

Laois Local Economic and Community Plan 2023-2028

Appendix 5 Consultation Report



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



Photography courtesy of:

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1. Consultation Process

Consultation Methodology

Laois County Council and Turley undertook a significant consultation exercise, designed to inform, and feed into the Local Development Strategy (LDS), Laois Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) and Local Authority Climate Action Plan (LACAP), including both virtual and in-person engagement. The consultation exercise was designed from the outset to be inclusive and to provide as many different opportunities and formats as possible for our communities, businesses, and organisations to contribute.

The principal methods of engagement involved:

- **Community Workshops**

Laois County Council and Turley ran a series of six in-person community workshops across Laois between 16-25 May 2023. The timing and location of these workshops was structured to allow as many people as possible to attend. In addition, Laois County Council and Turley also ran a virtual workshop via Zoom on 20 May 2023. In total these workshops were attended by 113 local citizens who participated in a range of exercises (described fully in Chapters 4 and 5) that were designed to capture insights and ideas which have directly fed into the LECP.

- **Stakeholder Workshop and One-to-One Engagement**

A stakeholder workshop was held on the 19th May 2023 and attended by representatives of a range of local organisations, including the Family Resource Centre, Laois Local Enterprise Office, Laois Sports Partnership as well as officers from different departments within the Council. Further one-to-one meetings were held with stakeholders covering a broad range of interests and specialists, including those working with and supporting disadvantaged and harder-to-reach groups.

- **Online Survey**

Hosted at www.laoisconsultation.ie, a Laois County Council and Turley consultation survey was live for two weeks, from 5-19 May 2023. It was responded to by 509 individuals, achieving a statistically significant sample. The profile of respondents was distributed across our Municipal Districts and captured a representative profile. Where almost two thirds of respondents were residents, just over 8% were representatives of a business and almost 11% were representatives of a voluntary or community organisation. The survey provided a comprehensive and contemporary insight into the issues and challenges perceived as facing the County as well as views on the success or otherwise of programmes delivered to date and perceived as impacting on our communities.

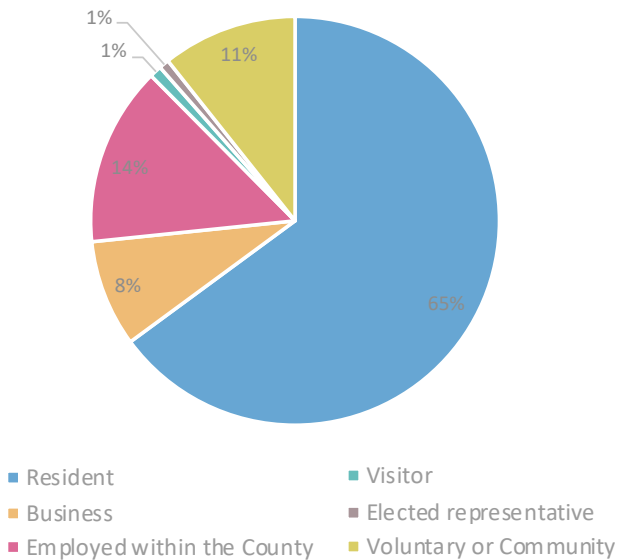


2. Respondent Profile

Online Survey Respondent Profile

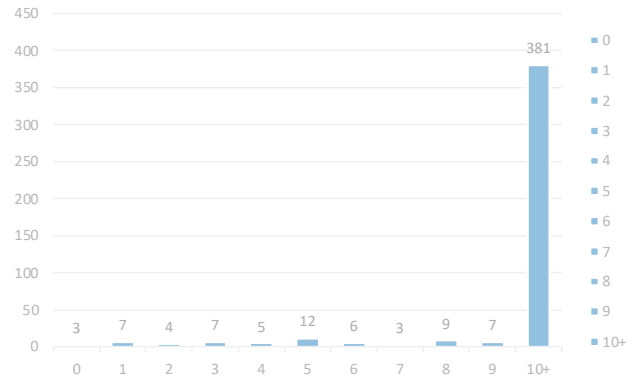
- 2.1** Of those who responded to our survey:¹
- 65.91% (407 respondents) said they were residents
 - 8.45% (53) were representatives of a business
 - 14.19% (89) were employed in the county
 - 0.96% (6) were visiting
 - 0.8% (5) were elected representatives
 - 10.69% (67) were representatives of a voluntary or community organisation

Figure 2.1: Answer to Question 'I am responding as...'



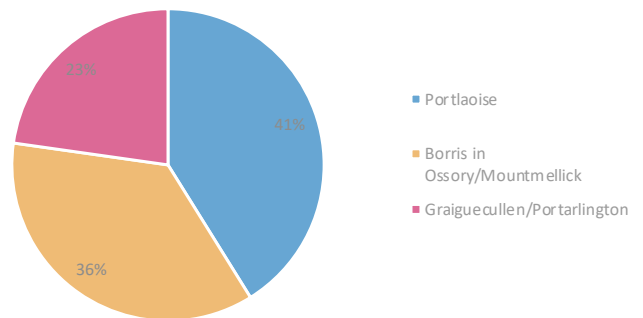
- 2.2** The vast majority of those who responded to our survey said they had been resident/located within County Laois for ten years or more. 85.51% of respondents (381 individuals) chose this option. Of the remainder, 8.33% (37) said they had lived or been located in Laois for between 5-9 years, while 5.86% (26) said they had lived or been located in the county for 0-4 years.

Figure 2.2: Answer to question 'How long have you been resident/located within County Laois?'



- 2.3** When asked in which Municipal District in the county they lived, or in which Municipal District their business/company or organisation was located:
- 41.14% (188 respondents) said Portlaoise,
 - 36.11% said Borris in Ossory/Mountmellick
 - 22.76% said Graiguecullen/Portarlinton

Figure 2.3: Answer to Question 'In which Municipal District are you resident/is your business, company or organisation located?'



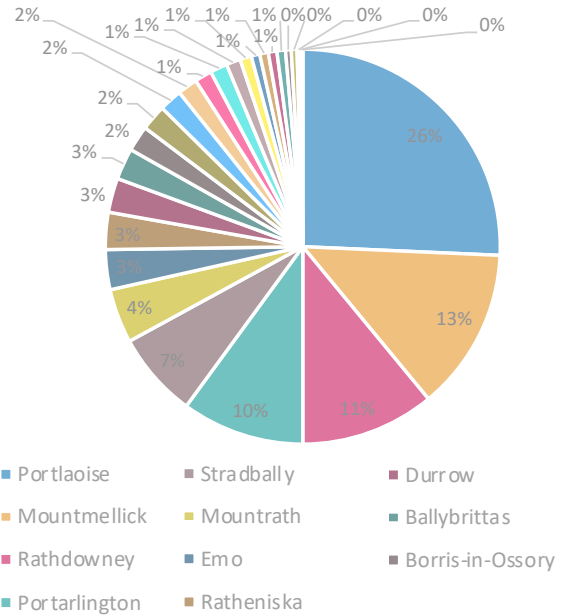
¹ Respondents were able to select more than one option to this question, hence the total number of respondents who chose each option sums to more than the total number of those who completed the survey.



2.4 Drilling down further into respondents' locations, we asked survey participants to state which population centre they were located closest to. This found that:

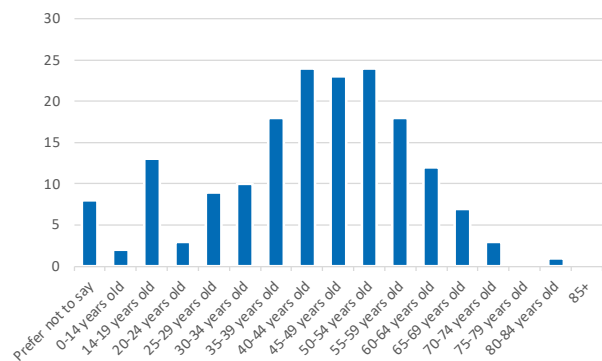
- 25.70% (110 respondents) said they were closest to Portlaoise
- 13.32% (57) said Mountmellick
- 10.98% (47) said Rathdowney
- 10.05% (43) said Portarlington
- 7.01% (30) said Stradbally
- 4.44% (19) said Mountrath
- 3.27% (14) said Emo
- 3.04% (13) said Ratheniska
- 2.80% (12) said Durrow
- 2.57% (11) said Ballybrittas
- 2.10% (9) said Borris-in-Ossory
- 2.10% (9) said Pike of Rushall
- 1.87% (8) said Rosenallis
- 1.64% (7) said The Heath
- 1.40% (6) said Ballyfin
- 1.40% (6) said Graiguecullen
- 1.17% (5) said Ballacolla
- 0.93% (4) said Raheen
- 0.70% (3) said Clonaslee
- 0.70% (3) said Errill
- 0.70% (3) said Wolfhill
- 0.47% (2) said Spink
- 0.47% (2) said Vicarstown
- 0.23% (1) said Killeen
- 0.23% (1) said Timahoe

Figure 2.4: Answer to question 'My community/locality is closest to:'



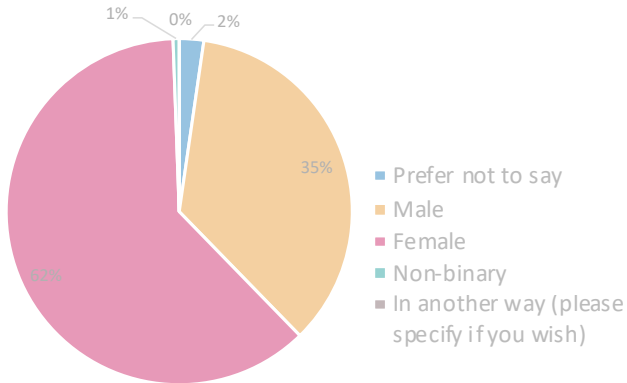
2.5 Based on the 175 respondents who told us their age, the survey can be considered to have captured a reasonable age range. That said, 61.14% of respondents (107 in total) said they were between 35-59 years of age. It is acknowledged there were also some age groups where responses were lower than would have been preferable, specifically acknowledging that only 1.71% (3) saying they were between 20-24 years of age and only 2.29% (4 respondents) saying they were 70 years of age or above.

Figure 2.5: Answer to question 'What age are you?'



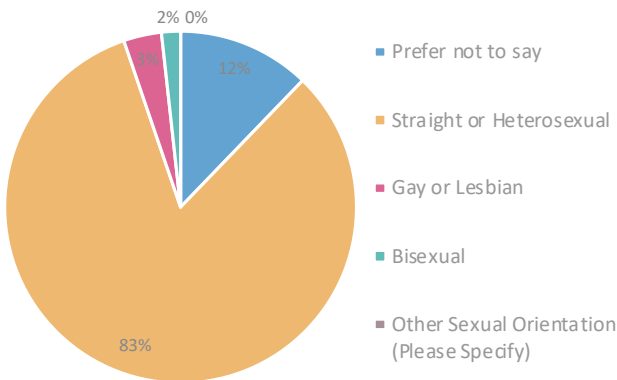
2.6 In response to our question about gender, the survey saw a preponderance of female respondents, with 61.71% (108 respondents). Males accounted for 35.43% (62), with non-binary and 'prefer not to say' making up the remaining 2.86% (4 respondents).

Figure 2.6: Answer to question: 'How do you describe your gender?'



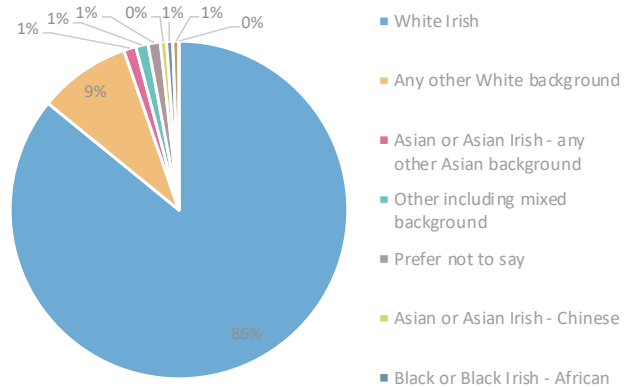
2.7 In response to our question about sexual orientation, 82.56% (142 in total) of respondents said they were straight or heterosexual, 3.49% (6) said they were gay or lesbian, 1.74% (3) said they were non-binary and 12.21% (21) preferred not to say.

Figure 2.7: Answer to question 'Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?'



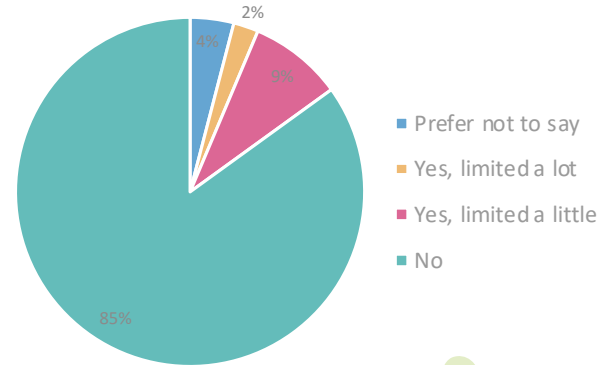
2.8 In terms of ethnic background, 85.88% (146) described themselves as 'White Irish', with 8.82% (15) describing themselves as 'Any other White background'. The other ethnicity options given made up just 5.29% (9) of the responses.

Figure 2.8: Answer to question 'What is your ethnic or cultural background?'



2.9 When asked if their day-to-day activities were limited because of health issues or a disability, 84.97% (147) said no, 8.67% (15) said they were limited a little, 2.31% (4) said they were limited a lot and 4.05% (7) preferred not to say.

Figure 2.9: Responses to 'Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability?'



3.2 We then asked ‘What are the key strengths and opportunities for investment in your area?’ We received a total of 250 responses to this question. A thematic breakdown of the responses to this question is presented in the table below:

Table 3.1: Summary of responses to question ‘What are the key strengths and opportunities for investment in your area?’

Theme	Tally	Summary of comments
Connectivity/ Location	47	<p>The largest group of respondents focused on Laois’ strong connectivity and central location within Ireland.</p> <hr/> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘Railway service, easy to commute to different places.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Great connectivity/transport links – trains.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Well connected by rail and national bus.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Proximity to motorway, rail facilities, Portlaoise is very accessible.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Close to M7 less than one hour from Dublin.’</i></p>
Natural/Outdoor Tourism and Business	37	<p>The county’s natural resources were highlighted as a focus for tourism/business development.</p> <hr/> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘Environmental-based tourism, walking trails, cycling facilities, tourism-based businesses such as cafés, accommodation.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Slieve Bloom Mountains.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Better advertising of mountains, woods and Emo – also as the Quaker square is still intact could develop into a real tourist attraction with costumes, events etc.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Local tourism around local infrastructure could flourish if developed to national standards.’</i></p>
Community	27	<p>A significant subset of the respondents focused on Laois’ community spirit as a strength of the county, or highlighted opportunities for investment in this area.</p> <hr/> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘Loads of land available to put community centre on something for the town to have for different activities’</i></p> <p><i>‘There is a great community spirit and involvement.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Good community spirit and support local co-op for locally produced foods.’</i></p>
Heritage Tourism	26	<p>The county’s heritage was highlighted as a strong opportunity.</p> <hr/> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘There is an opportunity for a historical trail to link all the areas of interest. Tourism is a key investment opportunity.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Mountmellick was home to the first Quakers in Ireland – huge opportunity to develop an historic tour, also beautiful walks could be developed by the Barrow River in Mountmellick.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Well known attractive heritage town.’</i></p>

continued



Theme	Tally	Summary of comments
Demography	25	<p>Several respondents highlighted Laois' demography as a key strength.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>'A highly educated workforce.'</i></p> <p><i>'A young and educated workforce – a diverse population.'</i></p>
Economic Potential	23	<p>The economic potential of the county was highlighted</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>'The National Broadband Ireland Plan has successfully installed high speed, reliable broadband to our locality, aiding businesses and those in hybrid working systems. This will be a positive incentive for anyone wishing to establish business in the area.'</i></p> <p><i>'Locals with a strong work ethic and an area open for business development.'</i></p>
Arts/Cultural Tourism and business	19	<p>Respondents highlighted the county's potential for arts/cultural tourism and economic development.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>'A creative, diverse population. Currently the creative community work hard of their own accord to improve the community, and this could (and should) be capitalised on.'</i></p> <p><i>'The World Ploughing Championships and Electric Picnic are held close to my home which is great for tourism and local businesses.'</i></p>
Agriculture	8	<p>The county's agricultural strengths were recognised by a number of respondents.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>'Support for farmers to produce local products.'</i></p> <p><i>'Agriculture – dairy, tillage and intensive horticulture.'</i></p>



Stradbally Steam Rally

3.3 We then asked participants what they saw as the key challenges requiring improvement in their area. We received 260 responses to this question.

Table 3.2: Summary of responses to ‘What are the key challenges that require improvement in your area?’

Theme	Tally	Summary of Comments
Roads/Traffic	63	<p>Despite the identification of connectivity as a strength in the responses to the previous question, respondents still highlighted a number of issues with local roads, leading to this being the most-commented-on theme within the answers to this question.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘Fixing dangerous roads.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Traffic management around schools.’</i></p> <p><i>‘The heavy goods traffic avoiding the toll is also causing major congestion and damage to our roads infrastructure.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Town centre parking for employees – the car park at old bofi is unsafe for female employees and as a business we have had to arrange a rota to escort female employees to their cars in the dark evenings.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Very poor bus links – heavily car reliant.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Signage on roundabouts is a huge problem. The placement of signs on every roundabout is lethal as it’s obstructing the motorists’ view of oncoming traffic to their right on the roundabout.’</i></p>
Public spaces and facilities	36	<p>A number of respondents highlighted Laois’ communal and public spaces as a key challenge for the county.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘Lack of communal public spaces.’</i></p> <p><i>‘We have no community hall which greatly effects groups in the area. There is no place in the town for the public to gather or for organisations to use indoor facilities. Presently groups travel to other nearby villages to use their facilities.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Dead villages with nothing but a church and graveyard need to have a heartbeat again... like a community shop, pub or café and some activity during the daytime.’</i></p>
Dereliction	34	<p>Dereliction was raised by a significant portion of the survey’s respondents.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘There are many empty retail units and many have fallen into disrepair, especially around Main Street. It would be great to see new life given to them and create more footfall for the main street.’ [Respondent from near Ratheniska]</i></p> <p><i>‘Derelict buildings need to be restored and given a new purpose in order to brighten up the town especially around the square like the Savoy as it’s the heart of our town in Portarlinton.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Property owned by people that have no interest or desire to add anything to the village. I believe there should be a law introduced where you’re obliged to keep your property to a standard and a fine for unused businesses or better still forced to sell or open.’ [Respondent from near Rosenallis]</i></p>

continued



Theme	Tally	Summary of Comments
Public Transport	32	<p>Public transport within the county was criticised, with most respondents who mentioned it suggesting that it didn't serve enough routes/areas within the county.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>'Lack of proper public transport.'</i></p> <p><i>'The reduction in transport to Dublin (Bus Éireann cancelled, Irish rail service reduced).'</i></p> <p><i>'Poor public transport.'</i></p>
Housing	32	<p>As should be expected during a nationwide housing crisis, there were a number of comments relating to housing. These ranged from calls for more housing, calls for housing of different tenure types, for better location of housing and for more services to support new housing development.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>'Too many houses being built – it's ruining the beauty of the land.'</i></p> <p><i>'Less social housing as there is more than private housing at this stage. Need a second GP service.'</i></p> <p><i>'Affordable housing opportunities for young professionals and first time buyers.'</i></p>
Active Travel	31	<p>There was strong support for improved active travel provision.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>'Roads, paths better walking/cycling less cars!'</i></p> <p><i>'Cycle lanes, more sidewalks are essential. If there was more lighting also that would make the area safer.'</i></p> <p><i>'Cycle lanes/footpaths. Connecting local towns villages to the mountains on safe to use cycle paths or footpaths.'</i></p>
Jobs/Economic Development	30	<p>Respondents felt that more needed to be done to stimulate job growth and economic development.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>'No proper infrastructure in place to entice companies to invest in the area.'</i> [From near Mountmellick]</p> <p><i>'The town has worked hard over the last few years to clean up and look appealing. Bloom HQ has demonstrated that business can be attracted to the town. Business and tourism development in a whole town way such as a tourist office/history museum, community festivals, Viking festivals, traditional music events, community integration opportunities such as 'Tastes of the World' and 'Community Fest' in Bloom HQ. Adult education, entrepreneur and startup courses and supports, cottage market/industry supports. Apprenticeship courses for electricians, plumbers, painters, welders, fabrication, mechanics, barber/hairdressing etc. Grants to support startup, angel investors, banking supports.'</i> [Comment from near Mountrath]</p> <p><i>'Little employment in the area with people travelling to the principal town of Portlaoise and further afield for employment'</i> [From near Emo]</p>

continued



Theme	Tally	Summary of Comments
Youth/Children's Facilities	27	<p>There was a strong feeling that children's and youth facilities were insufficient for the needs of the population.</p> <hr/> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>'Increased childcare facilities are needed in such a residential town and increased incentives to provide such services. Portlaoise has limited school places – keep families in other county towns which have the necessary facilities.'</i> [Abbeyleix]</p> <p><i>'No community creche/childcare in the area.'</i> [Mountrath]</p>
Scenery/Nature/Environment	12	<p>Respondents felt that more could be done to protect the natural assets of the county.</p> <hr/> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>'Environment protection, agricultural pollution, habitat protection/promotion.'</i></p> <p><i>'River biodiversity improvements.'</i> [Portlaoise]</p>
Litter	11	<p>Litter was raised as an issue by a number of respondents.</p> <hr/> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>'Litter and dumping are out of control and not enough is done about this.'</i></p>
Tourism	9	<p>Respondents felt more could be done to support tourism in Laois.</p> <hr/> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>'A county/town/village wide survey of what's on your doorstep type snag list for tourism – is there appropriate signage in place? Is there too much signage? Can we work on having a no poster policy and have digital noticeboards in key locations in every town and tourist village?'</i></p>
Broadband/Internet	9	<p>Broadband was cited as a challenge by some respondents.</p> <hr/> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>'Poor internet.'</i></p>
Water and Sewerage	7	<p>Water and sewerage services were criticised.</p> <hr/> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>'Connection to local sewage system.'</i> [Abbeyleix]</p>
Migrant Engagement	6	<p>Some respondents raised concerns around the integrating and providing services for new migrant communities to Laois.</p> <hr/> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>'Primary schools need expanding as they are at capacity, and we are just about to have 40 module homes filled with Ukrainian children.'</i> [Rathdowney]</p>



Survey Findings – Objectives, Actions and Outcomes

- 3.4** The survey suggests that a large section of the population feel that sustainable development, climate change capacity building and climate change mitigation require greater support in Laois.
- 43.15% of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that Sustainable development of the environment was well supported.
 - 32.43% were neutral
 - 22.84% agreed or strongly agreed
 - 48.73% strongly disagreed or disagreed that climate change capacity building was well supported.
 - 33.33% were neutral
 - 17.77% agreed or strongly agreed
 - 47.96% strongly disagreed or disagreed that climate change mitigation and adaptation were well supported.
 - 37.27% were neutral
 - 18.37% agreed or strongly agreed

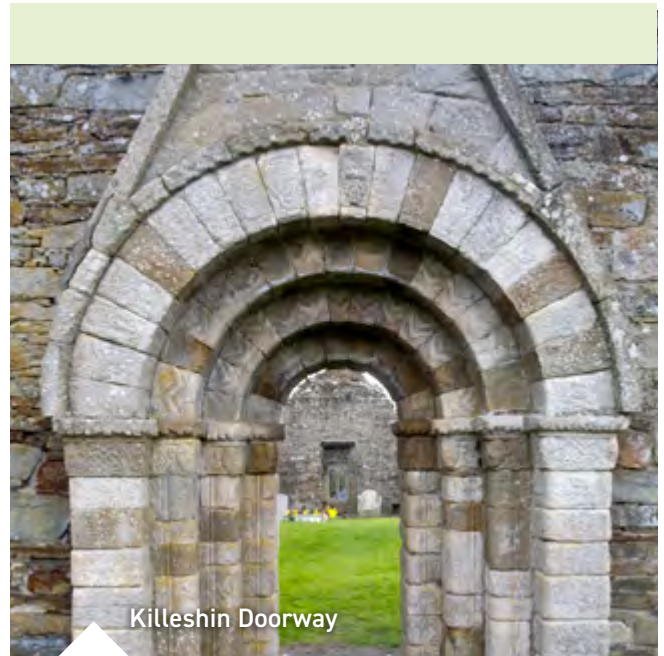
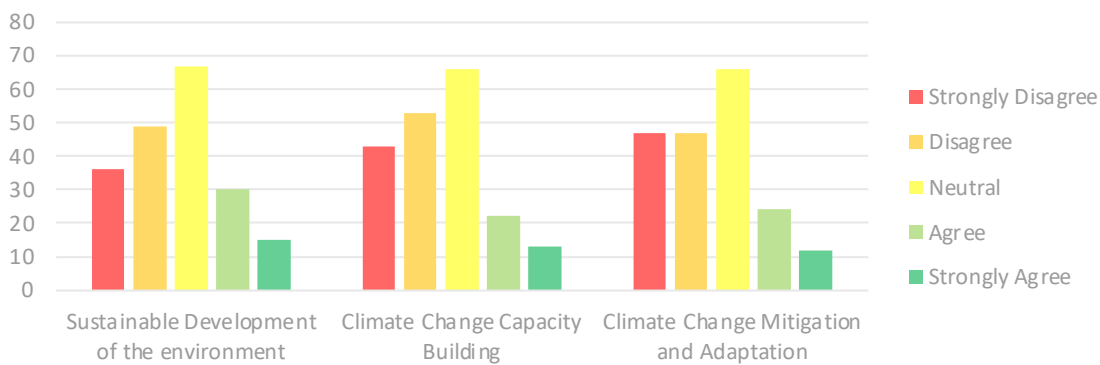


Figure 3.2: Responses to ‘To what extent do you agree? The following in my area are currently well supported, through programmes and initiatives (such as the LEADER Programme).’



3.5 We asked respondents ‘What projects, if any, have made a difference to protecting our environment, combating the effects of climate change, or supporting sustainable development in your area in the past five years?’ We received 141 responses to this question. A thematic breakdown of the responses received is presented below.

Table 3.3: Summary of responses to ‘What projects, if any, have made a difference to protecting our environment, combating the effects of climate change or supporting sustainable development in your area in the past five years?’

Theme	Tally	Summary of Comments
Not aware	65	The most common response from participants was either ‘none’ or to indicate they were not aware of any relevant projects, indicating a low level of awareness of projects in this workstream.
Biodiversity/ Nature/ Pollinators	25	Some participants focused on biodiversity and related issues in their responses. Representative comments <i>‘Really like the initiative to let the wildflowers grow on the roundabouts and verges.’</i> <i>‘The Abbeyleix Bog Project – Rewetting and conservation of plants work along with the walkways and the regular sharing of information re the flora and fauna of the bog. The meadow management at the Abbeyleix Church of Ireland field and graveyard. The promotion of vegetable gardening through the Abbeyleix Community Garden.’</i>
Tidy Towns	16	Tidy Towns projects were quite popular among the responses. Representative comments <i>‘Tidy Towns projects raising awareness and planting trees.’</i>
Energy Transition	10	Some respondents highlighted efforts to aid the energy transition within the county. Representative comments <i>‘Eirgrid grant approval for solar panels in the pool.’</i>
Transport – Modal Shift	7	Respondents pointed to the need to reduce car dependence through modal shift. Representative comments <i>‘Implementing some bike lanes, more needs to happen to avoid heavy traffic around school runs.’</i>
Energy Efficiency	5	Respondents showed awareness of domestic energy efficiency/retrofit grants, but highlighted the significant cost to avail of them. Representative comments <i>‘The grants available to the average private householder are not enough to enable people to retro fit. It is just too expensive.’</i>
Education Programmes	4	Some respondents highlighted the need to inculcate climate-conscious values early through education. Others pointed to the need to engender these values throughout people’s lives. Representative comments <i>‘Earth day events – school programmes.’</i> <i>‘Derryounce developments and the Solas Centre (as a private enterprise) as destinations have created the most local awareness of supporting sustainability, but these alone cannot change mindsets. More interventions are needed to create new habits.’</i>
Waste/Recycling	4	Some respondents focused on the need to address waste and make it easier to recycle Representative comments <i>‘New bins have been put into place all around the town. Derryounce is also very eco-friendly and has supported the sustainable development in my town.’</i> <i>‘More recycling.’</i>



3.6 This retrospective question was followed by a prospective one: ‘What kind of projects to protect our planet, combat the effects of climate change and support sustainable development would you like to see in your area?’ We received 156 responses to this question. A thematic breakdown of the responses received is presented below.

Table 3.4: Responses to ‘What kind of projects to protect our planet, combat the effects of climate change and support sustainable development would you like to see in your area?’

Theme	Tally	Summary of Comments
Transport – Modal Shift	37	<p>Respondents called for more to be done to encourage modal shift away from cars.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘Removing truck traffic from travelling through our town centres and by recapturing our roads to make them safe for walking and cycling again. All our country roads need to be cycle safe.’</i></p> <p><i>‘More green lanes, reduced (and enforced) car speeds for lowering the emissions and incentives for people to cycle (better cycle lanes, more secure bike parking, etc).’</i></p> <p><i>‘Restrict and ban heavy quarry traffic on community roads. Attract cyclists, runners, walkers, equestrians with safe roads and facilities.’</i></p>
Energy Transition	36	<p>Respondents called for more to be done to help transition away from fossil fuels and towards greener sources of energy.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘Local support for solar collection, whether it is for electricity or heating.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Car charger points. Energy banking centres as seen on TV. Solar panels on roofs of businesses and large buildings such as schools, etc.’</i></p> <p><i>‘More grants for solar panels, more grants for the air-to-water systems.’</i></p>
Biodiversity/ Nature/ Pollinators	32	<p>There was strong awareness among respondents of the need for measures designed to protect the natural world.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘Peatland rewetting and rewilding. Native forest and hedgerow protection and restoration.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Bees, pollinator friendly areas.’</i></p> <p><i>‘More grants for plantations and grants for exclusive wildlife/bird sanctuary areas of land would be good. To my knowledge some small patches of land that are not farmed and left to go into their natural state are marked as sanctuaries, more of that should be encouraged as its good for biodiversity.’</i></p>
Waste/Recycling	16	<p>Some respondents focused on the need to address landfill and littering, and to improve update of recycling.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘Recycling competitions, more education on recycling, workshops on recycling/ mending rather than disposing.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Managing litter problem, pollution of local rivers by agriculture and litter.’</i></p>

continued



Theme	Tally	Summary of Comments
Education Programmes	13	<p>Participants called for education to promote awareness of a range of issues, including importance of recycling and threat posed by climate change.</p> <hr/> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>'Bring more awareness of climate change to students.'</i></p> <p><i>'Please encourage our current young people, the next generation of adults, to participate and take an interest, if we don't, we have no hope.'</i></p>
Energy Efficiency	13	<p>Participants felt that grants were needed to encourage uptake of retrofitting.</p> <hr/> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>'Up to 90% grants for private houses to be retrofitted.'</i></p> <p><i>'Greater range of grants to upgrade energy performance of homes, especially windows.'</i></p>
Agriculture	7	<p>Respondents suggested measures to encourage sustainable agriculture.</p> <hr/> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>'Banning new dairy farm expansion (especially as they are ripping up hedgerows and forests)'</i></p> <p><i>'Employ farm inspectors to actually do something about farm related pollution.'</i></p>
Water Efficiency	4	<p>Respondents highlighted measures to improve water efficiency in domestic and public buildings/developments.</p> <hr/> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>'Water containers on gutters to collect rainwater to allow locals to water their plants. Green roofs where possible. Herb garden (dedicated area) to grow herbs/veggies.'</i></p> <p><i>'Rain water harvest system on all public buildings.'</i></p>



Rock of Dunamase

3.7 We then asked respondents ‘What objectives would you like to see the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) address and what actions would you like to see proposed?’ We received 135 responses to this question. A thematic breakdown of the responses is presented below:

Figure 3.5: Responses to ‘What objectives would you like to see the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) address and what actions would you like to see proposed?’

Theme	Tally	Summary of Comments
Infrastructure/ Facilities	45	<p>The largest group of respondents called for specific pieces of infrastructure to be added in their area. Many of these focused on active or green travel infrastructure, such as cycle lanes, greenways, and EV charging. Others called for specific pieces of community infrastructure, such as coffee shops, a community crèche, or sports facilities. Some responses referenced a perception that Laois has experienced significant immigration and needs additional facilities to help newcomers integrate.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘Development of youth facilities, services and programme and development of village amenities and services that restore life in villages again. Community centres need to become Community hubs and not remain as ghost halls. We need a freeway and safe cycling infrastructure.’</i> [From an individual from Ballyfin]</p> <p><i>‘A community café space that is non profit to allow integration of the international protection application residents who live in our town and have nowhere to go, nothing to do.’</i></p> <p><i>‘I [...] think would see the opening of new filling stations with solid infrastructure and a focus on more electric vehicle charging points along this new proposed bypass. This could include cycle and walk lanes to encourage exercise whilst also looking at planting trees and wildflowers to promote biodiversity.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Forward planning, with all the elements that affect the decline in this area. Address rural isolation for elderly. Rural and agricultural impact planning for climate change. The reality of electric power takes over. Lack of gas infrastructure. Poor broadband options. Roads and Ballyadams Roadstone quarry. Creative communities. Infrastructure, etc.’</i></p>
Business Support/ Development	40	<p>These individuals felt that more should be done to improve the local economy in their area. Measures called for included supporting infrastructure (eg taxis/mobility), greater training opportunities for young people, measures to attract IDA/external funding and other, locally specific interventions.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘More supports for home grown businesses. More third level outreach courses available locally – not necessary to have a third level institution set up in the county but courses accredited by TL available in through local bodies – preferably a wider choice than just childcare, sociology and SNA training.’</i> [From an individual in Portlaoise]</p> <p><i>‘It is vital that the IDA construct advanced business/industrial units in the towns of Mountrath, Rathdowney and Durrrow to attract FDI and also to assist our local business communities.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Initiatives to promote local businesses staying open – e.g. there’s no taxi service in Rathdowney – to encourage people back into pubs. There’s currently no restaurant in Rathdowney for evening meals – there needs to be some sort of initiative to incentivise restaurant startups.’</i></p> <p><i>‘To encourage small businesses involved, ie in music, drama and culture to use the Malt House and possibly build a music studio to keep Stradbally alive with music all year due to its connection with Electric Picnic.’</i></p>

continued

Theme	Tally	Summary of Comments
Community Funding/ Support	19	<p>Respondents stressed the need to invest in community initiatives.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>'Promote Laois as a place to live, work and have leisure activities/opportunities. Tourist opportunities and destinations, heritage to be preserved, protected, and promoted. Investment in community buildings, pubs, shops to strengthen the "offer" of villages to live and develop.'</i></p> <p><i>'Invest in the potential of people to make a difference in their own areas, such as a local Community Cultural Fund or a Capacity Development Fund.'</i></p>
Social Inclusion	9	<p>Respondents highlighted a requirement to ensure that new communities and potentially vulnerable groups are supported in society.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>'People with disabilities feel excluded from certain community involvement. Encourage key stakeholders to actively participate with the disability sector and for the PPN to reignite the Disability Special interest group.'</i></p> <p><i>'Increased participation for our rural youth. This could be done by encouraging groups like Youth Work Ireland or Foroige to re-establish youth clubs in the town of Stradbally.'</i></p> <p><i>'Greater fluidity and transparency around policy areas covered in the UN convention. Supporting employment opportunities, tourism initiatives, community development.'</i></p>



Portlaoise Library Opening, July 2023



3.8 Finally, we asked ‘What outcomes would you hope to see in the future, following the implementation of the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP)?’ We received 113 responses to this question. A thematic breakdown of the responses is presented below:

Table 3.6: Responses to ‘What outcomes would you hope to see in the future, following the implementation of the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP)?’

Theme	Tally	Summary of Comments
Economic Development	46	<p>Respondents said they hoped to see a thriving economy that would support and encourage young people to stay in the area.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘More sustainable local economy, more connected and thriving communities and economy, clear pipeline of young people with the necessary skills, greater retention of young people within Laois and encouragement for new residents to make their home here.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Attracting staff and people to Laois, to live and work here. To encourage FDI to Laois and see development of landbanks such as the IDA Business and Technology Park. Construction of an Advanced Building Solution to attract large companies to Laois.’</i></p> <p><i>‘A focus on job creation and to repurpose derelict buildings along Main Street in Mountmellick to house some of these businesses.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Stimulation of employment opportunities in the area.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Supported local ventures such as a shop/youth café.’</i></p>
Infrastructure/ Facilities	33	<p>A number of respondents felt that more infrastructure or new facilities were needed.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘There will be a reprioritised balance between investing in capital infrastructure and investing in communities who can animate places and spaces for social, economic and community benefit.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Better infrastructure, supported businesses and community, united businesses and community and a place where the youth of town respect and love to live in and stay.’</i></p> <p><i>‘More things to do for young people and older people.... Promote people to shop local.....More dental surgeries.....’</i></p> <p><i>‘We need a community centre, running and exercise centre for all ages. It’s vital in all communities not just in large cities. This will save lives – young and old.’</i></p>
Inclusion	12	<p>Respondents again stressed the need for better inclusion of potentially vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘A more equitable community, especially for rural dwellers, young people and older adults.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Job creation and greater equality and opportunity for disabled persons.’</i></p>



Survey Findings – Economic Development and Job Creation

3.9 In relation to economic development and job creation, perceptions of progress and support again erred towards the negative. In response to the question ‘*To what extent do you agree? The following in my area are currently well supported, through programmes and initiatives (such as the LEADER Programme):*’

- On ‘The Green Economy’ (opportunities to develop business in the circular and bio-economy, 43.22% (86) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.
 - 39.20% (78) were neutral
 - 17.59% (35) strongly agreed or agreed
- On Agricultural Diversification (e.g. farm shops, recreations activities, other non-agricultural opportunities on the farm), 51.01% (101) disagreed or strongly disagreed.
 - 32.32% (64) were neutral
 - 16.67% (33) strongly agreed or agreed
- On Rural Tourism and Recreation (e.g. outdoor recreation, cultural and heritage initiatives, festivals, and events), 47.50% (95) strongly disagreed or disagreed.
 - 24.00% (48) were neutral
 - 28.50% (57) strongly agreed or agreed
- On Enterprise Development (development of new rural businesses and supporting entrepreneurs - particularly women), 54.04% (107) strongly disagreed or disagreed.
 - 28.79% (57) were neutral
 - 17.17% (34) strongly agreed or agreed
- On Rural Food Production (investment in artisan and micro, small and medium food producers), 47.47% (94) strongly disagreed or disagreed.
 - 33.33% (66) were neutral
 - 19.19% (38) strongly agreed or agreed
- On Social, Community and Cooperative Enterprises (supporting organisations with social, societal, or environmental impact), 46.19% (91) strongly disagreed or disagreed.
 - 27.41% (54) were neutral
- 26.40% (52) strongly agreed or agreed

Figure 3.3: Responses to ‘To what extent do you agree? The following in my area are currently well supported, through programmes and initiatives (such as the LEADER Programme):’



3.10 We asked, ‘What projects, if any, in your area made a difference to Economic Development in the past five years?’. We received 145 responses to this question. These are summarised thematically in the table below.

Table 3.7: Summary of responses to ‘what projects, if any, in your area made a difference to Economic Development in the past five years?’

Theme	Tally	Summary of Comments
Not aware/None	72	Somewhat worryingly, the largest group of respondents by far were those who said they were unaware of any such projects in their area during the past five years, or did not think any had taken place.
Specific business supports/developments	24	<p>A number of respondents highlighted specific business supports or developments, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bloom HQ • Ballyfin Demesne • Solas Garden Centre • Ballykilcavan Brewery • Junction 17/Portlaoise Plaza • Roma Gracefield • Glanbia Cheese • METAC Training Centre <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘Bloom HQ (ex Brigidine Convent) has been transformed into a national award-winning remote working and meeting hub with 14 companies availing of the facility.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Glanbia Cheese opening, opening of Plaza on Junction 17 and the back road from it to Clonminam Business Park.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Eco Garden Centre that has developed a name nationally close by.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Ballykilcavan Brewery was able to access LEADER funding which provided a great boost to their business and employment opportunities for locals.’</i></p>
Festivals Cultural Events and Programmes	9	<p>Respondents highlighted a number of cultural events and programmes, or festivals, that they felt had encouraged economic development.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘Shine was supported and the 2023 event is also being promoted. While this does not increase employment it does give an opportunity for local enterprises to promote their services in the trade area.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Taste of Laois.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Electric Picnic, Ploughing Championships.’</i></p>



This was followed by a prospective question, asking respondents ‘What kinds of projects would you like to see investment in, to promote economic development in your area?’ We received 156 responses to this question – these are summarised thematically in the table below.

Table 3.8: Responses to ‘What kinds of projects would you like to see investment in, to promote economic development in your area?’

Theme	Tally	Summary of Comments
Business Development/ Attracting Investment	38	<p>Respondents called for business support that would encourage investment, diversify the local economy, and encourage retention of talent within the county.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘Investing in small businesses, encourage use of abandoned retail units. Increase in housing – particularly smaller units aimed at first time buyers.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Invest in social enterprises and encourage the establishment of same. We need to create more employment opportunities in our area and prevent our skilled workforce leaving our towns and villages to work in Dublin, etc’.</i></p> <p><i>‘We need IDA to build advance industrial/business units in our rural towns which will lead to less people driving outside Laois to their employment.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Proper real supports for new small business and also supports and initiatives for businesses who have been in the town for many years to upgrade and modernise.’</i></p>
Natural/Outdoor Tourism and Business	28	<p>Respondents called for initiatives to support outdoor activities and tourism.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘Improved parking/amenities for the biking/walking trails in the Slieve Bloom mountains. Farm shops, etc. also.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Greenway connecting Abbeyleix to Kilkenny for cyclists and pedestrians would attract tourism.’</i></p>
Arts/Culture & Tourism	17	<p>Respondents called for more support to the arts and cultural sectors in attracting tourism.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘Creative, community driven projects. Music, visual arts, creative pursuits.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Cultural revivals would be amazing. Cultural awareness surrounding Bealtaine, Samhain.’</i></p>
Heritage & Tourism	8	<p>Respondents felt that more could be done to maximise the tourism potential of the county’s heritage.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘Tourism development of the old sugar factory Laois side.’</i></p>
Hospitality	8	<p>It was felt by some respondents that more could be done to improve the hospitality offering within the county.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘Invest in local artisan food producers.’</i></p> <p><i>‘More places to eat at night-time with a variety of foods.’</i></p>
Agriculture	8	<p>Respondents called for more to be done to maximise the potential of the county’s strong agricultural economy.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘Diversification in farms, natural environment promoted as an asset.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Animal milk production from local famers for local usage via co-op or self-service machines. Plastic free!’</i></p>

Survey Findings – Infrastructure and Social Inclusion

3.11 On Infrastructure and Social Inclusion, again, the picture was relatively negative. In response to the question ‘*To what extent do you agree? Infrastructure and social inclusion in my area are currently well supported, through programmes and initiatives (such as the LEADER Programme):*’

- On Infrastructure (e.g. parks, open space, playgrounds, blueways/greenways, and walking, cycling, and wheeling), 45.21% (85) disagreed or strongly disagreed
 - 23.94% (45) were neutral
 - 30.85% (58) strongly agreed or agreed
- On Accessible Services (supporting those at risk of social exclusion, including hard to reach and new communities), 57.30% (106) disagreed or strongly disagreed
 - 31.89% (59) were neutral
 - 10.81% (20) strongly agreed or agreed

- On Optimising Digital Connectivity (e.g. broadband, digital skills and literacy), 43.24% (80) disagreed or strongly disagreed
 - 32.43% (60) were neutral
 - 24.32% (45) strongly agreed or agreed
- On Youth Provision (activities and initiatives, other than sports, for younger people), 60.11% (113) disagreed or strongly disagreed
 - 21.81% (41) were neutral
 - 18.09% (34) strongly agreed or agreed

3.12 We asked, ‘*What projects, if any, have made a difference to Social Inclusion or Infrastructure in your area during the past five years?*’. We received 133 responses. These are summarised thematically in the table opposite.

Figure 3.4: Responses to ‘*To what extent do you agree? Infrastructure and social inclusion in my area are currently well supported, through programmes and initiatives (such as the LEADER Programme):*’

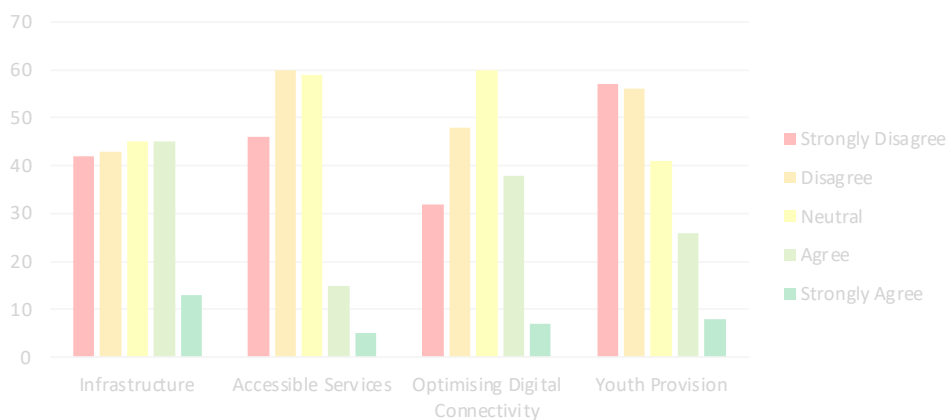


Table 3.9: Summary of responses to ‘What projects, if any, have made a difference to Social Inclusion or Infrastructure in your area during the past five years?’

Theme	Tally	Summary of Comments
Not aware/None	53	As in previous questions, the largest group of respondents said they were either unaware of any such projects or did not think any had taken place.
Cultural/ Community Infrastructure	34	<p>Respondents highlighted a range of pieces of cultural or community infrastructure that had contributed to social inclusion. These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GAA • Port Art Collective • Rathdowney Errill Activity Hub • Brigidine Convent • Bloom HQ • Mountrath Youth Club <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘Mountrath Youth Creative Space and Mountrath Youth Theatre.’</i></p> <p><i>‘The converted Brigidine Convent provide access to a gym, fitness classes, self-defence, adult education classes, upcycling, yoga and meditation, a home for clubs such as Scouts, Biker Shed, Mens Shed, Art Collective, Camera Club, Foroige, Film Club. They put on plays, public interest talks, education and business workshops, silver surfer classes, social media workshops, group support, agritech information workshops, grants support and advice as well.’</i></p> <p><i>‘The Rathdowney Errill Activity Hub and The Rathdowney Arts Group have been supported by Laois Partnership and Laois Sports Partnership and Laois County Council with programmes. However, to become sustainable, a community resource centre for all is badly needed.’</i></p>
Inclusion – Generations	15	<p>Respondents highlighted a range of initiatives that aimed to improve social inclusion across generations.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘Laois County Council through its Age Friendly Strategy are very active in creating a county where older people are valued and respected. Bloom HQ’s community area have introduced numerous initiative’s such as fit sticks, indoor bowls, indoor wheelchair basketball and hurling Ireland’.</i></p> <p><i>‘Parish based youth projects and parish funded food kitchen are important projects that serve our community well. Home care services help older challenged folk to continue to reside in their own home. Meals on wheels.’</i></p>
Inclusion – New Communities	8	<p>Respondents highlighted a range of initiatives that aimed to improve social inclusion for new communities.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘The development of The High Nellies Bike Club, community support for the Ukranian families.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Bloom HQ runs community integration events around culture, food, music, community, ethnicity, language, etc. They provide study rooms, classes for online exams, mentor programs, transition year student development programs, music classes, grinds school, concerts, dancing, art, photography and so much more.’</i></p>
Inclusion – Other Categories	7	<p>Some examples of projects to improve social inclusion for people in other protected categories were highlighted by respondents.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘Learning sign language locally.’</i></p> <p><i>‘There have been several opportunities that have been beneficial to Social Inclusion and Infrastructure such as the new St Francis School so that has been of substantial benefit to the many disabled persons who use that building.’</i></p>

3.13 We then asked respondents to look forward, asking ‘What kind of projects to support social inclusion or development of infrastructure in your area would you like to see supported in the future?’

Table 3.10: Summary of responses to ‘What kind of projects to support social inclusion or development of infrastructure in your area would you like to see supported in the future?’

Theme	Tally	Summary of Comments
Cultural/ Community Infrastructure	34	<p>The largest group of respondents called for specific pieces of community or cultural infrastructure at the locality.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘Development of local community centres that need investment that are not supported by current government funding.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Festivals, community ed class and possibly active citizens group could be explored’</i></p> <p><i>‘Community hall for all age groups to gather in the Stradbally area. We need to focus on our rural youth population with little or no voluntary activities available to them other than GAA.’</i></p>
Travel Infrastructure	24	<p>Physical inclusion was prioritised by a group of respondents, who called for better travel links between communities.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘Restrict and ban heavy quarry traffic on community roads, let the residents feel safe on the roads. You are trapping young and old people in their homes.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Improved public transport links, particularly buses – at the moment, without a car we can only get from Portarlinton to Portlaoise, there is no service that enables us to travel around the county, so we are incentivised to leave Laois for leisure, recreation, tourism and shopping.’</i></p>
Inclusion – Generations	23	<p>Reflecting findings in other parts of the consultation exercise, there was a strong sense that more needs to be done to accommodate younger and older people within the county.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘More opportunities for younger children particularly those at the pre-teen and teen stage who have nowhere to socialise in a safe and responsible manner. This is where we can lose our children (i.e. they can go down the wrong path) at this vulnerable age as there is nothing for them in our communities.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Youth, community centre, services for the elderly.’</i></p>
Inclusion – New Communities	11	<p>Respondents felt more needed to be done to accommodate new communities.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘New community introduction should be better. There are communities of refugees etc., in the town and how they have been introduced is causing great issue amongst the community. Do better.’</i></p>
Inclusion – Other Categories	10	<p>Respondents also felt that more should be done to accommodate the needs of people within other protected categories.</p> <p>Representative comments</p> <p><i>‘I would for there to greater emphasis on disabled persons and those with limited abilities and more resources and utilisation for those people or persons who need that societal insertion and infrastructural development.’</i></p>

4. Community Workshop Outputs

Workshop Overview

4.1 The structure of the community workshops was refined during the programme. However, the main substantive part of the workshops – its two core exercises – remained constant throughout the programme. These were:

(i) SWOT Analysis

During this exercise, we presented an overview of the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis produced by Turley's Economics Team. We then asked participants to identify which aspects of this analysis they agreed or disagreed with, and to identify any strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, or threats that they thought were missing from the analysis.

(ii) Local Project Identification Exercise

In this exercise, participants were asked to identify projects requiring funding in their local area, ranking them into three categories: 'Must Have', 'Would Love to Have' and 'Icing on the Cake'.

4.2 In total, we ran seven community workshops, including a virtual workshop held on the Zoom platform. These were:

- 16/05/23 – Rathdowney
- 17/05/23 – Mountmellick
- 18/05/23 – Abbeyleix
- 20/05/23 – Virtual Event, held over Zoom
- 23/05/23 – Portarlinton
- 24/05/23 – Portlaoise
- 25/05/23 – Ballylinan

4.3 In total, 113 local people attended the community workshops. The numbers at each workshop were:

- Rathdowney: 18
- Mountmellick: 23
- Abbeyleix: 14
- Online: 8
- Portarlinton: 14
- Portlaoise: 23
- Ballylinan: 13

SWOT Analysis

4.4 As the SWOT analysis was developed based on county-wide statistics, we have amalgamated the responses we received from each of the workshops into the table below. The name of the town(s) whose workshop produced the comment is included in brackets after the summary of each comment.

Table 4.1: Summary of Workshop Output: Commentary on SWOT Analysis

Comments on SWOT	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants agreed that Laois has a good strategic road network but questioned whether this meant that the county as a whole had good connectivity. There was a consensus that while it was easy to get into, out of, or pass through the county, the transport links within the county were insufficient. [All groups] • Participants disagreed with Laois being used as a 'pass through' county being considered a strength. [Abbeyleix] • Participants questioned whether the population was really 'naturally growing', as highlighted in the SWOT. There was also a general consensus that services (including community facilities, wastewater services etc) haven't kept pace with population growth. [Portarlinton, Portlaoise, Ballylinan] • Participants agreed that broadband was good, but suggested that the lack of available dark fibre connections could be a limiting factor for some industries. [Portarlinton] • Participants agreed that the innovation hubs were a strength but cautioned that they were now full and couldn't effectively support new start-ups. [Portarlinton]
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some participants disagreed with the statement that there are only '3 businesses who employ more than 250 employees' and queried whether this considered state-owned enterprises e.g. the prison, hospitals etc. [Abbeyleix] • However, this lack of larger employers was agreed with by participants in other workshops, leading to an overreliance on the public sector. [Portlaoise, Rathdowney]

Opportunities

- Participants questioned whether Portlaoise could really be considered a ‘low carbon town’, when its transport infrastructure was so car dependent. [Portarlington]
- Laois’ strong scenery and natural heritage was felt to present a significant tourism opportunity – though participants cautioned that there was potential for environmental damage if this was not done well. [Portarlington]
- Participants felt that rewilding and greening projects had the potential to bring economic and environmental benefits to the county. [Portlaoise]

Threats

- Participants agreed that representation of larger employers was low [Mountmellick, Portlaoise]
- Participants agreed that IDA investment was low [Mountmellick, Portlaoise]

4.5 Additionally, the responses we received from participants around items that were missing from our SWOT Analysis are provided below. Again, the name of the town(s) whose workshop produced the comment is included in brackets after the summary of each comment.



Table 4.2: Summary of Workshop Output: Considerations felt to be missing from SWOT analysis

Missing SWOT Considerations	
<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some participants felt that there was insufficient emphasis on the potential of the county’s natural heritage for tourism, economic development and promoting good health. [Abbeyleix, Portarlington, Mountmellick, Virtual, Ballylinan] • Participants were surprised that the SWOT analysis didn’t discuss the diversity of Laois’ population. [Abbeyleix] • It was suggested that the county’s Youth Network was a strength. [Portlaoise] • It was suggested that the digital innovation hubs could be developed still further to become gateways to third level education. [Portlaoise] • Participants agreed that digital connectivity was very strong in the county. [Ballylinan] • Participants said that volunteering rates were high, especially among new communities. [Portlaoise] • This assertion was directly contradicted, however, by the participants in another workshop, who said they found it very difficult to get volunteers. [Ballylinan] • The quality of Laois’ farmland was highlighted as a fundamental strength of the county – “it’s the best land in the country!” [Ballylinan] • Laois’ community spirit was heralded as a strength. [Rathdowney, Mountmellick] • The events economy in Laois was considered a strength. [Virtual, Ballylinan] 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants highlighted poor access to childcare as a weakness of the county. [Abbeyleix] • This was contradicted by respondents in Rathdowney, who felt that the county offered excellent access to childcare. • Poor signage was highlighted as a weakness, undermining the county’s strengths. Poor awareness of and signage to the Slieve Bloom mountains was highlighted as an example of this. [Abbeyleix]



Weaknesses (continued)

- A lack of support for proactive community groups was highlighted as a challenge, with participants calling for a designated person within the council to work with community groups to help them identify and apply for support. [Abbeyleix]
- Participants felt that the county's youth clubs were too expensive, so not easily accessible for many people. [Portarlington]
- It was felt that there weren't enough community hubs in some areas of the county and that those that did exist were under-utilised [Portarlington]
- Lack of third level education in the county was raised as a weakness. Participants said that it was very difficult to live at home and commute to education, which could lead to a drain on young people from the county. [Portarlington, Rathdowney, Ballylinan]
- The county's public and active travel routes were felt to be poor by participants. [Portarlington, Rathdowney]
- Lack of facilities for 13-18 year-olds, particularly girls, was cited. It was accepted that GAA was the exception to this. [Portarlington, Ballylinan]
- A lack of hotels and other places to stay was highlighted as a weakness of the county, as it would make it harder to exploit the county's tourism potential. [Ballylinan]

Opportunities

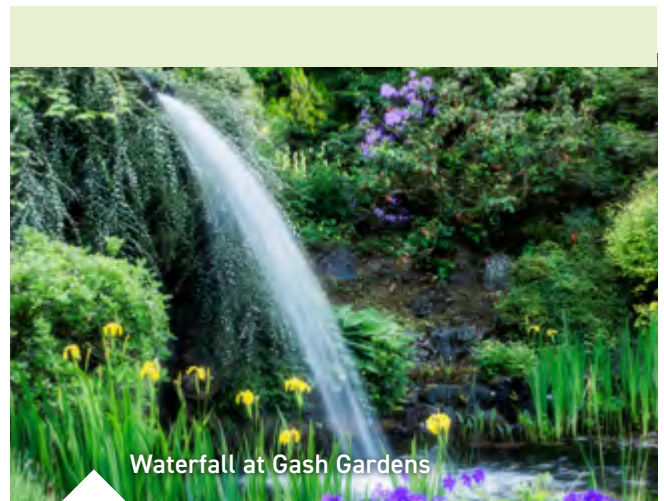
- Participants felt that the 'Opportunities' box should say more about tourism, particularly sustainable and eco-tourism, or suitable areas to create greenways and blueways. [Abbeyleix]
- The River Barrow was highlighted as an opportunity to create a greenway/blueway. [Ballylinan]
- Remote working was seen as an opportunity for the county. Its location and good broadband meant it would work well for people seeking to live somewhere more peaceful and closer to nature than the big city, while still being able to easily commute to the office should it be necessary. [Portarlington]
- Participants suggested that Laois could capture passing trade by putting in more EV Charging points – as uptake of EVs increases, people on long journeys through the country might stop in Laois if suitable charging were available, bringing in passing trade. [Portlaoise]

Threats

- Participants felt there was a risk of talent drain from the county to Dublin, Cork, etc., due to the lack of a third level education provider within the county. [Portarlington, Ballylinan]
- The economic drain of having facilities like Kildare Village just across the county line was raised as a threat.[Portarlington]
- Participants suggested that Laois was becoming a "drive-thru county", due to the excellent strategic roads and lack of well-known local attractions. [Rathdowney]
- Flood defences were felt to be poor, leading to risks to businesses and property [Mountmellick]
- Supporting the haulage and distribution industries was seen as a challenge in the context of ever-tighter climate and emissions standards. [Virtual]

Local Project Identification Exercise

- 4.6 Our second workshop exercise, called 'The Dating Game' focused on specific interventions that could be developed to improve the social, cultural, and economic life in the area. We have produced the following tables, summarising the responses we received as a result of running this exercise in each town.



Waterfall at Gash Gardens

5. Local Project Identification Exercise “The Dating Game”

Rathdowney Workshop

Must-Haves

- Better support for rural tourism
- Participants felt that public realm work on the town square would help make the town a more attractive place, supporting social and economic growth.
- Participants felt that a new community centre was needed in Rathdowney.
- Participants felt that the arts and cultural sector in Rathdowney needed support. They suggested investment in facilities for artists to work, with associated activities for members of the public to get involved with.
- Public Transport links were felt to be poor – improved links to nearby villages/towns were seen as essential.

Would Love to Have

- An opportunity exists to develop a new museum at Donaghmore Mill, focusing on the region's industrial heritage.
- More electric car charging infrastructure was felt to be needed in Rathdowney to support the rise of electric cars.
- A community-owned energy project was seen as a potential positive, offering the potential of cheaper green energy.
- More ATMs in the town would help local small businesses, increasing the number of cash transactions (cheaper) and making it easier for people to shop locally.

Icing on the Cake

- Local provision of post-leaving certificate courses could help to upskill the local workforce and address talent drain.
- The local bogs and rivers were seen as an excellent opportunity to create blueways and greenways, as well as potentially an eco-park.

Mountmellick Workshop

Must-Haves

- An EU Funding Officer within the council, helping towns like Mountmellick apply for and secure EU funding was seen as essential.
- New walkways and greenways around the town were called for, helping to facilitate active travel, and acting as an attraction for visitors. Participants also called for more cycle lanes to be introduced throughout the town, again to facilitate active travel.
- Support for new communities in accessing jobs was called for.
- The money and support to create a new town plan with community buy-in was sought.

Would Love to Have

- Support incentives to bring a new factory to the town would be welcome.
- A third level institution in the county, possibly with a focus on heritage and textiles was called for. In addition, any further support that could be provided to help people upskill would be welcomed.

Icing on the Cake

- Link Road.
- Parking/traffic plan .
- Walk and cycleways.
- More bus stops and shelters – better signposting.
- New job opportunities for young people.
- Community Forum.
- Repurposing derelict buildings.
- Ring Road.
- New factory.
- Better car parking facilities.
- Additional nursing homes.



Abbeyleix Workshop

Must-Haves	Would Love to Have	Icing on the Cake
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greenways • Sustainability Plan – funding and personnel to help deliver this • A community energy plan • More emphasis on tourism • Traffic management plan to control lorries passing through Abbeyleix • A wayfinding plan to get visitors to the Bog Walk attraction to visit the surrounding towns and stay • Position Abbeyleix as a destination in its totality – highlight ALL experience • Playground • Community bikes, dedicated cycle lanes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Position Abbeyleix as a food destination . • Greenway to connect to neighbouring counties. • An electric vehicle hub where people can co-share electric cars and benefit from charging points. Like a cooperative. • Blueway and associated uses • Professional sports centre for basketball. • E-bikes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centre of Excellence for sports which is all-season and multi-purpose. • Every car in Laois should have access to the electric vehicle hubs and allow for drop-offs. • Running track. • Campsite in the county • Green corridor across all the natural destinations. • Greenway to connect to neighbouring counties – connections with the river the mountains.

Virtual Workshop

Must-Haves	Would Love to Have	Icing on the Cake
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong tourism and amenity offering. • Supporting the Barrow and Emo Court. • Sustainable Green Corridors • Building up towns and villages by boosting economic investment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good use of advertising opportunities at events such as Electric Picnic. • Relaxing business rates • CPO derelict buildings for community use. • Community owned shops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for other sports beyond just GAA. • More afterschool activities in local areas. • Community gardens and sustainable local produce.

Portarlington Workshop

Must-Haves	Would Love to Have	Icing on the Cake
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants wanted money to regenerate the vacant Savoy Cinema – though no suggestions were posed as to what could replace it. • Cycle paths along and bridges across the River Barrow. • Bus services and public transport are needed to better connect. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Development. • CoderDojo – providing Level 7 qualifications. • Bypass for the town. • Community centre and creche (for Borris-in-Ossory – from two individuals from the other side of the county who attended the Portarlington workshop). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free transport. • Public rights of way. • Pedestrianised town centre, with dedicated space and services to support artisanal/pop-up markets. • Tourism destination in Slieve Bloom mountains, allowing vista across county at dawn and dusk.



Portlaoise Workshop

Must-Haves

- Public and active travel.
- Must be affordable.
- Must be easier to use network for both younger and older people
- Bus Depot/Travel Hub needed.
- Joined-up links.
- Bike hire.
- Accessible services.
- Joint investment (public/private) in youth/community space.
- Capitalise on arts and culture.
- More youth facilities, not centred on sport.
- Support for young people to find employment.
- Affordable tourism.
- Community garden.
- Greening project for each village/town.
- Community hubs.
- Integrate new communities.
- Provide support to community groups to get projects 'shovel ready'.

Would Love to Have

- Limit hours for HGVs – safe travel time.
- Funding for feasibility studies for businesses – supporting start-ups.
- Capacity building for community groups.
- Digital hubs linked to colleges and providing online courses.
- Major tourism attraction.
- Investment in Laois' strengths, eg ploughing championships, Electric Picnic, to maximise tourism potential.
- Housing co-operative.

Icing on the Cake

- Develop ambassadors/ influencers for Laois.
- Employment schemes for young people.
- Develop Laois' cultural and environmental heritage.
- Easier ways to apply for LEADER Funding.
- Sculpture Park in Portlaoise.
- Events facilities – conferences, sport, concerts, etc.
- Better use of school facilities – e.g. shared facilities programme.
- Address needs of young and older people.

Ballylinan Workshop

Must-Haves

- Feasibility study and community plan for Ballylinan.
- Partnership across town/county borders.
- Use existing buildings – eg for a mother and baby group.
- Every village should have a playground.
- Astro turf pitch and walking track.
- Community facility upgrade.
- Community café in old school.

Would Love to Have

- Skate park.
- 'Tartan Track' running track.
- Secondary school.
- Groups for people of all ages
- Infrastructure for walking (including signposting and marketing).
- Facility for older people to socialise (pub, dance hall, etc).
- Resurface and build a roof over play area.

Icing on the Cake

- Access to affordable event/ activity insurance.
- Festivals, eg country music. County Fayre.
- Campsite with a variety of associated facilities, including outdoor recreation activities.
- Accommodation (eco-hotel?).
- Greenway/blueway on River Barrow.
- Education re river quality – enhancing use of rivers as outdoor and educational resource

6. Conclusions

- 6.1** The Laois County Council and Turley survey provided great insight into the priorities of the people of Laois in terms of economic and community development. Key observations derived from the survey include:
- Laois is viewed as having a number of inherent strengths and opportunities, including:
 - Strong connectivity and a central location.
 - Potential for natural/outdoor tourism and business.
 - A strong community spirit
 - Strong demographic fundamentals – a young and well-educated workforce
 - Opportunity for heritage and arts/cultural tourism.
 - Good agricultural fundamentals.
 - Laois is also seen as facing a number of challenges, including:
 - The quality of local roads and the need for greater traffic management
 - A lack of high-quality public or communal spaces.
 - Dereliction in towns.
 - Poor public transport links.
 - Lack of available housing.
 - Need for more support for active travel.
 - Need for more support to stimulate jobs and economic development.
 - The survey suggests that a large section of the population feel that sustainable development, climate change capacity building and climate change mitigation require greater support in Laois.
 - Citizens are keen to see more done to encourage major systemic changes, modal shift (particularly by strengthening active and public travel provision) and the energy transition (through the creation of new charging points and domestic and commercial grants for solar panels, air-to-water systems, and similar measures).
 - When asked for their aspirations for the Local Economic and Community Plan, respondents called for an investment in infrastructure (including active/green travel infrastructure and community infrastructure), business support (such as third level outreach courses), funding for community groups and work to promote social inclusion for those who might otherwise be vulnerable to social exclusion.
 - Respondents generally disagreed that the green economy, agricultural diversification, rural tourism and recreation, enterprise development, rural food production and social, community and co-operative enterprises were well supported.
 - Awareness of council-led economic development initiatives over the past five years was relatively low. However, some respondents were able to cite specific business supports or developments, as well as festivals and cultural events.
 - When asked what projects to promote economic development, respondents were keen to see investment in business development or attracting outside investment (including small business support and intervention by the IDA), natural/outdoor tourism and business (such as facilities to support tourism to the Slieve Bloom Mountains), arts and cultural tourism, hospitality, and agriculture.
 - Respondents generally felt that more support was needed to support social inclusion through infrastructure, accessible services, optimising digital connectivity and youth provision.
 - There was a relatively low level of awareness of projects to improve social inclusion and infrastructure. However, some respondents were aware of a range of local initiatives for social inclusion, such as the Brigidine Convent and Rathdowney Errill Activity Hub and activities undertaken by Bloom HQ. There was also some awareness of Council-led initiatives such as the Age Friendly Strategy.



- When asked what they would like to see to support social inclusion, respondents felt that community and cultural infrastructure was needed, investment in community halls across the county. Similarly, it was suggested that transport changes, such as increased public transport and restrictions on heavy goods vehicles could make some groups feel more comfortable moving around the county. There was also a sense that more needed to be done to support potentially vulnerable groups, in particular additional youth supports and activity to help new communities integrate into the county.

6.2 In addition, we received a range of specific suggestions for local interventions from attendees at each of our workshops. Many of these were specifically local interventions, however, several themes that emerged in our survey results were also evident in the results of our workshops. These included:

- Better support for rural tourism
- Investment in expanded public and active transport infrastructure
- Need for investment in skills training within the county
- Support for both agriculture and hospitality/ food tourism
- Need for support for new communities to integrate into Laois society
- Need for more support/activities for young people, older people, and other potentially vulnerable groups.



An Artistic Impression from the Public Consultation Workshops

by Oisín McGann

THE BIG PICTURE



RATHFRONTOUR

OISÍN MCGANN 2023



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FINDINGS FROM THE SNAPSHOT



RATHFRONTOUR

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MOUNTMELICK

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An Artistic Impression from the Public Consultation Workshops

by Oisín McGann

THE BIG PICTURE



MEATHBELLECK

Oisín McGann 2023

THE BIG PICTURE



ABBEYLEIX

Oisín McGann 2023

THE BIG PICTURE



PORTARLINGTON

Oisín McGann 2023



PORTARLINGTON

Oisín McGann 2023

- MARKETING OF THE QUARTY
- MORE HOTELS
- LESS EMPHASIS ON WELL SERVED AREAS
- PUBLIC TRANSPORT
- CYCLING ROUTES
- BETTER LOCAL ROADS
- DARK FIBRE CONNECTIONS
- STOP USING US TO PLUG GAPS IN CONSTITUENCIES
- BETTER WATER SUPPLY
- BETTER FACILITIES AROUND THE BOGS
- BETTER AND CHEAPER COMMUNITY CENTRES
- LESS EMPHASIS ON JIF
- RENOVATE ECONOMIC DECLINE
- ARTS CENTRE
- REGENERATE OLD BUILDING
- SAFE ROUTES TO RIDGET AND FOOTBALL PITCH
- MAIN STREET PESTICIDES

An Artistic Impression from the Public Consultation Workshops

by Oisín McGann





Móráiteanna Spéise Top Attractions

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
|  1 Emo Court and Parklands |  4 Donaghmore Workhouse |  7 Mountmellick Embroidery and Heritage Museum |
|  2 Timahoe Round Tower |  5 Aghaboe Abbey |  8 Killeslin Church |
|  3 Rock of Dunamase |  6 Old Fort, Portlaoise |  9 Heywood Gardens and Estate |



LOCHANNA / IASCAIREACHT LAKES / FISHING

- 10 Ballinakil Gill Pond
- 11 Rathleira Lake
- 12 Derrynonce Lake
- 13 Emo Lake
- 14 Grand Canal Vicoistown
- 15 Little Bog Lake, The Heath
- 16 Grantstown Lake
- 17 Ballagmore Lake
- 18 Brittas Lake
- 19 Laois Angling Centre
- 20 River Barrow
- 21 Kellyville Lake
- 22 Stradbally Lake

GAIRDÍNÍ GARDENS

- 23 Castle Durrus
- 24 Danmore Country School
- 25 Heywood Gardens and Estate
- 26 Fruitlows Garden
- 27 Dove Sensory Gardens
- 28 Charis Garden
- 29 Bellinshubert Garden
- 30 Selous Lodge
- 31 Emo Court and Parklands
- 32 Gash Gardens
- 33 Cloonakill Garden
- 34 Gortalee Garden

GALF GOLF

- 35 Abbeyleix Golf Club
- 36 Mountrath Golf Club
- 37 Portlaoise Par 3 Golf Club
- 38 Portarlinton Golf Club
- 39 Rathdowney Golf Club
- 40 The Heath Golf Club
- 41 The Heritage Golf Resort

CONAIRÍ - Siúlóidí Lúibe

- 42 Abbeyleix Bog Walk, Collins Bog Loop and Iglamak Loop
- 43 Durrus Leafy Loops and Dunmore Loop
- 44 Cullahill Simianes and Healthy Way Loop Walks
- 45 Oughaval Woods
- 46 Brittas Forest Loop
- 47 Maricknow, Boodah Lodge, Riverside walk

TRAILS - Looped Walks

- 48 Slieve Bloom Way
- 49 Glenbarrow Eco Walk, Old Mill Loop, Waterfall Loop
- 50 Capend Walks
- 51 Ricketts Rock Clonalee Walk
- 52 Derrynonce Walk
- 53 Grantstown Walk
- 54 Heywood Walks: Garden, Looped and Historic

CONAIRÍ - Rothaiocht TRAILS - Cycling

- 55 Bounreagh MTB Trail
- 56 Kinsley MTB Trail
- 57 South Laois Cycle Trail

Is léarscáil tháscach í seo de na nithe is feidir a dhéanamh i Laois ach teigh chuig www.laoistourism.ie chun liosta iomlán de na himeachtaí, lóistín, skúlóidí agus nithe is feidir a dhéanamh a fháil.

This is an indicative map of things to do in Laois, but please visit www.laoistourism.ie for a full list of events, accommodation, walks and things to do.

www.laoistourism.ie

