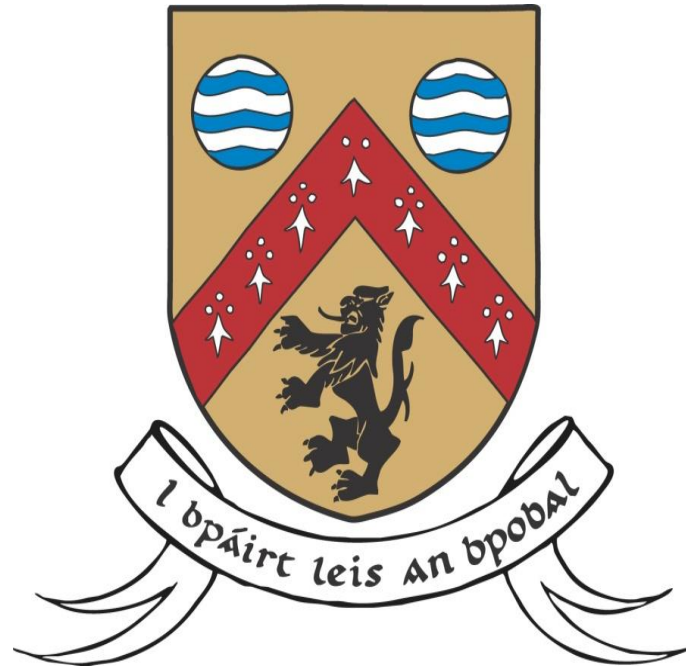


LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE LAOISE



**MONTHLY MANAGEMENT REPORT
MARCH 2022
TUARASCÁIL BHAINISTÍOCHTA
MÁRTA 2022**

To: Each Member of Laois County Council
Do: Gach Ball Comhairle Chontae Laoise

Section 136(2) of the Local Government Act, 2011 as inserted by Section 51 of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014, requires the Chief Executive to prepare monthly management report. The report for March 2022 is as follows:-

Finance, & Allocations Notified

Expenditure and income to the 28/02/2022 is summarised below:

Service Division	Budget Allocation	Expenditure to 28/02/2022
Housing and Building	19,748,000	2,246,453
Road Transportation and Safety	22,946,000	759,429
Water Services	3,259,000	534,008
Development Management	9,706,000	1,068,495
Environmental Services	7,939,000	289,556
Recreation and Amenity	4,361,000	187,377
Agriculture, Education, Health and Welfare	786,000	0
Miscellaneous Services	9,453,000	754,122
Central Management Charge	10,139,000	1,061,424
Total	88,337,000	6,900,864

Service Division	Budget Allocation	Income to 28/02/2022
Housing and Building	21,415,000	3,193,870
Road Transportation and Safety	18,682,000	232,280
Water Services	4,380,000	857,367
Development Management	6,946,000	1,737,794
Environmental Services	1,942,000	312,586
Recreation and Amenity	781,000	442,391
Agriculture, Education, Health and Welfare	314,000	24,553
Miscellaneous Services	8,702,000	599,994
Superannuation	714,000	108,297
Local Property Tax	9,065,150	1,510,858
Rates	14,662,952	778,713
Capital transfer	732,898	0
Total	88,337,000	9,798,703

Allocations Notified

TII Capital Maintenance Scheme – N78 Killyganard	€199,938.00
Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2021	€796,352.00
Heritage Council – Laois Heritage Plan Projects	€36,000
Built Heritage Investment Scheme – Conservation Grants	€96,000

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO REFUGEES FLEEING CONFLICT

Recent email correspondence from the Department of An Taoiseach to City and County Managers Association (CCMA) highlighted the imminent arrival of a significant number of displaced Ukrainians to Ireland in the coming days and weeks. In this regard, local authorities were requested to assemble lists of suitable vacant premises in our respective counties that could be considered to accommodate refugees, so to develop short and long term responses that meet our country’s obligations under the Temporary Protection Directive. A list of properties identified as having such potential in Laois was recently forwarded to the Department’s Humanitarian Response team and they will revert having examined same.

Laois County Council staff are currently assisting IPAS with the accommodation of a number of persons who have arrived into Ireland since last week and will continue to do so in this regard.

Members are advised that Laois County Council has set up a “Ukrainian Crisis Multi Agency Response Forum” along the lines of and largely similar to the Covid-19 Community Response Forum of the past two years. The forum convened for its first meeting on Wednesday 23rd March at which a number of tasks and local actions were agreed. The membership of the forum is included for your information in an information pack to be presented to the members at the March monthly Council meeting.

All efforts currently are being supported by An Garda Síochána, Dept of Social Protection and Housing personnel at this point. We are very grateful to all who have given assistance to date in sourcing available accommodation and who have made offers of support.

Members will be updated regularly on any developments locally. We are very grateful to all who have given assistance to date in sourcing available accommodation and who have made offers of support. Members will be updated regularly on any developments locally.

HOUSING DELIVERY

Social Housing Schemes Currently Under Construction – LCC & AHB

Location	No. of Houses	Constructed by	Comment
Moore St, Rathdowney	6	LCC (Construction)	On site – expected delivery Q2 2022
Pattison Estate, Mountmellick	10	LCC (Construction)	On site – expected delivery Q2 2022
Gleann na Glaise, Ballyroan	10	LCC (Construction)	On Site – expected delivery Q2 2022
Sean Doire, Durrow	22	LCC (Construction)	On Site – expected delivery Q2 2022
Coolroe, Ballybrittas	1	LCC (Construction)	Rural construct – on site; to be delivered in Q2 2022
Featherbed Lane, Borris-In-Ossory (Ph 2)	5	LCC (Turnkey)	On Site – expected delivery Q2 2022
Bruach Na Habhainn, Killeen	4	LCC (Turnkey)	On site – Delivery Q2 2022

The Orchard, Ballylynan	5	LCC (Turnkey)	On Site – Phase 1 (2 units) delivery Q1 2022 On Site – Phase 1 (3 units) delivery Q4 2022
Market Square, Portarlington	18	LCC (Turnkey)	On site – delivery Q2 2023
Church Avenue, Stradbally	31	LCC (Turnkey)	Phase 1 on site for delivery Q1 2023; Phase 2 to be delivered Q4 2023.
Oak Park Halting Site	4	LCC	TAU funded scheme – delivery estimated at end of 2022.
Harpurs Lane Portlaoise	44	Respond	On site – expected delivery Q1 2023
Clonrooske Abbey, Portlaoise	32	Cluid Housing	On site – to be delivered in phases by June 2022. All 32 units now built to roof level, internal fixing and finishes being carried out on all 32 units.
The Maltings & Roselawn, Portlaoise	55	Cluid Housing	Phase 1 Estimated delivery Q4 2022
Holdbrook, Portlaoise	10	Cluid Housing	Phase 2 – delivery Q4 2022
Droughill Lawns, Portarlington	26	Oaklee Housing	On site – expected delivery end of April 2022
The Springs, Kilminchy, Portlaoise	43	Cluid Housing	2 Phases – on site; Phase 1 delivery estimated Q3 2022
Goldencroft, Portlaoise (Old CBS site)	67	Cluid Housing	3 Phases – on site; 1 st Phase Q4 2022
Ballymorris Green, Portarlington	12	Cluid Housing	Currently on site - Phase 1 delivery delayed due to availability of sub-contractors – estimated at Q3 2022
South Dublin Road, Kilminchy	36	Cooperative Housing	On site – commenced early January 2022; delivery not expected until end 2023.
TOTAL	441		

Social Housing Schemes at Planning, Design or Tender Stage – LCC & AHB

Location/Scheme	No of Houses	To be constructed by	Comment
Harbour Court, Mountmellick	6	LCC (Construction)	Stage 4 Approved – Contractor due on site in Q1 2022.
St. Kieran's Errill	14	LCC (Construction)	Stage 3 Approved – Stage 4 application to be submitted in Q1 2022
Mooreville, Rathdowney	7	LCC (Construction)	Stage 3 Approved
Carraig Glas, Stradbally	26	LCC (Construction)	Stage 2 Approved
Clonrooske, Portlaoise	11	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 Approved
Iona, Portlaoise	9	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 Approved
Doonane	12	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 Approved
Derry Road, Durrow	22	LCC (Construction)	18 dwellings plus 4 serviced sites proposed Stage 1 Approved
Ballyadams	1	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 Approved – Tender underway for engagement of Design Team
Stradbally Road, Portlaoise	80 (approx)	Mixed tenure	Masterplan for entire lands recently noted by Portlaoise MD members. Options being explored for tenure and delivery of scheme

Bracklone St, Portarlinton	12	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 To Be Submitted
Rushall Mountrath	2	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 To Be Submitted
Main St, Ballinakill	3	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 To Be Submitted
Moanbaun, Mountrath	9	LCC (Construction)	Stage 1 To Be Submitted
The Meadows (old Midland Dairies site), Portlaoise	49	Cluid Housing	Funding Approved – on site for delivery Q4 2023
Convent Lands, Portlaoise	51	Sophia Housing	Stage 2 Approved. Design Team currently preparing Stage 3 application, to be submitted to DHGLH by end of March.
County Hotel, Portlaoise	10	Cluid Housing	Site investigations still ongoing, delays due to structural condition of the building. Clean up of front facade of the property to be complete within two weeks.
Hepburn Court	54	Cluid Housing	Part 8 will be published for public consultation before end of March.
Curragh na Mona, Abbeyleix Road, Portlaoise	39	Respond Housing	Tender examination completed by AHB; awaiting construction commencement date.
Doran's Site, adj to O'Moore Place, Portlaoise	70 potentially	Coop Housing	Layout and no of units to be confirmed
TOTAL	494		

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Expressions of Interest were invited via advertisement and LCC website in December 2021 in respect of:

- a. Appropriately zoned land for housing development
- b. Advanced Purchase arrangements for un-commenced residential developments

A survey of potential purchasers of affordable houses published on 3rd February, closing date 1st April. The survey will inform our research and ultimately our decision on prospective buyer affordability and potential location of scheme(s).

Members are also advised that the Council's Housing Team has met local builders on a face to face basis to explore the potential of affordable and cost rental agreements.

VACANT HOMES

Expressions of Interest recently invited via advertisement and LCC website for vacant /derelict properties. A Vacant Homes internal working group has been established to map and examine vacancy in a number of towns, including Mountmellick, Mountrath and Rathdowney. This is with a view to assessing future use of such properties in terms of housing or other use.

Properties identified/reported as vacant at 15 th March, 2022	293
Of the above, properties to be examined further re suitability for social housing	54
Of the above, properties being investigated as possible development sites	37
No further action taken	127*

**Properties found to be occupied on inspection and/or deemed to be unsuitable for social housing.*

CPO

Vacant Properties acquired by CPO now in LA ownership	15
Properties currently undergoing CPO	5

Repair & Leasing

Applications received to date	35
Applications approved to proceed	6
Applications under consideration	3
Leases commenced	1

HOUSING STOCK

Housing Re-Lets

Month	LA Keys Surrendered	Properties Acquired	Works Completed
January 22	10	0	3
February 22	6	1	10
TOTAL (YTD)	16	1	13

NOTE: There are currently 39 vacant units from our existing stock and a further 12 units that the Council acquired recently. Works are either ongoing on these properties or specifications are being prepared for works to be carried out.

Housing Maintenance

Month	Work Orders Raised	Work Orders Closed	Work Orders Open
January 22	424	352	72
February 22	517	487	30
TOTAL (YTD)	941	839	102

Midlands Retrofit Programme:

Address	Properties	Units Commenced	Units Completed	Update
Mountain View Sq., Portlaoise	24	11	0	M&E (plumbing) Works complete on 11 houses. Sealing and final testing cannot be completed until windows arrive on site. Windows to start arriving 28 th March.
Hillview Drive, Portlaoise	18	1	0	M&E (plumbing) Works complete on 1 house. (windows and doors needed to complete house)
Quigley Pk, Rathdowney	20	20	0	Works started, 1 house
Radharc Alainn, Arles	18	18	0	Air-tightness Tests completed
Derrymore, Portarlington	26	26	20 (Just Doors to be installed)	20 houses nearly complete, heating in place. Door installations started on 8 th March 2022. 20 houses to be fully completed by end of March.
Kirwan Park, Mountmellick	51	51	0	Air-tightness Tests complete.
Total Properties	157	127	20	

Energy Efficiency/Retrofitting Programme:

Address	Properties	Units Commenced	Units Completed	Update
O'Moore Place, Portlaoise	29	0	0	Retrofit re-tendered in Q1 2022.
Total Properties	29	0	0	

HOUSING NEED

Homeless Presentations

Time Period	Homeless Presentations	Emergency Homeless
16 th Feb – 15 th March 2022	28	7
Year to Date	45	20

Homeless Accommodation

Individuals Accessing.....	Emergency Accommodation as of 15 th March 2022	Transition Accommodation as of 15 th March 2022
Adults	18	0
Children	14	0

Social Housing List at 21st March 2022

TOTAL No of Social Housing Applicants	1,746
Applicants in receipt of HAP	928
Net Need	818

Housing Allocations

Method of Delivery	Allocations to 21 st March 2022	Numbers allocated Year-to-date 2022
First allocation of New Build/Acquired unit	3	3
Relet / Refurbished Stock Allocation	8	16
Nomination to AHB housing	2	9
TOTAL Y-T-D		28

Housing Assistance Payment

No of Active HAP Tenancies at 21 st March 2022	928
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LOANS & GRANTS

Loans

*Local Authority Home Loan: 4th January 2022 – 16th March 2022	
No of Loan Approvals	3
No of Applications refused	0

Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme now closed. All applications **received on or after the 4th January 2022 will be in respect of the new Local Authority Home Loan.*

A briefing note is currently being prepared for the elected members on the new Local Authority Home Loan Scheme under 'Housing for All' and qualification criteria.

Grants at 16th March 2022

Allocation 2022 (LCC Revenue Budget)	No of Applications Received in 2022	No of Approved Applications at works stage	Comment
€1,260,000	48	84 (€462,500)	All grants approved can proceed to carry out works and draw down grant monies upon satisfactory completion. Applicants revert to LCC once works are complete.

Disabled Persons Grant for Social Housing at 16th March 2022

Allocation 2022	Expenditure / Commitments to date	No. of applicants benefitting	No of new applications Received in 2022	Comment
TBC	€191,500.62	21	9	Small works on 20 properties currently ongoing; will be completed by end of Q1 2022.

Queries in relation to Housing Grants should be emailed to housinggrants@laoiscoco.ie

LEASING

RAS/Leasing Statistics at 15th March 2022

Active RAS tenancies	85
Active short-term leasing tenancies (Social Housing Leasing Scheme)	30
Active Repair & Leasing Scheme tenancy	1
Active long-term leasing tenancies with private landlords/investors	10
Active long-term Mortgage to Rent leasing tenancies with a private company	18

PRIVATE RENTED

Private Rental Standards - Housing Inspections

No of private rented inspections carried out 01/01/2202 - 08/03/2022	134
Target for private rented inspections in 2022	1,181

HOUSING DELIVERY ACTION PLAN

Further to the publication of “Affordable Housing Act 2021”, “Housing Circular 28/2021 on Affordable Housing Act 2021 - Amendments to Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000”, and “*Housing for All; a New Housing Plan for Ireland*” in September 2021, Laois County Council has prepared a Housing Delivery Action Plan in relation to the provision of social and affordable housing in Laois for the period 2022-2026, a copy of which was previously circulated to the elected members. This sets out the annual new build social housing delivery targets under *Housing for All* over the next 5 years as outlined by the Dept of Housing, Local Government and Heritage on 20th September 2021.

Annual Social Housing Delivery Targets 2022-2026

Planning, Development and Heritage

LAOIS DRAFT COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2021-2027

The LCDP (2021-2027) came into effect on the 8th March 2022. It is currently subject to a Draft Direction from the Minister for Local Government and Planning, with public consultation being held on the 21st March 2022 until 3rd April 2022.

LOCAL AREA PLANS

Work on the 4 Local Area Plans for Portlaoise, Mountmellick, Graiguecullen and Portarlinton will commence following the adoption of the Laois County Development Plan.

Two of the Plans, Graiguecullen and Portarlinton will be in the form of joint plans with Carlow County Council and Offaly County Council respectively.

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE

PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMPARATIVE FIGURES FROM 2021 TO 2022

Year	Valid applications from 01/01/2022 – 10/3/2022	Valid applications from 01/01/2021 – 10/03/2021
	108	118

2022 PERFORMANCE

Number of valid applications received:	108
Number of decisions made	132
Number of applications granted:	118 (Decisions to Grant)
Number of applications refused:	14 (Decisions to Refuse)
Invalid applications returned to applicant:	31 (2022 Invalid Applications)

Files scanned up to -	7 th March 2022
Referrals to Area Offices (working days):	within 14 days achieved
Pre planning	
No of requests to date	70
No of meetings held to date Up to and including the 10th February 2022	47
Wait time	3 weeks

ENFORCEMENT UPDATE

<u>Current year</u>	<u>2022</u>		<u>2021</u>	
<u>Service Review</u>	Feb	Jan - Feb	Feb	Jan - Feb
Total number of new cases subject to complaints that were investigated	17	26	9	12
Number of Warning Letters served	32	63	14	26
Number of Enforcement Notices served	5	6	14	23
No Of cases referred for legal proceedings	1	1	0	0
Number of cases in Court(incl adjournments)	13	19	5	9
Number of cases Resolved in Court	1	1	0	0
Number of Files Closed	15	29	14	18
Number of cases on system	179	179	163	163
Enforcement Costs recouped	€ 2,306.98	€2,556.98	2487.02	2886.24
Number of Valid Retention Applications Received relating to Enforcement Action	1	4	6	8
Fees received through Valid Retention Applications Received relating to Enforcement Action	€757.50	€3,495.70	€1,867.00	€2,243.00
Legal fees paid	€5,514.25	€5,866.65	€0.00	€597.74

HERITAGE

March 2022

1. MRTTT Just Transition Project Conservation and Pollination

- *Works:* Conservation plans for 5 sites are big finalised and will be published as draft soon. Vegetation management complete and structural engineers reports on masonry in preparation. In parallel with this specifications are underway for masonry conservation and it is planned to advertise for contractor tender for three sites this year.
- *Training:* Ecologist for community training has been appointed and workshop planning is underway

- *Communications:* Film company Crannog Media is continuing recording of the project.

2. Laois Heritage Plan Projects

Decision received on Heritage Council funding, €36,000 has been allocated for Heritage Plan projects this year. Projects are:

- Awareness: Events and promotion for Heritage Week, short films on the Gordon Bennet motor race
- Connecting Communities: Management work and kids archaeology dig for Timahoe Heritage Festival
- Publication of Book on the Rock of Dunamase
- Laois Festival of Flight

3. Biodiversity and Climate Change

3.1. Climate Change Webinars

A series of 4 webinars on the topic of climate change and heritage was held in February and March, with over 200 attendees at each (on zoom). Presentations were made by Heritage Officers from around the country and the Abbeyleix Climate Actin Project was one of the projects presented. The webinars can be viewed at <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4SXNMePVC2EuoGUUcLdywnxLncYuSc7R>

3.2. National Biodiversity Action Plan

Draft National Biodiversity Action Plan has been published (23rd February) and Laois County Council has been invited to make a submission on the draft by 23rd March 2022 (extended from 14th March) at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NBAP2>

3.3. Local Biodiversity Action Fund

Wetland Survey Phase II Field Survey will commence shortly, it is hoped that 20 – 30 sites will be surveyed this year, of a total 302 sites recorded in the desk study. Public event to publicise the project held at Bloom HQ on 10th March, very positive response.

As additional funding is available this year an application was made for additional funding for:

- Portlaoise Biodiversity Planting (led by Portlaoise MD)
- Survey additional wetland sites.

Decision is awaited on this additional funding.

4. Conservation of Churches and Graveyards in 2022

Condition reports for **Ballylinan** and **Clonkeen** churches were completed and applications for further work were submitted through the Community Monuments Fund (see below).

Grass and rank vegetation has been cut at **Ridge Graveyard**. A plan for future management (and a budget) will need to be agreed with the Portlaoise MD.

Emergency works at **Killeshin** graveyard wall were put in place. A longer term solution to the issue is being devised by David Kelly Partnership consulting engineers. Consent will be required in relation to archaeology.

5. Creative Ireland

5.1. Heritage and Landscape Training “Know your Locality”

Online training course in local heritage (with Creative Ireland funding) is ongoing (five sessions in March 2022), with field trip to Rock of Dunamase planned Sunday 27th March.

5.2. Laois Festival of flight

Laois Festival of Flight April 7th – 10th will involve performance of the Col Fitzmaurice music with Music Generation and Martin Tourish, historical talks, schools workshops and a wreath-laying

ceremony with display of the Portlaoise Plane. Detail have been advertised in local papers, on Midlands 103 and on social media. Full details at www.laois.ie/festivalofflight

5.3 Mountmellick Mural

Provisional approval has been given to work with Birdwatch Ireland on a Swift Mural in Mountmellick. We will be working with BirdWatch Ireland on this.

6. Community Action Projects

Heritage Council Community Heritage Grants were submitted with support from the Heritage Officer, decisions awaited.

7. Town and Village Renewal and Regeneration Projects

7.1. Timahoe TVRS

Lotts Architecture working on specifications and hope to get final approval and go to tender for works by Feb. Works due to be complete by June 2022.

7.2. Stradbally TVRS

Design team working on specifications for tender for the Stradbally Bridge, TII approval of method statement is required. Meetings have been held with the community on other elements of the project and discussions with Community Section are ongoing.

8. Commemorations

The Heritage Officer continues to work with the County Librarian on the Decade of Commemorations, including plans for commemoration of the centenary of the Air Corps and Col Fitzmaurice in 2022.

9. Community Monuments Fund

A total of 7 applications for funding were made to the **Community Monuments Fund** for 2022, a decision is awaited.

BROADBAND

1. National Broadband Ireland (NBI)

Section 254 Licences have been applied for in the Eastern Municipal Area to provide pole network for rollout. NBI are currently working on the Programme of works for rollout in the county. NBI are engaging with LCC in relation to above and in relation to hedge cutting.

2. WIFI 4 EU.

WiFi4EU is a project developed by the European Union that intends to bring free WiFi to local communities. The rollout of the provision of WIFI infrastructure in public places is underway (equipment, installation and maintenance and support) in the following locations : Portlaoise, Portarlinton, Abbeyleix, Mountmellick as follows :

- Fit out is currently under way in Portarlinton and Portlaoise in various building along the Main Street and the Link Road;
- Consultation is under way with property owners in Abbeyleix .
- Survey and Consultation to commence on Mountmellick.

This project is being delivered by “Network and Infrastructure Support Ltd.” On behalf of Laois County Council. The Broadband Officer is available for any queries in relation to this project.

3. Broadband Connection Points (BCP's)

As part of the roll out of the National Broadband Plan, Laois County Council launched **Broadband Connection Points (BCPs)** in 6 areas in rural Laois.

1. Vicarstown Community Centre
2. Emo “Old School” Community Centre
3. Oisín House Rossmore, Killeslin
4. Donaghmore workhouse and Agricultural Museum
5. Shanganamore Community Centre Barrowhouse
6. Ballyroan Community Centre

Connected Hubs Fund Call 2 Project is also under way and it is hoped some or all of the BCP’s will avail of grants for their Centres, submission date is 6th April 2022.

Local Enterprise & Economic Development

Local Enterprise Office (LEO):

There continues to be a steady demand for LEO supports as follows:

- €101,871 approved in grant aid to 5 Laois businesses
- 359 owners/managers/employees participated in LEO training programmes
- 32 potential entrepreneurs participated in Start Your Own Business Courses
- 71 Laois businesses availed of mentoring in finance, marketing, exporting, HR & health & safety
- 6 Trading Online Voucher approvals to the value of €13,280
- 11 Laois companies currently taking part in a Green for Micro programme
- 6 Laois companies currently taking part in LEAN programmes
- 27 Laois companies participated in the Client Stimulus Programme

Local Enterprise Week 2022

Local Enterprise Week took place from 7th to 11th March and featured a wide range of seminars, workshops and one to one mentoring clinics in the areas of finance, social media, business planning, web development and Brexit advice. A Women in Business Networking event was also organized by LEO in collaboration with Laois Chamber to mark International Womens’ Day.

Student Enterprise Awards 2022

The Local Enterprise Office is working with the secondary schools in Laois to deliver workshops in business planning, ideas generation, marketing and finance. The Student Enterprise County Final will take place on Tuesday 29th March where the winners will be announced. They will represent Laois at the National Student Awards in Dublin in May.

National Enterprise Awards 2022

Salutem Insights will represent Laois at the National Enterprise Awards to be held in the Mansion House on the 2nd June 2022. Salutem Insights create tailored solutions for a variety of complex pharma industry issues within the public and private marketplace.

Business Support Unit (BSU):

The BSU launched an advertising campaign in January/February 2022 in respect of the Town & Village Streetscape Enhancement scheme. A further 36 applications were received bringing the total number of applications received to date to 98.

The Vacant Commercial Property Incentive Scheme was launched in Portlaoise. This scheme offers a potential 11 incentives to businesses who set up a business in a previously vacant premises in Portlaoise Town Center. The BSU is collaborating with Laois Chamber on the Scheme and will liaise with auctioneers and property owners regarding the benefits of the scheme.

The BSU is chairing a steering committee in conjunction with the Roads Section to support Downtown Portlaoise with the provision of a Christmas Festival in Portlaoise in December 2022. 2 meetings have been held to date this year.

The BSU is working with the Marketing Sub-committee of the Portlaoise Town Team on a series of initiatives to market Portlaoise and what it has to offer. An application is being prepared to seek funding for the project from Laois Partnership.

The BSU submitted an application for funding to the Department of Agriculture in respect of a reboot of Laois Taste. The BSU attended and presented at the agm of Laois Taste in the Killeshin Hotel on 2nd March and have committed to working with them on various projects in 2022.

The BSU is preparing to launch the Portarlington and Portlaoise Façade Enhancement Schemes in early April.

Roads, Transportation & Smarter Travel

Schedules of MD Works;

The Schedules of MD Works 2022 have been presented to each of the Municipal District Committees for the Members' consideration and agreement at the March 2022 MD meetings.

Roadworks Programme 2022;

The Annual Road Works Scheme 2022 will be presented for the Members' consideration at March 2022 Monthly Meeting. Work has commenced delivering the Road works Scheme across all three Municipal Districts.

River Drainage Maintenance

Various, county-wide surveys are now ongoing to inform and underpin river drainage maintenance works later in 2022.

Environment & Environmental Protection

- Kyletalesha Landfill, Transfer Station and Civic Amenity Site, Portlaoise:**
Normal services continue at the Kyletalesha Landfill Facility. Landfill monitoring and aftercare maintenance on-going.
- Portarlington Civic Amenity Site:**
This facility is operated and managed under contract with Bord Na Mona Recycling.
- Recommended Minimum Criteria for Environmental Inspections (RMCEI)**
The 2022 RMCEI Plan submitted to the EPA on the 28th February 2022.
- Bring Banks:**
Tonnes of collected recyclable material in 2022.

Jan 2022	Feb 2022	Mar 2022 (To Date)
163.77	115.14	67.42

Table 1 – 2022 Bring Bank Tonnes

The bring bank facilities in the county are being inspected and maintained by Environment staff.

5. Waste Enforcement & Litter Management:

(a) **Clean Up Laois Week 2022 - 18th to 22nd April 2022.**

Groups are invited to register with Environment Section. The collected litter will be gathered by Bord na Mona during the week commencing 25th April.

(b) **Waste Enforcement & Complaints**

Table 1 below details the number and types of complaints received to date in 2022 by the Environment Section. Complaints for 2021 are also shown for comparison purposes.

Year	Complaint Type						
	Waste Enforcement	Management & Infrastructure	Air	Water	Noise	Vet	Total
2022	148	3	4	12	5	9	181

Table 2 - Environmental Complaint Register

- March saw the beginning of household waste disposal inspections across the County with homeowners required to provide evidence of their household waste disposal and segregation.

6. Illegal Dumping:

Waste Enforcement continue to tackle illegal dumping in various problematic areas within the County in accordance with current legislation. Enforcement efforts are limited by virtue of the current prohibition on the use of CCTV etc.

78 Tonnes of material collected to the end of February 2022.

7. Environmental Protection

a) **Protect the Water Quality Status in all Water Bodies**

All water pollution complaints are being investigated.

b) **Air & Noise:**

All noise and air complaints are being investigated.

Emergency Planning, Fire Services & Flood Relief

In 2022 (to date) Laois County Fire & Rescue Service attended 52 emergency incidents consisting of 24 fires, 34 special service incidents & 14 false alarms.

Turnout by Station*:

Portlaoise – 21	Portarlinton - 17	Stradbally – 14	Mountmellick – 8
Abbeyleix - 9	Mountrath – 4	Durrow – 11	Rathdowney – 8

*Note – figures are higher as many incidents are 2 station turnouts as per the PDA.

Fire Services Capital Programme

- The Part VIII planning process for a new fire station for Stradbally was approved by Laois County Council at its January 2022 meeting. Correspondence has now been sent to the

NDFEM advising them of same & requesting approval to go to tender for a design team to progress the project. An acknowledgement of this request has been received from the NDFEM.

- In 2021 Elected Members were advised of an allocation of €140,000 for the acquisition of a new Water Tanker to support Fire Services operations in County Laois. The tanker chassis has been delivered to HPMP Fire, who are now in the process of building the body. Delays due to supply issues have resulted in the build being delayed and delivery has now been put back until Q1 2022.

WATER SERVICES AND RURAL WATER

Public Water and Wastewater Capital

The following capital works have been approved by Irish Water:-

Durrow –Provision of a storage/blend tank and booster pump set being discussed with Irish Water. Final hydrogeologist report/recommendation detailing correct/sustainable operation of the new well, to be forwarded to Irish Water/Laois County Council.

Portlaoise Water Supply Improvement Scheme - Irish Water now progressing with developing well PW07 and well PW08. A draft planned maintenance programme has been submitted to IW for funding approval. A meeting took place at Kilminchy WTP on the 04/03/2022 with Briody Well Drilling Ltd., to discuss/progress this maintenance programme.

Disinfection/PH control programme – Civil works progressing in Derryguile, Kyle, Five Wells and Lough WTP. MEICA works progressed at Knocks, Derryguile, Lough, Kyle and Ballyroan WTP. SAT now complete at the Knocks and Ballyroan WTPs with both plants currently in process proving. Further site visits were carried out by CWL to Fermoy, Arles and Coolenaugh to progress the new design for these plants. Upgrade works progressing at Derrymoyle and Kilminchy WTP during 2022.

Castletown WwTP-Inlet Works Storm and Sludge Programme - remaining civil works to be completed over the coming weeks. Storm tank installation is underway.

Ballyroan WwTP Upgrade – a task instruction was recently issued to Conway Engineering by Irish Water for Ballyroan WwTP upgrade under contract 170/17_007 Wastewater Treatment Plants Contract 2 for the provision of a new SBR Tank, maintenance works to existing SBR Tank, new above ground Stormwater Holding Tank, new Sludge Holding Tank, Flow Splitting Chamber etc.

Borris Road, Portlaoise.

In regard to waste water capacity issues around the Borris Road, Hermitage, Colliers Lane area, Irish Water Asset Planning has identified 3 no. solutions and a preferred solution. Following a workshop in March this matter will be referred to Asset Delivery. All solutions have been run through the current hydraulic model. The solutions include pump station pumping capacity increases, installation of storage capacity at Borris Road pump station & sewer capacity improvements. No project programme has been agreed yet but it has been confirmed that there will be no increased connection costs to the proposed development (Kellys) at Rathevan.

At the first workshop, in an effort to reduce the number of pump stations, it was agreed that Laois County Council would examine levels between the Hermitage Pump Station and the Borris Road Pump Station to confirm if there was any possibility for a gravity sewer from the Hermitage to Borris Road. This was surveyed and confirmed that it will not be possible as the existing sump level in Borris Road pump station would need to be dropped 3.5m. Irish Water are going to consider if accommodating a gravity flow into the proposed (deeper) storm storage tank is feasible.

Filter Upgrade Programme – Kilminchy WTP put forward for upgrades, confirmation of scope required post filter assessment report.

Networks and Water Conservation - First fix, find and fix and lead replacement works continue throughout the county. Significant progress in Portarlinton in the area of leakage management. Replacement of watermain in the Swan network is ongoing.

Taking in Charge

Continue working with IW to take the 17 no. outstanding legacy estates in charge by IW - already taken in charge by LCC. 10 no. estates have been progressed and referred to the Planning Section and work is ongoing on the remaining 7 no. estates.

Multi Annual Rural Water Programme.

Projects under the current programme, 2019 – 2021, are being completed and claims paid and recouped. A Contractor has been appointed and also appointed PSCS for the proposed grouped sewerage scheme at Goodwin Estate Rosenallis with a stated start date for the end of March/start of April. The contractor is now saying that due to workload and staff turnover they will not be in a position to start until the summer or may not be able to carry out this work at all. In this case it would not be possible to get this project done as all other tender prices exceed the threshold cost per connection, making the scheme non-viable. There is no prospect of increasing the number of connections. A retender of this project will result in significantly increased tender prices. The contractor is to confirm by next week if they propose to continue and when they will start.

Details of the next Rural Water Programme from the Department are expected to be issued within the next 2-3 weeks.

Well Grants – 11 no. applications have been received in 2022 and all are being progressed.

Laboratory - In accordance with the EPA approved programme, as an essential service Lab staff continue to conduct testing and sampling throughout in accordance with Covid-19 safe systems of work plans/risk assessments. Work to maintain the existing customer base and seek and secure new business from neighbouring Local Authorities, LAWPRO and LCC's Environment Section in accordance with market opportunities is ongoing.

Corporate, Community, Climate Action, Arts, Culture, Libraries & Tourism

A Ceremony of Remembrance and Reflection to remember all those who have lost their lives during the pandemic and to pay tribute to those who have contributed to how we faced and are facing the challenges was held on Sunday 20th March 2022 in Fitzmaurice Place, Portlaoise.

COMMUNITY

Laois Public Participation Network

Laois PPN sought nominations for an Area Rep for the Borris-in-Ossory/ Mountmellick MD to the Laois PPN Secretariat. Nina Horan was deemed elected on 1st March.

Laois PPN hosted a well attended online Info Session on Leader Funding to PPN Member Groups on Wednesday 9th March. The Info Session was presented by Jenny Collier, Laois Partnership and was followed by a Q&A session on Leader Funding for participants at the end.

Laois PPNs County Plenary took place online on Tuesday 22nd March.

Laois Comhairle na nÓg

Laois Comhairle na nÓg are meeting every week. They are working on their project of Mental Health and are planning to hold 2 events before the summer. 6 members of Comhairle will attend Dail na nÓg on Saturday 26 March.

Age Friendly

Preparation of a new Age Friendly Strategy 2022-2027 is underway. A well attended workshop took place in March with the various stakeholders to review the existing strategy. A meeting of the Older Peoples Council also took place in March. This was the first in person meeting since the Covid pandemic began.

World of Work Programme 2021/22

As part of the World of Work programme, A 'Day in the Life' session took place at Portlaoise college in March. A number of staff from Laois County Council spoke to the students about their role in Laois County Council and how they progressed their careers. The session was very informative and gave students a chance to see the diverse career options available in local authorities.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

Laois County Council received funding of €766,652 for 4 projects under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2021 and funding of €29,700 for 1 project under the Town and Village Renewal Project Development Measure 2021. Details of approvals are as follows:

Scheme	Project	Approved Grant
TVRS 2021	Killeshin-Establishment of a Digital Hub	€500,000
TVRS 2021	Mountrath-Renovation of the 1st floor of the Brigidine Convent	€137,552
TVRS 2021	Camross-Completion of new park to include recreational facilities. Complete the Hub with facilities for remote working. Enhance outdoor recreational, seating and meeting facilities	€33,250
TVRS 2021	Knock-Construction of a new premises for Men's Shed	€95,850
TVRS Project Development Measures 2021	Landscape plan for Mountrath	€29,700

CLIMATE ACTION

School Sustainable Travel Study of Portlaoise was presented to Town Team Sub Travel Group by Travel Officers from An Taisce and funded by LEADER. The study commenced in October 2020 to establish a baseline of modes of school travel in Portlaoise so that we can measure impact of improved cycling infrastructure and also find out what are the barriers to walking or cycling to school. The final results of the study were presented to Community and Climate Action and Roads SPC's by An Taisce.

Green Flag Renewal Assessments were conducted in 9 schools and one new Green Flag awarded in County Laois.

National Tree Week was held on the Sunday 20th March to Saturday 26th March 2022. 500 native saplings and 100 root balled trees were distributed to 50 groups on the 25th March by Laois County Council.

SPORT & LEISURE UPDATE

Leisure Centres

Portlaoise Leisure Centre opened to the public on February 28th 2022. Portarlington Leisure Centre is operating at full pre-COVID 19 opening hours

Playgrounds Developments

Ballinakill playground was officially opened on Friday March 11th and is now under the management of Laois County Council

URBACT

Laois County Council hosted a meeting in Portlaoise of all 6 partner towns on 14th-16th March and 3 staff members participated in Placemaking Training.

ARTS & CULTURE

Laois Arthouse

A very successful Panel discussion entitled *Till Something Moves* took place on Saturday 12th March, 2pm – 5pm, exploring the optimum conditions for sustaining creative work as visual artists and writers, and the role Studio Spaces and Residencies.

Sightless Cinema

Launch of Laois ‘Sightless Cinema’ announced – on Wednesday 23rd March - online radio drama workshops for people with a visual impairment to present online radio drama workshops for people with a visual impairment from Laois for the first time. This is a Disability Awareness and Participation Funded project, supported by the Laois County Council Arts Office and the Laois office of the National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI).

Re/CENTRING/ Faoin Spéir - Mountrath

Shannon St Mountrath is the venue of the next Faoin Speir event on Sunday 27th March from 2pm – 6pm. Programme will include portraiture workshops, dance performance with the Kennedy Sisters, music by the Union key quartet and Kian Kavanagh, art with Ella de Burca and theatre performance events.

LLPPS phase 3 (Local Live Performance Scheme)

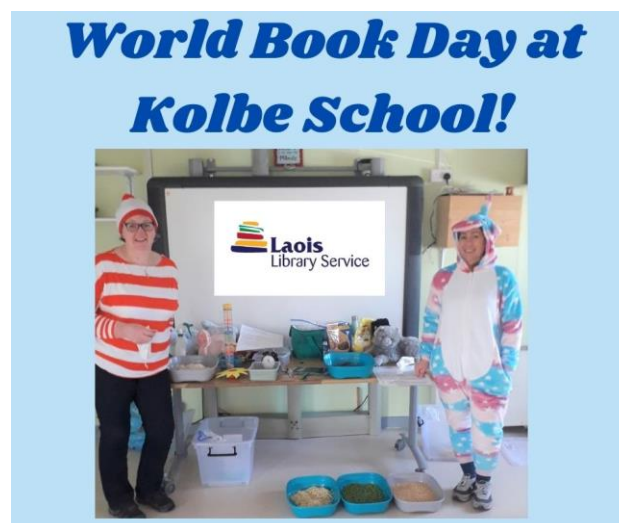
Funding from phase 3 of this scheme has been allocated to 15 separate programmes, to deliver arts projects in the County up to end of June 2022, with an overall budget of 143,000 Euro.

LIBRARY

World book day was celebrated by Laois Libraries

World book day was celebrated by Laois library Services with events held in schools, and other venues throughout the county

Below staff from the library service held a sensory storytime in Kolbe school





Above - Portlaoise library staff hosted a library stand and Information display distributing world book day books and promoting the library and its services on World Book Day 2022 in Laois Shopping Center

Sensory Library Services



Launch of Laois Library Sensory Library Services in Mountmellick Library

Laois County Libraries have recently introduced sensory library services and facilities. Funded by DAF (Dormant Accounts Funding) during 2020 and 2021, administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development, the funding has targeted library services to marginalised, socially excluded and disadvantaged communities,

The facilities in Mountmellick library include a Sensory room which provides a relaxing, quiet, calming environment with light projections and water feature.

Other Laois libraries including Abbeyleix, Mountrath and Rathdowney offer Pop up sensory spaces.

Mountmellick library now has on offer a Tovertafel or “Magic table” which consists of a series of interactive light games, specially designed to help those with dementia, autism and learning disabilities. It is suitable for all ages. Games, projected on to a table with infrared sensors, respond to hand and arm movements.

Both the sensory room and magic table can be booked for half hour sessions by ringing Mountmellick library on 057 8644572 or emailing mountmellicklibrary@laoiscoco.ie

Portarlinton and Abbeyleix Libraries also offer an interactive touch screen .

Adult learning at the library with LOETB and Laois libraries

The Library Services are pleased to be hosting free adult learning classes in our libraries in partnership with the LOETB. All the classes are free and booking is essential . See below some additional library highlights this month .

- Abbeyleix Library – Call 057 8730020 or email abbeyleixlibrary@laoiscoco.ie
Creative Writing Classes - this course in short fiction writing, held in conjunction with the LOETB, starts on Thursday, 7th April. Taking place in Abbeyleix Library from 6pm-7:30pm – places are limited so booking is essential.
- A “Staying Connected” free computer class @ the Library in Rathdowney Library is taking place . The 6 week course starts on Thursday, 31st March at 7pm.
For more information or to book a place, email rathdowneylibrary@laoiscoco.ie or call 0505 46852.
Stradbally library is also hosting a” Staying Connected “class on Thursdays from 3.30-5.30 in the library .
- A digital Photography course will be commencing in Stradbally library on Tuesday the 26th of April for 6 weeks. Contact stradballylibrary@laoiscoco for more details .



Creative Writing Classes

Portlaoise Library

FREE

Six-week course in Short Fiction Writing
Fridays, 11.30am - 1pm
Starts 4th March

☎ 05786 22333
✉ portlaoiselibrary@laoiscoco.ie



Library Online Book club

This month's title is "The Lamplighters" by Emma Stoney

**JOIN OUR
ONLINE BOOKCLUB**

- 1. VISIT OUR FACEBOOK PAGE**
Request to join here.
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/315513126404037>
- 2. DOWNLOAD THIS MONTH'S BOOK ON BORROWBOX**
This month we are reading
The Lamplighters by Emma Stoney
- 3. JOIN THE DISCUSSION ON THE LAST SUNDAY OF THE MONTH**
Let us know what you think of the book on our facebook page.



Laos County Library Service

Chief Executive's Orders

- A schedule of Chief Executive Orders signed during the month of March 2022 will be circulated.

John Mulholland
Chief Executive

March 24th 2022