

Evaluation of the Laois Heritage Plan

Report to Laois County Council

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1. Executive summary

An evaluation of the Laois Heritage Plan 2002-2006 was undertaken using standardised methodology developed by the Heritage Council. Performance indicators were developed to measure the effectiveness of the individual actions in the Plan. Consultations with stakeholders and the consultants' own knowledge and observations informed the evaluation.

The Laois Heritage Plan 2002-2006 is an ambitious document and comprises 13 objectives and 89 actions. One plan action is a statement of a legal position, one action (8.25) could not be completed because the relevant schemes had been suspended nationally, 57 of the actions were fully completed by March 2006 and 11 partially completed or underway. Of the 19 actions not yet completed, 3 are planned for inclusion in the next Heritage Plan (2007-2011).

The number of actions yet to be completed does not necessarily detract from the overall effectiveness of the Plan: some actions can be considered more important than others. For instance, the appointment of a full-time Heritage Officer in 2003 represents major progress and some actions could not have been undertaken without this appointment. Examples of important surveys undertaken were the survey of industrial sites, database of protected structures and their owners, the wildlife habitat survey, the hedgerows survey and the esker survey.

Notable awareness-raising actions include those concerned with hedgerows, folklore and folklife and Tidy Towns. The Laois website itself includes many publications on the county's heritage, most of which are based on actions in the Heritage Plan. The Laois website layout is accessible and well-presented.

The Laois Heritage Plan does not include actions on the aquatic environment and forestry, both of which we recommend for inclusion in the Laois Heritage Plan 2007-2011.

Awareness-raising - a central aim of the Heritage Plan - needs to increase steadily for positive results of Heritage Planning to be achieved. This need is apparent in Laois, although very good awareness-raising actions have already been completed.

Concerning the management of the Plan, we are satisfied that the appropriate procedures were followed, accounts are in order and well-presented, annual reports are concise and readable and internal documentation is accessible.

Recommendations are made for the structure and implementation of the Laois Heritage Plan 2007-2011, which includes the adoption of objective-based performance indicators. The approach we recommend should result in a more dynamic and responsive Heritage Plan. General and specific recommendations are also made for a range of heritage topics in County Laois.

We also recommend that the Heritage Council's evaluation methodology should be reviewed in the light of this evaluation.

Appendices include Heritage Office annual work reports, a list of stakeholders consulted and the consultants' brief.

2. Introduction

This section informs the reader about the roles of the various agencies and individuals involved with Heritage Plans in general. The remaining sections focus specifically on the Laois Heritage Plan.

2.1 The purpose of this report

This purpose of this report is to present the findings of the independent evaluation of the Laois Heritage Plan, 2002-2006. Evaluation of Heritage Plans is promoted by the State's advisory body on heritage, the Heritage Council. The layout of the report and the evaluation conform to standardised Heritage Council methodology (Heritage Council, 2003 and 2006). The Laois Heritage Plan 2002-2006 was the first such plan to be produced.

2.2 What is a County Heritage Plan?

The Heritage Council defines a Heritage Plan as “a cross-agency county strategy for the identification, protection, conservation, management, enhancement and interpretation of the heritage. It is an agreed, realistic and costed action plan, with reference to the delivery mechanisms”. “Whatever the scale, it should identify priorities for action by all stakeholders, over a five year period, and should include a mechanism for review and evaluation.”

A Heritage Plan can have a wide scope, embracing monuments, archaeological objects, folklore and folklife, buildings of architectural merit, historical and genealogical documents and artefacts, geological features, waterways, fauna, flora and wildlife habitats, and parks and gardens.

The Heritage Council continues its definition of the Heritage Plan by stating that: “a Heritage Plan is an opportunity to identify heritage issues and needs at the county level, and to address them locally, within a regional and national framework. The plan should also seek to influence the actions and activities of all the key players and stakeholders involved with the heritage, and raise awareness of that heritage. It is, therefore, both a strategic statement about what the County wants to achieve in terms of heritage management and conservation over a 5-year period, and a list of actions which will be taken to achieve the strategic aims and objectives (Heritage Council, 2003).”

2.3 How does the Heritage Plan relate to other official plans and policies?

The National Heritage Plan (Ireland, 2002) sets out a vision for the management of Ireland's heritage. A central element of the National Heritage Plan is the requirement to prepare county or city Heritage Plans. The Heritage Plan is coordinated by the local authority. However, it does not ‘belong’ solely to this body, but to a wide cross-section of different interests in the county, city or borough. The Heritage Plan should have an influence on the County Development Plan and ideally they should complement one another. The timing of drafting of either plan does not necessarily coincide. The Heritage Plan may also reflect, to a greater or lesser extent, on the County Strategy, which is coordinated by the County Development Board. Local authorities may undertake a heritage appraisal of County Development Plans; this is a means whereby the relevant objectives and actions in the Heritage Plan may be incorporated in the next County Development Plan, thereby encouraging complementarity.

2.4 The role of the Heritage Council

The Heritage Council is the State advisory body on heritage. The Council's website (www.heritagecouncil.ie) presents a comprehensive view of its role and activities. It has issued a range of policy and other advisory documents on many aspects of Ireland's heritage. As part of its

pro-active role with local authorities, the Heritage Council was responsible for introducing, promoting and part-funding county Heritage Plans, which the Heritage Officers (see 2.4) play a central role in implementing. The Heritage Council has produced guidelines for the preparation and evaluation of Heritage Plans (Heritage Council, 2003; Heritage Council, 2006). In so doing, the Heritage Council aims to standardise the official approach to the care of Ireland's heritage at the local level, while at the same time allowing each local authority to produce a Heritage Plan which is tailored to its local area and in which there is genuine local public participation and ownership.

2.5 The role of the Heritage Officer

The Heritage Council introduced the Heritage Officer Programme, through which Heritage Officers have been appointed to many local authorities, their salaries funded jointly by the Heritage Council and by local authorities. Heritage officers are responsible for three main areas of work:

- Delivering the Heritage Plan.
- Working on specific projects for the local authority.
- Liaising with the community, providing advice and information.

The Heritage Officer works closely with the Heritage Forum (see 2.6) and will attend all of its meetings. The Heritage Officer drafts the Heritage Plan in conjunction with the Heritage Forum.

2.6 The role of the Heritage Forum

The Heritage Forum is an appointed body of members drawn from the county and representative of all aspects of heritage. It is a non-statutory advisory group established by the Local Authority to provide advice on and to direct the preparation and implementation of the Heritage Plan. The Heritage Forum decides on the scope of the heritage to be included in the Plan, subject to the provisions of the Heritage Act. The Forum is responsible for drawing up the Plan, while the Heritage Officer is responsible for completing the actions in the Plan.

2.7 Funding for the Heritage Plan

The Heritage Council City/County Heritage Plan Fund and the local authority provide the two principal sources of funding for the implementation of actions in the Heritage Plan. Other sources of funding or contributions in kind may be provided by partners in various projects listed in the Plan, such as LEADER, other local or state bodies, private companies or individuals.

2.8 Aims and Objectives of the Heritage Plan

“A Heritage Plan aims to secure benefits for the local heritage, and to increase awareness, appreciation and enjoyment of it among the people” (Heritage Council, 2003). It aims to do this by forging new partnerships between the key players to protect heritage and raise awareness of it. In so doing, Heritage Planners recognise the value of the integrated, co-operative approach towards taking responsibility for the national heritage.

3. Introduction to the evaluation process

3.1 Introduction to the evaluation process

Evaluation of official plans on a systematic, methodical basis is a relatively new practice in Ireland. Evaluation enables those responsible for delivering on actions in the Heritage Plan to build on those actions which were successful and learn from the experience of those which were less successful. Evaluation allows us to measure progress and to improve in a meaningful way. The Heritage Plan Evaluation Guide lists three reasons why evaluation is necessary:

- “To verify that the plan in question replies to or has met the needs of protection, maintenance and promotion of the heritage resource of a county.
- “To gauge the effectiveness, efficiency, value for money and quality of the actions implemented and management and delivery structures.
- “To guide for future improvements in the county Heritage Plans (strengths and weaknesses).”

The methodology used in this evaluation was that set out in the consultants’ brief (see Appendix 3) and in the Heritage Plan Evaluation Guide (Heritage Council, 2006).

3.2 Evaluation methodology

The Heritage Council’s evaluation guidelines state that the evaluation must:

- identify clearly the actions, objectives and aims of the Plan;
- establish a baseline of heritage activity before its implementation;
- identify clearly the implementation and management process;
- provide for in-depth consultation with a range of stakeholders involved;
- develop a set of performance indicators against which the effectiveness of the plan can be judged
- produce an easy-to-use approach and clear presentation of findings.

3.3 Aims of this evaluation

This evaluation aims to

- assess the preparation process for the Laois Heritage Plan;
- assess the scope and broad objectives of the Plan;
- assess the success or otherwise of the specific actions, including the meeting of targets, listed in the plan;
- assess the effectiveness of the management and implementation of the Plan; and
- make recommendations which may inform the next Plan (2007-2011), which is in preparation.

4. Evaluation: Laois Heritage Plan preparation process

4.1. Introduction

The preparation of the Laois Heritage Plan was coordinated by Laois County Council. A summary of the steps taken in preparing the Plan is included in the Plan itself. All the relevant notes taken at meetings concerned with preparing the Heritage Plan have been filed and were available to the evaluators.

There was no public consultation in advance of the formulation of the draft Plan, in contrast to other counties. The reason for this was that Laois LEADER had recently completed an extensive electoral area-based needs analysis that included heritage issues. In addition, the County Development Board had just completed comprehensive community-based consultation to help shape the County Development Strategy. Since public consultation for the above exercises had already taken place, the Laois Heritage Forum decided that it would be better to draft the Heritage Plan using the information already gathered and then invite comments at that stage.

4.2 The Laois Heritage Forum

As with all heritage fora, the Laois Heritage Forum was established by Laois County Council to provide advice and facilitate delivery to the local authority on the preparation and implementation of the Heritage Plan. The Laois Heritage Forum comprises representatives of bodies and groups involved with all aspects of heritage in Laois, both statutory and voluntary, at both local and national level. Whereas some of the members of the Forum have changed during the period 2002-2006, the organisations represented have not changed, apart from several additions. A list of current members is given in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Organisations represented on the Laois Heritage Forum and current representatives

| Organisation/occupation | Representative |
|--|------------------------|
| Laois County Development Board | John Joe Fennelly, MCC |
| Chair, Housing, Social and Cultural SPC, Laois County Council | Brian Stanley, MCC |
| Slieve Bloom Association | Mick Dowling |
| Independent expert on Laois heritage | Teddy Fennelly |
| Irish Farmers Association | John Finlay |
| Laois LEADER | Anne Goodwin |
| Laois Tourism | Tom Cox |
| Bord na Móna | Tom Egan |
| Laois Federation of Tidy Towns | Noreen Byrne |
| Laois Heritage Society | Mary Lalor |
| Laois Community Forum | Eric Lewis |
| Teagasc | Con Maloney |
| Coillte | John Prior |
| Senior Planner, Laois County Council | Peter Dolan |
| Environment Section, Laois County Council | Martina Bracken |
| National Parks and Wildlife Service, Dept. of Environment, Heritage and Local Government | Ciara Flynn |

When the Forum was first appointed, national organisations which were not represented in Laois were not invited onto the Forum, for example, the Irish Peatland Conservation Council (IPCC). However, these organisations were to be consulted. In 2004, the NPWS was invited to nominate a representative. The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) and the National Monuments Service (NMS) were also each invited to send a representative, but both preferred to be consulted. Organisations involved with fisheries and water quality — important aspects of Laois heritage — are not represented.

4.3 Role of the Laois Heritage Forum in formulating the Laois Heritage Plan

The Laois Heritage Forum first met in April 2001. It was decided by Laois County Council that the Forum should be composed of representatives of bodies with a local “hands-on” quality. It was considered that there should be a relatively small number of members. The Heritage Plan lists 15 members, including the then Heritage Officer, Ms. Amanda Pedlow.

In common with County Offaly, initially the Forum had no elected chairman. Meetings were chaired by the Heritage Officer. The Forum elected a chairman in 2005.

Meetings were to be held every three months in order to promote good and regular attendance at meetings, to ensure that members had sufficient time to make contributions and so that agendas could be completed.

Three working groups of Forum members were formed in early June 2001 to develop the Plan's objectives and actions. These were:

- Museums, Archives, Genealogy, Folklore, Folklife, Crafts
- Archaeology and Architecture
- Landscape, Geology, Inland Waterways, Flora, Fauna, Wildlife Habitats

By the end of June 2001, the objectives and actions proposed by the working groups were discussed by the Forum as a whole. On 30 July 2001, the Forum placed the agreed objectives and actions into a framework, and listed the partners. (The project partners would participate in the various actions and help to complete them.) The opinion of the Forum was that £IRP100,000 (€126,973) per annum would be needed for the implementation of the Heritage Plan, which would be index-linked.

From 22 to 30 August 2001, public consultations were held in the five electoral areas of Co. Laois, with an average of 15-20 people attending at each meeting. The views of people attending were then incorporated into the draft Plan.

On 10 September 2001, the Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) of Laois Co. Council discussed the draft plan. Two weeks later, on 24 September, Laois County Council adopted the draft Plan. The draft Plan was then released on public view for six weeks, during October and November 2001, after which time the comments received were examined and, where appropriate, incorporated into the Plan by the Forum.

The Laois Heritage Plan was launched formally before an attendance of 100 people in Emo Court, Co. Laois by the Chief Executive of the Heritage Council, Michael Starrett, in February 2002.

Since the Plan was launched, the Forum has met four times annually. Each year, in Autumn, the Forum agrees a work programme for the following calendar year, which is then submitted to the Heritage Council for financial support. Project working groups are formed and meet as necessary to deliver each project.

4.4 Conclusions on the Laois Heritage Plan Preparation Process

The only significant departure from the Heritage Councils guidelines was in relation to public consultation prior to the drafting of the Heritage Plan. This is because public consultations had already been conducted by Laois LEADER and the County Development Board in relation to heritage just before the start of the plan preparation. Thus, yet more consultation at this stage was felt to be unnecessary and possibly counter-productive.

5. The Laois Heritage Officer

From 2001 to 2002, counties Laois and Offaly shared one Heritage Officer, Ms. Amanda Pedlow, who drafted the Laois Heritage Plan under the direction of the Heritage Forum. In 2003, Ms. Pedlow was appointed full-time in the Offaly Heritage Office, and was replaced in Laois by a full-time Heritage Officer, Ms. Dearbhla Ledwidge, in January 2003. She was succeeded in July 2003 by the current Heritage Officer, Ms. Catherine Casey, who has guided the current plan to completion. Ms. Casey is also responsible for steering the preparation of the next Heritage Plan 2007-2011. We understand that the Heritage Officer position has not been confirmed for 2007, as of the time of writing. We have borne in mind that for the first two years of the current Plan, Laois had the services of a part-time Heritage Officer, shared with Offaly.

The Heritage Officer in Laois has three main areas of work:

- Delivering the Heritage Plan.
- Working on specific projects for Laois County Council.
- Liaising with the community, providing advice and information.

Activities other than those listed in the Heritage Plan are not central to this report, but we have commented on them where we feel it necessary. Each year, the Heritage Officer has produced a work report (internal document) which includes details of actions completed under the Heritage Plan. From 2003, the annual work reports have included expenditure details for each project (see Appendix 1). A new work programme was agreed with the Heritage Council in August 2003. It was stated that some projects could not be completed until 2004 as a result of these changes in personnel.

The Heritage Officer produced a comprehensive report which detailed the results of the implementation of the Laois Heritage Plan to date and published on the Laois County Council web site (Laois County Council, 2006).

6. Evaluation: Laois Heritage Plan details

6.1 Focus and setting

The Introduction to the Laois Heritage Plan states that:

“The focus of the Plan is on gathering information, making it available to the public, raising awareness, working with communities, providing mechanisms for facilitating and enabling stakeholders in heritage to take care of it. Community development, partnership and working with the voluntary sector are central to the Plan. The key to caring for and appreciation of our heritage is to have knowledge, understanding and concern for it. There are already a number of agencies that provide capital grants for development of physical projects. The Plan focuses on raising awareness of the structures already in place.”

The overall effectiveness of the Laois Heritage Plan should be measured against these broad aims. The Plan lists the key international, national and local policies that provide the setting for the Plan. These include, inter alia, Local Agenda 21, the National Heritage Plan, the National Biodiversity Plan, the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage, the County Development Plan and the County Development Board. These are relevant to the proofing of the Plan nationally and internationally. In effect, we have to assess the degree to which the Plan complements these important statutory policies.

6.2 Objectives of the Laois Heritage Plan

The 13 objectives of the Laois Heritage Plan are:

1. To develop a sustainable museum service
2. To have improved access to the genealogy records in the county
3. To establish and maintain a permanent County Archive
4. To maintain the archaeological sites of the county
5. The Forum supports Dúchas (now the National Parks and Wildlife Service) in its policy of conservation and preservation of the Rock of Dunamase
6. To preserve the architectural character of the county
7. To quantify the asset of heritage gardens and parks and to understand their needs
8. To maintain and enhance the landscape quality of the county
9. To recognise and value hedges and verges as an integral part of the landscape
10. To establish a reservoir of folklore/folklife material which reflects the character of the area
11. To identify, preserve and maintain the crafts of the county
12. To value and protect our inland waterways/railways
13. To make heritage accessible to the public and to promote best practice

The large number of objectives are listed by heritage category rather than by the type of approach to heritage awareness and protection. The Laois Heritage Plan contrasts with, for example, the Offaly and Sligo Heritage Plans, which use the latter approach and have fewer objectives (Sligo Heritage Plan, www.sligococo.ie; Offaly Heritage Plan, www.offaly.ie). A total of 82 individual actions are listed against the 13 objectives. These are listed in Table 8.1. There is a mix of broad actions which allow some flexibility in approach and implementation, together with a large number of highly

focused, specific actions. Objective 9, concerned with landscape quality, includes a large number of actions which do not apply solely to landscape but to nature conservation and environmentally friendly forestry. Just 5 of the 25 actions under Objective 9 are concerned with landscape.

6.3 The project partners

The proposed partners for each action are listed alongside the action. The partners comprise many of the agencies or groups involved in aspects of heritage in Laois, whether local or national. As would be expected, Laois County Council is listed as a partner in 78 of the 82 actions listed. Many of the actions depend in part on the cooperation of a variety of official agencies other than Laois County Council, together with voluntary groups, and many actions list two or more partners.

6.4 Inclusion of performance indicators at preparatory stage

The Laois Heritage Plan was drafted in accordance with Heritage Council guidelines, with the exception of performance indicators, which were not included. The Heritage Council's Guidelines for Local Authority Heritage Officers on the Preparation of Heritage Plans were available in final draft form by March 2001 and are in the Laois Heritage Office files. The first meeting of the Heritage Forum was in April 2001. Therefore, the Heritage Forum had the opportunity to prepare performance indicators and to include them when the Plan had been adopted, as per the guidelines. This does not necessarily detract from the effectiveness of the Plan. The guidelines also state that: "The primary indicator ... will be the completion of the actions which are set out in the Plan, and the extent to which they contribute to the achievement of the objectives".

6.5 Costings and time of each action at the plan preparation stage

6.5.1 Costings

The Heritage Council's guidelines recommend that the Heritage Plan should state, inter alia, how much each action will cost. The published Laois Heritage Plan lacks costings for each action. However, the draft evolving document, dated July 2001 does include cost estimates for each action. In addition, each year, the Laois Heritage Officer has drawn up a list of actions which are submitted for funding from the Heritage Council and Laois County Council, in which estimated costs are included. The Heritage Officer has also produced detailed annual reports and has detailed the actual expenditure on each action of the Heritage Plan and other heritage office activities.

6.5.2 Timeframe for actions

The guidelines also recommend including the estimated time each action will take to achieve. The published Laois Heritage Plan does not include such information, but the draft evolving document of July 2001 does include timeframes. We do not view this as a deficiency. However, it is realistic to aim for completion of each action during the lifetime of the Plan.

6.6 Conclusions on the Heritage Plan preparation process

The Laois Heritage Plan was drawn up in accordance with Heritage Council guidelines, with exception of performance indicators, estimates of costs and timeframe for each action. As we have stated above, in practice we do not believe this to be a deficiency, in terms of completing the actions in the Plan. In any case, annual reports, including estimates of costs and actual expenditure for each action, are produced and presented to the Forum, the County Council and the Heritage Council. We suggest that performance indicators be included in the next Plan. This will allow for easier evaluation in 2011.

7. Evaluation: Budget

This evaluation does not involve an audit of the accounts of the Heritage Office. Figure 7.1 summarises the annual budgeted expenditure of Heritage Plan actions. The figures exclude the Heritage Officer salary. The costs of individual actions in the Plan are included in the summary of annual reports by the Heritage Officer in Appendix 1.

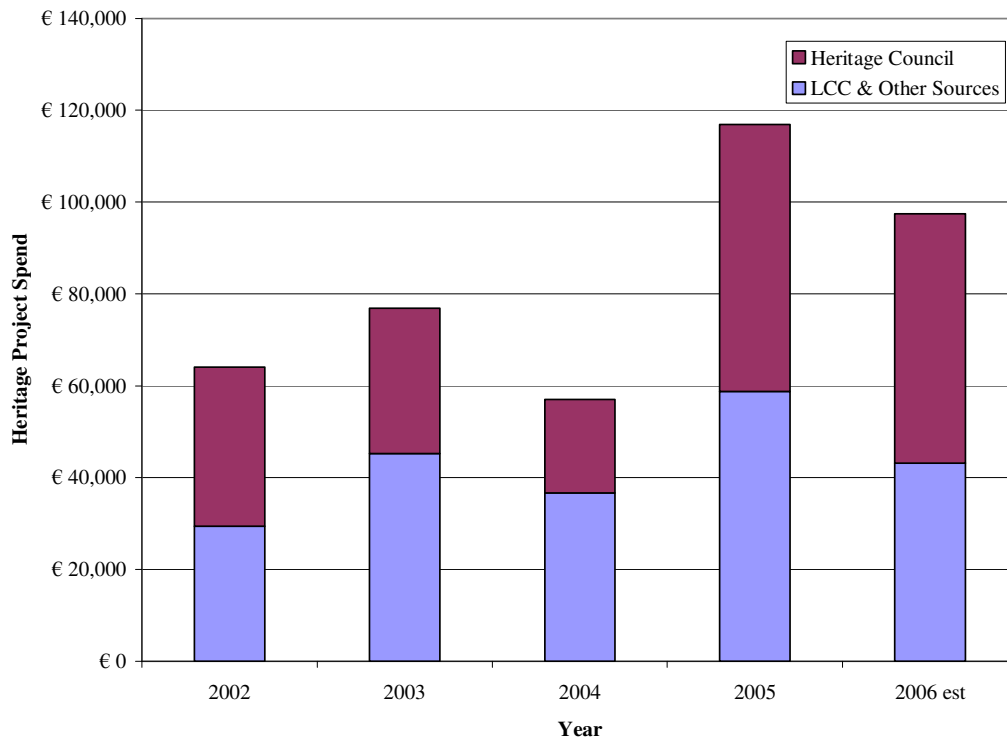


Figure 7.1 Annual budgeted expenditure for the Laois Heritage Plan

The Laois Heritage Office can recoup 75% of actual expenditure from the Heritage Council for Heritage Plan projects. This is conditional on Laois County Council spending additionally on other heritage projects. Thus, in practice, actual recoupment of money from the Heritage Council is equivalent to 50% of the total expenditure on projects.

The annual expenditure and the expenditure on individual actions in the Plan are modest and, in our view, represent very good value for money.

8. Evaluation: Effectiveness of Plan Actions

The Heritage Council's standard methodology for evaluation gives comprehensive guidance to evaluators about how to evaluate Heritage Plans. Central to this process is the selection of performance indicators. Performance indicators are becoming a regular feature of key official plans. For example, in order to standardise evaluation procedures, the European Commission has provided common indicators across a range of measures in the CAP Rural Development Plans of Member States, including Ireland.

This evaluation is only the second in which we aware that performance indicators have been applied to the evaluation of a Heritage Plan. (We understand the first is the evaluation of the Offaly Heritage Plan, which is being finalised as we write this.) Therefore, we are applying an as yet untried method. Indicators work best when measuring quantitative trends over time. In addition, indicators need to be standardised so that they are comparable: this maximises their effectiveness in portraying a trend or action. In the case of Heritage Plans, applying comparable indicators to actions is not possible, since each County Heritage Plan has different objectives and actions, and even these will tend to change when a new plan is prepared. Objective-based indicators are preferable and we include a discussion on these in Section 11. In order to apply Objective-based Indicators, the necessary data need to be collected. This was not possible during this short evaluation. Therefore, performance indicators were developed and used to evaluate the Plan Actions

Data for this part of the evaluation were gathered from consultations with the following sources:

- The Heritage Officer internal reports
- Heritage Forum
- Heritage Office files
- Laois County Council staff
- Staff members of relevant official agencies
- Members of voluntary organisations
- Our own observations

A list of organisations consulted is presented in Appendix 2.

We have constructed a table which lists each action as set out in the Laois Heritage Plan. Alongside each action is a performance indicator, which is in turn accompanied by the impact/result in summary form (see Table 8.1).

Table 8.1 Evaluation of actions in the Laois Heritage Plan using Action-based Performance Indicators

Objective 1. To Develop a sustainable museums service

| | Heritage Plan action | Indicator | Impact/result |
|-----|---|--|--|
| 1.1 | Feasibility Study on developing a County Museum and its links with the present museums | Has the study been carried out? | Yes: Feasibility Study carried out (2002). Museums Policy for Laois Co. Council produced (2005). |
| 1.2 | Provide ongoing support for museums / heritage centres already open | What type(s) of support given? | Advice: Laois Museums Sustainability Study (2004) Laois Museums Network established (2005) (See www.laois.ie) |
| 1.3 | 'Running a Museum on a Shoestring' Course | Was the course undertaken? | Yes, in 2002 |
| 1.4 | Access advice for groups and individuals planning to open museums | Was this advice given? | Yes |
| 1.5 | Purchase items necessary for county collection | How many items purchased? | 2 archive items |
| 1.6 | Keep relevant collections in the County, where appropriate | How many collections were kept? | Not quantifiable. Includes Gannon Collection. Most collections held in local museums |
| 1.7 | In the absence of a designated repository in Laois, all archaeological objects that come to light should, by law, be deposited with the National Museum | This is a statement: no indicator can be presented | Not possible to know without detailed study |

Objective 2. To have improved access to the genealogy records in Laois

| | Heritage Plan action | Indicator | Impact/result |
|-----|--|---|--|
| 2.1 | Explore options with the Offaly Historical and Archaeological Society for better access to the records in Laois and Offaly | What options, if any, were explored? Has access been improved? | Discussions ongoing Issue of access has remained the same Certain material has to be accessed in Tullamore but primary sources still exist |

Objective 3. To establish and maintain a permanent county archive in Laois

| | Heritage Plan action | Indicator | Impact/result |
|-----|--|---|---|
| 3.1 | Appoint a fulltime archivist to oversee and maintain archives services and public outreach | Has a full-time archivist been appointed? | No: Archivist is part-time, shared with Co. Offaly |
| 3.2 | Provide a building for storage of archives as a temporary reserve, including equipping it to BS 5454 standards | Has this storage facility been provided? | Yes, but not to BS5454 standard. However, no other such facility in Ireland meets this standard |
| 3.3 | Provide a permanent county archive in Laois | Has a permanent county archive been provided? | Yes: Good storage facility but difficult to undertake research because of restrictions on physical access |
| 3.4 | Microfilm of burial registers and part of Poor Law Union material | Has the microfilm been produced? | Yes. Ongoing and partially complete |
| 3.5 | Listing and arrangement of key Laois collections, with a view to microfilming them | Have these collections been listed? | Yes. Ongoing |
| 3.6 | Purchase items of archival interest for the county archive | How many items were purchased? Cost? | 2: Perry's Brewery Rathdowney; Lough Letters N/a |

Objective 4. To maintain the archaeological sites of Co. Laois

| | Heritage Plan action | Indicator | Impact/result |
|-----|--|--|---|
| 4.1 | Provide contact point in Laois for information | Has this contact point been provided? Nature of contact point? | Yes: Heritage Officer is contact point, but could be better publicised |
| 4.2 | Multidisciplinary Graveyard Seminar for all management committees | Has the seminar been held? Attendance? | Yes, in 2002. 76 |
| 4.3 | Ongoing advice for graveyard committees | Advice provided? | Yes |
| 4.4 | Record key Laois industries, interviews, photographs, archives | Extent of recording undertaken? | 1,000 sites listed in Industrial Heritage Desk Study (2003). Field survey of mills in Co. Laois (2005). |
| 4.5 | Summarise research done on post 1700 A.D. sites to inform decision on action needed | Has this research been summarised? | Not as yet |
| 4.6 | Information evenings for hill walkers to help identify archaeological sites in Slieve Blooms | How many information evenings organised? Feedback? | No action as yet |
| 4.7 | Investigate options for notifying landowners if they have a National Monument site on their land | What options were investigated? Were any options implemented? | Laois County Planning Office provides detailed maps and records but this is the extent of action taken |
| 4.8 | Work with Teagasc to provide information for REPS participants (e.g. not to fence off sites) | How much progress has been made? | Teagasc provides information and expertise via the REPS |
| 4.9 | Raise awareness of monument types | Nature and extent of awareness raising? | Poster (1,000 in 2003) and calendar (500 in 2004) |

Objective 5. The Forum supports Dúchas in its policy of conservation and preservation of the Rock of Dunamaise

| | Heritage Plan action | Indicator | Impact/result |
|-----|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| 5.1 | Continue to influence Dúchas and the Department for the consolidation work to be completed on the Rock | How was this achieved? | Laois Heritage Society lobbied for progress. €1.4 m spent to date. Additional €400,000 allocated for 2006. |
| 5.2 | Publish information booklet about the site for visitors | Was an information booklet published? | Yes: included in the Laois Heritage Trail brochure (2004). |
| 5.3 | Prepare Visual Impact Statement for Rock | Was this impact statement prepared? | No. Planned within the timeframe of the County Development Plan |

Objective 6. To preserve the architectural character of Co. Laois

| | Heritage Plan action | Indicator | Impact/result |
|-----|--|--|--|
| 6.1 | Appoint full time conservation officer | Has the post been made? | No. This is necessary |
| 6.2 | Identify and list and protect all buildings of merit | Identification and listing complete? | 800 buildings listed based on interim survey by NIAH; listing not complete. See www.laois.ie |
| 6.3 | Draw up a database of owners of protected structures | Database drawn up? | Yes, but list is incomplete: some protected structures still need to be confirmed and owners informed |
| 6.4 | Annual seminar on care of protected structures | Have seminars been held annually? | No. First seminar held in 2006 |
| 6.5 | Update database on any new Information/booklets/seminars | Has database been updated? | Yes. (See www.laois.ie) |
| 6.6 | List protected structures on Laois web site | Have protected structured been listed on the website? | Yes. (See www.laois.ie) |
| 6.7 | Promote the Architectural Conservation Areas | Has promotion been undertaken? | Yes. Proposed in Co. Development Plan 2006-2012 |
| 6.8 | PR on key issues such as render and sash windows – Windows Exhibition | Has PR been undertaken? Has a Windows Exhibition been held? | Yes. Calendar and poster produced Not yet |
| 6.9 | Produce external design guidelines for new houses including promotion of modern architecture where appropriate | Have guidelines been produced and published? | No. Proposed in Co. Development Plan 2006-2012 |

| | Heritage Plan action | Indicator | Impact/result |
|------|--|----------------------------------|--|
| 6.10 | Guidelines on siting of houses in the landscape | Have guidelines been made? | No. Proposed in Co. Development Plan 2006-2012 |
| 6.11 | Carry out village design statements | How many design statements made? | 2 in 2002: Durrow and Clonaslee |
| 6.12 | Carry out an integrated area plan for the development of historic Portlaoise | Has this plan been carried out? | In preparation; slow progress |

Objective 7. To quantify the asset of heritage gardens and parks in Co. Laois and to understand their needs

| | Heritage Plan action | Indicator | Impact/result |
|-----|--|---|---|
| 7.1 | Survey county to establish the range, number and types and their needs | Has survey been carried out? | Survey being carried out by NIAH. Laois survey on hold until methodology has been completed |
| 7.2 | Public talk on gardens of Laois to raise awareness | Has the talk been given? Attendance? | No. It was decided that a publication would reach wider audience. Leaflet on Garden Heritage of Co. Laois (10,000 copies) produced in 2004 N/a |

Objective 8. To maintain and enhance the landscape quality of Co. Laois

| | Heritage Plan action | Indicator | Impact/result |
|-----|---|---|---|
| 8.1 | Carry out landscape character assessment | Has the assessment been carried out? | No. Proposed in Co. Development Plan 2006-2012 |
| 8.2 | Natural Heritage Survey to collect baseline information on habitats | Has the survey been undertaken? Extent of survey? | Yes, on townland basis Emo-Stradbally-the Heath-Aghaboe (80 km ² in 2005). Extended in 2005. (See www.laois.ie) |
| 8.3 | Explore uplands management options for the Slieve Blooms to ensure the area develops as vibrant and sustainable | How many options explored? What options appear suitable? | None N/a |
| 8.4 | Audit two towns for wildlife present, carry out enhancement and awareness programme | Which two towns were audited? | Mountmellick (2002). Abbeyleix ecological survey (2004) |

| | Heritage Plan action | Indicator | Impact/result |
|------|---|---|---|
| 8.5 | Seminar for Tidy Towns-incorporating wildlife | Was seminar held? | Yes (2002) |
| 8.6 | Ongoing support for Tidy Towns through the Federation of Tidy Towns | Was this support given? | Yes, ongoing advice |
| 8.7 | Course for local interpretation options | Was course held? | Yes (2003) |
| 8.8 | Research, list and erect plaques for appropriate historical/noteworthy sites | How many sites have been listed? | 13 sites in Heritage Trail. More planned for 2006 in association with Laois Heritage Society. Plaques erected in historic Portlaoise. Laois Heritage Trail has site-specific interpretative panels and brochure. |
| 8.9 | Pilot the ECO golf idea | Was a pilot project made? | No |
| 8.10 | Promote awareness of SACs, SPAs, NHAs and importance of biodiversity | Extent of promotion? | Poster of natural heritage in Laois (2004). Calendar (2006) Local radio coverage Ongoing advice Hosting ENFO wildlife exhibition |
| 8.11 | Promote the concept of conservation plans | How was this promoted? | Ongoing promotion |
| 8.12 | Promote enhancement as planning condition | How was this promoted? | Input from Heritage Office to Co. Development Plan 2006-2012 |
| 8.13 | Explore suitable sites for developing greenways | How many sites explored? Have any sites been chosen? | None Yes. Survey of dry branch of Mountmellick canal underway in 2006 |
| 8.14 | Survey the ridge esker from Tullamore to Portlaoise and make proposals for its preservation | Was survey made? How is preservation proposed? | Yes Highlight ecological value; Develop action plan as part of biodiversity action plan; List sites in Co. Development Plan; (See www.laois.ie) |
| 8.15 | Audit of County Council property and the heritage responsibility of same | Has audit been made? Extent of audit? | No None |

| | Heritage Plan action | Indicator | Impact/result |
|------|---|---|--|
| 8.16 | Increase access to heritage sites by lobbying for changes in the public liability laws | Was lobbying undertaken? Have any changes been made to public liability law? | Laws have been amended. Most action has to happen at national level |
| 8.17 | Explore options of conserving one raised and one blanket bog for preservation | What options were explored? Have such bogs been earmarked? | None No |
| 8.18 | Establish research project to survey natural regeneration of cutaway and cutover bogs, establish permanent monitoring stations, examine future options for cut away | Research project established? Have monitoring stations been established? What future options were explored? | No No None as yet |
| 8.19 | Highlight the necessity of a National Fen survey | Has a Fen Survey been undertaken? | No. Fen inventory made by IPCC |
| 8.20 | Recommend adoption of list of fens in County Development Plan | Has a list of fens been adopted in the new Co. Dev. Plan? How many sites? | Yes 4 sites which include fen |
| 8.21 | Examine areas of raised and blanket bog in Coillte land in Slieve Blooms that may be suitable for restoration projects | What areas were examined? Progress made on restoration projects? | 6 blanket bog sites in Slieve Blooms. Demonstration site at Tinnahinch, near Clonaslee. One raised bog site at Windsor Bog, near Coolrain. |
| 8.22 | Monitor developments that affect blanket bog - watching brief. | What monitoring was made? Extent of monitoring? | Planning lists scanned weekly. Heritage Officer comments on developments which impact on sites of heritage value Not quantified |
| 8.23 | Survey the remnants of raised bogs around the cut away | Has survey been carried out? | No |
| 8.24 | Carry out desk survey of all palaeoecological studies | Has desk survey been carried out? | No |
| 8.25 | Promote the NeighbourWood and Native Woodland Schemes | How have schemes been promoted? Have any areas been chosen for these schemes? | Schemes suspended from 2003-2005 No, because schemes were suspended from 2003-2005 |

Objective 9. To recognise and value hedges and verges as an integral part of the landscape

| | Heritage Plan action | Indicator | Impact/result |
|-----|---|---|--|
| 9.1 | Provide training for hedge cutters and contractors | Number of training sessions? Numbers attending? | Teagasc carry out training for contractors at national level. |
| 9.2 | Provide training for farmers | What training undertaken? Numbers attending? | Series of seminars and farm walks on different topics in 2004. Approx 30 |
| 9.3 | Replant native/local species as part of road widening projects | Has this policy been adopted? Km roadside planted with native species? | No N/a |
| 9.4 | Maintain or replace hedges and walls where possible as part of new development | Is this policy being implemented? | Yes. In conditions of planning permission |
| 9.5 | Promote the Golden Mile | Has this been done? How has this been done? | Yes Began in 2005. Continued in 2006 |
| 9.6 | Carry out a hedgerow survey in County Laois | Has survey been undertaken? | Yes (2005). See report on www.laois.ie |
| 9.7 | Advertise in local papers and radio in autumn to start hedge cutting 1/9 and be finished by 1/3 | How many ads placed in press and on radio? | Radio ads placed each year in Autumn DoEHLG places local and national ads in newspapers in spring |
| 9.8 | Pilot areas of hedge laying | Have pilot areas been chosen? How many? | Yes, recommended in Hedgerow reports N/a |
| 9.9 | Set best practice examples of hedge management | Have demonstration hedgerows been implemented? | No. Planned for Heritage Plan 2007-2011 |

Objective 10. To establish a reservoir of folklore/folklife material which reflects the character of the area

| | Heritage Plan action | Indicator | Impact/result |
|------|--|---|---|
| 10.1 | Survey what has been collected to date | Nature and extent of survey undertaken? | Story-telling project (2002) and Reminiscence project (2004), both of which collected information |
| 10.2 | Examine best practice on collecting data through different media | Nature and extent of examination? | Series of training sessions held in 2004 |

| | | | |
|------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| 10.3 | Create awareness of importance | How has awareness been created? | Policy on Placenames produced by Laois Co. Council (2005) Other awareness exercises planned |
|------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|

Objective 11. To identify, preserve and maintain the crafts of the county

| | Heritage Plan action | Indicator | Impact/result |
|------|---|--|-------------------------|
| 11.1 | Establish what materials crafts and skills were traditional and examine mechanisms to preserve same | What crafts and skills were covered? What mechanisms examined to preserve them? | N/a Underway in 2006 |

Objective 12. To value and protect our inland waterways/railways

| | Heritage Plan action | Indicator | Impact/result |
|------|--|----------------------------------|---|
| 12.1 | Preserve the dry canal route from Grand Canal to Portarlinton-Mountmellick | Has the route been preserved? | First stage underway. This involves a survey of built and natural heritage along route underway in 2006 |
| 12.2 | Monitor pilot study on inland waterways corridor planning (Galway and Offaly Co. Councils) | Nature and extent of monitoring? | Watching brief; ongoing |

Objective 13. To Make Heritage accessible to the public and to promote best practice

| | Heritage Plan action | Indicator | Impact/result |
|------|--|---|---|
| 13.1 | Appoint a full time Heritage Officer | Has a full time post been created? | Yes, since January 2003 on contract basis |
| 13.2 | Provide link to information and agencies through Heritage Office | Has link been provided? Nature of link? | Yes Heritage Officer |
| 13.3 | Promote <i>Heritage in Schools</i> Programme | Nature and extent of promotion? | Ongoing assistance, with Heritage Council |
| 13.4 | Press for extension of Heritage Panel for the Schools programme to be made available to other groups at Parish level | Has this been achieved? | No |
| 13.5 | Have heritage related material including this Plan on the web site | Is heritage material available on website? Is the material adequate? | Yes. (See www.laois.ie) Yes. Updated at regular intervals |

| | Heritage Plan action | Indicator | Impact/result |
|------|--|--|--|
| 13.6 | Annual day seminar on best practice and recent projects | Has this seminar been held? | Yes. In 2002, 2004, 2005. Planned for 2006 |
| 13.7 | Seminars on specific themes for target audiences in heritage venues where possible | How many and what type of seminars have been held? | Quarterly Heritage Forum meetings held at a variety of heritage-related venues around the county |
| 13.8 | Encourage visits to County Laois sites by Laois people 'Get to Know Your County' | How many such visits have been made? | Schools tour of Laois heritage sites (2004). Survey of Laois heritage awareness planned for 2006; facilitated by production and dissemination of Laois Heritage Trail brochure in 2004 (10,000 copies) |
| 13.9 | Promote Heritage Appraisal of appropriate plans. Provide training for staff | Appraisal of Co. Development Plan? Nature and extent of staff training? | Yes (2004) Several training workshops for staff and elected members (2004, 2005) |

9. Evaluation: Discussion of results/impacts

In Section 8, we presented a summary table which indicated if the individual actions in the Plan had been completed and measured the extent of their success. This section presents a more in-depth assessment of the effectiveness of the Plan and the problems that are faced and some suggested solutions. The full recommendations are included in Section 13. This assessment is based on the results of extensive consultation with stakeholders and our own observations. It is a synthesis of consultations together with our own commentary.

1. Museums

Our findings indicate that some of the museums are struggling. Marketing, opening times and staffing are noted difficulties. The Museums Network is not yet as effective as it should be.

It has been stated that the proposed central museum which would have been incorporated into the Protector (the old fort) in Portlaoise has been revisited and shelved because of cost factors. Many members of the Heritage Forum believe the centre should be established. It was widely believed that with careful management such a centre would greatly benefit Portlaoise and enhance the prospects of the eight small museums. However, we are now convinced that it will not be possible to pursue this option in the short term because of the absence of sufficient capital funding. However, the feasibility of establishing a smaller museum in Portlaoise, not necessarily within the Protector, could be examined.

A travelling curator is needed, to assist in the collection of material and networking of the existing museums.

2. Access to Laois genealogy records

Having to direct visitors in Laois to another county for family records is seen by some as far from ideal. However, there is a recognition of the willingness of the officials and those in the Offaly Historical and Archaeological Society to be helpful. The Laois County Library contains a variety of genealogical and other records on microfilm are available on request. In addition, the information held by the Offaly Historical and Archaeological Society is still available from primary sources.

3. County Archive

There is a need for an archivist to focus exclusively on Laois. The county archive building in Kea Lew Business Park, although not ideal, is a good storage facility. However, the facility is not on the ground floor and has limited public access. Material may be studied by appointment. There may be a gap of five days between the request and the study by a member of the public.

Key Laois collections have been listed and this list has been updated. The fact that material relating to Laois is indexed in Tullamore appears not to be a significant problem.

The budgetary situation is unsatisfactory. Ideally, the archivist should have a budget, which is at present not the case. In addition, because microfilming is expensive, there should be a budget allocated to this exclusively.

4. Archaeological sites

Although a multi-disciplinary graveyard seminar was held (in 2002), there is a need for on-going awareness-raising here, since graveyards can, and have been, damaged by well-meaning but uninformed actions.

Although a survey of mills in Co. Laois has been completed, the survey of "key Laois industries, interviews, photographs and archives" remains incomplete and more field survey work needs to be done. Research on the crucially important post-1700 (1700-1840) in urban areas is especially important.

Some investigation might be carried out into the options for notifying landowners if they have a national monument on their land. For example, a parish project looking into monuments and other man-made and natural heritage might be initiated. Much depends on the public for the success of such an action. There should be more work carried out in conjunction with Teagasc to provide information for REPS participants (not to fence off sites for example). Detailed Heritage Council guidelines are also available. Insurance is still an unresolved issue for the owners of the sites of monuments.

5. The Rock of Dunamaise

The consolidation work on the Rock has seemed to progress very slowly. Certainly the Rock is important but it should be placed in its context. Important sites such as the medieval village, Cromwell's Lines, Piggott's Castle, Dysart Fair Green, Kiltale Church and Graveyard, and more in the environs of the Rock also deserve attention and a booklet on them produced. At the same time, other sites throughout the county deserve attention. The Visual Impact Statement, an intended action in the Plan, has not yet been carried out, but will be inserted into the next Heritage Plan. The scope of a VIS for the Rock needs to include the environs.

6. Architecture

The publication *An Introduction to the Architectural Heritage of County Laois*, by the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage, is a good start. However, a full, detailed audit remains to be done.

There is, as yet, no full-time conservation officer and the guidelines have not been produced and published. The listing of the architectural heritage in the county is incomplete.

The current Heritage Plan has paid most attention to buildings of historic and architectural importance. However, vernacular architecture, which is uniquely Irish, precious and fast disappearing, needs particular attention. Structures include thatched houses, outhouses, farm buildings, yards, gates, piers, walls, pumps, etc. Vernacular architecture can only be saved if more people respect it and recognise its cultural and economic significance. There is a need to campaign for greater financial assistance from the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government for the maintenance and use of our traditional structures.

7. Heritage gardens and parks

A leaflet describing the heritage gardens of Laois has helped to raise awareness of the importance of heritage gardens in the county. Action 7.1 - quantification of this asset - has not been completed. However, Laois gardens are being surveyed by the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) as part of a national survey. Therefore, the task will be completed in due course.

8. Landscape quality and wildlife conservation

A landscape character assessment of County Laois has not been carried out as yet, but is signalled as an action in the 2007-2011 Heritage Plan. In the meantime, the Laois County Development Plan defines areas of special landscape and amenity importance and the means whereby the landscape can be protected as part of ongoing development.

Most of the actions under Objective 8 are concerned with nature conservation. There are seven actions relating to peatlands alone. Many of these actions have either not been completed or only to a limited extent. However, extensive areas of blanket peatland in the Slieve Blooms are already in the ownership of the NPWS and appear to be safe from the threats of extraction and commercial afforestation. Coillte is in the process of restoring some areas of blanket bog in State ownership.

Threats remain for areas of raised bog, cutaway bog and fens in private ownership. A survey of raised bogs around the cutaway (Action 8.23) has not been carried out and needs to be pursued. There are perhaps numerous small areas rich in biodiversity which could be lost unless their value is known. Once this asset is quantified, it facilitates positive action. The Irish Peatland Conservation Council (IPCC) might be a useful partner in such a project in the next Heritage Plan.

Related to the above, an “Audit of Laois County Council property and heritage responsibility of same” (Action 8.15) has not yet been carried out. When the County Council completes this action, it can provide an example for others to follow.

Regarding the Eco Golf idea, this should be pursued if possible. Most committees in golf clubs now welcome advice on the sensitive and eco-friendly management of their courses, especially if such management gives their course an aspect that attracts the increasingly discerning visitor to Ireland.

Three very useful surveys were conducted in the lifetime of the Plan: the Natural Habitats Survey (Action 8.2), the Wildlife Audit of Mountmellick (Action 8.4) and the Survey of the Ridge Esker (Action 8.14). More of such actions need to be undertaken.

In terms of awareness raising for nature conservation, although some actions have been completed: 8.5; 8.7; 8.10, more needs to be done. The ongoing Seminar for Tidy Towns is useful, but there is an ongoing need to promote the concept of conservation in general. When County Laois prepares its Local Biodiversity Action Plan, awareness-raising should become an integral part of this action. We would like to draw attention to the survey undertaken under the local biodiversity action plan being conducted currently in Offaly. This could become the standard by which other counties are judged.

Under Action 8.25, it was intended to promote the Native Woodland and NeighbourWood schemes, but no action could be taken because of the suspension of funding at national level. With the exception of this action, there are no references to forestry in the Plan. A project under the NeighbourWood Scheme, with suitable partners, could be a useful means of raising awareness of nature and creating an asset which can be appreciated by the community. With regard to farm forestry, Laois has one of the highest broadleaf planting rates in the country (Hickie, 2004, unpublished). However, inappropriate conifer planting is still occurring. The next Heritage Plan could include an action on awareness raising of ecologically suitable forestry.

The current Heritage Plan makes no mention of water quality, which we feel is very important in the context of protecting and enhancing aquatic natural heritage, amenities and public health. Here again, we feel that awareness-raising actions are necessary in the next Heritage Plan.

9. Hedges and verges

A number of important actions have been completed successfully concerning hedges. The Hedgerow Survey of Co. Laois was particularly valuable as a means of quantifying the asset of hedges in the county. This, in combination with training courses, demonstration areas for best practice and the promotion of the Golden Mile, have helped to raise awareness of hedges in Laois considerably. Although the revised law on cutting dates for hedges was advertised on local radio, we feel that advertisements in the local press would also be useful. This excellent work should continue under the new Heritage Plan. The new Heritage Plan should also include the development of a Laois Hedgerow Conservation Strategy, based on the recommendations of the survey.

10. Folklore / folklife material

Folklore is not listed in the Heritage Act for inclusion in Heritage Plans. However, we feel that folklore helps to complete the story of our heritage and can increase the interest in heritage generally. The idea of repeating the late 1930s and early 1940s collecting through schools is a good one. It would help to enhance the idea of heritage amongst the young especially if it could be associated with particular places such as raths, rocks, places of patterns, ridges, houses, etc.

13 Making heritage accessible to the public and to promote best-practice

From 2001 to 2003, the Heritage Officer was shared with Co. Offaly. Great progress was made in 2003 with the appointment of a full-time Heritage Officer. This has been the single most significant action to make heritage more accessible and to promote best practice.

The heritage appraisal of the Laois County Development Plan was a crucially important action successfully completed by the Heritage Office. The Development Plan defines the policy for planning and development in the county for the next 5 years. Development pressure on many aspects of Laois heritage is intense and is unlikely to subside. We have examined the new County Development Plan and its heritage input. There is a considerable improvement in terms of heritage input compared with the previous County Development Plan. The practical application of heritage protection policies and approaches should make a significant difference to the conservation of the county's assets. The performance in practice can only be judged realistically at the end of this decade.

We believe that more could be done to promote heritage in schools and to encourage visits to Co. Laois by Laois people. There are many local speakers willing to share their interest, knowledge and enthusiasm with schoolchildren and students. Financial assistance is provided by the Heritage Council's *Heritage in Schools* programme. Children should be not just informed but also excited by their heritage. They could be encouraged by appropriate competitions and publications. Here, we feel that leaflets tend to be inadequate and temporary.

Even though many of the actions in the Plan have focused on awareness-raising, there is a need to build on the successes of the actions in the current Plan and steadily increase the profile of heritage in Laois. The success of Heritage Planning pivots on equipping people with the knowledge and expertise to manage their assets adequately. For example, archaeological and natural sites are still lost to development in Laois. This is usually not intentional, but because the owners are simply not aware.

10. Evaluation: Implementation and management

The projects and activities undertaken on a year-by-year basis are reported by the Heritage Officer. The information we used was obtained from Heritage Office files and from direct consultation with the Heritage Officer. A summary of the annual reports produced by the Heritage Office is included in Appendix 1. The annual work reports were in all cases clear and concise, with summaries of all the projects and other activities undertaken. The Heritage Officer also provided us with accounts, which detail the expenditure on each project, and the overall annual expenditure and income (see Section 7). In our view, the implementation and management of the Laois Heritage Plan have been conducted satisfactorily in terms of procedure, reporting and accounts.

Table 10.1 shows the number of actions completed during the lifetime of the Plan, those partially completed and those not yet completed. Of those not yet completed, these have been divided into those not completed to date and those proposed for inclusion in the next Plan (2007-2011).

Table 10.1 Number of Laois Heritage Plan actions completed, partially completed or not yet completed, out of a total of 89 actions

| Actions completed | Actions partially completed or underway | Actions not yet completed | |
|-------------------|---|---------------------------|------------------------|
| 57 | 11 | 19 | |
| | | Not completed to date | Proposed for 2007-2011 |
| | | 16 | 3 |

Note: 2 Plan Actions were not counted: Action 1.7 is more of a statement than an action; Action 8.25 could not be completed because the Forest Service schemes were suspended for 2 years during the lifetime of the Heritage Plan.

The statistics on the number of actions completed or otherwise do not tell the full story of the effectiveness of the Plan. The number of actions listed in the plan (89) was ambitious and it is understandable that some have not been completed. Nineteen actions have not been completed. Some of these actions were highly focused and within the remit of national bodies rather than Laois County Council. Eight actions on peatlands were included in the Plan, some of which were not completed, and perhaps there was an over-emphasis on peatlands under Objective 8.

A number of actions have been partially completed. In some cases, more needs to be done to complete the action, for example, Actions 6.2 and 6.3, where progress has been made but the listings are incomplete. Other actions are underway since the evaluation began, for example, 11.1 and 12.1. Finally, three actions have been carried over to the next Heritage Plan, 2007-2011.

It would not be wise to judge the Laois Heritage Plan solely by the actions completed or not completed. Well-chosen, objective-based performance indicators, as we have discussed in Section 11 could present a more accurate picture of the overall effectiveness of the Heritage Plan.

These observations should inform the next Heritage Plan (2007-2011). In our view, fewer actions would allow the Heritage Office and Forum more time to devote to implementing those actions more completely. Since the Heritage Council will fund eight projects or less per year, it would make sense to select 50 actions or less over a 5-year period.

11. Informing the new Laois Heritage Plan 2007-2011 (in preparation)

This evaluation, combined with the experiences of drafting and implementing the current Heritage Plan, should provide some valuable lessons for the preparation of the next Heritage Plan (2007-2011).

We feel that fewer objectives, based on approach to heritage rather than by heritage topic, might be more useful. Such objectives could include:

- “Raise awareness of heritage among the population of Laois”
- “Promote best practice in relation to heritage management”
- “Gather and disseminate information about Laois heritage”

These objectives reflect more accurately the real functions of a Heritage Plan. The structure of the current Laois Heritage Plan, with its large number of objectives and large number of actions, could be seen as somewhat constraining. The above approach to selecting objectives, combined with actions which allow some flexibility in their implementation, could result in a more dynamic and responsive Plan. Additional actions could be made under an objective to promote best practice as a means of responding to a new situation. With the structure of the current Plan, an appropriate response could be more difficult. For example, new funding could become available or a new project partner found, thereby presenting an opportunity to undertake a project which was previously unfeasible. A more flexible set of actions would allow a better response to such a new situation.

Performance-based indicators should be developed for the Laois Heritage Plan 2007-2011. This will make for easier and more efficient evaluation in the future. Objective-based performance indicators are probably the best means whereby successive Heritage Plans can be evaluated. The development of these indicators is beyond the scope of our report. However, we can provide some pointers.

Objective-based indicators might include:

- How many heritage-related publications were produced and how widely disseminated?
- What area of land or proportion of the county was surveyed for wildlife habitats?
- How many buildings or proportion of buildings were listed?

To measure objective-based indicators effectively, the appropriate data need to be collected. There is no point in selecting an indicator if the necessary data with which to measure progress cannot be obtained. Therefore, during the preparation of the next Heritage Plan, it is necessary to examine how data relating to indicators can be collected and processed. This will have implications for the structure and implementation of the forthcoming Laois Heritage Plan, and the Heritage Officer should be prepared for a possible increase in workload. It will probably mean an increase in data gathering, monitoring and reporting.

Indicators need to be selected which can be used in successive Heritage Plans, thus providing a means of measuring progress over the lifetime of several or more plans (for example, “areas of county surveyed for biodiversity”; or “number of buildings surveyed and listed”). The indicators could also be used by each county to provide comparisons between them. This would, of course, require each local authority to adopt a standard set of performance indicators. It remains to be seen if this is a practicable approach.

Finally, the Heritage Council guidelines for evaluation of Heritage Plans will need to be reviewed in the light of experience gained in Laois and other counties. Central to any such review would be the need to refine the approach to the development of performance indicators, as discussed above.

12. Conclusions

The evaluation of the Laois Heritage Plan was undertaken using the Heritage Council's standardised methodology. Performance indicators were developed which measure the effectiveness of the Plan's actions. Performance indicators, although helpful to the evaluators, do not, on their own, present a full and accurate picture of the effectiveness of the Plan. The evaluators must also use their knowledge of heritage priorities in general and Laois in particular, combined with the information gained from consultations with stakeholders, to make a fully informed and balanced judgement.

The Laois Heritage Plan 2002-2006 is an ambitious document and comprises 13 objectives and 89 individual actions. Fifty of the Plan actions were fully completed by March 2006 and 11 partially completed or underway. Of the 19 actions not yet completed, 3 are planned for inclusion in the next Heritage Plan (2007-2011). These statistics do not tell the full story, however. For example, some actions can be considered more important than others. One example is the successfully completed heritage appraisal of the Laois County Development Plan in 2004, which we believe to be vitally important for the protection of the county's heritage in the short- and medium-term. Another vitally important action is the appointment of a full-time Heritage Officer. However, in retrospect, it is evident that the Plan contained too many actions, some of which were very specific and which became dated during the period of the Plan's operation.

Examples of successful surveys undertaken were the survey of industrial sites, database of protected structures and their owners, the wildlife habitat survey, the hedgerows survey and the esker survey.

Notable awareness-raising actions include those concerned with hedgerows, folklore and folklife and Tidy Towns. The Laois County Council web site includes many publications on the county's heritage, most of which are based on actions in the Heritage Plan. The web site layout is accessible and well-presented. Awareness-raising - a central aim of the Heritage Plan - needs to increase steadily for positive results of Heritage Planning to be achieved. This need is apparent in Laois, although very good awareness-raising actions have already been achieved.

The experiences gained in the current Heritage Plan should inform the next Heritage Plan 2007-2011. The current plan is limited in its ability to respond to new situations and to initiate new projects which may only become suitable to pursue when the Plan is operational. The approach we recommend should allow the Heritage Plan to be more flexible and dynamic (see Section 13).

Concerning the management of the Heritage Plan, we have no special comments to make. We are satisfied that procedure was followed, accounts are in order and are well-presented, annual reports are concise and readable, and internal documentation is accessible. This is important, since the Heritage Council undertakes a detailed audit of the accounts each year.

Heritage planning in Ireland is still in its early stages, with the first round of Heritage Plans coming up for evaluation in 2006. In this sense, the evaluation of the Laois Heritage Plan should be viewed as a learning experience, in which the general and specific approaches can be refined in the forthcoming Heritage Plan, in the light of experience. Recommendations for possible inclusion in the next Heritage Plan are presented in Section 13.

13. Recommendations

13.1 Recommendations on Plan structure, implementation and evaluation

- 13.1.1 The structure of the Laois Heritage Plan 2007-2011 should be revised to include fewer objectives and fewer actions, numbering 50 or less. This should allow for each action to have more attention devoted to it, and more opportunity to complete it during the lifetime of the Plan. Clearly, the above does not refer to actions which are ongoing and continuous, such as various awareness-raising exercises.
- 13.1.2 Plan objectives should relate to the approach to heritage rather than to heritage topic. The objectives should reflect more closely the real functions of a Heritage Plan.
- 13.1.3 The next Heritage Plan should allow for flexibility as to the means whereby objectives and actions can be achieved. The aim should be to structure the Plan so that it can be more dynamic and responsive.
- 13.1.4 Performance indicators will be developed in order to evaluate the Heritage Plan 2007-2011. These indicators are best applied not so much to individual actions as to broad objectives. Some examples were presented in Section 11. Ideally, such indicators should be capable of being applied to successive Heritage Plans.
- 13.1.5 Performance indicators can only be meaningful if there are sufficient data with which to measure them. This means that the feasibility of collecting and handling these data need to be examined first. There is no point in developing an indicator if the appropriate data are not available or cannot be gathered. This will have implications for the Heritage Forum and the Heritage Officer and could mean an increase in workload.
- 13.1.6 There needs to be a longer timeframe for evaluation of the Laois Heritage Plan 2007-2011.
- 13.1.7 The next Heritage Forum might consider including a representative of a voluntary organisation concerned with nature conservation.

13.2 Recommendations based on heritage topics

- 13.2.1 The eight museums have yet to function as an effective network. A travelling curator might be employed to collect material and coordinate the operations of the museums.
- 13.2.2 Research on the crucially important post-1700 period (1700-1840 in urban areas) should be carried out. Some investigation might be carried out into the options for notifying landowners if they have a national monument on their land. For example, a parish project into monuments and other man-made and natural heritage could be initiated.
- 13.2.3 Laois County Council should recognise the importance of a records management element in the Archives Programme and the imposition of records management practices in accordance with statutory obligations.
- 13.2.4 Rock of Dunamaise: It is important that the planned Visual Impact Statement includes the environs of the Rock.
- 13.2.5 There is a need to campaign for greater financial assistance for the maintenance and use of the county's traditional structures.

- 13.2.6 Vernacular architecture needs particular attention in the next Heritage Plan. For example, one way to increase its profile would be to organise a photographic competition, in which the best examples of Laois structures could be displayed in a public space.
- 13.2.7 The integrated area plan for the development of historic Portlaoise is urgently required.
- 13.2.8 The biodiversity plans promoted in Offaly should be monitored carefully and the principles and practices applied, where appropriate, to Laois.
- 13.2.9 There is a need for more promotion of the concept of conservation. A conservation officer needs to be appointed.
- 13.2.10 The new Heritage Plan should include the development of a Laois Hedgerow Conservation Strategy, based on the recommendations of the survey.
- 13.2.11 Cross-linking various heritage topics could be explored. Some examples might include:
- linking the promotion of crafts with vernacular architecture.
 - a photographic competition about vernacular architecture in Laois (as described above).
- 13.2.12 A heritage audit of Laois County Council property needs to be carried out. It can provide an example for others to follow. The audit could be followed by, for example, actions to enhance the biodiversity value of certain properties, together with appropriate awareness-raising exercises.
- 13.2.13 One community forestry project could be initiated in Co. Laois in order to engage the public with environmentally-friendly forestry. Cross-linkages can be explored here, e.g. relationship between forestry and water, forestry and wildlife. If sufficient, suitable Council-owned land is available or can be made available, it might be possible to cross-link this exercise with a community forestry project.
- 13.2.14 Some actions are needed to raise awareness of water quality and aquatic heritage in the Heritage Plan 2007-2011. Example of actions might include the promotion of proper siting and maintenance of septic tanks, and reed bed treatment. The latter could be linked to the creation of new wetlands, as in south Co. Waterford. Such actions could be carried out in co-operation with the Environment Section of Laois County Council. Projects associated with the rare and protected Nore Pearl Mussel (*Margaritifera durrovensis*) and holy wells might be initiated. Possible project partners might include the NPWS and the Southern Regional Fisheries Board.
- 13.2.15 In general, the profile of heritage in Laois needs to be steadily increased. Certain awareness-raising actions found to be successful should be repeated. There needs to be a greater focus on heritage promotion in schools. Schools competitions and harnessing the skills and experience of local speakers are just a few examples of how this might be advanced. The aim should be to make heritage enjoyable and exciting as well as informative.

14. References

Ireland (2002). *National Heritage Plan*. Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands.

Heritage Council (2003). *Guidelines for Local Authority Heritage Officers on the Preparation of Heritage Plans*. Heritage Council, Kilkenny.

Heritage Council (2006). *Heritage Plan Evaluation Guide*. Heritage Council, Kilkenny.

Hickie, D (2004) *Site Audit of private afforestation applications*. An Taisce (unpublished).

Laois County Council (2006). *Laois Heritage Plan 2002-2006: Report on Implementation, February 2006*. Laois County Council and www.laois.ie

Appendix 1. Heritage Office annual work reports

1. Heritage Plan Actions completed in 2002

1. Microfilm of burial register and part of Poor Law Union material (Action 3.4). Records identified by the archivist were microfilmed.
2. Multidisciplinary graveyard seminar (Action 4.2). Held in March 2002 with 76 attendees. Resulting follow-up calls to graveyards committees by Heritage Officer and Caimin O'Brien from Dúchas.
3. Raise awareness of monument types (Action 4.9). Peter Harbison spoke on the monuments of Laois at the opening of the annual Laois seminar in November 2002.
4. Carry out one pilot village design statement (Action 6.11). As a result of partnership with Laois LEADER, a second VDS was funded. Durrow and Clonaslee villages were selected. CAAS consultants undertook the technical advice and production of the statement.
5. Audit one (large) town for wildlife present, undertake enhancement and awareness raising programme (Action 8.4). Mountmellick was selected.
6. Pilot study on incorporating heritage considerations in Tidy Towns 5 year plan (Action 8.6). Borris in Ossory was selected and CAAS consultants drew up the blueprint 5-year plan.
7. Survey the ridge esker from Tullamore to Portlaoise and propose recommendations for its preservation (Action 8.14). Survey of soils by GSI was completed but report remained to be published.
8. Annual day seminar on best practice and recent projects (Action 13.6). Over 75 bookings were made for the seminar, held in November 2002.
9. Promote heritage appraisal of appropriate plans and provide training for staff (Action 13.9) Heritage Appraisal of the Laois County Development Plan was carried out, and the appraisal of the County Strategy was in the process of being finalised.

2. Heritage Plan Actions completed in 2003

1. Survey of Industrial Heritage (Action 4.4). A paper survey of industrial heritage sites in Laois was carried out, based on the Sites and Monuments Record, cartographical and historical sources. This paper survey was to form the basis for a future field survey to be carried out in Laois.
2. Heritage Interpretation seminar (Action 8.7). A seminar was held on the theme of Heritage Interpretation, organised jointly with the Heritage Officer in Offaly County Council in Kinnitty, Co Offaly on 5 November 2003. The seminar was aimed at community groups, local heritage societies and individuals interested in presenting any aspect of the built and natural heritage to the public
3. Laois information plaques (Action 8.8). A Laois Heritage Design manual was produced for three different sign types: interpretive panels, directional signs and site identification signs. The use of the Laois Style Design will be promoted by the Heritage Officer and by Laois Leader.
4. Laois Heritage Trail Upgrade (13.8). The Laois Heritage Trail brochure was in progress.
5. Contribution to Tidy towns judging (Action 8.6). A contribution was made to the prizes for the competition in 2003, which allows the Heritage Officer access to the future development of the

competition. It is planned to introduce a more “heritage-friendly” focus to the competition in future years, with a greater emphasis on management of built and natural heritage, and less emphasis on “tidiness”.

3. Heritage Plan Actions completed in 2004

1. Sustainability options for Laois Museums (Action 1.2). A study of sustainability options for Laois Museums was completed.
2. Training for best practice in hedgerow management, in preparation for introduction of Golden Mile competition (Action 9.5, 9.9). A series of four evening seminars were held on a range of topics relating to hedgerow management, for community groups and for farmers. In addition, a half day farm walk was held, to look at practical aspects of hedgerow management.
3. Seminar on best practice in heritage management of Laois and recent projects of the Laois Heritage Plan (Action 10.2): A day-long conference on the theme “Celebrating Laois Heritage” was held in Portlaoise on 11th September 2004, as part of the celebration of Heritage Week.
4. Pilot study to examine best practice in social history recording through different media and with differing groups (Action 8.6). A series of training sessions was held in spring and summer 2004, with selected groups, on the subject of reminiscence and recording of social and oral history.
5. Support for community heritage awareness through Laois Federation of Tidy Towns. Laois Heritage Plan Action 8.6: The Heritage Officer, with the Environment Section of Laois County Council, recruited judges with expertise in the built and natural heritage, and provided guidance for communities and for judges.
6. Field Survey of Mills of County Laois. Laois Heritage Plan (Action 4.4). Postponed until 2005.

Other 2004 Laois Heritage Office Projects (undertaken without Heritage Council funding)

- Laois Natural Heritage Posters: A poster of natural heritage of Laois was printed by the Laois Heritage Office, with funding from Laois LEADER.
- Laois Heritage Postcards
- Laois Heritage Trail: Further work was undertaken on the development of the Laois Heritage Trail, and a booklet was produced.
- “Know your County” Tour: Primary and Secondary school children were facilitated in a tour of Heritage Sites in Laois
- 2005 Laois County Council Calendar: The theme of the Laois County Council Calendar for 2005 is “Laois Built Heritage”. The calendar featured a different aspect of built heritage each month.
- Laois Federation of Tidy Towns: The full Laois Tidy Towns competition for 2004 was co-funded by the Community & Environment Section of Laois County Council.

4. Heritage Plan Actions completed in 2005

1. Habitat Survey (Action 8.2). A survey of habitats in Laois was carried out using Heritage Council standard methodology. The final report on the 2005 Habitat Survey in Laois was placed on the Laois website.

2. Mills Survey (Action 6.2). A total of 150 mill sites identified from maps and other documentary sources were surveyed. The final report was placed on the Laois website.
3. Memorials Recording Project. Run jointly between Laois and Offaly Heritage Offices, with the aim of recording all aspects of graveyard memorials, for 4 graveyards in each county.
4. Esker Survey (Action 8.14). The survey was completed and the final report was placed on the Laois website.
5. Raising Awareness: Radio Soundbites. The Project Aimed to raise awareness of heritage in general and the presence in each county of a Local Authority Heritage Office, using a series of short “soundbite” type radio pieces, broadcast on Midlands Radio 3 throughout the year. Eight x 30 second heritage radio pieces were recorded.
6. “Celebrating Laois Heritage” Conference. A day-long conference on the theme “Celebrating Laois Heritage” was held in Abbeyleix on 10th September 2005, as part of the celebration of Heritage Week.
7. Hedgerow Survey (Action 9.6). The survey found the highest density and diversity of any of the four counties surveyed to date. The final report on the 2005 Hedgerow Survey in Laois is available on the Laois website.
8. Golden Mile Competition (Action 9.5). The Golden Mile of Laois was run in association with Laois LEADER. An awards evening was held during Heritage week.

Other 2005 Laois Heritage Office projects and activities (undertaken without Heritage Council funding):

- Durrow Courthouse Conservation
- Built Heritage of Laois Poster
- Heritage Calendar
- Canon O’Hanlon Centenary
- Pride of Place Competition
- Launch of Laois Heritage Trail
- Heritage Appraisal of draft Laois County Development Plan
- Slieve Bloom Eco-Node Project
- Laois Federation of Tidy Towns
- Heritage on the Farm Seminar

5. Heritage Officer Work Programme 2006 (ongoing)

| Priority | Heritage Plan Ref | Action | Partners | Action Cost in Laois (€) | Committed by Heritage Council (€) |
|-----------------|--------------------------|--|---|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. | 8.2 | Laois Habitats survey (Stage II) | - | 28,000 | 21,000 |
| 2. | 8.10 | Audit of biological datasets | Cork, Westmeath & Kildare County Councils | 7,500 | 5,625 |
| 3. | 12.1, 8.13 | Survey of dry Canal Route, Mountmellick Branch | - | 12,000 | 9,000 |
| 4. | 4.9, 7.2, 8.10, 13.8 | Production of Midlands Heritage Radio pieces | Westmeath & Offaly County Councils | 7,333 | 5,500 |
| 5. | 11.1 | Survey of traditional crafts in Laois and Offaly | Offaly County Council | 5,000 | 3,750 |
| 6. | 9.5 | Laois Golden Mile competition | Laois LEADER | 4,000 | 2,000 |
| 7. | All actions | Heritage awareness & needs survey | Westmeath & Offaly County Councils | 10,000 | 7,500 |

Appendix 2. Organisations consulted

Consultations included the "Proposed Partners" in the actions listed in the Plan:

1. An Taisce
2. Bord na Mona
3. Coillte
4. Community Groups
5. Community/Development Groups
6. Crann
7. Department of the Environment
8. Developers
9. East Coast and Midlands Tourism
10. ESB
11. Farming Organisations
12. FAS
13. Folklife Department UCD
14. Forest Service
15. Gardens of Ireland
16. Gardening Societies
17. Geological Survey of Ireland
18. Golf Course Owners
19. Heritage Council
20. ICA
21. IPCC
22. Irish Georgian Society
23. Irish Museums Association
24. Irish Wildlife Trust
25. Landowners
26. Laois County Council
27. Laois Heritage Society
28. Laois Leader
29. Laois Tourism
30. Library Service
31. National Museum of Ireland
32. NRA
33. Offaly County Council
34. Offaly Historical and Archaeological Society (OHAS)
35. Parish Councils
36. Slieve Bloom Association

37. Teagasc
38. Tidy Towns Federation
39. Tree Council of Ireland
40. Waterways Ireland
41. Owners of Collections
42. Other Individuals.

The above includes all the organisations represented on the Laois Heritage Forum and as partners in the Heritage Plan actions. We made attempts to contact all the above, but some did not reply or were not available at the time. These include the Southern Regional Fisheries Board (not represented on the Forum and not included as 'partners'), Waterways Ireland and BirdWatch Ireland.

Appendix 3. Consultants' Brief

Evaluation of Laois County Heritage Plan 2002 - 2006

Project Brief

1. Introduction

Laois County Council wishes to contract a suitably qualified individual or firm to carry out an external evaluation of the Laois Heritage Plan 2002 – 2006.

2. Context

County Heritage Plans have been implemented in partnership between the Heritage Council and Local Authorities since 2002. The adoption of County Heritage Plans in each local authority is stated Government Policy under the National Heritage Plan. The Laois Heritage Plan was adopted in 2002, and enters the final year of its implementation in 2006. An independent external evaluation is now required to analyse the effectiveness of the programme and to inform the preparation of the next County Heritage Plan for County Laois. The Heritage Council has commissioned a standard methodology (available at www.laois.ie/heritage) for the evaluation of County Heritage Plans. This methodology will be used by the successful consultants to evaluate the Laois Heritage Plan.

3. Objective

The project will assess the effectiveness of the Laois County Heritage Forum and Plan and its implementation and also identify areas for further development, using standard methodology.

4. Aims of the project

The project will incorporate the following:

- Implementation of the standard evaluation methodology which uses both quantitative and qualitative data, to assess to Laois Heritage Plan 2002 - 2006
- Consultation with key stakeholders in relation to the operation of the Laois Heritage Forum and the implementation of the projects of the Heritage Plan.
- Development of performance indicators for use in monitoring future plans.
- Presentation of a report which details the findings of the evaluation, with recommendations for changes/improvements in the County Heritage Plan programme
- Presentations on the results of the evaluation to the Laois Heritage Forum and to Laois County Council

5. Project Location

The project is limited to the area covered by the Laois Heritage Plan, ie the administrative area of County Laois. All meetings and presentations in relation to the project will take place in Laois.

6. Timescale

Appointment will be made in mid-February 2006, with the final evaluation report due for submission by the end of March 2006.

7. Project Management

A Working Group comprising representatives of the Laois Heritage Forum will guide the development of this project. Day to day contact will be with the Laois Heritage Officer.

8. Tenders

Tenders in response to this brief should set out in detail how the study will be approached, method of working, budget and any other relevant matters. The project design should include:

- Method statement, reference material to be used, consultation planned and a detailed timetable.
- A resource plan showing the breakdown of person hours between professions and stages.
- A detailed breakdown of the estimated costs of carrying out all elements of the project.

9. Required Skills and Experience

Proposals should contain clear details of the skills and experience of the project team, including the range of relevant professional skills which would be brought to bear, and the names and CVs of all proposed team members. Details should also be given of the relevant experience of the firm and personnel proposed including the project leader, with examples of previous relevant work.

Essential

- Proven experience of evaluation methodologies, particularly with reference to environmental or heritage issues
- Knowledge, experience and understanding of the County Heritage Plan process
- Experience of writing clear, concise reports for a general audience; working to tight deadlines

Desirable

- Knowledge and experience of the heritage of County Laois and the local government system

10. Required outputs

The following outputs are required: 1 loose hard colour copy of final report, 8 bound colour copies of final report; Electronic copy of report (in Microsoft Word format); Fully labelled set of any raw data including notes; Two presentations on the key findings of the evaluation will be required

Style and content of reports should be as detailed in the Heritage Council document *Standardisation of publication styles for Heritage Council reports*, available at <http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/publications/index.html>.

11. Budget

The maximum budget available for this project is €4,000. A detailed breakdown of proposed costs associated with all elements of the project (including VAT and all other expenses) should be submitted. A current tax clearance certificate will be required. Withholding tax may be deducted from any payments made under this contract.

12. Freedom of Information

Laois County Council operates under the Freedom of Information Act 1997 and all information held by the Council (including proposals submitted in response to this brief) may be subject to requests under the Act.

13. Evaluation of Proposals

Evaluation of proposals will be based on the skills and experience of the project team, cost-effectiveness and the ability of the consultant to deliver the outputs required. Short listing may apply and interviews may be held with short listed candidates prior to the final evaluation. Laois County Council is not bound to accept the lowest cost tender.

Deadline for receipt of Proposals is **12pm, February 15th 2006**. Three copies of all relevant documentation should be submitted. Tenders should be posted (*hard copy only, faxed or e-mailed proposals cannot be accepted*) to: Catherine Casey, Laois Heritage Office, Laois County Council, Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise, Co Laois.