



# Laois County Council

Annual Report 2008

Laois County Council  
In Partnership with the Community  
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## Cathaoirleach's Statement

It gives me great pleasure as Cathaoirleach to introduce Laois County Council's Annual Report for 2008.

Laois County Council continues to provide leadership in the promotion and development of the social, economic and cultural life of the county and this Annual Report provides an opportunity to highlight the achievements of the Council in 2008.

During the year, the new Civic Plaza adjacent to Áras an Chontae was opened and provides an important visual focus at this central location in the civic and commercial hub of Portlaoise. A new Fire Station was also opened in Abbeyleix during the year while the Council also continued to enhance the Library and Playground facilities in the county.

The Council provides a wide range of services for the benefit of all the citizens of the county and I would like to acknowledge the hard work of my fellow elected members and all the staff in delivering these services. The new area offices opened in Graiguecullen and Portarlinton further enhance the provision of services at local level.

2008 also saw the Council continue to promote Laois as an excellent place to visit and the county's profile was greatly enhanced by the variety of national and worldwide events held in the county during the year. Foremost among these events were the World Fleadh, the Rose of Tralee Regional Finals, the Gordon Bennett Classic Car Run and the Laois International Golf Challenge.

As we enter a period of economic difficulty and uncertainty, I am confident that Laois County Council is well placed to meet whatever challenges may arise.

Thomas Jacob,  
Cathaoirleach.





## County Manager's Foreword

Notwithstanding the very difficult economic climate, Laois County Council continued to make progress in 2008 in developing a more creative and sustainable County.

Considerable progress was achieved during 2008 in advancing critical major infrastructure such as the M7/M8 Motorway Scheme, Portlaoise Main Drainage Scheme and other major projects. The Council also delivered an impressive programme of social and affordable housing and commenced Phase 1 of the Knockmay Regeneration Project in Portlaoise.

The Council can be rightly proud of the successful provision of social infrastructure across the County and our two major leisure complexes in Portlaoise and Portarlington had an excellent first year in 2008. The rollout of an ambitious library programme continued with the completion of the Abbeyleix Library and commencement of the Mountmellick Library. Further progress continued during 2008 with the ongoing provision of playgrounds across the County.

The improvement of customer services also included the provision of new Area Offices in Graiguecullen and Portarlington, thereby facilitating local citizens. The Council continues to work with other agencies to boost the quality of life in the County. Economic development continues to be a major priority and the completion of the Portlaoise Enterprise Centre was another milestone in 2008. The Council also continued to actively support the Government Decentralisation Programme which has already resulted in the relocation of several hundred jobs to County Laois.

However, while it is important to acknowledge the progress made, there can be no doubt we are facing enormous economic challenges over the next few years. It is essential that the Council gives positive leadership to drive our local economy and to make it more resilient and sustainable.

I look forward to continuing to work in partnership with the elected Members, our staff, other public agencies, the business sector and our local communities to develop and improve County Laois into the future.

Peter Carey,  
County Manager.



# Mission Statement

*"We will provide leadership, develop, promote, protect and regulate our County and deliver quality public services so as to enhance the quality of life for the community."*

## Mandate

Laois County Council is the Primary Democratically Elected Authority in County Laois. Laois County Council provides an extensive and diverse range of services which impact upon the County's economic, social, environmental, infrastructural and tourism, industrial and cultural activities. These services include the provision and maintenance of houses, roads, water supplies and sewerage schemes, planning and development services, waste management, environmental protection, recreational activities, libraries, cultural and community development, including recreation and sport.

The Council is serviced by a large workforce, including the County Manager, professional, technical, legal, administrative, financial and outdoor employees and contractors.

## Council Membership and Meetings

Laois County Council consists of 25 Elected Members - four members each from Mountmellick, Emo and Luggacurren Electoral Areas, six members from the Portlaoise Electoral Area and seven members from the Borris-in-Ossory Electoral Area.

Council Meetings in 2008 were usually held on the last Monday of each month in the Council Chamber at Áras an Chontae. The March 2008 meeting of the Council was held in Durrow Castle as part of the Durrow 300 celebrations.

There was no meeting held in August.



Council Members and Staff with President Mary McAleese at Durrow Castle

## Corporate Policy Group (C.P.G.)

The Corporate Policy Group is designed to enhance the democratic mandate and policy making role of the elected members. The C.P.G. is supported by the County Manager and comprises the Cathaoirleach of the Council and the four Chairs of the Strategic Policy Committees (S.P.C.'s). The main function of the C.P.G. is to co-ordinate the work of the different S.P.C.'s and provide a forum where policy decisions affecting the whole Council are agreed for submission to the full Council for decision. The C.P.G. met on 12 occasions in 2008.



## Council Members

. : Mountmellick Electoral Area : .



David  
Goodwin  
MCC



Michael  
Moloney  
MCC



Paddy  
Raackan  
MCC



Seamus  
McDonald  
MCC



. : Emo Electoral Area : .



James  
Deegan  
MCC



Paul  
Mitchell  
MCC



Raymond  
Cribbin  
MCC



John D.  
Turley  
MCC

. : Portlaoise Electoral Area : .



William  
Ald  
MCC



Mary  
Sweeney  
MCC



Tom  
Jacob  
MCC



Catherine  
Fitzgerald  
MCC



Brian  
Stanley  
MCC



Jerry  
Lodge  
MCC



Laois County Council

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## Council Members

### Borris-in-Ossory Electoral Area



Laurence Jnr.  
Kavanagh  
MCC



Brendan  
Phelan  
MCC



John  
Bonham  
MCC



Geraldine  
Delaney  
MCC



Michael  
Lalor  
MCC



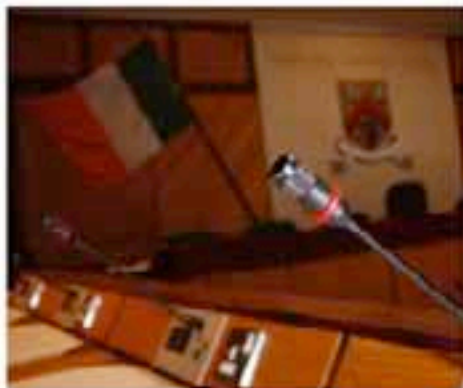
Martin  
Phelan  
MCC



John Joe  
Fennelly  
MCC



Council Chamber  
Áras an Chontae



### Luggacurren Electoral Area



Dick  
Miller  
MCC



James  
Daly  
MCC



John  
Moran  
MCC



Michael  
Rice  
MCC



# Corporate Affairs, Human Resources, Information & Communications Technology

Director of Services: Anna Marie Delaney  
Senior Executive Officer  
Corporate Affairs: Carmel McNicholl  
Senior Executive Officer  
Human Resources: Michael Rainey  
Head of Information Systems: John Forde

## Corporate Plan 2004 – 2009

The present Corporate Plan covers the period 2004 to 2009. The Council continues to pursue the detailed strategies for the achievement of the objectives listed in the Plan. An annual Progress Report is submitted to the Members.

## Customer Charter

Laois County Council has a Customer Charter which sets out the way in which the Council endeavours to deal with its customers. The document is on display in all public Council Offices and on our website at [www.laois.ie](http://www.laois.ie). The Charter includes a Customer Complaints Procedure which may be availed of by any person not satisfied with the quality of service received.

## Highlights

- 7th March, 2008 – Signing of Twinning Agreement between County Laois and Franklin, Williamson County, Tennessee, USA.
- 7th May, 2008 – Cathaoirleach's Reception in honour of Heywood Community School – All Ireland Under 19 National Basketball Cup winners
- 18th June, 2008 – Civic Reception in honour of Special Olympics Ireland 30th Anniversary
- 28th June, 2008 – Cathaoirleach's Reception in honour of the 54th O'Malley Clan Gathering
- 17th September, 2008 – Cathaoirleach's Reception in honour of Seamus Graham – Trainer of 2008 English Greyhound Derby winner
- 19th November, 2008 – Cathaoirleach's Reception in honour of The Heath Community Games Rounders teams – Leinster and All Ireland Champions

## Higher Education Grants

Laois County Council awards Higher Education Grants under the Local Authorities (Higher Education Grants) Acts, 1968-1992, on behalf of the Department of Education and Science. To be eligible for a grant under the Scheme, a candidate must satisfy the requirements as laid out in the Scheme. The Scheme is advertised annually and the closing date for receipt of completed applications is 31st August of each year.

Details of the Scheme and application forms are usually available in July from the Higher Education Grants Section at [heg@laoiscoco.ie](mailto:heg@laoiscoco.ie), Tel: (057) 8664137, or on our Website at [www.laois.ie/heg](http://www.laois.ie/heg).

Under the 2008 Grants Scheme, Laois County Council awarded 179 new grants and 306 grants were renewed. The maximum maintenance grant available was €3,420 and Registration fee was increased to €900. The Special Rate of Maintenance Grant payable increased to €6,690.

33 new awards and 41 renewal awards qualified for payment of this grant.

The total amount paid out in 2008 was €2,375,408.09



Civic Reception in honour of  
Special Olympics Ireland 30th Anniversary





# Corporate Affairs, Human Resources, Information & Communications Technology

## Partnership

The following were the members of the Workplace Partnership Committee at 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2008.

### Management Nominees

John Daly, Joint Chair  
Anna Marie Delaney  
Angela McEvoy  
Ian McCormack  
Gerry Maher

### Union Nominees

Bill Devoy, Joint Chair  
Geraldine Campion  
Tom Saunders  
Wes Wilkinson  
Valerie O'Reilly

The Partnership Committee held 9 meetings during 2008.

## Activities 2008

### Policies Agreed

- Acting Up Policy Agreed and in operation
- Attendance Management Policy
- Travel & Subsistence Policy
- Authorised Drivers Policy
- Diversity at Work – People with Disabilities
- Cultural Diversity – People of all colour, nationality or ethnic or national origin (race)
- Review of Secondment Policy

### Other Issues

- Current Employee Suggestion Scheme – 15 submissions received – to be evaluated by External Audit Committee
- PMDS completed for 2008.
- Performance Verification Group Site Visit on 2nd April, 2008
- Long Service Awards presented to 18 employees in June, 2008

## Area Partnership Activities

### Welfare Facilities

Provision of new welfare units at: -

- Derryguile, Mountmellick,
- Ballymorris, Portarlington
- Mountrath Sewerage Works.
- New Depots at Graiguecullen
- New Area Offices in Graiguecullen and Portarlington



Official Opening of Graiguecullen Area Office



Official Opening of Portarlington Area Office



# Corporate Affairs, Human Resources, Information & Communications Technology

## Handling Significant Change Through Partnership

Two meetings of the Handling Significant Change Through Partnership Steering Group were held in 2008.

## Funding

€29,000 was received in funding from LANPAG for Partnership Projects.

## Performance Verification Group

The Partnership Committee participated in the presentation to the Performance Verification Group in 2008, giving details of progress made in the work of the Partnership Committee during the previous two years.

## Freedom Of Information (F.O.I.)

### Applications received/processed in 2008

Applications on hand at 31/12/2007	Nil
Applications received during 2008	33
Decisions taken during 2008	31
Decisions refused	Nil
Applications withdrawn	1
Applications on hand at 31/12/2008	1

### Nature of Information Sought

Personal (to applicant)	16
Non-Personal	17

### Appeals

Appeals to Information Commissioner	Nil
Appeals to High Court	Nil

### Source of Requests

Journalists	2
Business	Nil
Oireachtas Members	Nil
Local Authority Members	Nil
Others/General Public	31

## Health & Safety

**Safety Advisor:** Jim Bolger

Laois County Council undertook to use the Health and Safety Authorities (HSA) 'Safe System of Work Plan' (SSWP) for all Roads crews. To ensure that all relevant employees had the necessary skills to implement the SSWP, an extensive training programme was provided. As many other Local Authorities are now also using this system, the expectation is that it should serve to ensure a more consistent national approach to safety management on roadwork sites.

An extensive inoculation programme was also provided for relevant employees during 2008. This programme proved very successful as there was a very large uptake from targeted employees.

Defibrillators were provided at many Council areas but in particular at areas which members of the public use frequently e.g. Motor Tax, the Civic Plaza, Libraries etc.

Phase one of the roll out of the 'Personal Protection System' was completed in 2008 and this system will serve to enhance the safety, health and wellbeing of employees who 'work alone' or work in 'remote locations'.



County Manager and Members with Mr John Bruton, EU Commissioner to the US, during the trip to the USA for the signing of Twinning Agreement with Franklin, Williamson County, Tennessee.



# Corporate Affairs, Human Resources, Information & Communications Technology

## Register of Electors 2008/2009

The Council is responsible for the compilation of the Register of Electors for County Laois which comes into force on 15<sup>th</sup> February each year. To be eligible for inclusion in the Register of Electors, you must be at least 18 years of age on the day that the Register comes into force and you must have been ordinarily resident in the State on the 1<sup>st</sup> September preceding the coming into force of the Register.

Dáil Constituency Laois/Offaly	Presidential Electors 52,043	Dáil Electors 52,563
European Parliament Constituency Leinster	European Electors 52,719	Potential European Electors 177
<b>Local Electoral Areas</b>	<b>Number of Electors</b>	
Borris in Ossory	14,151	
Emo	8,948	
Luggacurren	8,818	
Mountmellick	8,053	
Portlaoise	13,305	
Total	53,275	
<b>Borough or Town Council</b>	<b>Local Government Electors</b>	
Mountmellick Urban	2,859	
Portlaoise Urban	7,369	
Total	10,228	
<b>Postal and Special Voters</b>	<b>Dáil Constituency – Laois /Offaly</b>	
Gardaí	1	
Defence Forces	167	
Diplomats	4	
Physically Disabled	17	
Occupation Etc.	0	
Special Voters	105	

## Conferences Attended in 2008

The Members of Laois County Council attended the following Conferences in 2008:

Showcase Ireland	Dublin	21 Jan.
EPA Climate Change	Dublin	22 Jan.
Merriman Winter School	Westport	1 – 3 Feb.
Mid West Regional Authority	Ardee	7 – 8 Feb.
Association of Municipal Authorities	Trim	15 – 16 Feb.
Third Newest Immigrants	Letterkenny	21 – 23 Feb.
Skillnets Innovation	Limerick	28 Feb.
Irish Recycling Waste Mgt. Event	Dublin	5 Mar.
Colmcille Heritage Trust	Letterkenny	29 Feb. – 2 Mar.
Training Seminar for Councillors	Clonmel	7 – 9 Mar.
Local Authority Members Assoc.	Trim	27 – 28 Mar.
Rattoo Heritage Society	Ballubunion	2 – 6 Apr.
Kadenza	Letterkenny	4 – 6 Apr.
Birdwatch Ireland	Newtownmountkennedy	4 – 6 Apr.
Sherkin Ireland Marine Station	Cork	17 – 18 Apr.
Convergence Sustainable Living Festival	Dublin	18 Apr.
Slí Eile – Another Way to Recovery	Charleville	18 Apr.
Housing Conference	Cork	24 – 25 Apr.
B.M.W. Regional Authority – Investing in your Future	Portlaoise	1 May
Community Transport in 21st Century	Tralee	14 – 15 May
Local Government & the Environment	Ballyvaughan	16 May
The Cruchan School – Irish Culture & Heritage	Roscommon	16 – 18 May
The National Hub Conference	Mallow	29 May
Local Government Housing Service	Castlebellingham	6 – 8 Jun.
Regional Seminar on the Green Paper	Athlone	11 Jun.
Cross Border Co-operation	Dundalk	12 – 13 Jun.
Bioenergy	Athlone	19th Jun.
Byrne Perry Summer School	Gorey	27 – 29 Jun.
Synge Summer School	Rathdrum	29 Jun. – 5th Jul.
Local Government Planning Service	Skibbereen	4 – 6 Jul.
Ballymote Community Enterprise	Ballymote	10 – 12 Jul.



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## Conferences Attended in 2008 (cont):

National Day of Commemoration	Dublin	13 Jul.
Local Government in Sport	Oughterard	30 Jul. - 1 Aug.
Parnell Summer School	Rathdrum	10 - 15 Aug.
Merriman Summer School	Ennis	17 - 23 Aug.
Humbert Summer School	Ballina	21 - 24 Aug.
Tidy Towns	Dublin	8 Sept.
National Advisory Council Conference – Valuing our Water	Kilkenny	18 Sept.
Citizen First International Conference Supporting our S.M.E.S. - Overcoming barriers to their Development	Ennis	25 - 26 Sept.
Getting a Grip	Athlone	29 - 30 Sept.
2008 La Touche Legacy Seminar	Killarney	2 - 3 Oct.
Displacement – Real or Imagined	Greystones	3 - 5 Oct.
Europe – Internal Power	Dublin	6 Oct.
The Credit Crunch	Cork	8 Oct.
4th Annual Frank McCann Seminar	Dublin	9 October
Protecting our Water Resources	Strokestown	9 - 12 Oct.
TJK Conferences – Freedom of Information Seminar	Oughterard	9 - 12 Oct.
Local Authority Financing	Limerick	10 - 11 Oct.
21st Dr. Douglas Hyde	Kenmare	16 - 18 Oct.
The Good Friday Agreement – 10 years on	Ballaghaderreen	17 - 19 Oct.
Irish Language course for Councillors	Clifden	24 - 25 Oct.
Plan Expo	Galway	26 - 29 Oct.
Public Relations & Communication Skills for Councillors	Dublin	4 - 6 Nov.
Impact of Domestic Violence	Letterkenny	14 - 16 Nov.
LAMA – Annual Winter Seminar	Tullamore	22 Nov.
	Castlebar	26 - 27 Nov.

## Human Resources

### Recruitment Statistics

A total of 540 people were employed by Laois County Council at 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2008.

During 2008, Laois County Council held 42 competitions, in relation to which the following statistics have been extracted:

Total Applications received: 1086

	Male	Female
Applicants	586	500
Successful Applicants	137	135

### Permanent Appointments/Promotions 2008

	Male	Female
Appointments	22	19
Promotions	11	1

### Work Life Balance Initiatives

At year-end, 9 employees were availing of the Career Break Scheme, 25 employees were availing of the job/work sharing scheme, 24 employees availed of the Parental Leave Scheme and 10 employees availed of Term Time.

### Industrial Relations

Laois County Council continues to be characterised by good industrial relations. No days were lost due to industrial action in 2008.

### Employee Training & Development

Laois County Council is committed to training and developing all our employees in the context of securing the goals and objectives of the Council and for the skills development of employees. Laois County Council is striving toward continuous improvement in service delivery through the personal development of its employees.

The annual training programme is primarily based on the individual training needs identified through staff Personal Development Plans as part



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of the PMDS process. The Programme also incorporates Health & Safety Needs, Return to Learning Programme, Third Level Open Learning Programme and various Seminars/Workshops as they arise.



Expenditure on training was €382,000. A very comprehensive training programme was delivered throughout 2008. A sample of the training programmes provided is as follows: -

- ECDL & Advanced ECDL
- Disability Awareness Training
- Induction Training
- Abrasive Wheel
- Safepass
- Traffic Management Training
- First Aid
- Retirement Planning
- Sign Lighting & Guarding
- Mini Digger Training

A total number of 8 staff in the organisation successfully completed a Manual Handling Instructor & Assessors' Training Course. These trainers have now initiated a roll-out training programme across the organisation.

## Open Learning Programme

Laois County Council endeavours to facilitate employees wishing to pursue Third Level Open Learning Courses that are relevant to and contribute to the business development of both the Council and the employee's role and responsibilities. A sample of the Open Learning programmes facilitated are as follows:

- IPA Certificate, Diploma & Degree in Local Government Studies
- NUI Galway - Diploma in Irish
- Athlone IT - Higher Diploma in Engineering Highway Technology
- IPA - Certificate in Managing Change
- NUI Maynooth - Diploma in First Line Management
- UCD - Certificate in Health & Safety at Work

## Supporting Diversity:

Laois County Council supports the employment of people with disabilities and meets its target as set out by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. During 2008, Laois County Council, in conjunction with Midland Employment Support Agency, facilitated a number of work experience placements for people with disabilities.



## Excellence Through People

The Excellence Through People accreditation is Ireland's national standard for Human Resource development. The award is achieved by organisations that have best practice Human Resource systems in place, particularly in the area of employee training and development, communication, and employee involvement in the decision making processes in the organisation. Laois County Council first achieved this award in 2005. In 2008, the award was granted for for a further period of 2 years and is due for review in 2010.

This prestigious award is a great achievement on behalf of employees. It is an external validation conducted by FÁS and highlights the commitment and effort of all employees to their own learning and development as well





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as their involvement, as individuals and as part of a team, in the continuous improvement of the operation of the organisation's services and goals.

## Staff Policies

In line with best practice in Human Resource Management, Laois County Council has developed a range of staff policies - the following were introduced during 2008:

- Acting up Policy
- Guidelines for the Protection of Children
- Attendance Management Policy
- Travel and Subsistence Policy

## HR, Payroll and Superannuation Project

The HR, Payroll and Superannuation project in Laois County Council is part of a national project being implemented by 27 local authorities and their Town Councils. The project is being implemented on a phased basis with Laois in wave 1 of 4 implementation waves. The new system will integrate and standardise the administration of HR, Payroll and Superannuation in the local authorities that implement it. The Laois project team has been in place since August, 2008, carrying out a data capture exercise in preparation for implementation beginning in April, 2009. The project will conclude in June, 2010.

## National Performance Indicators

The Council exceeded the 3% National Performance Indicator for expenditure on training and development as a percentage of total payroll costs in 2008. The out-turn was 4.61%

Expenditure on Training & Development as a percentage of total payroll costs:

2007	2008
5.5%	4.61%

In relation to the number of working days lost to certified and uncertified

illness the following statistics apply.

	2007	2008
Certified	3.93%	4.75%
Uncertified	0.41%	0.38%

Local Service Indicator - No. of Training Days provided to staff - 1330

## Information & Communications Technology Department

In 2008, the ICT Department continued to push Laois County Council to the forefront in the use of modern technology and retained its position as one of the leading local authorities in this area in the country. The main projects that the ICT Department was involved in are grouped below under three headings i.e. Geographic Information Systems (G.I.S.), Software Development and Network Administration.

### Geographic Information Systems (G.I.S.)

G.I.S. has become an increasingly important technology in local authorities in analysing data with a geographical aspect. 2008 saw the roll out of the SSPS (self service pre-planning system) system on our website [http://193.178.1.178/laois\\_ssps/](http://193.178.1.178/laois_ssps/). This system allows the user to draw their proposed development site on OS mapping. This site is then submitted into the system, then queries relevant GIS layers and provides a report which can be used in a pre-planning meeting. Information such as previous applications in the locality, zoning information and water vulnerability, etc can be assessed. This report can be printed by the user or stored in the system using a report number and unique password which can later be accessed in a pre-planning meeting.

2008 also saw the development of a new corporate browser SIA or Spatial Intranet Application. Developed by the LGCSB, it will replace the existing browser system. It will be rolled out over the coming months to correspond with the rollout of the new Intranet. The SIA is a more user friendly system with more query options and a larger map window, which can be used to view many GIS layers from each department in conjunc-



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tion with the full suite of Ordnance Survey Ireland mapping.

## Software Development & Internet/Intranet

Laois.ie was recognized with the best local authority website award at the e-Government awards ceremony in April, where progress made on accessibility within the site was also recognised.

Over 80 employees throughout the Council are trained to use the content management system for the website [www.laois.ie](http://www.laois.ie). All sections now upload their own content and latest news items. The website is maintained on an ongoing basis with continuous improvements to enhance accessibility and usability. Our online payments have proven very successful with 10 services available which include Water Charges, Housing Rents and Housing Loans.

The new Intranet site is under development in Sharepoint 2007. It will have enhanced accessibility design and it will improve communication throughout the organization and allow staff to collaborate more on shared projects. It will also allow the introduction of new workflows and should result in better management of projects with more digital sharing and much less of a paper trail. In effect it will be a one stop shop for all our internal/external applications and documents broken down by the various sections.

Laois.ie now contains a FAQ section which will help site users in navigation as well as answer the most common queries collated from the sections. The site now contains video for users to view council services such as how to apply in as simple terms as possible for higher education grants. It is the intention to add a library of other video on services provided to the public via the website. New content always being added to the website and more users trained in content management.

## Network Administration

This department processed in excess of 2,600 support calls from Users during 2008, covering a wide variety of Hardware & Software issues. Just over 45 latest spec. PC's were provided to users throughout the organisation, in addition to Laptops, Servers, Printers, etc., as part of the annual Hardware replacement programme.

A number of significant infrastructural Projects were completed during 2008 including the following:

- We entered into an agreement with Magnet Networks to replace our 2 Mb Government Networks connection with a 50Mb connection for an equivalent payment. Later in 2008 we migrated the Motor Tax office connection to the VRU in Shannon onto this line which has provided an additional cost saving to Laois County Council.
- Upgrades to our wide area network were completed at Libraries in Mountrath, Portarlinton, Rathdowney, Mountmellick, Council office at Mountmellick Courthouse, Borris in Ossory and Portarlinton sewerage plant.
- Abbeyleix library was completed in 2008 with the installation of over 20 networked computers along with a modern voice over IP phone system, public internet and colour printing facilities.
- Durrow library was also completed in 2008 with the installation of public internet access points and colour printing facilities.
- Graiguecullen area office was also completed in 2008 with the installation of a modern computer network and voice over IP phone system for Council staff.
- To facilitate construction work on the new library in Mountmellick, the Town Council office was temporarily moved into the library in Irishtown, Mountmellick.
- Work began on new facilities for Portarlinton Area Office, Stradbally Area Office and Staff Welfare units in Portarlinton and Mountmellick.
- Remote working facilities were provided at Mountmellick Community Centre to allow Council staff to work more closely with their customers.
- During 2008 we upgraded our Antivirus software to the latest edition to ensure that Council data is suitably protected from malicious attacks.
- Additional work in data protection was carried out with an upgrade to our Storage area network and Tape library backup system.
- Early in 2008, we installed Microsoft System Management Server which allows staff in IT to roll out new PC's, operating systems and upgrades at a much faster rate than previously.
- Late in 2008, we upgraded our Helpdesk system and workshop area to improve accessibility for staff and visitors with disabilities.



# Housing, Social & Cultural Policy

Chair: Brian Stanley MCC

## Members:

William Aird, M.C.C.  
Laurence Kavanagh Jnr., M.C.C.  
Paddy Bracken, M.C.C.  
Seamus McDonald, M.C.C.  
Catherine Fitzgerald, M.C.C.  
Marc Connolly, T.C.

## Sectoral:

Mary Wheatley  
Pat Culleton  
John Grace  
Mick Dowling

## Director Of Services:

## Senior Executive Officer:

## Senior Executive Engineer:

## Senior Social Worker:

## County Librarian:

Anna Marie Delaney

Martin Daly

P.J. Dempsey

Fionnuala Daly

Gerry Maher

## Housing Services

Laois County Council's key objective is to maximise the availability of accommodation to meet different categories of need and to promote the full range of housing options.

### Highlights during 2008

- Successful implementation of Part V arrangements under the Planning & Development Acts and the Housing Strategy which resulted in the delivery of 249 units.
- Successful delivery of 149 social housing units
- Successful delivery of 185 affordable housing units with prices starting from €140,000.
- Completion of 92 voluntary housing units in Mountmellick, Portlaoise, Borris-in-Ossory and Abbeyleix.
- Work commenced on €6m scheme to refurbish and regenerate Oakleaf Place, Knockmay, Portlaoise.
- Completed plans and design of community facility in Knockmay in partnership with the community

## Report on Strategic Policy Committee (S.P.C.)

During 2008, the Housing, Social and Cultural S.P.C. met in March, June, September and December. At these meetings, reports and recommendations were received and considered from the Housing Section, Arts Section, Heritage Section, Sports & Leisure Section and the Library Section.

The Members adopted policies on Housing Adaptation Grants for People with a Disability, Mobility Aids Grant and Housing Aid for Older People Scheme. They also adopted a policy on Transitional Units of Accommodation for Homeless Persons, Byelaws in relation to the Control of Horses, a proposal to designate all open spaces taken in charge as amenity areas, the County Laois Play Plan 2008-2010 and the draft Traveller Accommodation Programme 2009-2013. They also discussed issues relating to the Scheme of Letting Priorities and management company fees and the integration of social and affordable housing.

## Rental Accommodation Scheme

The Rental Accommodation Scheme is a government initiative to cater for the accommodation needs of persons who are in receipt of rent supplement for a long period of time and who have a long term housing need. The scheme is intended to provide good quality rented accommodation for eligible persons and it enhances the response of Laois County Council in meeting the long-term needs of applicants.

Work is ongoing on assessing applicants' suitability for inclusion in the scheme and landlords are participating. Further information in relation to the scheme is available at [www.laois.ie](http://www.laois.ie)

## Housing Construction & Acquisition

During the year, 149 houses were completed under this Programme. The breakdown is as follows:

Rural dwellings	4 units
St Kieran's, Errill	10 unit
Arderin, Camross	8 units



## Housing, Social & Cultural Policy

Clonrooske Abbey (Pt V)	7 units
Mill Lane, Ballyfin Road Mountrath (Pt V)	1 unit
Rush Hall, Mountrath (Pt V)	16 units
Ossory Court, Borris in Ossory (Pt V)	1 unit
Manor Grove, Mountmellick (Pt V)	4 units
Castlegate, Portarlinton (Pt V)	8 units
Lansdowne, Portarlinton (Pt V)	12 units
Ballymorris Court, Portarlinton (Pt V)	4 units
Derrycorris, Portarlinton (Part V)	6 units
Maryborough Village, Portlaoise (Pt V)	40 units
Esker Hills, Portlaoise	25 units
Bridle Walk, Portlaoise	1 unit
Purchases of single units	2 units
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>149 units</b>

The total amount received from the Department for the Capital Programme in 2008 was €20,000,610.

### Summary of Programme

Houses under construction at 01/01/08	111
Houses commenced in 2008	99
Houses completed in 2008	149
Houses in progress at 31/12/08	61

*(The above summary includes demountables, second-hand purchases and Part V acquisitions.)*

### Knockmay Development Project

Laois County Council is undertaking a multi-million euro re-development of the Knockmay Estate in Portlaoise.

The Knockmay area of Portlaoise covers approximately 30 acres of land and comprises of six individual local authority estates containing a total of 217 houses, built and occupied over a 17-year period from 1980 to 1997.

A Masterplan has been prepared and agreed following extensive consultations with all relevant stakeholders and it was presented to the residents at a special meeting held on 3rd July, 2006. It is hoped that the project will address many of the problems with the original design of the estates and the social issues that have arisen.



Signing of Contracts for Phase 1 of Knockmay Regeneration Project

Phase 1/Pilot Programme at Oakleaf Place commenced in May, 2008 and is well underway. The physical works include improvements to the houses, demolition and replacement of some dwellings, removal of alleyways, redesign of open spaces and the construction of boundary walls. Laois County Council and the Stakeholders are also developing proposals for the construction of a neighbourhood centre and crèche.

Laois County Council is very positive about this project and has assigned dedicated staff resources on site to deal with all aspects of implementation. The staff will also work with the local residents to ensure that resources are used wisely and that maximum benefits are derived for the community from the re-development.

### Planned Maintenance Programme

The Planned Maintenance Phase 4 programme continued during 2008. This programme involves the carrying out of double glazing and fascia work to approximately 244 houses, electrical work to 149 houses and the provision of mains smoke alarms to approximately 285 houses. These works were completed in December, 2008.



# Housing, Social & Cultural Policy

## Central Heating Programme

In 2004, a new central heating programme was made available by The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The funding available is €5,600 per dwelling or 80% of expenditure, whichever is the lesser. Since 2004 approximately 490 houses have been provided with central heating with approximately 20 of these having been completed in 2008. The programme is now completed.

## Maintenance of Local Authority Stock

At 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2008, the Council had 1,948 dwellings in its rented stock, 98% of which were let at the end of the year. During 2008, a total of 3,138 repair requests were received by the Maintenance Section of which 2,894 were completed (92.2%).

## Part V- Housing Strategy

In accordance with Part V of the Housing Strategy, 258 housing units (125 social and 133 affordable) were completed around the county in 2008. 91 units (54 social and 37 affordable) are currently in progress in Ballylinan, Mountrath, Portlaoise, Rathdowney and Stradbally. In addition, a number of agreements are in place for the provision of more Part V units in these towns. Negotiations are also ongoing, under the Housing Strategy, for the provision of additional units at a number of locations around the County.

## Voluntary Housing Sector

The Voluntary Sector continues to play a vital role in assisting to meet the accommodation needs in Laois. In 2008, Respond! Housing Association completed work on 22 units in Portlaoise and 8 units in Abbeyfeix and are currently working on 20 units in Mountrath. Also in 2008, Owenass Housing Association for Intellectually Disabled completed work on a 6-bed unit in Mountmellick, Cluid Housing Association completed work on 47 units in Portlaoise and 9 units in Borris in Ossory and are currently working on 40 units in Portarlington.

## Affordable Housing

During the year affordable housing units were completed at the following locations:

Portarlington	36 units
Clonaslee	8 units
Errill	4 units
Camross	4 units
Part Vs	133 units
Total	185 units



Housing at Errill Village

Work is in progress on 8 units in Mountrath and there are currently houses for sale in all the major population centres. Prices start at €140,000 and represent a substantial discount on the market price.

## Private Sites Scheme

Following the adoption by the Members of Laois County Council of a Sale of Sites Scheme in 2006 a number of private sites were made available in Castletown, Ballyroan and Clonaslee. The purchase price of these sites is Castletown - €55,500, Ballyroan - €57,000 and Clonaslee - €48,000.

Some applicants may be able to buy these sites for as little as €23,700 if they qualify for a site subsidy. Interested parties should contact the Housing Department for details.





# Housing, Social & Cultural Policy

## Activity under Various Schemes

### Extensions to Local Authority Dwellings:

Commenced	-	14
Completed	-	9

### Improvement Works in Lieu of Local Authority Housing:

Commenced	-	2
Completed	-	2

### Disabled Persons Grants:

Total No. of Grants Paid	-	76
(Totalling €)	-	€907,869

### Essential Repairs Grants:

Total No. of Grants Paid	-	62
(Totalling €)	-	€465,884

### Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability:

Applications received	-	100
Total No. of Grants Paid	-	20
(Totalling €)	-	€397,639

### Mobility Aids Housing Grant Scheme:

Applications received	-	33
Total No. of Grants Paid	-	12
(Totalling €)	-	€48,390

### Housing Aid for Older People Scheme:

Applications received	-	200
Total No. of Grants Paid	-	23
(Totalling €)	-	€143,200

(Note: These 3 grants were introduced in November, 2007, to replace the Disabled Person Grant and the Essential Repairs Grant).

### Tenant Purchase Scheme:

Applications Received	-	23
Houses Sold	-	8

### Shared Ownership Loans:

Applications Approved	-	17
Transactions Completed	-	5

### Mortgage Allowance Scheme:

Applications Received	-	10
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## Housing Rents

The Council reviews its Differential Rent Scheme on an annual basis. The latest Scheme was implemented in October, 2008. The average weekly rent, under the 2008 Scheme, is €40.50. A total rental income of over €3.6m was received.

## Traveller Accommodation

The Four Year Traveller Accommodation Programme 2005-2008 was adopted by the Council in April 2005. Significant progress in relation to the accommodation of the Travelling Community has been made in County Laois with 13 families being accommodated in 2008. The five year Traveller Accommodation Programme 2009 - 2013 was adopted by the Council in January, 2009.



# Housing, Social & Cultural Policy

## Estate Management

2008 saw the continued development of the Council's policy on resident participation in Estate Management, addressing issues such as:

- Estate Management
- General Maintenance
- Traffic Calming Measures
- Anti-social behaviour

Pre-tenancy courses and tenant handbooks were provided for all new tenants.

## Best Estate Competition 2008

Category A: Laois County Council Housing Estate opened more than 10 years

1st Prize: Woodview, Stradbally

2nd Prize: Parnell Crescent, Portlaoise

Category B: Laois County Council Housing Estate opened between 3 to 10 years

Prize: Slieve Bloom View, Borris-in-Ossory

Category C: Laois County Council Housing Estate opened less than 3 years

Prize: Churchfield Heights, Castletown

Special Award for the estate which has made the greatest improvement to their estate went to Clanmalire Close, Portarlinton.

A Tenant Liaison Officer and a mobile Caretaker for the Aged and Disabled continue to work in the Housing Department with a separate Tenant Liaison Officer for the Knockmay area in Portlaoise. In 2008 there were 63 Residents' Associations supported by the Housing Department.

## Performance Indicators

Performance Indicator	2007	2008
Total number of dwellings in local authority stock	1,819	1,891
% that are empty	4%	1.81%
% of empty dwellings subject to major refurbishment schemes	12.3%	0%
% of empty dwellings unavailable for letting	45.70%	34.31%
% of empty dwellings available for letting	42%	65.69%
Average time taken to relet dwellings available for re-letting (a) time taken from notification of date of vacation of dwelling to date when all necessary repairs are carried out which are deemed necessary to re-let dwelling (b) time taken from works at (a) being completed to the date of first rent debit	1.09 weeks	9 weeks 2 weeks
Number of repairs completed as a % of the number of valid requests received	92.93%	92.22%
Average time taken to inform applicants of local authority's decision on applications: -		
Shared Ownership Housing Scheme	6.25 days	No longer a measurement
Housing Loans Scheme	19 days	
Local Authority Housing	28.1 days	
Total No. of traveller families accommodated as a percentage of the targets set in the local Traveller Accommodation Programme	125%	72.22%



## Housing, Social & Cultural Policy

Percentage of Rent Arrears	2007	2008
Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due (Rental Income)	88%	93.31%
4-6 weeks old	7.07%	10.47%
6-12 weeks old	8.45%	11.85%
over 12 weeks old	75.70%	81.41%
Grants to adapt housing for the needs of people with a disability		
(a) Average time taken (in weeks ) to notify applicants of decision under Mobility Aids Grant Scheme on receipt of a valid application		4 weeks
(b) Average time taken (in weeks) to notify applicants of decision under Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability on receipt of a valid application		8 weeks
Tenant Training - Percentage of total new local authority tenants who have completed pre-tenancy training		43.45%
Enforcements of standards in private rented sector		
(a) Total number of registered tenancies		2202
(b) Number of dwelling units inspected		101
(c) Number of inspections carried out		101
(d) Number of dwellings inspected as a % of registered tenancies		4.59%

**www.laois.ie**

Do it on-line

Do you know that you can avail of many on-line services on Laois County Council's website? These include:

- Pay On-line - Parking fines, Motor Tax Renewal, Landfill keyfob, Composter, Litter Fines, Fire Charges and more.
- Planning online - View applications and associated documents.
- Check the Register of Electors to see if you are registered to vote.
- Renew and browse for Library books online.
- View current jobs and download requirements, application forms and supporting documentation.
- View Publications.
- View Latest News.
- A range of application forms are available to download.



# Housing, Social & Cultural Policy

## The Arts

### Laois School of Music

The Laois School of music maintained its student body of 350 pupils, 18 part-time tutors and a full-time co-ordinator in 2008. The Laois Primary Schools Instrument Bank was launched in March, in conjunction with the Dunamaise Arts Centre and four local business sponsors, providing 20 Violins and 4 Cellos to two Primary Schools in the county for a period of 2 years. The LSM Orchestra performed in The Helix, Dublin, for the Chernobyl Children's Appeal Concert and in Portlaoise Civic Plaza for the Rose of Tralee Regional Finals amongst other local events. Families from the School of Music hosted French visitors from Portlaoise's twin town, Colounieix-Chamiers, France, in July. New musical initiatives this year were the establishment of the LSM Flute Choir and the LSM Adult Ensemble. Also, a new centre opened in Durrow in November, 2008, on a pilot basis, with classes in Kindermusic, Piano, Keyboards and Guitar.



Launch of Instrument Bank at  
Dunamaise Arts Centre

### Laois Youth Theatre

The 5 Laois Youth Theatre groups in Laois - Portlaoise, Stradbally, Mountrath, Portarlinton and Rathdowney - had a very busy year that included performances of plays in the Dunamaise Arts Centre, in Stradbally and in Rathdowney. Portlaoise Youth Theatre presented the play "Understanding Marcus" in Roscommon in November as part of the National Association of Youth Drama's NEW STAGE Regional Festival. An end of year reception was held in Áras an Chontae where all youth theatre members were presented with certificates of participation.

### Writer in Residence

The Writer in Residence, Caroline Barry, completed her six months residency in 2008. During her time in Laois she organised writers' workshops for younger writers with large numbers attending and also worked with a number of writers groups, Libraries, Schools and Portlaoise Prison as well as giving assistance to individual writers. The new Laois Anthology "Gold" was compiled and edited as part of the programme and copies of the book are now available from local bookshops, The Dunamaise Arts Centre and the Arts Office.

### Electric Picnic

The Arts Office in association with the Greencrafts group worked on a project with 7 Laois artists in the making of an environmental labyrinth at the festival and in association with Poetry Ireland a project was designed for the Spoken Word area that included dramatic performances of literary works of art.

### Access Funding

Grant aid under the ACCESS II scheme in the amount of €440,000 (max) has been approved by the Minister for Arts, Sports and Tourism, towards the cost of the Arthouse project in Stradbally. The work is to include the conversion of the old courthouse into a new arts facility.



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## Summer Arts programme

The 2008 Summer Arts Programme was a great success, with a total of 24 different weeklong workshops designed for children, adults and young people. These took place over the summer period and included Art, Pottery, Creative Writing, Drama, Dance and Kindermusic.



Dance Workshop at Summer Arts Programme



Arts Workshop at The Swan  
Summer Arts Programme



## "Leaves" - Laois Literary Weekend

The Arts Office, in association with the Dunamaise Arts centre, organised a literary festival on 12th, 13th and 14th September, 2008. The new Laois Anthology titled "Gold" was launched by Jane O'Hanlon of Poetry Ireland at the event. The festival included a number of readings, music, and workshops in the Dunamaise Arts Centre and it will become an annual event.

## UNIT Artists Project: November - February

UNIT is an Artists residency project running in Portlaoise from November to February 2009. Five artists and four curators are working together in various venues and with different groups, investigating and highlighting aspects of everyday life through works of contemporary art and practice. Artist Theresa Nanigian is working with 25 English language students in the VEC who have recently





# Housing, Social & Cultural Policy

arrived here from all corners of the world – to explore the notion of Eden and paradise through conversations and interviews. Hope Inherent (artists Tara Kennedy and Jennie Moran) are working and communicating with prisoners at Portlaoise Prison through letters in an effort to understand the prisoners altered environment. Artist Ruth Lyons is based at the Old Mill, Portlaoise, in a temporary studio space as she investigates the town and its context in being a nucleus to new suburbia and new housing developments. Ruth is working on large scale drawings from maps of the town projected in the studio space. Artist Vera Klute, who works in sound and animated media, is working on a project at the Portlaoise General Hospital as it supports the community during its entire life cycle. A publication on the outcome and findings of this interesting project will be published in 2009.

## RTE Nationwide

RTE's 'Nationwide' programme aired from Portlaoise in February 2008 and featured the James Fintan Lalor sculpture; the Laois Artists' Portraits in the Link Building, Áras an Chontae; Children's Writing Workshops with the Laois Writer in Residence; performances and interviews with members of Laois School of Music; a visit to the Dunamase Arts Centre and an interview with Arts Officer, Muireann Ni Chonaill. A further programme was broadcast from the Slieve Blooms in March and featured Composer-in-Residence Brent Parker with the Laois School of Music Orchestra.

## Bursaries and Awards

2008 arts awards included Arts Act Grants, The Laois Patronage Award, The Tyrone Guthrie Centre Bursary and the Drama League of Ireland Summer School Scholarship.

## Artists in Schools Programme

Artists' residencies took place in 9 schools in the county in 2008. Other activities included

- Bealtaine Festival – for Older People
- Exhibitions

- Visiting Drama Company to Schools
- Storytelling in Schools
- Writers workshops
- South East Arts Network Initiative
- Support of Festivals
- Midlands arts and culture magazine
- Midlands Masterclasses

## Local Service Indicators 2008

Total Arts Grants	- €208,242.25
Population	- 67,012

## Arts Grants

Number of Arts Grants Allocation	43
Total Value of Arts Grants allocated per 1,000 population	€3,107.53

Performance Indicators	2006	2007	2008
No. of Arts Grants Allocated	43	43	43
Per 1,000 population	2,809	2,781	3,107
No. of Youth Theatres	5	5	5
Summer Arts Workshops	15	20	21
Drama Workshops	1	1	1
Laois School of Music			
No. of Students	300	350	400



# Housing, Social & Cultural Policy

## Sport & Lesiure

The Sport and Leisure Section of Laois County Council delivered a highly successful calendar of events and activities in 2008. Most notable were:

### Play Provision

Tír Shúgratha (Land of Play) was officially opened at Killeen Community Centre on 29th June, 2008 by An Cathaoirleach Cllr John Moran. Features at the children's playground include a multi play unit with slide, a 2 Bay Junior swing, log walk, wobble board, tunnel net, twin balance beam, and a pony seesaw.

### Playground Markings

School Playground Markings were further developed in 2008, with a further nine schools in Laois availing of funding. The aim of the playground markings scheme is to increase the level of school based physical activity and play as well as increasing the number of children who are active. Playground markings offer children the opportunity to be physically active during their school day and encourage children to take part in active games that can help them to develop physically. Training was provided to teachers and children on games to play on their new markings.

### Children's Activity Programme

Laois County Council organised and delivered a very successful Easter and Summer activity programme in 2008 throughout the county. Parks Tennis Easter & Summer programme was delivered at Abbeyleix, Mountrath, Portlaoise & Portarlinton, with our six week Camp Co Co Summer programme being delivered at Portarlinton, Vicarstown, Camross, Rathdowney, Ballyroan and Portlaoise.

### Active Teen Camps

Three Active Teen camps were organised in Portlaoise & Portarlinton during the Summer & Halloween breaks. The purpose of the camps was to

introduce teenagers to gym & fitness workshops regarding their health and fitness needs. Participants were given the opportunity to design and monitor their own fitness programmes and take part in fitness and swimming classes throughout the week. Qualified instructors were on hand to provide expert advice and training throughout the camp for the teenagers.



### Club Development

The Council's Club Development Programme continued in 2008, promoting and supporting the development of new and existing clubs in county Laois, delivering workshops/seminars and providing assistance to secure funding through the Sports Capital Grant Programme. The total allocation for Laois in 2008 Sports Capital Programme was €799,000, allocated to eighteen various clubs throughout County Laois.

### Stepping out in Portlaoise

Stepping out in Portlaoise is a joint initiative by the Sport, Leisure & Play Section of Laois County Council and Laois Sports Partnership to promote walking. It is aimed primarily at non-walkers to meet new people, find a walking buddy, be part of an active group or to start or renew an interest in walking.



# Housing, Social & Cultural Policy

## Water Safety

### PAWS & JAWS

The PAWS & JAWS water safety programme continued in 2008, promoting the best water safety practices to primary and secondary school pupils in county Laois. The programme includes a classroom based element, where teachers teach children about safety practices in the home, on the farm, open waterways and at the beach. Both Portlaoise & Portarlington Leisure Centres then incorporate these swimming skills and safety practices into their school swimming sessions.

### Water Safety Classes

Laois County Council has a successful record of promoting water safety and this is highlighted through the junior and adult water safety classes which recommenced in 2008. These classes are designed to improve swimmers ability and lifesaving skills and are built around the theme 'every child a swimmer, every child a lifesaver'.

### The Nipper Club

New to 2008 was the Nipper Club. This club was created for young swimmers aged between five and twelve to learn the basic swimming and life-saving skills. This proved to be a very successful club with the young swimmers and even resulted in an awards night for all their effort throughout the year. Members of the club were also treated to a day out in Brittas Bay, County Wicklow, where the National Surf Championships were held. Members saw at first hand how vital lifesaving is and the amount of practice that is needed to be a lifesaver.

### Official Opening of Leisure Centres

Laois County Council, in association with Portarlington Leisure Centre Ltd., Portlaoise Leisure Centre Ltd., and The Swan Mini-Pitch were officially opened by Mr. Martin Cullen TD, Minister for Arts, Sport & Tourism on 6th June, 2008. All facilities are extensively used by the community with attendance numbers exceeding all expectations.

In January 2008, Laois County Council licensed the facility to the FAI to serve as a Regional Development Centre for football, which will provide opportunities for players and coaches to develop their talents, with Nicole Dunphy appointed as FAI Football in the Community Development Officer.



Official Opening of Portarlington Leisure Centre



Official Opening of Portlaoise Leisure Centre



# Housing, Social & Cultural Policy

## Awards

### Chamber's Ireland Excellence Award

Laois County Council received a prestigious award at Chambers Ireland 5th Annual Excellence in Local Government Awards on 6th November, 2008. The awards aim to acknowledge and encourage innovation and best practice among Ireland's Local Authorities. The award in the Sport & Recreation category was for the Portlaoise Leisure Centre and Portlaoise Athletic Track projects. Projects were initially nominated by local Chamber of Commerce and shortlisted into the various category areas and were adjudicated based on the project's ability to demonstrate its benefit to the community.



Chambers Ireland Excellence Award

### LAMA Local Government Award

Laois County Council received a LAMA Award for Portlaoise Leisure Centre when it was awarded Best Recreational Facility from a shortlist of eight facilities. The awards received a fantastic response to the call for all County Councils to participate and were set up to celebrate those whose work has been of tremendous benefit to the community. Also shortlisted for awards were two other Laois projects including Best Sporting Facility – Portarlington Leisure Centre and Best Eco Building – Portlaoise Parish Centre.



LAMA Local Government Award

### FAI/Laois County Council Fusion Intercultural Family Day

Portlaoise Leisure Centre, the FAI Regional Development Centre in Laois, was the host to the 1st Annual Fusion Family Intercultural Sports Day in December, 2008. Laois County, Laois Sports Partnership and the FAI, in association with Leinster Rugby and Laois GAA, organised the intercultural day to target the thousands of non- Irish nationals that are living in Laois. All activities were free on the day and included free use of the swimming pools, sauna, and steam room. Younger children enjoyed the indoor and outdoor inflatables, puppet show, face painting and storytelling as well as use of the pool and playground. Other activities with an ethnic flavour included Brazilian jiu-jitsu and African drumming. Ethnic flavoured foods were also available at The Gallery Café at the Leisure Centre.

### Football in the Community Programme

### Knockmay Council Estate Programme

The children took part in a 12 week programme from April until June, including soccer activities to help their soccer skills and to help them to learn to play as a team. There were two groups coached during the 12 weeks, ranging from 3 years up to 14 years.





# Housing, Social & Cultural Policy

## The Swan Mini Pitch League

The Swan Mini Pitch league was run over a period of six weeks by FAI/Laois County Council Development Officer, Nichole Dunphy.



The Swan mini pitch league



Late Night Soccer League

## FAI/Laois County Council Late Night Soccer League

The FAI/Laois County Council, in association with Laois LSP, The Block Project, Laois VEC, Foróige and An Gardaí Síochána, organised a six week late night soccer league which was run at Portlaoise Leisure Centre. The aim of the programme was to give teenagers a late night activity and to reduce anti social behaviour in the Portlaoise area.

## Knockmay Council Estate Programme

The children took part in a 12 week programme from April until June, including soccer activities to help their soccer skills and to help them to learn to play as a team. There were two groups coached during the 12 weeks, ranging from 3 years up to 14 years.

## Soccer Tots

Laois County Council ran a soccer programme that was aimed at children aged 3-6 years old.

## Soccer Sisters, Durrow

Soccer Sisters is a programme to try to encourage girls aged 7-12 years to get involved in soccer in the hope of forming teams from the group. The participants receive coaching from FAI Qualified coaches.

## Summer Soccer Schools

Summer Soccer Schools is the FAI's biggest programme and has been running in Laois for a number of years. In 2008, there were 6 mainstream camps and 1 goalkeeping camp run across the county in Portlaoise, Abbeyleix, Mountmellick and Rathdowney.

## Heritage

The Heritage Office of Laois County Council works to promote awareness and understanding of the built, natural and cultural heritage of County Laois. This is undertaken with the assistance of the Heritage Council, through the projects detailed in the Laois Heritage Plan.

## Laois Heritage Plan 2007-2011

The Heritage Plan for County Laois entered its second year of implementation in 2008. The plan contains 50 actions which will be implemented over the coming years, with four key objective areas: Collect information on the built, natural and cultural heritage of the county; Raise awareness

and promote enjoyment of heritage; Promote best practice in heritage management and Promote active conservation of heritage in Laois.



The following information relates to projects from the





# Housing, Social & Cultural Policy

Laois Heritage Plan undertaken with the support of the Heritage Council during 2008. Full survey and research reports are available from the Heritage Office of Laois County Council, or to download at [www.laois.ie/heritage](http://www.laois.ie/heritage).

## Collect information on the Heritage of County Laois

The collection of information on the heritage of Laois is a necessary first step in the conservation and highlighting of this heritage. The following heritage surveys were carried out during 2008:

- Survey of the architectural heritage of Portlaoise
- Phase IV of the field-by-field survey of habitats in the county
- Survey of bats using Laois County Council properties
- Survey of the built and natural heritage of graveyards in the county.

## Raise awareness and promote enjoyment of the Heritage of Laois

During 2008, the Heritage Officer worked with numerous individuals, community groups and the County Community Forum to plan heritage projects and provide advice on accessing grant aid and project support. In order to ensure wide dissemination of heritage information, all reports and publications produced during the year have been lodged in the local studies section of Laois County Library and made available to download on the Laois County Council website. Actions undertaken during 2008 to raise awareness of heritage issues included:

- A week-long programme of family events, guided walks, talks, slideshows and fun-days was organised for national Heritage Week



- A book on the built and natural heritage of the old Mountmellick Canal was published, based on the results of the survey carried out in 2006



- The 'Discovering Laois Wildlife' series of workshops and field trips entered its second year, with practical workshops and field trips on the topics of biodiversity and wildlife



- A series of wildlife events were held during Biodiversity Week in May, including Bat Walks in Emo Court, with the assistance of the Office of Public Works and the National Parks and Wildlife Service

- The annual 'Celebrating Laois Heritage' conference was held in Mountmellick Museum in November, to inform the public of issues relating to heritage, research and surveys undertaken during the year



## Housing, Social & Cultural Policy

- Dawn walks in Clonaslee and Durrow were organised to celebrate the annual Dawn Chorus Day in May
- The Laois Collection of oral history interviews recorded during 2006 continued to be broadcast as a series of programmes on Midlands 103 local radio
- Following the photographic competition held in 2007, an exhibition of entries on the theme of 'Our Built Heritage' was held in Áras an Chontae during Heritage Week



Photographic Competition Winners at Áras an Chontae

### Promote best practice in Heritage management and promote active conservation of Heritage

In co-operation with Forward Planning section, a day-long seminar for owners of historic and thatched buildings was held in Abbeyleix. This event delivered information and practical advice on many aspects of concern to owners of these buildings, such as maintenance, insurance, grants and funding.

The official opening of the Durrow Courthouse Cultural Centre by author Deirdre Purcell took place in June, 2008. This important heritage building, which had been almost derelict, has now received a new lease of life as a

library and community cultural facility, with the support of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

### Performance Indicators

Performance Indicator	2007	2008
Number of actions from the Laois Heritage Plan implemented (A maximum of 8 actions per year are part-funded by the Heritage Council).	8	8
Number of meetings of Laois Heritage Forum held	3	3
Number of biodiversity surveys carried out	3	3
Number of built/cultural heritage surveys carried out	2	2
Number of publications on Laois Heritage produced/supported (These publications are in addition to project reports produced following surveys etc.)	1	1
Number of Heritage Talks/Training Courses/Seminars organised (Including events held for Heritage Week)	12	39



# Housing, Social & Cultural Policy

## Libraries

### Introduction

The public library service performs an essential role in our communities by providing access to information, knowledge, lifelong learning and leisure reading in an inclusive manner. The Laois Library Service is delivered through a network of 8 part-time branches and 4 full-time branches. The service is currently engaged in a major infrastructural development programme meeting the objectives set out in the Library Development Plan 2007 - 2011.

### Abbeyleix Library

Construction of the new library and art gallery was completed in May and the library was opened to the public in June. The official opening was performed by John Gormley, T.D., Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The Library is playing a central role in the local community, with current membership of 1,455, and the number of visits at 23,706 since June.

The library has been nominated for the LAMA awards for Best Public Building and Best Architect.



The interior of Abbeyleix Library

### Durrow Library

The refurbishment of Durrow Courthouse was completed in May 2008 and is now called the Durrow Cultural Centre, housing a part-time library, which is open 14 hours per week to the public. The building was officially opened by well-known author Deirdre Purcell. The Membership since June is 269 with total issues of 5,016 of library stock.

The centre also operates as a community meeting point for local groups and clubs



Opening of Durrow Library

### Mountmellick Library

The contract for a new library at the former Courthouse building at O'Moore Street, Mountmellick, was signed on 4th September and the contractor moved onto the site during the following week. The development, which will be 690 square meters, will involve the refurbishment of part of the Courthouse and an extension to the rear and side of the present building.

### Local History/Studies

Library staff have improved and added extra content to the local history website [www.askaboutireland.ie](http://www.askaboutireland.ie). It includes a large selection of postcards of county Laois e.g. old streetscapes and famous landmarks. There is also added narrative about local customs and folklore. The link from the



# Housing, Social & Cultural Policy

Library Web Page is: [www.laois.ie/leisureandculture/libraries/localresearch](http://www.laois.ie/leisureandculture/libraries/localresearch).

## On-Line Services

Laois County Libraries provides free internet access to the following web-sites: [www.itsyourmoney.ie](http://www.itsyourmoney.ie), [www.laois.ie](http://www.laois.ie), [www.change.ie](http://www.change.ie)

WIFI is now available in Portlaoise, Mountrath, Abbeyleix, Portarlinton and Rathdowney Libraries.

## Bookfund

The Bookfund for 2008 was €219,000, an increase of €31,000 on the previous year. The Department of Science and Education contributed €37,643 for the purchase of books for primary schools within the local authority area.

## Statistics

Membership	9,202
Issues	231,799
Internet Sessions	12,547

## 2008 Performance Indicators

### L. 1 Public Opening Hours

Average number of opening hours per week for full-time libraries. 33.34

Average number of opening hours per week for part time libraries (where applicable). 7.52

Percentage of full time libraries that have Lunchtime openings. 100%

Percentage of full time libraries that have evening openings. 100%

Percentage of full time libraries that have Saturday openings. 100%

L. 2 Number of visits to full time libraries per 1,000 population. 58.48

L. 3 (i) Annual expenditure on stock per head of population county wide. 3.27

(ii) Number of items issued per head of population county wide for:

- books 2.71  
- other items 0.75

L. 4 Number of Internet sessions provided per 1,000 population 187.1

Local Indicator: Library Membership - 9,202

## Events and Activities

Laois County Library held a large variety of events and activities in all Branch Libraries throughout the county in 2008. Children and Adults throughout the county enjoyed the numerous events and activities organised by library staff. This year's programme was hectic and fulfilled with author visits, art competitions, music recitals, bookclubs and storytelling.

The highlights of the year included Library Ireland week, Seachtain na Gaelge and Children's Book Festival.

### Rathdowney Library

Rathdowney Library held a successful open day in September, with local storyteller Michael Creagh telling tales to local schoolchildren. Displays of library services were in the library.

### Abbeyleix Library

Abbeyleix Library had a hugely successful Children's Book Festival with Author visits by Don Conroy, Tom McCaughren and a visit by Animal Magic. A Samba workshop for teenagers was held in October. The library had a packed programme for Heritage week, the highlight of which was local historian Tom Cox, who talked about Abbeyleix town and its heritage. There were 6 art exhibitions in The Gallery since it opened in June.





# Housing, Social & Cultural Policy

## Portlaoise Library

Portlaoise Library had a busy year of events and these included author visits by Aubrey Flegg and Gabriel Fitzmaurice for Children's Book Festival. Historian, Michael Moylan, performed an informative session on the history of Ireland in a variety of guises. The Animal Magic show brought along toads, owls and snakes to the great amusement of local children. Heritage week highlights included poetry readings from Fr. Roche and a talk by archivist Sinead Holland.



Portlaoise Library

The library is very important within the prison as a space dedicated to independent learning. The library also works with other prison staff to address low literacy levels, provide greater access to information and to generally make learning, arts and culture more accessible to library users.

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform provided €12,000 for the purchase of library stock and also recouped the salaries of the two prison library staff to Laois County Council.

	Midlands Prison	Portlaoise Prison
Hours Open:	1014	1276.5
Visits:	3276	3941
Items borrowed:	4112	1820

## Mountrath Library

Mountrath Library celebrated its first birthday in May with a coffee morning for all library users. Computer classes are ongoing with the V.E.C students using the library computers for training. Arts and Crafts are held for Summer and Halloween and Games clubs and Book clubs are held regularly in the library. Open Day was held in September with a visit by author Geraldine O'Neill. Prize giving was held in December for the Overall Library Art and Short Story Competition.

## Prison Service

In 2008, Laois County Library extended the library service provided in the Midlands Prison to include Portlaoise Prison. Although facilities and requirements of the two prisons differ somewhat, both services include the provision of books, newspapers and magazines and various multi-media items.





# Economic Development & County Promotion Policy

## Economic Development & County Promotion Strategic Policy Committee Economic Development

Aim: To encourage, facilitate and promote balanced and sustainable development within the County.

Chair: James Deegan, M.C.C.

### Members:

Mary Sweeney M.C.C.  
Martin Phelan M.C.C.  
Paul Mitchell M.C.C.  
Tom Jacob M.C.C.  
Michael Moloney M.C.C.  
Brendan Phelan M.C.C.  
Rotimi Adebare T.C.

### Sectoral:

John Finlay  
Margaret Ryan  
Kathleen Gorman

Director of Services:  
Senior Executive Officer:

Declan Byrne  
Ian McCormack



### Report on Strategic Policy Committee

The following documents were produced by the Committee and agreed by the Members of Laois County Council in 2008:

- Developing a Tourism Culture in County Laois
- County & Town Twinning in County Laois

Laois County Council is actively involved and has a pivotal role to play in the economic development of the county. The Council is committed to attracting inward investment, fostering a climate of self sustaining development and is eager to ensure that balanced development takes place throughout the county.

### Portlaoise Interchange

The development of a 250 acre site at Portlaoise Interchange seeks to exploit the Economic Development potential of the key transport corridor which runs through the County. This project is as a direct result of the National Spatial Strategy which puts Laois and Portlaoise at a distinct advantage in designating it as a Transport Node and Inland Port.

### Highlights 2008

#### Laois Traincare Depot

The Laois Traincare Depot was officially opened by Minister John Moloney on 25th July, 2008. The €65 million purpose built facility has brought 51 jobs to the Portlaoise area. The depot is located on a 39 acre site to the west of Portlaoise and it will accommodate the Intercity trains for the Dublin/Cork route and existing Kildare, Cork and Limerick commuter fleets.



Laois Traincare Depot



# Economic Development & County Promotion Policy

## Energyst

Work has also been completed on two light industrial/warehouse units with associated offices in Togher. Energyst will be relocating part of their business to this location.

## Infrastructural Works

Works are also at an advanced stage on the Togher Link Road and Western Interceptor Sewer, which will service the entire site.

These and future developments will harness the potential of Portlaoise's geographical position in the centre of the country.

## Enterprise Centres

### Portlaoise Enterprise Centre

Work is substantially completed on this project. There will be a mix of office accommodation and incubator units at this location with an overall size of 20,184 sq. feet. Laois County Enterprise Board is the anchor tenant in the new Enterprise Centre.



## Portarlinton Enterprise Centre

The Portarlinton Enterprise Centre opened in November, 2005, with the purpose of providing locally based entrepreneurs with modern 'incubator' space within a supported framework, while encouraging the development of self sustaining micro industry within the Portarlinton area.

Planning permission was granted by Laois County Council in 2008 to erect a new enterprise building on a site adjacent to the existing Enterprise Centre. The proposed new centre will be divided into 9 units. A sum of €400,000 has been granted to Portarlinton Enterprise Centre Ltd. under Enterprise Ireland's Community Enterprise Centre (CEC) Scheme for the new building.

## Industrial Sites

Laois County Council continues to maintain its direct role in facilitating economic development/job creation through the ongoing disposal of sites throughout the county. The Council continues to acquire land for industrial development, given the county's potential for further development and capacity for new enterprise.

## Skills Database

Laois County Council has been revamping its skills databases for commuters who leave the county to work in other counties. It also focuses on school leavers and third level students. The objective of this initiative is to document the skills profile of the labour pool that is available to an enterprise choosing to set up in County Laois.



# Economic Development & County Promotion Policy

## Laois Expo 2008

Laois County Council participates actively with all Local and National Development Agencies to promote the social and economic development of the county. The Council jointly sponsored the Laois Business Expo 2008 which provided exhibitors with a unique opportunity to:

- Generate contacts and leads and make sales
- Launch or demonstrate new products
- Network with other exhibitors
- Generate interest in products and services and promote brands into the marketplace

## The World Fleadh

This year's event, which was supported by Laois County Council, proved to be a resounding success among the local community and visitors to the county. Some 30,000 people from across Ireland and the World converged on Portlaoise for the 3 day festival. The event acted as a showcase for County Laois and helped establish the county as the premier events destination in Ireland. The event brought a wealth of economic and cultural benefits to the county.



Entertainment at the World Fleadh

## Tourism

### Events & Festivals

The Tourism Section in Laois County Council continue to actively promote County Laois as the events destination in Ireland. The County's excellent geographical location and road and rail infrastructure, as well as quality venues and a good accommodation base, makes it an ideal location for hosting major events.

The Tourism Section had a pivotal role in the organisation and assistance of the following events in 2008:

### Laois International Golf Challenge

The Laois International Golf Challenge took place from 19th to 22nd May. The Challenge was open to all golfers affiliated to a club or with a GUI handicap (or equivalent). The Challenge attracted golfers from all over Ireland, Northern Ireland, Wales, England and Sweden. The Event was sponsored by 4 Aces Wholesale and Laois County Council. The overall winners of the 2008 event were locals, Kenneth Farrell and Damien Delaney of Mountrath Golf Club. The 2009 event promises to be a bigger event with a number of golf promotional shows taking place in Northern Ireland, Wales, Germany and Belgium



Winners of the Laois International Golf Challenge



# Economic Development & County Promotion Policy

## Gordon Bennett Classic Car Run

The Gordon Bennett Classic Car Run took place on the June Bank Holiday weekend and started with a Reception in Laois County Council on the Friday evening. The participants drove the Gordon Bennett Route which was signposted in 2006. The event has gone from strength to strength with a large number of visitors attending particularly, from the U.K. The event commemorates the biggest Sporting Event of the time in Ireland and runs through counties Laois, Carlow and Kildare. The Gordon Bennett Event and Route is an invaluable tourism attraction in its own right and links numerous tourism and heritage sites.



Gordon Bennett Classic Car Run

## Rose of Tralee Irish Regional Finals

The Rose of Tralee Regional Finals took place for only the second time outside Tralee and was held in Portlaoise in 2008. It was a great success and a fantastic opportunity to showcase the county. The organisers of the International Rose of Tralee work in conjunction with the Tourism Officer and the sponsors and hotels in organising all of the activities during the 5 day event. The Roses participated in tours around the county to view the tourism attractions in Laois. A number of local pubs officially 'twinned' with the Roses and offered entertainment for families and friends. A Reception was held in County Hall when An Cathaoirleach, Cllr John Moran, welcomed the Roses and the festival to County Laois.

There was a Classic Car & Vintage Car Parade on Saturday which was organised with the Gordon Bennett & Ballinakill Classic Car Associations.



Rose of Tralee Irish Regional Finals

The Rose of Tralee Irish Regional Finals will be back to Portlaoise for 2009 and promises to be another exciting event in the Laois Tourism calendar.

## Halloween Howls

The Halloween Howls Comedy Festival was held in Portlaoise during the October Bank Holiday weekend. This festival has great potential and takes place at an off peak tourism period which is extremely welcome for the county.



Halloween Howls Comedy Festival





# Economic Development & County Promotion Policy

The Tourism section of Laois County Council works on strategic projects to encourage more visitors to the County. The Tourism Officer works with state agencies, the business sector regarding the identification of suitable projects for County Laois. Other projects that were completed in 2008 were:

## Laois Conference Brochure

This project was instigated in 2007 by Laois County Council in conjunction with the Hotel Task Group and was completed in 2008. The Conference Brochure showcases all the facilities to host large conferences in Laois. The brochure also highlights the county's excellent geographical location and excellent accessibility by road and rail. The Hotel Task Group hope to work co-operatively to promote Conference Business in Laois to Conference Organisers and promote Laois as the events and conference destination in Ireland.

## Comprehensive Slieve Bloom Signage Project Laois/Offaly

Laois County Council, in conjunction with Offaly County Council, carried out an audit of tourism signage in the Slieve Bloom Mountains, with funding being provided by Fáilte Ireland under the Infrastructure Fund (NDP 2007-2013). This project was completed in 2008 where signage was provided to direct tourists on three circular driving routes around the Slieve Bloom Mountains. Signage was put in place from 10 outer towns – Castletown, Kilcormac, Mountmellick, Borris-in-Ossory, Mountrath, Portlaoise, Tullamore, Pike of Rushall, Roscrea and Birr. 9 inner gateway villages were also identified and information boards identifying walks, accommodation and facilities were installed in Rosenallis, Clonaslee, Kinnitty, Clareen, Cadamstown, Camross, Ballaghmore and Ballybrittas.



Slieve Bloom Mountains





# Environment & Water Services Policy

## Environment & Water Services Strategic Policy Committee.

**Chairperson:** John Bonham, M.C.C.

### Members

James Daly, M.C.C.  
Ray Cribbin, M.C.C.  
John Moran, M.C.C.  
Geraldine Delaney, M.C.C.  
Dick Miller, M.C.C.  
Denis O'Meara, T.C.

### Sectoral

Ger Lynch  
Chris Uys

**Director of Services:** John Daly  
**Senior Engineer, Water Services:** Brendan Clarke  
**Senior Engineer, Environment:** John O'Donoghue

## Report on Strategic Policy Committee

The Environment & Water Services Strategic Policy Committee (S.P.C.) held four meetings during 2008. A Bring Bank Policy and a Policy on Burning of Waste were recommended by the Strategic Policy Committee and subsequently adopted by full Council. The Litter Management Plan was approved by the Strategic Policy Committee in June and subsequently adopted by full Council. Draft Bye-Laws, namely Water Pollution (Regulation of Land Application of Industrial Organic Waste) Amended Bye-Laws 2008 and Storage, Presentation, Segregation and Collection of Household Waste Bye-Laws 2008, were approved by the Committee and the full Council. Further discussions and presentations included the National Hazardous Waste Management Plan, River Basin Management Plan, Local Agenda 21, Climate Change, Waste Enforcement Policy and Draft Septic Tank Bye-Laws.

## Parks and Green Open Spaces

The River Triogue Linear walk, from the Peoples Park along by Rankins Wood, linking JFL Avenue to the Monument at Millview and down to the River Triogue Park out to Green Mill land was completed. In each park there is newly installed adult outdoor fitness equipment offering visitors

and users of the Parks the opportunity to do gentle exercise which will improve flexibility, movement range, balance and co-ordination.

The Sponsorship of Roundabouts scheme was completed on all the roundabouts in Graiguecullen. The funds received from sponsors was used to help cover the ongoing costs of maintenance of these landscaped roundabouts. Our roundabouts continue to receive favourable mention in the National Tidy Towns competition report. Portlaoise Tidy Towns received assistance in preparation of the flower tubs for the summer season.



Fitness Equipment at Triogue Park

As in previous years, the Environment section worked in conjunction with Planning in relation to National Tree Week with schools, villages and local resident groups availing of trees funded by Laois County Council and the Tree Council of Ireland as part of National Tree Week.

## Litter Management

In 2008, 734 on-the-spot fines issued for varying offences, with 488 no. fines paid to date. This Section initiated 132 prosecutions for non-payment of fines with 15 successful convictions and 14 no. Section 9 (warning letters) served on private landowners. Again in 2009, staff will encourage the public's participation in reporting litter complaints by distributing merchandise promoting the confidential freephone hotline i.e. keyrings, stubbis, cartidi bins and signage.



# Environment & Water Services Policy



Wildlife exposed to Litter Pollution

## Anti-Litter Initiatives

In conjunction with the Environmental Awareness Officer, we continue to promote, encourage and participate in initiatives throughout the year to ensure both children & adults alike get actively involved in the importance of sustaining a litter-free environment in their local areas e.g. Tidy Primary Schools Competition, Inter-Community Litter Challenge, Community Litter Action Programme, PAL activities and Clean-Up Laois Week. In addition, Environment will pursue other worthwhile anti-litter initiatives in 2009 such as anti-litter promotion days and specific awareness campaigns e.g. dog fouling.

The success of the competition can be further measured by a remarkable increase in the marks allocated to participating towns in the National Tidy Towns Awards. Environment Section recognises their pro-active role with the communities involved and assist by providing support and anti-litter material e.g. signage, litter-pickers, stubbis, etc.

## Roadside Litter

In an effort to combat the growing problem of roadside litter on identified roads, Environment Section will continue to employ the services of a contractor to litter-pick specific blackspots. In addition, this Section will continue to carry out a number of spot-checks throughout 2009 in conjunc-

tion with members of Waste Enforcement and the Gardaí, as well as continuing to implement strict measures at the landfill to ensure customers transporting waste to the facility carry out appropriate measures to secure their waste. Trailer nets are available for landfill customers to purchase at cost price at the site.



Enforcement Officers (Litter Wardens)

## IBAL

Portlaoise town was ranked in 12th position out of 55 towns in the Irish Business Against Litter (IBAL) survey announced in December, 2008. The survey, which is based on the absence/presence of litter, described the town as "Clean to European Norms". Every effort will be made during 2009 to sustain our rating in this league.

## Community Initiatives

### Clean Up Laois Week

Clean up Laois Week commenced on 7th April, 2008 and was such a huge success that the initiative entered its third week. Litter-pickers, bags and gloves were provided to 120 groups, schools and individuals who were taking part in clean-ups in their localities. 17.5 tonnes of litter was collected from various locations around the county. Laois County Council provided €25,000 to fund this very worthwhile initiative.



## Environment & Water Services Policy



Roadside clean-up during Clean Up Laois Week



Laois County Council Staff taking part in Clean Up Laois Week

### Tidy Towns

26 towns and villages make up the Laois Federation of Tidy Towns and results at both national and local level continue to improve. The annual local competition continues to flourish with judging taking place during July and August. A gala awards night was held in September to celebrate the achievements of all during 2008. Under the Summer Wheelie Bin Scheme, all committees were provided with bins from May to October inclusive and grants totalling €31,000 were paid to tidy towns committees during the year.



Laois Federation of Tidy Towns Awards - Winners in Category A

### Grants

Community Grants were awarded to 67 groups throughout the County for various projects to benefit the environment and enhance local amenities. The maximum grant awarded under this scheme is €700. 6 groups received financial assistance under the Local Agenda 21 Environmental Partnership Fund which is a joint initiative between Laois County Council and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and aims to contribute to environmental awareness and sustainable development. The Community Project Fund allocated €1,500 to each elected member of Laois County Council to finance worthwhile projects in their own areas. In association with the Laois Federation of the I.C.A., Laois County Council arranges the 'Art from Waste' competition for primary schools annually. 36 entries were received and judged in 2008 with the presentation of prizes in December.



Art From Waste prize giving ceremony  
Derrymalogue National School, Rosenallis



# Environment & Water Services Policy

## Environment Awareness & Education

### Schools Programme

Tidy Primary Schools competition was a great success with 18 Primary Schools receiving litter free status – a 100% increase on 2007. An Awards ceremony was held in Portlaoise Parish Centre and prizes winners saw an animated film called 'The Last Penguin' made by the Students of the Sacred Heart, Portlaoise. Also, 2008 saw the number of Awarded Green Schools jump to 35! Congratulations to all involved.

During the summer of 2008, a week long primary school teacher training course was held by Laois County Council's Environment Awareness Officer and Heritage Officer. The course, which received approval from the Department of Education and Laois Education Centre, illustrated how teachers can include environmental issues in their daily curriculum.

### Compost Awareness Week

This new project was introduced in 2008 so people could learn more about composting, including how composting can contribute to a better environment and how composting can reduce the amount of money spent on waste charges. Both the Environment Awareness Officer and County Horticulturalist visited 5 different venues in County Laois to promote composting. It is now intended to make this an annual event.

### Environment Awards

The 2008 Awards saw Laois County Council acknowledge and reward various community groups throughout the County for their involvement in Laois Federation of Tidy Towns, the Inter Community Litter Challenge and their new Community Action Project, which Ballylynan and Clonaslee participated in. Based on the success of the Community Action Project, it is intended to make this an annual event.

### Meeting the Sustainability Challenge

Building on the work undertaken in 2007 by the Council on greening their internal procedures, a public consultation was conducted in 2008, based

on Laois County Council's 'One Shared Sustainable Vision for County Laois'. This consultation paper was distributed to over 500 different parties (including Elected Members, Laois County Development Board, Community Fora Executive, Schools, Community Groups, local Businesses as well as National Agencies) and welcomed comments and submissions based on the targets on how to achieve a more sustainable county. A public consultation meeting was also held in November to gain further comment. It is anticipated that a 'One Shared Sustainable Vision for County Laois' Plan will be produced in 2009.

### Green Your Business Seminar

During 2008, the Environment Awareness Officers in the Midlands Waste Management Region produced a booklet entitled 'Business Guide to Wise Waste Management'. To coincide with this, Laois County Council's Environment Awareness Officer distributed and promoted this booklet with local business. A business seminar was also hosted on sustainable waste and energy management for businesses and a '1-2-1 Information Clinic' was also held at the end of the seminar for businesses to get further information from the Midlands Energy Agency, County Enterprise Board as well as Laois County Council's Environment Enforcement Officer.

### Mobile Recycling Collections

In association with WEEE Ireland, 3 mobile recycling collections were conducted in Mountmellick, Rathdowney and Mountrath. Over the 3 collections, more than 18 tonnes of waste electronic and electrical goods was collected – which is equivalent to recycling over 920 Televisions. Many thanks to everyone who participated and made these collections a great success.

### Environmental Protection

Environmental Protection staff are responsible for improving air and water quality in Laois as well as dealing with environmental complaints from the public.





# Environment & Water Services Policy

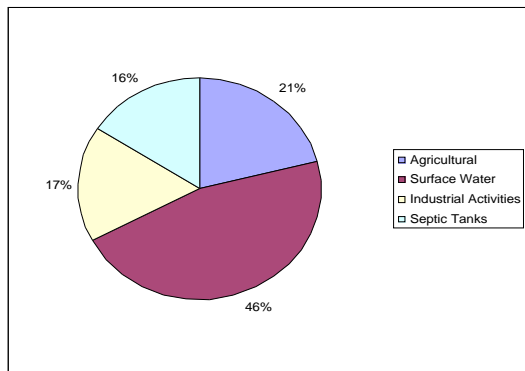
## Water Quality

Draft River Basin District Management Plans were published on 22nd December, 2008, and are currently on public display for members of the public to comment on their contents. Laois is covered by the South East River Basin District and the Shannon River Basin District. These plans will form the basis of the work required to comply with the objectives of the Water Framework Directive to improve water quality where necessary to “good” status and to protect the quality of waters considered “good”.

In 2008, Environmental Protection staff continued with the monitoring of Laois surface and ground waters under the Water Framework Directive, Phosphorous Regulations and Dangerous Substances monitoring programs. Samples were also taken from rivers to assess the biological status of waters under the Small Stream Risk Scores monitoring program.

A program of farm surveys was also undertaken in four river sub catchments in 2008. Samples of surface waters from these sub catchments were also taken to identify areas where pollution is occurring.

A total of 113 complaints concerning water pollution were received and investigated in 2008. As a result of these complaints, 34 Notices were issued under Section 12 of the Local Government (Water Pollution) Acts 1977 to 1990. One party was successfully prosecuted through the District Court in 2008 for non compliance with a Section 12 Notice issued in 2007.



Farm surveys are continuing in Laois. The Erkina and Stradbally river catchments were completed in 2008 and surveys are well advanced in the Goul and Glenlahan catchments. A total of 232 farm inspections were carried out in 2008.

Activity	No.
Water Framework Directive Monitoring Program (Carried out by EPA)	184
Phosphorous Regulations Monitoring Program	588
Dangerous Substances Monitoring Program	32
Small Stream Risk Scores	73
Farm Surveys River Catchment Monitoring	274
Samples taken as a result of Complaints	126
Sampling of Licensed Discharges	43
Total	1320

Table: No. of samples tested in 2008.

A license under Section 4 of the Local Government (Water Pollution) Act 1977 is required where trade or sewage effluents are discharged to surface waters or to groundwater. There are currently eight licenses in the county, four of which are active. One new license to discharge to surface waters was newly issued in 2008. All active licenses were monitored in 2008.



A complaint led to the discovery of this polluted watercourse



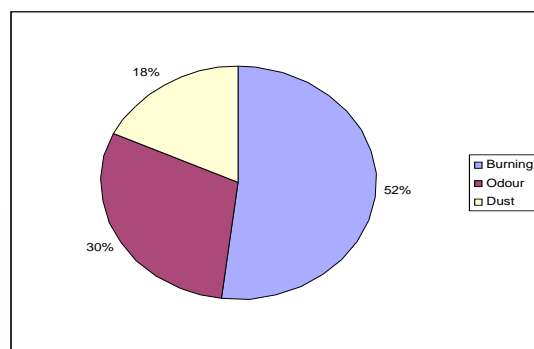


# Environment & Water Services Policy

## Air Quality

In 2008, one license was issued under Section 30 of the Air Pollution Act 1987 for a discharge to air from an asphalt plant. Two such licences are active in the county.

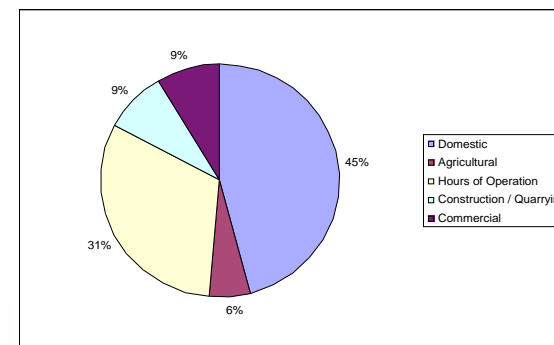
50 complaints were received and investigated in 2008 concerning air quality. The nature of these complaints varied between burning of refuse, dust from construction and quarrying activities and odours. 36 samples of dust were taken and analysed in 2008.



There is a requirement under the Emissions for Volatile Organic Compounds from Organic Solvent Regulations 2002 on Dry Cleaning establishments to register with Laois County Council and to seek a certificate of compliance with these regulations. A similar requirement exists for Vehicle Finishers under the Limitation of Emissions of Volatile Organic Compounds due to the use of Organic Solvents in Certain paints, varnishes and Vehicle refinishing Products Regulations 2007. One certificate was issued to a dry cleaner and nine certificates were issued to vehicle finishers in 2008.

## Noise Pollution

Thirty five complaints were received in 2008 concerning noise. Sixteen of these complaints were domestic and in these cases the Council would encourage people to discuss the problems such as dogs barking and loud music first and come to an agreed solution. The other nineteen complaints were of various natures such as hours of operation, building, commercial and agricultural.



## Waste Management

### Recycling Facilities

A total of 42 recycling bring banks were in place throughout the county by the end of 2008. 7 bring banks were upgraded from 240 litre to 1100 litre at the following locations: - Ballacolla, Shanahoe, Ballyfin, Cullohill, Arles, Ballickmoyler and Newtown.

Work commenced on the construction of Portarlinton Civic Amenity Facility in October, 2008, for completion by mid-February, 2009.

This facility will be run by the private sector and will be open Monday, Wednesday, Friday & Saturday of each week. It is hoped to have this facility operational by April 2009.



## Environment & Water Services Policy



A new Bring Bank Policy was adopted during 2008 requiring large commercial/residential developments to provide bring banks facilities as part of the design/planning process. The target density for bring banks is 1 set per 1,250 of population.

### Waste Enforcement

Permit granted by Laois County Council for the full remediation of Ballymorris illegal landfill site. Work to commence in April/May, 2009. All other major enforcement cases ongoing. Producer responsibility regulations e.g. WEEE and Battery Regulations along with Packaging and Waste Tyre Regulations were closely monitored during 2008. Waste Facility Permits processed as required. 5 no. End-of-Life Vehicle Authorised Treatment Facilities operational by the end of 2008.

### Landfill

Cell 14 was being filled during 2008. There was approximately 55,000 tonnes remaining capacity in cell 14 at the end of 2008. Capping works commenced on the eastern mini cell of cell 14 in December, 2008, with expected completion by mid-February, 2009.

A Scada Telemetry System was installed and commissioned in 2008 which facilitates remote monitoring of leachate levels, gas extraction and flare performance and security cameras. Outline approval was granted by the EPA in 2008 for new cell 15 which will be situated east of the lined cells 13 and 14. The design for this new cell is ongoing since June, 2008. Cell 14 will be full by March, 2010 and cell 15 must be constructed and completed by this time to allow for continuous waste acceptance.

New leachate storage tank were installed and commissioned in 2008 for the unlined cells 1 to 5. The gas flare was relocated in 2008 from the vicinity of the unlined lagoon to cell 12 area at the northern end of the site.



# Environment & Water Services Policy

## Performance Indicators – Environmental Services

Position at 31/12/2008

E. 3	Percentage of households provided with segregated waste collection for:	
	(i) Dry recyclables	77% *
	(ii) Organics	0 *
E. 4	Household waste collected from kerbside and household waste collected from recycling facilities, which is sent for recycling:	
	(i) Percentage of household waste (collected at kerbside), which is sent for recycling	28.83%
	(ii) Tonnage of household waste (collected at kerbside), which is sent for recycling.	4,554.85
	(iii) Tonnage of household waste recycled, which arises from waste collected from recycling facilities (i.e. bring banks, Civic amenity sites, transfer stations and other recycling facilities).	3,327.85
E. 5	Household waste collected which is sent to landfill	
	Tonnage	11,242.28
	Percentage of household waste collected	71.7%

\* Based on households who avail of kerbside collection in the County



# Environment & Water Services Policy

## E. 6 - Recycling Facilities

Position at 31/12/08

Category	Column A Number of Bring Sites	Column B Number of Civic Amenity Sites	Column C Total Number of Facilities	Column D Number of locations per 5,000 of population
Glass	42	1	43	3.21
Cans	42	1	43	3.21
Textiles	5	1	6	0.45
Batteries	-	1	1	0.07
Oils	-	1	1	0.07
Cardboard	-	1	1	0.07
Magazines	-	1	1	0.07
Plate Glass	-	1	1	0.07
Metal	-	1	1	0.07
Plastic	-	1	1	0.07
WEEE	-	1	1	0.07
Newspaper	-	1	1	0.07
Wood	-	1	1	0.07
Fluorescent Lamps	-	1	1	0.07
Hedge Trimmings	-	1	1	0.07
Tyres	-	1	1	0.07

## E.7 - Litter Prevention & Environmental Enforcement

Position at 31/12/08

Total No. of full-time Litter Wardens	3
Total No. of part-time Litter Wardens	2
No. of Litter Wardens (both full and part time) per 5,000 population	0.37
No. of On The Spot Fines issued	735
No. of On The Spot Fines paid	488
No. of Notices issued (under Sections 9, 15, 16, 17 and 20 - Litter Pollution Act 1997)	14
Total no. of prosecutions taken (all prosecutions under Litter Acts 1997 - 2003)	132
No. of prosecutions taken because of non-payment of On The Spot Fines	132
Total no. of prosecutions secured (all prosecutions under Litter Acts 1997 - 2003)	15
No. of prosecutions secured (relating to non-payment of On The Spot Fines)	15



# Environment & Water Services Policy

% of areas within the Local Authority that are:

Unpolluted (i.e. Litter Free)	8.3%
Slightly polluted with litter	65%
Moderately polluted with litter	23.3%
Significantly polluted with litter	3.4%
Grossly polluted with litter	0%

## E.8 - Environmental Complaints & Enforcement

Position at 31/12/08

Total Number of cases subject to complaints concerning environmental pollution (in relation to waste, litter, water pollution, air pollution)	903
Number of complaints investigated	903
Number of complaints resolved where no further action was necessary	753 (25 pending)
Number of enforcement procedures taken.	125

## E.9 - % of Schools participating in Environmental campaigns

Position at 31/12/08

Primary Schools	67%
Secondary Schools	82%

## Laois Civil Defence

Laois Civil Defence is a volunteer based organisation whose members are proud to serve as a high quality back-up service, supporting the primary emergency services and the local Community.



*Laois Civil Defence on duty*

Volunteers are multi-skilled and the main programmes of activity undertaken by the organisation are:

### First Aid:

Provision of first aid and ambulance service.

### Rescue Skills:

Urban rescue, open country search for missing persons with Laois having the only K9 H.R.D. search and rescue dog within the local authorities. Water based search and recovery.

### Fire-fighting:

Pump and ladder drills, pumping floodwaters and supply water to the Community.

### Warden Service and Radiation Monitoring:

Radiation detecting and monitoring.





# Environment & Water Services Policy

## Welfare Skills:

Provision of hot meals, drinks and psychosocial support.

## Radio Communications:

Operation of two independent radio systems U.H.F., V.H.F. and Marine Band Radio. These systems are operated from our specialised Operational Support Unit.

## Emergency response

### Responding to Major Emergencies.

During 2008 we assisted at events such as the St. Patrick's Day Parade, Electric Picnic, World Fleadh, Search and Recovery operations and any civic functions hosted by Laois County Council.

Training centres are located at Stradbally, Durrow and Mountmellick. If you are interested in the above and are aged between 16-65, contact us to find out more on (057) 8664000 or email [lpreston@laoiscoco.ie](mailto:lpreston@laoiscoco.ie) or visit our website at [www.laoiscivildefence.org](http://www.laoiscivildefence.org).

## Laois Fire & Rescue Service

### Fire Service

The operational service responded to 837 incidents in 2008. Of these, 486 were fires and the remaining were special service calls; 141 road traffic accidents, 48 incidents of flooding, 20 oil spills on roads and miscellaneous other incidents.



Road Traffic Collision Exercise

## Schools Programme

In keeping with the Community Fire Safety Program, the National Schools Program on fire safety was delivered in 65 schools. The 3rd class in each school was targeted and 1857 pupils were involved.

## Major Emergency Management

Implementation of the National Framework Document on Major Emergency Management issued by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government was brought to conclusion.

The new Major Emergency Plan for Laois County Council based on the Framework Document became operational on 30th September, 2008. An inter agency Major Emergency Exercise, involving the HSE, An Garda Síochána, and the Local Authority was conducted on 1st October, 2008.

## Fire Safety Certificate and Planning Applications

In 2008, Fire Safety Certificates for 141 commercial developments were processed and advice to the Planning Authority given in respect of 248 Planning applications.

## Training

As well as basic training for new entrants to the service, Fire Brigade staff underwent specialist training in the following areas - Road Traffic Accident Instructor course, use of chain saws, ladder maintenance, pump operation and First Responder (casualty handling).



Fire Service Training



# Environment & Water Services Policy

## Essential Equipment Procurement

The program of updating fire brigade equipment was continued with the purchase of crash rescue equipment, communications equipment and training aids.

## New Fire Stations

A new two bay Fire Station was completed in Portarlington.

On 22nd April, 2008, the new Fire Station in Abbeyleix was officially opened by Mr Tony Killeen T.D., Minister of State for Environment & Energy.



Turning of the sod at  
Portarlington Fire Station



Abbeyleix Fire Station

## Fire Services Capital Programme

A design team was appointed for the design and construction of a new Fire Station in Rathdowney.

Two new Class B fire appliances were ordered and the existing hydraulic platform refurbished.



Hydraulic Platform

Performance Indicators	2007	2008
<b>F. 1 - Average time taken in minutes to mobilise Fire Brigades</b>		
Fires	5.1	5.15
Other Incidents	-	5.35
<b>F. 2 - % of responses from time ordered to in attendance</b>		
Fires less than 10 mins	31.87%	45.19%
Other incidents less than 10 mins	-	35.62%
Fires between 10 and 20 mins	52.14%	43.52%
Other incidents between 10 - 20 mins	-	48.93%
Fires more than 20 mins	15.99%	11.30%
Other incidents more than 20 mins	-	15.45%
<b>F. 3 - Fire Safety Certificates</b>		
Number of Fire Safety Certificates received	135	114
Number processed (including cases deemed invalid)	150	114
Number of applications deemed invalid	-	6



# Environment & Water Services Policy

## Water Services

The Water Services functions are divided into four sections;

- Ongoing Operation and Maintenance of Water and Wastewater Schemes
- Rural Water Programme
- Capital Investment Programme
- Provision and maintenance of Cemeteries

Water Services also provides support to the Planning Department and consults with the public on planning issues relating to water and wastewater services.

### Ongoing Operation and Maintenance

The Water Services Section is responsible for the provision and maintenance of adequate water supplies and wastewater treatment and disposal facilities which comply with both the EU Drinking Water Directive and EU Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive. Laois County Council currently supplies approx 23,750 cubic metres of water .

Approximately 50% of this water is supplied to the domestic sector, 21% to the commercial sector and the remainder is considered Unaccounted for Water (UFW). The volume of UFW reduced in 2008 as a result of a number of significant leaks that were found by the Leak Detection team and ongoing repairs by the area staff.

### Waste Water

Construction commenced on a 5000PE upgrade to the existing Portarlinton Waste Water Treatment Plant. The extra capacity will provide treatment for the additional load that is expected from recent planning applications.

### EPA Waste Water Discharge Licence.

The Waste Water Discharge (Authorisation) Regulations, 2007 (S.I. No. 684 of 2007) require the Environmental Protection Agency to authorise all local authority waste water discharges. The purpose is to reduce and

prevent the pollution of waters and follows on from the requirements of the Water Framework Directive.

Rather than employing consultants, Laois County Council has dedicated two technical staff to the preparation of the licences.

To date applications have been made for:

- Portlaoise
- Abbeyleix
- Mountmellick
- Portarlinton
- Mountrath

Six further applications are underway and no licences have been granted yet. The total cost of the licencing programme for 2008 was €290,000.



Portlaoise Waste Water Treatment Plant



# Environment & Water Services Policy

## Rural Water Programme

Below is a summary of some of the most significant projects undertaken last year under the Small Schemes Programme:

- In 2008, the Civil, Mechanical & Electrical Contracts for the Mountrath Water Supply scheme were substantially completed and the first water was pumped to the new reservoir. The scheme will supply greater quantities of water at a higher pressure to Mountrath and Castletown as well as enabling a new Group Water Scheme at Ballycleary.
- In July, 2008, the operation of the Swan water supply was taken over by a private operator, EPS. A new treatment plant and reservoir was constructed and now provides high quality drinking water to The Swan, Luggacurran, Modubeigh and Newtown.
- In December 2008 a new borehole and water treatment plant was completed at Attanagh. The new supply will be operated by Laois County Council and will replace the quality deficient Group Water Scheme supply in 2009.
- In Ballyroan, two exploration boreholes were drilled and have identified a quality water supply that will be developed further in 2009. The information gathered from the boreholes will be used to design a major upgrade to the existing town supply.
- In Abbeyleix, construction commenced on a new reservoir and upgrades supply systems. The upgrades will provide greater security of supply, particularly in summer months, as well as higher pressures to the existing water network.

The Council's Rural Water Programme includes:

- Group Water Schemes
- Small Public Water and Sewerage Schemes
- Grants for Individual Well Water Installations

## Group Water Schemes

A group water scheme provides a private water supply to 2 or more houses by means of a common or shared source of supply and distribution system.

The Council assists groups by working in partnership with them and by:

- Providing advice and guidance on the formation and operation of group schemes
- Providing technical advice on source and supply issues, distribution networks, water quality and treatment, scheme design, etc.
- Enabling groups to take a water supply from public water mains where this is feasible
- Providing advice and assistance on tender procurement and evaluation
- Grant aiding group schemes up to 85% of the approved cost, subject to a limit of €6,475 per house
- Supervision of construction standards
- Providing an annual subsidy towards the operation and maintenance costs incurred on the scheme by the group.

## Small Water & Sewerage Schemes

The following projects were undertaken or managed by the Water Services Section in 2008:

Mountrath/Castletown Water Supply Augmentation  
Ballacolla GWS Network Upgrade Phase 2  
Ballacolla GWS Network Upgrade Phase 3  
Ballacolla GWS Universal Metering  
Ballypickas GWS - Access to Treatment Site  
Killeaney GWS - Link to Ballacolla GWS  
Killeaney GWS Upgrade  
Ballypickas GWS - Replace defective mains  
Ballycleary Group Water Scheme  
Moyanna Group Water Scheme (Connection to Ballyrider)  
Moyadd No 3 Group Water Scheme



# Environment & Water Services Policy

The Heath GWS Upgrade - Phase 4  
 Errill GWS Upgrade - Quality  
 Errill GWS Upgrade - Replace Damaged Main  
 Cullohill GWS - Upgrade  
 Clonanny GWS - Phase 2  
 Attanagh GWS - Takeover Upgrade  
 Reary GWS - Takeover Upgrade.  
 Durrow/ Ballinakill Water Supply Augmentation  
 Gallows Hill New Reservoir  
 Ballyroan Water Supply Augmentation  
 Abbeyleix Water Supply - New Reservoir  
 Castletown Water main Upgrade  
 Temporary Portarlinton WWTP upgrade  
 Abbeyleix Source Protection  
 Meter Reading Project  
 Chlorine & Turbidity Monitors  
 Gallows Hill Tank Refurbishment

## Water Quality

Laois County Council has statutory functions with regard to the monitoring of drinking water supplies in the county as laid out in the EC (Drinking Water) Regulations, 2000.

The EPA report on drinking water quality for 2007 has not been published yet. However, overall compliance by Laois with the drinking water standards in public water supplies was in line with the national average. In general, compliance with the majority of indicator parameters was good.

	Micro	Chemical	Indicator
Overall	96.7%	99.0%	95.9%
Public	99.3%	98.9%	97.9%
Public/Private GWS	100%	100%	99.6%
Private GWS	96.2%	98.5%	95.6%

## Water Conservation

In accordance with the Water Pricing Policy Framework document, the programme of installing water meters was completed in 2008. The leak

detection team, in partnership with the area staff, identified and repaired leaks with a total estimated volume equivalent to 1,200,000 litres/day. Water production levels were decreased towards the end of 2008 as a result of the reduced leakage rate.

## Discharges to Sewers

Under the Local Government (Water Pollution) Act 1977 and 1990 and its regulations, a licence is required by any company that discharges trade effluent (including cooling waters) to a sewer. In 2008, 1 new license was issued. A new approach to licence applications was developed to make the process less onerous on small businesses. It is hoped that this will see a higher uptake and compliance in 2009.

## Capital Investment Programme

### Capital Project Office

Following Department approval and establishment of the Water Services Capital Projects Office, the Project Office team has expanded to three engineers, one technician and one administrative staff member. The Capital Projects Office is responsible for delivering the major Water and Wastewater schemes that the Department of the Environment Heritage & Local Government has approved under the Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009.

### Portarlinton Water Supply Scheme Improvement Scheme

An advance contract was completed to supply a significant amount of water to Portarlinton from new wellfield sources at La Bergerie and Doolough. The detailed design of the main scheme was completed in 2008 following tests to assess the water quality and yield from the three proposed wellfields. Completion of contract documents is due at end of February, 2009, for approval by the Department of the Environment Heritage & Local Government.

### Portlaoise & Mountmellick Water Supply

The detailed design for this scheme was progressed in 2008. An advance





## Environment & Water Services Policy

contract involving the construction of 7km of new watermain and production well drilling was completed to supply a significant amount of water to Mountmellick from a new well source at Eyne. Production drilling contract of 9 remaining wells commenced in November, 2008. Pump Testing to commence in February 2009. Site investigation contract to be advertised in February, 2009 and Contract Documents will be issued to Laois County Council for approval in 3rd Quarter of 2009.



Portlaoise & Mountmellick Water Supply Improvement Scheme  
Site Preparation and Drilling

### Portlaoise Sewerage Improvement Scheme

Murphy International Ltd. completed the construction of the Sewerage Improvement Works (Network) contract during 2008. Three new pumping stations have also been constructed.

The Design-Build-Operate contract, for construction of the Portlaoise Waste Water Treatment Plant commenced in 2007. The Design-Build programme status was 90% complete at the end of 2008. The wastewater treatment process was commissioned in September, 2008. The installation of the sludge dryer is being finalized.

### Laois Grouped Towns Sewerage Scheme

During 2008 the contract documents for the treatment plants contract were submitted to the Department for the Environment Heritage & Local

Government for approval to proceed to tender. Land acquisition agreements and Part 8's for all six WWTP sites completed. Invitation to contractors to pre-qualify advertised in January 2009 - short listing to take place in April 2009. Approval of Contract Documents expected in April, 2009.

Network site investigation works completed May, 2008. Part 8's completed for 4 pumping stations. Network contract documents finalised and submitted to Department of the Environment Heritage & Local Government in February, 2009 for approval to proceed to tender.

### Laois Grouped Villages Sewerage Scheme

The final Feasibility Study Report for the Laois Grouped Villages Sewerage Scheme was completed and submitted to the Department in 2007. Laois County Council is currently awaiting Department approval to proceed with this scheme.

### Mountmellick Sewerage Improvement Scheme

A review of scope of the Mountmellick Sewerage Extension project was carried out in 2007. A Phase 1 scope focused on refurbishment and performance improvements to the existing pumping stations and wastewater treatment plant. This was designed and tendered during 2008 and is due to start in March, 2009. Consultants N. O'Dwyer appointed in March, 2008. Survey works contracts (Flow and Rain Survey, Archaeology Study and Flow and Load Surveys, Lidar survey, Impermeable area and CCTV/SUS) commenced in August, 2008. Draft Preliminary Report due in July, 2009.

### Portarlinton Emo/Ballybrittas/Killenard Sewerage Scheme

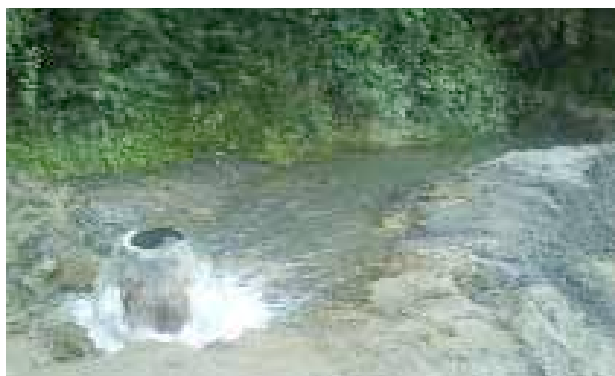
Following the submission of a revised brief to the Department, approval was obtained for the inclusion of Emo, Ballybrittas and Killenard in the Portarlinton Sewerage Scheme. Consultants N. O'Dwyer appointed in March, 2008. Survey works contracts (Flow and Rain Survey, Archaeology Study and Flow and Load Surveys, Lidar survey, Impermeable area and CCTV/SUS) commenced in August, 2008. Draft Preliminary Report due in July, 2009.



# Environment & Water Services Policy

## Graiguecullen Water Supply Scheme

Hydro geologist EDA appointed in 2007 to prepare Preliminary Report identifying suitable locations for exploration boreholes and tender documents for the drilling contract. Exploration drilling and pump testing contracts completed in December, 2008. EDA report due February, 2009.



Graiguecullen Water Supply Scheme  
Newly bored well with water rising to ground level without assistance of a pump  
Durow Water Supply Improvement Scheme

Phase 2 of Attanagh water supply now commencing design, to supply Durrow/Ballinakill. Design model to be constructed to evaluate solutions.

## Cemeteries

Laois County Council continued to operate twenty seven cemeteries throughout the county at Abbeyleix, Annatrim, Ballacolla, Ballinakill, Ballyadams, Ballyfin, Ballylinan, Barrowhouse, Borris-in-Ossory, Camross, Castletown, Clonaslee, Emo, Durrow, Killenard, Killeshin, Mountmellick, Mountrath, Moyanna, Portlaoise, Raheen, Rathdowney, Rosenallis, Shanahoe, Sleaty, Stradbally and Timahoe.

Cemetery Registrars are employed for each Council Cemetery with respon-

sibility for the sale of plots and the maintenance of the burial ground register. An important part of the section is the maintaining of records. In 2008, the transfer of manual data from registers to electronic format commenced and will continue in 2009.

During 2008, a survey was carried out by a tree surgeon at a number of cemeteries and subsequent remedial work was carried out.

The Council also assisted the Ballyfin Cemetery Committee with erection of a Calvary in the new cemetery.

## Capital Programme

The process of acquiring land for the extension to Rosenallis cemetery was completed in 2008 and development works will commence in 2009.

## Cemetery Grants

The Council encourages the work of the local burial ground committees by means of a grant each year. A total of 109 grant applications were received in 2008 and €82,300 was paid out. Valuable work is being carried out by these voluntary committees in the upkeep of local cemeteries.

Cemeteries are categorized and grants paid out on the following basis:

- Category A: Council Cemeteries
- Category B: Smaller Council Cemeteries
- Category C: Non Council Cemeteries
- Category D: Cemeteries no longer in regular use

## Public Conveniences

A total of €104,000 was spent on the maintenance and upkeep of the public toilets in Portlaoise, Mountrath and Stradbally. The Council paid for the refurbishment work on the old public toilet in Mountrath, which has been reopened and is being maintained by Mountrath Amalgated C.E.P. Ltd.



# Planning & Transportation Policy

## Chair

Michael Rice, M.C.C.

## Members

David Goodwin, M.C.C.  
Michael Lalor, M.C.C.  
John Turley, M.C.C.  
John Joe Fennelly, M.C.C.  
Jerry Lodge, M.C.C.  
Jack Nolan, T.C

Director of Services:  
Senior Engineer – Roads:  
Senior Planner:  
Senior Executive Officer:

## Sectoral Interests

Martin Keane  
Pat Flanagan  
Brian Bonham

Gerry Gibson  
Michael O'Hora  
Angela McEvoy  
Kieran Kehoe

The Planning Department can be broken down into 4 separate areas:

- (i) Development Management
- (ii) Forward Planning
- (iii) Planning Enforcement
- (iv) Building Control

## (i) Development Management

The number of planning applications received in 2008 was 1,510. However, it should be noted that 385 of the total applications received were invalid and required the applicant to submit a new application. The following table gives a breakdown of valid planning applications received and decisions made during 2008.

	2008
Number of valid applications received	1,125
Number of decisions made	1,191
Number of applications granted	1,007
Number of applications refused	196

## 2008 Performance

Invalid applications returned to applicant	25%.
Referrals to Area Offices	14 working days.

## Validation of Planning Applications

There were 1,531 planning applications validated in 2008 of which 1,185 were valid and 346 were invalid. While 23% of the planning applications were invalid, the main reasons were for public notices being out of date, agents name omitted from maps/drawings and distances not shown on site layouts.

55 applications were appealed to An Bord Pleanála in 2008.

## Report on Strategic Policy Committee

There were four meetings of this committee in 2008. The following policies were agreed and referred to the Corporate Policy Group for consideration prior to going before the full Council.

- Traffic Calming for Roads & Housing Estates
- Shop Frontages & Streetscapes
- Provision of Childcare facilities
- Update on Taking in Charge of Estates

## Planning Department

The overall objective of the Planning Department is to implement the provisions of the Planning Acts and provide appropriate support measures in order to promote the physical, social and economical well being of the County so that living standards are protected and raised and work opportunities fostered and created having regard to the principles of sustainability.



# Planning & Transportation Policy

## Customer Service Initiatives

2008 saw the continuation of the scanning of planning applications as they are received by the Planning Authority. Throughout 2008, the public were able to access all planning applications on-line within two weeks of the Planning Authority receiving them.

Works were completed on the new customer service area in early 2008 and it was opened to the public. A very positive reaction has been received from customers to the new layout.

481 Pre-planning meetings were held in 2008, at which members of the public had an opportunity to discuss planning matters with a planner prior to submitting a planning application.

27 Section 5 Certificates were issued by Laois County Council in 2008.

Laois County Council went “live” with the new Planning & Development Contribution System in 2008. This is a new IT based system which records all the financial data pertaining to development contributions. This system is linked to Laois County Council’s main financial system and is a much more transparent and efficient system for recording development levies.

The Planning website continues to be a very popular attraction with over 400,000 hits last year.

## (ii) Forward Planning

### Introduction

Forward Planning plays a pivotal role in the physical, economic and social development of County Laois. The Laois County Development Plan 2006 – 2012, adopted in January 2006, is intended to provide a strategic framework and policy context within which the Local Authority makes its planning decisions.

A variation to the County Development Plan 2006-2012 and Local Area Plans with respect to Carparking Standards for office developments was

adopted by Laois County Council at the September 2008 meeting.

The Forward Planning section is now pro-actively involved in the preparation of land use plans at all levels down to village and master planning. The Forward Planning Section is carrying out extensive Public Consultation in conjunction with the County Community Forum during the preparation of all Plans. This allows for all interested parties to have a valued input into the development of their own area, village, town, etc.

Following on from the successful programme of village plan preparation in 2007, the following Village and Town Plans were endorsed by the Area Councillors throughout 2008 - Stradbally, The Swan, Timahoe, Ballinakill, Mountrath, Castletown, Rosenallis, Clonaslee, Arles, Attanagh, Camross, Coolrain, Cullahill, Shanahoe and Ballyfin.

## Urban Renewal Scheme

In April 2008, the Civic Plaza Area at James Fintan Lalor Avenue, Portlaoise, which includes an open Public Amenity Space, 2 deck car park, hard and soft landscaping and street furniture, was opened by An Taoiseach, Mr Brian Cowen T.D. This was part funded through the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.



## Town Renewal Scheme

Five towns in Laois County qualify for tax incentives under the Urban and Town Renewal Schemes. The qualifying towns are Portlaoise, Mountrath, Mountmellick, Portarlinton and Rathdowney.



# Planning & Transportation Policy

## Conservation Grant Scheme 2008

The Conservation Grant Scheme is operated annually. In 2008, €121,000 was allocated to 17 successful applicants. The scheme is very important in promoting the conservation of the protected structures in the County and continues to be implemented by Laois County Council.

## Conservation Seminar

A Conservation Seminar was held on 18th October, 2008, in Heritage House, Abbeyleix and was well attended. The following presentations were given on the day:

- The Built Heritage of Laois - Willie Cumming, NIAH
- Maintaining Protected Structures - Jackie Donnelly, DoEHLG
- Conservation Grants - Angela McEvoy, Senior Planner, Laois County Council
- Thatched Buildings in Laois - Sinead Hughes, Architectural Recording & Research
- Owning a thatched building – Michael Dempsey, Jamestown



Catherine Casey, Heritage Officer, LCC at the Conservation Seminar

## National Tree Week 2008

The Tree Council of Ireland and sponsors Coillte and O2 allocate a number of sapling trees each year. Laois County Council makes the trees available to community groups throughout the county. Laois County Council funded a number of larger trees which were also available to the community groups. The scheme is open to residents associations, tidy towns groups, and other local development groups and schools.

## Shop Front Scheme 2008

This grant was made available in 2008. There were originally two applications for funding under the scheme and one was granted.

## Derelict Sites

In 2008, the Forward Planning Section carried out an extensive survey of derelict sites within the county, resulting in the addition of 50 sites to the Derelict Sites Register. This, in turn, has compelled owners to carry out works to improve the appearance of many structures in the county.

## (iii) Planning Enforcement

### Introduction

The Planning Authority, in accordance with the statutory requirements under the Planning and Development Acts, 2000 - 2007, will seek to ensure compliance with planning permission conditions and prevent unauthorized development.

### Unauthorised Development

Unauthorised development is where development is carried out without having received the appropriate planning permission or not being considered exempt under the Planning & Development Regulations 2001. In addition, developments being carried out which are not in accordance with planning permission granted are unauthorised developments.

### Functions

The Planning Authority follows up on all written complaints of unauthorised development where they appear to be well founded. A standard complaint form is available on line.

### General Procedural Steps

On receipt of a bona fide written complaint, an investigation will be carried out and a decision taken on validity of the complaint. The following





# Planning & Transportation Policy

Enforcement steps maybe initiated. A Warning Letter may be issued within 6 weeks from receipt of written representation.

If a satisfactory resolution is not achieved following issue of Warning Letter, then further Enforcement action may follow by service of an Enforcement Notice.

The Enforcement Notice gives a timescale for compliance and if not adhered to will result in further action such as referral to our legal advisor. It also includes for costs both administrative and legal.

The issuing of an Enforcement Notice can proceed even if a Warning Letter has not been sent.

## Developments in Enforcement

The public are now more involved in the Enforcement System as the Planning Authority is obliged to consider and respond to complaints. A number of enquiries from the Office of the Ombudsman are further evidence of increased public involvement. There are strong legal powers available to enable the Planning Authority to deal with offenders and there has been a significant increase in the fines payable, together with the imposition of a minimum fine where a person is convicted of an offence in relation to unauthorised development. Laois County Council has been very pro-active in 2008 in following up complaints of unauthorised developments.

## Licensing of Outdoor Events

An outdoor event is defined as a public performance which takes place wholly or mainly in the open air or in a structure with no roof or a partial, temporary or retractable roof, a tent or similar temporary structure and which consists of music, dancing, displays of public entertainment or any activity of a like kind.

The organisers of such events are required to obtain a licence from the Planning Authority where the audience comprises of 5,000 or more people.

Examples: Electric Picnic held in Stradbally in 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008.

## Notice of Registration of Quarries

Under Section 261 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, all Quarries which did not have the benefit of Planning Permission or which received Planning Permission more than five years prior to the operation of Section 261, were registered with the Planning Authority. Laois County Council received 78 applications for registration, of which 60 quarries were registered as operating quarries. The Council is currently monitoring compliance with quarries on which conditions were imposed under Section 261.

## Taking-in-Charge of Estates

Laois County Council commenced the process of taking in charge of estates upon request from developers and/or residents associations. The Planning Authority ensures that prior to advertising for taking in charge, the estate must be in compliance with the planning permission under which the development was conditioned. Laois County Council updates its taking in charge policy document in line with Ministerial guidelines.

There were 6 estates taken in charge in 2008.

## (iv) Building Control

The Building Control Section deals with all commencement notices received and carries out inspections on the buildings to ensure they comply with the various Building Control regulations.

Number of Valid Commencement Notices Received	507
Number of Buildings covered by Valid Commencement Notices	675
Number of Buildings Inspected	162
Number of Buildings Inspected as a % of buildings covered by valid Commencement Notices	24%



# Planning & Transportation Policy

## Planning and Building Control - Service Indicators

### Planning Applications – Decision making

#### Individual Houses

	31/12/07	31/12/08
Number of applications decided	705	466
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	408 (58%)	271 (58%)
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	295	194
Number of decisions where an extension of time was agreed to by the applicant under section 34(9) of the Planning and Development Act 2000	0	1
Average length of time taken (in days) to decide a case where further information was sought	75	72
% of grants	70%	75.75%
% of refusals	30%	24.25%
% of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations, by An Bord Pleanala	84%	90.91%
% of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanala	16%	9.09%

#### New Housing Development

	31/12/07	31/12/08
Number of applications decided	91	57
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	47 (52%)	25 (44%)
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	42	32
Number of decisions where an extension of time was agreed to by the applicant under section 34(9) of the Planning and Development Act 2000	2	0
Average length of time taken (in days) to decide a case where further information was sought	79	77.47
% of grants	45%	68.42%
% of refusals	55%	31.58%
% of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations, by An Bord Pleanala	87%	81.82%
% of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanala	13%	18.18%

#### Other: Not Requiring EIA

	31/12/07	31/12/08
Number of applications decided	1020	657
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	839 (82%)	494 (75%)
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	180	163
Number of decisions where an extension of time was agreed to by the applicant under section 34(9) of the Planning and Development Act 2000	0	0



# Planning & Transportation Policy

Average length of time taken (in days) to decide a case where further information was sought  
 % of grants  
 % of refusals  
 % of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations, by An Bord Pleanala  
 % of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanala

31/12/07

75  
 92%  
 7.6%  
 48%  
 52%

31/12/08

75  
 90.11%  
 9.89%  
 76.67%  
 23.33%

## Other: Requiring EIA

Number of applications decided  
 Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks  
 Number of decisions which required the submission of further information  
 Number of decisions where an extension of time was agreed to by the applicant under section 34(9) of the Planning and Development Act 2000  
 Average length of time taken (in days) to decide a case where further information was sought  
 % of grants  
 % of refusals  
 % of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations, by An Bord Pleanala  
 % of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanala

31/12/07

6  
 1 (17%)  
 4  
 0  
 95  
 83%  
 17%  
 0%  
 0%

31/12/08

11  
 1 (9%)  
 10  
 0  
 94.6  
 100%  
 0%  
 0%  
 100%

## Enforcement

Total number of cases subject to complaints that were investigated  
 Total number of cases subject to complaints that were dismissed  
 Total number of cases subject to complaints that were resolved through negotiations  
 Number of enforcement procedures taken through warning letters  
 Number of enforcement procedures taken through enforcement notices  
 Number of prosecutions

31/12/07

167  
 -  
 152  
 82  
 20  
 0

31/12/08

149  
 27  
 206  
 143  
 61  
 6

## Opening Hours and Consultations

Average number of opening hours per week  
 Number of pre-planning consultation meetings held  
 Average length of time (in days) from request for consultation with local authority planner to actual formal meeting for pre-planning consultation  
 Buildings inspected as a % of new buildings notified to the Local Authority

31/12/07

32.5  
 993  
 10 (working days)  
 12.25%

31/12/08

32.5  
 568  
 7 (working days)  
 24%



# Planning & Transportation Policy

## Roads

Laois County Council is responsible for and maintains the 2,278km of road-way and 28km of motorway in the County.

### Length of Roads by Classification

Motorway	23.4km
National Primary	59.6km
National Secondary	79.7km
Regional Roads	317.9 km
County/Other Main Roads	1,718km
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,198.6 km</b>

### 2008 Road Grant Allocations

In 2008, Laois County Council received a total allocation of €101,484,168m for National & Non-National roads in the county. Of this, €12.6m was available for expenditure on Regional and Local Roads.

### Specific Improvement Schemes

Laois County Council received funding from the Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government for the following schemes in 2008:

#### Kilmullen Bridge - €2,600,000

In December 2005, An Bord Pleanála held an oral hearing in respect of a draft compulsory purchase order for this scheme. The scheme was approved in 2006 and the allocation went towards a property purchased in 2006. Further lands were acquired in 2007 and 2008. It is anticipated that contract documents will be signed with the successful contractors, John Craddock Ltd., and a bridge agreement with Iarnród Éireann, will be finalised in early 2009. The scheme involves the realignment of the R420 Portarlinton to Monasterevin Road and includes a bridge over the main Dublin/Limerick/Cork railway line.

#### Togher Link Road - €1,280,000

Construction commenced on the Togher Link Road Scheme in November, 2008. The road consists of a single two-lane carriageway, namely the Togher Link Road, from the junction of Father Browne Avenue to the proposed National Transport Node & Inland Port and all ancillary works associated therewith. It is expected that Phase I of this scheme will be completed in March/April, 2009.



### Clár Funding

In April, 2006, the Minister for Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs announced that 39 Electoral Divisions in rural Laois are now eligible for funding under the CLÁR Programme. CLÁR is an investment programme for disadvantaged rural areas. Laois County Council received €74,911 under the 2008 CLÁR/Department of Transport co-fund for works on Local Primary, Local Secondary, Local Tertiary Roads and Bridges. CLÁR schemes were carried out in Ballyfin, Kyle, Farnans and Moneenalassa in 2008.

### Road Safety Remedial Measures

In 2008, Laois County Council received €67,000 to carry out eight Road Safety Remedial Measure Schemes at various locations throughout the county on Non-National Road Schemes. These schemes involved the re-alignment of junctions, the provision of lining, road markings and signs to improve road safety. Schemes carried out in 2008 included the R434 (Moyne Cross), R429 (Ballyfoyle Cross) and the R430 (Bend at Slatt Upper).



# Planning & Transportation Policy

## Road Safety

During 2008, 2000 high visibility vests were distributed in primary schools in Laois to improve road safety and awareness for both students and parents, together with arm bands and school bag reflectors. Education continued in both Primary and Secondary schools through the Drive for Life Program which targets students aged 17 years and Safe Cycling Program designed for 10 to 12 year olds. Laois County Council and An Garda Síochána joint Road Safety Committee continue to work to reduce the number and severity of crashes on our roads in Laois.



Students of Scoil Bhride, Knockmay



Maintenance of National Roads

Two pavement overlay schemes on National Primary Roads were completed in 2008. An allocation of €200,000 was received for pavement overlay of sections of the N7 at Mountrath, totalling approximately 800m in length. A further allocation of €200,000 was received for pavement overlay works at various locations on the N8.

## Maintenance of Non-National Roads

In line with previous years, Laois County Council carried out maintenance works on Regional and Local Roads in the county. These works include drainage works, verge trimming, footpath repairs, erection and replacement of signs, relining, the provision of studs, street cleaning and litter collection and the replacement of safety barrier/fencing.



In 2008, under the Multi-Annual Roadworks Programme 2008-2010, Strengthening and Surface Dressing works were carried out to Regional and County Roads throughout the county. A total of 56km of Regional and County Roads were strengthened and a further 83km were surface dressed in 2008.

## Development Charge Funded Schemes

A number of schemes funded through Development Charges were progressed in 2008.





# Planning & Transportation Policy

## Killenard Road Improvement

€800,000 has been allocated to this scheme. Work has begun on site and is expected to be completed in 2008.

## Crossneen Bends in Graiguecullen

David Walsh Contractors have been appointed and work is expected to be completed in May, 2009, at a cost of €1,000,000.

## Portlaoise Northern Orbital Route

Work was carried out in 2008 on ground investigations and topographical surveys along the route. Detailed design of this scheme is currently being completed. It is expected that sections of this road will be delivered through development of zoned lands. Consultation is ongoing with the NRA to progress this scheme further.

## Portlaoise Southern Circular Route

The CPO process was commenced and approved by ABP in December, 2008. The scheme will be developed by private developers within the context of planning permissions granted along the route of the scheme.

## Borris Road Realignment

Part 8 approval was obtained for this scheme in 2007. Consultants were appointed in early 2008 to undertake the detailed design, which is now complete. The CPO for this scheme is expected to commence in 2009. Tenders will be sought and construction is expected to start in 2009 with completion expected in 2010.

## Rathdowney Village Traffic Improvements

Detailed design was completed in 2008 and construction commenced in November, 2008, with a view to completion of Phase 1 in 2009 at a cost of €600,000.

## Stradbally By-Pass.

A Part 8 approval is now in place for the entire By-Pass route.

## Other Schemes

A number of other Part 8's have been brought forward in areas where road objectives in towns are affected by proposed developments viz:

- Abbeylax Inner Relief Road – Rathmoyle Section.
- R445, Mountrath Road, Portlaoise
- R445, Dublin Road, Portlaoise
- Portlaoise Southern Orbital Route/Meelick Road

## Local Improvement Schemes

An allocation of €354,000 was received from the Department of Transport in 2008 in respect of the above and 9 projects were completed. Local Improvement Schemes apply to private roads in Laois. A Grant of 85% of the total cost of the works is provided if the scheme costs in excess of €25,393. Where schemes cost less than this amount a grant of 90% is provided.

## Community Involvement in Roadworks Scheme

This scheme continued in 2008 with an allocation of €220,000 provided and a total of 9 projects were successfully undertaken in conjunction with local communities.

## M7 Portlaoise to Castletown/M8 Portlaoise to Cullahill Motorway Scheme

The M7 Portlaoise – Castletown/M8 Portlaoise – Cullahill PPP Motorway Scheme forms part of the improvement to the N7 and N8 national primary routes proposed under the National Development Plan. The Scheme ultimately will link into the N7 Castletown to Nenagh Scheme (N7 Scheme) on the N7 and the N8 Cullahill to Cashel Scheme (N8 Scheme) on the N8. The Portlaoise - Cullahill and Portlaoise - Castletown are being combined as one scheme. This is one of the projects announced by the NRA in June 2000 under Tranche II of the PPP Roads programme.



# Planning & Transportation Policy



Structure 27 - Existing N7 Overbridge

The Portlaoise - Castletown route lies on the N7 Limerick to Dublin route. The Portlaoise-Culahill route lies on the N8 Cork to Dublin route. The combined length of both sections is approximately 40 km.

The PPP contract was awarded in June, 2007, to the Celtic Roads Group (Portlaoise) Limited consortium which comprises BAM PPP bv, Iridium Concesiones de Infraestructuras S.A. and NTR plc.

The Scheme comprises the finance, design, construction and operation of the new road and tolling facilities. The Scheme is new-build in a largely 'green field' environment. It comprises approximately 41 kilometres of dual carriageway and approximately 3km of single carriageway link roads, approximately 15 kilometres of side roads, 3 grade separated junctions and a motorway to motorway Scheme. The Scheme also involves approximately 46 new structures, 2 existing structures, approximately 29 structural culverts and one Toll Plaza. Construction remains ongoing with an expected opening date of September, 2010.

## Performance Indicators

### R.1

Number of kilometres of Local and Regional Roads improved and maintained under the Restoration Programme up to 31/12/08	139.575 km
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Number of kilometers of local and regional road constructed under the specific improvements grants scheme per annum	0 km
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Erection of the Steel Toll Plaza Canopy



# Laois County Development Board

## Membership of the Board

### Local Government

James Deegan, MCC Laois County Council - Chairperson Laois County Development Board  
Peter Carey, County Manager  
Michael Rice, MCC, Laois County Council  
John Bonham, MCC, Laois County Council  
Brian Stanley, MCC, Laois County Council  
John Moran, MCC, Laois County Council  
Rotimi Adebari TC, Portlaoise Town Council

### Local Development

Maria Callinan, County Enterprise Board,  
Lena Ging, County Enterprise Board  
Ann Goodwin, Laois LEADER  
Julia Booth, Laois LEADER  
Pat Fitzpatrick, Mountmellick Development Association  
Diane Burke, Portlaoise Community Action Project  
Fionn Bardon, Laois County Childcare Committee

### State Agencies

Mary Delaney, HSE Midlands  
Pat Campbell, FAS  
Con Feighery, Teagasc  
Anne O'Keeffe, Laois VEC  
Barry Egan, Enterprise Ireland  
Brid Moody, IDA Ireland  
Jim Buckley, Dept. Social & Family Affairs  
Seamus Murray, Dept. Education & Science  
Chief Supt. D. Sheahan, Garda Siochana.  
Kevin Kidney, MERTA

## Social Partners

Margaret Ryan, Business Sector  
Miriam Hamilton, Trade Union Sector  
Michael Bergin, Farming Sector  
Brian Bonham, Community Forum  
Sarah Shakespeare, Community Forum

Director of Community & Enterprise,  
Economic Development & County Promotion: Declan Byrne

During 2008, Laois County Development Board held 4 meetings. Considerable progress was made in the implementation of the Board's prioritised actions. Presentations were made to the Board during the year by the following:

- Mr. Kieran Kehoe, Senior Executive Officer, Planning – Development Contribution Scheme
- Mr. Liam O'Callaghan, Laois/Offaly Health Manager, HSE – Progress regarding CDB Strategy - HSE Actions
- Mr. Pat Campbell, Training Centre Manager, FAS – Role of FAS in the event of company closure

*"Towards an Integration Plan for County Laois".*

Ms. Benedicta Atttoh, National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism

*"Promotion, Interpretation & Management of the Cultural Heritage of County Laois".*

Mr. Caimin O'Brien, Archaeologist with National Monument Services, DoEHLG.

*"A safe and healthy community with a good quality of life".*

Prof. Niall Moyna, School of Health & Human Performance, Faculty of Science, Dublin City University, Dublin.



# Laois County Development Board

*"How the work of the National Roads Authority was instrumental in the setting up of Dundalk Economic Development Group".*

Mr. Peter Malone, Chairman National Roads Authority

*"The development of sporting opportunities in Laois".*

Mr. John Delaney, CEO, Football Association of Ireland & Mr. Peter Gerard, Director of Communications, Football Association of Ireland

## Task Groups of the Board

The Task Groups of the Board continued to progress their priorities set out in the Board's Strategic Review 2005 to 2008.

## Realising Our Potential- Strategy Review 2009 - 2012

The Board commenced work on a review of the Strategy for the period 2009 - 2012, as required by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Review and Implementation Plan due for completion by 30th April, 2009.

## Facilities Audit

At the request of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, an audit of existing community facilities available for voluntary, sporting, civic or recreational activities was carried out by Laois County Council.

## Laois Community & Enterprise Development Limited (Cohesion)

Work continued on the development of a new unified structure for the Rural Development Programme, previously delivered by LEADER and the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (Mountmellick Development Association Social Inclusion and Portlaoise Community Action Project), which will deliver all rural development and social inclusion programmes in the county. In 2008, the company - Laois Community & Enterprise Development Board (now trading as Laois Partnership) - was established and all Directors were appointed. Mr. Michael Bergin was elected as Chairman of the company, and following interviews, Ms. Anne Goodwin was appointed to the position of CEO.

## Social Capital Projects

Work continued on the Social Capital Projects during 2008, in association with local and voluntary groups in each area. Four projects were completed and opened to the public during the year:

- Development of Ballycullenbeg Community Centre, Mountmellick and adjacent grounds.
- Development of Green Area at Doonane, Crettyard.
- Provision of a dedicated youth facility at Camross Community Centre.
- Development of Linear Walk, Portlaoise.

It is envisaged that the Youth Facilities at Portarlinton Community Centre will be completed and open to the public in early 2009.

## Social Inclusion Measures Working Group (SIM)

The SIM group is responsible for developing cohesion in the delivery of services to socially excluded groups. In 2008, Laois County Council, with the support of the SIM Group, began the implementation of the Local Anti Poverty Strategy for County Laois. This group also developed a Traveller Interagency Strategy in the county, which is currently being implemented including the appointment of a Traveller Enterprise Worker, who will provide support and advocacy for Travellers setting up enterprises and entering mainstream employment.

## Lone Parents Network

The Laois Lone Parents networking committee carried out a series of capacity building and training programs for its members. The group are currently endeavouring to develop stronger links with service providers/agencies to assist them with issues raised by lone parents in relation to transport, further education, Social Welfare benefits, accommodation, etc.



# Laois County Development Board

## Supports for Ethnic Minorities

The community and enterprise section continued to support Laois Ethnic Minority Support group and continued to work on expanding their membership. In association with the Sports Department and the Portlaoise Leisure Centre, the group participated in an intercultural day on 6th December at the Leisure Centre. The group held a cultural event for all Ethnic Groups in the county on 13th December in Mountmellick.

## National Pride of Place Competition

Two entries from Laois entered the 2008 National Pride of Place competition, following their nomination by Laois County Council – Portlaoise Parish Centre represented Laois in the Community Facility category, while Mountmellick Voluntary Housing Association represented Laois in the Services for the Elderly category. Laois County Council presented both entrants with certificates in recognition of their participation in this year's competition.



Portlaoise Parish Centre  
President Mary McAleese with Cllr James Deegan, Declan Kelly, Portlaoise Parish Centre and Peter Carey, County Manager.  
(Photo - Sean Byrne)



Mountmellick Voluntary Housing Assoc.  
Cllr James Degan, Tom Dowling, Chairman Pride of Place, Cllr Paddy Bracken, Seamus Sexton, Frances O'Loughlin, Cllr Tom Higgins, Mayor of Waterford, Christopher Moran, Chairman Co-Operation Ireland.  
(Photo - Sean Byrne)

President of Ireland, Ms Mary McAleese, was guest of honour at the All-Island Pride of Place Gala Awards ceremony at Cappoquin Community Centre, Waterford on 6th November. Hosted by Waterford County

Council, the President announced the winners to an audience of approximately 500, which included representatives from all of the 113 nominated groups.

Laois has enjoyed great success over the past number of years in the Pride of Place competition and 2008 was no different. Both the Laois entries were recognised for their excellent contribution to their respective communities – Portlaoise Parish Centre won first prize in Category 6 for their Community Facility and Mountmellick Voluntary Housing Association received the runner-up prize in the Care of the Elderly category.

## Youth Projects

### Comhairle na nÓg 2008

Comhairle na nÓg was held on 13th November in Portlaoise College. Approximately 180 fifth year and transition year students from 11 of the 12 secondary schools in Laois, along with pupils from Youth Reach in Mountmellick, participated on the day, assisted by a number of facilitators. There were three themes discussed - The Importance of Sport & Physical Activity, Substance Abuse and Funding Our Education System.

Five students from Laois - Richie Westman, John Delaney, Jennifer McDermot, Laura Birch and Jim Gibbons - were elected to represent Laois at the National Dail na nÓg which took place on 20th February, 2009, in Croke Park, Dublin.

## Youth Council

Preparations were ongoing during the year for the development of a Laois Youth Council. Elections for 26 positions on the council were held throughout April/May, with all secondary schools in the county participating. Communication & Committee skills training was held on 26th August and the first meeting of the Council took place on 29th September.





# Laois County Development Board

## Child Protection Policy

A "Child Protection Policy" was drafted and agreed by all relevant sections. The Policy was endorsed by both Management Team and the Partnership Committee. A Child Protection Officer will now be appointed and appropriate training for staff will be provided.

## Implementing the Disability Act 2005

Laois County Council implemented a programme of over €425,000 in 2008 to make facilities and places more accessible for people with disabilities. Improvement works were carried out on roads and footpaths throughout the county, County Hall, Emo Cemetery and in the Area offices at Portarlinton and Graiguecullen. Libraries in the county have also been stocked with a large collection of Audiobooks, Multimedia Library Material and Computer Hardware, which can be used by people with disabilities. The Council's website and IT information points were also improved during the year to ensure that the online services were fully accessible to all members of the community. This work resulted in the website being awarded the best overall Local Irish eGovernment Award at the 2008 Irish eGovernment Awards. Configure Limited, Ireland, carried out an Access Audit of 24 towns & villages in Laois. The results of the audit will inform the Council on necessary works for the future.

## Laois County Community Forum

The Forum Executive continued to meet monthly and work through their programme for 2008. The following projects were completed in 2008:

**Smoke Alarm Scheme 2008:** The members are actively involved with the distribution and delivery of 1,000 smoke alarms across the county for 2008.

**Launch of Disability Plan:** Laois Sports Partnership, in association with the Community Forum, launched their Disability Plan 2008/2009 on 11th November. The publication was distributed to all community & voluntary groups in the county.

**Community Supports & Grants Booklet:** A Community Supports & Grants Directory, with information on all the various grants and supports that are currently available from Laois County Council, was published and distributed to all Community & Voluntary groups in the county.

**Celebrating Older People:** The Community Forum, Laois Sports Partnership & Laois LEADER held an event for Older People and Active Retirement Groups on 19th May in the Parish Centre, Portlaoise.

**Laois Community & Enterprise Company:** The members assisted with the election process for the community & voluntary Director's positions on Laois Community & Enterprise Company.

**Community Alert/Neighbourhood Watch:** An Garda Síochána, together with the Community Forum launched its five year Community Alert/Neighbourhood Watch Plan on 26th March.

**New Members:** Three new members were elected to the Community Forum Executive at the Elections which took part in early March - Ms. Sheelagh Coyle, Ms. Sarah Shakespeare, and Ms. Sylvia Roujet, in the Mountmellick, Emo and Portlaoise Electoral Areas respectively.

## Report on National Service Indicators

### Community Participation & Co-operation

Percentage of Local Schools involved in the Local Youth Council/Comhairle na nÓg Scheme

Secondary Schools Event - 100%



# Financial Management

Head of Finance:  
Financial/Management Accountant:

Gerry Murphy  
Julie Bergin

The Finance Department is responsible for the following services:

Motor Tax, Accounts Payable, Revenue Collection, Payroll and Superannuation, Internal Audit, Preparation of Annual Budgets and Financial Statements, Financial Management and all ancillary matters.

## Commercial Rates

The General Annual Rate on Valuation was 64.63.

The rateable Valuation multiplier for Portlaoise and Mountmellick was

Portlaoise 66.63 Mountmellick 67.43

## Water Charges

In 2008, the total number of commercial users was 2,385, of which 2,127 were metered. A fixed charge applied to the remaining customers. By April, 2009, it is intended that all non-domestic users will be metered. The charge for metered water in 2008 was €5.18 per 1000 gallons and €5.73 per 1000 gallons of waste water. In addition there was a standing meter rental charge of €60 per annum.

## Prompt Payment of Accounts

Following the introduction of the Prompt Payments of Accounts Act, as amended by the European Communities (Late payment in Commercial Transactions) Regulations 2002, commercial suppliers are entitled to payment of interest on amounts owed to them after

- the date specified under the terms of a written contract or
- where there is no written contract or the contract does not specify a payment date, 30 days from receipt of the invoice or delivery of goods, whichever is the later.

Laois County Council complies with the terms of the Prompt Payments Act as amended by the European Communities (Late Payment in Commercial Transactions) Regulations. To ensure compliance with the Act and Regulations, invoices are date stamped on receipt in the Accounts Payable section and outstanding invoices approaching their due date are examined weekly. In cases where late payment interest is payable, a statement detailing the interest calculation is sent to the supplier with payment. The procedures detailed above can only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance against material compliance with the Act.

The standard payment periods specified in written contracts are generally:

Housing Contracts - 10 working days  
Roads Contracts - 28 days  
Water Contracts - 14 days/1 month

## Late Payment Statistics: 2008

Total number of late payments in excess of €250	2
Value of late payments in excess of €250	€3,837.26
Average length of late payments	27
Proportion in € of all late payments to total payments	0.0015% (€3,837.26/€259,562,119.27)
Total amount of Late Payment interest paid	€16.80

## Financial Management Systems – Improvements

A new system for Development Contributions has been introduced. Development Contributions are now on a Debtors system. This will greatly improve collections in this area.



# Financial Management

A new receipts system was also introduced. The main benefits of this new system are more clarity in the coding of receipts.

Other improvements include e-mailing of purchase orders to suppliers and improvements to the remittance advice giving more detail.

We are continually making improvements in the area of Low Value Purchase (LVP) Cards. We are currently reviewing the coding procedures in this area in order to make the process more efficient. This process is ongoing. This has greatly improved efficiencies in the Accounts Payable section and has also brought benefits to suppliers.

The Annual Budget for 2008 was prepared in the new format under the Costing System. The Annual Financial Statements for 2008 will also be prepared in this format.

## Motor Taxation

The Motor Tax Department continues to provide services widely availed of by the public. The NVDF (National Vehicle Driver File) System caters for all motor tax and driver licences.

The total transactions carried out by Laois MTO in 2008 was 81,249.

### New CO2 Rates

Motor Tax for new vehicles registered on or after 1st July, 2008 will be determined on the basis of seven CO2 bands. Taxes will range from €104 per year for the greenest cars to €2,000 per year for cars with the highest emissions ratings. Motor Tax rates will be graduated as one moves up the CO2 bands.

### Vehicle Licences

The total receipts for 2008 was €12,576,685 compared to €11,901,090 in 2007. The number of vehicle licences (discs) issued in 2008 was 56,812 compared to 56,044 in 2007.

### Driving Licences

Receipts for 2008 were €196,660 (including duplicates) compared with €148,605 for 2007. The number of driving licences issued in 2008 was 11,262 compared with 9,422 in 2007. A Theory Test is mandatory for all first applicants for Learner Permits. The telephone number to call for a test is 1890 606 106.

### Vehicle Testing

Certificates of Roadworthiness for commercial/goods vehicles were issued in respect of 5,887 vehicles during the year, compared to 5,337 for 2007. All commercial/goods vehicles require a DOELHG test every year.

### NCT (National Car Test)

Testing of private vehicles is ongoing since January, 2000. The Laois Centre is at Lismard Business Centre, Timahoe Road, Portlaoise. The initial test is after 4 years and then every 2 years thereafter. Vintage cars are the only vehicles exempt from this test.

Opening Hours: 9 a.m. – 3.30 p.m. Monday – Friday, including lunchtime.

% of Motor Tax transactions which:	31/12/08
Are dealt with over the counter	83% (57,859)
Are dealt with by post	17% (12,021)
Average number of Public Opening hours per week	31.125



# Financial Management

The Service Indicators were changed in 2008 to include all driver licence applications and postal vehicle taxation applications:

(a) on the same day	17,770 (76.29%)
(b) on the third day or less	5,421 (23.27%)
(c) on the fifth day or less	35 (0.15%)
(d) over 5 days	67 (0.29%)

## Revenue Collection

### Housing Loans

Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due	95%	94%
--	-----	-----

Percentage of arrears:

(i) 1 month old	14%	4%
(ii) 2 – 3 months old	19%	20%
(iii) more than 3 months old	67%	76%

### Commercial Rates

Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due	91%	90%
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### Non-Domestic Water Charges

Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due	68%	47%
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## Annual Financial Statements

Revenue Account	Gross Expenditure 2008	Income 2008	Net Expenditure 2008
Programme Group	€	€	€
Housing & Building	12,548,252	10,655,519	1,892,733
Roads Transportation & Safety	18,875,714	13,635,555	5,240,159
Water & Sewerage	10,793,189	4,536,206	6,256,984

Development Incentives & Controls	4,888,287	1,458,690	3,429,597
Environmental Protection	10,014,210	7,093,253	2,920,957
Recreation & Amenity	4,482,775	777,337	3,705,438
Agriculture, Education, Health & Welfare	5,170,706	4,413,495	757,211
Miscellaneous	4,152,995	3,141,409	1,011,586
Total Expenditure/Income	70,926,127	45,711,464	

Net cost of programmes to be funded from Rate & Local Government Fund	25,214,663
Rates	9,017,455
Local Government Fund - General Purpose Grant	19,360,800
Surplus/(Deficit) for Year before Transfers	3,163,591
Transfers from/(to) Reserves	(3,158,746)
Overall Surplus/(Deficit) for Year	4,845
General Reserve @ 1st January, 2008	(534,218)
General Reserve @ 31st December, 2008	(529,373)

## Capital Account

Balance @ 01.01.08	(8,140,580)
Grants	113,567,650
Other Income	47,199,904
Transfer from/to Revenue	3,149,028
Expenditure	169,057,293
Balance @ 31.12.08	(13,281,290)



# Portlaoise Town Council

Manager: Gerry Gibson  
Town Clerk: John Clarke  
Town Engineer: Philip McVeigh

## Annual General Meeting

At the Annual General Meeting of Portlaoise Town Council held on 26th June, 2008, Cllr William Aird was elected as Mayor. Cllr Brian Stanley was elected as Vice Mayor.

## Members on Boards/Committees

### Housing, Social & Cultural Policy Committee:

Cllr Brian Stanley - Chairperson  
Cllr William Aird  
Cllr Catherine Fitzgerald

### Economic Development & County Promotion Strategic Policy Committee:

Cllr Mary Sweeney  
Cllr Thomas Jacob  
Cllr Rotimi Adebari

### Planning & Transportation Policy Committee:

Cllr Jerry Lodge  
Cllr Jack Nolan

## Monthly Meetings

Portlaoise Town Council meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month.

## Main Services Provided

Housing maintenance and repair, School Warden Services, Community & Environmental initiatives, Public Convenience, Civic Receptions & Town Twinning.

## Budget 2008 - €120,920

In 2008, Portlaoise Town Council provided support to the following: St Patrick's Day Parade Committee, Portlaoise Tidy Towns, Rossvale Court Residents Association, Liogard Residents Association, Triogue Place Residents

Group, Marian Avenue Community Group, St. John's Square Residents Association, National Association for Parent Support Ltd., The Carers Association, Portlaoise Macra na Feirme Association, Parents Together Association, Portlaoise Boxing Club, O'Moore Place Education Project, Christmas Lighting and Naomh Bríd Music Class

## Conferences

The Town Council supported and was represented at the following conferences:

- The Annual Conference of the Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland
- The Annual Seminar of the Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland

## Highlights during 2008

The Town Council supported and welcomed various developments in Portlaoise, particularly:

- Portlaoise Civic Plaza
- Official opening of Portlaoise Leisure Centre
- New Portlaoise Retail Park
- Performance of Portlaoise in the IBAL Anti-Litter League Awards
- Visit from our Town Twinning friends from Coulounieix-Chamiers, France
- Public, Voluntary, and Affordable Housing Developments
- Road and Footpath improvements throughout the Town

## Receptions

Receptions were held in Honour of the following in 2008:

- Portlaoise Ladies Football All-Ireland Under 14 Féile Winning Team
- National Association of Nigerian Professionals
- National Association for the Unemployed
- The Carers Association



Reception for  
Portlaoise Ladies  
Football Team  
All Ireland Under  
14Féile Winners





# Mountmellick Town Council

Manager: Declan Byrne  
Town Clerk: Pamela Tynan  
Town Engineer: Dermot Leonard

## Annual General Meeting

At the Annual General Meeting of Mountmellick Town Council, Cllr Denis O'Meara was elected as Cathaoirleach. Cllr Joe Melia was elected Leas Cathaoirleach.

## Representation on Other Bodies

### Place Names Committee

Cllr Bobby Delaney represented the Town Council on the Place Names Committee for County Laois.

### Mountmellick Bye-Laws Committee

Cllr Michael Gormley, Cathaoirleach Cllr Denis O'Meara and former Cathaoirleach, Cllr Joe Melia represented Mountmellick Town Council on the Bye-Laws Committee, addressing all traffic management issues in the town.

### Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurances

Cllr Marc Connolly represented Mountmellick Town Council on the above body.

### Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland

Cllrs Patrick J. Bracken and Michael Gormley represented Mountmellick Town Council at the Annual Conference and the Annual Seminar of the above body.

### Strategic Policy Committees

Cllr Denis O'Meara is the representative on the Environment & Water Services SPC and Cllr Marc Connolly is the representative on the Housing Social and Cultural SPC.

## Mountmellick GAA Civic Reception – 1st March, 2008

The Mountmellick GAA and Sarsfield Ladies GAA dinner dance was held on the 1st March, 2008, in the Heritage Hotel, Portlaoise. The Chairman and Town Clerk attended this function on behalf of the Town Council and made formal presentations of citations to both clubs.

## Mountmellick Macra Civic Reception – 3rd April, 2008

Following the April Monthly meeting, the Town Council held a Civic Reception in honour of Mountmellick Macra. The function was attended by members of the local Clergy, Macra members, Members of Mountmellick Town Council, Town Clerk, Deputy County Manager and Guests. A formal presentation was made to Macra by the Cathaoirleach and Members.



## Job Shadow Day

Ireland's first National Job Shadow day was held on 23rd April. 'Job Shadow' is a nationwide initiative dedicated to giving people with disabilities a unique opportunity to "shadow" a workplace employee as he or she goes through a normal day at work. The ultimate goal of the National Job Shadow Day is to mobilise the employment of job seekers with disabilities while raising awareness of Supported Employment. The members unanimously supported this scheme.



# Mountmellick Town Council

## 40th Anniversary of Mountmellick Credit Union

The 40th Anniversary of Mountmellick Credit Union took place in June, 2008. A reception was held in the Credit Union which was attended by a number of Town Councillors. On behalf of the people of Mountmellick, the Council formally extended their appreciation on the huge voluntary work undertaken by members of the Credit Union for the benefit of the local community.

## Mountmellick Parking Areas and Car Park By-Laws

Works on the first phase of the by-laws were completed during the summer months. These included the provision of pay and display parking in O'Connor Square, a loading bay, a Bus Bay and Taxi Rank outside the Post Office.

Plans for the second phase of works have also gone through the public inspection process and it is hoped that work will commence in early 2009. During the year the members monitored progress and gave their views and contributions to the By-Laws Committee. This committee comprises representatives of the Town Council, Mountmellick Development Association and Local Traders and is chaired by Cllr Paddy Bracken who reported progress at Monthly Town Council meetings.

## Environmental Works/Grants

During 2008, various Environmental Enhancement Works were carried out throughout the town. These works included the following:

- Street furniture was painted and replaced where damaged
- Six Additional large flower pots were purchased and all flower pots were planted with summer and winter plants.
- Two new bubble gum bins were provided and placed at the Community Centre and Post Office.
- Six new public benches were purchased and erected at various locations around the Town.

## Convent Bridge Enhancement Project

The Town Clerk organised a meeting with Ms. Ciara Flynn, National Parks & Wildlife Service, which took place on 8th September. Approval for the planned development was subsequently given from NPWS and the project was completed in October.

## Mountmellick Positive Ageing Week 26th September – 4th October

Positive Ageing week is a national celebration of the contribution that older people have made and continue to make to our community. At the May Monthly Meeting it was unanimously decided that Cllr Melia & Cllr Whelan would represent Mountmellick Town Council on the Positive Ageing Week Committee. Some of the events organised included traditional singing & dancing, story telling and health, safety & finance workshops.

## Traffic Calming Measures

Yellow boxes were provided at the entrances to Kirwan Park, Twomey Park & Pattison Estate. Four ramps were also installed by The Housing Department of Laois County Council at Cullenbeg.

## Playground for Mountmellick

A Special Meeting was held in October between Laois County Council and local public representatives representing the Town Council, Mountmellick Area County Councillors and members of the Oireachtas. The consensus of opinion at the meeting was the selection of Smiths Field for the playground and the County Council is now progressing with plans with a view to providing the playground in 2009.

## Water Safety

During 2008, Water Safety Life Buoys were installed at various locations along the riverside in Mountmellick as recommended by the Irish Water Safety Council.



# Mountmellick Town Council

## Meeting with Gardai

A Special Meeting with An Garda Síochána was held during the year. The members highlighted various issues and areas of concern around the town. Sgt. Cawley addressed the Members informing them that the Gardai would do their best to reduce crime figures in Mountmellick.

It was unanimously agreed that the Town Clerk write to the Chief Superintendent to meet with the members to discuss Garda numbers in Mountmellick.

## Mountmellick Sewage Upgrade

In 2008, Laois County Council installed new aeration equipment at the Wastewater Treatment Plant. This has improved the level of treatment at the Plant by increasing the capacity of the Plant to match existing load. A new Temporary Treatment Plant was also installed in 2008. It is expected this will provide treatment capacity of up to 5,000 PE (Population Equivalent) in addition to the existing Treatment Plant capacity.

Regarding major capital projects, there is a two Phase approach. Phase 1 involves improvement to existing pumping stations and stormwater storage tank. Phase 2 is a longer term project involving provision of a wastewater treatment plant to cater for the projected population for the next 20 years and possible extensions to the network.

## Water Supply

A new water supply scheme was constructed and commissioned in March, 2008, to supply water from a new well source at Eyne. €2.1m in funding for this project was provided by the Department. The new supply is being gradually increased and monitored from this source as the supply from the old Catholes Plant is being reduced. Currently almost 50% of the supply to Mountmellick is being delivered from the new source at Eyne. Representations from the Members over the last number of years contributed to the decision for the carrying out of this work.

## National Pride of Place Awards 2008

Mountmellick Voluntary Housing Association, Wolfe Tone Court, Mountmellick, were runners up in the Category of Care of the Elderly at the National Pride Of Place Awards held in Cappoquin, Co. Waterford on 8th November, 2008.

## Establishment and Operation of Joint Policing Committee

At the November Monthly Meeting of Mountmellick Town Council, the Deputy Manager reported on how the Joint Policing Committee will operate. He advised the members that the committee will consist of 2 Council Officials, 9 Elected Members, 3 Members of the Oireachtas, 2 Garda Officials and 3 persons representing the Community and Voluntary Sector. He explained that the meetings will be held every 3 months and will be attended by the media and members of the public.

The members unanimously welcomed and agreed with the Establishment of the Committee.

## Business Meetings

As in previous years, there was exceptional attendance by the Members at meetings, during which they made representations regarding key issues of concern. These included environmental works, traffic management, roadworks and footpath repairs, signage, public lighting etc.



## Other Activities

### Social Club

2008 was another very successful year for the Social Club which currently has a membership of 276. Numerous events were held in 2008.

### Monthly Draw

On the first Friday of every month a Draw takes place for Social Club members. The prizes are as follows:

1st - €50      2nd - €30      3rd - €20

### Table Quiz

The Social Club held the in-house section Table Quiz in March, which was a great success. The Quiz Trophy found a new home in Corporate Affairs with the winning team comprising Catherine Gorman, Marie O'Hora, Gerry Ryan and Alec Bland.

### Treasure Hunt

Christy Crawford and Alec Bland set a fantastic Treasure Hunt around Laois on 29th May, to include Portlaoise, Ballyroan and Abbeyleix. The winning team was Geraldine Campion, Sean Mullins and Joan Dowling.

### End of Summer Party

The End of Summer Party was held in County Hall on 15th August, with Eunice and her staff preparing and serving the food which as usual was first class. A great crowd attended.

### Halloween Party

A fancy dress Halloween Party was held in Sky Venue on 17th October with entertainment provided by 'Glitter Bugs'. The event was attended by over 100 people and a great night was had by all.



### Annual Mass

The Annual mass for deceased members and staff of Laois County Council was organised by the Social Club in the Council Chamber. Invitations were issued to all retired and current staff members of Laois County Council. The mass was very well attended and refreshments were provided in the canteen afterwards.

### Kiddies Christmas Party

The Kiddies Christmas Party was held on 13th December in the canteen. There was great entertainment with Dora the Explorer, a Princess, Bart Simpson, a Pirate and of course Santa and one of his elves, who arrived by Fire Engine, thanks to John Ging. The disco was provided by our very own DJ Joe. Thanks to all who helped make it a fantastic day out for over 130 children who attended.



### Christmas Party

The Annual Christmas Party was held on 19th December in the Heritage Hotel, Portlaoise, with the music and disco on the night provided by 'Eden'. The party was a sell out with 128 members attending.

### Golf Society

Pat Keogh captained the Golf Society in 2008. His Captain's day was held in Mountrath Golf Club in July and a great day was had by all. The Captain's Prize was won by Barry Larkin who also won the Golfer of the Year Award for 2008. The Kennedy Cup was won by Pat Keogh at the staff outing held in Tullamore.



# Useful Directory

## Áras an Chontae

Portlaoise  
Tel: (057) 8664000  
Fax: (057) 8622313  
E-Mail: [corpaffairs@laoiscoco.ie](mailto:corpaffairs@laoiscoco.ie)  
Opening Hrs: 9.00 am to 5.00 pm  
(incl. Lunch Hour)  
Web: [www.laois.ie](http://www.laois.ie)

## Cash Office

Block 2  
Áras an Chontae  
Tel: (057) 8674308  
Opening Hrs: 9.00 am to 3.30 pm  
(incl. Lunch Hour)

## Planning Office

Áras an Chontae  
Tel: (057) 8664039  
Fax: (057) 8622491  
Opening Hrs: 9.30 am to 4.00 pm  
(incl. Lunch Hour)

## Motor Tax Office

Block 2  
Áras an Chontae  
Tel: (057) 8664009  
Fax: (057) 8621184  
Opening Hrs: 9.00 am to 3.30 pm  
(incl. Lunch Hour)

## Sports & Leisure Office

Áras an Chontae  
Tel: (057) 8664007  
Fax: (057) 8622313

## Arts Office

Block 2  
Áras an Chontae  
Tel: (057) 8674342  
Fax: (057) 8674382

## Library Headquarters

Block 2  
Áras an Chontae  
Tel: (057) 8674315  
Fax: (057) 8674381

## Western Area

Courthouse, Borris-in-Ossory  
Tel: (0505) 41123  
Fax: (0505) 41188

## Eastern Area

Cork Road, Stradbally  
Tel: (057) 8625227  
Fax: (057) 8625227

## Central Area

Mountrath Road, Portlaoise  
Tel: (057) 8664168  
Fax: (057) 8660135

## Graiguercullen Area Office

Sleaty Road, Graiguercullen, Carlow  
Tel: (059) 9165960

## Portarlington Area Office

1 Park Lane, Portarlington  
Tel: (057) 8636533

## Housing Repairs

Mountrath Road, Portlaoise  
Tel: (057) 8622177  
Fax: (057) 8622177

## Road Design Office

Áras an Chontae  
Tel: (057) 8664000  
Fax: (057) 8622633

## Laboratory

Mountrath Road, Portlaoise  
Tel: (057) 866416  
Fax: (057) 8663502

## Machinery Yard

Clonboyne, Portlaoise  
Tel: (057) 8621148  
Fax: (057) 8621148

## National Roads Project Office

Clonboyne, Portlaoise  
Tel: (057) 8664850  
Fax: (057) 8664858

## Landfill Site

Kyletalesha  
Portlaoise  
Tel: (057) 8620653  
Fax: (057) 8660858

## Civil Defence HQ

Áras an Chontae  
Tel: (057) 8664000  
Fax: (057) 8625058

