updated on an ongoing basis by each Registration Authority.

The Council continued to maximise efficiencies in the conduct of Council business and to provide administrative support to the Elected Members in 2022. The Statutory requirements of the Ethics Framework in Local Government were also implemented in 2022.

(6) To prudently manage the Council's resources to achieve effectiveness in outcomes for resources expended

Human Resources

A programme of continued investment in the development of the Council's employees was in place during 2022. Laois County Council undertook a substantial training programme with particular emphasis on Health and Safety requirements, despite some restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Council continues to maintain a highly committed workforce to deliver on the objectives of the Corporate Plan and recruitment continues in accordance with the requirements of the Workforce Plan.

Laois County Council maintained good industrial relations during 2022 with no major disputes arising. The Council continues to operate in accordance with the Public Service Agreements in consultation with the relevant Unions.

Property Management Section

The Property Management Section continues to carry out the property management function of the Council. This includes co-ordinating the purchase, sale and leasing of property. This section also deals with lifting of charges on folios, rectification of boundaries, land registry queries, general queries and the administration of same. M.App Enterprise software is used to record all assets and disposals. Work is ongoing with regard to reconciling the Property Management Asset Register with the Fixed Asset Register in Agresso MS7.

Local Government Payroll and Superannuation Shared Services Centre

- There are currently 88 employees based in the MyPay shared services centre.
- The following local authorities are being paid through MyPay: Longford, Roscommon, Westmeath, Leitrim, Laois, Offaly, Galway, Carlow, Monaghan, Cavan, Kildare, Meath, Kilkenny, Louth, South Dublin, Tipperary, Kerry, Wicklow, Mayo, Donegal, Sligo, Clare, Fingal, DunLaoghaire/Rathdown, Wexford, Cork County Councils, Limerick and Waterford City & County Councils and Galway and Cork City Councils..
- The LGMA and the East & Midlands Regional Assembly are also being paid from MyPay.
- Cork County Council went live with MyPay for payroll in June 2022.
- The following are the statistics on the project up to 31st December 2022:

Value of Payments	€6.340bn
Number of Payments	7,261,765
Number of Pay Groups Paid	14,044
Number of Payroll Runs	8,383

- There are currently 20 local authorities live for superannuation administration in MyPay with 13 sites yet to be onboarded. We are currently working with Wicklow Co Co and South Dublin Co Co to onboard them from March of 2023.
- MyPay has been chosen to administer the single public service pension scheme on behalf of the sector. We are currently providing the service for the 20 sites who are live for the Superannuation service.
- MyPay have achieved the ISAE 3402 certification (international standard for service organisations). The Type 2 Report has issued to the Chief Executive of all clients. This will be renewed annually.

Finance/Internal Audit

Revenue and Capital income and expenditure for 2022 was monitored against budget on an ongoing basis, with reports reviewed by Management Team on a weekly basis. The Corporate Policy Group was updated at all its monthly meetings as were the elected members of the Council in the Chief Executive's monthly report.

(7) To continue to develop Corporate Management practices within the Council and to execute effective risk management practices

Our safety statement / safety management system (SMS) manual was enhanced through review and update ensuring compatibility with ISO 45001 standard. Our risk register was amended and updated as appropriate throughout the course of the year. We were kept informed of changes and amendments to legislation through our legislative database. Our health and safety training programme was disrupted attributable to the pandemic particularly early in the year.

Summary

Laos County Council is now four years into the timeline of its 2019-2024 Corporate Plan. In that context it is informative to consider implementation of the plan in some key areas of public service delivery such as housing, economic and community development. At a summary level it should be noted that with assistance from various various streams of Government Funding, through collaboration with community volunteers and with the support of Elected members the following headline outcomes have been achieved over the past four years,

- The provision of accommodation for over 900 families on our social housing list
- The construction of over 500 new social homes
- The granting of approx. 2,500 planning permissions for new houses
- The development of a nationally significant enterprise park at J17, Togher
- The provision of over €2million for business start ups through the LEO office
- The provision of over €15million towards rural development
- The implementation of measures to improve energy efficiency and to reduce carbon emissions
- Investment of €12million in Urban Regeneration Development projects in Portlaoise

On this basis and having regard to its clearly defined programme of capital works it is very clear that the Council makes every effort to improve the quality of life for all in our community. Given the commitment and dedication of both staff and the elected members, together with ongoing collaboration with local and state partners, I am confident that this Council will continue to deliver quality public services for the people of Laois and that the Council can be pivotal in the economic, social and cultural development of our county.

John Mulholland
Chief Executive

26/01/2023