

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The County Development Plan 2005 for Laois sets out Laois County Council's policies for the overall development of the County up to 2012. It has been developed following a period of intensive consultation on issues to be included in the Plan. This was done by way of various public meetings in the five electoral areas organised through the Laois Community Forum, meeting with the planning agents – architects, engineers and end users of the Plan, meetings with service providers, written submissions and seminars and workshops for the elected members where debate and discussion was facilitated.
- 1.2 It outlines Laois County Council policies for ensuring balanced and sustainable economic and social growth throughout the County through direct action by Laois County Council internal departments and in conjunction with state, private and community sectors.
- 1.3 The Plan has regard to the Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines 2004 – 2010. It also takes account of the Laois County Development Board's Strategy – "Realise Your Potential"(2002-2012) and a range of other strategies and local plans and programmes, including:
- Laois County Council Corporate Plan 2004-2009;
 - Laois County Heritage Plan 2002-2006;
 - Laois County Council Housing Strategy 2005-2011;
 - The Accommodation of Travelling Families in County Laois 2005-2008;
 - Laois Retail Strategy 2003;
 - Portarlington Land Use and Transportation Strategy;
 - Portlaoise Land Use and Transportation Study 2000;
 - Economic/Promotional Strategy for County Laois – A & L Goodbody Report;
 - Appraisal of development opportunities at Portlaoise Motorway Interchanges -Branniff Report ;
 - Laois Arts Plan 2006-2011;
 - Homelessness – An Integrated Strategy for County Laois;
 - County Laois Play Strategy 2004-2008;
 - Laois County Childcare Strategy 2002 – 2006.
- 1.4 In preparing the County Development Plan the County Council had regard to relevant national plans, policies and strategies which relate to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. It also had regard to the plans of adjoining authorities. The Plan also takes account of the mandatory requirements which are to be included in Development Plans as set out in the Planning and Development Act 2000.
- 1.5 The main national plans, policies and guidelines, which must be considered, are:
- ***The National Development Plan 2000-2006*** which aims for balanced regional development and has identified County Laois as having a strategic role in the Midlands Region. Include the National Roads Development Plans/Programmes as published by the NRA
 - The ***National Spatial Strategy (NSS)*** which sets out Government policy in relation to achieving balanced regional development and has identified the strategic centrality and prominence of County Laois and indeed Portlaoise town as having strong National

Development Potential as a major transport hub and distribution centre, fulfilling the role of inland port.

- ***Sustainable Development: A Strategy for Ireland 1997***, which provides a framework for the achievement of sustainability at a local level.
- ***The National Anti Poverty Strategy*** which promotes social inclusion.
- ***Ministerial Guidelines and Directives*** including those on Housing Strategies, Retail Planning, Childcare, Residential Density, Architectural Conservation, Landscapes, Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines and Strategic Environmental Assessment Guidelines. Due regard will be taken of all future amendments during the plan period.
- ***Local Agenda 21*** identifies the principles for the involvement and participation of local communities in the local democratic process. Laois County Council is committed to the objectives of Local Agenda 21 as indicated in the guidelines "Towards Sustainable Local Communities".
- ***The National Biodiversity Plan 2002*** which aims at the conservation including where possible the enhancement and sustainable use of biological diversity in Ireland and to contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity globally.
- ***The National Heritage Plan 2002*** sets out a clear and coherent strategy and framework for the protection and enhancement of heritage over the next 5 years.
- ***Guidelines on Residential Development in Designated Tax Incentive Areas.***
- ***Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines-Guidelines for Planning Authorities.***

1.6 At a Regional level the main strategies to be considered are:

- ***Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines 2004*** which provides a strategy for the Midlands Region up to 2020 which aims at enhancing the critical mass of the region by combining the strengths of the gateway as envisaged in the NSS by including the county town of Portlaoise into the polycentric model for growth in the region.
- ***Midlands Waste Management Strategy 2001*** (currently under review) which provides a framework for the management of waste in the Midlands Region in accordance with current national and EU waste legislation/policy.

OVERALL GOALS

1.7.1 The Development Plan aims to achieve goals, which are designed first and foremost to improve the quality of everyday working, living and social life of the current and future population of County Laois.

In order to achieve this it is necessary to develop and improve the social, physical, economic and cultural aspects without compromising the environmental health of the County. The goals are as follows:

To encourage the sustainable development of Portlaoise as a major transportation and distribution centre in the midlands and to work in partnership with the relevant transportation authorities in pursuit of this goal in the short and mid term

1.7.2 In order to achieve this emphasis will be placed on facilitating development and infrastructural work and encouraging a high quality of design.

To encourage and promote balanced and sustainable growth patterns in urban and rural areas so as to develop the potential of County Laois and fulfil its role as envisaged in the NSS and Regional Planning Guidelines and the County Development Board Strategy.

- 1.9.1 This goal seeks to achieve the balanced and sustainable growth patterns in urban and rural areas in County Laois. In order to achieve this, particular emphasis will be placed on maintaining a high quality living, working and natural environment, protecting and providing for the local population and enhancing and managing the natural and built heritage.

To promote and encourage social inclusion in all aspects of life so as to ensure equal access to all employment, educational, transport, social and cultural activities.

- 1.10 Achieving social inclusion is now one of the fundamental goals in the Corporate Plan. The need to promote social inclusion is a key objective also of the National Development Plan and the National Anti Poverty Strategy. The Council is committed to ensuring that all policies and actions contribute positively towards achieving this fundamental goal. All policies of the County Development Plan will have regard to social inclusion principles.

To maintain and improve the quality of life for all local people and visitors to the County by ensuring that the rural landscape and towns and villages retain their natural and built character.

- 1.11 The attractiveness of the County is to a large degree dependent on the quality and character of the environment, the buildings, public realm, amenity areas and natural heritage. A good quality environment is important to the County for reasons of quality of life and economic prosperity. The County Council therefore introduces a range of measures in this Plan to ensure a high quality built and natural environment. In this regard emphasis will be placed on the principles of good urban and rural design.

To provide for and protect the interests of the local population of the County

- 1.12 One of the main underlying issues in the County is the provision of housing for local people. It is the intention of the Planning Authority to allow reasonable choice to live in both rural and urban areas in a manner which does not affect the environmental character of the area and ultimately the residential amenity of existing residents. The Council therefore proposes a more flexible settlement policy which will protect the existing residential amenity, to provide opportunity for future generations, and counteract rural depopulation.

To promote, maintain and enhance the rural character and the existing settlement hierarchy within the County

- 1.13 The County continues to experience urban growth. This growth will be facilitated through the provision of necessary services, as finances allow.

STRATEGIC AIMS

- 1.14 These goals underlie all the policies contained in the Plan. A more specific set of Strategic Aims setting out what the plan intends to achieve has been developed from these goals. These strategic aims will be realised through a series of integrated strategies detailed in the plan. The strategic aims are:

- To facilitate the future sustainable development of County Laois so as to optimise the benefits of its location, in accordance with the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) and the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines;

- 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;
- To promote balanced and sustainable economic development and employment throughout the County, ensuring that a diverse range of economic sectors are developed and supported;
- To facilitate the provision of social and recreational infrastructure and to provide access to new and existing community and social facilities throughout the County;
- To facilitate the economic and social development of the County through the provision of adequate transport infrastructure and to optimise the return of investment on infrastructure while preserving the natural and built heritage;
- To ensure a good quality of life for the citizens of Laois, through maintaining and improving waste water treatment and water supplies and to minimise the adverse impacts of development on the environment, through policies for the management of wastes and emissions;
- To reinforce the distinctive character of County Laois through ensuring that sites and species of biodiversity importance are identified, conserved and managed appropriately and by promoting awareness and enjoyment of the heritage of the County;
- 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;
- To ensure the orderly development of the county through the implementation of development control policies and standards for a range of developments;
- To promote the balanced and sustainable development of the urban and rural areas of the County for a range of residential, services and employment opportunities;
- To facilitate the achievement of the commitment given to Portlaoise in the National Spatial Strategy and Regional Planning Guidelines;
- To promote and encourage the development of the critical mass of Portlaoise and to enhance its strategic location on the national and regional road and rail network;
- To promote the development of sustainable transportation corridors within the county in accordance with the vision of the NSS.

STRUCTURE OF THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

- 1.15 The Plan consists of a written statement, accompanying maps and includes policies, strategies and objectives for the County at large and for specific settlements. The Plan pertains to the administrative area of County Laois and is presented in two sections.
- 1.16 Section 1 relates to the strategic policies for the County in general. The structure of Section 1 is closely related to the aims outlined above. Chapter 1 sets out the national and regional strategic framework within which the County Plan operates. The following chapters set out policies and actions under a range of topic headings:
2. Strategic Context;
 3. Housing and Settlement Policy;
 4. Enterprise and Employment;
 5. Social and Community Issues;
 6. Transportation;
 7. Environmental Management;
 8. Natural Heritage and Recreation, and
 9. Built Heritage and Urban Design.
- 1.17 All policy chapters should be read in conjunction with Chapter 10: Development Control Standards.
- 1.18 An Environmental Appraisal of the main policies in the Plan forms the final chapter.
- 1.19 Section 2 contains the settlement strategy for the County and contains zoning and settlement plans for the following villages and towns set out in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Towns and Villages

No	Location	No	Location
1	Abbeyleix	18	Errill
2	Arles	19	Graiguecullen (Carlow Environs)
3	Attanagh	20	Killenard
4	Ballacolla	21	Killeshin
5	Ballinakill	22	Mountmellick
6	Ballybrittas	23	Mountrath
7	Ballyfin	24	New Inn
8	Ballylynan	25	Newtown Doonane
9	Ballyroan	26	Portarlinton
10	Borris in Ossory	27	Portlaoise
11	Camross	28	Rathdowney
12	Castletown	29	Rosenallis
13	Clonaslee	30	Shanahoe
14	Clough	31	Stradbally
34	Coolrain	32	The Swan
15	Cullahill	33	Timahoe
16	Durrow	34	Vicarstown
17	Emo		

- 1.20 Appendix A contains the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) for the County and towns and villages which has been updated in line with the Ministerial recommendations as a result of the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) carried out by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG).

LOCAL PLANNING

- 1.21 Where appropriate the policies of the County Development Plan will be developed in more detail at a local level through the preparation of Local Area Plans, framework Plans, urban design strategies and design briefs. Proposals are put forward in the plan identifying some areas of the County, which would benefit from such an approach. These areas are selected based on their need for regeneration, renewal or pressure for development. Local Planning will be set within the context of the County Development Plan and will involve extensive local consultation.
- 1.22 A programme for preparation of local plans and strategies will be developed following from the adoption of the County Development Plan.
- 1.23 Local Area Plans are mandatory in certain circumstances as indicated in Section 19(1)(b) of the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act 2000 and the Planning Authority is obliged to make Local Area Plans for any area which
- Is designated as a town in the most recent census (not including suburbs and environs);
 - Has a population of more than 2000; and
 - Is situated within the functional area of a County Council.
- 1.24 Portlaoise, Portarlinton and Mountmellick fall within the parameters of this requirement and it is an objective of the Planning Authority that these towns have Local Area Plans. Graiguecullen (Carlow Environs) whilst falling beneath the population threshold for the requirement of the Act shall be the subject of a Local Area Plan owing to the shared nature of the urban area with Carlow Town Council.
- 1.25 It is an objective of the Planning Authority to carry out a Local Area Plan under Section 18(2) of the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act 2000, whereby two or more planning authorities may co-operate in preparing a local area plan in respect of any area which lies within the combined functional area of the authorities concerned.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

- 1.26 The Council will strive to secure the financial resources necessary to implement the policies and objectives of the Plan.