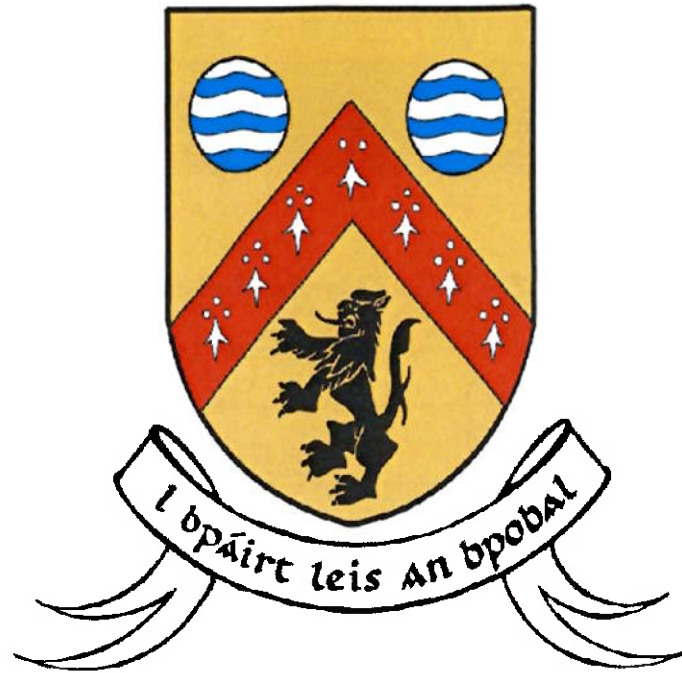


LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL
COMHAIRLE CHONTAE LAOISE



MONTHLY MANAGEMENT REPORT
NOVEMBER 2023
TUARASCÁIL BHAINISTÍOCHTA
SAMHAIN 2023

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

Section 136(2) of the Local Government Act, 2011 as inserted by Section 51 of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014, requires the Chief Executive to prepare monthly management report. The report for November 2023 is as follows:

FINANCE & ALLOCATIONS NOTIFIED

Expenditure and income to the 31/10/2023 is summarised below:

Service Division	Budget Allocation	Expenditure to 31/10/2023
Housing and Building	€21,247,400	€16,186,690
Road Transportation and Safety	€26,291,600	€20,884,584
Water Services	€3,404,500	€2,804,667
Development Management	€9,586,000	€7,946,754
Environmental Services	€8,677,500	€6,495,247
Recreation and Amenity	€4,990,000	€3,778,242
Agriculture, Education, Health and Welfare	€900,000	€681,492
Miscellaneous Services	€9,498,700	€6,528,108
Central Management Charge	€11,213,300	€7,960,059
Total	€95,809,000	€73,265,843

Service Division	Budget Allocation	Income to 31/10/2023
Housing and Building	€22,725,300	€20,238,737
Road Transportation and Safety	€21,583,000	€14,457,779
Water Services	€4,502,000	€3,770,311
Development Management	€6,495,500	€5,243,545
Environmental Services	€2,231,000	€1,896,033
Recreation and Amenity	€1,049,000	€519,705
Agriculture, Education, Health and Welfare	€436,000	€227,497
Miscellaneous Services	€11,954,262	€6,612,531
Superannuation	€720,000	€588,114
Local Property Tax	€9,033,703	€7,528,086
Rates	€14,578,963	€11,417,950
Capital transfer	€500,272	
Total	€95,809,000	€72,500,288

The Miscellaneous Services Expenditure is broken down as follows:

Service Division	Budget Allocation	Expenditure to 31/10/2023
Machinery Account	€220,000	€143,731
Administration of Rates	€2,211,000	€587,000
Franchise Costs	€104,000	€110,321
Op of Morgue and Coroner Expenses	€130,000	-€18,345
Op of Markets and Casual Trading	€3,000	€1,617
Local Representation/Civic Leadership	€987,000	€681,760
Motor Taxation	€226,000	€159,083
Agency & Recoupable Services	€5,617,700	€4,862,941
Total	€9,498,700	€6,528,108

The Central Management Charge Expenditure is broken down as follows:

Corporate Building Costs	€2,038,300	€539,421
General Corporate Services	€1,281,000	€1,036,354
Information and Communications Tech	€1,738,000	€1,568,931
Human Resources Function	€1,083,000	€840,320
Finance Function	€761,000	€532,922
Pensions and Lump Sum Costs	€4,312,000	€3,442,110
Total	€11,213,300	€7,960,058

Allocations Notified

Dog Control Support Initiative 2023	€58,692
Oris Funding - Completion of a Feasibility for the potential development of the Derryounce Amenity Area	€44,280

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	195	-	-	-	424

Social Housing Schemes completed in 2023

Location	Total No. of Houses	House Types	Constructed by	Comment
Market Square, Portarlinton (Vignoles Gardens)	18	15 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey 2 No. 2 Bed Apts 1 No. 3 Bed Apt	LCC (Turnkey)	Tenanted.
Ballymorris Green, Portarlinton (Ph 1)	34	34 no. 3 bed 2 storey houses	Cluid Housing	Phase 2 (12 units) to be completed in early 2024
South Dublin Road, Kilminchy (Dunamaise View)	36	13 no. 2 bed houses 23 no 3 bed houses	Cooperative Housing	Tenanted
Ashwood Walk, Portlaoise	4	4 no. 3 bed houses	LA Part V	Tenanted
Goldencroft, Portlaoise (Old CBS lands – Ph 1 and 2)	24	24 no. 3 bed houses	Cluid Housing	Tenancing commenced w/b 9 th October
Harpur's Crescent, Portlaoise	44	20 no. 2 bed houses 16 no. 3 bed houses 4 no. 1 bed apt 4 no. 2 bed apt	Respond	Tenancing commenced w/b 9 th October
Church Avenue, Stradbally (Phase 1)	20	20 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Turnkey)	Completed - Tenant to commence w/b 27 th November
Sruth na Gleanna, Killeslin	5	1 no. 4bed house 3 no 3bed houses	LA Part V	Complete - Tenancing to commence November 2023.
Mount Stewart, Summerhill, Portlaoise	4	1 no. 4bed house 3 no 3bed houses	LA Part V	Complete - Tenancing to commence in November 2023.
Harbour Court, Mountmellick	6	6 No. 2 Bed bungalows	LCC (Construction)	Complete - Tenancing commenced.
TOTAL	195			

Social Housing Schemes Under Construction in 2023

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
St. Kieran's Errill	14	6 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey 8 No. 3 Bed 1 Storey	LCC (Construction)	On site - expected delivery Q4 2023
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 Q2 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, Ballylynan (Phase 3)	1	1 No. 3-Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Turnkey)	On Site – Phase 3 (1 unit) delivery Q2 2024
Oldcourt, Ballylinan	1	1 No. 4 bed 1 storey	LCC (Renewal)	On site – expected delivery Q2 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
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 early 2024.
Clonrooske Abbey, Portlaoise	18	18 no. 3 bed 2 storey	Cluid Housing	Advised Delivery of: 6 units Q4 2023 12 units Q1 2024
Goldencroft, Portlaoise (Old CBS site – Phase 3)	30	26 no. 2 bed houses 4 no. 2 bed bungalow	Cluid Housing	Phase 3 to be delivered by Q4 2023.
The Meadows (old Midland Dairies site), Portlaoise	48	19 no. 3 bed houses 9 no. 4 bed houses 20 no. 2 bed apts	Cluid Housing	Currently on site – expected delivery Q4 2023
Ard Branagh, Portlaoise	6	6 no. 3 bed houses	Circle Housing	Currently on site – expected delivery by Q1 2024
Derryounce, Portarlinton	7	7 no. 3 bed houses	Oaklee Housing	Currently on Site – Expected Delivery Q3 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 4 no 2-3Bed apts	Respond	Currently on site. Phased delivery – social housing is across Phases 3 and 4. Likely total delivery by end of 2024.
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	324			

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)	Part VIII approved. Stage 3 to be 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)	Part VIII approved. Stage 3 to be submitted Q4 2023.
Doonane	12	12 no. 3 bed 2 storey	LCC (Construction)	Stage 2 approved. Part VIII exemption. Stage 3 to be submitted Q4 2023.
Derry Road, Durrrow	24	9 No. 1 Bed 1 Storey 4 No.1 Bed Apartmts 1 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey 7 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey 3 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Construction)	Stage 2 submitted in Q4 2023. Demolition complete. Section 179A notice erected on site.
Ballyadams	1	1 no. 6 bed bungalows	LCC (Construction)	Stage 3 Approved. Tender for construction advertised and Stage 4 to be submitted in Q4 2023.
Stradbally Road, Portlaoise	21	Tenure mix - numbers and house types - to be confirmed in detailed design	LCC Social and Affordable	Meeting of the MD members completed on 7/11/23. Part VIII to be progressed.
Bracklone St, Portarlinton	15	15 no. 2 bed houses	LCC (Construction)	Site investigation surveys on-going and Stage 2 to be progressed in Q4 2023
Rushall Mountrath	3	3 no. 3 bed 2 storey	LCC (Construction)	Site investigation surveys on-going and Stage 2 to be progressed in Q4 2023
Maryborough School, Stradbally Road, Portlaoise	11	2 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey 7 No. 2 Bed 1 Storey 2 No. 1 Bed 1 Storey	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 To Be Submitted in Q4 2023
Main St, Ballinakill	3	2 No. 2 Bed 2 Storey 1 No. 1 Bed Apt	LCC (Construction)	Site investigation surveys on-going and Stage 2 to be progressed in Q4 2023
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 progressed in Q4 2023
1 New Road, Portlaoise	1	1 No. 4 Bed 1 Storey	LCC (Renewal)	Stage 3 approved. Construction tender to be progressed in Q4 2023.
6 Emmett Terrace, Mountmellick	1	1 No. 4 Bed 1 Storey	LCC (Renewal)	Stage 3 approved. Construction tender to be progressed in Q4 2023.

13 and 14 Lakeglen, Portlaoise	2	1 No. 3 Bed 2 Storey 1 No. 4 Bed 2 Storey	LCC (Renewal)	Demolition works commenced on site.
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 Q4 2023. Tender for demolition of existing properties to be advertised in Q4 2023.
French Church St. Portarlinton	2	2 no. 2 bed apts	LCC (Renewal)	Stage 1 To Be Submitted in Q4 2023.
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	Turnkey application approved Nov 2023.
Convent Lands, Portlaoise (CAS)	52	33 no 2 bed apts 15 no 1 bed apts 4 no. 2 bed houses	Sophia Housing	CAS Stage 4 submission with Dept for approval.
County Hotel, Portlaoise (CAS)	10	8 no. 1 bed apts 2 no. 2 bed apts	Cluid Housing	Stage 1 approved under CAS. A conservation report to accompany the S179A planning notification is currently being prepared by LCC with Cluid input as to the challenges on this site. An in-committee meeting with MD members will be arranged in December.
"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	Site now in Cluid ownership. Cluid has advised that they will need to re-tender for this scheme with a view to commencing on site Q2 2024 as negotiations with initial tenderers were unsuccessful. In the meantime, they are progressing enabling works and hope to complete the diversion and demolition element before Christmas.
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	Respond Housing	Revised CALF application currently under review by Dept; notification expected in the coming weeks.

		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		
TOTAL	339			

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 Potential No of unit yield</i>	<i>Part V – Potential No of Unit Yield</i>	<i>LCC Construction Potential No of Unit Yield</i>
Affordable	13	27	*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.
- 2 further AHF applications with the Dept. of Housing for approval in relation to 2 schemes in Portlaoise for a total of 27 units for Affordable Purchase.
- A survey recently went live on www.laois.ie to ascertain interest in affordable purchase in Portlaoise.
- 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 – a meeting with the Dept of Housing will take place to discuss this.

Call remains open for Expressions of Interest in respect of:

- a. Appropriately zoned land for housing development
- b. 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.

Target for number of inspections in 2023 is 874.

	1 st Jan – 31 st October 2023
No of properties inspected	953
No of notices of works issued	1004

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	Offers accepted by 3 out of 4 offers made. Services/utilities currently being constructed on site.
Gleann na Glaise, Ballyroan	4	4 offers accepted and will proceed to conveyancing. All services/utilities in place on site.
Doonane	2	Stage 1 approved as part of larger housing scheme Part VIII & Stage 2 to be progressed in Q4 2023
Derry Road Durrow	4	Stage 1 approved as part of larger housing scheme Part VIII & Stage 2 to be progressed in Q4 2023
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 2023	5	2	6
February 2023	2	2	1
March 2023	6	6	16
April 2023	6	4	9
May 2023	11	2	14
June 2023	5	1	2
July 2023	4	2	6
August 2023	8	0	2
September 2023	5	2	0
October 2023	12	0	1
TOTAL (YTD)	64	21	57

NOTE: There are currently 34 vacant units from our existing stock and a further 13 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 2023	504	504	0
February 2023	378	378	0
March 2023	464	464	0
April 2023	357	357	0
May 2023	440	440	0
June 2023	325	325	0
July 2023	274	274	0
August 2023	409	404	5
September 2023	412	320	92
October 2023	460	314	146
TOTAL (YTD)	4,023	3,780	243

Energy Efficiency/Retrofitting Programme:

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

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)	29 units completed.
EERP (2022) – Phase 1&2 – 41 Units (Thornberry, Church Ave, Slieve Bloom Park)	Tender evaluation for the 2022 Retrofit Programme comprising 62 houses has been completed. It is now proposed to commence works in phase's set out below. <u>Phase 1</u> 1) Thornberry, Abbeyleix – 20 units. • Works to be completed in Q4 2023.
EERP (2022) – Phase 3 – 21 Units (St. Fintan's Tce, Old School Road, St Johns Sq.)	<u>Phase 2</u> 1) Church Avenue, Stradbally – 12 units. 2) Slieve Bloom Park, Clonaslee – 9 units. • Tender awarded and works to commence in Q4 2023. <u>Phase 3</u> 1) St Fintans Terrace – 6 units 2) Old School Road, Ballylinan – 8 units 3) St. John's Square, Portlaoise – 7 units. • Tender awarded and works to commence in Q4 2023.
EERP (2023) – 53 Units (St. Brigid's Place, Fr. O'Connor Cres., Erkindale Dr, Rossmore View)	Surveys of the 53 units are under way.

HOUSING NEED

Notices to Quit/Social Housing Acquisitions

All NTQ's are examined on a case-by-case basis and tenants are being dealt with using all social and other housing options available.

From 1st January – 31st October 2023:

Acquisitions completed	14
Acquisitions currently in progress	5
No. of above that have Tenants in Situ	9
Acquisitions under consideration from EOI's submitted	18

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

Homeless Presentations

Time Period	Homeless Presentations	Breakdown of Household
1 st October to 31 st October 2023	30	23singles, 7 families

Homeless Accommodation

	Emergency Accommodation Households booked at 31 st October 2023	Social Housing allocated from homelessness in October 2023
Families	9	3 HAP
Single Persons	18	1 AHB
TOTAL	27	4

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

Social Housing List at 31st October 2023

TOTAL No of Social Housing Applicants on waiting list	1,584
Proportion of SH applicants availing of HAP supports (790)	49.9%
Proportion of HAP tenants transferred from Rent Supplement (108)	13.7%

RAS/Leasing Statistics at 31st October 2023

Active RAS tenancies	68
Active short-term leasing tenancies (Social Housing Leasing Scheme)	25
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	29

Applicants housed during the period 1st January – 31st October 2023

Method of Delivery	No. housed 1 st January – 31 st October 2023
First allocation of New Build/Acquired unit	56
Relet / Refurbished Stock Allocation	56
Housed via leasing	0
TOTAL	112

Nominations to AHB - 1st January – 31 st October 2023	*210
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* Nominations are for new build and relet AHB units. Not all nominations will result in the creation of an AHB tenancy.

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

LOANS AND GRANTS

Loans

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

No of Loan Applications received since scheme commenced in January 2022	106
No of Applications approved since scheme commenced in January 2022	40
No of Applications refused since scheme commenced in January 2022	26*

*Predominant reasons for refusal are "Repayment Capacity not demonstrated" and "Insufficient Savings Record/Source of Equity", i.e., applicant not showing that they can afford to meet the monthly repayments on the prospective mortgage, and/or they have not proven that they have consistent, regular savings, and/or the deposit is made up of lump sums lodged that cannot be verified.

PRIVATE GRANTS

Housing Adaptation Grants at 31st October 2023

Allocation €1,421,438 (€1,137,150 Exchequer + €284,288 LA Own Resources)

	No. of applications received to 31/10/2023	No. of applications paid by 31/10/2023	Value of applications paid by 31/10/2023	No. of applications currently at work stage	Value of applications currently at work stage
HOP	163	110	€491,275	44	€230,390
MAG	13	12	€ 36,749	2	€ 11,200
HGD	150	59	€413,293	51	€401,337
TOTAL	326	181	€941,317	97	€642,927

Disabled Persons Grant for Social Housing

DPG works at 31st October 2023:

Allocation 2023 (including LA funded portion)	€641,100
No of new applications received to 31/10/2023	32
No of Works approved to date (incl 2 extensions*)	35
Value of approved works to date	€474,641

* It should be noted that extensions costing over €75,000 will only proceed subject to Dept approval and planning if required. Should planned extensions not complete in 2023, it will not be possible to draw down allocated funding in the current year. Currently, 2 extensions have commenced in 2023.

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

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.

Town Centre First

In relation to the Town Centre First Programme , the Town Regeneration Officer has a focused remit on the following Towns where town regeneration strategies and Town Centre First Plans have been approved :-

- **Rathdowney**

- The Town Centre First Plan for Rathdowney has been finalised with the official launch taking place in early December.
- Rathdowney Town Team are submitting an application under the 2023 Town and Village Renewal Scheme.
- The Commercial Vacant building scheme for Rathdowney is being launched on 28th November.
- Free WI4EU points have also being installed in Rathdowney and the scheme will be launched in December also.
- The TRO is liaising with the derelict sites staff to issue notices in respect of vacant and derelict buildings that have been identified as causing concern in the respective towns.

Sites identified with TRO - Rathdowney



- **Mountrath**

- Mountrath Town Team are submitting an application under the 2023 Town and Village Renewal Scheme.
- The Commercial Vacant building scheme for Mountrath was launched on 31st October.
- A landscape plan for the town will be finalised at the end of November.
- The TRO is liaising with the derelict sites staff to issue notices in respect of vacant and derelict buildings that have been identified as causing concern in the respective towns.

Sites identified – TRO - Mountrath



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 – 30
- Total No of Files on hand: 97
- 22 new files in 2023
- 11 files closed to date

Examples of where works have been carried out satisfactorily on buildings are given below:-



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

The Vacant Homes Team is currently continuing to survey properties identified as being vacant in data supplied by GeoDirectory (via a Dept of Housing 2022 initiative). The app has shown the following data so far - of the **880 properties surveyed** to date (residential and commercial), **527 properties were found to be vacant**, with 34 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 will 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

CPO Activation Programme

Circular 14/2023 provides details on the launch of the CPO Activation Programme. Laois target has been set for properties to enter the Compulsory Acquisition process, where engagement with the owner has not resulted in the vacant or derelict property being brought back into use, to be subsequently used for social housing or made available for sale on the open market.

A target of **60 vacant and derelict properties** to enter the Programme and **16 CPOs / Compulsory Acquisitions** to commence/complete in 2023 has been set for Laois County Council.

The Derelict Sites Team and the Vacant Homes Officer have cross referenced any common properties from both register and survey in an effort to determine the number of properties activated for the purpose of potential CPO.

11 properties are under consideration for CPO in a range of locations , however there are ongoing discussions in relation to potential acquisition by agreement under way. CPO of these properties will be for a number of reasons :-

- For use a social residential unit
- For use as an affordable residential unit
- For commercial or community purposes

At 31 st October 2023	Target	Actual
Vacant and derelict properties that have entered the CPO Activation Programme	60	170
CPO's / Compulsory Acquisitions commenced/completed in 2023	16	4

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 Grant Applications at 31st October, 2023

No. of Applications received	111
No. Approved	54
No. Approved in Principle	20
Applicants under consideration	31
No. Refused	3
No. Withdrawn by Applicant	4

Of the 111 applications received to date, 58 properties are in rural locations and 53 properties are located in a town or village.

32 of the applicant properties were identified as vacant in the Geodirectory Survey Data detailed above.

To date, the approved works have been completed on 8 properties and 5 grants have been paid to the applicants. Below are some examples where approved works have been completed.

- **Buy and Renew Scheme**

- This scheme enables the local authority to recoup costs where we acquire a property that is need of major refurbishment, beyond the limits of our acquisition cost ceilings.
- 2 properties received Buy and Renew Construct Stage 3 approval and will proceed to tender for construction – 1 New Road, Portlaoise and 6 Emmett Terrace, Mountmellick.

- **Repair and Leasing Scheme**

Applications received to date	45
Applications approved to proceed	10
Applications under consideration	3
Applications Withdrawn	1
No. of Leases commenced	1
Applications Refused	30*

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

(a) their location in areas of low housing demand or;

(b) the extent of works required exceeded the Scheme limit or;

(c) works were commenced or almost complete before an application was submitted, which is not permitted under the R&L Scheme.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO REFUGEES FLEEING CONFLICT

Laois County Council continues to lead and coordinate the **Laois Ukrainian Community Response Forum**. The Forum, consisting of 23 statutory and voluntary groups/agencies, meets regularly, with 20 meetings held to date, ensuring consistency and efficiency in service delivery and supports to new arrivals to our county from Ukraine. The most recent data indicates there are approximately 1231 displaced Ukrainian citizens in the County. Approximately 330 of these are in accommodation centres such as hotels, guesthouses, hostels, and refurbished properties, with the remainder in privately sourced or pledged accommodation.

Effective from 6th November 2023 the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth (DCEDIY) entered into a contract with the Stradbally Estate for a “winter ready” contingency transitional site, for a 32 week period, with a maximum occupancy capacity of 950. This winter-ready accommodation consists of own-door, en-suite, heated and insulated cabins, enclosed within large marquee-type structures that are also heated, containing all ancillary facilities. The overall site will be surrounded by secure fencing.

As with the previous contract, maximum duration of stay for any family has been indicated at 2-3 weeks. At time of writing, no families have yet been placed by DCEDIY at the site.

The Council continues to assist DCEDIY with the temporary accommodation of Ukrainian arrivals to our county, as well as 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 pledged/offered accommodation to Ukrainian families, with 52 households having been provided with accommodation through these mechanisms to date.

Landscaping and site finishing works are continuing at the 42 Modular Homes project in Rathdowney. DCEDIY anticipates handover of the site from OPW by end of November and that Ukrainian families will commence occupation at the site early to mid-December 2023.

Tuath Voluntary Housing Association have been contracted by DCEDIY to manage the site thereafter.

PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT, ARTS & HERITAGE

FORWARD PLANNING

The Draft Graiguecullen/Carlow Joint Urban Area Plan (JULAP) 2023-2029 is currently near completion and will go on display before the end of the year. Information Sessions with the MD Elected Members and the public will be held in late November and December 2024. The issues paper is available online and at Council offices. The pre-draft stage public consultation phase ended on the 19th of October 2023. 38 no. submissions (and 2 no. late submissions) were received – 28 no. were to Laois County Council and 10 no. to Offaly County Council. A wide range of issues including land zoning were raised. Preparation of the Chief Executive's report on the submission is now commencing.

The Draft Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2022-2028 is currently being finalised for public consultation. In addition, ABTA Plans for both towns are nearing completion.

Portarlinton Joint Urban Area Plan 2024-2030 – a very successful public information session to kickstart the public consultation period was held on the 4th of October 2023 in Portarlinton Library. In attendance were elected members, staff from each local authority and members of the general public. Topical issues were discussed including land use zoning, infrastructure, flood risk, access, transport, housing supply, support services, connectivity, employment and heritage.

Residential Zoned Land Tax

The final RZLT in-scope maps have been prepared and issued to the Dept. by deadline date of 15th November 2023.

In preparing the final RZLT in-scope maps, the Planning Authority had regard to the guidance provided in the Department circular letter NRUP 02/2023 of 27th October 2023.

This advises inter alia that final RZLT in-scope maps should take account of factors including:

- additions following publication of the supplemental map,
- removal of lands as a consequence of Planning Authority determinations following third party submissions,
- removal of lands as a consequence of An Bord Pleanala decisions following third party appeals,
- amendments on foot of the latest Uisce Eireann capacity registers dated 2023,

In addition, the Planning Authority has removed lands which are [or are about to be] subject to demands for levies under the Derelict Sites Act 1990 as amended for 2023.

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE

E-Planning Project	E-Planning has been live since 11 th November 2022 64% applications in 2023 have been made online - 489 online applications out of total 765 applications made to date in 2023.		
Planning Applications	Year	Valid applications from 01/01/2023 16/11/2023	Valid applications from 01/01/2022- 16/11/2022
		471	537
Total Number of valid applications received:	471		
Invalid applications returned to applicant	297		
Number of applications granted:	453 (Decisions to Grant)		
Number of applications refused:	21 (Decisions to Refuse) 4.3% refusal rate		
PRE PLANNING			
No of requests to date	294		
No of meetings held to date	282		
Wait time	2 weeks		

ENFORCEMENT UPDATE

Current year	2022		2021	
Service Review	Oct	Jan - Oct	Oct	Jan - Oct
Total number of new cases subject to complaints that were investigated	16	108	8	121
Number of Warning Letters served	25	351	32	240
Number of Enforcement Notices served	11	43	3	61
No of cases referred for legal proceedings	1	7	0	6
Number of cases in Court(incl adjournments)	7	50	8	58
Number of cases Resolved in Court	1	8	0	4
Number of Files Closed	8	137	14	117
Number of cases on system	151	151	177	177
Enforcement Costs recouped	€ 952.69	€ 8,472.95	€ 357.84	€10,545.94
Number of Valid Retention Applications Received relating to Enforcement Action	4	44	3	38
Fees received through Valid Retention Applications Received relating to Enforcement Action	€2,726.40	€43,012.50	€1,833.20	€26,093.92
Legal fees paid	€848.70	€21,085.40	€18,302.40	€37,056.54

Broadband

Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB) launched their (S.T.E.A.M.) Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics programme in conjunction with Laois County Council and Offaly County Council Broadband Officers on Thursday 16th November 2023.

The Programme was launched by Mr Joe Cunningham CEO , LOETB and was joined by both Mr Paschal McEvoy, Cathaoirleach, Laois County Council and Mr Eddie Fitzpatrick Cathaoirleach, Offaly County Council in welcoming the programme.



On the day, students from Portlaoise College showcased MINECRAFT and how it can be applied to various professions and spoke about the importance of partaking in this programme from a skills development and on a team working level. Other programmes showcased on the day included VEX robotics, LEGO and Podcasting. This programme will be rolled out in County Laois during 2023-2024 with the support of the Broadband Officer.



(a) Computer Science in Secondary schools.

Computer Science training for Secondary School teachers has continued with 4 modules been offered in this school year to May 24. This will allow schools to offer Computer Science to Leaving Cert students in the future.

The 4 schools in Laois are taken part this year.

1. Portlaoise Community College,
2. Dunamase Collage Portlaoise,
3. St. Fergal's Rathdowney and
4. Colaiste Iosagain Portarlington.

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

(b) STEM in Primary and Secondary Schools.

Midland ICT skills has been set up within the Midland region of County Councils through the BBO's – Laois, Offaly, Longford, and Westmeath in

association with Ericsson Athlone. (It is hoped to get other stakeholders involved in the future).

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

Ericsson have built training programmes to suit both primary and secondary schools to train teachers and students in topics such as Scratch, Microbit and Building Websites. This program is available to all Primary schools in Laois for the year end June 2024. Last year the following schools Killeshin NS., St.Colmans NS Stradbally, Muire Naofa Castlecuff Clonaslee and Rath NS. have completed their Scratch program with their 3rd and 4th class students for this year and all students have been awarded a Certificate of completion.

4. WIFI 4 EU

WIFI4EU is being rolled out in 3 locations in Rathdowney at present - 2 locations in the Square and one @ the New Garden of remembrance. These will be launched on 12th December along with formal launch of the Town Centre First Plan for Rathdowney.

HERITAGE

1. Laois Heritage Projects

On 28th October 2023, the Heritage Officer facilitated a Community Information and Engagement event at Luggacurren Community Hall on Clopook Church & Graveyard, and works completed under The Just Transition Fund – Conservation & Pollination.

2. 2024 Conservation Grants (BHIS and HSF) Open for Applications

Malcolm Noonan TD, Minister of State for Nature, Heritage and Electoral Reform at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, has launched the **Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS)** and the **Historic Structures Fund (HSF)** for 2024.

The total funding of €9 million across the two schemes is expected to support repair and maintenance of over 550 historic structures in every local authority area across the country in 2024. These will range from small-scale, labour-intensive projects in individual homes, up to larger-scale projects in major public buildings. This funding will help owners and custodians of our built heritage to undertake the repair and rejuvenation of these historic buildings, presenting them to their best effect today and safeguarding them into the future.

For details go to www.laois.ie Queries to Thomas Carolan, Laois Heritage Officer at 057-8664129 or tcarolan@laoiscoco.ie.

These schemes are now open for valid applications. These schemes are funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and managed by Laois County Council.

Examples of Funding 2023 -

Donaghmore Workhouse

Works funded : Refurbishment works to the Bakehouse building to ensure its protection to the rear of the site, works included –

1. Removal of vegetation from roof and walls,
2. Re-slating of roof including repairs to battens, new treated battens, underlay and splice repairs to rafters and wall plates where necessary,
3. Lifting and re-bedding of stone ridge tiles in lime mortar to main roof
4. Masonry repairs to chimney including renewal of soakers, flashings and installation of flue caps
5. Reconditioning of existing historic rainwater goods and installation of new cast-iron

Donaghmore – completed works to the Roof of the Bakehouse



3. Events update

A Memorial Ceremony was held on Sunday 19th November 2023 for those who died in all wars. A service of remembrance was held at St Peters Church of Ireland and a ceremony was held at the War Memorial thereafter.

ARTS

Culture Night 2023

Culture Night 2023 was a great success with visitor numbers to each event significantly up on previous years owing to reachout and support of the Arts Office. The Arts Office hosted the launch of 'Fragments of Time and Space', sculpture by David Beattie at the Portlaoise Library.(Workshops with the artist are in train with local schools and community groups).

STRADBALLY

The Arts Office curated an evening of events in Stradbally;

- Viewing of *Áille na Háille*, Stone Sculpture by Benedict Byrne at Mc Keon Stone LTD.
- "Local Materials, My Vison" an Exhibition by Evgeny Chubatyy was held in The Gallery, Laois Arthouse Stradbally
- Night Creatures Parade. This outdoor parade with illuminations involved 200 participants in Court Square, Stradbally. 200 children and young people took part in the parade. Workshops to make props, were held during summer art camps and prop making, and movement workshops were held in the schools. Music Generation Laois provided wonderful drumming and the Buggie School of Dance joined in also.
- A concert by 'Hank Wangford and the Messages' in the Stradbally Library.

PORTLAOISE

Laois Africa Support Group and the Ukrainian Choir staged a performance of music, dance, poetry, storytelling and food at the Portlaoise Library. The Dunamais Arts Centre hosted evening events which included Special guest Laois Influencer and Digital Media Artist, Mary Claire and Artist Demo and Talks by Local artists Paddy Critchley and Greg Hallahan, exhibited individually at Dunamais.

Greg's exhibited in the café gallery space, where he gave a live demonstration of his artwork using recycled cardboard. NOTIFY, with Séamus and Caoimhe Uí Fhlatharta performed on the Dunamais stage featuring six Irish traditional and jazz musicians, lead by concertina player Padraig Rynne. In Mountmellick, Emer Dunne & Folk Threads performed at The Balcony Theatre, Mountmellick Community Arts Centre, Mountmellick Arts Collective hosted an evening of Culture by the Mountmellick Writers Group and *Navigation* exhibition by Hazel Restricks was shown in the gallery. An evening of Traditional Irish Music by children and adults was held by Mountmellick Comhaltas Group.

MOUNTRATH

Mountrath Youth Theatre presented an evening of storytelling entitled 'Between Light & Dark' Storytelling Event for all and at Bloom HQ, an art exhibition was presented by studio artists.

PORTARLINGTON

Mary Slevin, Artist, welcomed adults and children to her art studio at Mount Henry to explore print making using everyday material. Port Art Collective hosted an art crawl for all-ages, a cultural extravaganza showcasing Street Art from artists ADW; DMC; KIN MX; Zurdie; KLOW! Myfanwy Nia created during the Forest Fest in Emo which brought colour and vibrancy to the hoardings around the Market House which is currently undergoing an ambitious renovation by Laois County Council. The Port Art Crawl will start at Portarlington Library with crafts demonstrations from the Brat Bhrídes and Made with Knots. Local illustrator David Butler presented his graphic novel *Michael Collins*, produced in collaboration with writer Mario Corrigan. A talk was given by local historian David Orford.

Crawlers had an opportunity to view and discuss an exhibition of recent work from artists Iwona K Tiernan, Catherine Terrett and Leonie Connellan to an eclectic backdrop of instrumental music from Kim Melia. Music from the Port Concert Band,

Ukrainian Choir and Georgian Folk Group brought the event to full swing. An exhibition took place in the Parochial Hall by local artists Mary Slevin, Pauline Hyland & Vasili Grdzeldze. Award winning Laois poet Pat Boran read from his work.

The French Quarter venue, presented music alongside an exhibition of prints by local photographer Frank Smith.

PORT SOUNDS AT THE ANVIL INN From 9pm there was an exciting and eclectic night of the best local performers featuring local bands. The night was compered by Adam Cullen.

EMO

Emo Court hosted an Interior Guided tour of the house, with guides dressed in period costumes.

SHANAHOE

The Shanahoe Community Hall, hosted dancing by the Aishling Walsh Dance School of dancers followed by the marching band. Some music from the pupils of Shanahoe National School, and a spoken piece on history and heritage presentation was presented by pupils.

SPINK

Ceol agus Craic by Spink Comhaltas included music performances by children and young people aged 6-18 years took place.

Leaves Festival 2023

The Leaves Festival ran from the 8-11 November 2023. Aingeala Flannery, the award-winning author of 'The Amusements,' was the festival writer in residence. Aingeala's novel, not only a critical success, has also garnered the prestigious John McGahern Prize and the Kerry Group Novel of the Year Award.

As part of the festival, 'The Amusements' was chosen for the One-County-One-Book initiative, aiming to connect readers across Laois. Aingeala conducted conversations with inmates at Portlaoise Prison who are students of literature. Aingeala held two conversations with senior cycle students, in Mountmellick Library and the Dunamais Arts Centre. These were moderated by our own Ann Marie Kelly and journalist and novelist Orla Barry.

Aingeala held two adult writing workshops. There was an evening entitled 'Telling Stories', in the Dunamais Arts Centre, moderated by acclaimed journalist Alex Clark. Man Booker award winner Anne Enright and Aingeala Flannery and music by Molly Donnery and Cathal Crowley.

Folk singers Ultan Conlon and Sabrina performed a café concert in the Hares Corner, The Mill, Mountmellick, for the service users at the Link Centre, St Fintan's Hospital and in the Portlaoise library. Ultan joined Donal Ryan for an evening of writing and music in the Portlaoise Library.

Other events included a conversation with author Emily Hourican, author of An Invitation to the Kennedys. This was moderated by Thomas Carolan, Heritage Officer.

Library events took place in Portarlinton and Portlaoise, including a comic book workshop with Colin O Mahoney and an event with members of the LOETB creative writing classes.

The festival's richness is further enhanced by a crime writing evening featuring John Banville and Andrea Carter in the atmospheric setting of St. Peter's Church of Ireland in Portlaoise, a special evening with Donal Ryan and Ultan Conlon, and an appearance by the bestselling novelist Emily Hourican, with her latest work 'An Invitation to the Kennedys.'

In addition to the literary events, there was performances at various venues with by Ultan Conlon, Cathal Crowley, Molly Donnery, and Michelle Mulcahy. The festival introduced an innovative comic book writing workshop with Colin O'Mahony across two events and a spoken word and music event celebrated the theme of 'Stand By Me', hosted by local Ann Marie Kelly.

Crime and Punishment St. Peter's Church of Ireland



Dunamais Arts centre

Creative Writing Course

Eileen Casey's Creative Writing Course continues at the Laois Arthouse until December. A monthly class is taking place.



Lions Club Peace Poster Competition

The theme for the competition this year is “Dare to Dream” It’s the 18th year Laois County Council have hosted this event – organised jointly by the Lions Club and the Arts Office.

This competition encourages children to express what peace means to them. The winners will be presented with their awards and the overall winner will go forward to the next stage of the international competition.

WINNERS & SCHOOLS

Killanure N.S

1st Prize: Rachel Allely 2nd Prize Kaiah Keenan

Holy Family Senior School

1st Prize Colina Weitong Zheng 2nd Prize Jamie Kavanagh

St Fintans, Mountrath

1st Prize Kim Weng Wang 2nd Prize Oisín Kirwan

Clonenagh N.S

1st Prize Laughlin Cooper 2nd Prize Richard Lalor

Rushall N.S

1st Prize Holly Scanlon 2nd Prize James Phelan

Maryborough N.S

1st Prize Hailey Uneh 2nd Prize Selena Angel Fragrante

Gaelscoil Thromaire

1st Prize Lola 2nd Prize Réaltín Kirwan

Scoil Bhríde, Mountrath

1st Prize Ambeabet Emmanuelle 2nd Prize Julia – Bell Eyongakta

Paddock N.S, Mountrath

1st Prize & Overall Winner Evelyn Delaney 2nd Prize Ruby Fitzpatrick

LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- 4 Trading Online Voucher applications approved.
- 23 businesses set up to avail of 1-1 mentoring.
- 6 training courses were delivered to 125 participants.
- Over 170 businesswomen from Laois, Offaly, Westmeath and Longford took part in the National Women’s Enterprise Day events, with this year’s event being hosted by LEO Laois at Castle Durrrow Country House Hotel. The theme for the event was “Empowering Business Together” and guest speakers included broadcaster and writer Terry Prone; celebrity chef and Ballymaloe Cookery School co-founder Darina Allen and the National Ploughing Association Managing Director Anna May McHugh. This year’s Event Ambassador was Kelly Ging of Kelly Lou Cakes in Portlaoise. Event MC was broadcaster and documentary maker Ann Marie Kelly.

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 Council is currently developing a feasibility study into current activities and potential future development options to facilitate the sustainable transformation of the Kyletalesha Facility in a manner that will align with environmental best practices, sustainable design principles, and community interests.

2. **Bring Banks:**

Tonnages of 2023 collected recyclable material is in Table 1 below.

Month	Tonnage	Month	Tonnage	Month	Tonnage
Jan	164.24	May	156.04	Sept	105.02
Feb	129.06	June	126.87	Oct	114.38
Mar	140.63	July	116.05	Nov	0
Apr	119.26	Aug	165.44	Dec	0
Annual Total			1,336.98 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 October 2023.

Nature	Number	Nature	Number
Waste Management/Enforcement	451	Air	36
Litter	310	Noise	34
Water	50	Waste Infrastructure	11
Total	892		

Table 2 – Environmental Complaint Register

b) **Litter Fines**

Month	Number	Month	Number	Month	Number
Jan	4	May	5	Sept	7
Feb	10	June	7	Oct	9
Mar	3	July	10	Nov	0
Apr	4	Aug	7	Dec	0
Annual Total			66		

Table 3 – 2023 Litter Fines

- c) **Illegal Dumping**
Tonnes of material collected is 262 tonnes.

4. **Waste Management & Enforcement:**

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**

- On site investigations of complaints in relation to water quality/water pollution are being carried out by Environmental staff.
- On-site investigations of complaints in relation to water pollution.
- On-going assessment of planning applications with regards to water quality protection.

b) **Domestic Wastewater Treatment System Grants**

The Department of Local Government recently announced new grant rates for Domestic Wastewater Treatment Systems/Septic Tanks, increasing the maximum grant from €5,000 to €12,000. The Department also announced the cessation of the requirement for the DWWTS/Septic Tank to be registered before 1st February 2013, to qualify for grant aid.

The changes set out above become effective from 1st January 2024. The Department has confirmed that new Regulations will be published before the end of 2023 and those Regulations are awaited. In the meantime, it is noted that the currently, the Regulations provide grant eligibility is confined to DWWTS/Septic Tanks that fall under/within the following Regulations;

- Housing (Domestic Wastewater Treatment Systems Financial Assistance) (under the National Inspection Plan),
- Housing (Domestic Wastewater Treatment Systems Financial Assistance for Prioritised Areas for Action),
- Housing (Domestic Wastewater Treatment Systems Financial Assistance for High Status Objective Catchment Areas).

c) **Air & Noise:**

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

6. **Local Authority Performance Framework**

The Local Authority Performance Framework (LAPF) evaluates the performance of local authorities in progressing the National Enforcement Priorities (NEPs) designed to achieve national environmental outcomes.

Laois County Council met the required standard of a Strong or Excellent result for 60% of the National Enforcement Priorities (NEPs) in 2022. The national average was 59%. Local authorities are expected to meet the required standard in 100% of the NEPs by the end of the 2022 – 2024 three- year cycle.

Additional focus is required in the work areas where a Limited or Moderate assessment result was achieved.

7. Additional Funding

Laois County Council have been allocated €58,692 provided by the Department of Rural and Community Development in 2023, This capital funding is provided under the **Dog Control Support Initiative 2023**, to facilitate the improvements to dog control infrastructure and equipment in local authority dog facilities or those contracted.

River Drainage Maintenance Programme 2023

The following are the River Drainage Maintenance Projects that were delivered in 2023.

OPW Minor Flood Mitigation Works funding – Phase 3 of the River Nore between Abbeyleix and Durrow. This funding has covered works at multiple locations on the river Nore as follows;

- Section 1; M7 to New Bridge
- Section 2; Mash River to Poormans Bridge
- Section 3; De Vesci Estate
- Section 4; Watercastle to Coilte
- Section 5; Erkina to Tallyho Bridge

These works consisted of the removal of deadwood/debris and pruning of trees that are Causing restrictions on approximately 6.5km of the River Nore in South Laois. The funding amount allocated to these works is €70,000.00.

Further details are available in Appendix 1 attached.

Emergency Planning, Fire Services & Flood Relief

To date (7th November 2023), Laois County Fire & Rescue Service attended 554 emergency incidents, consisting of 191 fires, 266 special service incidents and 97 false alarms.

Turnout by Station*:

Portlaoise – 250	Portarlinton - 96	Stradbally - 110	Mountmellick – 102
Abbeyleix - 71	Mountrath – 77	Durrow – 65	Rathdowney – 57

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

****Note – Not all incident reports have been uploaded to date.**

New Class B fire appliances – capital funded.

The NDFEM recently announced the 100% grant aiding of 2 new Class B fire appliances. It is expected that these appliances will be ordered in early 2024 with a delivery date of late 2024 or early 2025. The total cost of these 2 appliances is approximately €900,000 ex VAT.

New Fire Station in Stradbally

Following approval of Part 8 proposals, Laois County Council has recently received *'NDFEM approval in principle, for the construction of a new Fire Station at Stradbally.'* Laois County Council has now prepared a design brief for the project with a view to the appointment of a design team to oversee the detailed design, tendering and construction of the new Fire Station. A restricted tender competition was held to pre-qualify design teams. 3 architect-led design teams have been qualified & a detailed stage 2 tender competition has commenced, with a closing date for tender submissions of 1st December 2023.

Mountmellick Fire Station upgrade

Part VIII documents have been completed by Tobin Consulting Engineers. A public consultation on the proposed development will commence in January 2024.

Civil Defence

Volunteers

Civil Defence continues to provide ongoing training and upskilling for volunteers. As of 10th November, all volunteers meet the minimum training standard requirements, as required by the Department of Defence.

Activity Report January to November 2023

- 86 Community Events
- 20 Missing Person Search Activities
- 8 Supports to the Ukrainian Crisis

Equipment

Grant approval was received from the Department of Defence for the purchase of a new drone in November, to upgrade one previously in service. This unit has been put into service in November 2023.

Further grant aid was approved for the specialist fit-out for one of the existing vans, which will now be used as a dedicated response vehicle for search activities. This vehicle build is now underway and expected to be operational by the end of December 2023.

Training

Training courses completed in November included:

- Missing Person Search Responder
- PHECC First Aid Response Instructor
- QQI Level 6 People Moving Instructor
- Rescue3 Lifejacket for Emergency Services Competency

The winter weekly training plan also continues from the unit's new headquarters in Portlaoise. Additionally, 3 volunteers competed at the World Rescue Competition held in Lanzarote and placed 5th in the trauma competition.

COMMUNITY

Laos Public Participation Network Property Marker

Laos PPN launched the “Property Marker”, for Community Groups in Laois.

This is the first Property Marker available in County Laois. The Property Marker is a crime prevention initiative that provides a unique identifier on property that acts as a theft deterrent and assists Gardai in the recovery of stolen property. Laois PPN will make the Property Marker available to Community Groups in towns and villages across Laois over the coming months.

Laos Community and Voluntary Awards

Laos County Council in collaboration with our long-term partner Laois PPN and the People First Credit Union, hosted the Community and Voluntary Awards 2023 on Friday the 3rd of November. There was a record number of nominations. The Community and Voluntary Awards celebrate the wonderful work of Community Groups in Laois that enhance the quality of life in our County.



All Island Pride of Place Awards Ceremony

Congratulations to both of our Pride of Place Nominees this year, taking home 2 National awards in this year's IPB National Pride of Place Award Ceremony on Friday, 10th November in Armagh City Hotel. Camross Community Association won the Runner up -Population under 500. Stradbally, Vicarstown, Timahoe (SVT) Wellness Hub received a 'Special Award' on the night. This Special Award was to honour the group for their focus on health and wellbeing, the facilities and activities being put in place to achieve this and the shrewd use of national exposure and publicity to promote and active lifestyle.



Laois Comhairle na nÓg

Laois Comhairle na nÓg held their Annual Youth Conference in the Midlands Park Hotel on 7th November 2023. It was attended by students from 10 secondary schools and various youth organisations. During the conference, the young people held a workshop on mental health. They discussed 'What mental health means to them?'

Community Projects (Elected Members) Fund 2023

Over 86 community groups have received funding from the Community Projects (Elected Members) Fund 2023.

Borris in Ossory Courthouse

At the October meeting of Laois County Council held on 23rd October 2023, the members unanimously agreed to the Part VIII of the Planning & Development Regulations, 2001 (as amended) in relation to the development of a Digital Hub and associated works at Borris in Ossory Courthouse. The granting of planning permission for the project will enable Laois County Council to apply for Category 1 funding under the next round of the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund scheme.

LAOIS Local Economic and Community Plan 2023-2028

Laois LECP 2023-2028 is now at Stage 3, where the Sustainable Objectives and High-Level Outcomes have been signed off by the LECP Advisory Steering Group, the LCDC and the Economic SPC. On 15th/16th November, the Sustainable Objectives and High-Level Outcomes were presented to the three Municipal Districts. The Sustainable Objectives and High-Level Outcomes have been sent to EMRA for their review and input.

Age Friendly Laois

The Older Peoples Council AGM took place in Castletown Community Centre on October 24th last. 150 people were in attendance on the day and benefitted from the information available at the various Stakeholders stands. The new Laois Age Friendly Strategy was launched by Cathaoirleach Cllr Paschal McEvoy and our Age Friendly Ambassador, Mrs Anna May McHugh.



The Laois Federation Tidy Towns Awards 2023

The Laois Federation of Tidy Towns Awards took place alongside the Community and Voluntary Awards on Friday 3rd November 2023. The awards were adjudicated

by Laois Federation of Tidy Towns Committee members at the end of the Summer and we are very grateful for their considerable efforts in the hard task of deliberating as the competition across all categories was very strong. A total of 17 Tidy Town Groups entered the Laois Federation Tidy Towns Awards and the winners were as follows:

Public Consultations of Local Authority Climate Action Plan

The public consultation for the draft Laois Climate Action Plan is now underway and in order to facilitate input at local level, drop in Community Climate Action clinics were held across four libraries in Laois, providing guidance on applying to the Community Climate Action Fund. Attendees had the chance to drop in without appointments on November 15th at Mountmellick and Portarlinton Libraries and on November 23rd at Abbeyleix and Portlaoise Libraries. These sessions encouraged active community participation in shaping Laois's environmental future, facilitating open discussions and offering personalized guidance on funding applications. The initiative aimed to engage residents in climate action, fostering dialogue and input toward meaningful change in the county's sustainability efforts.

Climate Action Resources for Teachers

Laois County Council has developed a Climate Action Resource for 2nd to 6th classes, to schools which has been distributed to all 80 primary schools in County Laois. This comprehensive Kit includes curriculum-aligned lesson plans, animated videos, PowerPoint presentations, and interactive learning games for effective climate action education. Susan Adams from Education for Sustainability provided an instructional video for teachers to maximize kit utilization. Dr. Niamh Shaw's narrated animated video series enriches the content.

As an extension of this resource Laois County Council are sponsoring an Antarctic Workshop Series led by Dr. Shaw, in conjunction with Laois Education Centre which feature video blogs from her expedition along with over 70 fellow female explorers and scientists. Each week a lesson plan complementing the themes in the video is provided to classes participating in the series. Niamh has brought items sent to her from schools in Laois with her on her journey and will feature them in the videos and answer questions submitted to her.

Durrow SEC launch Energy Masterplan

On Saturday 4th November in The Castle Arms Hotel Durrow, Durrow Sustainable Energy Community supported by Laois County Council and in partnership with Tidy Towns, SEAI launched their Energy Master Plan. Laois County Council provided the bridge funding for the Durrow Energy Master Plan (EMP) and consultants 'Climate 23' were engaged to complete the plan.

The Durrow EMP launch event was supported by Laois County Council. There was excellent engagement at the event with 40 attendees and presentations from Durrow Sustainable Energy Community members, and the Energy Master Plan consultants 'Climate23' on their findings. SEAI presented details on grant funding programmes to support energy projects for homes, business owners and community organisations and Mark Clancy from Laois Local Enterprise Office spoke on tailored supports for businesses. There were stands on the morning providing practical information for homeowners and businesses with representatives from SEAI, One Stop Shop Contractors, Solar Suppliers/Installers, Energy Consultants & BER Assessors, Local Enterprise Office, Durrow Tidy Towns and local lenders.

SEAI Public Sector Annual Report 2022

The SEAI recently published their Public Sector Annual Report 2022. This document reports on the performance of public sector bodies in managing their energy consumption and reducing their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

This 2022 report includes data across the public sector during calendar year 2021. The results for Laois County Council were summarised as follows:

- Energy Efficiency improvement from Baseline: 59%
- Non-Electricity GHG improvement from Baseline: 52%
- Total GHG improvement from Baseline: 40%

These data placed Laois County Council as the highest placed local authority for energy improvements for the year 2021. Over the past number of years this Council has been consistently highly placed within the top quartile of local authorities on energy performance. As mentioned earlier this SEAI report is based on 2021 data and that year was impacted by covid related closures in Leisure Centres; however the data also shows how future decarbonisation of energy to these centres will dramatically impact the carbon footprint assigned to the council.

As part of the Council's planning for future energy reductions, detailed energy audits have been conducted at those Council owned buildings which account for the majority of our energy use. Further to these audits detailed proposals will be drawn up for further energy efficiency measures to help the Council achieve its 2030 targets as set out by Central Government.

Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise Environmental Awareness Campaign

Laois County Council staff attended an Environmental Awareness Campaign held in the Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise on Tuesday the 14th of November.

The campaign was organised by the hospital with collaboration from Laois County Council, SEAI and Clean Technology Centre (CTC). The event was held for hospital staff with the aim to raise environmental awareness both in the hospital setting and in their homes. Laois County Council handed out Food Waste Caddies and promotional materials to support the separation of food waste in both the household and in canteens in hospital settings. There was great interest from hospital staff and 250 caddies were distributed on the day.

Sports & Leisure

Active Parks – Phase 1 of the Autumn Programme concluded in 5 locations after successfully delivering 4 sessions in October, including outside Aras an Chontae, with excellent participation.

Chief Executive's Orders

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


John Mulholland
Chief Executive

November 21st 2023