

CHAPTER 5 - COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL FACILITIES

Introduction	48
Objectives	48
Educational Facilities	48
Existing Trends	48
Childcare Facilities	50
Community Facilities	51
Healthcare Facilities	51
Fire Services	52
Public Utilities	52
Facilities for Interments	52
Recreation and Sport	54
Sports Provision in County Laois	54

CHAPTER 5: SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES

AIM: To facilitate the provision of social and recreational infrastructure and to provide access to new and existing community and social facilities throughout the county, for all citizens.

INTRODUCTION

5.1 This chapter outlines the County Councils policy in relation to facilitating the provision of and management of community facilities across a range of sectors namely, childcare, health and education and other social infrastructure which has a direct bearing on peoples lives.

OBJECTIVES

5.2 The objectives for social and community infrastructure are to:

- Ensure that provision of access for the mobility impaired to and from existing public buildings and that all future buildings are designed in accordance with the publication "Building for everyone – Access and use for all citizens" (1998) published by the National Rehabilitation Board;
- Ensure adequate land and services are reserved, where demand exists, for the establishment, improvement or expansion of educational facilities;
- Implement the 5 year library Plan;
- Maintain and improve burial grounds in association with the relevant burial grounds committees;
- Provide a satisfactory Fire, Emergency and Civil Defence Service throughout the County;
- Facilitate and assist in the provision of sites and facilities which promote, encourage or facilitate community formation, integration and development;
- Provide worthwhile recreational opportunities for the widest possible range of age groups and interests.

EDUCATION FACILITIES

5.3 A number of schools in the County have a need for additional accommodation, play, sports and car parking facilities. Improvements in standard of accommodation and facilities in existing schools are envisaged for the Plan period. The Council will co-operate with the relevant groups and Government Departments to ensure that there are adequate school places to accommodate new developments.

Existing Trends

5.4 There are 74 education centres in Co. Laois including 59 national schools, 12 post primary schools and 3 centres for further education.

5.5 In light of recent population trends, a number of national schools especially those in the larger urban centres, are experiencing capacity problems.

5.6 There are no conventional third level education centres in Co. Laois. While Carlow Institute of Technology, Athlone Institute of Technology and Tipperary Rural Business Development Institution are all within relatively easy commuting distance, the absence of any such facility in the county is regarded as a serious drawback. This is especially important in the context of the ever changing technological environment in which modern global business tends to

operate and which places a major premium in the availability of a young, highly skilled and computer literate labour force.

5.7 It is also cited as the principal reason for the relatively low third level education participation rates in the county. According to Table 8, Co. Laois has a third level education participation rate of only 15.3%. Whereas the comparable figures for the state and province are 20.9% and 22.8% respectively.

Table 9: Third Level Participation Rates at County, Provincial & National Level.

Locus	Total aged 15 years & over	3 rd level non-degree	3 rd level degree or higher	Total 3 rd Level	3 rd level# participation rate
Co. Laois	45,118	3,251	3,659	6,910	15.3%
Province	1,664,380	138,419	241,691	380,110	22.8%
State	3,089,775	250,429	396,408	646,837	20.9%

Source: CSO, Ireland

5.8 Laois County Council will work the relevant bodies to implement the following:

- To reduce the rate of early school leaving;
- To increase retention rate at school;
- To expand adult education and second chance education and training;
- To widen of access to third level education;
- To encourage life long learning;
- To developing age appropriate after-school programmes and facilities in conjunction with the relevant bodies.

5.9 Early school leaving remains a worrying societal concern. In County Laois, successful programmes providing the necessary full time training for early school leavers, long term unemployed and people from marginalized groups and communities are in place. These programmes are funded by FAS.

5.10 Laois Youth reach programme is a new programme for early school leavers and is managed by County Laois Educational Committee in association with Youth and Community Partnerships.

CF1 Education

It is the policy of Laois County Council:

- To work with the education institutions to facilitate their expansion and redevelopment proposals in the most sustainable way possible so that the benefits of participation in adult education, further education and training courses by the long term unemployed, people from marginalized groups and communities (persons from disadvantaged backgrounds, persons with mobility impairment) can be achieved;
- To require the provision of School Impact Reports in conjunction with planning application in order to assess the impacts of proposed development on existing educational infrastructure.

CF2 Third Level Education Provision

It is the policy of Laois County Council:

- To actively encourage links with the surrounding Colleges and Institutes and market their skills and courses to the advantage of the County in attracting inward investment;
- To actively encourage expansion of outreach campuses in County Laois which will complement local enterprise development, and
- To facilitate the continued development of technical and vocational training and foster links between the surrounding third level institutions in Carlow, Athlone and other locations.

5.11 Laois County Council actively seek to work with the VEC, FAS, IPA and other such bodies to facilitate a broad range of educational and training facilities and to ensure that information on these educational facilities is made available in accordance with the requirements of the relevant educational authorities.

Childcare Facilities

5.12 National policy on childcare provision is to ultimately increase the number of childcare places available and improve the quality of childcare services in the community. The provision of childcare facilities is now one of the most important necessities for improving economic and social wellbeing. In addition the National Anti Poverty Strategy identifies access to and the provision of childcare facilities as a way of combating poverty and social exclusion. The Childcare Facility Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DoELG, 2001) emphasise the role of planning in the promotion of increased childcare provision.

5.13 Policies will encourage the provision of childcare facilities in appropriate locations including residential areas, town centre and neighbourhood areas and in areas of employment, i.e. business parks and industrial estates. In line with the guidelines referred to in the paragraph above provision should be made for purpose built, easily accessible childcare facilities in new residential developments of 75 dwellings or more. In existing residential areas smaller scale childcare facilities will be considered but the use must be ancillary to the main residential element of the dwelling and traffic and access arrangements must not interfere with the general residential amenity of the area. Development control standards in relation to the provision of childcare facilities are outlined in Chapter 10: Development Control Standards.

CF 3 Childcare Facilities

It is the policy of Laois County Council to:

- Encourage the provision of childcare facilities in appropriate locations, including residential areas, town centre and neighbourhood centres and in areas of employment in consultation with Laois County Childcare Committee. Such facilities will normally provide open space play areas, good accessibility and off street car parking and will be subject to the normal proper planning and development considerations;
- Continue to implement the Laois Childcare Strategy (2002-2006) and to endeavour to undertake a review of the Strategy in 2006. The review will strengthen the existing strategy and continue to help deliver policy guidance on childcare.

CF 4 Childcare Provision in new residential areas

It is Council Policy to:

- To require the provision of appropriate purpose built childcare facilities as an integral part of proposals for new residential development of more than 75 residential units. In applications for phased developments, proposals for crèches should be submitted as an integral part of the overall development.

CF5 Childcare provision in rural areas

It is council policy to:

- Encourage the provision of child care facilities in rural areas.

Community Facilities

5.14 The provision of a wide range of community facilities ranging from community halls and resources centres to arts exhibition areas, libraries, etc allow for participation by a wide variety of different groups in an array of uses such a arts, youth work, sports and recreation. This is paramount in the social development of all communities throughout the County. The County Council will continue to work with Laois Community Forum and individual community groups in making such facilities available.

5.15 The County Council currently operate Library facilities around the County. Plans are at an advanced stage for the refurbishment of the Market house in Abbeyleix to include the provision of a public library and there are proposals to provide/refurbish existing facilities in Mounrath, Mountmellick and Portlaoise to provide cultural exchanges.

CF 6 Community Facilities

It is Council Policy to:

- Encourage the provision and further development of community facilities which are flexible and capable of being managed for a number of different uses and to encourage the further use of existing facilities. This policy will have regard to locational opportunities which may arise as a result of policy expressed in CF7.

CF 7 New Library Facilities

It is Council Policy to:

- To provide for local library services in Abbeyleix, Mounrath, Mountmellick, and Portlaoise.

Healthcare facilities

5.16 There are a number of public, voluntary and private agencies responsible for the provision of healthcare facilities in the county, with the Midlands Health Board being the primary agency responsible for delivering health and personal social services. The main hospitals for the county are located in Portlaoise and Mountmellick and most institutions are expected to undergo some degree of development, change of focus and possibly redevelopment over the next plan period.

- 5.17 Healthcare policy is shifting from traditional hospital based care towards community based care with an increased emphasis on meeting peoples needs at a primary level by local sector teams. Community service such as health centres, day care centres, sheltered housing, family resource centres, and youth work programmes, residential care centres for children and those with special needs and other disabilities all require locations which are integrated with new and existing communities and which are accessible.

CF 8 Healthcare facilities

It is Council Policy to:

- Facilitate the provision of healthcare facilities which will develop the system of healthcare and to also facilitate the provision of appropriate community based care facilities subject to proper planning considerations.

CF 9 Community Based Care Facilities

It is Council Policy to:

- Provide for the integration of community based healthcare facilities in both existing and new communities and to ensure that they are accessible to those with special needs such as the elderly and all with disabilities.

FIRE SERVICES

- 5.18 The Central Fire Station is located on the Dublin Road in Portlaoise. The Brigade deals with Fire calls, vehicle accidents, chemical/oil spillages, flooding and deals with matters that arise under the Dangerous Substances Legislation. The service also provides licensing and certification of new development and monitors existing structures in terms of fire prevention.

CF10 Fire and Emergency Service

It is Council Policy to:

- Continue to provide a modern and effective fire and emergency service.

PUBLIC UTILITIES

- 5.19 Laois County Council, together with other utility companies and authorities, provide important services for residents, visitors and employers in County Laois. Laois County Council both directly and through the facilitation of other utility companies and authorities will seek to ensure the efficient and effective provision of utility services throughout the County.

FACILITIES FOR INTERMENTS

- 5.20 Laois County Council, Water Services Section provides facilities for interments through extension of existing, and provision of new burial grounds and by supporting voluntary groups in maintaining existing burial grounds.

CF 11 Interment Facilities

It is Council Policy to:

- Provide facilities for internments through the extension of existing, and provision of new burial grounds.
- Facilitate the provision of crematoriums at appropriate locations.

RECREATION AND SPORT

- 5.21 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 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.

Open Space Provision

CF12

It is the policy of the County Council to:

- Ensure that open space is provided to enhance the character of residential areas;
- Require developers to make provision for sport and recreational infrastructure as an integral element of their proposals. Such provision should include direct provision on or off site or a development levy to enable the Council to make appropriate alternative provision;
- Encourage developers to pool land for the purposes of open space requirements to allow for the provision of multipurpose amenity areas (e.g. playing pitches) as well as small ancillary open spaces within residential areas;
- Prepare an open space plan for the County having regard to the town parks, riverside walks and other amenity spaces;
- Ensure that a range of options are explored for the provision of open space in consultation with the County Play strategy;
- Pursue the provision of riverside walks and fishing areas, and where appropriate, the development of ancillary facilities to ensure that these are user-friendly and the development of other unique recreational offerings such as mountain biking at appropriate sites, in order to harness the potential of the county;

Open Space Policies will be considered in the context of these provisions as required in Chapter 10.

- 5.22 The Planning Authority will charge an appropriate levy on developments, which will be used for the pooling of land and development of amenity areas.

Sports provision in County Laois

- 5.23 Laois Sports Partnership was established in 2001 as part of the Irish Sports Council 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. Sporting facilities should be well managed and accessible.

CF 13 Recreations and Sports Provision

Laois County Council will not normally permit development, which would result in the loss of playing fields, parks, children's play space, amenity open space or land zoned for recreational or open space purposes.

An exception may be considered where the following requirements are demonstrably met:

- There is a clear excess of playing fields or open space provision within the area. This should take into account the long term needs of the community, the type of recreational and amenity value of such provision;
- Alternative provision is made which is both accessible and of equal or greater quality and benefit to the community;
- The continued use and proper maintenance of the facility can best be achieved by the redevelopment of a small part of the site that will not adversely affect its sporting, recreational or amenity value;

- 5.24 The County Laois Play Strategy 2004-2008 is aimed at developing new and existing play services and facilities in the County through consultation with children, parents, agencies, voluntary and community groups in line with the objectives of the National Play Policy 2004.

CF 14 Play Strategy

It is Council Policy to:

- To encourage new innovative leisure facilities. Supervised and covered playgrounds will be considered as appropriate subject to the development control standards and environmental criteria.

- 5.25 A demand has been shown for public playgrounds in the County. A new public playground was opened in Portarlinton in 2005.

CF 15 Public Playgrounds

It is Council Policy to:

- Maintain and where possible to improve the provision of public playgrounds in appropriate locations across the County.

- 5.26 Given that Portlaoise has been designated as a National transportation Hub - "Inland Port", Laois County Council will investigate the potential to develop a regional sports centre that would incorporate a range of facilities currently lacking in the region.

CF 16 Regional Sports Centre

Laois County Council will work in co-operation with Laois Sports Partnership and will explore the potential for clustering facilities to provide a regional sports centre in a strategic location.

CF 17 Motorcycles/Quads and 4WDS

Control of Motorcycles/quads and 4WDS will be considered in areas which are environmentally sensitive.

CF18 Noise generating Sports

Where development proposals for sport or recreational uses, generating high levels of noise, are proposed permission will be considered where the following criteria are met:

- The proposal will not cause an unacceptable level of disturbance to local residents;
- The proposal will not cause an unacceptable level of disturbance to farm livestock and wildlife;
- The proposal will not conflict with the enjoyment of areas used for informal recreation;
- The ambient noise level in the area is already high and the tone of noise produced by new activity will not be dominant.