

2021 - 2027

LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL
CHOMHAIRLE CHONTAE LAOISE



VOLUME 1: WRITTEN STATEMENT

Laois County Development Plan 2021 – 2027:

January 2022 - including Ministerial Direction changes

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The County Development Plan has been prepared in accordance with the provisions of Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and replaces the Laois County Development Plan 2017 - 2023. The Plan is being prepared at a time when the national economy has emerged from a sustained period of contraction and is showing strong signs of continued growth. However the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Irish society and the economy has resulted in a reimagining of how we live, work and socialize. There have been widescale job losses in areas such as accommodation, food, arts and entertainment, however for a county like Laois, remote working opportunities have arisen with people commuting less and working from home or from co working spaces in the county. The national unemployment rate stood at 14.7 per cent in September 2020 which is much higher than the pre-pandemic level. On a social side, local tourist attractions, recreational spaces and walks/ cycling routes have become better utilized during the course of the Pandemic which has informed how we plan for the future in the plan. The outlook for the next plan period is uncertain due to the combined risk of ongoing COVID-19 restrictions and a no-deal Brexit.

The main purpose of the Plan is to set out a framework for the sustainable spatial and physical development of the County Laois while considering the conservation and protection of the built and natural environment, over the period of the Plan and beyond. It also aims to carefully consider all the needs of society, its individuals and groups. Key to this is ensuring that equal opportunities are promoted under all the various themes of the Plan. Following the implementation of the Local Government Reform Act, 3 Municipal Districts have been established in the County:

- Portlaoise MD;
- Graiguecullen/Portarlinton MD; and
- Mountmellick/Borris-In-Ossory

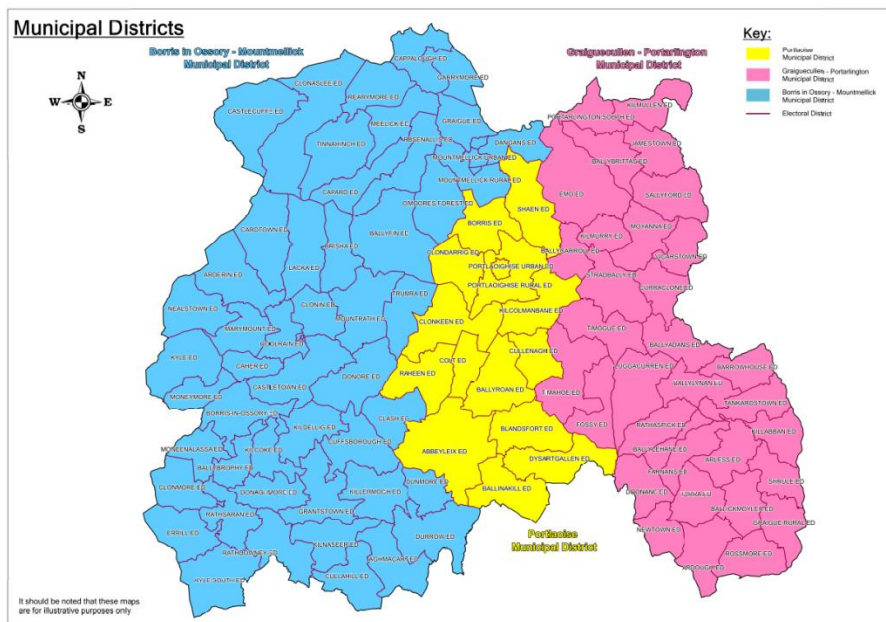


Figure 1.1 Laois Municipal Districts (Source PPN)

1.1 COUNTY LAOIS PROFILE

Laois is an inland county in the south midlands of Ireland covering an area of 171,990 hectares which equates to 2.4% of the national landmass. Occupying a strategic position near the centre of the country, County Laois is land locked and shares borders with five adjoining counties; Carlow, Kildare, Kilkenny, Offaly and Tipperary. Administratively, since January 2015 it is part of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly and in terms of travel patterns is increasingly under the influence of the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA), has twelve constituent local authorities split into three Strategic Planning Areas as follows: Dublin Region, Eastern Region and Midlands Region, of which Laois forms part of (Figure 1.2).



Figure 1.2 Strategic Planning Areas for the Eastern and Midlands Regional Authority (Source RSES)

County Laois is approximately 70kms from the Dublin metropolitan area. This relative proximity to the capital has had a major effect on both the nature and extent of development and the associated traffic movements, particularly in the northern and eastern parts of the county. The travel time between Laois and Dublin continues to decrease as a consequence of improved road and rail infrastructure.

Laois has a population of over 84,697¹ people living and working in a network of attractive towns and villages, ranging from the central key town of Portlaoise to the historic market towns of Abbeyleix and Stradbally. In physical terms, the landmass of County Laois consists of a central plain with productive agricultural land, surrounded by a number of upland areas including the Slieve Bloom Mountains in the northwest, Killeshin Plateau in the south east and Cullahill Mountain in the south. Though not as extensive as in counties such as Offaly and Kildare, there

¹ Census 2016

are significant tracks of cutaway peatlands in the county, mainly situated between Portlaoise, Mountrath and Abbeyleix.

Approximately 0.01% of County Laois is covered by water. The principal rivers are the Barrow, Nore and Erkina which flow in a northwest-southeast trajectory and there are minor man-made lakes at Ballyfin, Grantstown and Heywood. The Grand Canal passes through the north east of the county and links to the wider River Barrow navigation system. All of these watercourses offer much potential by way of natural and cultural heritage, tourism, leisure and recreational pursuits.

1.2 VISION, OBJECTIVES AND OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES

This Plan provides a positive vision for Laois which will enable the county to continue to make a significant contribution to national economic recovery by promoting sustainable development. The Strategic Vision of the Development Plan is as follows:

VISION

To improve the quality of life for all citizens in County Laois by creating sustainable communities and an environment that supports a vibrant, growing and well connected economy, making it a County where people want to live, work, visit and do business, without compromising the environmental integrity of the county.

In order to achieve this, the County Development Plan has the following objectives:

OBJECTIVES

- To provide a framework for the future sustainable development of the county, defining acceptable forms of development and where they should be directed;
- To support and facilitate and promote a transition to a low carbon society;
- To provide a detailed basis for the promotion and management of development;
- To implement National and Regional development policy provisions at a county level;
- To promote and assist Laois's economic development opportunity and encourage increased resilience in the County's enterprise;
- Support and respect the rights of the citizens of County Laois with respect to public participation in the planning process in accordance with EU and National legislation.

The following guiding and interrelated principles will be considered and integrated into each chapter and the formulation of each policy objective:



1.3 REVIEW PROCESS AND STATUTORY CONTEXT

Under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, each Planning Authority is obliged to prepare a Development Plan for its functional area every six years, the review of which should commence four years after its adoption.

However, due to the recent changes in Government planning policy (namely the introduction of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)), in accordance with Section 11 (1) (b) (iii) of the Act, the Planning Authority is required to either review or vary the current Plan within 26 weeks of the adoption of the RSES.

In this regard and given the timeframe of the existing Laois County Development Plan 2017 - 2023 which was due to be reviewed in July 2021, Laois County Council commenced a full review of the Plan in January 2020.

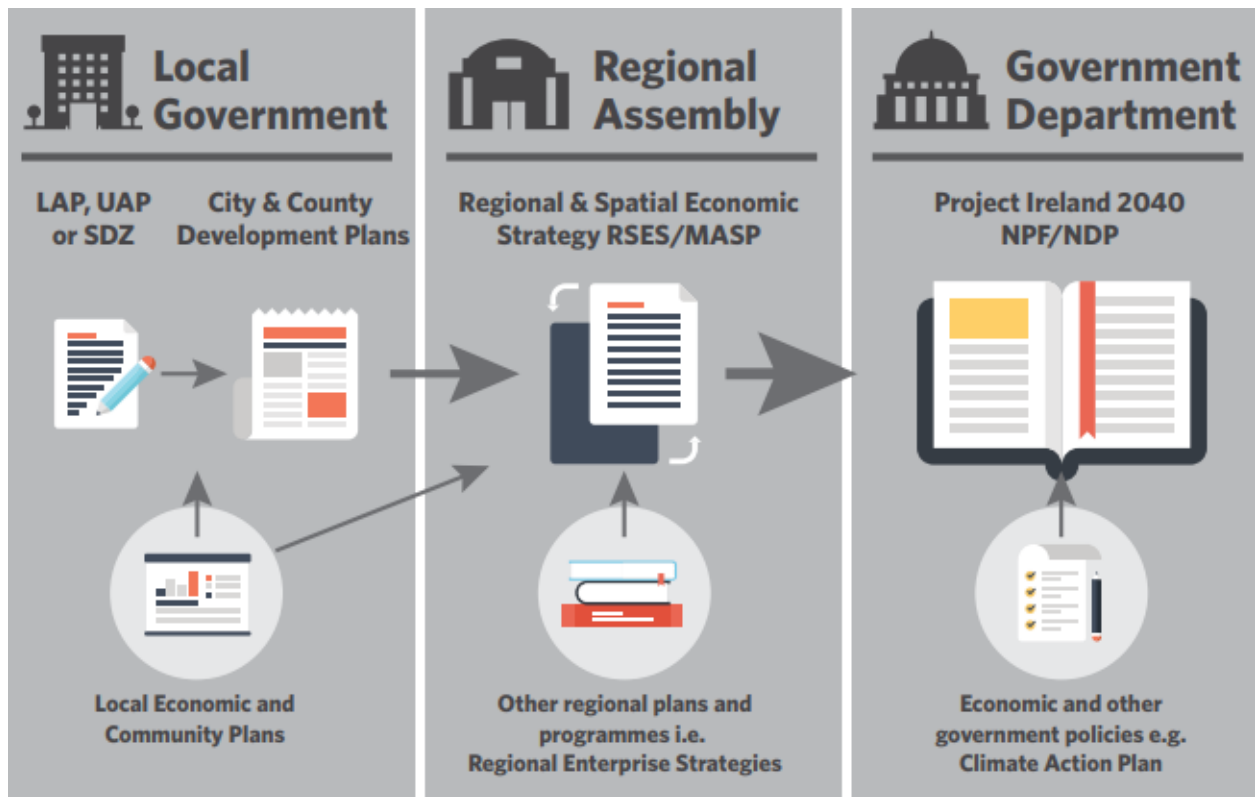


Figure 1.3: Overview of the Planning System in Ireland (source: NPF)

In accordance with Section 11 (1)(a) of the Planning & Development Act 2000 as amended, the review of the existing Development Plan and preparation of a new Development Plan by the Planning Authority is required to be strategic in nature for the purposes of developing:

- the objectives and policies to deliver an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area of the Development Plan;
- the core strategy;

- and shall take account of the statutory obligations of any local authority in the area and any relevant policies or objectives for the time being of the Government or of any Minister of the Government.

The Plan has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and fully complies with the mandatory requirements for preparation of a Development Plan as indicated in Section 10 (2) of the Act which consist of, inter alia, population and housing projections (core strategy), the zoning of land, the provision of infrastructure, the conservation and protection of the environment, and the integration of the planning and sustainable development with the social, community and cultural requirements (please note this list is not exhaustive).

The Act also requires the Development Plan to be consistent with the policies and objectives of our National and Regional planning guidelines, the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES). An overview of the planning hierarchy is illustrated in Figure 1.3.

1.3.1 PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Prior to the preparation of this Plan, notification of the review of the plan process was issued to all statutory prescribed bodies, local community and voluntary groups through the Public Participation Network (PPN), Planning and Economic Development Strategic Policy Committee (SPC), statutory undertakers and service providers and the general public.

The general public were consulted through a social media campaign, newspaper notices and public information meetings. Five public information meetings were carried out in January and February 2020 across the County.

Submissions were invited on the development of the county from all the interested persons, bodies and organisations. Following this preliminary consultation phase, the Chief Executive's Report on the submissions received was presented to the elected members. This report summarised the issues raised and outlined the Chief Executive's recommendation on changes to policy in the new plan.

1.4 ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS

The County Development Plan is also required to be compliant with other legislation and guidance, in particular the requirements for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA).

1.4.1 STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT [SEA]

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a formal systematic evaluation of the likely significant effects of a proposed plan or programme on the environment. It is carried out in parallel to the preparation of the County Development Plan in accordance with the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (SI No. 436 of 2004), as amended. The main environmental issues which are considered during this process are as follows:

- Biodiversity;
- Landscape;
- Soils;
- Population and human health;
- Water;
- Air;
- Material and cultural assets; and
- Climatic Factors.

The evaluation of the likely environmental consequences of alternative strategies for the accommodation of the future development of County Laois is also part of the SEA Process.

1.4.2 APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT (AA)

An Appropriate Assessment is an assessment of the potential effects of a proposed plan on its own or in combination with other plans or projects on one or more European Sites (these are Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for birds, Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for habitats and species). The findings of the assessment must be taken into account by the competent authority namely Laois County Council, in reaching its decision to adopt the County Development Plan 2021 - 2027.

1.4.3 STRATEGIC FLOOD RISK ASSESSMENT (SFRA)

In accordance with the Planning System and Flood Risk Management: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DEHLG, 2009), the purpose of the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) is *“to provide a broad (area wide) assessment of all types of flood risk to inform strategic land use planning decisions. SFRA’s enable the Local Authority to undertake the sequential approach, including the justification test, allocate appropriate sites for development and identify how flood risk can be reduced as part of the development plan process”*.

The context of flood risk in Laois will be considered with specific reference to people, property, infrastructure and the environment at risk of flooding. This will be examined in the context of a range of sources of flooding including fluvial, pluvial, groundwater, sewer and artificial reservoirs and canals. In accordance with the Planning System and Flood Risk Management: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DEHLG, 2009), a two stage assessment of flood risk was undertaken for settlements zoned for development within the County Development Plan 2021 - 2027.

1.5 POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) require that a development plan shall, so far as is practicable, be consistent with national plans, policies and strategies, which relate to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area covered by the plan.

The County Development Plan sits in a hierarchical context of Spatial Plans that exist at National and Regional Level as indicated in Figure 1.3 – The National Planning Framework (Project Ireland 2040) and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

1.5.1 PROJECT IRELAND 2040

Project Ireland 2040 is the Government’s overarching policy initiative to make Ireland a better country for all citizens. This policy initiative is set out in two documents as follows:

- The National Planning Framework (NPF): The NPF replaced the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) and became effective on 16th February 2018. The purpose of the NPF is to act as a strategic development framework, setting out the long-term context for Ireland’s physical development and associated progress in economic, social and environmental terms. The Framework consists of 10 National Strategic Outcomes (see Figure 1.4) and 75 National Policy Objectives formulated to ensure where development and investment should be guided to shape the national, regional and local spatial development in economic, environmental and social terms to 2040.
- The National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-27: which sets out details of infrastructure investment until 2027 and is closely aligned to the 10 National Strategic Outcomes detailed in the NPF. This will ensure that investment priorities and capital expenditure will be consistent with the underlying principles of the planning strategy set out in the NPF.



Figure 1.4: National Strategic Outcomes of the National Planning Framework

1.5.2 REGIONAL SPATIAL AND ECONOMIC STRATEGY FOR THE EASTERN AND MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

Following the publication of the NPF, each of the 3 regions within Ireland were required to adopt a Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) which replaced each Regional Authority's Regional Planning Guidelines.

County Laois forms part of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) (see Figure 1.5 below), which has 3 sub regions or Strategic Planning Areas (SPAs), namely the Midland, Eastern and Dublin SPAs. Laois is located in the Midlands SPA along with Offaly, Westmeath and Longford. The EMRA adopted the RSES on May 3rd, 2019 which became effective on June 28th, 2019.

The EMRA defines the RSES as a 'strategic plan which identifies regional assets, opportunities and pressures and provides appropriate policy responses in the form of Regional Policy Objectives. At this strategic level it provides a framework for investment to better manage spatial planning and economic development throughout the Region'.

Similar to the NPF, the RSES contains 16 Regional Strategic Outcomes and a suite of Regional Policy Objectives which are underpinned by the principles of Healthy Placemaking, Climate Action and Economic Opportunity, of which the Laois County Development Plan is statutorily required to be consistent with.

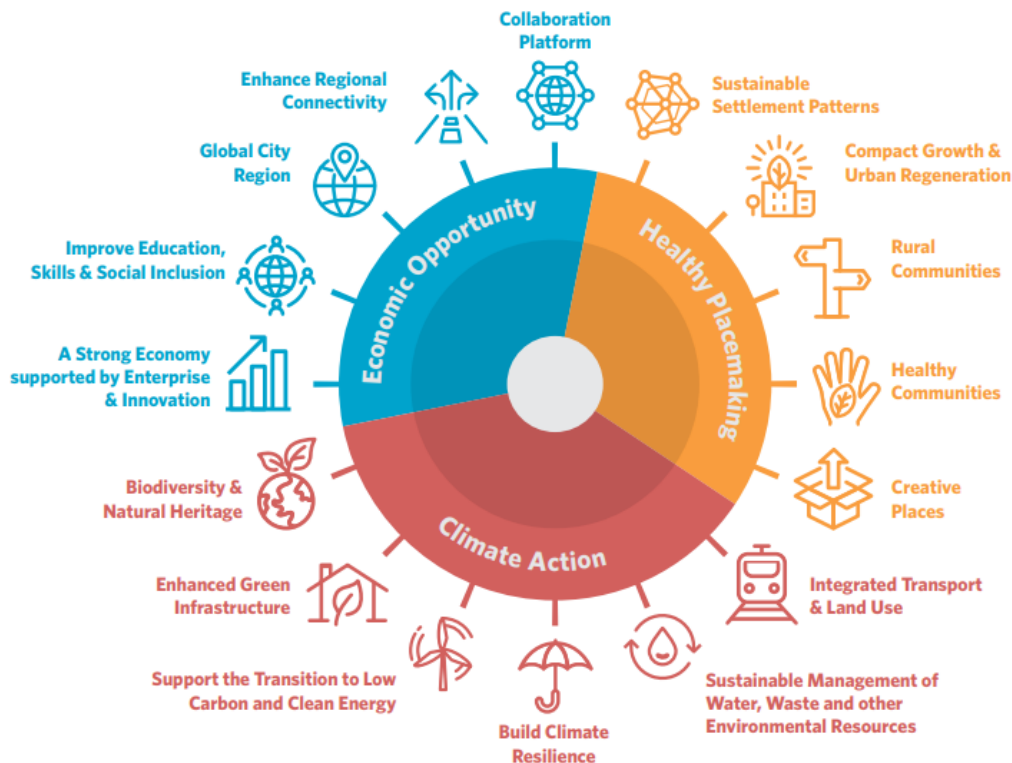


Figure 1.5: Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly (Source: RSES)

1.5.3 SECTION 28 PLANNING GUIDELINES

Other relevant documents include various Guidelines for Planning Authorities issued by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government.

1.5.4 LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN 2019 – 2024

Laois County Council's Corporate Plan 2019 – 2024 serves as a strategic framework for action during the lifetime of the Council and is one of a number of documents setting out the aims and principles that will inform and guide the activities of the Council over the period 2019 – 2024. Its Mission Statement is as follows- *'The Council will lead the sustainable economic, Social, cultural and community development of our County and deliver quality public services to the communities we serve'*.

The key strategic objectives to be pursued are as follows:

- Support and enhance local democracy.
- Facilitate and encourage sustainable economic growth and employment.
- Develop and grow Laois's social and physical infrastructure.
- Improve efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of services.
- Promote and develop Laois as a place to live, learn, work, visit and do business.

1.5.5 LAOIS LOCAL ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY PLAN (LECP) 2016 – 2021

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 sought to create a stronger and clearer role for local government in economic development and community development and introduced Local Economic and Community Plans.

The LECP sets out, for a six-year period, the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic development and the local and community development of the county, both by the Council itself directly and in partnership with other economic and community development stakeholders.

The Development Plan and the LECP effectively operate parallel to one another whereby the LECP provides a supporting framework for the economic development and local community development of Laois, the County Development Plan provides an overarching strategy and statutory policy support for the proper planning and sustainable development of the County at a spatial level. Consequently the policies and objectives of the County Development Plan must be complementary to and consistent with the high level goals and objectives of the LECP.

1.6 HOW TO USE PLAN

The format, layout and content of the Plan have been guided by the Development Plans: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DoEHLG, 2007), National Planning Framework and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy. Every effort has been made to co-ordinate and cross reference sections in order to provide a comprehensive and easy to read guide for the public, community groups and developers on particular types of development.

1.6.1 CONTENTS OF THE PLAN

The Plan consists of a written document with supporting appendices and maps, as set out in the table of contents. There are 3 volumes contained in the Laois County Development Plan:

Volume 1:	The Written Statement which comprises of 14 Chapters, providing policy objectives for each Chapter.
Volume 2:	Written Statements and maps for the settlements within the County which have been categorized as Self Sustaining Growth towns, Self Sustaining towns, towns and villages and rural areas.
Volume 3:	Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA).

Appendices include the following strategies: Housing Strategy, Retail Strategy, Landscape Character Assessment, Wind Energy Strategy, Record of Protected Structures, Architectural Conservation Areas, Rural Housing Design Guidelines.

A Glossary is provided at the end of Volume 1.

In order to provide a holistic consideration of policies and objectives, each chapter provides specific policy objectives, followed by development management standards. Climate adaptation and mitigation policy objectives have also been interwoven into each chapter where appropriate.

1.6.2 INTERPRETATION

In interpreting this document in all cases should any conflict arise between the written word and accompanying maps, the written word shall take precedence. In all cases the following protocols apply:

- The Council refers to Laois County Council.
- The Plan refers to the Laois County Development Plan 2021 - 2027.
- The County refers to County Laois.

1.6.3 POLICIES AND OBJECTIVES

The Plan includes specific policy objectives in each chapter. These are specific approaches or actions that the Council will endeavour to realise to ensure that policies are implemented and that all development proposals are consistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of the county. In the interest of clarity, any reference to a policy objective in the text of this Plan shall be construed as an “objective” of this Plan for the purposes of the Planning

and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended).

1.6.4 EXISTING SUITE OF LOCAL AREA PLANS

A Local Area Plan (LAP) is currently in place for the following settlement centres: Portlaoise, Graiguecullen, Portarlinton and Mountmellick. Both Graiguecullen and Portarlinton share a boundary with Carlow and Offaly respectively and as such have Joint LAPs in place.

A land use zoning objectives map has been included in Volume 2 of this Plan to establish a framework to support economic development and to provide a basis for continued operation of the development management process pending the completion of the LAP's for both Portlaoise and Mountmellick.

Zoning objectives maps for Joint LAPs for Graiguecullen and Portarlinton have not been included, as a coordinated approach with Carlow and Offaly County Councils is required to review both of these settlements and as such the current maps for both settlements will remain in place until Joint LAPs are adopted for both settlements.

It is intended to review all LAPs once the Laois County Development Plan 2021 - 2027 is in place. Zoning Maps contained in Volume 2 of this Plan will inform the LAPs for Portlaoise and Mountmellick. All current LAPs shall be read together with the Laois County Development Plan 2021 - 2027. Where a conflict arises between Plans, the County Development Plan 2021 – 2027 shall take precedent and the conflicting provision of the LAP shall cease to have effect.

CHAPTER 2 CORE AND SETTLEMENT STRATEGY

Aim: *Provide for the Growth Of County Laois In Line With The National Planning Framework / Regional Spatial And Economic Strategy (RSES) To Accommodate A Target Population Of Up To 94,700 By 2027 In The Settlements And Rural Areas Of County Laois.*

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Planning Authorities are required to prepare and incorporate a Core Strategy that shows the Development Plan is consistent with national and regional objectives under the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES). Under the Act, a Core Strategy focuses on:

- Defining a settlement hierarchy for the County that is consistent with the NPF and RSES.
- Transposing the prescribed NPF and RSES housing and population targets set at County level for the rural and urban centres identified within the settlement hierarchy.
- Providing an evidence-based rationale for the land proposed to be zoned for residential and mixed-use development having regard to the capacity of existing zoned land and the phasing of development taking account of the location of public transport and services.
- Demonstrating how the Planning Authority has had regard to the statutory Retail Planning Guidelines in setting out objectives for retail development.

The Core Strategy sets out a vision for Laois and strategic aims required to deliver this vision. The development of this Core Strategy has been guided by the Department of Environment Heritage and Local Government 'Guidance Note on Core Strategies' (2010), taking into account relevant changes brought about through the publication of the NPF and RSES.

The Core Strategy of this Development Plan provides relevant information to demonstrate consistency with both the NPF and RSES and sets out core aims that, in turn, define and shape the following:

- preferred growth locations;
- revised population targets and population distribution; and
- land use zoning requirements .

These are expressed in the Core Strategy Table 2.16 and related zoning maps in Volume 2, Settlement Plans.

2.2 STRATEGIC AIMS

The strategic aims which relate to the advancement of this plan are set out hereunder. These aims are addressed fully in subsequent chapters within the plan. A series of specific Core Strategy policy objectives are included in Section 2.8.

- (i) To guide the future development of Laois in line with national and regional objectives set out in the NPF and RSES and other national guidelines and policies;
- (ii) To promote and facilitate the development of the County in accordance with the provisions of the Core Strategy, including directing development in line with the settlement hierarchy and promoting development at an appropriate scale that is reflective of the terms of the Core Strategy Table and zoning maps;
- (iii) To apply the Settlement Hierarchy to determine the scale, rate and location of proposed developments and apply appropriate development management measures to ensure compliance with the Settlement Hierarchy including the population targets for the County;
- (iv) To promote the delivery of at least 30% of all new homes that are targeted in settlements within their existing built-up footprints;
- (v) To ensure that development is promoted, supported or facilitated through the Laois County Development Plan that provides for climate action including the increased risk of flooding and the promotion of sustainable transport options and renewable energy where possible in order to achieve a successful transition to a low carbon economy;
- (vi) To support the achievement of more self-sustaining towns and villages through residential and employment opportunities together with supporting social and community facilities;
- (vii) To monitor and maintain a record of residential development permitted in settlements designated under the Settlement Hierarchy in order to ensure compliance with the population allocations defined by the Core Strategy and to adjust the approach to permitting development proposals in instances where Core Strategy objectives are not being met;
- (viii) To support the development of the tourism sector as an economic driver for the County, identify and develop key destinations, visitor attractions and activities for the prioritisation of investment and to encourage the increase of tourism product development.

Underpinning the strategic aims above in relation to population growth, housing requirements and the future spatial development of our county are the following complimentary strategic aims which are integral in delivering the vision for the county during the period 2021-2027:

- a) To Build on the regional-level linkages between County Laois and other parts of the Eastern and Midlands Region and adjoining regions such as the South Region and Mid-West Region by supporting the implementation of regional spatial and economic strategies, collaborating on support for critical enabling infrastructure, such as inter-regional road and rail linkages, and co-operating on areas of mutual planning interest;
- b) To Target Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Irish Indigenous industries to appropriate zoned locations in the **Key Towns** of Portlaoise and Graiguecullen / Carlow and the **Self Sustaining Growth Town** of Portarlinton and build on the economic strengths and tourism opportunities of County Laois in a balanced and sustainable manner focusing on the opportunities as outlined in the following sections;
- c) To Facilitate the provision of and improvements to community, social and recreational infrastructure and ensure universal access to all to such facilities throughout the county for all its residents;

- d) To Facilitate Job creation within the County to ensure that the county grows in a sustainable manner;
- e) To provide for sustainable transport infrastructure and connectivity including walking and cycling infrastructure and initiatives and optimise the return of investment on infrastructure while preserving the natural and built heritage;
- f) To achieve a sustainable, integrated and low carbon transport system for the county and to protect, improve and extend water services and other enabling infrastructure in line with national, regional and local population and economic growth for the county;
- g) To Protect, conserve and enhance the built, natural and cultural environment through promoting awareness, utilising relevant heritage legislation and promoting good quality urban and rural design;
- h) To Support the development of key infrastructure such as telecommunications, electricity, gas to enable economic development.

2.3 STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF COUNTY LAOIS WITHIN A NATIONAL CONTEXT (NPF)

The National Planning Framework (NPF) is a high-level strategy that will shape growth and development in Ireland out to the year 2040. The NPF draws upon lessons learned from the National Spatial Strategy 2002-2022 and provides a framework for the sustainable development of Ireland's existing settlements.

As a framework document it sets in train a process by which more detailed planning documents must follow, including the relevant RSES and County Development Plan. It sets out ten National Strategic Outcomes (NSO's) which underpin the overarching vision for the country and serve as shared goals and contains a range of National Policy Objectives providing a wider context for targeting future growth across the country.

With regards the Eastern and Midland Region, the NPF states that the region's most significant place-making challenge will be to plan and deliver future development in a way that enhances and reinforces its urban and rural structure and moves more towards self-sustaining, rather than commuter driven activity.

In turn, this allows its various city, metropolitan, town, village and rural components to play to their strengths, while above all, moving away from a sprawl-led development model. The NPF identifies an urban structure for the Region based on commuting patterns, with reference to the EU/OECD definition of 'functional urban areas' (FUAs) which is used to identify areas with different sub-regional interdependencies and influence in the region.

Furthermore, the NPF includes specific targets related to securing compact and sustainable growth in Ireland's towns and cities, recognising that the physical format of urban development in Ireland is one of our greatest national development challenges. As such it states that within the Eastern and Midlands Region, **30% of all housing** outside of Dublin City and its suburb footprints are to be delivered within existing urban footprints.

The NPF further states that projecting housing requirements more accurately into the future at a Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and local authority development plan level (e.g. through Core Strategies) will be enabled by the provision of new statutory guidelines to ensure consistency of approach, implementation and monitoring. This is enshrined in National Policy Objective 36 (NPF; p95);

- **National Policy Objective 36:** *New statutory guidelines, supported by wider methodologies and data sources, will be put in place under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act to improve the evidence base, effectiveness and consistency of the planning process for housing provision at regional, metropolitan and local authority levels. This will be supported by the provision of standardised requirements by regulation for the recording of planning and housing data by the local authorities in order to provide a consistent and robust evidence base for housing policy formulation.*

2.3.1 **IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP FOR THE NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK**

The Implementation Roadmap for the National Planning Framework (July 2018) highlights the Governments focus on achieving alignment between national, regional and local planning policy and practice. It addresses issues around the legal status of the NPF and provides transitional population projections for the period up to 2031. It also sets out mechanisms to ensure that Development Plans will broadly align with the NPF and RSES's to address the six-year period up to 2026/2027.

The Roadmap provides transitional population projections for these milestones at a regional and county scale, in order to inform Development Plans for the period 2026 and 2031. The transitional population projections for the Eastern and Midland Region are listed in the table below.

Table 2.1: Transitional Regional and County Population Projections to 2031 for the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly.

Regions and Counties	2016	2026	2031
MIDLANDS			
Westmeath	89,000	96,500-98,500	100,000-102,500
Laois	84,500	92,500-94,000	95,500-97,500
Offaly	78,000	85,000-86,500	88,000-90,000
Longford	41,000	44,500-45,500	46,000-47,000
Subtotal	292,500	318,500-324,500	329,500-337,000

Source: Extract from NPF Implementation Roadmap, p13

2.3.2 **HOUSING NEEDS DEMAND ASSESSMENT**

In order to ensure that the plan-making system is supported by a robust methodology to inform policies and funding initiatives around housing and associated land requirements, the NPF (NPO 37) states that a Housing Need Demand Assessment (HNDA) will be developed by each Local Authority to support the preparation of housing strategies and all related housing policy outputs, e.g. City and County development plans, local area plans, traveller accommodation plans etc.

The purpose of the HNDA tool is to:

- Assist local authorities to develop long-term strategic views of housing need across all tenures.

- Provide a robust evidence base to support decisions about new housing supply, wider investment and housing related services that inform an overall national housing profile.
- Inform policies about the proportion of social and affordable housing required, including the need for different types and sizes of provision.
- Provide evidence to inform policies related to the provision of specialist housing and housing related services.

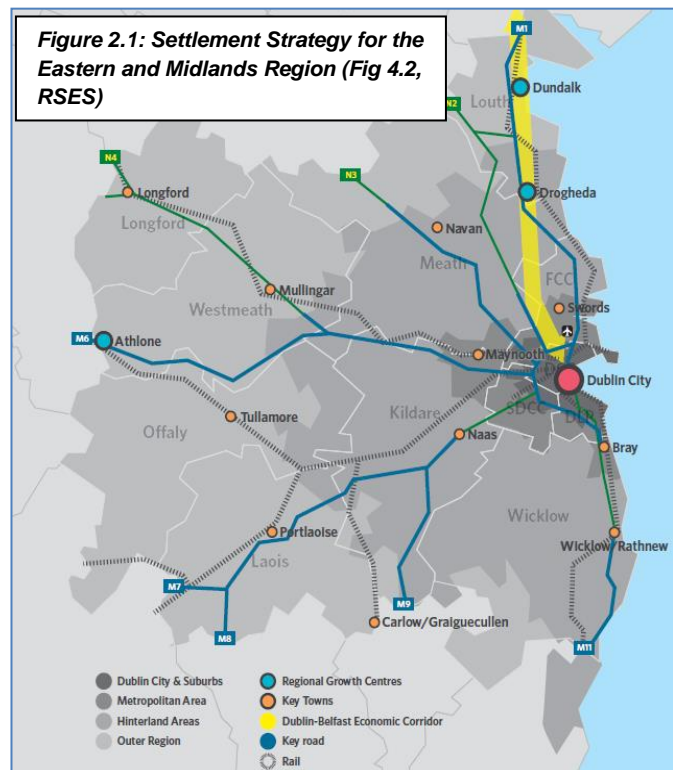
The Core Strategy must give effect to the NPF and RSES hierarchy by setting population targets and associated requirements for housing. This must now be undertaken through the HDNA process. This Core Strategy Chapter sets out the population targets and housing requirements for Laois for the period 2021-2027. The HDNA process is elaborated and presented in greater detail in the Housing Strategy (see Appendix 3).

2.4 STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF COUNTY LAOIS WITHIN A REGIONAL CONTEXT (EASTERN & MIDLANDS REGION)

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland region came into force in June 2019, superseding the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midland Region. The RSES is a high-level plan that seeks to support the implementation of the NPF by providing a strategic planning and economic framework for the region's sustainable growth and development. It echoes the NPF in emphasising sustainable development patterns and seeks to focus growth within the footprint of existing urban areas and in key regional growth settlements.

The RSES seeks to determine at a regional scale how best to achieve the shared goals set out in the National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) of the NPF. To this end, the Strategy sets out 16 Regional Strategic Outcomes (RSOs), which are aligned with international, EU and national policy and which in turn set the framework for City and County development plans.

The RSES also sets out a settlement hierarchy for the Region and identifies key growth areas which will see significant development up to 2031 and beyond. There are three distinct areas across the Eastern and Midland Region comprising of the Dublin Metropolitan Area, the Core Region and the Gateway Region (of which Laois is located).



2.4.1 SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY FOR THE REGION

Within the growth strategy for the region, the RSES has also determined a settlement hierarchy, depicted in Figure 2.1 and settlement hierarchy table below.

Table 2.2: Settlement Hierarchy for the Region

Dublin City and Suburbs	International business core with a highly concentrated and diversified employment base and higher order of retail, arts, culture and leisure offer. Acts as a national transport hub with strong inter and intra-regional connections and an extensive commuter catchment
Regional Growth Centres	Regional Growth Centres are large towns with a high level of self-sustaining employment and services that act as regional economic drivers and play a significant role for a wide catchment area.
Key Towns	Large economically active service and/or county towns that provide employment for their surrounding areas and with high-quality transport links and the capacity to act as growth drivers to complement the Regional Growth Centres
Self-Sustaining Growth Towns	Self-Sustaining Growth Towns with a moderate level of jobs and services – includes sub-county market towns and commuter towns with good transport links and capacity for continued commensurate growth to more self-sustaining.
Self-Sustaining Towns	Self-Sustaining Towns with high levels of population growth and a weak employment base which are reliant on other areas for employment and/or services and which require targeted catch up’ investment to become more self-sustaining
Towns and villages	Towns and villages with local service and employment functions
Rural	Villages and the wider rural region

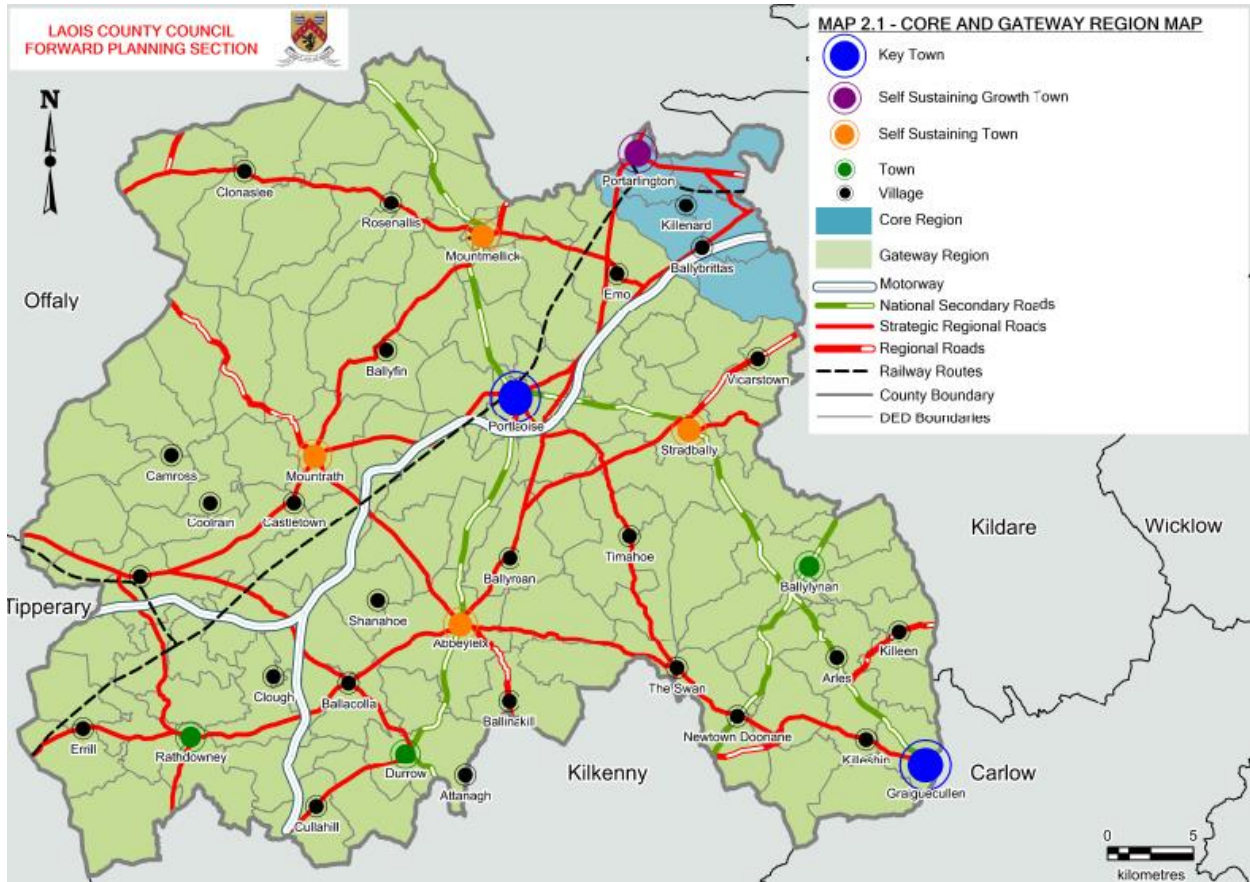
Within the top three tiers of the hierarchy, settlements are clearly defined by the RSES. Settlements within the other four tiers are to be further defined in each County’s Development Plans. The Regional Growth Centres consist of Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk which will be supported by Key Towns.

Co Laois is located in the Midland Region Strategy Planning Area of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly. To achieve effective regional development, Dublin and the regional growth centre of Athlone will be supported by the complementary development and regeneration of a small number of selected key towns such as Portlaoise and Graiguecullen/Carlow.

The RSES 2019, indicates the functional areas comprising of the Dublin Metropolitan Area, Core Region and the Gateway Region. Co Laois is part located within the Core region and the Gateway region. The Core region includes the peri-urban hinterlands in the commuter

catchment around Dublin, whilst the gateway region acts as an inter regional gateway to the rest of the island.

Map 2.1: Core and Gateway Region within Laois



Region	Growth Enablers
Core Region	<p>To promote continued growth at a more sustainable rate , whilst providing for increased employment and improved local economies , services and functions to allow towns become more self sustaining and to create the quality of life to attract investment.</p> <p>Catch up investment to promote consolidation and improvement in the sustainability of those areas that have experienced significant population growth but have a weak level of services and employment for residents.</p> <p>Portarlington is located within the regional functional area.</p>

Region	Growth Enablers
Gateway Region	<p>Portlaoise Key Town plays a regional role in providing key employment and services for their own extensive hinterland</p> <p>Graiguecullen Key Town also has an important function as a town that straddles the regional boundary with the southern region and acts as a Gateway in this respect. It too, will play a regional role in providing key employment and services for its own extensive hinterland.</p> <p>Regeneration of small towns and villages, with a focus on the identification of the rural town and village and rural regeneration priorities to bring vibrancy to these areas.</p>

In relation to Co Laois, the Settlement Strategy for the region designates Portlaoise and Graiguecullen as Key Towns, recognising that the towns provide a function at a much higher level than its resident population and provides key employment and services for its extensive hinterlands. Within the higher order settlements of Portlaoise and Graiguecullen², the RSES asserts that core strategies should apply higher densities in these towns. However, the RSES further states there should be a graded reduction in residential densities for Self-Sustaining Growth Towns, Self-Sustaining Towns, towns and villages that are commensurate to the existing built environment.

In developing this settlement hierarchy, the RSES recognises that population and employment size **are not the sole determinant** of a settlement's functional role or in the consideration of its strategic regional significance. The strategy states that;

'Some towns with a large population base located within the catchment of Dublin have emerged mainly as commuting towns, with a level of function significantly lower than their population base. Conversely, other towns have a level of function higher than their population base and play a key regional role' (EMRA RSES, P46).

A number of key criteria were considered in the development of the asset base, which can be summarised as follows from Table 3.1 of the RSES. This approach has been utilised to guide the development of Laois's Settlement Hierarchy, as elaborated in Section 2.6.

² RPO 4.75 Requires Laois and Carlow County Councils to prepare a Joint Local Area Plan

Table 2.3: Asset Based Approach to choosing the settlement hierarchy for Co Laois

DATA INDICATOR	DESCRIPTION	RATIONALE
SCALE	<p><i>The scale of population, growth rates and local ambition for sustainable compact growth</i></p>	<p>Settlements of Critical mass of population to drive county and add to regional development.</p> <p>The growth rates were applied to identify the capacity for future growth. Balancing high growth rates with investment in job creation, social and physical infrastructure has guided the settlement hierarchy for Co Laois.</p> <p>The NPF designations of Portlaoise and Graiguecullen as Key towns within the Region, both of which have the critical mass and ability to drive regional growth for the Midlands and the Southern region in combination with Carlow.</p> <p>Portlaoise is identified as a KEY town with a population of 22,050 and has a jobs to resident worker ratio of 0.997.</p> <p>Graiguecullen is identified as a KEY town with a population of 4,692 (together with Carlow Town, the population is 24,272 which is also a Key town within the Southern Region Assembly areas RSES).</p> <p>Carlow/Graiguecullen has a jobs to resident worker ratio of 0.881.</p>
FUNCTION	<p><i>The scale of employment provision and commuting flows; Particular sub-regional interdependencies and influence</i></p>	<p>The mapping of the Functional Urban Area for Laois has determined the commuter catchment of spread of the influence of the settlement . AIRO has provided this information to Laois County Council which indicates the FUA for Portlaoise, Tullamore, Carlow and Kildare. This information has informed the settlement hierarchy.</p> <p>The Commuter data for Laois shows us which towns within the settlement hierarchy are commuter based and which are self sustaining. Co Laois is particularly fortunate to have a high level of rail infrastructure which has made commuting from the county a strong feature a sustainable manner.</p> <p>The settlement strategy has justified the settlement status of each town based on their assets and in line with the settlement typologies in the RSES.</p> <p>The Retail Hierarchy for Co Laois has taken into account the RSES designations, Retail Planning Guidelines and a review of the Retail Strategy 2017-2023 has been carried out. The designated settlements within the County Settlement Strategy</p>

DATA INDICATOR	DESCRIPTION	RATIONALE
		<p>already provide a good mix of convenience and comparison shopping and this is reflected in the plans for each of the towns in the County.</p>
PLACEMAKING	<p><i>This is linked to 'Functionality' in terms of provision of suitable sites and property solutions to meet enterprise and labour force expectations</i></p>	<p>Quality of life factors are important in how well a place functions and in attracting people to live, invest, work and visit in. Access to a range of amenities such as cultural, social , health , education, etc are integral to the successful development of any town or village.</p> <p>A review of all assets in this regard for each town and village was carried out to inform their placement on the hierarchy.</p> <p>In relation to Portlaoise – the Key Town – Midland Hospital Portlaoise provides an important health care function for the town and its hinterland stretching beyond the county boundary. Additional to this primary health care centres provide important services and are located in Portarlinton at Kilnacourt House and Mountmellick.</p> <p>The pobal HP Deprivation Index which measures the affluence and disadvantage in the County has been mapped to ascertain the current position and where potential areas for investment exist.</p> <p>In relation to improving places within the county, leveraging Urban Regeneration Development Funding (URDF) has proved successful for Portlaoise in terms of transitioning to a low carbon town and also celebrating its heritage and reimagining a Cultural Quarter within Portlaoise Town Centre.</p> <p>Rural Regeneration Development Funding (RRDF) is also applicable to the towns of the county with populations less than 10,000 people.</p> <p>Other streams of funding utilized to improve places within the County are Town and Village Renewal Scheme (TVRS) and funding from Laois Partnership through the Local Community Development Committee.</p>
ENTERPRISE ECOSYSTEM	<p><i>The availability of economic development assets and clusters</i></p>	<p>The location of strategic employment opportunities is guided by the location of existing economic opportunities upon which to develop. To this end, in Portlaoise J17 National Enterprise Park (Togher) is a substantial land bank for future job creation, given its location on the M7/M8.</p>

DATA INDICATOR	DESCRIPTION	RATIONALE
		Other opportunities exist in Portarlinton adjoining the Railway station – the former Avon Lands. Other Strategic employment zones have been identified in locations across the settlement strategy appropriate to the scale and function of the town and services required.
CONNECTIVITY	<i>Transport accessibility and trip profiles, including internal trips</i>	<p>County Laois is serviced by 3 rail stations at Portarlinton, Portlaoise and Ballybrophy which connects the county with both north south routes and east west in Portarlinton.</p> <p>In particular the Key Town of Portlaoise is progressing public bus and rail improvements to service the town and Graiguecullen in relation to connecting in with the bus and rail in Carlow Town. Walking and cycling are key objectives for each of the towns within the settlement strategy.</p>
NATURAL CAPITAL	<i>Environmental sensitivities, resources and assets, Water quality, flood risk</i>	<p>The natural capital within the county such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated sites • Non designated sites • Green infrastructure • Ground water extraction • Peatlands and forested areas <p>The baseline information for the County used in the context of developing the SEA / AA/ SFRA has informed the development of the settlement hierarchy and the growth of each town and village.</p> <p>Strategic Flood Risk Assessment has interrogated zoning maps to ensure measures are put in place to protect such zones.</p> <p>The potential of areas to respond to climate change actions in terms of energy and waste has also been considered and informs the strategy.</p>
INFRASTRUCTURE	<i>Current and planned infrastructure capacity</i>	<p>Water services and Irish water data in relation to capacities and future potential and investment have been used to inform the growth of settlements.</p> <p>Many of the towns have routes for roads objectives for future development and specifically local transport plans will further inform the capacity of the towns and villages and look at integrating all forms of transport in a sustainable manner.</p>

2.4.2 SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY FOR LAOIS

In developing a settlement hierarchy for County Laois, an Asset Based Approach similar to that used in the preparation of the RSES was adopted (as indicated in Section 2.3). This amended version identifies and builds on a combination of social, economic and natural assets and potential that is available within towns and smaller settlements in the County. This has also been informed by the criteria listed in the Hierarchy of Settlements and related Infrastructure considered by NPF.

Table 2.4: Settlement Hierarchy for Laois

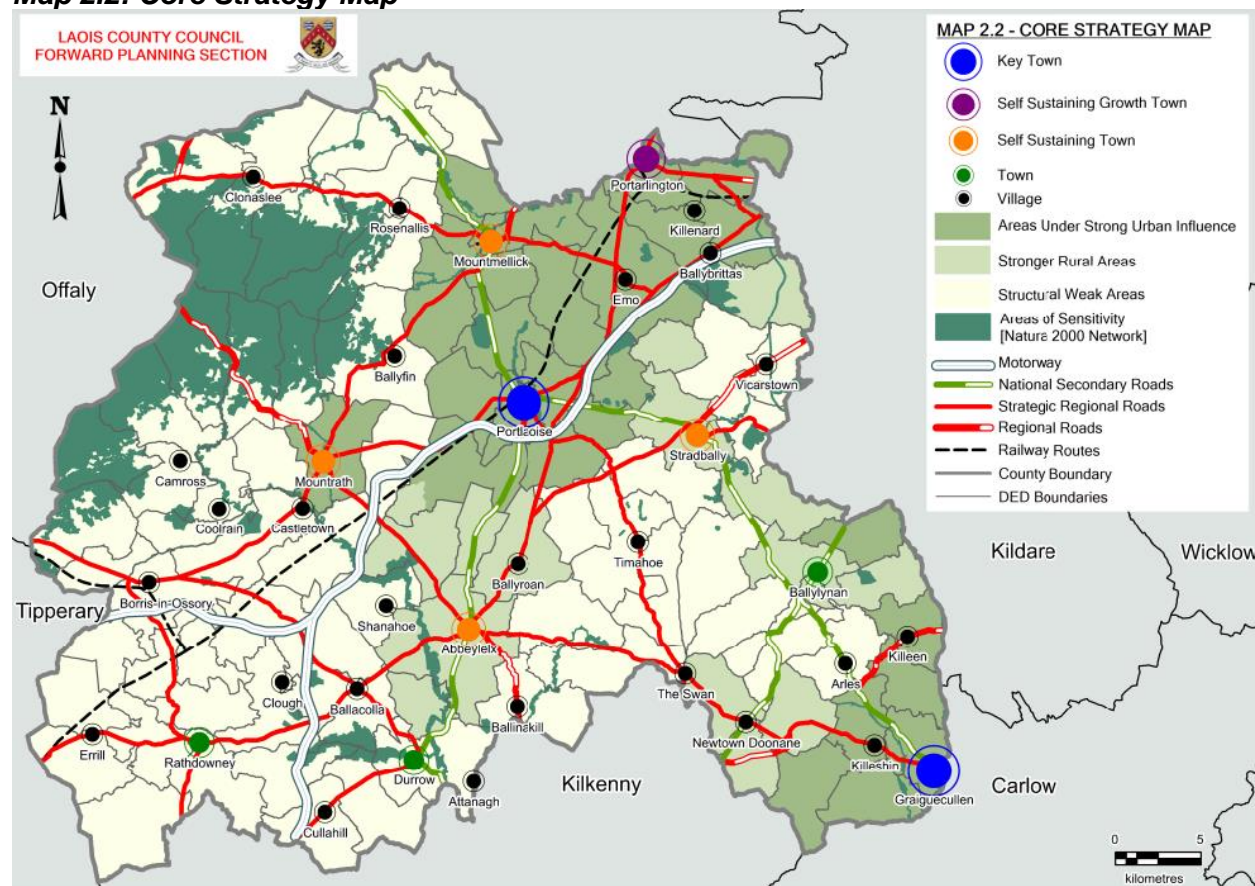
SETTLEMENT TYPOLOGY	DESCRIPTION	SETTLEMENTS	POPULATION 2016
KEY TOWNS	Large economically active service and/or county towns that provide employment for their surrounding areas and with high-quality transport links and the capacity to act as growth drivers to complement the Regional Growth Centres.	Portlaoise	22050
		Graigucullen	4692
SELF-SUSTAINING GROWTH TOWNS	Self-Sustaining Growth Towns with a moderate level of jobs and services – includes sub-county market towns and commuter towns with good transport links and capacity for continued commensurate growth to become more self-sustaining	Portarlinton	6,596 (8,368 total including Offaly side)
SELF-SUSTAINING TOWNS	Self-Sustaining Towns with high levels of population growth and a weak employment base which are reliant on other areas for employment and/or services and which require targeted 'catch up' investment to become more self-sustaining.	Mountmellick	4777
		Abbeyleix	1770
		Stradbally	1350
		Mountrath	1774
TOWNS AND VILLAGES	Towns and villages with local service and employment functions	Durrow	835
		Rathdowney	1271
		Ballylinan	1101
VILLAGES	Villages that serve their local area	Clonaslee	566

SETTLEMENT TYPOLOGY	DESCRIPTION	SETTLEMENTS	POPULATION 2016
(Pop > 500)		Killenard	671
		Ballyroan	563
		Borris In Ossory	508
RURAL REMAINDER (including villages with population <500)			36173

2.5 LAOIS CORE STRATEGY MAP

The Core Strategy Map (Map 2.2) provides a visual representation of the settlement distribution *throughout* the county and identifies the settlement hierarchy in the context of transport and infrastructure available, including the county's national primary and secondary routes along with regional and local roads and the county's railway line.

Map 2.2: Core Strategy Map



2.5.1 RURAL TYPOLOGIES

As required by the Core Strategy Guidance 2010, the Core Strategy must contain the classification of differing rural area types in map format in accordance with the 2005 Planning Guidelines on sustainable rural housing, which has been included in the Core Strategy Map. This classification is also an important factor in facilitating the development rural one off dwellings in the countryside in accordance with National Policy Objective 19 of the RSES – *[Ensure, in providing for the development of rural housing, that a distinction is made between areas under strong urban influence, ie, within the commuter catchment of cities and large towns and centres of employment, and elsewhere]*, which is discussed in Chapter 4 on rural housing policy and indicated in Map 2.2 Core Strategy Map.

Rural area typologies were established by analysing data for each Electoral Division against a range of criteria including, commuting patterns, planning applications for rural housing over the past 3 years, environmental sensitivity, population change and pobal deprivation indices. In County Laois the following rural housing area designations apply:

- **Areas under Strong Urban Influence**

Those rural areas within easy commuting distance of the main urban centres in County Laois and adjacent counties including the GDA³ which are experiencing pressure from the development of urban generated housing in the open countryside. These areas are essentially:-

- The north and eastern areas in the County
- National, Strategic Regional Routes and Regional Routes as defined in Chapter 10

Continued high levels of single rural houses in these locations would inhibit the growth of the County's urban areas which would result in a failure to achieve the growth targets. It would also cause further deterioration of rural amenities.

The key development plan objectives in these areas seeks to facilitate the **genuine** housing requirements of the rural community as identified by the planning authority in the light of local conditions while on the other hand directing urban generated development to areas zoned for new housing development in towns and villages.

- **Structurally Weak Areas**

The rural areas generally exhibit characteristics such as persistent and significant population decline as well as a weaker economic structure based on indices of income, employment and economic growth. These rural areas are more distant from the major urban areas and the associated pressure from urban generated housing.

³Greater Dublin Area

2.6 POPULATION PROJECTIONS TO MEET REGIONAL POPULATION TARGETS

According to the 2016 Census the total population of Laois is 84,697, an increase of 5.1% or 4,138 persons in the five year period since the 2011 Census – this was the 5th highest rate of growth in the state. The highest rates of growth in the state were recorded in Fingal (8.8%) and Meath (5.9%). The level of growth in Laois was significantly above the state average of 3.8% and slightly below the Eastern and Midland Regional Authority (EMRA) of 5.4%. A detailed analysis of population growth can be found in Section 3.1 of the Housing Strategy in Appendix 3.

Table 2.5: NPF / RSES Population Targets to 2026 and 2031

	Census 2016	2026 NPF / RSES Target	2031 NPF / RSES Target
EMRA Region	2,329,000	2,566,500-2,619,000	2,668,000-2,740,500
Midlands	292, 500	318,500-324,500	329,500-337,000
Laois	84,647	92,000-94,500	95,500-97,500

Source: Implementation Roadmap for NPF: Appendix 2

2.6.1 APPROACH

The approach to realise the population target as set out in the NPF implementation roadmap for County Laois, in its key towns and other settlements and rural area is set out in a robust evidence based analysis on requirements, completions / delivery and the social and physical capacity of the County's settlements. This was done by analyzing the capacity of the all the towns and villages throughout the county to ascertain where future growth could be supported and informed by the following:

- (i) NPF and RSES guidance;
- (ii) Existing population and other demographics relating to the county;
- (iii) Planning history and levels of activity on sites / completions of development;
- (iv) Availability of infrastructure within each settlement;
- (v) SEA / AA/ SFRA recommendations;
- (vi) Environmental constraints;
- (vii) Regeneration opportunities within settlements through identification of areas of dereliction/ vacancy, etc;
- (viii) Potential for economic and social development;
- (ix) Proposals for climate action in national, regional and local contexts.

2.6.2 POPULATION TRENDS

Within Laois, the County saw a population increase of 5.1% (+4,138 persons) during this period, as the population increased to 84,697 from 80,559. The level of growth in Laois was significantly above the state average of 3.8% and slightly below the Eastern and Midland Regional Authority (EMRA) of 5.4%. The County has had a steady growth of population since 1991. And even though the growth rates increased considerably over the 1996-2006 and 2006-2011, it dropped from 20.1% in 2011 to 5.1% in 2016 resulting in a slight growth of the population.

Table 2.6 Population Growth in County Laois 1996 - 2016

Year	1996	2002	2006	2011	2016
Population	52,945	58,774	67,059	80,559	84,697
Actual Change	-	5,829	8,285	13,500	4,138
% Change	-	11.0	14.1	20.1	5.1
Average Annual Increase	-	971	2,071	2,700	827

Source: CSO Statbank

According to the CSO's parameters, a total of 40,979 people (48.3%) were living in urban settlements in Laois in 2016. 43,718 (51.6%) were living in smaller towns and villages, as well as in the rural remainder of the County. In 2011, census results showed a distribution between the urban and rural population as 47.3% and 52.6% respectively. Thus, Laois is slightly becoming more urban in nature as a whole.

The change in the population between successive Census can be broken down into the combined effect of natural increase (births less deaths) and net migration (immigration less emigration). The table below presents the components of intercensal population change back to 2002, which indicates the overall trend of the components align with the State. While the birth and death rates defining the natural growth of the population are close to the State figures over this period, the migration variation is above the Irish national average and is pushing the rate of population change in the County above the national figure. Within the County, except for the period of 2006-2011 where drastic fluctuations occurred, the overall trend of the components of population change shows a decline since 2002, which indicates that population is increasing with a slower growth rate.

Table 2.7: Components of Population Change

COMPONENT	2002	2006	2011	2016
Change in Pop since previous Census	5829	8285	13500	4138
Births since previous Census	4630	3835	6701	6123
Natural Increase since previous Census	1900	2300	4703	3888
Net Migration since previous Census	3929	5985	8797	250
Birth rate since previous Census (Avg. Annual Rate per 1000)	13.8	15.2	18.2	14.8
Death Rate since previous Census (Avg. Annual Rate per 1000)	8.1	6.1	5.4	5.4
Rate of Natural Increase since previous Census (Avg. Annual Rate per 1000)	5.7	32.9	12.7	9.4
Rate of Change in Population since previous Census (Avg. Annual Rate per 1000)	17.4	9.1	36.6	10
Rate of Net Migration since previous Census (Avg. Annual Rate per 1000)	11.7	23.8	23.8	0.6

Source CSO Statbank

2.6.3 POPULATION PROJECTIONS

A number of population scenarios for County Laois have been investigated to 2031, including two “Non-intervention Scenarios” relying upon growth rate of the population over the previous 5-year intercensal period. These non-intervention scenarios utilise a projection of population developed using the Cohort Component Method (CCM). They are called ‘Non-Intervention’ as they do not assume a policy-based interaction on the modeled trajectory of population growth across Laois as required by the NPF and RSES. CCM is used internationally as the best-in-class methodology for demographic projection, including by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) to produce the Irish National and Regional population and labour force projections. It closely examines the interactions between the three key components driving changes in the population: mortality, fertility and migration.

Details of these scenarios are summarised in Section 3.1.5 of the Housing Strategy in Appendix 3.

Policy-Intervention Scenario

The total projected population growth for County Laois for the period 2016-2027 is 10,003, from 84,697 to 94,700. The population projections of this Plan are based on a policy intervention scenario where the NPF/RSES population targets are used as the fixed variables and then an interpolation of the required level of change per annum was developed for the County from baseline year 2016 to NPF/RSES target years 2026 and 2031; thus, producing annualised figures over the period of 2021 and 2027 which is the lifetime of the Development Plan. Projections in this scenario indicates that the population of County Laois would increase to 89,349 by 2021 and to 94,700 by 2027, an increase of 6280.

Table 2.8: Projected Population Growth Over the Plan Period based upon NPF/RSES 2021 and 2031 Targets

Year	Total Population in County Laois	Annual Population Increase during Year	Annual Population Increase 2021-2027	Total Population Increase 2021-2027	Total Population Increase 2016-2027
2006	67,059	14.10%	-	-	-
2011	80,559	20.10%	-	-	-
2016	84,697	5.10%	-	-	-
2017	85,627	1.10%	930	-	-
2018	86,558	1.10%	930	-	-
2019	87,488	1.10%	930	-	-
2020	88,418	1.10%	930	-	-
2021	89,349	1.10%	930	-	-
2022	90,279	1.10%	930	-	-
2023	91,209	1.10%	930	-	-
2024	92,139	1.10%	930	-	-
2025	93,070	1.10%	930	-	-
2026	94,000	1.10%	930	-	-
2027	94,700	0.74%	700	6,280	10,000
2028	95,400	0.74%	700	-	-
2029	96,100	0.74%	700	-	-
2030	96,800	0.74%	700	-	-
2031	97,500	0.74%	700	-	-

A further breakdown of population targets by settlement is indicated in the Core Strategy Table in Section 2.8.1.

2.7 HOUSING REQUIREMENT

This section sets out key considerations in relation to residential land requirements for this Plan period as set out in the NPF and RSES. The NPF notes that the concept of headroom based solely on zoned land provision does not account for housing yield arising from the re-use of existing housing stock, mixed-use development, urban intensification or infill or brownfield development. Indeed, projected population growth must be planned in accordance with NPF National Policy Objectives 3a, b and c, which target infill and brownfield development within the existing built footprint of urban settlements, in particular the objective to target at least 30% of all

new homes in settlements other than the five Cities and their suburbs, within their existing built-up footprints.

WHAT IS THE BUILT UP FOOTPRINT

The built-up footprint of an urban settlement is defined by the CSO as an area with a minimum of 50 occupied dwellings, with a maximum distance between any dwelling and the building closest to it of 100 metres, and where there is evidence of an urban centre (shop, school etc.). The built-up area of each settlement has been defined by the Census 2016 and is indicated on each settlement zoning map in Volume 2 of this Plan.

A key objective of the Plan is to integrate and reconcile predicted requirements for residential land with actual provision on the ground having regard to, among other factors, the spatial distribution of development lands throughout the county and the need to support sustainable settlement patterns which in the longer term can be provided with essential physical and social infrastructure.

The NPF sets out a new, standardised methodology that addresses the differentiation between zoned land that is available for development and zoned land that requires significant further investment in services for infrastructure for development to be realised. In this regard, lands have only been identified for development where they are able to connect to existing development services, i.e. road and footpath access including public lighting, foul sewer drainage, surface water drainage and water supply, for which there is service capacity available, and can therefore accommodate new development.

These lands are also positioned within the existing built-up footprint of established settlements or contiguous to existing developed lands. Regard has also been given to the availability of serviced lands as well as the identification of lands that are not currently sufficiently serviced to support new development but have potential to become fully serviced within the life of the plan.

2.7.1 HOUSING TARGETS AND HOUSEHOLD SIZE

As summarised in Table 41 and 42 of the Housing Strategy 2021-2027 (See Appendix 3), the number of households in County Laois is expected to increase from 29,107 in 2016 to 35,126 in 2027, an increase of **6,019** households (from 2016 – 2027), or the equivalent of a per annum average of 501 units. However, based on actual housing completions from 2016 – 2020 (Aug) as indicated in the CSO Statbank figures, a total of **817** units have been completed in Laois over that period and therefore **5,202** units will be required over the Plan period in order to achieve NPF population target of **94,700** for the County.

Table 2.9: Projected Households over the Plan Period

Year	Total Population in Laois	Avg Household Size in Laois	No of Households (private)	No of Anticipated Houses per annum	Total Anticipated Houses 2021 – 2027	Avg Anticipated Houses per Annum 2021 – 2027
2006	67059	2.97	22591			
2011	80559	2.88	28020			
2016	84697	2.91	29107			
2017	85627	2.89	29630	523		
2018	86558	2.87	30161	531		
2019	87488	2.85	30693	537		
2020	88418	2.83	31240	543		
2021	89349	2.81	31789	549		
2022	90279	2.79	32344	555		
2023	91209	2.77	32905	561		
2024	92139	2.75	33472	567		
2025	93070	2.73	34046	574		
2026	94000	2.71	34625	580		
2027	94700	2.70	35126	501	3886	555

The above total anticipated housing figure has been based on a graduated household size/occupancy. The average occupancy rate in Laois in 2016 was 2.9 compared to a state average of 2.75. However, the NPF states that this is expected to decline to around 2.5 by 2040, while also acknowledging that household sizes in urban areas tend to be smaller than in the suburbs or rural parts of the country.

In line with this projected trend, a graduated average household size is utilised within this Plan, however this rate is expected to fall to 2.7 by 2027 based on an evidenced-based assessment of Laois household size over 2006 - 2016 indicated in the Table 2.10.

Table 2.10: Projected Household Size

Year	Total Population in County Laois	Average Household Size in County Laois
2006	67059	2.97
2011	80559	2.88
2016	84697	2.91
2017	85627	2.89
2018	86558	2.87
2019	87488	2.85
2020	88418	2.83
2021	89349	2.81
2022	90279	2.79
2023	91209	2.77
2024	92139	2.75
2025	93070	2.73
2026	94000	2.71
2027	94700	2.70

2.7.1.1 Housing Supply Target

With respect to the:

- ESRI research work “*Structural Housing Demand at County Level*” published on the 14th December 2020;
- *Housing Supply Target Methodology for Development Planning* published by DHLGH in December 2020; and
- Ministerial Letter advising these publications as the most up to date approach towards demand projection.

this projection has been revised using the ESRI EXCEL spreadsheets and most up to date data from CSO Stat bank.

According to this method, the housing allocation over the Plan period is to be calculated by not only relying on the population projection, but also factoring in the two elements of housing supply and unmet demand in the county. Table 2.11 reflects the data that has been collated to calculate the housing demand for the Laois County Development Plan (2021 – 2027).

Table 2.11 – ESRI Household Projections

	County Council	Annual Avg. Households	Total Households
A	ESRI NPF scenario projected new household demand 2017 to Plan end year, or quarter (pro-rata) <i>(Using Data from ESRI Spreadsheet summing up annual NPF figures to 2027)</i>	335	3,688
B	Actual new housing supply 2017 to most recent available year or quarter period to Plan commencement (estimated future delivery projected pro rata for 2020) <i>(Using Data from Housing Completions 2017-2020 NDQ05 Label)</i>	231	925
C	Homeless households (latest data), and unmet demand as at most recent Census <i>(Using Homeless figure from latest report from the department and overcrowding from ESRI app)</i>	N/A	72
D	Plan Housing Demand = A - B + C	473	2,835
E	Potential adjustment 1 to end 2026 portion of plan period to facilitate convergence to NPF strategy (where justified)	Mid-point between ESRI NPF and Baseline scenarios to 2026 in lieu of A above	Adjusted Total
E1	ESRI Baseline scenario projected new household demand 2017, to 2027 <i>(Using Data from ESRI Spreadsheet summing up baseline figures to 2027)</i>	547	6,013
E2	Mid-point between A and E1 - ESRI NPF and Baseline scenarios, to 2027 <i>(Using Data from ESRI excel spreadsheets - NPF + BASELINE /2)</i>	441	4,851
E3	Adjusted Total Plan Demand calculation based on E2 in lieu of A above	571	3,998

According to the ESRI published excel spreadsheet utilising the ESRI NPF method (Row A above), it is projected that over the 2017 to 2027 period, **3,688** no. new households will be

required . However, when the ERSI Baseline method is applied (Row E1), 6,013 no. new households are projected.

County Laois is facing an overcrowding and concealed housing demand of 42 units, while the latest published statistics on homeless by DHLGH (December 2020) indicates 30 persons are homeless in the County. This gives an overall unmet demand of 72 (Row C).

On the supply side, Table 2.11 (Row B) shows that a total number of 925 units had been delivered over 2017-2020, as recorded on CSO StatBank.

To identify the housing demand the figures above were applied using the formula as indicated in the “*Housing Supply Target Methodology for Development Planning*” published by DHLGH in December 2020:

$$\text{Housing Demand 2021-2027} = (\text{Total Projection 2017-2027} - \text{Unit Completions 2017-2020}) + \text{Total Unmet Demand (E3 = E2 - B + C) which equates to: } 3,998 = 4,851 - 925 + 72.$$

Therefore, the overall housing demand over the Plan period therefore forecast to be **3,998** units, which equates to **571** housing units per annum over the Plan period.

This indicates a discrepancy of 16 no. units per annum when compared with the previous method, which can be explained through factoring in the two elements of housing supply and unmet demand in the ERSI method, resulting in a more accurate housing target.

Performing the same calculations to estimate housing demand up to 2031, the overall housing demand is expected to be 6,273 units. This equates to 570 housing units per annum over 2021-2031.

Table 2.12 – Total Plan Demand

	County Council	Annual Avg. Households	Total Households
A	ESRI NPF scenario projected new household demand 2017 to 2031	505	5,558
B	Actual new housing supply 2017 to most recent available year or quarter period to Plan commencement (estimated future delivery projected pro rata for 2020)	247	925
C	Homeless households (latest data), and unmet demand as at most recent Census	N/A	72
D	Plan Housing Demand = A - B + C	784	4,705
E	Potential adjustment 1 to end 2026 portion of plan period to facilitate convergence to NPF strategy (where justified)	Mid-point between ESRI NPF and Baseline scenarios to 2026 in lieu of A above	Adjusted Total
E1	ESRI Baseline scenario projected new household demand 2017, to 2031	790	8,694
E2	Mid-point between A and E1 - ESRI NPF and Baseline scenarios, to 2031	648	7,126
E3	Adjusted Total Plan Demand calculation based on E2 in lieu of A above	570	6,273

2.7.2 HOUSING PERMITTED AND COMPLETED

The global recession and collapse of the property market in 2008 resulted in the stagnation of household construction in the County and across the State. Census data indicates that the private housing stock of the County in 2011 was 28,020⁴ and increased marginally by 3.7% to 29,107⁵ in 2016. Since then, there has been a sustained rise in the number of residential units completed. The table below indicates that the housing stock has increased by 817⁶ units or 2.7% during the period 2016 - 2020.

⁴ CSO Statbank
⁵ CSO Statbank
⁶ CSO Statbank

Table 2.13: Unit Completion 2016 – 2020

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020 (Jan – Sep)
Unit Completion	103	117	235	242	120

Source: CSO Statbank

2.7.3 RESIDENTIAL LAND ZONED IN PREVIOUS THE PLAN

The following table sets out the area of land zoned for residential use / mixture of residential and other uses in the County Development Plan 2017-2023 and County Development Plan 2021 - 2027, together with the number of housing units allocated to these lands.

Table 2.14: Residential Zoned Land

	CDP 2017 - 2023	CDP 2021 - 2027
Land zoned to accommodate residential development	273 ha	155 ha
No of residential units ⁷	3,216 units	3998

2.8 CORE STRATEGY AND HOUSING ALLOCATION

The Section of the Plan indicates the distribution of future population and housing across the county’s settlements. The position of each town in the settlement hierarchy has been clearly linked to the quantitative population allocations. The distribution of future population and household growth in this Plan is based on the key principles of the NPF and RSES of delivering more compact growth but must also align population and employment growth. Growth is therefore targeted in large urban centres that have the capacity and greatest potential for growth on a sustainable platform. In addition there will be greater co-ordination between land use zoning and infrastructure availability through the implementation of the ‘Tiered Approach to Land Use Zoning’ set out in the NPF as indicated in Section 2.7. Along with key demographic change in indicated in Section 2.6.2, the following key considerations also informed this approach:

(i) Compact Growth

In accordance with the principles of compact Growth, at least 30% of housing within settlements is to be within the existing built up footprint area in conjunction with sequential development of settlements. The preferred choice for residential development is within town and village centres, however there are limiting factors which may be applicable e.g. the historic formation of many of the main towns in County Laois, flooding implications (as identified in the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA), inadequate access, limited and fragmented land holdings and the requirement to facilitate retail development in these locations in accordance with the sequential test under the Retail Planning: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DECLG, 2012).

⁷ This figure did not account for rural one off dwellings

This Plan also recognises the social and economic benefits of the redevelopment of brownfield lands to promote urban regeneration and will continue to support the delivery of compact growth and regeneration of under utilised sites in towns and villages throughout Laois. The achievement of this, the NPF notes, has the potential to make a transformational difference. It can bring new life and footfall to existing settlements, contribute to the viability of services, shops and public transport, increase housing supply and enable more people to be closer to employment and recreational opportunities, as well as supporting a more sustainable transport mode shift.

An analysis of the potential capacity of infill and brownfield lands zoned for residential, town/village centre, or mixed use developments in all settlements indicates that approximately **1,709 units** could be delivered on these lands. This equates to **33%** of the household allocation for the County. The development of these lands will make an important contribution to the creation of more sustainable communities in the County and will support the implementation of the national and regional policy objectives of creating more compact settlements.

(ii) Climate Change and Environmental Sensitivity

Climate change has an increasing role to play in how we plan for the future. This Plan has a critical role to play in ensuring our communities develop having regard to sustainable infrastructure networks which build resilience to climate change. A key component is delivering housing in a compact, sustainable way which better integrates with sustainable transport modes to become less dependent on single vehicular use.

Consideration is given to; ground and surface water vulnerability and any potential environmental impact (including SEA, HAD, EU Water Framework Directive, River Basin Management Plans and Flood Risk Management) requirements; availability of services and infrastructure; potential for economic and social development of the settlement; the sequential test; ground and surface water vulnerability; planning history and market availability/choice. A Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment has been prepared in tandem with the Core Strategy. The Core Strategy has had regard to both assessments with any changes/recommendations incorporated into the strategy.

(iii) Extant Planning Permission

A detailed review of extant planning permissions has been carried out and a total of **1562 units** has been recorded. It has been concluded that there are a number of unknowns in relation to the delivery of these units. While the Council works closely with associated parties to assist in bringing forward these sites for development, external market forces may prohibit this. It is considered that there is a relatively small number of these permissions to wither over the plan period. Many of those that have acquired extension of durations on permissions during the plan period 2017-2023 pursuant to Section 42 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), may also not come forward during this Plan period.

The Core Strategy Table (Table 2.16) does not deduct population that would be catered for in committed land by way of extant permission or Part VIII approvals.

(iv) Vacant Housing Stock

Census 2016 results record a total housing stock of 33,115 in Laois, an increase of just 541 on 2011 levels. In that time, the rate of vacant housing has fallen from 12.5% to 10.0% (-785 units). In other words, there were 35.5 vacant homes per 1,000 people in 2016, a fall from the corresponding figure of 48.88 recorded in 2011. This indicates the existing vacant stock is absorbing much of the growing need for housing in the county.

Table 2.15: Residential Vacancy

Housing Stock	Vacant Holiday Homes	Other Vacant Dwellings	Total Vacancy	% Vacancy
33,115	139	3,163	3,302	10

Source: CSO Statbank

2.8.1 CORE STRATEGY TABLE

The 'Core Strategy Table' below, sets out the population projections and household allocation for each settlement up to 2027. This table provides details of the most recent population (2016), population projections, the housing allocation for 2021 – 2027 and for 2027 - 2031 for each settlement based on the Housing Strategy (Appendix 3) analysis, the number of housing units which must be delivered within the built up footprint of each settlement and the quantum of land required for the delivery of the housing allocation based on a specific density⁸ for each settlement.

Land which allows for a mix of uses including residential has also been indicated. For the purposes of this Plan, such uses consist of 'Mixed Use' and 'Town/Village Centre', where the objective and purpose of that zoning specifies residential use along with the primary objective (commercial/retail) of that zoning.

Following the population allocations set out in the Core Strategy Table below, zoning maps are provided in Volume 2, Settlement Plans, to reflect these figures and to indicate the quantum and locations of future development for the plan period.

It is considered that the lands identified for residential development are sufficient to meet the population targets set out in the Core Strategy Table 2.16 and reflect each settlements role in the Settlement Hierarchy.

The amount and location of zoned lands required in each settlement was determined using an evidence-based settlement typology and asset-based approach, as detailed in Section 2.4.1 of the Plan and the considerations of Section 2.7.3 and also an Infrastructure Assessment in Appendix 9. The following table, indicates the population and housing projections for County Laois.

⁸ This density is based on Section 28 Planning Guidelines - Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (DEHLG, 2009)

Table 2.16: Core Strategy Table

	2016	2016 - 2027		Existing Zoning HA		Mixed Use		Brownfield / Infill			Greenfield		Total land for New Residential			2027 - 2031		
	CSO POP 2016	NPF Total Pop 2016 - 2027	Housing Allocation based on ESRI Household Projections 2021 - 2027	Existing Residential Lands (ha)	Existing Lands that permit residential (ha)	Potential Units on Mixed Uses	Mixed Use Lands for Residential HA	Potential Units on Brownfield / Infill	Land Required for Brownfield / Infill HA	% of Brownfield / Infill	Potential Units on Greenfield	Greenfield Land HA	Total Land Zoned for Residential Uses (HA)	Land within Built Up Footprint (HA)	% of Land within the Built Up Footprint	NPF Total Pop 2016 - 2031	Housing Allocation based on ESRI Household Projections 2027 - 2031	Housing Land Requirement 2027 - 2031 in HA (Strategic Reserve)
COUNTY LAOIS	84,697	94,700	3998	1030.8	571.6	508	21	1814	68	49%	1,626	54	138	95.2	69%	97500	2275	59
KEY TOWNS																		
Portlaoise	22,050	26,366	1725	383	171	388	15.7	899	26.3	39.1	787	22.2	64.2	59.2	88.1	27,359	982	24
Graiguecullen ⁹	4,692	5,392	280	74.0	6.1	0	0.0	140	4.0	50.0	140	4.0	8.0	NA	NA	5,553	159	5
SELF SUSTAINING GROWTH TOWN																		
Portarlinton ¹⁰	6,596	7,596	400	104.7	44.4	0	0.0	310	10.3	77.5	90	3.0	13.3	NA	NA	7,826	228	8
SELF SUSTAINING TOWNS																		
Mountmellick	4,777	5,227	180	90	45.5	0	0.0	60	2.0	44.4	120	2.5	4.5	4.0	88.9	5,331	102	3
Abbeyleix	1,770	1,970	80	81	48.6	30	1.0	7	1.7	15.7	270	8.1	10.8	5.1	47.2	2,016	46	2
Stradbally	1,350	1,550	80	28.0	26.8	18	0.6	25	0.5	4.2	37	3.1	4.6	4.0	33.9	1,596	46	2

⁹ A Joint Local Area Plan for Graiguecullen shall be carried out in collaboration with Carlow County Council. A zoning map has therefore not been included within Volume 2 of this Plan, until such time as the Joint LAP has been completed and incorporated through a variation of the CDP. The total amount of land zoned within the built-up footprint of the settlement has not been indicated as it may be subject to change. The projected growth and housing allocation will, however, be incorporated into the Joint LAP.

¹⁰ A Joint Local Area Plan for Portarlinton shall be carried out in collaboration with Offaly County Council. A zoning map has therefore not been included within Volume 2 of this Plan, until such time as the Joint LAP has been completed and incorporated through a variation of the CDP. The total amount of land zoned within the built-up footprint of the settlement has not been indicated as it may be subject to change. The projected growth and housing allocation will, however, be incorporated into the Joint LAP.

	2016	2016 - 2027		Existing Zoning HA		Mixed Use		Brownfield / Infill			Greenfield		Total land for New Residential			2027 - 2031		
	CSO POP 2016	NPF Total Pop 2016 - 2027	Housing Allocation based on ESRI Household Projections 2021 - 2027	Existing Residential Lands (ha)	Existing Lands that permit residential (ha)	Potential Units on Mixed Uses	Mixed Use Lands for Residential HA	Potential Units on Brownfield / Infill	Land Required for Brownfield / Infill HA	% of Brownfield / Infill	Potential Units on Greenfield	Greenfield Land HA	Total Land Zoned for Residential Uses (HA)	Land within Built Up Footprint (HA)	% of Land within the Built Up Footprint	NPF Total Pop 2016 - 2031	Housing Allocation based on ESRI Household Projections 2027 - 2031	Housing Land Requirement 2027 - 2031 in HA (Strategic Reserve)
Mountrath	1,774	2,024	100	43.2	31.4	19	0.6	54	3.6	76.6	7	0.5	4.7	4.7	100.0	2,082	57	2
SMALL TOWNS																		
Durrow	835	935	40	20.0	15.4	0	0.0	14	1.0	29.4	26	2.4	3.4	3.4	100.0	958	23	1
Rathdowney	1,271	1,396	50	41	30.3	23	0.9	12	0.8	29.6	15	1.0	2.7	1.2	44.4	1,425	28	1
Ballylynan	1101	1,226	50	21.2	10.3	8	0.5	103	4.1	60.3	66	2.2	6.8	2.3	33.8	1,255	28	1
VILLAGES (>500 POPULATION)																		
Clonaslee	566	616	20	8.2	14.6	0	0.0	20	3.1	100.0	0	0.0	3.1	2.5	80.6	628	11	1
Borris In Ossory	508	558	20	9.5	16.2	0	0.0	20	2.0	100.0	0	0.0	2.0	1.0	50.0	570	11	1
Ballyroan	563	613	20	10.0	10.9	10	0.4	10	1.0	71.4	0	0.0	1.4	1.0	71.4	625	11	1
Killenard	671	721	20	37.3	27.6	0	0.0	20	1.0	100	0	0.0	0	0.0	0.0	733	11	1
SMALLER VILLAGES (<500) AND OPEN COUNTRYSIDE																		
	36,173	38,509	934 ¹¹	79.8	72.5	12	1.2	70.0	7.4	NA	68.4	7.2	15.8	NA	NA	39,607	543	9

¹¹ This figure includes an approximation of 100 rural one off dwellings per annum over the lifetime of the Plan. Refer to Section 6.2 of the Laois Housing Strategy and Housing Needs Demand Assessment for analysis of rural one-off dwellings

2.9**CORE STRATEGY POLICIES AND OBJECTIVES**

Laois County Council shall ensure that the future spatial development of Laois is directed by means of a plan led approach, directing residential and employment generating development to locations in accordance with National and Regional Policy, and with environmental carrying capacity, which can support investment in public infrastructure and services and which is sensitive to the physical character of the built and natural environment. This approach is enshrined in a number of Core Strategy Policy Objectives, as below.

Overarching Core Strategy Policy Objectives	
CS 01	Ensure that the future spatial development of County Laois is in accordance with the National Planning Framework 2040 (NPF) including the population targets set out under the Implementation Roadmap, and the Regional, Spatial and the Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region 2019-2031.
CS 01A	Following the receipt and consideration of any section 28 Guidelines including the Revised Development Plan Guidelines, the Planning Authority will prepare a report detailing consistency with this guidelines and if required prepare a variation to ensure the County Development aligns with same.
CS 02	Implement all land use planning policy and objectives in a manner which takes account of and is consistent with the Core Strategy in order to accelerate a transition to a greener, low carbon and climate resilient county with a focus on reduced travel demand through the promotion of sustainable settlement patterns.
CS 03	In the assessment of development proposals, to take account of transport corridors, environmental carrying capacity, availability and/or capacity to provide waste water and water supply services, potential to conflict with Water Framework Directive objectives, potential to impact on the integrity of European sites and Annexed Habitats and species, features of biodiversity value including ecological networks, impact on landscape and visual characteristics, education and other socioeconomic objectives.
CS 04	Promote the integration of land use and transportation policies and to prioritise provision for cycling and walking travel modes and the strengthening of public transport.
CS 05	Support the regeneration of underused town centre and brownfield/infill lands along with the delivery of existing zoned and serviced lands to facilitate population growth and achieve sustainable compact growth targets of 30% of all new housing to be built within the existing urban footprint of targeted settlements in the County.
CS 06	Promote measures to reduce vacancy and the underuse of existing building stock and support initiatives that promote the reuse, refurbishment and retrofitting of existing buildings within urban centres and targeted settlements in the County.
CS 07	Incorporate, in the content of the County Development Plan, measures in accordance with Section 10 (n) of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 (as amended) for the promotion of sustainable settlement and transportation strategies in urban and rural areas including the promotion of measures to — (i) reduce energy demand in response to the likelihood of increases in energy and other costs

Overarching Core Strategy Policy Objectives	
	due to long-term decline in non-renewable resources, (ii) reduce anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, and (iii) address the necessity of adaptation to climate change; in particular, having regard to location, layout and design of new development.
CS 08	Review the Local Area Plans for Portlaoise and Mountmellick. During the transition period between adoption of this county development plan and the adoption of the Local Area Plans for Portlaoise and Mountmellick , the objectives (including zoning objectives) , policies and standards in this county development plan shall apply. The Local Area Plan for Portlaoise will be supported by a Local Transport Plan prepared concurrently in consultation with the National Transport Authority and Transport Infrastructure Ireland. The LTP will provide the strategic rationale for the development of any transport infrastructure objectives.
CS 09	Prepare a cross boundary Joint Local Area Plan (LAP) for Carlow / Graiguecullen and associated local transport plan in conjunction with Carlow County Council having regard to the projected population growth set out in the Core Strategy of this Plan and to its location within the combined functional area of both Laois County Council and Carlow County Council. During the transition period between adoption of this county development plan and the adoption of the Joint Local Area Plan for Carlow / Graiguecullen, policies and standards in this county development plan shall apply ¹² .
CS 10	Prepare a cross boundary Joint Local Area Plans (LAP) for Portarlinton and associated local transport plan, in conjunction with Offaly County Council having regard to the projected population growth set out in the Core Strategy of this Plan and to its location within the combined functional area of both Laois County Council and Offaly County Council. During the transition period between adoption of this county development plan and the adoption of the Local Area Plans for Portarlinton, policies and standards in this county development plan shall apply.
CS 11	Ensure that Laois County Development Plan is consistent with Section 28 Guidelines and support the development of quality residential schemes with a range of housing options having regard to the standards, principles and any specific planning policy requirements (SPPRs) set out in the Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009); Urban Development and Building Heights Guidelines for Planning Authorities’ (2018) and the ‘Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments, Guidelines for Planning Authorities’ (2020).

¹²The Joint LAP shall provide a coordinated planning framework to identify and deliver strategic sites and regeneration areas for the future physical, economic and social development of Carlow / Graiguecullen to ensure it achieves targeted compact growth of a minimum of 30% and ensure a coordinated approach is taken to the future growth and development of the of the combined urban area, ensuring that it has the capacity to grown sustainably and secure investment as a Key Town. The Joint LAP shall identify a boundary for the plan area and strategic housing and employment development areas and infrastructure investment requirements to promote greater coordination and sequential delivery of serviced lands for development. Regard shall be had to the respective housing, retail and other local authority strategies that may be in place.

2.10 FUTURE SETTLEMENT GROWTH

2.10.1 KEY TOWNS

Portlaoise and Graiguecullen are designated as Key Towns in the RSES, which are defined as 'Large economically active service and/or county towns that provide employment for their surrounding areas and with high- quality transport links and the capacity to act as growth drivers to complement the Regional Growth Centres'.

2.10.1.1 Portlaoise

In line with this objective, the following provides a rationale for directing significant growth towards Portlaoise:

a) Population Profile and Growth

County Laois has experienced significant population growth in the past decade, growing by 26.3% over the ten year period between 2006 and 2016. In the same ten year period, Portlaoise experienced a significant population growth rate of 45%. The proportion of the county's population living within Portlaoise has grown steadily over this period, rising from 21% in 2006 to 26% in 2016.

Table 2.17: Population statistics for County Laois and Portlaoise between 2002 and 2016

	Persons 2002	Persons 2006	Persons 2011	Persons 2016	% Change 06-16
County Laois	58,774	67,059	80,559	84,697	26.3
Portlaoise	12,127	14,613	20,145	22,050	45

(Source: CSO)

The 2016 Census reported 8,958 Portlaoise residents commute to either work (8,381) or third-level study (577) on a daily basis. Excluding mobile workers, those who work from or at home and those whose place of work, school or college could not be coded, a total of 6,623 Portlaoise residents regularly commute either to work (92%) or to third-level study (8%). Of those who commute to work, 63% commute to a location within County Laois and 37% leave the County.

The majority of Portlaoise commuters drive, accounting for 67% of those who commute to work and 28% of those commuting to third-level study. The next most popular modes of travel for workers is walking (9%) , and for third level students walking (21%) and bus (21%) were the next most popular.

Primary and secondary level students most popular mode of travel was passengers by car (57%), with walking (22%) and bus (13%) the next most popular. A large proportion of Portlaoise commuters to work are highly educated with nearly 44% holding a third-level or higher qualification. This compares to 53% for the state. The highest proportion of 29% work in the Wholesale or Retail sector with Education, Human Health and social work activities the next highest at 19%.

b) Strategic Infrastructure/Investment

As outlined under Project Ireland 2040 some of the other strategic infrastructure/ investment identified for Portlaoise include:

Transport Regional and Local Roads:

- Portlaoise Southern Distributor Road will be progressed over the course of the National Development Plan – Completed in 2019.

Health:

- A Mental Health project for a 40 bed Residential Unit.

Courts Service:

- Provision of a new or refurbished Courthouse.

Prison Service:

- Modernisation or replacement of the historic E Block in Portlaoise Prison.

The RSES states that Key Towns should seek commensurate population and employment growth, on high quality public transport corridors coupled with investment in services, amenities and sustainable transport.

c) Regeneration and Low Carbon Town

The “*Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy “2040 And Beyond: A Vision For Portlaoise”* sets out a vision for the future development of Portlaoise town centre. Improvements to the public realm through a program of infrastructural works will provide a safe, attractive, and comfortable place to live, work and visit. Infrastructural improvements will prioritise pedestrians through measures such as traffic calming, street maintenance and traffic management in the historic town centre.

The town has also been designated Ireland’s first low carbon town which is support by RPO 4.72 of the RSES. The aim of the Low Carbon Town is to reduce the impact of the car on the public realm and improving the mix of uses within the town centre. This will be achieved by removing large volumes of traffic from congested areas, utilising the South Circular Road and by reconfiguration of existing traffic flows throughout the town centre.

Building on the development of this ‘Park and Stride’ policy Laois County Council will also be encouraging an increase in the adoption of cycling by extending on-road and off-road cycle ways and the creation of the Triogue River Blueway as an environmental and amenity objective. The Local Authority will also be upgrading the laneway’s of Portlaoise by improving the overall look, retrofitting existing street lights with energy saving LED’s and adding additional lighting to poorly lit areas. Further energy efficient amenities will include the addition of 30 eCar charge Points and an extension of the number of solar powered compactor bins to 50. The Council has also received significant funding to develop a multi-point incubation hub called ‘The Cube’ for the development of a Low Carbon Centre of Excellence, assisting in attracting and developing companies with a low Carbon focus.

d) Strategic Employment Zone

Additional to this, it is objective to capitalise on Portlaoise’s location on the motorway and rail networks and proximity to the Greater Dublin Area. The zoning and servicing of land at Togher as a National Enterprise Park for enterprise, employment and industrial uses, in the immediate vicinity of national strategic transport infrastructure, represents a unique opportunity to develop a cluster of complementary enterprises and more generally a larger, more robust and diverse economic basis for the town, county and region. J17 National Enterprise Park Masterplan sets out the guidance in this respect.

Portlaoise Policy Objectives	
CS 12	Support the continued growth and sustainable development of Portlaoise to act as a growth driver in the region and to fulfill its role as a Key Town as outlined in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019.
CS 13	Direct population into the Key Town to ensure that population growth is appropriate in scale with its identified role in the Regional and County Settlement Hierarchy.
CS 14	Require sustainable , compact , sequential growth in Portlaoise by consolidating the built up footprint ¹³ with a focus on the redevelopment and regeneration of infill and brownfield sites.
CS 15	Apply increased residential densities where appropriate having regard to Sustainable Residential Developments in Urban Areas (2009) and apply appropriate development management measures in ensuring growth is appropriate and in compliance with the RSES 2019.
CS 16	Implement the actions of the ‘Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy “2040 And Beyond: A Vision For Portlaoise’ to improve the character of the town of Portlaoise.
CS 17	Support and facilitate the transition of Portlaoise to a low carbon centre of excellence in accordance with RPO 4.72 of the RSES.

2.10.1.2 **Graigucullen**

Graigucullen is designated as a Key Town in the RSES, which are defined as ‘Large economically active service and/or county towns that provide employment for their surrounding areas and with high- quality transport links and the capacity to act as growth drivers to complement the Regional Growth Centres’.

A joint LAP for the Carlow / Graigucullen area was prepared in 2012 and further extended up to and including 22nd October 2022 after which time a new Joint Spatial Plan will be prepared for

¹³ National Policy Objective 3C of the NPF 2018 states “deliver at least 30% of all new homes that are targeted in settlements other than the 5 cities and their suburbs , within their existing built up footprints”

the Greater Carlow Graiguecullen Area in conjunction with Carlow County Council which will align with the policy provisions of the EMRA RSES and the Southern Regional Assembly RSES in order to comply with RPO 4.75.

In addition to this RPO 4.76 will be considered and inform the preparation of the Joint LAP - support the sustainable development of environmentally sensitive , low intensity amenity development associated with the Barrow Blueway subject to compliance with the Habitats directive and floods Directive.

The vision for the Greater Carlow Graiguecullen urban area is as follows:-

“A high-functioning, inclusive, compact and accessible greater urban area, underpinned by a robust and diverse local economy comprising retail, commercial, industrial, education and tourism uses; with characteristics including a strong sense of place, a vibrant and vital town centre, opportunities for education and cultural experiences for all, a network of linked open spaces, recreational uses and other social infrastructure elements to provide for a good quality of life and increased emphasis on sustainable forms of transport and patterns of development”

The RSES states that Key Towns should seek commensurate population and employment growth, on high quality public transport corridors coupled with investment in services, amenities and sustainable transport.

Graiguecullen Policy Objectives	
CS 18	Support the continued growth and sustainable development of Graiguecullen to act as a growth driver in the region and to fulfill its role as a Key Town.
CS 19	Work with Carlow County Council to Identify strategic housing and employment development areas and infrastructure investment requirements to promote greater coordination and sequential delivery of serviced lands for development.
CS 20	Promote higher densities at appropriate locations, owing to position on public transport network where appropriate to do so having regard to Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Developments in Urban Areas (DEHLG, 2009) and ensure that any plan or project associated with the provision of new housing is subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening in compliance with the Habitats Directive, and subsequent assessment as required.
CS 21	Require sustainable, compact, sequential growth in Graiguecullen by consolidating the built up footprint ¹⁴ with a focus on the redevelopment and regeneration of infill and brownfield sites.

¹⁴ National Policy Objective 3C of the NPF 2018 states “deliver at least 30% of all new homes that are targeted in settlements other than the 5 cities and their suburbs , within their existing built up footprints”

2.10.2 SELF SUSTAINING GROWTH TOWN

The RSES defines 'Self Sustaining Growth Towns' as 'Towns With A Moderate Level Of Jobs And Services – Includes Sub-County Market Towns And Commuter Towns With Good Transport Links And Capacity For Continued Commensurate Growth To Become More Self-Sustaining'.

Laois County Council has identified Portarlinton as a Self Sustaining Growth Town. The population of Portarlinton in the 2016 Census is 6,576 persons (Laois County Council Area) and 1,772 persons (Offaly County Council Area). An established measure of the employment “health” of a settlement is a measure called the “Jobs Ratio”. This is the relationship between the number of people in the labour force and the number of jobs in any defined area. A healthy area is considered to be one where the jobs ratio is around 70%. While not all towns will be able to reach this level, it is considered reasonable that the plan should aim to increase the jobs ratio proportionately to accord with the town’s characteristics and level in the County settlement and employment hierarchy.

As indicated in Census 2016 Portarlinton has a total labour force of 3,798 persons. The census also indicates that there are 1,349 jobs within the settlement of Portarlinton. Given an indicated resident worker population of 3,103, Portarlinton has a jobs to resident workers ratio of 0.435 which is below the definition of a healthy area where it is considered to be one where the jobs ratio is around 70%. However it should be noted that since 2016 a number of new enterprise / employment opportunities have been established namely – Portarlinton Enterprise Centre is now at full capacity, sites within the Enterprise park have been further developed, investment in the Garden Shop, etc should be factored now into the figures going forward.

Portarlinton is one of the most accessible towns within the Midlands Region by virtue of the Train station which has had substantial investment in recent years.

The National Planning Framework (NPF) includes a National Policy Objective to prepare a Joint Local Area Plan where a town and environs lie within the combined functional area of more than one Local Authority. The Joint LAP has set out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of Portarlinton in the context of the relevant county development plans for both counties.

Due to the town’s proximity to the Greater Dublin Area and its location on the Dublin-Cork/ Dublin-Galway train line, Portarlinton has experienced significant population growth since the beginning of the millennium. In this regard, the town’s population increased from 4,001 persons in 2002 to 8,368 persons in 2016. Portarlinton is ranked third in overall population size in County Laois and fourth in County Offaly behind the county towns of Portlaoise and Tullamore.

While such population growth has created the critical mass to support the town’s own services and industry, this growth has in turn placed an even greater demand on the town’s infrastructure, in particular education, housing, recreational amenities and services.

The development of Portarlinton over the lifetime of this plan shall be focused on **employment generation**, the **consolidation of the town centre** and the provision of **community and social services and the transition to a low carbon town**.

The Council is currently preparing a Portarlinton Regeneration Strategy for the town centre. The aim of the strategy is to create a vision for Portarlinton's public realm, including the

suitable re-use of Market House and Square. The aim of the Strategy will be to identify key urban spaces designated for enhancement and connection, pedestrian priority linkages and proposals to better link the historic core with adjacent amenities (People's Park, River Barrow, Leisure Centre and play areas)

Overarching Core Strategy Policy Objectives	
CS 22	Promote consolidation in Self-Sustaining Growth Towns coupled with targeted investment where required to improve local employment, services and sustainable transport options and to become more self-sustaining settlements.
CS 23	Prepare a Urban Regeneration Strategy for the Town of Portarlington to ensure a framework for its future development which would seek to identify opportunities for heritage led regeneration in the Market Square and pedestrian and cycle linkages between Portarlington Railway Station and (i) Market Square/Main Street (ii) Portarlington Leisure Centre (ii) Colaistelosagain and Derryounce Lakes and Trails.
CS 24	Promote higher densities at appropriate locations, owing to position on public transport network where appropriate to do so having regard to <i>Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Developments in Urban Areas (DEHLG, 2009)</i> and ensure that any plan or project associated with the provision of new housing is subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening in compliance with the Habitats Directive, and subsequent assessment as required;

2.10.3 SELF SUSTAINING TOWNS

Self-Sustaining Towns, according to the RSES, are towns with *high levels of population growth and a weak employment base which are reliant on other areas for employment and/or services and which require targeted 'catch up' investment to become more self-sustaining.*

Mountmellick, Abbeyleix, Mountrath, Stradbally form this tier of the settlement hierarchy. Each of these towns have experienced limited growth over the past development plan period.

The Self Sustaining Towns are so designated, because they are important urban centres within their hinterlands, providing community and infrastructural facilities and services and the population base to maintain them. These towns perform important retail, residential, service and amenity functions for local, essentially rural hinterland and support the upper tiers of the urban hierarchy, including the key towns.

Many of these towns have experienced high levels of population growth over the last census period, in some cases without the necessary supporting services. The development of these towns needs to be increasingly aimed at consolidating growth within the Self sustaining Towns and better matching it to the development of social and physical infrastructure.

Mountmellick has a role to play in supporting both the Key towns of both Portlaoise and Tullamore within the Midlands Region.

Abbeyleix, Stradbally, Mountrath are also Self Sustaining Towns dispersed around the county on the national road network. These towns are considered appropriate for managed population

growth over the plan period, together with employment opportunities, business, industry and tourism and infrastructural development.

The RSES states that population growth in Self-Sustaining towns shall be at a rate that seeks to achieve a balancing effect and shall be focused on consolidation and inclusion of policies in relation to improvements in services and employment provision

Self Sustaining Towns Policy Objectives	
CS 25	Promote commensurate population and employment growth in the designated Self- Sustaining towns, providing for natural increases and to become more economically self- sustaining, in line with the quality and capacity of public transport, services and infrastructure available.
CS 26	Identify opportunities sites within the Self sustaining towns for residential, employment or social functions.
CS27	Ensure that population growth is appropriate in pace and scale and diversity of uses and services within its identified role in the settlement hierarchy.

2.10.4 TOWNS

Durrow, Rathdowney and Ballylinan are included within this tier of the settlement hierarchy. Facilitating housing is paramount to ensuring the sustainability, vitality and viability of the rural places of the Region, according to the RSES. Support for housing and population growth within rural towns and villages in County Laois will provide a viable alternative to rural one-off housing, contributing to the principle of compact growth.

These towns have an important role to play in performing local residential, retailing, social and leisure functions and providing appropriate local services to a wider rural hinterland. They have attractive streetscapes, physical settings and heritage buildings that present a strong visual character.

Rathdowney provides a range of services and facilities for the population of the immediately surrounding hinterland. It is a focus for social interaction in the west of the county, and provides linkages to the smaller settlement nodes [such as Errill and Donaghmore] in its district.

Durrow provides a limited range of services and facilities for the population of the immediately surrounding hinterland. It is a focus for social interaction in the south of the county, and provides linkages to the smaller settlement nodes in its districts.

Ballylinan also provides a limited range of services and facilities in the north eastern quadrant of the county for its population and that of its rural hinterland. Its proximity to Athy and Carlow has placed pressure on it from a commuting perspective and so it is considered appropriate to identify opportunities within the town that could grow employment and enterprise and potential serviced sites for residential purposes.

Having regard to their existing and envisaged size, their general structure as small country settlements, their range of housing requirements and their semi urban character, their plans include statutory zoning of particular land for particular purposes.

Towns Policy Objectives	
CS 28	Promote consolidation coupled with targeted rural housing and investment policies in Towns and Villages where required to improve local employment, services and sustainable transport options and to become more self-sustaining.
CS 29	Promote regeneration opportunities within these towns to ensure their viability as service centres for the surrounding areas.

2.10.5 VILLAGES AND RURAL AREAS

Laois has traditionally been a predominantly rural county. The 2016 Census results show a distribution between the urban and rural population as 48.4% and 51.6% respectively. In 2011, this distribution was as 47.4% and 52.6% respectively. Thus, the overall proportion of the County living in urban settlements is increasing.

Rural population will continue to be supported through the small towns and villages and through a sustainable approach to maintaining the rural population and rural economy, balanced against measures to protect the environment. Support for providing housing within our small towns and villages as an alternative to the consideration of one off housing in the countryside will be enabled in this development plan in order to achieve the principles of compact growth while transitioning to a low carbon economy.

A national programme will be developed for new homes in small towns and villages with Local Authorities, public infrastructure agencies such as Irish Water and local communities providing serviced sites with appropriate infrastructure. Examples of this have already emerged in County Laois in Small towns such as Castletown and are planned in towns such as Killeen in the East of the County.

In making the choice to live either in a small town / village or open countryside, consideration must now be given to impact on the climate and what actions we need to take to be more sustainably responsible. Facilitating and encouraging people to live in more sustainable communities in towns and villages, near to essential services and public transport, is essential in addressing the climate change agenda and our transition to a low carbon society which is less dependent on private vehicle.

The structure of rural villages in Laois can be categorized as follows :

- a) Villages >500 population (depending on assets available / function within the county)
- b) Villages < 500 population
- c) Rural settlements

Villages such as **Borris in Ossory, Ballyroan, Clonaslee and Killenard** have an important role to play in performing local residential, retailing, social and leisure functions and providing appropriate local services to a wider rural hinterland. They have attractive streetscapes, physical settings and heritage buildings that present a strong visual character. These villages provide opportunities for future expansion/ provision of services such as community centres, local shop, pub, petrol outlet and have the potential to attract a population seeking to live in a rural environment.

Development growth should be low density, relative to the scale of the settlement, located as near as is practicable to the core area. Due to their existing and envisaged size, their general structure as small country settlements, their range of housing requirements and their semi urban character, their plans include statutory zoning of particular land for particular purposes.

Smaller Villages such as **Ballinakill, Ballybrittas, Emo, Castletown, The Swan**, etc have a limited service base and are to a large extent founded on the local primary school catchment area. These villages provide opportunities for future expansion/ provision of services such as community centres, local shop, pub, petrol outlet and have the potential to attract a population seeking to live in a rural environment. Development growth should be low density, relative to the scale of the settlement, located as near as is practicable to the core area.

Rural settlements are very small, sometimes embryonic rural settlements with a very small amount of development to date. These settlements are defined by their loose gathering of one-off houses and some public services dispersed within the settlement such as a church, school, shop, playing pitch and speed limits. Examples of these settlements include **Arles, Attanagh, Ballyfin, Shanahoe, Ballaghmore, Kilbricken, Donaghmore, The Rock and Wolfhill**. The availability of serviced sites, in tandem with schemes such as the Irish Water Scheme for Small Towns and Villages, will help to enable this.

Rural Areas Policy Objectives	
CS 30	Support housing at an appropriate scale and repopulation taking place within villages in a consolidated, sustainable and sequential manner, priority will be given to refurbishment of existing houses or appropriate replacement to current building standards within the existing footprint.
CS 31	Promote the provision of serviced sites in line with investment opportunities by Irish Water in order to attract people to build their own homes and live in villages.
CS 32	Facilitate the expansion of villages and small towns to provide for employment, retail and social opportunities at an appropriate scale subject to normal planning requirements.
CS 33	Support the servicing of rural villages (serviced sites) to provide an alternative to one-off housing in the countryside, in line with RSES Objective RPO 4.78.
CS 34	Within the designated development limits of the rural villages in Volume 2, development will be permitted where it involves infilling, conversion, single site housing development, or the use of derelict or underused land or premises, subject to siting, design, protection of residential amenities and normal development management criteria.

2.11 ENVIRONMENT AND ECOSYSTEMS SERVICES APPROACH

The development objectives in the t Development Plan are consistent, as far as practicable, with the conservation and protection of the environment. The accompanying Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) processes have informed the preparation of the t Plan (see Chapter 1: Introduction for a description of these processes and Volume 4 for associated documents detailing the findings).

All recommendations made by these processes have been integrated into the Plan and this will contribute towards environmental conservation and protection within the County and beyond.

Ecosystems are multifunctional communities of living organisms interacting with each other and their environment. Ecosystems provide a series of services for human well-being (ecosystem services) either directly or indirectly contributing towards human wellbeing. The Ecosystems Services Approach followed by the Plan provides a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way.

Ecosystem Services Approach principles include:

- a) Consideration of natural systems - by using knowledge of interactions in nature and how ecosystems function (this has been considered in preparing the Plan including at Chapter 11 “Biodiversity and Natural Heritage”)
- b) Taking into account of the services that ecosystems provide - including those that underpin social and economic well-being, such as flood and climate regulation (including at Plan Chapter 3 “Climate Action and Energy”),resources for food, fibre or fuel (including at Plan Chapters3 “Climate Action and Energy” and 9 “Rural Laois”), or recreation, culture and quality of life (including at Plan Chapter5 “Quality Of Life and Sustainable Communities”)
- c) Involving people - those who benefit from the ecosystem services and those managing them need to be involved in decisions that affect them. Public consultation has informed the preparation of the Draft Plan which will be further refined before adoption, taking into account submissions/observations made on the Draft Plan during public display.

Natural capital consists of renewable and non-renewable resources (e.g. plants, animals, air, water, soils, minerals) which need to be managed. In recognition of this, policy objectives have been integrated into the Plan that will contribute towards the management of air quality, noise pollution, light pollution, pollination, flood risk, water bodies and river basins and natural resources supporting energy production and recreation.

Ecosystems Approach Policy Objectives	
CS 35	Promote an Ecosystem Services Approach in the preparation of lower-level plans, strategies and Development Management.
CS 36	Contribute, as practicable, towards achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals ¹⁵ of the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which came into force in 2016.

¹⁵ Including:

- Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere
- Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
- Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

-
- *Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all*
 - *Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all*
 - *Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation*
 - *Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries*
 - *Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*
 - *Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns*
 - *Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*
 - *Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*
 - *Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss*
 - *Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels*
 - *Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development*

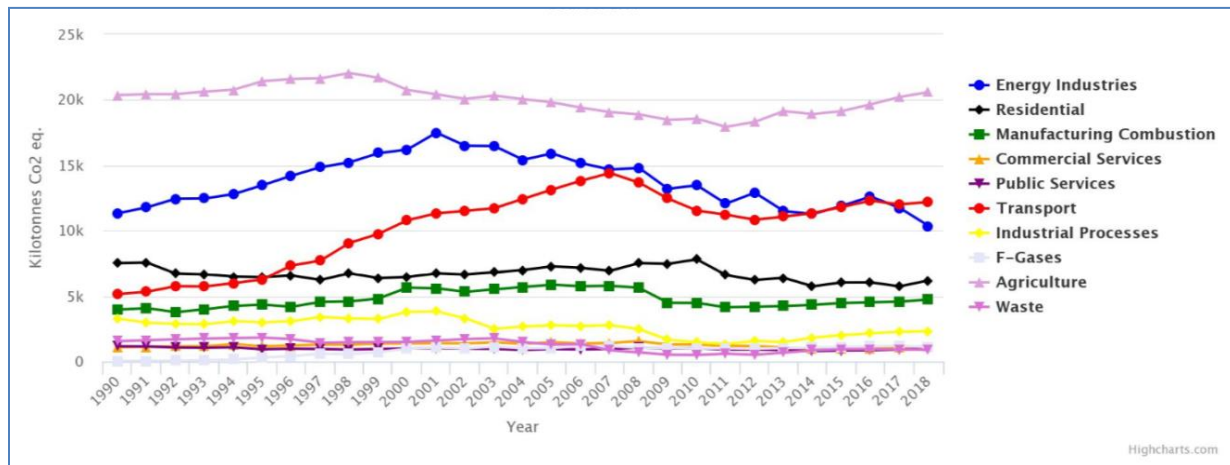
CHAPTER 3 CLIMATE ACTION & ENERGY

Aim: *To reduce our carbon footprint by integrating climate action into the planning system in support of national targets for climate policy mitigation and adaptation objectives, as well as targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions.*

3.1 WHAT IS CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change refers to a long term, large scale change in global or regional climate patterns. In recent years, global temperatures have been rising. Changes observed in our climate since the early 20th century are primarily driven by human activities, primarily fossil fuel burning, which increases heat-trapping greenhouse gas levels in Earth's atmosphere, raising the average surface temperature and creating a shift in global atmospheric pressure. Many human activities generate these gases such as the production of electricity, transportation, industrial and agricultural activity which contribute to high quantities of these emissions. As can be seen in the chart below, agriculture is the highest producer of greenhouse gas emissions in the country, followed by transport and energy industries.

Figure 3.1 Greenhouse Gas Emissions by Sector

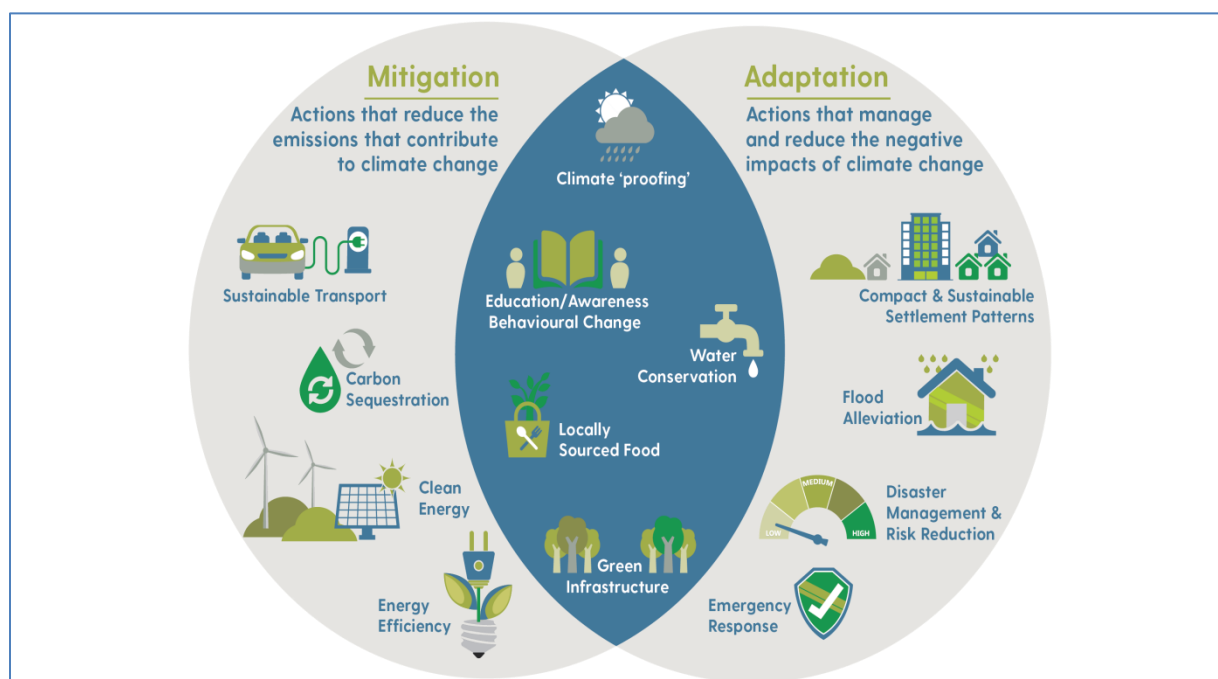


Source: EPA Environmental Indicator

3.1.1 CLIMATE ACTION = MITIGATION + ADAPTATION

Climate change is now recognised as the most significant global threat and its impacts are already having far-reaching economic, social and environmental consequences which can be seen in our rising sea levels, higher average temperatures, frequent weather extremes and flooding. 'Climate Action' includes the two approaches necessary to tackle climate change – Mitigation and Adaptation. Mitigation refers to efforts that will reduce current and future greenhouse gas emissions including reductions in energy use, switching to renewable energy sources and carbon sinks. Climate adaptation consists of actions that will reduce the impacts that are already happening and those that are projected to happen in the future. These include flood protection, reduced impact of rising sea levels, increased resilience of infrastructure and emergency response planning.

Figure 3.2 Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Measures



Source: Climate Action Regional Office

3.2 CLIMATE CHANGE LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND

3.2.1 INTERNATIONAL

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is an international environmental treaty adopted in May 1992, with an objective “to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system”. The framework outlined how specific international treaties may negotiate further action towards its key objective. Most recently, the Paris Agreement 2015 is a protocol set within the context of the UNFCCC and was ratified by Ireland on 4th November 2016 and it is aimed at limiting global warming to less than 2.0°C above pre-industrial level and pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.50°C along with building resilience and increasing the ability to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

3.2.2 EUROPEAN

The European Union published a Strategy on Adapting to Climate Change in April 2013 the main focus of which was to build a more climate resilient Europe. The EU Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy is the mainstream European voluntary movement involving local authorities in the development and implementation of sustainable energy and climate policies. Laois County Council is working towards becoming a party to the Covenant of Mayors.

3.2.3 NATIONAL

Ireland's first national policy to address the impacts of climate change was introduced in 2012 with National Climate Change Adaptation Framework (NCCAF) with the National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development 2014 reiterating the policy position. The National Policy Position 42 establishes the fundamental national objective of achieving transition to a competitive, low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050, guided by a long-term vision based on:

- an aggregate reduction in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions of at least 80% (compared to 1990 levels) by 2050 across the electricity generation, built environment and transport sectors; and
- in parallel, an approach to carbon neutrality in the agriculture and land-use sector, including forestry, which does not compromise capacity for sustainable food production.

Subsequently, the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act, 2015, provide the statutory basis for the national transition to a low carbon society by 2050 - the objective laid out in the National Policy Position. It also made provision for and gave statutory authority to both the National Mitigation Plan (NMP), published in 2017 and the National Adaptation Framework (NAF) published in 2018. Furthermore, the Government's 2019 Climate Action Plan sets out clear 2030 targets for each sector and the expected emissions savings that will result.

3.2.3.1 National Adaptation Framework (NAF) 2018

The NAF sets out the national strategy to reduce the vulnerability of the country to the negative effects of climate change and 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 the priority area that they are responsible for. Local authorities are also required to prepare local adaptation strategies, of which Laois County Council prepared the Laois Climate Adaptation Strategy in August 2019.

3.2.3.2 Laois County Council Climate Adaptation Strategy 2019 - 2024

The Laois County Council Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024 features a range of actions across six thematic areas, including: Local Adaptation Governance and Business Operations; Infrastructure and Built Environment; Land Use and Development; Drainage and Flood Management; Natural Resources and Cultural Infrastructure; and Community Health and Wellbeing. The Strategy sets out a number of 'Adaptation Actions' including:

- To ensure 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.
- To build capacity and resilience within Laois County Council to respond to climate change and climate change/severe weather events.
- To ensure and increase the resilience of infrastructural assets and the built environment, informing investment decisions.
- To Integrate climate action considerations into land use planning policy and influence positive behaviour.
- To manage the risk of flooding through a variety of responses.

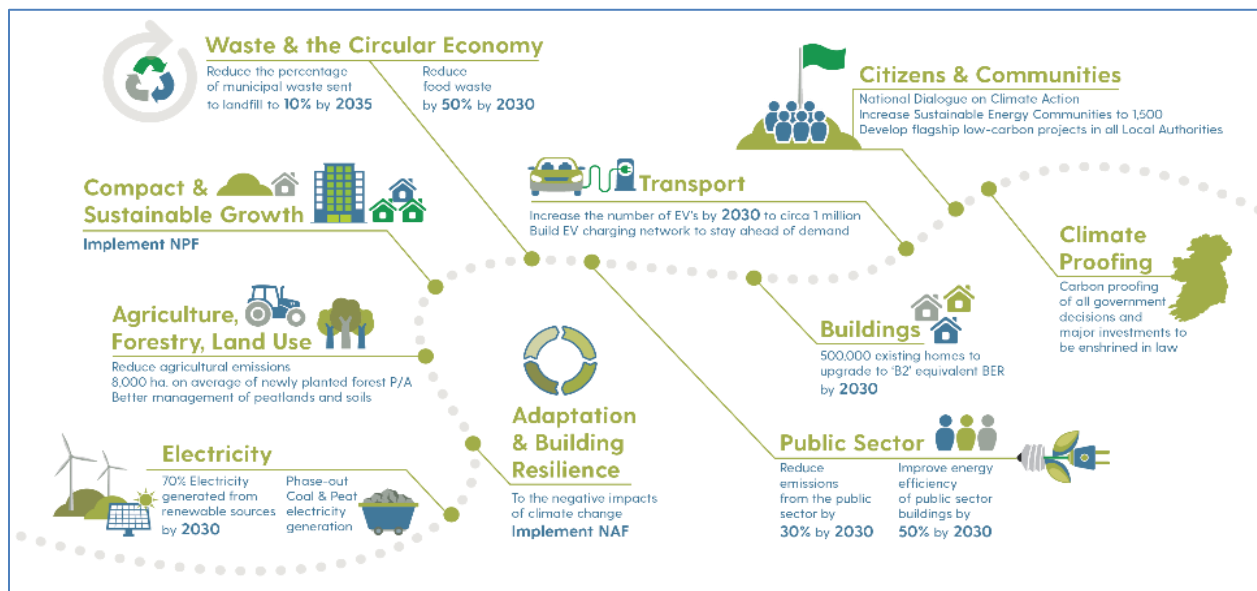
- To provide for enhancement of natural environment to work positively towards climate action.
- To promote effective bio-diversity management and enhance protection of natural habitats and landscapes.
- To build capacity and resilience within communities.

In this regard, the Laois's Climate Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024 has provided a critical point of reference in preparing this plan.

3.2.3.3 Climate Action Plan 2019

The Climate Action Plan identifies the nature and scale of the climate challenge and sets the course of action and carbon proof polices over the coming years to address climate change. This Plan clearly recognises that Ireland must significantly step up its commitments to tackle climate disruption. The leadership role both the Government and public bodies can play in taking early action on climate is fundamental to achieving our decarbonisation goals. The infographic below provides an overview of targets set.

Figure 3.3 Climate Action Plan



Source: Climate Action Regional Office

3.2.3.4 National Planning Framework (NPF)

The NPF identifies planning as a means to implement and integrate climate change objectives at local level and recognises that in order to meet this national target, it will be necessary to make choices about how we balance growth with more sustainable approaches to development and land use. The NPF sets out 10 National Strategic Outcomes to guide the future development of Ireland over the next 20 years, of which 2 are related specifically to addressing climate action - NSO 8 'Transition to a Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Society' and NSO 9 'Sustainable Management of Water, Waste and other Environmental Resources'. It is stated that these objectives will shape investment choices over the coming decades in line with the National Mitigation Plan and the National Adaptation Framework and how the country will adapt to a new renewables focused energy production system such as from wind and solar sources.

There are further National Policy Objectives noted within the theme of climate change and how mitigation and adaptation measures are required. Of particular note, Laois County Council must demonstrate compliance with NPOs in areas such as densification, NPO 3 (C) 30% brownfield (role of URDF in consolidation) integrating transport links, increasing permeability (both pedestrian and cycling) and connection to public transport (15min walk).

3.2.3.5 *Regional and Spatial Economic Strategy (RSES)*

Aligning with the National Policy Objectives of the NPF, the RSES sets out 16 Regional Strategic Outcomes (RSOs) which set the framework for City and County Development Plans to build climate resilience into their policies and objectives and to support the transition to a low carbon economy by 2050. The Strategy identifies the following RSOs in relation to climate action:

- RSO 6. Integrated Transport and Land Use
- RSO 7. Sustainable Management of Water, Waste and other Environmental Resources
- RSO 8. Build Climate Resilience
- RSO 9 Support the Transition to Low Carbon and Clean Energy
- RSO 10. Enhanced Green Infrastructure
- RSO 11. Biodiversity and Natural Heritage

EMRA is leading an ESPON EU research project (QGasSP) to identify a robust method for quantifying the relative GHG impacts of alternative spatial planning policies, the outputs of which are anticipated in 2021, and should inform the future plans as they progress.

Climate Action Policy Objectives	
CA 1	<p>Support and facilitate European and national objectives for climate adaptation and mitigation as detailed in the following documents, taking into account other provisions of the Plan (including those relating to land use planning, energy, sustainable mobility, flood risk management and drainage):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate Action Plan (2019 and any subsequent versions); • National Climate Change Adaptation Framework (2018 and any subsequent versions); • Any Regional Decarbonisation Plan prepared on foot of commitments included in the emerging Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region; • Relevant provisions of any Sectoral Adaptation Plans prepared to comply the requirements of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, including those seeking to contribute towards the National Transition Objective, to pursue, and achieve, the transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by the end of the year 2050; and • Laois Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024.
CA 2	Support and facilitate the creation of a Decarbonisation Zone in the Key Town of Portlaoise.

3.4 INTEGRATING CLIMATE ACTION INTO THE PLAN

One of the cross-cutting principles of this Plan is to support a transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society, a necessary measure that is supported by the aforementioned comprehensive legislative and policy framework relating to climate action. The Development Plan seeks to simultaneously address issues of climate change, energy supply and sustainability through the adoption and implementation of policy at a local level.

The majority of County Laois commuters drive accounting for 73 % of those who commute to work and 30% of those commuting to 3rd level study. The next most popular modes of transport for workers in walking (6%) and for 3rd level students on foot (23%) and bus (17%) were the next most popular. For primary and secondary students, the most popular mode of travel was as passengers by car (60%), bus(18%) and walking 15.

The following is the baseline modal share for the overall County.



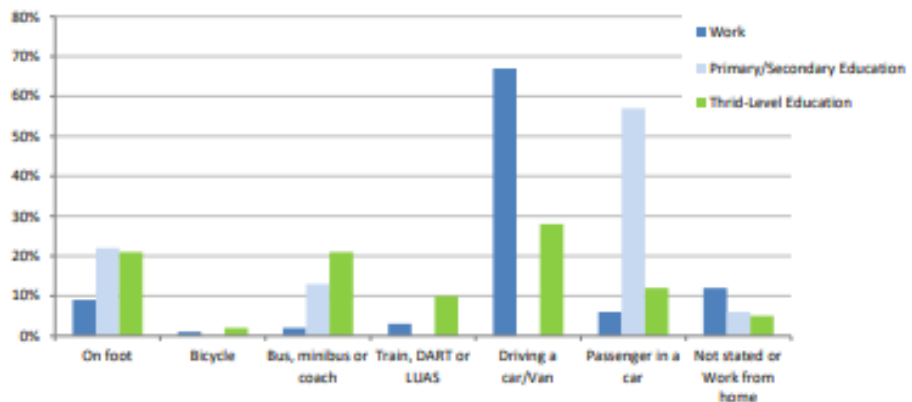
In relation to Portlaoise, the majority of commuters also favor driving which accounts for 67 % of those who commute to work and 28% of those commuting to 3rd level study. The next most popular modes of transport for workers in walking (9%) and for 3rd level students on foot (21%) and bus (21%) were the next most popular. For primary and secondary students, the most popular mode of travel was as passengers by car (57%), bus(22%) and walking (13%).

Table 17: Portlaoise Residents commuting to Work and Study by Means of Travel

Means of Travel	Commuters to Work	%	Commuters to Primary & Secondary Level Education	%	Commuters to Third Level Education	%
On foot	722	9%	1013	22%	121	21%
Bicycle	101	1%	64	1%	10	2%
Bus, minibus or coach	188	2%	577	13%	122	21%
Train, DART or LUAS	243	3%	12	< 1%	57	10%
Motor cycle or scooter	17	<1	0	0%	< 10	< 1%
Driving a car/Van	5611	67%	27	< 1%	161	28%
Passenger in a car	481	6%	2629	57%	70	12%
Other, including lorry	24	< 1%	0	0%	< 10	< 1%
Not stated or Work from home	994	12%	269	6%	27	5%
Total Commuters	8381	100	4591	100	577	100%

Note: This table includes people resident in Portlaoise and includes mobile workers and those whose place of work was blank or could not be coded

Source: POWSCAR 2016



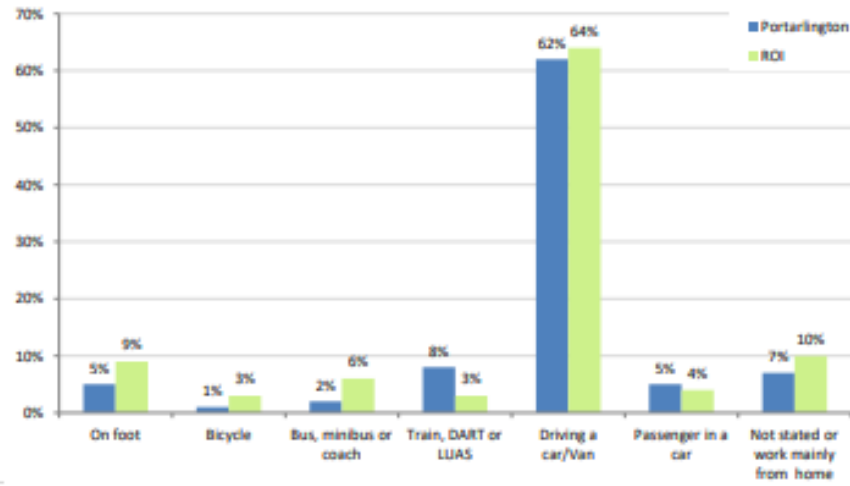
In relation to Portlaoise, the majority of commuters also favor driving which accounts for 67% of those who commute to work and 28% of those commuting to 3rd level study. The next most popular modes of transport for workers is the train (3%) and bus (2%) were the next most popular.

Table 26: Portarlinton Residents commuting to Work by Means of Travel

Means of Travel	Commuters to Work	%	Commuters to Work (ROI)	%
On foot	158	5%	172,068	9%
Bicycle	24	1%	56,566	3%
Bus, minibus or coach	69	2%	111,052	6%
Train, DART or LUAS	257	8%	62,915	3%
Motor cycle or scooter	<10	< 1%	7,945	< 1%
Driving a car/Van	2195	62%	1,269,739	64%
Passenger in a car	164	5%	77,116	4%
Other, including lorry	< 10	< 1%	11,323	< 1%
Not stated or work mainly from home	204	7%	204,750	10%
Total Commuters to Work	3085	100%	1,973,474	100%

Note: This table includes people resident in Portarlinton and includes mobile workers and those whose place of work was blank or could not be coded

Source: POWSCAR 2016



Please also refer to Chapter 6, 9 and 11 in relation to the future use of peatlands.

Aligning with the Climate Strategy of the RSES, the following key actions areas, along with the following section on energy (Section 3.5), will focus on how Laois County Council will respond to climate change to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, to make Laois a more climate resilient county. Furthermore, specific climate adaptation and mitigation objectives have been integrated into each chapter where appropriate.

ACTION AREA 1 – SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

COMMENTARY	NATIONAL TARGET	LOCAL COUNTY TARGET
<p>The transport sector is one of the biggest contributor of GHG emissions in the County where the predominant mode of transport is the private car. This is evident in the number of commuters leaving the county for work purposes which equates to 12,000 per day. How we travel between places will also need to be addressed, promoting a modal shift away from car dependency for more sustainable and active transport modes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce CO2 eq. Emissions From The Sector By 45 % To 50 % Pre NDP Projections • Increase the no of EV to 936,000 • Build the EV charging network to support the growth of EVS at the rate required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of a public transportation hub in the key town of Portlaoise by 2027; • The prioritization and delivery of Public bus measures in the key towns of Portlaoise and Graiguecullen by 2027; • The prioritisation of pedestrian linkages and creation of blueways / Greenways in the key town of Portlaoise/ Graiguecullen and Portarlinton • Additional 30 EV charge Points in Portlaoise by 2027 • Achieve Modal Shift in line with national targets and Table 14.1

CLIMATE MITIGATION OBJECTIVES

CM ST 1	Support construction of green routes/cycleways/pedestrian routes throughout the County.
CM ST 2	To support and facilitate the integration of land use with transportation infrastructure, through the development of sustainable compact settlements which are well served by public transport.
CM ST 3	To promote higher residential development densities in settlement centres along public transport corridors, that are not located in areas sensitive to flooding, or will increase temperatures of urban areas.
CM ST 4	Strengthen public transport linkages and promote their use.
CM ST 5	Support localisation of jobs/shops/services to minimise the need for most common travel patterns.
CM ST 6	Support the provision of electricity charging infrastructure for electrical

ACTION AREA 1 – SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

vehicles throughout County Laois, both on street and in new developments in towns and villages and also at key tourist destination such as Sliabh Bloom Trail Heads, in accordance with car parking standards and best practice.

CM ST 7 Promote and support the provision of Park-and-Ride facilities which improve public transport accessibility without exacerbating road congestion, or which cause increased car travel distances, at appropriate locations within the County.

CM ST 8 Deliver, in conjunction with the NTA and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport a Public Transportation Hub in Portlaoise to accommodate national, commuter, regional and local bus services.

CM ST 9 Promote more compact development forms that reduce overall demand for private transport and private transport infrastructure and support proposals that encourage modal shift towards sustainable travel modes.

CM ST 10 Specify baseline figures and targets for modal share in new / varied Local Area Plans in order to encourage a modal shift away from the private car to more sustainable forms of transport, such as public transport, cycling and walking. Set modal share targets within the county in cooperation with NTA, CARO, EMRA and other relevant stakeholders and in accordance with any relevant Guidelines that may come into effect’.

CLIMATE ADAPTATION OBJECTIVES

CA ST 1 Protect and enhance the County’s floodplains subject to flooding as “green infrastructure” where appropriate and subject to compliance with the Habitats Directive.

CA ST 2 Support low emission vehicle development, infrastructure and use through improving the resilience of County’s transport network to the impacts of climate change, in the areas connectivity and movement and concentrating on land use planning and a reduction in single occupancy vehicles, ensuring sustainability is a key consideration of future development.

CA ST 3 Ensure that existing Council critical infrastructure and services (particularly emergency services) are resilient to new climatic conditions.

CA ST 4 Ensure that applications for new critical infrastructure demonstrate resilience to new climatic conditions.

ACTION AREA 2 – BUILT ENVIRONMENT

COMMENTARY	NATIONAL TARGET	LOCAL COUNTY TARGET
<p>How we plan for different land uses and subsequently design our buildings will have significant impact on addressing climate change. Communities must become less dependent on fossil fuels in an emerging low or zero-carbon world by promoting more sustainable forms of travel and renewable energy sources. Residential, commercial, industrial and public buildings will also need to maximise their energy efficiency and move to more sustainable and renewable energy sources.</p> <p>Adapting the built environment through the use of green infrastructure such as sustainable urban drainage systems, living roofs and other innovations helps to alleviate the effects of climate change. Greening of buildings can also help with insulation against heat and cold, as well as offering new habitats to wildlife. Street trees and other vegetation also absorb air pollution and help with shading and cooling.</p> <p>Considerable emphasis has been placed in the Regional</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce CO2 eq. Emissions From The Sector By 45 % To 50 % Pre NDP Projections; • Reduce fossil fuel use and transition from reliance on gas, coal, oil and peat; • Increase the no of Sustainable energy Communities to 1,500; • Complete the rollout of the support system for Renewable Heat , including the support of biomass and anaerobic digestion heating systems; • Enterprise must contribute to the more ambitious targets for buildings (20-25%) and transport (45%-50%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the 2040 and Beyond: Is a Vision for Portlaoise' strategy to re-examines and re-purposes the Town Centre of Portlaoise to a low carbon town; • In addition to the SEC established in Abbeyleix, Establish an SEC's in Portlaoise by 2021, Graiguecullen by 2023 and Portarlinton by 2023; • Complete the Carbon Footprint measure for Portlaoise by Q1 2021; • Introduce a Decarbonisation Zone¹⁶ within Portlaoise Town which will seek to boost energy efficiency and reduce fossil energy use as this is vital to manage rapidly growing energy consumption in urban areas; • Carry out retrofit projects for public housing estates in Co Laois completing 160 units by 2021 and

¹⁶ Is a zone which achieves the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions through the use of low carbon power sources, achieving a lower output of greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere.

ACTION AREA 2 – BUILT ENVIRONMENT

and Spatial Strategy on the regeneration of vacant buildings and Brownfield sites in order to rejuvenate towns and villages.

RPO 3.2 of the RSES requires that at least 30% of future homes are targeted in settlements located within the existing built-up footprint of these settlements in an effort address compact development and reduce unsustainable urban sprawl.

Laois County Council has already began significant steps to transform Portlaoise into the Country's first low carbon town and has secured funding under the Urban and Regeneration Development Fund (URDF).

further retrofitting throughout the rest of the plan period. Actual completions will be specified in an annual monitoring report.

CLIMATE ADAPTATION OBJECTIVES

CA BE 1	Consider the effects of building density and mixed developments on energy consumption when preparing applications for development;
CA BE 2	Promote the repair and reuse of existing buildings particularly of underused upper floors in urban areas;
CA BE 3	Encourage the use of Green Roof technology particularly on apartment, commercial, leisure and educational buildings;
CA BE 4	Support enhancement of flood resilience of buildings, e.g. elevated work surfaces and storage facilities, raised sockets and electrical infrastructure, enhanced flood boards;
CA BE 5	Assess existing Council infrastructure for "fitness for purpose" under new climatic conditions;
CA BE 6	Promote the use of permeable surfaces to decrease run-off rates;
CA BE 7	Support grey-water recycling schemes that seek to decrease abstraction of potable surface water resources, thus reducing water stress during periods of low rainfall;

ACTION AREA 2 – BUILT ENVIRONMENT

CA BE 8	Support efforts to maximise water conservation – i.e rainwater harvesting, etc;
CA BE 9	Require the use of SuDS in accordance with the Greater Dublin Regional Code of Practice for Drainage Works for new developments (including extensions);
CA BE 10	Plant drought-resistant plants/ trees in public amenity areas to provide shade and increase green infrastructure linkages;
CA BE 11	Support the European Commission’s paper on Circular Economy Principles for Building Design and advance the reduce-reuse-recycle policy of the Circular Economy in relation to demolition of building stock.

CLIMATE MITIGATION OBJECTIVES

CM BE 1	Achieve more compact growth by promoting the development of infill and brownfield/ regeneration sites and the redevelopment of underutilised land within and close to the existing built up footprint of existing settlements in preference to edge of centre locations;
CM BE 2	Ensure that new developments in Key Towns, Self-Sustaining Growth Towns and Self-Sustaining Towns are laid out so as to facilitate the provision of public transport;
CM BE 3	Support energy-efficient building design and promote building of energy efficient smaller homes/higher density homes appropriate to demographics and with greatest infrastructure available;
CM BE 4	Promote sustainable land use planning measures which facilitate transportation efficiency, economic returns on transport investment, minimisation of environmental impacts and a general shift towards the greater use of public transportation throughout the County;

Decarbonisation Zone

Action 165 of the Climate Action Plan 2019 sets Local Authorities the challenge of initially identifying and developing one Decarbonising Zone in each local authority in Ireland. A Decarbonising Zone (DZ) is defined as a spatial area in which a range of climate mitigation, adaptation and biodiversity measures and action owners are identified to address local low carbon energy, greenhouse gas emissions and climate needs to contribute to national climate action targets.

In this case Laois County Council has established Portlaoise the County’s decarbonisation zone and are opting to strengthen the position of this DZ. Portlaoise is already a climate action demonstration town with a very important test-bed which will allow residents and other Local

Authorities to understand the scale of the challenge in decarbonising the economy and wider society, and maps out the various key stakeholders and enablers. A Carbon Footprint Report has established the baseline and shown the need for renewable energy and it is hoped Laois County Council will build upon this. It should be noted that this baseline will be required to be refined on the next remeasure.

LCC also wish to promote more remote working in Portlaoise as it poses more benefit to the community and to showcase Portlaoise and County Laois with provision of remote working hubs and support hubs around the county. It is important that Portlaoise progresses towards the 2040 Vision Statement, building upon the objectives for Portlaoise Low Carbon Town to:

- Remove the dominance of cars within the Portlaoise town centre
- Address the poor pedestrian experience of the area.
- To adapt to lower emission vehicles.
- Retrofit homes and businesses

The Portlaoise DZ will focus on the town of Portlaoise or more particularly the geographic area covered by the statutory Portlaoise Local Area Plan. It is however important that the DZ includes the hinterland of the town so that a full range of activities can be included (for example both the former town landfill and the Bord na Mona lands at Coolnamona (on both sides of the M7) lie outside the town area but will be important in realising measures to reduce greenhouse gases such as the provision of an anaerobic digester (currently at An Bord Pleanala). Therefore, the full definition of the DZ is:

- the town of Portlaoise as set out on the recent Carbon Footprint Report
- a connected hinterland covering:
 - that area with 5km of the M7 motorway to the south of the town (Junctions 16 to 18); and
 - that area within 5km of the Fairgreen roundabout on the N80 to the north of the town.

both of which areas have the capacity for enabling renewable energy generation.

The Renewable Energy Strategy will address large land banks for their potential in delivering climate action measures. This will require a variation of the CDP within a year as per policy objective.

The boundary in the map for the town and DZ is shown in red in the document titled *Carbon Footprint Study for the Town of Portlaoise, Co. Laois*. Portlaoise's settlement for the DZ covers circa 13.71 square kilometres represented in the map. The population consists 22,050 inhabitants in 7,547 households.

ACTION AREA 3 –LAND USE (INCLUDING AGRICULTURE / FORESTRY / GI)

COMMENTARY	NATIONAL TARGET	LOCAL COUNTY TARGET
<p>Agriculture is the highest producer of greenhouse gas emissions in the country¹⁷, both through intensive agriculture activity and through land use changes. Intensive agricultural practices such as land clearing can lead to essential loss of vegetation, soil cover and forestry that act as a carbon sink, storing carbon dioxide.</p> <p>The main direct agricultural GHG emissions are nitrous oxide emissions from fertilizers and methane production from ruminant animals.</p> <p>Climate change will affect the natural environment as weather patterns change, temperatures rise and species relocate. However, the natural environment, greenspaces and green infrastructure also have an essential role in offsetting some of the predicted impacts of climate change. There are many risks to the natural environment from climate change, including biodiversity change and loss, environmental degradation, longer growing seasons, increased incidence of pests and disease, and flooding.</p> <p>Green infrastructure provides a wide range of adaptive benefits, including providing shade and cooling for urban centres, reducing the impact of heavy rain by absorbing water and slowing run-off, improving air and water quality by absorbing pollutants.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver 16.5 -18.52 MtCO₂eq. Cumulative abatement • Achieve 26.8 Mtco₂eq abatmenet through LULUCF actions over the period 2021-2030 comprised of : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An average of 8,000 ha per annum of newly planted forest and sustainable forest management of existing forests (21 MtCO₂eq. • Cumulative abatement) at least 40,000 ha per annum of reduced management intensity of grasslands on drained organic soils (4.4 MtCO₂eq. Cumulative abatement) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the Public Open space provision in the Town of Portlaoise through the Open space and amenity at Tyrrells Land / The ridge Portlaoise • The greening of James Fintain Lalor Avenue • Progress the "Neighbourhood" project in Balladine , Abbeyleix which will hopefully see 1.5 Ha of native woodland established in the estate - carbon sink etc. • Support Abbeyleix Bog Conservation Group to progress actions in relation to biodiversity on the bog and green infrastructure through the bog

¹⁷ EPA Environmental Indicators

ACTION AREA 3 –LAND USE (INCLUDING AGRICULTURE / FORESTRY / GI)

Well-connected green networks aid species movement and dispersal, therefore integrated habitat networks form a key component of this Plan.

NOTE:

The Plan is informed by a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA). The Plan complies with OPW Guidance on climate change and flood risk management and has embedded the requirements for assessment within the key flood risk and surface water management policies identified in Section 10.3.2 of this Plan. Land use zonings and climate change have been informed by incorporating flood extent data within the plan on a settlement by settlement basis. The impacts of climate change are addressed in the SFRA incorporating a series of adaptation actions that will influence development through appropriate planning strategy/policy.

CLIMATE MITIGATION OBJECTIVES

CM LU 1	Maintain a vibrant and healthy agricultural sector based on the principles of sustainable development whilst at the same time finding alternative employment in or close to rural areas to sustain rural communities;
CM LU 2	Ensure that peatland areas which are designated (or proposed for designation) as NHAs, SACs or SPAs are conserved for their ecological, climate regulation, archaeological, cultural and educational significance;
CM LU 3	Support the fulfilment of the vision of carbon neutrality in the agriculture, forest and land use sector through better sustainable agricultural, land management and resource efficiency;

CLIMATE ADAPTATION OBJECTIVES

CA LU 1	Support diversification of the rural economy to promote crop viability options;
CA LU 2	Encourage afforestation (where environmentally appropriate) to enhance interception and infiltration of precipitation within river basin catchments;
CA LU 3	Support restoration of peat bogs when turf cutting has ceased and take into account relevant recommendations from the National Peatlands Strategy when implementing the Plan.
CA LU 4	Support the creation and enhancement of ecological linkages and buffer zones from development;
CA LU 5	Support the creation and protection of ecological resilient and varied landscapes to help support a wide range of species;
CA LU 6	Increase the climate resilience of the built environment through natural greening infrastructure in new developments, such as the use of natural features (e.g. street trees, green roofs, rain gardens etc) and other materials such as permeable paving;

ACTION AREA 4 – ENERGY (refer to Section 3.5 for further policy objectives on renewable energy)

COMMENTARY	NATIONAL TARGET	LOCAL COUNTY TARGET
<p>Improving Ireland's energy efficiency to address climate change is a fundamental part of Ireland's energy policy. The Government, through the EU's Energy Efficiency Directive 2012/27/EU, has committed itself to achieving a 20% reduction in energy demand across the whole of the economy by 2020 through energy efficiency measures and also set a more challenging target of achieving a 33% improvement on energy efficiency levels in the public sectors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce CO2 eq. Emissions from the Sector By 45 % To 50 % Pre NDP Projections • Deliver an early and complete phase out of coal and peat fired electricity generation • Increase electricity generated from renewable resources to 70%- indicatively comprised of • Up to 1.5 GW OF Grid scale solar energy • up to 8.2 GW total of increased onshore wind capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,500 LED Public lights have been upgraded within the Key town of Portlaoise, 1,200 in housing estates with a further 1,000 planned to be replaced by 2022, which will produce an energy saving of 60% • 50 additional solar powered compactor bins within the county by 2027; • Support the development of solar energy that has been permitted to date within the county by 2030 • Support the development of wind energy that has been permitted to date within the county by 2030

CLIMATE MITIGATION OBJECTIVES

CM RE 1	Prepare a Renewable Energy Strategy (RES) for County Laois including to identify the target which County Laois can contribute in delivering its share of overall Government targets on renewable energy and climate change mitigation over the plan period, and in particular wind energy production and the potential wind energy resource (in megawatts), and commencement of the variation to the County Development Plan within 1 year of adoption of the plan. Once adopted this will be by way of a variation to the Laois County Development Plan.
CM RE 2	Promote and encourage the development of energy from renewable sources such as hydro, bio-energy, wind, solar, geothermal and landfill gas subject to compliance with normal planning and environmental criteria in co-operation with statutory and other energy providers.
CM RE 3	Promote County Laois as a low carbon county as a means of attracting inward investment and to facilitate the development of energy sources which will achieve low carbon outputs.
CM RE 4	Protect areas of recognised landscape importance and significant landscape views from construction of large scale visually intrusive energy transmission infrastructure, alternative routing or transmission methods shall be used in this instance Ensure that the assessment of energy development proposals will have regard to the impacts on public rights of

ACTION AREA 4 – ENERGY (refer to Section 3.5 for further policy objectives on renewable energy)

	way and walking routes
CM RE 5	Promote and facilitate wind energy development in accordance with the Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Wind Energy Development (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government) and any update thereof and the Appendix 5 Wind Energy Strategy of this Plan, the Interim Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Statutory Plans, Renewable Energy and Climate Change, and subject to compliance with normal planning and environmental criteria.
CM RE 6	Ensure a setback distance for Wind turbines from schools, dwellings, community centres and all public roads in all areas open for consideration for wind farm development as per the Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Wind Energy Development (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government).
CM RE 7	Promote the location of wind farms and wind energy infrastructure in the 'preferred areas' as outlined on Map 3.2 to prohibit such infrastructure in areas identified as 'Areas not open for consideration' and to consider, subject to appropriate assessment, the location of wind generating infrastructure in areas 'open for consideration' and as per the Laois Wind Energy Strategy 2021-2027.
CM RE 8	Promote solar energy projects at appropriate locations.
CM RE 9	Promote the application and uptake of technologies and solutions that utilise grass for energy extraction such as anaerobic digestion, subject to proper planning and environmental considerations.
CM RE 10	Promote and prioritise utilisation of existing waste streams from agricultural and forestry sectors for renewable energy projects including anaerobic digestion, subject to proper planning and environmental considerations.
CM RE 11	Support the development of a Low Carbon Transportation Hub at Midway, Portlaoise to consist of a Compressed Natural Gas ('CNG') hub and Electric Vehicle fast-charging hub along with other national level pilot projects for other alternative and sustainable fuels e.g. Hydrogen facilities for the larger HGV's etc.
CM RE 12	Development proposals should demonstrate that sustainable design standards are integral to the proposal, including its construction and operation, and ensure that they are considered at the beginning of the design process.
CM RE 13	Development proposals should evaluate the feasibility of Combined Heat and Power (CHP) systems, and where a new CHP system is appropriate also examine opportunities to extend the system beyond the site boundary to adjacent sites.
CM RE 14	It is Council policy to facilitate micro-renewable energy installations and auto-generator installations where it is demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Council that they will not result in a significant adverse impact on residential, visual or environmental amenity.
CM RE 15	Promote the installation of community led renewable energy projects which has the support of the majority of the community, the development would

ACTION AREA 4 – ENERGY (refer to Section 3.5 for further policy objectives on renewable energy)

	subject to compliance with normal planning and environmental criteria in co-operation with statutory and other energy providers, and would be owned in partnership between the community and developer.
CM RE 16	<p>Favourable consideration will be given to the re-use, shared use (co-location), refurbishment, repair and repowering of existing renewable energy technology developments in order to prolong the life span of developments such as wind farms and solar farms providing that these do not result in unacceptable impacts on the:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Environment; 2) Residential amenity; and 3) Landscape and Visual Amenity. <p>The development would subject to compliance with national, regional and local development plan policy, as well as other relevant environmental criteria.</p>
CM RE 17	Promote the use of efficient energy storage systems and infrastructure that supports energy efficiency and reusable energy system optimization, in accordance with proper planning and sustainable development.
CM RE 18	Proposals for demolition of any existing building must include a full Whole Life Carbon calculation, which assesses the impact of renovation against proposals for new build.
CM RE 19	That a 1.5km buffer zone be applied to the potential location of any proposed Anaerobic Digester

3.5 RENEWABLE ENERGY

Renewable energy comes from natural sources that are continuously replenished by nature. The main sources of renewable energy are the wind, the sun (solar energy), water (hydropower), heat below the surface of the earth (geothermal energy) and biomass (wood, biodegradable waste and energy crops). Renewable energy options for the County include, but are not limited to a balance of the following.

3.5.1 HYDRO ENERGY

Hydroelectricity is electricity derived from the power harnessed from the flow of falling water, typically from fast-flowing streams and rivers. Small-scale micro hydro power is both an efficient and reliable form of energy. With the right site it is a viable way of providing power to houses, workshops or businesses that need an independent supply. The Council will seek to respond positively to applications in the context of a sustainable energy policy. In responding to applications, the Council will seek to ensure that the free passage of fish is provided for by incorporating a fish pass where considered necessary in consultation with the relevant Fisheries Board and the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources.

3.5.2 BIOENERGY

Bioenergy is energy extracted from biomass which includes biological material such as plants and animals, wood and waste. Bioenergy is produced through many different processes: combustion and anaerobic digestion being the most common and widely used. Combustion is the process whereby biomass (for example wood chips) is burned to produce process heat or to heat space or hot water.

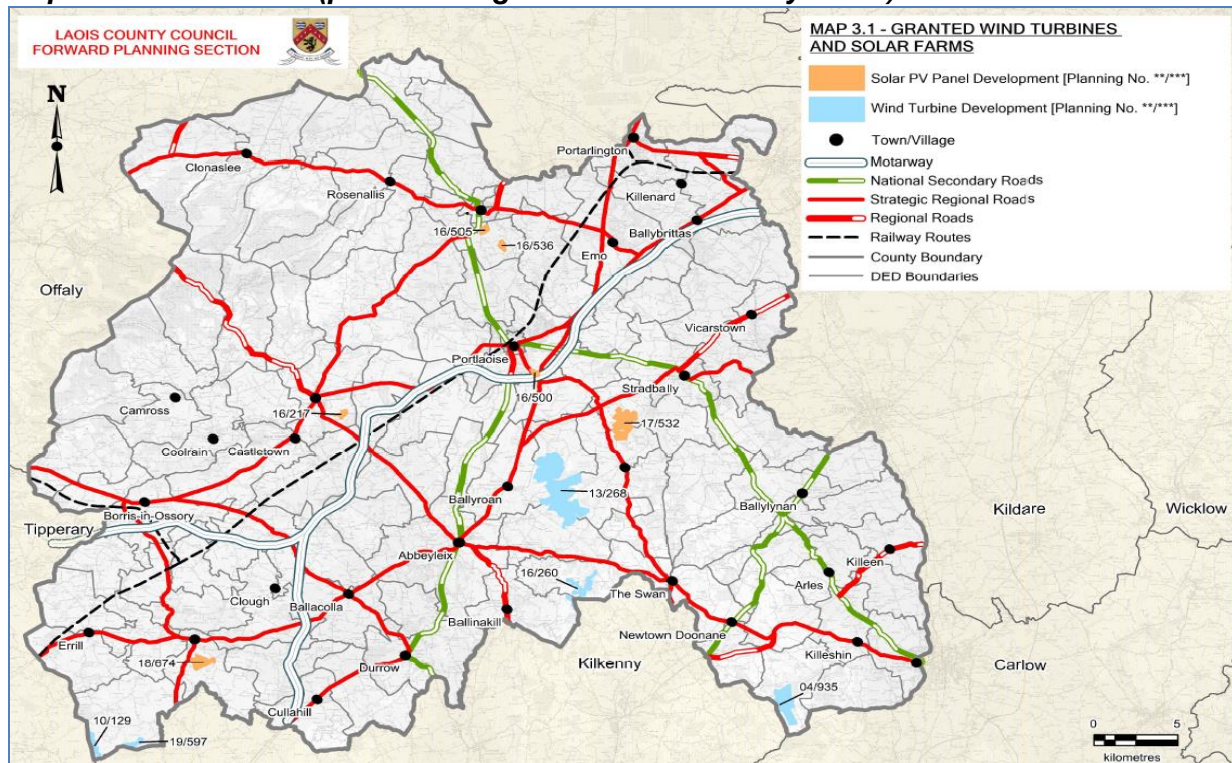
Anaerobic digestion involves the bacterial transformation of biomass (for example animal manure) to produce biogas which can be upgraded to biomethane. The biogas can be used to fuel a stationary gas engine or gas turbine to produce electricity, or burned in a boiler to provide heat or to raise steam. Biomethane can also be compressed and used as a transport fuel. The majority of current biomass derived energy comes from wood combustion to produce heat.

The Council supports the potential of growing biomass crops on cutaway bogs and at other suitable locations. The Council supports the use of Combined Heat and Power (CHP) Plants which would be fired by environmentally friendly low carbon fuels such as biomass.

3.5.3 SOLAR POWER

There are a range of technologies available to exploit the benefits of harnessing energy of the sun, including solar panels, solar farms, solar energy storage facilities all of which contribute to a reduction in energy demand. Solar technologies can be designed into buildings or retrofitted. Large scale solar farms have been granted planning permission across the County, however none have commenced development. The map below indicates the areas in question:-

Map 3.1: Solar Farms (permission granted within County Laois)



As they are relatively new, solar farms are not specifically identified in the classes of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) development listed either in the EIA Directive or in Schedule 5 to the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 as amended.

3.5.4 LANDFILL GAS

Laois County Council recognises the potential of the former local authority land fill site at Kyletalesha [between Portlaoise and Mountmellick] for the development of a gas utilisation project. Landfill gas utilization is a process of gathering, processing, and treating the methane gas emitted from decomposing waste to produce electricity, heat, fuels, and various chemical compounds.

Methane is highly flammable and is one of the major greenhouse gases responsible for climatic change. However, landfill gas (LFG) emissions can be minimized through effective recovery systems, which harness the gas and use it as a renewable and valuable fuel. In addition to electrical power generation, LFG can also be used for combined heat and power (CHP), kiln firing and as a heating or vehicle fuel. LFG is similar to natural or fossil gas and can be fed into the natural gas network.

There is potential to produce renewable gas from anaerobic digestion of organic wastes and residues from the agriculture sector and also from commercial food waste.

Renewable gas is carbon neutral and identical in function to natural gas so the existing network can be used and gas customers do not need to change their boilers or gas powered appliances.

There will be a presumption in favour of applications for anaerobic digestion plants, provided planning and environmental criteria are satisfied.

3.5.5 WIND ENERGY

The National Climate Action Plan (CAP) 2019 has sets out to deliver 70% of Ireland's electricity from renewable energy by 2030. The development of wind power has accelerated over the last few years to 2,851MW across Ireland¹⁸. IN order for Ireland to need renewable energy electricity targets, onshore wind farm must produce at least 250MW per year¹⁹. The Council seeks to achieve a reasonable balance between an overall positive attitude to renewable energy and enabling the wind energy resources of the county to be harnessed in a manner that is consistent with proper planning and sustainable development and will play a vital role in achieving this target.

The Local Authority will support the delivery on commitments under the Programme for Government (2020), which commit to a 7% average yearly reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions over the next decade and to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. A number of actions within Programme for Government must be delivered on to ensure Local Authorities can effectively deliver on this commitment in conjunction with the key stakeholders namely –

- Finalise and publish the Wind Energy Guidelines, having regard to the public consultation that has just taken place.

¹⁸ DCCA

¹⁹ DCCA

- Develop a Solar Energy Strategy, including for rooftop and ground based photovoltaics, to ensure that a greater share of our electricity needs is met through solar power.

Notwithstanding this and in line with the Climate Action Plan 2019, Ireland aims to increase reliance on renewables within the electricity generation sector from 30% to 70% adding up to a total of 8.2 GW (8200 MW) of renewable onshore wind energy capacity by 2030. Laois has to date contributed to renewable wind energy generation, with permitted wind farms constructed and granted on the following locations detailed in the Table below:

Table 3.1 – Wind Energy Outputs for County Laois (completed and granted)

Location of wind farm	Planning Application Reference	No of turbines	Rated Energy output
Constructed			
Baunaghra	10/129	4	12 MW
Gorthahile, Bilboa	09/237	1	2.5 MW
Gorthahile, Bilboa	04/935	7	17.5 MW
Sub Total		12	32 MW
Planning granted / awaiting construction			
Graigeadrisley, Rathdowney	20/386	2	7.2MW
Knockardugal, Boleybawn, Garrintaggart, Ironmills and Graiguenahown	16/260	11	35.2MW
East of Ballyroan Village and South West of Timahoe	13/268	18	45MW
Sub Total		31	87.4MW Approx
Total		43	119.4 MW

- The installed wind capacity in Co Laois in 2021 is 32MW. This represents **0.7%** of the total installed wind capacity in the Republic of Ireland to date based on the national installed wind capacity of 4,235 MW in 2020.
- A potential additional **87.4 MW** of energy to be generated from permission already granted for additional wind farms in the south east of the county would bring the total output in Laois to **120 MW**.
- If the potential from granted permissions were to be constructed , together with what has been built , it would represent a contribution from Co Laois at nearly **1.5%** of the total (8,200 MW) by 2030.

However, as outlined in a specific objective in Chapter 3 Climate Action and Energy, the Council commits to working with key stakeholders in the carrying out of an assessment of how the implementation of the Plan will contribute to realising overall national targets on renewable energy and climate change, and in particular wind energy production and the potential wind energy resource.

In addition to wind , Laois County Council has permitted the following solar farms in the county

Table 3.2 – Solar Energy Outputs for County Laois (completed and granted)

Location	Planning Reference	Application	Energy output
Kilcoran, Rathdowney	18/674		47 MWp
Nigbog, Coolnabacky, Esker, Money Lower and Lughteeog, Stradbally	17/532		76 MW
Sronagh, Mountmellick	16/505		6.5MV
Rathleague, Portlaoise	16/500		4 MW
Derry More, Mountrath	16/217		4.2 MW
Total			137.7 MW

An Anaerobic Digester can have the potential to use up to 80,000 tonnes of biodegradable waste as feedstock per year, which has a potential Green House Gas emissions saving of 270,160 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent. Such a project has the potential to produce approximately 7,000,000m³ of biomethane and used as an alternative fuel to fossil fuels for regional energy and heat production.

The biomethane from such a development will be injected into the gas network and it will then form a portion of gas used in the network for residential, commercial and industrial purposes.

The Planning Authority notes that there is still an absence of national guidance on how local authorities can set a target for wind energy generation within their functional area. However, in accordance with the *Specific Planning Policy Requirement for the Interim Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Statutory Plans, Renewable Energy and Climate Change (2017)*, Table 3.3 demonstrates County Laois’s contribution in terms of permitted applications to realising overall national targets (under the Climate Action Plan) on renewable energy and climate change mitigation.

The Council has had regard to the wind farm, solar farm, permitted and undeveloped as well as those under construction, which have the potential to be delivered in the plan period if constructed . It is apparent from the table below that decarbonized energy infrastructure in County Laois, for which statutory consent exists, can provide the following energy to the local and national grid.

Table 3.3 - County Laois’s contribution in terms of permitted applications to realising overall national targets

Wind Energy Output by the end of the Plan Period	119.4MW
Solar Energy Output by the end of the Plan Period	137.7 MW
Anaerobic Digestion Output by the end of the Plan Period	4,300 MWh per year

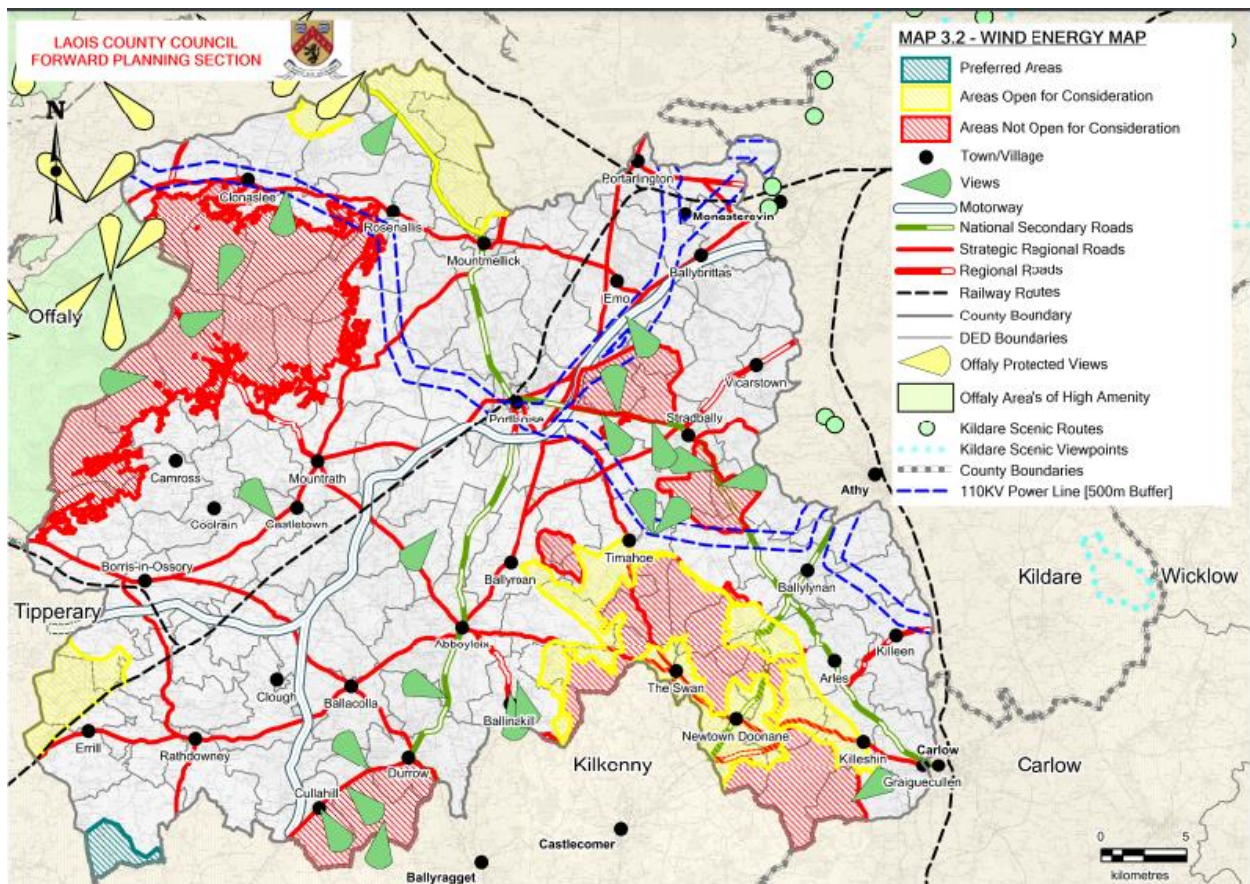
The specific targets for the Region and County will be designed on foot of a Regional Renewable Energy Strategy which will also identify targets at a county level, taking into

account the complexities of the receiving environment , a consistent approach to designations and cross boundary issues.

There are a number of issues which must be taken into consideration when dealing with applications for wind energy development. These include visual impact, landscape protection, impacts on residential amenity, impact on wildlife and habitats, connections to the national grid and impact of construction and ancillary infrastructure including access roads and grid connections. The Council will have regard to the Draft Wind Energy Development Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DHPLG, 2019) in relation to the siting and development of wind turbines and the information required as part of a planning application.

Further regard shall also be had to Appendix 6 Renewable Energy Strategy and Appendix 5 Landscape Character Assessment of this Plan and the policy objectives therein.

Map 3.2: Wind Energy Map



3.5.6 GEOTHERMAL ENERGY

Geothermal energy refers to heat energy stored in the ground. Solar thermal radiation is absorbed by the surface of the earth each day. This heat can be extracted by using a ground source heat pump which transfers the heat stored in the earth or in ground water to buildings in winter and the opposite in summer for cooling. The Council will encourage the provision of ground source heat pumps, also known as geothermal heat pumps. These are used for space

heating and cooling, as well as water heating for both residential and commercial developments. The following link provides a source of information:

<https://dcenr.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=a30af518e87a4c0ab2fbde2aaac3c228>

then clicking the Geothermal Tab to view the geothermal online maps and data.

3.5.7 COMPRESSED NATURAL GAS (CNG) INFRASTRUCTURE

Decarbonisation of HGVs and buses is particularly challenging as electricity is currently not a viable alternative to diesel. Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) has the potential to address these transport emissions with reduced carbon emissions relative to diesel. When the production of renewable gas is increased on the gas network, and this gas is utilised by CNG vehicles as bio-CNG, which is carbon neutral. The development of CNG Infrastructure would enable fuel switching from diesel to CNG for heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) and buses. This would lead to a reduction in carbon emissions along with air quality benefits for vehicles where currently electricity is not a viable alternative to diesel.

3.5.8 MICRO RENEWABLE ENERGY

Micro-generation is defined as micro-generation technologies, including micro-solar PV, micro-hydro, micro-wind and micro-renewable CHP with a maximum electrical output of 50kW, designed to primarily service the self-consumption needs of the property where it is installed.

The Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) provide exemptions from planning permission for domestic wind turbines, solar panels and heat pumps within the curtilage of a house, subject to certain conditions. The Regulations also provide exemptions for micro renewable generators within the curtilage of industrial buildings, business premises and agricultural holdings including CHP plants, wind turbines, solar panels, heat pumps and biomass boiler units.

The Council encourages the small scale generation of heat and electricity by individuals, small businesses and communities to meet their own needs and as an alternative to or to supplement grid connected power.

3.5.9 ENERGY STORAGE

Renewable energy sources have vast potential to reduce dependency on fossil fuels and Green House Gas emissions. However, many of the resources have intermittent or variable output and if they are not harnessed, the energy goes to waste. There is an increased need for energy storage when energy demand is low so it can be used when energy demand is high. There are a number of storage systems which could provide this function including battery storage, liquid air storage and synchronous condensers.

Development Management Standards for Renewable Energy Installations

DM RE 1	<p>SOLAR FARMS</p> <p>The following factors will be used to assess applications for Solar Farm Development within the county:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(i) Site Selection:<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Preference for use of brownfield sites/ contaminated land and non productive agricultural land versus productive agricultural lands;b. Proximity to electricity infrastructure(ii) Assessment of Impacts<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Effect of glint and glare;b. Visual impact on heritage and landscape assets, designated sites, views and prospects;c. The extent of additional impacts of solar rays follow the daily movement of the sun;d. Ecology including biodiversity, flora and faunae. Cumulative impacts of the proposal with other renewable energy installations in the area;f. Traffic impact on road infrastructure during all phases of development (construction, operation and decommissioning)g. Drainage, surface water runoff, floodingh. Effect on potential archaeological heritage, and therefore a planning application should be accompanied by an archaeological impact statement.(iii) As a minimum the following will be required to be submitted in support of a planning application:<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Drawings, including those addressing all drainage mattersb. Landscape/ Biodiversity Plan;c. Construction Environmental Management Plan; andd. Decommissioning / Restoration plan. <p>However, it is advised this to be agreed with the Planning Authority through pre-planning consultation.</p>
DM RE 2	<p>WIND ENERGY DEVELOPMENT</p> <p><u>Refer to Section 6 and Section 7 of Appendix 5 Wind Energy Strategy for the full suite of Development Management Standards</u></p> <p>When assessing planning applications for wind energy developments the council will have regard to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) The wind energy development guidelines for planning authorities;b) The wind energy strategy designations map for Laois showing areas (a) Area open for consideration and (b) Areas not deemed suitable

	<p>In addition to the above, the following considerations will also be taken into account:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Impact on visual amenity; ii. Impact on residential amenities; iii. Scale and layout of the project and the cumulative effects due to other projects and the extent to which the impacts are visible across the local landscape; iv. Visual impact of the proposal on the protected views and aspects; v. Impact on nature conservation, ecology, soil, hydrology; vi. Impact on ground conditions and geology; vii. Impact on the road network; viii. Impact on human health in relation to noise disturbance. <p>Other considerations may be taken into account depending on the site and on a case by case basis.</p>
DM RE 3	<p>HYDRO ENERGY</p> <p>The following factors will be used to assess applications for new river-based hydroelectricity plans:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the free passage of fish; • any protected structures; • maintenance of biodiversity corridors; • Protected species and any designated nature conservation area such as Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and National Heritage Areas; and • Any proposed projects do not conflict with the requirements of the Water Framework Directive.

3.6 NON - RENEWABLE ENERGY

3.6.1 ELECTRICITY AND GAS

The two main energy sources currently serving the County are electricity and gas. Eirgrid is the national body responsible for the management of the electricity transmission network. EirGrid's Grid Development Strategy (2017) sets out to ensure that the transmission network has the capacity to provide for growth in electricity demand between now and 2025, with the Implementation Plan 2017 – 2022 and Transmission Development Plan 2016 directing investing to upgrading and reinforcement of the transmission network. Relevant to County Laois, the Laois-Kilkenny Reinforcement Project proposes a new 400/110kV substation situated to the south east of Portlaoise at Coolnabacky. RPO 10.23 of the RSES recognises the importance of supporting the timely delivery of such major investment projects to strengthen the network in the midlands region.

The present gas infrastructure in County Laois is available in Ballylinan, Portarlinton, Portlaoise and Stradbally. The Bord Gáis customer base in the county comprises of domestic, commercial and industrial users.

Non-Renewable Energy Policy Objectives	
NRE 1	Support the reinforcement of the electricity transmission grid to improve energy supply to the county. Where strategic route corridors have been identified, the Council will support the statutory providers of national grid infrastructure by safeguarding such corridors from encroachment provided these corridors do not have adverse impacts on residential amenity or the environment.
NRE 2	Support the Laois-Kilkenny Reinforcement Project to strengthen the network in large parts of the Midlands and provide additional capacity for potential demand growth in the wider region and strengthen the Region's transmission network by improving security and quality of supply and ensuring there is the potential for demand growth subject to compliance with normal planning and environmental criteria.
NRE 3	<p>Ensure the provision, where feasible, of electricity cables been located underground, especially in the urban environment, and generally within areas of public open space. Where undergrounding of cables is being pursued, proposals should demonstrate that environmental impacts including the following are minimised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat loss as a result of removal of field boundaries and hedgerows (right of way preparation) followed by topsoil stripping (to ensure machinery does not destroy soil structure and drainage properties); • Short to medium term impacts on the landscape where, for example, hedgerows are encountered; • Impacts on underground archaeology; • Impacts on soil structure and drainage; and • Impacts on surface waters as a result of sedimentation.
NRE 4	<p>Facilitate the provision of and improvements to energy networks in principle, provided that it can be demonstrated that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. The development is required in order to facilitate the provision or retention of significant economic or social infrastructure; ii. The route proposed has been identified with due consideration for social, environmental and cultural impacts; iii. The design is such that will achieve least environmental impact consistent with not incurring excessive cost; iv. Where impacts are inevitable mitigation features have been included; v. Proposals for energy infrastructure should be assessed in accordance with the requirements of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive; vi. Ensure that the ability of the area to absorb overhead transmission lines is considered with reference to the National Landscape Strategy 2015; vii. Cognisance will be taken of the Code of Practice between the DoECLG and Eirgrid (2009). <p>Ensure that landscape and visual assessment of planning application shall focus on the potential to impact upon landscape designations and important designated sites.</p>

Non-Renewable Energy Policy Objectives

NRE 5	Support and facilitate the development of enhance gas supplies and associated networks, to serve the residential, commercial, industrial and social needs of the county.
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Development Management Standards

DM NRE 1

POWER LINES AND OVERHEAD CABLES

Applicants shall ensure that planning applications involving the siting of power lines and other overhead cables fully consider the following :

- i. Impacts on the landscape, national monuments, archaeology and views of special amenity value. Where impacts are inevitable, mitigation measures to minimise such impact must be provided;
- ii. Impacts on Ecology – An ecological Impact assessment shall be submitted to inform the decision making process;
- iii. Development shall be consistent with best practice, with regard to siting and design.

3.7 ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND ENERGY PERFORMANCE FOR BUILDINGS

Maximising Ireland's Energy Efficiency: The National Energy Efficiency Action Plan 2009-2020 (NEEAP) (Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, 2009) recognises that energy efficiency is the most cost effective means of reducing dependence on fossil fuels and abating GHG emissions. Saving energy is the easiest, quickest and most effective way to answer the challenge of society's growing energy dependence, while helping to reduce damage to the environment. By using less energy, we reduce the need to generate energy from any source, fossil or renewable. Improving energy efficiency also provides economic opportunities through the development of new markets for green technologies and services and security of supply.

Laois County Council is committed to developing sustainable building practices in terms of energy efficiency and low environmental impact in County Laois. The following legislation has been adopted to help progress sustainable construction and energy efficiency within our building stock:

- **Building Energy Rating:** As part of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (2002/91/EC) Directive, a Building Energy Rating (BER) certificate is required once a building is offered for rental or sale. The BER measures the energy performance of a building and provides homeowners with the information required in order to improve the thermal efficiency of their dwelling.
- **Part L of the Building Regulations:** Part L of the Building Regulations deals with the conservation of fuel and energy in buildings. The Regulations state that a building shall be designed and constructed so as to ensure that the energy performance of the

building is such as to limit the amount of energy required for the operation of the building and the amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions associated with this energy use insofar as is reasonably practicable. This can be achieved using a combination of measures including the use of renewable energy sources, limiting heat loss and availing of heat gain through the fabric of the dwelling and using energy efficient space and water heating systems.

- **Nearly Zero Energy Buildings:** Arising from the Recast of the European Performance of Buildings Directive 2010/30/EU, from 1 January 2019, every new public building and from 1 January 2021 all other new buildings will have to be designed to nearly zero energy building (NZEB) standards. The Council will have regard to the DoEHLG publication Towards Nearly Zero Energy Buildings in Ireland Planning for 2020 and Beyond and the EU Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (2010/31/EU) which promote the increase in nearly Zero Energy Buildings (nZEB).

Energy Efficient for Buildings Policy Objectives	
EEB 1	Require all new building developments to meet low energy performance targets. Each building's energy performance, as calculated by the Building Energy Rating (BER), will have a minimum energy efficiency that meets the requirements of Part L of the Building Regulations and Nearly Zero Energy Building standard. New buildings should incorporate renewable energy technologies in order to help achieve the rating required.
EEB 2	Inform and encourage new developments to mitigate against, and adapt to, where possible the impacts of climate change through the location, layout and design of the development.
EEB 3	Encourage improved energy efficiency of existing building stock and to promote energy efficiency and conservation in the design and development of all new buildings, including Local Authority dwelling.
EEB 4	Develop guidelines and standards to assist property owners in respect of energy retrofitting and planning considerations.
EEB 5	Encourage the integration of micro renewable energy sources into the design and construction of single and multiple housing developments.

CHAPTER 4 HOUSING STRATEGY

***Aim:** To facilitate the provision of housing in a range of locations to meet the needs of the county's population, with particular emphasis on facilitating access to housing to suit different household and tenure needs in a sustainable manner and in appropriate locations.*

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023 was following a period of recession in the national property market post 2008. A review of the Housing Strategy and preparation of Housing Need Demand Assessment (HNDA) as required by NPO 37 of the National Planning Framework was commissioned by Laois County Council in July 2020 and carried out in consultation with Downey Planning Consultants to reflect the fundamental changes that have taken place in the economy.

High levels of market uncertainty and the changing nature of housing demand, including mitigating factors such as income, demographics and credit conditions are key aspects which underline the current housing market.

4.2 HOUSING STRATEGY SYNOPSIS AND POLICY

The Housing Strategy outlines a number of broad principles that inform the overall approach to the strategy and formalises these aspects through a number of recommended housing objectives.

4.2.1 COUNTY LAOIS HOUSING STRATEGY & HNDA

The indication of population projection based on a policy-intervention scenario shows that the population of Laois is expected to increase to **89,349 by 2021** and to **94,700 by 2027** with the latter including an increase of 5,351 individuals compared to Census 2016. With respect to the ESRI research work, and the Ministerial Letter advising this method as the most up to date approach towards demand projection, the overall housing demand over the Plan period is expected to be 3,998 units, which equates to 571 housing units per annum over the Plan period.

Studying the income profile of the county and calculating the mortgage capacity of the households in Laois with regard to projection of affordable housing thresholds in the County determines that an average of **30.9 percent of the additional anticipated households will not qualify for a mortgage** during the Plan period.

Applying the above affordability criteria to the anticipated households per annum indicates that of the 1,235 households which are not qualified for a mortgage over the Plan period (30.9% of the overall housing demand), **816 no. households (20.4%) do not meet the affordability criteria** for the private rental market. These households are therefore considered to require social housing, and this shortfall can be met by provision of an average of **117 no. social housing per annum** over the Plan period.

4.2.2 SINGLE ONE OFF DWELLINGS

Considering the challenges that are faced by the rural communities, ranging from urban generated pressures in some locations, to a declining and ageing population, the structure of the economy and lack of access to quality infrastructure and new technologies, there seems to be an urge for policy intervention which has been quoted as “Cluster Planning” within the NPF and RSES. The cluster planning aims to encourage more focused settlements in the country where “Cluster Living” around towns and villages will emerge. Therefore, the estimation of single one-off dwellings over the Plan Period is based on an intervention-policy approach, where the number of rural housing is aimed to be restricted to an average of **100 no. of units for each year over the Plan Period**, equating a total number of 600 no. one-off dwellings during 2021-2027.

4.2.3 HOUSEHOLD SIZE COHORTS

Analysis of the historical trending of the households with a concentration on the household size cohort per household in the County over 2006-2016 indicates that a growing demand for apartments and smaller-size houses are expected. However, the bigger size houses are still having a steady market in the County which by considering the dominant characteristics of the County is not unexpected. More precisely, the bigger size households, including four-plus households, are expected to form approximately 49% of the total, while single- and two-person households form approximately 35% of the overall households. The following table provides an indication of anticipated households in each cohort over the Plan period.

Table 4.1 Indication of Households in Each Household Size Cohort over the Plan Period

Year	No. of Anticipated Households	1-person Household	2-person Household	3-person Household	4-person Household	5 plus-person Household
2017	29,630	6,556	7,799	5,117	5,551	4,607
2018	30,161	6,711	7,911	5,182	5,704	4,653
2019	30,698	6,869	8,023	5,246	5,861	4,699
2020	31,240	7,030	8,134	5,311	6,021	4,744
2021	31,811	7,198	8,252	5,380	6,189	4,793
2022	32,382	7,367	8,369	5,447	6,359	4,840
2023	32,953	7,538	8,484	5,514	6,531	4,886
2024	33,525	7,710	8,598	5,579	6,706	4,931
2025	34,096	7,883	8,711	5,644	6,884	4,974
2026	34,667	8,058	8,822	5,707	7,063	5,017
2027	35,238	8,234	8,932	5,769	7,245	5,058

Housing Policy Objective

HPO1	Ensure that 35% Of Any Residential Developments (10 units or more) provides for single and two person households.
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4.2.4 HOUSEHOLD TENURE

Analysis of the historical trending of the households with a concentration on the household tenure in the County over 2006-2016 indicates that rental market is expected to expand its share in the market, while the owner occupancy is expected to drastically shrink. Assuming a flat rate growth for these markets up to 2027, it is expected that owner occupancy forms approximately 44% of the market, while private rental is anticipated to take almost 45% of the market. The following table provides an indication of the expected households in each tenure type over the Plan period.

Table 4.2 Indication of Tenure Composition over the Plan Period

Year	Owner Occupied	Private Rental	Other Rental	Misc.
2017	20,673	4,649	3,012	1,296
2018	20,451	5,348	3,073	1,289
2019	20,164	6,132	3,124	1,278
2020	19,807	7,005	3,165	1,262
2021	19,395	7,977	3,196	1,243
2022	18,907	9,043	3,213	1,220
2023	18,345	10,203	3,215	1,191
2024	17,711	11,456	3,201	1,157
2025	17,011	12,796	3,170	1,119
2026	16,252	14,216	3,123	1,076
2027	15,441	15,707	3,060	1,030

4.3 KEY PRINCIPLES OF THE HOUSING STRATEGY

- To work to deliver the revised county population target of **94,700** by 2027 and **97,500** by 2031, having regard to the National Planning Framework, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and county's established Settlement Hierarchy as set out in the Laois County Development Plan;
- To promote socially balanced and inclusive communities in all housing areas across Laois;
- To provide for varying identified needs in the county with respect to housing typology, size and mix;
- To monitor the housing strategy, allowing for adequate consultation with those who are central to the implementation of the policies in the strategy.

The Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) sets out clear requirements for the monitoring and review of local authority housing strategies. Section 95 subsection (1) (b)

requires that a planning authority's development plan should include objectives to ensure that the housing strategy is implemented. These objectives should relate to:

- The existing and likely future need for social housing;
- The need to ensure the availability of housing for persons who have different levels of income;
- The need to provide different types and sizes of housing, to match, in so far as possible, the different types of households to be provided for;
- The special needs of the elderly and those with disabilities must be provided for; and
- The need to counteract social segregation in the provision of housing.

The County Laois Housing Strategy and Housing Needs Demand Assessment is closely aligned with the Core Strategy in that the future housing need is based on the population and household projections outlined in the Core Strategy in Section 2.8.1 of the Plan. The Strategy includes an analysis of housing requirements in the context of affordability and addresses the need to ensure that housing is available for persons with different levels of income. It also assesses the mix of house types and sizes (including accommodation for the elderly and persons with disabilities) and highlights the need to counteract undue segregation in housing between persons of different social backgrounds.

The Housing Strategy estimates that there will be a requirement for 1,200 social and affordable units between 2021 and 2027 (1,200 households which are not qualified for a mortgage over the Plan period, 793 no. households (20.4%) do not meet the affordability criteria for the private rental market).

The mechanisms for delivering social housing include the following:

- Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).
- Direct construction by Local Authorities or in partnership with Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs).
- Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS), Social Housing Lease Initiatives and Housing Assistance Payments (HAPs).
- Purchase of new or second-hand residential units.
- Casual vacancies.

The Housing Strategy and Housing Needs Demand Assessment can be found in Appendix 3 of this Plan.

4.4 HOUSING STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

To ensure the successful implementation of this Housing Strategy, it is necessary to keep it under review. Therefore, not more than two years after the making of the Development Plan, the Chief Executive of Laois County Council will give a report to the elected members on the progress achieved in implementing the Housing Strategy and the Development Plan objectives. Where the report indicates that new or revised housing needs have been identified, the Chief Executive may recommend that the Housing Strategy be amended and the Development Plan varied accordingly.

The Housing Strategy has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended as a basis to address the following key issues:

- The identification of housing need within County Laois;
- The identification of social and specialist housing needs within the County;
- The identification of supply side requirements to satisfy identified needs, including the consideration of appropriate land zoning in Laois;
- The consideration of specific policy response to the above.

The preparation of this strategy has included the assessment of all relevant and up-to-date publications and data resources, which have been analysed in detail to provide a robust basis for future policy development and implementation. In addition to meeting the statutory requirement for its production, this strategy ensures that the proper planning and sustainable development of Laois provides for the housing needs of existing and future populations in an appropriate manner.

4.5 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE URBAN REGENERATION AND HOUSING ACT 2015

The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 provides for the imposition of a Vacant Site Levy within areas where housing is required and areas in need of renewal. The levy will support the implementation of the Development Plan and Core Strategy objectives, particularly in respect of promoting the renewal and regeneration of urban areas thus ensuring a compact urban form and sustainable growth patterns. The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act set out two broad categories of vacant land that the levy may apply to:



- Lands zoned primarily for residential purposes
- Lands in need of regeneration




Laois County Council has determined that a need for housing exists in the Towns of Portlaoise, Portarlington, Mountmellick and Graiguecullen as indicated in Table 4.1. The Planning Authority may determine that a need for housing exists in additional Laois Towns during the Plan period.

4.5.1 REGENERATION SITES

Laois County Council has identified a number of regeneration sites within Volume 2 - Settlement Plans, having regard to NPO 35 of the NPF and the principles of compact development. A regeneration strategy is also included for each settlement. The review of the Local Area Plans for the County (Portlaoise, Portarlington, Graiguecullen and Mountmellick) will also provide a strategy for regeneration and include site specific objectives for each settlement. Strategic regeneration sites identified in the Portlaoise and Portarlington Local Area Plans are outlined in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Regeneration Sites for Local Area Plans

TOWN (LAP)	GENERAL LOCATION	OVERVIEW
<p>Portlaoise</p>	<p>The Former Centerpoint development, Mountrath Rd</p> 	<p>This brownfield retail site is a key site for regeneration, formerly a petrol station and commercial units located at Mountrath Road, with access also from Harpers Lane and an extensive surface car park. The site is within a 10 minute walk of both the Train Station and the Town centre and is in close proximity to both primary and secondary schools.</p> <p>Its Prime location is not located within an Architectural Conservation Area or contains any protected Structures.</p> <p>Future developments shall comprise a high quality design, fine grained active frontage blocks providing a strong built edge to the surrounding public thoroughfare. New buildings should be permanent, timeless and contemporary structures. Development could be intensified to provide a key landmark or gateway building.</p>
	<p>The Former Maltings Site Harpurs Lane</p> 	<p>This former brownfield site is located on the N80 (Mountmellick Road) in Portlaoise and within a 5 minute walk of Portlaoise Train Station. It previously had Planning Permission for a substantial mixed use development and is currently the subject of both residential and nursing home permissions.</p> <p>Its extensive site curtilage has been cleared for redevelopment and it is not located within an Architectural Conservation Area.</p> <p>Development could be intensified to provide a key landmark or gateway building at this location to replace the once tall malting buildings.</p> <p>Future development proposals should address both Mountmellick Road and Harpurs Lane and be designed to an exceptional standard. Development shall comprise high quality design, fine grained active frontage blocks providing a strong built edge to the surrounding public thoroughfare. New buildings should be permanent, timeless and contemporary structures.</p>

TOWN (LAP)	GENERAL LOCATION	OVERVIEW
	<p>Fitzmaurice Place Portlaoise - Convent Site and CBS Lands</p> 	<p>Both former school sites (Convent Lands and CBS) occupy a substantial portion of the lands within the Town Centre.</p> <p>Part VIII approval has been granted for approx 130 units (total) on both sites.</p> <p>Both developments have paid due respect to the Fort of Maryborough and archaeological considerations, their location within Portlaoise Architectural Conservation Area and the need to address the Protected Structures on both sites.</p>
<p>Portarlington</p>	<p>Colltederry, Lands West of Ballymorris Rd</p> 	<p>The site is a prime site located in close proximity to the town centre. The 3.84ha. greenfield site is fully serviced and outside of Flood Zones A and B.</p> <p>A Mixed use developments compliant with the zoning objective will be encouraged. The building should address the extensive street frontage and be designed to an exceptional standard.</p> <p>A high quality public realm will be required in any development including pocket parks and green links between Sandy Lane and Ballymorris Road.</p>
	<p>Foxcroft Street Landbank</p> 	<p>This site is in a prime location adjacent to the town centre with vehicular access from Foxcroft Street and potential pedestrian access from Main Street. The 4.08ha. is considered greenfield, backland and infill site and is fully serviced. A portion of the site is located within Flood Zone B.</p> <p>There is an opportunity to create a sustainable and compact urban quarter with a mix of uses. The site is located within the study area for the Urban Regeneration Strategy currently under commission by LCC.</p> <p>Pedestrian and cycle links and pocket parks between Main Street, Sandy Lane and Foxcroft Street should form key features to any proposal. Adjoining private amenity spaces of neighbouring residential properties should be protected through the design and layout of any proposal. A high quality public realm will be required in any development.</p>

Housing Development Policy Objectives	
HPO 2	Secure the implementation of the Laois County Housing Strategy in accordance with the provision of national legislation and relevant policies and standards.
HPO 3	Support the regional Settlement Strategy, taking into consideration the estimated population growth set out within the NPF and RSES, and make provision for the scale of population growth and housing allocations.
HPO 4	To ensure that sufficient zoned land is available at appropriate locations to cater for the envisioned population growth within the County and to satisfy residential development needs within the County in compliance with the Core Strategy and Settlement Strategy of the Development Plan.
HPO 5	To engage in active land management and site activation measures, including the implementation of the vacant site levy on all vacant residential and regeneration lands, and address dereliction and vacancy to ensure the viability of towns and village centres, i.e. Portlaoise, Portarlington, Mountmellick and Graiguecullen.
HPO 6	To plan for future housing needs and housing allocation within the County in accordance with the estimated population targets and the Core and Settlement Strategy, in order to facilitate the expansion of existing settlements in a planned, sequential and coordinated manner, which ensures development is built alongside the necessary infrastructure including works with Irish Water, and to consolidate the built-up area within the existing settlements. This ensures the creation of sustainable communities in line with national policy.
HPO 7	In relation to rural housing, it shall be provided where it promotes the economic role of these areas, negates isolation and promotes social inclusion. Development will be subject to infrastructure being delivered in rural areas or working with Irish Water to develop same.
HPO 8	To ensure that an appropriate mix of housing types and sizes is provided in each residential development and within communities in keeping with Development Plan standards. All new housing development is expected to be of a high-quality design in compliance with the relevant standards.
HPO 9	To promote residential densities appropriate to the development's location and surrounding context, having due regard to Government policy relating to sustainable development, which aims to reduce the demand for travel within existing settlements, and the need to respect and reflect the established character of rural areas.
HPO 10	To promote best practice and innovative solutions in relation to the ongoing management and maintenance of all housing stock and associated public realm.
HPO 11	To ensure that investment in infrastructure is distributed in a balanced manner around the County, with priority given to designated growth towns in line with the Settlement Strategy and in accordance with the sequential approach for developments. This includes working with Irish Water to ensure infrastructure is

Housing Development Policy Objectives	
	being delivered in rural areas.
HPO 12	To encourage the allocation of housing near co-working spaces and remote working hubs, as well as new housing in proximity of community centres which offer co-working services. This can promote a sustainable growth of the towns and villages located to the west of the County, or where deemed appropriate, and address the rising commuting daily trend from County Laois to Dublin.
HPO 13	Support the development of serviced sites to address the issue of single one-off dwellings.
HPO 14	Promote residential development addressing any shortfall in housing provision through active land management and a coordinated planned approach to developing appropriately zoned lands at key locations including regeneration areas, vacant sites, and underutilised sites. This includes backland development, thus promoting a more efficient use of zoned land.
HPO 15	Encourage and ensure high standards of energy efficiency in existing and new residential developments in line with good architectural conservation practice and promote energy efficiency and conservation in the design and development of new residential units, encouraging improved environmental performance of building stock. Improving environmental performance may include measures to reduce carbon emissions, improve resource use efficiency and minimise pollution and waste.
HPO 16	In order to address public safety and environmental improvement within Unfinished Housing Estates, the Local Authority shall continue to work with developers and residents of private residential developments, where possible.
HPO 17	Meet the needs of the elderly by providing accommodation in central, convenient and easily accessible locations to facilitate independent living where possible.
HPO 18	Encourage nursing homes and sheltered housing accommodation to be located within settlements to provide for easy access both for staff and visitors in order to enhance overall quality of life, increase their links with, and accessibility to, local amenities and to adopt a presumption against rural locations;
HPO 19	Provide for the housing needs of those with disabilities through the provision or adaptation of appropriate accommodation.
HPO 20	Apply flexibility in the application of development management standards with the consideration of performance-based criteria appropriate to general location, which will provide high-quality design outcomes, where appropriate. This more dynamic performance-based approach, applicable to town centre, infill and brownfield locations, will facilitate flexible design solutions in instances where a proposal fulfils specific planning requirements.
HPO 20	Opportunity sites identified in the County Development Plan shall be subject to a master plan for each site. A mix of type and design of dwelling is encouraged to allow for a transition between age groups such as additional single storey dwellings.

Housing Development Policy Objectives	
	Consultation should be held prior to the submission of any such application to ensure connectivity and accessibility has been a priority for the wider community.
HPO 21	The Council will facilitate the acquisition of lands by Compulsory Purchase Order to secure such lands for housing provision.
REG 1	Maintain the Laois Register of Vacant Sites, entering or deleting Sites from the Register in accordance with the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 and related Departmental Guidance.
REG 2	Identify additional Regeneration Area(s) and/or make determinations that a need for housing exists in additional Laois Towns during the Plan period as appropriate.
REG 3	Use the Derelict Site legislation to identify and address issues of dereliction within the towns and villages of the County.

Development Management Standard for Residential Development

DM HS 1	<p>RESIDENTIAL HOUSING DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>Applications for residential development will be assessed against the design criteria set out in Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009) and the companion Urban Design Manual: A Best Practice Guide (2009).</p> <p>The Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DTTS and DECLG, 2013) provides guidance in relation to the design of urban roads and streets, encouraging an integrated design approach that views the street as a multi-functional space and focuses on the needs of all road users.</p>
DM HS 2	<p>RESIDENTIAL APARTMENT DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>Applications for apartments will be assessed against the design criteria and Special Planning Policy Requirements set out in the Sustainable Urban Housing: A Design Guide for New Apartments –Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DHPLG, 2018).</p> <p>The Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DTTS and DECLG, 2019) provides guidance in relation to the design of urban roads and streets, encouraging an integrated design approach that views the street as a multi-functional space and focuses on the needs of all road users.</p>
DM HS 3	<p>DENSITY OF RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>The number of dwellings to be provided on a site should be determined with reference to the document Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009). Within these Guidelines a range of residential densities are prescribed, dependent on location, context, scale and availability of public transport.</p>

DM HS 4**LANDSCAPING AND PUBLIC OPEN SPACE IN RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS**

Public open space shall be clearly defined and be of high quality design and finish which is easily maintained, easy to access from all parts of the development, easy to use including by people with disabilities, has good lighting and natural surveillance and is enjoyable to use, walk and cycle around all year round. These spaces should include informal play spaces, safe well-lit pathways which will facilitate children learning to cycle, adults able to walk safely and encouraging social interaction between local residents.

A detailed plan for hard and soft landscaping should be submitted for each development. It should propose planting in public and private areas. Landscaping should contribute to the overall attractiveness of the development and be easily maintained.

Public open space shall comprise of the following:

- In large infill sites or brown field sites public open space should generally be provided at a minimum rate of 10% of the total site area.
- In greenfield sites, the minimum area of open space that is acceptable within the site is 10% of the total site area.
- In all other cases, public open space should be provided at the rate of 10% of the total site area.
- Where a public space is not fully usable due to the presence of infrastructure or occurrence of repeated flooding, the Council will require this to be offset by provision at another location, or addressed through a financial contribution in lieu of the shortfall arising, in accordance with the Council's Development Contribution Scheme.

SuDS are not generally acceptable as a form of public open space provision, except where they contribute in a significant and positive way to the design and quality of open space. Where the Council considers that this is the case, in general a maximum of 10% of the open space provision shall be taken up by SuDS.

DM HS 5

PUBLIC OPEN SPACE PROVISION FOR HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

No. of Dwellings	Amenity Required
<25	Landscaped passive recreational area (sitting out and setting)
	Active amenity open space (Ball Games)
26-99	Landscaped passive recreational area (sitting out)
	Active amenity open space (Ball Games)
	Areas for younger children (Play area/ground) (min.100m ²)
	OR -Multi Use Games Area (tennis/basketball)
100+	Landscaped passive recreational area (sitting out)
	Active amenity open space (Ball Games)
	Areas for younger children (Play area/ground) (min.200m ²)
	-Multi Use Games Area (tennis/basketball)
	-Grass sports pitch/ playing fields or -Multi Use Games Area (tennis/basketball)

Public open space shall have the following characteristics:

- Public open space shall be clearly defined, easily maintained, easy to access from all parts of the development, easy to use including by people with disabilities, have good lighting and natural surveillance and is enjoyable to use, walk and cycle around all year round
- Areas of public open space should be generally flat. While some undulation may be incorporated as a design feature, areas with high gradients, containing swales or attenuation ponds, or otherwise impractical to function effectively as amenity / play areas, will not be acceptable as open space.
- Narrow tracts of land (less than 10m) or pieces of land 'left over after planning' are not acceptable.
- Public open space should be innovative in its design approach, and designed to be functionally accessible to the maximum number of dwellings within the residential area.
- Public open space should be overlooked by as many dwellings as possible.
- Houses shall not generally be permitted to back onto public open spaces.
- Natural features and biodiversity, e.g. trees, hedgerows and wetland sites,

should be retained, protected and incorporated into public open space areas.

- Appropriate pedestrian and cycle linkages between open spaces should be clearly indicated on the site layout plan.

Existing and proposed areas of open space should be linked where possible

DM HS 6

PRIVATE OPEN SPACE IN HOUSING RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

All houses (terraced, semi-detached and detached) should have an area of private open space behind the building line.

House size	Minimum requirements
1 and 2 bedroom	60 sq m
3, 4, 5 bedroom	75 sq m

Private open space shall be designed to maximise sunlight, privacy and shelter from winds and shall normally be located to the rear of dwellings. Narrow or awkward spaces, spaces which are not private and spaces also used for parking will be excluded from private open space area calculations.

In general, a minimum distance of 22m should be achieved between opposing first floor windows at the rear of dwellings.

The Council will only consider exceptions to the standards in exceptional circumstances where an otherwise high quality design solution is proposed, which has full regard to the characteristics and context of the site. Discretion of this standard will be dependent on-site layout characteristics and flexibility may be employed where performance-based criteria can be adequately demonstrated. (For example, where a side garden of equal or greater dimensions can be substituted for rear garden space and where a situation of overlooking is demonstrably avoided).

DM HS 7

PRIVATE OPEN SPACE IN APARTMENT DEVELOPMENTS

It is a specific planning policy requirement that private amenity space shall be provided in the form of gardens or patios/terraces for ground floor apartments and balconies at upper levels.

These spaces must be of a certain minimum depth of at least 1.5m, to be useful from an amenity viewpoint, e.g. to accommodate chairs and a small table.

Vertical privacy screens should be provided between adjoining balconies and the floors of balconies should be solid and self-draining.

	<table border="1"> <tr> <th colspan="2">Minimum floor areas for private amenity space in apartments</th> </tr> <tr> <td>Studio</td> <td>4 sq m</td> </tr> <tr> <td>One bedroom</td> <td>5 sq m</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Two bedroom</td> <td>7 sq m</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Three bedroom</td> <td>9 sq m</td> </tr> </table>	Minimum floor areas for private amenity space in apartments		Studio	4 sq m	One bedroom	5 sq m	Two bedroom	7 sq m	Three bedroom	9 sq m
Minimum floor areas for private amenity space in apartments											
Studio	4 sq m										
One bedroom	5 sq m										
Two bedroom	7 sq m										
Three bedroom	9 sq m										
DM HS 8	<p>OVERSHADOWING OF DWELLINGS AND OPEN SPACE</p> <p>High buildings or when new buildings are located close to adjoining structures may significantly overshadow dwellings and open space. Daylight and shadow projection diagrams should be submitted for such proposals. The recommendations of 'Site Layout Planning for Daylight and Sunlight: A Guide to Good Practice', (B.R.E. 1991) or B.S. 8026 'Lighting for Buildings, Part 2 1992: Code of Practice for Day lighting' should be followed in this regard.</p>										
DM HS 9	<p>INTERNAL SPACE STANDARDS IN HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS</p> <p>The design and layout of individual dwellings should provide a high quality living environment for residents. Designers should have regard to the targets and standards set out in Table 5.1 of the Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities Guidelines, DCHLG (2007) with regard to minimum room sizes, dimensions and overall floor areas when designing residential accommodation.</p>										
DM HS 10	<p>BOUNDARY TREATMENTS</p> <p>The side boundaries of rear gardens shall be 1.8m-2m in height and shall be formed by high quality boundary treatments such as concrete block walls or concrete post and rail fencing.</p> <p>Two-metre-high concrete walls shall be provided between all areas of public open space and gardens to the rear of dwellings. The walls shall be suitably rendered and capped in a manner acceptable to the Council. Concrete screen walls along public spaces should be avoided through quality design but where it is not possible to do this, they should be suitably rendered and capped. Proposals for planting along the public side of the wall shall be included on a landscaping plan. An additional inner grass verge shall be provided at the footpath to facilitate this if necessary.</p> <p>In the interest of passive surveillance, where side boundary walls adjoin the public footpath, the walls shall be a maximum of 1 metre in height as far as the rear building line of the dwelling (beyond which a 2m wall may be provided).</p> <p>Landscaping along boundary walls is also encouraged to promote biodiversity and green infrastructure.</p> <p>Open plan front gardens will generally be discouraged and will only be acceptable</p>										

	<p>in innovative layouts and where a high level of safety is achieved and services can be accommodated at a location which meets the needs of service providers. Open plan gardens will not be permitted on main access roads.</p> <p>In general, where provided, front boundaries shall be defined by walls or fences at least 0.5 metres high in keeping with the house design and to a uniform scheme design.</p>
DM HS 11	<p>REFUSE/RECYCLING</p> <p>The Council will require that all developments include convenient and well-designed proposals for the storage of waste and recycling receptacles (3 receptacles per home). Secure pedestrian access shall be provided to the rear of terraced homes where appropriate. Sustainable waste reduction measures shall also be included in all proposals.</p>
DM HS 12	<p>BRING BANKS</p> <p>Bring bank facilities will generally be required at appropriate locations in the following developments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant new commercial developments, or extensions to same; • Mixed use developments, proposals should provide recycling facilities to serve residents; <p>One bring centre per residential development of 1,250 persons.</p>
DM HS 13	<p>NAMING OF ESTATES</p> <p>Naming and numbering of residential estates shall be approved in advance by the Placenames Committee of the Planning Authority. Developers must submit the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposed placename; • Reasons for their choice. <p>Naming of streets and residential estates shall reflect the local place names and local people of note, heritage, language or topographical or landscape features as appropriate and shall incorporate old place names from the locality as much as possible. The use of bi-lingual and Irish-Language signs will be encouraged.</p> <p>Signage should be of appropriate size and material and shall be erected in a timely manner.</p>
DM HS 14	<p>HOUSE EXTENSIONS/ALTERATIONS IN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS</p> <p>Extensions and alterations to dwellings should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Be of a scale and position which would not be unduly incongruous with its context; 2) Harmonise with the principal building and fit into the site and surrounding area in terms of scale, bulk, form and materials. 3) The design and finish of the proposed extension need not necessarily

	<p>replicate or imitate the design and finish of the existing dwelling. More contemporary designs and finishes often represent a more architecturally honest approach to the extension of a property and can better achieve other objectives, such as enhancing internal natural light;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4) Not have an adverse impact on the amenities of adjoining properties through undue overlooking, undue overshadowing and/or an over dominant visual impact; 5) Be positioned to ensure the privacy and adequate sunlight and daylight to key habitable rooms; <p>Site coverage should be carefully considered to avoid unacceptable loss of private open space.</p>
DM HS 15	<p>INFILL DEVELOPMENT IN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS</p> <p>Infill development is encouraged in principal where it does not adversely affect neighbouring residential amenity (for example privacy, sunlight and daylight), the general character of the area and the functioning of transport networks.</p>
DM HS 16	<p>ANCILLARY SELF-CONTAINED RESIDENTIAL UNIT (GRANNY FLAT)</p> <p>The Council will consider the provision of accommodation for older people and dependant relatives attached to the existing family home subject to compliance with the following criteria:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The unit shall be attached to the existing dwelling; 2) The unit shall be linked internally to the existing dwelling; 3) It shall not have a separate access at the front elevation of the dwelling; 4) It shall be of an appropriate size and design. <p>Should be capable of being served by adequate wastewater treatment.</p>
DM HS 17	<p>BACKLAND DEVELOPMENT IN URBAN AREAS</p> <p>There is the potential in appropriate circumstances to integrate new residential development into backland areas to produce a high quality residential environment. Development proposals should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i) complement the character of the area and main building to the fore with regard to scale, massing, height, building depth, roof treatment and materials. The design of such proposals should represent an innovative architectural response to the site and should be informed by established building lines and plot width; ii) Be of a form and scale which respects the scale and density of existing development. In general the scale and massing of new housing in backland areas should not exceed that of the existing dwellings fronting the surrounding streets; iii) Achieve a coherent and legible form and where possible provide a shared access with the development to the fore. New development should not inhibit vehicular access to car parking space at the rear for the benefit of the main frontage premises, where this space exists at present; iv) Integrate existing landscape features which form part of a backland plot,

	<p>the design should seek to retain these and integrate them into the new development;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> v) Provide parking within the site boundary unless otherwise agreed to by the Council; vi) Provide open space to the rear of the new building and shall be landscaped so as to provide for a quality residential environment; vii) The distance between the opposing windows of mews dwellings and of the main houses shall be generally a minimum of 22m. <p>Laois County Council will actively encourage schemes which provide a unified approach to the development of residential backland areas where consensus between all property owners has been agreed. This unified approach framework is the preferred alternative to individual development proposals.</p>
<p>DM HS 18</p>	<p>CORNER/SIDE GARDEN SITES</p> <p>The Council notes that some corner/side gardens are restricted to the extent that they would be more suitable for extending an existing home into a larger family home rather than to create a poor quality independent dwelling, which may also compromise the quality of the original house.</p> <p>The planning authority will have regard to the specific criteria contained in the section when assessing proposals for the development of corner/side garden sites such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The character of the street; • Compatibility of design and scale with adjoining dwellings, paying attention to the established building line, proportion, heights, parapet levels and materials of adjoining buildings; • Impact on the residential amenities of adjoining sites; • Open space standards and refuse standards for both existing and proposed dwellings; • The provision of appropriate car parking facilities, and a safe means of access to and egress from the site; • The provision of landscaping and boundary treatments which are in keeping with other properties in the area; • The maintenance of the front and side building lines, where appropriate.
<p>DM HS 19</p>	<p>LANDSCAPING AND BIODIVERSITY</p>

	<p>All applications for residential developments shall include a Landscape and Biodiversity Plans and should provide for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The creation of a coherent landscaping scheme appropriate to the type and scale of development and its surroundings. 2) The creation of paths through significant areas of open space. 3) The retention of any existing valuable features including trees, hedgerows, ponds, and areas of wildlife or ecological value. 4) The use of native trees, shrubs and plants in the planting schedules, planting schedules which include invasive species will not be accepted (a schedule of invasive species and native plants are included in Appendix 8). Preferred native deciduous tree species to be used are hawthorn, whitethorn, rowan, ash, oak, hazel, sycamore and holly. Beech (<i>fagus sylvatica</i>) shall not be used. 5) The linking up of site landscaping with adjacent open spaces, green spaces, foot or cycle paths; or linking up site landscaping with adjacent linear landscape features such as lines of trees or hedgerows. 6) The use of planting belts to absorb developments into the landscape, taking account of important views. 7) The creation of a pleasant environment for users, including sunny and shady areas. 8) The screening of development from neighbouring properties and from public roads for privacy. 9) Earthen berms in combination with planting belts are favoured to screen commercial developments such as quarries, waste disposal facilities or other large developments from the surrounding landscape. 10) A Habitat mitigation scheme shall be included in all housing schemes on Greenfield sites to mitigate any loss of habitat.
DM HS 20	In all Part 5 Agreements that Laois County Council reflect the need for downstairs Bedroom/Wetroom etc in a percentage of all Part 5 Agreements

4.6 OPEN COUNTRYSIDE AND RURAL HOUSING

Laois County Council’s rural housing policy has had careful regard to national advice and guidelines as set out in the National Spatial Strategy and *Sustainable Rural Housing: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DEHLG, 2005)* and also including the Habitats Directive with regard to Appropriate Assessment and the *Planning System and Flood Risk Management: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DoEHLG, 2009)*.

The Council’s rural development strategy is based on promoting sustainable rural development aimed at Maintaining vibrant and viable rural communities while also seeking to protect the amenity, recreational and heritage value of the rural landscapes and countryside of the county.

The implementation of the Settlement Strategy, as set out in Section 2 and the conservation and protection measures in Section 7-Heritage Strategy are considered to be essential towards achieving this aim. The designation of settlements for development enables the Council to

promote the strengthening of villages and settlements and to provide for the development of rural communities.

The approach taken towards the accommodation of residential development in the countryside has been twofold. In the first instance small scale settlements were identified. These are small scale settlements or small villages with an established identity that were considered suitable for the development of small scale housing schemes and/or single dwelling houses.

The second part of the approach was to determine the capacity of the countryside to absorb one-off housing having regard to issues in terms of environmental sensitivity, population trends, vacancy rates and the existing level of development in the area. In this regard the following actions were taken:

1. Environmentally sensitive areas including; – Special Areas of Conservation, Natural Heritage Areas, Special Protection Areas, Scenic Areas were identified and mapped.
2. Population trends have been mapped in terms of each Electoral Division (ED). The period taken was from 2006 to 2011.
3. Local areas within each ED that are clearly under significant development pressure for example northeast County Laois, the environs of the main urban settlements.

In County Laois the following three rural housing area designations apply:

- Areas under Strong Urban Influence,
- Stronger Rural Areas and
- Structurally Weak Areas.

The policy in relation to rural housing is, in certain areas, based on the local need factor which required applicants to demonstrate that they are functionally or socially related to the rural community in which the proposed site was located.

Other areas, where population stagnation or decline has been occurring, are not subject to housing need to the same extent or at all.

While the Council acknowledges the role of rural housing in sustaining rural communities, it also recognises that uncontrolled and excessive one-off urban generated housing in the countryside is not sustainable in the long-term and measures need to be put in place to regulate this form of development.

A concern arises that if 'one-off rural housing' is permitted at the current levels, then irreparable damage will be done to the environment including water quality and landscape character and the legitimate aspirations of those brought up in the countryside to continue to live within their own communities is likely to be jeopardized.

One-off housing refers to individually designed, detached houses primarily located on large un-serviced sites in the open countryside. The overriding aim of the Council's approach to one-off houses in the countryside is guided by the *Sustainable Rural Housing: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DEHLG, 2005)*

This approach seeks to accommodate within rural areas, people who are functionally or socially part of the rural community and to resist demand for urban generated housing in the countryside.

The Council will resist one-off housing proposals, where such development involves the creation of a new direct access point or the generation of increased traffic flows from existing direct access/egress points to the national road network where speed limits greater than 60km/h apply, in accordance with Policy Trans 7.

4.6.1 RURAL AREA TYPES

In accordance with the NSS and *Sustainable Rural Housing: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DEHLG, 2005)* document, the county has been defined into different rural area types based on different development demands and needs. These areas are described below and the extent of each is shown on the Rural Settlement Strategy Map.

The Council recognises the needs of local rural people who wish to live or work in the area in which they grew up. The following three criteria arise in assessing applicants under this category:

- The applicant must come within the definition of a ‘Local Rural Person’
- The proposed site must be situated within their ‘Local Rural Area’
- The applicant must have a ‘Local Rural Housing Need’

Table 4.4 – Rural Area designation

RURAL AREA DESIGNATION	DEFINITION	CRITERIA
RURAL AREAS UNDER STRONG URBAN INFLUENCE	<p>Those rural areas within easy commuting distance of the main urban centres in County Laois and adjacent counties including the GDA 6 which are experiencing pressure from the development of urban generated housing in the open countryside. These areas are essentially:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The north and eastern areas in the County • 5 km buffer zones around the Principal town, Key service Town and Service Towns of Graiguecullen and Mountmellick • National, Strategic Regional Routes and Regional Routes as defined in Section 7 <p>Continued high levels of single rural</p>	<p>It is an objective to recognise the individual housing needs of people intrinsic to the rural areas located within the areas defined as ‘rural areas under strong urban influence’. Such needs may be accommodated on lands within the rural area under strong urban influence, subject to the availability of a suitable site and normal proper planning and sustainable development criteria.</p> <p>It is an objective of the Council only to permit single houses in the area under strong urban influence to facilitate those with a local rural housing need²⁰ in the area, in particular those that have lived in a rural area.</p> <p>In order to demonstrate a genuine rural housing need, any of the following</p>

²⁰ An applicant who satisfies a ‘Local Rural Housing Need’ is defined as a person who does not or has never owned a house in the ‘local rural area’ and has the need for a permanent dwelling for their own use in the rural area.

RURAL AREA DESIGNATION	DEFINITION	CRITERIA
STRONG RURAL AREA	houses in these locations would inhibit the growth of the County's urban areas which would result in a failure to achieve the growth targets. It would also cause further deterioration of rural amenities. The key development plan objectives in these areas seeks to facilitate the genuine housing requirements of the rural community as identified by the planning authority in the light of local conditions while on the other hand directing urban generated development to areas zoned for new housing development in towns and village	<p>criteria shall be met:</p> <p>a) the application is being made by a long term landowner or his/her son or daughter seeking to build their first home on the family lands; or</p> <p>b) the applicant is engaged in working the family farm and the house is for that persons own use; or</p> <p>c) the applicant is working in rural activities²¹ and for this reason needs to be accommodated near their place of work; or</p> <p>d) the application is being made by a local rural person(s) who have spent a substantial period of their life living in the local rural area, and, who for family and/or work reasons need to live in the rural area.</p>
	The rural areas that traditionally have had a strong agricultural base, that are restructuring to cope with changes in the agricultural sector and have an extensive network of smaller rural towns, villages and other settlements. In these areas, the focus of urban generated housing should be in the network of settlements to support the development of services and infrastructure and to take pressure off development in the open countryside	<p>It is an objective to recognise the individual housing needs of people intrinsic to the rural area located within the rural areas defined as strong rural areas. It is an objective of the Council to permit single houses in the strong rural areas to facilitate those with a rural housing need in the area. In order to demonstrate a rural housing need, any of the following criteria should be met:</p> <p>a) the application is being made by a long term landowner or his/her son or daughter seeking to build their first home on the family lands; or</p> <p>b) the applicant is working in rural activities and for this reason needs to be accommodated near their place of work;</p>

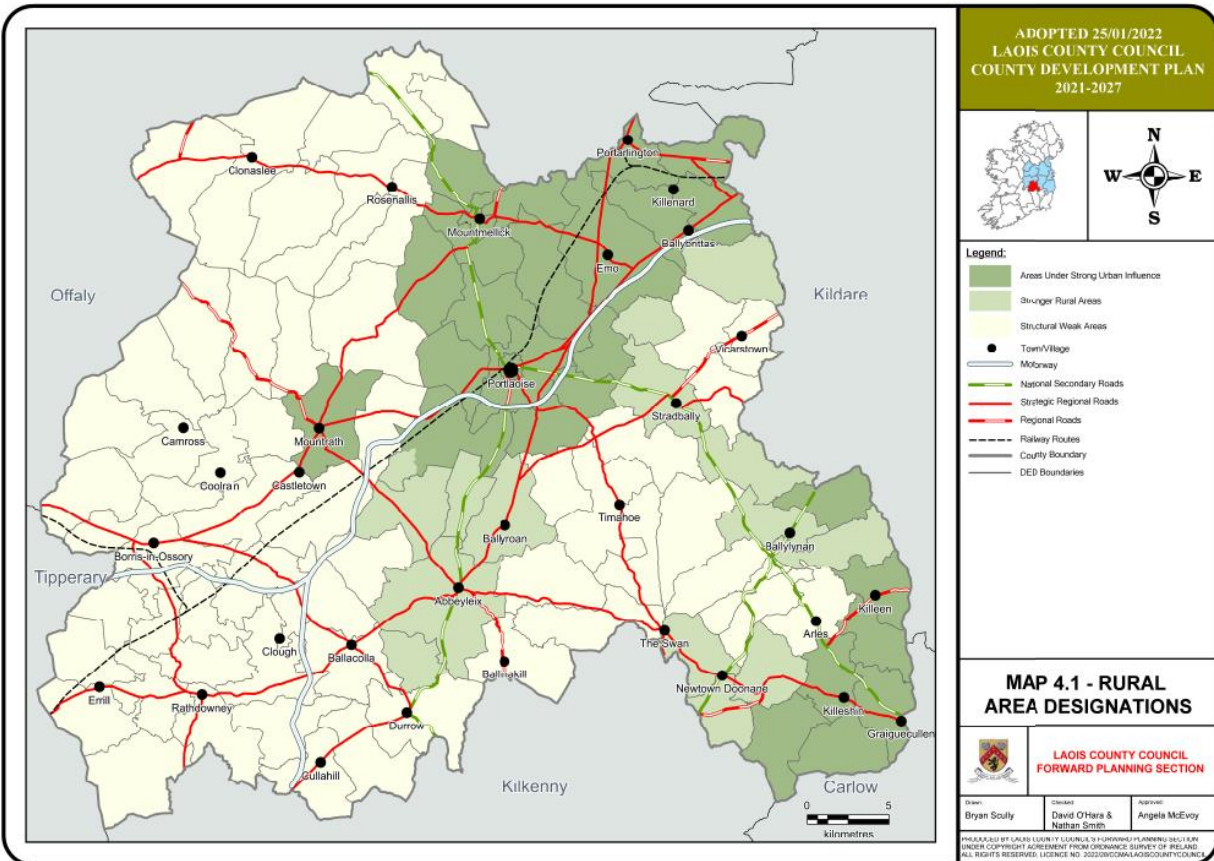
²¹ Such rural activities will normally encompass persons involved in full time farming, forestry, in land water ways or related occupations as well as part time occupations where the predominant occupation is farming/ natural resource related. Such circumstances could also encompass persons whose work is intrinsically linked to rural areas such as teachers in rural schools or other persons whose work predominantly takes place in rural areas.

RURAL AREA DESIGNATION	DEFINITION	CRITERIA
		<p>or</p> <p>c) the application is being made by a local rural person(s)²² who for family and/or work reasons wish to live in the local rural area in which they have spent a substantial period of their lives and are seeking to build their first home in the local rural area ²³.</p>
STRUCTURALLY WEAK RURAL AREAS	<p>The rural areas generally exhibit characteristics such as persistent and significant population decline as well as a weaker economic structure based on indices of income, employment and economic growth. These rural areas are more distant from the major urban areas and the associated pressure from urban generated housing.</p>	<p>To help stem decline and strengthen structurally weak areas, it is an objective of the Council that in general, any demand for permanent residential development should be accommodated, subject to meeting normal planning and environmental criteria.</p>

²² A 'Local Rural Person' is a person who is living or has lived in the local rural area for a substantial period of time prior to making the planning application

²³ The 'Local Rural Area' for the purpose of this policy is defined as the area generally within a 10km radius of the applicant's family home

Map 4.1: Rural Area Designations



4.6.3 RIBBON DEVELOPMENT

The Planning Authority will have regard to the publication *Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines for Planning Authorities [DoEHLG, 2005]* in dealing with planning applications involving cases of ribbon development.

These guidelines recommend against the creation of ribbon development for a variety of reasons relating to road safety, future demands for the provision of public infrastructure as well as visual impacts. Other forms of development, such as clustered development, well set back from the public road and served by an individual entrance can be used to overcome these problems in facilitating necessary development in rural areas.

In assessing individual housing proposals in rural areas the planning authority will therefore in some circumstances need to form a view as to whether that proposal would contribute to or exacerbate ribbon development. Taking account of the above and the dispersed nature of existing housing in many rural areas, areas characterised by ribbon development will in most cases be located on the edges of cities and towns and will exhibit characteristics such as a high density of almost continuous road frontage type development, for example where 5 or more houses exist on any one side of a given 250 metres of road frontage.

Whether a given proposal will exacerbate such ribbon development or could be considered will depend on:

- The type of rural area and circumstances of the applicant,
- The degree to which the proposal might be considered infill development,
- The degree to which existing ribbon development would be extended or whether distinct areas of ribbon development would coalesce as a result of the development.

4.6.4 REPLACEMENT DWELLINGS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

There is growing concern that the tendency to replace, rather than upgrade, older rural dwellings. There is a depleting the stock of vernacular rural dwellings and vernacular structures, the preservation of which is increasingly viewed as an important element of the built heritage of County Laois. They usually occupy mature, well secluded settings and as such, sit very comfortably within the landscape. With carefully designed extensions and sensitive restoration, these houses can be brought up to a standard capable of meeting modern day demands. Hence, the Council will encourage applicants and owners along this path in the interests of preserving valuable vernacular heritage.

Permission for demolition will only be considered where it is demonstrated that a vernacular dwelling is not reasonably capable of being made structurally sound or otherwise improved. Further information and Development Management Standards on vernacular structures is also provided in Section 12.3.3, Chapter 12 Built Heritage, of the Plan.

If a dwelling is not considered to be vernacular or does not make an important contribution to the heritage, appearance or character of the locality, planning permission will be considered for a new dwelling. In this instance the Local Needs Criteria as indicated in Section 4.6.2 does not apply. In cases where a dwelling has been recently destroyed by fire or through an accident, planning permission will be considered for a replacement dwelling.

4.6.5 SERVICED SITES

In response to RPO 4.78 of the RSES - *Development plans should support the development of a 'New Homes in Small Towns and Villages' initiative which would augment the delivery of actions by local authorities, Irish Water, communities and other stakeholders in the provision of services and serviced sites to create 'build your own home' opportunities within the existing footprint of rural settlements to provide new homes to meet housing demand, this Plan is supportive of the development of serviced sites within smaller town and villages throughout the County* (HPO 12) Currently Laois County Council are working with Irish Water to obtain funding for appropriate water and waste water infrastructure under the Small Towns and Village Growth Programme to develop smaller unserviced settlements such as Coolrain, Timahoe and Emo. Such areas would have the potential to provide serviced sites, providing an alternative to the one off house in the Countryside and strengthen the structure of such smaller settlements.

Furthermore, the Settlement Strategy (Volume 2) also indicates where such serviced sites could be accommodated, however their development is dependent on significant investment in infrastructure and agreement with Irish Water.

Cluster Housing Schemes in villages should be developed in a sustainable way respecting the unique aspects of the village and the site itself, whilst also responding to current economic and social needs.

Rural Housing Policy Objectives	
RH 1	Support the sustainable development of rural areas in Laois by encouraging growth and arresting decline in areas that have experienced low population growth or decline in recent decades and by managing the growth of areas that are under strong urban influence to avoid over-development, while sustaining vibrant rural communities.
RH 2	Having regard to the need to protect the natural resources, environment, landscape and infrastructure, it is Council policy to consider a single dwelling in the countryside subject to meeting the criteria in Table 4.4 in relation to Area of Strong Urban Influence.
RH 3	Having regard to the need to protect the natural resources, environment, landscape and infrastructure, it is Council policy to consider a single dwelling in the countryside subject to meeting the criteria in Table 4.4 in relation to Structurally Weak Areas.
RH 4	Provide for sustainable rural housing in the county in accordance with the <i>Sustainable Rural Housing: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DEHLG, 2005)</i> ‘, <i>EPA Code of Practice: Wastewater Treatment Systems for Single Houses (2009)</i> and ensure that any plan or project associated with the provision of new housing is subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening in compliance with the Habitats Directive, and subsequent assessment as required.
RH 5	Require all applicants seeking to live in the open countryside to submit proposals with regard to climate action and measures to reduce carbon emissions in this regard.
RH 6	Ensure that the provision of rural housing will not detract from the county’s natural and built heritage, economic assets and environment and the planning authority will have regard to the relevant development plan objectives.
RH 7	Outside the settlements which are zoned and designated in the Settlement Strategy, all proposed development which is vulnerable to flooding and is located in flood zones A and B must pass the development management justification test.
RH 8	Encourage the retention and sympathetic refurbishment, with adaptation if necessary, of traditional dwellings in the countryside in sympathy with the character of the existing building in preference to their replacement. ²⁴
RH 9	Facilitate the provision of accommodation for older people and dependant relatives

²⁴ *Planning permission will only be granted for replacement of a dwelling where it is demonstrated that it is not reasonably capable of being made structurally sound or otherwise improved, where the building is not of architectural merit. In this instance consideration will be given to the replacement of an existing dwelling with a new dwelling at the same location, subject to appropriate design, scale of building and normal planning considerations. Local rural housing need shall not apply in this instance..*

Rural Housing Policy Objectives	
	attached to the existing family home subject to compliance with the following criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. be attached to the existing dwelling; ii. be linked internally with the existing dwelling; iii. not have a separate access provided to the front elevation of the dwelling; iv. be of appropriate size and design; v. be capable of being served by adequate foul drainage facilities.
RH 10	Promote good rural design through the implementation of Rural House Design Guidelines prepared by Laois County Council in Appendix 7.
RH 11	Seek to retain vernacular dwellings and promote their sympathetic renovation and continued use rather than replacement. For this reason there will be a presumption against the demolition of vernacular dwellings and structures where restoration or adaptation is a feasible option ²⁵ .
RH 12	Restrict residential development on a landholding, where there is a history of development through the speculative sale or development of sites, notwithstanding the applicant's compliance with the local need criteria.
RH 13	Encourage the appropriate re-use and adaptation of the existing rural building stock in preference to new build such as vernacular farm building conversions.
RH 14	Recognise that exceptional health circumstances, supported by relevant documentation from a registered medical practitioner, may require a person to live in a particular environment. Housing in such circumstances will generally be encouraged in areas close to existing services and facilities and in Rural Settlements. All planning permissions for such housing granted in rural areas shall be subject to a seven year occupancy condition.
RH 15	Assess applications for one-off housing, in areas bordering neighbouring counties, where the proposed site is located on family land within County Laois, at a maximum distance of 5km from the county boundary. Applicants will be required to demonstrate that no suitable family owned site is available in the adjoining county and that all other aspects of rural housing policy including local need, siting and design are complied with. The applicant shall also fully demonstrate that they are building their first rural dwelling and that it will be for their permanent place of residence.
RH 16	Review the Laois County Council Rural Design Guidelines (Appendix 7) over the lifetime of the Plan.
RH 17	Control the level of piecemeal and haphazard development of rural areas close to

²⁵ The requirement to demonstrate local rural housing need shall be waived in cases of retention and upgrade of vernacular dwellings.

Rural Housing Policy Objectives	
	<p>urban centres and settlements having regard to potential impacts on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) The orderly and efficient development of newly developing areas on the edges of towns and villages; (ii) The future provision of infrastructure such as roads and electricity lines; and (iii) The potential to undermine the viability of urban public transport due to low density development
RH 18	<p>Discourage ribbon development (defined as five or more houses alongside 250 metres of road frontage). The Council will assess whether a given proposal will exacerbate such ribbon development, having regard to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) The type of rural area and circumstances of the applicant; (ii) The degree to which the proposal might be considered infill development; (iii) The degree to which existing ribbon development would coalesce as a result of the proposed development; (iv) Local circumstances, including the planning history of the area and development pressures. <p>Notwithstanding the above, special regard will be given to the circumstances of immediate family members of a landowner on single infill sites in a line of existing dwellings with 5 or more houses along a 250 metres of road frontage.</p>
RH 19	<p>Only consider family members for backland development within rural areas in exceptional circumstances. The proposed development shall not have a negative impact on third parties/ neighbouring property owners and viable sites with sufficient independent percolation areas will be required in order to meet technical guidelines.</p> <p>The proposed development shall also comply with Development Management Standards in relation to Backland Development.</p>
RH 20	<p>Facilitate the sensitive replacement of a structurally unsound derelict dwelling as an alternative to the construction of a one off dwelling elsewhere in the countryside. The scale of the replacement dwelling shall have regard to the site size.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentary evidence in the form of a structural survey and photographs shall be submitted to accompany the application. • The proposed applicant shall be subject to an occupancy condition.
RH 21	<p>Log cabins and pods or wooden structures are not vernacular typologies for County Laois and will only be permitted in certain cases where they are integrated into the landscape or where there is a unique siting.</p>
RH 22	<p>In addition to complying with the most up-to-date EPA Code of Practice for Wastewater Treatment and Disposal Systems Serving Single Houses, proposals for development in rural nodes shall include an assessment undertaken by a qualified hydrologist, that demonstrates that the outfall from the septic tank will not, in</p>

Rural Housing Policy Objectives

	combination with other septic tanks within the node and wider area, contribute towards any surface or ground water body not meeting the objective of good status under the Water Framework Directive.
RH 23	Investigate the feasibility of providing/facilitating serviced sites in pilot programmes around the County in rural villages, settlements and small town to cater for urban and rural generated housing need in conjunction with Irish Water's Small Town and Villages Growth Programme.

Development Management Standard for Rural Housing

DM RH 1

NEW DWELLING HOUSES IN RURAL AREAS

A range of criteria will be used to assess if a rural site is acceptable in principle for a dwelling house. The criteria are detailed in Appendix 7: Rural Design Guidance.

New dwellings in the countryside require the following:

- a) 30 metres of road frontage, unless a considerable set-back from the roadway exists.
- b) Minimum 0.202 hectares (0.5 acres) of site area.
- c) Sightlines at the proposed entrance must comply with Laois County Council Parking and Roads Standards indicated in Chapter 10 of the Plan and must be achieved within the boundary of the site only. Excessive removal²⁶ of hedgerow to achieve adequate sightlines is unacceptable.
- d) The location and design of a new dwelling shall take account of and integrate appropriately with its physical surroundings and the natural and cultural heritage of the area and respect the character of the area.
- e) Appropriate landscaping of proposed development using native species.
- f) The capacity of the area to absorb further development. In particular, the following factors will be examined; the extent of existing development in the area, the extent of ribbon development in the area, the degree of existing haphazard or piecemeal development in the area and the degree of development on a single original landholding.
- g) In the interests of protecting the biodiversity of the rural areas, the ability to provide safe vehicular access to the site without the necessity to remove extensive stretches of native hedgerow and trees. The need for the removal of extensive roadside hedgerow may indicate that the site is unsuitable for development.
- h) The ability of a site in an unserviced area to accommodate an on-site waste water disposal system in accordance with the EPA Code of Practice for Wastewater Treatment Systems for single houses (2009), the County Laois Groundwater Protection Scheme, and any other relevant documents / legislation as may be introduced during the Plan period.
- i) The ability of a site in an unserviced area to accommodate an appropriate on-site surface water management system in accordance with the policies of the Greater Dublin Strategic Drainage Study (2005).
- j) The need to comply with the requirements of The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities, DEHLG (2009).
- k) Floodlighting of single family dwellings or the lighting of private roads in rural areas will not be accepted.

<p>DM RH 2</p>	<p>INFILL DEVELOPMENT IN A RURAL AREA</p> <p>Limited infill development shall be permitted in rural areas where the proposed site shall coalesce the existing linear pattern of development and shall not be located at the end of a line of houses but on a vacant site within the existing linear form of development subject to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant satisfies the local need criteria contained in Table 6; • Evidence is provided that no other sites are available on the applicants or family landholding that can be developed; • Wastewater treatment can be provided for the proposed dwelling in line with the EPA Code of Practice (2009); • Maintains the existing building line and established lengths of site frontage with adjacent dwellings; • Complies with the road standards in the Roads and Parking Standards (2007) or amended document; • Has a minimum 0.202 hectares (0.5 acres) of site area; • The house design proposed is in line with the advice contained within the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Landscape Character Assessment contained in Appendix 6 ○ The Rural Design Guide contained in Appendix 7
<p>DM RH 3</p>	<p>REPLACEMENT DWELLINGS IN RURAL AREAS</p> <p>The demolition of a dwelling house, other than a vernacular dwelling, in the countryside and the construction of a new dwelling house in its place shall be considered where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The structure proposed for demolition is habitable - The structure must last have been used as a dwelling and the internal and external walls and roof must be intact; • A report from a suitably qualified competent person shall be submitted to verify that the dwelling is habitable but that replacement of the dwelling is the most sustainable option; • A replacement structure will only be accepted where the replacement dwelling is of equal or superior merit; • Refer to Rural; Design Guidance in Appendix 7 for policy on siting, design and landscaping.
<p>DM RH 4</p>	<p>WASTEWATER TREATMENT (UNSEWERED PROPERTIES)</p> <p>The Council will ensure that;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • only on-site wastewater treatment systems that are of a suitable design and located in a suitable area will be permitted; • the provision of wastewater treatment for single houses meets with the requirements of the EPA Code of Practice 2009 and an subsequent updates;

	The use of alternative wastewater treatment systems for un-sewered properties, such as wetlands and reed beds and the need for tertiary treatment of wastewater will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
DM RH 5	<p>BACKLAND DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS</p> <p>The proposed development shall comply with the following siting and design criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only single storey bungalow (including attic accommodation) type houses will be allowed in such backland locations to limit visual impact and overlooking. • Sufficient screening will be required to screen the house from adjacent homes and this has to be in place prior to occupation of the house. • A shared entrance with the existing dwelling to the fore on to the accessing road shall be permitted only. • The site shall be capable of accommodating an on site waste treatment system in compliance with EPA Code of Practice 2009 and any subsequent update.
DM RH 6	<p>SERVICED SITES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A serviced sites development may be planned and designed as a complete development but may also be developed on a phased basis, where one or a number of units may be built at a time. • The density of each individual site will be influenced by servicing requirements, the character of the settlement and the natural features of the site. • Plot areas, site subdivision and location of the treatment plant will be informed by whether the site is to be serviced by public services (e.g. connection to waste or water network) or individual on-site services (e.g. private well or waste water treatment system). • Where a serviced site scheme is proposed a design statement shall be prepared to assist future home owners in designing their own bespoke home.

4.7 GROUPS WITH SPECIFIC PLANNING NEEDS

There are a number of groups in society with specific design and planning needs including: children/young people, people with disabilities, older people, ethnic minorities and the Traveller community. The Council recognises the importance of planning for the needs of these groups.

4.7.1 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The ESRI projection indicate that the number of people 15 and under will decline by 10% by 2040. The 2016 Census states that County Laois has a population where 31% are aged under 19 years and a birth-rate of 13. This has a bearing on the present and future need for facilities such as childcare, play areas for children, sports facilities, schools and safe walking and cycling routes in the County and the importance of bringing together key voluntary providers of services to children and young people such as Comhairle Na N-Og and Laois/Offaly Children and Young Peoples Services Committee.

4.7.2 OLDER PEOPLE

In 2016, County Laois had a slightly lower than average proportion of older adults with approximately 11% of the population in the County aged 65 or over, compared to the national average of approximately 13%. This will mean that the demand for nursing homes, residential care homes and sheltered housing accommodation is continuing to grow. It also means that our housing developments need to be adaptable to cater for the future changing needs of our aging population. The 'Age Friendly Ireland' Initiative is a key policy document that provides leadership and guidance in identifying the needs and opportunities of an ageing population. Laois Age Friendly County Strategy 2016 - 2021 sets out key commitments for improvement to the areas of infrastructure, transportation, services and information.

4.7.3 PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

People with disabilities and mobility impairment face particular physical barriers to access and movement. The Council will ensure that development of all types provide mobility and access for people with disabilities in order to remove barriers to involvement in community, having regard for the National Disability Authority's document 'Building for Everyone: A Universal Design Approach – Planning and Policy' (2012) and Laois Public Participation Network 'Access for All Report' (2019).

4.7.4 TRAVELLER COMMUNITY

The Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019 – 2024 for County Laois assessed the need for Traveller accommodation in the County. It sets out the Council's policy regarding the provision of Traveller accommodation. According to the 2016 Census, 780 members of the Travelling Community are living in Laois. The Council will endeavour to provide accommodation for members of the Travelling Community.

4.7.5 MINORITY GROUPS

Laois is becoming an increasingly diverse County. According to the Census 2016, non Irish nationals account for 11.8% of County's population in comparison to 11.6% nationally. Portlaoise has one of the highest levels of non national residents, which accounts for 22% of the population. In this regard, service provision and community facilities in these areas should reflect the varying needs of the community.

Groups with Specific Planning Needs Policy Objectives	
HPO -22	Consider the needs of children and young people, including those with disabilities and additional needs, in the provision of indoor and outdoor recreational facilities.
HPO 23	Ensure that all buildings, public and open spaces, recreational and amenity areas are accessible for people with disabilities, having regard to the Building Regulations, the objectives of 'Building for Everyone' (National Disability Authority) and 'Access for the Disabled'.
HPO 24	Provide for the needs of people with visual and mobility difficulties in the design of pedestrian facilities, by assessing the options available and choosing the most appropriate design to implement on a case by case basis.
HPO 25	Continue to develop and implement the Age Friendly Programme and Actions and to investigate the possibility of expanding the programme into other towns and villages throughout the County.
HPO 26	Facilitate the provision of continuing care facilities for the elderly, such as own homes (designed to meet the needs of elderly people), sheltered housing, day-care facilities, nursing homes and specialised care units (e.g. dementia specific units) at appropriate locations throughout the County.
HPO 27	Cater for the diversity of older people's needs by promoting adaptability and flexibility in the design of homes, and the promotion of appropriate commercial and community facilities in population centres with higher proportions of older people.
HPO 28	Ensure that all new housing contemplates the principles of adaptability and flexibility, and addresses the changing needs of the homeowner, to facilitate a lifelong home for people and independent living in relation to housing for older people.
HPO 29	Support the concept of independent living and assisted living for older people, as well as the provision for specific purpose-built accommodation.
HPO 30	Facilitate and ensure the provision of social housing and affordable housing throughout the County to sufficiently cater for social and specific housing needs and relevant requirements over the Development Plan period.
HPO 31	Progress the provision of social and specific housing through partnership with approved housing bodies, voluntary and co-operative organisations, the Health Service Executive, and through agreements with private developers.
HPO 32	Promote social integration and facilitate a diverse range of dwelling tenures within housing developments, including social housing within the County.
HPO 33	Build and support the delivery of new housing appropriate to the needs of the county in terms of the demand for social housing, the needs of people with disabilities, homeless people, older people, and the Traveller community.

Groups with Specific Planning Needs Policy Objectives

HPO 34	<p>Meet the County’s housing need for social housing provision through a range of mechanisms, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), (ii) a social housing building programme, (iii) acquisition, leasing, (iv) the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, (v) the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) and (vi) the utilisation of existing housing stock, i.e. vacant and underutilised sites
HPO 35	<p>Ensure the provision of housing for people with varying levels of income taking into consideration the housing support system and the planning system which will ensure that an appropriate mix of units is provided in appropriate locations.</p> <p>All new social and/or affordable housing to be of the highest standard of design and in accordance with the development standards set out in the County Development Plan and the DoEHLG social housing guidelines.</p>
HPO 36	<p>Ensure 10% of all lands zoned for residential uses, or for a mixture of residential and other uses, shall be reserved for the provision of social and/or affordable housing in order to address the requirement for social housing under Part V²⁷, thus promoting tenure diversity and socially inclusive communities within the County.</p>
HPO 37	<p>Implement the Laois County Council Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019-2024 (and any superseding programmes agreed by the Council) in accordance with the principles of proper planning and sustainable development.</p>

²⁷ In this regard, the percentage reservation for Part V shall be decided on a case-by-case basis of individual site assessment. Criteria to be taken into account will include the type and location of the housing units required by the Planning Authority at a given time, as defined by the priority housing list by the Housing Section and the existing mix of housing classes in the area. The location, house size and house design requirements for permissions that will include social housing shall be discussed at pre-planning meetings between the applicant and the Local Authority

Development Management Standard For Groups with Specific Planning Needs

DM HP 22 NURSING HOMES

Provide for a mixed urban/rural setting for nursing homes in the County and to site residential care facilities for the elderly in accordance with the following:

- (i) Facilities should be located close to community and social facilities required by occupants (e.g. shops, post office, community centres, etc) thereby ensuring that older people can remain part of existing communities.
- (ii) Facilities should be easily accessible for residents, employees, visitors and service providers. Such facilities will generally be acceptable in villages and rural settlements to cater for local demand. A mobility strategy shall be provided detailing connections to town and village centres for residents, employees and visitors.
- (iii) Facilities should be located within an environment that is suitable for their stated purpose, integrating within the wider community while providing a safe environment for residents.
- (iv) Facilities should be located in an area which can benefit from the creation of strong links between the care for the elderly facilities and the local community including activities linked to other community groups.

CHAPTER 5 QUALITY OF LIFE & SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Aim: To facilitate the delivery of social infrastructure throughout the county, improve physical access to services, facilitate the maintenance and upgrading of cultural and heritage facilities for communities and to enhance the environmental, amenity and physical attributes of communities which creates healthy placemaking.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Building strong, inclusive communities is an integral component to achieving sustainable development objectives and the principle of healthy placemaking. Apart from housing and employment opportunities, sustainable communities require the provision of and access to a myriad of support infrastructure in the areas of education, childcare, health and community support services, recreational and leisure facilities and a good quality built environment. Communities also require opportunities to meet, interact and form bonds, all essential prerequisites to the evolution of a sense of place and belonging.

5.1.1 GUIDANCE

The objectives and policies of this chapter are informed by the principles of the following national policy documents:

- The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- National Planning Framework;
- National Development Strategy 2018 – 2027;
- Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy;
- Our sustainable future – A Framework for Sustainable Development;
- Building for Everyone: A Universal Design Approach, 2012, National Disability Authority;
- National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan 2013-2015, National Disability Strategy Implementation Group;
- National Women’s Strategy 2007-2016, Department of Justice and Equality;
- Get Ireland Active, National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland, 2016;
- Charter for Rural Ireland, 2016 Department of Environment, Community and Local Government;
- Our Communities: A Framework Policy for Local and Community Development in Ireland, 2015, Department of Environment, Community and Local Government;
- Tobacco Free Ireland, Department of Health;
- Healthy Ireland - A Healthy Weight For Ireland, Department of Health;
- The National Positive Ageing Strategy;
- Time to move on from congregated settings – A strategy for community inclusion;
- The Urban Design Manual – A Best Practice Guide;
- Rejuvenating Irelands Small Town Centres;
- Research 195: Health Benefits from Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure;
- National Biodiversity Action Plan;

- Sustainable Mobility Policy;
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

5.2 SOCIAL INCLUSION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

One of the overall aims of the Plan is the promotion of social inclusion. Social inclusion can be defined as a process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in society and have access to social infrastructure services. It is important that our living, working and leisure environments are designed and maintained in a manner that is accessible to all.

In order to facilitate social inclusion at local level, the Social Inclusion Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2022 is overseen by the LCDC, with the aim of tackling poverty, social exclusion and long term unemployment through engagement and participation between community organisations, public sector agencies and certain sectors of society. In Laois, the Public Participation Network acts as the main link through which the Council will connect with and seek representation from the local Community/Voluntary, Social Inclusion and Environmental sectors, to progress their work in the areas of arts, sports, community and social inclusion initiatives. This is vital in helping to attract economic investments to local areas, promoting tourism and providing local services and supporting the isolated in our community.

5.2.1 LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE AND LOCAL ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY PLAN

As previously stated, new local government structures brought about a greater emphasis on community development with the introduction of Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) in each local authority to addresses the need for creating sustainable communities for each County. This reform also brought about the requirement for the LCDC to prepare a Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) every six years, of which policies and actions will inform the County Development Plan. The Laois LECP 2016 – 2021 and the Laois County Development Plan operate in tandem and must be consistent with each other. The LECP provides the supporting framework for economic and local community development of Laois, whereas the County Development Plan provides an overarching strategy and statutory policy support for the proper planning and sustainable development of the County at a spatial level.

Overarching Social Inclusion and Community Development Policy Objectives	
SCPO 1	Deliver on the objectives and actions set out in the National Planning Framework, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (EMRA), Laois Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021 (and any subsequent LECP) and relevant National Guidance documents to strengthen community and social development in the County.
SCPO 2	Ensure that sufficient lands in appropriate locations are zoned to cater for new and existing social and community needs.
SCPO 3	Promote the highest levels of universal accessibility in all social and community facilities including flexible housing typologies, buildings and public spaces/areas.
SCPO 4	Ensure that all arts and cultural facilities in the ownership and management of the Council are accessible to the wider community and to promote the role of these facilities as focal points for the community.
SCPO 5	Support and encourage communities in the regeneration and expansion of community centres subject to budget allocations.
SCPO 6	Promote social inclusion through equality of access to services and facilities and to assist in the removal of barriers to full participation in society.
SCPO 7	Increase accessibility to public transport and walking and cycling infrastructure within main residential areas with schools, community and sports facilities to encourage more sustainable modes of transport.
SCPO 8	Seek to improve the energy efficiency of the County's existing building stock to promote energy efficiency in the design and development of all new buildings in the County, in accordance with the Building Regulations Part L (Conservation of Fuel and Energy).
SCPO 9	Encourage that new social infrastructure development proposals maximise energy efficiency through siting, layout, design and incorporate best practice in energy technologies, conservation and smart technology.
SCPO 10	Support and encourage pilot schemes which promote innovative ways to incorporate energy efficiency.
SCPO 11	Require, where feasible and practicable, the provision of Photovoltaic solar panels in new public and community buildings for electricity generation/storage and/or water heating purposes so as to minimise carbon emissions and reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels and reduce energy costs.
SCPO 12	Require the use of SuDS within Local Authority Developments and other social infrastructure projects in accordance with the Greater Dublin Regional Code of Practice for Drainage Works.
SCPO 13	Encourage the use of Green Roof technology particularly on leisure and educational buildings.

Overarching Social Inclusion and Community Development Policy Objectives	
SCPO 14	Support and implement the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Communities
SCPO 15	Support sport and physical activity opportunities for people with disabilities across the County in collaboration with national sporting disability organisations.
SCPO 16	Facilitate and support a more diverse and socially inclusive society that targets equality of opportunity and a better quality of life for all citizens, through improved integration of services and funding and greater accessibility in the delivery of sustainable communities and the provision of associated services.

Development Management Standard

DM SC 1	<p>ACCESSIBILITY</p> <p>The Council will require that the design of buildings and the layout of developments incorporate measures to ensure accessibility.</p> <p>Access requirements for parents and carers, people with disabilities, the elderly and others who may be temporarily impaired must be incorporated into the design of buildings, public spaces, car parking, footpaths and general facilities and services.</p> <p>Universal design will be encouraged in all new developments. Developers must have regard to or comply with (as appropriate) the following criteria in the preparation of development proposals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Part M of the Building Regulations and the requirement for Disability Access Certificates (DACs); ii. Buildings for Everyone: A Universal Design Approach (National Disability Authority, 2012); iii. Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas: Guidelines for Planning Authorities and its companion document Urban Design Manual (DEHLG, 2008). <p>Applications for significant development have regard to Appendix 6 of Buildings for Everyone: A Universal Design Approach (National Disability Authority, 2012).</p>
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DM SC 2**SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

In assessing planning applications for social infrastructure²⁸ both urban and rural locations, regard will be taken of considerations such as:

- 1) Practicalities of site location in terms of site location, uses, impact on local amenities, desirability, and accessibility;
- 2) Provision of renewable energy sources;
- 3) The potential for multi-use by other groups/members of the community;
- 4) Conformity with the requirements of appropriate legislative guidelines;
- 5) Consideration for local needs and baseline data.

5.3 SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE**5.3.1 EDUCATION**

Education is critical to achieving the full socio-economic potential of the County. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) indicates that there has been a slight decrease in birth rates in the County between 2012 and 2016 at 1,276 and 1,118 respectively. Nonetheless the provision of childcare facilities and primary and secondary level schools infrastructure in the County is essential. There are 66 primary schools in the County catering for 9,883 students and 10 post primary schools in the County catering for 4,954 pupils. Both of these figures equate to 17.5% of the population. The Department of Education and Skills is responsible for the delivery of educational facilities and services, however, in terms of planning for the provision of education infrastructure in Laois, the primary role of the Planning Authority is to identify and reserve sufficient lands at the most optimum locations within the study area. The Council works proactively with the Department of Education and Skills on an ongoing basis to identify educational needs and the spatial and land use implications of same as they arise.

The Council recognises the important role of higher education in providing for the economic and social wellbeing of the County's population. In terms of adult education, the Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board promote Adult Learning Services, Back to Education Initiative and Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme with Portlaoise Institute of Further Education offering many QQI Level 5 and 6 Courses. Portarlington Further Education and Training Centre, Lifelong Learning Department is the County's only third level institution which offers accredited part-time third level programmes. Laois Local Enterprise Office also offers business information and advice, business skills training and mentoring support as well as other skills and training options to support businesses in the County. The development of linkages between new and existing employers with the aforementioned institutions will add to the attractiveness of the area for investors due to the availability of potential future employees with the necessary skills locally.

²⁸ including leisure facilities, sports grounds, playing fields, play areas, community halls, organisational meeting facilities, medical facilities and other community orientated developments

Education Policy Objectives	
EDPO 1	<p>All sites for schools shall comply with the requirements of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'The Provision of Schools and the Planning System A Code of Practice for Planning Authorities', 2008, or any update thereof; • Technical guidance document TGD-025 (or any such updated document) in respect of primary schools; • Technical guidance document TGD-027 (or any such updated document) in respect of post primary schools.
EDPO 2	<p>Ensure that existing and new school sites are protected for educational use and allows for intensification of development on such sites and protect lands adjacent to existing schools for future educational use to allow for expansion of these schools, if required, subject to site suitability.</p>
EDPO 3	<p>Facilitate the development of primary, second-level, third-level, vocational and lifelong learning facilities and digital capacity for distance learning including lifelong learning and Up-skilling generally to meet the needs of the County including mature adults i.e. back to school in existing educational infrastructure</p>
EDPO 4	<p>Promote the shared use of educational and community facilities for community and non-school purposes where possible.</p>
EDPO 5	<p>Explore the potential for a dedicated third level / technical college in Portlaoise or Portarlington as appropriate.</p>
EDPO 6	<p>Ensure the provision and implementation of primary and secondary education facilities in concert with the planning and sustainable development of residential areas and community facilities in order to maximise the opportunities for use of walking, cycling and use of public transport. Safe walking and cycling zones (including signage) on the main approach roads to educational facilities will be encouraged.</p>
EDPO 7	<p>Increase the active school flag programme to at least another 20 schools in the County.</p>
EDPO 8	<p>Ensure new and existing school buildings are as self-sustaining as possible, endeavoring to avoid fossil fuel dependence and adapting to a lower energy society.</p>
EDPO 9	<p>Undertake a feasibility study for Portlaoise for the provision of a school / education infrastructure.</p>

Education Development Management Standard

DM ED 1	EDUCATION FACILITIES Assessing planning applications for new education facilities and/or redevelopment/extensions of existing schools, the Planning Authority will have regard to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Site location, proximity of school to catchment area, size of site relative to outdoor space requirements and the future needs of the school (i.e. sufficient space provided for future expansion).• Mobility Management Plan shall be submitted to ensure safe accessible pedestrian and cyclist routes to and from the school from nearby residential and commercial areas. This shall have regard to and comply with (as appropriate) the NTA's Workplace Travel Plans: A Guide for Implementers and the Toolkit for School Travel.• Provision of safe and adequate set down etc facilities for buses.• Provision of adequate, secure, covered cycle facilities.• Provision of safe access and adequate car parking and set down areas to facilitate drop off/pick up.• Adequate signage, lighting and boundary treatments.• Impact on local amenities and out of school hours uses.
DM ED 2	EXTENSIONS TO SCHOOLS Extensions to education facilities will generally be accepted subject to scale, high quality design and satisfactory integration with the existing structure. School extensions should not negatively impact on adjoining amenities and amenities within the school site.
DM ED 3	TEMPORARY CLASSROOMS Temporary classrooms will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and will generally be accepted for a temporary period not exceeding five years and such classrooms should not interfere with onsite car/cycle parking spaces or unduly impact the usability of outdoor play/sports facilities. Any such proposal shall be accompanied by a timeline for the construction of permanent facilities.

5.3.2 CHILDCARE FACILITIES

Access to affordable and high-quality childcare is an essential requirement for an equitable society, a thriving economy and sustainable communities and is a critical part of the County's infrastructure. Laois County Childcare Committee supports early childcare services, throughout the County catering for full day care, after school and preschool care. The 0-4-year preschool population within the County in 2016 represents XX% of the population of Laois. Whilst the Council is not directly involved in the provision of childcare services, the Plan will seek to ensure sufficient facilities are provided in the areas required.

Childcare Facilities Policy Objectives	
CCPO 1	Encourage, promote and facilitate the provision of childcare facilities in accordance with national policy and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government Planning Guidelines on Childcare Facilities: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DoEHLG, 2001) and any other relevant statutory guidelines which may issue during the period of this Plan
CCPO 2	Ensure the provision of quality affordable childcare throughout the County in consultation with the Laois County Childcare Committee, and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Tusla Child and Family Agency
CCPO 3	Promote and encourage the provision of a network of childcare facilities that reflect the distribution of the residential population in the County and to minimise travel distance and maximise opportunities for disadvantaged communities;

Development Management Standard

DM CC 1	<p>CHILDCARE FACILITIES</p> <p>Require the provision of childcare facilities of an appropriate type and scale in suitable locations throughout the County and comply with the Section 28 Guidelines on Childcare Facilities, 2001 (and any subsequent update).. In particular, the development of childcare facilities at the following locations will normally be required;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • areas of concentrated employment and business parks; • neighbourhood centres; • integrated into large retail developments and retail warehouse parks; • in, or in the vicinity of, schools or major educational facilities; • adjacent to public transport nodes; • in, or adjacent to, community centres and • within new and existing residential development.
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5.3.3 HEALTH CARE FACILITIES

Healthcare and medical facilities are provided by public, private and voluntary agencies within County Laois. The Health Service Executive (HSE) is the primary organisation responsible for the delivery of health care and personal social services to the people of the County. The primary role of Laois County Council with regard to health care is to ensure that there is an adequate policy framework in place which includes for the reservation of lands should additional services be required and that the health care facilities would be permitted subject to good planning practice. The Planning Authority will reserve sites within town and village boundaries for health care facilities in consultation with the HSE.

Health Care Policy Objectives	
HCPO 1	Co-operate with the Health Service Executive and other statutory and voluntary agencies in the provision of appropriate health care facilities covering the full spectrum of such care from hospitals to the provision of community based care facilities subject to proper planning considerations and the principles of sustainable development.
HCPO 2	Ensure that adequate lands and services are available for the improvement, establishment and expansion of health services and ensure that adequate services such as water supply or wastewater treatment are in place prior to development taking place.
HCPO 3	Encourage the integration of healthcare facilities within new and existing communities and to discourage proposals that would cause unnecessary isolation or other access difficulties, particularly for the disabled, the elderly and children.
HCPO 4	Encourage, support and facilitate the provision of a range of services for the aged population.
HCPO 5	Support the development and expansion of the Midlands Regional Hospital at Portlaoise in accordance with RPO 4.74 of the RSES.
HCPO 6	Have particular regard to public transport access in considering proposals for major hospital facilities or the re-location of major hospital facilities to a new location. This should include both public transport access from the catchment area of the hospital and, where the facility serves a specialist or national need, from outside of the catchment.
HCPO 7	To proactively encourage the development of public parkland at St. Fintan's Hospital Campus Portlaoise and to look at recreational infrastructure such cycle ways and pathways that connect St. Fintan's to main hospital, a hub.

Development Management Standard

DM HC 1	<p>CHANGE OF USE RESIDENTIAL TO HEALTHCARE FACILITY</p> <p>Consider change of use applications from residential to health care facilities / surgeries only where the privacy and amenity of adjacent occupiers can be preserved and the proposal does not have a detrimental effect on local amenity by way of an increase in traffic, car parking or noise.</p> <p>Conversion of part of a dwelling to a medical or dental surgery will normally be permitted where the dwelling remains as the main residence of the practitioner and where a need has been demonstrated.</p> <p>Conversion of the ground floor of a dwelling to a surgery with a separate apartment on the upper floor may be permitted where there are no other more suitable premises available.</p>
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5.3.4 EMERGENCY SERVICES

Fire services and civil defence are important emergency response and safety services provided by Laois County Council. The fire service also has a responsibility in relation to fire safety standards in the design of new and improved buildings, changes of use and also in relation to the fire safety aspects of the daily use of buildings which are accessed by the public. Under the Building Regulations, separate applications are sent to the Fire Service to obtain a Fire Safety Certificate and this is obtained prior to construction. There are eight fire stations at strategic locations throughout the County; Portlaoise (the headquarters of the network), Portarlinton, Abbeyleix, Rathdowney, Mountmellick, Stradbally, Durrow and Mountrath.

Emergency Services Policy Objectives	
EDPO 1	Continue to support the provision of a modern and effective fire service for the County through a programme for fire station development and improvement at existing and future stations.
EDPO 2	Facilitate the accommodation of fire service facilities in locations that allow ease of access and safe functioning with respect to the road network.
EDPO 3	Ensure new and refurbished developments are as self-sustaining as possible, endeavoring to avoid fossil fuel dependence.

5.3.5 CRIME PREVENTION

Informed, positive planning, particularly when co-ordinated with other measures, can make a significant contribution to tackling crime. Sustainable communities are communities which succeed economically, socially and environmentally, and respect the needs of future generations. They are well-designed places where people feel safe and secure; where crime and disorder, or the fear of crime, doesn't undermine quality of life or community cohesion. Designing out crime and designing in community safety should be central to the planning and delivery of new development.

Crime Prevention Policy Objectives	
CPPO 1	Support the provision of Garda liaison facilities within community facilities as resources allow.
CPPO 2	Co-operate with an Garda Síochána's Older Person Strategy to ensure contact and safety of elderly and rurally isolated citizens through the support of local CCTV, community alert/ neighbourhood watch schemes.

Crime Prevention Development Management Standard

DM CP 1	DESIGNING OUT CRIME The following principles of designing out crime must be considered for all developments: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access and movement: places with well-defined routes, spaces and entrances that provide for convenient movement without compromising security;• Structure: places that are structured so that different uses do not cause conflict;• Surveillance: places where all publicly accessible spaces are overlooked;• Ownership: places that promote a sense of ownership, respect, territorial responsibility and community;• Physical protection: places that include necessary, well-designed security features;• Activity: places where the level of human activity is appropriate to the location and creates a reduced risk of crime and a sense of safety at all times;• Management and maintenance: places that are designed with management and maintenance in mind, to discourage crime in the present and the future.
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5.3.6 ARTS AND CULTURAL FACILITIES

Our Public Libraries 2022, the national strategy for public libraries sets out the objective to consolidate the role of the library as the public face of local authorities. The strategy recognises that renewed investment in the development of library buildings, technology and other equipment is essential for libraries to deliver quality services.

The public library service of Laois County Council plays an increasingly important educational, community, information and outreach role in the county. Libraries such as Portlaoise, Portarlinton, Stradbally, Mountmellick, Abbeyleix, Mountrath and Durrow serve as key arts and culture outlets within the county. Works commenced in January 2020 on the construction of a new state of the art 1,800sqm public library in Portlaoise which has received funding of €3m from the Department of Rural and Community Development under the Libraries Capital Programme. Funding has also been received from the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund in respect of the development of a new Cultural Quarter in Portlaoise.

The County Laois Arts Development Plan 2014-2017 (check for update) sets out measures to encourage heightened awareness and interest in the arts and increase public participation by all sectors of the community including those previously not involved. The Arts Plan also includes objectives in relation to public art.

Arts and cultural facilities are wide ranging across the County and include - Dunamase Arts Centre in Portlaoise, Mountmellick and Attanagh museums, Laois Arthouse in Stradbally and outdoor music venues such as the internationally acclaimed Electric Picnic site in Stradbally Hall.

Arts and Cultural Facilities Policy Objectives	
ACPO 1	Continue to expand and improve the library service to meet the needs of the community, in line with the objectives and priorities of the Library Development Plan and subject to the availability of resources.
ACPO 2	Investigate the delivery of library services to rural villages using public private partnerships and electronic networking, subject to availability of resources.
ACPO 3	Develop links between existing library facilities for third level education and outreach facilities in relation to distance learning.
ACPO 4	Continue to recognise the importance of the arts in areas of personal development, community development, employment and tourism and to endeavour to create further opportunities in each of these areas.
ACPO 5	Ensure that all arts and cultural facilities in the ownership and management of the Council are accessible to the wider community and to promote the role of these centres as focal points for the community.
ACPO 6	Continue the physical enhancement programme of arts spaces in libraries countywide, including visual art galleries, performance and workshop facilities, subject to availability of resources.
ACPO 7	Promote the provision of public art, including temporary art and sculpture, through such mechanisms as the government supported Percent for Art Scheme and the development management process.
ACPO 8	Encourage and support the creation and display of works of art in public areas, including appropriate locations within the streetscape, provided no unacceptable environmental, amenity; traffic or other problems are created.

5.3.7 BURIAL GROUNDS

The individual Settlement Plans and Local Area Plans will examine the adequacy of the existing graveyards and burial grounds and will reserve lands within each development centre for burial facilities. In addition to the actual provision of burial grounds, another important planning issue is to recognise and protect the heritage value of the existing cemeteries, often located in the grounds of old churches. Cemeteries had been provided on a parish basis in Ireland and very frequently were in the vicinity of and associated with the ruins of churches that had existed in previous centuries.

Burial Grounds Policy Objectives

BGPO 1	Facilitate the provision of new burial grounds and the extension of existing cemeteries as appropriate to cater for the needs of a multi-cultural County and the mobility and accessibility requirements of all people. e Ensure the protection of groundwater dependent Natura 2000 sites which rely on the continued supply of groundwater resources to secure the key environmental conditions that support the integrity of the site and through protection of groundwater standards by the Water Framework Directive.
BGPO 2	Explore the use of environmentally sound burial site options such as Columbarium Walls, in appropriate locations in the county.
BGPO 3	Protect, preserve, enhance, conserve and maintain the cultural heritage of archaeological/historic graveyards and historic burial grounds(including those identified in the RMP), and continue to encourage and promote local involvement and community stewardship in the care, maintenance, rehabilitation, management and conservation of these graveyards in accordance with legislation and best conservation and heritage and principles.
BGPO 4	Facilitate the provision of pet crematoriums at appropriate locations subject to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

5.4 NATURAL AND RECREATIONAL AMENITIES

Recreation, leisure and sport are important components of a good quality of life and have major land use implications. Adequate and accessible provision of open space, sport and recreational facilities including swimming pools, Playgrounds and public parks is an important consideration in assessing the quality of life in a town or area. It is likely to become more important as densities in central areas increase and pressure from competing land uses becomes more intense.

It is also recognised that the countryside of County Laois provides an important resource in outdoor recreational facilities not only for its own population but also for those visiting the County particularly in terms of provision of a range of forest tracks such as Togher Portlaoise, Oughval Stradbally, Cullenagh Ballyroan, Fossey Timahoe, Dunmore Durrow and Grantstown Lake Ballacolla and Blueways and Greenways such as Grand Canal Walk Vicarstown.

The Council recognises the significance of natural amenities as a major resource for visitors and local people and attracting inward investment from tourism and increasing the marketability of Laois as a location for industry, business and commercial activity. This chapter should be read in conjunction with Chapter 10 Infrastructure and Chapter 11 on Biodiversity and Natural Heritage in relation to walking and cycling infrastructure.

5.4.1 SPORTS AND RECREATION PROVISION

Laois Sports Partnership was established in 2001 as part of the Irish Sports Council now Sport Ireland, initiative aimed at improving the delivery of sport at a local level. The Local Sports Partnership (LSP) initiative aims to increase participation in sport and optimise the use of local resources. Many of the sports facilities within the County are in private ownership. Laois County Council will continue, where appropriate, to facilitate the provision of further facilities to which public access will be available, where possible.

The Council will have regard to the Departments of Health and Children & Youth Affairs' policy document, "*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*" a National Policy Framework for children and young people 2014 – 2020. It is recognized that a multi-agency approach is required to deliver the needs of the young people of the County. Such needs include skate parks, youth cafes; hang out areas where young people can socialize with one another. The Council will be guided by this multi-agency Plan in the development of local play policies over the lifetime of the Plan.

Natural and Recreational Amenities Policy Objectives	
NRPO 1	Support local sports groups and community groups in the development, improvement and expansion of facilities for sporting and recreational needs of all sectors and ages through the reservation of suitable land and the provision of funding where available and appropriate.
NRPO 2	Recognize the role played by natural amenities as a major resource for visitors and local people and support, protect and promote public access to mountains, Natura 2000 sites, nature reserves rivers, lakes and other natural amenities that have been traditionally used for outdoor recreation and to the countryside generally.
NRPO 3	Work in co-operation with Laois Sports Partnership in exploring the potential for clustering facilities to provide a regional sports centre in a strategic location and develop County Laois as an Outdoor Activity Hub.
NRPO 4	Prepare an Open Space Plan for the County having regard to the town parks, riverside walks and other amenity spaces and resources and ensure that any plan or project associated with open space planning or tourism is subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening in compliance with the Habitats Directive, and subsequent assessment as required.
NRPO 5	Connect open spaces in such a way so as to provide links to, or consolidation of, areas of public open space within a settlement. Ensure such links are accessible for all users.
NRPO 6	Preserve the major natural amenities of the County (i.e. Slieve Bloom Mountains and River Valleys) and to provide parks and open spaces in association with them along with facilitating walking and cycling routes linking the mountains, river valleys and major parks.

Natural and Recreational Amenities Policy Objectives

NRPO 7	<p>Investigate the feasibility of the following specific recreation and leisure projects subject to the Habitats and Birds Directives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the ongoing development of an athletic track, including provision of dressing rooms and tartan resurface in Portlaoise; • Investigate and facilitate where appropriate the provision of strategic greenways throughout the county; • Facilitate where appropriate the provision of additional handball facilities throughout the county.
NRPO 8	<p>Encourage community gardening, allotments and other use of open space to facilitate lower carbon living education and practice</p>
NRPO 9	<p>Encourage and facilitate the development of green infrastructure that recognises the synergies that can be achieved with regard to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of open space amenities; • Sustainable management of water; • Protection and management of biodiversity; • Protection of cultural heritage; • Protection of protected landscape sensitivities
NRPO 10	<p>Identify and seek to implement a strategic, coherent and high-quality cycle and walking network across the County that is integrated with public transport and interconnected with cultural, recreational, retail, educational and employment destinations and attractions.</p>
NRPO 11	<p>Facilitate the development of the Derryounce Experience Lakes and Trails through the development of an historical trail through Derryounce Bog and a Heritage Museum documenting the history of the bog, turf production in the area and the former location of the town's Power Station.</p>
NRPO 12	<p>Facilitate development of a green corridor connecting Derryounce Lakes and Trails, the River Barrow and The Peoples Park, Portarlinton and on to Mount Lucas in Co Offaly.</p>
NRPO 13	<p>Facilitate the development of greenways / blueways along the main waterways through the county – Grand Canal, River Barrow and River Nore and their tributaries subject to the Habitats and Birds Directives and the proper planning and development of the areas.</p>
NRPO 14	<p>Support the development of the following leisure facilities throughout the County:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portlaoise Leisure Centre • Portarlinton Leisure Centre • National natural playground in Emo

Natural and Recreational Amenities Policy Objectives	
NRPO 15	Support the development of playgrounds and upgrade existing park infrastructure where necessary. Ensure these facilities are inclusive and encourage various kinds of physical activity of all ages.
NRPO 16	Devise and adopt, in co-operation with other relevant agencies, a “Play and Recreational Plan for County Laois” setting out strategy for the provision, resourcing and implementation of improved social and play opportunities for children and the youth of the County.
NRPO 17	Improve the provision of public playgrounds to allow for recreational areas including work out stations and appropriate seating for the elderly and the youth in appropriate locations across the county with particular emphasis on those areas with greatest need.
NRPO 18	Given the central location of Portlaoise, it is policy of the Council to acknowledge and support the role that sporting venues in the Key Town of Portlaoise play at a regional level in accommodating sporting events for the region.
NRPO 19	Develop of a Sports Plan for County Laois as part of National Strategy in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.

Development Management Standards on Natural and Recreation Amenities

DM NR 1	<p>SPECIALISED SPORTING FACILITIES</p> <p>Proposals for sports facilities involving the use of motor vehicles, aircraft or firearms or other noise generating sports will be considered with the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There will be no unacceptable disturbance to local residents. There will be no unacceptable disturbance to farm livestock and wildlife; • There will be no conflict with the enjoyment of areas used for informal recreation; • The ambient noise level in the area of the proposed development is already high and the noise likely to be produced by the proposed activity will not be pre-dominant; • In certain cases, the Council may only consider it appropriate to grant a temporary permission so as to allow the impact of noise levels and other forms of disturbance and nuisance to be more fully assessed; • The development will not have an unacceptable impact on the visual or natural amenity of the area especially with Natura 2000 sites.
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<p>DM NR 2</p>	<p>DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATED WITH WATER SPORTS</p> <p>The Council will normally only permit proposals for development associated with water sports adjacent to inland lakes and waterways where all the following criteria are met:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The proposed facilities are compatible with any existing use of water, including non-recreational uses; 2. It will not result in damage to sites of nature conservation importance or features of archaeological and built heritage; 3. The development can be satisfactorily integrated into the landscape or townscape surroundings; 4. The development will not have an unacceptable impact on the visual amenity especially with Natura 2000 sites; and 5. The development will not result in the over intensification of use leading to pollution, excessive noise and nuisance.
<p>DM NR 3</p>	<p>FLOODLIGHTING OF RECREATIONAL FACILITIES AND PUBLIC OPEN SPACE</p> <p>In assessing planning applications for the floodlighting of sports pitches, tourist attractions or other high-order structures regard will be taken of considerations such as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The horizontal and vertical luminance levels (lux levels) of the fixtures; 2) details of when the lighting are to be used; 3) Floodlights are to have fully-shielded light fixtures with cowl accessories to ensure that upward light emittance is low. <p>Street lighting schemes to residential areas and public open spaces should be modest in scale, with fixture designs that limit upward or horizontal light, in order to create safe environments, while limiting glare and enhancing efficiency.</p>

CHAPTER 6 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Aim: *To Promote And Develop Laois' Economy And Create A Viable And Favourable Low Carbon Economic Environment For Business And Enterprise To Thrive Both In Urban And Rural Areas Whilst Delivering Sustainable Jobs, Employment Opportunity Both Within The County And Beyond*

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the economic development of Laois including developing employment opportunities, inward investment, local entrepreneurship and town/village centre management, retail. A sound local economy is fundamental to fostering sustainable communities and a good quality of life.

This Plan seeks to create the conditions to support the sustainable economic development of County Laois during the Plan period 2021 – 2027 in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders. In addition to the economic benefits associated with the sector, Laois County Council is committed to protecting, promoting and enhancing the natural resources of the County making it a nicer place to live and visit.

Similar to the wider regional and national picture, the local economy has undergone rapid changes of fortune over the last ten years and in particular the instability caused by COVID 19 pandemic. There has been a significant shift in the number of people working from home and a greater emphasis is now placed on facilitating remote working facilities such as co-working hubs in particular in more rural areas.

The central location of Laois is strategically important, lying between the southern region and Dublin. Its central location in Ireland can be leveraged to enable significant strategic investment to a greater extent than at present, supported by a sustainable pattern of population growth, with a focus on strategic national employment and infrastructure development, quality of life and a strengthening of the urban cores of the county towns and other principal settlements.

6.2 POLICY CONTEXT

This section is prepared in the context of the following documents:

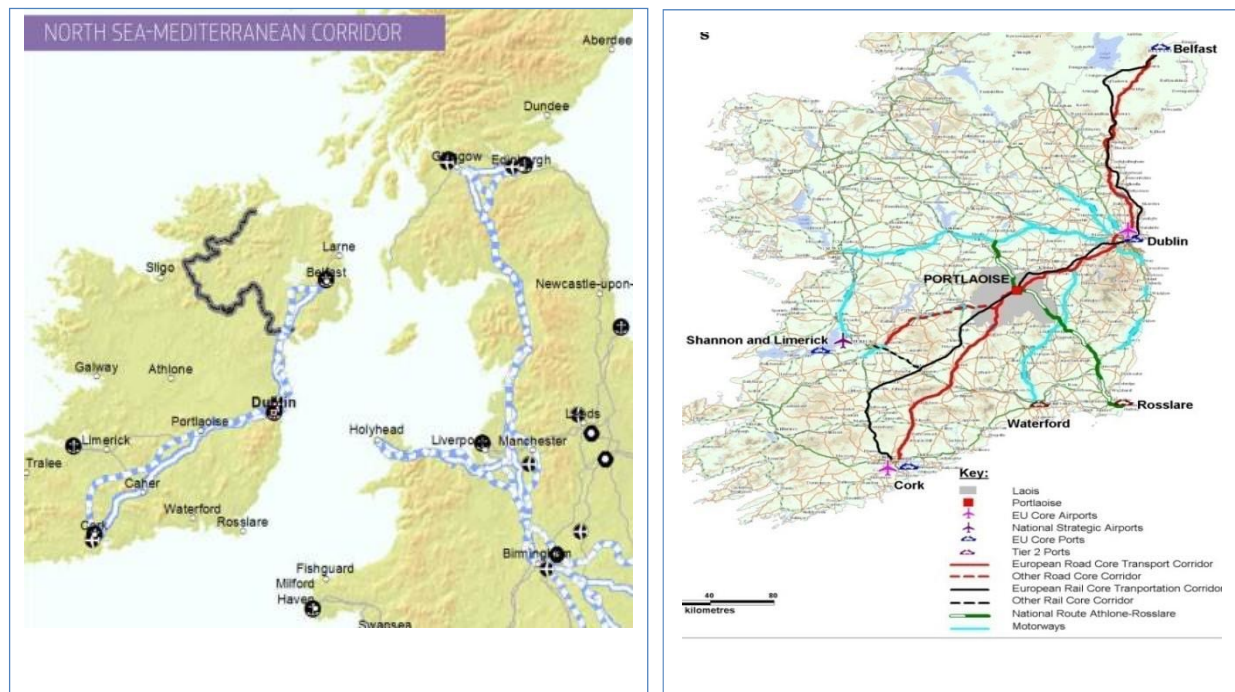
- Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework (2018)
- National Development Plan 2018-2027
- Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region(2019)
- Food Wise 2025: A 10 Year Vision for the Irish Agri-Food Industry (2015)
- Laois Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021
- Enterprise 2025 Renewed (2018)
- Realising Our Rural Potential (2017)
- Midlands Regional Enterprise Action Plan 2019-2020
- National Policy Statement on the Bio-economy (2018)
- National Mitigation Plan (2017)
- Climate Action Plan 2019

- National Broadband Plan (2012)
- Laois Digital Strategy (awaited)
- National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022
- Just Transition Progress Report 2020
- Powering the Regions, Enterprise Ireland Regional Plan Report, 2019
- Enterprise 2025 Renewed
- Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan

The RSES notes Dublin as the main economic driver of the region, however the region also contains an extensive network of large economically active towns which provide key employment functions within the urban and hinterland area.

There has been consistent improvement in employment levels in Laois since mid-2013. Relative to the national average, Laois has a young population and high labour-force participation rates. Similar to the wider Midlands and national trends, Laois' services sector continues to grow its share of the local economy in employment and productivity terms.

Figure 6.1: Portlaoise and its connectivity in the National and European Context



Portlaoise and the EU Trans-European Network

Portlaoise and National Transport Infrastructure

The modern economy is characterised by rapid changes with new and sometimes unexpected areas of commercial opportunities emerging, while some traditional enterprises lose their competitive advantage. It is anticipated that further employment growth in Laois will be strongly associated with private sector enterprises in the services sector. Zoned brownfield and greenfield lands provide opportunities for a range of uses including office-based uses.

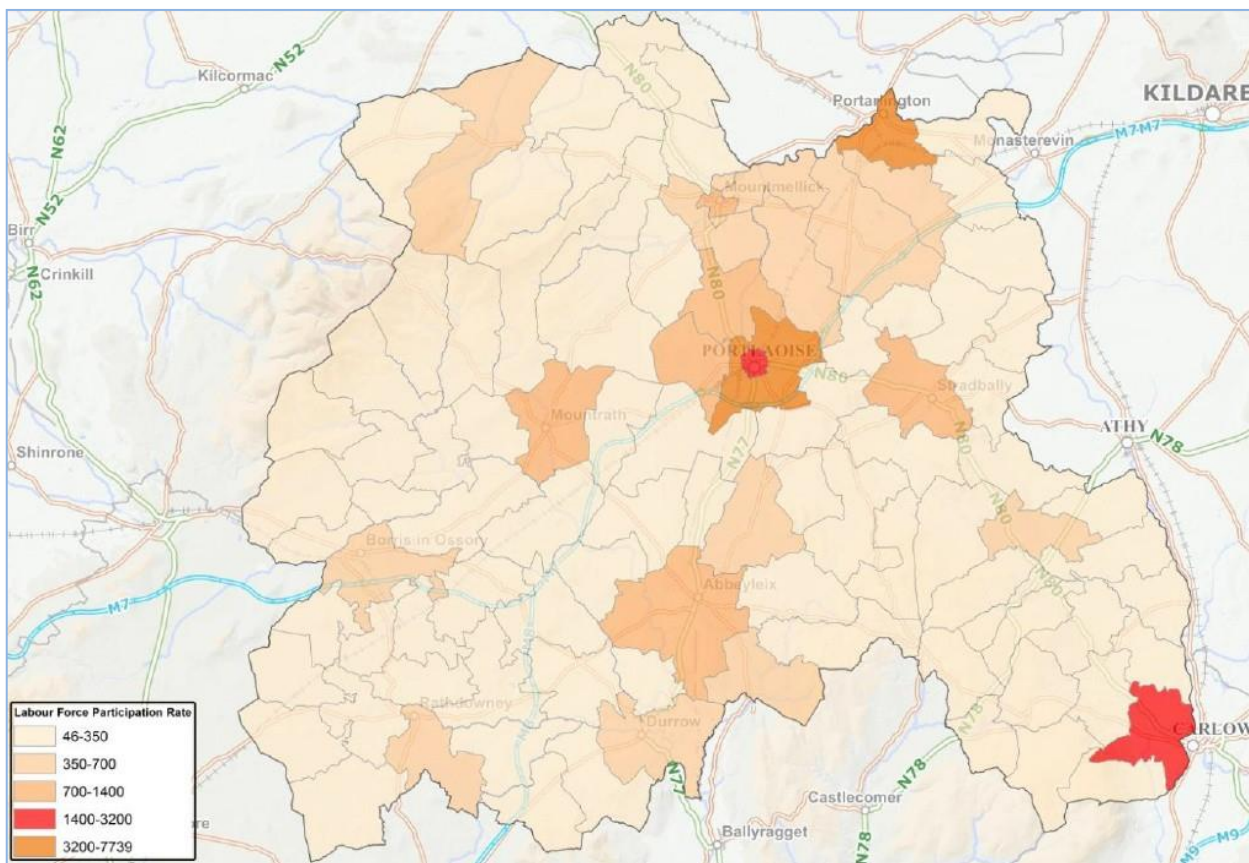
6.3 ECONOMIC PROFILE OF LAOIS

6.3.1 LABOUR FORCE

According to Census 2016, the total labour force residing in Laois was 39,609 which is equivalent to 62% (Labour Force Participation Rate) of the total population of the County. Between 2011 and 2016 the labour force in Laois increased by an additional 5.34% (+3,239). This rate of increase was marginally below the state average of 3.2%.

The distribution of the labour force in Co. Laois is varied with the highest rates tending to be in close proximity to urban settlements across the county. As presented in Figure 6.2 the highest rates were recorded in Portlaoise and Portlaoise Rural.

Figure 6.2: Distribution of Labour Force in Laois



Aside from these areas the highest rate was recorded in the ED of Graigue Rural; 67% (2,304 persons) of the total population within the ED aged 15 and over is part of the labour force. The following EDs also recorded a high labour force participation rate of the total population of the ED Mountmellick Urban 58% (1,367 persons), Borris 71% (822 persons), Clondarrig 71% (921 persons), Stradbally 56% (807 persons), Mountrath 60% (1,099 persons) and Abbeyleix 56% (1,232 persons).

According to the 2016 Census, the total labour force 'At Work' residing in Laois is 33,541 persons and equates to 84.6% of the total labour force within the county. The rate is lower than the state (87.1%) and neighbouring county Kildare (88.6%) yet higher than Offaly (84%).

Aside from Portlaoise and Portarlington, the highest number of individuals recorded 'At Work' was within the ED of Graigue Rural; 57% (3,455 persons) of the total population aged 15 years and over were recorded as been 'At Work'. High concentrations were recorded in the following EDs Mountmellick Urban 44% (1,028 persons), Clondarrig 60% (780 persons), Mountrath 47% (855 persons) and Abbeyleix 49% (1,072 persons).

With over 18,505 jobs in the County and a Jobs: Workforce ratio of 0.56 recorded in Census 2016, the economic benefits associated with the strategic location of the County and good transport connectivity, and in particular the strength of the employment base, are apparent.

At a settlement level, Portlaoise is the primary centre of employment in the County, with almost 8410 jobs in 2016. The Job: Workforce ratio in the town of Portlaoise was 0.99 in 2016, highlighting the close alignment between population and employment generation. Portarlington on the other hand has a lower job workforce ratio 0.435 which implies that more people are leaving the town for places like Kildare, Dublin, Tullamore and Portlaoise for employment.

Traditionally factories like Avon and Odlums and the ESB power plant would have created jobs for the resident population. However in recent years investment in both the Enterprise Centre and Business Park has not nearing full capacity and planning permission has been granted for extensions to commercial businesses and new enterprises such as the Garden Shop.

Table 6.1: Resident workers, jobs, and jobs ratio in Laois by settlement in 2016

Settlement Name	Population 2016	Resident Works	Total Jobs	Jobs : Resident Workers
Co Laois	84,697	33,244	18,505	0.557
Abbeyleix	1,770	645	501	0.777
Mountmellick	4,777	1,571	915	0.582
Mountrath	1,774	586	367	0.626
Portarlington	8,368	3,103	1,349	0.435
Portlaoise	22,050	8,438	8,410	0.997

Source: Appendix 2 NPF

6.3.2 UNEMPLOYMENT

According to the 2016 Census, the total labour force 'Unemployed' residing in Laois is 5,452 persons and equates to 13.8% of the total labour force within the county. The rate recorded for Laois is higher than the state (12.9%) and neighbouring county Kildare (11.4%) yet lower than Offaly (14.4%) and Carlow (17.0%). Highest rates tend to be strong in and around urban settlements, particularly to the north east of the county.

6.3.4 COMMUTING

The 2016 Census reported 35,795 County Laois residents commute to either work (33,245) or third-level study (2550) on a daily basis. Excluding mobile workers, those who work from or at home and those whose place of work, school or college could not be coded, a total of 25,959 County Laois residents regularly commute either to work (91%) or to third-level study (9%).

Of those commuting to work, 52% commute to a location within County Laois and 48% leave the County. Dublin (13%) is the most popular destination outside of County Laois, with nearly half of those travelling to Dublin City. Commuters to Kildare (13%) and Carlow (7%) are the next popular destinations.

The majority of County Laois commuters drive, accounting for 73% of those who commute to work and 30% of those commuting to third-level study. The next most popular modes of travel for workers is walking (6%) , and for third level students on foot (23%) and bus (17%) were the next most popular.

6.3.3 EMPLOYMENT SECTORS

In a similar fashion to the state profile, the most dominant industries of Laois workers is within the 'Professional Services' 23% (7,717 persons) and 'Commerce and Trade' 22% (7,307 persons). Industrial sectors such as Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing 7% (2,431 persons), Building and Construction 6% (1,976 persons) and Public Administration 8% (2,548 persons) are all higher than the equivalent state averages. According to the 2016 Census the number of Laois workers employed in Manufacturing Industries 10% (3,423 persons) and Transport Communications 7% (2,286 persons) is below the state averages.

6.3.5 EDUCATION

In contrast to national results from Census 2016, Laois has a higher than average level of attainment in the lowest category of No Formal/Primary Education (13.1%, 6,995 persons). Laois County also scores higher than the national average for other lower tiers of education attainment; Lower Secondary (16.2%, 8,651 persons), Upper Secondary (21%, 11,173 persons) and Technical/Apprenticeship/Certificate (16.5%, 8,774 persons). Laois County attains a relatively young population; possible justification for the higher than average education attainment in the lower tiers.

Third level education rates consist of 11.6% (6,195 persons) attaining Lower Third Level education (higher certificate or ordinary bachelor degree) and 14.6% (7,778 persons) attaining Higher Third Level education (honours degree, postgraduate or PhD). Of the total population in Laois County aged 15 years and over 26.2% (13,973 persons) attains third level education, significantly lower than the state average of 33.4%, the 8th lowest in the state.

6.3.6 SUMMARY

With employment levels or total labour force at work in Laois at 84.6%, (stats from CSO – census 2016) and the County's enterprise base significantly after diversifying and growing since the last Census with the development of a large Glanbia Cheese Manufacturing plant at Junction 17, Portlaoise together with other employment generators such as Greenfield Global, Alpha drives and Aubren to name but a few also locating here.

The resultant impact of both Brexit and the Covid Pandemic has yet to be measured in terms of job losses throughout the county, however the creation and promotion of remote working hubs has helped sustain a working population within the county.

Given most of the working population in Co Laois are involved in the following areas, it professional services and commerce and trade , Manufacturing and the skills being sought by third level students recorded in the 2016 Census relate to:

1. Social sciences , business and law
2. Engineering , manufacturing and construction
3. Health and welfare

FIELD OF STUDY

Figure 14 presents the field of study of those aged 15 years and over for Laois County as recorded by the 2016 Census.

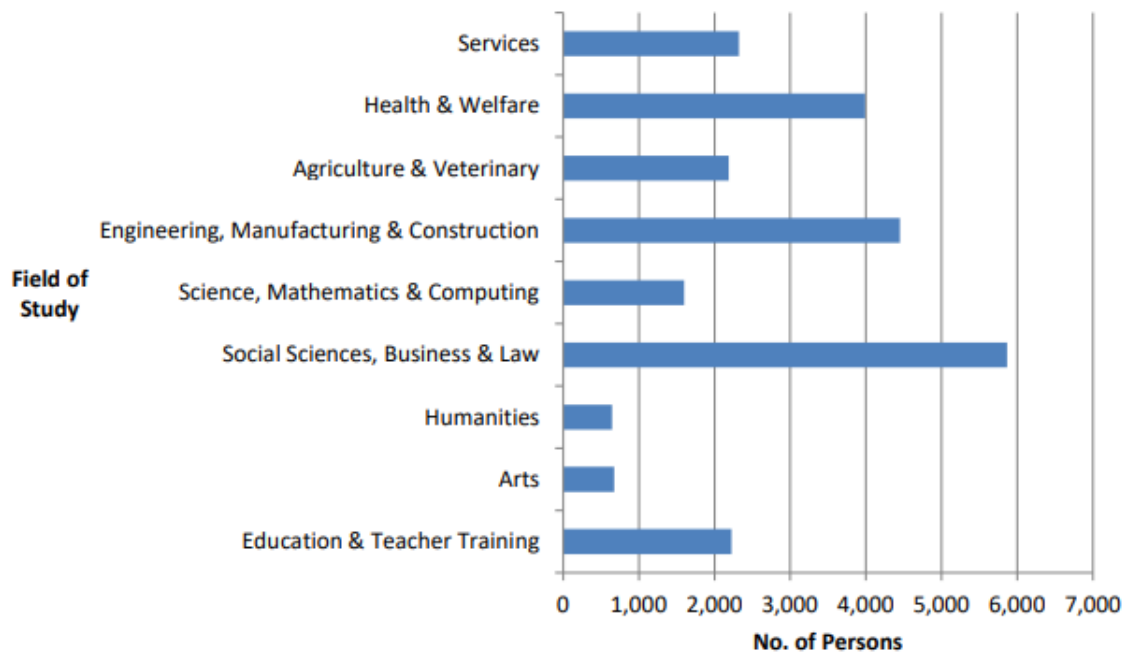


Figure 14: Population Aged 15 Years and Over by Field of Study
Source: Theme 10, Census 2016, CSO

The economic strategy has been structured so as to capitalise on the skill base within the county but also to advance and support new areas should they arise.

With the imminent review of the LECP process for the County, a new Census and some post Brexit / Covid Pandemic studies, more definite policy frameworks and further enhanced actions can be developed.

6.4 MANUFACTURING AND SERVICES ENTERPRISES (NATIONALLY INTERNATIONALLY TRADED)

Employment in manufacturing in Laois is low relative to the Midlands Region and the state average. However, it remains locally significant despite a long-standing international trend of declining employment levels in manufacturing. A very small number of Laois-based service and manufacturing jobs are agency-supported (IDA, Enterprise Ireland).

Laois has a limited share of high-value-added/high-technology manufacturing and service provision. However, a small cluster of clean-technology firms operate in the county including Enva Ireland and LSM Engineering based in Portlaoise.

Clean technology is an umbrella term for industries concerned with resource, material or energy efficiency as well as sustainable waste and water management, energy generation/storage and mobility. There may be opportunities to further develop this sector in revenue terms in Laois, having regard to its transport connectivity to domestic and international markets, infrastructural capacity (water, gas, and electricity), labour pool and land availability.

Some of Laois' manufacturing activities add value to local produce, for example the Dawn Meats factory in Rathdowney, Sheeran's timber manufacturing plant in Mountrath, Laois Sawmills in Portlaoise and Glanbia's Oats Mill in Portlaoise all utilise locally-produced commodities. The manufacturing of concrete and stone products, using locally-quarried aggregate and stone, is a feature of the manufacturing sector in Laois. Adding value to locally-produced commodities within the county is a way of increasing the value, sustainability and importance of the commodity sector to the Laois economy. Similarly, but on a smaller scale, the manufacture of niche or specialist food products using local agricultural produce provides for sustainable rural development.

Modest growth in employment in the construction sector is anticipated as the economy improves and following the employment collapse in this sector between 2006 and 2011.

National and regional policy supports the development of a landbank outside Portlaoise known as Togher for a range of service enterprises including transport, logistics and conferencing. Though policy support has been in place for several years, the envisaged development never materialised. Economic recovery may bring about fresh interest in taking advantage of Portlaoise transport connectivity and the enabling policy support.

The economic strategy Vision is *“To Promote And Develop Laois' Economy And Create A Viable And Favourable Economic Environment For Business And Enterprise To Thrive Both In Urban And Rural Areas Whilst Delivering Sustainable Jobs, Employment Opportunity Both Within The County And Beyond”*. This will be achieved by aligning with the following principles as identified in the RSES in conjunction with developing areas such as Retail / Town centre development, Tourism and the rural economy of Laois.

Smart Specialisation

Laois County Council is committed to working in collaboration with local partners and regional partners to boost growth and jobs within the county and Midland region. An example of this within the county is the development of the Cube and the innovative measures being taken to support climate action supported by the REDF .

Clustering

The Local Authority is supportive of cross industry linkage and the development of clusters across the region and will continue to work with stakeholders to identify and expand enterprise so as to benefit from mutual R&D, strengths and opportunities. Policy objectives within the Plan support such identification and collaboration and this will be further addressed in the LECF.

Placemaking

A number of policy objectives within the Plan and Local Area Plans identify action supported by policy objectives to invest in the county, its town and villages , improve the quality of life of the citizens of the county and promote better connectivity and active travel

Orderly Growth

Zoned lands have been aligned to the Core Strategy which correlates with national and regional policy objectives and is further expended in each of the settlements plans for the County.

6.5 ENTREPRENEURSHIP

A drop of 20% in the number of private enterprises headquartered in Laois occurred between 2008 and 2012, as well as a 40% reduction in employment in these enterprises (Business Demography 2012). Income levels of self-employed workers in Laois declined by 35% compared to a decline of 12% in employee incomes between 2008 and 2012 (County and Regional Incomes 2012). These figures suggest a strong focus on supporting innovation and entrepreneurship is needed in Laois. Around 80% of businesses operating in Laois are micro in scale (Data Ireland 2012).

Developing capacity in innovation and entrepreneurship is therefore an important objective for LEO Laois, Laois Partnership Company, Carlow IT as well as Portlaoise and Portarlington Enterprise Centre.

6.6 INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL ZONING

Laois County Council is proposing industrial and commercial land-use zonings in the Plan. The Council is mindful of the need to ensure that economic development and employment opportunities within the county are maximized so as to cater for the dramatic increase in population that has occurred over the past two decades in particular. The type and quantum of such zonings are as follows and are listed in order of size:

Table 6.2: Enterprise and Employment, General Business and Industrial Vacant Sites

Zone Type	Total Hectares	Area Ha
Enterprise and Employment	212.28	524.5
General Business	50.52	124.77
Industrial	107.33	265.2
Retail Warehousing	0.85	2.11
Total	370.98	916.58

In addition other zonings which are more generic in name allow for a certain level of economic development. For example the land use light industry is considered as “open for consideration” [without invoking a material contravention procedure] in Town and Village Centre zonings.

The Council is also mindful of the economic development opportunities presented as a result of recent large scale road and rail infrastructure projects throughout the county such as the M7 and M8 Motorway and various rail upgrades.

As expected the bulk of the industrial and associated zonings are located in accordance with the settlement strategy which in turn adheres to advice from the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy RSES as to the optimum siting of population growth and employment generation. Specifically in Portlaoise the following table indicates how much of the land zoned for economic purposes is available at this point in time.

Table 6.3: Portlaoise Zoning 2021-2027

Zone Type	Total Hectares	Area Ha
Enterprise and Employment	178.6	441.29
General Business	65.95	163
Industrial & Warehousing	36.91	91.22
Mixed Use	7.13	17.64

Moreover, the Council has allocated economic development and employment generating land use zonings in a number of smaller settlements that benefit from being in close proximity to the improved road and rail transport network. These locations include Borris-in-Ossory, Ballacolla, Ballybrittas and Rathdowney. The aforementioned strategic job creation sites are indicated in Map 6.1.

6.7 REMOTE WORKING / DIGITAL HUBS

'Making Remote Work' - Ireland's National Remote Work Strategy was published by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment on the 15th January 2021.

The Strategy's objective is to ensure that remote working is a permanent feature in the Irish workplace in a way that maximises economic, social and environmental benefits.

This strategy is built on 3 pillars

1. Create a conducive Environment
2. Develop and leverage Remote work infrastructure
3. Build a remote working policy and guidance framework

The Midlands Network of Co-working Facilities (MNCF), which offer a landing space option and a base for those wishing to work remotely and 'beat the commute'.

The Laois Hubs Collective, made up of six remote working centres, has been launched to highlight the facilities available to accommodate a wide range of employers, workers and start-ups.

There are six co-working hubs in the Laois Hubs Collective and they are based in Mountmellick (Webmill), Portlaoise (Portlaoise Enterprise Centre & Vision 85), Rathdowney (Brand Central Digital Hub – formerly Erkina), Mountrath (Bloom HQ) and Portarlinton (Portarlinton Enterprise Centre Innovation Hub).

6.8 HOME BASED ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

County Laois aims to provide enough jobs to support its population. 42% of Laois workers with a fixed place of work commute out of the County for work with Dublin (30%), Kildare (27%), Carlow (15%), Offaly (10%) and Kilkenny (7%) the most popular destinations (2011). Just 20% of Laois-based jobs are performed by inbound commuters.

The net outbound commuting of Laois residents to all surrounding counties (excluding Offaly) for employment indicates the need for the creation of additional jobs in the county in the interests of a sustainable economy, smarter travel and a good quality of life.

Many electoral divisions in east Laois experience out-of-county commuting in the order of 60%. High commuting patterns in eastern parts of the county correlate with higher rates of third-level education suggesting that commuters possess high-end skillsets and an employment profile distinct from in-county workers.

The creation of additional higher-skilled employment in the county may provide opportunities for Laois residents to work locally with economic as well as social and environmental benefits accruing as a result. For example, Portarlinton has a high % of residents with third-level education and a high % of commuters. Though it has over twice the population of Mountmellick, a similar numbers of jobs are based in Portarlinton as Mountmellick. Harnessing the full potential of Laois' rich pool of skills and talent is important to its future economic development.

6.9 CLIMATE ACTION AND JOBS

In response to the Low Carbon Transition for Portlaoise and generally for the County, Laois County Council has been funded under the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) to develop an Innovation and Collaboration space to create communities of practice will spearhead future Low Carbon initiatives on this island.

The project pivots around a set of recently published Government plans and strategic directions namely:

- Project Ireland 2040
- Climate Action Plan to tackle Climate breakdown
- Future Jobs Ireland 2019
- Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan 2020

The CUBE at Portlaoise, a Low Carbon Centre of Excellence, will act as a focal point for the development of new business and economic activity and that in turn will support and assist a transition to a low carbon economy. This is a new concept in business development not alone for the Portlaoise area but also in a national and international context and in that regard it is a strategic change project in every respect.

Companies located in the Cube and affiliated to the Cube will avail of or provide services through the Cube. These services will be available to the wider region and nationally. The Cube will specialise in bespoke professional services and training programmes tailored to align with the requirements of disparate sectors for which there is currently minimal advice or service available.

The project will deliver jobs and enterprise in its own right at the CUBE and at existing outreach landing points in Portlaoise, Portarlington, Mountrath and Mountmellick. It will also have a profound transitional impact on job creation in all key Markets including Agribusiness, Renewable Energy, Forestry, Food Production, Transport, Construction, Manufacturing, Retail, Business Services, Education and Urban Design and Planning.

It is anticipated that approximately 260 jobs will be created both within the Cube and as a consequence of the impact of the Cube services.

By creating links between existing and emerging industries and education the project can ensure Ireland has the technical knowledge and the skills necessary to excel in the changing marketplace. The Cube will provide services on the low carbon agenda for the region through a number of initiatives in partnership with regional enterprise and educational and training experts.

The Cube will dedicate space for the incubation of Low Carbon focused start-ups and SME's and will actively market the building, utilising the unique selling point of an exemplar Low Carbon Facility, with a focus on providing services with a Low Carbon agenda. This will be critical to attracting fledgling companies who fundamentally require key advice on Low Carbon specifics vital to their operations and future development.

6.10 RURAL BUSINESS

A key objective of the NPF is to enable all parts of the Country – both urban and rural – to achieve their full potential. The RSES reflects this core objective and aims to strengthen the fabric of rural Ireland, supporting rural towns and communities as well as the open countryside, improving connectivity, and supporting job creation, particularly in a more diverse range of sectors.

The rejuvenation of rural towns and villages requires that appropriate job creation can be supported in rural areas. Traditional sectors such as agriculture, tourism, extractive industries and forestry are complemented by diversification in sectors such as food, renewable energy and opportunities provided from improved digital connectivity.

The agri-food sector plays a significant role in Ireland's rural economy and this sector is supported through the implementation of Food Wise 2025. The forestry Sector is another significant contributor to the economy as is tourism and the development of greenways, blueways and peatways to provide an alternative visitor experience. Energy production, including renewable energy in the form of wind, solar and biomass have to date largely been provided in rural areas and the location of future renewable energy production is likely to be met in rural areas. See Section 9.6 of Chapter 9 on Rural Laois for specific policy objectives in relation to rural enterprise.

6.11 ECONOMIC STRATEGY FOR COUNTY LAOIS

The economic strategy for Co Laois aligns with the LECP for County Laois which aims to develop the following specific goals as they relate to economic development for the following period 2016-2021

- Goal 1: Market Laois to foster inward investment**
Goal 2: Diversify and strengthen a sustainable County Economy
Goal 3: Support innovation and entrepreneurship.

Working together with stakeholders such as the IDA, Enterprise Ireland, Laois LEO, Laois Partnership, Laois Chamber of Commerce has already resulted in additional jobs within the county and promoted the county on an national and international level. Local entrepreneurs and local food producers have also had the benefit of exposure on many platforms.

The primary place for job creation will be in the Key town of Portlaoise and also in the key town of Graiguecullen/ Carlow where job creation and investment opportunities will be developed in collaboration with the Carlow County Council.

The Key Town of Portlaoise has been identified as an FAU and key growth enabler within the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), however it is also important to note the large towns of Portarlington, Mountrath, Abbeyleix and Mountmellick and Key Town of Graiguecullen provide an important employment function in their own right and are suitable for economic development opportunities.

Portlaoise has a strong economic base spread across various sectors including global business, ICT, agri-business. The J17 National Enterprise Park is a 121ha site located to the southwest of Portlaoise town centre bound by the M7 motorway and includes an existing IDA Park.

A masterplan has been prepared for the area and has significant potential for the expansion of Portlaoise's economic base and as an identified in Table 6.5. Since 2017, two new industrial developments have established within the area – Glanbia Cheese EU (food manufacturing/processing plant) and Greenfield Global (ethanol and solvents Processing plant) with other sites going through the planning process.

Portlaoise has also undergone significant environmental improvements under the delivery of Portlaoise Regeneration and Development Demonstration Project to become Ireland's first Low Carbon Town. In this regard there is significant scope to develop Portlaoise and employment opportunities and as a centre of excellence for climate change.

The creation of sufficient **employment opportunities** in Portarlington is fundamental to build a sustainable community and reduce the rate of outward commuting. Portarlington's unique location on the regional road network, intersection of the national train line and proximity to the Greater Dublin Area, in conjunction with the zoning and servicing of cost effective land and good quality high speed broadband is of major benefit to attracting economic development to the town.

This plan places a firm emphasis on maintaining and expanding existing businesses such as Odlums, Jamestown, Camsaw, Polar Ice etc., small businesses, entrepreneurial development and tourism, rather than a return to reliance on construction and industry as the drivers of the local economy. Additionally, building strong communities, improving the physical environments namely the town centre and developing or marketing a strong identity for the town can do much to attract new businesses and investment. In this respect, the Council will support local enterprise and employment generating opportunities, facilitate the up skilling and training of the labour force and the provision of key hard and soft infrastructure. Opportunity sites in Portarlington have been identified for the purposes of job creation within this plan period.

Such measures aim to create an attractive base for employers and more self-sustaining development for the population, while providing an alternative to commuting to the GDA for employment.

6.12 STRATEGIC EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVES

The following are key strategic employment initiatives that will drive economic activity within the County during the plan period:

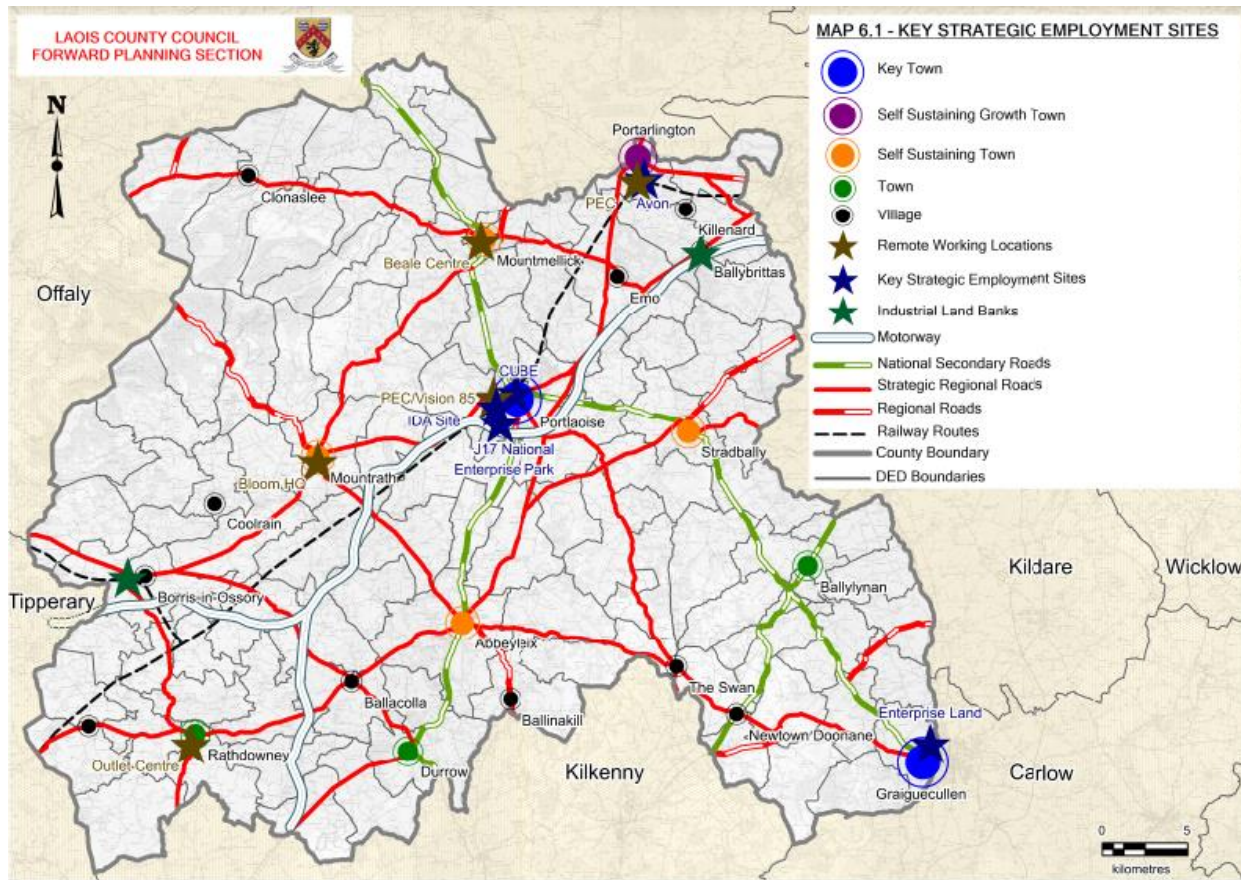
Table 6.4: Strategic Employment Initiatives

KEY STRATEGIC EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVES IN COUNTY LAOIS	
1	Continue to promote and develop J17 National Enterprise Park in Portlaoise – a Strategic Employment Zone for the County and to support the Regional Growth Centre of Athlone.
2	Support the development and designation of Portlaoise as a “Low Carbon Town” through the implementation of a suite of initiatives/range of technologies deployed that serve as demonstrators for other towns and support the development of The CUBE as a Low Carbon Centre of Excellence in Portlaoise .
3	Facilitate the development of lands in Graigucullen Key Town for job creation as identified in the Joint Spatial Plan and collaborate with Carlow County Council to identify an economic development strategy for the joint area.
4	Continued employment and enterprise generation support in the Self Sustaining Growth Town of Portarlinton at sites such as the SIAC steel site, the former “Avon” site, McMahons builders yards, etc in order to reverse long distance commuting as indicated in the Settlement Hierarchy in Chapter 2 of this Plan. The Council will also investigate the feasibility of providing new enterprise / business opportunities on appropriately zoned lands within the town of Portarlinton.
5	Promote and facilitate job creation Opportunity Sites in many settlements in the county as indicated in Chapter 7 – Retail and Town/Village Centre Renewal of this Plan and in Volume 2 Settlement Plans.
6	Potential for relocation of ‘ back-office ’ facilities from the Dublin Metropolitan Area to Laois to take advantage of cheaper land, high quality life and reduce long distance commuting.
7	Continued support of remote working practices in the Laois Hub Collective (Portlaoise Enterprise Centre / Portarlinton Enterprise Centre/ Bloom HQ/ Webmill /Vision 85 , etc) whereby facilities are made available to workers travelling outside of the county.
8	Provide adequate zoning in towns and villages to facilitate employment, enterprise and existing initiatives (indicated in Volume 2 Settlement Plans).
9	Continue to strengthen the attractiveness of Laois as a tourist destination to visit in collaboration with Laois Tourism.
10	Support the development of Laois as National Event Centre to support the concept of “Big Events” that represent niche cultural events hosted in unique settings such as Emo House, Stradbally Hall, Roundwood House.

KEY STRATEGIC EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVES IN COUNTY LAOIS



- 11 Continue to promote Portlaoise as a suitable location for Foreign Direct Investment and to work in collaboration with the IDA Ireland to identify appropriately sized land banks and business premises at suitable locations in Portlaoise in order to attract foreign direct investment.

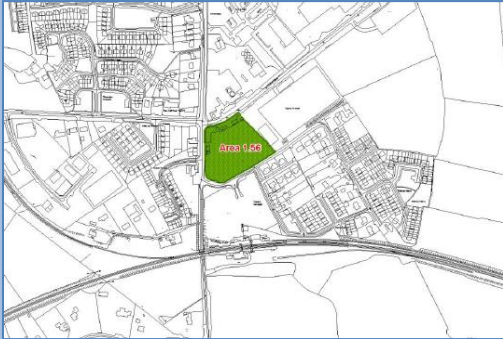
Map 6.1 Strategic Job Creation Sites and Strategic Employment Zones



The following key strategic sites offer the potential for job creation in the key town of Portlaoise and the Self Sustaining Growth Town of Portarlinton. These sites are well connected with regard to proximity to the national motorway network and by sustainable transport options via rail into both locations.

Table 6.5: Strategic Opportunity Sites

Location	Strategic Employment Opportunity sites	Commentary
<p>Portlaoise</p>	<p>J17 National Enterprise Park</p> 	<p><i>J17 Enterprise Park Master Plan Area</i></p> <p>This has been of major benefit to Portlaoise following on from supporting policies within the RSES in relation to continued development of the J17 National Enterprise Park.</p> <p>In recognition of this designation, the Council has been pro-active and has serviced and provided serviced sites at Togher, due south of the town centre and directly adjacent to the M7, for various enterprise and employment activities. The ability of this site to facilitate Foreign Direct Investment development opportunities will be maximised during the Plan period.</p>
<p>Portarlington</p>	<p>Former Avon Site</p> 	<p>This prime site is located in close proximity to the train station. The 5.18ha. brownfield site is currently vacant and fully serviced. Environmental considerations following previous uses of the site must be adhered to. The site is outside of Flood Zones A and B. There is an opportunity to provide a key landmark building/ enterprise campus.</p> <p>Suitable for a wide variety of enterprise and employment uses including low input and emission manufacturing, campus style offices, storage, wholesale and distribution etc. A high quality public realm will be required in any development.</p>
	<p>McMahons Site beside Train Station</p>	<p>This site is strategically located directly adjacent to Portarlington Railway Station and car park. The 1.56ha. brownfield site was</p>

Location	Strategic Employment Opportunity sites	Commentary
		<p>formerly used as timber and hardware retail outlet, the buildings have been cleared and the site is vacant. The site is fully serviced and outside of Flood Zones A and B.</p> <p>There is opportunity to intensify development to provide a key landmark or gateway building to signify the approach and entrance to the town from the south and railway station to create a sense of arrival.</p> <p>The building should address the extensive street frontage and be designed to an exceptional standard.</p> <p>A high quality public realm will be required in any development.</p>

Economic Development Policy Objectives	
ED 1	Build on the role of Portlaoise as the driver for the economic development of County Laois reflecting its designation as Key Town in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.
ED 2	Support the development J17 - National Enterprise Park in line with RPO 4.73 of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) and the J17 National Enterprise Park Masterplan.
ED 3	Provide a landing space for businesses who wish to establish a second site in a more competitively priced location.
ED4	Support the development of the Cube in Portlaoise as a space for incubation of Low Carbon focused start ups and SME's
ED 5	Support entrepreneurship in County Laois and jobs-focused education and training programmes.
ED 6	Support the implementation of LECP Economic Actions to market Laois for Inward Investment and for diversifying and strengthening a sustainable Laois economy, such as the preparation of a suite of opportunity site briefs suitable for large-scale enterprise/commercial uses and the promotion of Laois' centrality, its transport connectivity and Portlaoise's location along a Trans-European Core Network Corridor and its designation as a national transport node.
ED 7	Work in partnership with agencies such as Enterprise Ireland, Connect Ireland and

Economic Development Policy Objectives	
	IDA Ireland to find suitable sites or premises for prospective enterprises considering locating in Laois.
ED 8	Ensure the provision of enabling infrastructure (potable/waste water, electricity, gas) keeps apace with the needs of existing and prospective enterprises and protect lands reserved for enabling infrastructure development.
ED 9	Encourage the clustering of mutually supportive land uses to maximise synergistic business relationships and develop specialist labour skills in particular in the clean technology sector and enterprises that locally-produced commodities as inputs.
ED 10	Ensure a sufficient quantum and range of serviced employment lands is zoned and available to accommodate appropriate enterprise development.
ED 11	Support direct labour intensive enterprises to town centre/edge of centre locations and brownfield sites and favour brownfield sites over greenfield sites for general enterprise development in the interests of sustainability and orderly development.
ED 12	Work in partnership with agencies such as Enterprise Ireland, LEO Laois, Laois Partnership Company, the Portlaoise Enterprise Centre and the Portarlinton Enterprise Centre to provide enterprise incubator spaces and support enterprise formation and scaling, subject to the Development Management Standards contained in this section.
ED 13	Support home-based economic activities subject to environmental, traffic and residential amenity considerations and not undermining the land use zoning objectives of employment lands.
ED 14	Foster the cultivation of entrepreneurship among children, the provision of jobs-focused further education programmes and entrepreneur-focused training and mentoring to business owners in partnership with the Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board, LEO Laois, Laois Partnership Company, Department of Social Protection and Laois library network.
ED 15	Support and facilitate the development of remote working / co working space opportunities in a range of locations throughout the county such as Portlaoise, Portarlinton, Mountmellick, Mountrath, Rathdowney and other appropriate locations subject to proper planning and development.
ED 16	Seek to provide opportunities for highly-skilled outbound commuters to work locally through local employment opportunities, tourism opportunities, the development of an e-working centre or working-from-home arrangements facilitated by high-speed broadband in the interests of sustainable economic development, smarter travel and quality of life considerations.
ED 17	Support community initiatives to foster stronger engagement between commuters and their local towns and villages.
ED 18	Support the Core Strategy settlement patterns to ensure that economic priorities and job creation is reflective of this and aligns accordingly as indicated in Table 6.4.

Economic Development Policy Objectives

ED 19	Establish a formalised framework of key stakeholders to collectively plan and collaborate to ensure facilities are in place to achieve the main pillars of the National Remote Working Strategy.
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Economic Development Management Standards

DM ED 1	<p>INDUSTRIAL ACTIVITIES</p> <p>Where proposed industrial facilities, waste disposal facilities, mineral extraction developments, or other developments that may have a significant impact on surface water quality, ground water quality, or on the water table, the developer will be required (whether as part of an EIAR or an Environmental Report) to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) submit an assessment of the impact of the development on water quality and the water table; mitigation and monitoring measures should also be included, as appropriate; <p>Development proposals that could cause pollution, a reduction in biological or chemical water quality or changes in the water table will not be accepted unless appropriate mitigatory measures are proposed, such as settlement ponds, oil and chemical interceptors, bunding of storage tanks and refuelling areas, capping where ground water is exposed as a result of extraction etc.</p>
DM ED 2	<p>COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT - WAREHOUSES AND INDUSTRIAL USES/BUSINESS CAMPUSES (for shopping and office development see Chapter 7)</p> <p>The criteria for assessment of such developments will include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The nature/activities/processes of the proposed development and site location factors; 2) The compatibility and impact with/on adjoining uses; 3) The traffic implications and alternative access, servicing and sustainable mobility plans / commuting arrangements; 4) The quality of building design; 5) The site layout including car parking arrangements; 6) Landscaping plans; 7) The energy efficiency and overall sustainability of the proposed developments; 8) Details in relation to surface water/stormwater management systems; 9) Details in relation to climate resilience measure
DM ED 3	<p>HOME BASED ECONOMIC ACTIVITY</p> <p>Home based economic activity is defined as ‘working from home’. In dealing with applications for such developments the Planning Authority will have regard to the following:</p>

- 1) The nature and extent of the work and the justification for the proposed location;
- 2) The effects on the amenities of adjoining properties particularly as regards hours of operation, noise and general disturbance;
- 3) The anticipated levels of traffic generation (a traffic and car parking statement shall accompany any application for such a change of use);
- 4) The details concerning the generation, storage and collection of waste;
- 5) Quality signage proposals – plastics and neon signage on buildings will not be permitted.

Permissions for such partial change of use will be restricted to use by the applicant and may be temporary, for a temporary period, in order to enable the Planning Authority to monitor the impact of the development. Permission will not normally be granted for such changes of use in apartments.

CHAPTER 7 RETAIL AND TOWN / VILLAGE CENTRE MANAGEMENT

Aim: *Ensure that the town and village centres of co. Laois retain their vitality and viability and that all future retail development is plan led in line with the settlement strategy.*

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Towns and to a lesser extent villages are at the heart of trade, commerce and jobs in Laois. Towns and villages also have a strong community and social functions. They are a big part of a county's identity and perceptions about quality of life. Towns are good locations for labour intensive companies involved in internally traded goods and services.

An attractive and lively town centre can attract inward investment and can energise local entrepreneurship. Equally town or village centres blighted by vacancy and dereliction discourage investment and job creation. A flourishing town can function as a tourism hub as well as being a good place for local businesses. Retail uses are strongly associated with town centres where a range of convenience (food and goods for everyday needs) and comparison (durable) goods are available. The concentration of a wide mix of uses within a small area gives rise to a multiplier effect, where a local person or visitor makes multiple transactions with different traders during a short space of time.

The rural-focused *Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) 2015* report emphasises the role of towns as economic drivers for their rural hinterlands. The CEDRA Report emphasises the importance of re-invigorating the relationship between urban and rural Ireland.

Towns and villages in County Laois have much to offer in relation to their history, architecture, appearance and the community spirit of their residents. Towns like Abbeyleix and Durrow and villages like Ballacolla, Ballinakill, Castletown and Timahoe show local pride and care. Perceptions of a town as thriving or declining are informed by the appearance of its town centre and its public realm as well as the range and order of available retail and commercial services.

Town Centres were adversely effected by the recession and some have been in decline over longer periods, careful town centre management is now required. An intensification of retail, commercial and residential uses in these town centres is needed, as well as the enhancement of their public realms and less tangibly an increased sense of connection and pride among local people to their towns.

Looking at commercial/retail vacancy rates, Portarlington has high vacancy rates with over 18% (Geodirectory Q2/2019) vacant commercial/retail stock. Using this measure Mountmellick performed the best. The national vacancy rate is 13.5% (Geodirectory, June 2020) which means that Laois has more vacant commercial/retail stock than the national average.

Looking at Retail Excellence Ireland's review of towns in 2015 (based on customer/traders surveys in the town centre), Graiguecullen residents enjoyed the use of a strong town across the border in Carlow. Portlaoise and Mountmellick performed equally in the third quartile and

Portarlinton performed the poorest. Portlaoise, Portarlinton and Mountmellick performed well in relation to people’s views of:

- Safety and security in the town centre;
- The family-friendliness of the town centre;
- Town centre presentation and maintenance.

The towns performed poorly in relation to:

- Things to do and see in the town centres;
- Lots of events and promotions being run in the town centres.

Portlaoise scored well in relation to the number of quality retail stores to choose from and the large number of quality restaurants and pubs to choose from and it performed poorly on the price of car parking.

Portarlinton scored poorly as a first-choice shopping destination and just over 50% of those surveyed thought the town has a unique and positive image.

Around 75% of those surveyed thought Mountmellick has a unique and positive image, that there was abundant car parking available and that it is competitively priced. The retail, restaurant and pub choice in Mountmellick was considered poor.

To address this issue, in 2017 Laois County Council commissioned Consultants to prepare a Public Realm Strategy and a vision for the Town Centre. Portlaoise 2040 and Beyond – A strategy for a better Town Centre was prepared which, following consultation, presented a number of actions to address town centre management such as improvements to the public realm, increasing the residential capacity within the town centre, transitioning to a low carbon town. In tandem with this, the establishment of Portlaoise Town Team was enabled to drive actions in relation to the strategy.

Table 7.1: Assessment of Performance of Laois Towns

ASSESSMENTS OF LAOIS TOWNS <i>Source ↻ Area U</i>	Pop <i>(2016)</i>	DKM’s Q2 2019 Commercial Vacancy Rate (no. commercial address points)
Portlaoise	22,050	15.1%
Portarlinton	8,368	18%
Graigecullen / Carlow	4,692	%
Mountmellick	4,777	13.2%
Abbeyleix	1,770	N/A
Stradbally	1,350	N/A
Mountrath	1,774	N/A
Rathdowney	1,271	N/A
Durrow	835	N/A

Town/Village Centre Management Policy Objectives	
TC 1	Support the implementation of LECP Economic Actions and LECP Community Actions related to the maintaining and enhancing the vitality and vibrancy of Laois Town and Village Centres in particular focusing on Portlaoise.
TC 2	Support and facilitate the development of town centre strategies / Public Realm Strategies, where appropriate, liaising closely with residents, visitors and other relevant stakeholders.
TC 3	Enable the establishment of Town Teams to collaborate on and address the needs of town centre management which can be expanded to include “Collaborative Town Centre Health Checks (and utilise CTCHC – the 15-step process from Phase 1, etc to inform future strategies)’.
TC 4	Encourage the maintenance of town/village centre buildings and improve the quality of the public realm in town/village centres making them more attractive and safe to locals and visitors, as well as more pedestrian and cycle-friendly.
TC 5	Assist in site assembly and facilitate appropriate new development in town/village centres by way of alterations and extensions, infill development as well as demolition and redevelopment subject to planning considerations such as architectural heritage and flood risk.
TC 6	Maintain compact and permeable town/village centres, conserve any special architectural interest of town/village centres and foster active frontages at ground floor level to ensure bustling town and village centres.
TC 7	Retain and foster a mix of uses in town/village centres including residential commercial, community-based, civic, educational, recreational, tourism and religious to bolster the central role of town/village centres in the day-to-day lives of Laois people.
TC 8	Support the hosting of markets (including farmers markets), events or festivals in town/village centre locations and the running of town-based cultural/learning facilities such as the Dunamaise Theatre, the Stradbally Arthouse and Laois’ library network in the interests of vitality and vibrancy.
TC 9	Provide for night-time economy in town centres including public houses, nightclubs, restaurants and takeaways, subject to considerations of undue concentration/proliferation, and mitigate any adverse effects of these uses and other uses on the residential amenity of town centre residents.
TC 10	Encourage residential uses in town/village centres, such as at ground floor in certain instances or locations and in living over the shop arrangements through the flexible application of parking, amenity space and internal space standards where these standards cannot be practicably met on-site.
TC 11	Recognise and support the role of town/village-based community groups including trader groups that make a significant contribution to town/village centre management.

Town/Village Centre Management Policy Objectives	
TC 12	Encourage start-up businesses and tourism businesses to set-up in town and village centre locations.
TC 13	Provide short-stay parking in town centres to support business and tourism activities, balancing the need to encourage people into the town centre against sustainable transport and land-use efficiency considerations.
TC 14	Develop a regeneration framework for settlements identified in Volume 2 Settlement Plans as regeneration areas to address vacancy and dereliction. Any framework may be subject to Appropriate Assessment to ensure there are no likely significant effects on the integrity of any Natura 2000 sites in the County.
TC 15	<p>In dealing with Planning applications for renovations, redevelopment or demolition of old buildings in town and village centres the Planning Authority will have regard to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The avoidance of removal of swift nesting sites where possible, and where removal is unavoidable , the provision of new nesting sites - Planning applications of this type shall include a survey of existing numbers of swifts and swift nests and where swifts are shown to be present, location and details of proposed swift boxes during and after construction. Timing and methodology of works to shall be planned to ensure no damage to swift colonies during the breeding season”

7.2 RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

A Retail Strategy has been prepared to coincide with the preparation of the County Development Plan 2021-2027. The retail Strategy has been reviewed in accordance with provisions set out in the *Retail Planning: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DECLG, 2012)*. The document is available at Annex 2 of this Plan.

Retail is an important employment sector in Laois. More generally shopping is a lynchpin for the vitality of town and village centres. More than 75% of retail floorspace is located in Portlaoise and it is necessary to retain that primacy to reduce leakage to other counties. Proposals for retail development will be considered in the context of the retail hierarchy and sequential approach set out in the Laois Retail Strategy 2021-2027, the quantum of new convenience and comparison floorspace identified as appropriate therein, the Retail Planning Guidelines and the policies below.

7.2.1 KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE RETAIL STRATEGY

The Retail Strategy covers Portlaoise and the remaining County area. General policies and objectives for other towns and villages are included in the strategy. The key objectives of the retail strategy were heavily informed by the Retail Planning Guidelines. These key objectives are as follows:

- a. Define the retail hierarchy in the county and related retail core boundaries;
- b. Undertake a health check appraisal of the key retail centres in Laois, to ascertain the need for interventions in these areas;
- c. Identify the broad requirement for additional retail floorspace development in the county over the plan period, to support the established settlement hierarchy, and;
- d. Provide guidance on policy recommendations and criteria for the future assessment of retail development proposals over the Development Plan Period 2021-2027.
- e. retention and enhancement of the vitality and vibrancy of the town centre core areas as shopping destinations
- f. adhere to the sequential test approach principle in determining applications for retail development

7.2.2. STRATEGIC GUIDANCE

Both the quantitative assessment (capacity assessment) of additional retail floorspace requirements for the county and the qualitative review (health checks) of the various retail centres in the county outline how the principal towns within Laois are performing at present.

One of the functions of the strategy update is to review the broad quantum of additional retail floorspace that is required for the county over the period so as to maintain and enhance the positive economic performance of Portlaoise and the county. The Retail Strategy will indicate where the additional retail floorspace should be located. In this context, the location and extent of new retail development must have regard to the planning framework for the county and will be assessed against the criteria contained in the *Retail Planning: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DECLG, 2012)* and the Development Management Standards hereafter.

Central to the provision of additional retail floorspace is the need to reinforce the Retail Hierarchy of the county, in existing town and village centres. Therefore, it is vital that Portlaoise, as the Key Town continues to develop its retail function to meet expanding shopping needs and to ensure a healthy and competitive retail environment.

To achieve the key objectives of the strategy due cognisance must be taken of the strategic policy framework that underpins the updated specific policies and proposals in this document. This framework is set by:

- i. Portlaoise's position in the national Retail Hierarchy;
- ii. Identifying the County Retail Hierarchy;
- iii. The spatial distribution of new retail development with the County Retail Hierarchy;
- iv. The core retail areas;
- v. The sequential approach; and
- vi. A consideration of need.

7.2.3 PORTLAOISE’S POSITION IN THE NATIONAL RETAIL HIERARCHY

Portlaoise is the primary settlement and largest population centre within County Laois. Census 2016 records the population of Portlaoise at 22,050. Centrally located within the county, and having the advantage of excellent quality local, regional and national linkages, the town has become a settlement of regional importance.

The value of the town and the support function which it provides to its residents as well as those of its hinterland has been recognised at both a national and regional context. The Retail Planning Guidelines, recognises that the town provides a regional important retailing function. The importance of the town within a local and regional context has also been recognised by the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines, which has defined the town as being a Principal Town, the term also adopted as part of the Core Strategy.

7.2.4 IDENTIFYING THE COUNTY RETAIL HIERARCHY

The purpose of the Retail Hierarchy is to indicate the level and form of retailing activity appropriate to the various urban centres in the county. Taking a criteria-based approach enables the Council to protect each centre’s overall vitality and viability whilst allowing each centre to perform its overall function within the county’s settlement hierarchy. It is the core concept of the Retail Hierarchy that the Key Towns are supported by Self Sustaining Growth Towns and to a lesser extent local service towns and villages.

The Retail Strategy focuses primarily on the upper levels of the hierarchy. It is important to note that this is not to deter or discourage smaller scale retail development and investment in the smaller villages. Rather, it is important to set a clear hierarchy which identifies where the distribution of new retail floorspace should be delivered and which is appropriate in scale and character to the hierarchical role of the centre. The Laois County Retail Hierarchy 2021-2027 is set out in table 7.2 as follows:

Table 7.2: Laois Retail Hierarchy

Status under Retail Hierarchy for the Region (Table 6.1 RSES)	Town	Action
Level 1	Dublin	
Level 2 – Major Town Centres and County Town Centres	Portlaoise	Reinforce and grow high-order retail functioning with particular emphasis on historic core defined by the Primary Retail Area. Enhance the retail appeal of Laois by strengthening retail functions of Portlaoise.
Level 3 – Town and/ or District Centres and Sub County Town Centres (Key service centres)	Portarlington	Encourage retail development commensurate with existing and anticipated growth, with particular emphasis on traditional core.
	Graiguecullen	Provide for shopping, amenity, commercial and community facilities of a scale and type

Status under Retail Hierarchy for the Region (Table 6.1 RSES)	Town	Action
		to serve residents living within the district without undermining Carlow Town Centre.
Level 4 Neighbourhood Centres / Local Centres – small towns and villages	Mountmellick, Abbeyleix, Mountrath, Stradbally, Durrow, Rathdowney, Ballylynan Neighbourhood centres – Portlaoise – Kilminchy, Fairgreen, mountmellick road	Sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of the central parts of the town in conjunction with the utilisation of strategic backland areas.
		Provide and retain essential shopping facilities in smaller rural settlements to serve local residents and the wider hinterland.
		Provide and retain essential shopping facilities in smaller rural settlements to serve local residents and the wider hinterland.
Level 5 - Corner shops and small Villages	Various small towns and villages as identified in the settlement strategy	Provide for shopping, amenity, commercial and community facilities of a scale and type to serve neighbourhood residents without undermining the town centre.

7.2.5 SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF ADDITIONAL RETAIL WITHIN THE COUNTY RETAIL HIERARCHY

The Laois County Retail Strategy provides a strategic policy framework, in accordance with the provisions of the Retail Planning Guidelines, for the spatial distribution of new retail development in the county. While such a framework inherently emphasises strategic guidance on the location and scale of major retail development, it must ensure that the strategy does not inhibit appropriate scale retail development in identified centres within the county, specifically in smaller settlements. Thus, it is implicit in the key objectives of the strategy that such developments should be encouraged and facilitated where possible to enhance the sustainability, vitality and viability of smaller centres within the county.

7.2.6 CORE RETAIL AREAS

The Council will promote greater vitality in town centres through the implementation of a sequential approach to the location of all subsequent retail development. This sequential approach prioritises development within the town centres or core retail areas at the expense of more peripheral edge-of-centre or out-of-centre locations, which traditionally have poorer functional and spatial linkages with the core. This approach recognises the importance of core areas as the most suitable locations for higher order fashion and comparison goods, as they are easily accessible for the majority of the catchment population and also provide a compact and sustainable critical mass of commercial activity and public amenities, thereby reducing the need to travel.

Portlaoise’s Core Retail Area is to be the focus and preferred location for retail development during the Plan period. Portlaoise has a vibrant retail core but has a notable deficiency in high-end, modern comparison retail floor plates. The lack of high value comparison anchors in the

town core has undoubtedly contributed to the growth of expenditure leakage from the town's catchment area as the retail profiles of competing centres have developed at a faster pace. In order for Portlaoise to compete effectively with other urban centres of a similar scale, it is imperative that sufficient high-end comparison shopping is in place in the town core area.

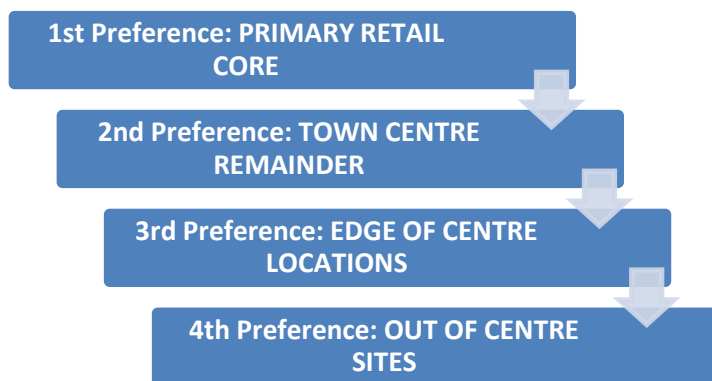
It is essential in terms of the sustainable development of the town going forward that this high-end comparison shopping provision is retained and substantially enhanced within the town core area and that leakage to the periphery is prevented. A proactive approach to urban design will be taken and substantial redevelopment in the core area should utilise opportunities to facilitate attractive and vibrant environments designed at a human scale, with enhanced pedestrian permeability, visually engaging, secure and inviting public realms that promote and encourage passive and active recreation.

7.2.7 THE SEQUENTIAL APPROACH

The Retail Planning Guidelines state that the order of priority for the sequential approach is to locate retail development in the town centre and only to allow retail development in edge-of-centre or out-of-centre locations where all other options have been exhausted.

All applications for retail developments at edge-of-centre or out-of-centre will be subject to the sequential test as outlined in the Retail Planning Guidelines. Where an application for a retail development edge of centre and out of town centre is lodged to the planning authority, the applicant shall demonstrate that all town centre options including but not limited to opportunity sites have been assessed and evaluated and that flexibility has been adopted by the retailer in regard to the retail format.

Figure 7.1: Order of Priority – Sequential Approach



7.2.8 CONSIDERATION OF NEED

Developing the retail offer of the county, especially in respect of high end high street comparison shopping, is vital if Laois is to remain competitive and arrest the levels of both convenience and comparison expenditure leakage to centres outside of the county.

This is particularly important for Portlaoise if it is to enhance its strategic role as outlined in the Midland's Regional Planning Guidelines, as an integrated link and a principal town in the broader polycentric model for the Region including the linked gateway. It is also critical given the town's position as a crucial urban anchor providing essential services in an otherwise predominantly rural county.

Apart from Portlaoise, the other retail centres in the county are small both in terms of population size and quantum of retail floorspace. The improvement of the retail offer of these centres needs to be encouraged and facilitated. Concurrently, in order to reduce expenditure leakage to other areas, the strategic priority must be to focus on enhancing the retailing environment of Portlaoise.

The Retail Planning Guidelines advise that Retail Strategies should “*assess the broad requirement for additional development over the plan period... these assessments of future retail requirements are intended to provide **broad guidance** as to the additional quantum of convenience and comparison floorspace provision. They should not be treated in an **overly prescriptive manner, nor should they serve to inhibit competition**”.* For this purpose, it is not the intention of this strategy to present figures as some form of cap on retail permissions in the County, but rather to guide the general scale of overall retail provision

Table 7.3: Additional Retail Floorspace Requirements for County Laois 2021-2027

Retail category	Floorspace (sq.m)
Convenience	7,798 m2
Comparison – non bulky	4,648 m2
Comparison – bulky	5,244 m2

Future additional retail provision within Portlaoise and its environs should address the insufficiency of the centre’s highend high street comparison retail offer and traffic congestion problems in the centre.

7.2.9 CONSIDERATION OF VACANCY

In undertaking the review of the Laois County Retail Strategy, Laois County Council has sought to take a proactive approach to addressing the issue of retail floorspace vacancy, while remaining cognisant of their responsibility to facilitate growth in retail and general economic activity within the county. The Retail Strategy has taken a cumulative approach to depleting vacant floorspace, while accommodating additional floorspace where it is required.

Retailing Policy Objectives	
RTP 1	Ensure the orderly development of future retail developments in County Laois, to keep the retail strategy under review, having regard to the changes in the retail sector and have regard to any such review in determining applications for retail development
RTP 2	Maintain, and where possible, enhance the existing competitiveness of the county’s main centres by facilitating the development of additional retail floorspace where it can be clearly established that such development will result in tangible improvements to the retail offering of the county
RTP 3	Acknowledge the importance of the retail hierarchy in providing a wide range of both convenience and comparison and visitor shopping in locations close to centres of population and larger, more remote retail hinterlands.

Retailing Policy Objectives	
RTP 4	Encourage the improvement to the designs of local retail centres in suburban areas and rural villages including the provision of facilities in the public realm.
RTP 5	Encourage and facilitate the reuse and regeneration of derelict sites and buildings and vacant buildings for retail uses with due cognisance to the sequential approach as indicated in the regional planning guidelines.
RTP 6	Permit retail development of a size and scale which is appropriate to the level of the town/settlement area, including its population, as defined within the County retail hierarchy.
RTP 7	Ensure that all retail development permitted is in accordance with the Retail Planning: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DECLG, 2012) and the Laois County Retail Strategy.
RTP 8	Protect the location of existing retail uses in town and village centres, the re-location of these uses to edge-of-centre or out-of-centre locations will not be accepted.
RTP 9	Encourage uses at Ground floor level which achieve an active street frontage, generates a high-degree of pedestrian movement, operates during day-time hours and contributes to the vitality and vibrancy of the town/village centre.
RTP 10	Acknowledge the role of Portlaoise as the primary retail centre in the County and the focus for comparison retail development, subject to the criteria of the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012. In principle, this will not preclude the consideration of proposals in locations where mitigating and robustly justified special circumstances apply.
RTP 11	Encourage the consolidation of other non retail based services within the town centres of the County utilising existing vacant retail floorspace where necessary.
RTP 12	Promote the reuse of vacant retail floorspace. Where no viable retail use can be sustained, alternative uses will be assessed on their own merits against the requirements of the proper planning and sustainable development of the areas within which they are located, require applicants to undertake an assessment of the quality and suitability of existing and available floorspace in the County relative to the circumstances of their proposals.
RTP 13	Enable the development of 4648sq ms of additional comparison [non-bulky] shopping floorspace, 5244 sq. ms. of additional comparison [bulky] shopping floorspace and 7798 sq. ms. of additional convenience shopping floorspace in County Laois in accordance with the Laois Retail Strategy 2021 - 2027 and Retail Planning Guidelines, to strengthen the retail offering available to Laois residents, reduce leakage and balance the need to protect the vitality and vibrancy of town centres against the need for competition.

Retailing Policy Objectives	
RTP 14	Ensure retail developments on edge of centre sites or out of town centre sites will only be considered when it has been clearly demonstrated that all viable, available and suitable sites in the town centre have been fully investigated and considered in accordance with the Retail Planning Guidelines and in particular the sequential test.
RTP 15	Improve the public realm of town centres through the encouragement of high quality civic design, including but not limited to the provision of attractive street furniture, lighting and effective street cleaning. Prepare Public Realm Strategies, where appropriate, liaising closely with residents, visitors and other relevant stakeholders.
RTP 16	Undertake measures to improve the accessibility of town centres by developing a pedestrian and cyclist friendly environment, which improves safety and limits traffic congestion where possible.
RTP 17	Ensure that all proposed town centre projects and any associated improvement works or associated infrastructure such as parking facilities, individually or in combination with other plans and projects, are subject to Appropriate Assessment to ensure there are no likely significant effects on the integrity of any Natura 2000 sites ²⁹ in the County.
RTP 18	There will be an explicit presumption against large out of town retail centres located adjacent or close to existing, new or planned national roads/motorways having regard to policy outlined in the Retail Planning Guidelines, 2012.

Retail and Town/Village Centre Development Management Standard

DM TC 1	<p>COMMERCIAL/RETAIL DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>In assessing planning applications for commercial development a number of considerations will be taken into account:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Conformity with the land use policies in respect of commercial development; 2) The design, quality and mix of uses being proposed particularly in town centres where redevelopment and changes of use need to be orientated towards creating a vibrant and lively, quality directed commercial core; 3) The requirement that design quality protects but also enhances the architectural character of the town, particularly in relation to landmark
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²⁹ In accordance with requirements under Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the EU Habitats Directive.

	<p>structures and viewpoints;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4) The potential impact of traffic generation, parking provision and desirability thereof and whether or not consideration has been given to access and commuter movements; 5) Potential impact on the amenities of the surrounding areas; 6) The energy efficiency and overall sustainability of the development which includes practical considerations, such as servicing, deliveries, waste/recycling and overall management thereof; 7) Whether or not a land contamination assessment is necessary and is required as part of the Planning Authority requirements; 8) Whether or not an E.I.S. and/or N.I.S or AA has been deemed necessary and provided as part of the Planning Authority requirements; 9) The requirements for bring banks in line with council requirements; <p>Demolition within town centres will not normally be permitted unless fully justified by structural assessment and positive redevelopment proposals within the context of preceding objectives outlined above.</p>
<p>DM TC 2</p>	<p>PUBLIC HOUSES/NIGHT CLUBS/ DISCO-BARS/ DANCE FLOORS/ CASINOS</p> <p>Night clubs and disco bars play an important role in urban areas providing a night use which adds to the attraction of a town.</p> <p>They will not, however, be permitted in residential areas.</p> <p>In dealing with applications for such developments the Planning Authority will have regard to the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The effects on the amenities of adjoining properties particularly as regards hours of operation, noise and general disturbance; 2) The anticipated levels of traffic generation (a traffic and car parking statement shall accompany any application for such a change of use); 3) The generation, storage and collection of waste; 4) Quality signage proposals – plastics and neon signage will not be permitted. <p>Noise levels at the boundaries of these establishments will be monitored as circumstances require and mitigation measures will be required at the time of the submission of the planning application.</p>

<p>DM TC 3</p>	<p>PETROL FILLING STATIONS</p> <p>Applications for filling stations should have regard of the Retail Planning: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DECLG, 2012) and the Spatial Planning and National Roads: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (NRA/TII, 2012) also take account of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Be located within urban areas within speed limits; 2) Access to filling stations will not be permitted closer than 35 metres to a road junction; 3) Frontage on primary and secondary routes must be at least 20 metres in length; 4) All pumps and installations shall be set back at least 5 metres from the roads; 5) A wall, of a minimum height of 0.5 metres, must separate the forecourt from the public footpath; 6) All external lighting should be cowled and directed away from the public roadway to prevent traffic hazard; 7) A proliferation of large illuminated projecting signs will not be permitted at filling stations - Generally only one such sign will be permitted; 8) Turbo-drying or car washing facilities will be located so as not to interfere with residential amenities; 9) Petrol filling stations can include an associated shop (no more than 100 sq.ms. (net retail floorspace) that provides for the sale of convenience goods. 10) An undue concentration of filling stations shall not be permitted, as in the past oversupply has led to closures with resulting unsightly derelict filling stations; 11) Late night opening will only be permitted if it does not impact adversely on nearby residences; 12) A landscaping Plan will form part of any Planning application.
<p>DM TC 4</p>	<p>TAXI/HACKNEY CAB BASES</p> <p>The importance of taxi/hackney services as a means of transport in all towns is recognised. However, taxi/hackney bases will not be permitted where they are likely to interfere with traffic flows or on street parking. A proliferation of hackney bases will not be permitted in any one location.</p> <p>In dealing with applications for such developments the Planning Authority will have regard to the following:</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The effects on the amenities of adjoining properties particularly as regards hours of operation, noise and general disturbance; 2) The anticipated levels of traffic generation (a traffic and car parking statement shall accompany any application for such a use. It should be shown that satisfactory off-street parking facilities are provided when the vehicles are not in use. 3) Taxi and hackney bases shall have universal access for all. <p>Quality signage proposals are required, plastic and neon signage will not be permitted</p>
<p>DM TC 5</p>	<p>CANOPIES, SMOKING SHELTERS AND OUTDOOR SEATING AREAS</p> <p>The council will ensure canopies, outdoor seating and displays add to the attractiveness and vibrancy of an area and do not disrupt movement along footpaths.</p> <p>A high standard of overall design will be required, relating to the scale, design and position of canopies. The following will apply:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Straight canopies are generally acceptable provided the footpaths are sufficiently wide and a clearing head height is provided; 2) Dutch canopies may be acceptable depending on location; 3) Advertisements placed on canopies will not generally be accepted. <p>Outdoor seating can contribute to the vitality and vibrancy of a town centre. Outdoor seating to the front of premises either on private forecourt or on the public footpath is subject to a Planning Authority license and will be considered generally acceptable if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sufficient space is available; • access arrangements are not impacted upon; • minimal impact on the amenities of nearby residents. <p>The provision of beer gardens or smoking shelters at public houses will be considered having regard to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The location of the beer garden or smoking shelter; • The impact on adjacent properties; <p>the hours of use, which may restricted if it is considered that the noise generated would adversely affect the amenities of nearby residents.</p>

<p>DM TC 6</p>	<p>HOT FOOD TAKE-AWAY</p> <p>The development of hot food take-aways will be strictly controlled and a proliferation of this use will not be encouraged.</p> <p>This type of development will generally only be considered in towns and villages where the development would not result in the loss of retail and office frontage. The Council may impose restrictions on opening hours.</p> <p>The opening of new fast food/takeaway outlets in close proximity to schools or children’s play areas will be restricted so as to protect the health and wellbeing of children.</p> <p>In dealing with applications for such developments the Planning Authority will have regard to the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The effects on the amenities of adjoining properties particularly as regards hours of operation, noise, odour and general disturbance; 2) The location; standalone take-aways not attached to restaurants will not be encouraged, where an existing residential unit is above or the proximity to a school or children’s play area; 3) The anticipated levels of traffic generation (a traffic and car parking statement shall accompany any application); 4) The generation, storage and collection of waste; <p>Quality signage proposals, plastic or neon signage will not be permitted.</p>
<p>DM TC 7</p>	<p>RETAIL IMPACT ASSESSMENT</p> <p>Require a Retail Impact Assessment to be carried out for development proposals in the following general circumstances:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Proposals featuring greater than 1,000sqm of net floorspace for both convenience and comparison type developments in the Principal Town of Portlaoise; b) Proposals featuring greater than 500sqm of net retail floorspace for both convenience and comparison type developments in all other settlements; c) Or where the Planning Authority considers the development may impact on the vitality and viability of a town centre. <p>The Retail Impact Assessment shall include, at minimum, the criteria set out in the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012.</p>

<p>DM TC 8</p>	<p>SHOPFRONTS - GENERAL DESIGN</p> <p>The design and quality of shopfronts play an importance role in the experience of a town centre environment. It is important that they should not compromise the local character, scale and architectural quality of the host building. The Council has designated buildings with important shopfronts as protected structures and some shopfronts fall within architectural conservation areas; conservation policies will relate to these shopfronts. Generally, the Council will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Seek the retention of traditional shopfronts; 2) Encourage the reinstatement of shopfronts, where they have fallen into disrepair; 3) Consider contemporarily-designed bespoke shopfronts in new commercial areas or on historic buildings if existing shopfronts are of poor quality; 4) Ensure new shop fronts provide ramped or level access to facilitate access for all. <p>Traditional shopfronts are comprised of the following principal elements and proportions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) the stallriser at the base of the shopfront, according to a general traditional rule of thumb should occupy approximately a third of the height of the shopfront 2) the shop window for the display of retails goods or the services provided the fascia board, according to a general rule of thumb should not exceed approximately a fifth of the height of the shopfront and is used to display an advertisement for the shop and commercial use.
<p>DM TC 9</p>	<p>SHOPFRONT ADVERTISEMENTS</p> <p>The Council expects the standard of advertisement to be of high quality and not to detract from the appearance of the shopfront or the street. As a general rule, subtle and simple schemes with regard to colours, size, design and lettering work best.</p> <p>In dealing with applications the Planning Authority will have regard to the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Where a business occupies more than one building, the fascia advertisement should not extend uninterrupted across two or more shopfronts; 2) The fascia advertisement should not extend beyond the pilasters/vertical shop front surround and not obstruct any other architectural detail, such as the cornices, corbels or first floor window sills; 3) Shop advertisements generally do not require illumination other than

	<p>street lighting or lighting of shop windows. Only late opening premises, such as public houses and restaurants, should require additional illumination;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4) Modern boxed fascia advertisements, which project from the face of the building, with internal illumination are not acceptable. Neon and fluorescent lighting is not acceptable. If necessary, external illumination should be kept to a minimum and discreetly positioned; spot lighting, recessed trough lighting and halo lighting are generally acceptable; 5) The fascia board should normally state only the name or trade of the business and the street number. Avoid oversized lettering and the application of too much additional information as this can create visual clutter. Letters should generally not exceed 60 percent of the height of the fascia; 6) Painted wooden, matt finished advertisements or individually applied brass or chrome letters are preferred over large areas of highly polished finishes, glossy plastic or perspex advertisements; 7) Lettering or sign writing should usually be applied directly to the fascia. Avoid adding new fascia boards to an existing one; 8) Projecting hanging signs are a traditional form of additional advertising of commercial premises, they can complement the colour and design of the fascia, it can add interest and originality to a building and street scene; 9) No more than one hanging sign per shopfront and they should keep an adequate vertical clearance from the pavement and not project over any carriageways; <p>The erection of speakers on the exterior of commercial or residential premises will not be permitted.</p>
<p>DM TC 10</p>	<p>ADVERTISEMENTS ON PUBLIC ROADS</p> <p>Permanent advertising signs on public land along the public road network for example finger post signs and signs for businesses are subject to a license under Section 254 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).</p> <p>Planning permission is required for signs on private land along public roads, other than those exempted by the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended).</p> <p>In dealing with applications the Planning Authority will have regard to the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Compliance with the Spatial Planning and National Roads: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012) and the Transport Infrastructure Ireland's policy statement on the Provision of Tourist and Leisure Signage on National Roads (March 2011) and any updated versions of these documents, when the development concerns a national roadway. 2) Signs should be of a different colour scheme to that of tourist signage;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Within urban speed limits signs will not be permitted for businesses; 4) Signs for rural businesses shall not compete with road signs or otherwise endanger traffic safety. They will only be considered at an appropriate junction on a regional road and one sign at each junction leading to the business; 5) Signs will not be permitted where there is a proliferation of signage within a small area that leads to visual clutter and which may constitute a traffic hazard; 6) For reasons of road safety, signs for commercial enterprises must not distract from road signs, changes to road layout or traffic lights/crossings; 7) Signs for tourism attractions and facilities will only be considered white on brown signs.
DM TC 11	<p>BILLBOARDS ADVERTISEMENTS</p> <p>The exhibition of billboard advertisements will be permitted only where approved advertisement structures are in place.</p>

CHAPTER 8 TOURISM

Aim: *To support the development of the tourism sector as an economic driver for the County, identify and develop key destination towns and visitor attractions and activities for the prioritisation of investment and to encourage the increase of tourism product development.*

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism plays an important role in the economic development of the Country as it generates significant employment opportunities and business development opportunities in more rural areas. Fáilte Ireland has identified that our landscape and heritage are the key driver for the promotion of Ireland's tourism, followed by its people, its safe environment and its range of attractions. There is an inextricable link between the Region's landscape, agriculture and tourism offer. Central to the development of an integrated ecotourism experience is the provision of quality cycling, walking and hiking routes connecting strategic tourism infrastructure, towns and villages.

Research has identified niche areas such as food, heritage and cycling tourism which can be built into unique tourism product offerings for each of their regional tourism brands. County Laois has much to offer the tourism product and marketing of Ireland as a tourist destination in both the domestic and international market, including; the Rock of Dunamase, the Round Tower Timahoe, Emo Court and Parklands, Aghaboe Abbey, Donaghmore Workhouse, the Slieve Bloom Mountains, the Rivers Nore and Barrow.

The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and Failte Ireland are responsible for the delivery of policy and investment in tourism in Ireland. Failte Ireland promotes Ireland based on a Regional Experience Brand of which Laois falls within 'Ireland's Ancient East'. The aim of the branding is to inspire visitors to travel to the Ireland's Ancient East by appealing to their interest in local culture authentic Ireland, its living culture, lush landscapes and heritage.

8.2 POLICY CONTEXT

This section is prepared in the context of the following documents:

- Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework (2018)
- National Development Plan 2018-2027
- Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region(2019)
- Food Wise 2025: A 10 Year Vision for the Irish Agri-Food Industry (2015)
- Laois Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021
- People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025 (DTTS, 2015)
- Tourism Development and Innovation – A Strategy for Investment 2016 – 2022 (FailteIreland, 2016)

8.2.1 LAOIS TOURISM STRATEGY 2018 - 2023

This collaborative strategy between key tourism stakeholders within County Laois including Laois County Council, Laois Local Community Development Committee, Laois partnership and the Department of Rural and Community Development, aims to grow tourism visitor numbers and the value of tourism through the enhancement of the Laois tourism product and service base supported by the structures that contribute to the strategic development of the tourism sector across the county.

Map 8.1: Tourist Attractions in County Laois



8.3 TOURISM IN LAOIS

There is significant potential to grow the tourism sector in County Laois. In 2018, Laois welcomed <0.5% of the 9.6 million overseas tourists who came to Ireland, spending <0.5% of the €5.2bn overseas tourism expenditure in Ireland. This figure is down from the 2015 figures, where approximately 57,000 overseas visitors came to Laois. Irish residents took 237,000 trips to Laois and Offaly (2% of the 10.9million domestic trips in 2018) spending €30mn (1% of domestic tourist spend)¹.

Analysis of the overseas visitor data for the East and Midlands Region reveals that a high proportion were Irish-born, repeat visitors or were visiting friends/family. The per capita spend of the overseas tourist who is visiting friends/family is similar or higher than the per capita spend of the traditional holiday-maker. A low percentage of visitors had travelled to the region for the first time. This suggests that while the East and Midlands Region may not be well-known as a tourism destination, once people visit they are inclined to return. It also indicates that many

overseas visitors to the area have a strong connection to the region. The high number of solo visitors and visitors to friends/family would suggest that these tourists may spend a lot of time with local people.

Despite the downturn in visitor numbers and revenue in recent years, tourism still makes an important contribution to the economy of Laois and has a strong emphasis in national planning policy. The Strategic Plan for Tourism in Laois 2018 – 2023 focuses on building projects in key destinations and the implementation of a targeted marketing brand in order to develop a high quality visitor destination and experience in Laois. The Strategy also places a strong emphasis on the diversification of the rural economy and the regeneration of towns and villages. Economic sustainability must be considered to ensure that the tourism sector is managed. The Strategy has identified 5 Strategic Ambitions to be achieved by 2023:

Fig 8.1 Strategic Ambitions of Laois Tourism Strategy



The key strengths of the County not only include its central location with robust transport network but also the pristine landscape, unique heritage and lifestyle and amenity pursuits. The growing trend towards activity and adventure based tourism provides a significant opportunity for County Laois. However, it is essential that resources upon which these activities are based are protected from inappropriate development and that Laois County Council works in partnership with a range of organisations to capitalise on and maximise the potential of such opportunities.

¹ Source: Failte Ireland

The areas of tourism that shall be promoted during the lifetime of the Plan include, however is not limited, to the following indicated in Table 8.1:

Table 8.1: Key Tourism Initiatives

1	The Slieve Bloom Mountains for walking, cycling and mountain biking.
2	Events (including sports events) and Festivals has proven to be a successful and a key driver of the Laois local economy and a means of revitalising and maintaining local culture as well as showcasing the people and places of Laois.
3	Local arts, crafts and food which provide a local connection and help to celebrate the diversity of the county as a destination.
4	Rural tourism and the development of walking and cycling trails and a possible Greenway for the County.
5	Towns and villages in the county provide a range of visitor attractions, facilities and services and rely on revenue from tourism.
6	Forest tourism for recreation such as walking, running, bird-watching and mountain-biking.
7	Explore the potential of the Upper Nore Blueway and development of the Barrow Blueway and Erkina Blueway.
8	Heritage attractions such as the Rock of Dunamaise, Aghaboe Abbey, Stradbally Hall, Timahoe Round Tower, Abbeyleix Heritage House Portlaoise's Cultural Quarter, Maryborough Fort and others such as Emo Court and Parklands and Donaghmore Famine Workhouse Museum, which have the potential for attracting a greater numbers of visitors.
9	Development of peatlands for sustainable eco-tourism potential such as Abbeyleix Bog and Derryounce Lakes and Trails (see Chapter 9 Rural Laois and Chapter 11 Biodiversity and Natural Heritage).
10	Development of Durrow as a Community/Family Cycle Hub".

Policy Objectives for Tourism in Laois	
TM 1	Identify all opportunities for funding, including LEADER, Urban and Rural Regeneration Development Fund, national and European funding schemes and seek to maximise the benefit of such funding opportunities to the county.
TM 2	Continue to support the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Tourism in Laois 2018 – 2023, in line with national and regional policy, tourism trends and identified challenges, in collaboration with Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland, Coillte, Bord na Mona, tourism businesses and communities and other supporting agencies.
TM 3	Continue to support the development and expansion of tourism-related enterprise including visitor attractions, services and accommodation and food and craft businesses, particularly those offering a visitor experience, such as tastings, tours and demonstrations.

Policy Objectives for Tourism in Laois	
TM 4	Facilitate the implementation of the Laois Local Economic Community Plan Economic and Community Actions related to tourism development such as the development of a Laois Walking and Cycling App with navigation functions, the translation of existing heritage audio guides and the development of an artisan food proposition associated with Ireland's Ancient East Programme.
TM 5	Direct the provision of tourist related facilities, such as information offices and cultural centres, into town and village locations to support and strengthen the existing economic infrastructure of such centres.
TM 6	Support in principle the development or expansion of a tourism around the Slieve Bloom Mountains, Laois' Inland Waterways, Laois' historic towns and villages, heritage-based tourism, activity-based tourism, geo tourism, eco-tourism, food-based tourism, diaspora-based tourism and spiritual tourism. Proposals for sustainable tourism development will be required to demonstrate a need to locate in a particular area and demonstrate compliance with the Development Management Standards.
TM 7	Promote and facilitate the development of rural tourism such as including but not limited to open farms, on-farm craft villages and visitor centres and the reuse and refurbishment of vernacular buildings (houses or farm/industrial buildings) for tourist related facilities, including holiday home accommodation; subject to compliance with Development Management Standards of this Plan.
TM 8	Work in collaboration with Coillte, neighbouring local authorities, Fáilte Ireland, community organisations and other interested parties to [bring forward development proposals for] develop new forest accommodation, with required ancillary facilities, access, signage and trails for walking, cycling, mountain-biking and horse-riding at suitable locations such as that of Emo Park, whereby it can be demonstrated that any such proposal complies with the Tourism Infrastructure Development Management Standards of this plan.
TM 9	Encourage the clustering of tourism enterprise in town and village centres in the interest of sustainable tourism development and the enhancement of the public realms of town and village centres to maximise their tourism potential; in all cases, the applicant must submit a robust assessment setting out the sustainability of any proposal with respect to economic, environmental and social sustainability, as defined herein.
TM 10	Support the preparation and implementation of Regional Tourism Plans in conjunction with key stakeholders.
TM 11	Engage with the relevant stakeholders and landowners at Emo Park and Emo Court in the assessment of tourism and recreation opportunities to ensure development proposals will include consideration of the historic landscape and views into and out of Emo Court, including the identification of opportunities as well as potential landscape protection areas.

8.4 CLIMATE CHANGE AND TOURISM

Environmental sustainability will be central to the development and protection of a viable tourism sector and this is a key consideration in a County where tourism attractions are located in environmentally sensitive areas and close to historic areas where the quality of the built heritage and environment must be protected from inappropriate development – whether tourism related or not. The ‘mainstreaming’ of policy guidance tools such as the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) will undoubtedly address any deficits in relation to many of these key policy areas.

As temperatures continue to rise, heat waves will worsen, extreme precipitation events will become more intense and frequent and the rate of sea-level rise will increase. The direct and indirect impacts of climate change on our cultural, heritage and natural assets may present a threat to their value and integrity. The tourism sector itself is vulnerable to climate change. Threats include more extreme weather events, increasing insurance costs and safety concerns, water shortages and loss and damage to natural assets and attractions at destinations.

Continued climate-driven degradation and disruption to cultural and natural heritage will negatively affect the tourism sector, reduce the attractiveness of destinations and lessen economic opportunities for local communities. In proposing measures to deal with the effects of climate change, it is important to consider any unintended consequences for heritage and tourism that might arise.

Truly sustainable tourism development must manage issues of physical and cultural impacts, as well as addressing the urgent necessity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in this growing sector, especially from transport. At the same time, tourism should pay much greater attention to understanding and addressing the many and varied impacts of rapid climate change that will increasingly affect its operations and destinations.

Climate Change and Tourism Policy Objectives	
TM 12	Promote Laois as a hub for sustainable tourism and development of low impact activities including orienteering, angling, equestrian activities, bird watching, canoeing and kayaking, caving, paragliding, botany, photography, painting and yoga and meditation, in appropriate locations in order to diversify the range of tourist experiences available in the county and extend the tourism season.
TM 13	Develop the tourism potential of peatlands and in particular facilitate the further development of Abbeyleix Bog and Derryounce Bog.
TM 14	Increase connectivity and accessibility to public transport, walking and cycling infrastructure and the provision of Electric Vehicle Charging Points to key tourist destination hubs to encourage more sustainable modes of transport.
TM 15	Encourage that all new tourism related development proposals maximise energy efficiency through siting, layout, design and incorporate best practice in energy technologies, conservation and smart technology.

Climate Change and Tourism Policy Objectives

TM 16	Strengthen resilience to climate change by ensuring all new major tourist developments provide a climate vulnerability assessment within sensitive and vulnerable sites.
TM 17	Where relevant, the Council and those receiving permission for development under the Plan shall seek to manage any increase in visitor numbers and/or any change in visitor behaviour in order to avoid significant effects, including loss of habitat and disturbance. Management measures may include ensuring that new projects and activities are a suitable distance from ecological sensitivities. Visitor/Habitat Management Plans will be required for proposed projects as relevant and appropriate.
TM 18	Ensure the potential environmental effects of a likely increase in tourists/tourism-related traffic volumes in particular locations/along particular routes shall be considered and mitigated as appropriate. Such a consideration should include potential impacts on existing infrastructure (including drinking water, wastewater, waste and transport) resulting from tourism proposals.

8.5 TOURIST INFRASTRUCTURE

Research has shown that overseas tourists want to visit a destination with a variety of experiences to offer and ensuring that support services and high-quality infrastructure to meet the needs of visitors is fundamental to Laois. The Plan will focus on identifying key strategic projects and areas for investment to deliver tourism products of scale with the capacity to be transformational and a catalyst for tourism development in Laois.

8.5.1 VISITOR SERVICES

Laois County Council will ensure that visitor attractions will be supported for expansion projects such as car parking areas, interpretative centres/signage, visitor kiosks etc. The Council recognises the potential for pressure being placed on the County's natural and heritage amenities through increased tourism. In this regard it is important that the provision for increased tourism activity is in line with the provision of the required infrastructure to support such development. Tourism-related development proposals will be required to demonstrate a high standard of design, with strong consideration given to a proposal's potential impact on its surroundings in terms of scale and intensity and the potential for the proposal to add significantly to the quality of the visitor experience.

8.5.2 ACCOMMODATION

The Council recognises that the provision of accommodation such as hotels, guesthouses, hostels, caravan and camping sites are essential to enable growth in the tourism sector. The Council shall support the development of tourism in the county by encouraging the provision of a wide range of tourist accommodation types and restricting development that would be likely to reduce the capacity of the resource, or have a detrimental impact on the local environment.

In general such developments shall be encouraged to locate within or in close proximity to existing towns and villages where they can avail of existing public services, commercial and community facilities. The Council will support the development and upgrade of accommodation to meet Fáilte Ireland Quality Standards, subject to development management criteria and will require that such relevant standards are met in development proposals where appropriate.

There is also potential within the County to create niche destination tourist accommodation, drawing on the policy objective to develop County Laois as a National Event Centre. Such niche accommodation will be supported in unique settings e.g. Emo House, Stradbally Hall, Roundwood House.

8.5.3 *BRANDING*

During the life-time of this Plan there will be a phased roll-out of the branding strategy, with investment in tourism signage and the enhancement of the visitor experience across the programme area. The strategy will develop Ireland’s Ancient East as a destination that is easy for the independent visitor to explore, interpret, understand and appreciate. The implementation strategy will deal with on the ground information as well as promotional aspects of the brand and the accessibility of sites, possibly including mechanisms for pre-booking, ticketing and improved management.

Policy Objectives for Tourism Infrastructure	
TI 1	Encourage and promote tourism related facilities and accessible accommodation within existing settlements and in rural areas where there is a clear and demonstrated need and benefits to the local community and where the development is compatible with the policies set out for the protection of the environment.
TI 2	Encourage and facilitate the provision of access to visitor accommodation, venues and activities and the availability of information on accessibility to those with varying levels of mobility and access issues.
TI 3	Support best-practice environmental management including energy efficiency, waste management, procurement and recycling in accommodation providers and tourism enterprises in the County.
TI 4	Support tourism branding in Laois and in particular support the development of Ireland’s Ancient East to promote accessibility to local sites.
TI 5	Encourage and support the provision of a wider range of accommodation types throughout the county in order to ensure that the county is an attractive location to spend increased amounts of time for a wide range of visitors.

Tourist Infrastructure Development Management Standard

<p>DM TM 1</p>	<p>TOURIST FACILITIES</p> <p>Tourist and recreation facilities, in particular accommodation, shall be generally located within towns and villages unless;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A comprehensive justification of the need for the development by its nature and space requirements to be located outside towns and villages, for example, golf courses, swimming, angling, sailing/boating, pier/marina development, water sports, equestrian and pony trekking routes, adventure/interpretative centres and associated ancillary uses, tourist related leisure facilities including walking and cycling; • Evidence that the proposed development will not have an adverse impact upon the scenic value, heritage value and the environmental, ecological or conservation quality of primary tourism asset(s) and its their general environment; • Evidence that potential environmental effects of a likely increase in tourists/tourism-related traffic volumes in particular locations/along particular routes have been considered and mitigation measures proposed. Such a consideration should include potential impacts on existing infrastructure (including drinking water, wastewater, waste and transport) resulting from tourism proposals; • Evidence that, where feasible, existing ruinous or disused buildings or existing heritage buildings have been re-used to maximum potential. This list is not exhaustive and the Council may consider other requirements contained in the chapter on a case by case basis with planning applications should the need arise.
<p>DM TM 2</p>	<p>CARAVAN, GLAMPING AND CAMPING DEVELOPMENTS</p> <p>Caravan, glamping and camping developments shall address the following;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A high standard integrated design and layout linking pitches to well located communal areas and on site facilities and amenities; • Compliance with the Regulations for Caravan and Camping Parks (Bord Fáilte Ireland 2009); • A detailed hard and soft landscaping plan for the overall site; • Mitigation plans for noise and litter; and • Details of wastewater disposal for the site.
<p>DM TM 3</p>	<p>SELF CATERING DEVELOPMENTS</p> <p>Self-Catering developments shall address the following;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The layout of the development shall be of a high standard, incorporating well laid out communal open spaces, significant and appropriate landscaping maintaining existing site features such as hedgerow and trees, car parking provision, segregated waste storage and public lighting. <p>The design of units should be high quality and respect the character of the area in which they are located. Suburban type developments will not be favoured. Courtyard type developments will be particularly encouraged.</p>

8.6 TOURISM

8.6.1 **ACTIVITY BASED TOURISM (INCLUDING GREENWAYS, BLUEWAYS AND CYCLEWAYS)**

Laois County Council is well placed to capitalise on the growing demand for experiential holidays in a perceived 'wild' setting with outdoor activity opportunities on offer throughout the county with an emphasis on walking, cycling and angling. Participation in adventure activities is also becoming increasingly popular amongst visitors from overseas and from within the island of Ireland which includes mountain biking, kayaking and canoeing. The development of greenways and blueways is also an important sector or tourism product to the County and is an important element of creating a sustainable tourism package.

This focus, in partnership with stakeholders such as Coillte, Bord Na Mona and Waterways Ireland, and local community groups, has led to the development of projects such the Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trail, Abbeyleix Bog Project, Barrow and Erkina Blueways. Off-road looped walking trails are located at various locations in the county, including Durrow Leafy Loop, Cullahill Loop, Dunmore Wood Loop, Ballagh Loop and Bishop's Wood, Emo Park and Gardens. These projects can be developed in a sustainable way, in harmony with a high quality environment. The Council recognises that these routes cannot come into existence or remain in existence without the full co-operation of the owners of private property on the routes.

Combined off-road cycle and walking routes and recreational trails developed along abandoned rail lines, utility corridors or other natural linear open spaces, such as river banks and canals, are often referred to as Greenways. Although Laois does not have a designated Greenway, the feasibility of a 24km route from Mountmellick – Portlaoise – Abbeyleix has been undertaken. The Council will continue to identify, support and facilitate opportunities for harnessing the potential of the scenic areas, lakes and waterways in a manner that is compatible with the natural heritage and environment of the area. (Refer to Map 8.1 for Laois' activity based tourist attractions).

Policy Objectives for Activity Based Tourism	
ABT 1	Support the development of the amenities and recreational potential of the River Barrow, particularly in Portarlington Town Park and the River Nore in co-operation with the National Parks and Wildlife Services, Irish Water, Laois Sports Partnership, adjoining Councils and other relevant authorities and interested local stakeholders.
ABT 2	Support in principle and investigate the feasibility of, subject to compliance with the Habitats and Birds Directive, developing and marketing off-road Slieve Bloom Mountain Biking Trail by Coillte, Mountmellick –Portlaoise – Abbeyleix Greenway (and potential extensions onto Portarlington to connect with the Offaly Greenway network) and Durrow Green Network Cycle Trail in co-operation with relevant stakeholders including Durrow Development Forum.
ABT 3	Develop on-road cycle trails in the Slieve Blooms along existing lightly-trafficked roads in partnership with cycling clubs, Offaly County Council, Laois Sports Partnership, Laois Partnership Company and the National Trails Office, subject to compliance with the Habitats and Birds Directive.

Policy Objectives for Activity Based Tourism	
ABT 4	Facilitate the sustainable provision at appropriate locations of a network of quality pathways amenities and associated car parks for walkers and cyclists and horse-riders that are attractive and free of vehicular traffic.
ABT 5	Co-operate with National Trails Office (management standards), Fáilte Ireland, National Way Marked Way Advisory Committee, Coillte, the Heritage Council and other relevant bodies, in order to support the sustainable development, maintenance and enhancement of walking routes at appropriate locations throughout the county.
ABT 6	Promote and investigate the feasibility of, subject to compliance with the habitats and Birds Directives, sustainable developing and improving of facilities and infrastructure supporting water based tourism activities, (including shore side interpretive centres and jetties). Development proposals outside settlement centres will be required to demonstrate a need to locate in the area and will be required to ensure that the ecological integrity and water quality of the river or lake, including lakeshore and riparian habitats, is not adversely affected by the development.

8.6.2 FESTIVALS AND ARTS

Laois is increasingly being marketed as an events and conferencing destination by reason of its accessibility and centrality. High-profile events include Electric Picnic - Music and Arts Festival with a capacity for 70,000 festival goers and the National Ploughing Championships which was most recently held in Ratheniska with a total of 281,000 attendees in 2015.

Events and Festivals have proven to be a successful and key driver of the Laois local economy and a means of revitalising and maintaining local culture as well as showcasing local arts, crafts and food. In particular, the growing importance of food tourism is also an expanding sector and Laois is well positioned to capture some of this market.

The agri-food sector has been credited with playing an integral role in the national economic recovery in recent years. Laois Taste was started in 2019 as a collaborative effort between 21 Laois food and drinks producers, Laois County Council, Local Enterprise Office and Laois Partnership to support and promote local provenance, strengthen the Laois food industry and transform Laois into one of Ireland's top food destinations. Through this medium food producers organise many free events throughout the County and has the potential to offer an alternative experience for visitors.

Figure 8.1: Laois Taste



Policy Objectives for Festivals and Arts

FA 1	Support the development of the arts, crafts and food sectors and liaise with the Crafts Council of Ireland, Laois Partnership, Laois LEO, Fáilte Ireland, and other interested bodies to facilitate growth within this sector.
FA 2	Support and facilitate Laois as a destination for business tourism by maximising the county's strong and competitive brand value and working with key stakeholders.
FA 3	Support and promote the existing festivals and cultural events which take place in the county and facilitate the establishment of new events where viable to increase the profile of the county as a key tourism destination.
FA 4	Support the expansion and growth of food enterprises and associated tourist development and in particular Laois Tastes.

8.6.3 IRELAND'S ANCIENT EAST

Ireland's Ancient East, established in 2016, is a brand concept that seeks to attract visitors to the east, midlands and south of the country and build on the wealth of historical and cultural assets in this strategic location. This brand provides Laois with an international platform to market the uniqueness of Laois and county's heritage. A number of key sites have been identified in Laois such as the Rock of Dunamaise, Timahoe Round Tower, Emo Court and Parklands, Gash Gardens, Ballintubbert Gardens and Heywood Gardens. Failte Ireland has a target growth in visitor numbers of 600,000 (21%) to the region and an additional visitor revenue of €204 million (28%) of which Laois can capitalize on.

This destination brand has been designed to appeal to the key customer segments identified by Failte Ireland, namely the Culturally Curious and the Great Escapers, and to present this large geographic area in a cohesive and unified manner. Ireland's Ancient East offers a personal experience of 5,000 years of Europe's history. The Plan will support and facilitate the development of this key tourism stimulus project in the County and support the objectives of the Laois Tourism Strategic Plan 2018.

Policy Objectives for Ireland's Ancient East	
IAE 1	Continue to work in collaboration with other key stakeholders to implement the programmes and plans of the Ireland's Ancient East initiative over the lifetime of the plan to maximise the tourism potential of the county.
IAE 2	(A) Collaborate with Fáilte Ireland, the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) and other key stakeholders in the development and implementation of a signage programme associated with Ireland's Ancient East to include branded orientation signage and roadside signage (B) Have regard to TII's Policy on the Provision of Tourist & Leisure Signage on National Roads (March 2011) in addition to Section 3.8 of the DoECLG's Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines
IAE 3	Facilitate the enhancement of appropriate visitor infrastructure and facilities in Laois associated with Laois Ireland Ancient East sites and other places with tourism potential such as Maryborough Fort, Donaghmore Workhouse, Ballinacill village and Durrow Town and the Rock of Dunamaise.
IAE 4	Continue to work in collaboration with Fáilte Ireland and other key stakeholders on the development of the Ireland's Ancient East branding strategy, to implement the programmes and plans of the Ireland's Ancient East initiative over the lifetime of the plan to maximise the tourism potential of the county.
IAE 5	Facilitate Fáilte Ireland initiatives for the development of tourism experiences in the County that are fit for purpose and deliver on the Ireland's Ancient East brand promise, within the context of the land use management and infrastructural provision in the County.
IAE 6	Support the implementation of Ireland's Ancient East by facilitating the provision of visitor information– in line with the policies and objectives with respect to heritage sites; and integrating the objectives of Ireland's Ancient East with transport programmes in the County.

8.6.4 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Cultural heritage is recognised as one of the most important and fastest growing aspects of the tourist industry which is demonstrated in the success of Ireland’s Ancient East. County Laois with its array of heritage sites including historical garden demesnes, architectural heritage, interpretive centres, archaeology and historic town centres is well positioned to benefit from this form of tourism. The development of tourist facilities at these locations and within the wider county should respect the outstanding quality and variety of the natural and built environment in the County and should not damage the resource attractions such as the Rock of Dunamaise, Aghaboe Abbey, Stradbally Hall, Timahoe Round Tower, Abbeyleix Heritage House and others such as Emo Court and Donaghmore Famine Workhouse Museum have the potential for attracting a greater numbers of visitors.

Policy Objective for Cultural Heritage	
CH 1	Ensure heritage assets (built and natural) that are the focus for tourism development are appropriately managed and their special interest conserved from potential adverse effects from visitors or development in general and that best practice standards in relation for the environmental management of tourism enterprises are adhered to.
CH 2	Take responsibility for the development of a more sustainable tourism industry which minimises adverse impacts on local communities, the built heritage, landscapes, habitats and species; leaving them undiminished as a resource for future generations, while supporting social and economic prosperity.
CH 3	Support and promote, with the co-operation of landowners, public access to heritage sites and features at appropriate locations whilst ensuring heritage related development does not result in negative impacts on the fabric or setting of Laois’s heritage assets.
CH 4	Support and promote, with the co-operation of key stakeholders, the development of the Fort of Maryborough in Portlaoise and ensure that any development will not result in negative impacts on the fabric or setting of the site.
CH 5	Support the objectives of Failte Ireland’s Visitor Experience Development Plans, Tales of Two Worlds and Castle and Conquests.

8.6.5 NATURAL ASSETS

The Slieve Blooms is perhaps the County's greatest tourism natural asset, particularly for walking and cycling and offers a mix of wide forest paths, rolling hills, single tracks, quiet twisty country roads. The Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trail which is a project in collaboration with Coillte, Laois County Council and Offaly County Council offers 35km of trail with trailheads in Baunreagh in Laois and Kinnity in Offaly. The Slieve Blooms also offers 17 different looped walking and hiking trails and eco walks ranging from 4km to 75km with trailheads located in Clonaslee, Glenbarrow and Monicknew.

The waterways of County Laois include the Barrow, Nore and Erkina which flow in a northwest-southeast trajectory and there are minor man-made lakes at Ballyfin, Grantstown and Heywood. The Grand Canal also passes through the north east of the county where it links to the wider River Barrow navigation system.

All of these watercourses offer much potential by way of natural and cultural heritage, tourism, leisure and recreational pursuits. In addition to their scenic beauty they offer opportunities for a wide range of activities such as angling, boating, bird-watching, canoeing, and other water based interests.

Increasing areas of Bord na Móna peatlands such as Abbeyleix Bog are becoming cutaway and have significant potential for development and beneficial uses including renewable energy, biodiversity, amenity uses, water storage and Green infrastructure

The County's Natural Heritage assets are also discussed in Chapter 11 of the Plan, where specific policy objectives have been included.

Table 8. 2: Key Heritage Assets

Archaeological Assets	Architectural Assets	Natural Assets
Monastic heritage including Abbey at Aghaboe, intact Round Tower at Timahoe and fine Romanesque doorway at Killeslin	Emo Court and Gardens	Slieve Blooms Nature Reserve with walks at: Monicknew Glenbarrow The Cut
Viking Longphort known as Dunrally Fort close to Vicarstown	Heywood Gardens	Timahoe Esker Nature Reserve with walk
Rock of Dunamaise with Norman Influences	Castledurrow, Ballyfin, Abbeyleix, Stradbally Hall, Roundwood House demesnes	Grantstown Nature Reservewith walk
Maryborough Fort and St Peter's Church and graveyard associated with Plantation of Laois-Offaly	Fine Georgian Square: O'Connor Square Mountmellick	Waterways: Nore, Erkina and Barrow including its source and smaller streams. Grand Canal Small lakes at Ballinakill, Brittas House, Ballyfin

Archaeological Assets	Architectural Assets	Natural Assets
<p>Tower houses at Lea, Cullahill and Ballaghmore</p> <p>Fortified houses at Brittas House,</p> <p>Industrial Archaeology Donaghmore Workhouse and Agricultural Museum</p> <p>Mill Buildings at Mountmellick, Castletown, Donaghmore</p> <p>Exhibits at Stradbally Steam Museum, Work Museum Mountmellick and Heritage Centre Abbeylax</p> <p>Heritage Trails, Sli Dala, ancient travelling route extant in places</p>	<p>Proposed Architectural Conservation Areas at Portlaoise, Abbeylax and Durrow</p> <p>Historic town and villages such as Portarlinton, Mountrath Market Square, Clonaslee, Ballinakill, Emo, Timahoe and Stradbally</p>	<p>Wetlands walks at Slieve Blooms, Killamuck, Portarlinton and the Derries</p> <p>Woodlands open to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oughaval Wood, • Carrick Wood • Dunmore Wood • Garryhinch Wood • Brittas Wood • Togher Wood • Capponellan Forest and Lake Walk
	<p>Coolbanagher Church, Emo</p>	<p>Subtle landscape of rolling hills, river basins and their floodplains, expansive flat areas, upland areas</p>
	<p>Midland Hospital</p> <p>Regional</p>	<p>On road and off-road walking and cycling routes open up the countryside to rural tourism</p> <p>Walks mapped on Laois Tourism www.laoistourism.ie Sli na Slainte Coillte</p>

Policy Objectives for Natural Heritage	
NH 1	Support the development and marketing of the Barrow Blueway and facilitate related commercial opportunities in Vicarstown, Portarlington, Graiguecullen and Portlaoise, subject to compliance with the Habitats Directive.
NH 2	Support the development and marketing of the Erkina River Blueway in association with all relevant stakeholders and facilitate related commercial opportunities in the area, subject to compliance with the Habitats and Birds Directive.
NH 3	<p>Promote and facilitate the continued development of the Slieve Bloom Mountains bike trail as a key tourism asset for the county and as part of the tourism offer on the Slieve Bloom Mountains, in conjunction with Offaly County Council.</p> <p>In addition, it is the Council policy to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) promote the further development of walking trails on the mountains; (ii) connect to and develop Clonaslee, Camross, Coolrain and Rosnalis as a service hubs for the area; (iii) promote and facilitate links to / from other existing and proposed greenways, blueways and peatways; and (iv) Support the development of visitor centre facilities in Baunreagh, subject to compliance with the Habitats and Birds Directive.
NH4	In relation to the Slieve Blooms, it is proposed to collaborate with Offaly County Council and relevant stakeholders to develop a masterplan for their protection and sensitive development subject to the Habitats Directive and environmental standards being met.

8.7 DESTINATION TOWNS

Failte Ireland research confirms that attractive towns are a key motivator for holidaymakers in choosing Ireland as a holiday destination, as is interesting heritage, culture and friendly people. However, the challenge is to unlock the economic potential of the visitor for local businesses and communities, and deliver high quality destination town experiences for visitors, that still capture local distinctiveness and support thriving local communities.

Portlaoise has been identified by Failte Ireland's Destination Towns Initiative and has recently received €500,000 funding to enhance public spaces in the town centre in a way that will engage tourists and enhance their visitor experience not just in terms of activities but also retail and food offering and accommodation to suit all types of tourists. Portlaoise, formerly known as Maryborough, grew around the old fort constructed in 1548 built primarily for military and political purposes. The town is known for a strong arts and culture scene, along with must-visit attractions such as Fort Protector, Dunamase Theatre, and further afield to the Rock of Dunamase, its architectural conservation and protected building.

The Laois Tourism Strategy also recognises the importance on harnessing Laois' rich heritage and stories through the Laois Towns Experience Project which is an approach to devise a central story/historic theme that designated areas employ as the basis for visitor experience development. The creation of this themed approach for key tourism gateway towns across Laois

will expand the experience development potential throughout the county. It is envisaged that two towns will be selected as pilot projects; among the proposed themes for initial consideration include Mountmellick (Quakers), Portarlington (French Huguenots), Mountrath (Slieve Bloom) and Stradbally (Arts).

Policy Objectives for Destination Towns	
DT 1	Continue to support the promotion of Portlaoise as a Destination Town and as the principle visitor services centre and hub for Fáilte Ireland’s Ancient East in the County, providing memorable and high-quality visitor experiences and providing services including accommodation for visitors to the range of attractions and activities in the surrounding region.
DT 2	Encourage the development of Laois Towns Experience Project to promote the unique attributes of towns and villages in the County in the design and delivery of all visitor interpretation, signage and public realm schemes in order to provide tourists with a strong ‘Sense of Place’ and a more memorable visit.
DT 3	Facilitate the enhancement and development of Portlaoise’s Cultural Quarter, as a location where cultural heritage and artistic visitor attractions are clustered, offering a unique and marketable tourism proposition.
DT 4	Improve the visual appearance of towns and villages, protect their character and maximise their tourism potential by the continuance of environmental and public realm programmes, design control, development initiatives and the removal / improving of dereliction where necessary.
DT 5	Support the provision of accessible tourism within the county.

CHAPTER 9 RURAL LAOIS

Aim: *Support the role of rural areas in maintaining a stable population base through a strong network of villages and small towns and strengthening rural communities by supporting a resilient rural economy and the sustainable management of land and resources.*

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The rural landscapes of Laois are shaped by economic activities such as forestry, peat, quarrying and farming. Unlike in urban areas where industrial uses that generate noise and odour can be clearly separated from emission-sensitive residential uses through zoning, this robust system of separating uses does not happen in the same way in rural areas and conflicting uses can occur in close proximity. Just over half of Laois residents live in rural areas and providing sustainable employment opportunities is essential.

Both the NPF and RSES recognise the crucial role rural areas play in driving our economy and diversifying rural economies.

9.2 AGRICULTURE

Rural economic sectors remain very important in Laois. According to Census 2016 data, 7.2% of Laois' workforce is engaged in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing.

In the Agricultural Census 2010, 72% of land in Laois was used for farming purposes, while 14.7% is associated with forestry. The future development of agriculture is underpinned by the State agency Teagasc programmes in relation to Foodwise Agri-Food Strategy 2025 and the Forestry Programme 2014–20 in its Advisory and Education Strategic Plan for the Region 2015–2020.

The Council recognises the importance of agriculture for sustaining, enhancing and maintaining a viable rural economy. The Council will support and facilitate agricultural restructuring and diversification within the framework of the 2020 Strategy (Department of Agriculture 2010), in order to integrate the sector more closely with rural development, in pursuit of environmental and social objectives. This approach accords with national policy as set out in the National Sustainable Development Strategy.

The Council supports the emphasis in the National Development Plan on investment, on measures for improving farm structures, including farm waste management, animal welfare, food quality and environmental protection, complementing the substantial investment in REPS. The optimum and environmentally sensitive use of land no longer required for agriculture will be a key issue over the Plan period. Where appropriate Laois County Council will support the production of energy crops on set aside land throughout the County.

Commonage and other rough grazing land should be regarded primarily as an important recreational, environmental and amenity resource.

9.2.1 SUSTAINABLE FOOD PRODUCTION

Ireland is a world leader in areas such as sustainable auditing and carbon foot-printing under the Origin Green programme. Origin Green is the national sustainability programme for the food and drink industry uniting government, the private sector and food producers. Origin Green is a strategic priority in Food Wise 2025.

Food Wise 2025, sets out a cohesive, strategic plan for the sustainable development of agri-food sector over the next decade. The strategy was informed by a detailed environmental impact analysis, and driven by a strong focus on sustainability.

Laois County Council has supported sustainable food production under previous REDZ programmes and this has further developed into Laois TASTE which is a diverse group of 21 Laois based Food & Drink Producers dedicated to promoting the Laois Food & Drink Sector through the Laois TASTE brand, locally, nationally and internationally. The aim is to promote local provenance, strengthen the Laois food industry and transform Laois into one of Ireland’s top food destinations.

Policy Objectives for Agriculture and Food Production	
RL 1	Maintain a vibrant and healthy agricultural sector based on the principles of sustainable development whilst at the same time finding alternative employment in or close to rural areas to sustain rural communities.
RL 2	Facilitate the development of agriculture while ensuring that natural waters, wildlife habitats and conservation areas are protected from pollution.
RL 3	Work with the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly and other relevant stakeholders in identifying areas of high value agricultural land in the County to address the need for sustainable food supplies.
RL 4	Continue to support and work with Laois Food producers to promote local provenance, strengthen the Laois food industry and transform Laois into one of Ireland’s top food destinations.

Agriculture Development Management Standard

DM RL 1	<p>GENERAL CONSIDERATION FOR AGRICULTURAL BUILDINGS</p> <p>Agricultural developments have the potential to impact on the environment and the landscape. The traditional form of agricultural buildings is disappearing with the onset of advanced construction methods and wider range of materials. Some new farm buildings have the appearance of industrial buildings and due to their scale and mass can have serious major visual impacts.</p> <p>In dealing with applications for agricultural developments the Planning Authority will have regard to the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Require that buildings be sited as unobtrusively as possible and that the finishes and colour used will blend the development into its surroundings.2) The proposed developments shall meet with the requirements of the Department of Agriculture with regard to storage and disposal of waste.3) The Council accepts the need for agricultural buildings and associated works (walls, fences, gates, entrances, yards) to be functional but they will be required to be sympathetic to their surroundings in scale, material and finishes.4) Buildings should relate to the landscape. Traditionally this was achieved through having the roof a darker colour than the walls.5) Appropriate roof colours are dark grey, dark reddish brown or a very dark green. Where cladding is used on the exterior of the farm buildings dark colours should be used.6) Location and impacts on the road network and other associated uses7) Ensure it does not have an undue negative impact on the visual/scenic amenity of the countryside and identify mitigating measures where required <p>All agricultural buildings should be located an adequate distance from any watercourse to reduce the risk of contamination.</p>
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9.3 AFFORESTATION

Forests and woodlands are a natural resource which can provide commercial, recreational, environmental, amenity and aesthetic benefits. There is considerable potential to develop this sector in County Laois from its current relatively low base.

The Council recognises the importance of forestry, its value added potential, and the opportunities it offers for on-farm diversification. Emphasis on forestry has increased because of its role in economic development and employment and the potential of forestry to sequester carbon, thereby offsetting the production of green house gases such as methane, nitrous oxide and carbon dioxide.

Nonetheless, the benefits arising from carbon sequestration must be balanced against the need to carefully manage forestry [especially coniferous plantations] so that it does not result in damage to visual amenity, residential amenity, soil and water quality or biodiversity. State ownership accounts for 63% of afforestation in County Laois.

9.4 PEATLANDS

The development of the county's peat resources will be promoted and facilitated by the Council also which recognizes the potential of peatland areas for tourism, amenity, educational and research purposes. They could also potentially accommodate large scale alternative energy production in the form of solar and wind.

9.4.1 FUTURE USE OF BORD NA MONA LANDS

In the context of Peatland distribution throughout the County, much of this natural asset is owned by Bord Na Mona. The company's estate is characterised by large tracts of land in dispersed landholdings. This, coupled with proximity to the national electricity infrastructure and relative isolation from residential areas, is particularly suited to the development of renewable energy such as windfarms and solar farms and other large-scale energy dependant industrial development. As the transition away from peat extraction activities progresses, this cutaway will be stabilised through the implementation of a rehabilitation programme with significant portions of these lands rewilding and supporting biodiversity and other ecosystem services.

9.4.1.1 Renewable Energy

There are approximately 3,000ha of Bord na Móna lands within County Laois. These lands have the potential to make a significant contribution to meeting national and regional policy objectives across a range of sectors. The company's existing network of workshops and production facilities also hold opportunities for the re-purposing of these facilities for new sustainable industries. In County Laois, the extensive industrial site, locally known as the Cúil Na Móna works site, has been in use for many years as a horticultural peat processing plant. The scale of this site, extending to c.20 acres, and its current buildings, totalling over 80,000 square feet, represent a significant opportunity for redevelopment and future industrial uses. This site, which is located at Junction 17 off the M7 motorway, is particularly close to the new Togher Business Park located at junction 17 and would enhance the overall viability of the region.

Most recently, Bord na Móna applied to Laois County Council for planning permission to develop a renewable gas facility at Cúil na Móna Bog. The proposed facility is designed to treat 80,000 tonnes per annum of biodegradable and organic waste material through an anaerobic digestion process to produce a renewable gas for injection into the local natural gas network. This proposed development is aligned with and will significantly contribute to achieving the targets and objectives set out in National and Regional policy by contributing to the development of a low carbon economy, achievement of renewable energy targets and the provision of much needed waste treatment capacity for the management of biodegradable waste.

9.4.1.2 Green Infrastructure

As we transition away from commercial peat production, the rehabilitated cutaway will naturally revert to a rich and diverse natural habitat enhancing biodiversity and supporting other ecosystem services and green infrastructure. Examples of Bord na Móna enabled green infrastructure in the county include the restored Abbeyleix bog, which is now leased to the local community as a conservation project.

The Abbeyleix bog is part of a Natural Walking Loop and is a very popular local walking route located in a natural landscape. Bord na Móna also restored Knockahaw Bog (312 ha raised bog) in 2018 as part of its Biodiversity Action Plan and peatland rehabilitation commitments.

Both Abbeyleix Bog and Knockahaw Bog are examples of high value biodiversity sites where Bord na Móna have made the decision to conserve and manage these sites for their biodiversity value and other ecosystem services. Other activities, such as amenity, are compatible with this primary objective. Peatland rehabilitation will also bring additional benefits of improving water quality and flood attenuation to downstream water-courses.

Derryounce Bog was originally purchased by Bord na Móna and developed as part of their greater Clonsast group of bogs in the mid-20th Century. The bog was cut for sod peat by Bord na Móna over several decades with peat supplying the old power station at Portarlinton. The remaining cutaway bog was planted with a conifer plantation by Coillte when industrial peat production ceased in the 1980s. With the lowering of ground levels during peat production, a basin was created in the central area and this area flooded permanently which is now known as Lough Lurgan. Derryounce Walks and Lakes are a valuable amenity asset for Portarlinton and the wider hinterland. The area offers opportunity for walkers, anglers, naturalists, photographers and people who want to experience its peace, tranquility and vistas.

The connectivity of Derryounce with Portarlinton is an opportunity to be explored within this plan period. Policies in relation to this are located in Chapter 10 Infrastructure and Chapter 11 Biodiversity and Natural Heritage.

9.5 MINING AND AGGREGATES

The Council recognises that the aggregate and concrete products industry contribute to the development of the national, regional and local economies by the proper use and management of natural resources for the benefit of the community and the creation of employment opportunities. These products are required as essential building materials in the social and economic development process including the provision of housing and infrastructure. Laois County Council will seek to safeguard these valuable resources for future extraction.

The *National Guidelines on Quarries and Ancillary Activities for Planning Authorities (DOEHLG, 2004)* is the guiding document against which applications for quarries and ancillary activities will be considered.

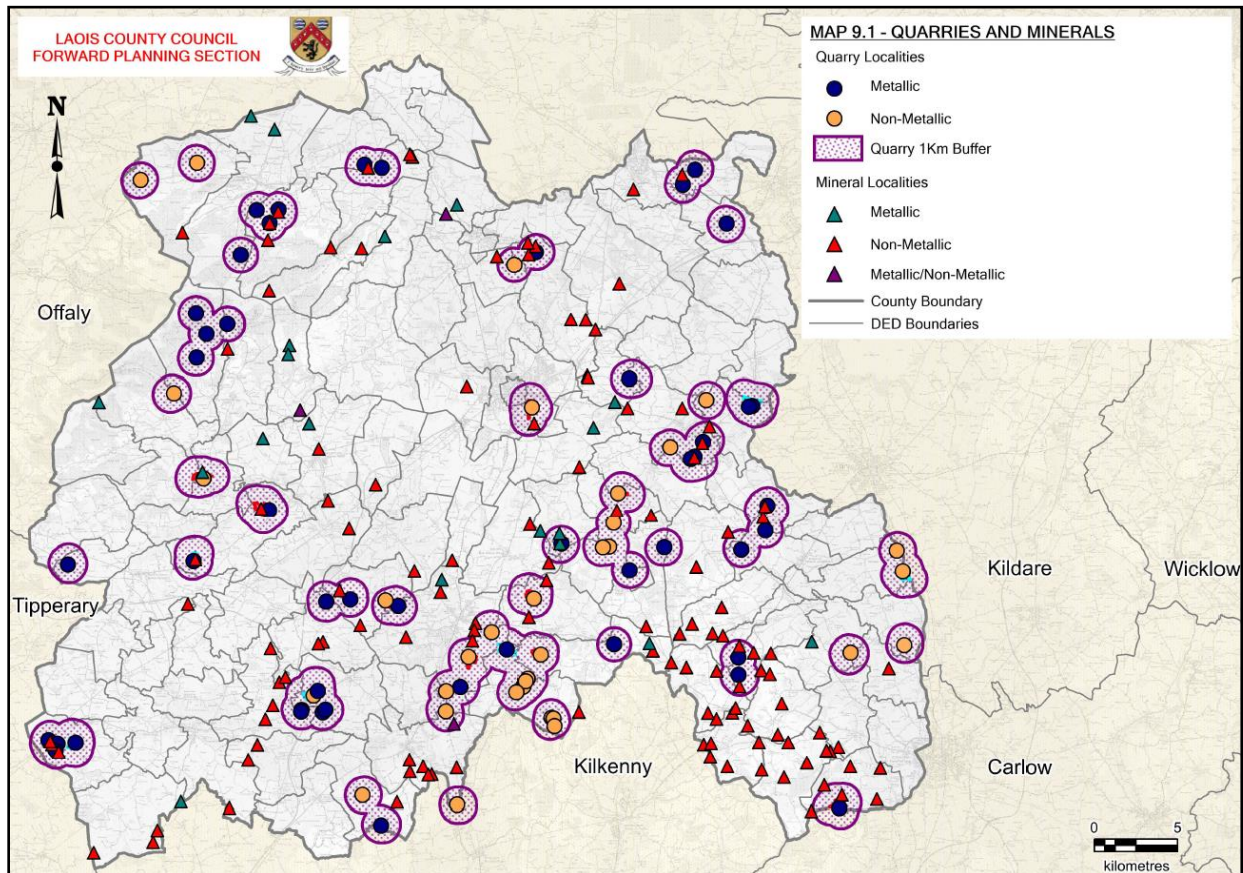
Aggregate extraction can only take place where suitable aggregate resources exist; they are a 'tied' resource. It is considered, therefore, that planning policies should be carefully constructed to avoid adverse effects on aggregate resources and the related extractive industries and added value production that are essential for the built environment, infrastructure and future economic development.

Like many forms of development, extractive industries have the potential to cause harm to the environment, heritage and the landscape if not appropriately designed and managed. However, aggregates are a necessary resource and are of great importance to the economy and society. In addition, well managed and designed quarry sites minimise environmental effects. There is also the potential for habitat creation through the restoration of quarry sites following the cessation of operations.

The following National Guidelines (as may be superseded and/or updated) should be complied with:

- Environmental Management(EPA 2006);
- Quarries and Ancillary Activities: DOE/CLG Guidelines 2004);
- Environmental Code(ICF 2006);
- Geological Heritage Guidelines(ICF & GSI 2008);
- Archaeological Code of Practice((ICF & DOE/CLG 2009);
- Sections 261 & 261A Planning and Development Acts 2000 – 2013.

Map 9.1: Quarrying Sites in County Laois



9.6

COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENTS IN RURAL AREAS

Rural businesses and enterprises are an important source of local employment in the County. Many examples of fine rural businesses exist throughout the county. This includes agricultural, equine, engineering/manufacturing, recreational, tourism, energy/renewable energy, and rural resource based enterprises. Whilst this Plan supports such enterprises and the diversification of the rural economy, it is also recognised that a balance is required between supporting rural based enterprises and projects and protecting the local environment.

In the first instance, new employment related developments are directed to settlements where services are available and lands have been identified for employment uses.

It is also recognised that there are instances where a development can be more readily accommodated or is more appropriate to a rural area. This can be due to a locational specific, or resourced based development, or a development of regional or national importance.

In relation to the expansion of an existing rural enterprise, consideration will be given to the scale of the existing and proposed development, the capacity of local infrastructure to accommodate the expansion, and the compatibility of the development with the surrounding area.

Policy Objectives for Rural Development	
RL 4	Support the expansion, diversification and intensification of agriculture and the agri-food sector by facilitating appropriate related development subject to environmental and planning considerations.
RL 5	Support and facilitate agri-tourism and the work of farming / local bodies within the county in the promotion of the rural economy, including agriculture development, tourism adaptation, rural diversification and in the development of new initiatives to support farming.
RL 6	support In principle the appropriate expansion of the forestry sector and related manufacturing activities subject to environmental, traffic and planning considerations; support an increase in the broadleaf component of any planting programme to a minimum of 33%.
RL 7	Encourage, subject to compliance with the Habitats and Birds Directives, access to forestry including private forestry for amenity and educational purposes including the provision of walking routes, cycling routes, mountain biking routes, mountain trails, nature trails and orienteering.
RL 8	Seek to have planting and felling conducted in a manner which takes into account best practice in forestry planting and felling in the context of landscape design so that it integrates into the landscape.
RL 9	Plan and prepare for the future use of large industrial peatland sites when peat harvesting finishes in conjunction with NPWS, Coillte and ESB/Bord na Mona and other stakeholders.

Policy Objectives for Rural Development	
RL 10	Support the longer-term strategic planning for industrial peatland areas, which should include a comprehensive after-use framework plan for the industrial peatlands and associated infrastructure which addresses environmental, economic and social issues including employment and replacement enterprise reflecting the current transition from employment based around peat extraction.
RL 11	Support the Midlands Regional Transition Team in developing a 'Holistic Plan for Just Transition in the Midland Region' including an inventory of project proposals and actions to support Just Transition in the Midlands and to assist the region in identifying potential investment needs for inclusion in a programme of support under the new EU Just Transition Fund.
RL 12	Reconcile the need for resource-based economic activities to conduct a reasonable operation and the needs of residents in rural areas to access a good quality of life and access to rural areas.
RL 13	Have regard to Laois' Landscape Character Assessment, as well as more general Planning considerations, such as transport, environmental sensitivities, habitat considerations, the need for buffer zones around water bodies in its determination of planning applications related to land-based economic activities.
RL 14	Support in principle the expansion of the aggregates and concrete products industry which offers opportunity for employment and economic development generally subject to environmental , traffic and planning considerations and ensure that any plan or project associated with extractive industry is subject to Appropriate assessment screening in compliance with the Habitats Direction and subsequent assessment as required , applicants for planning permission shall have regard to the GSI-ICF Quarrying Guidelines.
RL 15	To secure the long-term supply of value-added products (such as concrete products and asphalt, which are often, but not always, produced in conjunction with aggregate extraction.
RL 16	To support the necessary role of the extractive industries in the delivery of building materials for infrastructural and other development and to recognize the need to develop extractive industries for the benefit of society and the economy;
RL 17	Support in principle the processing of minerals to produce cement, bitumen or other products in the vicinity of the source of the aggregate, where the transport network is suitable to reduce trip generation.
RL 18	Protect rural amenities, natural archaeological and natural heritage, visual amenities, eco-systems, conservation areas, landscape and scenic views from adverse impacts of agricultural practices and development particularly in high amenity areas and ensure that it is appropriate in nature and scale, and ensure it does not have an undue negative impact on the visual/scenic amenity of the countryside and identify mitigating measures where required. Integrate into the landscape, including the minimal use of signage.

Policy Objectives for Rural Development	
RL 19	Facilitate land-based or resource-based economic activities in rural areas that support a sustainable environment and resilient communities.
RL 20	Investigate the feasibility of mapping the full extent of aggregate resources of the county during the lifetime of the County Development Plan 2021- 2027.
RL 21	<p>Laois County Council will implement the objectives and targets at county level of the EU ‘A Farm to Fork strategy’, published in May 2020. The Council will also implement the targets of the 14 point EU Nature Restoration Plan in the ‘EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 - Bringing nature back into our lives’. Agricultural development proposals must demonstrate compliance with the targets and policies of both strategies, with those agricultural installations below the Industrial Emissions Directive thresholds for EPA licencing will be subject to appropriate assessment screening and that assessment of these impacts should follow EPA Guidance published in May 2021¹.</p> <p>1 https://www.epa.ie/publications/licensing--permitting/industrial/ied/Assessment-of-Impact-of--Ammonia-and-Nitrogen-on-Natura-sites-from-Intensive-Agriculture-Installations.pdf</p>

Enterprise Development Management Standard

DM RL 2	<p>COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS</p> <p>Development proposals in the open countryside should satisfy a high standard of siting and design, while being properly located to ensure their assimilation into their rural setting. The following considerations should be taken into account:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Buildings should be kept simple and should be finished with materials appropriate to a rural setting such as nap plaster, stone and slate; 2) Buildings should reflect the scale and pattern of the rural development in the vicinity; 3) Building height should be restricted to that required for the normal operation of the premises, buildings of excessive height will not be permitted; 4) Buildings should be sited to make use of existing hedgerows and topography to provide natural screening, buildings in open landscapes should be avoided; 5) Access roads and driveways should respect existing site contours; 6) Car parking should be located to the rear of the building and in compliance with the car parking standards in Table 18; 7) Advertising signs should be kept to a minimum; 8) Large advertising signs at the road frontage will be resisted; 9) Hedgerows or stone walls should be used for boundary treatments; 10) Any new building will be required to respect the appearance of and
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	<p>character of the landscape.</p> <p>11) It will not be acceptable where it is unduly prominent in the landscape, where it results in build-up of development when viewed with existing and/or approved building or where the impact of the ancillary works, including the creation of visibility splays would damage rural character or impact negatively on the environment or which fails to protect Natura Sites, conservation areas, natural heritage or the environment or fails to protect and improve or is injurious to amenities(including visual amenities).</p> <p>12) A justification as to why the proposed development is to be located in a rural area over a settlement where adequate zoning is in place shall be submitted.</p>
<p>DM RL 3</p>	<p>MINING AND AGGREGATES</p> <p>Applications for new development for aggregate extraction, processing and associated processes, shall</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) identify existing public rights of way and walking routes which may be impacted on or are adjacent to the development site. They shall be kept free from development as a Rights of Way/Walking Route 2) ensure the protection, conservation, preservation and safeguarding of recorded monuments and areas in their vicinity, World Heritage Sites(including Tentative Sites), NHA's, Euro Sites, Nature Reserves, scenic views and prospects archaeological sites and features, natural heritage, natural environment, features of natural beauty or interest and prescribed sites, geological sites and areas of geological/geomorphological or historic interest and areas of high scenic amenity from inappropriate development that might be detrimental to them. 3) minimise adverse effect on the environment and visual and natural amenities to the greatest possible extent must be carried out during all life cycle stages, whether in respect of new quarries or extensions to existing ones and development will be prohibited if the quality of the environment or landscape, particularly sensitive landscape, is adversely affected or there is a reduction of the visual amenity of areas of high amenity. 4) be landscaped either by the retention of existing vegetation or by screening to minimise the detracting from the visual quality of the landscape. 5) Require that development proposals on or in proximity to a quarry site should investigate the nature and extent of the risks associated with the development together with appropriate mitigation.

CHAPTER 10 INFRASTRUCTURE

Aim: To achieve a sustainable, integrated and low carbon transport system for the county and to protect, improve and extend water services and other enabling infrastructure in line with national, regional and local population and economic growth for the county

10.1 TRANSPORTATION

The timely provision of a full range of transportation services is critical if County Laois is to continue to develop as an attractive location for business and residential development. Achieving spatial balance by developing the potential of areas will depend on enhancing capacity for the movement of people, goods, energy and information between different places. The attractiveness of particular locations depends on their relative accessibility and connectivity which in turn depends on the quality and quantity of the transport infrastructure. Although Laois County Council is only directly responsible for the development of some transportation modes, the Council will continue to provide those elements of the transportation system which are within its remit and to facilitate the development of those elements provided by others.

10.1.1 INTEGRATION OF TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE PLANNING

Laois County Council recognises that the current trends in transportation are unsustainable, in particular the relentless increase in private car traffic. The Council is strongly committed to the promotion of sustainable means of travel including public transport, walking and cycling, and the encouragement of modal change from private car use to these more sustainable alternatives. In planning for transport development, the Council will ensure that the needs of people with differing abilities are taken into account. The Council seeks to reduce the degree of commuting in the first instance by facilitating the creation of additional jobs within the County for the resident population.

The integration of good land use planning with transportation is fundamental to efficient and sustainable planning. For instance, a combination of urban design, land use patterns and transportation systems that promote walking and cycling will help create active, healthier and more liveable communities.

The Council will continue to provide for all components of the transportation system which are within its own remit and will encourage and facilitate the development of those other elements provided by external agencies, such as the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII).

10.1.2 POLICY CONTEXT

10.1.2.1 *The National Planning Framework – Ireland 2040*

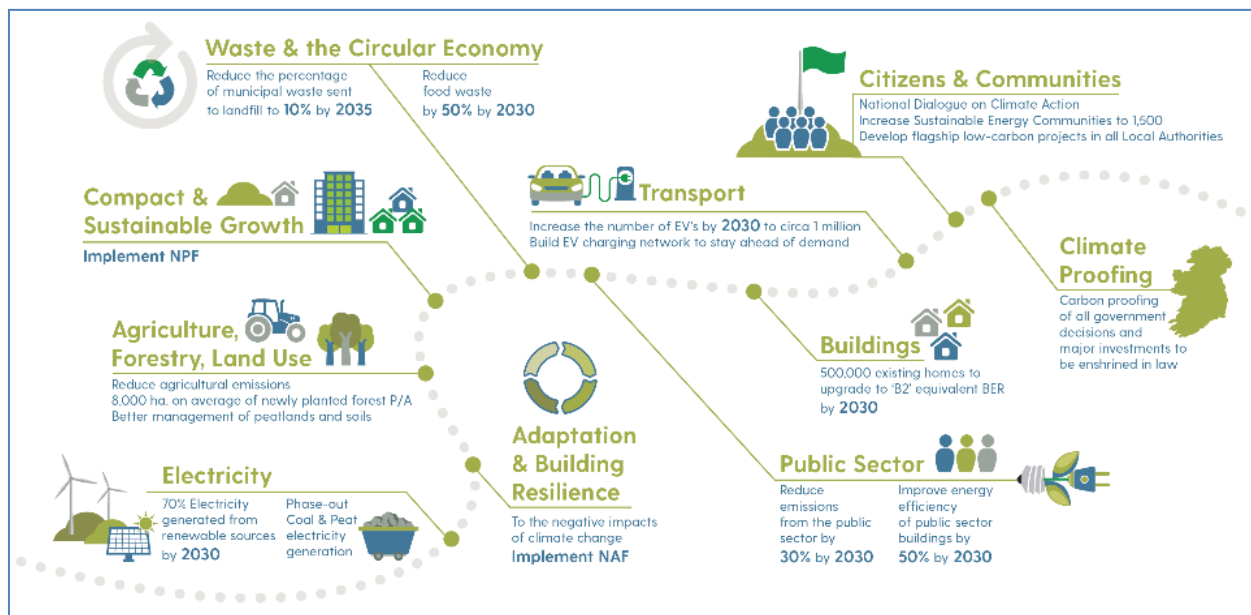
The NPF places a strong emphasis on sustainable mobility with a particular focus on electrification of public transport fleets and use of electric vehicles and the transition to more sustainable modes of travel such as public transport, cycling and walking. In particular, Enhanced Regional Accessibility (NSO 2), Sustainable Mobility (NSO 4) and Transition to a Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Society (NSO 8) apply to this section of the Plan.

10.1.2.2 *Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy*

The RSES, in Chapters 7 Environment and Climate and Chapter 8 Connectivity supports sustainable and low carbon transport modes through a modal shift from carbon heavy to more sustainable transport mode and promoting walkable communities and the importance of sustainable greenway, blueway and peatway networks.

10.1.2.3 *Climate Action Plan 2019*

The Climate Action Plan identifies the nature and scale of the climate challenge and sets the course of action and carbon proof polices over the coming years to address climate change. This Plan clearly recognises that Ireland must significantly step up its commitments to tackle climate disruption. The leadership role both the Government and public bodies can play in taking early action on climate is fundamental to achieving our decarbonisation goals. The infographic below provides an overview of targets set.



10.1.2.4 *National Guidance*

The policy objectives of this Plan shall be informed by the following National and Regional guidance and policies:

- The National Climate Mitigation Plan and Climate Adaptation Framework
- Building on Recovery: Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2016-2021
- National Energy Efficiency Action Plan (NEEAP)
- Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways, 2018
- Local Link Rural Transport Programme Strategic Plan 2018 to 2022
- Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets
- Smarter Travel—A Sustainable Transport Future: A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020

- Smarter Travel - National Cycle Policy Framework 2009-2020
- Developing Resilience to Climate Change in the Irish Transport Sector
- National Cycle Manual
- Spatial Planning and National Roads-Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DECLG, 2012)
- National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017 – 2021
- Provision of Tourist and Leisure Signage on National Roads (March 2011)

Transportation Policy Objectives	
TRANS 1	Maintain, improve and protect the safety, capacity and efficiency of Laois's roads network and associated junctions in accordance with the Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities, DECLG, (2012) and the Trans-European Networks (TEN-T) Regulations.
TRANS 2	Upgrade and improve the hierarchy of Laois's road transportation infrastructure including reserving corridors for proposed routes, free of development, so as not to compromise future road schemes.
TRANS 3	Co-operate with Transport Infrastructure Ireland [TII] in the upgrade of existing Interchange[s] on the National Routes where appropriate and to restrict development immediately adjacent to Interchange[s] to provide for the future enlargement of Interchange.
TRANS 4	Prevent inappropriate development on lands adjacent to the existing road network, including the intensification of the use which would adversely affect the safety, current and future capacity and function of national roads and having regard to possible future upgrades of the national roads and junctions.
TRANS 5	Prepare a Local Transport Plan for Portlaoise in compliance with RPO 8.6 of the RSES and carried out in accordance with the Area Based Transport Assessment (ABTA) guidance document (PE-PDV-02046)-and Support the strategic vision of J17 National Enterprise Park Masterplan to deliver a strategic economic zone within Portlaoise.
TRANS 6	Discourage the proliferation of access points onto public roads, particularly in areas where the maximum speed limit applies or where road safety is of concern. The Council also encourages and promotes shared access points in all circumstances.
TRANS 7	Subject to availability of resources, provide for and carry out improvements to sections of local roads that are deficient in respect of realignment, structural condition or capacity, and to maintain that standard thereafter.
TRANS 8	<p>Require development proposals accessing onto Laois's roads network to comply with the Council's road standards contained in the Road Design Section document titled Roads and Parking Standards (2007) and to any subsequent revisions thereto.</p> <p>Where developments are permitted in rural areas along National, Regional and County Roads that they must conform to the minimum distance listed in Table 4.1 – Minimum Desired Building Lines and Fence Lines, of the Laois County Council Roads and Parking Standards (2007) guidelines.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In situations where there is an established building line, new houses, where appropriate, shall conform to the established building line. Building lines in developed areas will be determined having regard to the historic urban grain of the area and the need to provide pedestrian

Transportation Policy Objectives	
	friendly streets with a sense of enclosure.
TRANS 9	Where the capacity, width, alignment or surface condition of the road are inadequate, development will not be favoured. Where new development would adversely impact on road drainage, development will not be permitted unless applicants agree proposals with the Council to improve the road.
TRANS 10	Work with the National Trails Office, Coillte, the Department of Planning, Housing and Local Government, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, and other relevant stakeholders, to improve on the existing level of transport infrastructure and facilities for walking and cycling.
TRANS 11	Integrate land use policies and transportation in a manner which reduces reliance on car based travel and promotes more sustainable transport choice and co-ordinates particular land uses with their accessibility requirements.
TRANS 12	Support sustainable travel in the tourism sector by the promotion of public transport use and by undertaking enhancements to overall accessibility thereby making the County easier for visitors to navigate. Integrate the County's transport and tourism strategies to promote increasingly sustainable travel patterns among visitors to the County. Support the construction of green routes/cycleways/pedestrian routes.
TRANS 13	Encourage transition towards sustainable and low carbon transport modes, through the promotion of alternative modes of transport, and 'walkable communities' together with promotion of compact urban forms close to public transport corridors to encourage more sustainable patterns of movement.
TRANS 14	<p>To undertake Local Transport Plans in conjunction with the NTA, TII, and relevant stakeholders which will identify a transport strategy to address modal shift traffic issues, parking and active travel deficiencies in the existing network and make recommendations on same in the following towns.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Portlaoise & Environs - Mountrath & Environs - Mountmellick & Environs - Durrow & Environs - Abbeyleix & Environs - Stradbally & Environs - Portarlinton & Environs (Joint Study with Offaly Co Co to be explored) - Graiguecullen & Environs (Joint Study with Carlow Co Co to be explored) <p>The strategic aim of the LTP is to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • examine the current lack of alternatives to the car and land use patterns which can better affect a modal shift to public transport, walking and cycling; • address current issues and anticipate future problems in the transport network of the town and its strategic routes; and in doing so will present a detailed analysis of the current transport situation and present potential interventions and recommendations for retention or not of roads

Transportation Policy Objectives	
	objectives, active travel options, roads based solutions including the strategic routes and solutions to encourage provision and greater use of public transport.
TRANS 15	<p>It is a Policy Objective that where projects for new roads or other linear projects, identified in Chapter 10 and Volume 2, are not already provided for by existing plans/programme or are not already permitted, that the feasibility of progressing these projects shall be examined, taking into account environmental sensitivities as identified in the SEA Environmental Report and the objectives of the Plan relating to sustainable mobility. A Corridor and Route Selection Process will be undertaken where appropriate, for relevant new road infrastructure in two stages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage 1 – Route Corridor Identification, Evaluation and Selection; and • Stage 2 – Route Identification, Evaluation and Selection.

Transportation Development Management Standard

DM TRANS 1	<p>GENERAL</p> <p>In towns, villages and settlements new developments access arrangements shall have regard to the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets, DTTS and DHPLG (2019) (DMURS) and TII Publication DN-GEO-03060.</p>
DM TRANS 2	<p>SIGHTLINES</p> <p>Sightline requirements are determined by the Council having regard to Laois County Council Roads and Parking Standards (2007) guidelines (and any and in exceptional circumstances on a case by case basis. Factors including the type, speed limit and condition of the road shall be taken into consideration: Where sightlines are inadequate and would give rise to a traffic hazard, development will not be permitted.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In cases where an access already exists with inadequate sightlines, it is Council policy to recommend the closing up of this entrance and to facilitate another entrance with adequate sightlines. <p>All applications for planning permission must clearly indicate the sightlines available at the proposed access within the boundary of the site.</p>
DM TRANS 3	<p>Proposals for residential developments near busy roads in urban areas may be required to show how it is proposed that impacts of noise are mitigated. A Noise Impact Assessment along with noise screening measures such as facade insulation and noise barriers should form part of proposals, as appropriate.</p>
DM TRANS 4	<p>The Council requires the submission of a Traffic and Transport Assessment (TTA) as part of planning applications for larger developments in accordance with the NRA Traffic and Transport Assessment Guidelines May 2014 document. These guidelines advise that applicants should consult with the Transportation Department of the Council prior to submission of an application.</p>

DM TRANS 5	Where a development requires that the existing roads / footpaths and public lighting be improved / extended, or any other works carried out to facilitate a development, the developer may be required to provide these as a condition of planning permission.
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10.1.3 ROADS INFRASTRUCTURE

A hierarchy of roads exists with the Plan area including sections of motorways, national roads, regional roads, local roads and urban roadways. There has been significant investment into the road infrastructure and therefore it is important to protect and maintain the carrying capacity of the road network within the county.

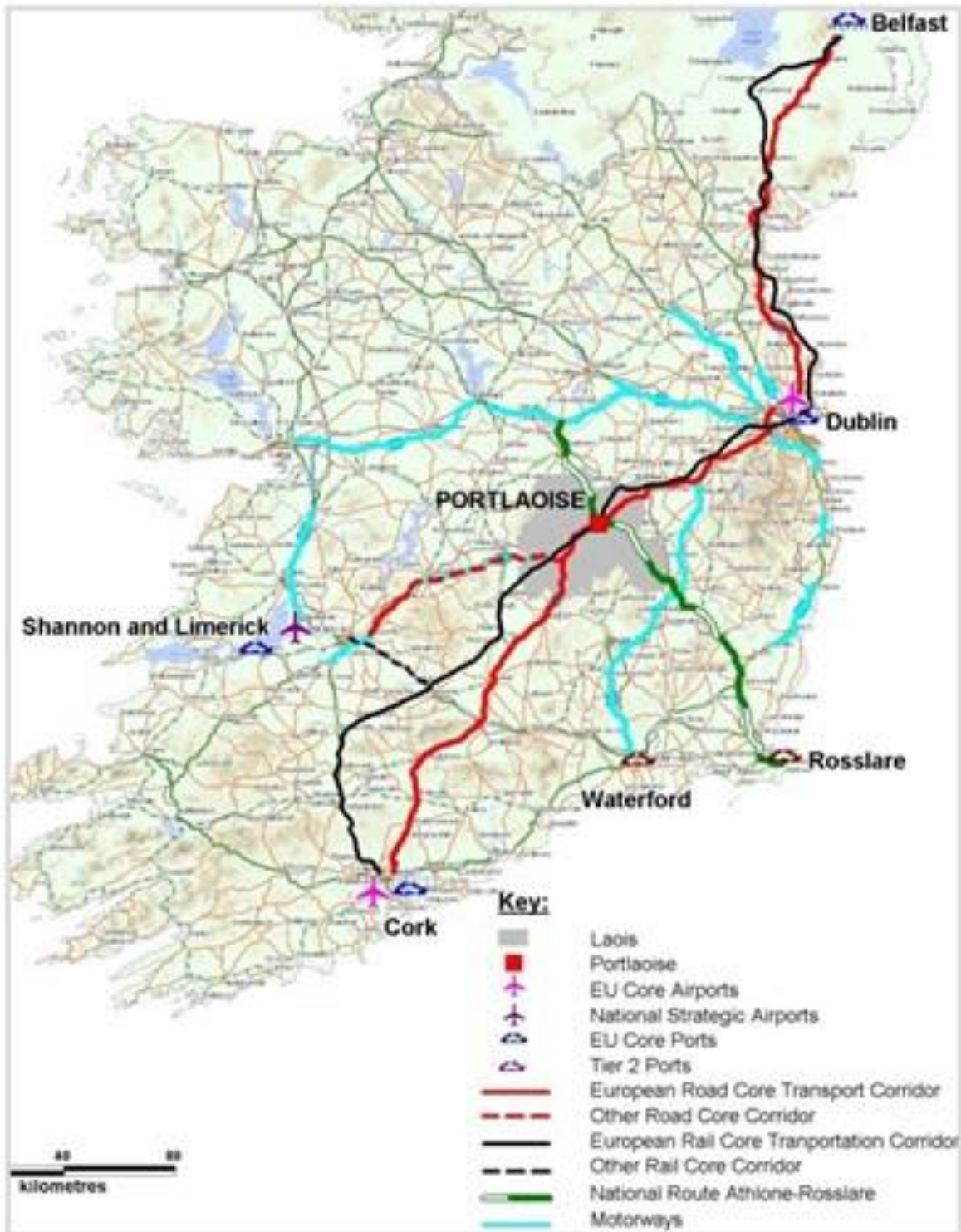
10.1.3.1 Motorway Network

County Laois occupies a strategic location on the National Road network with the M7, M8, N80, N77, N78, traversing the county. The primary purpose of the national road network is to provide strategic transport links between main centres of population and employment. The M7 and the M8 have been identified as part of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T).

Section 2.8 of the DoECLG Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines which indicates the requirement for a forward planning approach to the provision of off-line motorway service areas at national road junctions and also addresses road-side service facilities on non-motorway national roads and their junctions.

Motorway Policy Objective	
TRANS 16	Prohibit development seeking access onto the Motorway network and associated junctions through the implementation of the 'Spatial Planning and National Roads – Guidelines for Planning Authorities'.

Figure 10.1: Strategic location of Laois



10.1.3.2 National Routes

In terms of road transport, some of the country's most significant sections of national route network traverse County Laois and important connectors of the eastern and southern ends of the County to the wider regional and national communications network. These include:

- N80 Rosslare–Carlow-Moate National Secondary Route.
- N77 linking Portlaoise to Kilkenny via Durrow and Ballyragget.
- N78 from Athy to Castlecomer passing through Ballylynan and Newtown Doonane.

National Routes Policy Objectives	
TRANS 17	Avoid the creation of any new direct access points from development or the generation of increased traffic from existing direct access/egress points to the national road network to which speed limits greater than 60kmph apply.
TRANS 18	<p>Facilitate a limited level of new accesses or the intensified use of existing accesses to the national road network on the approaches to or exit from urban centres that are subject to a speed limit zone between 50kmph and 60kmph otherwise known as the transition zone. Such accesses will be considered where they facilitate orderly urban development and would not result in a proliferation of such entrances, leading to a diminution in the role of these transitional zones. A Road Safety Audit, prepared in accordance with TII Publications: GE-STY-01024 Road Safety Audit shall be submitted where appropriate.</p> <p>Proposals shall have regard to the TII Publication 'The Treatment of Transition Zones to Towns and Villages on National Roads' (TII Publications DN-GEO-03084).</p>
TRANS 19	<p>Consider permitting access for replacement dwellings for persons who [or their families] own the original house and site for a minimum of 10 years [documentary evidence in this regard to be submitted] subject to the following provisions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The original dwelling is in-situ and is habitable; • The cost of refurbishment of and/ or extension to the original dwelling is prohibitive; • The applicant complies with the provisions of the local need factor of the rural housing policy as outlined in Chapter 4 Housing Strategy, Section 4.6of the Plan; • An alternative site with access onto a minor road is not available; • The proposed development can be accommodated without the creation of a specific traffic hazard; • Where possible an existing entrance is used; • Sightlines of 215m must be achieved within the site boundary only and notrequire any set back of adjacent boundaries on 3rd party lands; • The Councils road standards are fully met;

National Routes Policy Objectives	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The site is of minimum size of 0.202 hectares [0.5 acres]; • A Site Suitability Assessment must be submitted.
TRANS 20	To develop policy that provides a framework for a less restrictive approach to non-residential development of strategic or national importance or extensions to such developments accessing onto the National Road Network in accordance with the provisions of Section 2.6 of the 'Spatial Planning and National Roads - Guidelines for planning authorities' (2012) with TII within 1 years of adoption of the County Development Plan.
TRANS 21	The capacity and efficiency of the national road network drainage regimes in County Laois will be safeguarded for national road drainage purposes.

10.1.3.3 *Regional Roads Network*

The regional road network in the county is subdivided into Strategic Regional Roads and Regional Roads. In the case of strategic regional roads and regional roads, especially those which have a high carrying capacity, the Council shall adopt a restrictive policy in relation to new development in the interests of traffic safety.

A policy to review the carrying capacity of these routes could be considered which would provide the evidential basis that could be used to strengthen if required protection of such routes.

Regional and Strategic Regional Road Policy Objective	
TRANS 21	Carry out a carrying capacity review of all strategic regional routes and regional routes to inform future policy on protection if required.

Strategic Regional Roads

There are 17 Strategic Regional Roads in County Laois linking the main county towns to the national routes and M7 and M8 motorways. These are shown in the table below.

Table 10.1: Strategic Regional Roads in County Laois

Road Name	Location
R419	Junction with R445 (Great Heath) to County Boundary (Portarlinton)
R420	Junction with R419 (Portarlinton) to Junction with R445 (Killinure)
R421	County Boundary (Ballynahown) to Junction with R422 (Coolagh Cross Rds)
R422	Junction with R419 (Coolagh Cross Roads) to Junction with R445 at New Inn
R423	Junction with R445 (Mountrath) to Junction with N80 (Derryclooney)
R425	Junction with N77 (Abbeyleix) to Junction with R445 (Rathbrennan)
R426	Junction with N80 (Portlaoise) to Junction with R430 at the Swan

Road Name	Location
R427	Junction with R425 (Cashel) to Junction with N80 (Stradbally Town)
R428	Junction with N80 (Stradbally) to County Boundary (Blackford)
R430	Junction with R445 (Mountrath) to County Boundary (Carlow)
R433	Junction with N77 (Abbeyleix) to County Boundary (Knockahaw)
R434	Junction with R445 (Sentryhill) to Junction with N77 (Durrow)
R435	Junction with R445 (Borris-in-Ossory) to County Boundary (Rossdaragh)
R445	County Boundary (Ballaghmore) to County Boundary (Killinure)
R639	Junction with N77 (Durrow) to Kilkenny County Boundary (Old Town)
R941	Junction with N77 (Knockmay) to Junction with N80 (Clonreher)

Strategic Regional Roads Policy Objectives	
TRANS 22	Prohibit unnecessary access onto strategic regional routes in areas where speed limits in excess of 50kmph applies.

Regional Roads

There are 2 Regional Roads in County Laois linking the main county towns. These are shown in the table below. The remaining regional roadways that are not listed in Table 16 are classified as standard regional roadways. The Council shall also adopt a restrictive approach in relation to new development along these roadways also.

Table 10.2: Regional Roads

Road Name	Location
R440	Junction with R423 (Ballyfin Rd) to Offaly County Boundary (Baunreagh)
R432	Junction with Ballinakill Rd to Kilkenny County Boundary (Kilcronan)

Regional Roads Policy Objectives	
TRANS 23	Restrict development requiring access onto Regional Roads where speed limits in excess of 50kmph apply.

10.1.3.4 County Roads and Urban Roads/Streets

County roads (or local roads) form the bulk of the road network in County Laois (a total of 1,718 km) and serve an important economic role because of the dispersed nature of the population in the county. Urban roads and streets are located in towns and villages and provide essential access from residential areas to retail streets, commercial lands and amenity areas. Laois County Council has responsibility for the carrying out of maintenance and improvement works on these roads, financed from their own resources and supplemented by state grants. Sight distance requirements for the above roads are outlined in the Council’s Road Design Section document titled *Roads and Parking Standards (2007) or any proceeding document thereafter*.

Local Roads Policy Objectives	
TRANS 24	<p>Ensure that the Council’s own development and those of other developers and agencies has regard to the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DTTS and DHPLG, 2019). Proposals shall:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users ahead of the needs of private car drivers; • Seek to create more attractive places on roads/streets which communities can understand and enjoy; • Seek to ensure that the design of the road/street is influenced by its function and the contexts of the places that road/street passes through, and that permeable and legible street networks are promoted; • Have regard to the detailed advice and standards within in the Manual including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Speed limits and traffic and congestion management; ○ Street landscaping and active street edges; ○ Control of traffic noise and pollution, Signage and line marking; ○ Street furniture and lighting, Material and finishes; ○ Historical contexts; ○ Pedestrianised and shared surface areas.

10.1.3.5 Laois County Council Priority Road Projects

Priority Roads Projects Policy Objectives	
TRANS 25	<p>Facilitate the following priority road projects during the lifetime of the Plan period 2021 -2027:</p> <p><u>Key Town – Portlaoise</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. M7 Junction 17 Off Ramp at Togher National Enterprise Park, Portlaoise; ii. Togher, Portlaoise Link Road Phase 2; iii. Portlaoise Northern Orbital Route (PNOR) iv. N80 Mountmellick Road , Portlaoise Improvements; v. R445 Mountrath Road, Portlaoise Improvements;

Priority Roads Projects Policy Objectives

Key Town – Graiguecullen

- i. Carlow Northern Relief Road Extension;

Self-Sustaining Growth Town – Portarlinton

- i. Portarlinton Relief Road;

County Wide roads projects

- i. Rathdowney Traffic Improvements Phase 2
- ii. M7/M8 Interconnector
- iii. Improvements to the N80 including Mountmellick By-pass
- iv. Improvements to N77
- v. Improvements to N78
- vi. Interurban Cycle facilities on former National Routes;
- vii. Ongoing Bridge Maintenance.

10.1.4 GUIDANCE ON ROAD ASSESSMENT

10.1.4.1 Traffic and Transport Assessments

Developers will be required to undertake Traffic and Transport Assessment (TTA) for development proposals, which may generate significant additional trips/travel, including road traffic, with potentially significant implications for national and non-national roads. TTAs are used to assess the transport impacts of a proposed development, incorporating any subsequent measures necessary to ensure roads and junctions and other transport infrastructure in the vicinity of the development remain fit for purpose and encourage a shift towards sustainable travel modes. Thresholds for TTAs are contained within the Traffic and Transport Assessment Guidelines 2014. The TTA should also address urban design impacts of proposed public and private transport proposals and also deal with delivery and monitoring regimes for various aspects.

10.1.4.2 Road Safety Audits

Road Safety Audits are generally required when a development requires a new access to a national road or significant changes to an existing access. Guidance for the preparation of road safety audits is included in the NRA [TII] Design Manual for Roads and Bridges

10.1.4.3 Mobility Plans

Mobility management plans/travel plans are proposals which will minimise the impact of the traffic generated by their development. They include mitigation measures which will take account of the findings of a Traffic & Transport Assessment (TTA). They bring together transportation requirements; employers, staff and site management issues in a coordinated manner. Measures that should be included are integration with public transport, promotion of car sharing/pooling,

parking pricing and control and the encouragement of cycling and walking by the provision of cycling and walking routes and secure cycle parking. The NTA document “Achieving Effective Workplace Travel Plans – Guidance for Local Authorities” also provides guidance on proposals to encourage employees to walking, cycling or carpool to the workplace.

Road Assessment Policy Objectives	
TRANS 26	Require the submission of a Traffic and Transport Assessment including mobility management plans in accordance with the guidelines in the Traffic and Transport Assessment Guidelines 2014, for developments with the potential to create significant additional demands on the traffic network by virtue of the nature of their activity, the number of employees, their location or a combination of these factors and for significant developments affecting the national and non-national road Network.
TRANS 27	Require a Road Safety Audit for developments that require a new access to a national road or significant changes to an existing access in accordance with the guidance included in the TII Publications GE-STY-01024 Road Safety Audit.

10.1.5 CAR PARKING AND CYCLE PARKING

Car parking requirements are to comply with standards contained in Table 10.3 (see below) and the following Policy Objectives and Development Management Standards.

Table 10.3: Land Use Parking Space Requirements

Land Use	Parking standard requirement
Houses	2 per Dwelling ³⁰
Apartments/Flats	1.26 - 2 per Unit
Retail	1 per 26m ² gross floor space
Offices	1 per 20m ² gross floor space
Financial Institutions	1 per 20 m ² gross floor space
Retail warehousing	1 per 36 m ² gross floor space
Cash and Carry Outlets	2 per 90 m ² plus adequate loading/unloading and circulation facilities
Industry	1 per 60 m ² gross floor space or 1 per 4no. employees, whichever is greater
Warehousing	1 per 100 m ² gross floor space or 1 space per 4no.employees, whichever is greater
Hotels, B&B's, Guesthouses*	1 space per bedroom
Bars and Lounges*	1 per 7 m ² gross floor space within speed limit 2 per 7 m ² gross floor space outside speed limit
Dance Areas, Dance Halls and Function Rooms	1 per 3 m ² gross floor space
Restaurants	1 per table
Take away	6 per unit
Commercial Garage	1 per 30 m ²
Service Station	1 per 300 m ² gross floor space + shop requirements
Showrooms	1 per 100 m ² gross floor space+ shop requirements
Hospitals	1 per bed
Nursing homes	1 per 2 bedrooms
Surgeries/Clinics	2 per consulting room
Funeral home	1 per 10 m ² gross floor space
Childcare/crèche/ montessori	1 per employee + 0.26 per child
Schools	2 per classroom plus sufficient bus circulation

³⁰ It is encouraged that parking spaces must be provided on site of the dwelling.

*** NOTE:**

- Bars and lounges, dancing areas, accommodation and function rooms to be calculated separately. Any development type not listed above shall be determined by the Planning Authority.
- Where settlements are covered by a Local Area Plan or Village Policy Statement, the provision for parking shall comply with the relevant document

Land Use	Parking standard requirement
	and off-loading facilities to cater for school-going population
Community Centre/Sports Club	1 per 14 m2 gross floor space or 2 per 90 m2 gross floorspace plus 2% whichever is greater
Golf and Pitch and Putt Courses	2 per hole
Golf Driving Range	1 per bay
Bowling Alley*	1 per lane
Theatre/ Cinema/Stadia/Churches*	1 per 6 seats
Non-Retail Service Outlet e.g. Hairdressers, Bookmakers etc	3 per 100m2 gross floor area

Parking Policy Objectives

TRANS 28	<p>Ensure that the provision of adequate parking facilities, including disabled parking, shall form part of the assessment of any application for development in accordance with the standards contained in Table 10.3: Land Use ParkingSpace Requirements.</p> <p>Where it is not possible to provide parking for the proposed development within the site, the matter will be dealt with in accordance with an approved Development Contribution Scheme.</p> <p>A relaxation of car parking requirement may be considered where a development is located in town centre locations, in close proximity to public transport or for certain types of housing developments such as assisted living units.</p>
TRANS 29	<p>Ensure that in the cases of certain activities where it can be demonstrated to the Planning Authority that there is a clear time demarcation between uses, dual use of parking spaces may be permitted. Such assessments shall be determined on a site by site basis and according to their merits.</p>
TRANS 30	<p>Ensure adequate space shall be made for the servicing of the facility, including loading and unloading of vehicles, which should be provided for within the site curtilage and should not interfere with the operation of adjacent public Thoroughfares.</p>
TRANS 31	<p>Ensure that cycle Parking will normally be required in development schemes and the Council shall promote and encourage the provision of cycle spaces in public car-parks and appropriate locations in towns and villages throughout the county. Where appropriate, cycle spaces shall be provided in prominent and secure locations convenient to building entrances.</p>
TRANS 32	<p>Ensure that Age Friendly Parking spaces are provided in main towns, near strategic areas e.g. Post office, credit union, doctors' surgery, civic buildings, etc.</p>

Parking Development Management Standard

<p>DM TRANS 6</p>	<p>DISABLED PARKING Disabled Parking will be calculated based on the following:</p> <p><u>Buildings not normally visited by the public:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum of one space of appropriate dimensions in every 26 standard spaces, up to the first 100 spaces, thereafter, one space per 100 standard spaces or part thereof. <p><u>Shops and buildings with public access:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum one space of appropriate dimensions in the first 26 standard spaces, minimum 3 in 26-60 standard spaces, five in 60-100 standard spaces and additional three per every 100 standard spaces in excess thereof. <p>Spaces shall be a minimum of 3.75m wide and 5m long and clearly marked with a highly visible symbol. Spaces should be located at the nearest point possible to the entrance to the facility served.</p>
<p>DM TRANS 7</p>	<p>PARKING IN FRONT GARDENS The cumulative effect of removal of front garden walls and railings damages the appearance of suburban streets and roads. Consequently, proposals for off street parking need to be balanced against loss of amenity. Where permitted, “drive-ins” should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not have outward opening gates; • Have a vehicular entrance of generally not less than 4m; • Have an area of hard standing (parking space of 2.5m x 5m); • Retain the balance as garden; • Have gates, walls or railings.
<p>DM TRANS 8</p>	<p>CAR PARKING DIMENSIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Car parking bay: 5m x 2.5m • Loading bay: 6m x 3m • Circulation aisles: 6m wide
<p>DM TRANS 9</p>	<p>CAR PARKS</p> <p>Surface car parks shall be designed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid an oppressive effect on the public realm and to provide for pedestrian mobility; • Create a pleasant environment through the use of soft landscaping including tree planting and planter boxes within large car parking areas, variation in the choice of surfacing material and the delineation of pedestrian routes; • Ensure disabled parking to be located as close to the destination entrance as possible and highlighted by way of signage and

colour variation.

DM TRANS 10

CYCLE PARKING

The following table gives guidance on the minimum number of cycle parking which should be provided at new developments.

Apartment developments	2 private secure spaces per 100 sq. m (design should not require bicycle access via living area) 1 visitor bicycle space per two housing unit
Offices	10% of employee numbers, (subject to a minimum of 10 bicycle places or one bike space for every car space, whichever is the greater)
Schools	10% of pupil registration numbers, minimum 10 places Consider separate teacher / employee parking
Other developments	1 bike space for every car space
Shops	1 space for every 100 sq. m
Public transport pick-up points (rail, bus)	205% of daily boarders at that point/station, subject to minimum of 10 bicycle places
Off- street parking (incl. Multi-storey)	10% of total car spaces, subject to a minimum of 50 spaces
Events	5% of forecast attendees

10.1.6 ELECTRIC VEHICLES (EV)

In 2008, the Government launched an Electric Transport Programme with a target that 10 percent of the national road transport fleet be electrically powered by 2020. Most recently the Climate Action Plan set an ambitious target of achieving 100% or 950,000 of all new cars and vans to be EVs by 2030. Developing the infrastructure for alternatively fuelled vehicles will be a vital step in encouraging consumers to make more environmentally friendly transport choices. In 2020, there was a total of 18 electric charging points registered throughout the County, 10 located in Portlaoise, 2 located in Mountmellick and 6 located in Portarlinton. It shall be the responsibility of the companies supplying the EV points to maintain and update the equipment to the current standards.

Electric Vehicle Policy Objectives	
TRANS 33	Support the growth of Electric Vehicles with support infrastructure, through a roll- out of additional electric charging points in collaboration with relevant agencies at appropriate locations, both on street and in new developments.
TRANS 34	All developments should provide facilities for the charging of battery-operated cars at a rate of up to 10% of the total car parking spaces. The remainder of the parking spaces should be constructed so as to be capable of accommodating future charging points, as required.
TRANS 35	New residential development should accommodate at least one car parking space equipped with an EV charging points for every ten car parking spaces being provided for the associated development.

10.1.7 PEDESTRIANS AND CYCLISTS

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 which reduces greenhouse gas emissions, noise and pollution. 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 DHPLG, 2019] advocates assigning higher priority to pedestrian and cycling without unduly compromising vehicular movement. A Walking and Cycling Strategy was undertaken during the last plan period for County Laois.

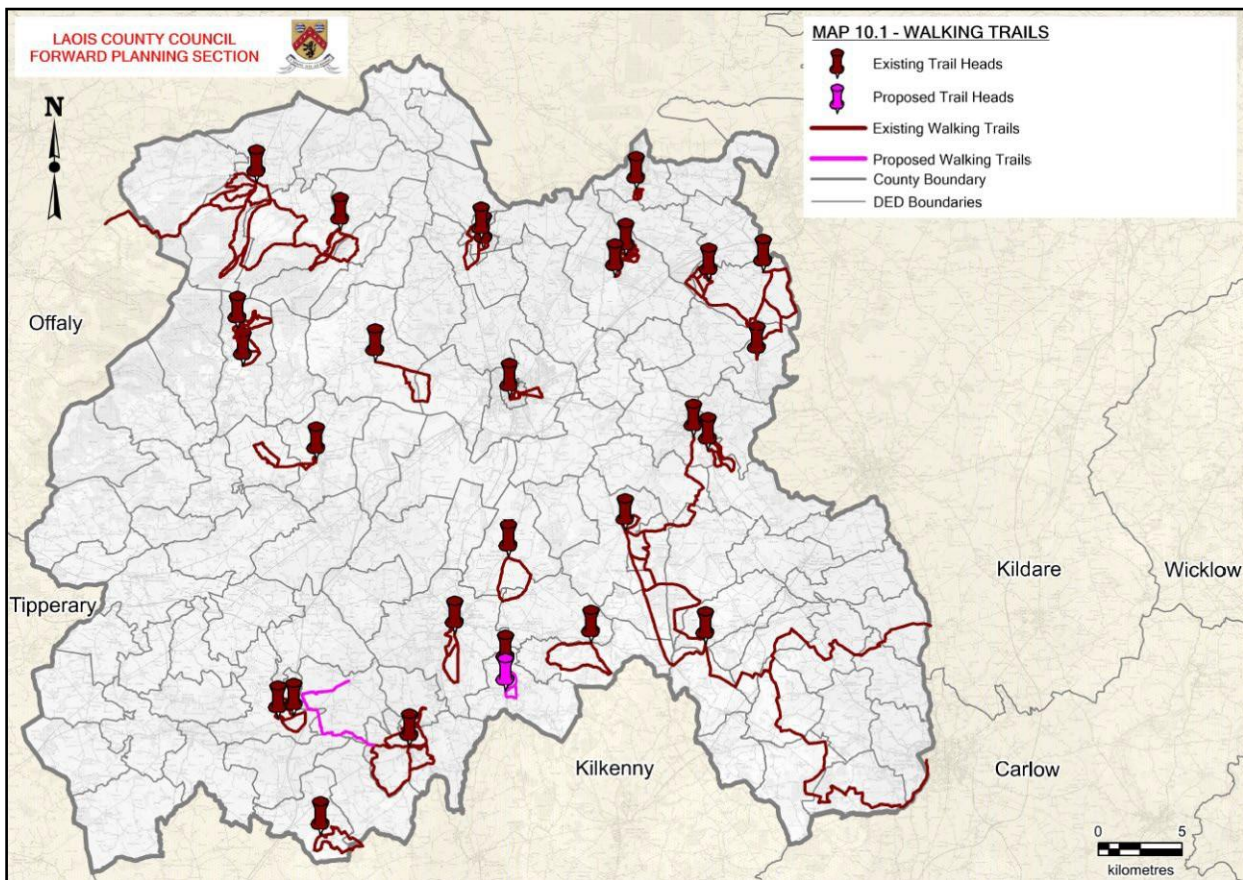
10.1.7.1 Greenways

Ireland has significantly invested in developing a network of strategic greenways across the Country. Although Laois has yet to secure a designated greenway, the feasibility of developing a 24km greenway along a dismantled railway line on privately-held lands between Mountmellick, Portlaoise and Abbeyleix and integrate into a wider network of off-road trails in Counties Kildare, Carlow, Kilkenny and Offaly is being considered.

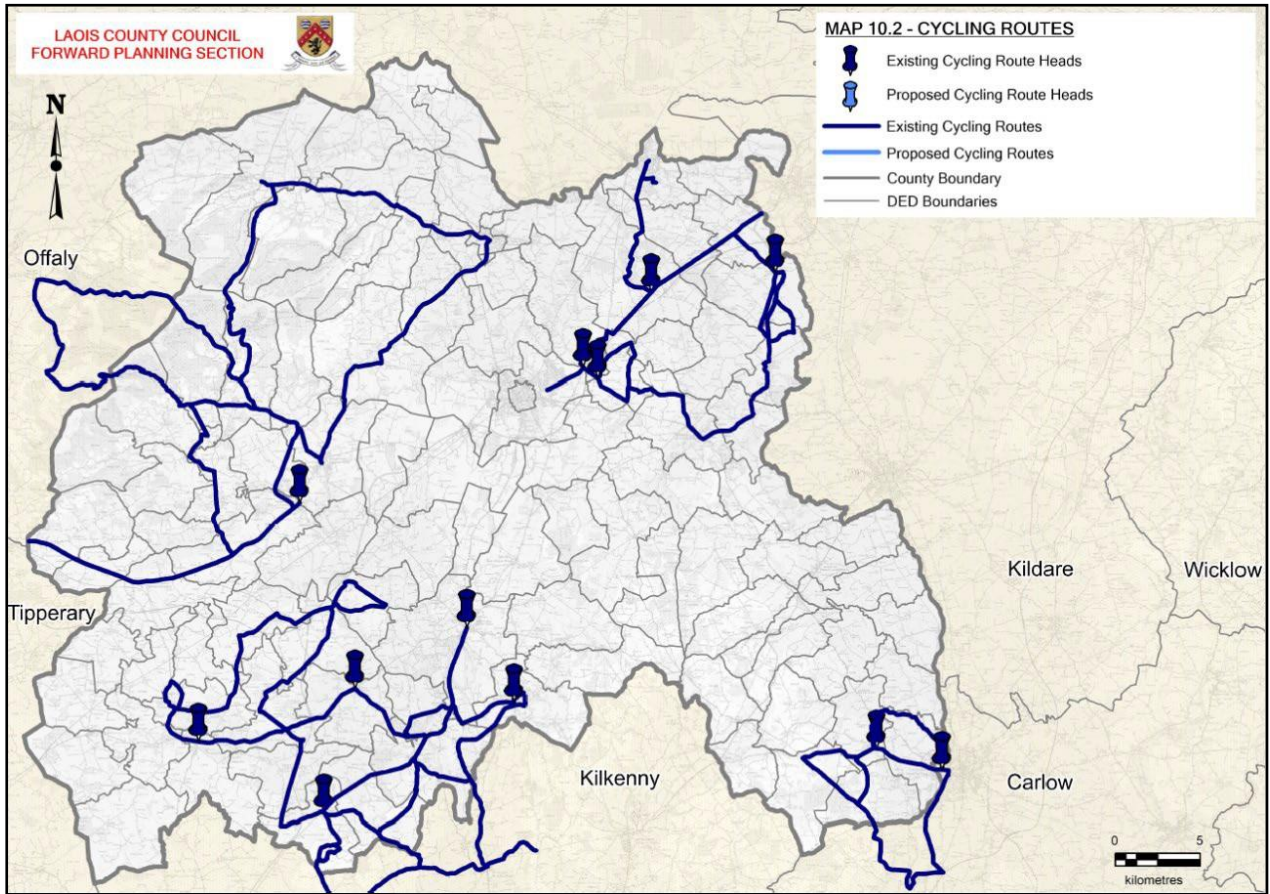
The Council recognises the numerous benefits arising **of providing greenways such as a safe** place to walk and cycle away from traffic, a safe commuting route to school and work and the

value of healthy exercise. There is also an economic benefit and the creation of jobs from cycle hire to service jobs in the food and construction sectors.

Map 10.1: Walking Trails



Map 10.2: Cycling Routes



Pedestrian and Cyclist Policy Objectives

TRANS 36	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.
TRANS 37	Support the installation of infrastructure measures (for example new/wider pavements, road crossings and cycle parking facilities), retrofitted if necessary, which facilitates, and encourages safe walking and cycling.
TRANS 38	Promote cycling and pedestrian friendly development layouts, provide facilities at public transport nodes, towns and villages, plan for and make provision for the integration of cyclist and pedestrian needs when considering new development proposals to promote Laois as a walking and cycling destination.
TRANS 39	Investigate the possibility of developing and utilising existing abandoned road/ rail and laneways infrastructure for the purposes of walking and cycling.
TRANS 40	Support the principle of delivering a cycling link between the towns of:

Pedestrian and Cyclist Policy Objectives	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tullamore – Mountmellick • Mountmellick - Portlaoise • Portlaoise - Stradbally • Stradbally - Graiguecullen/Carlow • Routing any link away from the N80 and tying into the Barrow Way <p>Seek the establishment of cycle links between the towns of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portlaoise, Kildare Town, Newbridge and Naas • Portlaoise and Athy • Portlaoise and Kilkenny via Abbeyleix and Durrrow; <p>Support the development of on-road cycle lanes to link towns and villages located along the R445 & R639 and if permitted proceed with works</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portlaoise – Monasterevin • Borris-in-Ossory – Roscrea • Durrrow – Cullahill;
TRANS 41	Support the development of and secure funding for a Greenway along adismantled railway line on between Mountmellick, Portlaoise and Abbeyleix.
TRANS 42	Support the development of Town Based Bike Hire Scheme, similar to “Dublin Bikes”.

Barrow Blueway Policy Objectives	
TRANS 43	Promote the Barrow Blueway and surrounding area as an Activity Hub in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.
TRANS 44	Designate on-road cycling trails to link the Barrow Navigation with Portlaoise, Stradbally and Portarlinton and to link the Barrow Navigation with the Killeshin Plateau. Trails to include points of interest such as Emo Court, the Rock of Dunamaise, Killeshin Romanesque Doorway and the Dancing Boards viewing point.

Slieve Bloom Walking and Cycling Activity Hub Policy Objectives

TRANS 45	Investigate the feasibility of developing a National Scale Centre for Off-Road Mountain-Biking in the Slieve Bloom Mountains, subject to planning permission & the Habitats' and Birds Directives.
TRANS 46	Investigate the feasibility of designating and promoting the Slieve Blooms as a Walking and Cycling Activity Hub.
TRANS 47	Continue to audit, maintain and promote walking trails and walking events in the Slieve Blooms, subject to planning permission & the Habitats' and Birds Directives.
TRANS 48	Designate the following graded on-road cycling trails in the Slieve Blooms; install related signage and improve road surfaces along these trails, as resources allow; produce trail maps and market the trails, subject to the Habitats' and Birds Directives; H1. Cut Cycle Climb H2. Wolftrap Cycle Climb H3. Glendine Cycle Climb H4. Mountrath-Clonaslee Trail H5. Camross Coolrain Trail H6. Castletown Mountrath Trail

South Laois Walking and Cycling Hub Policy Objectives

TRANS 49	Designate and promote South Laois as an Activity Hub.
TRANS 50	Support ancillary or complementary recreational uses in the area, such as the establishment of canoe trails, bridle trails and angling.
TRANS 51	Develop on-road cycle trail with a Rathdowney Trailhead to facilitate sporting and general cycling as well as link points of interest including Donaghmore Workhouse and Museum, Aghaboe Abbey, views of Gortnaclea Castle, Clough Village, Grantstown Lake and River Erkina.
TRANS 52	Establish a new Woodenbridge Walking Trail linking Durrow and Ballacolla, subject to the Habitats' Directive.
TRANS 53	Promote the physical and health benefits of walking, for example through Get Into Walking Workshops, the Annual Laois Walks Festival and other community /stakeholder organised walking events in Laois.
TRANS 54	Foster the development of initiatives such as walking buses to serve schools and continue the Green Schools Programme, cyclist safety and cycling to school during schools-based Road Safety Workshops.

South Laois Walking and Cycling Hub Policy Objectives	
TRANS 55	Foster the development of additional walking routes with trailheads in or close to Laois towns and villages, using National Trails Office toolkits, where an under-provision of walking trails exists, for example in Rathdowney and Borris-in-Ossory.
TRANS 56	Encourage the provision of facilities to support commuting by bike by large employers, such as workplace shower rooms and lockers via workplace workshops.
TRANS 57	Support the designation of forest cycling areas in Laois such as at cycle club trails at Durrow, Cullenagh, Fossy and Cullahill Mountain.

10.1.8 PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Key public transport corridors exist within County Laois. It is the aim of Laois County Council to facilitate a modal shift in transportation from car based modes to more sustainable forms of integrated public transport. In order to ensure developments are sustainable, land use and transportation planning (including non-motorised modes) has to be coordinated and integrated. Future development layouts should be designed to reduce trip generation, especially by cars. Laois County Council seeks to reduce car dependency and promote a balanced transportation strategy. This strategy shall combine and connect the Bus & Rail connectivity hubs. A proposed bus route within the town of Portlaoise is currently at design stage and is being considered to provide interconnection between the Bus route and Portlaoise Train Station.

10.1.8.1 Rail

County Laois is well served by a number of mainline and commuter train services. Mainline infrastructure consists of the main Dublin/Cork line with stations at Portarlington, Portlaoise and Ballybrophy. The Galway/Westport line via Athlone branches off at Portarlington and at Ballybrophy there is a branch line to Limerick via Nenagh which collectively provides strategic links within and beyond the County, facilitating lower carbon transport and mobility for people and freight. In addition, there are extensive daily commuter services between Portlaoise and Portarlington and Dublin which have played a central role in the residential expansion of these towns. Proposals for additional car and cycle parking at train stations within the County will be delivered during this plan period – permission has been granted for an additional 90 approx spaces at Portlaoise and further plans for Ballybrophy are being considered.

Recent roll-out of rail related infrastructure in the County includes provision of car parking facilities at Portarlington and Portlaoise stations and the development of a national train service depot located at J17 (Togher), Portlaoise.

Further opportunities exist to develop a light rail link between the main line service at Portlaoise and the J17 National Enterprise Park in order to develop a large inter modal facility. Laois County Council will fully encourage and facilitate the provision of bus, cycle and pedestrian facilities and linkages in the vicinity of rail stations to support the Smarter Travel 2009-2020 policy.

10.1.8.2 Bus

Bus Éireann operates daily mainline services to and from the main population centres of County Laois. Intra-regional services are provided to Limerick, Dublin, Cork, Waterford, Tullamore and Athlone. This level of national and regional service is augmented by a number of private operators with dedicated student orientated services to third level colleges in Athlone and Carlow. Aircoach runs a direct service from Cork to Dublin Airport with collection points in Portlaoise.

At a more local, rural level, the National Transport Authority funded Local Link Rural Transport Programme services, which are managed by Local Link Laois Offaly aimed at addressing rural social exclusion and the integration of rural transport services with other public transport services. This service provides door to door and semi-fixed route services, mainly in the west of the County, connecting these outlying rural areas to Portlaoise and other large towns in the County such as Mountmellick, Borris-in-Ossory, Rathdowney, Ballacolla, Durrow, Abbeyleix and Ballyroan. The service also provides destinations outside of the County to Tullamore, Carlow, Athlone and Roscrea. Other bus services are run by the Department of Education and the Health Service Executive in relation to their own functions.

Public Transport Policy Objectives	
TRANS 58	Support the maintenance and enhancement of rail infrastructure and associated facilities in County Laois, particularly the: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Examination of options for how to increase the capacity of the Dublin to Galway line; b) Develop a light rail link between the main line service at Portlaoise and the J17 National Enterprise Park in order to develop a large inter modal facility; c) Facilitate the development of additional car, coach and cycle parking at the train stations within the County – Portarlinton, Portlaoise and Ballybrophy.
TRANS 59	Support provision of additional rail links within the midlands region or other regions adjoining County Laois.
TRANS 60	Encourage co-ordination by providers to promote linked up services enabling complete coverage of the county independent of private vehicular transport and promote the provision of appropriately sited and designed facilities, bus shelters and bus lanes which facilitate increased public transport usage.
TRANS 61	Facilitate and encourage the upgrading of existing railway stations, and protect, as required, lands necessary for the upgrading of existing railway lines or stations or the provision of new railway stations throughout the County.
TRANS 62	Support the provision of bus services, connecting key towns in Laois with Dublin, Dublin Airport, Kilkenny, Carlow, Roscrea, Tullamore and other towns.

Public Transport Policy Objectives	
TRANS 63	Support the Rural Transport Programme and other rural transport providers to facilitate and promote sustainable options for rural transport given the increased running costs.
TRANS 64	Support the provision of a Park and ride facility at Junction 17 to encourage sustainable transport measures and facilitate a strategic park and ride link to public transport facilities within Portlaoise and links to other destinations including Dublin City & Dublin Airport.

10.1.9 COMPRESSED NATURAL GAS

The Planning Authority supports the development of CNG Infrastructure which will enable fuel switching from diesel to CNG for HGVs and buses at appropriate locations .

This is a renewable and carbon neutral fuel, produced using AD technology from existing waste streams and a variety of sustainable biomass sources, including grass, animal waste, crop residues and food waste.

Compressed Natural Gas Policy Objectives	
CNG 1	The Council will support the development of Compressed Natural Gas refuelling infrastructure on appropriate sites, provided that relevant planning and environmental criteria are satisfied.

10.2 SURFACE WATER, DRAINAGE AND FLOODING

10.2.1 SURFACE WATER & DRAINAGE

A major by-product of development in both urban and rural areas in County Laois is surface and storm water run-off. The management of surface and storm water is important so as to avoid increased flood or pollution risk in the storm water network, rivers and streams in the county's towns, villages and rural areas. The Council will require compliance with best practice guidance for the collection, reuse, treatment and disposal of surface waters for all future development proposals.

10.2.1.1 Sustainable Drainage Systems

Sustainable Drainage Systems, commonly known as SuDS is an approach that seeks to manage the water as close as possible to its origin by various engineering solutions that replicate natural drainage processes, before it enters the watercourse. The incorporation of SuDS techniques allows surface water to be either infiltrated or conveyed more slowly to water courses using porous surface treatments, ponds, swales, filter drains or other installations and to minimise the risk of flooding and contamination and to protect environmental and water resources. SuDS provide an integrated approach which addresses water quantity, water quality,

and helps to incorporate climate mitigation measures into development.

Surface Water and Drainage Policy Objectives	
SWD 1	Support in conjunction with Irish Water the improvement of storm water infrastructure to improve sustainable drainage and reduce the risk of flooding in urban environments.
SWD 2	Implement policies contained in the Greater Dublin Strategic Drainage Study (GDSDS) in relation to SUDS and climate change.
SWD 3	Ensure new development is adequately serviced with surface water drainage infrastructure which meets the requirements of the Water Framework Directive, associated River Basin Management Plans and CFRAM Management Plans.
SWD 4	Require that planning applications are accompanied by a comprehensive SUDs assessment that addresses run-off quantity, run-off quality and its impact on the existing habitat and water quality.
SWD 5	Ensure that in public and private developments in urban areas, both within developments and within the public realm, seek to minimise and limit the extent of hard surfacing and paving and require the use of sustainable drainage techniques for new development or for extensions to existing developments, in order to reduce the potential impact of existing and predicted flooding risks.
SWD 6	Ensure appropriate maintenance of surface water drainage infrastructure to avoid flood risk.
SWD 7	Ensure that all storm water generated in a new development is disposed of on-site or is attenuated and treated prior to discharge to an approved storm water system.
SWD 8	Promote storm water retention facilities for new developments and to incorporate design solutions that provide for collection and recycling of surface water in accordance with Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems as recommended in the Planning System and Flood Risk Management: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DoEHLG, 2009) and Laois County Council's Roads and Drainage Standards, or as amended.

Sustainable Drainage Systems Development Management Standard

DM SWD 1 SUSTAINABLE DRAINAGE SYSTEMS

Detailed proposals for Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) should be submitted which demonstrate that the development would not result in surface water discharges affecting neighbouring lands without agreement and/or the public road.

The following should be taken into consideration:

- 1) Store rainwater for later use (rainwater harvesting);
- 2) Use infiltration techniques such as porous hard surfaces, soft landscaping and green roofs;
- 3) Attenuate rainwater in ponds, swales or open water features for gradual release;
- 4) Attenuate rainwater by storing in tanks or sealed water features for gradual release;
- 5) Discharge into storm water collection system or watercourse (subject to license) having regard to capacity and quality of discharge;

Soakaways are suitable for single family dwelling houses but are not suitable for urban areas.

10.2.2 FLOODING RISK MANAGEMENT

The Office of Public Works (OPW) is the lead State body responsible for the coordination and implementation of Government policy on the management of flood risk in Ireland. The EU Floods Directive and the National Flood Policy Review Report (2004) set the parameters for flood management in Ireland. The National Catchment Flood Risk Management Programme (CFRAM) commenced in 2011 and is the principal response to EU Flood Directive on the assessment and management of flood risk. The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities, DECLG and OPW (2009) addresses flood risk management within the planning system and requires all County Development Plans and Local Area Plans to be in accordance with these guidelines.

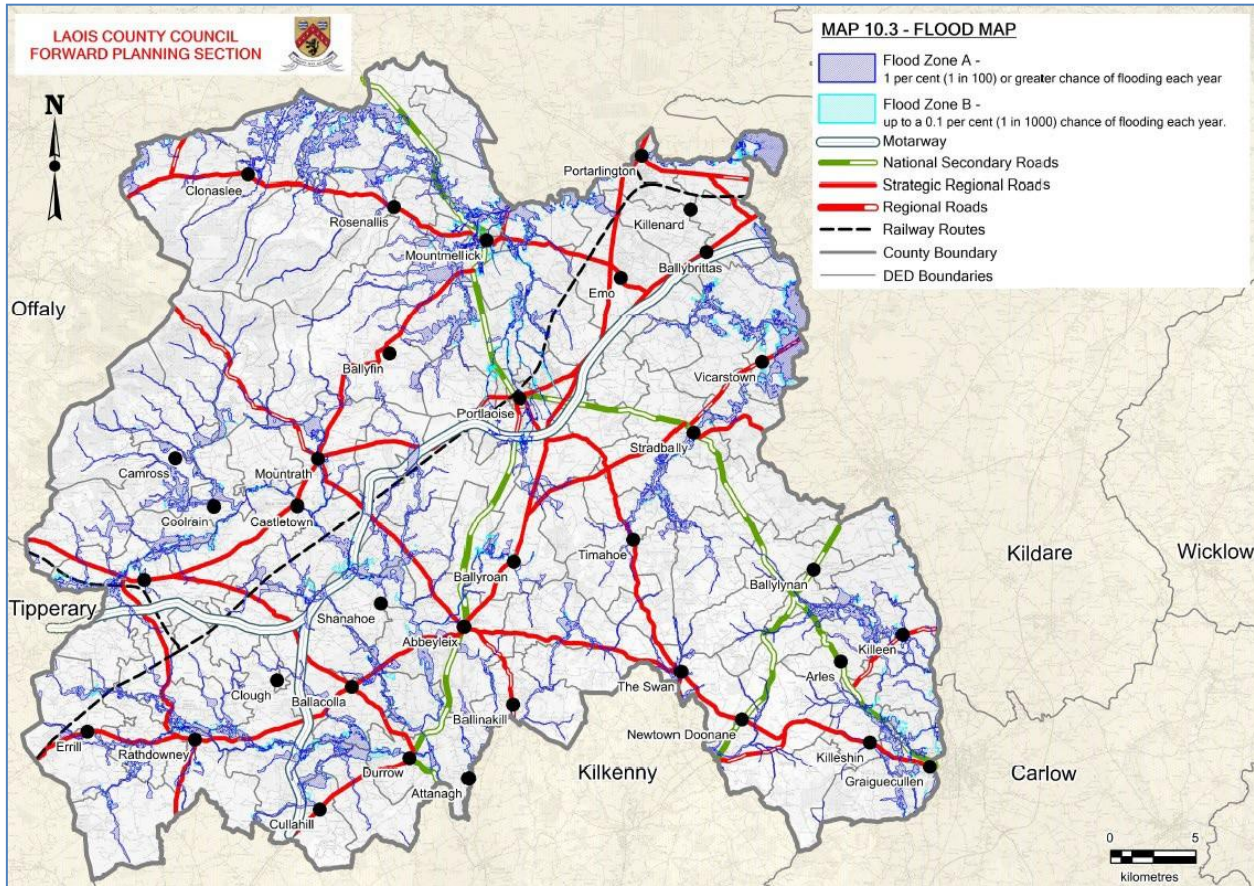
Over the past number of years there have been significant instances where flooding has occurred in areas of the County causing damage to homes and businesses. As a result of climate change, there is a likelihood of increased rainfall and rising sea levels. This in combination with the urbanisation of our settlements results in a greater flood risk to property. It is therefore important to protect and preserve our floodplains and wetlands from development to ensure that when a flooding event occurs, excess water can be slowly released back into the river system. Key sources of flooding are identified as follows:

- Fluvial flooding arising from rivers and streams
- Pluvial flooding in low spots following heavy rainfall
- Drainage flooding due to inadequate drainage infrastructure

The Council has prepared a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (Appendix 9) following which the county has been divided into two zones according to their risk of flooding and in compliance with latest CFRAM mapping. Map 10.3 indicates flood zones A and B in County Laois. In making its

zoning decisions and planning application decisions, the Council will rely on the best available flood-risk data and will be mindful of the unpredictable nature of climate change.

Map 10.3: Flood Map



10.2.2.1 Sequential Approach

The Planning System and *Flood Risk Management: Guidelines for Planning Authorities'* (DEHLG, 2009) prescribe the use of a sequential approach to ensure that new development is directed towards land that is at a low risk of flooding. The sequential approach makes use of flood risk assessment and of prior identification of flood zones for river flooding. It is essential that the risk potentially arising from other sources of flooding should also be taken into account in all areas and stages of the planning process. The planning implications for each of the flood zones are as follows:

Table 10.4: Flood Zones

Flood Zone A	High Probability of flooding	Most types of development would be considered inappropriate in this zone. Development in this zone should be avoided and/or only considered in exceptional circumstances where the requirements of the Justification Test set out can be met.
Flood Zone B-	Moderate Probability of flooding:	Highly vulnerable development would generally be considered inappropriate in this zone, unless the requirements of the Justification Test can be met. Less vulnerable developments might be considered appropriate in this zone subject to a flood risk assessment to the appropriate level to demonstrate that flood risk to and from the development can and will be adequately managed
Flood Zone C	Low Probability of flooding	Development in this zone is appropriate from a flood risk perspective (subject to assessment of flood hazard from sources other than rivers and the coast) but would need to meet the normal range of other proper planning and sustainable development considerations.

Flood Risk Management Policy Objectives

FRM 1	Ensure that flood risk management is incorporated into the preparation of all local area plans through the preparation in accordance with the requirements of the Planning System and Flood Risk Management-Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DoEHLG 2009).
FRM 2	Ensure that all development proposals comply with the requirements of the Planning System and Flood Risk Management-Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (DEHLG 2009) and to ensure that the Justification Test for Development Management is applied to required development proposals and in accordance with methodology set out in the guidelines and new development does not increase flood risk elsewhere, including that which may arise from surface water runoff.
FRM 3	Support the implementation of recommendations in the CFRAM Programme to ensure that flood risk management policies and infrastructure are progressively implemented.
FRM 4	Support the implementation of recommendations in the Flood Risk Management Plans (FRMP's), including planned investment measures for managing and reducing flood risk.

Flood Risk Management Policy Objectives

FRM 5	Consult with the OPW in relation to proposed developments in the vicinity of drainage channels and rivers for which the OPW are responsible, and to retain a strip on either side of such channels where required, to facilitate maintenance access thereto.
FRM 6	Assist the OPW in developing catchment-based Flood Risk Management Plans for rivers in County Laois and have regard to their provisions/recommendations.
FRM 7	Protect and enhance the County's floodplains and wetlands as 'green infrastructure' which provides space for storage and conveyance of floodwater, enabling flood risk to be more effectively managed and reducing the need to provide flood defenses in the future, subject to normal planning and environmental criteria.
FRM 8	Protect the integrity of any formal (OPW or Laois County Council) flood risk management infrastructure, thereby ensuring that any new development does not negatively impact any existing defense infrastructure or compromise any proposed new infrastructure.
FRM 9	Ensure that where flood risk management works take place that the natural and cultural heritage, rivers, streams and watercourses are protected and enhanced.
FRM 10	Ensure each flood risk management activity is examined to determine actions required to embed and provide for effective climate change adaptation as set out in the OPW Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan Flood Risk Management applicable at the time.
FRM 11	Consult, where necessary, with Inland Fisheries Ireland, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and other relevant agencies in the provision of flood alleviation measures in the County.
FRM 12	Prioritise plans for flood defence works in the towns as indicated in the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment in order to mitigate against potential flood risk.
FRM 13	Ensure new development does not increase flood risk elsewhere, including that which may arise from surface water runoff.
FRM 14	Protect water sinks because of their flood management function, as well as their biodiversity and amenity value and encourage the restoration or creation of water sinks as flood defence mechanisms, where appropriate.

Flood Risk Development Management Standard

DM FRM 1 FLOOD RISK ASSESSMENTS

Flood risk management will be carried out in accordance with the *Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities, Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (2009)*. Development proposals on lands that may be at risk of flooding should be subject to a flood risk assessment, prepared by a suitably qualified person, in accordance with the guidelines.

Proposals for minor development to existing buildings in areas of flood risk (e.g. extensions or change of use) should include a flood risk assessment of appropriate detail.

For any development proposal in an area at moderate or high risk of flooding that is considered acceptable in principle (i.e. has passed the Plan Making Justification Test), the site specific FRA must demonstrate that appropriate mitigation measures can be put in place and that residual risks can be managed to acceptable levels. This includes a number of mitigation measures, which could include:

- Site Layout and Design
- Ground Levels, Floor Levels and Building Use
- Raised Defences
- Green Corridor

The precise solution will depend on the site specific details, all of which shall adhere to the *Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities, Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (2009)*, or where relevant more up to date guidance.

10.3 WATER AND WASTE WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

10.3.1 PUBLIC WATER AND WASTEWATER

Irish Water is the statutory body responsible for the provision of public water and wastewater supply schemes. It is an objective of Irish Water to provide both drinking water and wastewater capacity to facilitate growth in accordance with core strategies at county level and with national and regional planning policies and objectives (subject to the constraints of the Irish Water Capital Investment Programme).

Laois County Council retains its role in the provision of water services, in conjunction with Irish Water, at a local level, through Service Level Agreements (SLAs). -. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the environmental regulator of Irish Water and the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) is their commercial regulator. The Council will work closely with Irish Water to inform and influence the timely provision of infrastructure within the County in line with the Core and Settlement Strategies of this Plan.

10.3.2 POLICY CONTEXT

Water and waste water services are governed by the following statutory legislation guidelines and plans:

- Water Services Act 2007 – 2017;
- Drinking Water Directive 98/83/EC and its imminent recast.
- Water Framework Directive.

The policy objectives of this Plan are informed by the following National and Regional guidance and policies:

- The National Planning Framework – Ireland 2040
- Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2031
- Irish Water's Water Services Strategic Plan (WSSP)
- Irish Water's Connection Charging Policy approved by the CRU
- Irish Water Capital Investment Plan 2020 to 2024 and subsequent plan.
- Code of Practice: Wastewater Treatment Systems for Single Houses Environmental Protection Agency-2010, updated 2012 & 2013
- Draft Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Water Services Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government-2018
- Irish Water Small Towns and Villages Growth Programme 2020 to 2024 and subsequent programme (2020 to 2024).
- Irish Water National Capacity Register for Wastewater Treatment Plans
- Taking in Charge of Private Estates Memorandum of Understanding and Protocol agreed between the Local Authority and Irish Water.
- Connection and Development Services Standards for Water and Wastewater Infrastructure and Code of Practice.

10.3.3 PUBLIC WATER SUPPLY

There is a total of 28 Public Water Supply (PWS) Schemes in Laois supplying drinking water to 14 Towns, 7 Villages, a number of small rural settlements and a considerable rural area. Laois is unique in that 98.5% of all Public Water Schemes sources come from groundwater. In general, the quality of groundwater in Laois is of good status and requires far less treatment in order to ensure compliance with the European Union (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014, as amended.

10.3.4 PUBLIC WASTEWATER INFRASTRUCTURE

In relation to wastewater, there are a total of 14 Licensed Wastewater Treatment Works (WWTW) in Laois – those are agglomerations treating greater than 500 population equivalent (p.e.) and a total of 13 WWTWs with Certificates of Authorisation issued by the EPA under the Wastewater Discharge (Authorisation) Regulations 2007 – less than 500 p.e.

10.3.5 IRISH WATER SERVICES STRATEGIC PLAN

In 2015, Irish Water published its Water Services Strategic Plan (WSSP), which sets out strategic objectives for the delivery of water services over a 25 year period and sets a context for investment and implementation plans. This plan is reviewed every five years. Irish Water and the Council will continue to work together to identify the water services required to support planned development in line with national and regional planning policies for inclusion in the Irish Water Capital Investment Plans.

The Strategic Aims in IW's WSSP are as follows:

- **Strategic Objective 1:** Quality - Ensure a Safe and Reliable Water Supply by managing the sustainability and quality of drinking water from source to tap to protect human health.
- **Strategic Objective 2:** Provide Effective Management of Wastewater by managing the operation of wastewater facilities in a manner that protects environmental quality and manage the availability and resilience of wastewater services now and into the future:
- **Strategic Objective 3:** Ensure a Safe and Reliable Water Supply and Manage water supplies in an efficient and economic manner and manage the availability, sustainability and reliability of water supply now and into the future:
- **Strategic Objective 4:** Conservation - Protect and Enhance the Environment to ensure that services are delivered in a sustainable manner which contributes to the protection of the environment
- **Strategic Objective 5:** Support Social and Economic Growth – Facilitate growth in line with National, Regional and Local spatial planning policy and the Core Strategies in Development Plans:
- **Strategic Objective 6:** Meet Customer Expectations.

10.3.6 IRISH WATER CAPITAL INVESTMENT PLAN

The Capital Investment Programme (CIP) of Irish Water outlines the indicative priorities and investments in water services infrastructure over the plan period. This CIP aims to deliver improvements in drinking water quality, leakage, wastewater compliance, business efficiencies and customer service. The current investment plan covering the period 2020 to 2024 is being finalized by IW on foot of the CRU's decision dated 4th August 2020 on its updated CIP submitted to the CRU in April 2020.

10.3.7 CAPITAL INVESTMENTS IN LAOIS

Having regard to the IW Capital Investment Plan CIP 2020 to 2024 and the subsequent CIP, Laois County Council, will work collaboratively with IW in accordance with the Service Level Agreement with Irish Water, and consistent with Irish Water's Water Services Strategic Plan (WSSP).

The strategic objectives and aims identified in the WSSP outline the measures and the Programmes and Projects to be implemented by IW to deliver on these strategic objectives. **The specific projects and programmes as proposed by Laois County Council in this Plan represent what Laois County Council considers are priority schemes to ensure that IW deliver on the Strategic Objectives and aims within their WSSP.** It is recognized that IW are

restricted by the funding approved by the CRU and that some of these programmes / projects may not be delivered within the lifetime of this plan for the period 2021-2027.

Laois County Council will continue to work with IW in accordance with the SLA and aim to achieve the **strategic objectives within IW’s WSSP** by setting the following specific objectives.

Public Water Supply Policy Objectives	
WS 1	Continue in conjunction with Irish Water to ensure that a Safe and Reliable Water Supply by managing the sustainability and quality of drinking water from source to tap to protect human health.
WS 2	Provide for Resilience in Public Water Schemes and support social and economic growth and meet customer demands particularly during drought conditions by working with IW to deliver on the following priority schemes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Portlaoise PWS – Bring into production the 3 non-producing Boreholes in Coolbanagher and increase Storage Capacity to provide 24 hours emergency supply; ➤ Portarlinton PWS – Bring into Production Borehole(s) and Treatment Plant in the Doolough Wellfield and increase Storage Capacity to provide 24 hours emergency supply and ➤ Swan PWS – Bring into Production the Borehole and Treatment Plant at Tollerton.
WS 3	Protect both ground and surface water resources and to work with Irish Water to develop and roll-out Drinking Water Safety Plans across all water schemes to protect sources of public water supply and their contributing catchments and to ensure that good water quality is sustained in all public water supplies.
WS 4	Work with Irish Water to ensure that adequate water services will be available to service zoned development and to require developers to engage with IW in a timely fashion by way of submitting a pre-connection enquiry form to IW.
WS 5	Laois County Council will not permit housing developments of greater than one dwelling which propose standalone developer provided water infrastructure in areas remote from Public Water Schemes.
WS 6	Work with IW to minimise wastage of water supply by requiring existing and new developments to incorporate water conservation measures.
WS 7	Promote and encourage the harvesting of rainwater to meet non-potable water needs.
WS 8	Implement Energy Efficiency solutions in Water Systems.

Public Water Supply Policy Objectives

WS 9	Encourage industrial and commercial developments with small private water supplies to connect to the public water schemes where technically and financially feasible.
WS 10	Ensure Water Conservation through the following actions : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Roll-out further Mains Replacement programmes: ➤ Continue with validation of District Metre Areas(DMA's) ➤ Carry out focused Find and Fix Programmes to achieve target volumetric reductions in accordance with IWs targets.
WS 11	Work in accordance with IW/LA MoU and Protocol on an agreed programme with LA planning to take in charge private housing estates Water and transfer assets to IW.
WS 12	Work in accordance with IW/LA MoU and Protocol and with the NFGWS on an agreed programme with the Local Authority to take in charge Public Group Water Scheme and transfer assets to IW.
WS 13	Secure the future sustainability of Laois County Council's INAB Accredited Laboratory and enhance the accreditation status of the Laboratory in order to develop the Laboratory into one of 4 Regional Local Authority Accredited Laboratories nationally.

Public Wastewater Objectives

WS 14	Support and facilitate social and economic growth in line with National, Regional and Local spatial planning policy and the Core Strategy in Chapter 2 of this plan through the following actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Measure 1: Facilitate Growth: Wastewater Growth Programme:</u> - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Upgrade to the Portlaoise WWTP – phase 1 as proposed in the Feasibility Study. ➤ Roll-out agreed priorities for IWs Small Towns and Villages Growth Programme 2020 to 2024 and subsequent Programmes. • <u>Measure 2: Network and Treatment Programmes:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Roll-out improvements to network in Portlaoise WW Network as identified in the Portlaoise Drainage Area Plan (DAP). ➤ Complete DAPs for Portarlinton and Mountmellick Wastewater Networks and complete modeling for improvements to these networks.
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Public Wastewater Objectives

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Measure 3: Irish Water Small Towns and Villages Growth Programme</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Under IWs Small Towns and Villages Growth Programme 2020 to 2024 and subsequent programmes agree priorities for delivering upgrades/replacements of WWTPs with insufficient headroom or plants that are non-compliant and damaging to the receiving environment so as to enhance and provide for growth in small towns and villages throughout the county.
<p>WS 15</p>	<p>Work in conjunction with Irish Water and with the DHPLG during the lifetime of the plan for the provision, extension and upgrading of waste water collection and treatment systems in the County that have existing facilities to serve existing populations and facilitate sustainable development of those towns, in accordance with the requirements of the Settlement Strategy and associated Core Strategy. In particular</p> <p>A. Wastewater Discharge Authorisation Compliance (EPA Licensed Plants)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Complete upgrade to Portlaoise – phase 1 as proposed in the Feasibility Study; ii. Upgrades to Ballinakill; iii. Ballyroan – Phase 3, 4 and 5; iv. Castletown _ - Sludge and Storm Tank Programmes; v. Mountmellick – Ortho P and Ammonia Compliance. <p>B. Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive Compliance: Complete upgrades to COA WWTPs (plants with <500pe design) under the National Certificate of Authorisation Programme (NCAP) on a priority basis as agreed with the Local Authority.</p>
<p>WS 16</p>	<p>Promote use of wetland systems for treatment of waste-water in accordance with Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government guidelines “Integrated Constructed Wetlands –Guidance Document for Farmyard Soiled Water and Domestic Wastewater Applications” [2010].</p>
<p>WS 17</p>	<p>Deliver Energy efficient Capital Programmes where appropriate and as follows</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Borris-in-Ossory – Install Fine Bubble Diffused Aeration
<p>WS 18</p>	<p>Work in accordance with IW/LA MoU and Protocol on an agreed programme with LA planning to take in charge private housing estates Wastewater Infrastructure and transfer assets to IW.</p>

Waste Water Development Management Standard

DM WS 1 DISTANCES FROM WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANTS

Proposals to develop in close proximity to existing or proposed sewerage treatment Plants and pumping stations will be assessed having regard to:

- 1) The nature of the effluent being treated;
- 2) Prevailing wind direction;
- 3) Noise;
- 4) Type of treatment process employed;
- 5) Sludge treatment;
- 6) Visibility and screening of treatment plant;
- 7) Development will not be allowed within 100m of a treatment works or 25m of a pumping station. This distance may be increased if significant environmental issues are likely to arise and will be judged on a site by site basis.

The buffer area may be used to fulfil open space requirements.

DM WS 2 WAYLEAVES

Wayleaves for infrastructure necessary for the provision of wastewater and / or water infrastructure over third party lands must be legally binding and in place prior to making planning applications.

10.3.8 PRIVATE WATER AND WASTEWATER SUPPLIES

Private water supplies are those supplies not operated by Irish Water. They include Group Water Schemes- both public and private (GWSs), Small Private Supplies (SPSs) with a commercial or public use and individual Wells serving single houses. The water source for all private supplies comes from groundwater and are either from a spring or a Borehole (well). One fifth of the people of Ireland get their water from private supplies.

In the EPAs 2018 Focus on Private Water Supplies the key findings were that water quality in private water supplies remains poorer than in Public Supplies (excepting Public Group Water Schemes) and when one looks at E Coli Compliance in the results from sampling the following is the position:

- Public Supplies are 99.9% Compliant
- Public Group Water Schemes are 100% compliant
- Private Group Water Schemes are only 95.4% compliant and
- Small Private Group Water Schemes are only 95.4% compliant

While certain functions of the Council have transferred to Irish Water, Laois County Council remains responsible for ensuring that the water supplied by any other water supplier which includes the Public and Private Group Water Schemes, Small Private Water Supplies is wholesome and clean and meets the requirements of the European Union (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014, as amended.

The overarching objective of Laois County Council is to use its powers as Supervisory Authority under the European Union (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014, as amended to improve the quality of water in private supplies. The crucial importance of ground water resources and abstraction points is recognised by the Council.

Careful protection of water resources from pollution in the interests of the common good and public health is a priority of the Council. The control of pollution and prevention of contamination of groundwater and watercourses will be assessed in developments which discharge to groundwater or watercourses within the requirements of the Water Pollution Acts 1977 to 1990. Effluents must be treated and discharged in a satisfactory manner.

10.3.8.1 *Group Water Schemes*

Under the European Union (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014, as amended Laois County Council is the Supervisory Authority for 74 Group Water Schemes. 46 of these schemes are connected to a public water supply, while 28 use privately sourced groundwater serving an estimated population of almost 6,000 people. The Council monitors the quality of water in all 74 GWSs in order to ensure compliance with the EU (Drinking Water) Regulations, as amended.

10.3.8.2 *Small Private Supplies (SPSS)*

Under the European Union (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014, Laois County Council is the Supervisory Authority of SPSs with a Commercial or Public Use. Laois County Council has responsibility for ensuring compliance with the Regulations of 93 small private supplies with a commercial or public use. This includes 14 National Schools.

10.3.8.3 *Private Wells*

Private boreholes are used when access to the public water supply or a group water scheme is not possible. It is estimated that up to 30% of private wells are contaminated by E-Coli and that around two thirds are at risk on contamination. Laois County Council administers a Grant Scheme for the provision or upgrade of private wells and treatment systems. In all circumstances the applicant will need to clearly demonstrate that a suitable site is available and that sewage treatment can be accommodated without negative impact on the proposed water source.

Rural Water and Wastewater Policy Objectives	
WS 19	Work in conjunction with the NFGWSs and with the support and funding of the DHPLG by way of the Rural Water Multi-Annual Programme 2019 to 2021 and subsequent programmes to - through various measures - improve the quality, reliability and efficiency of water services for rural dwellers where Irish Water services are not available and thereby sustain and enhance the social, economic and future prosperity of the rural water sector.
WS 20	Support, monitor, advise and administer Group Water Schemes on behalf of the DHPLG in conjunction with the NFGWSs by implementation of Source Protection Works, Water Treatment Improvements, Amalgamation / Rationalisation of schemes and administering of Capital Replacement Costs.
WS 21	Continue to draw up and implement annual programmes for the monitoring of water quality in Group Water Schemes in accordance with the European Union (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014, as amended and as approved by the EPA.
WS 22	Embed water conservation at the heart of water policy through prioritising resource management, abstraction control, source protection, tackling leakage and encouraging behavioural change.
WS 23	Promoting water conservation and water resource management reflected in investment for leak detection and repair, network improvements, cost effective metering and awareness campaigns among the GWS.
WS 24	Ensuring that rural water services investment decisions are aligned with the broad strategic aims of Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework ² and Improve the resilience of rural water supplies by supporting the implementation of the following measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Group Water Schemes and extensions; • Transition of Group Water and Group Sewerage schemes to the Public (Irish Water) Water Sector; • Community Connections (Water & Wastewater) Networks; • Innovation and Research.
WS 25	Ensure that the scheme relating to private wells is administered effectively and that improvements to sources and/or treatment works are carried out in accordance with IW and EPA standards.
WS 26	Work in conjunction with stakeholders through various measures to improve the quality, reliability and efficiency of water services for consumers of Small Private Supplies ³ where Irish Water services are not available and thereby sustain and enhance the social, economic and future prosperity of the rural water sector.
WS 27	Support, monitor, advise and raise awareness among owner/operators of SPSs of their duties as water suppliers under the European Union (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014 as amended to ensure that a safe and dependable water supply

Rural Water and Wastewater Policy Objectives	
	is available to those persons who avail of the service (Customers/service users/children etc).
WS 28	Collaborate with stakeholders including LA Water and Environmental Services staff, the HSE, LEO staff, Laois Chamber, representatives from the educational, tourist, childcare and hospitality sectors to raise awareness among their members of the duties of the Owners/Operators in relation to the provision of clean and wholesome drinking water.
WS 29	Maintain and update its register of SPSs and focus enforcement powers on those schemes that are non-compliant with the Drinking Water Regulations by carrying out Audits on these schemes and by further enforcement measures if improvements are not implemented. Where the option exists to connect to a public water supply, the water supplier will be encouraged to make an application to IW for a connection.

10.4 ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Laois County Council's environmental policy objectives aim to minimise waste using the Circular Economy concept; mitigate where possible and adapt to the impacts of climate change; protect and improve ground and surface waters; and provide a clean natural environment.

The Environmental Services consist of Waste Management (Waste Recovery & Disposal and Enforcement) and Environmental Protection (Water Quality, Air Pollution & Noise).

10.4.1 WASTE MANAGEMENT

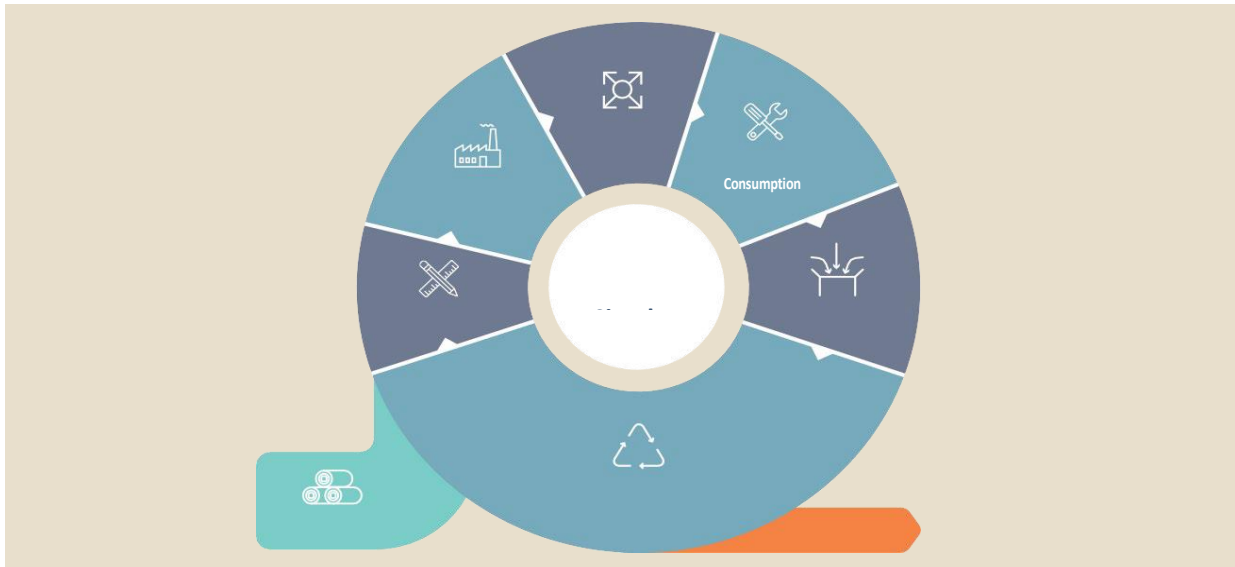
The concept of the Circular Economy is to minimise waste going to landfill and maximise waste as a resource. This means that prevention, preparation for reuse, recycling and recovery are prioritised in that order, over the disposal of waste.

The European Commission has proposed a recycling rate of 65% for 2030 for the Circular Economy Package. The Council will support circular economy principles, prioritising prevention, re-use, recycling and recovery over the disposal of waste.

The [Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy](#) is Ireland's new roadmap for waste planning and management. This Plan shifts focus away from waste disposal and looks instead to how we can preserve resources by creating a circular economy.

² See at this link: <http://www.gov.ie/en/project-ireland-2040>

³ *Small Private Supplies are private water supplies with a commercial or public use e.g. Hotels, B and Bs, Schools, Crèches, Nursing Homes, Public Houses that are supplied from a private source e.g. Borehole or well. These supplies are not connected to the Public Water Supplies. The owner or operator of the supply is the water supplier and the Local Authority is the Supervisory Authority under the European Union (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014, as amended.*



The Plan sets out a range of aims and targets for the State and the measures by which these will be achieved, including increased regulation and measures across various waste areas such as Circular Economy, Municipal Waste, Consumer Protection & Citizen Engagement, Plastics and Packaging, Construction and Demolition, Textiles, Green Public Procurement and Waste Enforcement.

The overarching objectives of the [Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy](#) are to:

- Shift the focus away from waste disposal and treatment to ensure that materials and products remain in productive use for longer thereby preventing waste and supporting reuse through a policy framework that discourages the wasting of resources and rewards circularity;
- Make producers who manufacture and sell disposable goods for profit environmentally accountable for the products they place on the market;
- Ensure that measures support sustainable economic models (for example by supporting the use of recycled over virgin materials);

10.4.1.1 Waste Recovery and Disposal

Laois County Council is actively involved in facilitating the delivery of a more sustainable approach to waste management within the county. Key to this is the implementation of the Eastern-Midlands Regional Waste Management Plan 2015-2021 and the Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy. Waste Management policy is predicated on the EU Waste Hierarchy of prevention, preparing for re-use, recycling, energy recovery and sustainable disposal.

The Eastern–Midlands Region Waste Management Plan, 2015-2021 provides the framework for waste management in the Region and sets out a range of policies and actions to meet specified mandatory and performance based targets.

The strategic vision of the regional waste plan is to rethink the approach to managing waste, by viewing waste streams as valuable material resources. Three strategic targets have been set in

the plan covering the areas of prevention, recycling and landfilling.

- 1% reduction per annum in the Quantity of Household Waste per capita over the period of the Plan.
- Achieve a Recycling Rate of 50% of managed municipal waste by 2020
- Reduce to 0% the direct disposal of unprocessed residual Municipal waste to landfill (from 2016 onwards) in favour of higher value pre- treatment and indigenous recovery practices.

In tandem, the Plan identifies measures to develop a circular economy whereby waste management initiatives are no longer confined to treating and disposing of waste, instead supporting initiatives that value waste as a resource or potential raw material. The delivery of these targets will require the local authority and industry to work together.

Waste Recovery & Disposal Policy Objectives	
ES 1	Implement and support the strategic objectives of the Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy – Ireland’s National Waste Policy 2020-2025.
ES 2	Implement and support the strategic objectives of the Eastern Midlands Regional Waste Management Plan 2015-2021 and any subsequent Waste Management Plan adopted during the current development plan period.
ES 3	Promote circular economy principles, prioritising prevention, reuse, recycling and recovery, and to sustainably manage residual waste. New developments will be expected to take account of the provisions of the Waste Management Plan for the Region and observe those elements of it that relate to waste prevention and minimisation, waste recycling facilities, and the capacity for source segregation.

10.4.1.2 Waste Enforcement

The implementation and enforcement of environmental legislation is one of the key responsibilities of the Council’s Environment Section. The main pieces of legislation are the Waste Management Act, 1996, as amended and the Litter Pollution Act, 1997, as amended.

In relation to waste activities, the principal piece of legislation is the Waste Management Act, 1996, as amended. Under the Act, it is the responsibility of the Council to monitor and inspect waste activities generally and to take appropriate and proportionate enforcement action in respect of illegal waste activities.

In relation to litter, the principal piece of legislation is the Litter Pollution Act, 1997, as amended. Laois County Council’s Strategy on litter as set out in the Laois County Council Litter Management Plan 2018-2020, aims to increase public awareness by increased education, and to promote a litter free environment through the implementation of enforcement action through the relevant legislation. The Council shall continue its education and awareness programmes in local schools and shall promote schemes and initiatives which aim to reduce litter pollution in the County.

Waste Management Enforcement Policy Objectives	
ES 4	Implement the provisions of the Waste Management Act, 1996, as amended and associated Waste Regulations.
ES 5	Investigate and take appropriate legal action against those involved in unauthorized waste activities.
ES 6	Implement the provisions of the Litter Pollution Act, 1997, as amended and the Laois Litter Management Plan 2018 -2020 and any subsequent revisions.
ES 7	Implement, complete and report to the EPA on the annual agreed Recommended Minimum Criteria for Environmental Inspections (RMCEI).
ES 8	Encourage and support the segregation of food waste and the provision of separate collection of waste in accordance with the requirements of the EU (Household Food Waste & Bio-Waste) Regulations 2015, the Waste Management (Food Waste) Regulations 2009, the Waste Framework Directive Regulations, 2011 and other relevant legislation.
ES 9	Implement the provisions of the Laois Waste Management (Storage, Presentation and Segregation of Household & Commercial) Waste Bye-Laws 2018 and to take enforcement action where necessary to protect the environment and local amenities.
ES 10	Process and make recommendations of all Waste Facility Permit (WFP) and Certificate of Registration (COR) Applications under the relevant Regulations. To monitor and inspect all authorised facilities with WFPs & CORs.
ES 11	Require Construction and Environmental Management Plans (CEMPs) to be prepared for larger scale projects and this requirement shall be assessed on a case by case basis as part of the development management process.
ES 12	Require that all construction projects are carried out in accordance with Best Practice Guidelines on the Preparation of Waste Management Plans for Construction and Demolition Projects.
ES 13	Encourage best environmental practice in all agricultural, industry, business and local authority activities.

10.4.1.3 Laois Recycling Facilities

Civic Amenity Facilities

Laois has two Civic Amenity Sites (Kyletalesha, Portlaoise & Portarlinton) in operation for the acceptance of recyclable materials and waste electrical and electronic equipment. The Portlaoise Facility is managed and operated directly by the Council whereas the Portarlinton Facility is currently managed and operated by an authorised Waste Contractor.

The Council is developing a 10-year roadmap for the strategic planning and development of the Kyletalesha Landfill and Civic Amenity Site.

Bring Banks

There are currently 46 bring banks within the County for the collection of aluminium / metal cans and glass. There are also a number of privately owned/operated textile banks throughout the county.

The collection of the materials from the bring banks is carried out by an authorised contractor engaged under a regional contract (Laois, Longford, offaly & Westmeath).

The Council aims to maintain improve and increase the capacity of these existing recycling facilities pending regular reviews being carried out investigating the necessity and viability of each facility. The Council will seek out further suitable sites for these facilities.

Civic Amenity Facilities & Bring Bank Policy Objectives	
ES 14	Provide for, improve and maintain the network of bring infrastructure (e.g. civic amenity facilities, bring banks) in the County to facilitate the recycling and recovery of hazardous and non-hazardous municipal wastes.
ES 15	Develop a 10-year roadmap for the strategic planning and development of the Kyletalesha Transfer Station and Civic Amenity Site.
ES 16	Develop the Bring Bank Regional Contract to improve the quality of service and frequency of collection.

10.4.2 ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

10.4.2.1 The Water Framework Directive

Water provides a clean source of drinking water, a vital raw material for industry, and a home for a huge variety of aquatic plants and animals in County Laois. The Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) (WFD) establishes a framework for the protection of all waters including rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastal waters, groundwater, canals and other artificial water bodies for the benefit of everyone.

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National River Basin Management Plans (2018 - 2027)

In County Laois we have the Nore and Barrow catchments and a tributary of the Shannon catchments. Management of water resources must be planned and implemented, through the National River Basin Management Plan (RBMP 2018-2021). The Plan outlines the measures that will be taken to protect and improve water quality up to 2021. Work is now underway to prepare the third cycle of River Basin Management Plan (2022-2027).

10.4.2.3 Water Quality in Laois

The protection of our surface and groundwater resources is one of the most fundamental challenges facing Laois in the future as good quality water is essential in supporting diverse and varied ecosystems, sustainable communities and a developed economy. The Environmental Protection Agency recently published its Water Quality in Ireland Report 2013-2018. Water quality in County Laois is quite good with 58% of rivers stations in the county at good or high ecological status. However there is no room for complacency, a deterioration in some of our most pristine river sites is a very significant concern. The Blue Dots Catchment Programme has been established under the current River Basin Management Plan specifically to improve the protection and restoration of these high ecological status water bodies. The Nore Freshwater Pearl Mussel, known as *Margaritifera durrovensis* found only in the River Nore in Laois (not found anywhere else in the world) and its habitat needs protection.

Groundwater quality remains good, with 70% of the groundwater underlying County Laois is at good status and 5% identified as being at risk. The status of 25 % of groundwaters in Co. Laois is currently under review. The protection of groundwater is so important in Co. Laois as nearly all of our public and private water supplies are from groundwater sources.

In County Laois, the most significant pressures on water quality are Agriculture, Urban Waste Water, Forestry, Urban run-off and Hydromorphology. Other activities which also impact on water quality are Mines and Quarries, Industry, Peat Extraction and Domestic Waste Water.

Laois County Council is working to protect this valuable natural resource which is fundamental for the development of the county. Important elements in delivering targets include the regime of planning permissions, waste permits and discharge licenses and enforcement of planning law, waste management law and water pollution law as well as the licensing of effluent discharge, inspection of Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems, farming and business activities, and monitoring the quality of our waters.

To try and improve water quality, Laois County Council is working closely with *The Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO)*, the EPA, the IFA and other agencies such as Inland Fisheries Ireland, Coillte and Bord na Móna to identify the specific issues that are impacting on our rivers and to implement solutions. The Council will also work with the community including the farming community to protect the environment through the effective management of environmental resources.

10.4.2.4 Water Quality Protection

The Council operates under the Water Pollution Acts 1977 and 1990 which enables Local Authorities to:

- Prosecute for water pollution offences;
- Attach appropriate pollution control conditions in the licensing of effluent discharges from industry, etc., made to waters;
- Issue notices requiring a person to cease the pollution of waters and requiring the mitigation or remedying of any effects of the pollution in the manner and within the period specified in such notices;
- Seek court orders, including High Court injunctions, to prevent, terminate, mitigate or remedy pollution/its effects;

- Prepare water quality management plans for any waters in or adjoining their functional areas;
- Make bye-laws regulating certain agricultural activities where the Local Authority considers this to be necessary so as to prevent or eliminate pollution of waters

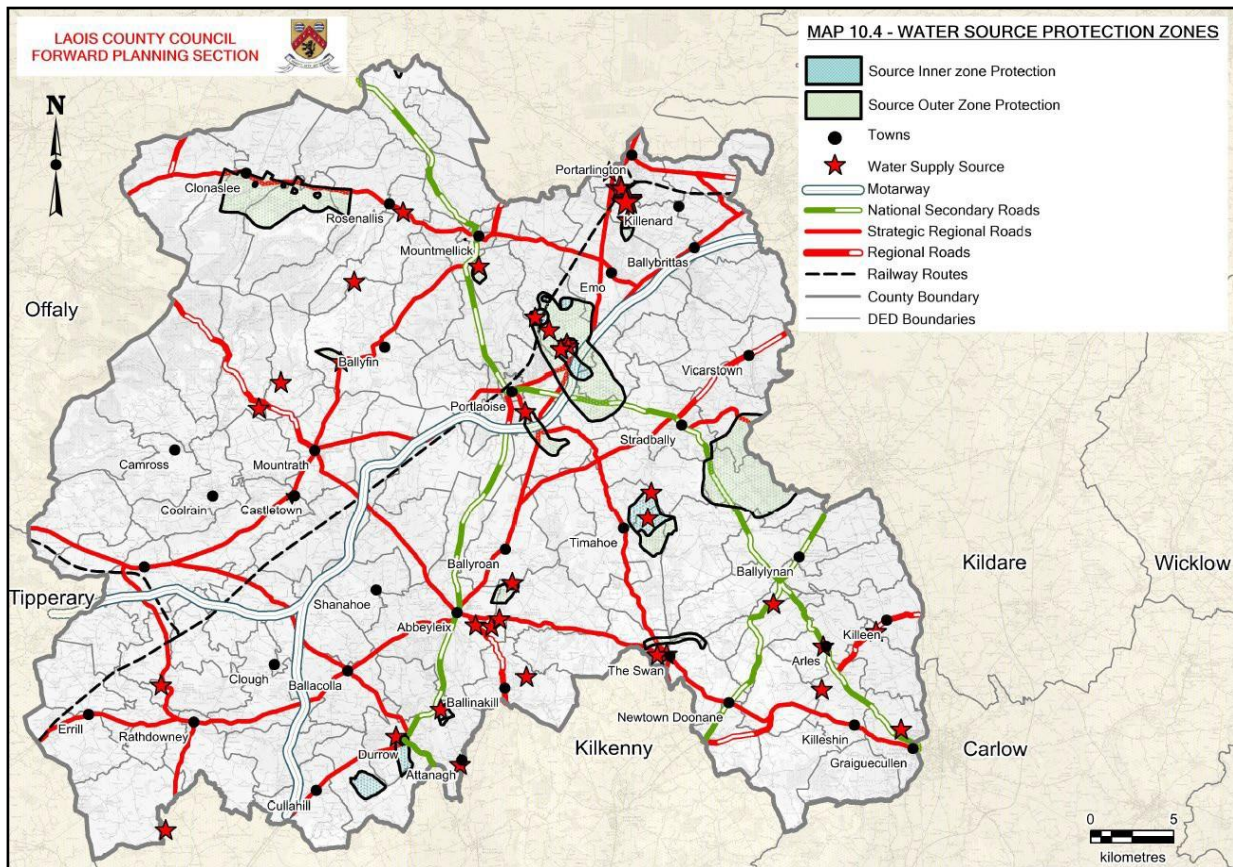
Water Quality Policy Objectives	
ES 17	Implement the provisions of water pollution abatement measures in accordance with National and EU Directives and other legislative requirements in conjunction with other agencies as appropriate.
ES 18	Maintain and improve the water quality in rivers and other water courses in the county, including ground waters. The Council will have cognizance of, where relevant, the EU's Common Implementation Strategy Guidance Document No. 20 and 36 which provide guidance on exemptions to the environmental objectives of the Water Framework Directive.
ES 19	Minimise the impact on groundwater of discharges from domestic wastewater treatment systems and other potentially polluting sources. The Council will comply with the Environmental Protection Agency's 'Code of Practice: Wastewater Treatment and Disposal Systems Serving Single Houses' (2009) and the Environmental Protection Agency's 'Code for Treatment Systems for Small Communities, Business, Leisure Centres and Hotels'.
ES 20	Assist and support with the Blue Dots Catchment Programme which been established under the current River Basin Management Plan specifically for the protection and restoration of high ecological status water bodies.
ES 21	Ensure the protection of all High Status Water Bodies in the county by complying with the requirements of the Local Government (Water Pollution) Act 1977, (as amended), the Nitrates Directive (91/676/EEC), the European Communities Environmental Objectives (Surface Waters) Regulations 2009, the European Communities (Groundwater) Regulations 2010; which standards and objectives are included in the River Basin Management Plans, and other relevant Regulations.
ES 22	Ensure where private wastewater treatment systems are permitted by virtue of their remoteness from Public Wastewater Schemes to serve commercial and business developments, e.g Motorway Service Stations, Tourism and the Hospitality Sector etc, that their performance is monitored and audited so that they are operated in compliance with their wastewater discharge license, in order to protect water quality.

10.4.2.5 Groundwater Protection

Groundwater provides drinking water requirements and almost 100% of households and businesses in county Laois via public, group scheme and private wells. Groundwater also contributes water to the river system as base flow, and so its quality is intrinsically linked to surface water quality. The main threats are posed by:

- i) Point contamination sources e.g. farmyard wastes (mainly silage effluent and soiled water), industrial discharges, activities related to quarrying and extraction, septic tank effluent, leakages, spillages, the improper use of pesticides and leachate from waste disposal sites.
- ii) Diffuse sources e.g. spreading of fertilisers (organic and inorganic) and pesticides

Map 10.4: Laois's Groundwater Protection Scheme



A number of surface water bodies are protected by way of Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designation. Sensitive aquifers that contribute to the groundwater resources of the county also require protection and careful management. The Geological Survey of Ireland has completed a Groundwater Protection Scheme for County Laois. The overall aim of a Groundwater Protection Scheme is to preserve the quality of groundwater, for drinking water, surface water ecosystems and terrestrial ecosystems, for the benefit of present and future generations.

The Groundwater Protection Scheme provides guidance for Laois County Council in decision-making on the location, nature and control of developments and activities in order to protect groundwater. Some areas may not have suitable hydrogeological conditions to accommodate discharges to groundwater such as a conventional septic tank or a proprietary wastewater system; in addition a high density of septic tanks in an area may cause a reduction in water quality.

Source Protection Areas for Groundwater sources, particularly for public, group scheme and industrial supplies, are of critical importance. Consequently, Source Protection Areas are delineated around groundwater sources to provide protection by placing tighter controls on activities within those areas. Source Protection Areas are divided into Inner Protection Areas and Outer Protection Areas. Development within Source Protection Areas shall be subject to stringent requirements in accordance with the Groundwater Protection Scheme and the Water Services Acts 2007 & 2012.

In County Laois, the main pressures on waterbodies are from nutrients related to agriculture. The objective of the Nitrates Directive is the prevention of the pollution of ground water and surface waters by nitrates from agricultural sources. The Council works with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to achieve the maximum protection of waters from nitrate and phosphorous pollution, and will seek compliance with any bye-laws made under the Local Government (Water Pollution) (Amendment) Act 1990 in relation to agricultural activities in those parts of the county, which have been prescribed in the byelaws.

There are also pressures on groundwater bodies from housing developments and single dwellings located in areas where the groundwater vulnerability is extreme or high. Waste Water Treatment Systems which serve these developments must be appropriate for the area and maintained according to their manufacturer's instructions on a on-going basis to prevent pollution of groundwater.

Groundwater Protection Policy Objectives	
ES 23	Ensure, through the implementation of the relevant River Basin Management Plan and their associated Programmes of Measures and any other associated legislation, the protection and improvement of all drinking water, surface water and ground waters throughout the county.
ES 24	Protect and develop, in a sustainable manner, the existing groundwater sources and aquifers in the County and control development in a manner consistent with the proper management of these resources, in accordance with the County Water Source Protection Zones.
ES 25	Assist and co-operate with the EPA, LAWPRO and IW in the Continued implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive.
ES 26	Minimise the impact on groundwater of discharges from septic tanks and other potentially polluting sources through compliance with the Environmental Protection Agency's 'Code of Practice: Wastewater Treatment and Disposal Systems Serving Single Houses' (2009).
ES 27	Ensure the protection of groundwater dependant Natura 2000 sites which rely on the continued supply of groundwater resources to secure the key environmental conditions that support the integrity of the site and through the protection of groundwater standards as defined by the National River Basin Management Plan 2018 – 2021 (and any subsequent Plan). Where no detailed Plan for protection of a specific source is available wastewater discharge will not be permitted within a radius of 200 metres of that source.

Groundwater Protection Policy Objectives

ES 28	Ensure that Source Protection Areas are identified for any public and group scheme water supplies or multiple unit housing developments with private water supplies.
ES 29	Continue efforts to improve water quality under the Local Government (Water Pollution) Act 1977, (as amended) and by implementing the measures outlined under the Nitrates Directive (91/676/EEC) and complying with the requirements of the Surface Water Legislation Environmental Objectives (Surface Waters) Regulations 2009, the European Communities (Groundwater) Regulations 2010; which standards and objectives are included in the River Basin Management Plans, and other relevant Regulations.
ES 30	Ensure that all industrial development is appropriately located, to seek effluent reduction and 'clean production' where feasible, and require that waste water treatment facilities are adequate, and that effluents are treated and discharged in a satisfactory manner.
ES 31	<p>New developments which include on-site wastewater treatment in an Extreme Vulnerability Inner Source Protection Area shall be restricted to the following categories:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. A dwelling for a full-time farmer; b. An existing inhabited dwelling in need of replacement; c. A second family dwelling on a farm where this is required for management of the farm <p>Permission may be granted in the above instances subject to the following stipulations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. That an alternative site outside the Extreme vulnerability Inner Protection Area is not available b. The existing water quality of the source is not subject to any significant nitrate and /or microbiological contamination c. The existing water quality of the groundwater source is in compliance with the environmental objectives set out in relevant River Basin District Management Plan.
ES 32	<p>Control intensive agriculture development e.g. intensive pig unit productions in order to minimise their impact on soil and ground water quality.</p> <p>Developments involving intensive pig units shall be required to show compliance with the following requirements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. The developer shall demonstrate that all lands available are suitable for landspreading of manures and have satisfactory Nutrient Management Plans for such lands b. Satisfactory arrangements for storage, management and spreading of slurries are provided.
ES 33	Encourage the use of catchment-sensitive farming practices, in order to meet Water Framework Directive targets, European Union (Good Agricultural Practice for

Groundwater Protection Policy Objectives	
	Protection of Waters) Regulations 2017, as amended and comply with the relevant River Basin Management Plan.
ES 34	Consult as necessary with other competent authorities with responsibility for environmental management.
ES 35	To work in co-operation with relevant organisations and major stakeholders, to ensure a co-ordinated approach to the protection and improvement of the county's water resources.
ES 36	Ensure that developments that may adversely affect water quality will not proceed unless mitigation measures are employed, such as settlements ponds, interceptors etc.
ES 37	Promote public awareness of water quality issues and the measures required to protect both surface water and groundwater bodies.

10.4.3 AIR QUALITY

Poor air quality both in the urban and rural environment can lead to major environmental problems and be detrimental to public health. The most sensitive areas in relation to air quality are built-up urban areas and major transport developments.

Air pollution continues to present challenges including:

- transport emissions, especially road transport emissions of NO_x and fine particulate matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}) arising from increase in diesel cars and buses on our road network;
- power generation and emissions from industry, agriculture and agricultural activities that lead to methane and nitrous oxide emissions;
- burning of fossil fuels e.g. gas, peat, and coal resulting in carbon dioxide emissions and the persistent problem of 'smoky' emissions from the use of solid fuel in homes and backyard burning.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the body responsible for the monitoring of air quality in Ireland. The Council is the regulatory authority under the Air Pollution Act 1987 and the Air Pollution Act 1987 (Licensing of Industrial Plant) Regulations 1988. Under the above legislation Laois County Council's role is to protect, enhance and control air pollution and to ensure the provision of the highest standards. The Council is empowered to improve air quality and prevent pollution by having regard to the Air Quality Standards Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 180 of 2011).

These regulations implement Directive 2008/50/EC on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe (CAFE Directive).

The Council has adopted policies in relation to air quality having regard to its importance to a good quality of life, public health and environmental sustainability. Air pollution can negatively affect human health and eco-systems with the main threat to air quality being emissions from

road traffic and solid fuel burning. The policy approach of the Council to integrate land use planning and transportation will reduce emissions from vehicles.

The most sensitive areas in relation to air quality are built-up urban areas and major transport developments. A reduction in the amount of heating required through improved energy efficiency of homes is also an important part of the solution.

The Council will have regard to the EU Framework Directive on Air Quality Assessment relating to air quality standards. Regard shall also be had to the relevant WHO Guideline Values and the EPA document "Air Quality in Ireland".

Air Quality Policy Objectives	
ES 38	Promote the preservation of best ambient air quality compatible with sustainable development in accordance with the EU Ambient Air Quality and Cleaner Air for Europe (CAFE) Directive (2008/50/EC) and ensure that all air emissions associated with new developments are within Environmental Quality Standards as out in the Air Quality Standards Regulations 2011 (SI No. 180 of 2011) (or any updated/superseding documents).
ES 39	Encourage more sustainable modes of transport and a more balanced modal split to reduce carbon emissions.
ES 40	Encourage the use of appropriate mitigation measures, such as dust dampeners, chimney stack scrubbers, etc. to minimise the potential impacts of developments on air quality.
ES 41	Require developments of a certain nature to carry out assessments of the impact of the development on air quality.
ES 42	Ensure the implementation of the radon prevention measures for new homes as contained within the Building Regulations.

10.4.4 NOISE POLLUTION

Noise control is governed by the Environmental Protection Agency Act 1992 and the Environmental Protection Agency Act (Noise) Regulations 1994 (S.I. No. 179 of 1994). The definition of environmental noise includes "noise which causes a nuisance, or would endanger human health or damage property or harm the environment".

Noise that is continuous, repeated or loud can have significant impacts on the quality of life of individuals, communities and the environment, in particular, wildlife. The protection of noise sensitive land usage, such as residential uses, is important in order to foster a good quality of life. The Planning Authority of Laois County Council will seek to minimise noise through the planning process by ensuring that the design of future developments incorporate measures to prevent or mitigate the transmission of noise and vibration, where appropriate. Similarly, where noise sensitive uses are proposed within proximity to a noise source, such as national roads, rail lines, etc., proposals shall include noise and/or vibration attenuation measures in any planning application.

10.4.4.1 Noise Action Plan

Laois County Council adopted the 2019-2022 Noise Action Plan in 2019, which is in accordance with Environmental Noise Regulations (SI 140 of 2006). The aim of the plan is to avoid, prevent and reduce, on a prioritised basis the harmful effects, including annoyance due to the long term exposure to environmental noise.

This Noise Action Plan 2019 has been prepared by Laois County Council to address environmental noise from major roads with more than three million vehicles per annum. The action planning area covers the M7, M8, N80, N77 and sections of the R445. It also covers the major rail line between Hazelhatch and Portarlinton within the functional area of Laois. It is a follow up to the 2014 Noise Action Plan which addressed environmental noise from roads with more than three million vehicles per annum and the 2008 Noise Action Plan which addressed environmental noise from roads with more than six million vehicles per annum.

Noise Pollution Policy Objectives	
ES 43	Require an assessment of impact of the developments on noise levels, having regard to the provisions of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Acts 1992 and 2003 and the EPA Noise Regulations 1994 when assessing planning applications.
ES 44	Support the implementation of the Noise Directive 2002/49/EC and associated Environmental Noise Regulations 2006.
ES 45	Ensure that relevant planning applications comply with the provisions of any Noise Action Plan or noise maps relating to the area.
ES 46	Restrict development proposals causing noise pollution in excess of best practice standards
ES 47	Regulate and control activities likely to give rise to excessive noise, other than those activities which are regulated by the EPA.
ES 48	Ensure new development does not cause an unacceptable increase in noise levels affecting noise sensitive properties. Proposals for new development with the potential to create excessive noise will be required to submit a construction and/or operation management plan to control such emissions.
ES 49	Require activities likely to give rise to excessive noise to install noise mitigation measures and monitors. The provision of a noise audit may be required where appropriate

10.4.5 LIGHT POLLUTION

The control of light pollution is important in the interests of nature conservation, residential amenity and energy efficiency. While adequate lighting is essential to a safe and secure environment, light spillage from excessive or poorly designed lighting is increasingly recognized as a potential nuisance to surrounding properties, a potential hazard to road safety, a threat to wildlife and can reduce the visibility of the night sky.

Light Pollution Policy Objectives	
ES 50	Ensure that external lighting and lighting schemes are designed so that light spillage is minimised, thereby limiting light pollution into the surrounding environment and protecting the amenities of nearby properties and wildlife, including protected species.
ES 51	Encourage the maintenance of dark skies in rural areas and limit light pollution in urban and rural areas.
ES 52	Encourage the maintenance of dark skies in rural areas and limit light pollution in urban and rural areas.

10.4.6 SOIL QUALITY

The large percentage of permanent pasture land has protected Ireland's soils from serious degradation, with the notable exception of peatlands. There is, however, increasing pressure on soil, particularly from land use changes, intensification of agriculture, erosion and overgrazing, afforestation, industry and urbanisation. These developments have significant impacts on soil quality and require careful management to protect soils and the wider environment.

Soil Quality Policy Objectives	
ES 53	Ensure good soil quality throughout the county by requiring developments of a certain nature (as specified in the relevant environmental legislation) to carry out assessments of the impact of the development on soil quality.
ES 54	Recognise the significant impacts of land use, land use change and sludge generation and treatment in relation to carbon loss/stocks and recognise the function of soil assessment and management, carbon sinks, carbon sequestration and restoration of degraded lands in plan led settlement and development strategies

10.5 CONTROL OF MAJOR ACCIDENT HAZARDS DIRECTIVE (SEVESO III DIRECTIVE)

The Chemicals Act (Control of Major Accident Hazards involving Dangerous Substances) Regulations 2015 (S.I. No. 209 of 2015) (the “COMAH Regulations”), implement the Seveso III Directive (2012/18/EU). The purpose of the COMAH Regulations requires for the prevention of major accidents involving dangerous substances, and seeks to limit the consequences for human health and the environment of such accidents.

COMAH Policy Objectives	
ES 55	Ensure that any COMAH sites in County Laois are managed in accordance with the provisions of the Seveso III Directive.
ES 56	Have regard to the following in assessing applications for new developments (including extensions); <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Major Accidents Directive Seveso III Directive (2012/18/EU);• The potential effects on public health and safety;• The need to ensure adequate distances between such developments and residential areas, areas of public use and any areas of sensitivity
ES 57	Any proposals for developments within the vicinity of major accident hazard sites shall have cognisance of the required minimum separation distances as required by the Major Accidents Directive. In this regard all future proposals of this nature shall be forwarded to the Health and Safety Authority.

10.6 TELECOMMUNICATIONS

The development of high-quality telecommunications infrastructure is critical to advance the economic and social development of the county. The development of telecommunications infrastructure is essential to attracting investment and facilitating economic development. The Council is committed to enhancing the telecommunications network and infrastructure throughout the county. However, this must be managed to ensure a balance between the provision of telecommunications infrastructure in the interests of social and economic progress, and sustaining residential amenity and environmental quality.

10.6.1 BROADBAND

The availability of a high-quality and high speed broadband network will, increase economic development potential by facilitating a transition to a knowledge-based ‘smart economy’, it promotes sustainable development by encouraging remote working and reducing commuting and it can promote social inclusion and an enhanced quality of life for all.

The National Broadband Plan is Government policy focused on ensuring that everyone, irrespective of where they live, should have access to high quality, competitively priced

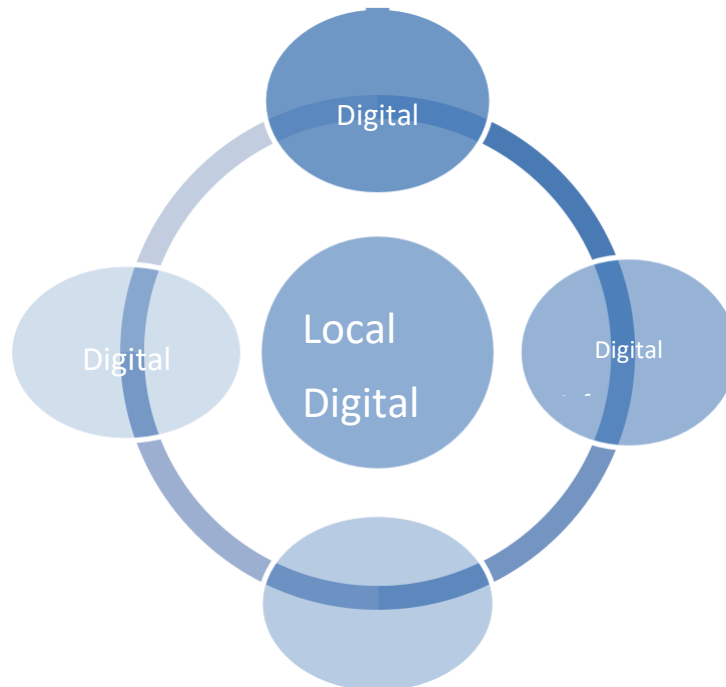
broadband services. The contract for the delivery of the National Broadband Plan was awarded in November 2019. As part of this plan, each local authority is required to prepare a Digital Strategy for the County.

10.6.2 LAOIS DIGITAL STRATEGY 2020-2024

Laois County Council adopted a Local Digital Strategy in October 2020 to ensure the delivery of high speed broadband throughout the County. The Vision of the strategy is two fold – to set out the Councils ambitions to meet the needs and aspirations of the people of County Laois in enabling them to benefit from digital technologies and infrastructures throughout the county and to enable the citizens of Laois to be better informed and skilled, to be able to carry out their

business in a more resilient manner, access all aspects of life – education, public services and entertainment, whilst offering a better experience to visitors coming into the County.

Actions relating to the following objectives frame this strategy:



10.6.3 PUBLIC WIFI ZONES

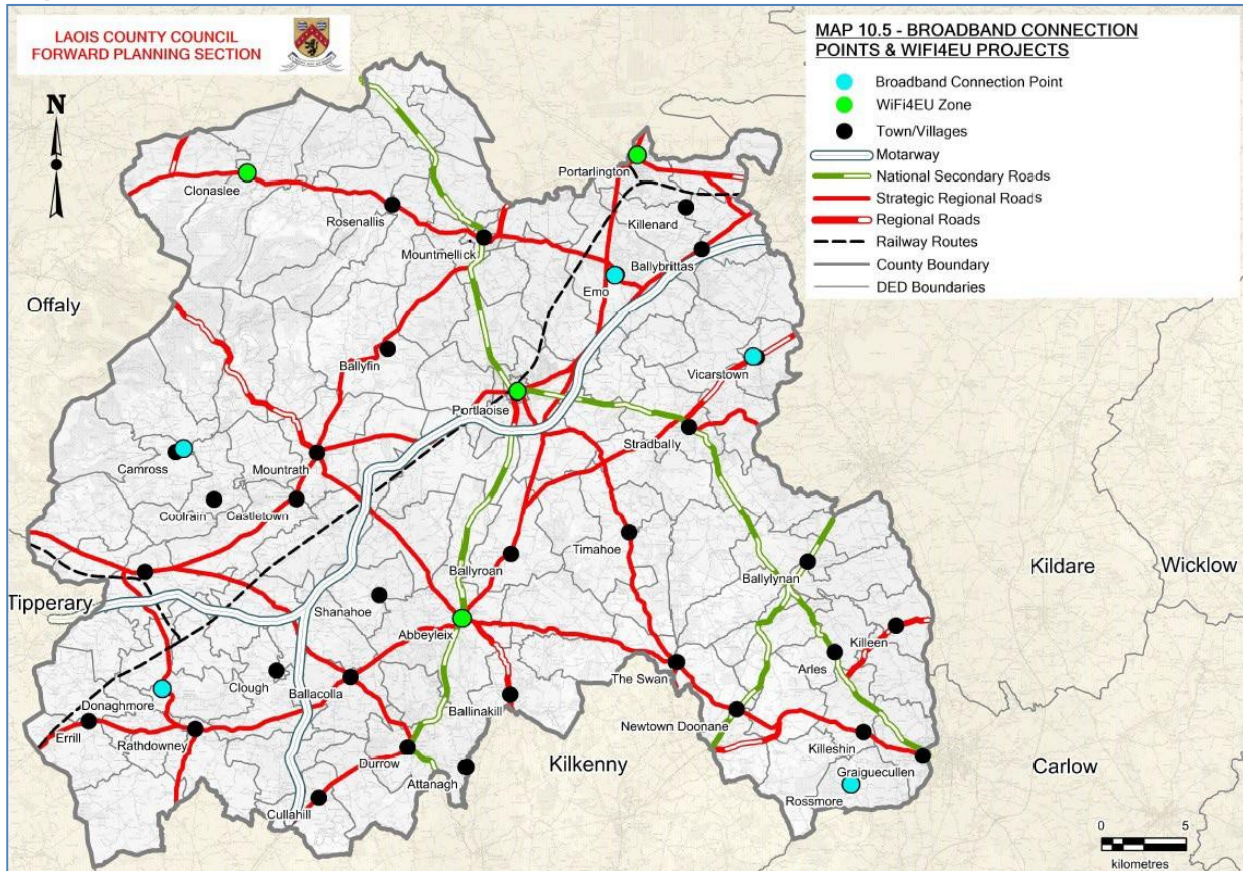
Extensive work has been carried out by the Department of Rural and Community Development to determine intervention areas that will be connected throughout the Country. Nearly 300 Broadband Connection Points (BCP's) will be provided in Year 1 (2020) which will provide free WIFI in local communities supporting digital work hubs in every county. In County Laois 11 such BCP's have been identified and developed on site as per Map 10.5.

The European commission also promotes free WIFI connectivity for its citizens and visitors in public spaces. To support this, the WIFI4EU initiative matched by the Department of Rural and Community Development funding will provide the equipment and installation costs of internet

access points across the County.

Laois County Council has been successful in securing 4 such vouchers under WiFi4EU which will roll out during 2020/ 2021 in 4 public locations within the county. This will provide free public WiFi in urban centres and at locations with increased visitor numbers.

Map 10.5: BCPs in Laois



10.6.4 TELECOMMUNICATIONS MASTS AND ANTENNAE

An efficient telecommunications system is important in the development of the economy of which the provision of masts and associated antennae are an essential element. The Council will have regard to the document titled *Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DoELG, 1996)* when considering applications for masts and antennae.

Telecoms Policy Objectives	
TEL 1	Encourage and facilitate the coordinated development and extension of broadband infrastructure throughout the county, by state or private operators.
TEL 2	Support the delivery of the National Broadband Plan and implement the objectives of the Laois Local Digital Strategy 2020 – 2024.
TEL 3	Ensure that ducting for broadband fibre connections is provided during the installation of services, in all new commercial and housing schemes and during the carrying out of any work to roads or rail lines.
TEL 4	Encourage the provision of WiFi zones in public buildings.
TEL 5	Facilitate the delivery of high-capacity telecommunications infrastructure at appropriate locations throughout the county having regard to the guidelines for “Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures”, Circular Letter PL07/12 and any updated documents issued by the DoECLG or relevant authority.
TEL 6	Co-operate with telecommunications service providers in the development of infrastructure, having regard to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, normal planning and environmental.
TEL 7	Adopt a presumption against the location of structures in vulnerable landscapes as identified in the Landscape Character Assessment (Appendix 6) and in areas where views are to be preserved and in areas adjacent to national monuments, sites of archaeological heritage or protected structures.
TEL 8	Existing Public Rights of Way will be identified prior to any new telecommunication developments (including associated processes) which will be prohibited if they impinge thereon or on recreational amenities, public access to the countryside, communities or the natural and built environment.
TEL 9	Encourage co-location of antennae on existing support structures and to require documentary evidence as to the non-availability of this option is proposals for new structures. The shared use of existing structures will be required where the numbers of masts located in any single area is considered to have an excessive concentration.
TEL 10	Assess proposals for the location of telecommunication structures in sensitive landscapes in accordance with the policies set down within the Landscape Character Assessment.

Telecommunications Development Management Standards

DM TEL 1 TELECOMMUNICATION STRUCTURES

To facilitate the evaluation of development proposals for the erection of antennae and support structures, applicants/developers/operators will be required to:

- 1) Submit a reasoned justification as to the need for the particular development at the proposed location in the context of the operators overall Plans to develop a network in County Laois and strive to reduce the number of telecommunication structures by ensuring that ComReg's Code of Conduct is implemented.
- 2) Indicate what other sites or locations in the County were considered;
- 3) Submit evidence of consultations, if any, with other operators with regard to the sharing of sites and/or support structures;
- 4) Where masts are located in areas of high amenity, landscapes of exceptional or high value or international or national importance and high sensitivity as indicated in the Landscape Character Assessment, there shall be a presumption to provide a "Landscape Impact Report" to allow proper assessment of the visual impact. Surrogate (coniferous trees) shall be considered.
- 5) Masts will only be permitted if supported by an acceptable Visual Impact Report.
- 6) Furnish a statement of compliance with the International Radiation Protection Association (IRPA) Guidelines (Health Physics, Vol. 54, No. 1(Jan) 1988) or the equivalent European Prestandard 50166-2 which has been conditioned by the licensing arrangements with the Department of Transport, Energy and Communications;
- 7) Cumulative effect of dishes in the area should be considered.
- 8) Furnish evidence that an installation of the type applied for complies with the above Guidelines.
- 9) Cables and wire connections shall be located underground where feasible.
- 10) The design of the mast structures should be simple and well finished; monopoles are preferred to latticework types. Where appropriate, masts, antennae and fencing should be in harmony with their surroundings and should be of dull or neutral sky grey colour so as to be less visually obtrusive. Green or black is the preferred colour at ground level.
- 11) Subject to visual and landscape considerations, support structures will normally be required to be designed to facilitate the attachment of additional antennae to facilitate co-location. The number of ancillary buildings/containers shall be kept to the minimum and the need for each structure must be clearly justified. They should be located in accordance with the provisions of the DoECLG Guidelines 1996 (or as may be amended).
- 12) Restoration plans shall be submitted with the application for when antennae and their support structures are no longer being used and nonew user has been identified.
- 13) Access roads will be permitted only where they are absolutely necessary.
- 14) Where it has been proven that there is a need for new/expanded coverage in a particular area, the applicant shall show that all existing

masts and support structures have been examined to determine if the attachment of new antennae to existing structures can provide the coverage required, the applicant shall submit either a Discovery Series Map or similar map type (to be agreed with planning authority) to the scale of 1:50,000 the location of all telecommunication structures within a radius of 1km of the proposed site, indicating the coverage area of the proposed facility and a technical evaluation of the capabilities of these masts to take additional antennae and provide the coverage required be considered.

DM TEL 2 UNDERGROUNDING AND CONCEALING OF SERVICES

In new housing and in other forms of urban development, all services including E.S.B., telephone and television cables shall be

- Placed underground;
- Service buildings or structures should be sited as unobtrusively as possible and must be screened;

Care should also be given to the treatment of maintenance boxes, electrical boxes and bin storage on facades so that such items are concealed as unobtrusively as possible.

CHAPTER 11 BIODIVERSITY AND NATURAL HERITAGE

Aim: *To contribute towards the protection, conservation and management of biodiversity and natural heritage including sites designated at national and EU level and protected species and habitats outside of designated sites and to develop a green infrastructure network in the interests of the proper planning and sustainable development of the county.*

11.1 INTRODUCTION

The County's natural heritage and biodiversity is of local, national and international importance and is recognised as an important environmental and economic resource that requires care and management through the planning process. Laois has a wide range of habitat types and landscapes supporting diverse species both in natural and semi-natural state and managed locations. Natural heritage areas includes the upland area of the Slieve Bloom Mountains, scenic river valleys of the Barrow and Nore, woodlands, rolling farmland and a network of mature biodiversity areas such as boglands, riparian habitats and hedgerows. Protecting and enhancing our biodiversity, ecosystems and landscapes is vital to the health, well-being and quality of life of our communities and assists societal adaptation to the challenges of climate change.

11.2 POLICY CONTEXT

Ireland has signed and ratified a number of international conventions and agreements including the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern) and the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar). These various obligations are given legal effect through both European and National legislation and have resulted in the designation of natural heritage sites throughout the country.

11.2.1 EU BIRDS AND HABITATS DIRECTIVES

EC Birds Directive (Directive 2009/147 EC) The EU Birds Directive (Council Directive 79/409/EEC) and the EU Habitats Directive (European Directive 92/43/EEC) provides for the establishment of the Natura 2000 network of sites of highest biodiversity importance for rare and threatened habitats and species across the EU. The Natura 2000 network of European sites comprises Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), and Special Protection Areas (SPA).

11.2.2 THE EU BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY 2030

The EU's biodiversity strategy for 2030 is a comprehensive, ambitious and long-term plan to protect nature and reverse the degradation of ecosystems. The strategy aims to put Europe's biodiversity on a path to recovery by 2030, and contains specific actions and commitments in relation to pollinators, water quality, nature restoration targets, fishing , etc.

11.2.3 NATIONAL LEGISLATION

Development Plans must include mandatory objectives for the conservation of the natural heritage and for the conservation of European sites and any other sites which may be prescribed. National legislation includes the following: Wildlife Acts 1976 and 2010 (as amended), the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and associated Regulations, European Union (Planning and Development), (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2018, the European Union (Water Policy) Regulations 2003 (as amended), the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (as amended), the European Communities (Environmental Liability) Regulations 2008 (as amended) and the Flora Protection Order 2015.

11.2.4 NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK (NPF)

The National Planning Framework (NPF) aims to protect and value our important and vulnerable habitats, landscapes, natural heritage and green spaces. It highlights the importance of the interrelationships between biodiversity, natural heritage, landscape and our green spaces. The NPF states that integrated planning for Green Infrastructure and ecosystem services will be incorporated into the preparation of statutory land use plans. It also refers to the importance of biodiversity and how the planning system will be responsive to our national environmental challenges and ensure that development occurs within environmental limits having regard to the requirements of all relevant environmental legislation.

11.2.5 REGIONAL SPATIAL AND ECONOMIC STRATEGY

The Strategy recognises the need to conserve and enhance the biodiversity of our protected habitats and species including landscape and heritage protection, to identify, protect and enhance our Green Infrastructure, to ensure the sustainable management of our natural resources, to build climate resilience, to support the transition to a low carbon economy by 2050 and the protection of the healthy natural environment to ensure clean air and water for all. In line with Regional Policy Objective (RPO) 7.21 of the Eastern and Midland Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, the Council promotes an ecosystems services approach in the preparation of this County Development Plan.

11.2.6 NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN 2017 – 2021

The Plan sets out actions through which a range of government, civil and private sectors will undertake to achieve Ireland's 'Vision for Biodiversity', and follows on from the work of the first and second National Biodiversity Action Plans. The objectives lay out a clear framework for Ireland's national approach to biodiversity, ensuring that efforts and achievements of the past are built upon, while looking ahead to what can be achieved over the next five years and beyond.

11.2.7 LAOIS BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

Laois County Council has developed a suite of Local Biodiversity Action Plans for Abbeyleix, Ballacolla, Cullahill, Emo, Killenard, Mountmellick and Portarlinton with funding from Laois Partnership. Each Plan builds on the measures outlined in the National Biodiversity Action Plan.

11.2.7 ALL IRELAND POLLINATOR PLAN

One third of our bee species are threatened with extinction from Ireland. This is because we have drastically reduced the amount of food (flowers) and safe nesting sites in our landscapes. The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan is about all of us, from farmers to local authorities, to schools, gardeners and businesses, coming together to try to create an Ireland where pollinators can survive and thrive. The first Plan covers the period 2015-2020 and a new version will be developed to cover 2021-2025. Each sector have been targeted in the Plan including Councils where key actions have been identified to protect natural wildflower areas, promote pollinator friendly planting and raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity.

11.3 BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

At the national level, climate change has also become central to Ireland's National Biodiversity Action Plan which focuses on removing threats and building resilience in Ireland's ecosystems to help them adapt to climate change and other threats. Increasing our understanding of the effects of climate change on biodiversity and developing practical ways of mitigating such effects, are critical to limit the damage. Biodiversity can support efforts to reduce the negative effects of climate change. Conserved or restored habitats can remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, thus helping to address climate change by storing carbon in peatlands and other Green Infrastructure. Options to increase the adaptive capacity of biodiversity in the face of accelerating climate change include:

- Reducing non-climatic stresses, such as pollution, habitat loss and fragmentation and invasive alien species.
- Wider adoption of conservation and sustainable use practices including through the strengthening of protected area networks and Green Infrastructure.

11.4 DESIGNATED SITES

The National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government is responsible for designating areas of special biodiversity interest in the context of national and European legislation. These areas include Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) and Statutory Nature Reserves. The county contains:

- 8 Special Areas of Conservation, SACs (See Map 11.1)
- 2 Special Protection Areas, SPAs (See Map 11.2)
- 2 Natural Heritage Areas, NHAs and 28 proposed Natural Heritage Areas (See Map 11.3)
- 3 Statutory Nature Reserves (See Map 11.4).

"Natura 2000 sites" is the collective name given to Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Areas of Protection (SPA). These sites contain habitats or species of special European importance. Appropriate Assessment is a requirement of Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of Council Directive 92/43 /EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild flora and fauna, also known as the Habitats Directive. The requirement for an appropriate assessment is not defined by the nature of the scale of the proposed development but solely by its potential to negatively

impact on a Natura 2000 site. It is the responsibility of the proponent of a plan or project to carry out an AA at each stage of the proposed development in accordance with Article 6. Appropriate Assessment is not and should not be regarded as a prohibition on new development or activities but involves a case by case examination of the implications for Natura 2000 sites and its conservation objectives in a recorded step wise procedure.

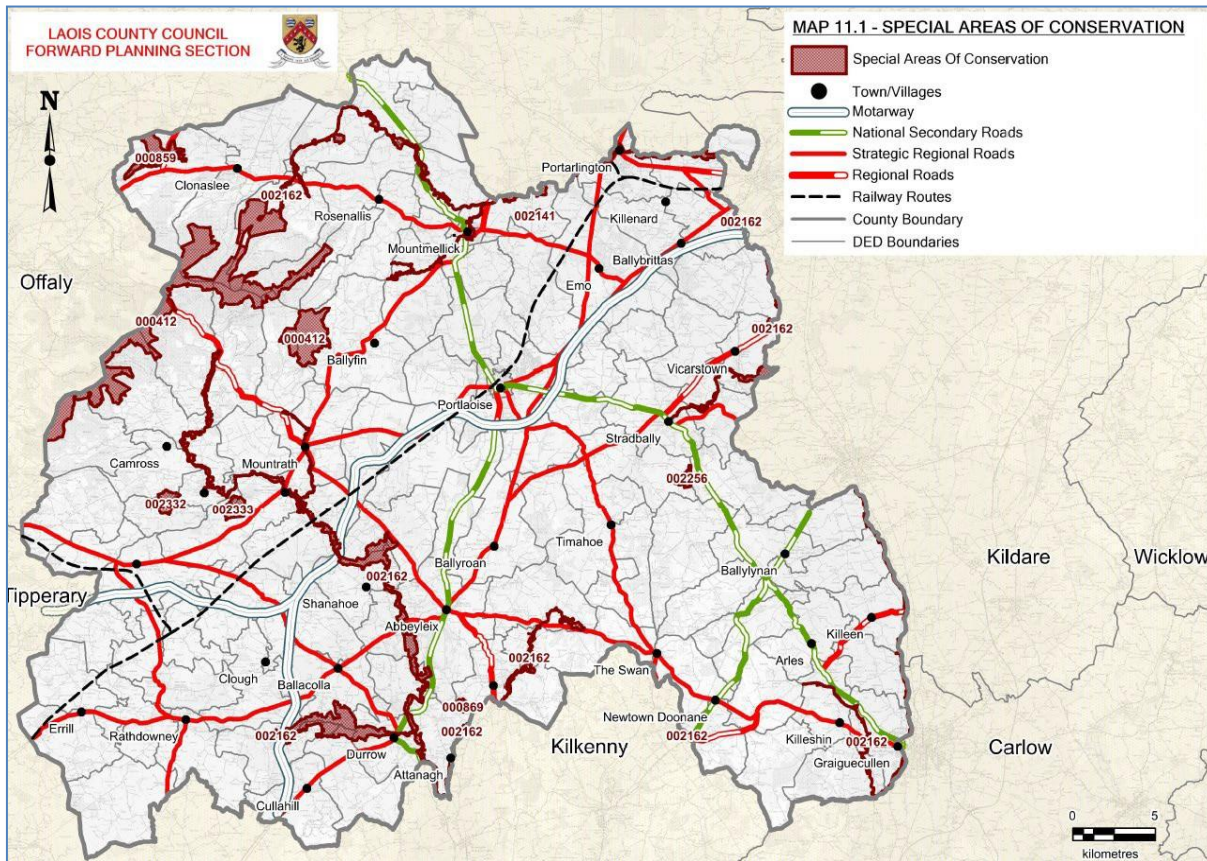
11.4.1 SPECIAL AREAS OF CONSERVATION (SAC)

Special Areas of Conservation are prime wildlife areas, considered to be important on a European as well as Irish level. The legal basis on which SACs are selected and designated is the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), transposed into Irish law in the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 209-2015. The Directive lists certain habitats and species that must be protected within SACs. Irish habitats include raised bogs, blanket bogs, turloughs, sand dunes, machair, heaths, lakes, rivers, woodlands, estuaries and sea inlets. The species which must be afforded protection under the Habitats Directive include inter alia all our bat species, Salmon, Pearl Mussel, Common Frog, Pine Marten, Mountain Hare and Otter. There are eight SACs to date in County Laois noted in Table 11.1.

Table 11.1 Special Areas of Conservation in County Laois

Site Name	Site Code
Ballyprior Grassland	002256
Clonaslee Eskers and Derry Bog	000859
Coolrain Bog	002332
Knockacoller Bog	002333
Lisbigney Bog	000869
Mountmellick	002141
River Barrow And River Nore	002162
Slieve Bloom Mountains	000412

Map 11.1: Special Areas of Conservation



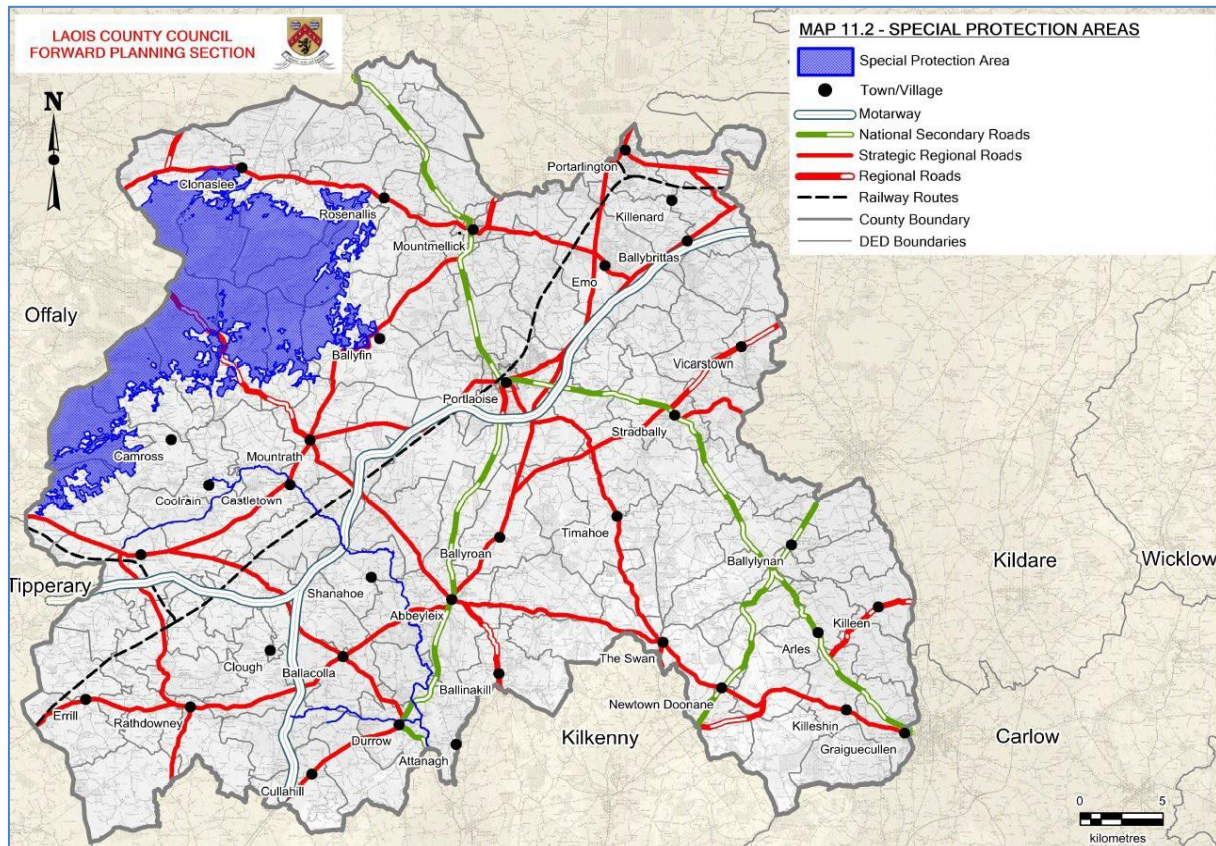
11.4.2 SPECIAL PROTECTION AREAS (SPA)

These are sites designated under the EU Birds Directive 79/409/EEC as a result of their importance for birds. There are two SPAs to date in County Laois, the Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA designated for the Hen Harrier, but also important for Merlin, Peregrine and Red Grouse and the River Nore SPA whose feature of interest is the Kingfisher.

Table 11.2 Special Areas of Protection in County Laois

Site Name	Site Code
Slieve Bloom Mountains	004160
River Nore	004233

Map 11.2: Special Protection Areas



11.4.3 NATURAL HERITAGE AREA (NHAS)

To date, only a selection of raised and blanket bog NHAs have been given formal legal protection. In County Laois, these sites are:

- 000652-Monaincha Bog / Ballaghmore Bog NHA
- 002357-Clonreher Bog NHA.

The remaining 28 proposed NHA (pNHA) sites in County Laois are given limited legal protection through; inter alia, recognition in the County Development Plan (See Table 11.3).

Map 11.3: Natural Heritage Areas

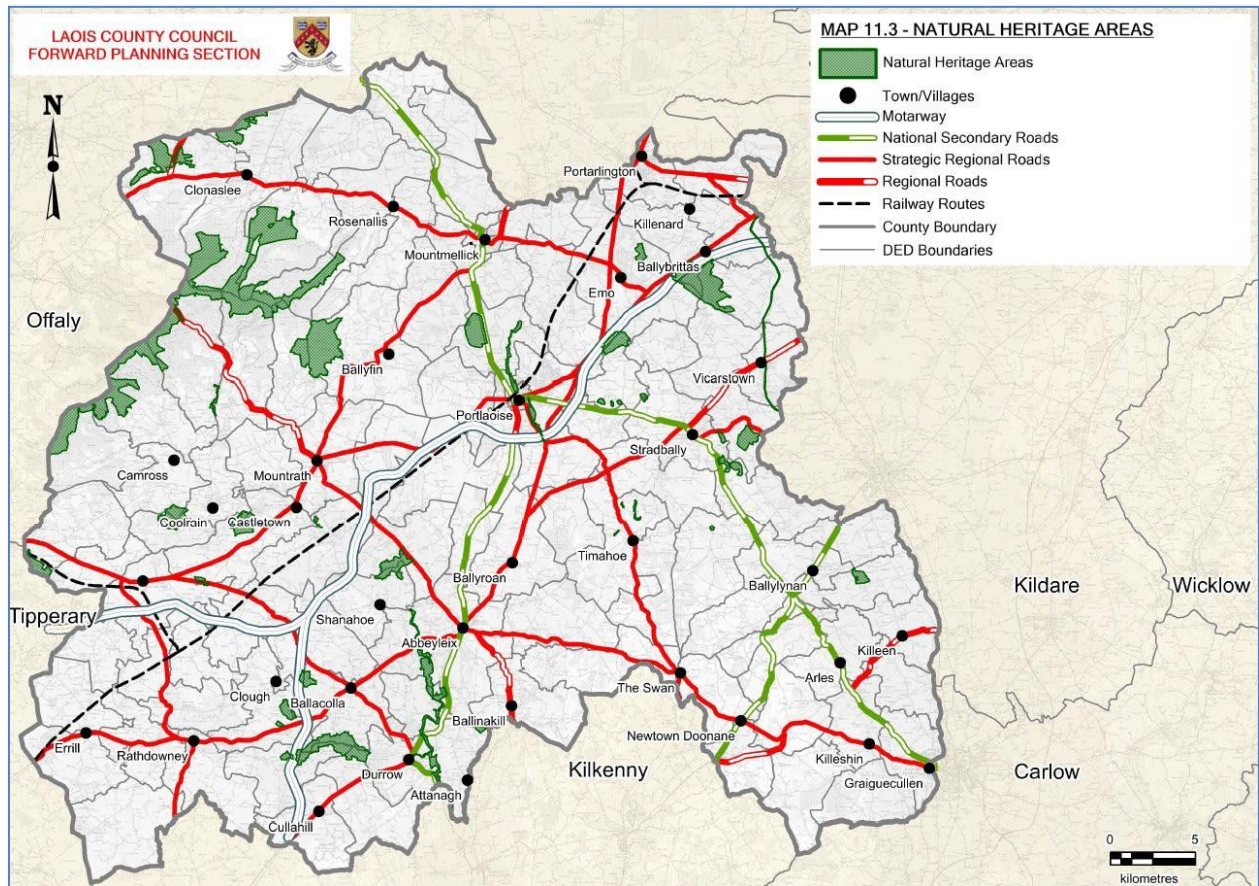


Table 11.3: Proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs)

SITE NAME	SITE CODE	MAIN HABITAT OR SPECIES
Annaghmore Lough Fen	000413	Calcareous fen with willow and birch scrub
Ballylynan	000857	Grassland, wet meadows
Barrow Valley At Tankardstown Bridge	000858	River, canal, grassland, marsh
Clonaslee Eskers And Derry Bog	000859	Esker, raised bog
Cloppook Wood	000860	Ash/hazel woodland, limestone hill
Coolacurragh Wood	000862	Birch/alder woodland, fen peat
Coolrain Bog	000415	Midland raised bog (with Knockacoller Bog, these two bogs are the most southerly intact examples of true Midland Raised Bogs in the country)
Cuffsborough	000418	Grassland used by Greenland White-fronted Geese
The Curragh And Goul River Marsh	000420	Wet meadow, river, winter feeding site for Greenland White-fronted Geese
Delour River Nr Lacca Manor	000864	Oak/birch woodland, river, wet grassland
Derries Wood	000416	Disturbed raised bog, disused gravel pit, conifer Plantation, lake, reedbed, important insect populations
Dunamais Woods	001494	Limestone hills, oak/ash woodland
Emo Court	000865	Semi-natural mixed (oak/ash with beech) woodland, lake, parkland, amenity grassland
Forest House Wood	000874	
Grand Canal	002104	Canal, wetland, grassland
Granstown Wood and Lough	000417	State-owned nature reserve. Lake in transition through fen to alder/willow. Important invertebrate fauna
The Great Heath of Portlaoise	000881	
Kilteale Hill	000867	Limestone hill, hazel/ash woodland
Knockacoller Bog	000419	Midland raised bog, Birch and alder woodland. One of the few intact bogs south of the Slieve Blooms
Lisbigney Bog	000869	Raised bog
Mannin Wetland	00868	Species-rich fen
Ridge Of Portlaoise	000876	Esker ridge, ash/hazel woodland, species-rich grassland, disused gravel pits
River Barrow And River Nore	002162	River, wetland, woodland
River Nore/Abbeyleix Woods Complex	002076	River, site for Freshwater Pearl Mussel (international importance), Twaite Shad (Vulnerable), wet grassland, mixed deciduous woodland of great antiquity and species diversity, with specimen oak
Rock of Dunamais	000878	
Shanahoe Marsh	001923	
Slieve Bloom Mountains	000412	Old Red Sandstone mountains, mountain blanket bog, Peregrine Falcon, Hen harrier, redgrouse
Stradbally Hill	001800	
Timahoe Esker	000421	Esker ridge, Hazel/Ash woodland

11.4.4 STATUTORY NATURE RESERVES

A Statutory Nature Reserve is an area of importance to wildlife, which is protected under Ministerial order. All four Statutory Nature Reserves in Laois are State-owned.

11.4.4.1 *Grantstown Wood and Grantstown Lough Nature Reserve*

These reserves are situated about 8km north-west of Durrow, County Laois and provide rare examples of wet woodland on base-rich soils, while Grantstown Lough is a classic example of a lake which has gradually infilled through fen to alder carr. Animals and plants of interest include

Kingfishers, Cormorants and Otter. The wood is composed of native tree and shrub species, especially Oak, Ash, and Birch, along with Hawthorn, Guelder Rose, and Spindle.

11.4.4.2 *Slieve Bloom Mountains Nature Reserve*

This high mountain blanket bog, unlike many other bogs in Ireland, has been spared severe burning and grazing. It formed about six thousand years ago when the climate became wetter and bog began to blanket the mountain slopes. Animals and plants of interest include Ling Heather, Deer Grass and Sphagnum Moss. The mountains are important for populations of RedGrouse and Hen Harrier.

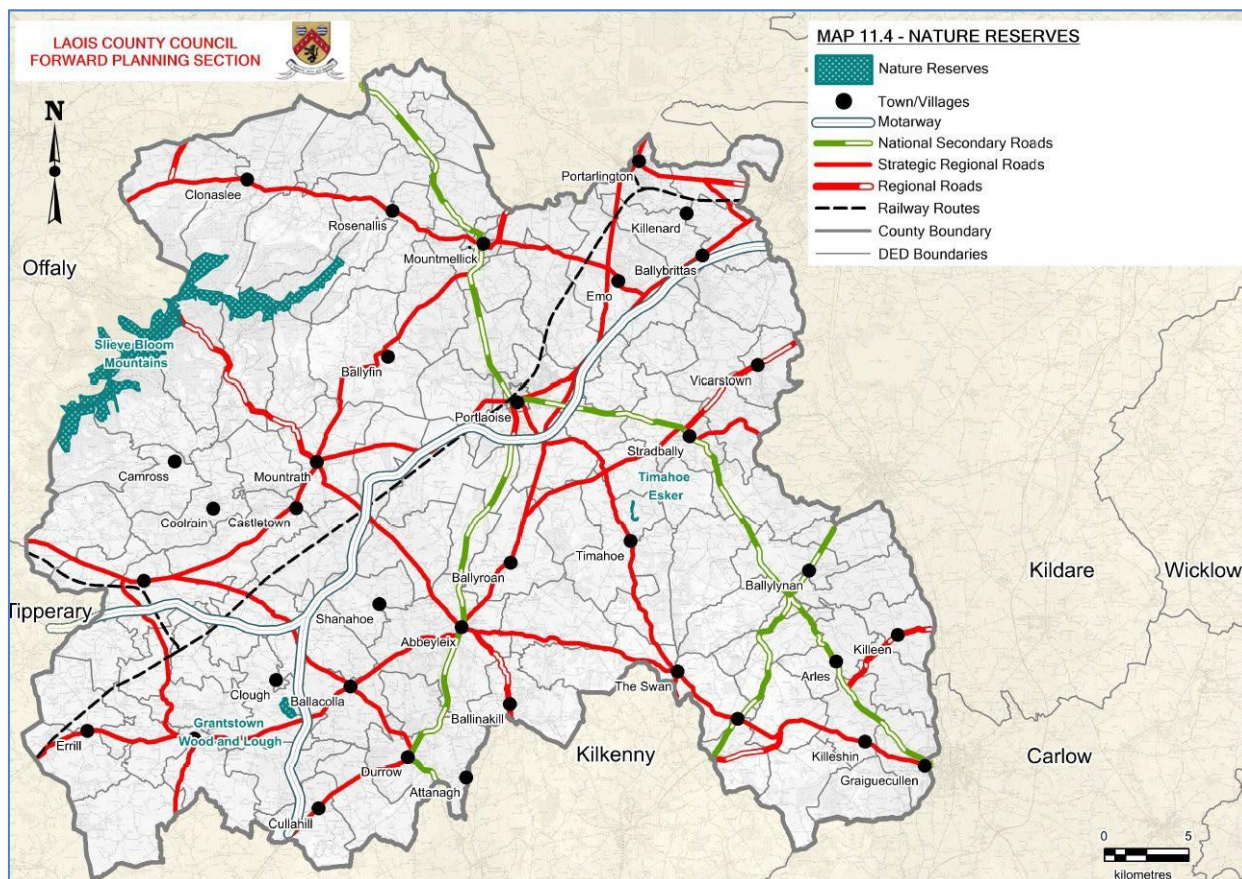
11.4.4.3 *Timahoe Esker Nature Reserve*

This is one of the few esker ridges left in the country which still carry native woodland. It is planned to expand the native woodland using appropriate management techniques.

11.4.4.4 *Coolacurragh Wood*

This reserve is an example of wet woodland on base-rich soils. It is dominated by alder, ash and birch with hawthorn in the shrub layer. The herb layer is dominated by bramble, nettle and meadowsweet. Fish in the lake provide Kingfishers, Cormorants and Otter with food

Map 11.4: Nature Reserves



Policy Objectives for Biodiversity and Designated Sites

BNH 1	Protect, conserve, and seek to enhance the county’s biodiversity and ecological connectivity.
BNH 2	Conserve and protect habitats and species listed in the Annexes of the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) (as amended) and the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC), the Wildlife Acts 1976 and 2010 (as amended) and the Flora Protection Orders.
BNH 3	Support and co-operate with statutory authorities and others in support of measures taken to manage proposed or designated sites in order to achieve their conservation objectives and maintain the favourable conservation status and conservation value of Sites under National and European legislation and International Agreements and maintain and /develop linkages between them where feasible.
BNH 4	Protect and maintain the conservation value of all existing and future Natural Heritage Areas, Nature Reserves, Ramsar Sites, Wildfowl Sanctuaries and Biogenetic Reserves in the county.

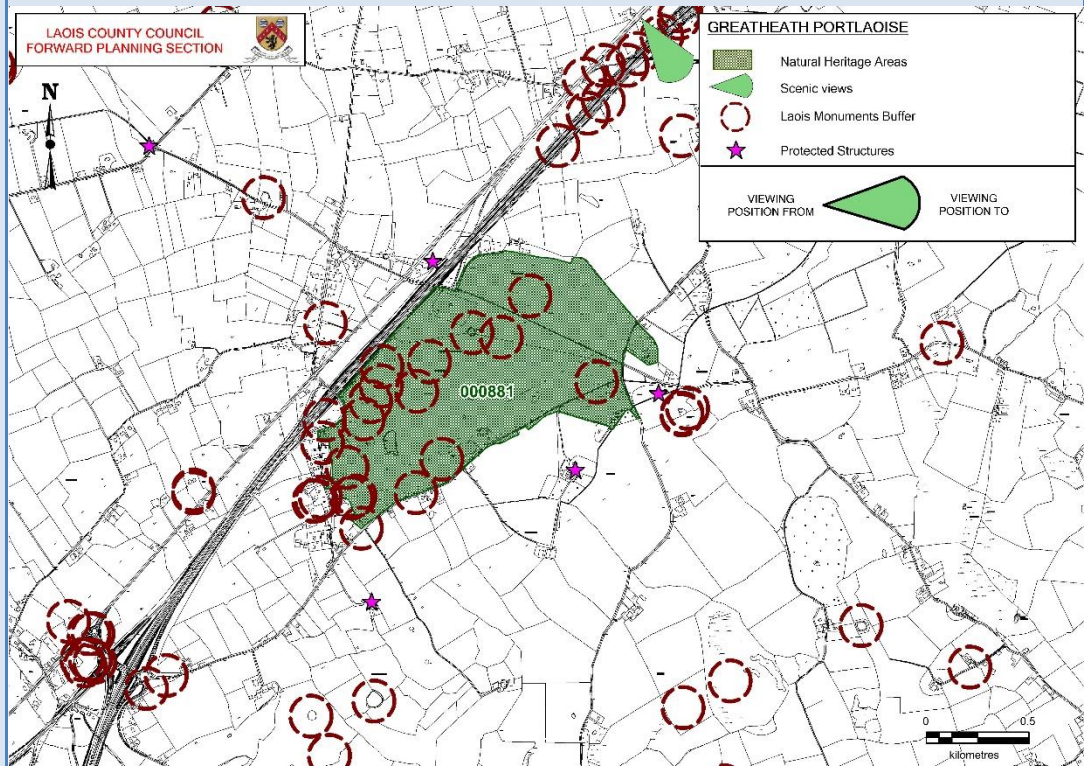
Policy Objectives for Biodiversity and Designated Sites	
BNH 5	Projects giving rise to significant cumulative, direct, indirect or secondary impacts on Natura 2000 sites arising from their size or scale, land take, proximity, resource requirements, emissions (disposal to land, water or air), transportation requirements, duration of construction, operation, decommissioning or from any other effects shall not be permitted on the basis of this Plan (either individually or in combination with other plans or projects) ^[1] . Screening for AAs and AAs undertaken shall take into account invasive species as relevant.
BNH 6	Assess, in accordance with the relevant legislation, all proposed developments which are likely to have a significant effect (directly or through indirect or cumulative impact) on designated natural heritage sites, sites proposed for designation and protected species.
BNH 7	Protect Natural Heritage Areas (NHA) from developments that would adversely affect their special interests.
BNH 8	Recognise and protect the significant geological value of sites in County Laois and safeguard these sites, in consultation with the Geological Survey of Ireland and in accordance with the National Heritage Plan and “Geological Heritage Guidelines for the Extractive Industry”.
BNH 9	Engage with the National Parks and Wildlife Service to ensure Integrated Management Plans are prepared for all Natura sites (or parts thereof) and ensure that plans are fully integrated with the County Development Plan and other plans and programmes, with the intention that such plans are practical, achievable and sustainable and have regard to all relevant ecological, cultural, social and economic considerations and with special regard to local communities.
BNH 10	Support the objectives of the All Ireland Pollinator Plan 2015-2020 by encouraging the planting of pollinator friendly trees and plants within grass verges along public roads and existing and future greenways, new hedgerows, public parks and public open spaces in towns and villages, including part of mixed use and residential developments.
BNH 11	Support measures to protect Swift population such as the creation of Swift nest cavities in all new commercial and public buildings (schools/libraries, etc).
BNH 12	Supports the efforts of the Midland Transition team to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursue funding opportunities and actions to mitigate the impact of the Bord na Móna job losses on the individuals concerned, and the impact on the local and regional economy; and • Position the region to develop alternative forms of employment, attract investment and maximise existing employment opportunities and resources.
BNH 13	It is a policy objective of the Council to require new developments to identify, protect and enhance ecological features by making provision for local biodiversity (for example, through provision of swift boxes or bricks, bat roost boxes, green roofs, etc.) and improve the ecological coherence of wider green infrastructure.

Policy Objectives for Biodiversity and Designated Sites	
BNH 14	It is an objective of the Council to protect existing swift roosts as identified in the County Swift Survey and ensure existing nest sites are not lost through inappropriate renovation or destruction.
BNH 15	In dealing with applications for new developments, the Planning Authority will have regard to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion of swift nesting opportunities in new buildings through use of swift brick or swift nest boxes where appropriate
BNH 16	Work with relevant stakeholders such as the Office of Public Works (OPW) and local stakeholders to develop a Landscape Conservation Assessment in relation to the Heath and its attributes during the plan period.

BNH 17

The Great Heath of Portlaoise

The Great Heath or The Heath is a rare example of unenclosed natural grassland in Ireland interspaced with small lakes and turloughs. It has one of the most sensitive and valuable landscapes in laois. It is unique as a natural areas (one of the last heathlands to develop in Europe , grazed but unfertilized for hundreds of years , a geological area (a rare example of karst and wetland ecosystem), an archaeological area, an ecological area , a historic area and a widely used amenity area. The area has many interested stakeholders and it requires a study to develop a Landscape Conservation Assessment which would provide a framework for its protection and development into the future.



BNH 18

Preserve, protect and, where necessary, enhance mass rocks and holy wells

Development Management Standard for Designated Sites

<p>DM BNH 1</p>	<p>DEVELOPMENTS IN PROXIMITY TO PNHA</p> <p>Where a development is of a significant scale or in close proximity to a pNHA, the Council will require an Ecological Impact Assessment to determine the impact of the proposed development on the designated site or natural heritage.</p>
<p>DM BNH 2</p>	<p>APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT</p> <p>Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive requires an Appropriate Assessment of any plan or project whether within or outside a designated Natura 2000 site, which does not directly relate to the management of the site but may impact upon its conservation objectives. All planning applications shall be screened for Appropriate Assessment and a Phase II Appropriate Assessment carried out if necessary.</p> <p>Where full Appropriate Assessment is required, the assessment shall be based on best scientific knowledge, by a person with ecological expertise. It shall address the potential impacts of the plan or project on the conservation objectives of any Natura 2000 site. The impacts assessed must include the indirect and cumulative impacts of approving the plan or project, considered with any current or proposed activities, developments or policies impacting on the site. The potential impacts of policies outside Natura 2000 sites but potentially impacting upon them (known as ‘ex situ’ impacts) must also be included in the assessment. (Refer to: Appropriate Assessment of Plans and projects in Ireland, Guidance for Planning Authorities, DEHLG (2009).</p>

11.5 GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE (GI)

Green Infrastructure is broadly defined as “as a strategically planned network of high quality natural and semi-natural areas with other environmental features, which is designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services and protect biodiversity in both rural and urban settings¹. Similarly Blue infrastructure refers to a network of assets which are linked to water such as rivers, canals, lakes, reservoirs, ponds and wetlands.

The GI network is a network of parks, green spaces, gardens, woodlands, rivers and wetlands, as well as urban greening features such as street trees and green roofs, which is planned, designed and managed as a multifunctional resource capable of delivering a wide range of economic, environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities:

¹ Except as provided for in **Article 6(4)** of the Habitats Directive, viz. There must be: a) no alternative solution available, b) imperative reasons of overriding public interest for the project to proceed; and c) Adequate compensatory measures in place.

- promote healthier living, providing spaces for physical activity and relaxation
- address climate change adaptation
- create a strong sense of place
- filter pollutants to improve air and water quality
- make streets clean, comfortable and more attractive to encourage walking and cycling
- store carbon in soils and woodlands
- create better quality and better-connected habitats to improve biodiversity and resilience
- promote local food production in allotments and gardens

The multiple benefits of GI are recognised in a number of national policy documents:

- The National Biodiversity Plan sees GI as crucial to achieving biodiversity targets and developing ecological corridors that allow the movement of species through their entire natural habitat.
- The Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways focuses on the economic and social benefits of creating and connecting greenways, particularly in rural areas.
- The Flood Risk Management Guidelines highlight GIs key role in managing flood risk and adapting to climate change.
- The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Region recognises the strategic importance of developing GI assets across the region with specific objectives (RPO 7.22 and 7.23) that development plans and local area plans shall identify, protect, enhance, provide and manage Green Infrastructure in an integrated and coherent manner. Linking strategic natural assets with cultural and heritage assets further enhances the opportunities for GI strategies to drive recreation and tourism benefits.

Specific to County Laois, the following GI, Cultural and Natural assets have been identified:

Table 11.4 Strategic Natural Assets

ASSET	LOCATION
Lakes, Rivers and Canals	River Barrow, River Nore
Greenways, Blueways and Peatways	Barrow Blueway
Uplands, Woodlands and Designated Sites and “Cullenagh mountain, Fossey mountain”	Slieve Blooms (all SACs, SPAs, NHAs, pNHAs and Ramsar sites)
Boglands and Peatlands	Abbeyleix Bog
National and Regional Parks	Emo Court, Heywood Gardens
Medieval, Historic and Walled Towns	Abbeyleix
Heritage Sites	Sites on Record on National Monuments

¹ European Union (2013): Building a Green Infrastructure for Europe

11.5.1 URBAN GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

In towns and villages, GI is a patchwork of natural areas that provides habitat, flood protection, cleaner air and cleaner water. Each town and village in the County should include urban GI to create corridors between and link green spaces, creating healthier environments and a greater sense of place. The following elements, many of which are sustainable Urban Drainage Systems, can be integrated into sites to create GI at an urban scale:

- Rainwater Harvesting/Bioswales
- Planter Boxes/Permeable Pavements
- Green Streets/Green Parking
- Green Roofs and Living Walls
- Urban Tree Canopy

11.5.2 GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY FOR LAOIS

It is the Council’s intention to develop a Green Infrastructure Strategy for the County in consultation with all key stakeholders and with the public during the lifetime of this Plan. The Strategy will identify key Green Infrastructure aims and objectives for the County taking account of the priority projects identified in this Plan and it will provide for the delivery of these projects including the provision of appropriate funding mechanisms.

Policy Objectives for Green Infrastructure	
BNH 19	Ensure that areas and networks of Green Infrastructure are identified, protected, enhanced, managed and created to provide a wide range of environmental, social and economic benefits to communities.
BNH 20	Develop and implement a Green Infrastructure Strategy for Laois in partnership with key stakeholders and the public which reflects a long-term perspective, including the need to adapt to climate change. Ensure the Green Infrastructure Strategy for Laois protects existing Green Infrastructure resources and plans for future Green Infrastructure provision.
BNH 21	Require all Local Area Plans and Master Plans to protect, enhance, provide and manage Green Infrastructure in an integrated and coherent manner. Set targets for the provision of Green Infrastructure elements such as trees and green roofs as part of the preparation of Local Area Plans.
BNH 22	Promote a network of paths and cycle tracks to enhance accessibility to the Green Infrastructure network, while ensuring that the design and operation of the routes respect and where possible enhances the ecological potential of each site.
BNH 23	Encourage, pursuant to Article 10 of the Habitats Directive, the management of features of the landscape, such as traditional field boundaries and laneways, important for the ecological coherence of the Natura 2000 network and essential for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species.

Policy Objectives for Green Infrastructure

BNH 24	To identify and map Green Infrastructure assets and sites of local biodiversity value over the lifetime of the Plan.
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Green Infrastructure Development Management Standard

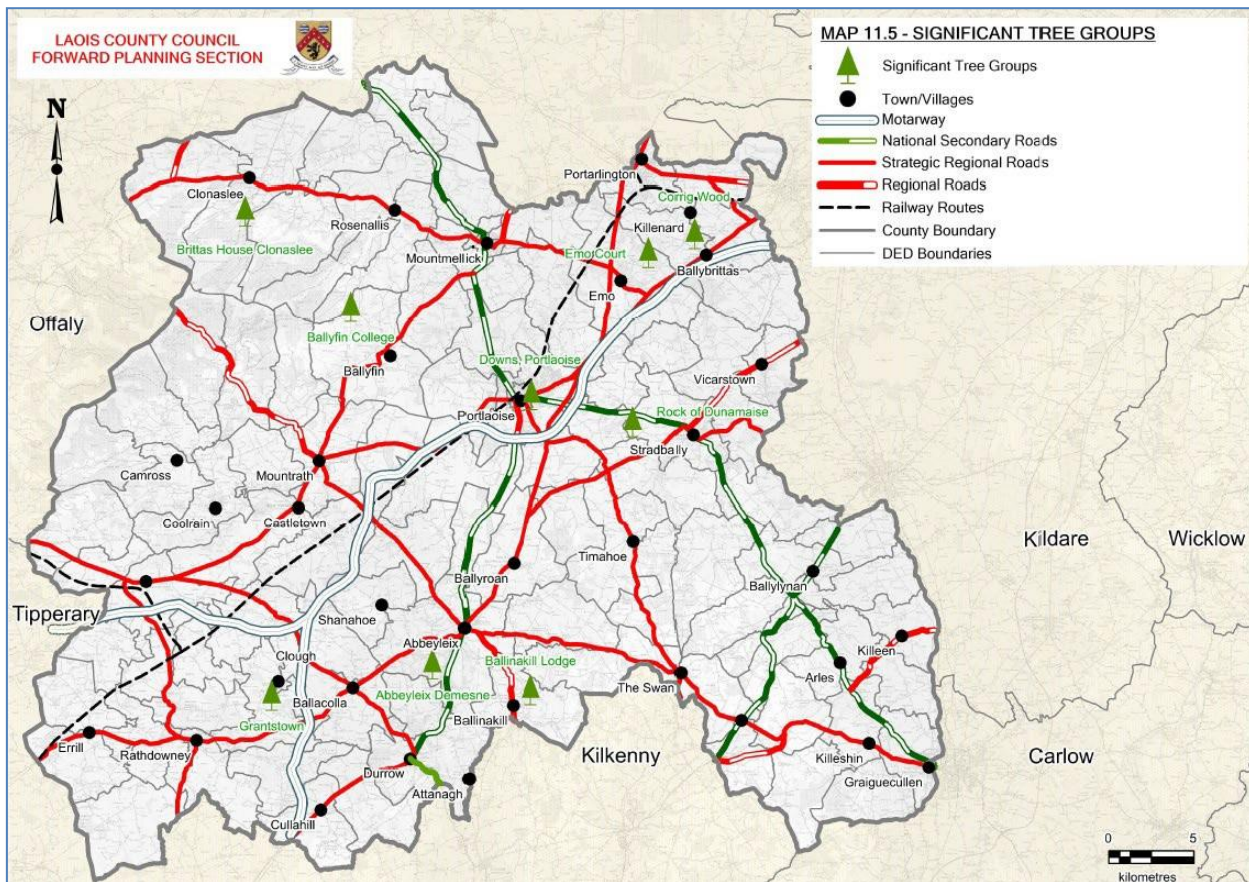
DM BNH 3	GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN Require all proposals for large scale development such as road or drainage schemes, wind farms, housing estates, industrial parks or shopping centres to submit a Green Infrastructure Plan as an integral part of a planning application.
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11.6 TREES, WOODLANDS AND HEDGEROWS

TREES AND WOODLANDS

Trees play a crucial role in capturing pollutants and particulates from the air. Street trees can significantly improve air quality, which can in turn provide health benefits, if planned, planted and maintained carefully. Carbon storage relates to the carbon currently held in trees' tissue (roots, stem, and branches), whereas carbon sequestration is the estimated amount of carbon removed annually by trees. Trees can help mitigate climate change by sequestering atmospheric carbon as part of the carbon cycle. Trees and woodlands make a positive contribution to the county's landscape biodiversity and townscapes providing wildlife habitats, soften hard urban edges and provide scale and backdrops to streets and buildings. Trees, either individually or in groups also make an important contribution to the landscape of many of the country house demesnes throughout the county. In urban settings trees or groups of trees can contribute significantly to the local landscape or townscape and to the successful integration of new buildings into the landscape. The planting or retention of mature trees can contribute to amenity and more attractive developments as well as providing important wildlife habitats. The retention of trees should be considered at the design stage of any development. They also filter out noise, dust and pollutants and prevent flooding by retaining moisture. A number of important tree groups have been identified in Map 11.5 and will be considered for Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) during the Plan period. Further assessment of important trees and groups of trees will also be considered during Local Area Plan reviews.

Map 11.5: Trees, Views and Prospects



HEDGEROWS

Hedgerows define rural landscapes and are valuable for terrestrial forms of wildlife. They are particularly important for birds and woodland plants. They provide commuting and feeding corridors for bats. Where they are found in settlements they are significant habitats and corridors for biodiversity.

Hedgerows also provide effective farmland barriers and boundaries, as well as vital habitats and landscape corridors for a vast array of native plants and wildlife. Most hedgerows were planted over the last 300 years or so following the enactment of legislation in the 18th century requiring landowners to enclose their land. However, heritage hedgerows which are considerably older than the majority of hedgerows often have strong links with native woodland that date back thousands of years and are of even greater biodiversity and historical value

Good hedgerows can easily be identified by their structure and location in the landscape. Best quality hedgerows will have all the following characteristics:

- A few mature trees,
- A three tier structure (with trees, shrubs and herbs)
- Few gaps and
- Will not have been cut into a box shape. Shrubs (almost always) include hawthorn, blackthorn or and possibly dog rose.
- The herb layer is found under the shrub layer. It should form a strip of tall grassland along the margin of the hedgerow.

There is an extensive network of hedgerows throughout County Laois. There will be a firm presumption against the removal of hedgerows to facilitate development including where sight lines are deficient. In cases where removal is necessary, the planting of an equivalent length of native hedgerow will be required as a condition of planning permission. Further policy objectives in relation to the management of hedgerows for development is also provided in Chapter 4 Housing and Chapter 10 Infrastructure.

Policy Objectives for Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows	
BNH 25	Undertake a study within the lifetime of the Plan and for all Local Area Plans to document and map significant trees and groups of trees that require preservation and prepare Tree Preservation Orders for individual trees, groups of trees or woodland areas where expedient and in the interests of visual amenity, biodiversity and the environment.
BNH 26	Protect individual trees, groups of trees and woodland in the interests of landscape conservation (including townscapes) and nature conservation as part of the development management process.
BNH 27	Protect existing hedgerows, particularly of historical and archaeological importance of townland boundaries, from unnecessary removal in order to preserve the rural character of the countryside and promote biodiversity.
BNH 28	Ensure that hedgerow removal to facilitate development is kept to an absolute minimum and, where unavoidable, a requirement for mitigation planting will be required comprising a hedge of similar length and species composition to the original, established as close as is practicable to the original and where possible linking in to existing adjacent hedges. Native plants of a local provenance should be used for any such planting.
BNH 29	Promote and develop urban forests in parkland and street trees in urban settlements to enhance public realm and increase tree canopy coverage and diversity.
BNH 30	Ensure that hedgerow and mature tree removal to facilitate development is kept to an absolute minimum and, where unavoidable, a requirement for mitigation planting will be required comprising a hedge of similar length and species composition to the original, established as close as is practicable to the original and where possible linking in to existing adjacent hedges. Native plants of a local provenance should be used for any such planting.

Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows Development Management Standards

DM BNH 4	MATURE TREES Where there are trees within an application site, or on land adjacent to it that could influence or be affected by proposed development (including street trees), the planning application must include a detailed submission prepared by a suitably qualified Arboriculturist in accordance with British Standard 5837: 2012 'Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction – Recommendations'. A Tree Management Plan shall be provided to ensure that trees are adequately protected during development and incorporated into the design of new developments.
DM BNH 5	HEDGEROWS In dealing with applications for new developments, the Planning Authority will have regard to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Retention of a connected network of good quality hedgerows;b. The value of hedgerows as green infrastructure (landscape, biodiversity, shelter, supporting services to agriculture/horticulture);c. The avoidance of the unnecessary removal of hedgerows;d. If it is necessary to remove a hedgerow, developers should be reminded of their obligations under the Wildlife Acts not to remove or interfere with them during the bird nesting season, between March 1st and 31st August. Also, replacement or compensatory planting of hedgerows using indigenous species such as whitethorn or blackthorn only will be required;e. Proposals to integrate hedgerows into the layout of a new linear feature such as a road/ pedestrian/cycle track;f. Depending on the potential risks of anti-social activity or requirements for a more garden look the margins of these new hedgerows/woodlands/new shrubberies could be planted with colourful non natives (for amenity) or spiny shrubs to deter vandals.g. By occasionally mowing the grass margin of hedgerows (or part of it), they will look managed. As litter will accumulate in long grass along their margins arrangements will have to be made to carry out regular clean ups;h. Encouragement should be given to develop a new linear feature of biodiversity value such as a hedgerow or dry stone wall, particularly if this type of habitat is found adjacent to the development site;i. The use of native tree and shrub species similar to those found in adjacent hedgerows in new or replacement hedgerows;j. The wholesale removal of hedgerows to facilitate the achievement of adequate sightline visibility for one-off houses in the countryside will not be encouraged.

11.7 WATERWAYS AND WETLANDS

The rivers and streams, lakes, wetlands and groundwater occurring within County Laois are home to a variety of habitats and species. Wetlands associated with rivers and streams, such as wet grasslands and marshes, are important for biodiversity and to help manage fluvial and pluvial flooding whilst supporting a quality, multi-functional green network generating multiple benefits for the environment, tourism and society.

The waterways of County Laois include the Barrow, Nore and Erkina which flow in a northwest-southeast trajectory and there are minor man-made lakes at Ballyfin, Grantstown and Heywood. The Barrow Blueway Project which is set to begin works in July 2020, is a coordinated project between Waterways Ireland, Laois County Council and Kildare County Council of the River Barrow Navigation system from Lowtown in Kildare, through the towns of Rathangan, Monasterevin, and Vicarstown to Athy. The planned upgrade is to provide a multi-use shared 46km off-road, flat accessible, public space and leisure route. In time this route could extend on to St Mullins in Carlow.

The Grand Canal is a key element of Green Infrastructure in the County also passes through the north east of the county where it links to the wider River Barrow navigation system, the towpath of which provides an uninterrupted corridor for pedestrians and cyclists. The Mountmellick Line of the Grand Canal, built between 1827 and 1831, runs from the Barrow Line at Monasterevin via Portarlinton to Mountmellick

Wetland habitats are an important source of biodiversity and contain species such as otters (*Lutra lutra*), Salmon (*Salmo salar*), Kingfishers (*Alcedo atthis*), Freshwater crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*) and Lamprey species, all protected under the Wildlife Acts of 1976 and 2000 and/or listed on the annexes of the EC Habitats Directive and Birds Directive. County Laois is particularly important for the Nore Pearl Mussel "*Margaritifera durrovensis*" and special mention is made of this species throughout the Plan and SEA. The species is protected under the Freshwater Pearl Mussel Nore Sub-Basin Management Plan [2009]. The Slieve Bloom Mountains are also designated as a Ramsar Site which is a site designated internationally for the conservation of wetlands, particularly those of importance to waterfowl under The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, the so-called Ramsar Convention.

Policy Objectives for Waterways and Wetlands

BNH 31	Protect waterbodies and watercourses from inappropriate development, to ensure they are retained for their biodiversity and flood protection values and to conserve and enhance where possible, the wildlife habitats of the County's rivers and riparian zones, lakes, canals and streams which occur outside of designated areas to provide a network of habitats and biodiversity corridors throughout the county.
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Policy Objectives for Waterways and Wetlands	
BNH 32	Promote and develop the Barrow Blueway initiative and work with State Agencies, landowners, local communities and other relevant groups to protect and manage inland waters, river corridors and their floodplains from degradation and damage, and to recognise and promote them as natural assets of the urban and rural environment.
BNH 33	Promote and facilitate the development of the Grand Canal for cycling, walking and nature study in conjunction with the relevant bodies including Waterways Ireland to enhance its amenity. Investigate the possibility of developing long distance walking routes/Greenway, within the lifetime of the Plan, along the disused Mountmellick Grand Canal Line.
BNH 34	Protect riparian corridors by reserving land along their banks for ecological corridors and maintain them free from inappropriate development. Where developments are proposed adjacent to waterways in previously undeveloped areas, the Planning Authority will require a general setback distance of a minimum of 10 metres from the waterways edge, subject to site-specific characteristics and the nature and design of the development. In previously developed areas, for example, within town centres, this general setback distance is likely to be reduced and should be part of any pre-planning consultations with the Council.
BNH 35	Require that development along rivers set aside lands for pedestrian routes and cycleways that could link to the broader area and established settlements in the area.
BNH 36	Provide for public access to waterways where feasible and appropriate, in partnership with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), Waterways Ireland and other relevant stakeholders, whilst maintaining them free from inappropriate development, subject to Ecological Impact Assessment and Appropriate Assessment, as appropriate.
BNH 37	Protect the Nore Pearl Mussel through the measures set out in the Freshwater Pearl Mussel Nore Sub-Basin Management Plan (2009).
BNH 38	Protect the migration of fish in the River Barrow Nore SAC from high risk barrier such weirs and bridge sills.
BNH 39	Protect, conserve, preserve, manage and enhance wetlands (including fens and turloughs) from infilling, fragmentation, degradation and protect and conserve their quality, character and features. Resist development (including land reclamation) which would destroy, fragment and degrade wetlands, coastal wetlands, estuarine marshland and control adjacent development by the use of buffer zones.

11.8 PEATLANDS

Peatlands are one of the world’s most important ecosystems, covering a mere 3% of the world’s terrestrial surface and 20% of Ireland’s land area, containing 550 gigatonnes of carbon, making them the most important long term carbon sinks in the terrestrial biosphere. Peatland rehabilitation will also bring additional benefits of improving water quality and flood attenuation to downstream water-courses.

The majority of larger peatland areas in the county are located in the north west within the Slieve Blooms and mid area of the County to the south and south west of Portlaoise. Approximately 3,000 ha of peatland is under the ownership of Bord Na Mona with much of the land utilised for industrial peat extraction for decades and consequently much of the overlying peat deposits has been cutaway.

As Bord Na Mona transition away from commercial peat production and decarbonise business structures, the rehabilitated cutaway will naturally revert to a rich and diverse natural habitat enhancing biodiversity and supporting other ecosystem services by integrating other sustainable land-uses, including renewable energy and Green Infrastructure.

Examples of Bord na Móna enabled Green Infrastructure in the county include the restored Abbeyleix bog (190ha), which is now leased to the local community as a conservation project and forms part of a Natural Walking Loop. Bord na Móna also restored Knockahaw Bog (Errill Bog) in 2018 as part of its Biodiversity Action Plan and peatland rehabilitation commitments.

Knockahaw Bog is a relatively large restored raised bog of 312 ha located on the south east range of raised bog distribution in Ireland. Both Abbeyleix Bog and Knockahaw Bog are examples of high value biodiversity sites which can be prioritised for similar tracts of boglands. Further details on the reuse of peatlands are provided in Section 9.4 of the Plan.

Policy Objectives for Peatlands	
BNH 40	The County Development will continue to support the objectives of the <i>Strategic Framework for the Future use of Peatlands</i> which identifies new potential future land uses and also seek to progress opportunities under Just Transition Fund.
BNH 41	Protect the county’s designated peatland areas and landscapes and to conserve and manage their ecological, archaeological, cultural, and educational heritage by promoting high environmental standards in conjunction with Bord na Mona, NPWS, IPPC, NGO’s and local communities.
BNH 42	Work with relevant agencies such as Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, Bord na Mona, NPWS, Coillte and adjacent Local Authorities to prepare an integrated afteruse framework and management plans for the peatlands and related infrastructure,

Policy Objectives for Peatlands	
BNH 43	Support the preparation of a Sustainable Holistic Management Plan for the future use of the Industrial Peatlands in the County, which recognises the role of peatlands in carbon sequestration.
BNH 44	Support the designation of a National Park for the peatlands area in the Midlands in conjunction with adjoining Local Authorities.
BNH 45	Undertake a feasibility study to identify peatways, where appropriate and examine the tourist potential of same such as a peatway link from Portarlinton to the Grand Canal and River Barrow Greenway.
BNH 46	Support relevant agencies to provide for the future sustainable and environmentally sensitive use of large industrial peatlands at Cuil Na Mona.

Development Management Standard for Peatlands

DM BNH 6	<p>PEATLANDS</p> <p>In the consideration of development on or adjacent to peatland areas, the following guiding principles should apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of the potential contribution of peatlands to climate change mitigation and adaptation including renewable energy production; Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027: Draft Stage Chapter 13 Development Management Standards 402; • Consideration of habitats and species of environmental significance; • Consideration of the potential contribution of peatlands to an existing or proposed greenway / blueway / peatway network; • Consideration of the ecosystem services and tourism potential provided by peatlands; • Development of peatlands shall ensure that there are no negative impacts on water quality and hydrology; • Consideration of peatland stability; • Achieving of a carbon emissions balance; and • Incorporation of fire mitigation measures such as fire breaks or ensuring access points and routes are suitable for travel by emergency services.
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11.9 PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY

As the population of the county grows and people become more aware of the importance of our built and natural heritage, the issue of access to the countryside and to heritage sites has become increasingly important. The formal process for designating rights of way is outlined in Section 14 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

Section 10(2)(o) of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 as amended state that a Development Plan shall include an objective for 'the preservation of public rights of way which give access to seashore, mountain, lakeshore, riverbank or other place of natural beauty or recreational utility, which public rights of way shall be identified both by marking them on at least one of the maps forming part of the development plan and by indicating their location on a list appended to the development plan'.

Existing public rights of way constitute an important amenity and the Council recognises the importance of maintaining established public rights of way and supporting initiatives for establishing walking routes in the county.

This is, by its nature, a lengthy process which will be conducted throughout the lifetime of this Development Plan. Table 11.5 below provides a list and Map 11.6 shows the extent and location of such public rights of ways, identified to date, in accordance with this provision. It is important to note that this is not an exhaustive list and that the omission of a public right of way from this list shall not be taken as an indication that such a right of way is not a public right of way.

Map 11.6: Public Rights of Way

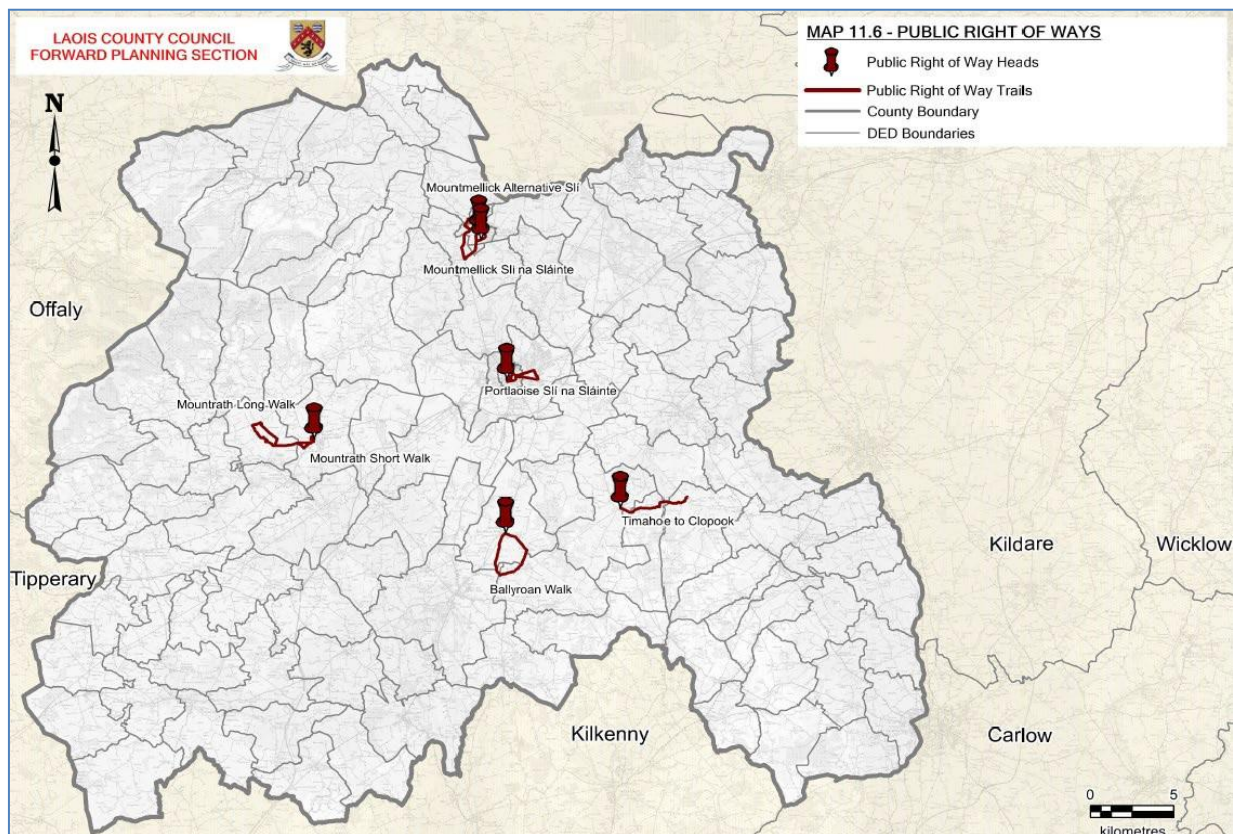


Table 11.5: Public Rights of Way in County Laois

Ref No.	Public Rights of Way	Description
PRW 1	Mountmellick Sli Na Slainte	Footpath and public road
PRW 2	Mountmellick Alternative Sli	Footpath and public road
PRW 3	Timahoe to Clopook	Forest and road walk
PRW 4	Mountrath Long Walk	Road walk
PRW 5	Ballyroan Walk	River and road walk
PRW 6	Portlaoise Sli na Slainte	Footpath and public road

There are significant stretches of land that were formerly in use as railway lines within the county / region.

To the extent that these are engineering works negotiating difficult topographical obstacles, they constitute significant resources, with potential for use as corridors for amenity access, free from motorised traffic, and even have potential for a revived railway use. The Council encourages the consideration of proposals for development in these areas for local heritage and outdoor activities including the provision of recreational walkways or cycling routes.

Policy Objectives for Public Rights of Way	
BNH 47	Preserve public rights of way which give access to, mountain, lakeshore, riverbank or other place of natural beauty or recreational utility indicated in Map 11.6 of the Plan.
BNH 48	Review and protect existing public rights of way for the common good and bring forward proposals for the creation of public rights of way. Ensure that PublicRights of Way are well marked and signposted.
BNH 49	Development will not be permitted where a public right of way will be affected unless the level of amenity loss is minimised by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the footpath/bridleway being diverted is by the minimal practical distance • the route continuing to be segregated from vehicular traffic • Appropriate legal procedures have been undertaken to extinguish the existing right of way and to establish the new right of way to replace it

11.10 LANDSCAPE

Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is a process that describes, maps and classifies landscapes objectively. Defining landscape character enables an understanding to be formed of the inherent value and importance of individual landscape elements and the processes that may alter landscape character into the future.

Laois County Council has prepared a Landscape Character Assessment to identify specific areas that are characterised by sensitive landscapes. (See Figure 11.6) Sensitive areas include upland areas, visually open and expansive areas and areas in the vicinity of natural heritage or built heritage assets or scenic views.

The Assessment will help developers select less sensitive sites for development. Landscape Character Types are distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogenous in character. They are generic in nature in that they may occur in different localities throughout any defined area. Nonetheless, where they do occur, they commonly share similar combinations of geology, topography, land cover and historical land use. For example, blanket bog uplands are distinct landscape character types and are recognisable as such whether they occur in County Laois or other counties.

The Landscape Character Areas for County Laois are as follows and are identified in Map 11.7. Table 11.6 also classifies the sensitivity of each area when assessing development.

- Hills and Upland
- Lowland Agricultural Areas
- River Corridors and Lakes
- Mountain Areas
- Peatland Areas
- Urban Fringes
- Rolling Hills

Map 11.7: Landscape Character Assessment

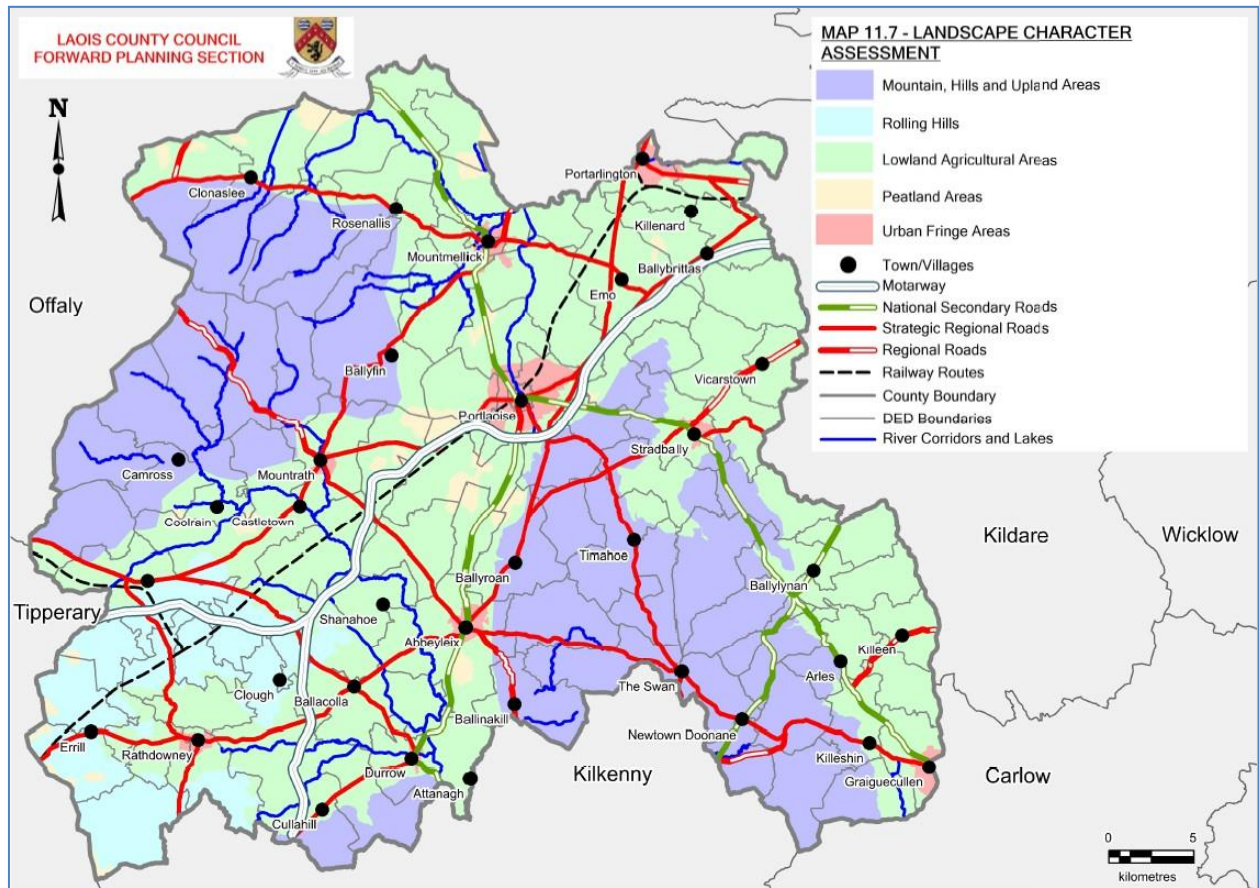


Table 11.6: Landscape Sensitivity

Sensitivity	Landscape Character Area and Special Features	Description
Low Sensitivity	Lowland Agricultural Areas, Urban Fringes	Areas with the capacity to generally accommodate a wide range of uses without significant adverse effects on the appearance or character of the area
Medium Sensitivity	Rolling Hills and Hills and Upland Areas	Areas with the capacity to accommodate a range of uses without significant adverse effects on the appearance or character of the landscape having regards to localised sensitivity factors

Sensitivity	Landscape Character Area and Special Features	Description
High Sensitivity	Peatlands, River Corridors and Lakes, Mountain Areas, European Sites	Areas with reduced capacity to accommodate uses without significant adverse effects on the appearance or character of the landscape having regard to prevalent sensitivity factors or special sensitivity factors

Policy Objectives for Landscape Character Areas	
LCA 1	Ensure that consideration of landscape sensitivity, as indicated in Table 11.6 of the Plan, is an important factor in determining development uses In areas of high landscape sensitivity, the design, type and the choice of location of proposed development in the landscape will also be critical considerations.
LCA 2	Protect and enhance the county's landscape, by ensuring that development retains, protects and, where necessary, enhances the appearance and character of the existing local landscape and conserve valuable habitat including any European and National Designations.
LCA 3	Seek to ensure that local landscape features, including historic features and buildings, hedgerows, shelter belts and stone walls, are retained, protected and enhanced where appropriate, so as to preserve the local landscape and character of an area, whilst providing for future development.
LCA 4	Seek to minimise the individual and cumulative adverse visual impacts that local concentrations of one-off housing, outside of settlements, may have on Hills and Upland, River Corridor and Lakes and Mountain landscape character areas or High Sensitivity areas. In this regard, in locations where the Council considers that there is a risk of individual or cumulative adverse impacts, the Council will only consider proposals for housing developments where a need for the dwelling has been demonstrated in accordance with the criteria contained in the Rural Housing Policy contained in Chapter 4.

Policy Objectives for Hills and Uplands Areas and Mountain Areas

LCA 5	Ensure that development will not have a disproportionate visual impact (due to excessive bulk, scale or inappropriate siting) and will not significantly interfere with or detract from scenic upland vistas, when viewed from areas nearby, scenic routes, viewpoints and settlements.
LCA 6	Ensure that developments on steep slopes (i.e. >10%) will not be conspicuous or have a disproportionate visual impact on the surrounding environment as seen from relevant scenic routes, viewpoints and settlements.
LCA 7	Facilitate, where appropriate, developments that have a functional and locational requirement to be situated on steep or elevated sites (e.g. reservoirs, telecommunication masts or wind energy structures) where residual adverse visual impacts are minimised or mitigated.
LCA 8	Maintain the visual integrity of areas which have retained a largely undisturbed upland character and Respect the remote character and existing low-density development in these areas.
LCA 9	Have regard to the potential for screening vegetation when evaluating proposals for development within the uplands.
LCA 10	Actively propose the designation of the Slieve Blooms as a Special Amenity Area and seek an Order to that effect.
LCA 11	Protect the positive contribution that views across adjacent lowland areas and landmarks within the landscape make to the overall landscape character.

Policy Objectives for Lowland Agricultural Areas

LCA 12	Recognise that this lowland landscape character area includes areas of significant landscape and ecological value, which are worthy of protection, particularly the 18th and 19 th century estate landscapes and associated parkland & woodland to develop them as a tourism resource.
LCA 13	Continue to permit development that can utilise existing structures, settlement areas and infrastructure, whilst taking account of the visual absorption opportunities provided by existing topography and vegetation.
LCA 14	Recognise that the lowlands are made up of a variety of working landscapes, which are critical resources for sustaining the economic and social wellbeing of the county.
LCA 15	Promote good agricultural practices to create a sustainable rural economy and support incentives for smaller rural/family farms to manage their land to avoid loss of hedgerows and field patterns.

Policy Objectives for River Corridors and Lakes Areas	
LCA 16	Recognise the importance of river corridors for scenic value, ecology, history, culture and for recreational purposes such as walking, cycling and various on-water activities.
LCA 17	Maintain the rivers throughout the county whilst ensuring that all works are carried out subject to appropriate environmental assessment in accordance with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive, in respect of any proposed development likely to have an impact on a designated natural heritage site, site proposed to be designated and any additional sites that may be designated during the period of this Plan.
LCA 18	Preserve riverside historic features and their landscape settings and Conserve valuable habitats focused on and around river corridors and estuaries including European and national designations.
LCA 19	Recognise the potential constraints on development created by river flood plains and the value of these flood plains as increasingly rare habitats.
LCA 20	Avoid unsustainable exploitation of watercourses, e.g. for abstraction and dilution of effluent, to the point that these water courses lose their ecological and amenity value.
LCA 21	Collaborate with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Waterways Ireland and other relevant stakeholders to facilitate public access to waterway corridors and maintain and enhance the natural character of rivers, lakes and canals by reserving land to facilitate walking, cycling and other non-noise generating recreational activities.
LCA 22	Explore the establishment of the Barrow/Nore Valley and the Grand Canal as Areas of Special Amenity, as per section 202 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

Policy Objectives for Peatland Areas	
LCA 23	Recognise the importance of peatlands for ecology, history, culture and for alternative energy production.
LCA 24	Conserve valuable habitats including any European and national designations.
LCA 25	Support the identification of projects that have the potential to achieve commercial value such as industrial developments, renewable energy, tourism developments etc. while at the same time promoting high environmental standards and supporting Biodiversity objectives.
LCA 26	Support the restoration of peatlands on suitable sites.

Policy Objectives for Peatland Areas

LCA 27	Recognise that intact boglands are critical natural resources for ecological and environmental reasons and recognise that cutaway and cut-over boglands represent degraded landscapes and/or brownfield sites and thus are potentially robust to absorb a variety of appropriate developments.
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Policy Objectives for Urban Fringe Areas

LCA 28	Diversify the urban fringe by developing mixed-use amenity areas, which will create a landscape buffer creating a transition between urban and rural areas.
LCA 29	Define the urban fringe with planting of native species and mixed woodland to tie into existing rural landscape.

Policy Objectives for Rolling Hill Areas

LCA 30	Maintain the visual integrity of rolling hill areas which have retained an upland character.
LCA 31	Continue to facilitate appropriate development, in an incremental and clustered manner, where feasible, that respects the scale, character and sensitivities of the local landscape, recognising the need for sustainable settlement patterns and economic activity within the county.
LCA 32	Continue to permit development that can utilise existing infrastructure, whilst taking account of local absorption opportunities provided by the landscape, landform and prevailing vegetation.

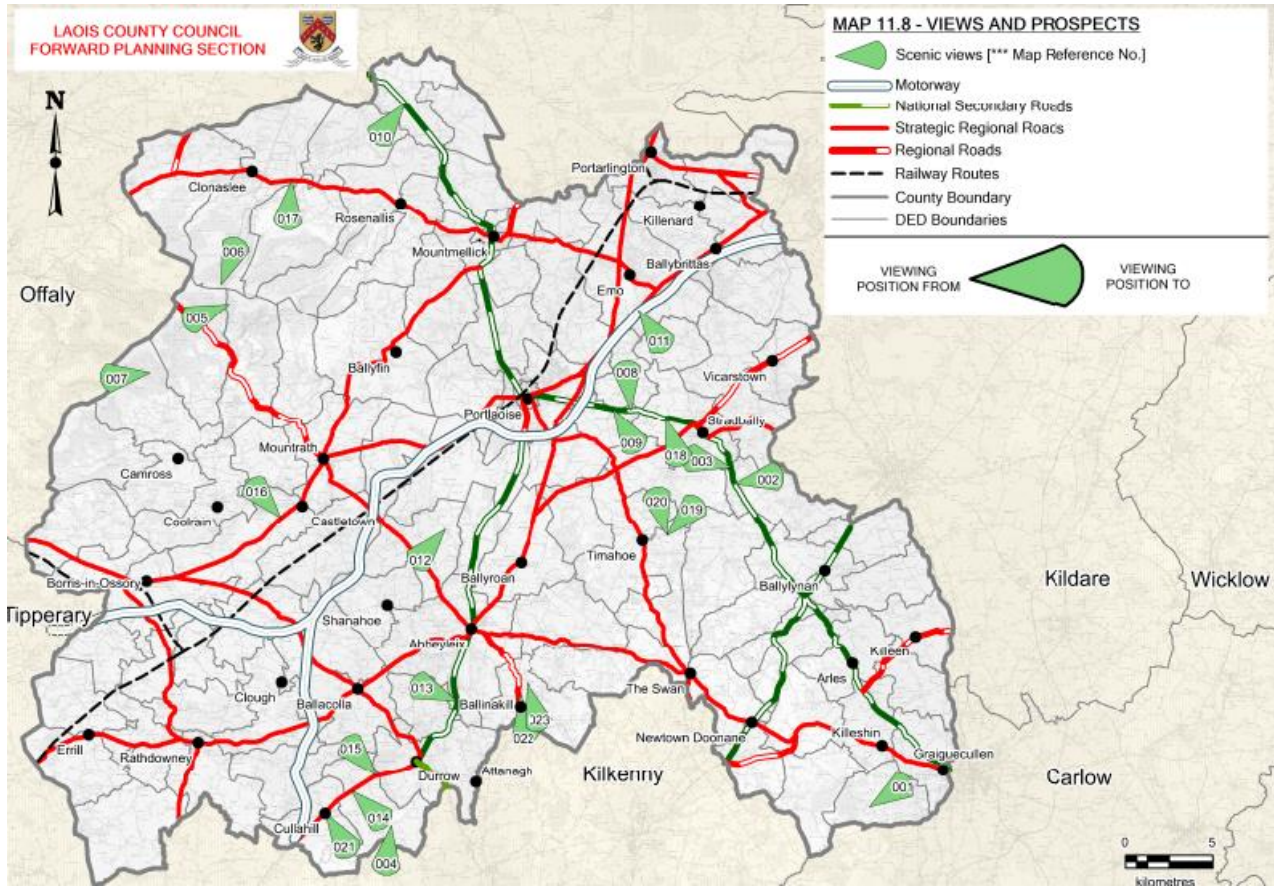
11.11.1 **VIEWES AND PROSPECTS**

Scenic routes and protected views consist of important and valued views and prospects within the county. Table 11.7 below, lists the specific scenic views of the landscape, many of which are located along scenic routes and include built and archaeological features. Map 11.8 also indicates such scenic views within the county. The Council recognises the need to protect the character of the county by protecting views and scenic routes. However, it is acknowledged that in certain circumstances, some development may be necessary.

Table 11.7: Scenic Views and Prospects in County Laois

No.	View From	View To
001	Road No. L3896 in the townlands Killeshin, Rossmore	Views towards lowlands of Graiguecullen/Carlow
002	N80 in the townlands of Stradbally [The Windy Gap]	Views of the Windy Gap
003	N80 in the townlands of Stradbally	Views of the Windy Gap
004	Road No. L5753 in the townlands Cullahill	Views towards Knockmannon Hill
005	Road No. L1005 in the Slieve Bloom Mountains	Slieve Bloom Mountains views towards Clodiagh River over lowlands
006	Road No. L1005 in the Slieve Bloom Mountains	Slieve Bloom Mountains views towards Delour River over lowlands
007	Road No. L10317 in the Slieve Bloom Mountains	Slieve Bloom Mountains, Killeen River
008	N80 in the townlands of Stradbally, Portlaoise	Views towards Rock of Dunamais
009	N80 in the townlands of Stradbally, Portlaoise	Views towards Hewson Hill
010	N80 in the townlands of Mountmellick	Views towards Slieve Bloom Mountains
011	R445 in the townlands of The Heath	Views towards Carrigeen Hill
012	The village lands of Raheen	Views over farmland
013	N77 in the townlands of Abbeyliex, Durrow	Views over farmland and River Nore
014	R639 in the townlands of Cullahill, Durrow	Views towards Caponellan Hill
015	R639 in the townlands of Cullahill, Durrow	Views over farmland and River Goul
016	R445 in the townlands of Castletown	Views over farmland and Slieve Bloom Mountains
017	R422 in the townlands of Clonaslee	Views over farmland and Slieve Bloom Mountains
018	N80 in the townlands of Stradbally	Views over farmland and River Bauteogue
019	Road No. L3840 in the townlands of Timahoe	Views over farmland and Hewson Hill
020	Road No. L3840 in the townlands of Timahoe	Views over farmland and Ballaghmore Hill
021	Road No. L5757 in the townlands of Clonaslee	Views of Cullahill Castle and Knockmannon Hill
022	Heywood Demense	Views of Mass Lough and of Ballymartin Hill beyond
023	Heywood Demense	Views over farmland and of Ballymartin Hill

Map 11.8: Scenic Views and Prospects



Policy Objectives for Views and Prospects	
SV 1	Protect views from designated scenic routes indicated in Table 11.7 and Map 11.8 (Scenic Views and Prospects in County Laois) of the Plan, by avoiding any development that could disrupt the vistas or disproportionately impact on the landscape character of the area, thereby affecting the scenic and amenity value of the views.
SV 2	Review and update all Scenic Routes and Views in the county during the lifetime of the Plan.

11.11 GEOLOGY

Geology is an intrinsic component of the natural heritage of Laois. The Geological Survey of Ireland established the Irish Geological Heritage Programme in 1998. The programme identifies and selects the very best national sites for NHA designation, to represent the country's geology. It is also identifies many sites of national or local geological heritage importance, which are classed as County Geological Sites (CGS). These sites will be protected primarily through their

inclusion in the County Development Plan.

The Council recognises that Geology is an intrinsic component of natural heritage within the Planning Acts and Regulations and the Heritage Act 1995 to be protected and promoted for its heritage value and for its potential for recreational and geo-tourism initiatives and that it must ensure that geological heritage is adequately addressed in Development Plans.

While the most important geological sites and geomorphological scientific sites will be designated as NHAs the National Heritage Plan (2002) has recommended the recognition and protection of other important sites known as County Geological Sites. The Irish Geological Programme (a partnership between the GSI and NPWS) identifies CGs, that although of national, regional and local importance will not receive the statutory protection of NHA sites.

Policy Objectives for Geology	
GEO 1	Work with stakeholders to protect, preserve, enhance, maintain, manage, conserve, recognise and, where appropriate, restore the character conservation value and integrity of these sites for their amenity, scientific, heritage and historic values (including County Geological Sites listed in Table 28, proposed NHA's, areas near site and areas of geomorphological interest.
GEO 2	Protect geological NHAs as they become designated and notified to the Local Authority, during the lifetime of the Plan.
GEO 3	Promote and encourage, where practicable and when not in conflict with ownership rights, access to geological and geomorphological features.
GEO 4	Encourage and facilitate the development of geo-tourism by conserving and managing geological resources, and by the development of a Rock Trail (named), Geoparks or other similar geo-tourism initiatives.

Map 11.9: Geological Sites

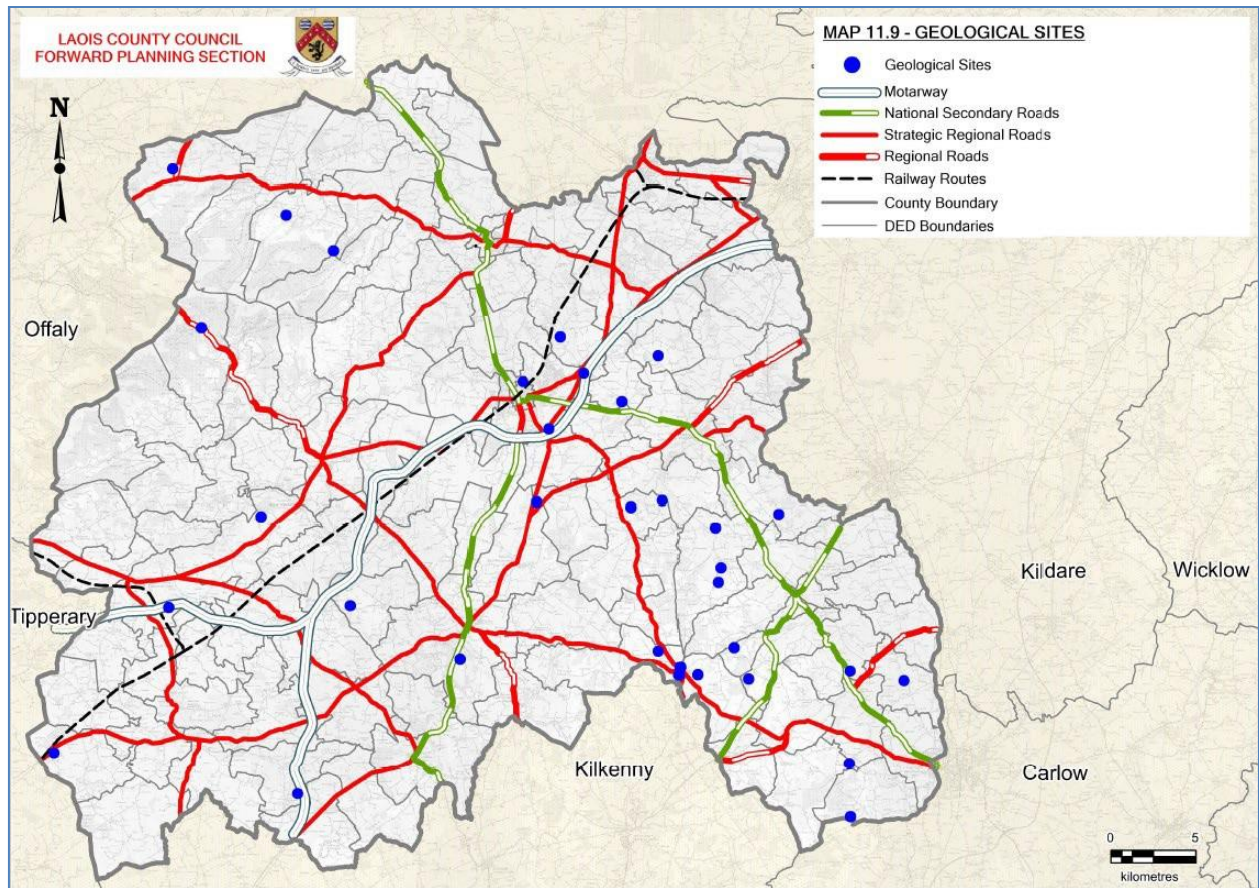


Table 11.8: County Geological Sites

SITE NAME	PRINCIPAL CHARACTERISTICS	TOWNLAND(S)/DISTRICT	SUMMARY DESCRIPTION
Abbeyleix Bog	Peatland	Tullyroe, Abbeyleix Demesne, Killamuck	Abbeyleix Bog comprises an extensive area of peatland extending in a low-lying hollow
Arless Quarry	Quarry	Rathillig / Arless, south of Athy	Small disused quarry. Shows basal Namurian contact
Ballyadams Quarry	Quarry	Ballyadams formation	Quarry
Baunreagh Quarry	Quarry	Baunreagh	Small roadside quarry in two sections
Carrolls Quarry	Ballysteen Limestone Formation	Knockacoller / Castletown	Typical representative of Ballysteen Limestone Formation. Quarry contains some cherty limestone and dolomite.
Castlecomer Artesian Borehole	Artesian Well	Moyadd / Swan	Artesian well
Clogh River	braided river channel	Swan	Series of dry braided river channels are found along the tightly meandering Clogh River. Braided or transitional to braided river may be influenced by input of sediment from mining waste
Clonaslee Eskers	Esker ridges	Garryhedder, Coolagh, Castlecuffe, Larragan, Ballykineen Lower	A complex series of ridges that bends around Slieve Bloom to become the Ridge of Portlaoise. Should be considered on its' own, however, as it has its own orientation and topography which is distinct from the Portlaoise Ridge. (Part of the Kinnity- Clonaslee Esker extending from Co. Laois to Co. Offaly)
Clopook Cave	Cave	Clopook	Small cave is situated in the side of a possible relict karst tower
Darkin Well	Spring	Straboe	Spring rising within a fenced compound.
Farnans Quarry	Quarry	Farnans	Working sandstone quarry
Flemings Fireclay Quarries	Fireclays	Slatt Upper, Slatt Lower / Swan	Double fireclays. The term fireclay was introduced by Richard Griffith
Glebe Quarry	Quarry	Glebe	Quarry exposes Devonian rocksof the Clonaslee Member, comprising the upper part of the Cadamstown

SITE NAME	PRINCIPAL CHARACTERISTICS	TOWNLAND(S)/DISTRICT	SUMMARY DESCRIPTION
			Formation
Glenbarrow	Fluvial and Lacustrine Geomorphology	Glenbarrow	Long section in the bed and banks of the river in Glenbarrow
Hollymount	Important Neogene site and Miocene - Late Pliocene	Hollymount / Carlow	This is an important Neogene (Miocene - Late Pliocene) site. dark non-marine clays & sands >50m with Miocene - Late Pliocene flora. Only proven Miocene in ROI
Killeany Quarry	Quarry	Killeany	Small quarry cut into a small, but prominent, steep-sided limestone hill.
Killeshin Glen	Fossiliferous Rocks, Goniatites and Killeshin Siltstone Formation	Coorlaghan, Keeloge / Killeshin	A valuable stream section through Upper Namurian fossiliferous rocks in which goniatites are frequent. The Killeshin Siltstone Formation is mainly grey argillaceous or silty mudstones (Higgs 1987) poorly bedded with occasional plant remains, dark grey to black shales occur occasionally containing goniatites and lamellibranchs
Killeany Quarry	Quarry	Killeany	Small quarry cut into a small, but prominent, steep-sided limestone hill.
Killeshin Glen	Fossiliferous Rocks, Goniatites and Killeshin Siltstone Formation	Coorlaghan, Keeloge /Killeshin	A valuable stream section through Upper Namurian fossiliferous rocks in which goniatites are frequent. The Killeshin Siltstone Formation is mainly grey argillaceous or silty mudstones (Higgs 1987) poorly bedded with occasional plant remains, dark grey to black shales occur occasionally containing goniatites and lamellibranchs
Kyle Spring	Wells	Kyle/Timahoe	Springs
Lisduff Quarry	Limestone Quarry	Lisduff/Knockahaw	Lisduff Oolite Member (Ballysteen Formation) bedrock comprising thick bedded, pale bluegrey, cross-bedded, well-jointed oolite of Lower Carboniferous (Mississippian) age

SITE NAME	PRINCIPAL CHARACTERISTICS	TOWNLAND(S)/DISTRICT	SUMMARY DESCRIPTION
Luggacurran Fireclay Pit	Farm Borrow-pit	Luggacurren	Site exposes Namurian rocks of part of the Killeshin Siltstone Formation
Luggacurran Stream Section	Namurian stratigraphical section through Castlecomer Plateau	Luggacurren	Two stream sections provide almost continuous exposure in the Namurian of the Castlecomer Plateau
M7 Road Cut Derryvorrigan	500m long road cut through limestone bedrock on the M7 Motorway	Derryvorrigan	Bedrock is Lower Carboniferous (Mississippian) dark-coloured muddy limestone (Ballysteen Formation)
M8 Road Cut Addergoole	800m long road cut through limestone bedrock on the M8 Motorway	Addergoole	Bedrock is Lower Carboniferous (Mississippian) shaly limestone (Durrow Formation)
Modubeagh Mine Spring	coal mine discharge spring with steps	Swan	An old coal mine northeast of Wolfhill Colliery. Reportedly has a capped well which was piped to Athy as a water supply. Reportedly has steps built to precipitate iron from mine adit spring
Moyadd Stream	Westphalian stratigraphical section	Moyadd / Swan	An excellent example of the typical lithologies of the basal Coal Measures is shown in this stream section. Many of the beds are fossiliferous.
Old Rossmore	Anthracite	Rossmore, Clogrenan	Anthracite
Poulastore	cave situated in the top of Killone Hill	Killone, Killmurry, Ballythomas	The cave is in Carboniferous Limestone rock, in the Clogrenan Formation which is the youngest part of the limestone sequence. The age of the cave is unknown but may be older than the immediate post glacial period of the last 10,000 years (Holocene)
Rathleague Spring	warm spring	Rathleague Derry	Warm spring
Ridge of Portlaoise	Esker ridges	Townparks, Ballycullenbeg, Strahard, Debicot, Acragar, Cloncosney, Derrydavy, Kyletalesha, Ballytegan, Gorteen, Maryborough, Borris, Beladd, Downs, Rathleague, Meelick, Capoley, Ballycarnan	A glacial esker ridge. It has a road on top. This long, narrow ridge is an excellent example of a straight, uncomplicated esker which does not have a complex topography. It lies 90 degrees to the Kinnity-Clonaslee esker, but was formed in the same tunnel system.

SITE NAME	PRINCIPAL CHARACTERISTICS	TOWNLAND(S)/DISTRICT	SUMMARY DESCRIPTION
Rock of Cashel	deposition features, crinoids and brachiopods	Cashel	Small outcrop of limestone with characteristics of deposition in turbid environments. The rock is highly fossiliferous with crinoids and brachiopods
Rock of Dunamase	Small Limestonehills: Hums.	Park or Dunamase	One of a series of small limestone hills, erosion features known as 'hums' above a plain. Youngest Brigantian strata in the area. Rock of Dunamase - representative site for Stradbally Hills. Site is large enough to include the glacial sediments around it.
Sluggory Cross Roads	Complex active sinkhole (swallow hole) in karstic limestone, northeast of Portlaoise	Ballydavis, Rathbrennan	The sinkhole, drainage and cave development are probably all post-glacial in age, formed over the last 11,000 years
Timahoe Eskers	Esker ridges	Esker, Coolnabracca, Kyle, Orchard Lower, Clondoolagh, Fallowbeg Lower, Guileen, Clopook, Fallowbeg Middle	One of the best examples of esker ridges in the country showing branching and other characteristic features. A nice anatomising ridge, associated with moraine and fan features in a nice topographic setting.

11.11.1 *ESKER*

The Council recognises the unique importance of esker landscape and its archaeological and historic value. All proposals for sand and gravel extraction will be determined by considering the need to conserve the environment and the extent to which proposed developments would be damaging. There is a presumption against new quarry development on eskers. The Council recognises that the exploitation of deposits can have seriously damaging environmental impact on the esker network.

Policy Objectives for Eskers	
GEO 5	Protect, preserve and conserve the landscape and natural heritage and geo-diversity values of esker systems from inappropriate development. Ensure that any plan or project affecting eskers are adequately assessed with regard to their potential impact on the environment.
GEO 6	Assess applications for quarrying activity and gravel extraction and other development in proximity to eskers, with respect to their landscape importance or amenity value and the need to conserve them free from inappropriate development and to conserve their environmental character values and the extent to which proposals would damage these qualities.

CHAPTER 12 BUILT AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

Aim: To protect, conserve and manage the archaeological and architectural heritage of County Laois and to encourage sensitive sustainable development so as to ensure its survival and maintenance for future generations.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

County Laois has a considerable variety of the built heritage that contributes to the identity and culture of the county itself and also to the wider region that are deemed worthy of protection. It includes the Rock of Dunamase the seat or fort of the ancient Irish kings of Laois, the historic towns of Abbeyleix and Durrow, great country houses, demesne landscapes and a significant industrial heritage of our boglands.

12.2 POLICY CONTEXT

Ireland has signed and ratified a number of International and European Conventions and EU Directives such as the European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage, 1992 - the Valletta Convention and the Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe, 1985 - the Granada Convention, which have provided the context for the formulation of national and regional legislation and policy to protect our built and natural heritage.

The following legislation and policy has informed this Chapter:

12.2.1 PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT ACT 2000, AS AMENDED

Comprehensive and systematic legislative provisions for the protection of architectural heritage were introduced by the Planning and Development Act, 2000. It is a mandatory requirement for the Development Plan to include a Record of Protected Structures (RPS) and also provide a number of objectives in relation to the protection of archaeological heritage, structures and areas of special interest, the preservation of the character of the landscape, views and prospects.

12.2.2 THE NATIONAL MONUMENTS ACTS 1930 – 2004

Archaeological heritage is legally protected from unauthorised damage or interference through powers and functions under the National Monuments Acts 1930-2004. Section 10 of the National Monuments (Amendments) Act 1994 made provision for the compilation of all recorded sites and features of historical and archaeological importance in the county into the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP).

12.2.3 *FRAMEWORK AND PRINCIPLES FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE (1999)*

Policy and Guidance on Archaeological Excavation (1999) This Framework and these principles which stipulate the basic principles for the protection of archaeological heritage are based on a presumption of avoiding development impacts on archaeological heritage with preservation in-situ being the first option followed by preservation by record where the archaeological heritage is affected or proposed to be affected by the development.

12.2.4 *THE ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE PROTECTION GUIDELINES 2011*

These Guidelines are issued under Section 28 and Section 52 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Under Section 52(1), the Minister is obliged to issue guidelines to planning authorities concerning development objectives, a) for protecting structures, or parts of structures, which are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest, and b) for preserving the character of architectural conservation areas. Guidelines issued under Section 28 of the Act require planning authorities to have regard to them in the performance of their functions.

12.2.5 *THE NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK (NPF)*

Ireland has an abundance of iconic natural heritage areas that not only play a key part in our cultural heritage, but are also an important part of our tourism industry. The NPF also notes that there is a need to conserve, manage and present our heritage for its intrinsic value and as a support to economic renewal and sustainable employment.

12.2.6 *REGIONAL SPATIAL AND ECONOMIC STRATEGY (RSES)*

The RSES acknowledges that the region's historic environment provides a unique sense of place and makes a positive contribution to quality of life. The RSES highlights the importance of incorporating best practice in heritage management into land use planning through the protection of historic urban fabric, the sensitive reuse of historic properties and the enhancement of places of special cultural or natural significance and the provision of high quality public realm and recreational spaces. It is a regional policy objective to - promote historic towns in the Region in the practice of heritage-led generation, to promote sensitive and adaptive re-use of historic building stock, industrial features and protected structures.

12.2.7 *NATIONAL ADAPTATION PLAN - BUILT & ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE CLIMATE CHANGE SECTORAL ADAPTATION PLAN*

The adaptation strategy and accompanying action plan is a sectoral subset of the National Adaptation Plan in relation to the impact of climate change on built heritage and aims to:

- Build adaptive capacity within the sector;
- Reduce the vulnerability of built and archaeological heritage to climate change;
- Identify and capitalise on the various potential opportunities for the sector.

12.3 ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

The Council supports the conservation, marketing, interpretation and appreciation of significant architectural assets in the county. Some of these assets comprise individual structures with distinct architectural integrity, groups of buildings, streetscapes, demesne landscapes intrinsically linked to the special interest of country houses, the arrangement of buildings in and around spaces such as in vernacular farmyards and at market squares, the sympathetic evolution of individual structures displaying different architectural trends.

There are two primary mechanisms to protect the county's architectural heritage:

- If a structure is considered to be of significant importance, the Council may designate it as a protected structure. A protected structure must be of architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, technical and social interest.
- If a group of buildings is considered special and is of significant importance, the Council may designate it as an Architectural Conservation Area. At present there are seven Architectural Conservation Areas in County Laois.

12.3.1 PROTECTED STRUCTURES

Protected Structures are buildings, features and structures that are protected because they are representative of the diversity of the architectural heritage of the county which are of architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, technical and social interest. Such features are contained in the Record of Protected Structures (RPS). A protected structure, unless otherwise stated, includes the exterior and interior of the structure, the land lying within the curtilage of the structure and any other structure lying within the curtilage. The protection also extends to any features specified as being in the attendant grounds. The 900 structures in the County Laois Record of Protected Structures (RPS) are listed at Appendix 1 of the Plan.

12.3.1.1 Works to a Protected Structure

The placing of a structure on the RPS seeks to ensure that the character of the structure is maintained and any changes or alterations to it are carried out in such a way as to retain and enhance this character. Works to a protected structure, that would, materially affect the character of the structure, require planning permission.

It is important to note that not all works to a Protected Structure will constitute material alterations. Under Section 57 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended), owners/occupiers may request a declaration from the Planning Authority as to the type of works, which it considers, would or would not materially affect the character of the structure.

Total or substantial demolition of a Protected Structure or any significant element of the Protected Structure will not be acceptable in principle, save in exceptional circumstances where demolition and redevelopment would produce substantial strategic benefits for the community which would decisively outweigh the loss resulting from demolition.

Policy Objectives for Protected Structures

PS 1	Consult with the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government in considering planning applications that may affect Protected Structures or Architectural Conservation Areas (ACA). The Council will have regard to comments made by the Department and relevant guidelines such as the Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DAHG, 2011) and other pertinent guidelines regarding energy ratings for Protected Structures.
PS 2	Protect and conserve buildings, structures and sites contained in the Record of Protected Structures in accordance with 'Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities' 2004 and ensure the effective promotion of the Architectural Heritage provisions of Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and therefore the protection of Laois's built heritage, including Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs) and Protected Structures.
PS 3	<p>Any development, modification, alteration, or extension affecting a Protected Structure must be prepared by suitably qualified persons and Accompanied by appropriate documentation as outlined in the Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities [DAHG, 2011] to enable a proper assessment of the proposed works and their impact on the structure or area and be carried out to best practice conservation standards. Its setting will be considered against the following criteria, and whether it is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Sensitive sited and designed; b) Compatible with the special character; c) Views of principal elevations of the protected structures are not obscured or negatively impacted; d) Of a premium quality of design and appropriate in terms of the proposed scale, mass, height, density, layout, and material so that the integrity of the structure and its curtilage is preserved and enhanced. Where appropriate, the Protected Structure status is used as a stimulus to the imaginative and considered design of new elements.
PS 4	Where the restoration or refurbishment of a Protected Structure or a key Architectural Conservation Area building that is in poor or fair condition is proposed and is for a purpose compatible with the character of the building, the relaxation of development management standards on unit sizes, amenity space or parking will be considered by the Council.
PS 5	Refuse planning permission for the demolition of any protected structure unless the Council is satisfied that exceptional circumstances exist. The demolition of a protected structure with the retention of its façade will likewise not generally be permitted.
PS 6	Favourably consider the change of use of any structure included on the Record of Protected Structures provided such a change of use does not adversely impact on its intrinsic character. In certain cases, the Planning Authority may relax site zoning restrictions / development standards in order to secure the preservation and restoration of the structure.
PS 7	Review and update the Record of Protected Structures on an on-going basis and to make additions and deletions as appropriate.

Policy Objectives for Protected Structures

PS 8	Integrate climate-change adaptation measures into all heritage works and maintenance plans by demonstrating green ways of working in historic buildings, ensuring that the carbon footprint of adaptation measures is considered.
PS 9	Promote the repair and reuse of existing building stock, including heritage buildings, as a means of avoiding unnecessary carbon outlays with new build.
PS 10	Support proposals to improve the thermal performance of historic buildings with renewable energy technologies. Such proposals shall be sensitive to traditional methods of construction to ensure that the proposed works are appropriate and do not cause damage to the structure, require the removal of historic fabric such as original windows, doors and floors, or have a detrimental visual impact.

Protected Structures Development Management Standards

DM PS 1	DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE CURTILAGE OF A PROTECTED STRUCTURE In considering applications for development within the curtilage and/or attendant grounds of a protected structure, the Council shall have regard to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The various elements of the structure which give the protected structure its special character and how these would be impacted on by the proposed development.• The proximity of any new development to the main protected structure and any other buildings of heritage value.• The design of the new development that should relate to and complement the special character of the protected structure.• Outward and inward views from the protected structure are to be protected. High quality design will be a foremost consideration when assessing proposals for development within the curtilage of a protected structure, with particular emphasis on siting, building lines, proportions, scale, massing, height, roof treatment and materials. This does not preclude innovative contemporary buildings. High quality contemporary interventions will be encouraged over historic pastiche. Development proposals should include appraisal of the wider context of the site and structure including its demesne landscape, where applicable.
DM PS 2	RESTORATION OF A PROTECTED STRUCTURE The following information is required to be submitted with respect to applications for permission for restoration, refurbishment, demolition development or change of use of protected structures: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• An Architectural Assessment Report as per the <i>Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities</i>” (2011) Department of the Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht carried out by a suitably qualified person;• A comprehensive schedule of proposed work that follows the guidelines set out in the <i>Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities</i>” (2011) Department of the Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht.
DM PS 3	ARCHITECTURAL ASSESSMENT REPORT The following information is required to be submitted with respect to applications for permission for restoration, refurbishment, demolition development or change of use of protected structures: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• An Architectural Assessment Report as per the <i>Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities</i>” (2011) Department of the Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht carried out by a suitably qualified person; A comprehensive schedule of proposed work that follows the guidelines set out in the <i>Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities</i> ” (2011) Department of the Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht.

12.3.2 ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION AREAS

Section 81 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) describes an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) as: “An area, place, group of structures or townscape of special architectural historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest, or an area that contributes to the appreciation of a Protected Structure”.

Architectural Conservation Areas within County Laois are identified in Volume 2 Settlement Plans of this CDP on the relevant settlement maps in the following settlements:

- Abbeyleix
- Ballinakill
- Castletown
- Clonaslee
- Durrrow
- Portlaoise
- Timahoe

The Council will examine the potential for designating additional ACAs within the County during the lifetime of this Plan. In considering the designation of additional ACAs, the Council will have regard to the following factors:

- The sensitivity of areas of special interest to inappropriate development;
- Availability of resources;
- Local support for the designation;
- National architectural heritage protection guidelines or government circulars.

Policy Objectives for ACA	
ACA 1	Ensure that any development, modifications, alterations, or extensions within an ACA are sited and designed appropriately, and are not detrimental to the character of the structure or to its setting or the general character of the ACA and are in keeping with any Architectural Conservation Area Statement of Character Guidance Documents prepared for the relevant ACA.
ACA 2	Demolition of buildings or substantial parts of structures in cases where those structures make a positive contribution to the special character of the ACA will not be acceptable in principle. Only in exceptional circumstances, where the redevelopment or replacement structures would produce substantial benefits for the community which would decisively outweigh the loss resulting from demolition, would demolition of this nature be considered.
ACA 3	Investigate the designation of further ACAs at appropriate locations throughout and prepare a character statement appraisal and area specific policy for each ACA to include Stradbally, Mountmellick Mountrath and Portarlinton, (the latter in collaboration within Offaly County Council).

ACA Development Management Standard

DM ACA 1	DEVELOPMENT WITHIN AN ACA <p>Ensure that applications for new development within or affecting an ACA (infill development, conversions, alterations, extensions, shopfronts, advertisements) pay attention to detailed matters such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• finishing materials;• rainwater goods;• fenestration details;• any external illumination;• scale, layout, built form, proportions; and• building lines and relationship of proposals to the site and surrounding area. <p>The following information is required to be submitted with respect to applications for permission for restoration, refurbishment, demolition development or change of use of buildings /structures with Architectural Conservation Areas (ACA):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• An Architectural Assessment Report as per the Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities” (2011) Department of the Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht, carried out by a suitably qualified person;• A comprehensive schedule of proposed work that follows the guidelines set out in the Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities” (2011) Department of the Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht.
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12.3.3 VERNACULAR BUILDINGS

Vernacular architecture is the expression of the culture of a community and refers to the traditional building forms and types using local materials, skills and building techniques which form a vital component of the landscape. This includes traditional domestic buildings such as thatched cottages but also include other traditional structures such as shop fronts, farmsteads, outbuildings, aspects of the industrial past, including lime kilns, mills, forges and their products, such as gates. These structures reflect the unique local history and character of a place.

There are many traditional buildings in the Laois countryside with architectural heritage value which have been left to deteriorate and waste away. Traditional farm buildings can make a significant positive contribution to the Irish landscape. Many were laid out using local tried and tested materials, built to patterns and arrangements that made optimum use of resources. They reveal a great deal about the way the countryside has evolved and the changing fortunes of farming through the ages. A survey of thatched buildings was recently carried out which identified the remaining thatched dwellings within the county. In the interest of sustainability, it is considered that the re-use and adaption of existing buildings is preferable to their demolition

and should be regarded as the first priority in any development project.

Policy Objectives for Vernacular Structures	
VS 1	Recognise the importance of the contribution of vernacular architecture which may not be protected to the promote where feasible the protection, retention and appropriate revitalisation and use of the vernacular built heritage, including structures that contribute to landscape and streetscape character and discourage the demolition of these structures.
VS 2	Resist the demolition of vernacular architecture, in particular thatched cottages and farmhouses and to encourage their sensitive reuse having regard to the intrinsic character of the structure.
VS 3	Ensure that both new build, and extensions to vernacular buildings are of an appropriate design and do not detract from the buildings character.
VS 4	Seek the repair and retention of traditional timber and/or rendered shop fronts and pub fronts, including those that may not be protected structures.
VS 5	Develop and publish guidelines on the conservation and appropriate reuse of Local Authority Cottages and similar vernacular structures.
VS 6	Have regard, where appropriate, to guidance in the DAHG Guidelines and conservation best practice in assessing proposed interventions and planning applications relating to vernacular structures, traditional farmhouses, their curtilage, out buildings and settings.

Vernacular Structures Development Management Standards

DM VS 1	<p>EXTENSION TO VERNACULAR STRUCTURES</p> <p>All applications for extensions to vernacular structures shall comply with the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality design which respects the character of the existing structure; • The quantity and quality of private open space that would remain to serve the house; • Extensions which break the existing front building line will not normally be acceptable. A porch extension which does not significantly break the front building line will normally be permitted; • Extensions are subordinate to the existing dwelling with a presumption against the size of any extension exceeding 100% of the floor area of the existing dwelling.
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12.3.4 HISTORIC GARDENS, COUNTRY HOUSES AND DEMESNES

County Laois has a rich heritage of country houses, gardens and designed landscaped gardens. They consist of private gardens, public parks and the landscapes associated with country estates and demesnes. These landscapes often include tree-lined avenues, formal ornamental woods, water-features, planned gardens, a bowling green, grass lawns, terraces and other formal features. In some cases, the house and buildings are gone, but the demesne and designed landscape remain. The two most notable houses and demesnes in the county

are Emo House and Castle Durrow Demesne of which are accessible to the public.

Laois County Council recognises the importance of these historic houses, gardens and designed landscapes and their role in providing the setting for protected structures and thus seeks to ensure that they are properly protected from encroaching or adjacent development. The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) has conducted a field survey which has listed a number of historic gardens in County Laois such as Heywood Gardens near Ballinakill.

Policy Objectives for Historic Gardens, Country Houses and Demesnes	
CH 1	Ensure that new development will not adversely affect the site, setting or views to and from historic gardens and designed landscapes.
CH 2	Require that any proposals for new development in an historic garden or demesne include an appraisal of the landscape, designed views and vistas, and an assessment of significant trees or groups of trees, as appropriate.
CH 3	Build on the information compiled as part of the National Survey of Historic Gardens & Designed Landscapes, and to carry out a survey to assess the intactness of these assets, including developing a strategy for their conservation, restoration and development.
CH 4	Assess the demesnes and historic designed landscapes within Laois and promote the conservation of their essential character, both built and natural, while allowing for appropriate re-use.
CH 5	Work with stakeholders including the OPW, The Heritage Council, the Arts Council, local communities and businesses to support the development of heritage and cultural tourism in County Laois.
CH 6	To implement the action in relation to the development of a Cultural Quarter within the Town Centre of Portlaoise as envisaged in the "Portlaoise 2040 - A Strategy for a Better Town Centre" which places the celebration of its heritage at its core through the provision or expansion of existing facilities to provide heritage related interpretation and archive.

12.4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE

Archaeology is an irreplaceable link with the past and is to be found in virtually every townland in County Laois. Laois County Council recognises the importance of preserving and protecting this resource and fostering a greater public appreciation of it among both residents of the county and visitors. The archaeology of County Laois varies greatly in form, date and condition and includes structures, constructions, groups of buildings, developed sites, all recorded monuments as well as their contexts, and moveable objects, situated both on land and underwater.

Archaeological Heritage is comprised of:

- Recorded sites and features of historical and archaeological importance included in the Record of Monuments and Places as established under Section 10 of the National

Monuments (Amendment) Act, 1994,

- Major sites of archaeological importance in State Ownership or Guardianship (as outlined in Table 10.1).
- National Monuments which are the subject of Preservation Orders in Laois (as outlined in Table 10.2).
- All previously unknown archaeology that becomes known (e.g. through ground disturbance, fieldwork, or the discovery of sites underwater).

The Rock of Dunamais is a site of particular historical, archaeological and cultural importance in County Laois. While the monument is owned by the State through the Office of Public Works (OPW), it is appropriate that the Plan sets out special measures to conserve and enhance this site, and to make it more accessible to the public. The Council is committed to the conservation of the Rock of Dunamais and will work closely with DOAHRRGA to ensure its protection for future generations.

Similarly, the Fort Protector in Portlaoise town centre is a significant historical site in the County. It was built in 1547-48 as part of the suppression of the Gaelic Irish territories of the O'Moore and O'Connor clans. The plantation of Laois and Offaly followed shortly thereafter and was formalised in the creation of King's County and Queen's County in 1556. The Fort marks the foundation of the town of Portlaoise. Laois County Council was successful in obtaining funding from the Heritage Council and the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht under the new Historic Towns Initiative. The project funded will see the transformation of Fort Protector and Fitzmaurice Place at the historic core of the town, over several phases to create a new Heritage Quarter for the town.

The industrial archaeology of Laois was the subject of a survey by the Laois Heritage Forum in 2003. The results of this survey and future field surveys will be used to inform the implementation of the County Development Plan and the formulation of future policies. Laois County Council will afford appropriate protection to such industrial archaeological sites as may come to light following future surveys. In considering the protection of the industrial heritage of the county ancillary heritage such as millraces will also be protected.

12.4.1 THE RECORD OF MONUMENTS AND PLACES

The Record of Monument and Places (RMP) is a statutory audit of archaeological monuments provided for in the National Monuments Acts. It consists of a county by county set of marked-up Ordnance Survey maps and a manual listing basic information in relation to each monument or area included in the RMP. Monuments in the RMP are protected under the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994. The RMP is revised periodically.

Table 12.1: National Monuments in State Care in Laois

DESCRIPTION	TOWNLAND	RMP NUMBER	NATIONAL MONUMENT NUMBER
Ringfort	Aghnahilly	LA013-063	540
Ringfort	Coorlaghan	LA037-002	567
Castle	Dunamase	LA013-052	615
Church & Cross	Errill, Ballagharahin	LA027-024-, LA027-025	113
Church	Fossy Lower	LA019-016	114
Church	Killeshin	LA032-020002	115
Church & Crosses	Sleaty	LA032-018001-, LA032-018003-, LA032-018007-	116
Church & Round Tower	Timahoe	LA018-031002-, LA018-031005	114

Table 12.2: Monuments protected by Preservation Orders in County Laois

PRESERVATION ORDER NO	MONUMENT NAME	RMP NUMBER	TOWNLAND	EFFECTIVE DATE
3/95	Clogrennan	LA034-008---	Clogrennan	1995
197	Lamberton Fort	LA018-010---	Lamberton Demesne	1957
190	Motte	LA024-006001-	Ballyroan	1952
4/81	Motte & Bailey	LA024-015001 LA024-015002-	Ballinclogh	1981
9/77	Ringfort	LA028-011---	Garryduff	1977

12.4.2 ZONES OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

Historic Towns which have been identified by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government for general protection are towns which were first identified in the Urban Archaeological Survey of Laois and which have been included in the RMP. Within Laois these historic towns include Ballinakill, Castletown, Dunamase, Killaban, Portarlinton and Portlaoise. The guideline boundaries for these towns are illustrated within the RMP.

The areas within the historic boundaries are known as Zones of Archaeological Potential, and are areas where intense archaeology is present. The following zones of archaeological potential have been identified by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, and are detailed of the settlement maps for the following settlements:

- Ballinakill
- Castletown
- Dunamaise
- Killabban
- Portarlington
- Portlaoise

Any proposed development (due to its location, size or nature) with the potential to affect the archaeological heritage resource will be subject to an Archaeological Impact Assessment. This includes proposals close to archaeological monuments, extensive in area) or length and development that requires an Environmental Impact Assessment. Other areas of high archaeological potential may exist outside the boundaries of conventionally recognised monuments especially in wetlands and former wetlands.

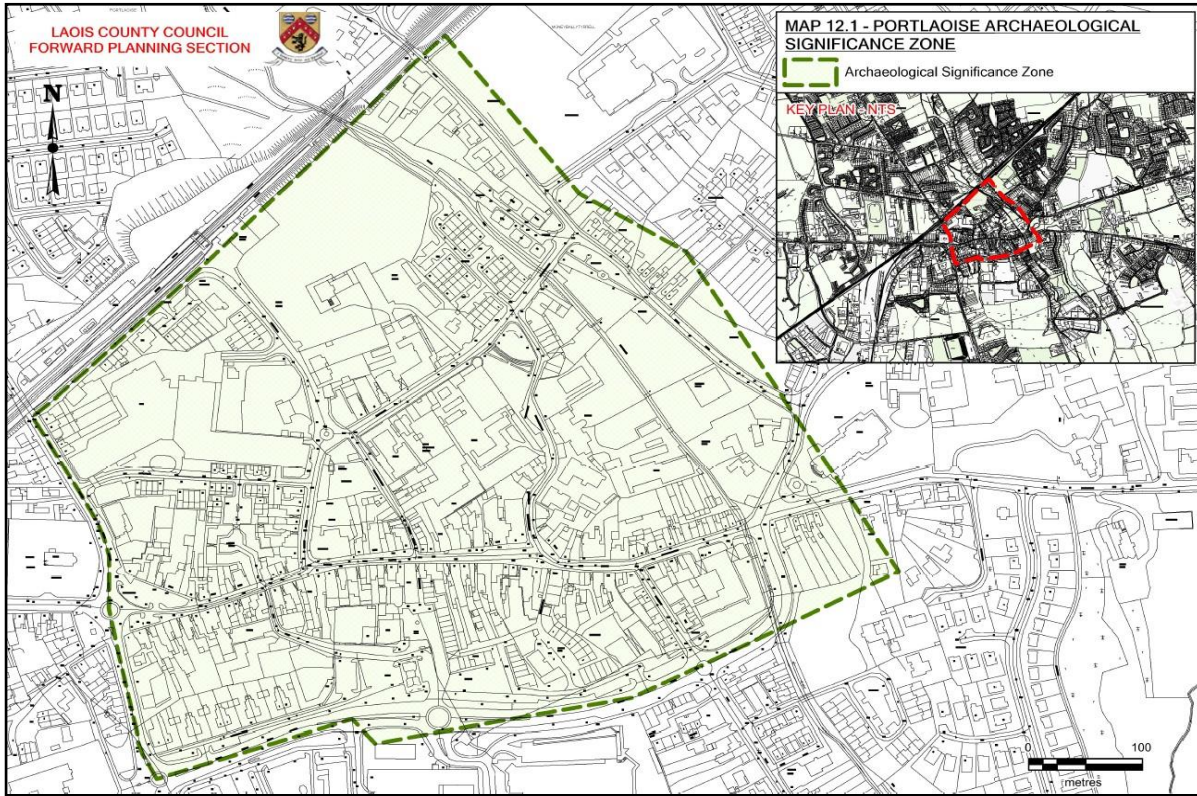
Policy Objectives for Archaeological Heritage	
AH 1	Manage development in a manner that protects and conserves the integrity and character of archaeological heritage of the county which avoids adverse impacts on sites, monuments, settings, features or objects of significant historical or archaeological interest and secure the preservation in-situ or by record of all sites and features of historical and archaeological interest.
AH 2	Support the preservation or conservation of historically significant street patterns, building lines and plot widths in its towns and villages as well as the preservation of features such as town walls, historic revetments, and public realm features such as granite kerbing, historic drinking fountains, cobbles, vent pipes whether or not they benefit from protection in their own right.
AH 3	Protect the intrinsic value, character, integrity and settings of monuments and places in the Record of Monuments and Places (RMPs) and any forthcoming statutory register and protect Zones of Archaeological Potential against inappropriate development.
AH 4	In areas of archaeological potential, where groundworks are proposed, ensure that all works are undertaken to the highest standard and the resultant information made publicly available. Developers will be required to have regard to Archaeology and Development: Guidelines for Good Practice for Developers (ICOMOS, 2000) in planning and executing development in sensitive areas. The Council favours the preservation in-situ of archaeological remains, where areas of archaeological potential are located in town centres or villages, preservation of archaeological remains by record will be considered.
AH 5	Encourage, where practicable, the provision of public access and signage to sites identified in the Record of Monuments and Places under the direct ownership, guardianship or control of the Council and/or the State.
AH 6	Work closely with the relevant State bodies to deliver the conservation objectives of the Rock of Dunamase and redevelopment of Fort Protector to secure funding for the preservation and development of these culturally

Policy Objectives for Archaeological Heritage	
	important sites.
AH 7	Require visual impact statements for developments within the area around the Rock of Dunamase in order to assess the potential impacts of development in the area.
AH 8	Work with stakeholders including the OPW, the Heritage Council, the Arts Council, local communities, Bord Fáilte and businesses to support the development of heritage and cultural tourism in County Laois .
AH 9	Maximise the potential of Durrally Viking Fort, as a heritage/cultural and tourism site.
AH 10	Protect where appropriate industrial heritage structures or elements of significance identified in the Laois Industrial Archaeology Survey by adding them to the Record of Protected Structures during the lifetime of the Development Plan.

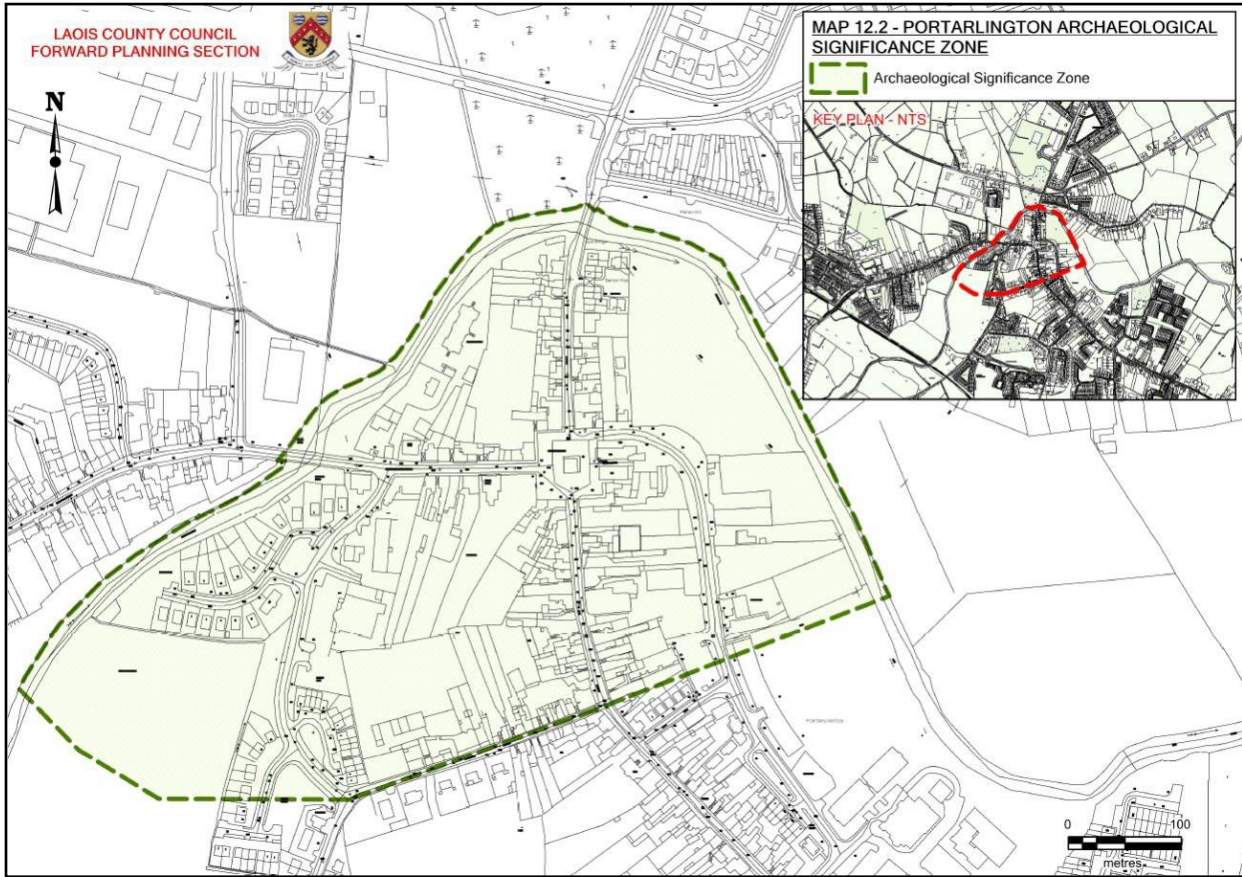
DM Standard for Archaeological Heritage

DM AH 1	<p>ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL</p> <p>In areas of archaeological potential, where groundworks are proposed, the Council favours the preservation in-situ of archaeological remains, where areas of archaeological potential are located in town centres or villages, preservation of archaeological remains by record will be considered.</p> <p>Where it is proposed to undertake groundworks to lands within an area of archaeological potential or in the vicinity of Recorded Monuments or Zones of Archaeological Potential, the Council will require the preparation of an archaeological field evaluation by a licensed archaeologist, the details of which will be submitted with a planning application. Such development shall be assessed in the context of the following documents:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accord with the Framework and Principles for the Protection of Archaeological Heritage (DoAHG, 1999). • The National Monuments Acts 1934-1994. • Heritage Council's Archaeology and Archaeology and Development Guidelines for Good Practice for Developers (2000).
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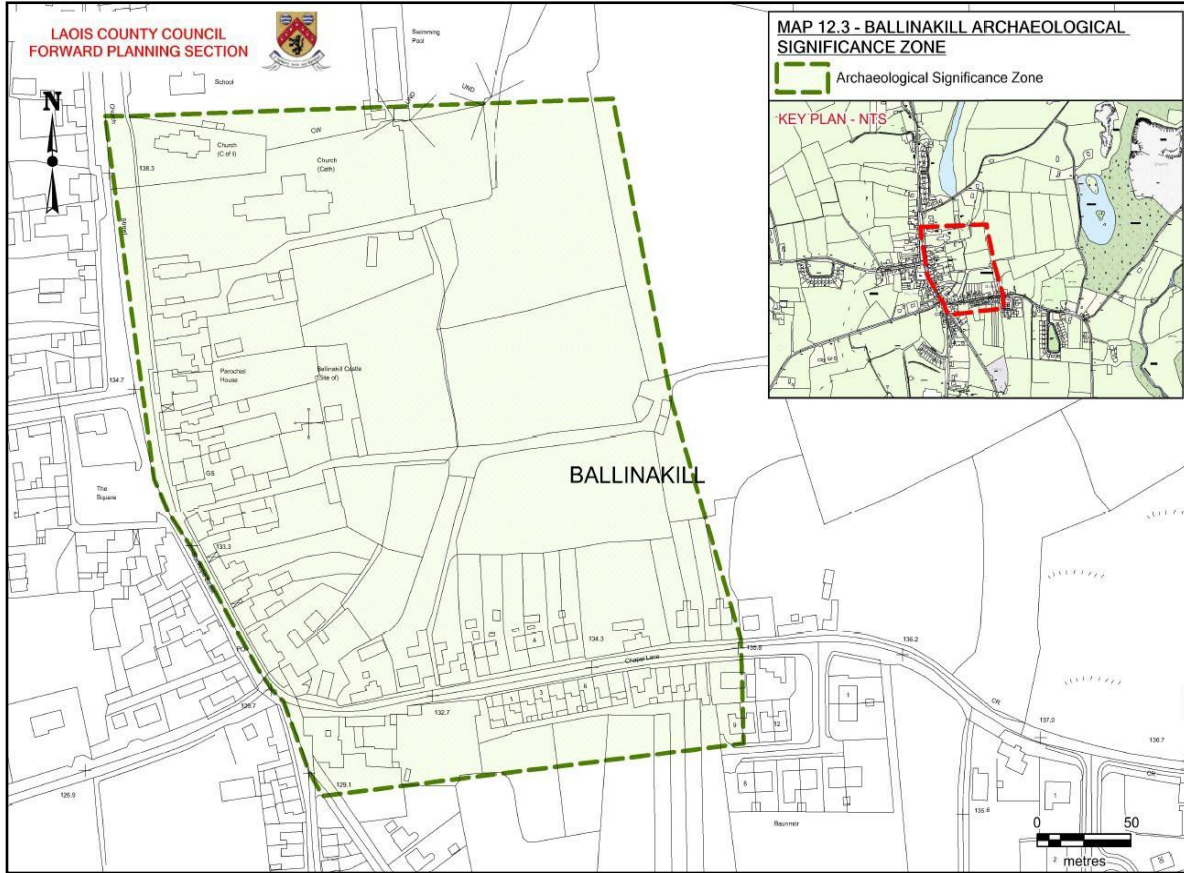
Map 12.1 Portlaoise Archaeological Significance Zone



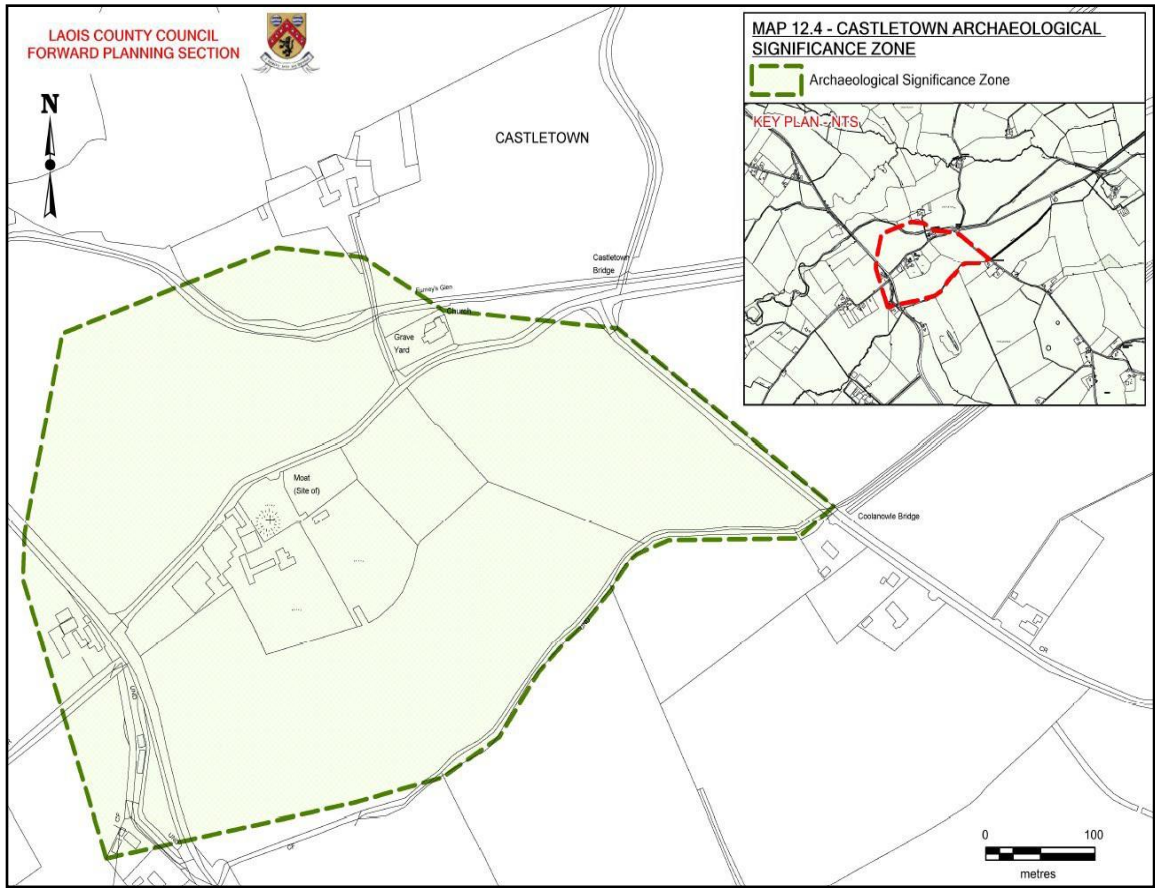
Map 12.2 Portarlington Archaeological Significance Zone



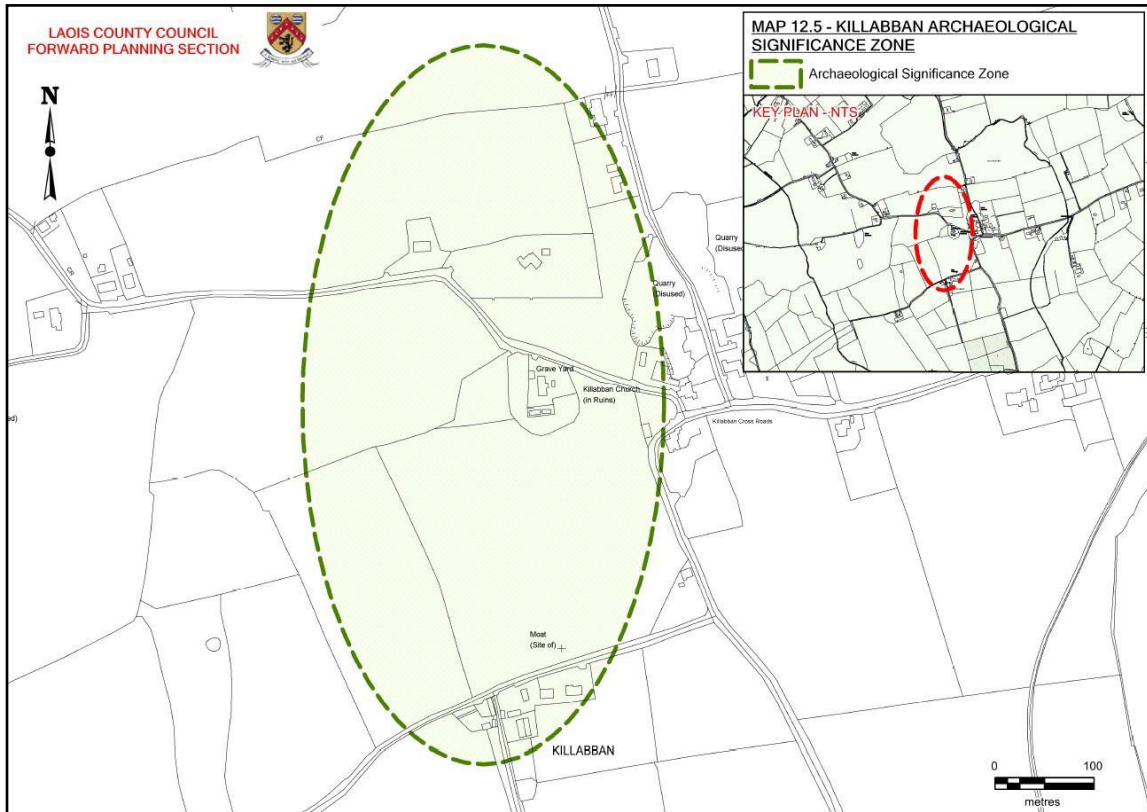
Map 12.3 Ballinakill Archaeological Significance Zone



Map 12.4 Castletown Archaeological Significance Zone



Map 12.5 Killabban Archaeological Significance Zone



CHAPTER 13 GENERAL LOCATION AND PATTERN OF DEVELOPMENT

13.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of zoning is to indicate to property owners and the general public the types of development which the Planning Authority considers most appropriate in each land use category. Zoning is designed to reduce conflicting uses within areas, to protect resources and, in association with phasing, to ensure that land suitable for development is used to the best advantage of the community as a whole.

Section 10(8) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) states that there shall be no presumption in law that any land zoned in a particular development plan (including a development plan that may have been varied) shall remain so zoned in any subsequent development plan.

The land use zoning matrix gives guidance as to the acceptability of a list of uses under each zoning objective.

13.2 ZONING PRINCIPLES

The NPF requires for a targeted approach to growth within significant infill/brownfield in settlements. This Plan has specifically provides linkage between zoning of land and the availability of infrastructure.

An infrastructure assessment has been carried in order to differentiate between zoned land that is available for development and zoned land that requires significant further investment in services for infrastructure for development to be realized which is required by the National Policy Objectives 72(a) – (c) of the National Planning Framework.

There are many other planning considerations relevant to land zoning beyond the provision of basic enabling infrastructure including overall planned levels of growth, location, suitability for the type of development envisaged, availability of and proximity to amenities, schools, shops or employment, accessibility to transport services etc.

Weighing up all of these factors, together with the availability of infrastructure, has assisted Laois County Council in determining an order of priority to deliver planned growth and development.

Sufficient lands have been zoned at appropriate locations throughout the county to facilitate the land use requirements for the period 2021-2027;

- A. Promote the redevelopment of brownfield sites within urban centres;
- B. Ensure that appropriate locations are sought for new developments.

The land use zoning matrix details the most common form of land uses in accordance with the county's zoning objectives. These are considered as to their acceptability under the following categories:

Table 13.1 Land Use Zoning Acceptability

Y= Will Normally be Acceptable	A use which will normally be acceptable is one which the Local Authority accepts in principle in the relevant zone. However, it is still subject to the normal planning process including policies and objectives outlined in the Plan.
O= Are Open for Consideration	Land uses that are listed as 'open for consideration' may be acceptable to the Planning Authority subject to detailed assessment against the principles of proper planning and sustainable development, and the relevant policies, objectives and standards set out in this Plan. Such uses may only be permitted where they do not materially conflict with other aspects of the County Development Plan.
N= Will Not Normally be Acceptable	Development which is classified as not normally being acceptable in a particular zone is one which will not be entertained by the Local Authority except in exceptional circumstances. This may be due to its perceived effect on existing and permitted uses, its incompatibility with the policies and objectives contained in this Plan or the fact that it may be inconsistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. The expansion of established and approved uses not conforming to land use zoning objectives will be considered on their merits.

13.2.1 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS AND LIMITATIONS IN THE TYPES OF USES

There are a wide range of land use types identified under each of the Land Use Zoning Objectives. Proposals for development will need to demonstrate compliance with the various written provisions of the Plan, as relevant, including those relating to environmental protection and management. Environmental considerations, such as those related to elevated levels of flood risk or European site ecological designations, may limit the types of uses that may be possible at certain sites. Prospective applicants are encouraged to engage with the planning authority at the earliest opportunity to seek guidance as to the appropriateness of emerging proposals.

13.2.2 ESTABLISHED USE AND NON-CONFORMING USES

Throughout the county there are uses which do not conform to the zoning objective for the area. These are principally uses which were already in existence on the 1st of October 1964. Extensions to and improvement of premises accommodating these uses may be permitted where the proposed development would not seriously injure the amenities of the area or prejudice the proper planning and development of the area. In some cases, the Planning Authority may encourage relocation of permitted incompatible uses, for example by exchange of sites.

Existing uses which do not conform to the zoning objectives outlined will continue to operate. A reasonable expansion of non-conforming uses will generally be accepted notwithstanding the zoning objectives. The intensification of a non-conforming use will be considered with regard to zoning objectives as well as general Planning considerations.

13.2.3 *TRANSITIONAL AREAS*

While the zoning objectives indicate the different uses permitted in each zone, it is important to avoid abrupt transitions in scale and use at the boundary of adjoining land use zones. In these areas, it is necessary to avoid developments, which would be detrimental to the amenities of the more environmentally sensitive zone. For instance, in zones abutting residential areas particular attention must be paid to the uses, scale, density and appearance of development proposals and to landscaping and screening proposals in order to protect the amenities of these residential areas.

While the zoning objectives indicate the different uses permitted in principle in each zone, it is important to avoid abrupt transitions in scale and use in the boundary areas of adjoining land use zones, where such a transition would have an adverse effect on the amenities of more environmentally sensitive zones. For instance, in enterprise zones abutting residential development within predominantly mixed use zones, particular attention must be paid to the use, scale and density of development proposals in order to protect the amenities of residential property.

13.2.4 *PHASED DEVELOPMENT*

The Council considers it desirable that development takes place in an orderly manner but recognises it would be unduly restrictive to insist that development takes place in a rigidly phased manner.

13.2.5 *ZONING*

The Council recognises that land may not become available for development purposes in an orderly, phased manner and that therefore an allowance must be made over and above the acreage required to accommodate the anticipated development during the Plan period. The area zoned within the development boundary takes account of this fact and permits a more flexible approach to development. Developments in rural areas that would undermine appropriately zoned lands or policies in forgoing chapters will not be permitted.

Development cannot take place without the requisite standard of infrastructural services, and the presence of land use zoning objectives does not necessarily imply that infrastructural services or capacity exist but rather that a particular land use is appropriate to a specific location. Land use zoning objectives are indicated in Table 13.2. The uses considered appropriate to each zone is shown in the land use matrix in Table 13.3.

Table 13.2: Zoning Objectives and Purposes

LAND USE ZONING	OBJECTIVE	PURPOSE
Town/ Village Centre	<i>To protect and enhance the special physical and social character of the existing town centre and to provide for and improve retailing and commercial activities.</i>	<p>The purpose of this zoning is to enhance the vitality and viability of town and village centres through the development of under-utilised land and brownfield sites and by encouraging a mix of uses to make the town and village centres an attractive place to visit, shop and live in. The character of the town and village centres shall be protected and enhanced.</p> <p>The Council will encourage the full use of buildings and backlands; in particular, the full use of upper floors in buildings, preferably for residential use.</p>
Mixed Use	<i>To provide for a mixture of residential and compatible commercial uses.</i>	<p>To facilitate the use of land for a mix of uses, making provisions, where appropriate for “primary” uses i.e. residential and combined with other compatible uses e.g. offices as “secondary”. These secondary uses will be considered by the Local Authority, having regard to the particular character of the area. A diversity of uses for both day and evening is encouraged. These areas require high levels of accessibility, including pedestrian, cyclists and public transport (where feasible).</p> <p>Compatible uses within this zone include: residential, community buildings, civic buildings, entertainment, hotels, leisure and recreation, offices, professional/ specialist services, restaurants etc.</p>
Residential 1	<i>To protect and enhance the amenity of developed residential communities.</i>	<p>This zone is intended primarily for established housing development but may include a range of other uses particularly those that have the potential to improve the residential amenity of residential communities such as schools, crèches, small shops, doctor’s surgeries, playing fields etc.</p> <p>It is an objective on land zoned for Residential 1 to protect the established residential amenity and enhance with associated open space, community uses and where an acceptable standard of amenity can be maintained, a limited range of other uses that support the overall residential function of the area. Within this zoning category the improved quality of existing residential areas will be the Council’s priority.</p>
Residential 2	<i>To provide for new residential development, residential services and community facilities.</i>	<p>This zone is intended primarily for housing development but may include a range of other uses particularly those that have the potential to foster the development of new residential communities such as schools, crèches, small shops, doctor’s surgeries, playing fields etc.</p> <p>It is an objective on land zoned for residential 2 to promote development mainly for housing, associated open space, community uses and where an acceptable standard of amenity can be maintained, a limited range of other uses that support the overall residential</p>

LAND USE ZONING	OBJECTIVE	PURPOSE
		<p>function of the area.</p> <p>Within this zoning category the improved quality of residential areas and the servicing of orderly development will be the Council's priority. New housing and infill developments should be of sensitive design, which are complementary to their surroundings. No piecemeal development can take place unless it does not conflict with the possible future development of the reserved development areas of the town. Adequate undeveloped lands have been zoned in the Plan for residential use to meet the requirements for both public and private house building over the Plan period.</p>
Strategic Reserve	To provide lands for future development in line with national and regional targets over the next Plan period 2021-2027	Regarding lands included in the Strategic Reserve land bank, it is important to highlight that the inclusion of such lands will not in any way infer a prior commitment on the part of Laois County Council regarding their future zoning during the review of the subsequent development plan for the plan period 2027-2033. Such a decision will be considered within the framework of national and regional population targets applicable at that time and the proper planning and sustainable development of the County.
Community, Educational Institutional and	To protect and provide for local neighbourhood, community, ecclesiastical, recreational and educational facilities.	The purpose of this zoning is to protect and improve existing community, educational and institutional facilities and to safeguard their future provision. The land use will provide for local civic, religious, community, educational and other facilities ancillary to neighbourhood uses and services.
Tourism	To provide for and improve tourist amenities in the county.	The areas included in this zoning objective are intended to meet with the needs of the tourist in the county. Uses such as accommodation of all types and ancillary services such as food and beverage establishments will be encouraged within the land use zone.
Open Space and Amenity	To preserve, provide for and improve active and passive recreational public and private open space.	The areas included in this zoning objective cover both private and public open space and are dispersed throughout urban centres of every size. The Council will not normally permit development that would result in a loss of open space.
Industrial Warehousing and	To provide for and improve industrial and warehousing development.	<p>The purpose of the zoning is to provide for heavy industry associated with environmental emissions, including noise and odour and with intensive or hazardous processing and also provide for warehousing, light industry, technology related office development and general office development that exceed 400 square metres.</p> <p>Other uses, ancillary or similar to industry and warehousing will be considered on the merits of each planning application and may be acceptable in this zone. Where employment is a high generator of traffic, the location of new employment at appropriate scale, density, type and location will be encouraged to reduce the demand for travel. The layout of new employment sites shall have regard for alternative sustainable modes of transport. Proposed</p>

LAND USE ZONING	OBJECTIVE	PURPOSE
		<p>site layout should emphasize the necessary connections to the wider local and strategic public transport, walking and cycling networks. Residential or retail uses (including retail warehousing) will not be acceptable in this zone.</p> <p>Where any industrial/warehousing land adjoins other land uses, Laois County Council will require that a buffer zone is provided for and landscaped in accordance with the Development Management Standards of this Plan.</p>
General Business	<i>To provide for and improve commercial activities.</i>	The purpose of this zone is to provide for commercial activities and acknowledge the existing/permitted retailing. Any specific development proposal must have due regard to the location of the site within the wider town context and be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.
Enterprise and Employment	<i>To provide lands for enterprise and employment use, more specifically low input and emission manufacturing, campus-style offices, storage uses, wholesaling and distribution, commercial services with high space and parking requirements that may not be suitable for town centre locations.</i>	<p>The purpose of this zone is to provide for activities which will generate employment and encourage enterprise. Warehousing, commercial, enterprise and ancillary services should be provided in high quality landscaped campus style environments, incorporating a range of amenities.</p> <p>The uses in this zone are likely to generate a considerable amount of traffic by both employees and service traffic. Sites should therefore have good vehicular and public transport access. The implementation of Mobility Management Plans will be required for such developments as they provide important means of managing accessibility to these sites.</p>
Transport and Utilities	<i>To provide for the needs of all transport users and other utility providers.</i>	Car parks and commercial development associated with the provision of public transport services are considered appropriate in this zoning. This zoning also provides for and preserves land in the ownership of the Council or other bodies charged with the provision of services such as electricity, telecommunications, water, wastewater etc. to the town.
Constrained Land Use Zoning Objective FOR Natura 2000 site	<i>To ensure that the Plan, and any lower tier plans or projects arising, will not impact on this type of designated site.</i>	In order to be granted permission, other than demonstrating compliance with other Plan provisions (including those relating to the protection of the environment), proposals for development will need to undergo Appropriate Assessment.

Table 13.3: Land Use Zoning Matrix

Land Use	Village / Town Centre	Mixed Use	Residential 1	Residential 2	Enterprise & Employment	General Business	Neighbourhood Centre	Com/Education/ Institutional	Open Space	Tourism	Horticulture	Industrial	Transport and Utilities
Apartment	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	O	N	N	N	N	N
Car Park	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
Animal Housing	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	O
Café	Y	Y	O	O	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	O	O	N
Caravan Camping	N	N	O	O	N	N	N	O	N	Y	N	N	O
Cemetery	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	O
Cinema, Dancehall, Disco	O	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
Community Hall	O	O	Y	Y	O	O	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	N
Craft Industry	Y	N	O	O	Y	O	O	O	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Crèche/ Playschool	Y	Y	Y	Y	O	O	Y	O	N	Y	O	O	N
Cultural Uses/ Library	Y	Y	O	O	O	O	Y	O	N	Y	N	N	O
Dwelling	O	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	O	N	Y	N	N	N

Land Use	Village / Town Centre	Mixed Use	Residential 1	Residential 2	Enterprise & Employment	General Business	Neighbourhood Centre	Com/Education/ Institutional	Open Space	Tourism	Horticulture	Industrial	Transport and Utilities
Funeral Home	O	N	N	N	N	N	N	O	N	N	N	N	N
Garages, Panel Beating, Car Repairs	N	N	N	N	O	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
Garden Centre	O	N	N	N	O	O	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
Guest House/ Hostel/ Hotel	Y	Y	O	O	O	O	N	O	N	Y	N	N	N
Halting Site	N	N	O	O	N	N	N	O	N	N	N	N	N
Health Centre	Y	Y	O	O	O	O	Y	O	N	N	N	N	N
Heavy Commercial Vehicle Parks	N	N	N	N	O	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
Hot Food Takeaway	O	O	N	N	N	N	O	N	N	Y	N	N	N
Industry	N	N	N	N	O	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
Industry (Light)	O	N	N	N	Y	O	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
Medical and Related Consultants	Y	Y	O	O	O	O	O	O	N	N	N	N	N
Motor Sales	O	N	N	N	Y	O	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Nursing Home/ Sheltered Housing	O	Y	O	O	N	N	N	O	N	N	N	O	N
Offices < 100 sq m	Y	Y	O	O	Y	Y	O	O	N	N	Y	Y	N

Land Use	Village / Town Centre	Mixed Use	Residential 1	Residential 2	Enterprise & Employment	General Business	Neighbourhood Centre	Com/Education/ Institutional	Open Space	Tourism	Horticulture	Industrial	Transport and Utilities
Offices > 100 sq m	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	O	O	N	N	N	O	N
Park Playground	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	O	Y	Y	Y	O	O	N
Petrol Station	Y	Y	N	N	O	Y	N	N	N	N	N	O	N
Place of Worship	Y	O	O	O	N	N	O	Y	N	O	N	N	N
Playing Fields	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	O	Y	Y	Y	N	N
Pub	Y	O	N	N	N	O	O	N	N	Y	N	N	N
Recreational Building (Commercial)	O	Y	O	O	O	O	O	O	N	Y	N	N	N
Recreational Building (Community)	Y	Y	Y	Y	O	O	Y	Y	O	Y	O	N	O
Restaurant	Y	Y	O	O	O	O	Y	O	N	O	O	O	N
Retail Warehouse	Y	O	N	N	O	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
School/ Educational Facilities	Y	O	O	O	N	N	O	O	N	N	O	N	N
Scrap Yard	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	O	N
Retail < 100sqm (Comparison)	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	O	O	N	N
Retail > 100sqm (Comparison)	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N

Land Use	Village / Town Centre	Mixed Use	Residential 1	Residential 2	Enterprise & Employment	General Business	Neighbourhood Centre	Com/Education/ Institutional	Open Space	Tourism	Horticulture	Industrial	Transport and Utilities
Retail < 100 sq m(Convenience)	Y	Y	O	O	O	Y	Y	N	N	O	O	N	N
Retail > 100 sq m (Convenience)	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
Sport/Leisure Complex	Y	Y	O	O	Y	O	O	O	N	Y	O	N	N
Utility structures/ Infrastructure (roads / carparking)	Y	Y	O	O	Y	O	O	O	O	O	Y	Y	Y
Warehouse (Wholesale)	N	N	N	N	Y	O	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
Workshops	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N

13.2.6 DENSITY

The Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas, DEHLG (2009) outline sustainable approaches to the development of urban areas. The guidelines recognise that land is a scarce resource that needs to be used efficiently. These guidelines set out a range of appropriate residential densities for different contexts based on site factors and the level of access to services and facilities.

Densities should take account of the location of a site, the proposed mix of dwelling types and the availability of public transport services. As a general principle, higher densities should be located within walking distance of town and district centres and high capacity public transport facilities.

Table 13.4: Residential Density¹

Settlement	Location for New Residential Development	Density – Units per Hectare
Key Town	Town Centre/Infill/Brownfield	35 or Site Specific
	Institutional Lands	35
	Outer Suburban/Greenfield	25 – 30 (at locations adjacent to open rural countryside)
Self Sustaining Towns/Self Sustaining Growth Towns	Town Centre/Infill/Brownfield	30 or Site Specific
	Institutional Lands	30
	Outer Suburban/Greenfield	15-25
Towns	Town Centre/Infill/Brownfield	25 or Site Specific
	Edge of Centre/Greenfield	25
Small Towns and Villages	Town/Village Centre/Infill/Brownfield	15 or Site Specific
	Edge of Centre/Greenfield	10-12
Rural Settlements	Infill/Brownfield/Edge of Centre	of The overall expansion of larger rural settlements should proceed on the basis of a number of well-integrated sites within and around the village core. Individual housing schemes will generally not be larger than about 10-12 units / ha

¹ Source: Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas, DEHLG (2009)

DN 1	<p>The appropriate residential density of a site shall be determined with reference to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009) and the accompanying Urban Design Manual (2009); • Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments 2020; • The Urban Development and Building Heights Guidelines 2018; • Recommended maximum densities per settlement tier as shown in Table 2.16 Core Strategy Table and Table 13.4 Residential Density of this Plan; • The prevailing scale and pattern of development in the area.
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13.3 DESIGN

Urban and rural design is concerned with enhancing the character of existing places and creating new places. When places are designed well, they are comfortable places to spend time, feel safe, are well-organised, are interesting to the eye and fit into their setting. With the drive at national level towards higher densities in urban areas, building design is increasingly challenging and important. With our landscapes experiencing significant change, it is as important as ever, that buildings in the countryside do not erode the essential character of our landscapes, but rather sit comfortably and are appropriate for a rural setting.

In considering applications for new residential housing estates, any extensions to town or village centres, or new mixed use developments the proposals will be examined against the following robust principles, which are key to the making of good quality places.

In its decision-making the Council will also have regard to the detailed design guidance contained in the DoEHLG's Urban Design Manual (2009) and any iteration thereafter. The character of a town or village as experienced by residents or visitors depends in large part upon the public realm. Streets constitute the largest component of the public realm; the perception of them is a major element in the overall experience of a place. Streets that are well-designed and maintained in a good state of repair, that provide for comfortable pedestrian traffic, create a positive ambience and contribute to a sense of civic pride. An attractive village or town centre will draw people in and once there encourage people to spend time, reinforcing its vitality and vibrancy.

Concerns about personal security can deter people from walking, especially when dark. Issues that can contribute to an individual's fear of crime include: poor lighting, narrow laneways, blind corners, vacancy or dereliction of buildings, absence of passive surveillance of a path, graffiti, and dense vegetation adjacent to paths. Pedestrians will generally take the shortest most convenient route regardless of the location of footpaths.

13.3.1 RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT LAYOUT CONSIDERATIONS

Design considerations for new residential development should include the following:

13.3.1.1 *Layout and Permeability*

- All new development should provide a fully permeable and recognisable interconnecting network of streets. Permeability within town and village centre must be protected and where possible improved.
- Recognisable routes which provide a coherent and easily read pattern of streets, lanes, squares, urban rooms and green spaces.
- Intersections and landmark buildings which are provided to help people find their way

around and aid orientation.

- Development should be designed for a diverse community which will encourage sustainable living and reinforce neighbourhood values.
- Residential layouts should, where appropriate, utilise the perimeter block principle as a departure from cul-de-sac type layouts.

13.3.1.2 Pedestrians and Cyclists

- Streets should be designed and well lit to encourage pedestrian activity. Priority should be given to pedestrians and cyclists by providing routes that are direct, safe and secure.
- Where provided, cycle routes should be safe, direct, coherent, attractive and comfortable.
- Pedestrian paths should be routed to maximise surveillance from surrounding buildings and well lit.

13.3.1.3 Buildings

- All housing should at a minimum be dual aspect and designed so that greatest advantage is taken of southwest orientation recent cul-de-sac type layouts. Buildings should be orientated to maximise privacy.

13.3.1.4 Public Realm

- Attractive outdoor spaces should provide a quality public realm which is essential to providing each area with its own distinctiveness.
- Passive supervision of the public realm, which is the most effective means of preventing anti-social behaviour. Medium or high-level dense vegetation should not be planted immediately adjacent to paths unless secured by fencing.
- Where developments face onto river / canals, the following design criteria should be taken into account:
 - Any proposals to increase the extent of public access;
 - The nature of any recreational use proposed; and
 - Any conflict or compliance with proposals for walking or cycling routes.

13.3.2 STREETScape

Streetscape describes the space between buildings on either side of a street, and the elements contained within, such as paving materials, road surfaces, street furniture, lighting, signage and landscape treatment. The following principles are considered important to the design and maintenance of streetscapes:

13.3.2.1 Function

- Minimise clutter, remove redundant elements.
- Commercial use of footpath for tables and chairs relating to restaurants or bars can contribute to the vibrancy of a town centre or village and are appropriate where footpaths are sufficiently wide.

13.3.2.2 Quality

- Better quality materials and components will look better and last longer, returning better value when a whole life cycle approach is considered.
- The use of durable materials and a high standard of workmanship are encouraged.

13.3.2.3 *Consistency*

- Materials in the public realm and elements of street furniture should be consistent where possible to produce a coherent streetscape.
- Different operators that shape the public realm should coordinate as much as possible.

13.3.2.4 *Sensitive to Existing Character*

- The visual, spatial and historical characteristics of a street should inform the carrying out of any environmental improvements.
- Historic elements of the streetscape such as post boxes, drinking troughs and memorials are familiar landmarks within a local area and sympathetic treatment of these elements and their settings is important.
- Formal arrangement and styling of street furniture are suited to formal streets; a more informal approach should be taken to organic or vernacular areas.
- A contemporary or historicist approach to the design of public lighting schemes, surface treatments, street furniture or signage can be equally valid, depending on the local context.
- Dark, neutral or muted colour schemes for materials work best and simple, timeless designs are often the most appropriate.
- Soft landscaping can contribute shade, softness and character to the built environment.

13.3.2.5 *Safety and Balancing of Interests*

- It is important to create a safe environment where walking and cycling represent viable alternatives to private vehicle use. In towns and villages, there is a balance to be struck between the allocation of space to private car users to allow for fast transit and high throughput and the allocation of space for wider footpaths, footpaths on either side of the street and the provision of dedicated cycle paths.

13.3.2.6 *Accessible to Everyone*

- Footpath surfaces should be firm, even and slip-resistant and mobility measures such as tactile paving and dished kerbs should be provided in accord with relevant standards and best practice guidelines.
- The provision of public seating areas in town centres can be useful to elderly people as well as other users.
- Pedestrian networks should be continuous.

13.3.2.7 *Legibility*

- Signage, lighting, recognisable routes and landmarks all contribute to a sense of place and help users orientate themselves and navigate through an area.

13.3.3 DESIGN AND GREENFIELD URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The following guidance relates to lightly trafficked new streets serving greenfield development for example a new residential estate or a new enterprise park. Although the principles may be applied to other road types where appropriate.

- **Buildings first:** Generally, layouts of buildings and spaces should be considered first, and not be dictated by carriageway alignment.
- **Hierarchical Network of Streets:** Principal arterial routes that serve the new development should be wide and provide for designated vehicular, pedestrian and cycle travel; A reduction in street width, the use of footpaths on both sides of the street and the sharing of streets by pedestrian and car traffic is appropriate for collector/distributor streets which serve multiple buildings; the use of home zones where streets or small open spaces are shared by pedestrians, cyclists and cars are suitable for mews-style developments or where buildings are sited around small public spaces and will also be considered on a pilot basis. The street width should relate to building heights and the characteristics of the street.
- **Enclosure of Streets:** The extent of the street should be clearly defined and enclosed whether by a building line, where site coverage by buildings is high or by landscaping where site coverage by buildings is low.
- **Permeability:** Pedestrians and cyclists should have more than one route to get to a destination. Block sizes, open spaces and circulation networks that permit convenient, safe and comfortable linkages are desirable with new routes connecting to existing networks and movement patterns.
- **Traffic Calming:** The use of curving streets and junctions with turning radii that require low speeds are preferable over hard traffic calming infrastructure such as speed bumps. Changes in road surface materials can alert drivers to areas where they do not have right of way.
- **Streets as Public Spaces:** Streets make up a large proportion of our public realm, so it is important they are designed as spaces for people as well as spaces for movement. Landscaping, street furniture, finishing materials can contribute interest or character to a street making it a pleasant public space to use and move through

Urban Design Policy Objectives	
UD 1	Deliver a high-quality built environment throughout Laois, by consolidating the urban structure, and reinforcing and enhancing the existing character of Laois' towns and villages and focusing on place-making in new urban or suburban developments.
UD 2	Ensure new structures are designed with special attention to the specific characteristics or features of the development site, its setting and the surrounding area, be it urban or rural.
UD 3	Encourage an improvement of the environmental quality of the existing streetscape in urban and suburban areas and ensure the delivery of streetscapes that are well-considered and designed, having regard to the principal functions of the urban or suburban street: place, movement, access, room for parking, drainage, conveyance of utilities and street-lighting.

Urban Design Policy Objectives	
UD 4	Create and maintain a network of high-quality public open spaces in urban and suburban areas to foster social inclusion, community cohesion, good health and quality of life, as well to provide meeting places, play areas, sporting facilities, walking and cycling routes and wildlife habitats.
UD 5	The Council will encourage a reduced density of housing on transition and edge of town/village lands to accommodate a greater range and mix of tenure of residential units, including smaller single dwelling units for occupants wishing to downsize and also larger site areas for executive style dwelling units.

13.3.4 DESIGN AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Laois County Council has produced Rural Housing Guidance (Appendix 7) for all those who are thinking of building a house in the countryside. It has been prepared to show the importance of good siting and sensitive design for one-off houses in the rural areas of County Laois. The aim of the Guidance is:

- To describe the site planning and design issues that need to be addressed; and
- To clearly set out what is acceptable and what is **not** acceptable in terms of one-offhouses in County Laois.

Laois County Council recognises the need to improve the quality of house design in the countryside and, in particular, that new houses are better related to their surroundings. The Guidance does this by identifying crucial site planning and design principles that need to be taken into account when considering building a new house.

This does not mean that all one-off houses should look the same. Instead the Council promotes a creative interpretation of the key principles so that individual and contemporary house designs are achieved.

The Council will require all planning applications for one-off houses to demonstrate how these guidelines have been taken into account. Proposals which fully reflect the guidelines are likely to reduce requests for further information, while those that do not are unlikely to be successful.

Rural Design Policy Objectives	
RD 1	Encourage the creation of attractive, usable, durable and adaptable structures, spaces and places in order to foster the development of sustainable and cohesive communities.
RD 2	Encourage successful coordination of proportions, material, colour and detail. Proposed new buildings should be fit-for-purpose and use internal and external space efficiently. Particular attention will be given to form, emphasis, building lines, eaves and rooflines as these elements have a significant effect on the impression of a building.

13.4 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT AND THE PLANNING PROCESS

Certain developments may require the submission of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in accordance with the provision of Schedule 5 and 7 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended).

The assessment must include an examination, analysis and evaluation and it must identify, describe and assess in an appropriate manner, in light of each individual case and in accordance with Articles 4 to 11 of the EIA Directive, the direct and indirect effects of a proposed development on the following:

- a) Population
- b) Biodiversity, with particular attention to protected species and habitats
- c) Land, soil, water, air and climate
- d) Material assets, cultural heritage and the landscape
- e) Interaction between the above factors

The Planning Authority will have regard to the Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála on carrying out Environmental Impact Assessment August, (DHPLG, 2018) and any updated version of these Guidelines when assessing relevant cases

13.4 PRE PLANNING CONSULTATIONS

The Council in accordance with Section 247 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) provides an opportunity for applicants to engage in discussions with the Planning Authority, prior to making a planning application. The Main purpose of pre planning discussions is to advise applicants of the policy provisions within the County Development Plan and/ or Local Area Plans as they relate.

Applicants are encouraged to avail of this service, particularly for large scale developments such as residential estates, quarries and wind farms, to ensure planning applications are processed in a timely manner. It should, however, be noted that such discussions will not prejudice any subsequent decision made by Laois County Council.

CHAPTER 14 IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

14.1 INTRODUCTION

The Plan sets out the Council's vision and strategy for the sustainable development of the County over the period 2021-2027 and includes a range of policy objectives that provide a framework for the future growth and development of the County.

The Council has a statutory obligation to implement the provisions of the Plan and is committed to securing its objectives.

The Council will progress the policy objectives of the Plan:

- to advance Portlaoise and Graiguecullen as Key Towns,
- to enhance economic activity, promote the transition to a low carbon County, and in particular, Portlaoise' lead role as Ireland's first low carbon town,
- to promote the County's unique cultural, built and natural heritage,
- to develop sustainable communities ensuring sustainable use of natural resources.

The implementation of the Plan is also dependant on a number of factors including collaboration with the community, key stakeholders, adjoining authorities, political support. Council funding and the availability of capital from other sources is also a key factor which, at present due to the uncertain economic climate as a result of COVID 19, may present a challenge in the years ahead.

The Plan will also be regularly reviewed in light of new legislation or guidelines, to assess progress, and to determine where amendments are required, a variation of the Plan will be necessary.

14.2 LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

The *Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)* provides under:

- Section 15 (1) that it shall be the duty of a Planning Authority to take such steps within its powers as may be necessary for securing the objectives of the Development Plan, and;
- Section 15 (2) that the Manager of the Planning Authority shall, not more than 2 years after the making of a Development Plan, give a report to the members of the authority on the progress achieved in securing the objectives referred to in subsection (1).

Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) provides under: Article 13J(2) that the report required of the manager under section 15(2) of the Act shall include information in relation to progress on, and the results of, monitoring the significant environmental effects of implementation of the development plan'

14.3 LOCAL AREA PLANS

The policy objectives of the Plan provide a general framework, but not necessarily the detailed treatment required for significant proposals in certain towns. For a number of towns within the County, a more detailed local level of spatial planning is required through the development of Local Area Plans and Joint Spatial/Local Area Plans.

Joint Local Area Plans will be prepared for the following settlements:

- **Key Town** of Graiguecullen: A Joint Local Area Plan is to be prepared in collaboration with Carlow County Council; and
- **Self Sustaining Growth Town** of Portarlinton: A Joint Local Area Plan is to be prepared in collaboration with Offaly County Council; and

Local Area Plans will be prepared for the following settlements:

- **Key Town** of Portlaoise
- **Self Sustaining Town** of Mountmellick

14.4 DEVELOPMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Development contributions for the provision of services such as roads, footpaths and amenity / open space provision, etc will be applied where appropriate to development applications. The details and basis for the determination of the contributions are set out in a Development Contribution Scheme 2017-2023 or any subsequent schemes adopted thereafter in accordance with the provision of section 48 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

14.5 URDF AND RRDF

One of the key objectives of the NPF relates to the need for compact growth, with development being focused within and close to existing built-up areas. A core element of this approach is the regeneration of infill and brownfield sites. This is in line with the NPF targets of achieving at least 50% of all new homes within or contiguous to the built-up area of Dublin city and suburbs and a target of at least 30% for other urban areas.

In this regard, it is a policy objective of Laois County Council to promote measures to reduce vacancy and the underuse of existing building stock and support initiatives that promote the reuse, refurbishment and retrofitting of existing buildings within urban centres. 30% of lands zoned for residential purposes as part of this Plan have been identified for brownfield development. These lands are primarily located in the larger urban areas such as Portlaoise, Portarlinton, Mountmellick and Graiguecullen where the greatest potential exists.

The importance of the role of regeneration in the delivery of Project Ireland 2040 is acknowledged by the provision of the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) and the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF).

The €2 Billion ten-year Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) was launched in 2018 to support compact sustainable development, through the regeneration of Ireland's cities and large towns, in line with the objectives of Project Ireland 2040 – The National Planning

Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan (NDP) 2018 -2027. The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) provides the investment framework for Eastern and Midland Region. The types of proposals eligible for funding include strategic development areas, active land management, measures to address building vacancy and refurbishment, public realm improvements, enabling infrastructure, sustainable mobility and transition to low carbon and climate resilience.

14.5.1 REGENERATION DEMONSTRATION PROJECT - PORTLAOISE

The aim of this project is to focus on regenerating the original town centre and main street areas and how they relate to the expanded town, with a view to creating more attractive, desirable places that people want to live and spend time in. The Demonstration Project will be initiated on a community and locally led urban design and renewal initiative. The national Regeneration and Development Agency, with investment from the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund and wider community and local businesses, will create and deliver a new vision for the centre of Portlaoise, to show how the best quality planning, urban design and implementation can create a rejuvenated town. There will be a particular focus on self-sustaining and community-driver renewal.

14.5.2 RURAL REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT FUND (RRDF).

The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund is a commitment of €1 billion by government to be invested in rural Ireland over the period 2019 to 2027. The purpose of the fund is to support job creation in rural areas, address de-population of rural communities and support improvements in our towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000, and outlying areas.

It will be a key instrument to support the objectives of the NPF and to aid in the implementation of the RSES and the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027.

14.6 BONDS

Depending on the nature of the development, the Council may require, as a condition of planning permission, the lodgment of financial security to ensure that the permitted development is satisfactorily completed.

The amount of the security will be determined by the Council and will be reviewed during the plan period. The security will be held by the Council until all works are satisfactorily completed to the exacting standards of the Council, or until the development is taken in charge by the Council

14.7 PHASING

The timely provision of supporting infrastructure and community facilities in tandem with the development of areas is important in ensuring high quality, sustainable development takes place. All large-scale development proposals shall be phased having regard to the delivery of both physical and social infrastructure and orderly development.

14.8 MONITORING AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Planning Department of the Council is the lead section responsible for monitoring and implementing the Plan, mainly through its development management function.

However, it is important to note that this Plan co-ordinates the work and objectives of not only of the Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development directorates but also the Corporate and Emergency Services, Operations, Housing, as well as the Finance and Water Service directorates.

In some instances, the implementation of certain policy objectives may be the responsibility of external bodies such as OPW, Irish Water, National Parks & Wildlife Service, Fisheries Ireland, National Roads Authority, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, and the Environmental Protection Agency etc. The Planning Authority will work in collaboration with the relevant external body to assist in ensuring the implementation of the relevant policy objective.

The t Plan policy objectives are specific, measurable, achievable and realistic. However, a number are set within a longer timeframe, thus they may not be fully implemented over the lifetime of this Plan.

14.8.1 IMPLEMENTATION AND MONTORING OF THE CORE STRATEGY

The NPF states that new statutory guidelines, supported by wider methodologies and data sources, will be put in place under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act to improve the evidence base, effectiveness and consistency of the planning process for housing provision at regional, metropolitan and local authority levels.

This will be supported by the provision of standardised requirements by regulation for the recording of planning and housing data by the local authorities in order to provide a consistent and robust evidence base for housing policy formulation.

The mode share targets set for County Laois are focused on internal work and college trips. In terms of sustainable modes, "A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020" set out key National modal share targets for achievement by 2020.

These targets were aimed at reducing work-related commuting by car as a modal share from 73% to 45% and accommodating car drivers on other modes of transport such as walking, cycling, public transport and car sharing. Although these targets have not been achieved, County Laois would aim to achieve this modal shift by 2040 and are putting in place many initiatives to deliver on this which are supported in policy objectives throughout the plan. The figures will be adjusted in accordance with Government policy and updated once a new census has been carried out in 2022.

The development of multi-modal options has been based on these mode share targets.

Table 14.1 - Modal share targets for Co Laois 2040

Modal share Targets for County Laois 2040				
Mode Share	Walk	cycle	Public Transport	Car
2016	6%	1%	4%	73%
2040	20%	15%	20%	45%

As such, Laois County Council, as set out in section 2.18, will monitor ongoing developments in this respect and review the operation and implementation of this Plan. This includes adjustments as needed to ensure the effectiveness of its alignment with National and Regional policy and objectives.

Implementation and Monitoring Policy Objective	
IM 1	Monitor development for compliance with the objectives of the Core Strategy and adjust, where necessary, the approach taken to the consideration of development proposals in order to ensure effective alignment with National and Regional policy and objectives.
IM2	Support the ongoing monitoring and review of the Housing Need Demand Assessment (HNDA) and monitor and maintain a record of residential development permitted in the open countryside, in accordance with forthcoming Departmental guidance for the establishment of a Housing Need Demand Assessment Coordination and Monitoring Unit and related implementation of a centralised spatial database for local authority housing.

14.9 STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The SEA Directive requires that the significant environmental effects of the implementation of plans and programmes are monitored. Monitoring can both demonstrate the positive effects facilitated by the Plan and can enable, at an early stage, the identification of unforeseen adverse effects and the undertaking of appropriate remedial action.

The occurrence of significant adverse environmental effects not predicted and mitigated by this assessment, which are directly attributable to the implementation of the Plan, would necessitate consideration of these effects in the context of the Plan and potential remediation action(s) and/or review of part(s) of the Plan.

14.9.1 INDICATORS AND TARGETS

Monitoring is based around indicators which allow quantitative measures of trends and progress over time relating to the Strategic Environmental Objectives identified in Section 5 of the SEA Environmental Report and used in the evaluation. Each indicator to be monitored is accompanied by the target(s) which were identified with regard to the relevant strategic actions. Given the position of the Development Plan in the land use planning hierarchy beneath the Eastern and Midland Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), the measures identified in that RSES SEA have been used – as they are or having been slightly modified – in most instances. This consistency across the hierarchy of land use plans will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of future monitoring programmes.

Table 10.1 of the SEA Environmental Report shows the indicators and targets which have been selected for monitoring the likely significant environmental effects of implementing the Plan, if unmitigated. Monitoring is an ongoing process and the programme allows for flexibility and the further refinement of indicators and targets. The Monitoring Programme may be updated to deal with specific environmental issues – including unforeseen effects – as they arise. Many of the indicators relate to more than one of the freshwater and terrestrial environments.

14.9.2 SOURCES

The Plan will form part of the wider land use planning framework comprising a hierarchy of policies, plans, programmes, etc. This wider framework, including the National Planning Framework and the Eastern and Midland RSES, is subject to its own SEA (and associated monitoring) requirements. At lower tiers of the hierarchy, Local Area Plans and individual projects will be subject to their own monitoring requirements as relevant.

In implementing the Monitoring Programme, the Council will take into account this hierarchy of planning and environmental monitoring. Sources for indicators may include existing monitoring databases (including those maintained by planning authorities and national/regional government departments and agencies) and the output of lower-tier environmental assessment and decision making (including a review of project approvals granted and associated documents and the output of any EIA monitoring programmes).

Internal monitoring of the environmental effects of grants of permission in the Council would provide monitoring of certain indicators on a grant of permission basis. Where significant adverse as the result of a development to be permitted are identified, such effects could be identified, recorded and used to inform monitoring evaluation.

14.9.3 IMPLEMENTATION AND MONTORING OF THE CORE STRATEGY

The Council shall, in conjunction with the Regional Assembly and other sources as relevant, implement the monitoring programme as set out in the SEA Environmental Report and Statement. This will include the preparation of stand-alone SEA Monitoring Reports:

1. To accompany the report required of the manager under Section 15(2) of the Act, including information in relation to progress on, and the results of, monitoring the significant environmental effects of implementation of the Plan, as required by Article13J(2) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended);

On the significant environmental effects of implementing the Plan, in advance of the beginning of the review of the next Plan

Implementation and Monitoring Policy Objective	
IM 3	Prepare a stand-alone SEA Monitoring Report on the significant environmental effects of implementing the Plan in advance of the beginning of the review of the next Plan.

GLOSSARY

ACA	Architectural Conservation Area
CAFE	Cleaner air for Europe Directive
CEDRA	Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas
CEMPs	Construction and Environmental Management Plans
CIP	Capital Investment Programme
COA	Certificate of Authorisation
COMAH	Control of Major Accident Hazards
COR	Certificate of Registration
CRU	Commission for Regulation of Utilities
DAP	Drainage Area Plan
DHPLG	Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government
DMA	District Meter Area
DMURS	Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets,
DTTS	Department of Transport
DECLG	Department of Environment Community and Local Government
EPA	Environmental Protection Authority
EVs	Electric Vehicles
GWS	Group Water Schemes
HSE	Health Service Executive
IFA	Irish Farmers Association
IWSTVGP	Irish Water Small Towns and Villages Growth Programme
LAWPRO	Local Authority Waters Programme,
LCDC	Local Community and Development Committee
LEO	Local Enterprise Office
LECP	Local Economic and Community Plan
NCAP	National Certificate of Authorisation Programme
NEEAP	National Energy Efficiency Action Plan
NFGWS	National Federation of Group Water schemes
NPF	National Planning Framework
NTA	National Transport Authority
PWS	Public Water Supply
RBMP	River Basin Management Plan
RMCEI	Recommended Minimum Criteria for Environmental Inspections
RPS	Record of Protected Structures
RSES	Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SLA	Service Level Agreements
SPS	Small Private Supplies
TEN-T	Trans-European Networks
TTA	Traffic and Transport Assessment
TTI	Transport Infrastructure Ireland
WFD	Water Framework Directive
WFP	Waste Facility Permit
WHO	World Health Organisation
WWSP	Water Services Strategic Plan
WWTW	Wastewater Treatment Work