

LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE LAOISE



**MONTHLY MANAGEMENT REPORT
FEBRUARY 2023
TUARASCÁIL BHAINISTÍOCHTA
FEABHRA 2023**

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 February 2023 is as follows:-

FINANCE & ALLOCATIONS NOTIFIED

The Annual Financial Statement for 2022 is currently being prepared and will be finalised in March 2023. A report for the year end 31/12/2022 will then be made available

Allocations Notified

Department of the Environment, Climate & Communications – Waste Enforcement Measures Grant Scheme	€137,370
Department of the Environment, Climate & Communications – Landfill Remediation Works 2023	€41,900
Local Improvement Schemes	€304,736
Non-National Roads Grants	€13,586,290
T.I.I. Roads Grants	€5,274,158
L.E.O. Operational Grants	€1,006,841
N.T.A. Active Travel Grants	€3,300,000

HOUSING & REGENERATION

SOCIAL HOUSING DELIVERY

Annual Social Housing Delivery Targets under Housing for All

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

Annual Social Housing Delivery Targets under Laois County Council Housing Delivery Action Plan

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

*Total figure of 925 units published in HDAP includes 25 proposed LA Buy and Renew units. These units are not counted f social housing delivery figures.

No of Social Houses constructed in 2022	216 – (4 no. 4 bed, 131 no. 3 bed and 81 no. 2 bed)
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Social Housing Schemes Under Construction

Location	Total No. of Houses	House Types	Constructed by	Comment
Harbour Court, Mountmellick	6	6 No. 2 Bed bungalows	LCC (Construction)	On Site – expected delivery Q2 2023
Moore St, Rathdowney	6	6 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Construction)	On site – expected delivery Q4 2023
Mooreville, Rathdowney	7	3 No. 2 Bed bungalow 4 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Construction)	On site – expected delivery Q4 2023
St. Kieran's Errill	14	6 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey 8 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey	LCC (Construction)	On site – expected delivery Q4 2023
Church Avenue, Stradbally	31	9 No. 4 Bed 2 Storey 20 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 2 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey	LCC (Turnkey)	On site – delivery Q3/Q4 2023
Market Square, Portarlington	18	15 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey 2 No. 2 Bed Apts 1 No. 3 Bed Apt	LCC (Turnkey)	On site – delivery Q2 2023
Bruach Na Habhainn, Killeen	1	1 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Turnkey)	On Site – Phase 1 (1 unit) delivery Q2 2023
The Orchard, Ballylynan (Phase 3)	1	1 No. 3-Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Turnkey)	On Site – Phase 3 (1 unit) delivery Q3 2023
Oak Park Halting Site	4	4 no. serviced bays	LCC	TAU funded scheme. Issues have arisen with discovery of an underground ESB cable on site. Estimated delivery date Q4 2023 but dependent on ESB addressing issue as a matter of urgency.
Ballymorris Green, Portarlington (Ph 1)	34	34 no. 3 bed 2 storey houses	Cluid Housing	Due for delivery Q1 2023
Harpurs Lane, Portlaoise	44	20 no. 2 bed houses 16 no. 3 bed houses 4 no. 1 bed apt 4 no. 2 bed apt	Respond	On site – expected delivery Q2 2023
Ballymorris Green, Portarlington (Ph 2)	12	12 no. 3 bed houses	Cluid Housing	Currently on site – Last phase of scheme – advised that these units will be delivered in early 2024.
Clonrooske Abbey, Portlaoise	18	18 no. 3 bed 2 storey	Cluid Housing	Advised by Cluid Housing that all 18 units will be delivered in Q2 2023.
Goldencroft, Portlaoise (Old CBS site)	67	13 no. 2 bed apts 24 no. 3 bed houses 26 no. 2 bed houses 4 no. 2 bed bungalow	Cluid Housing	3 Phases – on site. Advised that Phases 1 and 2 will be delivered together in Q2 2023 Phase 3 to be delivered by Q4 2023.
South Dublin Road, Kilminchy	36	13 no. 2 bed houses 23 no 3 bed houses	Cooperative Housing	On site – 3 phases for delivery commencing Q2 2023.

The Meadows (old Midland Dairies site), Portlaoise	48	19 no. 3 bed houses 9 no. 4 bed houses 20 no. 2 bed apts	Cluid Housing	Currently on site – expected delivery Q3 2023
TOTAL	347			

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

Location/Scheme	No of Houses	House Types	To be constructed by	Comment
Carraig Glas, Stradbally	26	15 no. 2 bed houses 9 no. 3 bed houses 2 no 4 bed houses	LCC (Construction)	Currently out to tender for construction – due back Q1 2023
Clonrooske (Knockmay), Portlaoise	12	8 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey 3 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 1 No. 3 Bed 1 Storey	LCC (Construction)	Part VIII approved. Stage 3 to be submitted in Q1 2023.
Iona, Portlaoise	7	2 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 1 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey 4 No. 1 Bed Apt	LCC (Construction)	Part VIII advertised Jan 2023
Doonane	12	12 no. 3 bed 2 storey	LCC (Construction)	Stage 2 approved. Part VIII being progressed in Q1 2023
Derry Road, Durrow	22	9 No. 1 Bed 1 Storey 4 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey 5 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Construction)	18 dwellings and a minimum of 4 serviced sites proposed Stage 1 Approved
Ballyadams	1	1 no. 6 bed bungalow	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 Approved – Design Team appointed; Stage 2 submitted
Stradbally Road, Portlaoise	80		Mixed Tenure	Design Team Appointed
Bracklone St, Portarlinton	15	15 no. 2 bed houses	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 approved in Q3 2022
Rushall Mountrath	2	2 no. 3 bed 2 storey	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 To Be Submitted in Q1 2023
Maryborough School, Stradbally Road, Portlaoise	11	2 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey 7 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey 2 No. 1 Bed 1 Storey	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 To Be Submitted in Q1 2023
Main St, Ballinakill	3	2 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey 1 No. 1 Bed Apt	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 To Be Submitted in Q1 2023
Moanbaun, Mountrath	15	4 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 7 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey 4 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 approved
1 New Road, Portlaoise	1	1 No. 4 Bed 1 Storey	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 approved
6 Emmett Terrace, Mountmellick	1	1 No. 4 Bed 1 Storey	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 approved
13 and 14 Lakeglen, Portlaoise	2	1 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 1 No. 4 Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Construction)	Rebuild currently at design stage, yet to be approved by the Dept.
Oldcourt, Ballylinan	1	1 No. 4 bed 1 storey	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 approved
Townparks, Rathdowney Rd, Borris-in-Ossory	26	4 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 12 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey 10 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey	LCC Turnkey	Application approved Jan 2023. Expected delivery Q4 2024

Convent Lands, Portlaoise (CAS)	52	33 no 2 bed apts 15 no 1 bed apts 4 no. 2 bed houses	Sophia Housing	Stage 3 application approved; Construction tender to be issued by end Feb 2023.
County Hotel, Portlaoise (CAS)	10	8 no. 1 bed apts 2 no. 2 bed apts	Cluid Housing	Propping up works complete – surveys ongoing to inform cost plan and progression to Part VIII
“Radharc Darach” Hepburn Court, Portlaoise	54	8 no. 2 bed bungalow 12 no. 2 bed 2 storey 34 no. 2 bed 2 storey	Cluid Housing	Part VIII approved; site transfer in progress. Construction imminent and phasing to be advised by Cluid.
Curragh na Mona, Abbeyleix Rd, Portlaoise	39	5 x 2 bed fully accessible apts 12 x 2 bed bungalows 6 x 3 bed house with downstairs bedroom 2 x 4 bed house with downstairs bedroom 2 x 2 bed apts – accessible (ground floor) apts 2 x 1 bed 1 st floor apts 4 x 3 bed 2 storey. 6 x 2 bed 1 st floor apts	Respond Housing	Respond has advised that they are currently re-tendering for this construction and awaiting the review of the CALF Funding model by the Dept of Housing which will dictate how this scheme is funded.
TOTAL	392			

AFFORDABLE HOUSING / COST RENTAL

Minimum targets for Laois issued by Dept of Housing in relation to the delivery of Affordable Purchase / Cost Rental housing by the local authority are as follows:

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	TOTAL
LA Affordable Purchase & Cost Rental Delivery Target	5	7	10	8	8	38

Discussions ongoing to progress potential affordable units as follows:

Affordable	Advance Turnkey Purchase arrangement – EOI received Potential No of unit yield	Part V – Potential No of Units Yield	LCC CONSTRUCTION Potential No of Units Yield
Affordable	53	8	5
Cost Rental	27		

- Design Team procured for the design of social and affordable housing on Council owned landbank on the Stradbally Road, Portlaoise. No of affordable units to be determined.

Call remains open for Expressions of Interest in respect of:

- Appropriately zoned land for housing development
- Advanced Turnkey Purchase arrangements for un-commenced residential developments in respect of social/affordable housing.

Workshop/seminar for elected and SPC members held on 20th February 2023.

REGENERATION / VACANT HOMES

Vacant Homes Office

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

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

Vacancy Surveys were carried out in Mountmellick and Mountrath in 2022. The following is the status at 31st January, 2023 of the surveyed properties:

	Mountmellick	Mountrath
No. of properties identified as potentially vacant at initial survey	95	69
No. of properties subsequently found to be occupied following further investigation	21	17
No. of properties requiring further investigation to confirm vacancy	15	25
No. of properties that have been sold or are for sale since the survey was carried out	11	2
No. of properties going through CPO/Repair & Leasing/ Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant process	7	4
No. of properties where correspondence has been issued to registered owners	12	14

Efforts are ongoing to contact the owners of residential properties identified as being vacant in the surveys. Where ownership cannot be established, we will continue to make local enquiries in relation to ownership, vacancy history, etc. and use the CPO process to acquire properties deemed to be suitable for social housing where all other means of returning the properties to use have been exhausted.

Vacancy / Regeneration Funding Schemes

- **Croí Conaithe (Towns) Fund Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant**
 - A grant of up to a maximum of €30,000, including VAT, available for the refurbishment of vacant properties for *occupation as a principal private residence*, including the conversion of a property which has not been used as residential heretofore. A top-up grant of up to €20,000 is also available for properties which are derelict.

Croí Conaithe (Towns) Applications at 31st January, 2023

No. of Applications received to 31 st January 2023	31
No. finally approved	5
No. Approved in principle	3
No. refused	0
No. withdrawn by Applicant	1
No. under consideration	22

- **Buy and Renew Scheme**
 - This scheme enables the local authority to recoup costs where we acquire a property that is need of major refurbishment, beyond the limits of our acquisition cost ceilings.
 - 2 properties received B&R Construct Stage 1 approval in 2022 – 1 New Road, Portlaoise and 6 Emmett Terrace, Mountmellick.

- **Repair and Leasing Scheme**

Applications received to date	45
Applications approved to proceed	10
Applications under consideration	4
No. of Leases commenced	1
Applications Refused	30*

*Applications refused as properties deemed to be unsuitable for the R&L Scheme due to:

- (a) their location in areas of low housing demand or;
- (b) the extent of works required exceeded the Scheme limit or;
- (c) works were commenced or almost complete before an application was submitted, which is not permitted under the R&L Scheme.

PRIVATE RENTED INSPECTIONS

Laois County Council is responsible, through inspection, for determining if a property meets the standards for rental accommodation in accordance with the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2019.

	Jan 2023
No of properties inspected	85
No of notices of works issued	79

The Housing Inspections team can be contacted via email at propertyinspections@laoiscoco.ie.

SERVICED SITES

Laois County Council is actively considering the development of **serviced sites** over the coming years at a number of locations in the county. In advance of finalising its plans, Laois County Council has opened a **survey** to establish the level of interest in serviced sites among prospective home buyers in the county and, in general, their preferred locations.

In the first instance, eligibility will be determined by criteria as set out under the **Croí Conaithe (Towns) Fund – Ready to Build Scheme (Serviced Sites for New Homes) Scheme**. Under the scheme, local authorities are supported to make serviced sites in towns and villages available to potential individual purchasers. These sites will be available at a discount on the market value of the site for the building of a property for occupation as the principal private residence of the purchaser. The level of discount to the individual will depend on the level of servicing cost incurred by the local authority before the sale of the site with discounts up to a maximum of €30,000. The amount of such discount will be reflected in the sale price of the site to the purchaser. The survey can be located on the links below:

<https://laois.ie/serviced-site-development-survey/>

<https://consult.laois.ie/en/content/serviced-site-development-survey>

The following locations are currently under consideration for serviced sites. Sites to be a minimum of 0.25 acres in size.

Location	No. of Sites	Comment
Doonane	2	Stage 1 approved as part of larger housing scheme Part VIII to be progressed in Q1 2023
Derry Road Durrow	4	Stage 1 approved as part of larger housing scheme Part VIII to be progressed in Q2 2023
Castletown	9	Proposal. Detailed design currently on-going
Ballacolla Road, Durrow	4	Proposal. Detailed design currently on-going.
Gleann na Glaise	4	Proposal. Detailed design currently ongoing.
TOTAL SITES UNDER CONSIDERATION	19	

HOUSING STOCK

Housing Re-Lets

2023

Month	LA Keys Surrendered	Properties Acquired	Works Completed
January 23	9	0	6
TOTAL (YTD)	9	0	6

NOTE: There are currently 27 vacant units from our existing stock and a further 10 units that the Council acquired. Works are either ongoing on these properties or specifications are being prepared for works to be carried out.

Housing Maintenance

2023

Month	Work Orders Raised	Work Orders Closed	Work Orders Open
January 23	504	332	172
TOTAL (YTD)	504	332	172

Midlands Retrofit Programme (Completed in 2022)

Address	Properties	Units Commenced	Units Completed	Update
Mountain View Sq., Portlaoise	24	24	24 houses complete	All Works complete.
Hillview Drive, Portlaoise	19	19	19 houses complete	All Works complete.
Quigley Pk, Rathdowney	20	20	20 houses complete	All Works complete.

Radharc Alainn, Arles	18	18	18 Houses complete.	All Works complete.
Derrymore, Portarlinton	26	26	26 houses complete	All Works complete.
Kirwan Park, Mountmellick	51	51	51 houses M&E complete	M&E, windows and doors complete
Total Properties	158	158	158 Units (fully complete)	

Energy Efficiency/Retrofitting Programme:

Address	Properties	Units Commenced	Units Completed	Update
O'Moore Place, Portlaoise	27	13	9	Construction Works has commenced on 13 houses. 9 houses with heating completed and external insulation works complete. Boxing of pipes to be completed. Works continuing on remaining houses.
Total Properties	27	13	9	

NOTE A: Laois County Council has been approved Department Retrofitting funding for 47 units at a total cost of €1,299,987. Surveys of these properties (listed below) commenced in Q3 2022 and tenders advertised in Q1 2023.

- 1) Thornberry, Abbeyleix – 16 units.
- 2) Church Avenue, Stradbally – 9 units.
- 3) Slieve Bloom Park, Clonaslee – 8 units.
- 4) St. John's Square, Portlaoise – 7 units.
- 5) Old School Road, Ballylynan – 7 units.

LCC has recently issued a tender for Energy Consultancy services for 2023 for a further 53 houses.

There will be a match funding requirement from the Council in the above regard, which will be determined when tender prices are returned.

NOTE B: The Housing Section are currently preparing their submission for the continued programme of retrofitting homes in 2023. We have been advised that funding will be made available for up to 65% of last year's programme and we have been provisionally approved funding with an average of €36,000/unit.

The following 53 units in the following estates are being considered in 2023:

- 1) St Brigids Place, Portlaoise – 26 units.
- 2) Fr O'Connor Crescent, Mountrath – 11 units.
- 3) Erkindale Drive, Durrow – 6 units.
- 4) Rossmore View, Graiguecullen – 10 units.

(NOTE: The above estates were prioritised based on property age and MD area.)

There will be a match funding requirement to complete all the retrofitting works which will depend on the tender prices returned. Once this proposal has been approved by the Dept, we will commence surveys of properties to inform the tender for works.

HOUSING NEED

Homeless Presentations

Time Period	Homeless Presentations	Breakdown of Household
1 st January – 31 st January 2023	24	20 single, 2 families and 2 couples

Homeless Accommodation

	Emergency Accommodation booked at 31 st January 2023	Social Housing allocated from homelessness to 31 st January 2023
Families	5	0
Single Persons	21	4
TOTAL	26	4

Social Housing List at 31st January 2023

TOTAL No of Social Housing Applicants on waiting list	1,750
Proportion of SH applicants availing of HAP supports	49%
Proportion of HAP tenants transferred from Rent Supplement	17%

RAS/Leasing Statistics at 31st January 2023

Active RAS tenancies	77
Active short-term leasing tenancies (Social Housing Leasing Scheme)	28
Active Repair & Leasing Scheme tenancies	1
Active long-term leasing tenancies with private landlords/investors	11
Active long-term Mortgage to Rent leasing tenancies with a private company	27

Applicants housed during the period 1st - 31st January 2023

Method of Delivery	No. housed 1 st January – 31 st January 2023
First allocation of New Build/Acquired unit	0
Relet / Refurbished Stock Allocation	6
Nominations to AHB housing from which a tenancy was created	1
Housed via leasing	0
TOTAL	7

LOANS AND GRANTS

Loans

Local Authority Home Loan (LAHL) at 31st January 2023

No of Loan Applications received since scheme commenced	66
No of Applications approved since scheme commenced	29
No of Applications refused since scheme commenced	21

Grants

Housing Adaptation Grants at 31st January 2023

Allocation €TBC

	No. of applications received to 31/1/2023	No. of applications paid by 31/01/2023	Value of applications paid by 31/01/2023	No. of applications currently at work stage	Value of applications currently at work stage
HOP	17	4	€11,200	50	€247,985
MAG	4	1	€1,300	7	€30,100
HGD	9	1	€5,000	23	€208,620
TOTAL	30	6	€17,500	80	€486,705

Disabled Persons Grant for Social Housing

DPG works at 31st January 2023:

Allocation 2023 (including LA funded portion)	€TBC
No of new applications received to 31/01/2023	3

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

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO REFUGEES FLEEING CONFLICT

Laois County Council continues to lead and coordinate the “Laois Ukrainian Community Response Forum”. The Forum, consisting of 23 member groups/agencies, convened its 13th meeting on Wednesday 15th February 2023. All response efforts are supported, as required, by An Garda Síochána, Dept of Social Protection, the HSE, Civil Defence, the Laois Partnership Company, LOETB, TUSLA and various local voluntary groups, and community organisations.

Most recent data indicates there are 873 displaced Ukrainian citizens in County Laois. Approximately 310 of these are in accommodation centres such as hotels, guesthouses and hostels around the county, with the remainder in privately sourced or pledged accommodation.

Laois County Council continues to assist the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS - under the auspices of Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, DCEDIY) with the temporary accommodation of Ukrainian arrivals to our county, as well as providing details nationally in relation to vacant buildings and sites suitable for medium to long term accommodation solutions.

A public engagement meeting was hosted by DCEDIY at Rathdowney Library on 9th February, in relation to the site in the town which has been deemed suitable for a 42 modular homes development. While some individual concerns were expressed there was an overall positive reaction to the project.

The Council continues to allocate privately pledged accommodation to Ukrainian families, both in shared settings with a host family, and in matching vacant properties offered under the 'Offer A Home' campaign which launched nationally last November. Almost 30 families have been provided with accommodation through these mechanisms to date.

In relation to the new **Community Recognition Fund** which was announced on 24th January 2023, the Community Department hosted a public information session for interested community groups at Dunamais Theatre on 9th February last. The deadline for submission of Expressions of Interest to the Community Department is **24th February 2023**.

PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT & HERITAGE

LOCAL AREA PLANS

Graiguecullen / Carlow Joint Urban Area Plan

The Draft Plan and associated SEA is currently being prepared. It is scheduled to go on public display in April 2023. The Draft Local Transport Plan is currently being prepared as well. The intention is that it two will go on public display in April 2023. A workshop for the Transport Plan was held on 25th January 2023. It was attended by AECOM consultants, elected members and officials from both local authorities. Various options were presented at the workshop.

Portlaoise LAP

Following pre-draft public consultation in November 2022-December 2023 a Chief Executives report on the issues raised is being prepared by the Forward Planning Team and will be circulated to the members of the Portlaoise MD in March.

Rathdowney Town Centre First Plan

A Town Team whose function is to deliver on the actions of the Town Centre First Plan has also been established. It comprises members of the local business and community sectors as well as elected members and council officials.

The first meeting of the Town Team is scheduled for 23rd February 2023. A draft version of the Town Centre First Plan will be made available by the end of February 2023 with the final version scheduled for completion by April 2023.

Aughnaharna Masterplan

A Steering Group has been established of stakeholders including Landowners and Council officials to prepare a Masterplan for lands at Augnaharna from the southern circular road to Rathleague. The masterplan will look at transport links for the lands taking account of current land uses and proposed land uses.

Residential Zoned Land Tax

Laos County Council prepared a draft map of the land considered to be in scope for the RZLT as of October 1, 2022. The Planning Authority has sought further information in respect of three parcels of land based on submissions received during the public consultation stage. It has also written to Irish Water for clarification in respect of two submissions in which the landowners are alleging that Irish Water services are deficient, thereby preventing development proceeding.

An evaluation of the submissions, including a determination as to whether or not the subject lands shall be retained in scope for the purposes of the RZLT, is required to be made by the Planning Authority **by not later than 1st April 2023**.

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

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE

EPlanning has been live since 11th November 2022 and has resulted in a shift by agents in the way they submit applications to the Planning Authority. The increase in the invalid number of applications is as a result of Eplanning and as the Planning Authority cannot seek Agents to fix minor issues over the counter but rather return the application as invalid.

Planning Applications		Year	Valid applications from 01/01/2022– 15/2/2022	Valid applications 01/01/2023– 15/2/2023
			54	51 (24 online applications)
Total Number of valid applications received:	51			
Number of decisions made	78			
Invalid applications returned to applicant	44 (invalid applications)			
Number of applications granted:	72 (Decisions to Grant)			
Number of applications refused:	6 (Decisions to Refuse) 7.7% refusal rate			
Files scanned up to	14/2/2023			
Referrals to Area Offices (working days):	within 14 days achieved			
No of appeals to ABP	2			
PRE PLANNING				
No of requests to date	28			
No of meetings held to date	10			

ENFORCEMENT UPDATE

Service Review	2023		2022	
	Jan		Jan	
Total number of new cases subject to complaints that were investigated	12		9	
Number of Warning Letters served	20		31	
Number of Enforcement Notices served	19		1	
No Of cases referred for legal proceedings	2		0	
Number of cases in Court(incl adjournments)	1		6	
Number of cases Resolved in Court	0		0	
Number of Files Closed	11		14	
Number of cases on system	144		174	
Enforcement Costs recouped	€ 20.00		€ 250.00	
Number of Valid Retention Applications Received relating to Enforcement Action	2		3	
Fees received through Valid Retention Applications Received relating to Enforcement Action	€1,459.43		€2,738.20	
Legal fees paid	€617.46		€352.40	

HERITAGE

Laois Heritage Plan Projects

Heritage Council funded projects for 2022 were completed successfully and all funds recouped.

An application for 2023 funding has been sought from the Heritage Council.

Community Monuments Fund

7 applications were made to the Dept under the community Monuments fund on 14th February 2023.

Community Mounuments fund
Dysart Enos Church - Stream 1
Kilbreedy Church - Stream 1
Baunaghra Church - Stream 1
Clonkeen Church – Stream 2
Ballyadden – Stream 2
Burial Ridge Portlaoise – Stream 2
Dysart Enos Church – Stream 3

Community Action Projects

The Heritage Council is now accepting applications from community groups and not for profit non-governmental organisations around the country for its [Community Heritage Grant Scheme 2023](#).

A total of €1.5m is available for this year's scheme. Applications are sought for projects aimed at improving access and inclusion to heritage sites, and that apply

good heritage practice to the management of places, collections, or objects (including buildings), with the maximum grant amount increased to €25,000 this year.

Funding is also available for groups who want to improve access to heritage for people with disabilities, as well as for projects which explore the heritage of minorities, including newly arrived immigrants, and the Traveller community.

The scheme also supports training events for traditional building skills, biodiversity, and archaeology, as well as the purchase of specialised equipment.

Conservation Grants

Applications for the **Built Heritage Investment Scheme** and **Historic Structures Fund** were forwarded to the Dept on February 10th 2023. Under the HSF scheme 3 submissions were made from private applicants and 1 from Laois County Council. 8 applications were made under the BHIS scheme. 7 applications were made to the Dept under the community Monuments fund.

	BHIS 2023
BHIS23/01	Newtown Mill Newtown House & Mill, Newtown, Durrow Co. Laois
BHIS23/02	Protrane House Stradbally Road Portlaoise
BHIS23/03	Preston House Boutique Ltd. Abbeyleix Co. Laois
BHIS/04	Thatched House Rathmakelly
BHIS/05	RIC Barracks Clonaslee
BHIS/06	Fisherman's Inn, Fisherstown
BHIS/07	Cuffsborough House, Ballacolla
BHIS/08	Former Goods Shed, Abbeyleix

	HSF 2023
Applicant	Property
LCC	Donaghmore
Thomas Cosby	Stradbally Hall
Frank Kennan	Roundwood House
Mary & Catherine Whelan	Dooary
Vicarstown old community Centre Committee	Vicarstown School

BROADBAND – DIGITAL PROJECTS

Broadband / Fibre Rollout.

(a) National Broadband Ireland (NBI)

Section 254 Licences have been applied for in all 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 Civils subducting, blockages, OH caballing, tree trimming and chamber building.

NBI are rolling out fibre in all MD areas of the county at present.

(b) Siro - Fibre Rollout.

Engaging with Siro in relation to Fibre rollout in the town of Portarlinton. This work is due to commence in March.

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 been completed (equipment, installation and maintenance and support) in the following location:

Portlaoise, Portarlinton, Stradbally, Abbeyleix, Ballinakill, Ballyroan, Mountmellick, Mountrath, Camross and Borris in Ossory as follows:

- Portlaoise town is completed in the Top Square, Main Street, Fitzmorris Place, Lyster Square and the Plaza at Co. Hall.
- Portarlinton town is completed on Main Street, part of the Peoples Park including the playing courts, the Swimming Pool Car Park, the Link Road area, the library both externally and internally.
- Stradbally is completed in Market Square, the Arthouse both internally and in the Courtyard.
- Abbeyleix is completed in the Market Square, part of the Main Street, the entrance to The Bog Walk, Fr. Byrne Park including the GAA grounds, Tennis Courts, Soccer Pitch and the Outdoor Gym area, Internal meeting room in the Complex and at the Parish Hall.
- Ballinakill is complete on the Main Square.
- Ballyroan is completed in the Old School.
- Mountmellick is completed in the Carpark of the MDA Complex, The Square, The CYMS Courtyard.
- Mountrath is completed in the Main Square.
- Camross is completed in Community Centre and Poets Cottage both internally and externally.
- Borris in Ossory is completed in the Community Centre both internally and externally.

This project was delivered by “Network and Infrastructure Support Ltd at a cost of €115,084.43.” On behalf of Laois County Council, NIS were successfully granted €60,000 from the EU on this project.

LCC funded the remainder € 55,084.43 which was recouped from DRCD.

Signage will be located in all of the above areas over the next few weeks.

Portlaoise WiFi4EU project was launched in June ‘22, and it is proposed to launch all other locations in Q1 of this year as well as ongoing advertisement.

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 6 areas in rural Laois.

1. Vicarstown Community Centre
2. Emo “Old School” Community Centre
3. Oisín House Rossmore, Killeslin
4. Donaghmore workhouse and Agricultural Museum
5. Shangnamore Community Centre Barrowhouse
6. Ballyroan Community Centre

New projects and available funding are being examined for the coming year. The Launch of all BCP’s was deferred in 2022 and Minister Heather Humphreys is to reschedule her visit.

Vex Robotics.

Vex Robotics Programme has been secured for Laois schools.

We have rolled out in 2 schools to date. *Scoil Eoin Phóil II Naofa Ballyroan* and *Shanganamore, Barrowhouse*. Both schools have rolled it out to their 6th class student.

A workshop event has taken place in both school showing children how to build and operate Robots, with both schools putting in as much of their own time now to develop the project.

The students will build their own Robot and develop the game using the Scratch programme.

All the equipment for the board game and the Robot has been supplied by funding secured from DRCD.

It will be rolled out to 2 further schools in March and hopefully to more in the future.

Future Projects.

(a) Computer Science in Secondary schools.

Computer Science training for Secondary School teachers has commenced with 2 modules been offered in this school year to May '23 with 4 remaining modules to be rolled out in the school year Sept '23 to May '24. This will allow schools to offer Computer Science to Leaving Cert students in the future.

3 Laois schools have signed up to the 1st rollout. It is hoped to get more on board for future rollouts.

This is an initiative been piloted by Laois Co.Co., Offaly Co.Co., LOETB and ATU Donegal.

(b) STEM in Primary and Secondary Schools.

Midland ICT skills has been set up within the Midland region of County Councils through the BBO's – Laois , Offaly , Longford and Westmeath in association with Ericsson Athlone. (It is hoped to get other stakeholders involved in the future).

The proposal is to engage with schools primary and secondary schools to introduce and rollout STEM projects.

Ericsson have built training programmes to suit both primary and secondary schools to train teachers and students in topics such as Scratch, Microbit and Building Websites which will be rollout to 6 schools here in Laois initially before the end of this school year. It will be further rolled out in September '23 to more schools.

Consultations ongoing at present re the following:

- CEF – 2 Traffic Corridors and Smart Communities Project.
- Engaging with PPN re programmes / courses that could be facilitated in our BCP's.
- Providing WIFI4EU in Rathdowney.
- IoT and Smart Projects.

Digital Strategy Review

Digital Strategy is under review with a programme of proposals to be outlined for 2023.

All the above pillars 1 – 5 are included in the LDS.

LOCAL ENTERPRISE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Local Enterprise Office

- €99,950 approved in grant aid to 3 businesses with potential to create 8 new jobs.
- 7 Trading online voucher applications received with 1 approved to the value of €2,400
- 38 Laois businesses availed of 1-1 mentoring
- 5 training courses were delivered to 57 participants
- 3 companies are participating in the Lean for Micro Programme.
- 4 companies are participating in the Green for Micro programme.
- 2 Laois companies were assisted to access Micro Finance Ireland loan funding.
- 7 Schools are currently participating in the Student Enterprise Programme. Closing date for entries to the County final is 28th February with judging and awards taking place in the Midlands Park on Tuesday 14th March. National Finals are being held in Croke Park on Friday 5th May
- Enterprise Week is scheduled to run from 6th of March to 10th March. The programme will include 5 national “Spotlight” events as well as a full schedule of local events including training, mentoring clinics and other public talks with industry experts.
- Ongoing close working with Laois Chamber Alliance - delivered a funding workshop to members in January and supported the Jobs Fair on 20th February.

Business Support Unit (BSU)

The BSU launched an advertising campaign in January/February 2023 in respect of the suite of grants and incentives available to businesses. The vacant commercial incentive scheme is being launched in Portarlinton in March.

The BSU is working with the Marketing Sub-committee of the Portlaoise Town Team on a new project called “Bringing Portlaoise Online” which involves engaging with a social media company to market Portlaoise as a place to visit. Funding for this project is being provided by Laois Partnership and Laois County Council.

The BSU is working with Laois Taste on a series of initiatives for 2023. A new co-ordinator has been appointed to the group and this position is being funded by Laois Partnership and Laois County Council. An application for funding has been submitted to the Department of Agriculture to support the work of the new co-ordinator and Laois Taste’s participation at various events this year.

Portlaoise Innovation Centre DAC (The Cube)

The new Manager is expected to be in place on the 27th March 2023. The official opening of the building will take place on Thursday 30th March at 5.00pm.

ROADS, TRANSPORTATION, DRAINAGE & PUBLIC REALM

Grant Notifications 2023

The following grant notifications have been received by the council for 2023.

DTTAS GRANT ALLOCATION	2023 GRANT AMOUNT	2022 GRANT AMOUNT
Restoration Improvement	€6,920,500	€6,549,000
Restoration Maintenance	€1,010,500	€1,010,500
Supplementary Restoration Maintenance	€794,000	€794,000
Discretionary Grant	€1,892,000	€1,880,000
Bridge Rehabilitation	€535,000	€530,000
Specific Imp. Grant	€150,000	€300,000
Safety Improvement Works	€324,000	€294,000
PSCI: Survey Support	€17,000	€17,000
Training Grant	€32,000	€32,000
Drainage Works	€473,000	€472,884
Former National Roads	€650,000	€680,000
Cycle Signs	€2,200	€28,000
Speed Limits (Housing Area Signage)	€15,040	
Speed Limits (Rural Speed Limit Signage)	€42,000	€13,160
Climate Change Adaptation & Resilience Works	€410,000	€311,000
Community Involvement Scheme	€319,050	€389,950
Active Travel		€148,002
Total Allocation	€13,586,290	€13,449,496

TII GRANT ALLOCATION	2023 GRANT AMOUNT
Capital Funding	
N77 Course to Dunmore	€300,000
N77 Portlaoise to M7 Pavement	€900,000
N78 Ballylehane Lower to Farnans	€1,000,000
N80 Kyletalesha to Mountmellick Phase 2	€2,500,000
Maintenance Funding	€474,158
Total Allocation	€5,274,158

National Transport Authority Allocation - 2023	
Father Browne Avenue Cycle Scheme, Portlaoise	€40,000
Active Travel Scheme, Beladd, Portlaoise	€30,000
Active Travel Scheme, Dublin Road, Portlaoise	€40,000
Footpath Scheme - Carlow Road, Stradbally	€6,000
Active Travel Scheme - Ballyroan Road, Abbeyleix	€60,000
Low Cost Junction Tightening / Pedestrian Crossing Schemes	€250,000
SRTS - St Paul's NA, Mountmellick	€40,000
Portlaoise Local Transport Plan	€330,000
Footpath Scheme - Shanboe, Borris in Ossory	€20,000
Footpath Scheme - Ballinakill Swimming Pool	€9,500
Footpath Scheme - Ballyroan Footpath to GAA club	€3,500
Active Travel Office - Staff Costs	€271,000
Portlaoise - Bus Stop Accessibility	€60,000
Rapid Deployment - Dublin Road, Portlaoise	€500,000
Active Travel Scheme - Southern Circular Road, Portlaoise	€350,000
Rapid Deployment - R445 Mountrath Road, Portlaoise	€250,000
Active Travel, Permeability Scheme, Mountmellick	€100,000
Active Travel, Stradbally Road, Portlaoise	€100,000
Active Travel, Permeability Scheme, Portarlinton	€70,000
Active Travel Scheme, Borris Rd, Portlaoise	€40,000
Footpath Scheme, R433 Rathdowney	€110,000
SRTS - Maryborough NS, Portlaoise	€100,000
Triogue Way, Portlaoise - Phase 2	€100,000
SRTS - Scoil Phadraig Naofa, Mountmellick	€100,000
SRTS - Scoil Mhuire, Abbeyleix	€100,000
Active Travel Scheme - Rathleague, Portlaoise	€100,000
Triogue Way, Portlaoise - Phase 3	€80,000
SRTS - Camross National School, Camross	€40,000
Total Allocation	€3,300,000

The overall grant allocation received by the Council through the various funding streams identified comes to a total of €22,160,448.

The Annual Road Works Scheme 2023 will contain a more detailed breakdown and will be presented for the Members' consideration at March 2023 Monthly Meeting.

ENVIRONMENT & ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

1. Kyletalesha Landfill, Transfer Station & Civic Amenity Site, Portlaoise:

Normal services continue at Kyletalesha Landfill Facility and Civic Amenity Site. Landfill monitoring and aftercare maintenance is on-going. All monitoring results are being submitted to the EPA.

2. Bring Banks:

Tonnages of collected recyclable material 2019 - 2023.

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total Tonnage
2023	164.24	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	164.24
2022	163.77	114.28	162.18	120.57	133.64	149.84	132.44	172.27	57.17	120.65	138.07	121.82	1641.66
2021	196.89	140.31	177.84	173.60	143.65	170.08	153.40	139.77	160.03	115.17	130.24	176.10	1877.09
2020	138.37	86.81	121.35	205.29	195.24	190.74	177.39	160.14	146.11	141.37	144.68	176.83	1884.33
2019	138.80	113.96	86.93	108.42	122.60	86.79	129.25	105.45	86.87	112.86	100.25	122.97	1315.15

Table 2 – 2022 Bring Bank Tonnages

The bring bank facilities in the county are being inspected and maintained by Environment Staff.

Waste Management, Complaints & Litter Management:

a) Illegal Dumping

Tonnes of material collected for 2023 is 11 tonnes. Table 3 below shows the material collected from 2019 to 2023.

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Tonnage	367	238	530	649	11

Table 3 – Illegal Dumping Tonnages

b) Waste Enforcement & Complaints

Table 4 below details the number and types of complaints received in January 2023.

Nature	Number
Waste Management/Enforcement	71
Litter	20
Water	4
Air	2
Noise	1
Waste Infrastructure	0
Total	98

Table 4 – Environmental Complaint Register

c) Litter Fines

January 2023 - 11 litter fines were issued.

3. **Waste Management & Enforcement:**

The Environment Section continues with its duties and responsibilities regarding facility authorisation, waste management and enforcement, producer responsibility and the national waste priorities.

4. **Historic Landfills:**

Laos County Council made a funding application to the Department of the Environment, Climate & Communications. Table 5 below outlines the approved funding for 2023.

Site Code	Site Name	Allocation 2023	2023 Objective
S22-	Aghanure Landfill	€1,200	Monitoring Costs
S22-	Killabban Landfill	€2,000	Monitoring Costs
S22-	Rathdowney Road	€1,200	Monitoring Costs
S22-02287	Kilbreedy Landfill	€15,000	Preparation of Tier 3 Site Risk Assessment, AA Screening
S22-02273	Kilmainham Landfill	€22,500	Preparation of Tier 2 & Tier 3 Site Risk Assessment, AA Screening Report plus Certificate of Authorisation Fee
Total		€41,900	

Table 5 – Historic Landfill Approved Funding 2023

Table 6 below outlines the approved funding for 2022 and the works completed..

Site Code	Site Name	Allocation 2022	2022 Objective
S22-02280	Aghanure Landfill	€15,371	Preparation of Tier 3 Site Risk Assessment, AA Screening
S22-02286	Killabban Landfill	€23,073	Preparation of Tier 3 Site Risk Assessment, AA Screening
S22-02274	Rathdowney Road Landfill	€13,057	Preparation of Tier 3 Site Risk Assessment, AA Screening
Total		€51,501	

Table 6 – Historic Landfill Approved Funding 2022

In 2022, Certificate of Authorisation Applications were submitted to the EPA for Aghnure, Killabban and Rathdowney Road, Durrow Landfills. Previous Certificate of Authorisation applications were submitted for Trumera, Wynne Park and Oughaval Landfills. No decisions have yet been made on these applications by the EPA.

5. **GAP Regulations - Farm Inspections**

The purpose of the farm inspections is to improve the water quality in the “at-risk” river catchments identified as catchments under pressure from agricultural activities.

- 2022 - Approximately 50 Farms have been visited to date and farms ranked as high, medium low risk, as appropriate. Where necessary, advice letters have issued.
- 2023 - Farm surveys to continue targeting more than 100 farms.

Emergency Planning, Fire Services & Flood Relief

In 2023 (to date) Laois County Fire & Rescue Service attended 25 emergency incidents consisting of 6 fires, 17 special service incidents & 2 false alarms.

Turnout by Station*:

Portlaoise – 15	Portarlinton - 10	Stradbally – 0**	Mountmellick – 0**
Abbeyleix - 0**	Mountrath – 3	Durrow – 6	Rathdowney – 3

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

**Note – Incident reports not yet entered onto payroll

New Fire Station in Stradbally

Following approval of Part 8 proposals in February 2022, for a new Fire Station in Stradbally, Laois County Council has recently received 'approval in principle for the construction of a new Fire Station at Stradbally.' Laois County Council has now prepared a design brief for the project with a view to the appointment of a design team to oversee the detailed design, tendering and delivery of the new Fire Station. This brief was sent to the NDFEM in December & approval to appoint the design team is now awaited.

Mountmellick Fire Station upgrade

Approval to go to tender for the upgrade has been sought from the NDFEM.

WATER SERVICES AND RURAL WATER

Uisce Éireann

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

Portlaoise Water Supply Improvement Scheme – Following submissions from Laois County Council, Irish Water is progressing the introduction of Borewells PW07 and PW08 at Coolbanagher. IW/NOD currently agreeing design with the ESB. This intervention will provide for increased supply to the network, enhanced resilience for periods of drought and enable a planned maintenance programme for all Borewells to be introduced, funding is available from Irish Water under Capital Maintenance.

Disinfection/PH control programme – Civil works progressing in Meelick, Derryguile, Kyle, Five Wells, Derrymoyle and Lough WTPs. MEICA works progressed at the Strand, Knocks, Derryguile, Lough, Kyle, Five Wells, Clonin Hill, Derrymoyle, Ballyroan and Meelick WTP. Process proving now complete at the Knocks, Kyle and Ballyroan WTPs.

ESB supply upgrade currently being progressed for Five Wells. Power switchover at Lough WTP now complete. Design for Kilminchy WTP and Fermoy WTP currently being progressed by CWL/IW.

Irish Water Small Towns & Villages Growth Programme

Under this Programme Irish Water have allocated €2.249m for the improvement and increase in treatment capacity at three waste water treatment plants in Laois. These are Ballyroan, Ballinakill and Borris In Ossory. Ballyroan is the most advance of these with Irish Water currently considering the options and pricing report for this site. Ballinakill and Borris In Ossory are at design stage.

Lead Mitigation Strategy – Derryguile WTP has been identified as a priority plant under the IW Lead Mitigation Strategy for addition of Orthophosphate Treatment.

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

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

Filter Upgrade Programme – Kilminchy WTP put forward for upgrades, confirmation of scope required post filter assessment report.

Networks and Water Conservation - First fix, find and fix and lead replacement work continued throughout the county in 2022 and will continue into 2023. Significant progress was made in leakage management in Portarlinton following back yard service works in St. Michael's Park.

Replacement of watermain on the Swan network is now complete.

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

National WWPS programme – Bob's Bar Pump Station has been issued by Irish Water to Ward & Burke Construction / Tobin Consulting Engineers for detailed design. Survey works recently completed on site by Tobin's to finalise design.

Taking in Charge

Continue working with IW to take the outstanding legacy estates in charge by IW - already taken in charge by LCC. 10 no. estates have been progressed and referred to the Planning Section and work is ongoing on the remaining 7 no. estates.

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

Multi Annual Rural Water Programme.

Projects under the current programme, 2019 – 2021, are being completed and claims paid and recouped. The Department has advised that details of the next Rural Water Programme will be issued in due course.

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

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

Well Grants – There were 65 applications received for grant aid assistance to improve private water supplies to domestic households in 2022 and the sum of €139,944 was paid out to 39 applicants in respect of well grants. The remaining grant applications will be processed in 2023.

Domestic Lead Remediation Grant Scheme



The Domestic Lead Remediation Grant Scheme has been in existence since 2016 and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage have revised the eligibility criteria with effect from 1 December 2022. The grant is no longer means tested and is available for both public and private water supplies. This grant provides 100% financial assistance (max of €5,000) to eligible applicants to replace lead piping and fittings in a house, that is occupied as the applicant's normal place of residence. Applications can be made through the local authority.

CORPORATE, COMMUNITY, CLIMATE ACTION, ARTS, CULTURE, LIBRARIES & TOURISM

CORPORATE

A Civic Reception in honour of Mr. Teddy Fennelly in recognition of being named Irelands 2022 Heritage Hero by the Heritage Council will be held on Thursday 23rd February 2023.

COMMUNITY

Laois PPN

Laois PPN will host the Midlands Regional PPN (MRPPN) meeting on the 23rd March. The MRPPN meeting will see delegates representing Offaly, Kildare, Westmeath, Longford, and Meath welcomed to Laois. The event will take place in Castle Durrow. The MRPPN meeting is an important opportunity to share knowledge and ideas that benefit all members of the MRPPN.

Laois Comhairle na nÓg

Laois Comhairle na nÓg continue to meet on a biweekly basis. The Comhairle are working through their Topic this year of Discrimination and are currently devising a plan to impact young people.

World of Work

This programme has commenced with 2nd year students in Portlaoise College. In February, an introduction to the functions of Laois County Council was delivered, including an information session about climate change.

Community Recognition Fund

A Community Recognition Fund was recently announced by the Department of Rural and Community Development. The fund aims to support the development of

community infrastructure and facilities in recognition of the contribution being made by communities across the country in welcoming and hosting significant numbers of arrivals from Ukraine and other countries. It is specifically targeted at projects that are located in communities, towns and villages that are hosting the Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection and/or International Protection Applicants (“new arrivals”).

Laois received an allocation of €1,014,607

Projects to be funded must be:

- Capital in nature. Operational or running costs will not be funded.
- Deliver tangible benefits for the communities in which they are located.

The type of projects eligible for funding are:

- development, enhancement or refurbishment of community or cultural facilities including play areas, walkways, parks, community/sensory gardens including communication boards, allotments, and recreational areas;
- development, enhancement or refurbishment of local club and sports facilities including facilities such as community swimming pools, changing rooms, toilets, digital aids such as score / information boards etc.
- enhancement to school/parish facilities which are open to use by all of the community after school hours

A well attended information session was held in the Dunamais Arts Centre on the 9th

February for interested community groups. The closing date for submission of

Expressions of Interest is **Friday 24th February 2023**.

Age Friendly Programme

The new Age friendly Strategy 2023-2027 is being reviewed and will be open for consultation in the coming weeks. It will then be brought to the Age Friendly alliance for final approval. A formal launch will then be held and a new Older Persons Council executive formed.

Planning is ongoing for the Age Friendly & Healthy Laois Expo, which is scheduled for the 13th April, from 4-8pm in Portlaoise College. This will be an information event for many different demographic groups, with 40 exhibitors confirmed so far.

Operation Transformation

The Final Ad Break Challenge was filmed in Timahoe on 10th February 2023 and was the culmination of seven weeks of filming, which commenced on 27th December 2022 in Stradbally. The Operation Transformation host Mr Karl Henry, confirmed that the attendances in Stradbally, Vicarstown, Portlaoise, Kilcavan, Portarlinton, Ratheniska and Timahoe were the highest on record. The large turnout representing local Clubs and Groups for each Ad Break Challenge showcased the fantastic community spirit in Laois.

ARTS & CULTURE

St.Colman’s NS Exhibition at Laois Arthouse Stradbally

A wonderful exhibition of artworks titled ‘We Are Artists’ was presented by Junior and Senior infant students in St Colman’s NS from Wednesday 8th February to Friday 10th February at Laois Arthouse, Stradbally. Through the Arts-in-Education BLAST Residency Programme, the pupils got the opportunity to work with local professional artist Orla McDonagh. The pupils created beautiful creations inspired by their woodland walk at Cosby Estate.

The official opening of the exhibition took place on Thursday 9th February with Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council Cllr. Thomasina Connell opening the exhibition.



Arts Awards and Opportunities

Following advertisement and promotion, applications have been received for 2023 Arts Act Grants, the Tyrone Guthrie Centre Bursary, Artists in Schools Scheme, Laois Culture Night 2023. Closing date for receipt of applications was Friday 17th February 2023. Adjudication process to be carried out in the coming weeks.

Creative Ireland Laois Events

'Activations' is part of Laois's Creativity in Older Age Programme supported by Creative Ireland in partnership with Laois County Council Arts Office. An 'Activations' workshop on Digital Skills Development and networking Session for Laois Artists aged 55+ will take place on Thursday 23rd February at Dunamaise Arts Centre.

Business of the Local Community Development Committee

The Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) comprises of 17 representatives from both the public and private sectors and has primary responsibility for coordinating, planning and overseeing Local and Community Development in the County, and disburses significant funding in pursuit of these development objectives.

The LCDC oversees the implementation of:

- Community objectives in the Local Economic & Community Plan(LECP) 2016 - 2021
- Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2023
- Implementation of the Laois Local Development Strategy operated under the LEADER Programme 2014 - 2020 in partnership between the County Council (financial partner) and local development company, Laois Partnership (implementing partner).

- Implementation of the Department of Rural & Community Development (DRCD) Community Facilities/Enhancement/Supports Programme since 2017
- Healthy Ireland/ Healthy Laois Plan

Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP). This Plan was compiled in agreement with a number of public sector stakeholders, under both community and economic development headings. It was adopted by Laois County Council in March 2016, and sets out the strategic framework for economic and community development resource allocation, and informs other planning processes over the course of the 5 year plan.

The new LECP 2023- 2028 is currently being development with 10 draft High Level Goal established which will go out for public consultation in March 2023. The high level goal consultation document has been developed in conjunction with a Socio Economic Statement and detailed mapping.



The **SICAP Programme** provides funding to tackle poverty and social exclusion at local level through local engagement and partnerships between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations and public sector agencies. Laois Partnership Company are the LCDC's implementing partner for the programme, and the annual spend for 2023 is in the amount of €849,393. This amount includes an allocation of €133,687 that focuses on Ukrainian supports under both Goal 1 and Goal 2 of the programme.



LEADER Programme 2014 – 2020

The LEADER Programme 2014 – 2020 enabled rural communities and partners to actively engage and direct the local development of their area. Laois County Council are the financial partner for governance of the programme.

The LCDC acts as the Local Action Group (LAG) for the County and holds the contract for the LEADER programme in Laois. Almost €8m of LEADER funding has been invested in innovative community and private enterprise projects throughout rural Laois over the duration of the programme. The LCDC has responsibility for the delivery of the Programme and works with the Implementing Partner (IP) which has been Laois Partnership Company. Animation is undertaken on a continuous basis by the IP through attendance at community meetings, business briefings and contributions to other events such as Teagasc Options Programmes and the LEO Start Your Own Business Training Programmes. This animation process energises interested parties to make applications for funding and those projects which successfully come through this process are brought to LAG, for funding approval. 134 separate projects have been approved to date by the LCDC in its capacity as the LAG under the programme.

Transitional LEADER Programme

The Transitional LEADER Programme came into effect on **1st April 2021** to bridge the gap between the 2014-2020 LEADER Programme and the start of the next EU programme in 2023. A key focal point of the Transitional LEADER Programme was on building capacity within communities which have not received LEADER funding to date.

With a project budget allocation of €1,095,976, 47 projects have been approved by the LCDC in its capacity as the LAG to date under this Transitional Programme.

EURI Fund

The European Union Recovery Instrument (EURI) is a fund established by the European Union to support recovery in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. With a project allocation of €485,767 a total of 13 projects have been approved to date under this funding stream

Examples of LEADER Funded Projects

Cullohill Community Plan

The Laois Local Development Strategy identified Cullohill as one of six areas to be targeted with public funding programmes and an area for development.

Cullohill Community Council responded to a LEADER funding call and applied to develop a five-year Community Plan for the area. This would establish a shared vision for the future of the village and assess development potential aligned with wider local and national policy objectives.

Developing a community plan for Cullohill involved a number of stages including research, profiling, consultation and monitoring. Consultants were appointed to coordinate and manage each step and write the final community plan report. Initial work involved a focus around strategic themes, objectives and actions such as developing infrastructure, enterprise, tourism and community facilities. Where actions required funding, potential sources were identified in the plan. Notably, many of the actions identified, rather than requiring significant financial support, primarily rely on community resources such as time, organisation and coordination skills.



Consultation session which formed part of community plan process.

The process of preparing this plan also required analysis and reflection on the strengths, issues and opportunities in Cullohill's future development at the community level. The community engaged very strongly with the planning process and a number of strong outcomes emerged:

- Fundraising drive delivered to accumulate a community fund.
- A community managed and coordinated 'education hub' was established providing extra weekend tuition to small groups and hosted in the community centre.
- LEADER funding secured to deliver ca €300K refit of the local multi-use community centre
- LEADER funding secured to develop the Folly Music Festival in collaboration with organisers of the Electric Picnic. This festival is the first gender balanced festival in Ireland, staging equal numbers of male and female performers.



Ballykilcavan Brewing Company

Another LEADER funded success story is that of Ballykilcavan Brewing Company, based at Ballykilcavan farm near Stradbally, Co. Laois, the home of the Walsh family since 1639. David and Lisa Walsh Kemmis have set up a new craft brewery in a 230 year old courtyard on the farm.

LEADER Funding in the form of a grant of just under €50K was sought to help purchase brewing equipment an essential element of the project. The overall cost of the project totalled €350K. The objective of the project was to create an on-farm craft brewery

that sources 100% of the grain used from the farm where the beers are brewed. The brewery based in an existing courtyard is the centre piece of a wider tourist project that is being developed around it. The brewery released a range of craft ales designed to showcase the qualities of Irish Malting barley. A number of guided walks have also been held on the farm which have allowed the farm to be enjoyed by the local community.

Two full time jobs have been created by the company; a head brewer and a salesperson, in addition to the CEO and co-founder David Walsh-Kemmis working fulltime, as well as season jobs.

Community Enhancement Programme (CEP) 2017-todate

This additional scheme funded by DRCD through the LCDC presents a favourable alternative for promoters of small scale projects who may be discouraged by the more rigorous and bureaucratic process which applies to the LEADER funding programme.

Since 2017 Laois LCDC has approved funding in excess of €640K in respect of approx. 344 applicant groups, supporting a myriad of local small-scale projects and initiatives countywide. This funding opportunity for 2022 under the Community Support fund has been advertised with Laois receiving an allocation of €291,487.

A sample of some of the grants paid out are:

Rathdowney Men's Shed received €1,501.00 towards the cost of the refurbishment of their kitchen area.

Castlecuffe National School received €1,000 for a playtower with swingset and buddy bench. This is proving a very beneficial activity and imaginative play area for children in the school. It facilitates the development of gross motor skills and the buddy bench ensures that no child will feel lonely in the playground.



Rosenallis Development Association received €1,000 toward the replacement of 2 wooden benches in a picnic area which greatly improved the appearance of the approach road to the village.





Healthy Ireland – The Healthy Ireland fund was created by the Department of Health to establish and support the implementation of Healthy Ireland programmes and projects which would improve the health and wellbeing of Ireland over the coming generation.

This funding is distributed through Laois LCDC to our Action Partners who implement a range of programmes, targeted at different groups throughout County Laois. All actions undertaken under the Healthy Ireland programme are guided by the Healthy Laois Plan 2018-2020. In excess of €400k has been approved by the Department of Health for Laois based initiatives since 2017. Programmes have been designed to help address and respond to local community health and well-being needs throughout the county and are targeted at all age and socio economic groups. Laois County Council's Community Section provides financial oversight and management in the delivery of the Healthy Ireland fund on behalf of Laois LCDC.

Upcoming LEADER programme 2023-2027

The Department of Rural and Community Development invited applications late last year for organisations interested in becoming the "Local Action Group" for the next round of LEADER funding.

Laois LCDC applied to continue to be the Local Action Group for Laois.

Separately, Laois Partnership submitted their own application to be the Local Action Group. On the 26th January this year the Department announced that both groups have passed the first stage of the selection process, which now requires the development of a Local Development Strategy (LDS) for the County by each applicant. The national guidelines for the development of the LDS have recently been issued.

LIBRARY SERVICES

All our branches are open to the public for browsing, PC usage, printing, photocopying and studying, in addition to all the free events taking place throughout the month – see all details below.

Age Friendly Laois – As part of Age Friendly Laois, Laois Library branches are now stocking a supply of free I.C.E (In Case of Emergency) cards which can be carried in your purse or wallet to provide valuable information to emergency first responders, an information booklet for services available to older persons in Laois and the Message in a Bottle, which encourages people to keep their basic personal and medical details in a common place that can be easily accessed by emergency teams if needed.



Ireland Reads-A National Day of Reading took place on Saturday February 25th. Libraries and readers from around the country were encouraged to “Squeeze in a read” and visit the local Library on February the 25th. Abbeyleix library held an author reading event with local author Ruby Eyre on Saturday the 25th of February to do a reading of her new publication.

Abbeyleix Library

Bridge Club – A brand new bridge club is up and running and takes place every Wednesday at 12noon. All welcome.

Lego Science Club – the Lego Science Club takes place every Thursday afternoon from 4pm-5pm and focuses on a STEM based approach to a series of Lego challenges. The club is suitable for ages 9-12 years. Contact the library for more information and to register your interest.

Art Gallery – the gallery is hosting an exhibition by Portlaoise artist Catherine Brennan for the month of February. Entitled “The Journey of Love”, the work started during lockdown and examines love and friendship to heartbreak and fragility. The collection is a mixture of mixed media, photography, 3D wall sculptures, acrylics and watercolours.

Durrow Library

Adult Art Classes in partnership with the LOETB took place every Tuesday throughout February in the library at 3:30pm.

Irish Circle – the Irish Circle group meets in the library on Tuesdays at 6.15pm. Beidh fáilte róimh cupán tae a ól agus cúpla focail Gaeilge a labhairt nó a canadh.

Mountmellick Library

Healthy Ireland Talk – Helen Vaughan from Maynooth Counselling hosted an online workshop “Helping Your Teenager Through the Leaving Cert” on Weds, 8th Feb at 7pm.

Writing Space – the library offers a writing space every Thursday mornings where people can write/journal, meet and discuss ideas.

Sensory Morning – a dedicated sensory morning took place on Fri, 24th Feb from 10am-11:30am for ages 0-3 years and their parents/carers.

Art Gallery – the gallery was delighted to host local Laois artist Siobhán Parkinson for the month of February. With a strong theme of nature, human spirit and the mysteries of the interconnectedness of all life, her pieces carry deep spiritual messages. The exhibition was launched on Tues, 7th Feb at 6:30pm – Siobhán hosted a sound experience with guided meditation followed by words inspired by the artwork and spoken by the Mountmellick Writer’s Group. All welcome to attend.

Mountrath Library

Ciorcal Comhrá - Deardaoin, Feabhra ag 6.15pm go 7.30pm. Bígí linn le comhrá as Gaeilge agus cupán tae!

Knitting Group – the group meets every Friday morning from 11am-1pm – all skill levels welcome. Light refreshments provided!

Portarlington Library

My Brat Bhride – in recognition of the Feast Day of St Brigid and the tradition of St Brigid's Cloak, Rita O'Loughlin from *My Brat Bhride* in Portarlington gave a demonstration in the library on Thursday 2nd February at 11.00am on the group's upcycling of scarves/shawls and discuss the traditions and stories associated with St. Brigid. Participants were invited to bring a scarf with them to work on at the demonstration if they wish.

Adult Book Club - The club is currently reading *Pew* by Catherine Lacey. Next meeting takes place on Tues, 28th Feb at 11am. All welcome.

LOETB – Stay Connected A Free 3 week digital skills course with LOETB commenced in the library offering training on mobile phones and Ipads (tablets)

Portlaoise Library

Healthy Ireland Talk –Dr. Colman Noctor and Dr. Aileen McGloin gave an online Zoom talk on the 7th of February on how small daily changes can start families on the way to a healthier life .

Ciorcal Comhrá – Come along for some Irish conversation and chat every Wednesday evening at 5:30pm – for all levels, from beginners to advanced.

Rathdowney Library

Junior Chess Club – the chess club for ages 9-13 years takes place in the library on Thursday evenings from 7pm-8pm. New members are welcome

The **Sensory Toy Resource Collection** is now available in Rathdowney Library - a service for parents of children with additional needs who live in Co. Laois. The toys are designed to support the development of gross motor skills, fine motor skills and communication skills.

Stradbally Library

Talking Art – the library was delighted to welcome artist Angela Delaney for the Talking Art: Art Appreciation Programme during February from 10:30am-12noon. Take a closer look at selected artworks from the Irish Museum of Modern Art and Laois County Arts Collection. Booking essential

Creative Writing Course – a new 6-week creative writing course in collaboration with Ryan Dunne from the LOETB began on Tues, 14th Feb from 3:15pm-4:45pm.

Digital Phone Skills – a new 6-week Digital Phone Skills programme with the LOETB is starting on Tues, 28th Feb from 1:15pm-3pm

Portarlington Library

Tues: 10am-1:30pm, 2:30pm-5:30pm
Weds: 10am-1:30pm, 2:30pm-7:30pm
Thurs: 10am-1:30pm, 2:30pm-5:30pm
Fri: 10am-1:30pm, 2:30pm-5pm
Sat: 10am-1pm

Portlaoise Library

Tues: 10am-5pm
Weds: 10am-7:30pm
Thurs: 10am-7:30pm
Fri: 10am-5pm
Sat: 10am-4pm

Rathdowney Library

Mon: 2:30pm-5pm, 7pm-9pm
Weds: 12:30pm-1:30pm, 2:30pm-5pm
Thurs: 7pm-9pm
Fri: 2:30pm-5pm

Stradbally Library

Tues: 1pm-5pm, 5:30pm-8pm
Weds: 10am-1pm, 1:30pm-5pm
Thurs: 1pm-5pm, 5:30pm-8pm
Sat: 10am-1pm

Chief Executive's Orders

- ✚ A schedule of Chief Executive Orders signed during the month of February 2023 will be circulated.


John Mulholland
Chief Executive

February 24th 2023

