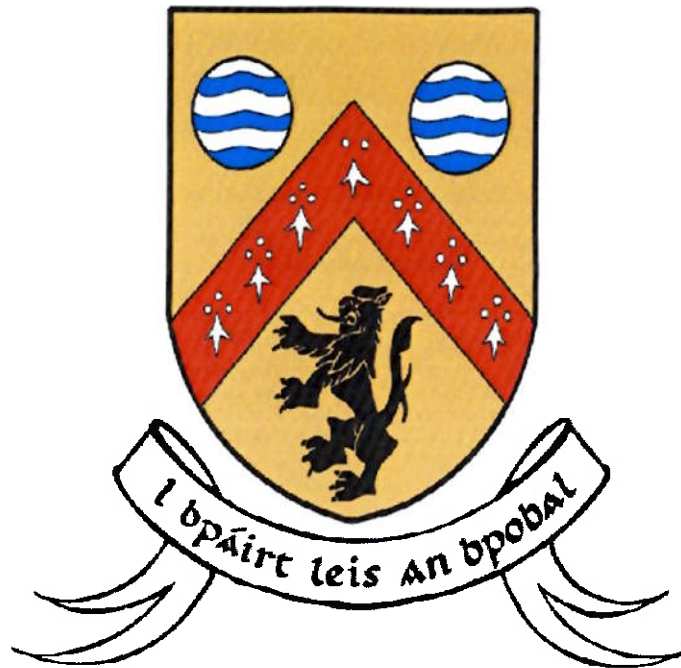


LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE LAOISE



**MONTHLY MANAGEMENT REPORT
MARCH 2024
TUARASCÁIL BHAINISTÍOCHTA
MARTA 2024**

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 2024 is as follows:

FINANCE & ALLOCATIONS NOTIFIED

Expenditure and income to the 29/02/2024 is summarised below:

Service Division	Budget Allocation	Expenditure to 29/02/2024
Housing and Building	€30,641,800	€3,573,434
Road Transportation and Safety	€29,636,000	€1,950,462
Water Services	€3,349,000	€469,357
Development Management	€10,390,000	€1,011,646
Environmental Services	€11,871,700	€630,703
Recreation and Amenity	€5,494,000	€422,172
Agriculture, Education, Health and Welfare	€955,000	€37,921
Miscellaneous Services	€10,109,500	€1,166,201
Central Management Charge	€11,434,000	€1,544,620
Total	€113,881,000	€10,806,516

Service Division	Budget Allocation	Income to 29/02/2024
Housing and Building	€31,776,000	€1,602,792
Road Transportation and Safety	€24,788,000	0
Water Services	€4,410,000	€471,183
Development Management	€7,195,000	€881,705
Environmental Services	€4,733,400	€228,280
Recreation and Amenity	€1,069,000	€230,853
Agriculture, Education, Health and Welfare	€454,000	€23,916
Miscellaneous Services	€11,424,500	€1,863,448
Superannuation	€735,000	€111,388
Local Property Tax	€12,144,172	€0
Rates	€14,584,066	€902,938
Capital transfer	€567,862	
Total	€113,881,000	€3,550,117

The Miscellaneous Services Expenditure is broken down as follows:

Service Division	Budget Allocation	Expenditure to 29/02/2024
Machinery Account	€220,000	€33,249
Administration of Rates	€1,953,000	€72,135
Franchise Costs	€318,000	€53,167
Op of Morgue and Coroner Expenses	€135,000	€353
Op of Markets and Casual Trading	€1,000	€0
Local Representation/Civic Leadership	€1,056,000	€117,449

Motor Taxation	€17,000	€29,644
Agency & Recoupable Services	€6,209,500	€860,204
Total	€10,109,500	€1,166,201

The Central Management Charge Expenditure is broken down as follows:

Corporate Building Costs	€1,530,000	€0
General Corporate Services	€1,335,000	€345,839
Information and Communications Tech	€1,915,000	€396,744
Human Resources Function	€1,257,000	€262,356
Finance Function	€825,000	€128,298
Pensions and Lump Sum Costs	€4,572,000	€596,816
Total	€11,434,000	€1,730,053

The Annual Financial Statement for 2023 is currently being prepared. It is expected that it will be finalised for the April meeting of Laois County Council.

Allocations Notified

Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage – Built Heritage Investment Scheme 2024	€96,000
Community Recognition Fund	
Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage – Energy Efficiency Retrofit Programme 2024	€2,630,920
Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage – Historic Structures Fund	€75,000
Department of Rural & Community Development – Community Recognition Fund	€1,012,996

HOUSING

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

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Total
Social Housing completions to date	229	286	-	-	-	515

Social Housing Schemes Under Construction in 2024

Location	Total No. of Houses	House Types	Constructed by	Comment
Moore St, Rathdowney	6	6 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Construction)	On site – expected delivery Q2 2024
Mooreville, Rathdowney	7	3 No. 2 Bed bungalow 4 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Construction)	On site – expected delivery Q2 2024
Church Avenue, Stradbally (Ph 2)	11	9 No. 4 Bed 2 Storey 2 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey	LCC (Turnkey)	On site – phased delivery To be delivered by Q2 2024
Bruach Na Habhainn, Killeen	1	1 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Turnkey)	On Site – Phase 1 (1 unit) delivery Q3 2024
Carraig Glas, Stradbally	26	15 no. 2 bed houses 9 no. 3 bed houses 2 no 4 bed houses	LCC (Construction)	On site – expected delivery Q2 2025
The Orchard, Ballylunan (Phase 3)	1	1 No. 3-Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Turnkey)	On Site – Phase 3 (1 unit) delivery Q3 2024
Sruth na Gleanna, Killeshin	1	1 no. 3 bed house	LA Part V	Delivery Q2 2024
Oldcourt, Ballylunan	1	1 No. 4 bed 1 storey	LCC (Renewal)	On site – expected delivery Q3 2024
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	On site – expected delivery Q4 2024
Shannon Street, Mountrath	20	13 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 4 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey	LCC Turnkey	On site – expected delivery Q4 2024
Townparks, Mountmellick	49	28 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 11 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey 8 No. 1 Bed 2 Storey 2 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey	LCC Turnkey	On site – expected delivery Q4 2025
Ballymorris Green, Portarlinton (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 Q2 2024.
Clonrooske Abbey, Portlaoise	18	18 no. 3 bed 2 storey	Cluid Housing	Advised Delivery of 6 units Q1 2024 (subject to snags remedied) and 12 units in Q2 2024
Ard Branagh, Portlaoise	6	6 no. 3 bed houses	Circle Housing	Currently on site – expected delivery by Q2 2024
Wallis Street, Mountrath	11	9 no. 2 bed Bungalows 2 no. 2 bed Apts.	Co-Operative Housing	Currently on Site – Expected Delivery Q2 2024
An Lochán, Summerhill, Portlaoise	32	20 no. 1 bed maisonettes 8 no 3 Bed duplexes	Respond	Currently on site. Phased delivery – social housing is across Phases 3 and 4

		4 no 2-3Bed apts		overall scheme. Likely total delivery by end of 2024.
Convent Lands, Portlaoise (CAS)	52	33 no. 2 bed apts 15 no. 1 bed apts. 4 no. 2 bed houses	Sophia Housing	Contractors on site. Expected delivery date Q. 1 of 2026
Rockview, Portlaoise	47	9 no. 2 bed houses 35 no. 3 bed houses 4 no. 4 bed houses	Oaklee Housing	Currently on site - 3 phases of social housing delivery commencing Q2 2024
TOTAL	327			

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

Location/Scheme	No of units	House Types	To be constructed by	Comment
Clonrooske (Knockmay), Portlaoise	12	8 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey 3 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 1 No. 3 Bed 1 Storey	LCC (Construction)	Stage 3 submitted in Q4 2023.
Iona, Portlaoise	7	2 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 1 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey 4 No. 1 Bed Apt	LCC (Construction)	Stage 3 submitted in Q4 2023.
Doonane	12	12 no. 3 bed 2 storey	LCC (Construction)	Stage 3 submitted in Q1 2024.
Derry Road, Durrow	24	9 No. 1 Bed 1 Storey 4 No.1 Bed Apts 1 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey 7 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey 3 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Construction)	Stage 2 approved and Stage 3 currently being progressed.
Ballyadams	1	1 no. 6 bed bungalow	LCC (Construction)	Tender evaluated on-going and Stage 4 to be submitted in Q2 2024.
Stradbally Road, Portlaoise	21	Tenure mix - numbers and house types - to be confirmed in detailed design	LCC Social and Affordable	Part VIII and Stage 2 to be progressed in Q1 2024. Funding mechanism for mixed tenure scheme to be agreed.
Bracklone St, Portarlinton	15	15 no. 2 bed houses	LCC (Construction)	Site investigation surveys on-going and Stage 2 to be submitted in Q2 2024
Rushall, Mountrath	3	3 no. 3 bed 2 storey	LCC (Construction)	Site investigation surveys on-going and Stage 2 to be progressed in Q2 2024
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 Submitted in Q1 2024.
Main St, Ballinakill	3	2 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey 1 No. 1 Bed Apt	LCC (Construction)	Demolition works completed. Stage 2 to be submitted in Q2 2024
Moanbaun, Mountrath	15	4 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 7 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey 4 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey	LCC (Construction)	Site investigation surveys on-going and Stage 2 to be submitted in Q2 2024
1 New Road, Portlaoise	1	1 No. 4 Bed 1 Storey	LCC (Renewal)	Tender evaluation on-going and Stage 4 to be submitted in Q2 2024.

6 Emmett Terrace, Mountmellick	1	1 No. 4 Bed 1 Storey	LCC (Renewal)	Tender evaluation on-going and Stage 4 to be submitted in Q2 2024.
13 and 14 Lakeglen, Portlaoise	2	1 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 1 No. 4 Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Renewal)	Demolition works completed on site. Stage 1 approved.
Beladd, Portlaoise	5	1 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 3 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 1 No. 4 Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Construction)	Design Team to be Appointed and Stage 1 to be submitted in Q2 2024. Demolition of existing properties complete.
French Church St. Portarlinton	2	2 no. 2 bed apts	LCC (Renewal)	Stage 1 Submitted in Q1 2024.
Maltings Site, Mountmellick	30	TBC	LCC (Construction)	Design Team to be Appointed and Stage 1 to be submitted in Q2 2024.
County Hotel, Portlaoise (CALF)	10	8 no. 1 bed apts 2 no. 2 bed apts	Cluid Housing	Stage 1 approved. Part VIII currently being prepared. In-committee meeting with MD members took place on 5 th March 2024. This scheme will be progressed with a CALF application for funding.
"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	Tender for design/build contract closed on 4 th March. Cluid is currently progressing an enabling works contract for demolition of the remaining structures and ESB cable diversion works on site.
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	Revised CALF application currently under review by Dept; notification expected in the coming weeks.
TOTAL	268			



Contract signing - Presentation Convent Portlaoise – Sophia Housing

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	<i>AHF approved in principle by DHLGH</i>	<i>AHF Application submitted to DHLGH – Potential no of unit yield</i>	<i>Advance Turnkey Purchase EOI's under consideration</i> Potential No of unit yield	<i>Part V – Potential No of Unit Yield</i>	<i>LCC Construction Potential No of Unit Yield</i>
Affordable	40	0	*60	8	40 minimum
Cost Rental			28		

**Expressions of Interest received for proposed units across potential schemes, under consideration from the perspective of demand, price affordability and feasibility of subsidy funding from DHLGH. Not all units may be realised.*

- 13 units approved for Affordable Purchase in Stradbally. Currently working with developer regarding their Local Authority Subsidy Agreement with LCC. Construction of units not yet commenced.
- 16 units approved for Affordable Purchase Scheme at Kilminchy, Portlaoise. Application portal for units comprising 2- and 3-bedroom houses closed on 4th January 2024. Applications being assessed, and potential purchasers details have been forwarded to the developer's agent for properties that are ready for sale.
- 11 units approved for Affordable Purchase Scheme at An Lochan, Summerhill, Portlaoise. Application portal for units comprising 2- and 3-bedroom houses closed on 11th January 2024. Applications being assessed, and potential purchasers details have been forwarded to the developer's agent for properties that are ready for sale.
- Design has been finalised for social (21) and affordable (46) housing on Council owned landbank on the Stradbally Road, Portlaoise. Funding mechanism for this developing this site as a mixed tenure scheme is still 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.

Queries regarding affordable housing should be emailed to affordablepurchase@laoiscoco.ie

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.

The Council has not yet been advised of the target number of Private Rented Inspections for 2024.

	1 st January 2024 - 29 th February 2024
No of Private Rented Inspections	159
No of notices of works issued	114

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

SERVICED SITES FOR SELF BUILDERS

Laois County Council is actively considering the development of **serviced sites** over the coming years at a number of locations in the county.

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 following locations are currently under consideration for serviced sites and/or have advertised sites for sale. Sites to be a minimum of 0.25 acres in size.

Location	No. of Sites	Comment
Ballacolla Road, Durrow	4	4 offers accepted and conveyancing ongoing.
Gleann na Glaise, Ballyroan	4	4 offers accepted and conveyancing ongoing.
Doonane	2	Stage 3 submitted in Q1 2024
Derry Road Durrow	4	Stage 2 approved and Stage 3 currently being progressed.
Castletown	9	Proposal. Detailed design currently on-going
TOTAL SITES UNDER CONSIDERATION	23	

Queries regarding serviced sites should be emailed to servicedsites@laoiscoco.ie

HOUSING STOCK

Housing Re-Lets

Month	LA Keys Surrendered	Properties Acquired	Works Completed
January 2024	8	1	4
February 2024	9	0	5
TOTAL (YTD)	17	1	9

NOTE: There are currently 40 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

Month	Work Orders Raised	Work Orders Closed	Work Orders Open
January 2024	612	515	97
February 2024	453	207	246
TOTAL (YTD)	1,065	722	343

Energy Efficiency/Retrofitting Programme:

The Midlands Retrofit Programme (MRP) was rolled into the Energy Efficiency Retrofit Programme (EERP) in 2022/2023/2024/2025.

A summary of both programmes is outlined in table below.

PROGRAMME	COMMENTS
MRP – 159 Units	159 units completed.
EERP (2021) – 29 Units – O'Moore Place	27 units completed. Remaining 2 to be completed in Q2 2024.
EERP (2022/2023) – Phase 1&2 – 33 Units Thornberry, Church Ave, Slieve Bloom	Tender evaluation for the 2022 Retrofit Programme comprising 59 houses has been completed. It is now proposed to commence works in phase's set out below. Phase 1 1) Thornberry, Abbeyleix – 16 units.

<p>Park, Quigley Park & Other Locations</p> <p>EERP (2022/2023) – Phase 3 – 26 Units St. Fintan’s Tce, Old School Road, St Johns Sq & Other Locations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works completed in Q4 2023. <p><u>Phase 2</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Church Avenue, Stradbally – 7 units. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works completed in Q1 2024. 2) Slieve Bloom Park, Clonaslee – 4 units. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works to be completed in Q1 2024. 3) Quigley Park, Rathdowney – 2 units <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works to be completed in Q1 2024 4) Other Locations – 4 units <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works to be completed in Q2/Q3 2024. <p><u>Phase 3</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) St Fintans Terrace – 4 units <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works completed in Q1 2024. 2) Old School Road, Ballylinan – 9 units <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works to be completed in Q2 2024. 3) St. John’s Square, Portlaoise – 7 units. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works to be completed in Q2 2024. <p>Other Locations – 6 units</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works to be completed in Q2/Q3 2024.
<p>EERP (2024) – 55 Units St. Brigid’s Place(Phase 1), Meadowbrook, Imleach, Triogue Court & Other Locations</p>	<p><u>Phase 1</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) St Brigid’s Place, Meadowbrook, Imleach, Triogue Court & Other Locations. – 55 units. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey works to commence in Q1 2024 and retrofit works to commence in Q3 2024.
<p>EERP (2025) – 50 Units St. Brigid’s Place (Phase 2), Arderin, Fr. O’Connor Cres., Erkindale Dr, Rossmore View & Various Locations</p>	<p><u>Phase 1</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) St. Brigid’s Place (Phase 2), Arderin, Fr. O’Connor Cres., Erkindale Dr, Rossmore View & Various Locations. – 50 units. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey works to commence in Q4 2024.

HOUSING NEED

Circular 06/2024 sets out arrangements for social housing acquisitions for 2024 and notifies local authorities that Government have agreed to an increased provision of 1,500 social housing acquisitions. Similar to 2023 the additional acquisitions will focus on properties where a tenant in receipt of social housing supports, including Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS), and has received a Notice of Termination (NOT) due to the landlord’s intention to sell the property

Laois County Council has been given an allocation of 15 for 2024 - This is not a target, but rather to support planning and to allow local authorities to prioritise the acquisitions to be targeted. The Dept has advised they will keep this under review throughout 2024

From 1st January – 15th March 2024:

Acquisitions completed	2
Acquisitions currently in progress	6
No. of above that have Tenants in Situ	4

Queries regarding acquisitions should be emailed to housingdelivery@laoiscoco.ie

Homeless Presentations

Time Period	Homeless Presentations Households	Breakdown of Household
1 st February 2024 – 29 th February, 2024	24	16 singles 8 families

Homeless Accommodation

	Emergency Accommodation Households booked at 29 th February 2024	Social Housing allocated from homelessness in February 2024
Families	7 (1 hostel)	0
Single Persons	18 (3 hostel)	0
TOTAL	25	0

Homeless related queries should be emailed to homeless@laoiscoco.ie or housinglcc@laoiscoco.ie

Social Housing List at 29th February 2024

TOTAL No of Social Housing Applicants on waiting list	1,568
Proportion of SH applicants availing of HAP supports	(697) = 44.5%

RAS/Leasing Statistics at 15th March 2024

Active RAS tenancies	63
Active short-term leasing tenancies (Social Housing Leasing Scheme)	23
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	34

Tenancies Created during the period 1st January 2024 – 29th February 2024

Method of Delivery	No. housed
First allocation of New Build/Acquired unit	1
Relet / Refurbished Stock Allocation	6
Housed via leasing	0
AHB Tenancies created (via new build and relet)	41
TOTAL	47

Queries regarding Housing Allocations should be emailed to housingallocations@laoiscoco.ie

LOANS AND GRANTS

Local Authority Home Loan (LAHL)

No of new Loan Applications received since 1 st January 2024	13
No of 'Live' Applications approved at 15 th March 2024	5
No of Applications refused since 1 st January 2024	1

PRIVATE GRANTS

Housing Adaptation Grants at 29th February 2024

Allocation €TBA

	No. of applications received	No. of applications paid	Value of applications paid	No. of applications currently at work stage	Value of applications currently at work stage
HOP	38	20	85,565.00	65	346,299
MAG	0	2	8,720.00	1	5,200
HGD	16	9	54,562.50	69	576,240
TOTAL	54	31	148,847.50	135	927,739

Disabled Persons Grant for Social Housing

DPG works at 29th February 2024:

Allocation 2024 (including LA funded portion)	€TBA
No of applications included on 2024 funding submission to Dept of Housing on 29 th Feb 2024	30
Value of the above proposal	€776,135

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 Community Integration Forum (CIF). The Forum, consisting of 23 statutory and voluntary groups/agencies, meets regularly, with 23 meetings held to date, ensuring consistency and efficiency in service delivery and integration supports to new arrivals to our county. The overall number resident in the various accommodation centres around Laois remains largely static, with no significant variations.

The Council's Integration Support Office continues to develop its programmes for the coordination of service delivery and integration supports to all those in need of such services.

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth (DCEDIY), commenced operation of the Designated Accommodation Centre at Stradbally (90 day Centre) on 14th March 2024. Stradbally in one of 5 DAC's currently operating nationwide, with 66 persons accommodated there as at 19th March 2024. This number will continue to fluctuate on a daily basis for the remainder of the contract term, which is due to expire in June 2024. CIF member groups and organisations are involved in the provision of additional supports to those resident at the site.

The Council continues to assist DCEDIY in sourcing temporary accommodation for Ukrainian displaced persons, providing liaison locally in relation to vacant buildings and sites suitable for medium to long term accommodation solutions. The Council also continues to allocate privately offered accommodation (Offer A Home Scheme) to Ukrainian families, with 60 households having been provided with accommodation through this mechanism to date.

PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT, ARTS & HERITAGE

FORWARD PLANNING REPORT

COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The 2-year report on the Implementation of the objectives of the Laois County Development has been prepared and circulated to the Council for consideration at the March Council meeting.

Draft Local Area Plans

Draft Graiguecullen / Carlow Joint Urban Area Plan (JULAP)

A chief executive report has been prepared on the 92 (11 in Laois) submissions received during the draft plan public consultation phase. This has been circulated to the Council for consideration and will be considered at a special meeting in April 2024.

Draft Portarlinton Local Area Plan

Writing of the draft Plan has commenced and a draft plan will go on public display in April 2024.

Draft Mountmellick Local Area Plan

A CE report has been prepared on the submissions received at the Issues Consultation Stage and will be circulated to the MD members for their noting.

Part 8s -Part VIII projects due before the council in March:-

- Triogue Way, Portlaoise active travel project [8 subs received during consultation period],
- Canal Road Business Park, Portarlinton site development works project [2 subs to date],

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT REPORT

E-Planning Project	65% of the applications received in 2023 have been made online – 564 online applications out of total 864 applications in 2023		
Planning Applications	Year	Valid applications from 01/01/2024 – 08/02/2024	Valid applications 01/01/2023– 08/02/2023
		43	39
Total Number of valid applications received:	43		
Number of decisions made	44		
Invalid applications returned to applicant	30		
Number of applications granted:	44 (Decisions to Grant)		
Number of applications refused:	0 (Decisions to Refuse)		
Referrals to Area Offices (working days):	within 14 days achieved		
No of appeals to ABP	1		
PRE PLANNING			
No of requests to date	44		
No of meetings held to date	32		
Wait time	1.5 Weeks		

ENFORCEMENT

Current year	2024		2023	
Service Review	Feb	Jan - Feb	Feb	Jan - Feb
Total number of new cases subject to complaints that were investigated	2	13	11	23
Number of Warning Letters served	39	64	50	70
Number of Enforcement Notices served	24	28	16	35
No Of cases referred for legal proceedings	1	1	1	3
Number of cases in Court(incl adjournments)	4	11	10	11
Number of cases Resolved in Court	0	1	1	1
Number of Files Closed	11	16	7	18
Number of cases on system	139	139	148	0
Enforcement Costs recouped	€ -	€650.00	70	90
Number of Valid Retention Applications Received relating to Enforcement Action	3	3	4	6
Fees received through Valid Retention Applications Received relating to Enforcement Action	€502.00	€502.00	€2,461.70	€3,921.13
Legal fees paid	€81.18	€621.24	€537.67	€1,155.13

BROADBAND – DIGITAL PROJECTS

NBI Update

The total number of Premises in Laois = 12,874 with 8426 Residential, 2234 Commercial & Residential, 1776 Farm and 438 Commercial.

21% of Premises (2681) - have HSB connected to date.

57% of Premises (7206) - now available to pre order connection.

12 % of Premises (1548) – Network build in progress.

2% of Premises (207) – Survey completed.

8% of Premises (1094) – Survey pending.

Vex Robotics

The Vex IQ Robotics Competitions for primary schools in 2024 are as follows: -

- A. RECF Midlands Regional VEX Robotics competition took place in Mucklagh Community Centre, Offaly on Thursday 8th February with all winners going forward to the All-Ireland Championships in Cork in May.
Two primary schools from Laois took part in the Competition – Scoil Eoin Phoil 11 Naofa, Ballyroan and Camross NS, both schools performed very well in both the driving skills and Coding on the day however unfortunate not to qualify for the All Irelands.



B. The Midlands LA Competition dates are as follows:

- Emo National School Laois – Wednesday 6th March. (1st time ever an event will be held in Laois).
- Gallen Community School Offaly – Wednesday 20th March.
- Sacred Heart School Tullamore Offaly - Thursday 21st March.

Vex Robotics. – V5 Programme.

- For the 1st time Vex Robotics V5 for Senior Cycle Secondary Schools is being piloted in Co. Laois and was rolled out in Clonaslee Collage on the 18th of December 2023.
- The TY class took are busy preparing to showcase their work at the STEAM Showcase Event on 11th April.

Lego League

The LEGO LEAGUE Competition was held in Tullamore ETB on Thursday 22nd of February. The event involved nine post-primary schools including 1. Portlaoise Collage, 2. Dunamase Collage Portlaoise, 3. Clonaslee Collage and 4. St. Fergal's Collage Rathdowney.

The First Lego League Masterpiece event is a science and technology challenge, which is aimed at 11 - 16 year olds and tasks teams to build a robot to tackle a series of missions, and create an innovative solution to a real-world problem, while demonstrating their skills in robotics, computer programming, teamwork, research, problem solving and communication.

The Lego League is supported by the Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) Discover Programme, the initiative is organised by the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) in partnership with Irish delivery partner, CreativeHUT.

The programme will be Showcased at an Awards Event in Portlaoise Collage on Thursday 11th of April.

HERITAGE

Laois Heritage Office Project Updates:

- Burial Ridge Portlaoise: Grass cutting and maintenance on going
 - First (NEW) Laois Heritage Office Newsletter went out 31st January to mailing list and on social media platforms.
1. Other Heritage Community Projects:
- **Tunduff Cillín Project:** Heritage Office is working with community group to mark the site of historic Cillín at Tunduff Cross, Abbeyleix.

- **Aghaboe Abbey Interpretive Signage:** Heritage Office is supporting community group to create signage for the abbey based around an artist's impression of how the abbey looked in the past.
- **Colonel Fitzmaurice Commemoration:** Event planned for April 12th – further details on www.laois.ie shortly

2. CONSERVATION GRANTS: [Historic Structures Fund (HSF) & Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS)]

Details below of successful projects under HSF and BHIS 2024.

HSF

Scheme	Structure	Amount Approved
HSF Stream 1	Newtown Mill, Durrow	€30,000
HSF Stream 1	Woodbrook House, Portarlinton	€25,000
HSF Stream 1	Vicarstown Old National School	€ 20,000
	TOTAL	€75,000

BHIS

Ref No.	Projects	Funding Allocated
BHIS24/LS01	Church Of St Michael And All Angels, Abbeyleix	€14,000
BHIS24/LS02	Newtown Mill, Newtown, Durrow	€15,000
BHIS24/LS03	St. Fintan's Church Durrow	€5,770
BHIS24/LS04	Preston House, Abbeyleix	€14,000
BHIS24/LS05	Thatched Cottage, Jamestown Cross, Ballybrittas	€12,172
BHIS24/LS06	Vicarstown Old National School, Vicarstown	€15,000
BHIS24/LS07	Woodbrook House, Woodbrook, Portarlinton	€14,250
BHIS24/LS08	Fisherman's Inn, Fisherstown, Ballybrittas	€2,750
BHIS24/LS09	Thatched Cottage, Garrymore, Mountmellick	€3,058
Total		€96,000

REGENERATION TEAM

Laois County Council has established a multi-disciplinary Regeneration Team, comprising staff from Housing, Planning sections and the Town Regeneration Officer, aimed at addressing vacancy and dereliction in the county.



This team aims to achieve targets set, by gathering data via:

- Geodirectory exercise (set out below)
- Continued engagement with property owners
- Engagement via derelict sites legislation where appropriate

- Action objectives of the Town Centre First Plan for Rathdowney and other town/village plans.

Derelict Sites

The Derelicts sites register is maintained by the Planning Staff. In conjunction with the TRO, the Derelict sites team are working on sites in both Rathdowney and Mountrath as indicated on the maps above.

Currently

- Total No of Derelict sites entered onto Register to date in 2024 – 32
- Total No of Files on hand: 92
- 1 new file opened to date in 2024
- 5 files closed to date in 2024

CPO Activation

Notice of intention to CPO issued to landowners and also in the Leinster Express dated the 20th February for the following sites (Closing date for receipt of submissions – 22nd March 2023)

1. 2 sites at Old Knockmay Road Portlaoise,
2. 26 and 27 Triogue Manor, Portlaoise
3. 15 Bracklone Street, Portarlinton
4. Main Street, Stradbally

The Derelict sites Team also works along side the Business Support Unit in advising in relation to the incentives available through the BSU and LEO office in relation to the reuse of derelict and vacant commercial properties.

Vacancy Surveys

A Vacant Homes Team survey of properties identified as being vacant in data supplied by GeoDirectory (via a Dept of Housing 2022 initiative) has shown so far - of the **977 properties surveyed** (residential and commercial), **600 properties were found to be vacant**, with 39 of those also found to have some elements of dereliction. The Housing Section will endeavour to contact the owners of the vacant residential properties and outline the schemes available to return these properties to use for social housing. Where ownership cannot be established, local enquiries will continue in relation to ownership, vacancy history, etc. Where all other means of returning the properties to use have been exhausted, use of the CPO process to acquire properties deemed to be suitable for social housing may be considered.

Suitability for social housing will depend on the need and housing typology of need in particular locations. Queries regarding vacant properties should be emailed to vacanthomes@laoiscoco.ie

Vacancy/Dereliction Activation Programme

Circular 14/2023 provided details on the launch of the Vacancy/Dereliction Activation Programme. Targets for 2024 have not been issued to date.

Properties are counted as entering the Vacancy/Dereliction Activation Programme where they have been identified as being vacant or derelict as part of the vacancy survey and where efforts are being made to contact property owners. Properties approved/approved in principle for a Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant are also counted as entering the Programme.

Properties are counted as exiting the Vacancy/Dereliction Activation Programme in the following circumstances:

- Sale of Property by Owner – the property exits the programme once the sale is closed
- Action taken by owner – bringing property back into use following engagement – the property exits the programme when the local authority is satisfied the property has been brought back into use
- Repair and Leasing Scheme – the property exits the programme when the lease commences between the owner and local authority
- Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant (Grant paid) – the property exits the programme when the grant is paid to the applicant
- Buy and Renew – voluntary acquisition – the property exits the programme once the sale is closed
- Property is acquired by the local authority by agreement or by CPO
- Ready to Build Scheme – the property exits the programme once the local authority advertises the serviced site for sale

1 st January – 29 th February, 2024	Target	Actual
Vacant and derelict properties that have ENTERED the Vacancy/Dereliction Activation Programme	N/A	9
CPO's / Compulsory Acquisitions commenced/completed	N/A	5
Vacant and derelict properties that have EXITED the Vacancy/Dereliction Activation Programme	N/A	5

Vacancy / Regeneration Funding Schemes

A Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant is available for up to a maximum of €50,000, including VAT, for refurbishment of vacant properties for use as a principle private residence or to be made available for rent, 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. To qualify for the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant, properties must be:

- Vacant for over 2 years
- Built before 2008

Vacant Property Refurbishment Grants	1 st January, 2024 – 29 th February, 2024
Number of grant applications received	15
Number of applications APPROVED	6
Number of applications APPROVED IN PRINCIPLE	2
Number of applications REFUSED	1
Number of applications WITHDRAWN	0
Number of grants paid to Applicants	5

Arts Department

Writing Workshops

The Laois Arts Office were delighted to welcome Eileen Casey back to deliver a four-week course entitled 'Story Through Myth'. Eileen Casey is originally from the Midlands and is currently based in South Dublin. Her poetry, prose and short fiction are widely published and awarded.

Mentoring workshops

The Laois Arts Office offered *artist mentoring* by Marie Brett with multi-disciplinary artists. These mentoring workshops conclude on 20th March. Applications were invited from Laois artists in all genres and art forms. Themes include identifying goals, opportunities & supports, ethics, aesthetics, methods & priority. The programme was funded under Laois Creative Ireland programme.

Laois Arthouse Studio Artist Awardee

Stephanie Deady, a Laois Arthouse Resident Artist, was the recipient of the Hennessy Craig Award 2024. This prestigious award was presented at the Royal Hibernian Academy.

Grants & opportunities

Application forms for the following Art Awards and Opportunities were advertised in mid-January and closed on 22nd February 2024 and have been awarded.

- 1 **Arts Act Grants**
- 2 **Tyrone Guthrie Centre Bursary**
- 3 **Artists in Schools Scheme**
- 4 **Laois Arthouse Studio Scheme**

The Arts Act Grants are listed for the March Council meeting.

LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

STUDENT ENTERPRISE AWARDS

The County Final of the Student Enterprise Awards was held on Tuesday, 5th March, in the Midlands Park Hotel, Portlaoise. An estimated 600 students from 7 schools took part in the annual programme locally, with 104 students making it to the County Final.

In the Junior Category, the student representing Laois at the National Final is Olivia Przepiora from Via's Jewellery at Portlaoise College. Olivia makes unique nickel-free resin earring and is selling in a local pharmacy.

Also representing Laois at the National Finals, in the intermediate category, is Amina Adnan, with her project Eternity, a long-lasting perfume made with natural ingredients.

In the Senior Category, Laois will be represented by John Phelan and David Reddin from Steady Wine at St Mary's CBS. John & David make handcrafted, personalised wooden holders for wine bottles and glasses with a very innovative gravity bottle holder utilising their physics knowledge.

Since the Student Enterprise Programme began in 2003, over 380,000 students have taken part, learning key skills on how to create a business idea, start a business and grow a business.

LOCAL ENTERPRISE WEEK

Another very successful local enterprise week ran from 4th – 8th March with over 100 entrepreneurs/aspiring entrepreneurs attending free mentoring, training, and networking events throughout the week.

MARKETING PROJECT

Laois County Council was successful in securing €50,000 under the Town & Village Renewal Scheme 2022 to market Laois as a place to do business. Under this scheme,

the Business Support Unit has developed 4 promotional videos which will be launched with the new Laois.ie website in June and is currently looking at an online marketing campaign and the development of promotional material.

FAÇADE ENHANCEMENT SCHEME

The BSU are currently preparing a Façade Enhancement Scheme for Stradbally town, to include both commercial and residential properties. This is due to commence on the 9th April, 2024.

LAOIS TASTE

Laois County Council was recently successful in securing €17,500 under the Agri Food Tourism Scheme from the Department of Agriculture, Food and The Marine to work with Laois TASTE to promote and grow the food sector in the county.

ROADS, TRANSPORTATION, DRAINAGE & PUBLIC REALM

Annual Road Works Scheme 2024

This is being presented for the Members' consideration at this month's meeting.

WASTE MANAGEMENT & 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. The facility is being operated in compliance with the facility's EPA waste license.

2. **Bring Banks:**

Tonnages of 2024 collected recyclable material is in Table 1 below.

Month	Tonnage	Month	Tonnage	Month	Tonnage
Jan	174.00	May		Sept	
Feb	123.50	June		Oct	
Mar		July		Nov	
Apr		Aug		Dec	
Annual Total			297.50 Tonnes		

Table 1 – 2023 Bring Bank Tonnages

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

3. **Waste Management, Complaints & Litter Management:**

a) **Waste Enforcement & Complaints**

Table 2 below details the number and types of complaints received to the end of February 2024.

Nature	Number	Nature	Number
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Nature	Number	Nature	Number
Waste Management/Enforcement	114	Air	7
Litter	95	Noise	3
Water	10	Waste Infrastructure	9
Total		238	

Table 2 – Environmental Complaint Register

b) Litter Fines

Month	Number	Month	Number	Month	Number
Jan	22	May		Sept	
Feb	3	June		Oct	
Mar		July		Nov	
Apr		Aug		Dec	
Annual Total			25		

Table 3 – 2023 Litter Fines

c) Illegal Dumping

Month	Tonnage	Month	Tonnage	Month	Tonnage
Jan	26.50	May		Sept	
Feb	4.00*	June		Oct	
Mar		July		Nov	
Apr		Aug		Dec	
Total Tonnage			30.5*		

* Awaiting February figures from A1 Metals & Bord na Mona

Table 4 – Illegal Dumping Cleanups

4. Waste Management & Enforcement:

The 2023 RMCEI National Enforcement Priority (NEP) Progress Reports submitted to the EPA. A national extension given to the 15th March 2024 for the submission of the 2024 RMCEI Plan as EPA released required 2024 farm survey minimum figures close to original submission date of 14th February 2024.

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

5. Environmental Protection

a) Protect the Water Quality Status in all Water Bodies

- Development of 2024 Farm Inspection Programme. Information meetings will be held with the IFA prior to commencement of inspections.
- On-site investigations of complaints relating to water quality and/or water pollution.
- On-going assessment of planning applications with regard to water quality protection.

b) Air & Noise:

- All noise and air complaints are being investigated.
- On-going assessment of planning applications with regard to air quality and noise pollution protection.

6. Domestic Wastewater Treatment System Grants (DWWTS)

- Commencement Date – 01st January 2024.

Number of EOIs to date	35
Number of inspections carried out	6 Full Inspections & 2 pre-inspection visits
Number of Advisory Notices served	6
Number of inspections/requests that do not qualify for the grant	2 (1 GAA Club ineligible and 1 other property withdrew request)

Table 5 – DWWTS Data

7. Rural Water – Multi Annual Programme 2024 to 2026

Following the announcement of the Multi Annual Programme 2024 – 2026, expressions of interests have been received from various Group Water Schemes, for funding under the various funding measures available within the scheme. Discussions have taken place with the interested groups.

The Council is required to make its submission to the Dept for funding for the new programme no later than the 12th April 2024. Thereafter, all submissions will be reviewed and considered by a Dept expert group. Following that, an announcement of confirmation of funding for projects approved by the Dept will be issued.

Emergency Planning, Fire Services & Flood Relief

Retained Fire Services in Ireland – A Review of Recruitment and Retention and the Future Sustainability of Service Delivery

For information, as of 12th March 2024, there are 28 permanent vacancies in the Laois retained fire service. This is based on the new compliment of 100 retained firefighters (up from 75) in the 8 fire stations, following the WRC Agreement. 17 prospective new staff are currently at various stages of the recruitment process. Recruitment processes are ongoing to recruit more fire-fighters.

New Fire Station in Stradbally

Following approval of Part 8 proposals, Laois County Council received 'NDFEM approval in principle, for the construction of a new Fire Station at Stradbally.' Following a procurement process, Laois County Council has appointed NODE Architecture as the Architect-led Design Team. Cathaoirleach of LCC, Cllr Pascal McEvoy, signed the contract, accompanied by Simon Walton DoS and Noel O'Dwyer of NODE Architecture, on Friday 16th February 2024. Detailed design and costing has now commenced.



As an interim measure, the existing fire station ins Stradbally will relocate to the new site in the next few months, operating out of the old Civil Defence building. This is primarily to facilitate the 3 new staff members, as the current station on Main Street is too small and cannot cater for the increase in staffing.

Mountmellick Fire Station upgrade

Approval to go to tender for the upgrade has been sought from the NDFEM but no approval provided to date. Part VII documents are on public display since 1st March, with a final closing date for receipt of submissions on 15th April 2024.

Civil Defence

Volunteers

Civil Defence continues to provide ongoing training and upskilling for volunteers. As of 12th March 2024, the unit has 53 active volunteers.

Activity Report January 1st – March 31st, 2024

- 21 Deployments & Events
- 19 Training Events

The unit's quarter one training plan concluded on the 2nd March with a multi disciplined training exercise where volunteers put skills learned and refreshed during quarter one into practice.

Additional courses completed by volunteers include:

- Lantra Severe Weather & Off-Road Driving,
- PHECC Practitioner CPG Upskilling,
- Child Protection Designated Liaison Person Training,
- Critical Incident Stress Management.

Facilities

The next phase of the units move into the new headquarters building in Portlaoise started at the beginning of March. Remaining vehicles and equipment from Stradbally are being moved across and all Civil Defence services are now responding from Portlaoise.

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

Local Enhancement Programme 2023-2024

Laois received an allocation €153,591.05 under the Local Enhancement Programme 2023. The LCDC CEP subcommittee convened on Thursday 7th March to review all applications with their recommendation to be approved by LCDC members at the March meeting.

Women's Allocation: 23 Applications received seeking funding in excess of €80,395.41.

General LEP Allocation: 143 Applications received seeking funding in excess of €862,546.03

World of Work Programme 2023 – 2024

This programme has commenced with 2nd year students in Portlaoise College. Students recently met members of the staff of Laois County Council in the Council Chamber to discuss a day in the life.

Laois Public Participation Network

Laois PPN held a sustainable gardening workshop at Dunmore Country School. The event which was part of Laois PPN's Climate Action Project was hosted by nationally recognised Tanguy de Toulgoët. Attendees learnt how to grow tasty vegetables, fruit & herbs in a sustainable, intensive, and cost-effective way using time proven French traditional techniques.

This Climate Action Event was in collaboration with Portlaoise Tidy Towns and Trees on the Land. The "Free Native Irish Tree Give Away", took place during National Tree week on Saturday the 9th of March outside the Laois PPN Office, in Leister Square Portlaoise.

LEADER Local Development Strategy

On the 13th December the Department of Rural & Community Development wrote to Laois LCDC advising that the Local Development Strategy submitted by Laois LCDC in respect of its interest in delivering the LEADER programme for 2023- 2027 in the Laois Sub-regional area was unsuccessful.

On the 9th January Laois LCDC lodged an appeal to the Department of Rural & Community Development. On the 23rd February a communication was received from DRCD advising that Laois LCDC's appeal was not upheld.

Age Friendly Laois

Age Friendly Laois and Healthy Laois welcomed Laois' Age Friendly ambassador , Anna May McHugh to the chamber of Laois County Council to launch Live Well 2024.

Many exhibitors attended the launch – there are currently more than 100 stands (up by 30 stands on last year) registered with the event running in Portlaoise College from 1pm to 6pm on April 4, 2024.

The Road Safety authority will be speaking on the day along with a number of speakers. There will be workshops and demos by the LOETB , physical activity with the Active Parks team and also entertainment to round off the day. The HSE have confirmed that they will be providing free health screening on the day to attendees- this feature of last years event was very busy with 97 people availing of this service.

Age Friendly Alliance

The Laois Age Friendly alliance met for the first time in 2024 to discuss strategy implementation updates, Updates were received from some delivery partners , and we await other updates to give a broader overall picture of progress made.

Climate Action and Community Strategic Policy Committee

A meeting of the Climate Action and Community Strategic Policy Committee was held on the 4th March, 2024.

County Laois Joint Policing Committee

A meeting of the County Laois Joint Policing Committee was held on the 11th March, 2024.

Healthy Ireland

Healthy Ireland have confirmed €75,000 in funding to deliver the Healthy Ireland programme in Laois in 2024.

Town Centre First

€30,000 was received in respect of a Town Centre First Plan for Mountmellick. A photo launch is taking place in Cavan on Wednesday 20th March to announce the €10,000 funding being awarded by Irish Architect Foundation to Mountrath Town Team to undertake a design project in the town to connect the Town Centre to the Whitehorse River.

Community Recognition Fund 2024

On the 15th March, Minister Heather Humphreys TD and Minister Joe O'Brien TD announced a funding allocation of €50 million funding under Community Recognition Fund 2024. Laois will receive an allocation of €1,012,996.

Projects that may be funded include:

- Development or refurbishment of community or cultural facilities including play areas, walkways, parks, community/sensory gardens, allotments, and recreational areas;
- Development or refurbishment of local club and sports facilities;
- Enhancement to school/parish facilities which are open to use by all of the community after school hours;
- Purchase of equipment for local clubs, festivals, community events and organisations
- Transport infrastructure such as community vehicles.

Further details will be communicated and made available to communities in due course.

Climate Action

Laois Federation of Tidy Towns Annual General Meeting

The LFTT AGM was held on Wednesday the 28th Feb in the Manor Hotel and was attended by over 70 guests representing 27 Laois Tidy Towns groups. Tidy Towns Adjudicator Christy Boylan delivered an informative talk offering valuable insights into the Tidy Towns application process and suggestions to enhance community involvement and environmental initiatives throughout Laois County. Robbie Quinn, Chairperson of Abbeyleix Tidy Towns, shared an overview of the community's

remarkable journey towards winning Ireland's Tidiest Town 2023. The Environment Section of Laois County Council provided an update on Clean Up Laois Week and provided clean up materials to all registered groups. As part of National Tree Week a selection of native shrubs species were gifted to Tidy Towns groups.



Fast Laois Schools Explore: The Antarctic Project

Laois County Council, in collaboration with Laois Education Support Centre, is delighted to announce the successful conclusion of "The Antarctic Project," with an engaging competition that captivated schools across County Laois. This initiative was inspired by the Antarctic Video Series featuring esteemed scientist and explorer, Niamh Shaw, which was exclusive to schools in County Laois and attended by 573 pupils over the 4 weeks. To culminate the project Laois schools were invited to participate in the "Antarctic Project" competition, encouraging students to explore various aspects of Antarctic life and research. The Awards Night, held at Laois Education Centre on Monday, February 19th, was a celebration of achievement. In addition to honouring outstanding projects, attendees were treated to a motivational presentation by Dr. Niamh Shaw, inspiring them to pursue interests in science, exploration, and environmental stewardship.

Fashion Swap

Laois County Council in collaboration with Circular Fashion Ireland have developed a swap shop package for Laois schools to encourage the reuse of clothing via the sustainable action of swapping clothes and promoting a circular economy in the classrooms. Circular Fashion Ireland and the Laois County Council Environmental Awareness Officer will go to schools to help set up and run a swap shop. They will provide students and teachers with all the tools equipment, guidance and during the day will host a talk on the impacts of fast fashion and how we can drive climate action via our wardrobes. The first workshop took place on the 27th February in Heywood Community School. There are 2 more upcoming workshops with both Portlaoise College and Dunamase College swap shops taking place this month.



Green Schools

Laois County Council actively promotes the Green Schools programme in County Laois by facilitating workshops and initiating various themed programs. The Environment Awareness Officer oversees the Green Flag Assessment, resulting in the renewal of Green Flags for 12 schools this year across various themes, including Litter & Waste, Water, Energy, Biodiversity and Travel. As the renewal deadline is approaching on March 15th, assessments for 12 schools have been completed.

Sport & Leisure

National Bike Week

Funding of €24,285 was allocated by the Department of Transport to Laois County Council to deliver Bike Week 2024 which will take place from Saturday 11th to Sunday 19th May 2024. Expressions of Interest have been sought from interested community groups, clubs, youth organisations and schools to organise events which will be co-ordinated by the Sport & Leisure Section.

Playground Maintenance Programme

Following receipt of our external annual inspection reports in January 2024, the annual maintenance programme of repairs and upgrading commenced in February 2024. Subject to weather conditions the programme will be completed by end of June 2024.

Opening Ballyfin Playground

Ballyfin Playground was formally opened by An Cathaoirleach Pascal McEvoy on 4th February, 2024. This project was funded under the CLAR programme.

Active Parks Programme

The spring Active Parks programme part-funded under Healthy Ireland commenced in Feb 2024 in Portlaoise, Abbeyleix and Stradbally. The programme is free to users and promotes use of outdoor public and civic spaces for recreation. Weekly attendances are exceeding expectation with 124 registered participants.

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- Development or refurbishment of local club and sports facilities;
- Enhancement to school/parish facilities which are open to use by all of the community after school hours;
- Purchase of equipment for local clubs, festivals, community events and organisations
- Transport infrastructure such as community vehicles.

Further details will be communicated and made available to communities in due course.

Creative Laois Report February 2024

Heritage Through Art Grant Scheme 2024

Creative Laois has announced year two of our Heritage through Art grant scheme. This grant scheme is aimed at encouraging communities and artists to work together in exploring and presenting aspects of Laois's heritage through varying art forms.

Creative Laois are currently inviting community groups to apply for funding to work with an artist to explore aspects of Laois's heritage.

Heritage will include the following – monuments, archaeological objects, heritage objects including archives, architectural heritage, flora, fauna, wildlife habitats, landscapes, geology, heritage gardens and parks, inland waterways, folklore and local history.

Successful applicants from the 2023 scheme were from the Errill Famine Commemoration Committee, Dysart Enos Old Church Committee, Mountrath Youth Theatre, Mountmellick Christmas Tree Project, Aghaboe Abbey Conservation Committee and Abbeyleix Heritage House.



Artist Aime O'Sullivan painting Dysart Old Church in memory of the 2023 project.



Heritage through Art Grant Scheme 2024

Now Open

Successful applicants from Community groups and Creatives working together will be supported in presenting aspects of Laois's heritage through various art forms.

*Closing date April 1st 2024

Application forms can be downloaded from <https://laois.ie/departments/creative-ireland/>



Heritage Laois and Arts Laois have jointly unveiled the painting of Dysart Old Church at Rathmala GAA Club in October 2023.

Cruinniú na nÓg 2024

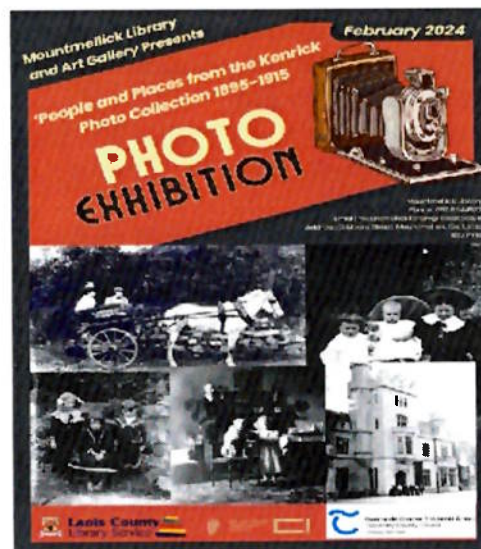
The 2024 Cruinniú na nÓg preparations also began in February with the Creative Ireland Cruinniú na nÓg 2024 Open Call-Grant Scheme being advertised.

The Creative Laois unit is seeking artists/creatives to create and deliver a programme of activities/events to celebrate Cruinniú na nÓg on Saturday 15th June 2024.



"People and Places" Exhibition

Mountmellick Library and Art Gallery presented a photographic exhibition, "People and Places" from the Kenrick Photo Collection 1895-1915. The exhibition ran at Mountmellick Library during February and the exhibition featured a selection of pictures from the Kenrick Photo Collection taken by Fethard photographer Patrick Kenrick between 1895 and 1915. These photographs - printed from plate glass negatives kept in Tipperary Studies- showcase Kenrick's exceptional talent as an amateur photographer at the turn of the 20th century.



The Peatlands Exhibition

The 'Peatlands' exhibition was launched at Dunamaise Arts Centre on Friday February 9th.

The Peatlands immersive installation explores the ecological treasures that are the peatlands and wetlands of Ireland and amplifies the extraordinary species found within. Combining animated paintings, photography, field recordings, sound sculpture and video into a transmedia essay, narrated through the voice of the natural and built worlds.

The exhibition was open to the public and ran from from January 20th to March 3rd. The event was a major success attracted large numbers from across the county.

Laois Short Film Bursary 2024

The Arts Office invited applications for the Laois Short Film Bursary. This funding of €10000 is to fund the making of a short drama film or short documentary film. A prerequisite of this award is that it is produced and/or written by someone who was Laois born or is a Laois resident. The film must be filmed on location in Co Laois and completed by the year end in 2024. A public screening of the film will be arranged locally by the Arts Office in association with the Dunamaise Arts Centre. The closing date for receipt of these completed applications was Thursday 22nd February.



Artist Mentoring

Artist mentor Marie Brett began her artist mentoring sessions that are open to all disciplines and career stages. Based at Laois Arthouse, Stradbally, these are a “friendly, nourishing, artist development opportunity.”

The series of activities, and topics include, ethics & aesthetics, working with others, challenges, boundary issues, self-care & support, building resilience, collective outputs, authorship & ownership issues.

LIBRARY SERVICE

Ireland Reads- National day of Reading

“Ireland Reads” returned for a fourth year in February 2024. The annual campaign ran throughout February, leading up to ‘Ireland Reads Day’ on Saturday February 24th and aimed to encourage as many people as possible to get reading and to visit their local library.

In Portlaoise, Portlaoise Library hosted Midlands 103’s live broadcast of the Feel Good Saturday radio show with Lorraine McCormack from outside the library and well-known author Andrea Mara visited in the afternoon to chat with Claire O’Brien about her bestselling crime fiction novels.

As part of Ireland Reads Abbeyleix Library played host to two local authors on Thursday, 22nd Feb. Noel Burke, author of *Grandad Tells Us Another Story*, and Billy Phelan, author of *St. Lazerian’s GAA Club Abbeyleix - From the Beginning*, both read from their books and chatted with attendees. There was a great evening had by all!

World book day 2024

- World Book Day took place on Thursday, 7th March and was marked in over 100 countries around the globe. To celebrate, all our Laois Libraries had book displays and promotions and gave away **FREE World Book Day books**. Staff from Portlaoise Library held a promotional pop up library stand in Portlaoise Shwith a stand in Laois Shopping Centre on the day.
- Mountrath Library were delighted to host 4th, 5th & 6th class from St

Fintans BNS for a Wonderlarking workshop! Inspired by her book "The Chestnut Roaster", author Eve McDonnell showed the boys how to search for the wonder and magic in the nature surrounding us. Everyone had the chance to design their own leaf map based on their imagined mysterious world! Well done to all the boys

Form Filling and Digital Drop in clinics

Laois Libraries are pleased to partner with LOETB in delivering their Form Filling and Digital Support Clinics, hosted in Portlaoise Library every Monday morning at 10.00. All are welcome to attend these free and confidential drop in clinics which offer free and confidential supports for a variety of online, digital and smart device services. For more information, please contact tlatham@loetb.ie or phone 085 856 0160.

loetb
**Form Filling
&
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Support**

Free and confidential service to support people with form filling, digital queries and accessing available services.

- Form Filling Support
- Digital/Smartphone Support
- Free & Confidential Service

Portlaoise Library
Tuesdays 10am-12pm

More Info
tlatham@loetb.ie or
085 8560160

Drop in clinic

C--Pens Available to Borrow

Laois Libraries will be making C-pens available to borrow from our libraries throughout the county for children and adults who find reading difficult or for those with dyslexia.

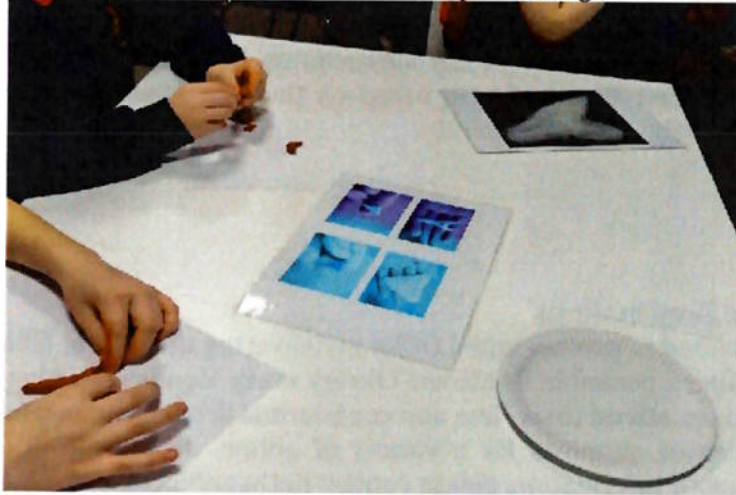
These portable devices offer a Text-to-Speech function, reading aloud the text you scan.

Seachtain na Gaeilge celebrations

Mountmellick Library hosted a Pop-up Gaeltacht on Tuesday 12th March Míle buíochas le gach éinne a tháinig linn don choicís d'imeachtaí Gaeilge i Leabharlann Mhóinteach Mílic. Here's some pictures of our events over Seachtain na Gaeilge and February here in Mountmellick Library. Thank you to all who came. Go raibh maith agat gach duine.

Thanks to 5th class from Gaelscoil Phortlaoise for joining Portlaoise Library and John Kerrigan for an 'Anyone for Science' workshop in which the class got a chance to learn more about sharks and make model sharks teeth!

The workshop was also conducted entirely as Gaeilge!!



Portlaoise New Library also hosted an evening celebration Irish music and dance with thanks to everyone who joined us for our first ever NEW Portlaoise Library Seachtain an Gaeilge celebrations. We had a wonderful evening's entertainment, with tea, coffee and light refreshments served. Particular thanks to all our friends in the community who contributed to make the evening a success: Dunamaise College, Gaeilscoil Phortlaoise, Lynam School of Irish Dancing, Portlaoise Ceoltas and our own Ciorcal Comhra.

Jane Landy children's author visited Laois Libraries to read and tells us about her Gringer the Whinger Books Many thanks to Jane Landy for sharing some Gringer the Whinger magic with Abbeyleix and to @spinkcomhaltas for their wonderful concert on Thursday! Lá fheile Pádraig sona daoibh! [#SeachtainNaGaeilge](#)



Laois Integration Network Open Meeting

Laois Integration Network held an open meeting on Wednesday, 6th of March @ 7pm in Portlaoise Library. This meeting celebrated our diverse communities in Laois.

Astronomy Week 2024

Portlaoise Library welcomed Declan Molloy from the Midlands Astronomy Club as part of celebrations of Astronomy Week 2024. Declan examined the concept of Deep Time, linking earthly fossils and meteorites to celestial objects in the Universe. The free event was fascinating and engaging for the audience.

Art Exhibition In Mountmellick Library

Oksana Rohovska's beautiful exhibition is currently on display in Mountmellick library and was launched in March with the Malva Ukrainian Choir in attendance . Oksana is a talented Ukrainian artist and studied at the Lviv National Academy of Arts in her native Western Ukraine. Her pieces are in wool, oil, acrylic oil and pastels and she is inspired and attracted by nature, especially flowers. This exhibition runs for the month of March in the Gallery at Mountmellick Library. Fáilte roimh chách.



Mountmellick Library and Art Gallery presents

**Oksana Rohovska's exhibition:
"The Edge of the Heavenly Realms
through the eyes of my soul"**

for March 2024

The exhibition will be launched on Tuesday, March 5th
at 6pm in Mountmellick Library.

Music will be provided by The Ukrainian Choir.

Fáilte roimh chách

Mountmellick Library
Phone: 017 8544572
Email: mountmellicklibrary@aois.ie
Address: O'Moore Street, Mountmellick, Co. Laois, R22 PX61



Art Exhibition in Abbeyleix Library

The gallery is hosting an exhibition of artwork by Raymond Ging. Raymond is currently a full-time art student in the local Abbeyleix FETC. The body of work questions the human perception of social norms in a visual framework and is a collection of 12 pieces through the medium of acrylics on deep edge canvas. Sample of Raymonds work below



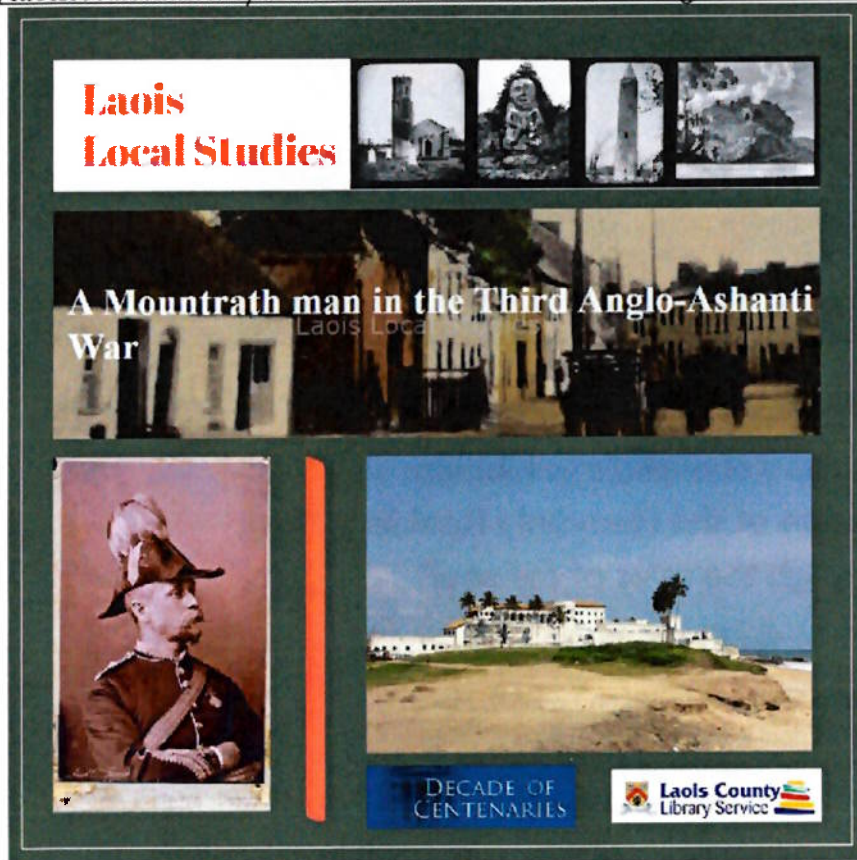
Local History

Laois Libraries Historian-in-Residence Terry Dunne's latest article takes us back 150 years to February 1874, to tell the story of Mountrath native John Joseph Crooks.

Crooks first landed in what was then known to Europeans as the Gold Coast, present-day Ghana, to take part in the Third Anglo-Ashanti War. This brilliantly researched article traces links between the British Empire's various outposts and its complex web of colonial occupation.

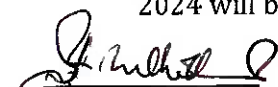
Please follow the LINK BELOW:

<https://laoislocalstudies.ie/a-mountrath-man-in-the-third-anglo-ashanti-war/>



Chief Executive's Orders

- A schedule of Chief Executive Orders signed during the month of March 2024 will be circulated.


John Mulholland
Chief Executive

March 21st 2024