

Laois County Council
Draft Climate Change Adaptation
Strategy
Public Consultation – Chief Executive’s Report



Environment Department
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Laois County Council has prepared a draft Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024. This local authority climate change adaptation strategy forms part of Ireland's national strategy for climate adaptation as set out in the National Adaptation Framework (NAF) which was produced under the provisions of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015. It is tasked with mainstreaming climate change adaptation over time into all functions, operations and services of the local authority.

The draft strategy includes a range of actions across six thematic areas that are developed further as high level goals as shown in Table 1.1. These goals identify the desired outcomes anticipated through the effective implementation of the climate change adaptation strategy. They are supported by specific objectives and adaptation actions to achieve their desired outcomes.

Table 1.1 Thematic Areas & High Level Goals

Theme 1: Local Adaptation Governance and Business Operations Goal: Climate Change adaptation considerations are mainstreamed and integrated successfully into all functions and activities of the local authority ensuring operational protocols, procedures and policies implement an appropriate response in addressing the diversity of impacts associated with climate change
Theme 2: Infrastructure and Built Environment Goal: Increased capacity for climate resilient structural infrastructure is centred around the effective management of climate risk, informed investment decisions and positive contribution towards a low carbon society
Theme 3: Land use and development Goal: Sustainable policies and measures are devised and implemented to influence positive behavioural changes, support climate adaptation actions and endorse approaches for successful transition to low carbon and climate resilient society.
Theme 4: Drainage and Flood Management Goal: Great understanding of risks and consequences of flooding and successful management of a co-ordinated approach to drainage and flooding
Theme 5: Natural Resources and Cultural Infrastructure Goal: Fostering and implementing meaningful approaches to protecting natural and key cultural assets through an appreciation for the adaptive capacity of the natural environment to absorb the impacts of climate change.
Theme 6: Community Health and Wellbeing Goal: Empowered and cohesive communities with strong understanding of climate risks, increased resilience to impacts of climate change with capacity to champion climate action at local level

1.1 Purpose of the Report

Laois County Council at its Council meeting on the 13th May 2019 noted the draft Climate Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024.

As part of the process of making this strategy a period of public consultation was undertaken from June 25th 2019 to 26th July 2019 inclusive. Submissions and or observations were accepted up to 4.00 pm on the 31st July 2019. A total of 9 no. submissions were received within the timeframe specified. This report is the report of the Chief Executive on the submissions received during that consultation period.

This report on submissions received summarises and details the outcome of the public consultation stage and contains the following:

- List of persons or bodies who made submissions or observations on the Draft Climate Change Adaptation Strategy
- Summary of all issues raised by the persons or bodies in the submissions or observations; and
- Consideration, response and recommendation to the issues raised.

During the progress of the report the Government of Ireland published its Climate Action Plan 2019 – To tackle Climate Breakdown. Chapter 4 of this report examines this new report in the context of the draft Strategy.

1.2 Background

Ireland's first statutory National Adaptation Framework (NAF) was published in January 2018. This sets out the national strategy to reduce the vulnerability of the country to the negative effects of climate change and to avail of positive impacts. The NAF was developed under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015. The NAF outlines a whole of government and society approach to climate adaptation in Ireland. Under the NAF, a number of Government Departments are required to prepare sectoral adaptation plans in relation to a priority area for which they are responsible. Each Local Authority is also required to make a local adaptation strategy with an expected timeframe for completion by 30 September 2019.

As the level of government closest to local communities and enterprise and as first responders in many emergencies, it is acknowledged that local authorities are uniquely placed to effect real positive change with respect to delivery of the national transition objective to a low carbon and a climate resilience future.

The local authority adaptation strategy takes on the role as the primary instrument at local level to:

- (i) ensure a proper comprehension of the key risks and vulnerabilities of climate change

- (ii) bring forward the implementation of climate resilient actions in a planned and proactive manner
- (iii) ensure that climate adaptation considerations are mainstreamed into all plans and policies and integrated into all operations and functions of the local authority.

1.3 Recommendation of Chief Executive Report

The submissions received during the timeframe specified for public consultation are examined and considered in this report in the context of their relevance and added value to the adaptation strategy.

Accordingly amendments have been made to the provisions of the strategy in the form of new additional information and actions, supplementation or clarification of text, deletion of text and general grammatical and formatting enhancements.

The revised draft strategy has undergone assessment in accordance with the provisions of SEA regulations and the provisions of the Habitats Directive.

The final draft strategy, SEA Screening Report and Appropriate Screening Reports will be presented to council for consideration for approval by the elected members.

The timeframe for completion of the strategy and approval by the members is 30th September 2019.

2 PUBLIC CONSULTATION

2.1 Public Consultation

Public consultation on the draft Climate Change Adaptation Strategy was carried out over a four week period from 25th June 2019 to 26th July 2019.

The following documents were subject to the public consultation process:

- The *Climate Change Adaptation Strategy* as guided by the Local Authority Adaptation Strategy Development Guidelines (Dec, 2018),
- The *Strategic Environmental Assessment* (SEA) Screening Report undertaken in accordance with the provisions of the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 435 of 2004 as amended by S.I. 200 of 2011).
- The *Appropriate Assessment* screening report undertaken in accordance with the requirements of Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive (directive 92/43/EEC).

Submissions and/or observations were accepted up to 4.00 pm on the 31st July 2019. A total of 9 no. Submissions were received within the timeframe specified.

2.2 Details of the Public Consultation Process

Methodology used for consultation with key stakeholders included the following:

- Newspaper Notice in two local circulating newspapers.
- Notice, information and link on Laois Website and on Laois Social Media Platforms.
- Notice, information and link sent to Laois PPN to circulate to various groups across the county to reach local level stakeholders.
- Circulation to Laois Members, Staff and retired employees.
- Engagement with neighbouring Local Authorities, links to copies of the documentation listed in 2.1 together with invitations to comment were sent to:
 - Carlow County Council
 - Kildare County Council
 - Kilkenny County Council
 - Offaly County Council
 - Tipperary County Council
- Uploaded to Government Consultations on 25th June 2019. Sectoral and High level agencies as per Table 2.1 were advised by CARO that access to documentation for local authority adaptation strategies was available on the government consultations portal, inviting them to review the local authority adaptation strategies and to make submissions.

Table 2.1 Sectoral and High Level Stakeholders Identified.

Sectoral Stakeholders	High Level Stakeholders
Seafood -Department of Agriculture, Food & Marine	Eastern-Midlands; Connacht-Ulster and Southern Regional Waste Management Offices
Agriculture - Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Northern & Western; Eastern & Midlands and Southern Regional Assemblies
Forestry - Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Enterprise offices
Biodiversity - Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	An Taisce
Built and Archaeological Heritage – Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	Arts Council
Transport infrastructure – Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport	Birdwatch Ireland
Electricity and Gas Networks – Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment	Chambers Ireland
Communications networks – Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment	Climate Ireland
Flood Risk Management – Office of Public Works	Commission for Reg of Utilities
Water Quality – Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government	Enterprise Ireland
Water Services Infrastructure – Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government	EPA
Health – Department of Health	Failte Ireland
	Heritage Council
	Inland Fisheries
	Irish Rail
	Irish water
	LA Waters LAWPRO
	National Transport Authority
	NPWS
	OPW
	SEAI
	Teagasc
	Tourism Ireland
	Transport Infrastructure Ireland
	Waterways Ireland

2.3 Submissions

The table below identifies the submissions to the strategy. The submissions will be examined in further detail in section 3 of this report.

No.	Received	FROM	Position
1	11 th July 2019	Irish Water	Chief Technical Officer
2	26 th July 2019	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Higher Executive Officer, Climate Change & Bio-Energy Policy
3	26 th July 2019	Gas Networks Ireland	Commercial Analyst
4	29 th July 2019	OPW	Assistant Chief Engineer, Head of Flood Relief and
5	29 th July 2019	An Taisce	Natural Environmental Officer
6	29 th July 2019	Laois Farm Forestry Group	Secretary
7	30 th July 2019	Failte Ireland	Environment and Planning Manager
8	31 st July 2019	Abbeyleix Tidy Towns	
9	31 st July 2019	Nore Vision for Laois Partnership	Researcher

3 CONSIDERATION OF SUBMISSIONS

3.1 Sub No. 1: Irish Water

Submission No. 1 was received from Irish Water on 11th July 2019.

Irish Water welcomes the publication of Laois County Council's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and look forward to collaborating with the council in implementing the measures set out in the recently published Government Climate Action Plan and in the Draft Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan: Water Quality and Water Services Infrastructure.

Response to issues raised in submission:

I note and welcome the submission from Irish Water. I note also that Irish Water contributed to the sectoral adaptation plan for Water Quality and Water Services Infrastructure which is currently at draft stage. Close co-operation between the sectors and local authorities is required to ensure a coherent approach to building resilience. I acknowledge the need to strengthen future collaboration with Irish Water.

Recommendation:

Submission noted and no further action required.

3.2 Sub No. 2: Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Submission No. 2 was received on the 26th July from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine (DAFM) noted that the Laois strategy was a very informative report but felt it did not inform the reader of the complex issues the county faces from an agricultural/forestry/seafood viewpoint. The submission highlights farmers as the biggest landowners within the county and notes that many adaptation/mitigation measures for climate change will be influenced and managed by this group.

In particular the Department wanted to highlight the climate change related impacts on the inland aquaculture industry which depends on the freshwater resource and the impact on seafood related infrastructure such as coastal harbours and piers.

General observations were made on issues that are recognised as being of cross-sectoral concern for both DAFM and the local authority. These included wildfires, slurry storage and land spreading issues, soil quality and non-native invasive species.

DAFM noted that the focus of the report is broader than the focus in DAFM's priority impacts and consequences but acknowledged that this was understandable given the differing nature and focus of the work of the respective organisations. It felt that while the main crossover areas of water supply/contamination which are of critical concern to both organisations are dealt with there is no specific mention of agriculture/forestry/aquatics. The submission suggests that agriculture be mentioned more frequently and include a few agriculture examples to better explain the potential impacts of issues affecting agriculture on Laois Co. Co. (e.g. mention agriculture adaptation measures but as these will not always work that is when Laois Co. Co. adaptation measures kick in).

Response to issues raised in submission:

The submission from the DAFM is noted and welcomed. I note the DAFM is the lead State body for the coordination and implementation of Government policy on the management of Agriculture, Food and Marine in Ireland. The DAFM is identified as the lead department for undertaking the sectoral adaptation plan for Agriculture, Forestry and Seafood in the National Adaptation Framework, 2018.

Within the context of the NAF Laois County Council recognize the role and responsibilities of all 12 identified sectors as well as local authorities in undertaking Adaptation Plans/Strategies, the challenges and opportunities that may arise and the importance of working collaboratively as the process of adaptation planning becomes more embedded.

Like the Agricultural Sector and other identified sectors in the NAF, adaptation is now a fundamental consideration for local authorities. The Laois Climate Change Adaptation Strategy has been developed specifically to focus on the remit and operational control of Council functions and activities. Insofar as the request by the DAFM to examine complex issues facing agricultural/forestry activities; It is considered that these are best explored and dealt with in the Sectoral Adaptation Plan for Agriculture, Forestry and Seafood.

Recommendation:

Submission noted. Laois County Council will support and interact with the DAFM in its efforts to deliver actions of the Agriculture, Forestry and Seafood Adaptation Plan where in particular the Council is identified as having a particular role and through statutory obligations where it forms an integral aspect of the functions of the Council.

3.3 Sub. No. 3 Gas Networks Ireland (Part of Ervia group)

Submission No. 3 was received from Gas Networks Ireland (Part of the Ervia group).

Gas Networks Ireland (GNI) sought to highlight some of the carbon reduction initiatives that GNI itself is involved in. These include the development of Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) infrastructure for gas in transport and renewable gas injection infrastructure.

GNI has considered the potential impact of climate change on the gas network and has worked with the Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment to develop the Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the Electricity and Gas Network Sector.

GNI asks that the Council considers the role that renewable gas and CNG in transport can play in reducing carbon emissions in the region and their contribution to providing economic benefits to the local economy. GNI has asked that Laois County Council support anaerobic digestions plants, CNG refueling stations and renewable gas injection points.

Response to issues raised in submission:

The submission from Gas Networks Ireland (Part of Ervia group) is noted and welcomed. Gas Networks Ireland is part of the Ervia Group, which is the commercial semi-state multi-utility company responsible for the delivery of Ireland's national gas and water infrastructure and services.

Through their regulated business, Gas Networks Ireland, they build and operate the gas network in Ireland. They are responsible for the operation and maintenance of Ireland's water and wastewater assets through their other regulated business Irish Water. They also provide dark fiber broadband infrastructure through their business Aurora Telecom.

I note that the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment is developing a Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the Electricity and Gas Networks as part of the National Adaptation Framework (one of twelve sectoral plans). The objective of this Plan is to identify options that will help to build resilience against the impacts of climate change, and it focuses on assessing vulnerability to key climate variables and the likely impacts of such on our electricity and gas networks, based on our current understanding of climate change and its consequences for Ireland.

This submission seeks to establish the support of Laois County Council for new technologies including anaerobic digestions plants, CNG refueling stations and renewable gas injection points. Laois County Council recognises the range of new and developing technologies and has recently tendered for consultants to develop a new Local Authority Renewable Energy Strategy which will set out proposals for the generation of green energy in Laois. The proposed renewable energy strategy for the county will be incorporated into the County Development Plan.

Recommendation:

Submission noted and I am satisfied that the promotion of infrastructure or new technologies for renewable gas are best dealt with in the County Development Plan as part of the Local Authority Renewable energy Strategy.

3.4 Sub. No. 4 Office of Public Works

Submission No. 4 was received from the Office of Public Works (OPW) on the 29th July 2019.

The OPW welcomed the publication of the Draft Climate Change Adaptation Strategy for County Laois, the identification of flooding and extreme precipitation events as key climate impacts for the County, the recognition that climate change may increase flood risk in the future and that relevant actions should consider such future risk.

The submission recognised that Laois County Council has been working with the OPW over recent years on the National Catchment-based Flood Risk Assessment and management (CFRAM) Programme, through which extensive detailed flood maps have been produced. The flood maps having been produced for potential future scenarios, taking into account the potential impacts of climate change, as well as for current scenarios.

The submission noted that the towns of Mountmellick and Portarlinton are identified as tranche 1 flood protection schemes and Clonaslee is identified as tranche 2 scheme, all of which will consider climate change adaptation. OPW would welcome their promotion and support within the Strategy.

OPW also submitted a general local authority climate adaptation strategies flood related issues for consideration document which included:

- Current Climate Impacts (Flood Risk)
 - Past Floods (Occurrence and Impacts)
 - Predictive Assessments (Extents and Risks/Impacts)
- Potential Future Climate Impacts (Flood Risk)
- Relevant Adaptation Issues
 - Flood Relief Schemes
 - SUDS and Urban Storm Water Drainage
 - Natural Water Retention Measures
 - Land Use Planning
 - Infrastructure

- Emergency Response Planning

Response to the submission:

I welcome the submission from the OPW. I note the OPW is the lead State body for the coordination and implementation of Government policy on the management of flood risk in Ireland and is also the national authority for the implementation of the EU Directive on the Assessment and Management of Flood Risks [2007/60/EC]. I note the draft Flood Risk Management Climate Change Adaptation Plan has been prepared under the remit of the National Climate Change Adaptation Framework. It sets out the approach to climate change adaptation of the Office of Public Works (OPW), the lead agency for flood risk management in Ireland, based on a current understanding of the potential consequences of climate change for flooding and flood risk in Ireland, and the adaptation actions to be implemented by the OPW and other responsible Departments and agencies in the flood risk management sector.

Close co-operation between the sectors and local authorities is required to ensure a coherent approach to building resilience.

On 26th June 2018 Laois County Council approved the following Flood Risk Management Plans for County Laois:

- UoM 14 Barrow
- UoM 15 Nore
- UoM 25/26 Shannon Upper & Lower

The Laois County Capital Projects Office are currently in the process of progressing the development of Flood Relief Schemes for the towns of Mountmellick, Portarlinton & Clonaslee village (Small Project funding) with a scheme also identified for Rathdowney to be progressed under a further future tranche.

During the project level development of these schemes climate change adaption will be considered. Scheme Climate Change Adaptation Plans (SCCAP) will be prepared setting out how it may be necessary to adapt and amend the individual Schemes to maintain the defined Standard of Protection as the potential impacts of climate change may be realised over time.

Recommendation

The draft strategy would benefit from the inclusion of an additional action in Goal 4, “*G4 Drainage and Flood Management*” in support of the towns of Mountmellick, Portarlinton and Clonaslee with regards to possible future flood protection schemes. The Lead and Partner for this action is proposed as the Project Office and the OPW.

New Proposed Action No. 7 under Goal 4

“To support the development of flood protection schemes which consider climate change adaptation in the towns of Mountmellick, Portarlinton and Clonaslee.”

I am satisfied that the Laois climate adaptation strategy has considered the issues concerning flooding and flood risk management as outlined in the general document submitted for consideration by the OPW. And that these considerations are comprehensively dealt with in the Laois Flood Management Plan. A number of actions in relation to these considerations are set out in Goal 4 Drainage and Flood Management in the strategy.

3.5 Sub. No. 5 An Taisce

Submission No. 5 was received from An Taisce on the 29th July 2019.

An Taisce is a registered charity working for a better quality of life for all – for now and for future generations. An Taisce holds in trust 10,500 acres and 45 historic structures in 10 counties for future generations for the people of Ireland.

An Taisce welcome the drafting of this climate change adaptation strategy. The An Taisce submissions highlights the following:

1. Timetabled and Actionable Plans
 - a. The document provides relevant and necessary objectives in Section 5 but lacks detail, no deadlines are provided by which the actions must be completed and there are no key performance indicators or targets. The funding available for each action is not provided.
 - b. An Taisce submits that portions of section 5.3 that discusses the aims of high level goals may serve to undermine the entirety of the adaptation strategy. One of four guiding principles “*projected changes in climate may result in additional **benefits and opportunities** for the local area and these should be explored and capitalised upon to maximise use of resources*” in the document is considered ill-judged and detracts from the severity of the current situation.
 - c. The people and organisations responsible for specific actions need to be identified, and made aware of their responsibility.
2. Biodiversity

An Taisce considers that the objectives of goal 5 and the proposed actions there under for Biodiversity fail to make any significant contribution towards preserving and enhancing the biodiversity of County Laois.
3. Policy Coherence
 - a. Action 1 under goal 3 “identify and integrate climate change as a critical consideration and guiding principle informing core strategy, strategic objectives, policies and development standards of the County Development Plan” should be one of the priority actions in the plan and cannot be left to a single department within the Council.

- b. Submits that the Planning system lacks mechanisms which allow climate change considerations to be integrated.
 - c. Action 3 under Goal 3 “promote the integrated planning, design and delivery of green infrastructure (including urban greening) through appropriate provisions in planning policies, development standards, infrastructural, public realm and community projects” is lacking in detail, including what mechanisms will be used, whether these measures will be obligatory and what national/international best practice designs these will be modeled on.
4. Transport
- a. An Taisce consider that the offset from Action 2 under goal 2 “make provision to incorporate green infrastructure as a mechanism for carbon offset” will be miniscule compared with the system overhaul that is required.
 - b. Considers that the integration of “climate considerations into the design, planning and construction of all roads, footpaths, bridges, public realm and other construction projects and make provision to incorporate green infrastructure as a mechanism for carbon offset is counter intuitive given that traffic is a source of carbon emissions.
 - c. Refers to the Transport Policy for Ireland (2009-2020) in which one of the aims is that work related commuting by car will be reduced from 65% to 45%, and that car drivers will be accommodated on other modes such as walking, cycling, public transport and car sharing and that commuting by these modes will rise to 55% by 2020. Notes that this Transport Policy is further identified as an action (Action 96) in the Climate Action Plan 2019, “*Review and bring forward a revised implementation plan for the outstanding policies and actions in the 2009-2020 policy Smarter Travel, A Sustainable Transport Future, in time for Budget 2020*”.
5. Flooding
- a. Under Theme 4 there is no mention of natural flood retention and suggests that rehabilitation of bogland in Laois would provide considerable natural flood retention, in addition to mitigating against climate change and providing additional biodiversity.
 - b. Submits that protection of Laois peaty habitats should be the priority and could be facilitated by an implementation of the management actions set out in the Strive Peatlands Document.
6. Steering Group
- a. An Taisce submits that the tasks of the steering group outlined in section 6 should be outlined in detail in the Climate Adaptation Plan, and not left to the Steering Group to devise without the scrutiny of public consultation, as required under the Aarhus Convention.
 - b. An Taisce note that there is no public stakeholder representative nor environmental NGOs on the proposed Climate Action Steering Group.
 - c. They submit that an emergency Climate Action Group should be established, with full representation across all state and semi-state bodies, the public and relevant stakeholder and business interests.

- d. An Taisce submits that in section 6.4 the local authority should be required to liaise with other key stakeholders to provide delivery of actions at all times and not just as considered necessary.
7. Recommendations
- a. An Taisce recommend the establishment of an emergency climate action task force of relevant state bodies, relevant public stakeholders, including environmental NGOs, and business, to thoroughly implement any actions outlined in the Final Plan.
 - b. A prioritised action should be that this stakeholder group should examine the integration of this Plan with other plans, programmes and policies.
 - c. The Adapataion Plan should contain more specific and timetabled targets, which are measureable, and for which responsibility can be assigned to a lead agency. Also indicate KPI's used to review the implementation of this plan.
 - d. A financial plan should accompany this document.
 - e. The appointment of a biodiversity officer within the council should be prioritised.
 - f. The Transport section should assess and promote sustainable transport policies, in keeping with the ambitions of the Climate Action Plan 2019.
 - g. Plan needs to facilitate immediate and decisive action.

Response to Submission

I note the submission from An Taisce, the National Trust for Ireland and make the following observations in response to the itemised submission.

1. Timetabled and Actionable Plans

- a. Goal one, *Local Adaptation Governance and business operations* endeavors through its first objective to establish a framework within the organisation to support the successful and practical implementation of adaptation actions.

Given that this strategy represents all functions and operations of Laois County Council, it is important that the Climate Action Steering Group brings together representatives from all key functional areas with various technical, operational and management expertise who can successfully carry out the necessary tasks and implement the actions contained within strategy. The Management Team will nominate representation to the Climate Action Steering Group and assign its Chair/Champion. The Climate Action Steering Group will meet quarterly. Section 6 of the Strategy outlines how this group will prioritise actions, initiate implementation, liaise with stakeholders, monitor and evaluate implementation and report on progress.

- b. International and EU Policy context to adaptation planning frame the national policy objective of transitioning to climate resilience and realizing inherent opportunities. The IPCC (2014) defines adaptation as *'the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects, in human*

systems, adaptation seeks to moderate or avoid harm or exploit beneficial opportunities... The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 directs the scope of the National Adaptation Framework for sectors and local authorities under section 5(2) in order to

(i) reduce the vulnerability of the State to the negative effects of climate change, and (ii) avail of positive effects of climate change that may occur. The National Adaptation Framework 2018, translates this scope also. Taking a consistent approach with the legislative and policy context, availing of opportunities is a guiding principle informing the framework of actions in this adaptation strategy. Examples of opportunities that may be capitalised upon include:

- Positive increase in political and social change resulting in environmental enhancement and societal cohesion
 - Technical advances and innovations including disruptive technologies.
 - Change in consumer awareness driving an increase in demand for example in renewable energy generation, reduction in waste production, technologies with reduced emissions etc
 - Agricultural regeneration to improve food production and diversification into other crops, taking advantage of extended growing seasons.
 - Tourism opportunities through extended tourism seasons, increase in outdoor leisure pursuits, wilderness tourism etc.
 - Construction standards increasing demand for climate adapted homes including retrofit and the up skilling and training of people to new standards.
 - Adaptation and mitigation as responses to climate change can drive innovation creating economic and business opportunities and act as a source of competitive advantage that can transform business, examples include Bord na Mona in their Transition in business model - ‘Brown to Green’, advancing Green technologies development, changes in business efficiencies etc.
 - Change in drive innovation and diversification in business models
- c. The strategy provides for the mainstreaming of climate change considerations into all functions, activities and services of Laois County Council. As actions are implemented there will be a need to liaise, collaborate and bring on board key stakeholders as considered appropriate at such a time. It will remain the responsibility of the lead in the council to drive the action, engage with stakeholders as required and report on same.

2. Biodiversity

The actions under goal 5 are derived in the context of climate adaptation. It is not the intention or role of the Adaptation Strategy to replace the National Biodiversity Action Plan or the Local Biodiversity Action Plans for Abbeyleix, Ballacolla, Cullahill, Emo, Kilenard, Mountmellick, Portarlinton, Shanahoe, Portlaoise, Mountrath, Clonaslee and Attanagh. Action 3 under goal 5 seeks to

support the community led biodiversity action plans positively towards climate action and resilience.

The Strategy seeks to align with Ireland's Biodiversity Sectoral Climate Change Adaptation Plan undertaken by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht as part of the coordinated response to resilience as prescribed by the National Adaptation Framework, 2018.

3. Policy Coherence

- a. Action 1 under goal 3 seeks to advance and encourage the integration of climate change considerations into the County Development Plan during its next review. The lead department is identified as the Planning Section. It is the responsibility of the forward planning division of the planning section to undertake, coordinate and deliver the County Development Plan in collaboration with an extensive range of local, regional and national level stakeholders and aligning with the established spatial planning framework of the National Planning Framework, the Eastern and Midlands Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy. The process of making the plan is underpinned by the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).
- b. Climate Change policy takes a commanding influence over existing policy. The purpose of the adaptation strategy in the context of its relationship with the County Development Plan is to identify key adaptation considerations for further development as policy approaches (i.e. mainstreamed) and identify specific climate action responses/projects for practical implementation. The planning system is widely recognized as being a fundamental instrument to provide for the practical implementation of climate action and to influence positive behavioural change.
- c. Action 3 under Goal 3 to “promote the integrated planning, design and delivery of green infrastructure (including urban greening) through appropriate provisions in planning policies, development standards, infrastructural, public realm and community projects” seeks to build in the provision of additional greening as standard into policies and standards in land use plans to encourage the enhancement of public realm and development sites.

4. Transport

- a & b. Action 2 under goal 2 to “Integrate climate considerations into the design, planning and construction of all roads, footpaths, bridges, public realm and other construction projects and make provision to incorporate green infrastructure as a mechanism for carbon offset is seeking that climate change is incorporated into all projects in the local authority to ensure collectively the positives of climate integration can be realised.
- c. Laois County Council welcomes Action 96 of *Climate Action Plan 2019*, which seeks to “*Review and bring forward a revised implementation plan*

for the outstanding policies and actions in the 2009-2020 policy Smarter Travel, A Sustainable Transport Future, in time for Budget 2020”.

5. Flooding

I note the OPW is the lead State body for the coordination and implementation of Government policy on the management of flood risk in Ireland and is also the national authority for the implementation of the EU Directive on the Assessment and Management of Flood Risks [2007/60/EC]. I note the draft Flood Risk Management Climate Change Adaptation Plan has been prepared under the remit of the National Climate Change Adaptation Framework. It sets out the approach to climate change adaptation of the Office of Public Works (OPW), the lead agency for flood risk management in Ireland, based on a current understanding of the potential consequences of climate change for flooding and flood risk in Ireland, and the adaptation actions to be implemented by the OPW and other responsible Departments and agencies in the flood risk management sector. Close co-operation between the sectors and local authorities is required to ensure a coherent approach to building resilience.

I acknowledge the potential contribution of bogland rehabilitation, restoration and enhancement to reduce flood risk by providing natural flood retention and provide additional biodiversity. I note the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has published “*Managing Ireland’s Peatlands, A National Peatlands Strategy 2015*”. This strategy sets out a cross-governmental approach to managing peatlands including compliance with EU environmental law, climate change, forestry, flood control, energy, nature conservation, planning and agriculture.

6. Steering Group

The Climate Action Steering Group comprising representatives from across the range of functions/activities of the council will oversee the practical implementation of this all of local authority strategy and will collaborate as is considered necessary with the Eastern and Midland CARO. The Climate Action Steering Group draws on relevant departments, skill sets and disciplines across the council as is considered most appropriate. Chapter 6 sets out the key tasks required of the Steering Group to initiate implementation and report on progress through the SPC (which has external representation) and the elected members. An implementation plan will be devised to structure the delivery of final agreed actions subject to considerations around prioritization of actions, resources required and budgetary considerations. Mainstreaming of climate adaptation into all functions and activities i.e. integrating into all policy structures of Laois County Council, will be a fundamental priority as prescribed by the NAF. Key stakeholders will be engaged with as considered appropriate and necessary to drive the practical implementation of actions. There is significant scope for the community sector to be involved in the implementation of the actions of this strategy and this will be encouraged, particularly through the PPN and Tidy Towns groups etc. Initially Laois County Council will lead on all actions.

7. Recommendations

- a. *The establishment of an emergency climate action task force.* LCC proposes a Climate Action Steering Group.
- b. *The integration of this Plan with other plans, programmes and policies.* Mainstreaming of climate adaptation into all functions and activities i.e. integrating into all policy structures of Laois County Council, will be a fundamental priority as prescribed by the NAF.
- c. *More specific and timetabled targets, which are measurable, and for which responsibility can be assigned to a lead agency.* The steering group will devise a methodology for implementation as described in Section 6.3.
- d. *A financial plan should accompany this document.* A great number of adaptation actions, particularly those with the purpose of 'mainstreaming' climate adaptation into all functions and activities of the council, are already in use in some form and require little more than a change in scale or focus, improved efficiencies or different approaches.

In terms of funding available, the Climate Action Fund set out under Project 2040 (Capital Investment Plan) earmarks 20% (€500M) of the total funding for the plan towards Climate Action. This is to support the range of adaptation and mitigation measures stemming from the National Adaptation Framework, National Mitigation Plan and Climate Action Plan that will deliver a step change in the transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society. Private Sector investment is required alongside substantial public sector investment. The strategic investment priorities on Climate Action are set out in the Government publication, *Investment in the Transition to a Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Society 2018-2027*.

Other funding streams that can be leveraged for adaptation projects include EU funding i.e. European Structural and Investment funds, Horizon 2020 and the LIFE programme. The [LIFE Programme](#) for example funds pilot, demonstration, best practice and governance projects to support adaptation action. In addition, under LIFE, innovative financial instruments are available for Natural Capital financing i.e. biodiversity objectives. Funding for research on climate adaptation is also provided by [Horizon 2020](#). The CARO in conjunction with the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly will work with local authorities in the region to identify funding opportunities, progress climate adaptation projects and leverage EU funding where appropriate.

Projects pursuing climate adaptation measures can also be presented to other competitive funding streams available including for example Town & Village Renewal, Urban/Rural Regeneration and Disruptive Technologies, funding under LEADER programme etc.

- e. The appointment of a biodiversity officer within the council should be prioritised. Goal 5 of the strategy aims to promote protect natural habitats and biodiversity within the organisation and with communities.
- f. *The Transport section should assess and promote sustainable transport policies.* Laois County Council welcomes Action 96 of *Climate Action Plan 2019*, which seeks to “*Review and bring forward a revised implementation plan for the outstanding policies and actions in the 2009-2020 policy Smarter Travel, A Sustainable Transport Future, in time for Budget 2020*”.
- g. *Plan needs to facilitate immediate and decisive action.* The purpose of this Strategy is set out in Section 1.2. The local authority adaptation strategy takes on the role as the primary instrument at local level to:
 - ensure a proper comprehension of the key risks and vulnerabilities of climate change
 - bring forward the implementation of climate resilient actions in a planned and proactive manner
 - ensure that climate adaptation considerations are mainstreamed into all plans and policies and integrated into all operations and functions of the local authority

Recommendation

I am satisfied that the Strategy has addressed the issues raised by the An Taisce Submission adequately. No changes recommended.

3.6 Sub. No. 6 Laois Farm Forestry Group

Submission No. 6 was received from the Laois Farm Forestry Group on the 29th of July 2019.

The Laois Farm Forestry Group (LFFG) was established in 2009 to represent private forestry owners in County Laois who have planted forestry prior to 2002. Promoted by the Teagasc Forest Development Department, IFA Farm Forestry and local forest owners, it provides a representative voice for private forest owners with plantations now approaching or at the stage of timber production.

The submission notes the private forestry resource is significant in Laois, the land area planted is considerably in excess of the national average with more than half the forest asset in the county in private ownership.

The submission requests that the strategy support further afforestation and should also assist mobilisation and utilisation of the timber products. The submission highlights the potential to replicate the successful deployment of renewable heat from forest based products. It seeks that Laois County Council support the development of this market and the necessary infrastructure that is required in order to facilitate its operation. The

potential for Laois County Council to engage in renewable energy projects associated with public buildings and properties that have a high energy demand is highlighted.

Response to submission:

The submission from the Laois Farm Forestry Group is noted and welcomed. I note the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Marine (DAFM) is the lead State body for the coordination and implementation of Government policy on the management of Agriculture, Food and Marine in Ireland. The DAFM is identified as the lead department for undertaking the sectoral adaptation plan for Agriculture, Forestry and Seafood in the National Adaptation Framework, 2018.

Within the context of the NAF Laois County Council recognize the role and responsibilities of all 12 identified sectors as well as local authorities in undertaking Adaptation Plans/Strategies, the challenges and opportunities that may arise and the importance of working collaboratively as the process of adaptation planning becomes more embedded.

Like the Forestry Sector and other identified sectors in the NAF, adaptation is now a fundamental consideration for local authorities. The Laois Climate Change Adaptation Strategy has been developed specifically to focus on the remit and operational control of Council functions and activities. Insofar as the request by Laois Farm Forestry Group that Laois County Council support further afforestation and assist in the mobilization and utilization of timber products; It is considered that these are best explored and dealt with in the Sectoral Adaptation Plan for Agriculture, Forestry and Seafood.

The submission seeks that Laois County Council support the development of renewable heat from forest based products and the necessary infrastructure that is required in order to facilitate its operation. Laois County Council recognises the range of new and developing technologies and has recently tendered for consultants to develop a new Local Authority Renewable Energy Strategy which will set out proposals for the generation of green energy in Laois. The proposed renewable energy strategy for the county will be incorporated into the County Development Plan.

Recommendation:

Submission noted. Laois County Council will support and interact with the DAFM in its efforts to deliver actions of the Agriculture, Forestry and Seafood Adaptation Plan where in particular the Council is identified as having a particular role and through statutory obligations where it forms an integral aspect of the functions of the Council.

I am satisfied that the promotion of infrastructure or new technologies for renewable energy such as forest based products are best dealt with in the County Development Plan as part of the Local Authority Renewable Energy Strategy.

Actions under Goal 5 Natural Resources and Cultural Infrastructure provide for a strategy to undertake and implement a tree planting programme in the context of climate adaptation in conjunction with an awareness campaign that informs of the benefits to

communities in improving air quality, offsetting carbon emissions, promoting diversity, limiting flood risk, reducing urban heat as well as aesthetic value.

3.7 Sub. No. 7 Fáilte Ireland

The 7th submission received was from Fáilte Ireland on the 30th July 2019.

Fáilte Ireland is the National Tourism Development Authority.

Fáilte Ireland noted that together with the Heritage Council it commissioned a report, Climate Change, Heritage and Tourism, Implications for Ireland's Coast and inland waterways. The report sought to investigate what climate change will mean for Irish tourism and the heritage of our coastline and inland waterways with an aim to help plan for the likely eventualities of climate change. The report was completed in 2009.

The submission notes the importance of the Tourism Sector and also the benefits it creates for many other sectors such as agriculture, food and drinks, transport and retail.

The submission concludes that adaptation and mitigation measures need to carefully consider the impact on tourism and tourism amenities and to consider any unintended consequences for heritage and tourism that might arise.

Response to submission:

I welcome the submission from Fáilte Ireland.

Goal 5 Action 5 *“Undertake a risk assessment of the Heritage and Cultural Assets in the county to assess the vulnerability and the risk to the historical environment from the impacts of climate change and to help build resilience to these important assets.”*

Recommendation

Submission noted. I am satisfied that Goal 5 Action 5 considers any unintended consequences of climate change for heritage and tourism.

3.8 Sub No. 8 Abbeyleix Tidy Towns

The 8th submission was received from Abbeyleix tidy Towns on the 31st July 2019.

Abbeyleix Tidy Towns welcomed the Strategy and the strong provision to transform the management of the assets of the Local Authority. The group would also encourage policies to promote positive climate action beyond the direct sphere of the local authority. The Group sees the potential under Themes 5 and 6 and encourages working with a “pioneer community” such as Abbeyleix as this could develop a model of good practice in this area.

They note the proposed tree planting programme and recommend that support be given to Abbeyleix Tidy Towns to access Forestry Service funding to develop a Neighbourhood in the County Council owned Balladine Estate site.

The group would like to look at the establishment of biodiverse swards on the wide road verges to the north and south approaches to Abbeyleix in particular. Other County Council owned land banks could be considered.

Support the development of Fr. Breen Park in Abbeyleix as a model for a co-located sporting facility.

Designate Abbeyleix as first low carbon small town in Laois.

Support Abbeyleix to develop as a Sustainable Energy Community and also to deliver recommendations set out under the Energy Master Plan (in preparation). Other communities and tidy towns groups should also be supported to engage in the SEC programme.

Select Abbeyleix as a pilot community for the implementation of the proposed smart metering programme for Laois.

Implement the Dutch model whereby public and community buildings (Scoil Mhuire/South School, Garda Station, Fire Station, Fr. Breen Park) with large roof spaces are utilised for solar panels connected to EV charging points/battery packs.

Support Abbeyleix community to implement a retrofit programme for residential, commercial and community buildings in the town.

Continue to support schools in Abbeyleix to engage in the green schools programme.

Provide additional electric car charging points to facilitate the move to EV's.

Extend the cycle corridor on the N77 (as is currently in place between Durrow and Abbeyleix) northwards to Portlaoise and southwards to Cullohill and beyond.

Implement water harvesting in the fire station in Abbeyleix.

Support water conservation projects in the town.

Assess the feasibility of developing a greenway between Abbeyleix and Portlaoise and also southwards to Attanagh/Durrow.

Response to the submission:

The submission of the Abbeyleix Tidy Towns group is welcomed. Laois County Council acknowledges the strength, leadership and success of this Tidy Towns group and that they have been exemplar leaders in environmental and sustainability issues.

Goal 5 Action 1 proposes to develop a strategy to undertake and implement an active Tree Planting programme in the context of climate adaptation in conjunction with an awareness campaign that informs of the benefits to communities in improving air quality, offsetting carbon emissions, promoting biodiversity, limiting flood risk, reducing urban heat, as well as aesthetic value. Support to Abbeyleix Tidy Towns to develop a Neighbourhood in the County Council owned Balladine Estate site can be addressed in the development of this strategy.

Goal 5 Action 2 aims to Develop guidelines for the provision of natural borders/buffers and include as an integral component of the design of greenways/blueways, tracks and trails and amenity areas to promote natural enhancement. These guidelines will assist Abbeyleix Tidy Towns in looking at the establishment of biodiverse swards on the road verges to the north and south approaches to Abbeyleix.

Laois County Council supports Abbeyleix Tidy Towns in its development as a Sustainable Energy Community (one of five in the County to date) and the preparation of their Energy Master Plan. Abbeyleix Tidy Towns has become one of the first communities in country to undertake a formal energy master plan. This project went out to tender and 3CEA are currently delivering the masterplan (Budget 15,000 Euro). Approx. 33% of the project is delivered. Note that Laois Co Co has supported the project by providing bridging finance.

ESB Networks, as part of its Climate Action Plan, is replacing 2.4 million electricity meters in homes, farms and businesses across Ireland with next generation meters. Starting in autumn of 2019 they plan to replace 250,000 meters between autumn 2019 and the end of 2020 and a further 500,000 meters every year from 2021 to 2024. Laois County Council welcomes its inclusion on the replacement programme and notes that Laois is one of the counties in which the programme will begin this September 2019, in addition to Kildare and Cork.

Laois County Council recognises the range of new and developing technologies and has recently tendered for consultants to develop a new Local Authority Renewable Energy Strategy which will set out proposals for the generation of green energy in Laois. The proposed renewable energy strategy for the county will be incorporated into the County Development Plan.

Goal 2 Actions 4, *Develop a Local Authority Energy Strategy to manage and reduce their energy consumption in accordance with national targets*, Action 5, *Become leaders in and champions of energy efficiency, ensuring that all council owned buildings are assessed for possible retrofitting to improve energy efficiency*. And Action 6, *Assess potential for council led renewable energy projects on public buildings & properties*

address issues in relation to energy efficiency of local authority buildings and providing a mechanism for demonstration projects for public buildings, commercial and community buildings.

Government policy, as set out in the publications “Smarter Travel – A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020” and the “National Cycle Policy Framework 2009-2020”, clearly places an emphasis on walking and cycling as alternatives to vehicular transport. The National Cycle Policy Framework states that by 2020, 10% of journeys should be by bicycle. The Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets [DTTS and DECLG, 2013) advocates assigning higher priority to pedestrian and cycling without unduly compromising vehicular movement. The importance of the provision of walking and cycling infrastructure for transportation is twofold. Firstly, it will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, noise and pollution. Secondly, walking and cycling help to achieve a health population. An essential element of any integrated transport system is to provide for the needs of cyclists and pedestrians. The Council will endeavour to encourage walking and cycling through the provision of the necessary infrastructure and also provide a mix of land uses which generate short trip distances to combat sedentary transport patterns. All new development proposals shall be required to provide for well integrated pedestrian and cycling networks.

Green schools is a long term environment education and awareness programme where schools, including the wider population, contribute to the sustainable development of the County for both current and future generation. School undertake various activities on a number of themes which include litter, energy conservation, water conservation, transport and healthy living and are awarded the Green Flag Award once they have successfully completed An Taisce’s 7 step programme. To date 76 Laois schools out of a potential 84 have achieved this prestigious award.

Recommendation

I am satisfied that the promotion of infrastructure or new technologies for renewable energy including solar panels are best dealt with in the County Development Plan as part of the Local Authority Renewable energy Strategy.

I am satisfied that actions under goal 2 to develop a Local Authority Energy Strategy to manage and reduce their energy consumption in accordance with national targets will provide example and a demonstration project for energy efficiency in other public buildings, commercial buildings and community buildings.

Laois County Council welcomes Action 96 of *Climate Action Plan 2019*, which seeks to “*Review and bring forward a revised implementation plan for the outstanding policies and actions in the 2009-2020 policy Smarter Travel, A Sustainable Transport Future, in time for Budget 2020*”. The extension of cycle corridors, provision of greenways and EV charge points will be considered in this context.

The Green Schools programme will continue to be supported by Laois County Council through the Environmental Awareness Officer.

3.9 Sub No. 9 Nore Vision for Laois Partnership

Submission No.9 was received from Nore Vision on behalf of Laois Partnership on the 31st July 2019. Laois Partnership welcomed the opportunity to consult on the Draft Climate Change Adaptation Strategy.

The Nore Vision recorded the aspirations of stakeholders for the future of the River Nore and all of its tributaries, the land that drains into them, and the people who live and work there.

This submission outlines relevant proposals and ideas generated by the Nore Vision consultations for the future of the Nore Catchment conducted in Laois that the Strategy could incorporate.

The submission recommends that the Strategy include an action on developing authentic community engagement through capacity raising among council staff and among community champions across Laois to learn together how best to work in partnership by sharing both responsibilities and power with a view to co-creating solutions.

Submission highlights the role for ‘moral leadership’ from the more powerful, such as Laois County Council’s management team. Emphasises the need for inclusion of stakeholders, stating that Young people are probably the most important stakeholders and the youth initiative “School Strike for Climate Change” needs to be considered.

States the Steering Group assembled by Laois County Council to oversee its strategy will benefit from grassroots input by Laois’s women and Youth Leaders drawn from its urban and rural communities.

As part of Goal 1, Action 6 on building expertise the submission recommends training Laois County Council staff and other stakeholders in catchment geography and management.

Goal 1, Action 11 of the draft strategy to support and encourage opportunities that may arise associated with environmental and technological advances that support low carbon transition through the work of the Laois Local Enterprise Office could include the development of expertise in ecological engineering as Ireland is at an early stage of experimenting with this approach to flood mitigation. The submission also suggests an opportunity to develop expertise in climate resilient food production in Laois.

Goal 6, action 1 and Action 4 in relation to public participation network, awareness campaigns and promotion of tidy towns, tree planting and other environmental initiatives throughout the county are felt to strongly align with a number of programmes being

implemented by Nore Vision. Including funding opportunities through partnership of the four Local Development Companies (across three Local Action Groups), supported by LAWPRO and other collaborators to carry out a number of relevant actions including Invasive Species Eradication, Citizen Science in Water Quality and Upland Community Development and Land Use Management. The submission emphasises the need for initiatives to be done on a catchment basis.

The proposals and ideas generated by the Nore Vision consultation process which are being used by LEADER companies and LAGS across the Nore catchment contained in this submission intersect with objectives in the Strategy.

Response to submission

Laois County Council welcomes the submission of the Nore Vision on behalf of Laois Partnership.

Laois Partnership Company, formed in 2008, is a local development company operating in Laois to offer one unified structure for the delivery of economic, social and cultural services to small businesses, community groups and individuals in County Laois. This work is largely delivered through: The Rural Development Programme (previously LEADER) the Local Community Development Programme (previously LDSIP), as well as a number of other complementary programmes.

The Nore Vision Project seeks to harness the wide and existing efforts of established River Nore Catchment initiatives and to knit these into an over-arching catchment-wide vision and ensuing action plan.

As outlined in the submission the Goals and Actions of the strategy support the Nore Vision's ambitions.

Recommendations

I am satisfied that the Laois climate adaptation strategy has considered the issues of the Nore Vision on behalf of Laois Partnership in the development of the strategy and that the ambitions of Nore/Vision Laois Partnership are echoed in the Actions outlined in the Strategy. No further action required.

4 CLIMATE ACTION PLAN 2019

4.1 CLIMATE ACTION PLAN – To Tackle Climate Breakdown

The all of government Climate Action Plan 2019 - *To Tackle Climate Breakdown* was published on Monday 17th June 2019. The plan sets out 183 individual actions over 12 sectors and charts an ambitious course towards decarbonisation. It acknowledges the failure to meet emissions targets to 2020, failure to address efforts to decarbonise particularly during the period of the economic downturn and failure in breaking the link between emissions and economic growth. In light of this, the ambition is clearly set out to deliver a step-change in emission performance over the coming decade to meet 2030 targets and to set a trajectory to meet 2050 objectives. There is strong commitment under new governance arrangements to update the plan annually, to track performance of targets and revise or update the actions



13.2 Targets

To meet the required level of emissions, by 2030 we will:

- Reduce CO₂ eq. from the sector by 30%
- Improve the energy efficiency of public sector buildings by 50%
- Set a target to demonstrate leadership in the adoption of low emission transport options
- In 2019, have a Climate Mandate adopted by every Public Body, making the sector a catalyst for climate action
- In 2019, agree a Climate Action Charter with Local Authorities
- All Public Buildings to reach BER 'B' Rating

as necessary. To drive the successful and practical implementation of Climate Action towards achieving 2030 and 2050 targets, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment will bring forward a legislative framework through a new Climate Action Act.

Within the 12 Sectors described in the Plan, the Public Sector is identified as having a significant role in '*Leading by Example*'¹ to not only just reduce their own emissions but to inspire climate action across communities and society. Local Government in particular is recognized for its pivotal role in stimulating climate action at community level. The Plan speaks also to the role of the Climate Action Regional Offices (CARO) in assisting local authorities in building capacity to engage effectively with climate change. There are a range of actions that are specific to and/or relate to local authorities as well as the CAROs.

Local authorities will be required to undertake an annual programme with measurable impact particularly with actions to focus on, inter alia;

¹ Chapter 13

- Reducing emissions by 30% and Improve energy efficiency of local authority buildings by 50% under the guidance of a new Public Sector Decarbonisation Strategy.
- Setting a target to demonstrate leadership in the adoption of low emission transport options
- Developing and implementing a Climate Action charter
- Public buildings (all) to reach BER ‘B’ Rating
- Building capacity through upskilling and knowledge dissemination
- Supporting and delivering projects that include strong ambition on climate action through funding resources from Project Ireland 2040
- Developing robust community engagement on climate action by linking to existing and new networks and clustering initiatives using the National Dialogue on Climate Action and local authority structures.
- Working with communities to expand Sustainable Energy Communities.
- Continue to implement Adaptation Planning with emphasis on building Climate Resilience and delivering the objectives of the National Adaptation Framework.

On Climate Change Adaptation, the Plan is very strong on the need *to address the current and future risks posed by a changing climate... Adaptation is both urgent and essential to successfully transition to a climate resilient economy and society by 2050*². It cites examples of extreme weather events to explain that the cost of inaction to the effects of climate change are simply too significant to discount.

It is acknowledged that much of the focus for the local authority sector to date, has been on Adaptation Planning. Local authorities are now prescribed to widen their scope and act as a catalyst for much wider change. Since 2018 Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs) have been co-ordinating the Local Authority response to Climate Change. The structures deployed have proved highly effective and can be utilised to direct local authority actions within the Climate Action Plan. The CAROs will lead a step up in climate action within local authorities to pursue mitigation measures to reduce emissions, activate meaningful citizen engagement, encourage community leadership and capacity building using the National Dialogue on Climate Action linking in with existing and new local authority structures.

The Climate Action Plan is notably focused on mitigation measures to achieve emission targets to 2030. However, there is full commitment to provide clear leadership in promoting Adaptation. Recognising that Climate Change is a hugely complex issue that requires a range of responses from every sector in society all measures collectively represent a coherent approach to dealing with the challenges ahead.

Local Authorities, through the process of Adaptation Planning are gaining a clear understanding of the risks presented by climate change and the current levels of

² Chapter 16

vulnerability to such risks. Actions identified in the adaptation strategies are aimed at building climate resilience and integrating adaptation into effective local level decision making. This is crucially important. Building on this work, local authorities will undoubtedly need to expand their role to take on actions and measures from the Climate Action Plan to respond to and meet obligations set out.

It is important that the Laois County Climate Change Adaptation Strategy recognizes the purpose of the Climate Action Plan and the role intended for Local Authorities to meet targets and contribute to the national climate ambition.

It is recommended to include an action to reflect same in the Adaptation Strategy.

CE Recommendation for adaptation strategy:

Include action in Adaptation Strategy in Goal 1, Local adaptation Governance and Business Operations under Objective no. 1, That Climate Change adaptation considerations are mainstreamed and integrated successfully into all functions and activities of the local authority ensuring operational protocols, procedures and policies implement an appropriate response in addressing the diversity of impacts associated with climate change.

Action No. 6

To support and compliment the practical implementation of actions arising from the National Climate Action Plan – to Tackle Climate Breakdown (as revised and updated annually), across the broad range of functions of the local authority to achieve the national climate ambition i.e. decarbonisation targets to 2030 and objectives to 2050.

5 ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

5.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment

The proposed amendments to the draft adaptation strategy as recommended in this report have been screened in accordance with the EC (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (SI 435 of 2004 as amended by SI 200 of 2011). Based on the pre-screening check and review of the amendments against the environmental criteria as set out in Annex II of the SEA Directive, a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required. The screening report and final determination accompany the final adaptation strategy.

5.2 Appropriate Assessment

The proposed amendments to the draft adaptation strategy as recommended in this report were screened in accordance with the requirements of Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC) to determine if they are likely to have a significant effect on any Natura 2000 sites. No significant effects were identified — the AA screening report accompanies the final adaptation strategy.