

# Laois Local Economic and Community Plan 2023-2028

## Appendix 1 LECP Review Report 2016-2021



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



**“The purpose of the LECP, as provided for in the Local Government Reform Act 2014, is to set out, for a six-year period, the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic development and the local and community development of County Laois, both by Laois County Council directly and in partnership with other economic and community development stakeholders.”**

**There is a requirement under the legislation to review the LECP at least once within the 6-year LECP timeframe (section 66F(b) Economic, 128B(c) Community) the preparatory phase for the next LECP should include a review of the current LECP. The information obtained from the review process will inform the development of the new LECP. The required statutory review process will be satisfied through the review process undertaken as part of the preparatory phase for the new LECP.**

Photography courtesy of:

Pat Guilfoyle, Ann Marie Kelly, Midlands Ireland, Laois County Council Business Support Unit, Department of Rural and Community Development, Rene PR Design, Age Friendly Laois, Laois Tourism, Dom Reddin, Kathleen Sheridan, Bloom HQ.



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# Introduction

In line with Departmental Guidance the development of the new LECP will initially consist of four broad phases: preparation, public consultation, development of High Level Goals, objective and outcomes and finalization of the LECP. However, a review of the existing plan was a necessary precursor to this process.

On the 1st March 2022 Community Staff commenced a desk top review of all actions, both social and economic, contained within the Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021. The review complied with statutory legislative requirement taking into account actions achieved to date under the LECP plan with the added objective that information obtained during the process would further inform the development of the new LECP. The review provided an opportunity to reflect on the experiences of all stakeholders on the plan. The letter at Appendix A issued to all stakeholders.

These Lead Agencies were requested to review all actions associated with their organisation and revert back with specific feedback/comments in relation to those actions i.e. initiatives undertaken, outcomes and reach etc.

<b>Stage 1: Preparation</b>	Socio-economic Analysis	Socio-economic Statement and High-Level Goals based on Socio-economic Analysis	Preparation by Advisory Group. Sign off by SPC and LCDC
<b>Stage 2: Public Consultation</b>	Public Consultation on High-Level Goals	Revision of Statement based on consultation	Preparation by Advisory Group. Sign off by SPC and LCDC
<b>Stage 3: Develop Objectives and Outcomes</b>	Develop detailed objectives and outcomes	Preparation by Advisory Group. Sign off by SPC and LCDC	Final Draft to MDs and RAs for input
<b>Stage 4: Finalise Plan</b>	SPC and LCDC to adopt final draft reflecting MD and RA input	LA to approve final draft	Submission to Minister and Published by LA
<b>Stage 5: Implementation</b>	Implementation Plans	Consideration of available resources	Ongoing flexible implementation
<b>Stage 6: Monitoring and Evaluation</b>	KPIs to address proposed outcomes	Ongoing data collection including case studies	Implementation report

## Review Analysis

Part 2 of the current LECP consists of detailed objectives and actions. This comprises specific, measurable and timebound Objectives and Actions to promote economic and community development in Laois. The organisation or group responsible for delivering each action was specified with the committee responsible for overseeing the delivery of each action also specified. Many actions were collaborative in nature involving a number of partners. In these instances, the lead agency was identified.

Ten high level goals formed part of the current LECP, see below. Some goals had stronger economic emphasis, others had a stronger community emphases while some were equally balanced.

### Economic

- Goal 1:** Market Laois to Foster Inward Investment
- Goal 2:** Diversify and strengthen a sustainable Laois economy.
- Goal 3:** Support Innovation and Entrepreneurship



### Community

- Goal 4:** Enrich Civic Participation and Empower Communities
- Goal 5:** Promote Equality and Inclusiveness across all Sectors
- Goal 6:** Recognise and Support the Diverse Needs of People



### Cross-cutting

- Goal 7:** Cultivate a Strong Laois Identity and an Excellent Quality of Life
- Goal 8:** Create an Integrated and Holistic Approach to Education, Training and Employment
- Goal 9:** Develop and Promote Ways of Living and Doing Business that Support a Sustainable Environment and Resilient Communities
- Goal 10:** Enhance and Sustain our Town and Village Centres and their function as Focal Points for their Rural Hinterlands





Rock of Dunamase



Bowes, Durrow, Co. Laois

# High Level Goal Response

## High Level Goal 1

**Market Laois to Foster Inward Investment.**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Economic emphasis</li> <li>▶ Two key objectives:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Enhance networking and the communication of information relevant to inward investment;</li> <li>– Offer business information and advisory services for potential inward investment into Laois.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
Objective 1	Objective 2
<p><b>Enhance networking and the communication of information relevant to inward investment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 12 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 9 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 9 Lead Agencies contacted, 6 responded</li> </ul>	<p><b>Offer business information and advisory services for potential inward investment into Laois</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 3 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 2 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 2 Lead Agencies contacted, 2 responded</li> </ul>

### Objective 1

**Enhance investment and communication of information relevant to inward investment**

#### Lead Agencies

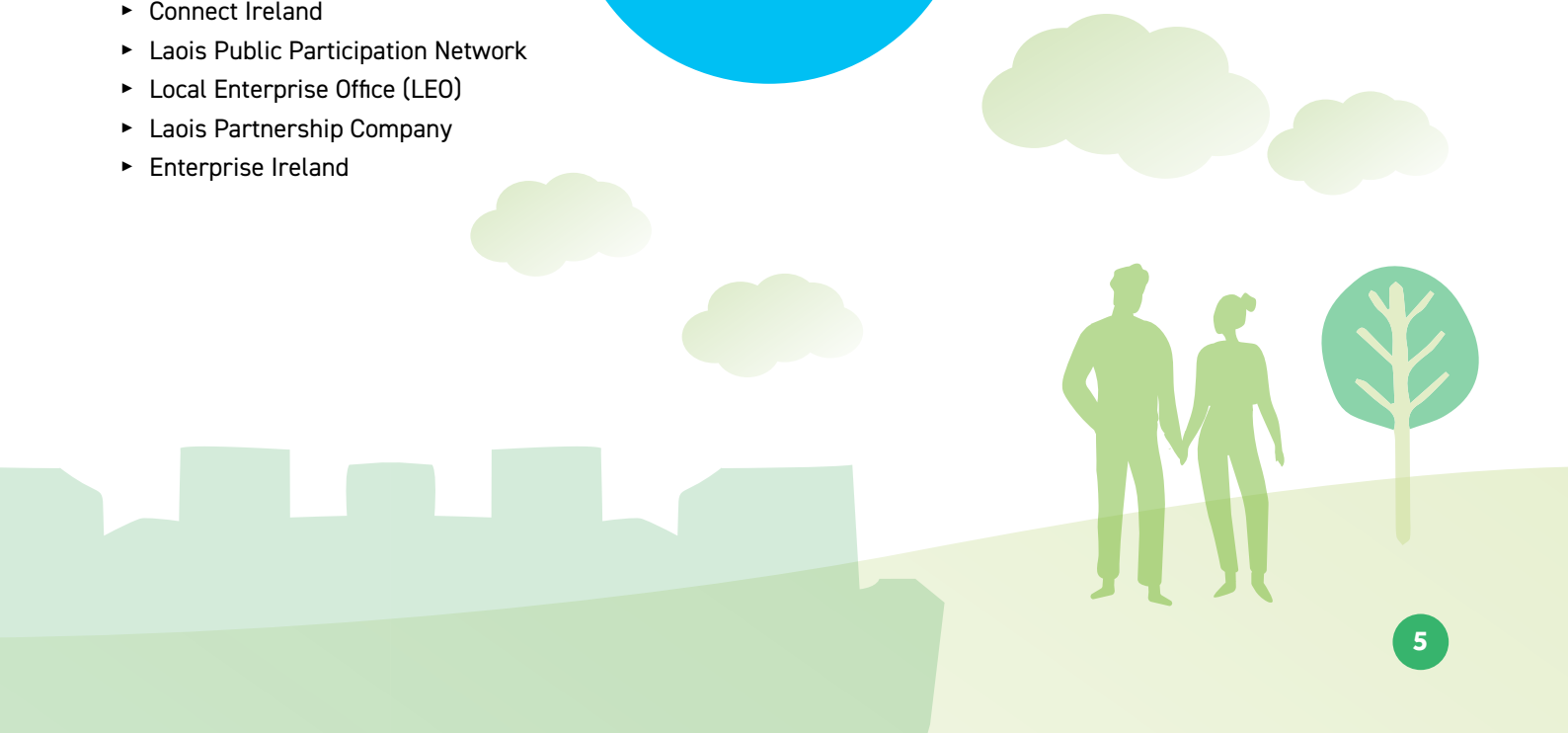
- ▶ Laois County Council – Management Team
- ▶ Laois County Council – Planning Department
- ▶ Business Support Unit
- ▶ IDA Ireland
- ▶ Connect Ireland
- ▶ Laois Public Participation Network
- ▶ Local Enterprise Office (LEO)
- ▶ Laois Partnership Company
- ▶ Enterprise Ireland

### Objective 2

**Offer business information and advisory services for potential inward investment in Laois**

#### Lead Agencies

- ▶ Laois County Council
- ▶ Local Enterprise Office (LEO)



## Actions

### (a) Enhance networking and the communication of information relevant to inward investment (x12 actions)

1. Establish a Business Support Unit with a focus on inward investment as part of Laois County Council's organisational structure.
2. Develop and implement a marketing strategy for Laois with enterprise and tourism modules, to include brochures, apps, videos and web content.
3. Promote (i) Laois' track record in hosting large-scale outdoor events and conferences, (ii) Laois' centrality, its transport connectivity and Portlaoise's location along a Trans-European Core Network Corridor (North Sea-Mediterranean) and designation as a transport node.
4. Target investments for the Midlands Region.
5. Organise (i) meetings of local public enterprise partners to discuss collaboration to harness the enterprise potential of Laois and of the Midlands and (ii) facilitate the establishment of an industry-led CEO Forum in the Midlands.
6. Develop a marketing proposition on (i) High Value Manufacturing (ii) Global Business Services built around the Midlands cluster.
7. Continue to roll out Research, Development and Innovation Programme and its Transformation Programme with client companies and Develop a Regional Design and Manufacturing Network linking companies and AIT research centres.
8. Produce video featuring Laois Champions for inward investment.
9. Harness the diaspora connections of Laois people and rollout Midlands Connect Ireland Plan.
10. Organise and promote Expo of Laois Businesses.
11. Prepare and promoting a suite of opportunity site briefs suitable for large-scale enterprise/commercial use in locations such as Portlaoise in accordance with regional and local planning policy.
12. Promote the [midlandsireland.ie](http://midlandsireland.ie) brand and publications under the four pillars of Living, Learning, Tourism and Enterprise.

### (b) Offer business information and advisory services for potential inward investment into Laois (x 3 actions)

1. Connect inward investors and other entrepreneurs with relevant agencies.
2. Provide an on-line and walk-in first-stop shop for inward investors and other entrepreneurs on (i) local authority services, consent regimes, rates and procurement processes and on (ii) national or regional services and (iii) employer supports.
3. Provide on-line links to web content promoting Laois or promoting the Midlands for inward investment.



## Agency Feedback

### Initiatives Undertaken/ Outcome/Reach

#### (a) Enhance networking and the communication of information relevant to inward investment

##### Business Support Unit

*Identified as the Lead Agency for five actions*

The Business Support Unit was established and continues to operate from its hub in County Hall having launched the 'Connect2Laois' marketing strategy which was fully completed in 2017 to include a new website, on-line brochure and video with the BSU promoting Laois as a place to do business. In addition, the BSU created a Laois Diaspora Network on its 'Connect2Laois' web page.

The BSU organised a number of events which included the 2017 Laois Business Awards and attended the National Manufacturing and Supply Chain Conference in Dublin in 2018 and 2019. The BSU has also hosted a number of events throughout the county to promote the food and drink sector in Laois.

Finally, the BSU produced a brochure for J17 National Enterprise Park which was targeted at attracting large scale enterprises to the County.

##### Laois Tourism

*Note: Not identified as a Lead agency but responded under this initiative*

Laois Tourism marketing strategy developed and deployed to include:

- County tourism map developed (A3 size) with 30,000 copies distributed to date;
- Outdoor signs designed and installed across ten locations;
- 9,000 brochures distributed;
- Video reach of 36,500 views in January 2022;
- Audience reach of 13,000 in the month of January 2022 through the web page and Laois Tourism media channels.

##### IDA Ireland

*Identified as the Lead Agency for five actions*

IDA Ireland achieved an uplift of 40% in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the Midlands Region over the five years of its 'Winning – Foreign Direct Investment 2015-2019' strategy. Recent wins for Laois include Greenfield Global's €30m investment in a new manufacturing facility and the creation of 75 jobs in Portlaoise; N'Ware announced the creation of 25 new roles with the establishment of its European HQ in Mountrath Co Laois; SkOUT is establishing a 30-person cybersecurity team in Portlaoise.

There are 49 new IDA client companies in the Midlands region, employing 6,868 people. The FDI performance in the region has been strong over the past six years with employment among IDA clients increasing by 43%. The existing FDI base of client companies continues to perform well in terms of operational sustainability, job retention and ongoing transformation.

IDA host regular stakeholder meetings throughout the year with sharing of knowledge, updates and initiatives. A successful TUS/Industry has been established with company leads meeting on a quarterly basis. This has proved very beneficial for networking of clients and TUS research centres.

##### Laois Public Participation Network

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Secretariat members participated in the creation of the Midlands Connect Ireland Plan which has been phased out of the workplan as it was deemed appropriate to Laois Chamber of Commerce.

##### Laois Partnership Company

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Shine 2022 funded by LEADER, Laois Chamber of Commerce and Emo GAA. Laois Jobs Fair 2022 and 2023 delivered with widespread coverage. [laoisjobsfair.ie](http://laoisjobsfair.ie)

SICAP supported the 2019 expo to advise attendees in relation to services available in Laois from Laois Partnership Company under the SICAP programme, Jobs Club along with community employment vacancies.



**(b) Offer business information and advisory services for potential inward investment into Laois**

**Local Enterprise Office (LEO)**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for three actions*

LEO continues to work with Enterprise Ireland, IDA and other relevant agencies and continues to provide a one-stop-shop for entrepreneurs and inward investment, signposting them to relevant departments in Laois County Council. LEO provides walk-in and on-line supports in all areas of business development, with all details captured on [submit.com](https://submit.com) and other on-line management systems.

LEO provides links to web content promoting Laois. In addition, LEO promotes Laois through its website [www.localenterprise.ie/laois](https://www.localenterprise.ie/laois) with updated news items, through Facebook, Twitter and Mailchimp newsletters.



Junction 17 National Enterprise Park and Clonminam Industrial Park, Portlaoise



# High Level Goal 2

**Diversify and strengthen a sustainable Laois economy.**

- ▶ Economic emphasis
- ▶ Three key objectives:
  - Market Laois as a visitor destination and improve the visitor experience;
  - Support businesses to grow and improve performance;
  - Promote economic development through enhanced Local Authority services.

Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3
<p><b>Market Laois as a visitor destination and improve the visitor experience</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 22 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 22 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 22 Lead Agencies contacted, 16 responded</li> </ul>	<p><b>Support businesses to grow and improve performance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 10 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 9 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 9 Lead Agencies contacted, 5 responded</li> </ul>	<p><b>Promote economic development through enhanced local authority services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 7 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 6 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 6 Lead Agencies contacted, 5 responded</li> </ul>

## Objective 1

**Market Laois as a visitor destination and improve the visitor experience**

### Lead Agencies

- ▶ Laois County Council – IT
- ▶ Business Support Unit
- ▶ Laois Partnership Company
- ▶ Laois Events and Festivals Network
- ▶ Laois Tourism
- ▶ Fáilte Ireland
- ▶ Laois County Council – Heritage
- ▶ Laois County Council – Tourism
- ▶ OPW
- ▶ Tus Programme
- ▶ Laois County Council – Sports
- ▶ Laois Walks
- ▶ South Laois Tourism
- ▶ Laois Sports Partnership
- ▶ Laois County Council – Planning
- ▶ Coillte
- ▶ Waterways Ireland
- ▶ Carlow Tourism
- ▶ Durrow Development Forum
- ▶ Laois County Council – Community
- ▶ Laois Lions
- ▶ Laois County Council – Roads

## Objective 2

**Support businesses to grow and improve performance**

### Lead Agencies

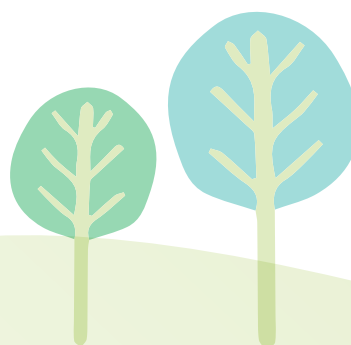
- ▶ Enterprise Ireland
- ▶ Business Support Unit
- ▶ Laois County Council
- ▶ Intertrade Ireland
- ▶ Laois LEO
- ▶ Other Midland LEOs
- ▶ Laois Partnership Company
- ▶ Teagasc
- ▶ Other Midland LAs

## Objective 3

**Promote economic development through enhanced Local Authority services**

### Lead Agencies

- ▶ Laois County Council – IT
- ▶ Laois LEO
- ▶ Business Support Unit
- ▶ Laois County Council – Finance
- ▶ Laois County Council – Property Management
- ▶ Laois County Council – Planning



## Actions

### (a) Market Laois as a visitor destination and improve the visitor experience (x22 actions)

1. Establish and promote a Laois calendar of events including heritage, arts, sports, business and tourism events through social media, on websites, through local libraries and the Tourism Office.
2. Organise and promote the Annual Laois Walking Festival.
3. Capacity building of local businesses and community groups involved in the tourism sector in Laois.
4. Continue to examine how proposals to develop an off-road mountain bike trail in the Slieve Bloom Mountains across the Laois-Offaly County boundary can be advanced.
5. Work with inter-territorial partners to market Laois as a visitor destination and improve the visitor experience.
6. Continue to examine how Barrow Blueway Proposals (Works and Re-Branding), to make the Barrow Way a better known and more attractive recreational and tourism amenity, can be advanced.
7. Roll-out the Ireland's Ancient East initiative in County Laois including signage at identified sites, the development of a food proposition, the translation of related audio guides and development of related smart phone apps.
8. Reconvene steering group(s) associated with the Barrow Navigation Tourism, Recreation and Commercial Product Identification Study.
9. Continue to maintain and enhance local tourist attractions, in compliance with the provisions of the CDP10, in particular prepare promotional measures for Emo Court and other historic sites of Laois including the Rock of Dunamase.
10. Promote Vicarstown and Portarlinton Leisure Centre as activity hubs along the Barrow Way.
11. Continue to promote the Laois Heritage Trail, the Laois Garden Trail, the Laois Monastic Trail and Laois Audio Guides.
12. Organise the Annual Barrow Awards, open to community groups and clubs, to raise the local profile of the Barrow River and Barrow Line as a natural heritage, recreational and tourism assets.
13. Develop Laois walking and cycling app and website content with navigation function showing existing trails.
14. Continue to organise the Durrow Scarecrow Festival annually.
15. Coordinate with other Local Authorities to discuss the feasibility of joint projects or funding applications such as (i) developing cross-regional walking and cycling trails and (ii) LIFE funding for a Midlands Holistic Peatlands Plan.
16. Provide financial assistance to community groups organising events and preparing publications that promote Laois as a festival and events destination.
17. Continue to organise meetings to discuss the feasibility of developing additional walking and cycling trails or the development of canoeing trails or bridle paths.
18. Undertake feasibility study to determine Laois' potential to attract major sporting events.
19. Grant aid new and existing tourism products particularly activity-based tourism businesses.
20. Establish Steering Group and undertake feasibility study of potential to establish an indoor centre of excellence for disability sports in Laois.
21. Roll-out counters for Laois walking trails to gauge visitor and local use.
22. Audit directional road signage on regional and local roads.

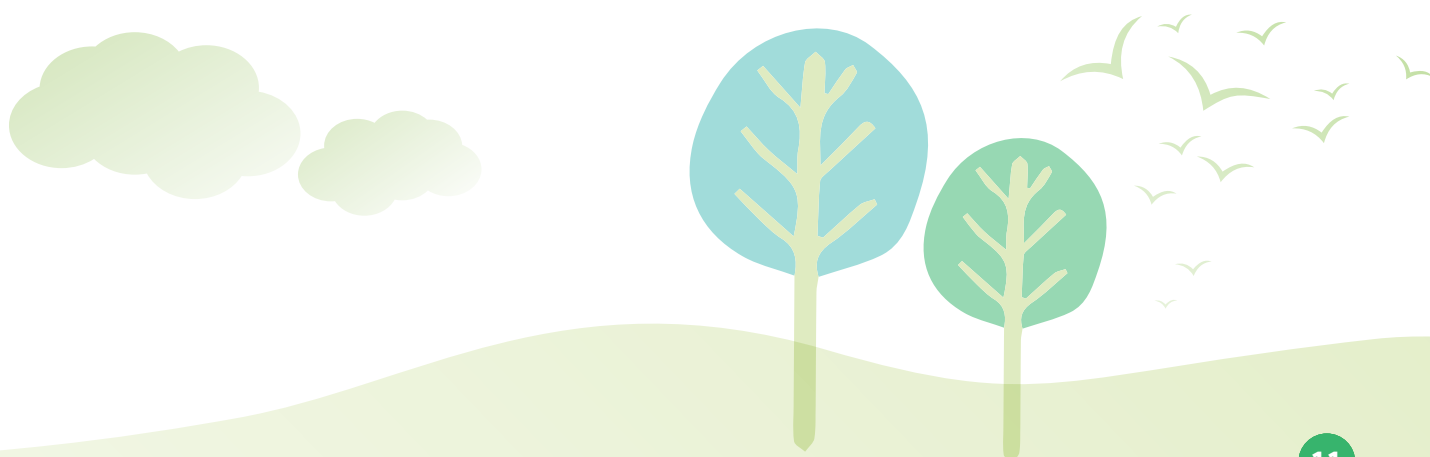


**(b) Support businesses to grow and improve performance (x10 actions)**

1. Increase enterprise formation and scaling in the Midlands through initiatives such as Enterprise Start workshops, New Frontiers, competitive Feasibility/Start Fund, pilot entrepreneurial partnering programme, start-up open days and clinics, innovating start-up events and the promotion of existing financial assistance schemes.
2. Provide financial support for the development of on-line trading for existing businesses.
3. Establish a Steering Group to examine the reconvening of Laois Chamber of Commerce and the Laois Economic Forum.
4. Continue to promote the growth of the food sector in Laois by collaborating with partner agencies.
5. Implement INSPIRE Rathdowney Project and examine potential for additional funding for other projects under the Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ) Scheme.
6. Assist businesses to avail of public sector opportunities by providing training in public procurement.
7. Promote north south trade by building business capacity and competitiveness by (i) hosting workshops (ii) promoting Acumen and Elevate Programmes (iii) running Trade Accelerator Voucher Scheme (iv) providing access to Challenge Programme.
8. Review the implementation of the Teagasc Advisory Regional Strategic Plan 2015-2020 to enhance the economic functioning of the agricultural sector.
9. Organise a National and a Local Enterprise Week for existing Laois entrepreneurs and potential entrepreneurs.
10. Continue to support farm family diversification into sectors such as artisan foods, rural tourism, alternative land use and other entrepreneurial activities under the Teagasc Options programmes.

**(c) Promote economic development through enhanced local authority services**

1. Launch new [laois.ie](http://laois.ie) website providing business owners, visitors as well as residents opportunities to navigate Council services more easily and get a sense of County Laois.
2. Rollout a property database of industrial or commercial sites available to sell or let to assist businesses in Laois.
3. Prepare Annual Local Enterprise Plan setting out specific targets in relation to LEO Laois Services.
4. Promote the availability of reduced development contributions where jobs are created; and in important economic areas such as town centres.
5. Continue to manage the Council's portfolio of enterprise/commercial lands to encourage economic development in compliance with local and regional planning policy.
6. Offer timely preplanning advice service.
7. Offer rates payment plans enabling businesses to spread payments.



## Agency Feedback

### Initiatives Undertaken/ Outcome/Reach

#### (a) Market Laois as a visitor destination and improve the visitor experience

##### Laois County Council – IT Department

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Local events are promoted via social media and Laois County Council webpage with an automatic update of social media accounts implemented as part of the Laois website update. This ensures greater exposure for Laois events via multiple social media and on-line platforms.

In 2020 Laois County Council Facebook page had a following of 8,000, with Twitter having a 47% increase in followers between 2016 and 2020. Laois Arts Facebook page has built up a following of 1,200 people by the end of 2020.

##### Laois Partnership Company (LPC)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for seven actions*

LPC as the implementing partner of the LEADER programme supported a number of initiatives:

- Laois Tourism funded for the development of their website, production of promotional material and the development of a marketing strategy: [laoistourism.ie](http://laoistourism.ie) get 1080 hits per month.
- Undertook a Tourism Development Programme, Laois Tour Guide Training, useful skills for tour guides and training for festivals and events committees. 171 participants trained with 23 tour guides receiving advanced training. The Tourism Development Programme will be completed in 2022.
- Supported the Slieve Bloom Outdoors website and print content with the website and Laois Heritage Trail App operating successfully. [slievebloom.ie](http://slievebloom.ie) and [laoistourism.ie](http://laoistourism.ie)
- Sustainable School travel study in Portlaoise via Youth Work Ireland.
- Training taking place in 2022 on the development of amenities along the River Nore. Approved capital funding for works to be completed along River Erkina to develop the Blueway.
- Four existing tourism focused businesses funded to upgrade facilities in 2022 with 1 new community-based activity funded.

In 2020, LEADER funded €352,291 for festivals and events through an open call process. To date 15 events were held. The total visitor attendance record at festivals in 2018/2019 was 118,504 an increase of 47,533. No festivals were able to proceed in 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

##### Laois Tourism

*Identified as the Lead Agency for three actions*

Laois Tourism Strategy 2018-2023 developed. Laois Tourism re-launched as Laois Tourism CLG with new board elected to animate the strategy. Currently have over 100 businesses and communities registered. In addition, Laois Tourism has developed a new website which includes an extensive listing, accompanying maps and promoting local events such as Laois Walks.

With the assistance of Fáilte Ireland, promotional signage was installed at a number of iconic tourist locations promoting Ireland's Ancient East. An audio guide had also been developed being translated into various languages. Laois Tourism have supported the establishment of Laois Food and Drinks Network.

##### Laois County Council – Tourism

*Identified as the Lead Agency for two actions*

Capacity building facilitated by Laois Tourism to build on assets within the county. Following on from this a new Tourism Strategy was completed with the Board of Laois Tourism being re-established with a wider representation across the county.

##### Laois County Council – Community

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

LEADER funding was made available under festivals open call to support a number of local events and to promote Laois as a tourist destination. In addition, funding was made available by the Department of Rural and Community Development via Community Enhancement Programme and Community Activities Fund.

A number of large-scale events were cancelled as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The extension of LEADER project completion dates will ensure that events will now take place in 2022.



## Laois County Council – Planning

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Convene a quarterly meetings to co-ordinate with other local authorities to discuss the feasibility of joint projects or funding applications, i.e. development of cross-regional walking/cycling trails and LIFE funding for Midlands Holistic Peatlands Plan.

## Laois County Council – Sports

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Steering Group was established to undertake feasibility study of potential to establish an indoor centre of excellence for disability sports in Laois. Demand and Analysis Report completed in 2019 highlighting cost prohibitions. Colloquium of Portlaoise clubs/groups organised in 2021 recommending that Laois County Council has a role in the facility.

## Fáilte Ireland

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Ireland's Ancient East signage was erected with Laois boundary signs installed at twelve regional roads, five national roads and on three motorways.

## Laois Heritage Society

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action.*

Audio guides available via the app store with Laois Heritage website and trails successfully established in order to promote Ireland's Ancient East.

## Laois Sport Partnership (LSP)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for three actions*

LSP are in a position to assist with the development of Laois walking/cycling app which will be led by Laois County Council.

LSP are part of the steering group being led by Laois County Council to undertake a feasibility study of the potential to establish an indoor centre of excellence for disability sports in Laois.

LSP commenced a feasibility study to determine Laois's potential to attract major sporting events.

## Coillte

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Identified Mountain Bike Trail for which all necessary funding and consents are in place. Construction is currently on-going with some sections of the trail already open.

## Durrow Development Forum

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Continue to organise the annual Durrow Scarecrow Festival with 19,000 visitors in 2019. The festival was impacted as a result of the Covid-19 but will once again take place in 2022.

## Laois Lions Club

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Continue to advocate for the establishment of an indoor centre of excellence for people with disabilities, for which to-date there is no sign of any positive update.

## Carlow Tourism

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

- Undertook organisation of the Annual Barrow Awards 2016-2018, with participation from a number of towns, organisations and commercial operators along the River Barrow.
- Information workshops organised with participation from all centres.
- Award ceremonies held with an excess of 80 key stakeholders in attendance (2016-2018) providing a networking opportunity and gaining significant local media exposure.
- Projects undertaken include renovation of the Quaker cemetery in Rathangan.

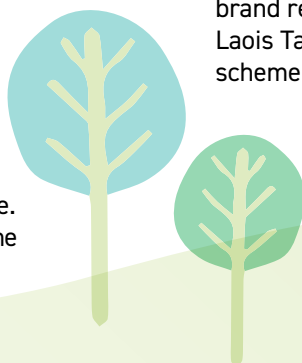
## (b) Support businesses to grow and improve performance

### Business Support Unit

*Identified as the Lead Agency for two actions*

Supported the re-establishment of Laois Chamber of Commerce in 2019 with the appointment of new Chief Executive.

In addition, the BSU have collaborated with Laois Partnership Company on a number of projects designed to promote the growth of the food and drink sector in Laois. Funding received from the Department of Agriculture resulted in a number of new initiatives, namely the establishment of Laois Taste in 2019 as a brand representing Laois Food and Drink sector. Held Laois Taste month in October 2019 with a provenance scheme launched in March 2020.



## Local Enterprise Office (LEO)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for five actions*

In 2018, LEO Laois organised the 'Going North Initiative' in collaboration with LEOs Offaly and Westmeath to fast track the efforts of early start exporters to identify, target and exploit business opportunities in Northern Ireland. In total, 13 participants took part and 61 sales meetings took place during the three days in Northern Ireland. Over 2020 and 2021, four Laois-based businesses completed an intensive first-time exporters training and development programme. This assisted them to develop export markets in Northern Ireland, Europe and beyond.

LEO Laois has organised a Local Enterprise Week Laois as part of the National Initiative every year 2016-2022. Events, seminars, one-to-one mentoring clinics have been organised to support micro enterprises in the County and over the past two years. Laois entrepreneurs have also had access to on-line national events.

LEO Laois has provided financial grants (trading on-line vouchers) for the development of on-line trading for existing businesses in the County. A total of 177 trading on-line vouchers were approved in 2020 with a further 70 approved in 2021.

The Business Support Unit is actively involved in promoting the growth of the food sector in Laois. LEO also actively encourages food businesses to participate in initiatives such as the Food Academy Programme in collaboration with Bord Bia and Musgraves (Supervalu).

LEO Laois has delivered four separate training courses on public procurement for small businesses. Fifty-six participants availed of this training.

## Laois County Council

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Completed the INSPIRE Rathdowney project in 2016. In addition, the 'Business of Food' programme was completed in 2018 under the REDZ programme with the BSU being actively involved in both projects.

## Teagasc

*Identified as the Lead Agency for two actions*

Review of the Teagasc Advisory Regional Strategic Plan 2015-2020 is ongoing with a number of consultations, events, farm visits and media awareness undertaken. 4,000 clients and 8,000 non-clients participating in activities throughout the Laois, Kildare, Meath, Louth and Dublin advisory region.

Teagasc held a number of events throughout Laois on an annual basis in order to continue to support family farm diversification, with 30 participants per course.

## Laois Partnership Company (LPC)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

LPC via LEADER funding are supporting feasibility study to promote new food start up's and community-run food hub, with reporting presently ongoing.

### (c) Promote economic development through enhanced local authority services

## Laois County Council – IT

*Identified as the Lead Agency for two actions*

[Laois.ie](http://Laois.ie) website redeveloped, undertaken and published in 2017 providing an easy-to-use portal to navigate the Councils services more easily. [Laois.ie](http://Laois.ie) was utilised to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic and supported handling restart grant applications. Over 640,000 views were recorded on the website in 2021, an increase of 20% from 2016.

Any commercial/industrial sites sold are done through an auctioneer who values said site and publicly advertises. The OPW operated a land registry showing all state-owned land in the county being updated by Laois County Council. <https://maps.opw.ie/property/map/>

## Laois County Council – Finance

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Laois County Council have an increased number of businesses availing of available schemes to offer rate payers payments plans for commercial rates liabilities. It is noted from April 2020 to September 2021 rates were waived for the vast majority of rates payers. It will be 2022 before take up on schemes can be reassessed.

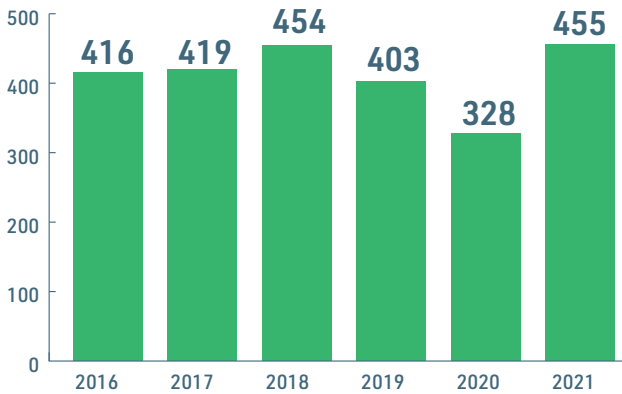
## Laois County Council – Planning

*Identified as the Lead Agency for two actions*

Development Contribution Scheme 2017-2023 adopted in 2017 for which reduced contributions were included for developments of a commercial nature. A 33% reduction applies to new business developments where five or more new jobs are being created. Development of this nature is thriving in Portlaoise with many applicants applying for full discount.



Pre-planning meetings continue to be held on a weekly basis with on-line and telephonic meetings being facilitated as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Pre-planning meeting statics are as follows:



### Local Enterprise Office

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

LEO prepare an annual Local Enterprise Plan setting out targets in relation to Laois LEO. The 2022 plan is currently being finalised.

### Business Support Unit (BSU)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

The BSU continues to promote economic development by managing the Councils portfolio of lands in association with the property management section of Laois County Council.



Junction 17 Enterprise Park



# High Level Goal 3

## Support Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

- ▶ Economic emphasis
- ▶ Three key objectives:
  - Support start-up enterprises and the growth of small businesses in Laois;
  - Promote entrepreneurship across diverse groups;
  - Exploit next generation broadband for local communities in an innovative manner.

Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3
<p><b>Support start-up enterprises and the growth of small businesses in Laois</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 14 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 6 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 6 Lead Agencies contacted, 6 responded</li> </ul>	<p><b>Promote entrepreneurship across diverse groups</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 8 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 9 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 6 Lead Agencies contacted, 6 responded</li> </ul>	<p><b>Exploit next generation broadband for local communities in an innovative manner</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 5 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 3 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 3 Lead Agencies contacted, 3 responded</li> </ul>

### Objective 1

**Support start-up enterprises and the growth of small businesses in Laois**

#### Lead Agencies

- ▶ Carlow IT
- ▶ Laois LEO
- ▶ Laois Partnership Company
- ▶ Mountmellick Development Association
- ▶ Portarlinton Enterprise Centre
- ▶ Portlaoise Enterprise Centres

### Objective 2

**Promote entrepreneurship across diverse groups**

#### Lead Agencies

- ▶ Enterprise Ireland
- ▶ Business Support Unit
- ▶ Laois County Council
- ▶ Intertrade Ireland
- ▶ Laois LEO
- ▶ Other Midland LEOs
- ▶ Laois Partnership Company
- ▶ Teagasc
- ▶ Other Midland LAs

### Objective 3

**Exploit next generation broadband for local communities in an innovative manner**

#### Lead Agencies

- ▶ Laois Partnership Company
- ▶ Laois County Council – Libraries
- ▶ Laois Public Participation Network



## Actions

### (a) Support Start-Up Enterprises and the Growth of Small Businesses in Laois (x 14 actions)

1. Heighten awareness about Carlow IT's research activities and its supports for industry and enterprise, increase collaboration with Laois businesses developing and enhancing technology driven disciplines through its Design+ Technology Gateway and encourage SME-HEL interaction to foster innovation and knowledge transfer in Laois.
2. Provide existing LEO Laois schemes to provide financial assistance to start-up companies and microenterprises.
3. Promote existing loan schemes to provide access to finance for existing companies and focus in particular on the retail, craft and food sectors.
4. Provide mentoring support and training to potential, micro and small entrepreneurs as well as high-potential start-ups.
5. Fund training for new business start-ups in particular those individuals wishing to set up innovative services and agri-diversification enterprises.
6. Work with inter-territorial and transnational partners to support start-up enterprises including social enterprises and the growth of small businesses in Laois.
7. Market the availability of three kitchens, one bakery and one training/demonstration kitchen suitable for expanding/emerging food companies.
8. One-to-one contact with potential entrepreneurs, providing general advice and information on starting a business.
9. Maintain high occupancy rates in Portlaoise and Portarlinton Enterprise Centres during plan period.
10. Seek to develop and enhance Hot Desk service and examine feasibility of introducing a Virtual Office service in Portlaoise and Portarlinton Enterprise Centres to lower barriers to entry to professional accommodation.
11. Complete an audit of existing and former clients to investigate and measure the impact of the Enterprise Centres on their business ventures and to enable us to take any necessary steps which may be required to improve our offering.
12. Prepare Mission Statement and Business Plan which will reflect their current situations and their respective outlooks during the lifetime of the LECP.
13. Capital investment, in compliance with the provisions of the County Development Plan and other sectoral plans, in new and existing innovative businesses in Laois particularly those wishing to set-up in rural areas.
14. Capital investment in new and existing artisan food businesses.

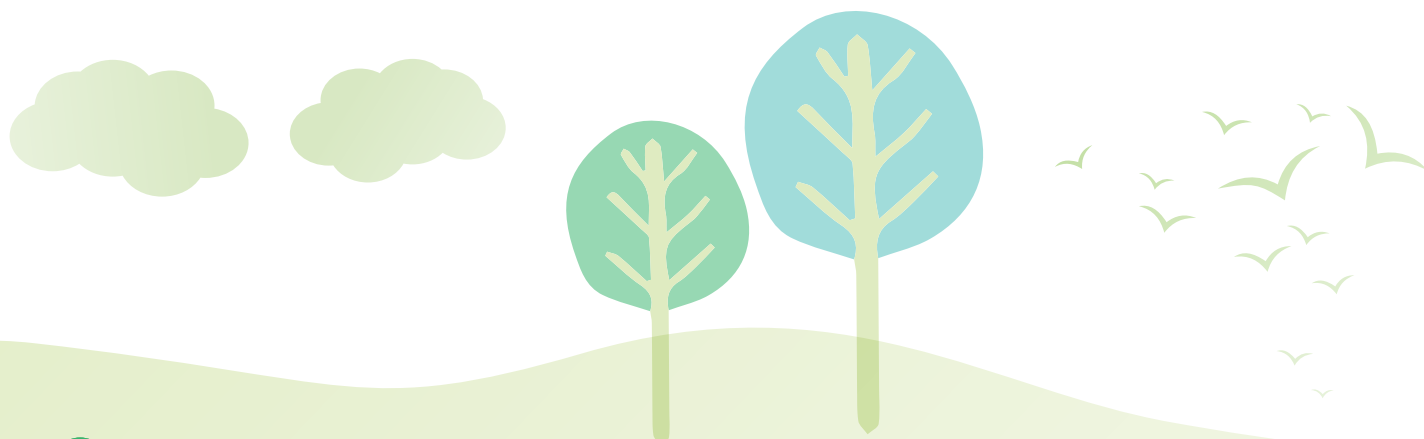


**(b) Promote entrepreneurship across diverse groups (x 8 actions)**

1. Examine feasibility of developing special loan products for women, migrants and young people.
2. Promote enterprise and self-employment as a viable career option for women in particular through the Laois Enterprise Womens Network.
3. Promote entrepreneurship and self-employment as a suitable career path for primary school students (School-based Enterprise Promotion Workshops) and for secondary school students (Enterprise Awards, LCVP – School-based Enterprise Talks), especially in the areas of science, technology, engineering and maths.
4. Offer Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) in youth clubs and Youthreach Centres to promote entrepreneurship in the youth work setting outside schools.
5. Deliver inputs on entrepreneurship to all participants on Further Education and Training Courses and Further Education Courses to promote self-employment.
6. Work with inter-territorial and transnational partners to Support Start-Up Enterprises including Social Enterprises and the Growth of Small Businesses in Laois.
7. Both ECs will offer universal access to all clients and visitors. This will enable each EC to compete for tenders for training from Government bodies and agencies (Solas, ETB, HSE, etc.) and thereby strengthen their potential for sustainability.
8. Encourage entrepreneurship and deliver mentoring supports to individuals identified as SICAP target groups considering self-employment. Identify key stages for mentoring supports, e.g., idea stage, business start-up stage and business growth and expansion.

**(c) Exploit next generation broadband for local communities in an innovative manner (x5 actions)**

1. Capacity building of community groups and rural businesses to find innovative solutions to access and utilise next generation broadband for rural areas.
2. Training and information activities of community groups and rural businesses to fund innovative solutions to access next generation broadband for rural areas.
3. Provide remote access to online e-resources: e-books, -language learning, e-magazines to library members.
4. Establish a dedicated digital communications infrastructure to support the community sector in respect of provision of information and strategic networking. This action will include establishing a Laois Public Participation Network website and interactive ways of communicating information between the Laois Public Participation Network and the wider sector.
5. Engage with relevant stakeholders to establish a capacity building framework to up-skill community groups in ICT and to incentivise the use of communication technologies.



## Agency Feedback

### Initiatives Undertaken/ Outcome/Reach

#### (a) Support Start-Up Enterprises and the Growth of Small Businesses in Laois

##### Carlow IT

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Promote and support Laois-based entrepreneurs through Carlow IT's new Entrepreneurs Programme with 22 Laois participants in Phase 1 and 2 of the scheme focusing on international scaling of start-ups.

Carlow IT engaged with a number of Laois based SME's through the 'TEAM Rural Initiative'. Networking linkages established four enterprise hubs in Laois to allow SME's access research and development supports. Reach includes international market development of SME's.

Carlow IT delivered an Innovation and Design Development Programme supporting 20 emerging food and drink businesses in the Midlands Region, building competitive advantage through innovation.

##### Local Enterprise Office (LEO)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for four actions*

LEO Laois consistently promotes LEO Laois schemes to provide financial assistance to start-up businesses which meet and exceed existing targets. Uptake of business expansion, priming and feasibility grants have increased year on year. Other smaller grants are available also via the LEO.

LEO Laois work with small businesses in collaboration with Micro Finance Ireland in assisting them to apply for loans. Ten businesses were assisted through the LEO to apply for MFI loans in 2021.

Client engagement is a key priority to provide general advice and information on starting a business. Queries are logged on-line. One-to-one mentoring clinics are provided by LEO to assist potential entrepreneurs with business planning advice.

##### Laois Partnership Company (LPC)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for four actions*

LPC funded five modules of training from April to September 2018 with a particular focus on business start-up, in particular those wishing to set up innovative services. An average of 56 persons participated in each module.

In partnership with Tipperary North and South LDC and Kilkenny LEADER Partnership LPC undertook an analysis and development of Community Run Shops.

LPC through the LEADER programme funded 11 existing innovative businesses and one new business as of 2021 with a focus on those wishing to set up in rural area.

Again, through the LEADER programme LPC supported one existing artisan food business in 2021.

##### Mountmellick Development Association

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

The MDA undertook an extensive marketing campaign to promote the facility and the commercial kitchens. Eight courses have been facilitated by the MDA and MYFRC with LPC also conducting two training sessions with participants gaining Level 3 certification and preparation for entry into the catering trade.

Initially take up on units was slow with several start-ups drifting away from the facility. The MDA turned a corner with Muller O'Connell operating from the premises before moving to Abbeyleix. Currently Sweet Bakery have expanded their operations, Virginia Health are developing new products and Temptation Patisserie building their business.

##### Portlaoise Enterprise Centre

*Identified as the Lead Agency for four actions*

Despite the onset of Covid-19 Portlaoise Enterprise Centre maintained an occupancy rate of 80%. A client audit showed that client businesses are long term in nature with the centre seeking regular input on suggestions for potential improvements in the Centre with the office co-ordinator available for informal mentoring or signposting to supports available for clients.

Portlaoise Enterprise Centre are currently in the process of planning and developing a strategy for the centre for 2022 and beyond. Hot desks and designated desks are available with the board of directors deciding not to proceed with the provision of virtual office services.



**(b) Promote entrepreneurship across diverse groups**

**Local Enterprise Office**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for three actions*

Women in Business networking meetings took place six times a year in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 via Network Ireland and the LEO. During Covid-19, there were no in person meetings. March 2022, a Women in Business Networking event took place which was attended by 70 female entrepreneurs in collaboration with Laois Chamber.

LEO organises the Student Enterprise Awards on an annual basis. Delivery of business workshops to secondary schools in Laois culminating with a County Final in March. Winners will represent Laois at National Finals in May.

LEO Laois has promoted and organised Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur Competition in 2016, 2018 and 2019. This has been an excellent showcase of young entrepreneurs and some have proceeded to apply for financial grants through LEO.

**Micro Finance Ireland**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Sponsored National Women's Enterprise Day with 20% of all loan approvals to female promoters. In addition, a significant proportion of all applications are from non-nationals.

**Laois Partnership Company**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Under SICAP 2014-2017 and 2018-2022 LPC provided one-to-one mentoring and supports to SICAP clients referred through the DSP. LPC provided advice on completion of business plans, Start Your Own Business Courses, Taxation. LPC provide follow up mentoring supports and access to business mentoring through LEO. SICAP pivoted to using on-line technology to assist potential and existing self-employment clients. LPC have supported 880 SICAP clients to date, of which 346 have been supported into self-employment. SICAP has reached clients in disadvantaged and very disadvantaged areas of Laois to support them in moving into self-employment.

**Laois/Offaly ETB**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for two actions*

NFTE programme organised with FET Centres and youth organisations in both Laois and Offaly to promote entrepreneurship in youth work setting outside school and to promote self-employment.

**(c) Exploit next generation broadband for local communities in an innovative manner**

**Laois Partnership Company (LPC)**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for two actions*

LPC through the LEADER programme funded one existing and one new remote working hub. Again, through LEADER funding, a coding training programme was facilitated with 10 participants.

**Laois Library Service**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Laois Library Services offer a full suite of on-line services that can be accessed for free on [www.laois.ie](http://www.laois.ie) with a library card, includes a large and updated range of eBooks and eAudiobooks Borrowbox, Enewspapers (from all over the world and in different languages) Pressreader, E-learning - universal class, E-languages - language learning 'Transparent Languages' and E-magazines - adult and children's magazines.

**Laois Public Participation Network (LPPN)**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for two actions*

LPPN established website and CRM. LPPN provide information to 650+ member organisations on a regular basis with the organisation being viewed as a one-stop-shop on information such as funding opportunities for community groups.

LPPN provided members with ICT training.

# High Level Goal 4

**Enrich Civic Participation and Enrich Communities.**

- ▶ Community emphasis
- ▶ Three key objectives:
  - To strengthen the capacity for community participation;
  - Develop a communications strategy and enhance the skills of communities in communications technologies;
  - Incentivise and encourage community participation and access to mainstream funding streams.

Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3
<p><b>To strengthen the capacity for community participation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 8 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 4 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 4 Lead Agencies contacted, 4 responded</li> </ul>	<p><b>Develop a communications strategy and enhance the skills of communities in communications technologies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 3 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 2 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 2 Lead Agencies contacted, 2 responded</li> </ul>	<p><b>Incentivise and encourage community participation and access to mainstream funding streams</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 4 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 4 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 4 Lead Agencies contacted, 3 responded</li> </ul>

## Objective 1

**To strengthen the capacity for community participation**

### Lead Agencies

- ▶ Laois Public Participation Network
- ▶ Laois Sports Partnership
- ▶ Laois County Council – Planning
- ▶ Laois County Council – Environment

## Objective 2

**Develop a communications strategy and enhance the skills of communities in communications and technologies**

### Lead Agencies

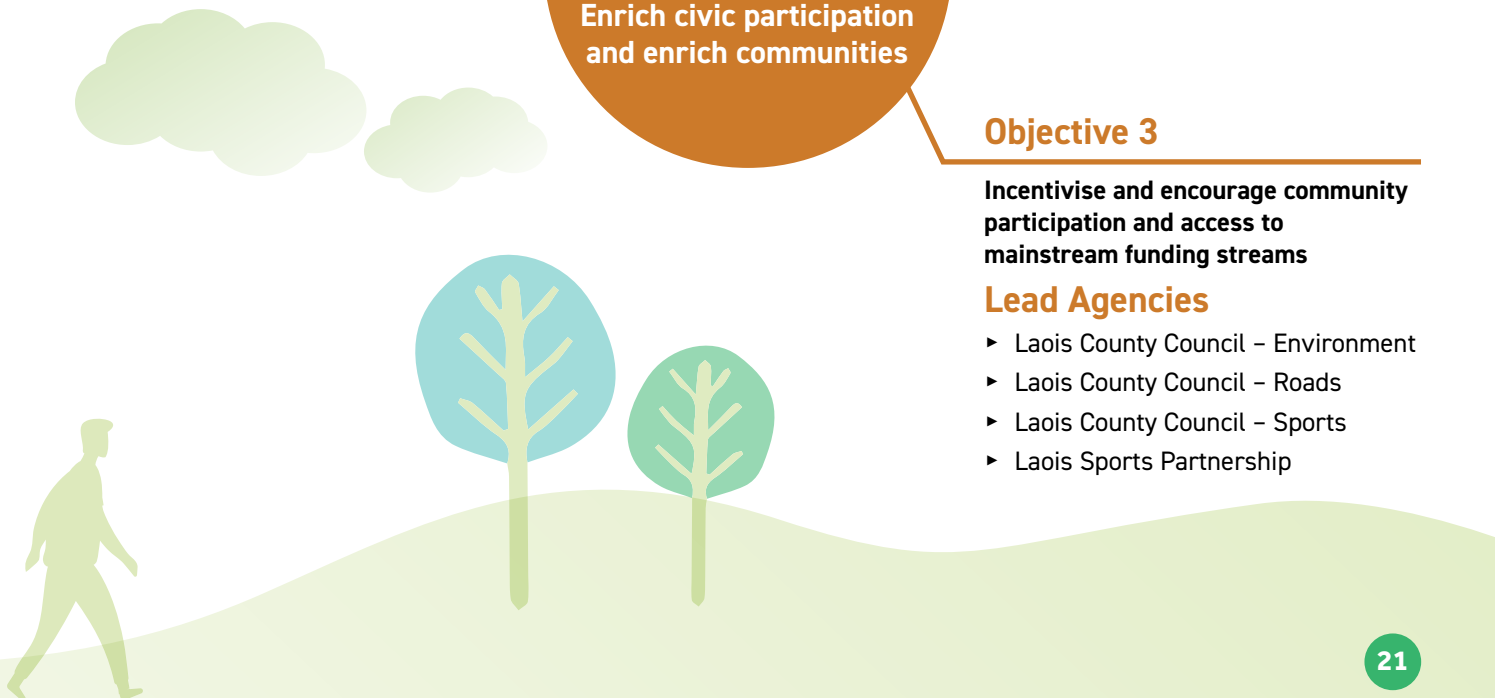
- ▶ Laois Public Participation Network
- ▶ Laois County Council – Community and Enterprise

## Objective 3

**Incentivise and encourage community participation and access to mainstream funding streams**

### Lead Agencies

- ▶ Laois County Council – Environment
- ▶ Laois County Council – Roads
- ▶ Laois County Council – Sports
- ▶ Laois Sports Partnership



## Actions

### (a) To strengthen the capacity for community participation (x8 actions)

1. Work with relevant agencies and organisations to look at innovative ways to incentivise active citizenship. This will include (a) seeking volunteering skills in relation to task-based needs, (b) building skills and capacity of volunteers and (c) associated training for CV enhancement and job-related purposes.
2. Engage with relevant stakeholders to establish a volunteer training and capacity building framework to incentivise active citizenship and sustainable committee management. Training will be tailored to the needs of community organisations in relevant topics e.g. charities regulations, health and safety for community groups, social enterprise IT, social media, strategic planning, project management, HR and other topics identified by the Laois Public Participation Network.
3. Upskill volunteers engaged in sport, leisure and recreation sector e.g. Paws Programme (aquatic), Community Coaching Programme, Outdoor Recreation LEADER Training Programme, Coach Education, Go for Life Programme, Child Protection Programme.
4. Agree a schedule of events and activities promoting community engagement, strategic networking, sharing of learning, skills and resources.
5. Arrange event(s) to celebrate community activity/volunteering.
6. Undertake a mapping exercise of community facilities with a view to upgrading or establishing community centres/hubs of activities where none exist.
7. Enable meaningful representation by community representatives on local authority committees through the Laois Public Participation Network and establish a strong structure to support this.
8. Encourage community participation in the formulation of Local Government policy, e.g., County Development Plan Review and Local Area Plan Reviews.

### (b) Develop a communications strategy and enhance the skills of communities in communications technologies (x3 actions)

1. Develop a local communications strategy with agreed yearly implementation plans, as a roadmap of detailed communication actions supporting the achievement of each community-based objectives.
2. Investigate innovative communication initiatives in association with public library services and other public services.
3. Establish a functional two-way feedback mechanism between Laois Public Participation Network community representatives and general community sector.

### (c) Incentivise and encourage community participation and access to mainstream funding streams (x4 actions)

1. Support and encourage access to mainstream funding streams such as Tidy Towns, LA21, Community Grant, Cemetery Grant, to facilitate community projects at local level. Through the grant schemes process, encourage an evaluation culture for the purposes of assessing impact, demonstrating need and allocating resources.
2. Support the Community Involvement in Roads Scheme and the Local Improvement Scheme to advance projects of community interest.
3. Work in partnership with community groups to seek funding under Sports Capital Grant/Rural Recreation Fund/ other relevant funding streams to improve sporting and recreational facilities in Laois.
4. Inform and support older adult groups in making funding applications such as Go For Life Grant Scheme.





## Agency Feedback Initiatives Undertaken/ Outcome/Reach

### (a) To strengthen the capacity for community participation

#### Laois Public Participation Network (LPPN)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for six actions*

LPPN provided a wide range of training and capacity building events on an annual basis, surveying members to identify needs across Community, Social Inclusion and Environmental sectors. All 650 member organisations are afforded the opportunity to attend training with events now capped as a result of Covid-19. It was noted that CV training for private individuals is not within the PPNs remit.

In order to promote community engagement LPPN hold two County plenaries and three MD plenaries annually in addition to a number of networking events.

LPPN support the Annual Community and Voluntary Awards co-ordinated by Laois County Council with the event gaining large media coverage.

LPPN undertook a mapping exercise of all Community Centres within the County boundary and have 21 Community centres registered with the network.

LPPN holds representative elections as vacancies arise across various forums and committees. There are currently 29 PPN reps on various local committees.

#### Laois Sports Partnership (LSP)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

LSP upskill volunteers with community coaching courses leading to employment in the leisure industry. In addition, LSP have facilitated 230 courses with 3,821 participants (from 2016-2021). Examples of courses delivered:

- Walking LEADER Training;
- PAL's Training;
- Athletics LEADER and Coach Training;
- PDP 1;
- Safeguarding 1, 2 and 3;
- Sports LEADER Awards Course;
- Disability Inclusion Training.

### Laois County Council – Planning

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

In order to encourage community participation 10 public meetings were held in County Hall, feeding into various plans to include the County Development Plan. In 2020 the 'consult.laois' portal was utilised giving and extended reach during the Covid-19 pandemic. On-line meetings were also facilitated as part of the consultation process. There were 154 submissions received on the Draft County Development Plan and a further 29 on material amendments.

### (b) Develop a communications strategy and enhance the skills of communities in communications technologies

#### Laois Public Participation Network (LPPN)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for two actions*

Laois PPN utilise a nationally approved CRM system to provide regular information to our member groups, e.g. funding opportunities and public consultations. A two-way feedback mechanism between Laois Public Participation Network, community representatives and general community sector has been established.

### Laois County Council – Community

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Communicate all funding streams/grants and general information through Laois PPN, who have a membership of over 650 member groups. In addition, all information is shared via social media outlets to include Laois County Council web page newsfeed, Facebook and Twitter.

As part of the Keep Well campaign an extensive publicity campaign was undertaken to include podcasts, radio advertising and age-friendly radio show (Chatters and Matters).

2021 Community and Voluntary Awards Livestream - 14,185 post interactions; 14,034 post reach; 5,059 post engagements; 7,113 views; 740 reactions; 198 comments; 94 shares and 1,874 other clicks.

Keep Well campaign:

- Social Media Posts: 39 with 294,711 interactions.
- Radio adverts: 162 with weekly listenership of 130,000.
- Paper adverts: 45 with weekly readership of 73,236.
- Age-friendly interviews: 17 with listenership of 130,000
- Leaflets: 24 sent to 3,745 persons.



**(c) Incentivise and encourage community participation and access to mainstream funding streams**

**Laois County Council – Environment**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Supported and encouraged community groups to access funding with all target groups contacted via email and public notices on social media, advertisements and local newspapers, with 100 community groups awarded funding. In addition, 23 Tidy Towns applied for the 2021 grant scheme with the LA21 not been administered since 2019.

**Laois County Council – Sports**

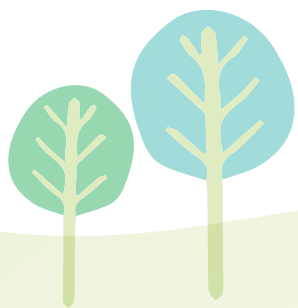
*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Training provided for community groups and sporting organisations for various funding streams. Year-round advice and support of community groups to source appropriate funding streams. Exceeded target with high rate of success in sourcing funding under Sports Capital Grants, ORIS, CLÁR, TVRS, etc.

**Laois Sports Partnership (LSP)**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

There were 14 older groups supported in 2016 with 20 groups supported in 2017. In 2016-2021 LSP supported 150 older adults with funding application (i.e. Go for Life Grants, Covid-19 funding).



# High Level Goal 5

Promote Equality and Inclusiveness across all Sectors.

- ▶ Community emphasis
- ▶ Two key objectives:
  - To ensure the voice of the most excluded is heard across sectors;
  - Develop leadership capacity in promoting inclusion.

Objective 1	Objective 2
<p><b>To ensure the voice of the most excluded is heard across sectors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 7 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 3 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 3 Lead Agencies contacted, 2 responded.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Develop leadership capacity in promoting inclusion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 4 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 1 Lead Agency identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 1 Lead Agency contacted, 1 responded</li> </ul>

## Objective 1

To ensure the voice of the most excluded is heard across sectors

### Lead Agencies

- ▶ Laois County Council – Community and Enterprise
- ▶ Laois County Council – Arts Office
- ▶ Laois Partnership Company

## Objective 2

Develop leadership capacity in promoting inclusion

### Lead Agencies

- ▶ Laois Public Participation Network



## Actions

### (a) To ensure the voice of the most excluded is heard across sectors (x7 actions)

1. Complete a review of all targeted initiatives promoting social inclusion in County Laois, with particular emphasis on diverse communities of interest.
2. Engage with relevant stakeholders to provide additional initiatives where shortfalls in the current service provision have been identified.
3. Use of music as a means of promoting inclusion, (review the status of Music Generation in Laois and work with Music Education Partnership in agreeing an action plan in this context for the remainder of the programme period).
4. Encourage and enable the use of the arts to promote social inclusion in Laois.
5. Work with local area-based residents' groups and develop their capacity to address their community's needs and to support engagement with decision making structures at local, regional and national level.
6. Support the development of six communities with a history of low engagement with public funding programmes – Mountrath, Borris-in-Ossory, Ballinakill, Cullahill, Errill and Doonane/Crettyard.
7. Grant aid for improved facilities for social inclusion initiatives with priority to older people, people with disabilities, children, young people, travellers, migrants, refugees, unemployed people, new communities and people living alone in rural areas.

### (b) Develop leadership capacity in promoting inclusion (x4 actions)

1. Develop the capacity of Laois Public Participation Network (PPN) to become a fully inclusive, representative network and to produce effective annual action plans in pursuit of priority objectives.
2. Develop the skills and capacity of the PPN to become involved in the design and delivery of services based on identified needs of both geographic and interests-based groupings and establish linkage groups in this regard.
3. Establish a support structure (including staff, funding and operations space) and facilitate the participation of the PPN on Local Authority and other relevant decision-making structures.
4. Further develop the PPN membership paying particular attention to socially excluded communities and interest groups.



## Agency Feedback

### Initiatives Undertaken/ Outcome/Reach

#### (a) To ensure the voice of the most excluded is heard across sectors

##### Laois County Council – Community

*Identified as the Lead Agency for two actions*

- Africa Day commenced in 2019 being funded by Irish Aid and Dept of Justice. As a result of Covid-19 the 2020 event was unable to proceed with the 2021 event taking place on-line. In 2022 normal service resumed with an in-person event taking place in June 2022, which was very successful.
- Age-friendly information guide updated and distributed.
- Age-friendly strategy currently under review with public consultation phase complete.
- As a result of Covid-19 the Healthy Laois Plan was extended to December 2021. A review of the plan is due to commence in line with Round 4 funding.
- Laois Resettlement programme concluded in December 2021 with 22 families account for 106 persons resettled in Portlaoise, Portarlington and Mountmellick.
- LCC member of Laois Asylum Migration Integration Services Steering Committee and were actively involved in the preparation of Laois Integration Strategy 2019-2023.
- LCC member of Laois Integration Network.
- Secured funding from the Department of Justice to employ an integration worker through SLA with Respond. The worker was able to focus on initiatives specific to Laois which increased integration and engagement.
- SICAP Programme: Families and children disadvantaged as a result of Covid-19. Supported persons who are unemployed, new communities and disadvantaged children and families. Delivered food, education and homework packs while development workers also refer persons to relevant services/ service providers. Number of beneficiaries January 2022-May 2022 x 227.

##### Laois Partnership Company (LPC)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for two actions*

SICAP has worked with Local Community Groups in the most disadvantaged areas of Laois. They have worked with them from preformation and supported them to progress into organised community groups. SICAP has provided advice, mentoring, activities and training for clients in these areas. LPC supported the most disadvantaged people during Covid-19, providing educational and food packs along with a vital connection to keep them informed and assisted during lock downs. During Covid-19 and the changing needs of community groups and clients, LPC worked on the ground to support clients with food, activities and training to address the mental and physical challenges of Covid-19.

Under Action One SICAP has worked with an average of 15 Local Community Groups per year from 2015 to 2021 and an average of 35 LCG's per year across Goal One. This has provided invaluable one to one and group support and enabled participation in activities and training, along with vital supports during Covid-19.

SICAP has reached the most disadvantaged areas in Laois since 2015.

#### (b) Develop leadership capacity in promoting inclusion

##### Laois Public Participation Network

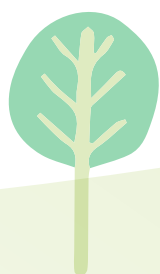
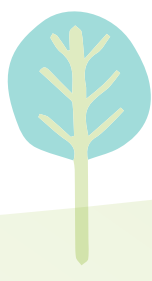
*Identified as the Lead Agency for all four actions*

Laois PPN is a fully inclusive and representative network. Membership is open to community and voluntary groups who meet the eligibility criteria. Membership has grown year on year. Laois PPN prepare an Annual Workplan in pursuit of priority objectives. Membership has grown year on year. Membership of Laois PPN is now 650+ Member Groups. Annual Workplan approved by Laois PPN secretariat and ratified at annual County plenary.

LPPN delivered training and capacity building across all three pillars – community and voluntary, social inclusion and environmental.

Laois PPN Office located at Lyster Square, Portlaoise is staffed with PPN Resource Worker and Support Worker.

Laois PPN received funding from DRCD and Laois County Council. Laois PPN have community representation on a wide variety of committees e.g. LCDC, JPC and SPC. It is noted that LPPN have increased number of groups registered under the social inclusion pillar. Laois PPN have representation from the migrant community on both its secretariat, JPC and the LCDC.



# High Level Goal 6

**Recognise and Support the Diverse Needs of People.**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Community emphasis</li> <li>▶ Two key objectives:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Identify, acknowledge and integrate the diverse needs within our community;</li> <li>– Target specific and diverse groups in the promotion of health and physical activity.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
Objective 1	Objective 2
<p><b>Identify, acknowledge and integrate the diverse needs within our community</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 9 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 6 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 6 Lead Agencies contacted, 6 responded</li> </ul>	<p><b>Target specific and diverse groups in the promotion of health and physical activity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 6 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 3 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 3 Lead Agencies contacted, 3 responded</li> </ul>

## Objective 1

**Identify, acknowledge and integrate the diverse needs within our community**

### Lead Agencies

- ▶ Laois County Council – Community and Enterprise
- ▶ Laois Partnership Company
- ▶ TUSLA
- ▶ Laois Children and Young Persons Task Group
- ▶ Laois Traveller Action Group
- ▶ Laois Public Participation Network

## Objective 2

**Target specific and diverse groups in the promotion of health and physical activity**

### Lead Agencies

- ▶ Laois County Council – Sports
- ▶ Laois Sports Partnership
- ▶ HSE Community Alcohol and Drugs Addiction Service (CADS)



## Actions

### (b) Identify, acknowledge and integrate the diverse needs within our community (x9 actions)

1. Establish an older person's forum as part of the Laois Age-friendly Strategy and implement the actions of the Laois Age-friendly Strategy.
2. Undertake an analysis of needs and agree an inter-agency approach to support and integrate new communities in Laois. For example, support the roll out of the Fáilte Isteach programme within relevant communities through the SICAP programme.
3. Encourage and support the hosting of intercultural events and activities in the County paying particular attention towards the inclusion of asylum seekers living in direct provision, refugees and including a newly formed group from Syria.
4. Collaborate with TUSLA, key agencies and community groups to develop a Children and Young Persons Services Committee in Laois/Offaly to assess the needs of children and young people and develop a targeted strategy in response to local needs.
5. Investigate the possibility of supporting youth focused community groups to develop a programme of activities for young people provided at low/no cost as part of an overall growth and well-being strategic initiative for young people.
6. Address educational disadvantage by working in collaboration with key agencies to prevent early school leaving and criminality amongst young people and establish a referral system amongst key organisations whilst working with local communities in the process.
7. Work in collaboration with key agencies and organisations to identify and address the needs of the local Travelling Community.
8. Work with key organisations to build a representative structure within the Disability Sector in Laois. Facilitate their participation in decision making structures which inform social and economic policies and practice impacting on the sector.
9. Directly engage with disadvantaged communities of interest and build their confidence and capacity to engage with decision making structures and work for effective change. Groups will include Laois Traveller Action Group, Recovering Substance Misusers and Men's Sheds Groups.

### (b) Target specific and diverse groups in the promotion of health and physical activity (x6 actions)

1. Deliver sporting initiatives in Laois targeted at specific groups e.g. Young people at risk, traveller men, socially disadvantaged, substance abusers, older people.
2. Deliver safe outdoor teen spaces for physical activity.
3. Roll out Go for Life Programme in Laois to involve a greater number of older people in sport and physical activity.
4. Promote social inclusion through sports and physical activity initiatives e.g., Games on the Green, Teen Time.
5. Run the Sports Inclusion Disability Programme promoting participation in sport and physical activity among people with disabilities.
6. Provide drugs and alcohol abuse services, i.e., drugs and alcohol assessment treatment, rehabilitation and support services for adults and under 18 years old concerned with their own or another person's drug/alcohol use.



## Agency Feedback

### Initiatives Undertaken/ Outcome/Reach

#### (a) Identify, acknowledge and integrate the diverse needs within our community

##### Laois County Council, Community

*Identified as the Lead Agency for two actions*

Older Persons Forum established in 2014 with 28 executive members in Laois. The current age-friendly strategy is under review with request for submissions now concluded.

Fáilte Isteach classes delivered through the SICAP programme via Laois Partnership Company. In addition, a number of actions under Goal 1/Goal 2 of the programme target new communities in Laois, i.e. empowering communities, inclusion of new communities and working with Travellers.

##### Laois Partnership Company

*Identified as the Lead Agency for three actions*

Since 2015 SICAP has supported 21 new communities through intercultural events, activities, and the provision of courses in conversational English through Fáilte Isteach. LPC pivoted during Covid-19 to provide support for new communities through support with on-line delivery of Fáilte Isteach classes. SICAP has supported the most vulnerable clients in the new communities in Laois.

SICAP has also collaborated with key agencies to provide vital supports to young people at risk of leaving education and moving into criminality. In particular SICAP has organised activities and mentoring, supported by the LOETB and along with input from An Garda Síochána and Youth Work Ireland. During Covid-19 the challenges of mental and physical well-being were heightened, and SICAP staff worked tirelessly on the ground to support vulnerable clients.

SICAP has supported Laois Traveller Action Group, The Laois Travellers Men's Shed through activities, training and Funding Advice and Supports. It has enabled some of the most marginalised members of society to form their own community groups. SICAP has worked in

collaboration with the LOETB, Laois County Council and the Laois Traveller Action Group to support this cohort of clients. During Covid-19 the challenges of mental and physical well-being were heightened, and SICAP staff worked tirelessly on the ground to support vulnerable clients. SICAP has supported seven Men's Sheds Community Groups including Laois Travellers Action Group Men's Shed.

##### TUSLA

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

CYPSC Laois Offaly was established in 2017 with the CYPSC plan being approved in 2021. Since 2019 numerous actions are underway in Laois. Laois Youth Wellness Centre Feasibility Study was developed in addition to Laois Children and Young People's Consultation report. Trauma informed training sessions organised over three years and Seed Funding and Healthy Ireland funding utilised to deliver six key projects in Laois working with targeted groups.

##### Laois Children and Young Persons Task Group

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

CYPSC supported Portlaoise FRC and Youth Work Ireland Laois with funding for activity programmes during the pandemic and before. CYPSC funded activities for children in Direct Provision accommodation. CYPSC funded children's counselling where there was domestic violence. CYPSC provided new opportunities for gaining new skills, interaction and learning targeting and supporting marginalised groups.

##### Laois Traveller Action Group (LTAG)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

LTAG undertook mental health and well-being initiatives to support Traveller Women to connect and engage in activities aimed at promoting self-esteem, confidence and overall well-being. LTAG completed a series of at home groups during lockdown and then outdoor summer groups and activities during summer and Christmas arts and crafts to end of the year.

Twenty Traveller women (aged 18-66) engaged with the groups throughout the year and were able to connect with their peers and participate in activities that enabled them to be independent and complete projects with a sense of achievement.





## Laois Public Participation Network (LPPN)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Laois PPN prepared and launched a disability report titled 'Access for All' establishing the Disability Special Interest Linkage Group. 'Access for All' report submitted to Corporate Plan and County Development Plan by Laois PPN for consideration.

### **(b) Target specific and diverse groups in the promotion of health and physical activity**

## Laois County Council – Sports

*Identified as the Lead Agency for three actions*

Delivered Parks Tennis Programme; Games on the Green, Active Parks Programme; Urban Outdoor Adventure Programme; National Play/Recreation targeting specific groups with all targets being exceeded with the exception of 2020/2021 due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Skate park installed at Portlaoise Leisure Centre and enhancement to public parks facilities/play spaces for Young People in Portlaoise, Portarlington, Mountrath, Durrow, The Swan and Killeen.

Parks Tennis Programme; Games on the Green, Active Parks Programme; Urban Outdoor Adventure Programme; Bike Week, etc., undertaken to promote social inclusion through sports and physical activity initiatives.

## Laois Sports Partnership (LSP)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for two actions*

LSP facilitated a number of Sports Inclusion Disability Programmes such as Go for Life fun days, Fitstick Walking, Activator Poles, wellness walks, Laois Transformation for older adults, PrimeTime for older People, Easy Peasy, chair aerobics, Swimming Women Midlife etc. to involve a greater number of older people in sports and physical activities.

Multi-sports activities, camps, cycling, walking, sustainable inclusive clubs, basketball, soccer, rugby, GAA, athletics, corrective gymnastics, cycling camps and summer camps delivered to promote participation in sport and physical activity among people with disabilities

## HSE Community Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services (CADS)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Through funding allocated by HSE, CADS and MRDATF services delivered a drug and alcohol prevention and treatment support services to those under 18 years and adults across County Laois. A harm reduction and safer injecting programme also operated across the County. During the course of the plan services were further developed to include a rehabilitation and aftercare service and a family support specialist service. A range of drug and alcohol education and training initiatives were also delivered to include CRA/ACRA/CRAFT, SAOR, Putting the Pieces Together, Cocaine/Crack Cocaine and Chemsex. A range of conferences were also organised e.g. trauma informed care. HSE CADS designed, built and opened a new treatment centre on the grounds of St. Vincent's Campus for those living in Laois and surrounding areas. Service provided include shared care programme, OST programme (GP-led), nursing-led clinics, holistic therapies, addiction counselling and addiction homeless services.

Due to Covid-19 a hybrid service was also delivered across all services which included telephone and video consultation and face to face where appropriate and provided an in-reach and outreach-based service to target those most at risk.



# High Level Goal 7

## Cultivate a Strong Laois Identity and an Excellent Quality of Life.

- ▶ Cross-cutting emphasis (i.e. both economic and community)
- ▶ Four key objectives:
  - Improve quality of life and build a strong identity for the people of Laois
  - Use heritage, arts and library events and initiatives to explore Laois' identities
  - Provide an extensive library service with universal access
  - Promote positive physical and mental health, well-being and physical activity

Objective 1	Objective 2
<p><b>Improve quality of life and build a strong identity for the people of Laois</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 6 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 5 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 5 Lead Agencies contacted, 5 responded</li> </ul>	<p><b>Use heritage, arts and library events and initiatives to explore Laois' identities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 3 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 3 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 2 Lead Agencies contacted, 1 responded</li> </ul>
Objective 3	Objective 4
<p><b>Provide an extensive library service with universal access</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 2 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 2 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 1 Lead Agency contacted, 1 responded</li> </ul>	<p><b>Promote positive physical and mental health, well-being and physical activity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 5 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 6 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 6 Lead Agencies contacted, 6 responded</li> </ul>

### Objective 1

**Improve quality of life and build a strong identity for the people of Laois**

#### Lead Agencies

- ▶ HSE
- ▶ Laois County Council – Sports
- ▶ Laois Public Participation Network
- ▶ Laois TRIP
- ▶ Laois County Council Joint Policing Committee

### Objective 3

**Provide an extensive library service with universal access**

#### Lead Agencies

- ▶ Laois County Council – Heritage
- ▶ Laois County Council – Arts

### Objective 2

**Use heritage, arts and library events and initiatives to explore Laois' identities**

#### Lead Agencies

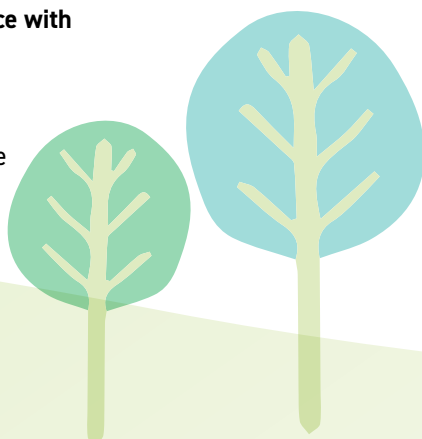
- ▶ Laois County Council – Sports
- ▶ Laois Sports Partnership
- ▶ HSE Community Alcohol and Drugs Addiction Service (CADS)

### Objective 4

**Promote positive physical and mental health, well-being and physical activity**

#### Lead Agencies

- ▶ HSE
- ▶ Laois County Council – Sports
- ▶ Laois County Council – Community
- ▶ Laois Sports Partnership
- ▶ Portlaoise Leisure Centre
- ▶ Portarlington Leisure Centre



## Actions

### (a) Improve quality of life and build a strong identity for the people of Laois (x6 actions)

1. Work with local communities and key service providers, agree and implement a 'Healthy Ireland' Strategy in Laois based on 'Healthy Ireland' thematic areas. This will include (but not limited to) a particular focus on mental health, both identifying and addressing needs of specific communities and groupings of interest e.g., socio economically disadvantaged, older people, young people, ethnic minority communities, Travelling community, men, women, etc.
2. Through community-led development, work with Laois Sports Partnership in devising and implementing a strategy for the use of sport in promoting inclusion targeting specific communities of interest such as older people, young people, ethnic minority communities, Travelling community, men, women for example, Women in Sport, National Play Day, National Recreation Week, Active Parks, Get Ireland Active.
3. Work in collaboration with key organisations to support local communities to promote culture and pride in the County.
4. Promote availability and usage levels of rural transport and investigate possibility of a county and town integrated transport service.
5. Implement actions in Laois Joint Policing Strategy particularly in respect of engaging with community alert, text alert and neighbourhood watch groups on the matter of crime prevention initiatives.
6. Support and encourage communities to engage in national community safety schemes, e.g., seniors alert, text alert, 'Dial to Stop Drug Dealing'. Develop a 'one-stop' information media tool/portal for community groups to access information in respect of Joint Policing initiatives, community safety and crime prevention.

### (b) Use heritage, arts and library events and initiatives to explore Laois' identities (x3 actions)

1. Run a collaborative programme of events to celebrate the centenary of 1916 and the related Decade of Commemorations.
2. Implement the Laois Arts Plan 2014-2017 – Sustain, Nurture, Grow. Encourage and incentivise community participation in activities.
3. Implement the Laois Heritage Plan 2014-2019. Encourage and incentivise community participation in heritage activities.

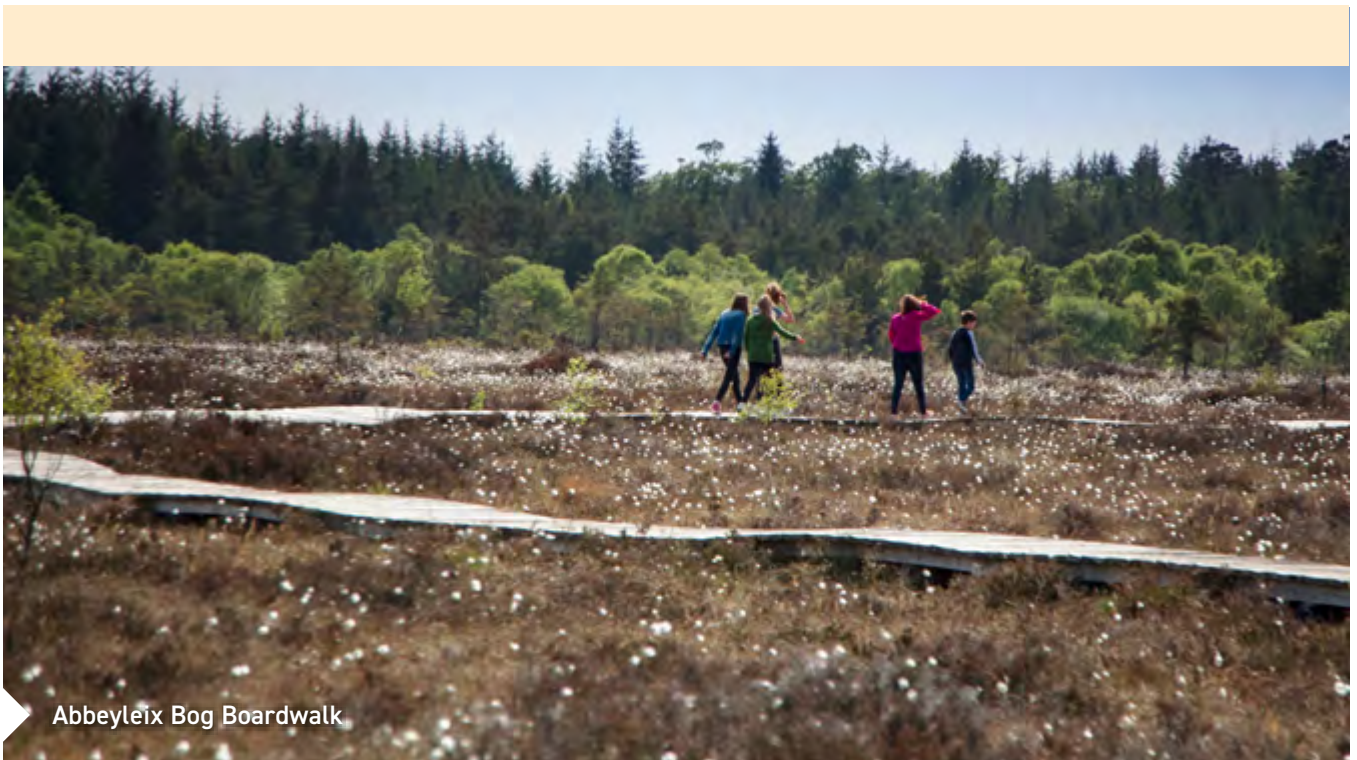
### (c) Provide an Extensive Library Service with Universal Access (x2 actions)

1. Promote the use of libraries by making Laois Libraries more attractive for Laois residents to join and enjoy. Offer library meeting spaces to local community groups/agencies for meetings or events of local or community interest subject to health and safety considerations and library policy. Link community actions with Laois Heritage Plan and Laois Arts Plan.
2. Identify, establish and maintain collections of local interest in each branch library. Maintain Local Studies/ Archives section in Portlaoise and related services to interested members of the public by appointment (This action can be linked to community activities/Laois Heritage Plan); National catalogue sharing and maintenance of stock, including school stocks.

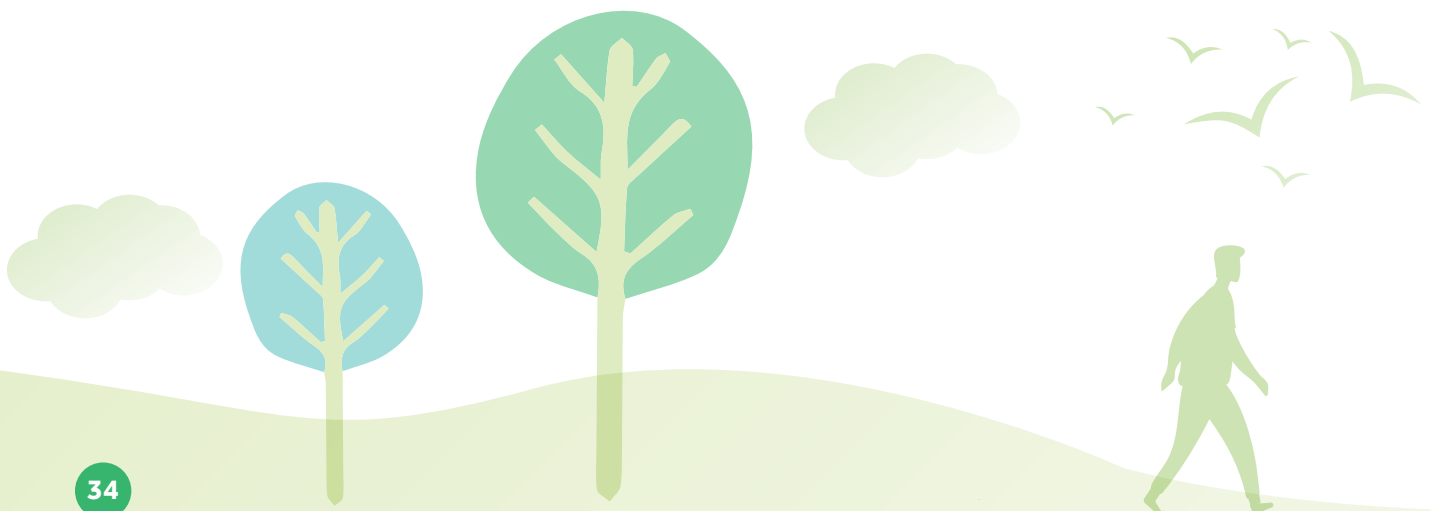


**(d) Promote Positive Physical and Mental Health, Well-being and Physical Activity (x5 actions)**

1. Provide accessible information on sports, clubs, activity courses and sporting events in Laois through social media and publications.
2. Deliver 'Laois Connects' - mental health event and investigate innovative and educational ways of engaging communities in activities to maximise the impact and scope of the event.
3. Maintain a high standard of service and facilities in Laois' public leisure centres, public playgrounds, outdoor gyms and multi-use game areas.
4. Appoint a walking facilitator to work with communities throughout Laois to form walking groups and prepare club development plans.
5. Provide a comprehensive range of community health services.



Abbeyleix Bog Boardwalk



## Agency Feedback

### Initiatives Undertaken/ Outcome/Reach

#### (a) Improve quality of life and build a strong identity for the people of Laois

##### Health Service Executive (HSE)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Healthy Laois Plan 2018-22 developed by LCDC Healthy Ireland subcommittee for which the HSE are a member. Healthy Laois initiatives have been delivered with partner agencies including LSP Activating our Communities; Laois Partnership; Healthy Communities, New Communities; Positive Laois; Swimability/Parkability; We've Breastfeeding Friendly; LGBTI project; Community Engagement programme. Community Mental Health small grants were allocated to community projects.

HSE Mental Health Promotion initiatives undertaken include- Laois Connects mental well-being podcasts developed HSE Health Promotion and Improvement and Suicide Prevention Resource Officer, with Laois Partnership with local community contacts <https://laoispartnership.ie/laois-connects-podcasts>. Psychosocial support service [MLMpsychosocial@hse.ie](mailto:MLMpsychosocial@hse.ie) developed and provided for people experiencing stress or anxiety due to the Covid-19 pandemic. HSE Minding your Well-being on-line programme [yourmentalhealth.ie](http://yourmentalhealth.ie) HSE on-line Stress Control workshops provided [stresscontrol.ie](http://stresscontrol.ie) HSE Health Promotion/Jigsaw mental health promotion training for youth workers. Mindout mental health promotion training for teachers. HSE Health and Well-being Living Well programme delivered for people with long term health conditions.

HSE Mental Health Promotion initiatives include- 17 podcasts and five on-line Minding Your Well-being programmes videos developed in 2021. Minding your Well-being workshops provided pre- Covid-19.

##### Laois County Council – Sports

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Strategy Developed and Delivery of Programmes such as National Play Day and National Recreation Week Programme; National Bike Week Programme; Urban Outdoor Adventure Programme; Swim Ability; Creating Playful Spaces; Active Parks and Games on the Green with funding secured and Programmes delivered annually with high levels of participation.

##### Laois Public Participation Network (LPPN)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Laois PPN works in collaboration with Laois County Council to support local communities to promote culture and pride in the county e.g. Community and Voluntary Awards, Heritage events for Laois PPN member groups – promoting the culture and heritage of Laois. LPPN also work in collaboration with the Arts Office to promote and support Town and Village Renewal Scheme, Pride of Place and Tidy Towns.

##### Laois TRIP

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Over the past five years Laois TRIP pre-booked services have increased in frequency from once to twice/three times weekly to allow more choice and options for our passengers and meet unmet needs. Laois TRIP passenger figures rose from just over 50,000 trips in 2016 to a height of 96,000 in 2019 on their door-to-door services alone. Laois TRIP have also piloted three evening services over the past three years which have now moved into their mainstream budget and hopefully will expand from Q1 in 2023 pending funding.

TFI Local Link has over the past three and half years expanded into the high frequency daily routes to cater for voids left by private operators pulling out and unviable routes that otherwise would not operate without state intervention. These current routes are: '834 Portlaoise to Roscrea' and the '858 Portlaoise to Thurles'. In tandem with the 858, the Tipperary TFI Local Link office operate the 828 service which services Cashel to Portlaoise providing 17 services daily along this corridor servicing Abbeyleix, Durrow, and Cullahill. All services can be viewed on [locallinklaoisoffaly.ie](http://locallinklaoisoffaly.ie)

#### (b) Use heritage, arts and library events and initiatives to explore Laois' identities

##### Laois County Council – Heritage Office

*Identified as the Lead Agency for two actions*

Heritage Officer contributes to annual Decade of commemorations programme under Laois Library Service. Also, in order to run collaborative programme of events the Heritage Office has an input into the Laois Library Service Programme which is rolled out annually.

**(c) Provide an extensive library service with universal access**

**Laois County Council – Library**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for two actions*

Since 2017 Laois Library services is now a fully free service with records held on attendance at library meetings.

In order to identify, establish and maintain collections of local interest collections of Local history are established in each library, in addition to a dedicated on-line site has been set up [laoislocalstudies.ie](http://laoislocalstudies.ie), which has records, photographs, archives, maps , blog posts pertaining to County Laois. These records can be browsed on-line.

**(d) Promote positive physical and mental health, well-being and physical activity**

**Laois Sports Partnership (LSP)**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for two actions*

Club directory updated and printed in 2016 and regular updates on social media sites of LSP programmes, courses etc; monthly slots in local media.

Walking groups established with Mountmellick Walking Group, Laois Travellers Action Group, Ballyroan Strollers Walking Group, Mountrath Ramblers Walking Group, Graiguecullen Walking Group, Ballylinan Walking Group, Cullochill Walking Group, Rathdowney Walking Group and Arthritis Laois Walking Group. All groups meet weekly and enjoy a 2-5k walk pre-Covid-19. In 2016-2021 LSP established nine walking groups with approximately 270 walkers.

**Laois County Council – Community**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Laois Connects has taken place consecutively since 2013 taking place annually in October (mental health weeks). Laois Connects is coordinated by LCC Community Section along with a number of key partners to include HSE, Laois Partnership Company. Annually produce information booklet detailing events taking place throughout the county in an easy to read and user-friendly format.

**Laois County Council – Sports**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Licence Agreement to manage Leisure Facilities; Capital Investment Programme for Leisure Centres; Capital Investment Programme/Accessibility Upgrade of Playspaces; Inspection and Maintenance Regime for Play Spaces. Funding also sourced and ongoing Capital Upgrade of Leisure Centres including Energy Upgrades.

**Portlaoise and Portarlington Leisure Centres**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Laois Leisure (Portarlington Leisure Centre and Portlaoise Leisure Centre) has just re-opened the Portlaoise site and now have both facilities operational again. Laois Leisure only deal with the leisure centre and playing pitches (grass and Astro turf) directly associated with the leisure centres. They do not play a role in the provision, maintenance or improvement programme of public playgrounds, outdoor gyms or MUGA's.



## High Level Goal 8

### Create an Integrated and Holistic Approach to Education, Training and Employment.

- ▶ Cross-cutting emphasis (i.e. both economic and community)
- ▶ Five key objectives:
  - Develop relationships with targeted third-level institutions to meet identified employment and entrepreneurship needs;
  - To increase collaboration in support of life-long learning and innovative transition approaches;
  - Identify existing and emerging skills needs and source the provision of relevant accredited training;
  - Provide targeted work-placements, training courses and support programmes to improve opportunities for people to re-enter the workforce;
  - Examine and address barriers to participating in education and training.

Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3
<p><b>Develop relationships with targeted third-level institutions to meet identified employment and entrepreneurship needs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 2 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 2 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 2 Lead Agencies contacted, 2 responded</li> </ul>	<p><b>To increase collaboration in support of life-long learning and innovative transition approaches</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 4 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 2 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 2 Lead Agencies contacted, 1 responded</li> </ul>	<p><b>Identify existing and emerging skills needs and source the provision of relevant accredited training</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 8 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 3 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 3 Lead Agencies contacted, 3 responded</li> </ul>
Objective 4		Objective 5
<p><b>Provide targeted work-placements, training courses and support programmes to improve opportunities for people to re-enter the workforce</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 7 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 6 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 6 Lead Agencies contacted, 4 responded</li> </ul>		<p><b>Examine and address barriers to participating in education and training</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 7 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 5 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 6 Lead Agencies contacted, 6 responded</li> </ul>



### Objective 1

Develop relationships with targeted third-level institutions to meet identified employment and entrepreneurship needs

#### Lead Agencies

- ▶ Laois Offaly ETB
- ▶ LEO Laois

### Objective 2

To increase collaboration in support of life-long learning and innovative transition approaches

#### Lead Agencies

- ▶ Laois Children and Young Persons Task Group
- ▶ Laois Partnership Company

### Objective 5

Examine and address barriers to participating in education and training

#### Lead Agencies

- ▶ Laois Offaly ETB
- ▶ Laois County Council – BSU
- ▶ Laois County Council – Libraries
- ▶ Laois Partnership Company
- ▶ Laois County Council – Community and Enterprise

### Objective 3

Identify existing and emerging skills needs and source the provision of relevant accredited training

#### Lead Agencies

- ▶ Laois Offaly ETB
- ▶ Teagasc
- ▶ Laois County Council – Libraries

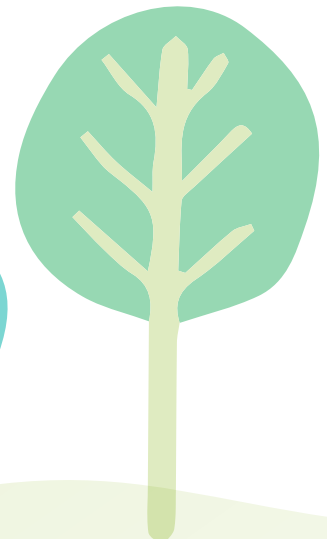
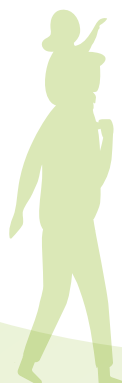
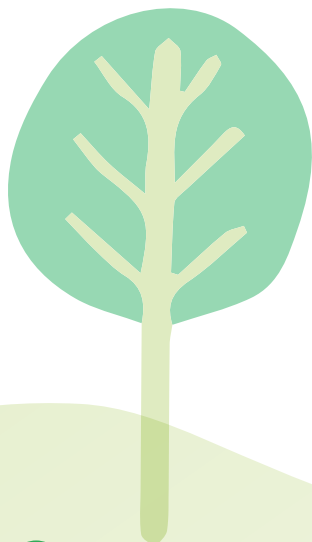


### Objective 4

Provide targeted work-placements, training courses and support programmes to improve opportunities for people to re-enter the workforce

#### Lead Agencies

- ▶ Laois Partnership Company
- ▶ DSP
- ▶ Laois Sports Partnership
- ▶ Laois County Council – HR
- ▶ IDA
- ▶ Laois Offaly ETB





## Actions

### (a) Develop relationships with targeted third-level institutions to meet identified employment and entrepreneurship needs (x2 actions)

1. Cultivate positive working relationships and linkages between Laois Offaly ETB, Laois LEO and third-level institutions.
2. Cultivate positive working relationships and linkages between Laois LEO and Carlow and Athlone IT's and run the New Frontiers Programme.

### (b) To increase collaboration in support of life-long learning and innovative transition approaches (x4 actions)

1. Examine the feasibility of establishing guidance and progression services through outreach facilities into isolated communities.
2. Support families and individuals in progressing in and towards mainstream education, including sports programmes and home school community liaison, e.g., Portlaoise Soccer Street Leagues and Birchgrove Programme.
3. Support individuals experiencing educational disadvantage to participate in life-long learning opportunities. Initiatives will include ICT training, Social Media training, Food and Health Programmes and Triple 'P' Parenting Programmes.
4. Support social enterprise projects individually and collectively as a sector whilst investigating job creation potential for people living in disadvantaged communities.

### (c) Identify existing and emerging skills needs and source the provision of relevant accredited training (x8 actions)

1. Establish and run industry/apprenticeship traineeships in line with FET Strategy 2014-2019.
2. Research and continue to provide Post-Leaving Certificate Courses.
3. Run Skills for Work Programme in Laois to give workers the opportunity to improve their literacy, numeracy and IT skills.
4. Continue to develop third-level training courses in areas of potential employment.
5. Provide distance learning agricultural courses to meet the needs of new entrants and work with relevant agricultural colleges in the delivery of part-time and other courses.
6. Encourage self-directed e-learning on a range of topics in library settings.
7. Provide accessible space and facilities in libraries to support lifelong learning in partnership with other agencies.
8. Encourage the sharing of training infrastructure, the reduction in duplication of training courses offered and the provision of additional courses where gaps are identified.



**(d) Provide targeted work placements, training courses and support programmes to improve opportunities for people to re-enter the workforce (x7 actions)**

1. Work in collaboration with key agencies and engage with SICAP target groups and young people, to move them closer to the labour market and progress to employment. This action includes participants on the Childcare Community Employment Project.
2. Work in collaboration with key agencies and employers to identify employers needs, and to subsequently tailor training initiatives to meet employers needs and to encourage a more inclusive approach to recruitment.
3. Market Springboard, Further Education Courses and Post-Leaving Certificate Courses to unemployed people in Laois.
4. Provide sports-specific training for long-term unemployed people seeking paid employment in the sports, leisure and recreation sector.
5. Run Labour Activation Scheme in Laois including the Gateway – Local Authority Labour Activation Scheme in Laois County Council and the Tus Programme.
6. Collaborate with the Department of Social Protection and Solas in promoting the recruitment of people from the Live Register amongst client companies.
7. Provide a broad range of educational opportunities to Laois' prison population.

**(e) Examine and address barriers to participating in education and training (x7 actions)**

1. Organise and promote a flagship Career and Training Exhibition open to all secondary school students, those interested in apprenticeships and people interested in further education opportunities.
2. Establish steering group to examine ways to improve levels of participation in third-level education.
3. Run the 'Right to Read' initiative through local libraries to increase accessible and community orientated services.
4. Target early school leavers in the promotion of training programmes with potential employment opportunities.
5. Provide support to children and young people who are at risk of early school leaving to increase retention in the education system.
6. Work with Schools Business Partnership as a partner organisation in the 'Skills@Work' programme rolled out to fifth year LCVP students in Portlaoise College, to support retention in school and encourage life-long learning opportunities and progression to third-level education.
7. Run the Back to Education Initiative, Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme and provide Adult Literary Services to help improve access to further training or employment.



## Agency Feedback

### Initiatives Undertaken/ Outcome/Reach

#### **(a) Develop relationships with targeted third-level institutions to meet identified employment and entrepreneurship needs**

##### Laois Local Enterprise Office (LEO)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

LEO clients were signposted towards and supported to access programmes delivered by Carlow and Athlone IT including the Innovation Voucher Programme and the New Frontiers Programme. The Design+ lab at Carlow IT was also commissioned to deliver the product innovation module of the Midland Food Development Programme. This was an intensive training and development programme delivered to emerging Midlands-based food companies (including five based in Laois) during 2020 and 2021.

##### Laois/Offaly Education Training Board (LOETB)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

LOETB collaborates with Carlow and Athlone IT's on numerous programmes, enhancing Higher Education pathways for learners in Laois and Offaly.

#### **(b) To increase collaboration in support of life-long learning and innovative transition approaches**

##### Laois Partnership Company (LPC)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for three actions*

SICAP has supported Families and Individuals in the areas of most disadvantage in County Laois. SICAP has provided a number of sports programmes including the Portlaoise Soccer Street League in collaboration with Laois Sports Partnership. This has included 150 non-caseload participants. During Covid-19, the challenges of mental and physical well-being were heightened, and SICAP staff worked tirelessly on the ground to support vulnerable clients.

SICAP has supported individuals with educational disadvantage to participate in Lifelong Learning Opportunities. SICAP has successfully run a number of food and health programmes during 2015-2021. SICAP has successfully collaborated with the LOETB to run

ICT training in various locations in Laois. LPC delivered Triple P courses from 2014-2017. SICAP has reached or exceeded its targets into participating in life-long learning opportunities with an average of 375 individuals per year, rising to 2,911 in 2020 and 3,871 in 2021 including delivery of educational and art/craft packs as well as on-line/WhatsApp training.

SICAP has supported the Social Enterprise LSTEP since 2015 in its work to assist the elderly in Portlaoise and surrounding areas. LPC have expanded their remit to support new and existing social enterprises in Laois since 2021, and have included a new action under Goal 2 in 2022 to support individuals with training and mentoring in setting up or running an existing social enterprise in Laois. SICAP supported one Local Enterprise LSTEP since 2015. In 2021 and 2022 this has expanded to support 10 social enterprises and 45 individuals.

#### **(c) Identify existing and emerging skills needs and source the provision of relevant accredited training**

##### Laois/Offaly Education Training Board (LOETB)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for five actions*

LOETB has grown its Traineeship and Apprenticeship annually during the period, initiating the development of a new Apprenticeship programme in Scaffolding and introducing a number of new Traineeships in partnership with local, regional and national industry sectors. PLC forms an integral part of FET provision in Laois and Offaly offering enhanced outcomes to both HE and employment.

The successful Skills For Work programme has evolved into a national Skills To Advance (STA) programme, aimed at upskilling low skilled members of the labour force. LOETB is to the fore in STA provision nationally. The focus of this initiative has changed over the period with greater collaboration between FET and HE providers resulting in co-development and co-delivery of HE programmes resulting in a wider, and more accessible, range of pathways for learners.

##### Teagasc

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Teagasc delivered three distance education courses (35 participants each) and a number of part-time courses in Laois-Kildare-Meath-Louth-Dublin advisory region with 25 participants partaking at any given time. Other course are taking place in agricultural colleges – Kildalton, Ballyhaise and Gurteen are the closest colleges to Laois.

## Laois County Council – Libraries

*Identified as the Lead Agency for two actions*

Laois Library Service offer free wi-fi in all their service points. In addition, they continue to provide further education classes in Stradbally and other libraries in partnership with LOETB.

**(d) Provide targeted work-placements, training courses and support programmes to improve opportunities for people to re-enter the workforce**

## Laois Partnership Company (LPC)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for two actions*

SICAP has supported unemployed individuals into employment under the Laois Partnership Childcare Community Employment Project. This has enabled this cohort of clients to gain valuable work experience along with access to training towards a major award in childcare. SICAP has provided a holistic approach to supporting the clients to become employment ready, and also support their training which will enable them to move into full-time employment. During Covid-19 the challenges of providing training were overcome by the use of on-line and blended training. SICAP has supported 232 clients with mentoring and training since 2015 through the Childcare Community Employment Project – of these, 72 went into employment.

SICAP has worked in collaboration with the DSP and other agencies to support SICAP clients with identified needs-based training and mentoring to meet requirements to gain employment. During Covid-19 the challenges of providing training were overcome by the use of on-line and blended training.

SICAP has supported 306 clients with mentoring and training in order to be more prepared to enter part-time or full-time employment. Of these, 126 went into employment. In 2022 as supports for clients to enter employment is now the remit of the Regional Employment Programme, SICAP will not support any new clients. We will continue to support existing SICAP employment mentoring clients.

## Laois Sports Partnership Company (LSP)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

LSP completed Community Coaching Programmes with a total of 54 participants receiving training whom were unemployed in 2016. The Foundation Community Coaching Programme was completed by 14 out of 17 participants. Two students are enrolling in Portlaoise College for a PLC course, childcare and social care courses. One student is enrolling in an adult education programme. One student has found employment in the leisure industry. A second Level 2 community coaching commenced in 2016 in Portarlinton Leisure Centre with nine participants from our foundation course and five from Offaly Sports Partnership. Participants received qualifications in Swim Teacher Instruction and Lifeguarding with six participants gaining part-time employment in the leisure industry from January 2017. In 2017 a Community Coaching programme was delivered for the unemployed with 11 people completing out of 15. In 2018 & 2019 one course was delivered with 18 participants each year, and in 2021 an on-line Community Coaching programme was delivered as well as Lifeguarding with Laois Leisure Portlaoise with 26 participants.

## IDA

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

IDA references the potential pool of talent within the Live Register with clients when appropriate. IDA regularly collaborate with the DSP, the ETB's and the Regional Skills Manager to address client staffing challenges/opportunities.

## Laois/Offaly Education Training Board (LOETB)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

LOETB has continued to grow its provision at both Midlands and Portlaoise prisons.

**(e) Examine and address barriers to participating in education and training**

**Laois/Offaly Education Training Board (LOETB)**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for three actions*

Career and Training Exhibition was held as planned. However, in line with Action 152 the LOETB now actively participates in related events such as the Laois Jobs Fair.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) Youth Employability Initiative 2018/2019 targeted young people of 16 to 24 years of age, living in Portlaoise, Portarlinton, Mountmellick, Mountrath and Rathdowney. The 'Not in Employment Education or Training (NEETs)' engaged in a dynamic programme of development and education to improve their likelihood of reengaging with education, training or employment which resulted in improved communication skills, increased confidence and improved planning and problem solving skills, improved relationships with adults, use of creativity and imagination, increased resilience and determination, improved ability to manage emotions and emotional intelligence.

Adult Literacy and Back to Education form part of the integrated provision at all FET centres throughout Laois. VTOS and/or programmes with similar aims continue to meet learners needs in the county.

**Business Support Unit (BSU)**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

The business support unit work to ensure students/young people are consulted regarding projects being undertaken that may affect them.

**Laois County Council, Libraries**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

The Right to Read – a national literacy programme, is now fully implemented in Laois County Libraries, with the service being recognised as a 'Right to Read Champion' in 2019/2020 and 2021.

**Laois Partnership Company (LPC)**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Laois Partnership operates a pre-school and afterschool service based in the most disadvantaged areas in Laois. Under SICAP, LPC support five community-based childcare services in Laois and are also working with young people aged 11-14 and 15+ who we previously engaged with in their afterschool services, targeting those at risk of early school leaving. SICAP collaborates with the Laois Sports Partnership, Laois County Council, HSE and FAI provide high quality extra-curricular activities including the Street Leagues which will benefit the health and well-being of the young people in the target areas. During Covid-19 the challenges of mental and physical well-being were heightened, and SICAP staff worked tirelessly on the ground to support vulnerable clients by assembling and delivering homework packs, educational packs, sports packs and arts & crafts packs.

SICAP have engaged with and supported an average of 700 children per year and a total of 251 young people in the 15-24 age bracket since 2015. In the Covid-19 period of 2020 we provided support to 1,699 children and in 2021 to 2,816 children.

**Laois County Council, Community**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

The 'Skills@Work' programme is facilitated by LCC in partnership with Portlaoise College. The programme is now called 'World of Work' which introduces second year students to the work of Laois County Council, with talks delivered by staff from various departments on the work they undertake on a day-to-day basis. Following Covid-19 restrictions the programme resumed in person in 2022 with all second year students of Portlaoise College taking part. The programme gave those participating a good overview of the work of Laois County Council and the employment and progression opportunities within the organisation.



## High Level Goal 9

**Develop and Promote Ways of Living and Doing Business that Support a Sustainable Environment and Resilient Communities.**

- ▶ Cross-cutting emphasis (i.e. both economic and community)
- ▶ Three key objectives:
  - Provide leadership in supporting a sustainable environment;
  - Enhance the efficient use of the County's existing building stock, public infrastructure and the preservation of the related embodied energy and any special interest;
  - Encourage smarter travel to school/work.

Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3
<p><b>Provide leadership in supporting a sustainable environment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 15 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 10 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 10 Lead Agencies contacted, 8 responded</li> </ul>	<p><b>Enhance the efficient use of the county's existing building stock, public infrastructure and the preservation of the related embodied energy and any special interest</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 6 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 5 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 5 Lead Agencies contacted, 4 responded</li> </ul>	<p><b>Encourage smarter travel to school/work</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 6 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 6 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 7 Lead Agencies contacted, 5 responded</li> </ul>

### Objective 1

**Provide leadership in supporting a sustainable environment**

#### Lead Agencies

- ▶ Offaly County Council
- ▶ Laois County Council – BSU
- ▶ Midland Energy Agency
- ▶ Laois County Council – Roads
- ▶ Laois County Council – Climate Action
- ▶ Laois County Council – Planning
- ▶ Laois County Council – Heritage
- ▶ Laois County Council – Environment
- ▶ EMRA
- ▶ Laois Partnership Company

### Objective 2

**Enhance the efficient use of the county's existing building stock, public infrastructure and the preservation of the related embodied energy and any special interest**

#### Lead Agencies

- ▶ Laois County Council – Housing
- ▶ Laois County Council – Planning
- ▶ Laois County Council – Heritage
- ▶ DECLG
- ▶ Midlands Energy Agency

### Objective 3

**Encourage smarter travel to school/work**

#### Lead Agencies

- ▶ Laois County Council – IT
- ▶ Laois County Council – Environment
- ▶ Laois County Council – Road Safety Officer
- ▶ Laois County Council – Sports Officer
- ▶ Laois Sports Partnership
- ▶ Laois County Council – Roads



## Actions

### (a) Provide leadership in supporting a sustainable environment (x15 actions)

1. Continue to support the development of the Midlands Regional Energy Hub and seek funding for this or related projects.
2. Examine feasibility of developing branding and promotional material for a Clean Technology Hub in Portlaoise and a related network of entrepreneurs noting existing profile of companies.
3. Launch and publicise the development of the Landfill Gas Project and investigate options for use of grid connection for future renewable energy.
4. Work to develop and promote sustainable energy communities model in the region and identify willing early adopter communities to act as exemplars and facilitate Better Energy Community grant applications.
5. To examine plans for the development of a county-wide energy efficient public lighting retrofit.
6. Promote the learning outputs of the RESILENS project.
7. Review any local authority service requirements arising from the commencement of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015.
8. Promote energy efficiency across all local authority services through energy efficiency programmes and training.
9. Continue to liaise with the Sustainable Energy Association of Ireland in relation to the development of a Local Authority Renewable Energy Strategy as part of the review of the County Development Plan 2011-2017 and subject to SEA and AA.
10. Work with communities in suitable locations to implement actions of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan and Local Biodiversity Action Plans.
11. Work with partner agencies, NGOs and community groups to encourage more sustainable lifestyles including through programmes such as 'Stop Food Waste' and 'Grow It Yourself'.
12. Perform and oversee the performance of Site Suitability Assessments in accordance with EPA standards.
13. Carry out a feasibility study for 12 community initiatives: for example, green technologies/renewable energy technologies/sustainable energy technologies/water recycling.
14. Animation of communities in community mapping. Five community mapping reports, for example, natural heritage, bird colonies, waterways, looped ways and trails.
15. Promote SEAI and other relevant publications on energy efficiencies to micro, small and medium enterprises.



**(b) Enhance the efficient use of the county's existing building stock, public infrastructure and the preservation of the related embodied energy and any special interest (x6 actions)**

1. Acquire structures and sites included in the Derelict Sites Register and re-furbish or redevelop for social housing.
2. Identify regeneration lands and housing lands by way of Vacant Sites Survey.
3. Continue to prepare/oversee site resolution plans – unfinished estates.
4. Continue to ensure conservation, active use and enhanced presentation of public buildings of special architectural or historic interest such as Donaghmore Workhouse, Borris-in-Ossory Courthouse and Timahoe.
5. Help conserve buildings of special interest and seek additional funding for the conservation of protected structures and architectural conservation areas.
6. To improve the energy performance of public buildings in the County in line with EPBD (Energy Performance of Buildings Directive) S.I. 243 of 2012.

**(c) Encourage smarter travel to school/work (x6 actions)**

1. Examine the feasibility of developing a networking centre in Portarlinton or Portlaoise to enable remote working for outbound commuters in light of high levels of outbound commuting by car.
2. Continue to run the Green Schools Programme including the travel flag in partnership with Laois schools and roll out the Green Flag for Parks programme.
3. Include safe travel to school on foot or by bike as theme of school-based road safety workshops.
4. Include travelling to school and work by bike as a key theme in the Annual Bike Week Programme of Events.
5. Promote establishment of walking buses.
6. Prepare proposals to make Portlaoise Town Centre more cycle and pedestrian friendly should the N80 be re-routed and seek funding to make smarter travel a safer and more practical choice for Laois residents.



Donaghmore Museum



## Agency Feedback

### Initiatives Undertaken/ Outcome/Reach

#### (a) Provide leadership in supporting a sustainable environment

##### Offaly County Council

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

There was an aspiration to develop a Midlands Regional Energy Hub. There isn't one, but there have been a lot of developments in Offaly and it could be argued that the existing and proposed green energy projects means that there is a hub already in place. In September 2021 Bord na Móna announced a plan to develop an energy hub across Offaly, Westmeath and Meath. The Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 has a number of actions under Objective 1: Transition to a Carbon Neutral Economy. *Note: the development at Lough Boora Offices is for a Bord na Móna's 'Accelerate Green' a Bord na Móna funded project for Green businesses.*

##### Business Support Unit (BSU)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

The Cube is a multi-point incubation hub for the development of a Low Carbon Centre of Excellence, assisting in attracting and developing companies with a low carbon focus. It is due to officially open in May 2022.

##### Midlands Energy Agency

*Identified as the Lead Agency for five actions*

- 28 registered Sustainable Energy Communities (SEC's) in Laois;
- Four SECs progressed to approval of Energy Master Plan Stage;
- In County Laois Abbeyliex SEC, Portlaoise 2040 SEC, Portarlinton Business Association SEC, and Durrow SEC;
- LCC provides bridge funding and support to SECs.

To date 4,344 public lights have been retrofitted (roughly 50%).

Laois County Council (LCC) reported an energy efficient improvement of 48% in 2022 against the 33% target by 2020. LCC joined Optimising Power @Work in 2014 resulting in 15% energy savings.

##### Eastern Midlands Regional Authority (EMRA)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Pilot testing and evaluation work package four was achieved through a series of pilot demonstrations with the project. An increase in the awareness of critical infrastructure providers of resilience management best practices and a resultant improvement in the way they conduct their resilience management.

EMRA promoted the inclusion of the concept of the Resilience of Critical Infrastructure in the RSES to promote awareness raising of the concept of resilient societies to support and develop understanding of resilience. The EMRA RSES included a Regional Policy Objective (RPO) in relation to the Resilience of Critical Infrastructure; RPO.

At the eighth Meeting of the European Commission 'Community of Users' on secure, safe and resilient societies in Brussels, EMRA detailed the European Resilience Management Guideline and Toolkit testing process in the three critical infrastructure case study areas of Ireland, Germany and Portugal. The workshop enabled EMRA and the RESILENS consortium to gather invaluable feedback from a wide variety of stakeholders.

##### Laois County Council – Planning

*Identified as the Lead Agency for two actions*

Commitment given to prepare a draft MRES given in 2018 and was reiterate in the CDP 2021-2027. Tender process for Consultants to carry out same currently on going.

Carrying out and oversight of Site Suitability Assessment continually ongoing. Tests carried are as follows:

2016 x 192, 2017 x 185, 2018 x 203, 2019 x 164, 2020 x 159, 2021 x 249

On average 37 spot checks on privately carried out tests are completed annually, with a reduction in that number due to Covid-19 restrictions.

##### Laois County Council – Heritage

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Laois County Council signed up as partner in All Ireland Pollinator Pan 2021 with the Annual programme of actions, summarised at <https://laois.ie/departments/heritage/biodiversity/pollinators/>

## Laois County Council – Environment

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Series of food waste prevention promo videos were devised and promoted on social media featuring Catherine Fulvio. Video series on Reuse with The Useless project featuring local businesses. Cookery demonstrations on food waste and advertisement campaign on Midland 103, on-line Food Waste Challenge, Festive Food and BBQ campaigns lead by LCC EAO.

LCC partnered with Wicklow, Westmeath and Meath. 23,000 views on Laois County Council with Seven Secrets to Stop Festive Food Waste with eight other LAs – Kildare County Council, Wicklow County Council, Cork County Council, South Dublin County Council, Westmeath County Council, Dun-Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, Meath County Council and Longford County Council.

Social Media Metrics

- Over 225k with SFW on-line challenge;
- Cobbler video: 22,000 views and 14,500 reach;
- Musical instruments: 15,500 views and 10,700 reach;
- Charity Shop: 15,600 views and 10,500 reach;
- Repair My Stuff: 22,000k and 14,500 reach.

## Laois Partnership Company (LPC)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for two actions*

LPC funded via LEADER supported two green infrastructure plans with sports groups. In addition, via the LEADER programme: plans and training for tidy towns groups, River Erkina Ecological Assessment were delivered. Twenty-two biodiversity plans for Tidy Towns Groups, one ecological assessment on the River Erkina/ Feasibility Study on Derryounce Bog were undertaken by project promoters.

**(b) Enhance the efficient use of the county's existing building stock, public infrastructure and the preservation of the related embodied energy and any special interest**

## Laois County Council – Housing

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

CPO's undertaken in respect of 20 properties since 2018 which could possibly be renovated under the DHLGH Buy and Renew Scheme. Six properties acquired in Council Social housing stock and tenanted, six in progress with eight on hold/proceeding for various reasons.

## Laois County Council – Planning

*Identified as the Lead Agency for four actions*

Site inspections undertaken to identify derelict sites with four sites acquired.

Site Resolution Plans prepared for 14 no developments. Works were completed in accordance with the Site Resolution Plans and subsequently taken in charge. Fourteen no developments taken in charge, in addition to 31 estates not subject to a Site Resolution Plan.

## Laois County Council – Heritage

*Identified as the Lead Agency for two actions*

Conservation work undertaken and planned at LCC owned properties including Donaghmore Workhouse, Timahoe Church and Borris in Ossory Courthouse. RRDF Funding secured for conservation of Portarlington Market House, RRDF funding secured for conservation plan for Borris in Ossory Courthouse. TVRS funding secured for conservation at Timahoe Church.

Annual management of Built Heritage Investment Scheme, Historic Structures Fund (for protected structures) and Community Monuments Fund (for Archaeological Monuments) – Heritage. Funding sought and secured under the Built Heritage Investment Scheme and the Historic Structures Fund in addition to the Just Transition Fund, Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the Rural Regeneration Fund Project, the Community Monuments Fund – Planning. Two schemes administered each year by the Heritage Officer 2016-2021. CMF introduced in 2020 and administered each year since then. Funding from Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Historic Structures Fund (previous title Structures at Risk Fund) and Community Monuments Fund €658,220 2016-2021 c 20 projects. Built Heritage Investment Scheme €381,686 2016-2021 c48 projects. Figures do not include 2022 project still underway – Heritage. On average eight no projects benefited from the Build Heritage Investment Scheme and three from the Historic Structures Fund annually. In addition, three no towns/villages benefited under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, one project benefited from the Rural Regeneration Fund Project and six no projects benefited under the Community Monuments Fund.

**(c) Encourage smarter travel to school/work**

**Laois County Council – IT**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

The formation of the Laois HUB collective, which incorporates six remote working hubs around Laois, gathers together the facilities available to enable remote working opportunities for the County. Remote working hubs available and advertised in Mountmellick Webmill, Portlaoise Enterprise Centre and Vision 85, Rathdowney Erkina Digital Hub, Mountrath Bloom HQ and Portarlinton/Portarlinton Enterprise Centre Innovation Hub.

**Laois County Council – Environment**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Teacher seminars and workshops for schools delivered in order to continue the Green Schools Programme. There are 71 schools that have been awarded Green Flag status which represents 93% of schools in the County. Twenty-eight schools awarded a Green Flag for travel between 2016-2021; 141 schools awarded Green Flag. Between 2016-2021 TY Climate Literacy and Midlands Science Workshops on Climate Action were also undertaken.

**Laois County Council – Sports**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Delivery of National Bike Week and European Mobility Annual Programme of Events averaging 20 events/bike week programmes.

**Laois County Council – Planning**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

N80 not re-routed. Works on-going in conjunction with the Roads Section on proposals to make Portlaoise Town Centre more cycle/pedestrian friendly.

**Laois Sports Partnership (LSP)**

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Walking pack created and distributed to all schools to promote the establishment of walking buses.



Bloom HQ, Mountrath

# High Level Goal 10

**Enhance and Sustain Our Town and Village Centres and their Function as Focal Points for their Rural Hinterlands.**

- ▶ Cross-cutting emphasis (i.e. both economic and community)
- ▶ Two key objectives:
  - Enhance the vitality, vibrancy and appearance of Laois town and village centres;
  - Undertake capacity building and support projects to ensure the vibrancy of rural towns in county Laois.

Objective 1	Objective 2
<p><b>Enhance the vitality, vibrancy and appearance of Laois town and village centres</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 14 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 10 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 10 Lead Agencies contacted, 7 responded</li> </ul>	<p><b>Undertake capacity building and support projects to ensure the vibrancy of rural towns in County Laois</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 6 Actions within this objective</li> <li>▶ 4 Lead Agencies identified</li> <li>▶ Of the 5 Lead Agencies contacted, 5 responded</li> </ul>

## Objective 1

**Enhance the vitality, vibrancy and appearance of Laois town and village centres**

### Lead Agencies

- ▶ Laois County Council – Planning
- ▶ Laois County Council – Roads
- ▶ Durrow Development Forum
- ▶ Laois County Council – Finance
- ▶ Laois County Council
- ▶ Laois County Council – BSU
- ▶ Mountrath Development Forum
- ▶ Laois County Council – Heritage
- ▶ Laois County Council – Libraries
- ▶ Laois County Council – Arts

## Objective 2

**Undertake capacity building and support projects to ensure the vibrancy of rural towns in County Laois**

### Lead Agencies

- ▶ Laois Partnership Company
- ▶ Laois County Council – Community and Enterprise
- ▶ Laois County Council – Environment
- ▶ LEO Laois



## Actions

### (b) Enhance the vitality, vibrancy and appearance of Laois town and village centres (x14 actions)

1. Review the Joint Portarlinton Local Area Plan 2012-2018 and the Joint Spatial Plan for the Greater Carlow Graiguecullen Urban Area 2012-2018 and seek their replacement with Joint Local Area Plans in the interests of efficiency, proper planning and sustainable development.
2. Continue to organise cross-boundary meetings of elected members from Laois and Offaly regarding Portarlinton, from Laois and Carlow regarding Carlow Town/Graiguecullen in the interests of effective management of towns on County boundaries.
3. Advance preparation of a Portlaoise Vision Statement to improve the quality of the public realm.
4. Examine feasibility of procuring and operating a free Wi-Fi zone along Portlaoise Main Street suitable for customer and visitor use.
5. Complete Phase Two of the Durrow Greens Project.
6. Promote Business Incentive Schemes and consider its extension to other town/village centres.
7. Provide funding for the preparation of Portlaoise Purple Flag application in relation to Portlaoise's night-time economy.
8. Roll out a pop-up shop scheme for vacant ground floor premises along Portlaoise Main Street to coincide with the Downtown Portlaoise Christmas Market Festival or June Weekend Festival.
9. Examine how proposals to enhance the appearance of Mountrath Market Square could be developed.
10. Undertake a Stage 2 Conservation Plan for Maryborough Fort and implement recommendations for conservation, interpretation and public awareness.
11. Undertake a Stage 2 Conservation Plan for Maryborough Fort and implement recommendations for conservation, interpretation and public awareness.
12. Seek funding and permission for the development of a new library in Portlaoise, subject to compliance with the Portlaoise LAP and AA Screening or full AA, as appropriate.
13. Refurbish and launch the re-opening of Portarlinton Library.
14. Examine the potential of creating a Portlaoise Cultural Quarter brand to encompass Maryborough Fort, the new Portlaoise Library, the Dunamais Arts Centre and Laois School of Music.

### (b) Undertake capacity building and support projects to ensure the vibrancy of rural towns in County Laois (x6 actions)

1. Training and animation local rural towns and villages to develop a plan for their own sustainable economic development.
2. Grant aid programme for projects arising from capacity building above, e.g. cooperative shops.
3. Facilitate the establishment of a cross-sectoral Portlaoise Community Development Group to drive the enhancement of vibrancy, economic activity and community pride in the county town.
4. Promote the Tidy Towns Scheme and the enhancement of the appearance of Laois Towns and Villages by local Tidy Towns Groups.
5. Promote Laois Town and Village websites and apps developed by community groups.
6. Ensure Capital investment in community managed social resources.

## Agency Feedback

### Initiatives Undertaken/ Outcome/Reach

#### **(a) enhance the vitality, vibrancy and appearance of Laois town and village centres**

##### Laois County Council – Planning

*Identified as the Lead Agency for five actions*

Local area plans were reviewed with plans drafted in conjunction with Offaly and Carlow County Councils. Both joint Local Area Plans for Portarlinton and Greater Carlow Garaigulcullen Urban areas were adapted.

Bi-annual cross-county meetings held from 2016-2021 with Laois/Offaly regards Portarlinton and Laois/Carlow regarding Carlow Town and Graigucullen. Management of both Portarlinton and Graiguecullen is now more efficient.

Vision Statement prepared for Portlaoise, with a number of Part VIII's progressed emanating from same including public realm improvements works to Fitzmaurice Place, Bull Lane, Lyster Lane and Lyster Square, the regeneration of the Old Covent Site and a performance area in the School of Music. Works completed on the public realm improvement works at Fitzmaurice Place.

Feasibility study undertaken exploring the operation of free wi-fi zone along Portlaoise Main Street. Infrastructure for free wi-fi has been installed and is operational.

##### Durrow Development Forum

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

As a result of Covid-19 the festival in Durrow was postponed for two years but will proceed in 2022.

##### Laois County Council – Finance

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

To promote business incentive scheme annual mailshots are sent to ratepayers. Consultation with business organisations in Portlaoise and Portarlinton and corresponded with auctioneers. Borris-in-Ossory added to a list of towns and villages that can avail of Business Incentive Scheme which improved take up of the scheme with rate payers, auctioneers and business organisations being reached throughout the county.

##### Laois County Council, Business Support Unit (BSU)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for two actions*

The BSU offer a shop front grant scheme to businesses in all towns across the County. There has been an increase in the take up of this scheme for 2020 and 2021.

##### Laois County Council – Heritage Officer

*Identified as the Lead Agency for two actions*

Conservation Plan published in 2022 and Interpretation Plan published in 2020. Works undertaken guided by the proposals of the plan at Fitzmaurice Place, Tower Hill, and former Odlum's Granary. Conservation and interpretation plan guided heritage interpretation funded through Portlaoise Destination Towns (Fáilte Ireland) now at design stage.

Portlaoise Cultural Quarter grants URDF Funding in 2019, the Cultural Quarter focused on a number of landmark buildings relating to the town's establishment in the 16th century. This included the Fort Protector, Old St. Peter's Church and Presentation Convent, The River Triogue, and the Ridge Burial Ground. Conservation of Fort Wall and public realm at Fitzmaurice Place and Tower Hill complete. Conservation of Old St. Peter's Graveyard complete, with funding from URDF and Community Monuments Fund. Other projects ongoing.

##### Laois County Council – Libraries

*Identified as the Lead Agency for three actions*

Portlaoise new library commenced construction in January 2020. Planning permission (Part 8) was granted in 2017. The new library is due to open in Q4 2022. Funding of €3million was secured from DRCD with additional funding of €2.7 million from the URDF/Project 40 Fund. Current cost of the construction is €5.8 million and an addition €664,000 for books and fitout.

After the courts service in Portarlinton vacated the building in 2012 it presented an opportunity for Laois County Council to extend the library and refurbish the space for a suitable public library for the area. The works resulted is a modern public library space of over 450 metres square which will cater for the growing populations of Portarlinton and its surrounding area. The new library offers a state-of-the-art facility for the whole community. With over 16,000 volumes of stock and media, also upgraded and increased IT printing, scanning facilities, free wi-fi and now free membership for all, there



really is something for everyone in this space. The new library will be open on full-time hours including Saturdays and has been fitted out with self-check systems which will enable customers to check in and out their own items.

Modern public libraries provide a whole range of services for all of the community and now offer more than just books to their customers. Here in this space members of the public can borrow books, DVD's , magazines, use the free wi-fi or attend free events. Libraries are about communities and engagement, providing a high quality public space for people to experience culture, engage in lifelong learning, up-skill in the area of ICT, languages and other on-line resources. Laois County Council has recognised this and continues to support and prioritise the ongoing development of libraries in the County, and this fantastic building demonstrates this. The total cost of the project will be in the region of €780,000, grant aid from DECLG = €248,000

The library service continues to support and collaborate on the Cultural Quarter development.

## Laois County Council – Arts

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Ongoing Cultural Quarter meetings have and are taking place. An outdoor performance space is being developed in the grounds of the Music Centre with funding from the Department of Arts. The Arts Office are liaising with Downtown Portlaoise on events and cultural programming including LLPPS 2 and festival programming.

### **(b) Undertake capacity building and support projects to ensure the vibrancy of rural towns in County Laois**

## Laois Partnership Company (LPC)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for three actions*

Laois Partnership Company through the LEADER programme funded 13 community plans to develop their own sustainable economic development, with seven capital projects progressing for further funding.

Two new community facilities, one playground, six community centres and two landscaping projects were funded under the LEADER programme with grant aid arising from capacity building.

Two new community facilities, one playground, six community centre upgrades and one astroturf facility were funded under the LEADER programme, which ensures capital investment in community managed social resources.

## Laois County Council – Community

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Portlaoise Town Team/Downtown Portlaoise established, being led by BSU/LEO.

## Laois County Council – Environment

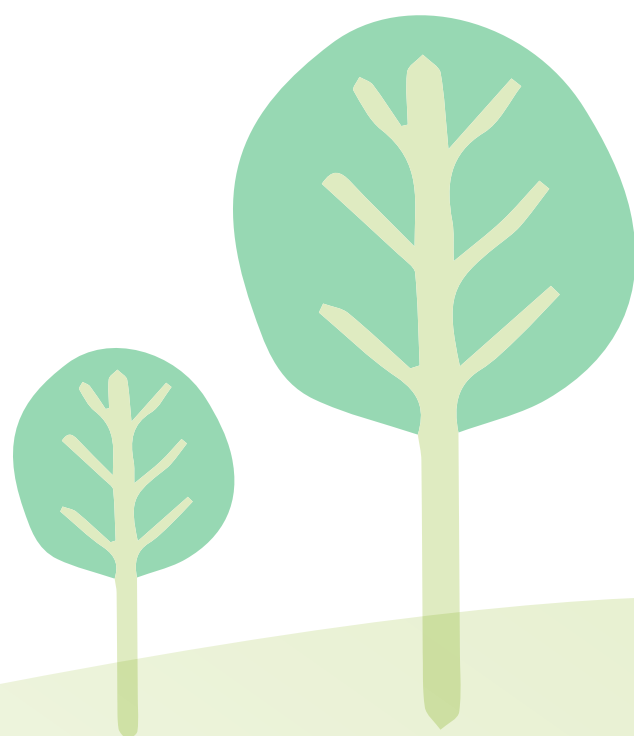
*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

Laois Federation of Tidy Towns was re-established in 2020. On-line webinars and information sessions well attended. LEADER funding acquired to develop Biodiversity Plans by Green Pine Consultants.

## Local Enterprise Office (LEO)

*Identified as the Lead Agency for one action*

LEO promotes links to website and apps such as Laois towns and villages on [laois.ie](http://laois.ie) and [localenterprise.ie/laois](http://localenterprise.ie/laois) and via social media.



## Appendix A

[INSERT NAME/ADDRESS HERE]

[INSERT DATE HERE]

Re: Review of Laois Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021

Dear [INSERT TITLE HERE]

Laois County Council (in association with Laois LCDC) is undertaking a review of the Laois Local and Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2016-2021. The review complies with a statutory legislative requirement and must take account of actions achieved to date under the LECP Plan, with information obtained during the process informing the development of the new LECP.

Please find attached an extract from the current LECP, with the relevant actions highlighted, where your organisation is identified as a lead agency/organisation.

I would appreciate if you could review all actions associated with your organisation and revert back with specific comment/feedback in relation to those actions i.e. of initiatives undertaken, outcomes and reach (i.e. numbers reached, statistics etc where appropriate) by **close of business on Monday, 21st March 2022**.

I would also welcome any additional comments or feedback you may wish to make with regard to the overall format of the existing LECP, and any suggestions based on the learning achieved to date.

Your co-operation in this process is appreciated and essential to the development of a new LECP, which will enhance and support economic, social and community development within County Laois.

Is mise le meas,

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**Ms. Carmel McNicholl,**  
*SEO, Community, Arts and Sports*

