

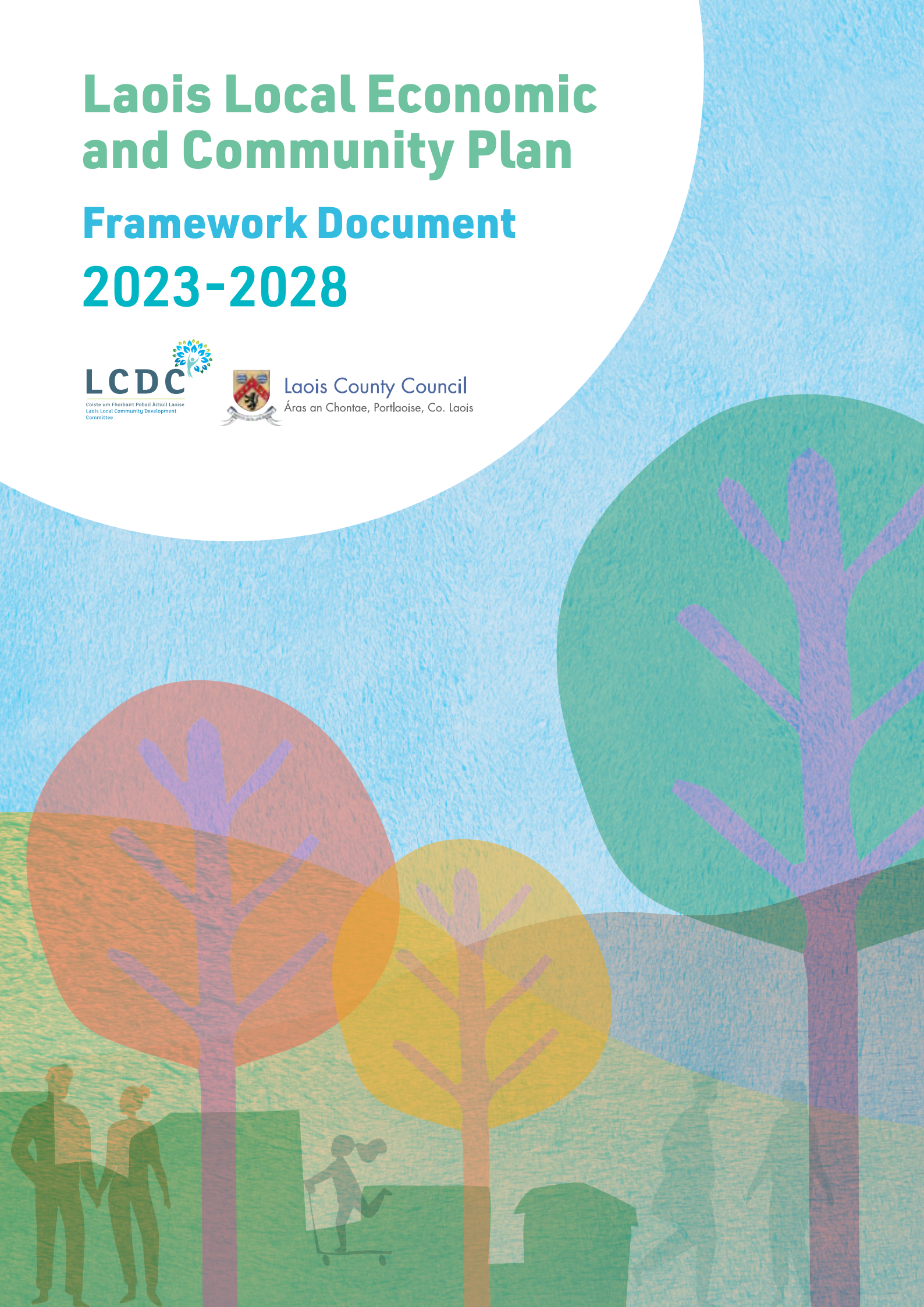
Laois Local Economic and Community Plan

Framework Document

2023-2028



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



“The purpose of the Local Economic and Community Plan, as provided for in the Local Government Act 2001 (as amended), is to set out, for a six-year period, the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic development and the local and community development of the relevant Local Authority Area, both by itself directly and in partnership with other economic and community development stakeholders.”

The LECP aligns with and supports the Council’s Corporate Plan whose mission statement is that “The Council will lead the sustainable economic, social, cultural and community development of our County and deliver quality public services to the community we serve.”

Photography courtesy of:

Rene PR Design, Michael Scully, Pat Guilfoyle, Alf Harvey, Ann Marie Kelly, Frank Smith, Renata Metelicka, Laois Tourism, Age Friendly Laois, Midlands Ireland, Laois County Council Business Support Unit, Bloom HQ, Downtown Portlaoise, The Falls Glenbarrow, Department of Rural and Community Development, IPB Pride of Place, Laois Chamber Alliance, Kathleen Sheridan, Electric Picnic and National Ploughing Championships.



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Acronyms

AA	Appropriate Assessment
CDP	County Development Plan
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LA	Local Authority
LCDC	Local Community Development Committee
LECP	Local Economic and Community Plan
LEO	Local Enterprise Office
NDP	National Development Plan
NPF	National Planning Framework
RA	Regional Assembly
REP	Regional Enterprise Plan
RPO	Regional Planning Objective
RSES	Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy
SCO	Sustainable Community Objective
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SEDO	Sustainable Economic Development Objective
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SICAP	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely
SPC	Strategic Policy Committee
UN	United Nations
URDF	Urban Regeneration and Development Fund

Glossary of Terms

Appropriate Assessment: (AA) an assessment of the potential adverse effects of a Plan or project (in combination with other Plans or projects) on Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas. These sites are protected by National and European Law.

“Bottom-up” approach: This emphasises the participation of the local community in development initiatives so that they can select their own goals and the means of achieving them. It also ensures community ownership, commitment, and accountability to the development project as it seeks development from below.

Circular Economy: A model of production and consumption, which involves sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing, and recycling existing materials and products as long as possible, thus extending the life cycle of products.

Climate change: Includes both the global warming driven by human emissions of greenhouse gases, and the resulting large-scale shifts in weather patterns.

Ecosystem: A community or group of living organisms that live in and interact with each other in a specific environment.

Evaluation: The structured interpretation and giving of meaning to predicted or actual impacts of proposals or results. It looks at original objectives, and at what is either predicted or what was accomplished and how it was accomplished.

Framework Plan: A document that provides a methodology for directing change in the community over time. This type of Plan is to be differentiated from a traditional comprehensive Plan that attempts to address in depth and in detail all of the elements required to govern the long-range growth of the area. While providing a powerful long-term vision, it does not attempt to define each and every policy and detail necessary to achieve that vision.

Implementation Plan: A document that entails the steps required to facilitate the execution and implementation of a Plan, idea, model, or policy by presenting clear implementation steps that need to follow.

Indicator: A measurable and quantitative statistic which, when grouped over a time period, shows a trend.

Low Carbon Economy: An economy that causes low levels of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions compared with today's carbon-intensive economy.

Mitigation: An action that helps to lessen the impacts of a process or development on the receiving environment (most often in association with measures that would seek to reduce negative impacts of a process or development).

Monitoring: The systematic process of collecting, analysing, and using information to track a programme's progress toward reaching its objectives and to guide management decisions. Successful monitoring delivers timely and relevant information that allows you to track progress towards outcomes and adjust implementation arrangements as necessary.

Public Consultation: a regulatory process by which the public's input on matters affecting them is sought. Its main goals are in improving the efficiency, transparency and public involvement in large-scale projects or laws and policies. It usually involves notification (to publicise the matter to be consulted on), consultation (a two-way flow of information and opinion exchange) as well as participation (involving interest groups in the drafting of policy or legislation).

Public Realm: The external places in our towns and cities that are accessible to all. The everyday spaces that we move through and linger within, the places where we live, work and play.

Review: A part of the Planning process to assess the progress of implementation. They are a 'snapshot' in the life of an initiative and tend to focus on operational issues, effectiveness of governance and project management structures, and may also include policy outcomes. Findings and recommendations from reviews should be used to improve implementation.

Socio-economic Analysis: A tool to evaluate what costs and benefits an action will create for society by comparing what will happen if this action is implemented as compared to the situation where the action is not implemented.

Social Enterprise: An enterprise that trades for a social/societal purpose, where at least part of its income is earned from its trading activity, is separate from government, and where the surplus is primarily reinvested in the social objective.

Social Inclusion: The process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society—improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity.

Spatial Planning: Planning that gives geographical expression to the economic, social, cultural, and ecological policies of society. It is at the same time a scientific discipline, an administrative technique and a policy developed as an interdisciplinary and comprehensive approach directed towards balanced regional development and the physical organisation of space according to an overall strategy.

Stakeholder: a person such as an employee, customer, or citizen who is involved with an organisation, society, etc. and therefore has responsibilities towards it and an interest in its success.

Strategic Environmental Assessment: A systematic decision support process, aiming to ensure that environmental and possibly other sustainability aspects are considered effectively in policy, plan and program making.

Sustainable Development: Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Message from the Cathaoirleach and the Chief Executive

We warmly welcome the new Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) for County Laois and the positive impact it is expected to have on the local community and economy. This Plan reflects a forward-thinking approach, emphasising sustainability and inclusivity, which is essential for the long-term well-being of Laois.

We would like to acknowledge the efforts of the LECP Advisory Steering Group, the Strategic Policy Committees, and the Local Community Development Committee in shaping this Plan.

Stakeholder engagement and public consultations with communities, individuals and businesses throughout the county were an integral part in forming this plan. This inclusivity ensures that the Laois LECP truly represents the needs and aspirations of the people it serves.

We look forward to the positive impacts the Laois LECP will have on the local communities and the local economy in the coming years.



Paschal McEvoy

Cllr. Paschal McEvoy
Cathaoirleach



John Mulholland

Mr. John Mulholland
Chief Executive

Joint Statement from the Chair of the Local Community Development Committee and the Chair of the Enterprise, Economic Development and Tourism Strategic Policy Committee

It is encouraging to see that Laois is building on the success of the previous Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) and taking a positive approach to address evolving challenges and opportunities. This Plan has sought to align with regional and national strategies, including the Climate Action Plan, Roadmap for Social Inclusion, Healthy Ireland Framework and Project Ireland 2040.

The ten High Level Goals that form the foundations of the Plan are comprehensive and mindful of the development of Laois, encompassing both economic and community development.

The Plan was developed through collaboration with a broad range of stakeholders, and organisations.

It is clear that this LECP is a significant step towards an inclusive and sustainable county that residents and businesses can be proud to call home.



Joe Thompson

Joe Thompson
LCDC Chairperson



Conor Bergin

Cllr. Conor Bergin
EEDT SPC Chairperson





1

INTRODUCTION



Abbeyleix Bog Boardwalk

"This Plan reflects a forward-thinking approach, emphasising sustainability and inclusivity, which is essential for the long-term well-being of Laois."

Purpose of the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2023-2028

The primary aim of the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) is to set out, for a six-year period, the objectives and actions needed to support and promote the economic development and the local and community development of Laois, both by Laois County Council directly and in partnership with other economic and community development stakeholders.

The LECP is a multi-agency plan, with a vision for Laois as it moves towards 2030, along with High Level Goals and specific objectives, outcomes and actions. Some High Level Goals will focus on economic development with others focusing on community development, climate action or health and well-being. Some goals will be cross cutting, meaning they will have a dual focus both on economic and community development.

Vision

Laois County Council's Corporate Plan 2019-2024 contains the following Vision statement:

"That Laois is an excellent place to live in, to work in, to invest in and to visit – for now and for the future."

The LECP aims to further deliver on that Vision, so that Laois will continue to be a place where people are drawn to live, work and recreate due to its welcoming communities, excellent amenities, and vibrant business sectors.

The LECP looks to cultivate a diverse and dynamic economy, providing opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship, while supporting the communities to lead on locally based initiatives designed to improve quality of life for residents.



Consultative approach

The LECP was developed through collaboration with a broad range of stakeholders, and organisations. It is clear that this LECP is a significant step towards an inclusive and sustainable county that residents and businesses can be proud to call home.

The Laois Local Economic and Community Plan required an extensive process of consultation which reflected the needs and aspirations of the people of Laois. The consultation process included:

- An online survey conducted over two weeks to which 509 individuals responded.
- Six in person and one online community workshops in Rathdowney, Mountmellick, Abbeyleix, Portarlinton, Portlaoise and Ballylinan.
- A Stakeholder workshop attended by representatives of a range of local organisations, including Laois Sports Partnership, Laois Local Enterprise Office and Portlaoise Community and Family Resource Centre.
- Consultation with the LECP Advisory Steering Group (ASG), the Enterprise, Economic Development and Tourism Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) and the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC).

A detailed report on the consultation process, and its outcomes, is included at Appendix 5.



Age-friendly event in Castletown



Celebrating Laois Africa Day



Census 2022 Summary results for County Laois

Population

Population of Laois: **91,877** Female: **45,599** Male: **46,278**

Families

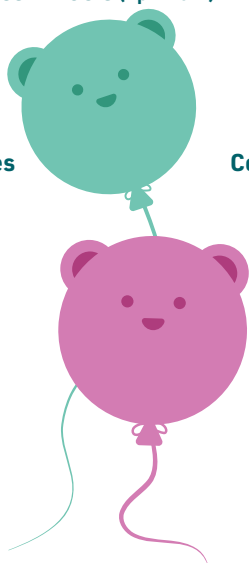
23,416 Families in Laois (April 2022)

Married couples with children: **11,291** Married couples without children: **4,925**

Cohabiting couples with children: **1,914** Cohabiting couples without children: **1,296**

Families with children of single mothers: **3,344** Same-sex couples: **142**

Families with children of single fathers: **646** Adults living with parents: **9,793**



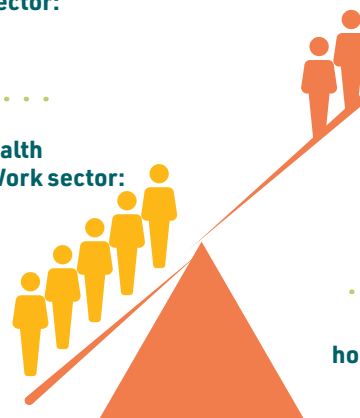
Workers & Retirees

39,934 People aged 15+ in Laois (April 2022)

Wholesale & Retail sector: **5,600** Unemployed people: **3,900** Down 36%

Human Health & Social Work sector: **4,900** Retired people: **9,700** Up 20%

Education sector: **3,700** Working from home (age 15+): **10,088**



Commuting to work

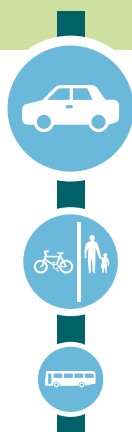
Car: **23,944**

Train/Bus: **1,397**

On foot/Bicycle: **2,440**

Average Distance: **25.3km**

Average Journey Time: **32.3** minutes



Childcare

Children aged 15 & under: **20,408**

Children in childcare: **6,977**



Schools

Children age 5-12: **1,553**

Students age 13-18: **7,972**

Young people at third-level: **2,883**



Health

People unable to work due to sickness or disability: **3,766**

People in Laois in good health: **84%**



Home Ownership

71% Households owning a home (April 2022)

Families in private rented accommodation: **5,153**

Families renting: **24%**




Local Economic and Community Plan Consultation

Our consultation reached:

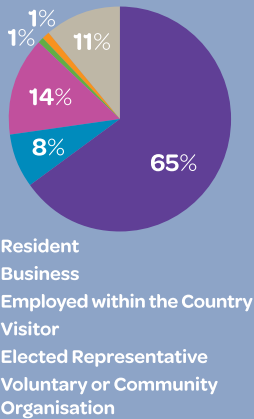
 www.laoisconsultation.ie
 2,547 unique users
 4,168 page views

 **Workshops**
8 workshops
 (6 in-person, 2 virtual)
4,168 page views
 Attended by **113** people

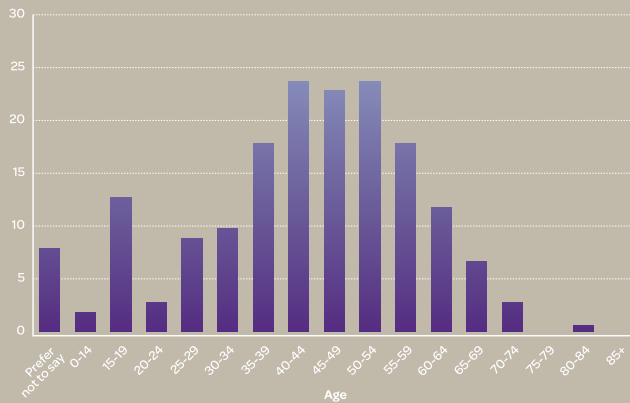
 **Survey**
509 responses
62% Female 35% Male
3% Other/Prefer not say
5% LGBTQIA+
1% Irish Traveller

1% Black or Black Irish
1% Other including mixed background
11% with health or disability related issues

Survey Respondents were:




It sought views from marginalised groups including older people (55+) and young people (<18)



To raise awareness of our survey, we issued:



 **Social Media Ads**
 Ran on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn, targeted at people right the way across Laois, running from 8 – 21 May


 **Press Release and Public Notice**
 Published in the Leinster Express, Leinster Today and Midlands 103 Online on 9 May

 **Stakeholder Letters**
 Issued to 64 local stakeholder groups, with follow-ups

 **Radio Adverts**
 Issued on Midlands 103 on 9 May

Our social media ads achieved:

  **Reach: 78,858 accounts**
Clicks: 2,598 link clicks

 **6590 views**
104 link clicks

19 one-to-one stakeholder meetings

with key voluntary, community, business and state agencies.

The LECP Process

In line with the Local and Economic and Community Plan Guidelines issued in 2021 by the Department of Rural and Community Development the Laois LECP 2023-2028 is separated into two distinct elements.

These are:

- The **LECP Framework Document** consisting of the ten High Level Goals, objectives and the desired outcomes for the entire LECP period.
- The **Implementation Plan** consisting of the actions and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to assist in achieving the overall goals, objectives and outcomes.

A summary of the LECP Development Stages (as shown in the departmental guidelines) is outlined below in Figure 1.1. The finalisation and publication of the *Framework LECP* (this document) is at Stage 4 in the departmental guidelines.

Figure 1.1: LECP Development Stages

Stage 1: Preparation	Socio-economic Analysis	Socio-economic Statement and High-Level Goals based on Socio-economic Analysis	Preparation by Advisory Group. Sign off by SPC and LCDC
Stage 2: Public Consultation	Public Consultation on High-Level Goals	Revision of Statement based on consultation	Preparation by Advisory Group. Sign off by SPC and LCDC
Stage 3: Develop Objectives and Outcomes	Develop detailed objectives and outcomes	Preparation by Advisory Group. Sign off by SPC and LCDC	Final Draft to MDs and RAs for input
Stage 4: Finalise Plan	SPC and LCDC to adopt final draft reflecting MD and RA input	LA to approve final draft	Submission to Minister and Published by LA
Stage 5: Implementation	Implementation Plans	Consideration of available resources	Ongoing flexible implementation
Stage 6: Monitoring and Evaluation	KPIs to address proposed outcomes	Ongoing data collection including case studies	Implementation report



High Level Goals and Sustainable Objectives

A High Level Goal is an idea of the future or a desired result that an individual, group or organisation plan and commit to achieve in Laois. High Level goals will be crucial in guiding the development and implementation of the Plan, ensuring the vision of the LECP is translated into real outcomes for Laois.

The Laois LECP has ten High Level Goals outlined below that are broad in scope and seek to recognise the challenges the County will face over the lifetime of the Plan.

Figure 1.2: Ten High Level Goals

Goal	High Level Goals
1	Encourage civic participation and support local communities to lead on their own developments.
2	Develop and promote ways of living and of doing business that support a sustainable environment and resilient communities.
3	Encourage a sustainable culture of innovation and entrepreneurship throughout the county.
4	Help the local economy to diversify in a long-term, sustainable manner, broadening employment opportunities in the county.
5	Recognise and support diversity in the county, promoting equality, integration, and inclusiveness across all sectors.
6	Sustain, develop, and enhance town and village centres as focal points for their communities.
7	Support an integrated and holistic approach to education, training, and employment along with life-long learning.
8	Promote well-being and excellent quality of life within the county.
9	Strengthen and encourage a strong sense of pride in the county and promote our unique identity.
10	Promote the county as a key location for foreign and domestic investment.



2

CONTEXT





The Stony Man, Ridge of Capard, Co. Laois

The Laois LECP focuses on addressing the specific needs, challenges, and opportunities within Laois. It is important to note that this LECP closely aligns with existing government policies, ensuring that the actions are consistent with government vision and objectives.

The goals, objectives, and outcomes of this LECP have been designed to be consistent with local and regional planning documents such as the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midlands regions, the Laois County Development Plan (CDP) and the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan (REP).

In accordance with guidelines this LECP had been developed with a multi-tiered approach to ensure it aligns and complements strategies and policies at national, regional, and local level.

This coordinated approach aims to create an effective and integrated LECP that caters to the needs for the future community and economic development of Laois.

National Context

This LECP forms part of the overall process for national transformation set out in Project Ireland 2040 and supporting national policy documents including the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan (NDP). These national policy documents provide a clear geographic vision to achieve change.

Project Ireland 2040 is the government's long-term overarching strategy to make Ireland a better country for all and to build a more resilient and sustainable future. The strategy ensures the alignment of investment plans with the stated National Strategic Objectives for 2040 in a considered, cohesive, and defined manner. This represents a shift from the approach of the past, which saw funding spread thinly across sectors and public investment decisions. Alongside the development of physical infrastructure, Project Ireland 2040 supports business and communities across all of Ireland in realising their potential.



Regional Context

The Midlands/Eastern Regional Spatial Economic Strategy (RSES) is a strategic plan and investment framework to shape future development, to identify key strategic assets, opportunities and challenges and set out policy responses to ensure people’s needs are met for our region up to 2030 and beyond.

‘The Eastern and Midland part of Ireland will, by 2040, be a Region of around 2.85 million people, at least half a million more than today’.

(Ref: National Planning Framework)

RSES identified Laois as one of the fastest growing counties with a ten-year growth rate of 26% respectively to 2016. Portlaoise and Graiguecullen were identified as “key towns”, which are large economically active service county towns that provide employment for their surrounding areas and with high-quality transport links and the capacity to act as growth drivers to complement the Regional Growth Centres.

The Midland Regional Enterprise Plan (MREP) is a suite of collaborative actions to grow enterprise and stimulate job creation across the Midlands Region. The Plan identifies three strategic objectives to realise this ambition namely: Climate Action – transition to a zero carbon economy, Smart Specialisation and Digitalisation and positioning the Midlands as a Destination of Choice to live, work, visit, invest and learn. The Laois LECP has been designed to be consistent with that Plan.

See Appendix 7: Alignment of LECP with Local and Regional Policy.

Alignment of Laois LECP with Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

The chosen High Level Goals align with the three key principles of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) 2019-2031 for the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly (EMRA Area). These three principles were:

- Healthy Placemaking,
- Climate Action, and
- Economic Opportunity.

Examples of alignment of LECP with Principles of RSES:

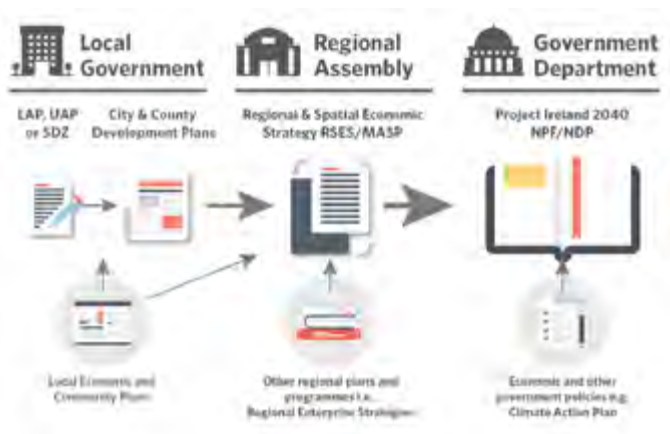
High Level Goal 4 states: “Help the local economy to diversify in a long-term, sustainable manner, broadening employment opportunities in the county”.

High Level Goal 8 states: “Promote well-being and excellent quality of life within the county.”

RSES vision is to create a sustainable and competitive Region that supports the health and well-being of our people and places, from urban to rural, with access to quality housing, travel and employment opportunities for all. (Ref: RSES-Executive-Summary-EMRA).

See Appendix 7: Alignment of LECP with Local and Regional Policy.

Figure 2.2: Spatial Planning Hierarchy in Ireland



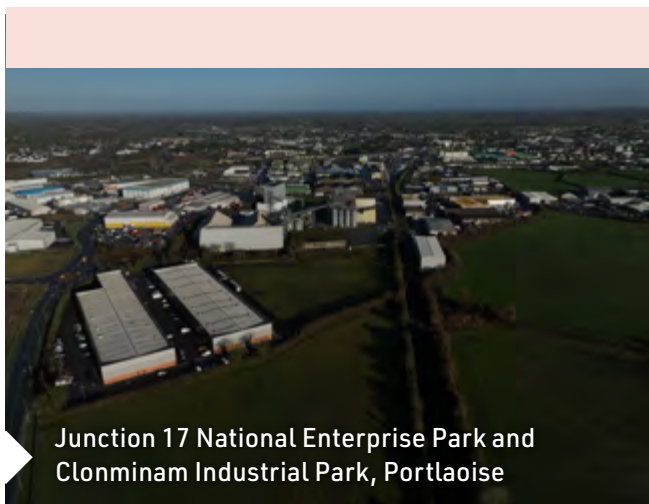
Local Priorities

The Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023 sets out a clear vision for County Laois: *“To improve the quality of life for all citizens in County Laois by creating sustainable communities and an environment that supports a vibrant, growing and well connected economy, making it a County where people want to live, work, visit and do business, without compromising the environmental integrity of the county”*. The LECP has been designed to be consistent with the County Development Plan.

See Appendix 7: Alignment of LECP with Local and Regional Policy.

Economic Development

The Laois LECP takes a positive approach to local economic development while recognising our unique economic dynamics, and focuses on supporting the local economy, enhancing workforce skills, and fostering economic growth. A range of the High Level Goals in this framework support economic development.

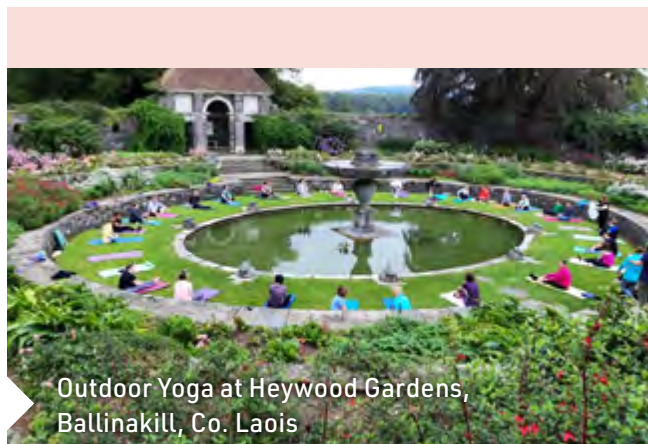


Junction 17 National Enterprise Park and Clonminam Industrial Park, Portlaoise

Example of Economic Goals within the LECP:

Goals supporting economic development include High Level Goals 2, 3, 4 and 10.

High Level Goal 4 states: *Help the local economy to diversify in a long-term, sustainable manner, broadening employment opportunities in the county.*



Outdoor Yoga at Heywood Gardens, Ballinakill, Co. Laois

Social Inclusion

Addressing and promoting social inclusivity is a critical aspect of this LECP and its commitment to improving the well-being of individuals, households, and communities of Laois. High Level Goal 5 is dedicated to recognise and support diversity, promote equality, integration and inclusiveness.

Example of Social Inclusion within the LECP:

High Level Goal 5 states: *Recognise and support diversity in the county, promoting equality, integration, and inclusiveness across all sectors.*

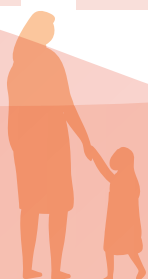
Well-being cannot solely be measured by income, but needs to consider health, community, education and broader factors. The LECP seeks to promote the holistic development of the county across both community and economic measures, while also through those measures promoting increased social inclusion.

Climate Action and Biodiversity

This LECP was prepared at the same time as the Laois County Council Climate Action Plan (LACAP) that was adopted in January 2024. The climate aspects of this LECP are designed to complement the overall actions within the LACAP.

Example of Climate Action within the LECP:

High Level Goal 2 states: *Develop and promote ways of living and of doing business that support a sustainable environment and resilient communities.*



United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

The Laois LECP has been developed within the context of the principles of sustainable development, including the **United National 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.

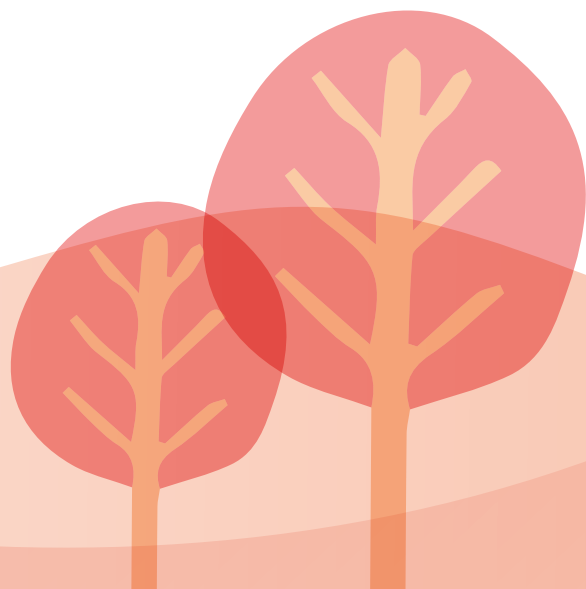
The UN have set 17 sustainable development goals as set out below. SDGs recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations must go together with strategies that improve health, education, reduce inequality and spur economic growth ;all the while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. They recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.

(Ref: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>)

Further analysis as to how the LECP addresses the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is shown in Table 3.2 on page 41.

Figure 2.1: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals



Public Sector Duty

Under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014 all public bodies have responsibility to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans. This is a legal obligation called the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty under Section 42 of the Act. The duty is commonly referred to as the "Public Sector Duty".

Laois County Council in the preparation of this LECP (including its goals and objectives) has had regard to this Public Sector Duty. In developing the Laois LECP, Laois County Council as a public body in performing its function, had regard to the potential of the LECP to assist in the:

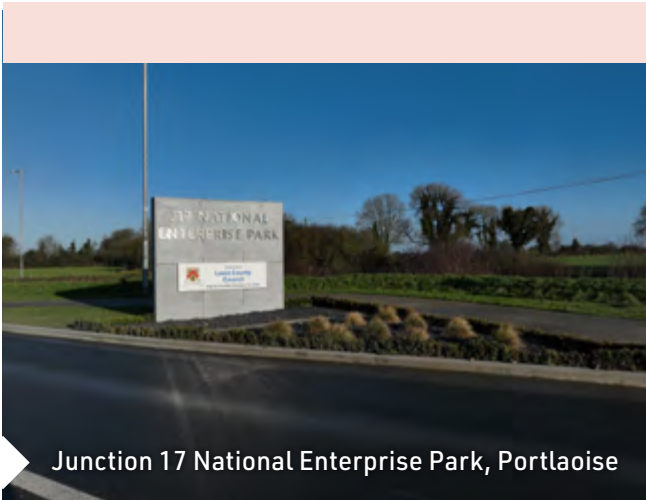
- (i) Elimination of discrimination ;
- (ii) Promotion of equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the person to whom it provides services; and
- (iii) Protection of the human rights of its members, staff, and the persons to whom it provides services.

Example of Public Sector Duty within the LECP:

High Level Goal 5 states: *Recognise and support diversity in the county, promoting equality, integration, and inclusiveness across all sectors.*

Sustainable Objective 5.1 states: *To work to support equity in social participation and employment opportunities, particularly across areas of disability, disadvantage, diversity, and ethnic backgrounds.*

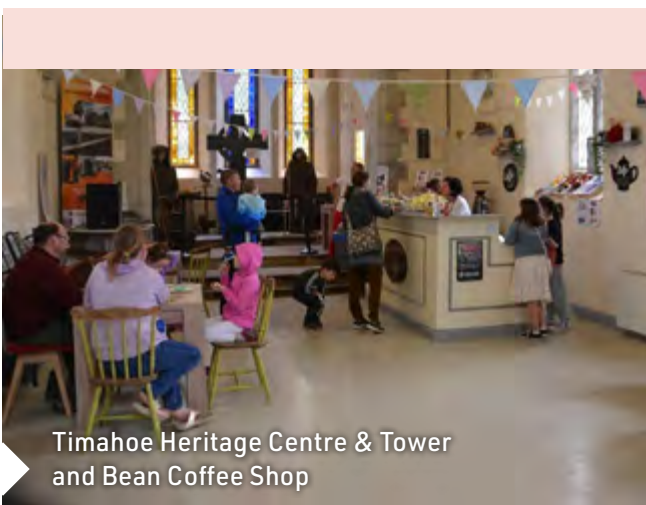




Junction 17 National Enterprise Park, Portlaoise



Bloom HQ, Mountrath



Timahoe Heritage Centre & Tower and Bean Coffee Shop

Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

This LECP has undergone AA and SEA screening process in order to determine if a full detailed assessment is required.

Appropriate Assessment Screening Report Conclusion:

The outcome of the AA screening process was: "The results of the source pathway receptor (s-p-r) modelling process identified that – given the scale of the nature of the potential sources identified, there is no likely significant effects identifies to any European sites. The AA screening process has considered potential effects which may arise during all phases of the draft Plan. Through an assessment of the pathways for effects and an evaluation of the sources for impacts, taking account of the processes involved and the distance of separation from European sites, it has been evaluated that there are no likely significant adverse effects on the qualifying interests, special conservation interest or the conservation objectives of any designated European sites".

Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report Conclusion:

The outcome of the SEA screening process was: "SEA Screening was carried out to determine the need for a SEA for the Laois LECP 2023-2028. It has been concluded, based on pre-screening check, and review against environmental significance criteria as set out in Annex II of the SEA Directive, that a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required".

See Appendix 6 for the full report.







3

STATEMENT OF
HIGH LEVEL GOALS





LECP public consultation in Portarlington Library

High Level Goals/Sustainable Objectives/High Level Outcomes Breakdown

A series of ten High Level Goals for the Laois LECP have been developed by Laois County Council based on the extensive consultation process and working with its partner bodies. These High Level Goals together with their associated objectives have been developed following the stakeholder engagement process and the socio-economic analysis. These High Level Goals are listed over the page.

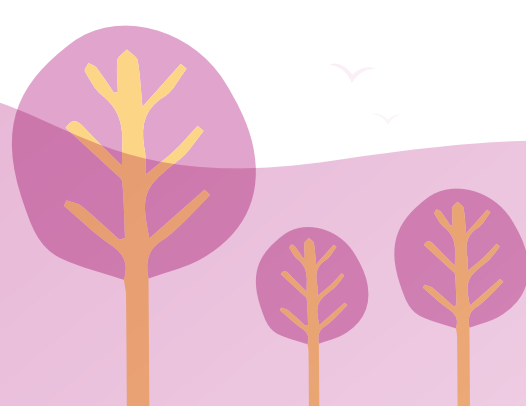
These ten High Level Goals span both the economic and community spheres. For example, Goal 1 speaks about encouraging civic participation, while Goal 4 speaks about helping the local economy diversify. These goals provide the core aims of the LECP with sustainable objectives highlighting the key priority areas within each goal.



Durrow Scarecrow Festival, Durrow



Downtown Portlaoise Traders Banner



Goal	High Level Goals
1	Encourage civic participation and support local communities to lead on their own developments.
2	Develop and promote ways of living and of doing business that support a sustainable environment and resilient communities.
3	Encourage a sustainable culture of innovation and entrepreneurship throughout the county.
4	Help the local economy to diversify in a long-term, sustainable manner, broadening employment opportunities in the county.
5	Recognise and support diversity in the county, promoting equality, integration, and inclusiveness across all sectors.
6	Sustain, develop, and enhance town and village centres as focal points for their communities.
7	Support an integrated and holistic approach to education, training, and employment along with life-long learning.
8	Promote well-being and excellent quality of life within the county.
9	Strengthen and encourage a strong sense of pride in the county and promote our unique identity.
10	Promote the county as a key location for foreign and domestic investment.

In the following pages the above High Level goals are further broken down into Sustainable Objectives, High Level Outcomes, and Impacts.





Rock of Dunamase



Bowes, Durrow, Co. Laois



High Level Goal 1

“Encourage civic participation and support local communities to lead their own developments.”

Goal Breakdown

This goal focuses on encouraging active participation and is intended to develop and enable individuals and communities within Laois. Goal 1 aims to ensure that members of our community can take part in all aspects of society.

Impact

To have a strongly engaged population which will be positive for participative democracy and support bottom-up approach with increased participation of disadvantaged minority groups.

Sustainable Objective 1.1

To increase the depth of community participation and civic engagement across the county.

High Level Outcomes

- ▶ An increase in civic engagement, especially in those areas with historically lower rates of community activity.
- ▶ More community groups and individuals actively participating in their local community.
- ▶ That an equality perspective is integrated into civic engagement.

Sustainable Objective 1.2

Build capacity and skills within individuals and groups to take leadership roles within their communities.

High Level Outcomes

- ▶ The personal skills development of community group leaders to take on leadership roles within their communities.
- ▶ The development of capacity within community groups to enable them to take on projects on behalf of their communities, with particular emphasis on those communities with lower activity rates and on communities impacted by Just Transition.
- ▶ Strengthened capacity in target areas and groups.

Sustainable Objective 1.3

To increase the breadth of community-led development across the county.

High Level Outcomes

- ▶ Better designed and more appropriate social and physical rural and urban infrastructure/facilities (including locally-led business).
- ▶ Increased initiatives led by communities to support their own needs.
- ▶ To help develop succession Planning across the spectrum of community groups from youth right through to men’s/ women’s sheds to older people.





Ballykilcavan Brewery, Stradbally, Co. Laois



G's Gourmet Foods, Abbeyleix, Co. Laois



High Level Goal 2

“Develop and promote ways of living and of doing business that supports a sustainable environment and resilient communities.”

Goal Breakdown

Goal 2 seeks to support businesses and local communities in protecting and enhancing our local biodiversity in a sustainable manner so that we can reduce our carbon footprint. Sustainability and environmentally aware habits must be factored into all areas of life in Laois.

Impact

Enhanced opportunities for businesses to shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economic activity and to mitigate the climate change impact of enterprise and commercial activity.

Sustainable Objective 2.1

High Level Outcomes

Support initiatives that allow businesses/enterprises to become more sustainable and environmentally friendly and to target environmentally conscious markets.

- ▶ Enhanced opportunities for Laois businesses.
- ▶ Reduced environmental footprint and transition to a competitive low carbon climate resilient economy.
- ▶ Improved understanding on the impacts of climate change on our local environment.
- ▶ Improved green and circular economy.

Sustainable Objective 2.2

High Level Outcomes

Assist communities and their citizens to take actions that address the causes and impact of climate change at local level.

- ▶ Reduction in overall carbon footprint of the county.
- ▶ Increase in Climate Action interventions tackling climate change and environmental protection by members of our communities.

Sustainable Objective 2.3

High Level Outcomes

Protect the quality of life in rural communities, supporting a sustainable rural economy and environment.

- ▶ Better protection of biodiversity in the county.
- ▶ Reduction in “carbon miles” of goods and services available to consumers in the county.

Sustainable Objective 2.4

High Level Outcomes

Provide for public and community spaces and infrastructure that supports individuals to live in a more sustainable manner.

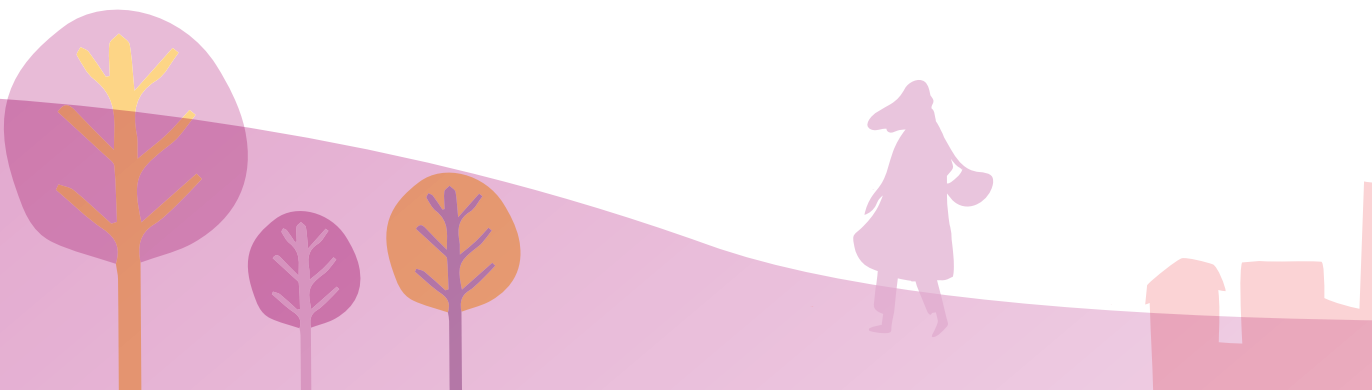
- ▶ Increased use of remote working hubs.
- ▶ Increased access to sustainable travel options.
- ▶ EV chargers in place near key destination locations.



Aghaboe Abbey



Temptation Patisserie, Abbeyleix, Co. Laois



High Level Goal 3

“Encourage a sustainable culture of innovation and entrepreneurship throughout the county.”

Goal Breakdown

The third High Level Goal centres on supporting both new and existing businesses throughout Laois, taking advantage of our excellent road and rail transport networks in addition to our highly skilled local workforce. This goal aims to strengthen local employment in Laois.

Impact

Broaden a more diverse enterprise and employment base giving greater access to rural employment to sustain our towns and villages.

Sustainable Objective 3.1

High Level Outcomes

To provide for practical encouragement, support, and advice to those looking to innovate or start their own business.

- ▶ Appropriate financial and mentoring supports.
- ▶ More entrepreneurs developed and SME's/micro-enterprises established in Laois.
- ▶ Local job creation without displacing existing businesses in Laois.

Sustainable Objective 3.2

High Level Outcomes

To enhance the attractiveness of the offering in hubs and co-working centres as part of providing supports to start-up companies and remote workers.

- ▶ Increased remote workers in Laois, with less citizens commuting to neighbouring counties to work.
- ▶ Retained talent, young people and increased footfall in towns and villages in Laois.
- ▶ More remote working/innovation hubs in Laois joined the National Hub network connectedhubs.ie

Sustainable Objective 3.3

High Level Outcomes

To encourage additional off-farm and alternative enterprises to support a changing rural economy.

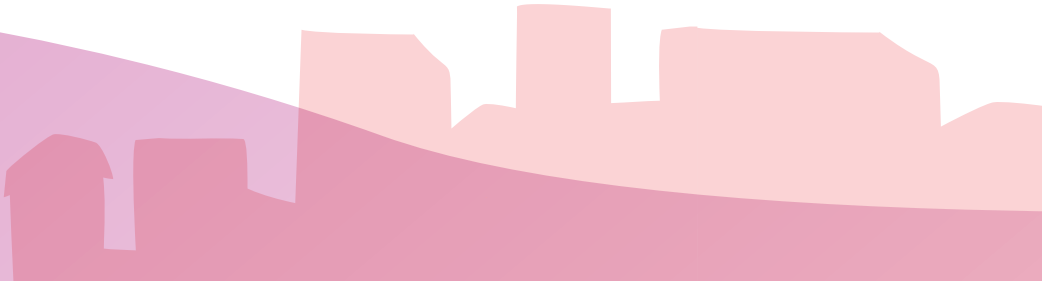
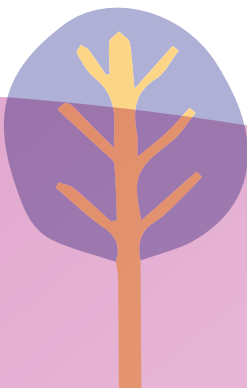
- ▶ Increased entrepreneurship and improved use of farm resources.
- ▶ Increased eco-tourism and local economy.
- ▶ Increased diversification of the rural economy.

Sustainable Objective 3.4

High Level Outcomes

Promote business participation and enterprise among those currently underrepresented in the business sector.

- ▶ More female entrepreneurs mitigating gender employment gaps, lessening income inequality and social exclusion.
- ▶ More resilient social enterprises that better realise their potential to positively impact their communities.
- ▶ Increase in employment participation rates.
- ▶ More diversity in the workplace.



High Level Goal 4

“Help the local economy to diversify in a long-term, sustainable manner, broadening employment opportunities in the county.”

Goal Breakdown

The fourth goal seeks to promote the local economy and provide Leadership in increasing employment levels in the county by attracting foreign investment as well as focusing on local enterprises.

Impact

High quality sustainable employment with a capacity for growth.

Sustainable Objective 4.1

To support business to develop and expand a skilled and talented workforce.

High Level Outcomes

- ▶ Improved workforce development and educational opportunities to meet the needs of the local business sector.
- ▶ Skills developed necessary to sustain, and be in demand, in the emerging economy.
- ▶ Better paid jobs with a more skilled workforce.

Sustainable Objective 4.2

To work with the range of infrastructure suppliers (e.g., data, power, transport, water, public realm) to have a sufficient standard of infrastructure provision to attract and service new and developing economic sectors.

High Level Outcomes

- ▶ Increased investment in key social, physical, and digital infrastructure.
- ▶ More people living, working, and doing business in Laois.
- ▶ Good standard of data/broadband infrastructure and services across the county.

Sustainable Objective 4.3

To market Laois as a vibrant destination for business and tourism.

High Level Outcomes

- ▶ Enhanced knowledge base of the business, tourism, and hospitality sectors in Laois.
- ▶ Realisation of the economic potential of the natural built environment for outdoor recreation, tourism, and hospitality.

Sustainable Objective 4.4

To work with Midlands Ireland and national enterprise agencies to position the county as an attractive investment location for high value sectors.

High Level Outcomes

- ▶ More employers considering Laois as a location to do business.
- ▶ Good quality local jobs reducing the need for outward commute.

Sustainable Objective 4.5

To assist communities affected by changes in employment and economic decline especially those affected by Just Transition or climate change impacts.

High Level Outcomes

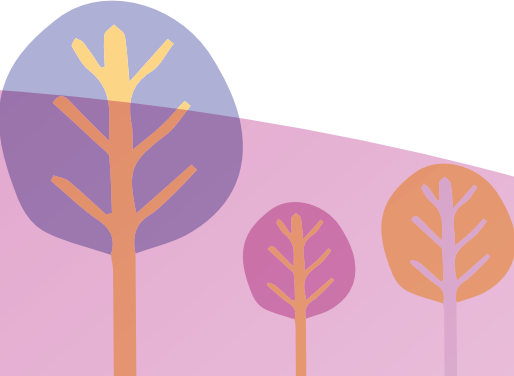
- ▶ A workforce retrained to take advantage of new opportunities.
- ▶ Regeneration of local facilities in communities affected by economic decline.



Yarn Bombing Mountmellick, Co. Laois



Mountrath Town Centre, Co. Laois



High Level Goal 5

“Recognise and support diversity in the county, promoting equality, integration, and inclusiveness across all sectors.”

Goal Breakdown

Goal 5 intends to support all sectors of our society to ensure the voice of all, including the most excluded, is heard across all sectors while identifying, acknowledging and integrating the diverse need within Laois.

Impact

An increasingly inclusive county.

Sustainable Objective 5.1

To work to support equity in social participation and employment opportunities, particularly across areas of disability, disadvantage, diversity, and ethnic backgrounds.

High Level Outcomes

- ▶ Enriched social capital.
- ▶ Increased participation rates across people in the areas of disability, disadvantage, diversity, and ethnic backgrounds.

Sustainable Objective 5.2

To target specific groups, by needs, in the promotion of broader health and physical activity.

High Level Outcomes

- ▶ Improved health and well-being for all in our county.
- ▶ Increased participation in sport and physical activity for all.
- ▶ Increase in safe and appropriate spaces for young people in our county.
- ▶ Increase in participation in the Older Peoples' Council.

Sustainable Objective 5.3

To reduce barriers to participation in the breadth of economic and social life by those in less advantaged sectors of society.

High Level Outcomes

- ▶ Improved access to facilities and activities.





Borris-in-Ossory Playground, Co. Laois



Abbeyleix Ireland's Tidiest Small Town National Winner 2023

High Level Goal 6

“Sustain, develop and enhance town and village centres as focal points for their communities.”

Goal Breakdown

The sixth goal will aim to grow and enhance our towns and villages while safeguarding our cultural and natural heritage making Laois a wonderful place to live, work and visit.

Impact

Laois will have more vibrant towns and villages better equipped to face the future challenges.

Sustainable Objective 6.1

To make our towns and villages attractive places to live and work through the provision and upgrade of both community and appropriate public infrastructure.

High Level Outcomes

- ▶ Quality town centre living/regeneration with established town teams.
- ▶ More people choosing to live in our rural towns and villages.

Sustainable Objective 6.2

To encourage opportunities for arts, culture and social events in our towns and villages.

High Level Outcomes

- ▶ Better access to arts and cultural events throughout the county.
- ▶ A vibrant cultural scene.
- ▶ Enriched cultural environment contributing to the overall quality of life in our communities making them more attractive places to live.

Sustainable Objective 6.3

To encourage the re-use/re-purposing of properties and sites within our towns and villages to address vacancy and underutilisation.

High Level Outcomes

- ▶ Increased vibrancy, renewal and regeneration of towns and villages.
- ▶ Stimulation of economic activity.

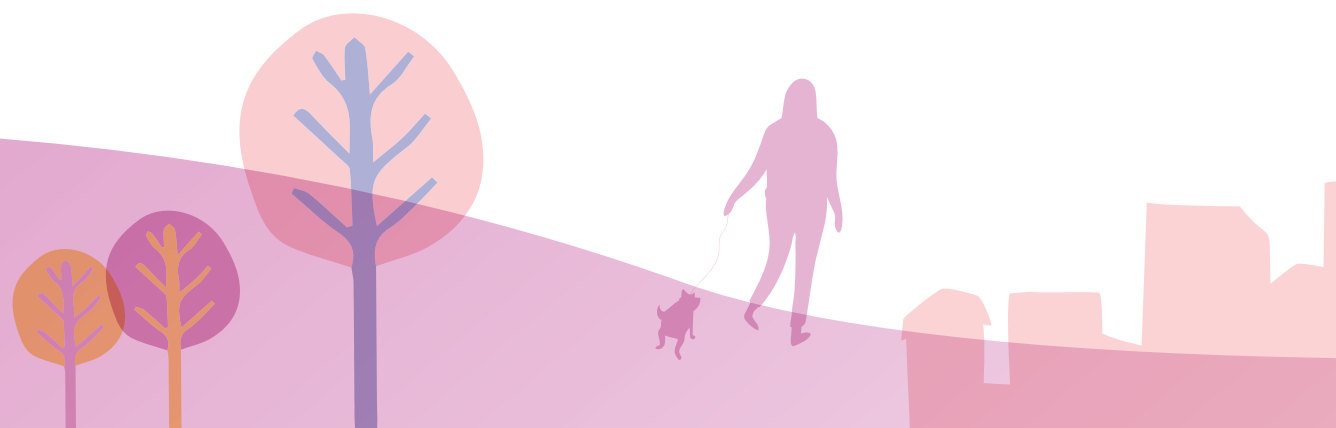




Canoeing at the River Nore, Castletown, Co. Laois



Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trail, Co. Laois



High Level Goal 7

“Support an integrated and holistic approach to education, training and employment along with life-long learning.”

Goal Breakdown

Goal 7 seeks to encourage the development of training and employment opportunities in Laois and seeks to establish and maintain long-term working partnerships between agencies to ensure the development and enhancement of our existing workforce.

Impact

A workforce better equipped for employment opportunities and an improvement in the imbalance in unit income between regions of the county.

Sustainable Objective 7.1

To continue to support improvements in educational attainment and skills.

High Level Outcomes

- ▶ Improved employment/self-employment prospects and increased social inclusion (addressing the Leave No One Behind principle).
- ▶ Enhanced education and training attainment and capital.
- ▶ A more skilled and adaptable workforce assisting in the regenerating of deprived urban and rural communities.

Sustainable Objective 7.2

To reduce barriers to participation in education and training.

High Level Outcomes

- ▶ Increased participation rates in TUS Learning Hubs.

Sustainable Objective 7.3

To address the factors which result in imbalances in educational attainment statistics between different regions of the county.

High Level Outcomes

- ▶ More educational attainment in disadvantaged and geographically isolated areas.
- ▶ Improvements in income inequality.
- ▶ Increased number of citizens progressing to employment from SICAP target groups.



Electric Picnic Aerial View, Stradbally, Co. Laois



National Ploughing Championships 2022, Ratheniska, Co. Laois

High Level Goal 8

“Promote well-being and excellent quality of life within the county.”

Goal Breakdown

Goal 8 will focus on promoting good health and well-being across all communities in Laois. This goal will aim to enable good physical and mental wellness for all and lessen inequalities for all generations.

Impact

A population which is healthier, both physically and mentally.

Sustainable Objective 8.1

To support the availability of community level meeting spaces where people can meet and interact socially.

High Level Outcomes

- ▶ Improved access to a physical environment which support mental health, social health, and well-being.

Sustainable Objective 8.2

To improve access to recreational facilities, to increase participation in foundation level sport and in exercise across all ages.

High Level Outcomes

- ▶ Improved health of the community.
- ▶ Increased access to facilities and participation in physical activity.

Sustainable Objective 8.3

To support the development of events and facilities that enhance cultural expression and creativity.

High Level Outcomes

- ▶ Increased opportunities for cultural expression and creativity throughout the county.
- ▶ Increase in the number of Community Arts Groups across the county.

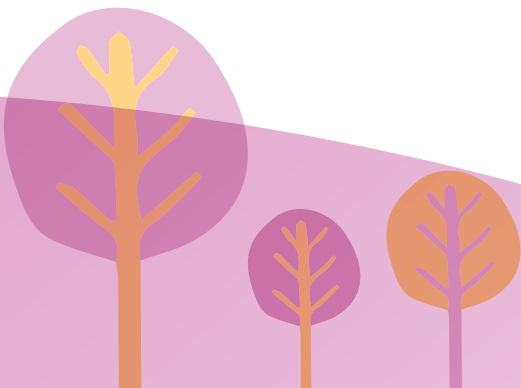




Gordon Bennett at Abbyleix House



Jamestown Manufacturing Ltd., Portarlinton



High Level Goal 9

“Strengthen and encourage a strong sense of pride in the county and promote our unique identity.”

Goal Breakdown	
Goal 9 places a strong emphasis in advocating pride in places where we live and work in Laois.	
Impact	
A county with a positive self-identity is more likely to develop economically and socially.	
Sustainable Objective 9.1	High Level Outcomes
Document and celebrate the achievements of individuals and local communities in achieving positive goals for the county.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The presence of a palpable pride and confidence in the county which will be able to aid economic development in addition to the general well-being of our people.
Sustainable Objective 9.2	High Level Outcomes
Provide opportunities to record and publicise the extent of aspects of the county’s heritage, biodiversity, and cultural achievements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Documentation of the attributes of the county. ▶ Community and voluntary awards.
Sustainable Objective 9.3	High Level Outcomes
Through festivals and events promote opportunities for people to celebrate locally.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Events which assist in the well-being of local communities.





Stradbally, Vicarstown, Timahoe, Activity & Wellness Hub Special Award Winner at Pride of Place 2023



Ossory Agricultural Show 2023



High Level Goal 10

“Promote the county as a key location for foreign and domestic investment.”

Goal Breakdown	
<p>Goal 10 centres on promoting all corners of the county to attract investment by both local businesses and large scale foreign investment. This goal will aim to promote Laois and its distinctive characteristics and skilled workforce.</p>	
<p>Impact Additional private sector investment in the county.</p>	
Sustainable Objective 10.1	High Level Outcomes
<p>To research and regularly update key business data from Laois to support the competitive advantages of doing business in Laois.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Increased awareness of potential of Laois as an investment destination.
Sustainable Objective 10.2	High Level Outcomes
<p>Through research and regularly updating key social provision data (for example leisure, schools, preschools, youth provision, etc.) to help ensure that social/community infrastructure continues to be available for a developing workforce (and their families) outside of their working lives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ That social and community infrastructure keeps pace with an expanding population and workforce. ▶ That the county remains as an attractive location for an incoming skilled workforce and especially for returning graduates from the county.
Sustainable Objective 10.3	High Level Outcomes
<p>Encourage and develop sector-based clusters to highlight quality outputs from the county.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Enterprise clusters encouraged to develop similar to Laois Taste.



Table 3.1: Cross Analysis of LECP High Level Goals against Themes of LECP

High Level Goals	Theme 1 Health and Well-being	Theme 2 Economic Development	Theme 3 Community and Local Development	Theme 4 Climate Action	Theme 5 Training, Education and Further Development
1 Encourage civic participation and support local communities to lead their own developments.			✓		
2 Develop and promote ways of living and doing business that supports a sustainable environment and resilient communities.		✓	✓	✓	✓
3 Encourage a sustainable culture of innovation and entrepreneurship throughout the county.		✓	✓		✓
4 Help the local economy to diversify in a long-term, sustainable manner, broadening employment opportunities in the county.		✓			✓
5 Recognise and support diversity in the county, promoting equality, integration and inclusiveness across all sectors.	✓	✓	✓		✓
6 Sustain, develop and enhance town and village centres as focal points for their communities.		✓	✓		
7 Support an integrated and holistic approach to education, training and employment along with life-long learning.		✓			✓
8 Promote well-being and excellent quality of life within the county.	✓		✓		
9 Strengthen and encourage a strong sense of pride in the county and promote our unique identity.	✓		✓	✓	
10 Promote the county as a key location for foreign and domestic investment.		✓			✓

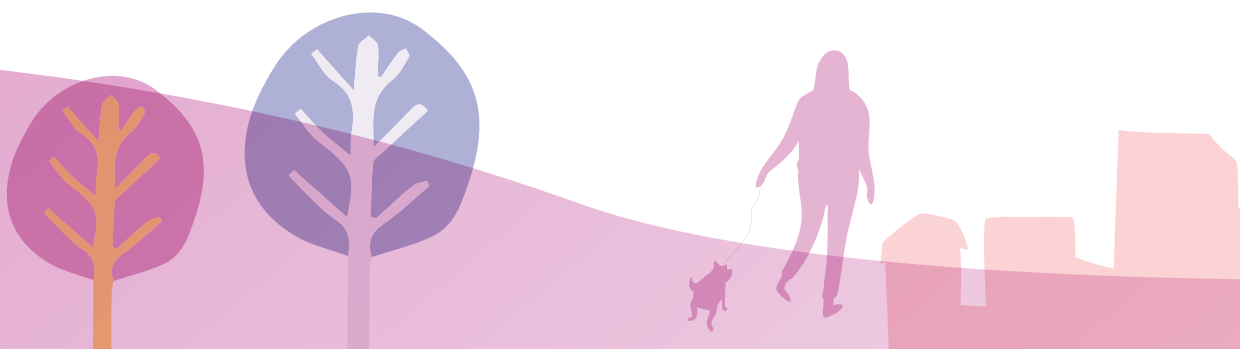


Table 3.2: Analysis of LECP High Level Goals against UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Analysis of LECP High Level Goals against UN Sustainable Development Goals		
LECP High Level Goal Number	LECP HLG Description	UN SDG #
1	Encourage civic participation and support local communities to lead on their own developments.	      
2	Develop and promote ways of living and of doing business that supports a sustainable environment and resilient communities.	      
3	Encourage a sustainable culture of innovation and entrepreneurship throughout the county.	  
4	Help the local economy to diversify in a long term, sustainable manner, broadening employment opportunities in the county.	   
5	Recognise and support diversity in the county, promoting equality, integration, and inclusiveness across all sectors.	     
6	Sustain, develop and enhance town and village centres as focal points for their communities.	  
7	Support an integrated and holistic approach to education, training and employment along with life long learning.	   
8	Promote well-being and excellent quality of life within the county.	    
9	Strengthen and encourage a strong sense of pride in the county and promote our unique identity.	   
10	Promote the county as a key location for foreign and domestic investment.	 





4

IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS



Canal Side Recreational Area at Vicarstown

An Implementation Plan separate to this framework document will be developed subsequent to the adoption of this framework document. The Implementation Plan will identify specific actions to assist in achieving the High Level Goals, objectives and outcomes outlined in the previous chapters. The Laois LECP 2023-2028 will run to 2028 with the overall goals, objectives and outcomes to be achieved over that time period. However, the initial Implementation Plan once developed will last for two years and will be closely monitored and evaluated before being reviewed and revised in 2026. This flexible approach to the implementation of the LECP will allow Laois County Council and its partners to ensure the actions remain relevant and responsive to changing contexts, opportunities, and challenges.

The successive Implementation Plans will be presented to the Enterprise, Economic Development and Tourism Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) and the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) for consideration and adoption.

Responsibilities and Monitoring

The Community and Economic sections of Laois County Council will liaise regularly with action owners for consultation and feedback. Twice yearly progress reports on the Implementation Plan will be sent to the Economic SPC and the LCDC.



Appendices to LECP

Link to Appendices available on www.laois.ie and available on request from lhcp@laoiscoco.ie.

Appendix 1: LECP Review Report 2016-2021

Appendix 2: Socio-Economic Profile of Laois

Appendix 3: Socio Economic Statement

Appendix 4: LECP High Level Goals Rationale

Appendix 5: Consultation Report

Appendix 6: Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Reports

Appendix 7: Alignment of LECP with Local and Regional Policy

Appendix 8: Membership of Relevant Structures



