

Abbeyleix Tidy  
Towns:  
Review of Laois  
County  
Development Plan  
2017 -2023



# ABBEYLEIX Tidy Towns



*Working in partnership to build a sustainable community in Abbeyleix*

Abbeyleix Tidy Towns welcomes this opportunity to input into the consultation on the Laois Community Development Plan. This submission will outline relevant proposals and ideas generated by informal consultation with our members.

We feel there is great scope for the Local Authority to partner with our community to achieve positive socio-economic and climate based outcomes. Indeed, our view is that working in partnership with a “pioneer community” such as Abbeyleix could develop a model of good practice in community led development.

Our recommendations are presented as follows:

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## Conservation and Pollinator Recommendations

Support Abbeyleix in the delivery of the innovative biodiversity action plan (Supported by Community Foundation of Ireland) which will see a comprehensive programme of green infrastructure based recommendations.

Support Abbeyleix Tidy Towns to access Forestry Service funding to develop a *Neighbourwood* in the County Council owned Balladine Estate site.

Support Abbeyleix Tidy Towns to deliver pollinator initiatives. We would like to look at establishment of biodiverse swards on the wide road to the north and south approaches to Abbeyleix in particular. Other County Council owned land banks could also be considered.

Undertake an audit of publicly owned land banks which would be suitable for pollinator initiatives.

Support Abbeyleix to procure specialist equipment to facilitate chemical free management of weeds, cleaning of buildings etc.

## Energy and Climate Recommendations:

Designate Abbeyleix as the first low carbon small town in Laois (in the same way that Portlaoise is being proposed as the first Low Carbon Town in the country)

Support Abbeyleix to develop as a Sustainable Energy Community. In particular, assist the community to deliver the Register of Opportunities (ROO) set out under the recently completed Energy Master plan (see draft report attached). Other communities and tidy towns groups should also be supported to engage in the SEC programme.

Select Abbeyleix as a pilot community for the implementation of the proposed smart metering programme for Laois. Smart meters will complement the recommendations of our energy masterplan and will enable the move to a low-carbon electricity network, the development of smart grids, and support the electrification of heat and transport, local renewable generation and microgeneration.

Implement the Dutch model whereby public and community buildings (in our case Scoil Mhuire / South School, Garda Station, Fire Station, Fr Breen Park, Library) with large roof spaces are utilised for solar panels connected to EV charging points / battery packs. As noted in the Energy Master Plan, it has become apparent that Scoil Mhuire in Abbeyleix is in need of extensive renovations. This building would be an ideal public building to serve as an exemplar retrofit project.

Support Abbeyleix community to implement a retrofit programme for residential, commercial and community buildings in the town. Abbeyleix has track record in this area having recently participated in a Laois County Council led Better Energy Community (BEC) application for LED lighting upgrade to Abbeyleix Tennis Courts.

Continue to support the schools in Abbeyleix to engage in the green schools programme and ensure provision of resources to support same.

Provide additional electric car charging points to facilitate the move to EVs

Support carbon sequestration initiatives on Abbeyleix Bog

**A draft copy of the Energy Master Plan for Abbeyleix (Prepared by 3CEA) is appended.**

## Water Conservation Recommendation

Support water conservation projects in the town such as the innovative "water ram" project which was rolled out by Michael Moloney (engineer Laois Co Co) in partnership with Abbeyleix Tidy Towns.

Implement water harvesting in the fire station in Abbeyleix as per recent good practice project in Dublin Fire Service. The integrated plan for Kilbarrack Fire Station in Dublin would be an excellent model to follow (this plan delivers on all circular economy objectives)

<http://www.dublincity.ie/sites/default/files/content/WaterWasteEnvironment/DublinFireBrigade/Documents/Green%20Plan%20Kilbarrack%20Fire%20Station%20FF%20Neil%20McCabe%20Sept%202010.pdf>

Support the placement of public drinking water fountains in and around the town to promote plastic free environment.

## Sustainable Transport and Healthy Living

In order to facilitate a move from car to bicycles, extend the protected cycle corridor on the N77 (as is currently in place between Durrow and Abbeyleix) northwards to Portlaoise and southwards to Cullohill and beyond.

Support the development of a greenway between Abbeyleix and Portlaoise and also southwards to Attanagh/Durrow

Heavy passing traffic and particularly HGS continues to be a problem in Abbeyleix despite the availability of the motorway. This is damaging to public infrastructure and also discourages pedestrians and cyclists. Furthermore, it encourages use of “rat runs” using local minor roads which in turn discourages cyclists on these country lanes.

Support the development of pedestrian friendly and cycle friendly infrastructure:

- Utilisation of the new variable speed limit opportunities to lower speed limit on minor roads within a radius of the town centre. This would help create a cycle and pedestrian friendly zone around Abbeyleix. This should include safe passage through the town centre which would link the Heritage Centre with Abbeyleix Bog, allowing safe passage to explore all elements of the town environs.
- Supplement by other measure including ramps (where appropriate), signage, and other innovative techniques evolving.
- Placement of additional pedestrian crossings along Main Street in Abbeyleix.
- Introduction of bicycle racks at Abbeyleix Heritage Centre, Market Square, Abbeyleix Bog, Fr Breen Park and any other areas identified, subject to agreement with all stakeholders to facilitate and encourage cycling

## Tourism and Economic Recommendations

Support Abbeyleix to market and promote itself as a tourism destination in Line with Irelands' Ancient East. All initiatives should correlate with initiatives of relevant "umbrella groups" such as Laois Tourism.

Support the development of co-working spaces in Abbeyleix to allow the development of new businesses and to facilitate commuters with a "work from home" option

## General Planning

Support the ongoing development of Fr Breen Park in Abbeyleix as a model for a co-located sporting facility which represents an excellent and intensive use of resources within the town centre location. This great facility now requires additional investment to allow it to serve the community into the future. All development should be in line with green infrastructure principles.

Rezone lands within the settlement of Abbeyleix as appropriate to create opportunities for new housing and recreation infrastructure. The Stone Arch site on the southern approach to the town would be an obvious site to consider.

Abbeyleix has offered a strong welcome to new members of the community who are staying in the direct provision centre. Additional facilities should be provided to cater properly for these new members of our community.