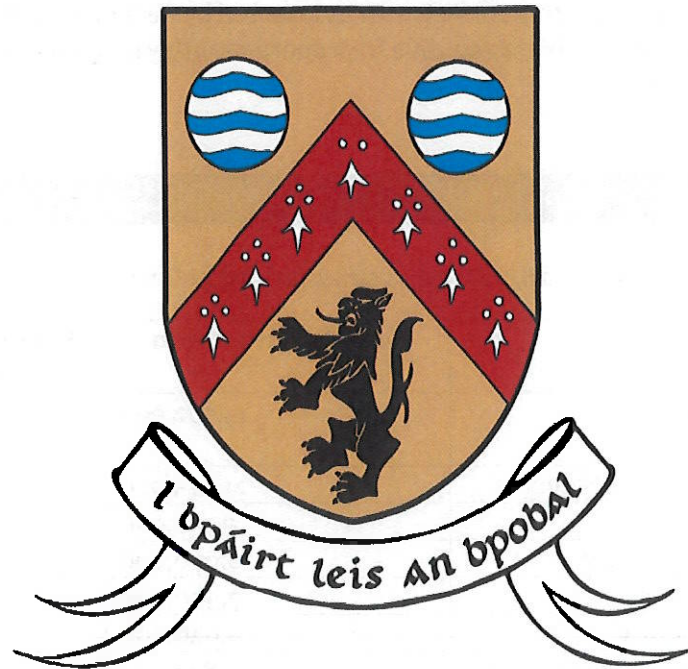


LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL
COMHAIRLE CHONTAE LAOISE



MONTHLY MANAGEMENT REPORT
MARCH 2021
TUARASCÁIL BHAINISTÍOCHTA
MÁRTA 2021

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 March 2021 is as follows:-

Finance, & Allocations Notified

Expenditure and income to the 28/02/2021 is summarised below:

Service Division	Budget Allocation	Expenditure to 28/02/2021
Housing and Building	15,772,000	1,882,137
Road Transportation and Safety	21,225,000	981,773
Water Services	3,421,000	402,322
Development Management	6,970,000	1,033,939
Environmental Services	7,500,000	449,765
Recreation and Amenity	3,926,000	326,634
Agriculture, Education, Health and Welfare	822,000	64,068
Miscellaneous Services	9,533,000	873,543
Central Management Charge	9,714,000	1,400,938
Total	78,883,000	7,415,119

Service Division	Budget Allocation	Income to 28/02/2021
Housing and Building	17,594,000	2,524,001
Road Transportation and Safety	16,749,000	1,773,721
Water Services	4,534,000	716,776
Development Management	4,423,000	1,817,887
Environmental Services	1,501,000	220,139
Recreation and Amenity	601,000	345,412
Agriculture, Education, Health and Welfare	330,000	8,123
Miscellaneous Services	8,126,000	622,775
Superannuation	700,000	100,796
Local Property Tax	9,063,079	1,510,513
Rates	14,495,092	1,572,149
Capital transfer	766,829	0
Total	78,883,000	9,640,143

Allocations Notified

URDF Urban Regeneration Development Fund	€9,000,000
Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage (Deep Retrofit)	€552,572
TII Allocations – Capital Maintenance NS Pavement Works:- N80 Ballylinan	€175,188
N80 Laught or Common	€198,109
Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage (Housing Adaptation Grans for Older People and People with a Disability Scheme)	€1,263,744
ORIS Measure 3 Slieve Bloom signage project	€270,000

Housing & Regeneration

Rebuilding Ireland Construction Programme

Scheme	Units	Progress
Shannon St., Mountrath	6	Complete
Ballymorris, Portarlinton	22	Complete
Hillview, Portaoise	2	Complete
Gleann naGlaise, Ballyroan	10	Site currently closed due to COVID 19 Level 5 restrictions.
25-30 Moore St., Rathdowney	6	Site currently closed due to COVID 19 Level 5 restrictions.
Pattison Estate, Mountmellick	10	Site currently closed due to COVID 19 Level 5 restrictions.
Sean Doire, Durrow	22	Site currently closed due to COVID 19 Level 5 restrictions.
Coolroe, Ballybrittas (Rural)	1	Site currently closed due to COVID 19 Level 5 restrictions.
Harbour Court, Mountmellick	6	Tender documents currently being prepared for Departmental approved
Mooreville, Rathdowney	7	Stage 3 documents to be submitted to Department in April 2021.
St. Kierans Park, Errill	14	Stage 4 submission being prepared for the Department. Site start expected next quarter
Clonrooske, Knockmay	13	Revisions being made following recent meeting with Portlaoise councillors
Iona, Abbeyleix Road	9	Draft layout being prepared for discussions with local councillors
Oak Park Halting Site	4	Part VIII approved in December 2020. Tenders advertised.
Carraig Glas, Stradbally	26	Awaiting approval of Stage 2 application submission.

Scheme	Units	Progress
Former C.B.S. Site	67	Part VIII granted. Detailed design is currently underway. CALF funding application to be submitted in Q2 2021.
Hepburn/Knockmay	54	Cluid Housing Association are progressing this development. Revised site layout submitted for 54 units.
O'Moore Place Regeneration	To be determined	Access to the site has now been resolved. The landowner is working with an Approved Housing Body and concept drawings on the proposed development are being prepared for future discussion.
Convent Site, Portlaoise	51	Stage 2 approved in February 2021. Site investigations almost complete. Enabling works contract this summer with main contract due to go to tender later in the year.
County Hotel, Portlaoise	11	Stage 1 approval for 11 units granted on 4/9/20. Redesign required following engagement with the Department of Heritage. Meeting with local councillors
Vacant Homes Office		<p>A total of 249 properties have been investigated by the Vacant Homes Officer following reports of vacancy by Council Members and other Elected Representatives, members of the public or via www.vacanthomes.ie and applications under the Repair & Leasing Scheme and Buy & Renew Scheme. A total of 28 applications have been received to date under the Repair & Leasing Scheme of which 5 are currently under consideration.</p> <p>The Vacant Homes Officer has carried out an initial inspection on 220 vacant dwellings to date. Following this inspection, no further action has been deemed necessary in 99 cases due to the properties being found to be occupied, undergoing works by the owners or in a location of low housing need and unsuitable for social housing.</p> <p>71 vacant houses have been identified to date as being suitable for social housing due to the type of house and location and further action may be taken in these cases. 39 properties have been identified as having potential for use as development sites for social housing and these sites will be examined further.</p> <p>12 vacant properties have been acquired by CPO and 5 properties are currently going through the CPO process.</p>

Turnkey Projects

Scheme	Units	Progress
Expressions of interest		The Council has invited expressions of interest from the public in respect of the supply of newly completed homes as turnkey projects.
Main St., Borris-in-Ossory	11	Contractors on site. 6 units complete - Phase 2 (5 units) in Q3 2021.
Clonaslee	7	Complete
Church Avenue, Stradbally	31	Turnkey application approved by the Department 4 th March 2021. Expected delivery Q4 2022.

Approved Housing Bodies Delivery

Scheme	Units	AHB	Progress
Borris Road, Portlaoise	36	Tuath	Complete
Bellingham, Portlaoise	30	Cluid	Contractor is on site. 15 of the 30 units have already been delivered. Development is on track for delivery of phase 4 (9 units) in March 2021 Phase 5 (6 units) expected delivery end of Q2 2021.
Ballickmoyler Road, Graiguecullen	20	Co-Operative Ireland	Complete
Doirin Alainn, Ballylinan	12	North & East	Complete
The Glen (Phase 2) Kilnacourt Portarlinton	18	Co-Operative Ireland	Contractor is on site. Expected delivery in March 2021.
Wilton Lawns, Portarlinton	2	Respond	Contractor is due to commence on site when current lockdown is lifted
Lake Drive Kilminchy	10	Co-Operative Ireland	Contractor is on site with expected delivery in March 2021
Holdbrook, Portlaoise	20	Cluid	Contractor is on site. Phase 1 (10 units) to be delivered in March 2021 Phase 2 (10 units) to be delivered in April 2022.
Clonrooske Abbey, Portlaoise	32	Cluid	Contractor is on site. Phase 1 (14 units) expected delivery in March 2021 Phase 2 (6 units) expected delivery in Q3 2021 Phase 3 (12 units) expected delivery in Q1 2022
Spa Street, Droughill,	26	Oaklee	Site currently closed due to COVID 19 Level 5 restrictions.

Portarlington			Expected delivery in February 2022
The Meadows, Mountrath Road, Portlaoise	48	Cluid	CALF funding has been approved for delivery of these units. Expected delivery in Q3 2022
Ballymorris Court, Portarlington	46	Cluid	CALF funding has been approved for delivery of these units. Expected delivery in Q4 2022
Harpers Lane, Portlaoise	44	Respond	CALF funding has been approved for delivery of these units. Expected delivery in Q4 2022

From the above tables it can be noted that there will be 174 new homes delivered under our New Build programme in 2021. The current Covid19 Level 5 lockdown has had a negative impact on our 2021 delivery with a number of units being pushed in to 2022.

In addition to the units outlined in the above tables the Housing Department are also in discussion with various AHB's regarding the delivery of further Social Housing units throughout the county. The total number of units currently under discussion in the county, in addition to the units mentioned above, is **382** broken down by MD area as follows –

- Portlaoise MD – 221
- Borris in Ossory/Mountmellick MD – 111
- Portarlington/Craigecullen MD - 50

Refugee Resettlement Programme

There is currently 1 family remaining to be housed under our Refugee Resettlement Programme. This tenancing will take place as soon as the current government guidelines allows and this will see us completing our overall Refugee Resettlement Programme to house 22 families.

Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan

Since 1st February 2018, 97 Rebuilding Ireland Home Loans have been approved. 91 applications have been declined. Some of the reasons for negative outcomes include:

- Don't have the deposit required
- Repayment on the mortgage would exceed 30/35% of their income
- Already sufficiently committed (i.e. already are at capacity with other loans)
- Credit rating issues

HAP

There are currently 1,059 active HAP tenancies, 289 of which have transferred from rent supplement.

Private House Grants

To the 15th March, 2021 the following grants for privately owned houses were approved:-

- 36 Housing Aid for Older People Grant Applications in the sum of €147,168
- 23 Mobility Aids Grants have been paid in the sum of €94,650
- 21 Housing Adaptation Grants have been paid in the sum of €144,500

Private Rented Inspections

470 Private Rented Inspections were carried out in 2020. No physical Private Rented Inspections have been carried out to date in 2021 due to Covid-19 restrictions. 46 Virtual Inspections have been carried out to 11th March, 2021

Housing Maintenance

Month	Work Orders Raised	Work Orders Closed	Work Orders Open
January 21	234	181	53
February 21	216	161	55
TOTAL (YTD)	450	342	108

Month	Work Orders Raised	Work Orders Closed	Work Orders Open
January 20	517	517	0
February 20	341	341	0
March 20	228	228	0
April 20	120	120	0
May 20	205	205	0
June 20	278	276	2
July 20	287	284	3
August 20	286	282	4
September 20	359	351	8
October 20	369	329	40
November 20	286	252	34
December 20	296	203	93
TOTAL JAN to DEC	3,572	3,388	184

NOTE: There are also 335 routine maintenance requests currently on-hold due to current Level 5 COVID restrictions.

Midlands Housing Retrofit Programme

Laois has been notified that it can proceed with the inspections of 160 homes as part of a pilot initiative under the above programme. The scope of eligible works includes:

- a) Attic Insulation
- b) Flat Roof Insulation
- c) External Wall Insulation / Dry Lining / Pumped Cavities
- d) Windows & Doors
- e) Heat Pumps
- f) LED Lighting

Houses must achieve a minimum BER rating of “B2” (or Cost Optimal Equivalent). It is proposed to carry out the inspections and subsequent works in two phases.

Survey inspections commenced in September 2020 on the first phase. Feedback to date has been positive from residents. Tenders for Phase 1 (62 houses) were advertised in December 2020 with a return date of March 20.

Homeless Presentations

Time Period	Homeless Presentations	Emergency Homeless
February 11 th – March 13 th 2021	9	6
Year to Date	31	17

Individuals Accessing	Emergency Accommodation as of 15 th March, 2021	Transition Accommodation as of 15 th March 2021
Adults	10	1
Children	10	2

Housing Allocations Year to 15th March 2021.

Method of Housing Delivery	Numbers allocated
1 st allocation including new builds LCC	0
2 nd and subsequent allocations LCC including refurbished stock	20
Nominations to Approved Housing Bodies	27
Total Allocations	47

Social Housing List at 23rd March 2021

Social Housing Applicants	672
Applicants in receipt of HAP	981
Total Applicants	1653

Planning, Development and Heritage

FORWARD PLANNING PROGRESS REPORT

Draft COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2021-2027

Public Consultation has concluded on the Draft Laois County Development Plan on the 23rd March 2021. The Consultation was carried out via a number of webinars held from 18th February - 01st March 2021.

All submissions are available on www.consult.laois.ie. The submissions will now be considered in the Chief Executives report and this will be presented to the Council in June 2021 for their consideration.

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT REPORT

PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMPARATIVE FIGURES FROM 2020 TO 2021

Year	Valid applications from 01/01/2021 – 11/3/2021	Valid applications from 01/01/2020 – 11/03/2020
2021	128	99

2021 PERFORMANCE	
Number of valid applications received:	128
Number of decisions made	117
Number of applications granted:	114 (Decisions to Grant)
Number of applications refused:	5 (Decisions to Refuse) 3.9% refusal rate
Invalid applications returned to applicant:	25 (2021 Invalid Applications) 16.3%
Files scanned up to -	
Referrals to Area Offices (working days):	within 14 days achieved
Pre planning	
No of requests to date	
No of meetings held to date Upto and including the 12 th March 2021	97 telephone pre-planning meetings
Wait time	1 week

ENFORCEMENT UPDATE

Service Review	2021		2020	
	Feb	Jan - Feb 2021	Feb	Jan - Feb 2020
Total number of new cases subject to complaints that were investigated	9	12	6	16
Number of Warning Letters served	14	26	16	130
Number of Enforcement Notices served	14	23	7	16
No Of cases referred for legal proceedings	0	0	0	1
Number of cases in Court(incl adjournments)	5	9	5	8
Number of cases Resolved in Court	0	0	0	1
Number of Files Closed	14	18	30	50
Number of cases on system	163	163	168	168
Enforcement Costs recouped	€ 2,487.02	€2,886.24	€ 387.18	€1,141.24
Number of Valid Retention Applications Received relating to Enforcement Action	6	8	4	9
Fees received through Valid Retention Applications Received relating to Enforcement Action	€1,867.00	€2,243.00	€1,712.00	€3,495.78
Legal fees paid	€0.00	€597.74	€100.86	€452.64

Heritage Officer Update Report

The following streams of funding are currently open for applications :-

For **archaeological** sites – Community Monuments Fund. Applications to Laois County Council by 12th April. Details at <https://laois.ie/community-monuments-fund-21/>

For **community heritage** projects – Heritage Council Community Grants details at <https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/funding/community-heritage-grant-scheme-2021>, closing date **Monday 29th March 2021 at 5pm.**

For **biodiversity** projects – Funding call open under the National Biodiversity Action Plan – deadline for receipt of applications is **Friday 26th March 2021.**

With funding from the National Biodiversity Action Plan a series of research projects were carried out at Abbeyleix Bog in 2020. A further €16,000 has also been committed for 2021 for survey and research work at Abbeyleix Bog and awareness raising activity.

A commemorative event on the Portlaoise Plane and Col Fitzmaurice will be held online on 12th April 2021. Further details in relation to this will be circulated.

Healthy Ireland / Keep Well Projects

Gardening for Biodiversity/Nature is good for you

The Gardening for Biodiversity book was reprinted with Healthy Ireland funding as part of the overall “Nature is Good for you” campaign.

In your Nature Podcasts

In partnership with BirdWatch Ireland and Offaly County Council and 18-episode Podcast on wildlife and nature has been commissioned. Three episodes have been released to date and so far over 2,000 downloads have been recorded.

Abbeyleix Climate Action End of Residency Project

An interactive online and real-world exhibition will be created by Dr Niamh Shaw to mark the end of the Abbeyleix Climate Action Project. This is underway.

Balladine Neighbourwood

The Neighbourwood application to the Forest Service was approved in early 2021 and with Abbeyleix Tidy Towns will proceed, with part funding through the Climate Actin Section.

BROADBAND OFFICERS REPORT

1. National Broadband Ireland (NBI)

A special meeting to be held with respect to an update on the work in this area as it relates to the county.

2. WIFI for EU.

A tender in relation to the provision of WIFI infrastructure (equipment, installation and maintenance and support) in the following locations has been advertised on E-Tenders -

1. Voucher A - Portlaoise
2. Voucher B - Clonaslee / Mountmellick
3. Voucher C - Abbeyleix
4. Voucher D – Portarlinton

3. Broadband Connection Points (BCP's)

Broadband connection Points are available to the public as outdoor facilities currently due to public health guidelines at

- Vicarstown
- Oisín House
- Emo NS
- Donaghmore Workhouse

An indoor facility will be made available once the premises open to the public. Funding has been secured to develop these locations under the TVRS scheme for the provision of desks/ chairs, screens, IT equipment, Health and safety equipment for compliance with public health, etc. This will improve the offering at these locations to visitors and users of the facilities.

Local Enterprise & Economic Development

Demand is still high for supports through LEO from businesses that have been directly impacted by Covid-19 and Brexit. Businesses continue to present with the challenges of cashflow, financial difficulties, getting staff back to work and huge uncertainty about the future. Our ongoing focus is to ensure that Laois businesses are in the strongest position possible in the face of this unprecedented and continuously evolving crisis.

LEO continues to offer complementary mentoring in all aspects of business from HR to Finance. This mentoring support is currently being delivered remotely via zoom, teams, etc. To-date 91 businesses have availed of mentoring support. For all early stage companies, our business advice service remains operational and all appointments are being dealt with via phone.

LEO is continuing to offer a range of online interactive training programmes to support businesses. The courses are free to clients and are delivered online via ZOOM. 310 people have availed of online training since 1st January.

Trading vouchers to the value of €2,500 (90% of eligible costs up to the maximum of €2,500) continue to be available through LEO. Since January, 33 vouchers to the value of €80,000 have been approved.

THE SMALL BUSINESS ASSISTANCE SCHEME COVID (SBASC)

On the 11th March 2021, the Department of Enterprise Trade & Employment launched the Small Business Assistance Scheme for COVID (SBASC). This scheme is for businesses that do not qualify for the COVID Restrictions Support Scheme (CRSS) operated by the Revenue Commissioners. The eligibility criteria for both schemes are similar. SBASC also aligns with recently announced grant schemes for the tourism, arts and entertainment sectors.

The grant available for eligible applicants is a contribution towards the cost of re-opening or keeping a business operational and re-connecting with employees and customers. The grant could be used to defray ongoing fixed costs, e.g. utilities, insurance, refurbishment or for measures to ensure employee and customer safety. The grant is only available to an applicant operating from a rateable property. Each eligible applicant will receive a payment of €4,000 for quarter 1 of 2021 with an additional payment of €4,000 from May 2021 to applicants continuing to meet the scheme criteria. There is an online application process similar to the Restart Grant Schemes. The SBASC Scheme will be administered by the local authorities.

25 applications have been received to date and we are currently awaiting the software to process the payments.

RATES WAIVER 2021

On the 27th January 2021, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage advised of a rates waiver for specified businesses for the first quarter of 2021. This has now been extended to include the 2nd quarter of 2021. The scheme has modified criteria and is a standalone waiver scheme. The Council will apply the waiver to eligible categories. Where ratepayers are in the excluded category they can appeal their exclusion to the Council and they can, also, engage with the Council where their businesses have been severely impacted by the pandemic. Details of the scheme have been advertised on: <https://laois.ie/commercial-rates-waiver-2021/>

Roads, Transportation & Smarter Travel

J17 National Enterprise Park

Laois County Council has executed the main contract for the delivery of enabling infrastructure at J17 National Enterprise Park. In the coming weeks, to accord with construction-related public health guidelines a number of smaller contracts will be commenced to provide for Public Lighting, pedestrian/cyclist connectivity to the broader road network, signage, landscaping and entrance details.

Roadworks Scheme 2021

Laois County Council Grant Allocations 2021	
Restoration Improvement	€6,038,000
Restoration Maintenance	€1,010,500
Supplementary Restoration Maintenance	€721,500
Discretionary Grant	€1,857,000
Bridge Rehabilitation	€323,000
Specific Imp. Grants	€400,000
Safety Improvement Works	€220,000
Speed Limits	€9,000
Cycle Signs	€800
Training Grant	€32,000
Drainage Works	€472,884
Former National Roads	€250,000
PSCI: Survey Support	€17,000
Community Improvement Scheme	€452,000
Active Travel	€709,308
Climate Adaption	€126,330
Total Allocation	€12,639,322

DTTaS grant allocations were received on the 15th February 2021. It is noteworthy that the overall grant allocation for Laois has increased by approx. €300k with some modest increases in allocations for recurring items and some additional items. Key items below;

- Specific Improvement Grant funding for 2 projects (Derrin Cross and Redcastle Junction - €200k each)
- Bridge rehabilitation funding for 5 bridges in the amount of €323k
- Safety Improvement Works funding for 8 schemes (2 in Western MD, 3 in Central MD, 3 in Eastern MD)
- Active Travel funding in the amount of €709k
- Climate Adaptation funding amounting to €126k

Work is ongoing preparing the priority roads for the 2021 Roadworks Programme. This will now be progressed and the 2021 Roadworks Scheme will be presented to Elected Members for their consideration at the April 2021 Monthly Meeting.

TII Funding;

In March 2021 the following additional TII allocations were announced to fund road structure rehabilitation works at;

o N80 Ballylinan	€175,188
o N80 Laught/Common	€198,109

In addition, the following specific national road maintenance allocations have recently been notified by TII:

o N80 footpath Repairs Mountmellick	€22,000
o N80 Minor pavement repairs	€18,000
o N78 Minor pavement repairs	€30,000
o N80 Arles Drainage Works	€47,000
o N80 Ballymacken Gully drainage clearance	€15,000

The funds above are in addition to previously advised 2021 TII funding allocations in the sums of;

- National Road Maintenance	€482,717
- National Road Improvement	€1,550,957

TII Funded Projects;

There are a number of specific National Road Schemes being progressed, as follows;

- **N80 Stradbally Road Portlaoise Pavement Renewal (Church to Ballymacken);** Tender documents for the delivery of this Scheme have been finalised and agreed with Transport Infrastructure Ireland. This tender has been published and subsequently awarded. The estimated value of the Scheme is €2.0M. Works will commence in Q1 2021.
- **N77 Abbeyleix Road Portlaoise Pavement Renewal (JFL to M7);**
 - o A sum of €900k has been previously advised to Elected Members to fund a pavement renewal scheme on this stretch of the N77.
 - o Approval has also been received for safety works along this stretch of the N77 from TII in the amount of €495k.
 - o Additionally HD15 Safety Scheme discussions are ongoing with Transport Infrastructure Ireland whereby other improvements to provide enhanced pedestrian connectivity, enhanced provision for cyclists and landscaping are being sought for this important approach to Portlaoise Town.
 - o Consultants have been appointed to progress the design element of this project.
- **HD28 Road Resurfacing ;** This programme of resurfacing re-establishes skid resistance to the road network. We are awaiting our 2021 programme of works under this programme to be confirmed by TII. In the meantime two HD28 schemes carried forward from 2020 will be completed by the end of February 2021 in Abbeyleix (N77) and Portlaoise (N80 JFL)

DRCD ORIS Measure 3 Funding;

ORIS Measure 3 funding allocation has been received for;

- Destination Slieve Bloom- development & implementation of a Signage, Orientation, and Interpretation Strategy €270,000

River Drainage Maintenance

Surveys are currently underway to seek consents for the 2021 programme of works and full details of that programme will be presented to Elected Members in Q2 2021.

Environment & Environmental Protection

1. Kyletelesha Tipping Head and Civic Amenity Site, Portlaoise:

Normal services continue at the Kyletelesha Landfill & Civic Amenity Site following the takeover of operations at the facility by Laois County Council.

(a) Accommodation Works (Phase 1):

Phase 1 of the accommodation works are completed. This will enable all customers using the facility (Transfer Station & the Civic Amenity Site) to go across the weighbridge, thus providing for greater accountability, a fairer charging regime and will also allow more detailed data to be gathered on the weights of recycled items etc.

(b) Landfill Aftercare Monitoring:

All waste licence monitoring is on-going and up to date.

The SCADA system must be upgraded in the current year in order for the Council to be fully compliant with the EPA landfill licence.

2. Portarlinton Civic Amenity Site:

This facility is operated and managed under contract with AES (Ireland) Ltd.

Opening Hours: Monday, Wednesday, Friday, from 8am to 3.30pm and Saturday 8am to 1.30pm.

3. Bring Banks:

There are 42 Bring Bank sites provided in the county. To date 337.17 tonnes of recyclable material has been collected in 2021.

A new Request for Tender was recently advertised on eTenders for the Regional Contract for the collection of glass and cans. The Tender Closing Date has passed and the replies received will be evaluated shortly.

4. Waste Enforcement & Litter:

Environmental Complaint Register

Complaint Type	Litter	Abandoned Cars	Waste Enforcement incl. C&D	Management & Infrastructure (Bring Banks)	Air	Water	Noise	Vet	Total
Jan	10	2	53	1	2	2	1	2	73
Feb	8	3	71	1	1	4	2	2	92

- 2021 – 165 complaints logged for investigation for months of Jan/Feb.
- 2021 – 33 fixed penalty notices issued to date, for breaches of Litter Pollution Act, 1997
- Notices - 1 Section 55 Notice has been issued to date in 2021.

5. **Illegal Dumping:**

A large cleanup of illegal waste/dumping took part in Knockmay and O'Moore Place, Portlaoise during February and March 2021. Environment Enforcement staff along with the help of sub-contractor removed large quantities of waste to authorised facility.

Illegal dumping was also removed from areas such as Clonenagh Bog; the Heath; Clonkeen; St. Brigids, Portlaoise; Straboe; Brockera Ballyfin; Congress Tce & Canal Rd Portarlinton to mention but a few.

Illegal dumping was also removed from areas such as Portlaoise; the Heath; Ballybrittas, a no of areas in Portarlinton and Ballyfin, Ballyadams Killeshin, Emo and the Rock of Dunamaise.



O'Moore Place, Portlaoise



Dunamaise Church Grounds

6. **Clean-Ups:**

Clean-Up Laois Week will not go ahead in 2021 in the normal way. Notwithstanding that, 64 packs of litter pickers, gloves and bags have been distributed in 2021 to Tidy Towns, large community groups, GAA Clubs and members of the public. This has supported various litter picks which have been carried out in a safe manner. The Environment Section has arranged for the safe pick up and disposal of litter collected.



Pictures from Clean-ups completed by residents in Cullahill & Durrow.

Tidy Towns

The Laois Federation of Tidy Towns Committee met to discuss activities for 2021. A Tidy Towns Seminar was held in early March with guest speak Duncan Stewart facilitated by Green Pine Consultants and Laois Partnership. The Tidy Towns Groups were given updates regarding the arrangements for the 2021 competition and this meeting has been followed up with a one-to one consultation session with Green Pine Consultants to assist Tidy Towns Groups with the completion

of the Application Forms. These consultations along with preparation of 5 year plans and maps have been funded through LEADER. It has been noted by Tidy Towns adjudicators in the past that application forms from Laois Tidy Towns Groups were not showcasing the work of groups to maximum effect so this advice is vital to improve marks awarded in the national competition.

A number of clean-ups have been organised by Tidy Towns county wide. This has been commendable as they have had to organise these collections while observing social distancing rules within the 5km zone under Level 5. Many groups have organised clean-ups in association with local GAA clubs most notably Durrow Tidy Towns organised a collection in conjunction with Abbeyleix and Cullahill Tidy Towns and both local GAA clubs held a Litter pick along the main road from Cullahill to Abbeyleix to the benefit to all 3 communities. Camross Tidy Towns, Coolrain Tidy Towns, Camross GAA and families from local primary school all participated in a local clean up and collected a huge amount of litter and waste from the area. Laois County Council have been providing litter pickers, bags, gloves and arranging pickup of collected waste from these groups



Durrow Tidy Towns

7. RMCEI:

The 2020 Annual Returns Report for RMCEI Plan Implementation and the 2021 Laois County Council RMCEI Plan have been submitted to the EPA. A mid-year review of the plan will be carried out at the end of Q2 2021.

8. Environmental Protection:

i) Protect the Water Quality Status in all Water Bodies:

- (a) 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.
- (b) Investigation ongoing into surface water discharges to the Borris Road Pump Station and foul water discharges to the lakes at Kilminchy.

- In 2021 (to date), Laois County Fire & Rescue Service attended 71 emergency incidents consisting of 38 fires, 21 special service incidents & 12 false alarms.

Turnout by Station*:

Portlaoise –28	Portarlinton - 14	Stradbally – 13	Mountmellick – 14
Abbeyleix - 4	Mountrath – 6	Durrow – 11	Rathdowney – 3

***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. The current suspension of non-essential construction activity has delayed the progress of this project.
- In recent months 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 tender competition has closed & the order has been placed with HPMP Fire. Delivery is expected in mid 2021
- A tender competition for new PPE has also closed & the order has been placed with Hunter Apparel Solutions for an initial order of 140 sets of fire kit. Delivery is due early Q2
- In accordance with the Planning & Development Acts, a Part 8 application is currently being produced for the proposed new fire station in Stradbally.

COVID-19 Report update

- Laois County Fire & Rescue Service continues to provide a full emergency service. In addition Covid – 19 Contingency Planning is still a key focus for the Fire & Emergency Service.
- In parallel the Civil Defence have provided key assistances, servicing requirements of the HSE, the Community Forum Call Centre and other local agencies. Civil Defence taskings have been scaled back due to volunteers returning to work & operations being scaled back nationally.

Flood Relief

Mountmellick FRS

- Options report being finalised. Options public consultation to commence 16th April 2021.

Clonaslee FRS

- Public engagement recently completed. 10 submissions received and under evaluation.

Mountrath Minor Works

- Section 177AE application made to An Bord Pleanala on the 4th February for the provision of an overflow culvert on the Shannon Stream to the Mountrath River.

Public Water and Wastewater Capital

The following capital works have been approved by Irish Water:

- **Ballyroan WwTP** – Installation of 2nd Sequence Batch Reactor. SBR 2 has been commissioned and seeded. Initial effluent results are good. We are doing further testing and hope to confirm to IW in the next two weeks that the project is complete. We will be encouraging IW to proceed with storm tank and waste sludge storage tank as soon as possible.
- **Durrow** – bring an additional production borewell into service in Fermoy – M + E works substantially complete, bringing of new borewell into supply ongoing. Price now received by Irish Water (IW) from Campions to install larger 6 inch pump with a 4 inch motor and associated works at Fermoy. Provision of a storage/blend tank and booster pump set also being discussed with IW.
- **Coolbanagher** – Irish Water intend to commission PWg only. Currently with Asset Planning in IW – NOD addressing ESB connection issue. Due to be handed over to Asset Delivery by the end of March 2021.
- **The Strand WTP** – boil water notice has been issued for this WTP, upgrade works as part of the Laois/Offaly disinfection programme intended to be completed by the end of April 2021, with a 30-day process-proving period by the end of May 2021.
- **Castletown WwTP** – Inlet Works Storm and Sludge Program, new storm tank and sludge holding tank intended to be installed on site by the end of 2021.
- **Doolough Wells** - Campions and EMR have completed all works on site at Doolough. The rising main has been sterilised. Weekly samples and testing has been carried out.

Multi Annual Rural Water Programme 2019-2021

Measure 2 -Public Health Compliance

- **The Heath GWS:** Work in progress.

Measure 3 - Enhancement and Water Conservation

- **Ballypickas GWS:** the supply and laying of a distribution mains extension-work planned for 2021 – Awaiting Department approval to proceed.
- **Mains Upgrade** – Tender award recommendation received from consultant – preparation for works to commence in progress.
- **Heath GWS:** Network upgrade – advertised & tenders submitted. Recommendation of the Consultant due.

Measure 6 - Community Water and Wastewater Connections

- **Waste Water Community Connection at Goodwin Estate:** Project is progressing and will appear on the eTenders site from Friday 26th March 2021.

Railway Mews, Portarlinton: Surveying for misconnections started prior to Christmas and found that a small number of connections are blocked with grease. Surveying contractor has confirmed that they will recommence when Level 5 restrictions are lifted.

Corporate

The 2021/2022 Register of Electors has been published and is available for inspection at the usual locations.

Associated Companies

Risk Assessment - The Laois Arts Theatre Company Ltd

Purpose of Company:

The company was established in 1998 to:

- provide facilities and opportunities for the organisation of artistic and cultural events and to maintain a centre for the holding of performances, exhibitions, workshops and conferences of all kinds on the premises.
- encourage, develop, foster and stimulate public interest in all aspects of the arts and cultural affairs.
- promote the knowledge, appreciation and practice of the Arts

Box Office Review:

- In 2019 Dunamaisé sold over 33,000 tickets to 471 events/performances with gross sales of €400,500. (This includes additional free/un-ticketed events at the Centre)
- In 2020 Dunamaisé sold over 9,000 tickets to 225 events/performances with gross sales of €101,000.
- Up to 13 March 2020 Closure: Sales of 7,650 tickets to 107 events/performances with gross sales of €90,950. There were a small number of events under brief Level 2 in September; the rest were online throughout the year.

Risks to viability and operations of Company from Covid19 Pandemic:

It has been a very difficult time for the Arts sector and community, including Laois Arts Theatre Company. Many of the staff are on temporary lay-off since the end of March 2020 and the remaining core staff are on the EWSS scheme/working remotely for the most part.

Initially the building was powered down and put on minimum use to ensure safety and most economical usage, with regular site visits. In the interim the buildings large capacity has been used for holding Council meetings and has been hired by other bodies to hold meetings, when government guidance allowed.

Management is planning for when they can reopen safely to the public and within government guidelines. Seating capacity may be affected in relation to how many and what performances can be put on in the future. Seating capacity is 240 but new and adapted performances, including online and significantly reduced capacity will need to be in place in the short term and as advised by public health guidelines.

Management has noted that during Level 2 restrictions in September and October 2020 the Centre was able to successfully open and hold events, albeit at reduced capacity of less than 50 audience members for performances. Feedback was very positive and confidence from patrons who did return was high, which is encouraging for the future.

Programming plans for the rest of 2021:

- Management is continuing their limited programme of online work and a wide range of other artists supports. They have adapted several spaces to rehearsal and development studios, writers' rooms and with the investment in new equipment, can record and stream work to our audiences online.
- Working towards the coming months, when they can safely and viably re-open the Gallery and performances to live audiences. Reopening supports/subvention will be needed for any programming in a reduced capacity setting.

While the Covid pandemic has changed the way in which the business model will work in future it is considered the risk to the company and its mission will be medium, mitigated by the support of the Arts Council who continue to work to ensure artists are protected and provide funding, as well as the ongoing Wage Subsidy and annual funding from Laois County Council.

Assessment:

The Arts Council currently appears committed to supporting venues such as the Dunamaise, along with other locations for performance artists.

The venue has been forced to close on various occasions due to the Covid19 restrictions.

When the Covid restrictions are lifted there would appear to be a pent-up demand for return to live venues, which should help the Dunamaise Theatre.

Financial out-turns in recent years have hovered around break-even on the revenue account.

The company has managed its finances prudently during the past year and has taken advantage of available central government supports.

On the basis of the above, the immediate risk assessment for the venue is viewed as "medium".

Risk Rating: Medium

Risk Assessment -Portlaoise Enterprise Centre Ltd

Purpose of Company:

The company was set up in July 1989 to support enterprise development in Portlaoise and its surrounding areas

Risks to viability and operations of Company from SARS CoV2 Pandemic:

The impact of COVID19 has not been as bad as first feared. One year into the pandemic it is gratifying to note that there is a full complement of clients, approx. 20, operating from the centre and that the management of the centre looks forward to developing its services so as to take advantage from emerging remote working practices.

Cash flow and company accounts are managed well on an ongoing basis.

Current Risk Rating; Low

Risk Assessment - Portarlington Enterprise Centre Ltd

Purpose of Company:

The Portarlington Enterprise Centre was established by the Portarlington Community Development Association (**PCDA**) in 2004 to help foster an entrepreneurial culture in the area and operates on a “not-for-profit” basis. The Innovation Hub has been developed to encourage creativity, technology and social inclusion.

Risks to viability and operations of Company from SARS CoV2 Pandemic:

While a number of tenants are availing of rent deferrals or a temporary reduction of licence fee it is notable that the centre has full occupancy. The management operates on the basis that it will support and assist its existing clients (15 no) through a very difficult time and will do whatever it can to maintain a good level of occupancy in the centre. In responding to current challenges and remote working a virtual office initiative has been launched whereby clients can avail of the service of the centre on a remote basis.

Current Risk Rating; Medium

Risk Assessment - The Portlaoise Innovation Centre DAC (THE CUBE)

Purpose of Company:

It was necessary to establish the Designated Activity Company in June 2018 in order to apply for and avail of funding provided by the Department of Enterprise and Innovation under the Regional Enterprise Development Fund. The DAC sets out to facilitate the creation of a low carbon centre of excellence and to stimulate job creation and entrepreneurship in Laois. The Company at present has no assets and has not commenced trading.

Risks to Viability of Company from SARS CoV2 Pandemic:

Members will be aware that the Company was awarded a grant allocation of €2,050,560 in early 2020 under the Regional Enterprise Development Fund with matched funding of €512,000 from Laois Co Council. There has been no significant level of expenditure over the period of the pandemic to date.

The property at Tower Hill, Portlaoise (The CUBE) is currently the subject of an emerging turnkey agreement between the owner JETO Ltd and the DAC.

A Director for the CUBE was appointed by the DAC late last year and work is underway in developing a business model for the centre at Tower Hill.

While much has changed since the time the application was made to DETE by way of uncertainty amongst prospective clients/tenants and stakeholders including the take up of corporate offices, it is considered the company is nimble enough to respond and improvise in the current business and public health environment.

Current Risk Rating; Medium

Risk Assessment - Treo Nua Ltd

Purpose of Company:

Cash flow and accounts are closely monitored on an ongoing basis.

Risks to viability and operations of Company from Covid19 Pandemic:

Treo Nua was closed to the public from 16th March and reopened Monday 29th June 2020.

Several of the Centre tenants are providing an essential service and as such have remained opened since June 2020, despite further lockdowns.

Income and activity have been affected during the pandemic which is reflected in the summary financial figures. However, centre management is confident that they can increase income and activity again in the future once restrictions lift. They have confirmed that they have had positive engagement and numerous enquiries in relation to using the facilities as soon as it is safe and acceptable to do so.

The Centre will be trying to accommodate as many bookings as possible while adhering to social distance guidelines (this may be problematic for larger groups). While the Covid pandemic has affected the way in which the business model will work in future it is considered the risk to the company and its mission will be low to medium, with continued support from Pobal.

Assessment:

Historically Treo Nua has been well managed financially, with the company having built up reserves against unanticipated shocks.

However, for the 2019 financial year, the company suffered a loss in excess of €34k. While the company held reserves to withstand this loss, there is evidence that its cost base has increased without a corresponding increase in income sources.

Given the scale of the 2019 loss, the risk rating must be viewed as high until such time as fully audited accounts in a normal year (post covid) show a return to at least break-even.

Current Risk Rating: High

Risk Assessment - Portarlinton Leisure Centre Ltd

Purpose of Company:

Established in 2007, the company's mission is to encourage, develop, foster and stimulate public interest in all aspects of sports and leisure activities and to provide access to sport and leisure facilities to the wider community with emphasis on those who are disadvantaged and socially excluded through physical or mental disability, age, infirmity and isolation.

Risks to viability and operations of Company from Covid19 Pandemic:

The Leisure Centre has had a very challenging time since the pandemic first closed its door on March 12th, 2020. Due to Covid-19 restrictions Portarlinton Leisure Centre operated as follows:

- January 1st to March 12th – Normal operations
- March 13th to July 12th - CLOSED
- July 13th to August 7th – OPEN. Indoor fitness classes not operational as our studio was used to store gym equipment for social distancing. 5 Aquafit classes per week proceeded.

- August 8th to August 28th – CLOSED, Kildare, Laois, Offaly lockdown (ended Aug 21st at zero notice, we re-opened Aug 29th)
- August 29th – October 6th – OPEN. Indoor fitness classes not operational as our studio was used to store gym equipment for social distancing. 5 Aquafit classes per week proceeded.
- October 7th – October 21st. OPEN. Level 3 restrictions, no indoor fitness classes or Aquafit.
- October 22nd – November 30th. CLOSED.
- December 1st - December 30th OPEN. Level 4+ restrictions, no indoor fitness classes or Aquafit or swimming lessons.
- January 1st, 2021 – CLOSED

Although closed at present, there are significant ongoing costs during closure in relation to maintenance of pools and facilities. Summary risks identified:

- Ongoing costs during closure
- Staff layoffs
- Reduction in customer confidence to return to activities - especially schools
- Additional and increased hygiene costs
- Potential loss of key staff
- Reduced opening hours on re-opening to comply with guidelines
- Insurance costs

While the Covid pandemic has affected the way in which leisure centres will work in the period ahead it is considered the risk to the company and its mission will be medium to high, with notable high quality on site management and established track record of the Company. This is proven by the robust financial position and reserves held by the company before Covid showing strong financial management. However, there will need to be an ongoing assessment of trading as the year progresses.

Assessment:

This company has historically been well managed. However, Covid 19 has hit the company very severely and it has suffered a significant loss in income while still subject to certain maintenance costs on the premises.

The immediate future for a number of its markets (eg school swimming lessons) appears most uncertain even when Covid restrictions are lifted.

The risk assessment for the company for the immediate future must be viewed as “very high”.

There have been recent discussions with the Chairman of the Board of the company regarding the future licencing requirements of the centre, the broadening of the scope of the company to take on the management of the Portlaoise Leisure Centre as a single combined entity to serve the entire county and the need for support and assistance from Laois County Council and Government Departments. Discussions will continue with a view towards having a solution in place to bring both leisure centres (Portarlinton and Portlaoise) back to full viability as soon as possible.

Current Risk Rating: Very **High**

COMMUNITY

Covid-19 Community Response

Covid-19 Helpline

To date (30.03.2020 – 22.03.2021) the helpline has received **781 calls**.

Calls Received 2020: 732

Calls Jan 2021: 24

Calls Feb 2021: 13

Calls March 2020: 12

It is noteworthy that the majority of these calls received are from those seeking food parcels. PATH continue to provide this invaluable service and their selfless work in the community is deeply appreciated. Otherwise volume of calls are low, and this is similar to those in neighbouring counties. The helpline continues to be promoted on various outlets such as Laois Co Council web page, social media and local radio.

The Council phone line **057 866 4000** is open Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays) between the hours of 9am to 5pm, for the **Laois County Council Community Response Support Helpline** to facilitate the most appropriate community response to the needs of vulnerable people living in the community where their usual sources of support have become unavailable due to COVID19 and to deal with normal Council queries.

Laois Community Support Response Forum

The most recent meeting of the Covid-19 Community Forum took place on 8th February.

Notwithstanding the difficulties being experienced by many people in our community the Forum believes that the multiple voluntary and state agencies are working well together and that help is available for the vast majority of people seeking assistance and advice.

Public Participation Network

County Plenary

Laois PPN are required to hold two County Plenaries a year. Laois PPN held their first County Plenary of 2021 of Member Groups on Tuesday 9th March. This was an online event. There was a large attendance on the night.

Emily Nelson of The Wheel was the guest speaker. She gave a presentation on EU Funding opportunities for Community Groups including the recently launched Access Europe Programme which is a three-year programme, led by The Wheel and funded by the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs. Laois PPN were the first PPN in the country to receive this presentation.

Laois Check-In Cards

The Laois Check-In cards are an initiative of Laois County Council as part of the 'Keep Well' Campaign and promoted in collaboration with Laois PPN. The Laois Check-In cards are distributed by Laois PPN member groups to ensure that the needs of older and vulnerable persons in our communities, living alone or more isolated, are not forgotten during this pandemic.

Comhairle na nÓg

Comhairle na nÓg currently has 12 members and meets weekly online

- Four new members have joined
- The schools represented are:
 - Scoil Christ Ri
 - St. Fergals
 - Mounthrauth Community School

- Colaiste Iosagain
- Heywood Community School
- Clonaslee College
- All schools and organisations have been sent nomination forms to ensure that all young people are represented
- The group are currently working on their theme of BODY IMAGE

Age Friendly Update

- The Laois Older Peoples Forum had their second virtual meeting on Friday 19th March 2021.
- The Chatters and Matters radio show continues. Sponsorship has been secured to ensure the show will continue until June 2021.
- The Age Friendly Business Recognition Scheme has restarted. The second workshop for local business owners was delivered by Zoom on Thursday 4th March. There was 9 organisations represented at the workshop. The initiative was covered by the Laois Nationalist.

Community Funding

- **Community Resilience Fund** - launched in November 2020, the Keep Well Campaign is aimed at helping people - individuals & communities - to keep up their resilience & wellbeing through an especially challenging winter and through to spring. People are being encouraged to plan some “self-care” every day or week to get them through the winter and will be supported with information and resources to help them to do so. The campaign is well under way, budget has been fully allocated and radio advertising, adverts in local media and regular weekly posts to Social Media are taking place. On social media the Keep Well campaign has made 104 posts having 107,934 interactions. Activities have been adapted where required to fit with the current Covid-19 Guidelines, some activities have been completed while others are progressing as planned.
- **Community Grants Scheme (Environmental) 2021**
This grant scheme has been launched and advertised on 1st March 2021, both online and in the Local Newspapers. Applications are now invited from Community Groups with closing date for receipt of applications of 9th April 2021

Climate Action and Energy Efficiency: -

Carbon Footprint Study of Portlaoise.

The Carbon Footprint Study for Portlaoise has now been finalized and is ready for publication in the coming days. The report was prepared by Siemens/Avanta for Laois County Council as part of the necessary work associated with the Portlaoise Low Carbon Town Project. The availability of this report is timely in the light of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2019 and the changes that are expected at every level of society over the coming decades.

The main points from the report are summarized in the infographic below. It can be seen, in order to achieve a 7% reduction in greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide mainly) in Portlaoise on a future year by year basis, that it is necessary

- to generate renewable energy locally,
- to retrofit at least 2,000 homes to at least B2 energy rating standard, and
- to begin the transition to electric vehicle and increased use of cycling and public transport.

PORTLAOISE TOWN

Carbon Footprint Study

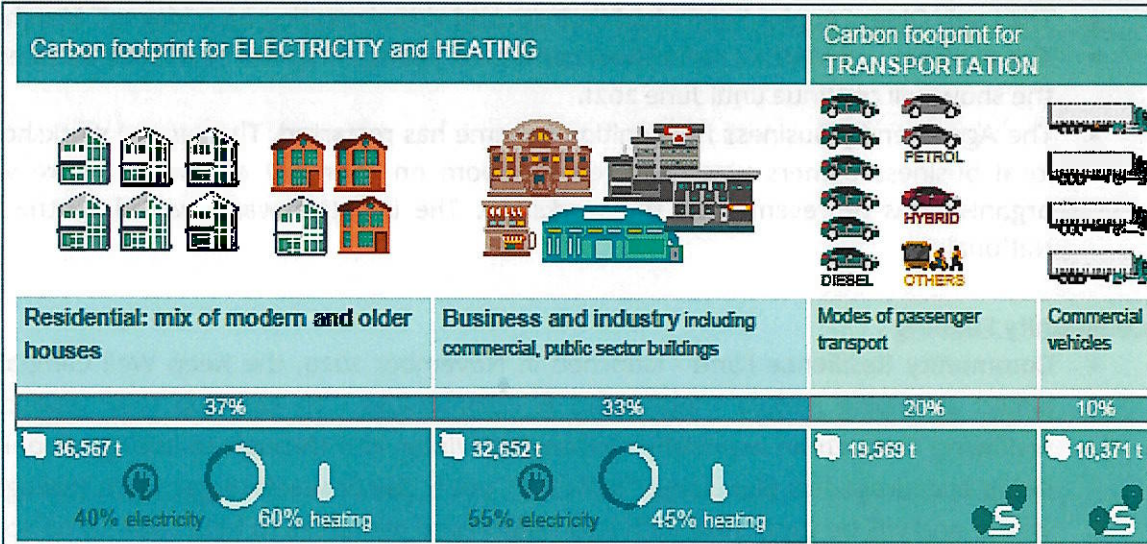


SIEMENS

Portlaoise Town emits around ~100,000 tons CO₂ per annum (pop 23,000 in 2019)
 That is around 4 tons per person per year net of agricultural emissions and travel outside the zone

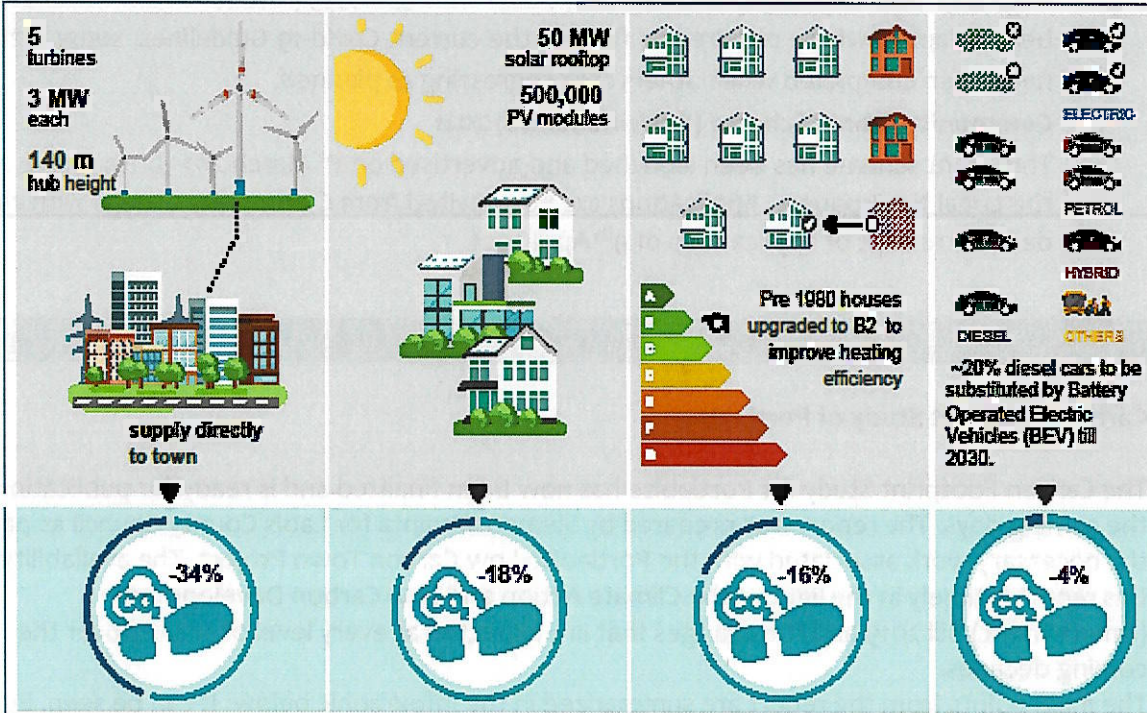


TODAY



The study identified local solutions to reduce the town's carbon footprint

OPPORTUNITIES



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

Working for your future

The scope of this study is limited to emissions from direct energy consumption and does not include secondary emissions from consumption of products

Energy

- As per the recently published *Annual Report 2020 on Public Sector Energy Efficiency Performance*– the greatest efficiency savings within the local authority sector for 2019 were achieved by Louth County Council at 43.62% and Laois County Council at 43.23%.
- The impact of the LED lighting replacement project is expected to add further to these savings in next year’s SEAI report. We continue to examine energy efficiency projects and have submitted applications SEAI under the BEC Grant for a number of items in public buildings.

Arts Update

Arts Awards and Opportunities

Arts Act Grants, the Tyrone Guthrie Centre Bursary, Artists in Schools Scheme adjudication process has been completed and Arts Act Grants go to the full Council meeting in March for approval. Applications for the Artist in Schools scheme were very limited this year due to the Covid-19 restrictions on schools and a review of this budget allocation area is now required.

Seachtain na Gaeilge

Laois Arts in partnership with the Library Service and Dunamaise Arts Centre, presented a free virtual conversation between acclaimed Irish writer and documentary maker Manchán Magan and RTÉ radio producer Clíodhna Ní Anluain on Tuesday 9th March. The interview, via Zoom, discussed Manchán Magan’s bestselling book, ‘32 Words for Field’ is available to view via facebook – Laois Arts or from the DAC website.

Laois Youth Theatre

Online workshops have now re-commenced with the Portlaoise YT Groups. A planned programme is in place in partnership with the Dunamaise Arts Centre to continue the programme up to 12th June to include online and if allowed, some physical workshops and an end year performance event for Cruinniu na nOg.

Laois Bealtaine Programme

Programme plan is reduced due to lock down but plans are in place for online events and art in hospitals commission project.

Sport & Leisure Update

- **Laois County Council managed playgrounds:** Essential repairs and weekly inspections are being carried out at all Laois County Council managed play facilities given the current COVID 19 restrictions.
- **Playground Development:** Part VIII Application for Borris-in-Ossory playground & MUGA is on public display and assistance provided to the local group to make a Sports Capital Application for the MUGA.
- **Community Resilience Funding** – Splash into Spring campaign has been completed and had significant social media engagement. A short video is now being prepared to highlight the participation and positive messaging encouraging outdoor recreation.
- **Portlaoise Leisure Centre:** Refurbishment works are currently ceased due to COVID restrictions at Portlaoise Leisure Centre.
- **Portarlinton Leisure Centre** is currently closed in line with Level 5 restrictions.
- **Sports Capital Grant Scheme** Sport & Leisure Office assisted 38 community groups with Sports Capital Applications. Two applications were submitted on behalf of Laois County Council for Portlaoise and Portarlinton Leisure Centres. In total an unprecedented number of applications- 89- were submitted by Co Laois groups

- **CLÁR 2021** – Laois County Council have advertised seeking expressions of interest from schools/ community groups seeking applications under Measure1, 2 & 3a. Closing date for receipt of EOI's is Wednesday April 14th 2021
- **ORIS – Measure3** – Funding of €270,000 has been allocated for a signage project for the Slieve Blooms

Libraries

Online Services

Library Services continue to operate our online Library services supported by staff on a remote basis. Library buildings are closed due to Level 5 restrictions. The library now is promoting and supporting the public to access all of our online material. Below are the 2020 statistics

E resource- Laois County Library	2020			
Total number of E-books loaned	8739			
Total Number of EAudio books loaned	8239			
Total Number of Newspapers magazines and -(issues)	29865			
Total number of online Language users/sessions	5022 users with 49808 sessions			
Total number of online courses taken and completed	189 courses with over 4,013 individual lessons viewed			

Laois Library Age Friendly booklet

A Laois Library Activity booklet has been compiled and printed and includes well-wishes from some famous Laois personalities, including Claire Byrne, Darina Allen and Anna May McHugh, in addition to local interest articles, song lyrics and plenty of puzzles and brain teasers. These booklets will be distributed in packs to nursing homes around the county. The packs also include artwork by local Laois artist Caroline Keane. Copies of the booklets have been distributed to day care centers and nursing homes in the County.



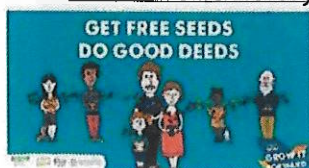
Ireland Reads day Thursday Feb25th

Held on Thursday February 25, Ireland Reads was a national initiative inviting people of all ages to make a pledge to read. To participate in "Ireland Reads" and this reading pledge the public were encouraged to go to www.irelandreads.ie. and pledge some minutes to read. A new website www.irelandreads.ie has been set up where people can pledge to read and get a book recommendation suited to their interests and the time they have available. There are more than 800 recommendations from librarians all around the country including Laois. A website user can simply enter their favourite type of book and how long they would like to read each day and the

website will offer the perfect book suggestion and work out how long it will take to complete. This nationwide Public Libraries initiative is in partnership with publishers, booksellers, authors and others under the Government’s “Keep Well” Campaign. Laois County Library Services participated and promoted reading in all forms during the month of February with over 50 separate online events which had an engagement of over 1, 200 reach of over 19,000 for the week 18th-25th of February.

Grow it Forward -National Campaign

The Grow It Forward campaign which is a grow your own food initiative between GIY and public libraries in Ireland was launched on Tuesday 23rd of March. Libraries are working with GIY to distribute seed packs to the public to encourage people to grow their own food. It will be starting easy with just 5 seed types, carrots, beetroot, peas, oriental greens and tomatoes. The packs are free to the public and will include the seeds, growing information and also Laois Libraries promotional information. The public can contact their library to ask for a pack. emailmountmellicklibrary@laoiscoco.ie or call 057 8644572.



Get free seeds, do good deeds. Today is the launch of Grow It Forward as part of the Government's Keep Well programme.

Seedling offers are invited to claim a Grow It Forward pack at any of 250 public libraries or by contacting their local library on 057 8644572 nationwide are helping to raise the effort.

The campaign is designed to help the nation eat well by inspiring and supporting people to grow some of their own food at home while connecting with friends and family to join the fun.

Each free growing pack includes seeds for beetroot, carrots, salad leaves, peas and tomatoes, a guide to help grow them and a postcard and gift tags to help share them. Those who sign up will also receive regular emails with growing support, video clips and tips for how to 'grow it forward' by passing on seeds, seedlings or produce in schools and with social distancing guidelines.

To get your free pack please email mountmellicklibrary@laoiscoco.ie or call 057 8644572. You can also contact your local library or register here: <https://www.laoiscoco.ie/8147/8644572>

Laois County Library Service

Keep well Campaign -Library Online Talks

The County Library Service as part of Laois’s “Keep Well” Community Resilience Campaign hosted FREE virtual / online talks and sessions to support communities to look after their mental health and general wellbeing. The talks were held via ZOOM included **Empowering and Protecting Children Online** , **Physiotherapist Tips on Working from Home** with chartered physiotherapist Colette O’ Flynn, as seen on **RTE’s Afternoon Show** and YouTube, A series of online **Mindfulness** sessions for adults and young people with Patricia Kavanagh are also taking place throughout March. Patricia is a strong advocate of the benefits of mindfulness in everyday life, emphasising the evidence and scientific basis for its practice.

Eat Well from Scratch – online cooking classes is brought to you by Yvonne Carty from Hey Pesto, is continuing a 4 week online cookery class. **Laughter yoga** held on Thursday March 11th 11.30am) with Mary Ananda Shakti from laughteryogaireland.org. is a practice involving prolonged voluntary laughter and finding that happy place inside.

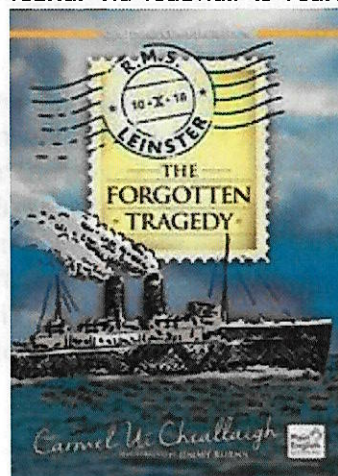
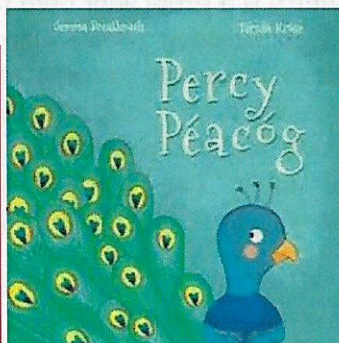
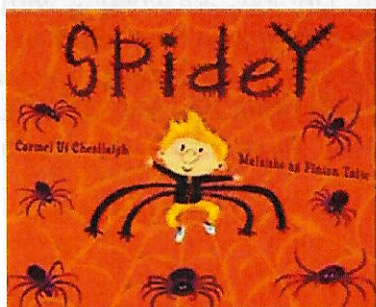
Laois Library Digital Ambassador Programmes

Library staff are providing digital training to those who may need some help accessing our e-books, e-magazines or audiobooks. Staff have been trained as part of the National Age Friendly Digital Training programme is done by telephone and staff are here to help . Contact Portlaoise Branch Library at 0578622333 or email portlaoiselibrary@laoiscoco.ie

Seachtain na Gaeilge

The following events were organized and hosted online by the Library during March 2021 to mark Seachtain na Gaeilge

1. **Music Workshops - as Gaeilge-Interactive Music workshops-3 sessions were held online on the 12 March 2021**
2. **Cómhrá le Carmel faoi Leabhra (Aois 8-10)**
 Friday 5th March, 11am agus Gemma agus Percy Péacóg (Aois 6-8)
 Wednesday 10 March, 3pm, D'inis Carmel Kelly scéalta ó leanaí na leabhair is fearr léi



3. **Ciorcal Cómhrá agus Trá na gCeist via ZOOM 12 March (Aois 13-15)**

Chief Executive's Orders

- ✦ A schedule of Chief Executive Orders signed during the month of March 2021 will be circulated.


 John Mulholland
 Chief Executive

25/03/2021