



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Date: 4th February 2020

Review of Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023: Pre-Draft Stage

The Environmental Health Service is making this submission under the remit of Healthy Ireland and relevant health supporting strategies. Healthy Ireland is a framework for improved health and wellbeing. Its vision statement is '*A Healthy Ireland, where everyone can enjoy physical and mental health and wellbeing to their full potential, where wellbeing is valued and supported at every level of society and is everyone's responsibility*'.

We have reviewed key health strategies and make recommendations to Laois County Council to take this opportunity to incorporate these relevant health actions into the strategic planning of the spatial and built environment of the county, with the overall aim being to improve the health and wellbeing of the population of Laois. Laois County Council should consider ways strategic planning can protect population health and the built environment should be explored for opportunities that can maximise health gain.

County Laois Health Status

The creation of County Health Profiles is one of the key actions from the Healthy Ireland strategy which is our national framework for action to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Ireland. Understanding health needs at a local level enables local action and creates an environment where every individual and sector of society can play their part in achieving a healthy Ireland.

County profiles help identify health priorities in areas and highlight health inequalities which may exist.

County Laois Health Profiles can be accessed at:

<http://hdl.handle.net/10147/584040>

Key Facts for Laois:

- Had the largest growth in population at a national level since 2006, of 20.1%.
- Has an above average proportion of young dependent population (those aged 0-14 years of age) of 24.8% (national rate 21.4%)
- Has an above average birth rate to those aged under 20 years of age of 16.4 (national rate 12.3)
- Cancer incidence rates are either average or below average nationally for all main causes of cancer
- Rates of mortality for all deaths and all main causes of deaths are average or below the national rate
- Suicide rate is above average at 14.0 (national rate 11.3)

The statics also show that Laois has a higher proportion of younger people 0-14 years than the national average. It is essential that services and facilities that cater for the needs of younger members of the population are developed in the Laois area. The unemployment rate is also higher than the national average and measures to promote employment opportunities in the county must be promoted.

Get Ireland Active – National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland

<http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Get-Ireland-Active-the-National-Physical-Activity-Plan.pdf>

A key aim of the National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland is compiling a directory of publicly accessible sports/recreational and amenities facilities. The Strategic Development Plan should include a strategy for meeting this aim for County Laois. All new facilities should be added to this directory and an audit should be carried out to ensure that all existing sites/facilities are entered.

A strategic aim for County Laois should be to increase the active school flag programme to at least another 20 schools in the county.

A strategic aim for Laois County Council should be to develop and establish processes that enable consultation with children and young people in the development and implementation of programmes in which they are involved, ie. playgrounds, activity centres and public spaces. This is particularly important given the age profile of the County. Suitable facilities that cater for all age ranges, including teenagers, should be provided.

A strategic aim for development in Laois should be that all plans and development for Nursing Homes or Residential Care Facilities should include proposals for gardens and recreational activities. Physical activity should be integrated into long term care planning and practice.

Strategic development of Laois County should include:

- a) Opportunities for physical activity in the development of the built environment
- b) All development should promote cycling and walking. A network of cycle routes and footpaths should be planned and developed which aim to promote connectivity of housing/employment to town centres, park and recreational amenities
- c) Develop local and regional parks and recreational spaces that encourage physical activity.
- d) Prioritise the planning and development of walking and cycling and general recreational/physical activity infrastructure.
- e) Explore opportunities to maximise physical activity and recreation amenities in the natural environment.
- f) A framework for workplace health and wellbeing, including physical activity should be developed. Any possible health gain for employees should be explored and developed.
- g) The smarter travel workplaces initiative should be promoted. Sustainable or active modes of travel should be facilitated.
- h) Ensure planning makes provision for recreational facilities for staff in industrial estates and ensures connectivity of work to park and recreational activities.
- i) Support and develop 20 new walking groups in the County through funding of signage, upgrade of paths and lighting and resolving safety issues.
- j) Developing a standardised framework for publicly funded programmes designed to increase physical activity levels. Use public money to leverage private funding to promote and develop physical activity and sport programmes.

Employment

Laois has an unemployment rate above the national average and nearly half the workforce (11,500 people) has to leave the county daily to commute to work. To improve the quality of life and promote more sustainable 'live work' communities it is essential that employment opportunities are created in the county. It is acknowledged that 495 hectares are zoned for employment and enterprise in the county.

It is essential that planning of employment services also takes into consideration the health and wellbeing of workers.

- A travel plan, which promotes and facilitates sustainable and active modes of travel, should be implemented for all these sites.
- There should be strong cycle and pedestrian links to town centres and to parks and/or recreational facilities to improve connectivity.
- There should be secure bike parking facilities provided
- shower facilities for staff should be considered.

- Recreational amenities that promote the health and wellbeing of employees on future employment sites should be considered. Any opportunity to promote physical activity and possible health gain for staff should be explored.
- The quality of design and landscaping of these sites is also of the utmost importance as it is well established that there is a need to reconnect urban society with nature in order to promote health. Options such as walking trails that maximise contact with green spaces, water features, wildlife gardens, outdoor dining facilities are just some proposals that should be considered.

Tobacco Free Ireland

<http://static.rasset.ie/documents/news/tobacco-free-ireland.pdf>

Laois County Council should take action to assist in decreasing smoking rates among the population of the county. A strategic aim of the Laois County Development Plan should be to:

- a) Implement the tobacco free playgrounds initiative.
- b) Promote tobacco free environments, parks, beaches, and public campuses and grounds

With regard to the protection of people from second hand tobacco smoke all plans for development that include a designated smoking area should be forwarded to the Environmental Health Service prior to the planning decision.

Healthy Ireland - A Healthy Weight For Ireland

<http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/A-Healthy-Weight-for-Ireland-Obesity-Policy-and-Action-Plan-2016-2025.pdf>

Rising levels of overweight and obesity are placing an increasing burden on individuals and society. Currently, in Ireland, six in ten adults and one in four children are overweight or obese (Department of Health, 2013; Layte and McCrory, 2009; 2011). According to World Health Organization forecasts, Ireland could top the European league tables in the coming years (WHO, 2015).

There are 10 action steps outlined in this document to tackle obesity, Step 2 is to regulate for a healthier environment. Laois County Council can influence the built environment to improve health and reduce the extent to which it promotes obesity. An assessment of food outlets in every town and village in Laois should be carried out to ensure that choices of healthy food options are equally available and to prevent a proliferation of fast food outlets. Providing easy access and

choice to healthier food options should be promoted as outlined in government policy.

The environment in which we live impacts on the choices that we make and Laois County Council should create environments that make the healthy choice the easy choice:

- a) Support community based initiatives that develop programmes that support healthy lifestyles and prevention of obesity in children and adults.
- b) Promote through planning and the built environment the benefits of healthy eating, physical activity and non-sedentary behaviour
- c) Improve availability of and access to healthier food choices. Support developments that aim to improve the health of the population.
- d) Support opportunities for increasing physical activity levels generally/ in the community through Local Sports Partnerships and supporting initiatives e.g. Parkrun.
- e) Facilitate community gardens through identifying and releasing suitable publicly owned land.
- f) It should be a strategic aim from the Laois Development Plan to facilitate the production of more locally produced healthy, high quality food.

Steering group report on a national substance misuse strategy

http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Steering_Group_Report_NSMS.pdf

The Strategic Development Plan for Laois should include:

- a) A strategy to reduce and eliminate the reliance on alcohol sponsorship. Any public event or events on publicly owned lands or buildings should use alternatives to alcohol sponsorship
- b) Develop the provision of alcohol-free venues for young people, (e.g. Youth cafés, alcohol-free music and dance venues and sports venues) with:
 - a. the young people being centrally involved in the development and management of the programmes and venues;
 - b. late night and weekend opening; and increased access to school facilities in out of- school hours.

The National Positive Ageing Strategy

http://health.gov.ie/wpcontent/uploads/2014/03/National_Positive_Ageing_Strategy_English.pdf

A strategic aim for the development of County Laois should be to enable people as they age 'to get out and about' through the provision of accessible, affordable, and flexible transport systems in both rural and urban areas. This should include:

- a) Provision of age-friendly public transport,
- b) Promotion of the integration of the Rural Transport Programme with other local transport services,
- c) Provision of public transport linkages to major health facilities and personal social services.
- d) Supporting the design and development of age friendly public spaces, transport and buildings.
- e) Designing age friendly urban environments (street lighting, footpaths, roads, public seating)
- f) Promote access (in terms of affordability, transport availability, accessibility of venue) to a wide range of opportunities for continued learning and education for older people.
- g) Promote the concept of active citizenship and the value of volunteering, and encourage people of all ages to become more involved in and to contribute to their own communities.
- h) Promote the development of opportunities for engagement and participation of people of all ages in a range of arts, cultural, spiritual, leisure, learning and physical activities in their local communities.

Suitable housing is a key aim in the National Positive Ageing Strategy and a key strategic aim for County Laois should be to:

- a) Carry out an assessment of housing need and provision and consider all housing options in development (i.e. social housing, sheltered housing; retirement villages).
- b) All residential development should incorporate the 'Universal Design' Principal to ensure housing can meet the needs of the occupants regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. This will also ensure that the houses provided will meet their changing needs over time so that people can continue living in their own homes and communities as they get older or become disabled.

Universal Design Guidelines For Homes In Ireland

<http://universaldesign.ie/Built-Environment/Building-for-Everyone/>

This will also assist in implementing the Older People Remaining at Home (OPRAH) strategy.

- c) Implement a strategy that facilitates older people to live in well-maintained, affordable, safe and secure homes, which are suitable to their physical and social needs. Development should incorporate the principals outlined in the 'Design Out Crime' Document.

http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/asset/document/designers_Guide_digital_0_0.pdf

Time to move on from congregated settings – A strategy for community inclusion

<http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/disability/congregatedsettings/congregatedsettingsreportfinal.pdf>

The Strategic Development Plan for County Laois should:

- a) Improve community inclusion of people with disabilities in their local community and community based services.
- b) Improve greater connectivity between generic community based services and disability specific organisations. Facilitate their engagement as stakeholders.
- c) Focus on meeting the housing and accommodation needs of people with disabilities through a combination of purchased housing, new-build housing, leased housing or rented housing. A local re-housing plan should be prepared and jointly co-ordinated with the HSE, in collaboration with service providers. The plan should be based on best practice in including people with disabilities in local communities and should facilitate dispersed housing with personal supports.
- d) All residents in congregated settings should be assessed by the local authority to establish their eligibility and need for social housing support.
- e) Consideration should be given to reserving a certain proportion of dwellings for people with disabilities.
- f) Focus on supporting and sustaining people with disabilities to live in their own homes in the community through the provision of housing grants.
- g) Support people with disabilities to access employment and education opportunities.
- h) Support people with disabilities to access mainstream community services.

Housing

There has been massive population growth in Laois in recent years, with a 5.1% pop increase from 2011 alone. Portlaoise is Ireland's fastest growing town and it is expected the population will increase by 9,400 by 2026. 243 hectares in the county have been zoned for residential development. In line with government policy the onus is on 'compact growth' in the towns and villages of Laois.

There must be a shift away from commuter led development in County Laois. Greater emphasis must be placed on the creation of sustainable communities whereby the expansion of the settlements is proportionate to the availability of services.

The Urban Design Manual – A Best Practice Guide

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Planning/FileDownload,19216,en.pdf>

It should be the objective of Laois County Council to provide attractive, interesting and well used public realm and open spaces and to create a pedestrian centred environment with active, inviting public spaces and parks. Best practice should be implemented in the design of sustainable neighbourhoods. The 12 criteria outlined in the Urban Design Manual should be incorporated into the planning for urban areas Laois Development Plan.

The Environmental Health Service recommends that any proposed housing/residential development is made up of a variety of household types, tenures and typologies, thereby creating a range of lifestyle, affordability and lifespan choices. This should ensure sustainable development with a diversity and mix of uses. The EHS also recommends that development proposals for large housing or urban areas should be accompanied by a Design Statement. It is hoped this will provide coherency and quality in design and also ensure compliance with all the objectives of the Laois Development Plan.

It is stated an efficient use of land is essential for sustainable development and an emphasis has been placed on compact growth, with increased housing densities. The NPF requires that 30% of all new homes will be delivered within the existing built up footprint of settlements making better use of underutilised land including infill and brownfield sites. It is essential that houses and apartments are designed to specifically to suit the spaces they are in. Laois County Council should request a shift away from generic housing layouts and a move towards quality design, specific to the requirements or impediments of the site.

It is also recommended that Laois County Council outlines an 'implementation and sequencing strategy' for the county or other similar initiatives which would identify and outline the key infrastructural requirements for an area and which would aim to ensure that the necessary infrastructure, facilities and amenities are provided in conjunction with residential development. This should ensure that development throughout the Laois County takes place in a planned, proportionate and sustainable manner.

Rejuvenating Irelands small town Centres

https://www.scsi.ie/resources/pdf/2018/scsi_rejuvenating_irelands_small_town_centres

With the continued growth and dominance of online shopping and the decline of towns and villages it is essential that Laois County Council adapts to the changing commercial landscape. Innovative ideas to rejuvenate the counties small town and

village centres must be developed. Issues like improved broadband connectivity, improved public transport links and facilities, cycle lanes to link small towns and villages, secure bike parking facilities, measures to improve the public realm and streetscape, improving marketing and placemaking, promoting destination shopping, measures to tackle vacant units and proposals to increase housing in town main streets should all be considered to try and revitalise declining towns and villages in the county.

Research 195: Health Benefits from Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure

<http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/research/health/research195.html>

Recreational, green spaces are a fundamental part of any development as they promote the health and wellbeing of residences who will occupy the accommodation and indeed the wider community. It is well established that there is a need to reconnect urban society with nature in order to promote health. With more people being encouraged to live in urban environments and the onus on increasing housing densities and compaction, the need for quality recreational, green spaces is now greater than ever.

It is recommended that all future developments in County Laois are examined for the opportunity to integrate green infrastructure into the design at planning stage. Any potential for health gain should be explored and incorporated into all development and the built environment.

"For amenity purposes at least 9m² /person of accessible open green space are recommended by the World Health Organization, however it is recognised that this may vary depending on the size of the city, the number of inhabitants and where boundaries are drawn" (Dzhambov et al., 2014).

It is recommended that the following proposals are considered when planning for parks and recreational areas:

- a) Green biodiverse spaces should be designed so that there is at least one within walkable distance from people's homes.
- b) Green spaces should be co-designed with communities and reflect local needs.
- c) Areas should be as large as possible with connections through flowery verges or linear habitats alongside paths and roads.
- d) Areas should be relatively open, but grass does not all have to be the same length. This design could suggest careful, rather than a lack of, management. Interpretative signage can explain the practice and highlight signs of nature to look out for.

- e) A few scattered trees or clumps of trees are preferable to dense planting of trees.
- f) Paths, recreational areas and places to relax and engage with nature should be incorporated from the start, to promote use and maintain a feeling of safety. It is recommended all proposed green areas are provided with paths for walking.
- g) Exercise areas, trails and paths need to provide maximum contact with green space, as this made exercise accessible and nature contact motivated people to walk more.
- h) Not all areas should be managed to the same intensity. Some parts near paths could be managed more to look tidy, whereas stakeholders recognised the value of incorporating wild areas, which could be further away from paths.
- i) Biodiversity areas can be designed to accommodate playgrounds and other amenity areas.

Biodiversity & Green Areas

It should be a strategic aim of the Laois Development Plan to bring biodiversity into the planning decision making process. A Biodiversity Action Plan should be developed which aims to conserve and restore biodiversity and ecosystem services in the wider countryside. Guidance on managing Biodiversity in strategic planning and urban areas is found in:

http://www.uep.ie/pdfs/guidelines_complete.pdf

All opportunities for green infrastructure should be explored and integrated into the design of public areas. Existing green areas should be preserved and utilised to their full capacity. New green areas should be provided. The provision of pedestrian and cycle routes through green areas should be a key provision of the design. The landscaping or 'greening' of these pedestrian/cycle routes should be considered at design stage, not only in the interest of making them more attractive for use but also to facilitate the movement of fauna, creating ecological corridors and thus having a positive effect on biodiversity. Towns and villages in Laois should be explored to identify areas where biodiversity can be integrated into the urban fabric. All towns and villages in the county should commit to a pollinator plan.

It should be noted that the quality of green areas is key and the on-going need for maintenance should always be factored into any decisions at the design stage.

Transport

It is stated in the issues paper that the transportation objectives of the Laois County Development plan must include measures to reduce energy demand and greenhouse

gas emissions to aid in our transitioning to a low carbon sustainable society. This is essential if we are to be successful in reaching the Government's goal of an 80% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050. Laois is a central location linking major transport corridors of Dublin, Cork and Limerick. Investment in public transport infrastructure to build on the connectivity of the county must be prioritised. The council should also invest in initiatives that improve customer experience, schemes like improvements to bus shelters, bike parking at public transport nodes, real time travel information and integrated ticketing are just some examples of what should be considered.

Laois County Council must ensure that alternatives to the car are more widely available by investing in cycling and walking. Providing a comprehensive network of safe, well-lit and convenient footpaths and cycle lanes is essential to promote active travel and to provide connectivity of residential areas to schools, local neighbourhood centres, public transport stops and workplaces.

It is recommended that an audit be carried out of existing pedestrian and cycle facilities in the county to fully establish the existing infrastructure. It is also recommended that a programme of works is drawn up on a needs basis, to ensure that specific infrastructural works that improve connectivity will obtain funding. Pedestrian and cycle facilities should not be viewed as just for tourism or recreational purposes but considered as sustainable modes of travel that will reduce traffic congestions and reduce greenhouse gasses.

To ensure progress on sustainable transport is made it is recommended that Laois County Council dedicates more of its budget for active transport schemes and sustainable travel infrastructure.

Smarter Travel Policy

http://www.smartertravel.ie/sites/default/files/uploads/2012_12_27_Smarter_Travel_english_PN_WE_B%5B1%5D_0.pdf

The Strategic Development Plan should:

- a) Set targets requiring a minimum percentage of new residential and mixed-use development to take place on brownfield/existing sites to consolidate urban growth and enable organic development of urban areas from the centre out.
- b) Specify a maximum permitted level of car parking for commercial sites, which have suitable public transport facilities and are within walking/cycling distance to amenities.
- c) Set a general restriction of the future development of out-of-town retail centres except in exceptional circumstances and consideration of a similar requirement that parking charges be introduced for most existing centres.

- d) Require developments above a certain scale to implement viable travel plans which promote public transport and modes of active travel and which reduce reliance on the car. All development should be required to show a route map showing safe cycling and walking routes to schools, shops and public transport.
- e) Establish e-working centres to provide opportunities for people in rural areas and satellite towns to work from a location closer to home.
- f) Set a target that every school in Laois has a school travel plan to encourage students to take alternatives to the car. This should be supported with a strategic aim to develop safe walking and cycling routes to and from schools and other educational institutions as well as providing disability access.
- g) Provide facilities such as secure bike parking and changing/showering facilities at places of employment in public authorities to encourage staff to cycle.

To support smarter travel there should be a strategic aim to:

- h) Reprioritise traffic signals to favour pedestrians instead of vehicles, reducing waiting times and crossing distances at junctions.
- i) Create level grade crossings for pedestrians across junctions. Create larger traffic-free areas in urban centre. Ensure that 30 km/h zones are designated in central urban areas which accommodate motorised traffic.
- j) Widen footpaths where there are high pedestrian flows, particularly close to public transport nodes. Improve the surface quality of footpaths Provide appropriately designed safe, well-lit, direct, continuous facilities for pedestrians.
- k) Ensure State-owned lands such as canal towpaths, former rail lines, Coillte estates, etc. are made available for the development of walking and cycling trails.
- l) Support private and public sector initiatives to establish car club schemes in Ireland. Provide on-road parking spaces to be designated for car clubs through appropriate signage.
- m) Establish park and ride facilities along major public transport nodes, at the periphery of major urban areas and at key public transport locations and nodes.

National Cycle Policy Framework

http://www.smartertravel.ie/sites/default/files/uploads/2013_01_03_0902%2002%20EnglishNS1274%20Dept.%20of%20Transport_National_Cycle_Policy_v4%5B1%5D%5B1%5D.pdf

There is a need to improve the safety of cycling in County Laois and make it more attractive for users. The Strategic Development Plan should include the needs of cyclists, and in particular:

- a) Implement measures to reduce the volumes of through-traffic, especially HGVs, in town centres and especially in the vicinity of schools and colleges.
- b) Introduce traffic calming measures / enforce low traffic speeds in urban areas, make junctions safe for cyclists.
- c) Support the provision of dedicated signed rural cycling networks building on Fáilte Ireland's Strategy to Develop Irish Cycling Tourism.
- d) Segregate cycle paths if possible. Ensure that all surfaces used by cyclists are maintained to a high standard and are well lit and signposted.
- e) Provide secure cycling parking at all destinations of importance to the cyclist and aim to integrate cycling and public transport and the provision of cycling parking at all appropriate public transport interchanges.
- f) Ensure that the urban road infrastructure (with the exception of motorways) is designed / retrofitted so as to be cyclist-friendly. Link up all existing cycle lanes.

It is recommended that a 'quality audit' is carried out of pedestrian routes in towns and villages in the county, to ensure they are safe, well lit and enticing for users. It is essential that attractive, safe and secure pedestrian walkways/cycleways are provided in order to influence behavioural change in the population and promote greater take up of active travel.

Waste

A Resource Opportunity – Waste Management Policy in Ireland

https://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/waste/plans/Resource_Opportunity2012.pdf

The Laois Development Plan should implement the Waste Hierarchy set out in the Waste Framework Directive and place prevention and minimisation at the forefront of any waste policy.

- a) Disposal of municipal waste to landfill should be a last resort.
- b) Implement waste prevention measures with local business and community groups.
- c) Include community waste prevention demonstration programmes, which provides skills to develop waste prevention within local communities.
- d) The use of easily accessible public recycling bins should be considered for public areas, paths and green spaces that will allow for adequate waste segregation and will encourage the use of the waste management hierarchy.
- e) Food waste reduction initiatives and incentives should be implemented in homes and in business.

- f) A Reuse Policy should be developed in consultation with the national Procurement service and other relevant bodies, and implemented within public bodies in Laois to ensure that full consideration is given to feasible reuse options before embarking on the purchase of new goods.

Water

The strategic aim of Laois County Council should be to ensure the provision of safe secure drinking water and promote the reduction in waste and over use of water.

Water usage audits of public buildings should be carried and water conservation measures implemented.

To protect the ground water quality in the County there should be a strategic aim of ensuring all waste water treatment plants can operate effectively with their current demand and future demand, and that private effluent treatment and domestic septic tanks are fit for their purpose

Sustainable Development

Our sustainable future – A Framework for Sustainable Development

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/Environment/Miscellaneous/FileDownload%2C30452%2Cen.pdf>

It is stated in the issues document that sustainable development and climate mitigation and adaptation will be key drivers of the policies and objectives of the Plan. There is also a welcome initiative for Portlaoise to become the 1st low carbon town centre in the country.

In terms of climate change and land use planning the County Development Plan should play an important role in influencing a reduction in GHG emissions by guiding the sustainable growth of the County, encouraging more compact mixed-use development and greater use of sustainable transport options such as cycling, walking and public transport, restricting development in areas that are at risk of flooding and protecting the natural landscape and biodiversity. Specific actions that seek to combat, reduce or eliminate the emissions of greenhouse gases must be incorporated into the Development Plan.

Laois County Council should ensure that climate considerations are fully integrated into the planning of new projects and their design. All future development within Laois should have a green procurement approach, which incorporates carbon pricing and climate criteria into decision making. Environmentally friendly proposals such as the integration of public transport infrastructure, building typologies that minimise the use of energy, the use of low carbon materials, increased SuDS management initiatives, water recycling and conservation; green roofs, use of photovoltaic or rainwater harvesting and the integration and utilisation of open space should all be incorporated into the design stage of any development in the Laois area. It is

recommended that all large development should document their energy efficiency proposals via a design statement at the planning stage.

Any local authority housing which is provided by Laois County Council affords them the opportunity to be a leader in the promotion of innovative, low carbon, renewable energy design and technology. It is also recommended that Laois County Council carries out a carbon audit of its existing building stock and retrofits with more insulated building fabric and sustainable technologies.

To ensure progress is made in this area it is recommended that specific targets for reductions of CO₂ emissions in county Laois are set by the council. An action plan which sets out specific measures to achieve these reductions should also be implemented.

Energy

Ireland's Second National Energy Efficiency Action Plan to 2020

http://www.seai.ie/Publications/Energy_Policy_Publications/Energy_Service_Companies/Ireland%E2%80%99s_second_National_Energy_Efficiency_Action_Plan_to_2020.pdf

The Strategic Development Plan for County Laois should include spatial planning policies to reduce the need for commuting to and from work.

The Strategy should:

- a) Promote and facilitate the incorporation of energy efficient design into projects.
- b) Develop and implement an energy management programme for all public buildings.
- c) Develop new key skill sets in areas such as green procurement, carbon accounting, carbon management and energy management.
- d) Support and promote the Better Energy Communities Scheme to enable communities around the country develop new and innovative, locally-based solutions to energy poverty.

Environmental Noise

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has identified Environmental Noise as an increasing cause of ill health and detrimental effect on health and wellbeing.

http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/136466/e94888.pdf

It is recommended that a Noise Impact Assessment is carried out for any development proposals with the potential to give rise to significant noise impacts. Also new developments must consider the impact of noise from existing noise sources. We recommend that environmental noise should be considered in the context of:

- a) New roads, railways, airports, industry or recreational activities adjacent to residential properties or noise sensitive premises such as schools or hospitals,

or recreational spaces,

- b) New residential properties or noise sensitive premises such as schools or hospitals, adjacent to existing roads, railways, airports, industry or recreational activities;
- c) The development of mixed residential/commercial use buildings, and multipart Residential buildings;
- d) Public house, night clubs, restaurants or other recreational activities; and
- e) Industrial operations, workshops and factories.

It should be a Strategic aim of the Laois Development Plan to map noise and implement Noise Action Plans as per EPA Guidance:

<http://www.epa.ie/pubs/advice/noisemapping/epaguidancenotefornoiseactionplanning.html>

Air Quality

The Strategic Development Plan for Laois should aim to reduce polluting emissions into air and increase the quality of air in County Laois by:

- a) Participating in, and facilitating national programmes of air quality monitoring,
- b) Working to develop and promote the Air Quality Index for Health,
- c) Develop Local Air Quality Management Plans that identify pollution 'hot spots' and aim to reduce pollution through local action on emissions.



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