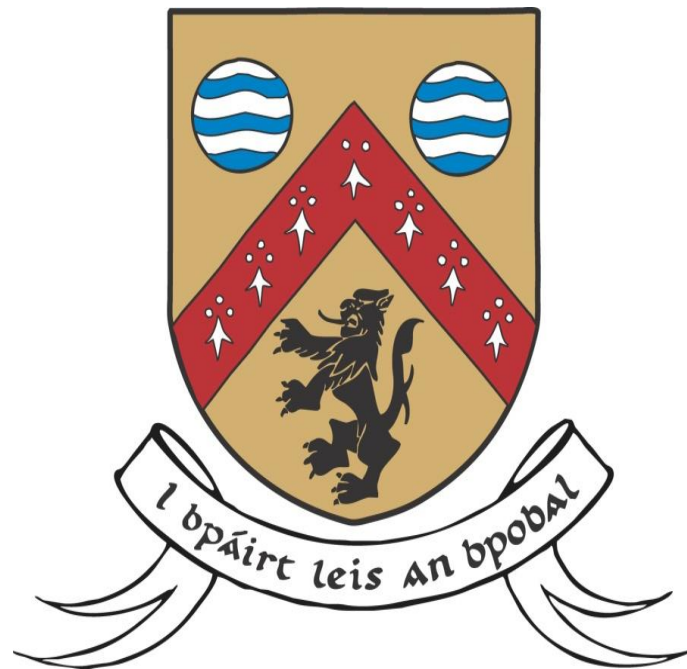


LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE LAOISE



**MONTHLY MANAGEMENT REPORT
DECEMBER 2021/JANUARY 2022
TUARASCÁIL BHAINISTÍOCHTA
NOLLAIG 2021/EANAIR 2022**

To: Each Member of Laois County Council
Do: Gach Ball Comhairle Chontae Laoise

Section 136(2) of the Local Government Act, 2011 as inserted by Section 51 of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014, requires the Chief Executive to prepare monthly management report. The report for December 2021/January 2022 is as follows:-

Finance, & Allocations Notified

The Annual Financial Statement for 2021 is currently being prepared and will be finalised in March 2022. A report for the year end 31/12/2021 will then be made available

Allocations Notified

Disability Participation and Awareness Fund	€75,000
RRDF Borris in Ossory Courthouse	€212,000
TVRS Town Centre First Initiative- Rathdowney	€100,000
DHLGH – Covid-19 related costs	€382,269
TII Allocations National Road Maintenance & Improvement	€5,409,157
NTA Smarter Travel	€3,000,000

Local Government Payroll and Superannuation Shared Services Centre

Local Government Payroll and Superannuation Shared Services Centre

- There are currently 85 employees based in the MyPay shared services centre.
- Waves 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 were completed on schedule with Longford, Roscommon, Westmeath, Leitrim, Laois, Offaly, Galway, Carlow, Monaghan, Cavan, Kildare, Meath, Kilkenny, Louth, South Dublin, Tipperary, Kerry, Wicklow, Mayo, Donegal, Sligo, Fingal, Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown, Clare County Councils, Limerick, Wexford and Waterford City & County Councils and Galway and Cork City Councils now live in MyPay.
- The LGMA and the East & Midlands Regional Assembly are also being paid from MyPay.
- The implementation of Cork County Council is now commencing and is expected to be complete in 2022.
- The following are the statistics on the project up to 31st December 2021:

Value of Payments	€5.166bn
Number of Payments	6,021,176
Number of Pay Groups Paid	12,328
Number of Payroll Runs	7,116
- The Superannuation service pilot with Laois, Carlow and the LGMA has been completed. There are currently 20 local authorities live and this will increase to 30 by the end of 2022
- MyPay has been chosen to administer the new 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. The remaining sites are scheduled to come on board in 2022

- MyPay have achieved the ISAE 3402 (international standard for service organisations) The Type 2 Report has issued to the Chief Executive of all clients. This will be renewed annually.

Housing & Regeneration

HOUSING DELIVERY

Social Housing Build Delivery: Completions in 2021 – LCC & AHB

Location	No of Houses	Constructed by	Comment
Ballymorris, Portarlington	22	LCC (Construction)	Complete and tenanted
Shannon St, Mountrath	6	LCC (Construction)	Complete and tenanted
Featherbed Lane, Borris-in-Ossory (Phase 1)	6	LCC (Turnkey)	Complete and tenanted
Corbally, Clonaslee	7	LCC (Turnkey)	Completed and tenanted
Borris Road, Portlaoise	9	Tuath Housing	Final phase
Bellingham, Portlaoise	15	Cluid Housing	Final phase
Holdbrook, Portlaoise	10	Cluid Housing	Phase 1
Doirinn Alainn, Ballylinan	6	North & East Housing	Final phase
Kilnacourt, Portarlington	26	Cooperative Housing	Phases 2 and 3 complete
Lake Drive, Kilminchy	10	Cooperative Housing	Complete
Rathilian, Killeshin	4	Cooperative Housing	Complete
TOTAL	121		

Social Housing Acquisitions in 2021

Location	No of Houses	Comment
Abbeyleix	1	LA Acquisition
Ballylinan	2	LA Acquisition and 1 AHB supported acquisition
Borris in Ossory	1	LA Acquisition
Camross	1	LA Acquisition
Castletown	1	LA Acquisition
Mountmellick	3	1 LA Acquisition; 2 acquired under Buy & Renew Scheme
Mountrath	8	7 LA Acquisitions; 1 acquired under Buy & Renew Scheme
Portarlington	7	5 LA Acquisition and 2 AHB supported
Portlaoise	16	12 LA Acquisition and 4 AHB supported
TOTAL	40	

*Per DHLGH Circular 02/2022, delegated sanction to local authorities to acquire properties no longer applies with effect from 1st Jan 2022. In limited situations, a business case should be

made to the Dept of Housing focusing on priority areas, i.e., (a) one-bed units under Housing First, (b) to allow families exit homelessness and (c) specific housing for disability or other particular priority needs. No more than 200 acquisitions countrywide will be approved in 2022.

Social Housing Schemes Currently Under Construction – LCC & AHB

Location	No. of Houses	Constructed by	Comment
Moore St, Rathdowney	6	LCC (Construction)	On site – expected delivery Q2 2022
Pattison Estate, Mountmellick	10	LCC (Construction)	On site – expected delivery Q2 2022
Gleann na Glaise, Ballyroan	10	LCC (Construction)	On Site – expected delivery Q1 2022
Sean Doire, Durrow	22	LCC (Construction)	On Site – expected delivery Q2 2022
Coolroe, Ballybrittas	1	LCC (Construction)	Rural construct – on site and to be delivered in Q1 2022
Featherbed Lane, Borris-In-Ossory (Ph 2)	5	LCC (Turnkey)	On Site nearing completion – delivery expected by end of Q1 2022
Bruach Na Habhainn, Killeen	4	LCC (Turnkey)	On site – Delivery Q2 2022
The Orchard, Ballylynan	5	LCC (Turnkey)	On Site – Delivery Q4 2022
Market Square, Portarlington	18	LCC (Turnkey)	On site – delivery Q2 2023
Church Avenue, Stradbally	31	LCC (Turnkey)	Phase 1 on site for delivery Q1 2023; Phase 2 to be delivered mid 2023.
Oak Park Halting Site	4	LCC	TAU funded scheme – delivery estimated at end of 2022.
Clonrooske Abbey, Portlaoise	32	Cluid Housing	3 Phases all to be finally delivered by June 2022
The Maltings & Roselawn, Portlaoise	55	Cluid Housing	Phase 1 under construction
Holdbrook, Portlaoise	10	Cluid Housing	Phase 2
Spa Street, Droughill, Portarlington	26	Oaklee Housing	On site
The Springs, Kilminchy, Portlaoise	43	Cluid Housing	2 Phases – on site
Goldencroft, Portlaoise (Old CBS site)	67	Cluid Housing	3 Phases – on site
Ballymorris Green, Portarlington	12	Cluid Housing	Currently on site - Phase 1 delivery March 2022

South Dublin Road, Kilminchy	36	Cooperative Housing	On site – commenced early January 2022.
Part V	10	Laois County Council	Various Locations
TOTAL	407		

Social Housing Schemes at Planning, Design or Tender Stage – LCC & AHB

Location/Scheme	No of Houses	To be constructed by	Comment
Harbour Court, Mountmellick	6	LCC (Construction)	Stage 3 Approved – Stage 4 application ready to submit
St. Kieran’s Errill	14	LCC (Construction)	Stage 3 Approved – Tender evaluation ongoing; Stage 4 application will be made in February.
Mooreville, Rathdowney	7	LCC (Construction)	Stage 3 Approved
Carraig Glas, Stradbally	26	LCC (Construction)	Stage 2 Approved
Clonrooske, Portlaoise	11	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 Approved
Iona, Portlaoise	9	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 Approved
Doonane	12	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 Approved
Derry Road, Durrow	22	LCC (Construction)	18 dwellings plus 4 serviced sites proposed Stage 1 Approved
Ballyadams	1	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 Approved – Tender underway for engagement of Design Team
Stradbally Road, Portlaoise	87	TBC	Stage 1 To Be Submitted Masterplan for entire lands to be finalized Tender underway for engagement of Design Team
Bracklone St, Portarlinton	12	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 To Be Submitted
Rushall Mountrath	2	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 To Be Submitted
Main St, Ballinakill	3	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 To Be Submitted
Moanbaun, Mountrath	9	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 To Be Submitted
Wilton Lawns	2	Respond	Respond have advised that construction has not yet commenced on these units
The Meadows (old Midland Dairies site), Portlaoise	49	Cluid Housing	Funding Approved

Convent Lands, Portlaoise	51	Sophia Housing	Stage 2 Approved – Demolition of buildings complete, with exception of rear of school building, to be done as part of construction contract. Design Team currently preparing Stage 3 application for DHLGH Heritage funded works to Convent building roof complete.
County Hotel, Portlaoise	10	Cluid Housing	Site investigation underway in Jan 2022 – Stage 2 application and Part 8 docs to be prepared thereafter for Council approval
Hepburn Court	54	Cluid Housing	Layout to be presented to elected members in advance of Part 8 – meeting will be arranged with Portlaoise MD members in the first instance to discuss and agree layout.
TOTAL	387		

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Expressions of Interest were invited via advertisement and LCC website in December 2021 in respect of:

- a. Appropriately zoned land for housing development
- b. Advanced Purchase arrangements for un-commenced residential developments

A survey of potential purchasers of affordable houses will be published online in the coming weeks that will inform our decision on affordability and location scheme(s).

VACANT HOMES

Expressions of Interest recently invited via advertisement and LCC website for vacant/derelict properties.

Properties identified/reported as vacant at 20 th January 2022	285
Of the above, properties to be examined further re suitability for social housing	50
Of the above, properties being investigated as possible development sites	37
No further action taken	126*

*Properties found to be occupied on inspection and/or deemed to be unsuitable for social housing.

COMPULSORY PURCHASE ORDER

Vacant Properties acquired by CPO now in LA ownership	12
Notices of Intention to take possession issued	3
Properties currently undergoing CPO	5

Repair & Leasing

Applications received to date	25
Applications approved to proceed	5
Applications under consideration	2
Leases commenced	1

HOUSING STOCK

Housing Re-Lets in 2021

Month	LA Keys Surrendered	Properties Acquired	Works Completed
January 21	11	1	7
February 21	3	1	7
March 21	7	2	10
April 21	12	0	5
May 21	11	0	7
June 21	7	1	7
July 21	10	0	5
August 21	9	0	6
September 21	5	2	8
October 21	8	0	12
November 21	7	0	12
December 21	5	0	15
TOTAL (YTD)	95	7	101

NOTE: There are currently 33 vacant units from our existing stock and a further 10 units that the Council acquired recently. Works are either ongoing on these properties or specifications are being prepared for works to be carried out.

Housing Maintenance

Month	Work Orders Raised	Work Orders Closed	Work Orders Open
January 21	234	234	0
February 21	216	216	0
March 21	252	251	1
April 21	368	365	3
May 21	329	325	4
June 21	301	290	11
July 21	290	267	23
August 21	325	279	46
September 21	338	265	73
October 21	305	213	92
November 21	416	301	105
December 21	253	187	66
TOTAL (YTD)	3,627	3,203	424

Energy Efficiency/Retrofit - Midlands Retrofit Programme

Address	Properties	Units Commenced	Units Completed	Update
Mountain View Sq., Portlaoise	24	24	0	All surveys & air tightness tests complete. Works commenced in January
Hillview Drive, Portlaoise	18	18	0	All surveys completed and works to commence in February
Quigley Pk, Rathdowney	20	20	0	All surveys & air tightness tests complete. Works commenced in January
Radharc Alainn, Arles	18	18	0	All surveys completed and works to commence in February
Derrymore, Portarlinton	26	26	0	13 houses to be completed by end of February.
Kirwan Park, Mountmellick	51	51	0	All surveys completed and works to commence in February
Total Properties	157	157	0	

Energy Efficiency/Retrofitting Programme:*(Note: Planned Maintenance works proposed as part of this programme)*

Address	Properties	Units Commenced	Units Completed	Update
O'Moore Place, Portlaoise	29	0	0	Surveys completed and tender evaluation is on-going.
Total Properties	29	0	0	

HOUSING NEED**Homeless Presentations**

Time Period	Homeless Presentations	Emergency Homeless
12 th Nov 2021 – 31 st Dec 2021	23	6
1 st Jan 2022 – 18 th Jan 2022	17	8

Homeless Accommodation

Individuals Accessing.....	Emergency Accommodation as of 18 th Jan, 2022	Transition Accommodation as of 21 st Jan, 2022
Adults	22	0
Children	13	0

Social Housing List at 21st January 2022

TOTAL No of Social Housing Applicants	1,730
Applicants in receipt of HAP	925
Net Need	805

Housing Allocations to 31st December 2021

Method of Delivery	Numbers allocated
First allocation of New Build/Acquired unit	93
Relet / Refurbished Stock Allocation	51
Mortgage to Rent/Long Term Leasing	14
Nomination to AHB housing	122
TOTAL to year end	280

Housing Allocations at 21st January 2022

Method of Delivery	Numbers allocated Year-to-date 2022
First allocation of New Build/Acquired unit	0
Relet / Refurbished Stock Allocation	7
Nomination to AHB housing	1
TOTAL Y-T-D	8

Housing Assistance Payment

No of Active HAP Tenancies at 31 st December 2021	912
No of Active HAP Tenancies at 21 st January 2022	925

LOANS & GRANTS

*Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan : 1st February 2018 – 31st December 2021	
No of Loan Approvals	129
No of Applications refused	107

**Scheme now closed. All future applications will be in respect of the new Local Authority Home Loan with effect from 4th January 2022.*

Local Authority Home Loan Scheme (LAHL)

The Local Authority Home Loan (LAHL) Scheme is available nationwide and replaces the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan scheme, from 4th January 2022.

Similar to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, applications will be for 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 Schemes, with the exception of the First Home Scheme, which will not be operated by local authorities.

One of the main differences is that a 'Fresh Start' principle also applies to the Local Authority Home Loans scheme, i.e., applicants divorced/separated and have no financial interest in the family home are eligible to apply. People who have undergone personal insolvency/bankruptcy proceedings will also be eligible to apply for the LAHL Scheme.

GRANTS

Private Grants (HOP/MAG/HGD) to 31st December 2021

Allocation 2021	Expenditure to year end	No of Applications Received	No. of applicants benefitting	Comment
€1,263,744	€1,294,412	299	191	Approved grants worth €1,448,438 in total in 2021.

Disabled Persons Grant for Social Housing at 31st December 2021

Allocation 2021	Expenditure / Commitments to year end	No of Applications Received	No. of applicants benefitting	Comment
€1,031,693	€566,895	71	64	36 small works complete at 31/12/21; 28 to be completed by end Q1 2022. 9 proposed extensions at varying stages of design and procurement. To be commenced subject to 2022 funding

Queries in relation to Housing Grants can be emailed to housinggrants@laoiscoco.ie

DISABILITY

Allocation of Homes to Persons with a Disability

	2019	2020	2021	2022
% of allocation	24%	15%	37%	-
No of houses allocated	33	78	104	-

The number of persons on the housing list reported as having a disability is 250 at the end of 2021

LEASING

RAS/Leasing Statistics at 20th January 2022

Active RAS tenancies	87
Active short-term leasing tenancies (Social Housing Leasing Scheme)	30
Active Repair & Leasing Scheme tenancy	1
Active long-term leasing tenancies with private landlords/investors	8
Active long-term Mortgage to Rent leasing tenancies with a private company	17

PRIVATE RENTED

Rental Standards – Housing Inspections

No of house inspections to 31 st December 2021	142
DHLGH Minimum target for housing inspections 2022	1,181

HOUSING DELIVERY ACTION PLAN

Further to the publication of “Affordable Housing Act 2021”, “Housing Circular 28/2021 on Affordable Housing Act 2021 - Amendments to Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000”, and “*Housing for All; a New Housing Plan for Ireland*” in September 2021, Laois County Council has prepared a Housing Delivery Action Plan in relation to the provision of social and affordable housing in Laois for the period 2022-2026, a copy of which was previously circulated to the elected members. This sets out the annual new build social housing delivery targets under *Housing for All* over the next 5 years as outlined by the Dept of Housing, Local Government and Heritage on 20th September 2021.

Annual Social Housing Delivery Targets 2022-2026

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

Planning, Development and Heritage

Monthly Management report January 2022

LAOIS DRAFT COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2021-2027

Consultation on the Proposed Material Amendments has ended. The Chief Executive Report has been completed. The plan was formally adopted by resolution of Council on the 25th of January 2022 and will come into effect in March 2022.

LOCAL AREA PLANS

Work on the 4 Local Area Plans will commence on the adoption of the County Development Plan at the end of January 2022. Two of the Plans, Graiguecullen and Portarlinton will be in the form of joint plans with Carlow County Council and Offaly County Council respectively.

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE

	<u>2020 PERFORMANCE</u>	<u>2021 PERFORMANCE</u>
Total No of Applications	722	930
Number of valid applications received:	571	742
Number of decisions made	530	692
Number of applications granted:	511	657 94.94%
Number of applications refused:	19 3.6% refusal rate	35 5.05% refusal rate
Invalid applications returned to applicant:	151 20.91%	188 20.21%
Applications appealed to An Bord Pleanála	15	15
No of Oneoff House Granted permission	152	174
No of houses with Urban Areas (Multiple Units granted)	440	553
No of applications with an EIAR submitted	5	4
No of applications with an NIS	14	17
No of pre planning meetings held to Year End	311	424

ENFORCEMENT UPDATE

<u>2021</u>	<u>2021</u>		<u>2020</u>	
	Dec	Jan - Dec 2021	Dec	Jan - Dec 2020
<u>Service Review</u>				
Total number of new cases subject to complaints that were investigated	8	143	5	94
Number of Warning Letters served	2	259	14	270
Number of Enforcement Notices served	5	67	0	63
No Of cases referred for legal proceedings	0	12	0	5

Number of cases in Court(incl adjournments)	5	65	8	46
Number of cases Resolved in Court	3	7	1	4
Number of Files Closed	5	137	9	129
Number of cases on system	179	179	165	165
Enforcement Costs recouped	€ 259.40	€12,660.30	€ 300.00	€5,941.93
Number of Valid Retention Applications Received relating to Enforcement Action	4	46	7	37
Fees received through Valid Retention Applications Received relating to Enforcement Action	€811.25	€36,687.17	€27,757.00	€59,644.48
Legal fees paid	€553.50	€38,587.62	€246.00	€7,447.65

PROTECTED STRUCTURE – MILLBROOK HOUSE

Millbrook House .. A Protected Structure

Laos County Council took ownership of Millbrook House, Abbeyleix, a protected structure, in 2021 following the confirmation of a Compulsory Purchase Order by An Bord Pleanala in May 2020.

The Council, via an agent, held a bid competition in 2021 on foot of which the most advantageous bidder was selected. The criteria for the award of the bid included price offer, timeline for completion of restoration works on the building and a statement of resources available to the bidder to complete the works in a diligent and expedient manner.

The panels below show the current condition of the endangered structure and a representation of what it may look like following refurbishment. Members will consider the disposal under Section 183 of the Local Government Act at its January 2022 monthly meeting.



HERITAGE

1. MRTTT Just Transition Project Conservation and Pollination

Communications: Film company Crannog Media has been appointed to record the project. Site meeting to be held this month.

Works: Work on the conservation plans is ongoing and they are due for publication in January. Grass cutting was carried out in Offaly, and ivy trimming will be carried out at Clopook and two Offaly sites before end Feb.

Specifications will be prepared for masonry conservation as soon as Conservation Plans are approved and we hope to go to tender for three sites this year.

2. Laois Heritage Plan Projects

Heritage Council funded projects for 2021 were completed successfully and all funds recouped. An application for 2022 funding is available from the Heritage Council (an increase of €6,000 on 2021).

3. National Biodiversity Action Plan

Wetland Survey Phase I desk survey is complete by Wetland Surveys Ireland and draft report has been submitted. Work on Phase II Field Survey will commence shortly. Total 2022 budget €27,000, grant aid €22,950.

The “In your Nature” Podcast in partnership with BirdWatch Ireland will be supported again in 2022. Total 2022 budget €5,000, grant aid.

4. Conservation of Churches and Graveyards in 2022

There are two churches on the list for conservation in 2022: Ballylinan and Clonkeen. The Heritage Officer plans to commission a design teams to carry out condition reports and specifications for these sites this year, with a view to applying to the Community Monuments Fund for funding.

A site management plan to benefit pollinators of the **Ridge Graveyard** is being prepared by an Ecologist. Woodfield landscaping will be carrying out landscaping work including removal of vegetation. This work will be done in January. A plan for future management (and a budget) will need to be agreed with the MD.

5. Community Monuments Fund

Community Monuments Fund for conservation of **archaeological** sites is open for applications, public closing date **17th February 2022** to Laois County Council.

6. Creative Ireland

6.1. Heritage and Landscape Training “Know your Locality”

Online training course in local heritage (with Creative Ireland funding) will be held again in early 2022, details to be finalised.

6.2. Laois Festival of flight

Plan to submit funding request to Creative Ireland for part funding of the Laois Festival of Flight.

7. Community Action Projects

Heritage Council Community Heritage Grants have been advertised with closing date set at 16th February. Full details at <https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/funding/community-heritage-grant-scheme-2022>.

8. Town and Village Renewal and Regeneration Projects

8.1. Timahoe TVRS

Lotts Architecture are working on specifications and hope to get final approval and go to tender for works by Feb. Works due to be complete by June 2022.

8.2. Stradbally TVRS

Design team for Stradbally Bridge element of the TVRS has been appointed. Meetings have been held with the community on other elements of the project and discussions with Community Section are ongoing.

9. Commemorations

Decade of Centenaries

The Heritage Officer continues to work with the County Librarian on the Decade of Commemorations, including plans for commemoration of the centenary of the Air Corps and Col Fitzmaurice in 2022.

10. Conservation Grants

Applications for the **Built Heritage Investment Scheme** and **Historic Structures Fund** for 2022 have opened already and details are on the Laois.ie website, closing date **31st January 2022**.

BROADBAND

1. National Broadband Ireland (NBI)

Section 254 Licences have been applied for in the Eastern Municipal Area to provide pole network for rollout. NBI are currently working on the Programme of works for rollout in the county. NBI are engaging with LCC in relation to above and in relation to hedge cutting.

2. WIFI 4 EU.

WiFi4EU is a project developed by the European Union that intends to bring free WiFi to local communities.

The aim of WiFi4EU initiative is to bring high-quality WiFi access to places where it is not yet available but would provide value for the community and visitors to the County.

The rollout of the provision of WIFI infrastructure in public places has commenced (equipment, installation and maintenance and support) in the following locations : Portlaoise, Portarlinton, Abbeyleix, Mountmellick as follows :

- Fit out is currently under way in Portarlington and Portlaoise in various building along the Main Street and the Link Road;
- Consultation is under way with property owners in Abbeyleix .
- Survey and Consultation to commence on Mountmellick.

This project is being delivered by “Network and Infrastructure Support Ltd.” On behalf of Laois County Council. The Broadband Officer is available for any queries in relation to this project.

3. Broadband Connection Points (BCP's)

As part of the roll out of the National Broadband Plan, Laois County Council launched **Broadband Connection Points (BCPs)** in 4 areas in rural Laois.

1. Vicarstown Community Centre
2. Emo “Old School” Community Centre
3. Oisin House Rossmore, Killeshin
4. Donaghmore workhouse and Agricultural Museum

An additional two have been added with Shanganamore Community Centre Barrowhouse live in January 2022, and Ballyroan Community Centre going live by end of Q2 2022.

Under the TVRS in 2021, these Broadband Connection Points (or BCPs) were supported by the Dept of Rural Development with additional furniture, safety equipment etc to ensure the locations were compliant with Public Health Guidelines and available for the general public to use.

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.

Local Enterprise & Economic Development

LEO Laois supports in 2021 were as follows:

- €405,582 approved in grant aid to 18 Laois businesses
- 1,159 owners/managers/employees participated on LEO training programmes
- 185 potential entrepreneurs have participated on Start Your Own Business Courses
- 324 participants have availed of mentoring to-date in finance, marketing, exporting, HR & health & safety
- 70 Trading Online Voucher approvals to the value of €153,747
- 17 Laois Companies took part in the Green for Micro Programme
- 27 Laois companies took part in the Client Stimulus Programme
- 10 Laois companies took part in the LEAN Programme
- Employment Survey Results 2021:
Gross Jobs (FT + OT) - 689
Net Jobs Created – 47

Business Support Unit:

- Portlaoise Façade Enhancement Scheme: 13 applications received
- Portarlington Façade Enhancement Scheme: 47 applications received
- Town & Village Streetscape Enhancement Scheme 2021: 65 applications received
- Shop front grant : 30 applications received
- Business Incentive Scheme : 2 applications received

Portlaoise Innovation Centre (The Cube)

- The Cube has recruited a number of key partners that allow for the delivery of world class training, education and knowledge dissemination. These include Trinity College, Chris Mee Group, EIT Climate KIC, Global Strategic Sustainable Leadership PVT, Irish Institute of Training and Development and The Irish Times Training Group
- A core finding in our initial outreach was that businesses needed more than education on Low Carbon; they, also, needed the tools and capability to act on this knowledge. The centre has on-boarded best in class consultants to assist midlands business. These include SEAI, Carbon Action, The International Energy Research Centre, Tyndall- UCC, Trinity Tangent, Walton Institute - WIT, Community Power, Irish Bio Economy Foundation, and 3CEA among others.
- The Cube has developed considerable capability in the advisory/development of innovation in the area of sustainability for both SMEs and Start-up organisations. To date, this includes early-stage start-up and Ideation through DBIC and EI partner accelerators and workshops. The Cube offers a "one stop shop" solution for integrated energy advice, capacity and auditing through its partnership with H2020 Speedier. The Cube has secured the Irish Licence for Innoloft which will allow midlands-based business access to an international eco system of customers and business development.
- Business funding: Provision of support in the confidential fundraising of projects from a network of investors and Debt solution providers. This capability extends from early-stage seed investment to larger capital requirements. Corporate funding partners include - Baker Tilly, DBIC Ventures, BVP, HBAN and Bank of Ireland.
- The Cube can provide a turnkey Solar As a Service Energy System that can pay for itself. This solution can be tailored to a Pay As You Save Solar package to meet your individual needs.

Midlands Just Transition Fund.

Network of Co Working Facilities (MRTT81)

Members are advised that following funding approval by the Department of Rural and Community Development Mr Michael Newham, has been appointed to the role of Business Development Manager by Laois County Council on behalf of the four midland counties. Mr Newham's role is to promote and support the development and collaboration of the network of co working hubs , approx. 26, that have to date been established in the midlands area and to lead the development of remote working in the midlands region.

Digital Roadmap ... Destination Midlands (MRTT8o)

Members are advised that Mr. Emmet Kavanagh has been appointed to the role of Communications Manager by Laois County Council on behalf of the four midland counties. Mr. Kavanagh's role is to promote and market the midlands region to a wide audience as a destination of choice in which to live, work and study .

RATE WAIVER: Quarter 1 of 2022

On the 14th December 2021, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage confirmed a further rates waiver for the first quarter of 2022. This waiver applies to businesses in the hospitality, leisure, entertainment and tourism related sectors. It is estimated that the Waiver amount will be in the region of €420,000. The waivers will be applied to accounts over the next few weeks.

Roads, Transportation & Smarter Travel

TII Funding;

TII funding allocation has been received for National roads within the county in the following amounts;

- National Road Maintenance - €474,157
- National Road Improvement - €4,935,000
- Total Allocation - €5,409,157

TII Funded Projects

Whilst the majority of TII funded works under the 2021 Roadworks Scheme are complete there are a number of specific National Road Schemes being progressed, as follows;

- **N77 Abbyleix Road Rehabilitation & Enhancement Scheme;**
 - o Preliminary designs have been completed for this project and it is currently on Part 8 public consultation, with a closing date for submissions of 10th February 2022

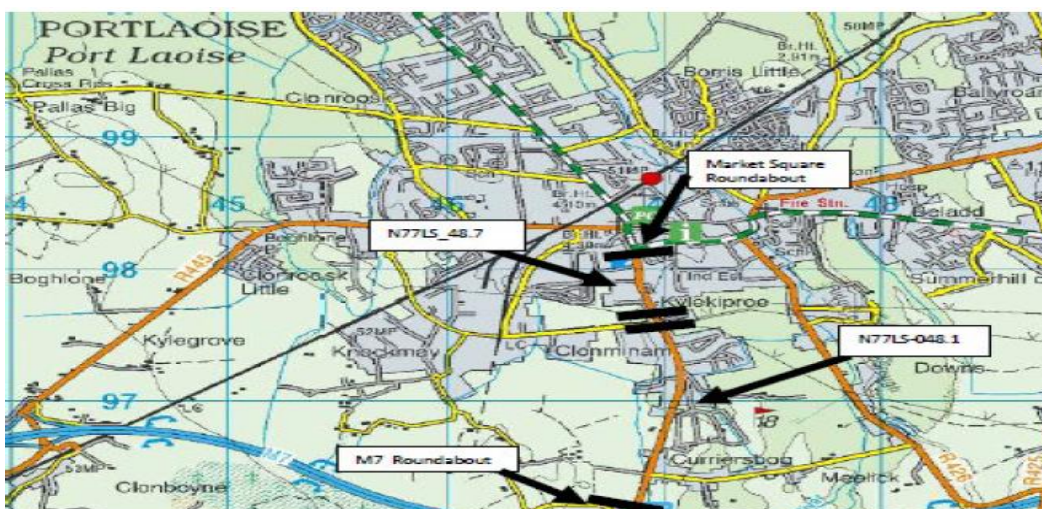


Figure 1.1 Scheme Extents

- **Pavement Renewal;**
 - o There are a number of projects awarded funding in this category, as follows;
 - N80 Kyletalesha to Mountmellick
- **HD 15 & HD 17 Safety Schemes;**
 - o **Fencing Retrofit**
 - o **Deer Pilot Study, Abbeyleix**

National Transport Authority (NTA) Funded Projects

NTA funding allocation has been received for County Laois in the overall sum of €3million. Some of the Schemes are carried forward from 2021 and funded from previous NTA allocations. Additional funds, over and above 2021 allocations, include funds for dedicated resources now allocated towards oversight and delivery of NTA funded projects.

River Drainage Maintenance

Various, county-wide surveys are now ongoing to inform and underpin river drainage maintenance works later in 2022.

Environment & Environmental Protection

1. Kyletelesha Landfill, Transfer Station and Civic Amenity Site, Portlaoise:

Normal services continue at the Kyletelesha Landfill Facility. A Waste Licence Alteration application has been submitted to the EPA for the continued acceptance of C&D waste materials. Landfill monitoring and aftercare maintenance on-going.

2. Portarlinton Civic Amenity Site:

This facility is operated and managed under contract with Bord Na Mona Recycling.

3. Historic Unregulated Waste Disposal Sites:

The Environmental Site Assessments for the 3 unregulated waste disposal sites (Aghanure, Killabban & Rathdowney Road, Durrow) are completed. The final grant claim forms are with the Department and payment of the claim will be made in January 2022. Further applications for funding from the Department are being prepared for other registered historic unregulated waste disposal sites.

4. Bring Banks:

A total of 1,877.09 tonnes of collected recyclable material was collected in 2021.

5. Waste Enforcement & Litter Management:

(a) Waste Enforcement

Table 1 below details the number and types of complaints received in 2021 by the Environment Section.

Complaint Type	Litter	Abandoned Cars	Waste Enforcement incl. C&D	Management & Infrastructure (Bring Banks)	Air	Water	Noise	Vet	Total
Total	184	35	680	11	56	67	32	25	1,090

Table 1 - Environmental Complaint Register

- 2021 – 1,090 complaints logged for investigation in 2021.
- 2021 – 79 fixed penalty notices issued in 2021, for breaches of Litter Pollution Act, 1997 and five cases were submitted for legal proceedings.
- Notices – Two Section 9 notices under the (Litter Pollution Act) and seven Section 55 Notices under the Waste Management Act were issued in 2021 regarding unauthorised litter or waste activities. Waste Enforcement Officers are working to resolve issues where possible, but all cases will be pursued through Courts as necessary.

Recent incident of illegal fly-tipping on back road between Mountmellick and Ballyfin. Waste removed by Council’s subcontractor. No evidence found.



6. Illegal Dumping:

Waste Enforcement continue to tackle illegal dumping in various problematic areas within the County in accordance with current legislation. Enforcement efforts are limited by virtue of the current prohibition on the use of CCTV etc.

Table 2 below shows quantities of illegally dumped waste collected in 2021



Illegal Dumping Cleanups – 2021					
Tonnes					
Month	Contractor	Litter Wardens	Month	Contractor	Litter Wardens
January	31.92	6.5	July	10.00	9.6
February	12.60	22.49	August	12.35	5.26
March	65.58	13.48	Sept	25.04	8.96
April	25.02	11.8	October	21.8	11.1
May	29.14	13.62	November	26.86	137.5
June	14.50	6.6	December	10.32	8.74
Total Collected			540.78 Tonnes		

Table 2 – Quantities of Illegally Dumped Waste Collected

Illegal Dumping Costs 2021	
Contractor	
Collection/Clean-up Costs	€41,990.96
Disposal Costs to Landfill	€26,511.33
Litter Wardens	
Disposal Costs to Landfill	€19,812.88
	€88,315.17

The Litter Warden labour costs are not included in this table.

Table 3 – Collection/Clean-Up & Disposal Costs

Update on the Enforcement of Waste Management Bye Laws,

Laois County Council's Waste Management (Storage, Presentation & Segregation of Household & Commercial Waste) Bye Laws 2018 came into force on 1st November 2018.

These Bye-Laws place obligations on waste producers in households and commercial premises regarding storage, presentation, segregation of waste, contamination prevention and demonstration of proof that their waste is disposed of by an approved waste operator or brought by the waste producer to an authorised waste facility. Door to door household waste inspections commenced in November 2018 and continued in 2019. The arrival of Covid 19 and lockdown restrictions periods, along with changes in staffing led to a slow down in inspections and enforcement. Two fixed penalty notices were issued in 2020. See table of enforcement / inspections to date.

Action under Waste Management Bye Laws 2018	2019	2020	2021
Letters and follow ups issued to no. of houses in 2019: Portarlinton, Portlaoise, Mountrath, Clonaslee, Mountmellick, Killenard. 2020: Portlaoise, Mountrath, Crettyard, The Swan, Ballylinan, 2021: Portlaoise, Portarlinton and Graiguecullen	1035	509	117
Door to door calls made to no. of houses	776	127	644
Sufficient evidence provided by households	668	442	49
Outstanding dwellings to be followed up	347	48	68

Ensuring compliance with the **Waste Management Bye Laws 2018** is a priority action for the Waste Environment team in 2022, who will target problems areas / estates.

Brown Bin Compliance

Under the EU Food Waste Regulations 2015, waste operators must provide and collect a food waste bin for all customers in agglomerations of over 500 people. The Regulations also places a duty on householders to segregate their food waste for collection. The Environment Section is in continuous communication with the authorised household waste collectors to promote and improve the roll out and operation of the brown bin service and Environment staff carry out household waste inspections around the county each year, issue advice letters and promote brown bins through various media channels.

Action under European Union (Household Food Waste and Bio-waste regulations) 2015	2019	2020	2021
Letters, notices, house checks and speaking to customers at Anti-Dumping events.	1,794 460	636 0	117 644
Brown Bin / food waste separation promotion on social media – audience reach, likes, comments etc.	19,161	155	402

7. **Anti-Dog Fouling Campaign**

- Laois County Council continue to provide support to local residents and Tidy Towns Groups with the provision of mutt mitt dispensers and bags at numerous popular walking locations around Laois.



- Social media messages continued throughout the Christmas period asking members of the public to do the right thing, by cleaning up after their dog.



8. **Environmental Protection:**

a) **Protect the Water Quality Status in all Water Bodies:**

On site investigations of complaints in relation to water pollution are being carried out by Environmental staff in compliance with Health and Safety and Covid-19 control measures.

- Investigation ongoing into surface water discharges to the lakes at Kilminchy.
- Investigation into unauthorised wastewater discharges in the Triogue River at Kyletalesha, Portlaoise
- On-going assessment of planning applications with regards to water quality protection
- Regulation of Discharge Licensed Companies.
- Several Advisory Notices under the Water Pollution Acts 2007 & 2012 have been served relating to wastewater treatment systems and continue to be enforced relating to domestic wastewater treatment systems and continue to be enforced.
- Implementation of Water Framework Directive
- On-going inspections being carried out on domestic wastewater treatment systems

b) **Air & Noise:**



In conjunction with the EPA, an NO₂ (Nitrogen Dioxide) monitoring survey is being carried out in the towns of Abbeyleix, Durrow and Cullahill to quantify prevailing air quality. Diffusion tubes were erected at 20 locations across the region on the 6th July and will be monitored for six months. The EPA will issue a final report in late February/early March 2022.

Advertisement for three steps to improve air quality, promoted through local press in December 2021

Burning of Agricultural Waste

Circular WP02.21 from the DECC notified Local Authorities of an extension of the exemption provided for under the Waste Management (Prohibition of Waste Disposal By Burning) (Amendments) Regulations 2020 (S.I. No 738 of 2020) as amended, to all farmers, as a last resort, to dispose of waste generated by agricultural practices. Circular WP02.21 extended this exemption until 1st January 2022.

Please note that the Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities (WERLA) WERLAs have been informed by The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communication (DECC) that this extension to the exemption does not extend beyond 1st January 2022 and will not be re-introduced. The DECC have informed us that The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) are evaluating alternative options for the farming sector and discussions are ongoing in this regard between DAFM and the Air Quality Unit in the DECC. The Dept. and WERLAS in turn will advise local authorities of any outcomes from those discussions. We will keep Members briefed on any further updates once to hand.

Emergency Planning, Fire Services & Flood Relief

In 2021 Laois County Fire & Rescue Service attended 616 emergency incidents consisting of 266 fires, 240 special service incidents & 110 false alarms.

Turnout by Station*:

Portlaoise – 245	Portarlinton - 120	Stradbally – 85	Mountmellick – 126
Abbeyleix - 65	Mountrath – 75	Durrow – 68	Rathdowney – 51

*Note – figures are higher as many incidents are 2 station turnouts as per the PDA.

Fire Services Capital Programme

- Planning & design is continuing for the Mountmellick Fire Station upgrade, a, €150,000 project, which consists of a fire service drill tower & new concrete yard to the rear of the fire station. It has not been possible to obtain the services of an engineering consultant locally & therefore this appointment was advertised on E-Tenders. The tender process is now closed. 2 responses were received & following an assessment of the 2 responses, a Design Team has been appointed as consultants & PSDP for the upgrade work. Detailed design work is expected to commence in February 2022.

- In 2021 Elected Members were advised of an allocation of €140,000 for the acquisition of a new Water Tanker to support Fire Services operations in County Laois. The tanker chassis has been delivered to HPMP Fire, who are now in the process of building the body. Delays due to supply issues have resulted in the build being delayed and delivery has now been put back until Q1 2022.

Risk Based Management - Nearest Available Resource Project

- In accordance with the recently issued Circular Fire 01/2021, Laois County Council has established the Senior Project Group which has endorsed this project. The Working Technical Group has completed its work. New townland data sets have been completed & uploaded it to the STORM mobilising system in ERCC & has been tested operationally & the project is now live.

WATER SERVICES AND RURAL WATER

Public Water and Wastewater Capital

The following capital works have been approved by Irish Water:-

Durrow – Further progress was made in Durrow with the bringing into service of a borewell at Fermoy WTP. Provision of a storage/blend tank and booster pump set also being discussed with Irish Water.

Portlaoise Water Supply Improvement Scheme - borewell PW09 at Coolbanagher has been developed and is currently on standby to be used as required. Irish Water now progressing with developing well PW07 and well PW08.

Disinfection/PH control programme – Civil works progressing in Derryguile, Kyle, Five Wells and Lough WTP. MEICA works progressed at Knocks, Derryguile, Lough and Ballyroan WTP. Site works are also in progress at Five Wells WTP with upgrade works progressing at Derrymoyle and Kilminchy WTP early in 2022.

Containerised unit program – UV containerised unit along with break tank installed on site at Aughfeerish WTP with the commissioning/testing/process proving completed. Disinfection upgrade works also completed.

Castletown WwTP-Inlet Works Storm and Sludge Programme: a new storm tank is to be installed on site by the end of 2022.

Networks and Water Conservation.

Water Network Improvement and upgrade works completed in Portlaoise, Portarlinton and Mountmellick. First fix, find and fix and lead replacement works continue throughout the county. Significant progress in Portarlinton in the area of leakage management. Ongoing projects in Portlaoise, Portarlinton, Stradbally, Rathdowney, Durrow and Abbeyleix, including mains rehab and back yard services, funded by Irish Water funded via a Stimulus Package during 2021, have been completed.

Funding approved for replacement of 900m of watermain in the Swan network with works to start in February 2022.

Taking in Charge

Continue working with IW to take the 22 no. outstanding legacy estates in charge by IW - already taken in charge by LCC.

Multi Annual Rural Water Programme 2019-2021

The following projects have been carried out/completed:

Measure 2 -Public Health Compliance

- Raheenavannagh GWS
- The Heath GWS
- Derrynaseera GWS
- Barrowhouse GWS

Measure 3 - Enhancement and Water Conservation

- Derrynaseera GWS
- Ballacolla GWS
- Ballypickas GWS
- The Heath GWS
- Errill GWS
- Cullohill GWS

Measure 4 - New Group Water Schemes

- New GWS at Shanbo, Borris-in-Ossory
- Vicarstown GWS

Measure 5 - Transition of Existing Group Water Schemes to Irish Water

- The Rock GWS
- Moyadd GWS
- Kilbride
- Ullard
- Raheen

Measure 6 - Community Water and Wastewater Connections

- Contractor appointed for a Wastewater Community Connection at Goodwin Estate, Rosenallis with works to commence in Q1 2022.

In 2021 €465,703.67 was processed in respect of subsidy payments to Group Water Schemes.

Well Grants –41 applications were received in 2021 with €174,189.93 paid.

Laboratory - In accordance with the EPA approved 2021 programmes, as an essential service Lab staff continued to conduct testing and sampling throughout 2021 in accordance with Covid-19 safe systems of work plans/risk assessments. The sample throughput increased from 3,529 in 2020 to 4,076 in 2021. During 2020-2021 there was a capital investment of € 157,000 in instrumentation. Work to maintain the existing customer base and seek and secure new business from neighbouring Local Authorities, LAWPRO and LCC's Environment Section in accordance with market opportunities is ongoing.

CORPORATE AFFAIRS

The 2022/2023 Register of Electors which comes into force on the 15th February will be published on the 1st February and will be distributed in the usual manner.

Plans are also underway by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage for the modernisation of the Electoral Register. The modernisation includes the introduction of a rolling register and a centralised database from which the electoral register will continue to be managed by individual local authorities for their own area. The Electoral Reform Bill is at an advanced stage of drafting and is proposed to be published in 2022.

COMMUNITY

Laois Public Participation Network

At the end of 2021, 634 registered groups were registered with Laois PPN. Laois PPN welcomed 54 new member groups in 2021. Laois PPN held 3 Municipal District Plenaries and a second County Plenary online in December. All plenaries were well attended.

The PPN Annual Report for 2020 was circulated by DRCD in December. This report highlights the work and achievements of PPNs nationally. The integral role of Laois PPN to the Covid 19 response in Laois with the creation of the interactive map – which was utilised by the Communny Call Helpline – was highlighted in the report. Also highlighted in relation to Laois PPN was the hosting of our first ever Social Inclusion week.

Laois Community and Voluntary Awards

The 2021 Community and Voluntary awards received a staggering 52 applications across 8 award categories. This year will see the launch of a new COVID-19 Community Response Awards in association of Laois Volunteer Centre. As a result of on-going COVID-19 restrictions the awards were somewhat delayed and are expected to be broadcast on Facebook by the end of January 2022.

Laois Comhairle na nÓg

2 members of Laois Comhairle na nÓg took part in TedX in Dun Laoghaire on the 19th of November 2021. The National Executive of Comhairle na nÓg have worked with government to get a new travel card for 19 – 23 year olds to avail of 50% off public transport. Funding was made available for a Strategic Plan 2022-2024 which has been prepared

Age Friendly

The Age Friendly programme engaged a company called Wool in School to deliver an intergenerational project called Knit Stitch. Knit Stitch was rolled out to Laois nursing homes in December and will continue into January. Knit Stitch is a beautifully designed knitting kit using Irish wool to encourage the passing down of skills while strengthening generational connections. This initiative brings young and older people together. This intergenerational project is an inclusive project designed to give older people the

opportunity to be creative and get involved with grandchildren / schools . The knitting kit is provided for both the nursing home resident and the child. 40 knitting kits were distributed through 8 nursing homes in Laois and feedback has been very positive to date.

Community Activities Fund

This funding scheme was announced by the Department on 11th November 2021, with an allocation to Laois LCDC of €273,048. Application process closed on the 7th January with 118 applications received, seeking funding in excess of €564,075. The CEP subcommittee will convene on the 7th February to appraise applications which will go forward to the February LCDC meeting for full approval.

Social Enterprise Capital Grant Scheme

Laois LCDC funded a further 4 projects amounting to €23,794 under the newly established Dormant Accounts Social Enterprise Capital Grant Scheme.

Disability Participation and Awareness Fund

Laois County Council were successful in their application for funding under the Disability Participation and Awareness Fund. €75,000 was granted under this fund for a suite of projects/initiatives including accessibility works at Portlaoise Leisure Centre, a sightless cinema initiative, social inclusion event delivered through Laois PPN and staff training.

Town and Village Revewal Scheme

All Town and Village Renewal Accelerated Measures project are now complete. In addition, TVRS projects at Durrow, Camross, Castletown and Ballinakill are now complete. We await announcement of the 2021 approved projects under this scheme.

Rural Regeneration Development Fund

Laois County Council were successful in their application under Category 2 of the Rural Regeneration Development Fund. €212,000 has been granted for development of the renovation of Borris in Ossory Courthouse project to reach the stage of being shovel ready. This project involves the renovation and re-use of the historic courthouse building as a remote working and community facility.

Town Centre First Initiative

Laois County Council were successful in their application for funding under the Town Centre First Initiative Scheme. €100,000 has been awarded to Laois County Council to develop a masterplan for Rathdowney. The aim of the fund is to tackle dereliction and revitalise town centres.

CLIMATE ACTION

Sustainable Energy Communities

Portlaoise 2040 SEC and Durrow SEC have applied for Energy Master Plan to SEAI. Portarlinton Business Association have received approval and are progressing to tender stage.

Climate Literacy Course

An 8 module Climate Literacy Course for Transition Year pupils has been rolled out in five Secondary Schools across the County. This action based learning course includes a teacher

training element to enable teachers to incorporate sustainability modules into mainstream subjects.

Midland Energy Agency

Roscommon County Council have joined the Midland Energy Agency.(MEA) The MEA now aligns with the Climate Action Regional Office Midlands Regional Group.

SPORT & LEISURE UPDATE

Leisure Centres

Works at Portlaoise Leisure Centre have progressed considerably (cost incurred to date by Laois County Council is €330,000) and the facility will open to the public by 28th February 2022. Tenders are being prepared for accessibility improvements at Portlaoise LC as a result of disability funding recently awarded to Laois County Council. The board of Portlaoise Leisure Centre have agreed to rename the company to Laois Leisure CLG and an application for a change of name has been submitted to CRO's office. The board having advertised for directors from the greater Portlaoise area, have selected 3 new directors who join the board in January 2022. Training of the board will commence in February in addition to the development of Strategic/Business Plans and company policy documents

Playgrounds Developments

Ballinakill playground installation works are completed subject to post installation inspection. The site will remain closed for access until March 2022 to allow the site to settle and dry.

Annual maintenance works are continuing in all playgrounds.

Healthy Ireland – Creating Playful Spaces

The tender for a Landscape Architect has been awarded in Dec 2021, to work with 3 social housing areas to develop plans for their green spaces – Oak Glen-Stradbally, Bruach/Cois na hAbhann- Portlaoise and Old Forge Crescent - Mountrath. The consultation phase with residents has commenced with the assistance of Housing and Laois Partnership staff. The designs will be completed in March and assistance will be provided to the residents to access funding to realise their plans over a 1-3-year period.

ORIS 2020

The installation of play trail, amenity area and accessible fishing stands along the canal bank in Vicarstown by SVT Activity and Wellness Hub, funded under ORIS 2020 was completed in early January 2022 subject to final inspection. These amenities are a wonderful addition to the Barrow Blueway.

ARTS & CULTURE

Laois Arthouse & Gallery

On Dec 4th 2021, the Laois Arthouse launched its 10th anniversary celebrations with an exhibition 'In Trust. In Gratitude. In Hope - with 60 artists responding to a specially commissioned poem 'The Window Seat' by poet Pat Boran. A specially commissioned catalogue was also published and is now available for sale.

Arts Awards and Opportunities

Advertisements have been placed for 2022 Arts Act Grants, the Tyrone Guthrie Centre Bursary, Artists in Schools Scheme and expression of interest for Laois Culture Night 2022. Closing date 24th February 2022.

Local Live Performance Scheme Phase 2 completed in December 21st last and included a diverse range of live events in multiple outdoor and indoor settings across the County, enlivening community events, markets, and offering intimate concerts in our Arts Centres. Performing artists were encouraged to develop and perform work that was again recorded, giving the performers an important promotional tool to utilise when restrictions were eased once again. In addition to these events Music Generation Laois produced a fantastic programme of events throughout the county, including a major outdoor event to premier new music by Martin Tourish and the Music Generation Laois, Trad Orchestra.

Local Live Performance Phase 3

Laois County Council will participate in the third Phase of this scheme, with a further €143,000 available to support employment and wellbeing in the commercial arts and culture sectors to include musical society and pantomime projects, through the provision of live performances for the period up to June 2022. Advertisements and call outs have been circulated.

Creative Ireland Laois

Winners of the inaugural Cruinniú na nÓg 'Laois Series: Sense of Place' Art Competition were announced with the launch of the winning artworks as a series of A5 postcards at Dunamase Arts Centre on Dec 15th 2021. The competition had five age categories up to 18 years, with one winner selected from each category.

On Jan 5th 2022 'Made in Laois' grant scheme recipient and poet Laura Murphy launched an online video poem 'In Laois I Fly Free' inspired by the history, mythology and beauty of Laois, filmed at the Rock of Dunamase, Slieve Bloom Mountains, Oughaval Woods and Portlaoise.

In the Open / Faoin Spéir

The *In the Open / Faoin Spéir*, programme produced by the Dunamase Arts Centre in conjunction with the newly formed Port Art Collective, in collaboration with the Arts Office and Music Generation Laois, resulted in a host of outdoor events for all the family - street theatre performances, world music, art exhibitions and workshops- at Portarlington Market Square on Sunday 12th December last. Activities included:

- Art installations and displays by Ella de Burca and Rebecca Deegan,
- displays of large-scale images from the Press Photographers Association of Ireland award winners
- stilt walkers, unicyclists and the CelticCon - Midland Comic Convention.
- A Circus Street Show as well as a packed programme from Music Generation Laois Bandwagon that culminated with a Fire Circus Show with Maria Corcoran and the Fireflies and
- a projection of a looped film *Childrens Luminaries* developed by artist Caroline Conway with children from St Patricks BNS primary school.

Rathdowney Library

Rathdowney Library has reopened to the public on the 21st January 2022 following the roof repair and upgrading works which were grant aided by the Department of Rural and Community Affairs .

Online Events and Programmes

- **Empowering and Protecting Children Online with Cybersafe Kids – A Comprehensive Overview for Parents and Carers of Kids Aged 8-13** Webinar – was held on Tuesday 25th of January With Internet Safety Day approaching, Cybersafe Kids held an information session on empowering and protecting children online.
- **Digital Wellbeing and Online Safety for Young People with Cybersafe Kids – A Comprehensive Overview for Parents and Carers of Teenagers**
Webinar - Tuesday, 1st of February at 7.00pm
The talk will provide information and guidance on platforms teenagers are using, digital literacy and wellbeing, and the inherent risks of being online: oversharing and privacy, cyberbullying, sexting, grooming and digital footprint. This webinar is free, but places are limited, so booking is essential.
Contact **Portlaoise Library** on 057 86 22333 or portlaoiselibrary@laoiscoco.ie to book your place
- Free Online Spanish Classes continue each Saturday via Zoom
- Mountmellick library online “Short Story book club” continues weekly by Zoom
- The Gallery @ **Abbeyleix Library** is hosting an exhibition by KATE|ART which is a collection of acrylics on canvas board of Dairy cows. This collection has been beautifully put together by artist Catherine Holohan from Johnstown, Kilkenny. Catherine is a self-taught artist and she has drawn her inspiration from working on her own farm. The collection shows the different personalities and humours of the animals. A beautiful collection full of joy and colour.



Portlaoise library -Our library of Sanctuary



Portlaoise Library was named as the first public library of Sanctuary in March 2020. The library engages regularly with Laois Integration Network to celebrate our diverse community. the library service has been featuring a series on Facebook interviews with members of the international community in Laois as they speak about their home countries in Ireland .

Pictured above staff member Margaret presenting Rami with an information pack which was organized as part of a liaison between Respond, the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Programmes and Laois Library Services .

Chief Executive's Orders

- 📅 A schedule of Chief Executive Orders signed during the month of December 2021/January 2022 will be circulated.

John Mulholland
Chief Executive

January 26th 2022