

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE LAOISE LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL



ANNUAL REPORT 2010



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CATHAOIRLEACH'S STATEMENT

It gives me great pleasure as Cathaoirleach to introduce Laois County Council's Annual Report for 2010.

This Annual Report provides an opportunity to highlight the achievements of the Council in 2010 and to outline the wide range of services that we provide for the benefit of everyone in the county. I would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of my fellow elected members and all of the staff in delivering these services.

During 2010, the Council continued to contribute positively to the quality of life of our communities with the opening of new Libraries in Mountmellick and Ballylinan and with the continued successful operation of leisure complexes in Portarlinton and Portlaoise. Laois also enjoyed further success in the All-Island Pride of Place Awards in 2010.

Laois County Council was again involved in the organisation and promotion of major events in the county in 2010, such as the Rose of Tralee Regional Finals, Laois International Golf Challenge, Magnet Festival, Electric Picnic, All Ireland & International Sheep Shearing Championships and the Gordon Bennett Rally. As well as enhancing the profile of the county, the hosting of such major festivals impacts positively on the local economy.

The challenge facing the Council is to continue to provide quality services and to promote all aspects of the county's development despite challenging economic circumstances. I am confident that Laois County Council will continue to meet this challenge.



James Deegan
Cathaoirleach

COUNTY MANAGER'S FOREWORD

I am delighted to welcome the publication of Laois County Council's Annual Report for 2010, which provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the achievements of the past year.

2010 presented the Council with many challenges in terms of budgetary management and a rapidly changing work environment. However, a committed workforce and the positive support of the elected members ensured that Laois County Council performed efficiently and achieved positive results within restrictive budget parameters.

Significant milestones were met with the opening of the remaining sections of the M7/M8 motorway. This has resulted in major improvements to the accessibility of Laois and offers huge potential to exploit our centrality and secure economic development over the coming years. In terms of physical and social infrastructure, excellent progress has been achieved in County Laois and this augurs well for the future.

Having regard to the economic difficulties being experienced in the country at large, it is even more important that the Council continues to give positive leadership at local level. Notwithstanding the serious challenges we face, I am confident that progress will continue if we work in partnership and keep a sharp focus on doing the right things.

I would like to thank all the staff for their dedication and commitment in these difficult times. I also wish to acknowledge the support of the elected members in the many projects undertaken in 2010. I look forward to continuing to work in positive partnership to further develop our county over the coming years.



Peter Carey
County Manager

MISSION STATEMENT

“The Council will lead the sustainable economic, social and cultural development of our county and deliver quality public services to the communities we serve”

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.

Council Membership

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



Elected Members with the County Manager at Laois County Council AGM in June, 2009

Council Meetings

Council Meetings in 2010 were usually held on the last Monday of each month in the Council Chamber at Áras an Chontae. There was no meeting held in August.

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 11 occasions in 2010.

MEMBERS OF LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL

The following Members of Laois County Council were elected in June, 2009.

Borris in Ossory Electoral Area



John Joe
Fennelly
(F.F.)



Michael
Lalor
(F.G.)



John
King
(F.G.)



Brendan
Phelan
(F.F.)



John
Bonham
(F.G.)



Martin
Phelan
(F.G.)

Emo Electoral Area



Raymond
Cribbin
(F.F.)



Paul
Mitchell
(Non Party)



Tom
Mulhall
(F.G.)



James
Deegan
(F.G.)

Luggacurren Electoral Area



James
Daly
(F.G.)



John Robert
Moran
(F.G.)



Padraig
Fleming
(F.F.)



Ben
Brennan
(Non Party)

Mountmellick Electoral Area



David
Goodwin
(F.G.)



Patrick
Bracken
(F.F.)



Patrick
Bowe
(Labour)



Seamus
McDonald
(F.F.)

Portlaoise Electoral Area



William
Aird
(F.G.)



Brian
Stanley
(S.F.)



Mary
Sweeney
(F.G.)



Jeremiah
Lodge
(F.F.)



Kathleen
O'Brien
(F.G.)



Rotimi
Adebari
(Non Party)



Catherine
Fitzgerald
(F.F.)

Director of Services: Anna Marie Delaney

**Senior Executive Officer
Human Resources &
Corporate Affairs:** Carmel McNicholl

**Head of Information
Systems:** John Forde

CORPORATE AFFAIRS

Corporate Plan

Laois County Council's Corporate Plan 2009 – 2014 was adopted by the Members of the Council in December, 2009.

The Corporate Plan provides the framework for the implementation of a coherent strategy for the development of the county for the period to 2014 and was prepared following consultation with employees, elected representatives, community, voluntary and environmental interests, external stakeholders and other public bodies operating at local level.

The strategies and objectives outlined in the Plan enable Laois County Council's Elected Members and Employees to continue to provide leadership in the promotion and development of the social, economic and cultural life of the county. It enhances the role of the Elected Members while continuing to deliver focused more co-ordinated, efficient, and effective services to the public.

An Annual Progress Report is prepared and submitted to the Members for their consideration.

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. The Charter includes a Customer Complaints Procedure which may be availed of by any person not satisfied with the quality of service received.

Highlights

- 24th June, 2010 – Cathaoirleach's Reception in honour of the Red Eagles Group in recognition of their achievement in fundraising for and raising awareness of Teen-Line Ireland
- A delegation from County Laois, including An Cathaoirleach, Councillor James Deegan, County

Manager, Peter Carey, Councillor John Bonham and representatives of Laois Chamber of Commerce, Laois V.E.C. and Laois Golf travelled to Montebelluna, Italy in September, 2010 for the initial signing of the Twinning Oath.

- 29th November, 2010 – Formal signing of Twinning Oath between County Laois and the Municipality of Montebelluna, Italy at Áras an Chontae



24th June, 2010 – Cathaoirleach's Reception in honour of the Red Eagles Group

Irish Language Scheme 2009 – 2012

Laois Local Authorities Irish Language Scheme was confirmed by the Minister for Community Rural and Geeltacht Affairs and came into effect on 1st December, 2009, for a period of 3 years. The scheme is available to view on our website www.laois.ie

Laois Local Authorities recognise that our customers have the right to choose to do business with us in their preferred language and they are facilitated in their dealings with us as far as practicable, whether that is through Irish or through English.

One of the main objectives of this Language Scheme is to ensure that higher standards of public services are available through the Irish Language as the national language and the first official language of the country.

An implementation team has been established, representative of the functional areas of the Council. An implementation plan has been developed together with a schedule of the actions necessary to realise the commitments contained in the Scheme.

If you wish to contact the Council in Irish, please send an e-mail to gailge@laoiscoco.ie.

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, Tel: (057) 8664137, or on our Website at www.laois.ie/heg.

In 2010, a total number of 651 applications were approved for grant assistance, inclusive of renewal and new applications. Funding in respect of the maintenance grant was reduced in the December budget by 4% and became applicable from 1st January, 2010.

The total amount paid out in 2010 in respect of Higher Education Grants was €3,268,665.13.

Health & Safety

Safety Advisor: Jim Bolger

Safe Operating Procedures (SOP's) were developed for all work activities. In order to enhance our consultation processes training was provided for Safety Representatives from the Fire Services. This new initiative will serve to ensure that the Fire Services are represented on Laois County Council's main safety committee.

The Health and Safety Authority's 'Safe Systems of Work Plans' (SSWP's) were extended to cover sections other than roads, as appropriate.

Ancillary safety statements were reviewed and amended as appropriate. Workplace inspections were conducted on a cross-directorate basis.

Partnership

The following were the members of the Workplace Partnership Committee as at 31st December, 2010.

Management Nominees

John Daly
Joint Chair
Anna Marie Delaney

Union Nominees

Tom Saunders,
Joint Chair
Anne Marie Maher

Angela McEvoy
John O'Donoghue
Gerry Maher

Bernie Kilbride
Tom O'Carroll
Valerie O'Reilly

The Partnership Committee held 4 meetings during 2010 and regrettably was not in a position to meet during the national Industrial Action due to a number of Unions withdrawing from the process nationally.

The HSCTP Roads Working Group held two meetings during 2010.

The County Manager held two Staff Briefing Meetings in February and November, 2010, to inform staff of the challenges facing Laois County Council during 2010.

Training continued by way of the National FETAC Course carried out by Laois VEC and was completed by 8 Outdoor Workers.

Freedom of Information (F.O.I.)

The Freedom of Information Act 1997 commenced on 21st April, 1998 for Government Departments and Offices and certain other Government Bodies and on 21st October, 1998 for Local Authorities and Health Boards.

The Freedom of Information (Amendment) Act 2003 came into force on 11th April, 2003. This Act introduced a number of important amendments to the 1997 Act, notably in relation to Section 19 (Government Records), Section 20 (Deliberations of Public Bodies), Section 24 (Security, Defence and International Relations) and Section 47 (Fees).

All Freedom of Information requests must be processed under the F.O.I. Act, as amended.

Applications received/processed in 2010

Applications on hand at 31/12/2009	Nil
Applications received during 2010	38
Decisions taken during 2010	38
Applications on hand at 31/12/2010	Nil

Nature of Information Sought

Personal (to applicant)	20
Non-personal	18

Appeals

Appeals to Information Commissioner	1
Appeal to High Court	Nil

Source of Requests

Journalists	5
Business	Nil
Oireachtas Members	Nil
Local Authority Members	Nil
Others/General Public	33

Register of Electors 2010/2011

The Council is responsible for the compilation of the Register of Electors for County Laois which comes into force on 15th 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 Constituency on the 1st September preceding the coming into force of the Register.

Dáil Constituency	Presidential Electors	Dáil Electors	
Laois/Offaly	54,420	55,067	
European Parliament Constituency	European Electors	Potential European Electors	
Leinster	55,564	244	
Local Electoral Areas	Number of Electors	Postal and Special Voters	
Borris in Ossory	13,967	Gardaí	3
Emo	9,156	Defence Forces	231
Luggacurren	9,459	Diplomats	4
Mountmellick	9,016	Physically Disabled	50
Portlaoise	<u>15,277</u>	Occupation Etc.	7
Total:	56,875	Special Voters	59
Borough or Town Council	Local Government Electors		
Mountmellick Urban	2,988		
Portlaoise Urban	<u>8,279</u>		
Total	11,267		

CONFERENCES ATTENDED IN 2010

Conference	Venue	Date	Delegates	Expend.
A Guide to Child Protection	Letterkenny	15 - 17 Jan	3	€2,431.27
Delivering Lifelong Learning in Disadvantaged Communities	Dublin	21 Jan	1	€105.48
Tourism in the 21st Century	Antrim	28 - 30 Jan	1	€673.62
Planning Seminar for Councillors Association of Municipal Authorities	Limerick	29 - 30 Jan	4	€1,575.99
Spring Seminar	Sligo	12 - 13 Feb	6	€3,386.12
Bioenergy Conference	Tipperary	18 Feb	1	€194.03
Change Management in Local Government	Westport	19 - 21 Feb	2	€1,298.10
The Role of Small Enterprises in Overcoming the Recession	Letterkenny	26 - 28 Feb	7	€5,399.87

HOUSING, CORPORATE AFFAIRS, CORPORATE PLANNING, HUMAN RESOURCES & INFORMATION COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

Conference	Venue	Date	Delegates	Expend.
Annual Museum Conference	Sligo	26 - 28 Feb	1	€536.51
The Local Government Housing Service	Killarney	18 - 20 Mar	3	€1,773.83
Energy Security – Ireland on the Edge	Dublin	25 Mar	1	€59.86
Exploring Arts & Culture Through Town Twinning	Listowel	25 - 27 Mar	2	€784.01
Irish Management, Media & IT Skills	Clonakilty	26 - 28 Mar	2	€1,210.09
Climate Change, Impacts & Strategies	Letterkenny	26 - 28 Mar	1	€786.17
Local Authority Members Association	Sligo	9 - 10 Apr	10	€5,254.37
Banking, Insurance & NAMA	Tralee	16 - 18 Apr	4	€2,373.25
Impact of EU Environmental Policy in Ireland	Ballaghadereen	27 Apr	1	€240.39
Waste Management Exhibition	Dublin	20 May	1	€105.45
Waste Management Regulations - Prohibition of Waste Disposal	Limerick	28 - 29 May	3	€1,554.86
Defamation Seminar	Limerick	28 - 29 May	3	€1,149.87
Transformation of the Public Sector	Tralee	4 - 6 Jun	2	€1,199.81
Wars of Independence - Challenging Authority	Leitrim	18 - 20 Jun	7	€3,466.38
A Practical Guide to Embracing School Networking as the Modern Medium for Councillors	Letterkenny	18 - 20 Jun	1	€737.68
Retail Market Conference	Dublin	25 - 26 Jun	1	€205.74
Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009	Kildare	16 - 18 Jul	1	€407.31
2010 Patrick McGill Summer School	Glenties	18 - 23 Jul	10	€9,518.19
Parnell Summer School	Rathdrum	8 - 13 Aug	2	€1,811.97
Merriman Summer School	Ennis	18 - 22 Aug	1	€572.79
Entrepreneurs & Economists – Concensus or Conflict	Tralee	8 - 10 Sep	1	€580.56
Association of Municipal Authorities Conference	Buncrana	9 - 11 Sep	4	€2,967.68
9th Annual Rural Water Services Conference	Claremorris	16 Sep	1	€349.46
Performance Management & Development	Galway	17 - 19 Sep	1	€465.28
Suicide is Everybody's Business	Cavan	18 Sep	1	€229.11
Planning Applications Professional Indemnity	Galway	24 - 26 Sep	1	€580.59
Building a Social Response	Killarney	7 - 8 Oct	2	€1,067.16
Local Authority Members Association	Listowel	8 - 9 Oct	3	€1,332.50
Douglas Hyde Conference	Roscommon	15 - 16 Oct	4	€1,706.46
Planning & Development Conference	Roscommon	15 - 17 Oct	2	€992.44
Alternative Energy	Maynooth	22 - 24 Oct	1	€485.51
Criminal Law Bill 2010	Galway	29 - 31 Oct	5	€2,577.89
The Future of Local Areas to 2021	Charleville	11 - 12 Nov	4	€1,035.99
Radon - A Hidden Killer	Tralee	12 - 14 Nov	5	€2,819.90
Where's The Harm	Tralee	19 Nov	2	€807.66
Getting Ahead of the Curve	Dublin	19 Nov	1	€183.86
Achieving World Class Tourism	Ennistymon	25 - 27 Nov	10	€5,799.08
Enforcing EU Environment Law	Dublin	26 Nov	1	€239.01
Waste Management (Food Waste) Regulations	Letterkenny	3 - 5 Dec	1	€590.65
The Key Role of Local Government	Galway	6 Dec	2	€475.00
Water Conservation - The Impact of Rainwater Harvesting	Galway	14 - 15 Dec	3	€1,091.61
New EPA Guide on Planning Applications	Tralee	17 - 19 Dec	4	€2,547.57
Council Budgets 2011	Tralee	17 - 19 Dec	4	€3,006.63
Building Regulations – Renewable Energy	Tralee	17 - 19 Dec	6	€3,351.08
TOTAL				€84,095.69

Housing & Social Strategic Policy Committee

Chair: John Moran M.C.C.

Members Sectoral

Willie Aird, M.C.C.	Pat Flanagan
Brian Stanley, M.C.C.	Mick Dowling
James Daly, M.C.C.	Miriam Hamilton
Mary Sweeney, M.C.C.	Michael Kelly
Catherine Fitzgerald, M.C.C.	
Rosemary Whelan,	
Mountmellick T.C.	

HOUSING SERVICES

Director of Services: Anna Marie Delaney

Senior Executive Officer: Michael Rainey

Senior Executive Engineer: P.J. Dempsey

Senior Social Worker: Fionnuala Daly

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 2010

- Continuation of work on Portlaoise Resource Centre to achieve a target completion date in early 2011.
- The establishment of a Management Company, Treo Nua Ltd, to manage the new Resource Centre.
- Completion of long-term leasing arrangements with Steer Housing Association resulting in 14 social units of accommodation.
- Successful delivery of 21 social housing units
- Approval for additional 12 No. voluntary housing units in Portlaoise and Mountmellick
- Upgrading of 40 social units under Energy Efficiency Programme

Report on SPC

The Housing & Social SPC met in March, June, September and December, 2010. The following policies were agreed and approved during 2010:

- Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy
- Rental Accommodation Scheme Policy
- Housing Maintenance Policy
- Sale of Private Sites Scheme

Rental Accommodation Scheme

The Rental Accommodation 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 housing needs of applicants. Further information with regard to the scheme is available on www.laois.ie. In 2010, 54 leases were acquired under the Rental Accommodation Scheme.

Social Leasing Arrangements

With Departmental approval, Laois County Council entered into an Agreement with Steer Housing Association for the long-term leasing of 14 units in Portlaoise. A number of other agreements with voluntary housing bodies are in the pipeline and will be in place in 2011.

Housing Construction & Acquisition

During the year, 21 houses were completed or purchased under this Programme. The breakdown is as follows:

Purchase of second hand dwellings	14 units
Rural Dwellings	3 units
Construction of new dwellings	2 units
Part V units	2 units
TOTAL	21 units

The Capital Allocation for 2010 was €6,500,000.

Summary of Programme

Houses under construction at 31/12/09	22
Houses commenced in 2010	14
Houses completed in 2010	21
Houses in progress at 31/12/10	15

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

Knockmay Development Project

Following extensive consultation Laois County Council has prepared a masterplan for a multi-million euro re-development of the Knockmay Estate in Portlaoise.

Phase 1/Pilot Programme at Oakleaf Place was completed in December, 2009. While no capital funding was available in 2010 for Phase 2 of the masterplan, some improvement works were completed in the area under the Energy Efficiency Programme.



Harpur's Lane, Knockmay

Portlaoise Resource Centre

The Knockmay masterplan also identified the need for a shared services community building that will deliver the required services locally.

The contract for the construction of the building was signed in November, 2009 and work commenced on site shortly thereafter. The official handover date is March, 2011. A Management Company, Treo Nua Ltd, was established in 2010 to manage the complex.



Portlaoise Resource Centre

The building will include a local HSE clinic, a large crèche, after-school rooms, Family Resource Centre offices, a Laois County Council office, a range of training rooms including a fully equipped computer room, general meeting rooms, shop and a cafe. The development is supported by Laois County Council, HSE, Laois Partnership, Pobal, Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government and the Family Resource Centre.

Maintenance of Local Authority Stock

At 31st December, 2010 the Council had 2,032 dwellings in its rented stock, 97.3% of which were let at the end of the year. During 2010, a total of 2,739 repair requests were received by the Maintenance Section of which 2,562 were completed (93.5%).

Part V - Housing Strategy

In accordance with Part V of the Planning & Development Act 2000, 2 housing units (social) were completed in 2010.



Part V Units at Vale View, Stradbally

Voluntary Housing Sector

In 2010, Helm Housing Association was successful in obtaining approval for 8 units under the Capital Assistance Scheme in Portlaoise, while Owenass Housing Association for the Intellectually Disabled were given approval for 4 units in Mountmellick, under the Capital Assistance Scheme.

Affordable Housing

There are currently houses for sale in Maryborough Village, Portlaoise and Clonrooske Abbey, Portlaoise for as low as €89,000. Further details can be found on www.laois.ie and on www.daft.ie.

Private Site Scheme

A number of private sites are still available in Castle-town, Ballyroan and Clonaslee. The purchase price of these sites is::

Ballyroan	€30,000
Castletown	€25,000
Clonaslee	€20,000

but some applicants may qualify for a site subsidy. Interested parties should contact the Housing Department for details.

Activity under Various Schemes

Extensions to Local Authority Dwellings:

Approved	2
Completed	2

Improvement Works in Lieu of Local Authority Housing:

Commenced	4
Completed	3

Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability:

Applications received	66
Total No. of Grants Paid	74
(Totalling €)	683,009

Mobility Aids Housing Grant Scheme:

Applications received	49
Total No. of Grants Paid	50
(Totalling €)	208,114

Housing Aid for Older People Scheme:

Applications received	169
Total No. of Grants Paid	185
(Totalling €)	946,630

Tenant Purchase Scheme:

Applications Received	21
Houses Sold	1

Housing Loans:

No. of Loans Advanced	10
(Totalling €)	1,101,748

Housing Rents

The Council reviews its Differential Rent Scheme on an annual basis. The average weekly rent in 2010 was €41.00.

Traveller Accommodation

The current Programme was adopted by the Council in January, 2009 and runs from 2009 to 2013. The Accommodation Programme for the period 2009 – 2013 has been prepared in accordance with the provisions set out in the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998.

It provides for a current (existing) need of 37 families and a projected need of 18 families.

In 2010, 8 families were accommodated in standard Local Authority Housing.

Estate Management

The year 2010 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

Best Estate Competition 2010

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

1st Prize: Clanmalire Close, Portarlington.

Award certificate and cheque for €150.00

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

1st Prize : Sean Doire, Durrow

Award certificate and cheque for €150.00

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

1st Prize : Meadowbrook, Rosenallis

Award certificate and cheque for €150.00

Special Award: For the Estate which has made the greatest improvement to their estate.

Old Forge Crescent, Mountrath

Award certificate and cheque for €150.00

In 2010, there were 78 Resident Associations supported by the Housing Department.

National Service Indicators (Effective 01/01/2010) - Progress Report for position 31/12/2010

H: Housing

H.1. Housing Vacancies:

Total Number of dwellings in local authority stock:	2032
Total Number of dwellings excluding those subject to major refurbishment projects:	2028
Overall % of dwellings that are empty (excluding those subject to major refurbishment):	2.32%
% of empty dwellings unavailable for letting:	94%
% of empty dwellings available for letting:	6%

H. 2 Average time taken to re-let dwellings available for letting:

Time taken from notification of date of vacation of dwelling to the date when all necessary repairs are carried out which are deemed necessary to re-let the dwelling:	13 weeks
Time taken from works above being completed to the date of the first rent debit:	3 weeks

H. 3 Number of repairs completed as a percentage of the number of valid repair requests received:	93.73%
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H. 4 Traveller Accommodation:

Total number of traveller families accommodated as a percentage of the targets set in the Local Traveller Accommodation Programme:	100%
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H.5. Enforcement of standards in private rented sector (NEW):

Total number of registered tenancies:	2256
Number dwelling units inspected:	245
Number of inspections carried out:	288
Number of dwellings inspected as % of registered tenancies (i.e. B as % of A):	10.86%

H. 6 Grants to adapt housing for the needs of people with a disability (NEW):

Average time taken (in weeks) to notify applicants of decision under Mobility Aids Grant Scheme on receipt of a valid application:	3 weeks
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:	7 weeks

H. 7 Tenant Training (NEW):

Percentage of total new local authority tenants who have completed pre-tenancy training:	0%
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Rev: Revenue Collection:

Housing Loans

(a) Amount collected at year end as a % of amount due:	86%
(b) Percentage of arrears:	
1 month old	23%
2 - 3 months old	13%
More than 3 months old	64%

HUMAN RESOURCES

Recruitment Statistics

A total of 492 people were employed by Laois County Council at 31st December, 2010.

During 2010, Laois County Council held 10 competitions, in relation to which the following statistics have been extracted:

Total Applications received: 98

	Male	Female
Applicants	93	5
Successful Applicants	28	1

Permanent Appointments/Promotions 2010:

	Male	Female
Appointments	4	0
Promotions	6	0

These competitions related primarily to vacancies in the Fire Service, which due to the nature of the work are exempt from the terms of the current moratorium on recruitment, in place since August, 2009.

Work Life Balance Initiatives

Laois County Council continued to implement work life balance initiatives for staff during 2010. At year-end, 9 employees were availing of the Career Break Scheme, 29 employees were availing of the job/work sharing scheme, 10 employees availed of the Parental Leave Scheme and 20 employees availed of the Shorter Working Year Scheme.

National Performance Indicator

The Council exceeded the 3% National Performance Indicator for expenditure on training and development as a percentage of total payroll costs in 2010. The outturn was 4.13%.

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

2009	2010
4.10%	4.13%

In relation to the number of working days lost to certified and uncertified illness the following statistics apply.

	2009	2010
Certified	3.81%	5.09%
Uncertified	0.44%	0.55%

Local Service Indicator

Number of Training Days provided to staff (excluding Retained Fire Fighters) – 681

Industrial Relations

Despite a difficult year nationally, Laois County Council maintained good industrial relations during 2010. The Public Service Agreement 2010 - 2014 represents an agreement between the Trade Unions and Management in the Public Sector and is designed to improve efficiencies and demonstrate cost savings. On foot of this agreement, a Local Action Plan was put in place for implementation.

Employee Training & Development

Laois County Council is committed to the training and development of 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 of the PMDS process. The programme also incorporates Health & Safety Needs, National FETAC Programme, Return to Learning Programme, Third Level Open Learning Programme and various Seminars/Workshops as they arise.

Total expenditure on training was €352,608 (inclusive of expenditure for Fire Services). A very comprehensive training programme was delivered throughout 2010. A sample of the training programmes provided is as follows:-

- Advanced Surface Dressing
- First Aid
- Site Suitability Assessment Course
- Safepass
- Pre-retirement Planning Course
- Driver CPC
- Excel
- Asbestos Awareness
- Intensive Course on Planning Law
- EC Licence Training

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. Samples of the Open Learning programmes facilitated during 2010 are as follows:-

- IPA - Certificate, Diploma & Degree in Local Government Studies
- DCU/LGMSB – Masters in Business Administration
- UCD - Certificate in Health and Safety at Work

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 and is due for review in 2011. 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 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/revised during 2010:

- Annual Leave Policy
- Shorter Working Year Scheme
- Dignity at Work Policy

Equality

Laois County Council is an equal opportunity employer and is committed to the introduction of a broad range of policies, practices and procedures

which aim to recognise individual contribution and performance, develop each individual's capability and give everyone an equal opportunity to use his/her talent and realise his/her potential.

An Equality Action Team, representative of management and employee interests, is in place to examine equality issues, monitor progress and ensure achievement of equality objectives.

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 2010, Laois County Council, in conjunction with Midland Employment Support Agency, facilitated a number of work experience placements for people with disabilities.

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 started in 2008 and will be completed in 2012.

During 2010 the project team made significant progress in the implementation of the project. All flexi-time staff were migrated to CORE Time and Attendance from the previous legacy system. The Superannuation module was implemented with all service history imported from the data capture system used by the project team in 2008 to record all employee service records. The Recruitment and Training modules were also implemented and are embedded in the current HR processes for the relevant functions.

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

In 2010, despite severe budgetary constraints, the ICT department continued to remain at the forefront of technological advancement within the local authority area. During 2010, the emphasis in the department was on improving service provision while reducing costs and in improving communications within the organisation and with the general public.

In addition to the normal day to day work, the department embarked on the following initiatives to reduce costs while maintaining and improving service levels:

Server Virtualisation and Disaster Recovery

An analysis of Laois County Council's server environment showed an environment that was underutilising a majority of the server resources. Of the 34 servers that were assessed 58% (20 servers) averaged less than 1000MHz CPU utilization during their peak utilisation hours and nearly half of the servers polled never peaked at more than 20% utilisation, usage figures such as this are not uncommon in the standard server environment. These findings suggested that Laois's environment was a prime candidate for server virtualisation. In summary, the assessment recommended that Laois County Council reduce the number of physical servers from 34 to 3.

By implementing server virtualisation we generated cost savings from lower power and cooling requirements due to fewer physical servers. In addition, virtualisation also provided Laois County Council with high availability to more of its systems, redundancy of operations, and more effective disaster recovery capabilities.

The Midland Energy Agency estimate that the effect of reducing the physical servers from 34 to 3 should lead to savings of €14,000 per annum in energy costs in our main communications room.

Print Cost Reduction

There were approximately 100 print devices in operation in our main offices in early 2010. These devices were maintained by several service providers at varying costs. It was decided to rationalise print services for the organisation so a tender was prepared for a single contract to cover these services.

As a result of this tender process the number of printers was reduced to 8 multifunctional devices (i.e. print, copy & scan) and the cost per page to print both colour and black & white was reduced significantly. Now, rather than having desktop printers, each floor has one printer. This obviously leads to reduced power consumption but this has not been possible to quantify. After 6 months in operation the new print service was reviewed and has produced savings of almost €60,000 when compared to the same period in 2009.

General Cost Reduction

New contracts have also been negotiated for communications links, mobile phones and equipment maintenance contracts to allow services to be maintained despite budgetary constraints.

Initiatives on improving communications both within the organisation and with the general public were also progressed during 2101 as follows:

Laois.ie

The Council's website is used extensively by the public. There were an average of 1,500 site visits per week in 2010, with online planning and online payments proving most popular. It is a vital element of our day to day communication with the general public and proved invaluable in communicating effectively during bad weather incidents. Up to date information was made available on road conditions, water supplies and emergency response numbers to name a few during these trying periods.

Facebook & Twitter

The Department also employed Facebook and Twitter in 2010 to improve communications with the general public. These also proved invaluable to our communications efforts during the incidents mentioned above. There are currently 4 departments with their own Facebook pages and it is envisaged that this will increase in 2011. (Departments that are represented on facebook include Libraries, Environment, Heritage and Fire Services)

Isteach

In early 2010 our new Intranet site 'Isteach' was launched. This site facilitates all of our internal communications and houses our extensive document library. This resource is available to all staff and is intended to facilitate improved customer service by ensuring that information pertaining to all departments is readily available to frontline staff when dealing with queries, thereby facilitating faster and more accurate responses. It also contains the new mapping function Spatial Intranet Application (SIA) allowing all staff full access to a variety of Council assets with detailed Ordnance Survey mapping.

The department is committed to ensuring that Laois County Council continues to utilise new technology as it emerges to improve both internal and external customer service.

Community and Economic Development, Culture & Heritage Strategic Policy Committee

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

Chairperson: Michael Lalor, M.C.C.

Members **Sectoral**

John King, M.C.C.	Miriam Hamilton
John Bonham, M.C.C.	Margaret Ryan
James Deegan, M.C.C.	Kathleen Gorman
Paul Mitchell, M.C.C.	Fintan Phelan
Padraig Fleming, M.C.C.	
Rotimi Adebari, M.C.C.	
Alan Hand, T.C.	

Laois County Development Board

In 2010, Laois County Development Board continued its work, and held 4 meetings to progress the three objectives of its Strategy Review:-

- Enhancing Employment Opportunities for All.
- Promoting Laois as a Child Friendly county.
- Laois will retain and develop the viability of its towns and villages.

The three Task Groups established by the Board to carry out specific actions in the Strategy Review met regularly in 2010 and are working on these actions.

Membership of the Board

Local Government:

John Moran, M.C.C., Chairperson Laois County Development Board.
Peter Carey, Laois County Manager.
Martin Phelan, M.C.C.
Michael Lalor, M.C.C.
James Daly, M.C.C.
James Deegan, M.C.C.
Paddy Bracken, M.C.C.
John Joe Fennelly, M.C.C.

Local Development:

Maria Callinan, Laois Enterprise Board
Lena Ging, County Enterprise Board
Anne Goodwin, Laois Partnership Company
Paddy Buggy, Laois Partnership Company
Fionn Bardon, Laois Childcare Committee

State Agencies:

Mary Delaney, HSE Midlands
Anne O' Keeffe, Laois VEC
Pat Campbell, FÁS
Con Feighery, Teagasc
Barry Egan, Enterprise Ireland
Gillian Maunsell, IDA Ireland
Chief Supt. Frank Moore, An Garda Siochána
Kevin Kidney, Fáilte Ireland

Social Partners:

Liam McEvoy, Business Sector
Miriam Hamilton, Trade Union Sector
Maria Groarke, Laois Community Forum
Kathleen Gorman, Laois Community Forum
Theresa Carter, Environmental Pillar
Michael Bergin, Farming & Agricultural Sector

Social Inclusion Measures Working Group

The S.I.M. committee held bi-monthly meetings throughout the year and oversaw the drafting of the new Traveller Interagency Strategy 2010 – 2013 and the Laois Anti Racism & Diversity Plan 2010 – 2013. The committee also oversaw two Social Inclusion Weeks in May and October, which helped to showcase the supports provided by agencies in the county for the socially excluded. A Networking Day on the theme 'Supporting People with Disabilities' was also organised by the committee which was held to assist with drafting up Laois County Council's new Disability Implementation Plan 2010 – 2012.

Laois Local Drugs Network

Laois Local Drugs Network Committee continued to meet throughout 2010. The work of the Local Drugs Network is to help raise awareness of combating substance abuse within the county. In 2010, the network provided a 6 Day 'Training the Trainer' programme on Drugs and Alcohol Awareness for 12 youth workers in the county.

An information evening was held in Portlaoise Parish Centre on 21st June as part of Drugs Awareness Week. Presentations were made on the night by Nicola Corrigan from Midland Regional Drugs Task Force, Tony Geoghegan, CEO of Merchants Quay Ireland, and Garda Tony Ryan, An Garda Siochána, regarding services offered in Laois and the various types of drugs and their effects on individuals. Information on the dangers of goods sold in headshops was also available on the night.

Laois Ethnic Minority Support Group

Laois Ethnic Minority Support Group held bi-monthly meetings throughout 2010 and was very much involved in drafting up the Laois Anti Racism & Diversity Plan 2010 - 2013. The Embracing Diversity Awards Night took place on 15th October as part of Laois County Council's Social Inclusion week. Awards were presented to Community Groups and individuals as an appreciation for their supports and commitments to embracing the diversity of all cultures and nationalities in the county.

Laois Anti Racism & Diversity Plan 2010 – 2013

Laois County Council drafted their Racism & Diversity Plan 2010 – 2013 throughout the year. Consultations were held with Ethnic Groups, members of the Travelling Community, as well as the agencies that provide services and work with these groups. The plan will focus on 5 key actions under each heading suggested by the National Strategy - PARTICIPATION, PROTECTION, INCLUSION, PROVISION & RECOGNITION.

Laois Traveller Interagency Committee

Laois Traveller Interagency committee continued to meet throughout 2010. Among their activities they assisted with drafting the new Traveller Interagency Strategy and the Laois Anti Racism & Diversity Plan 2010 - 2013. The committee were also involved with supporting the Traveller Enterprise Centre.

Traveller Enterprise Centre

The Laois Traveller Enterprise Centre opened on 17th April, 2010, with 10 male members of the Travelling Community. Agencies involved in this project include Laois County Council, Laois Partnership, H.S.E., F.A.S., Department of Social & Family Protection and Laois Traveller Action Group.

Funding was secured in 2009 and 2010 from FÁS Special Initiative Fund for Travellers for an Enterprise Worker for Travellers in County Laois. The training program started in April and continued up to December. Three days a week were set aside for production/carpentry skills. One day per week was dedicated to literacy through which the men did a FETAC Level 2 in woodwork and one day a week was allocated to basic business skills/group skills/conflict management and health promotion work.

Laois Comhairle Na nÓg 2010

Laois Comhairle na nÓg (Laois Youth Council) 2008 - 2010 completed its term this year, having commenced work on its 'Teens of Laois' website as well as work in other areas such as mental health awareness and sexual health awareness among young people. Following elections in September, 2010, 27 young people were elected to Laois Comhairle 2010-2012, representing all schools in the county, youth organisations such as Foróige, Youth Work Ireland and Scouting Ireland, as well as some 'sel-dom heard' groups such as the Travelling Community and youth diversion projects, including Youthreach.



Laois Comhairle na nÓg's Annual Meeting took place on 11th November, 2010 in Portlaoise College, attended by 123 young people from all over Laois. The issues raised by the young people in discussions at this meeting form the work plan for the Comhairle members over the next two years and include:

- Raising awareness of sexual health among young people and particularly increasing sexual health education in our schools.
- Increasing access to activities for young people in smaller towns and villages in Laois.

The Annual Meeting was also addressed by Carmel Daly, Drugs Education Officer, Midland Regional Drugs Task Force who carried out some drug awareness workshops with 123 attendees.



Dáil Na nÓg 2010

The National Dáil na nÓg event took place on 5th March, 2010 in the Croke Park Conference Centre and was attended by 5 delegates from Laois Comhairle - Eoin Burke (Chair), Niamh Hyland, James Deegan, Tara Flannery and Ciara Leavy. Issues discussed at the national event included equality of access to education and mental health, which would be examined and progressed by the National Dáil na nÓg Council during its 15 month term beginning in May, 2010.



Laois Dáil na nÓg Representatives

In September 2010, upon the election of our new Comhairle, Tom Orford was elected to represent Laois on the National Dáil na nÓg Council.

Laois Community Forum

www.laoiscommunityforum.ie

Forum Members

Laois Community Forum is made up of an elected Forum Executive Committee representing the community/voluntary section in each of the five Electoral Areas:



*Laois Community Forum Members
(Absent from photo: Sylvia Rouget, Paul Donnelly,
Mary Wheatley, Nuala Finnegan)*

Portlaoise:

Phil Mulhare, Sylvia Rouget, Andy Sutton, Maria Groarke

Emo:

Paul Donnelly, Margaret Guijit-Lawlor, Michael Cobbe

Luggacurren:

Mary Wheatley, Nuala Finnegan, Kathleen Gorman

Mountmellick:

Sheelagh Coyle, Matt Barrett, Paddy Buggy (Chairperson)

Borris-in-Ossory:

Pat McSpadden, Michael Lynch, Michael G. Phelan, Noreen Byrne, Mick Dowling

Laois Community Forum - Mental Health Awareness Evening

'Work well, Live well, Be well' was the theme of an awareness evening held in Portlaoise Parish Centre on 17th May, 2010, to highlight the importance of 'Minding Our Mental Health'.

This evening was a great success, with an attendance of over 100 people. The evening was ably presided over by Sheelagh Coyle, Laois Community Forum's PRO and featured guest speakers on all issues surrounding the area of mental health.



The speakers at the Mental Health Awareness evening

Deputy John Moloney T.D., Minister for Disabilities and Mental Health spoke about the stigma which to this day is still attached to mental health and issues surrounding it, making it so difficult for people to seek help or advice.

Finola Colgan, Development Worker with Mental Health Ireland described how one in four people in Ireland will suffer from a mental health issue in their lifetime and one in ten will suffer from a mental health illness. She spoke about the importance of assisting each other and to encourage people who are struggling to seek professional help. John Farnen, Development Officer with GROW spoke about young people and how their lives can be affected by

depression or mental health issues, coming from exam stress, peer or other pressures which may occur during that particular stage in life.

Finally, Ciaran Mullooly, Midlands Correspondent with RTE but also Vice District Governor of Lions Clubs of Ireland, spoke about suicide prevention and the need for local community groups and clubs to ensure that suicide prevention training is made available to their members and leaders. He spoke about the programme in this instance, named ASIST, a skills based workshop which trains participants to 'deliver suicide aid', i.e. recognise and respond to a suicidal risk. Participants are trained to reduce the immediate risk of suicide and increase the support for a person at risk.

Laois Community Forum Recognises Community Heroes

Laois Community Forum hosted its 2nd Annual Community & Voluntary Awards Ceremony on 3rd November, 2010 in the Killeshin Hotel, Portlaoise. The Awards were also held in association with Laois County Council Heritage Office and Laois Sports Partnership and aimed to recognise the tremendous contribution made by community and voluntary groups to life in County Laois.



Community Awards 2010 - Nominees & Winners

The Forum, comprising of 18 members who represent all registered community and voluntary groups countywide, welcomed 42 nominees in six categories and 16 individuals nominated for their outstanding contribution to their local community, the unsung heroes of our county. Each group and individual was congratulated and presented with a certificate acknowledging their contribution to the community and voluntary effort in Laois.

Winners and Runners-up on the night were:

Arts & Culture

Winner: South East Laois Arts Network
Runner-up: Open Door Theatre Group

Children & Young People

Winner: Mountmellick Macra na Feirme
Runner-up: 4th Laois Scout Group Portarlinton

Sport & Leisure

Winner: Wolfhill Athletic AFC
Runner-up: St. Abbans Fit for Life

Heritage & Environment

Winner: Clonaslee Tidy Towns
Runner-up: Killenard Historical Society

Community Services & Supports

Winner: Laois Offaly Families for Autism
Runner-up: Killenard Community Centre

The Community Forum also honoured Chris Horan with the Unsung Hero 2010 Award.



Chris Horan - Unsung Hero Award Winner

Paddy Buggy, Chairman of the Community Forum congratulated the prize winners and praised all the nominees for their incredible work in their respective communities, adding that in these difficult times, the enthusiasm of community groups and their volunteers is invaluable in keeping our communities alive. He highlighted the importance of encouraging people to do voluntary work. He thanked his fellow Forum members for their commitment and hard work and thanked Laois County Council for its constant support.

The Community Forum also acknowledged the presence of invited guests, Cllr James Deegan, Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council, Cllr John Moran, Chairman of Laois County Development Board and Declan Byrne, Director of Services with Laois County Council, who all congratulated the nominees for their hard work in the community, their motivation and their enthusiasm for doing voluntary work and helping others and emphasising the important role of Laois Community Forum as a recognised pillar representing the community/voluntary sector in the County Development Board process.

Charities Act Information Event

Laois Community Forum held an information event on 18th November, 2010 to highlight the recently published code of principle in relation to best practice for fundraising by the community/voluntary sector. Sheila Nordon, Executive Director of the Irish Charity Tax Reform Group, addressed this event, giving information also on the Charities Act 2009.

Networking with Older People

Successful Networking Days were held in Mountrath, Borris-in-Ossory and Rathdowney, in association with Laois Sports Partnership and Laois Partnership, which included talks and discussion on issues which affect older people, e.g., nutrition, personal safety, healthcare, keeping active, etc. Activities e.g., sit-fit, music, dance, bocchia (bowls) and arts/crafts were also provided at each event.



Older Persons Activity Day - Mountrath 2010

Other initiatives

Links were formed by the Forum with local ethnic associations during 2010, such as the Laois Polish Community. The Forum also supported the Embracing Diversity Awards which took place in October. The Forum continued its linkages with Laois Sports Partnership, again supporting their programme for disability awareness in local secondary schools in 2010.

The Forum also supported the pilot of a Youth Democracy Programme by Mountmellick Youth Development Centre and in association with Laois County Council and Camross Scouts, hosted a local youth event to celebrate cross-cultural links between Ireland and other European countries.

Pride of Place 2010

Laois celebrated great success at the All-Island National Pride of Place Awards, which were held in Trim, Co. Meath in November, 2010.

The awards were presented to all successful groups by Noel Dempsey T.D., Minister for Transport and Christopher Moran, Chairperson of Co-Operation Ireland. In his address, the Minister paid tribute to all the participating groups who work tirelessly to create and promote pride in their cities, towns and villages, highlighting the importance of the volunteer in the current climate.

Runners-up in their **Category – Population over 2,000** were Mountmellick Christmas Tree Committee who showcased the town's most cherished project which celebrates over 50 years in existence, heralding a 60 ft tree and crib, a beacon of light and a symbol of community co-operation and spirit in the town of Mountmellick.

The project entails massive community commitment in the construction and preparation for its annual 'switch-on' night. The community also benefits from a visit by Santa Claus, facilitated by the committee, bringing toys for the under 10's of the communities of Mountmellick, The Rock and Clonaghadoo. The senior citizens are not forgotten either; free fuel is delivered by the committee annually to older people in the wider community during the Christmas season. Accepting the award on behalf of the group were members of the committee, including founder members Ger Lynch and Brian Lynch.

Winner of an **Adjudicator's Special Endeavour Award** were the residents and staff of the Green Cottages, Stradbally. Previously cottages to families employed on the Cosby Estate and more recently derelict and an eyesore on the road to Carlow, the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary undertook, in collaboration with Laois County Council, Health Services Executive and the local community in Stradbally, the development of a project, to restore and preserve the cottages, while also developing a place where men and women with intellectual disabilities could live with the appropriate care and support both within the Cottages and out in the community.



Pride of Place - 2010 Prizewinners

Accepting the award were Michael Dunne, a resident of the cottages and Janet O'Brien-Devoy, member of SCJMS staff and the Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council, Cllr James Deegan, who was originally involved in the project.

An Cathaoirleach, Cllr James Deegan and Peter Carey, County Manager, congratulated all of the entrants and the prize-winners on their success in this year's competition and thanked them for representing Laois so well at national level.

Joint Policing Committees

The Joint Policing Committee offers Local Authorities, Elected Members, An Garda Síochána, Members of the Oireachtas, community leaders and members of the public, through a partnership model, the opportunity to make a significant impact on the quality of daily life for all members of the community in each Local Authority area. They provide a forum where the Local Authority and the Senior Garda Officers responsible for the policing of the County, with the participation of the Oireachtas members and community interests, can consult, discuss and make recommendations on matters affecting the policing of County Laois.

Laois County Joint Policing Committee met 4 times during 2010, including a public meeting held on 20th September, at which members of the public were entitled to attend and submit questions to the members of the Joint Policing Committee for response at the meeting. Issues progressed at the Joint Policing Committee during 2010 included initiatives regarding Community Alert and raising awareness in our communities, highlighting the need for vigilance for the rurally isolated and/or elderly people in relation to bogus callers/repair workers and addressing the issue of vandalism and graffiti in our towns and villages.

Other Activities

Community & Enterprise Section also participated on the following outside Committees/Programmes during 2010:

- Laois Partnership Company
- Laois Sports Partnership
- Laois Trip
- Laois County Enterprise Board
- Laois County Childcare Committee
- BLOCK and PORT Garda Diversion Projects
- Trick 'r' Street Festival Committee
- Laois Local Drugs Network Committee
- Laois Third Level Initiative

- Citizens Information Centre
- Traveller Men's Enterprise Project Committee
- Midlands Regional Drugs Task Force
- Midland Traveller Conflict & Mediation Committee

National Service Indicators - December 2010

CP: Community Participation & Co-operation

Percentage of local schools/youth groups involved in the Comhairle na nÓg Scheme. 100%

Total number of schools and youth groups: 16
(9 secondary schools and 7 youth organisations running groups within the county)

Number of youth groups and schools involved in the Comhairle na nÓg Scheme: 16
(9 secondary schools and 7 young people representing youth organisations countywide)

Number of community/voluntary organisations registered with Laois Community Forum: 503

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic Development Officer: Ian McCormack

Laois County Council is actively involved in 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.

Economic Task Group

The County Manager chairs a very proactive economic task group which provides a focal point for the economic promotion of the county.

Prioritised Actions/Objectives include:

- Development of the National Enterprise Park
- Encourage/facilitate the development of indigenous industry
- Decentralisation
- Promoting County Laois as an events centre
- Promoting the development of high and specialised education fields in the county to attract new industry
- Developing a high level support group to act as advocates for County Laois
- Implement objectives contained in the County Development Strategy review 2009-2012 which focus on enhancing employment opportunities for all.

The Task Group has set up two sub-committees of local business people who will make recommendations to the group in relation to Business Development Initiatives and Marketing and Promoting the county.

Portlaoise Enterprise Centre

Portlaoise Enterprise Centre is open for business and committed to developing and sustaining a local enterprise culture in the Portlaoise area. Resident Businesses include:

- TSI Flowmeters Ltd
- Laois County Enterprise Board
- Advanced Renewable Energy Ireland Ltd

A total of 25 people are presently employed at Portlaoise Enterprise Centre.

Clonminam Business Park Upgrade

Work commenced on the upgrade of Clonminam Business Park in 2009. Work will consist of footpath replacement, public lighting, landscaping, road marking and repairs and signage installation.

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 will continue to make sites available given the county's potential for further development and capacity for new enterprise.

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 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. Works have been completed on the Togher Link Road and Western Interceptor Sewer which will facilitate developments in this area.

Work is ongoing on the preparation of a masterplan and a Motorway Order which will also enhance development in this area. Developments on this site will harness the potential of Portlaoise's geographical position in the centre of the country.

Other Activities in the Economic Development Department in 2010 included

- Organising the Start & Grow Expo which was held in Portlaoise in 2010.
- Produced a Broadband Policy Paper for County Laois
- Broadened the membership base on the Economic Task Group.
- Completed a 5-Year Business Development Plan for Festivals in County Laois.
- Participation on a Steering Group which is preparing a report on Recreational, Tourism and Commercial Product identification on the River Barrow

TOURISM

Events & Festivals

Laois County Council's Tourism Office continued to actively promote County Laois as the events destination in the Midlands throughout 2010. The following events were held throughout the year which attracted large numbers of people to the county.

Laois International Golf Challenge

The Laois International Golf Challenge 2010 was officially launched by Après Match Comedian, Barry Murphy in April. Driven by the Tourism Section of Laois County Council, a lot of golf marketing was carried out and shows were attended in Wales, Northern Ireland and England. 4 Aces Wholesale Ltd, GALA and Laois County Council sponsored the event. The Laois International Golf Challenge took place from 17th to 21st May and attracted golfers from all over Ireland, Northern Ireland, Wales, England, Sweden, Germany and Italy.

The event was very successful with a full programme of golf over the 7 golf courses in Laois. There was also an entertainment programme for visitors during the Challenge. The Overall Prize giving took place at the Heritage Golf & Spa Resort at Kilenard. The overall Winners for 2010 came from Northern Ireland (Strabane). Entertainment was provided each evening of the Challenge and the visitors thoroughly enjoyed the week.

Italian Golf

Laois Tourism and Laois Golf Committee continued to work closely with Italian Golf Clubs to promote golf in the two areas. As a result, Italian golfers participated in the Laois International Golf Challenge

2010 for the first time. A group of Italian Golfers also travelled to Laois from 8th to 12th September and played an 'Italy / Ireland' Tournament on 10th September at Abbeylax Golf Club.

Gordon Bennett Classic Car Run

The Gordon Bennett Irish Classic Car Run 2010 took place over the June Bank Holiday weekend. A Cathaoirleach's Reception was held at Áras an Chontae on Friday evening to welcome the visitors, particularly the overseas visitors to Laois. A display of classic cars took place at Áras an Chontae and the participants drove the historic Gordon Bennett Route over the weekend.



The highlight for many was their participation in the Gala Rose of Tralee Regional Parade through the streets of Portlaoise on Saturday. The Gordon Bennett Festival is now an important component of the Rose of Tralee Regional Finals Festival in Portlaoise. The Gordon Bennett Cars also visited the All-Ireland Sheep Shearing Event over the weekend.

Rose of Tralee Irish Regional Finals

The Rose of Tralee International Regional Finals 2010 was a very successful event, which took place on the June Bank Holiday weekend, with 40 Roses from all over Ireland participating. There was also an international dimension this year, with 10 Roses from the U.S. and the U.K. participating in the International Selection in Portlaoise. A Cathaoirleach's Reception was held on Friday afternoon for the Irish and International Roses. 50 Rosebuds from the National Schools all over Laois took part in this year's Festival and were twinned with Roses. On the Saturday, bumper crowds turned out for the Gala Rose Parade. The Gordon Bennett Irish Classic Car Run again worked with the Rose Committee and took the Roses and Rosebuds through the streets of Portlaoise.

Many groups performed on the day from the Portlaoise Gymnasts, Irish dancing troupes, hip hop dancers, marching bands such as St. Joseph's Ac-

cordion Band and Killeslin Pipe Band, African dancers, Belly dancers and many more. Na Fianna, the runners up in the All-Ireland Talent show were a major attraction. Huge crowds gathered around the Civic Plaza for performances from the various groups and there were lots of activities for families. 50 Market stalls were on site around the Plaza to coincide with the event.

The Portlaoise Heritage Hotel hosted the three selection nights during the weekend and was one of the festival's main sponsors, in addition to sponsorship from Laois County Council and Laois Partnership Company Ltd.

All-Ireland & International Sheep Shearing Championships

The All-Ireland and International Sheep Shearing Championships took place on Saturday 5th and Sunday 6th June, 2010 and attracted a large number of visitors to Portlaoise over the June Bank Holiday weekend. The event showcased the Rugby grounds as an excellent venue for hosting events.

Portlaoise Magnet Festival

The Magnet Festival was a new community driven festival which took place in Portlaoise over the August Bank Holiday weekend, supported by Laois County Council and Fáilte Ireland.

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 contains 50 actions which have been implemented over the past number of 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 Laois Heritage Plan undertaken with the support of the Heritage Council during 2010. Full survey and research reports are available from the Heritage Office of Laois County Council, or to download at 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 2010:

The detailed habitats survey of Laois was continued in 2010 with a new focus on collecting data on all settlements in the county, with the aim of informing the new County Development Plan, due to be adopted in 2012.



In co-operation with Durrow Development Forum and Abbeyleix Heritage Company, surveys of the built heritage of Durrow and Abbeyleix were carried out, with the aim of designating Architectural Conservation Areas in these two towns under the County Development Plan. These designations have now been published in the Draft Plan.

Raise Awareness and Promote Enjoyment of the Heritage of Laois

In 2010, 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.

Events held during 2010 to raise awareness of heritage issues included:

Dawn walks in Clonaslee and Durrow were organised to celebrate annual Dawn Chorus Day in May.

A week long series of Biodiversity events in May to tie in with International year of Biodiversity, including Bat Walks in Emo Court, with the assistance of the Office of Public Works and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Biodiversity Week this year was planned to tie in with Social Inclusion week in Laois, with free, fun wildlife events organised for children living in Local Authority Estates in Portlaoise, Mountmellick and Portarlington.

*Learning about wildlife in Kirwan Park, Mountmellick during Biodiversity Week
(Photo: Dom Reddin)*



In association with The Dunamase Arts Centre, a series of Living Architecture Workshops were presented at sites around the county in June and July.



*Heritage Week walk on the Grand Canal, Vicarstown
(Photo: Michael Scully)*

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

The annual Celebrating Laois Heritage conference was held in November, with speakers on all aspects of the built, natural and cultural heritage of the county and the wider region.

In addition to events, the following publications were produced during 2010:

A book on Thatch in Laois, based on the detailed survey carried out in 2007. This book will be published in early 2011.

In association with Abbeyleix Business and Community Group, a leaflet on the Heritage Town of Abbeyleix was prepared in 2010. This will be followed up in 2011 by interpretive signs with attractive illustrated maps at prominent sites in the town. A similar sign and map is in preparation for Mountmellick.

Promote Best Practice in Heritage Management & Promote Active Conservation of heritage.

A range of groups were assisted with practical conservation projects in areas ranging from wildlife surveys to graveyard management. In addition, assistance was provided in preparing applications for Heritage Council grant schemes from groups around the county.

Laois County Council commenced a major restoration project at Donaghmore Workhouse during 2010. Working in co-operation with the Donaghmore Museum Committee and with the support of Laois Partnership Company, a conservation plan was prepared for the former dining hall at the site, which

has been derelict for some time. It is intended that, subject to the availability of funds, the restoration project will start in 2011.



The Dining Hall at Donaghmore Workhouse, now scheduled for restoration (Photo: MCOH Architects)

Heritage Performance Indicators

Performance Indicator	2010	2009	2008	2007
No. actions from the Laois Heritage Plan implemented: (A maximum of 8 actions per year are part-funded by the Heritage Council)	4	3	8	8
No. meetings of Laois Heritage Forum held: (The Laois Heritage Forum generally meets quarterly, with working groups meeting more often as required)	3	4	3	3
Number of biodiversity surveys carried out:	1	1	3	3
Number of built/cultural heritage surveys carried out:	2	0	2	2
Number of publications on Laois Heritage produced/supported: (These publications are in addition to project reports produced following surveys etc.)	4	0	1	1
Number of Talks/Training Courses/Seminars organised or supported: (Including events held for Heritage Week)	46	40	39	12

ARTS SECTION

Laois School of Music

Laois School of Music maintained its enrolment of 350 students in Portlaoise and 40 students in Durrow. 'The Young Voice of Laois' scholarship competition for young singers was inaugurated in association with Durrow Development Forum. The School also held its first Annual Orchestra Workshop Day with over 60 participants.

100 students took Music exams between the Royal Irish Academy of Music and The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music. In September, 2010 Laois School of Music Ltd. was established as an independent Company, Limited by Guarantee.

Laois Youth Theatre

Laois Youth Theatre worked in Portlaoise, Stradbally, Mountrath, Portarlinton and Rathdowney during the year.



Laois Youth Theatre taking part in the St Patrick's Day Parade

As well as weekly workshops the programme included a colourful end of year performance in the grounds of Emo Court on 29th May. The Portarlington group gave a performance for family and friends on 28th May.



Laois Youth Theatre 2010

The Portarlington group performed in Mountmellick Library as part of the Leaves Literary Festival. Members attended the National Association of Youth Drama Festival in Wexford. Two editions of the new Laois Youth Theatre newsletters were published and tutors took part in Skills Sharing workshops during the year.

Stradbally Arthouse

Work commenced and was completed on the Courthouse, Stradbally in 2010. This exciting and vibrant development includes the refurbishment and extension of Stradbally Courthouse, providing a state of the art community library, artists' studios and living accommodation, an exhibition gallery, a rehearsal space, a kiln and a garden space with a commissioned Percent for Art wall mounted artwork.

The complex will be available for use by local community groups. The development, costing in excess of €1.2million, commenced in early in 2010 and has been assisted with funding from the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport Access II scheme. Construction work was completed in December, 2010.

Bealtaine Festival – for Older People

The Arts Office published a colourful Laois Festival brochure listing events throughout the county and it was launched at a celebratory tea dance in the Dunamase Arts Centre. Events organised by the Arts Office included drama performances by the Carnation Theatre Group in two hospitals for older people, performances by the Laois ICA Federation Choir and Creative Writing workshops for active age groups with Jean O'Brien.

The Artists in Schools Scheme

The Artists in Schools Scheme ran in 10 schools in 2010. The Scheme allows students to have an in-depth experience with the professional artist and gives them the opportunity to experience different art mediums.



The Artists in Schools Project in Borris-in-Ossory

The Arts Office, in partnership with Cups and Crowns Educational Theatre Company, gave two schools in the county the opportunity to engage with a touring theatre company as they held workshops and presented a play entitled 'Blennie and the Water Daughter'.

Midland Masterclasses

A series of masterclasses organised for Sept-October in collaboration with Midland arts offices and delivered by nationally recognised experts, the Laois programme included 'Running a Festival' and 'Portraiture' masterclasses.



Midland Masterclasses

Writer-in-Residence

The residency programme with writer Ann Egan entitled Filiochta Laoise included a writing course for adults and young writers, Library events and a schools project over 3 weeks in 21 schools in the county. A new Laois Anthology of work using writings from this programme entitled 'Laois Echoes with Fionn Mac Cumhail' was published and launched as part of the Leaves Literary Festival.

Summer Arts programme

The Summer Arts Programme included a total of 18 different weeklong workshops designed for children and young people, which took place over the summer period.

The workshops were held in different parts of the county and included the following art practices: visual art, pottery, creative writing, drama, dance and kindermusic.



Summer Arts Programme

'Leaves'- Laois Literary Weekend

The weekend Literary Festival in November included workshops in schools, Mountmellick Library, and literary evenings at Stradbally Hall, Áras an Chontae and the Parish Centre.

Other activities included

- Arts Act Grants Awards
- Tyrone Guthrie Centre Bursary
- Patronage Award
- Exhibitions
- Percent for Art Projects included the Library and Arthouse, Stradbally and Knockmay Regeneration Project
- National Poetry Day Event
- National Music Day
- Support of Festivals - Mountmellick Drama Festival, Slieve Bloom Storytelling Festival, Durrow Arts Festival and Voices Across Cultures.
- Publishing 3 editions of the Midlands arts and culture magazine.

Performance Indicators 2008 2009 2010

No. of Arts Grants Allocated:	43	61	45
Per 1,000 population:	3107	3098	2714
No. of Youth Theatre:	5	4	4
Summer Arts Workshops:	20	18	18
Laois School of Music -			
No. of Students:	400	400	390

SPORT & LEISURE SECTION

National Bike Week

To celebrate National Bike Week 2010 from June 13th to 20th, Laois County Council co-ordinated a series of thirteen events with the assistance of Community groups countywide.



The events catered for all ages and abilities and were attended by over 800 participants.

Events were held in Killenard, Abbeyleix, The Heath, Clonaslee and Portlaoise and included a Criterium, School Safe Cycling Workshops, Youth Bike Expo and Community Cycles.

Children's Activity Programme

Laois County Council organised and delivered very successful Easter and Summer activity programmes in 2010 throughout the county. A Parks Tennis

programme was delivered at Mountmellick, Abbeyleix, Portlaoise and Portarlington, with our six week Camp Co Co Summer programme being delivered at Killeen, Portarlington, Vicarstown, Castle-town, Rathdowney and Portlaoise. Over 800 children participated in these activity programmes.

National Play Day

Laois County Council delivered a series of free family events during the summer of 2010. Portarlington Family Fun Day, organised in association with Portarlington Lions Club and Portarlington Community Development Association was attended by over 2,500 people. Other events took place in Kiln Lane, Mountrath, Balladine, Abbeyleix and Rathdowney.

Trick'r Street Celebrates National Recreation Day

Portlaoise Halloween Festival Committee delivered another ground breaking event for teenagers and their families – 'Trick 'r Street'. Crowds were held spellbound by the entertainers and firework display at O'Moore Park on 29th October.



Over 4,000 people were treated to free performances by a variety of artists including the chart toppers 'The Delorentos'. Youth groups countywide created a 'Haunted Village' spectacular and presented a specially commissioned performance. The night concluded with a spectacular fireworks display.



Playground Markings

School Playground Markings was further developed in 2010, with a further six primary 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 encouraging children to be active.

New Playground opened at Kiln Lane Mountrath

February, 2010, saw the official opening of Kiln Lane play facilities - 'Croí na nÓg' Playground. This was a unique project, the first residential playground development in the county uniting two areas; Respond residents and the established residents, bringing them together in play. The facility demonstrates the commitment of Laois County Council to its Play Policy 'Playing for Keeps' and the National Play Policy. Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council, Cllr James Daly, officially cut the ribbon assisted by Zoe Doheny, resident of Kiln Lane, whose entry was chosen to name the playground 'Croí na nÓg - Heart of the Young People'.

Football Association of Ireland/Laois County Council - Football in the Community Programme

Community Football programmes

The football in the community programme has been rolled out across the county in local Council estates and community areas. The areas were nominated by both local residents and Councillors. The programme is aimed at children who may not play soccer with a club. The programmes ran for 8 weeks in Knockmay Portlaoise, Kiln Lane, Mountrath, St. Brigid's Place, Portlaoise and Balladine, Abbeyleix. Children aged from 6-14 took part in the programme with over 100 children receiving coaching on a weekly basis.

Soccer Tods Programme



Soccer Tods was introduced to provide soccer activity for boys and girls aged between 3 and 6 years of age. There is currently little opportunity for children of this age to learn soccer in a fun yet educational environment.



The programme is run indoors over an 8 week period. Children learn the basics of soccer while implementing educational aspects including numbers, colour, animals, etc in the training.

Football in Schools

The Football Association of Ireland (FAI) caters for all levels of school children in different programmes run through schools.

Xtravision Primary School 5 a-side competition runs in April/May of each year and is a national competition. Each school can enter teams in Boys, Girls or mixed sections within their county. 61 teams took part in the Laois competition coming from 23 schools.

Primary School Futsal competition is run in October/November each year. It is an indoor game using a weighted ball to help develop more skilful players. 9 teams entered the competition coming from 7 schools. St. Paul's Boys National School came out winners in the boys and The Rock National School won the girls competition.

Secondary School Futsal competition runs in November/December. Aimed at children in 1st year, this is a national competition with the winners of each county represented at regional level. 3 schools took part with 10 teams. Winners of the boys were Mountrath Community School and girls were Scoil Christ Rí, Portlaoise. Both teams went on to represent Laois at the Leinster finals in Meath.

Late Night Soccer

This programme was established mainly to give young adults aged 15-18 an activity to take part in late on a Friday night. The programme is run in as-

sociation with the Gardaí and the Garda diversion programmes in the town where the league is set up. The Late night Soccer league was run in two venues in 2010 - Timahoe as the rural hub and Portlaoise as the Urban hub. Over 50 teenagers took part in the programme with prizes being awarded to the winners.

Coach Education

Each year in Laois the FAI run coach education courses to help people get FAI accredited certificates to help them develop as coaches. There was 1 mainstream Kick Start 1 Course run in Portlaoise and 1 Kick Start 2. Portlaoise prison ran two Kick Start 1 courses, one which was for the prisoners of Block C and the second for the prison officer across Ireland. Portlaoise College Coaching students also completed their Kick Start 1 course.

Women/Girls Soccer

Soccer Sisters programme

There were three Soccer sisters' programmes run in Laois in 2010. During the Easter break, 2 Soccer Sisters Easter Camps were run in Mountmellick and Portlaoise. 60 participants took part in the camps. Scoil Mhuire in Abbeyleix also hosted a Soccer Sister programme with 45 participants at the end of 2010.

Women's Soccer Leisure League

This league is run for Women over the age of eighteen. The league runs for 8 weeks over one hour in May/June each year and is aimed at women who may have never played soccer or any sport before. 36 women took part in 2010 with 12 women getting involved with local teams after the league finished.

Football for All

The FAI Football for All programme comprises soccer programmes that are run for individuals with special needs. There are many opportunities for individuals from primary school right up to adults. Within Laois, the FAI development officer works with a number of different groups including National Learning Network, St Francis' Special School and Rehab Care. Weekly sessions were run with National Learning Network and St Francis' School and support given to coaches of Rehab Care. Participants also completed their Kick Start 1 coaching course.

Street League Soccer

The street leagues were run over 10 weeks from June until August to provide weekly activity for students, long-term unemployed or individuals recovering from addiction to alcohol or drugs.



2010 was the most successful year, as a player from the Portlaoise centre was chosen to represent Ireland at the Homeless World Cup in Brazil. Brian Farrell also captained his team in Brazil.

LIBRARIES

County Librarian: Gerry Maher

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 4 full-time branches and 8 part-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.

Mountmellick Library and Art Gallery

In May, Mountmellick Library and Art Gallery was officially opened by John Moloney, T.D. Minister for Disability and Mental Health.

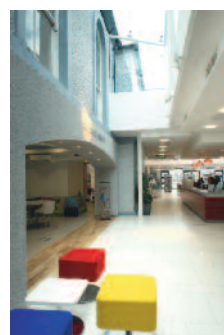


Official Opening of Mountmellick Library & Art Gallery

The building, measuring 690m², has extensive adult and children areas, study areas, teenage section, a large suite of internet PCs and WIFI connectivity, CD and DVD collections.



The library is fully automated and has self-check facilities. The art gallery is equipped with the latest hanging and lighting systems and is available for local and regional artists to display their works. A coffee/tea area is located within the library for patrons.



In the 7 month period from opening to the end of 2010, the library recorded a registered membership of 1,891 and issued 44,205 items to the public. The total number of visits to the library was 24,712 in the same period. As evident from these figures, the library and art gallery has proven to be a huge success in the town and is continuing to attract new members and visitors.

Stradbally Library

During the year refurbishment of Stradbally Courthouse continued. When completed in early 2011, the public library will operate from the ground floor of the premises from an area of 100m² approximately. The library will be fully automated and will provide 5 public internet points.

A grant of €100,000 was sanctioned by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government for book stock and fit-out of the library. Attached to the library will be 4 artists' studios and a rehearsal studio.

Ballylinan Library

In April, Ballylinan Library, a new leased premises on the Main Street, was officially opened by Cllr James Daly, Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council.



Official Opening of Ballylinan Library

A complete new fit-out and bookstock was carried out which now provides a modern service in comfortable surroundings. The library is fully automated and has 2 public internet points with broadband connection.

Local History/Studies

Library staff have improved and added extra content to the local history website 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 Library Web Page is: www.laois.ie/leisureandculture/libraries/localresearch. Some well known books on Local history have been digitised and are now available online. They are 'Statistical Survey of the Queens County' by Coote, 'The History of the Queens County' by O'Byrne and 'The Manor of Glenmore'.

FÁS eLearning and Computer Learning

Laois County Libraries, in partnership with FÁS, are continuing the 'FÁS eLearning at the Library' in selected libraries in Laois. This new learning programme has been developed by FÁS for people with little or no IT skills as well as for those with some basic IT skills. The project is running very successfully in Abbeylax, Mountrath, Mountmellick and Portlaoise Libraries with waiting lists for all courses.

WIFI

WIFI is available in Portlaoise, Mountmellick, Mountrath, Abbeylax, Portarlinton and Rathdowney Libraries.

Bookfund

The Bookfund for 2010 was €90,000.

Events and Activities

Laois County Library held a large variety of events and activities in all Branch Libraries throughout the county in 2010. Children and adults throughout the county enjoyed the numerous events and activities organised by library staff. This year's programme was hectic and exciting with author visits, art competitions, art launches and exhibitions, music recitals, book clubs, computer classes and story-telling.

The highlights of the year included Library Ireland week, Heritage Week and Children's Book Festival.

Heritage Week - Library Events

All of the libraries hosted a great selection of events for Heritage Week 2010. Mountrath and Mountmellick Libraries had a visit from Reptile Zoo and Irish History Live gave animated history sessions for children in Abbeylax, Mountmellick and Rathdowney libraries. Well known illustrator Gordon Darcy held wildlife drawing sessions in Mountmellick and Portlaoise Libraries. Dr. Jane Lyons held genealogy lectures in Portlaoise and Abbeylax libraries which was very well attended.

Mountrath Library

Mountrath Library continued with events and children's activities during 2010. Monthly class visits and Book displays continued with arts and crafts for younger readers. For Easter there was a Mad Hatters Tea Party. For Children's Book Festival, author Niamh Sharkey visited in October and held an interactive storytime with local school children. Adults and children's bookclubs are held every month in the library.

Abbeylax Library

Abbeylax Library continued to have weekly and monthly events. The highlights were a songwriting workshop in February, creative writing workshops with Nadaline Webster in April and in June the library was involved in Abbeyfest with author visits by Oisín McGann and Dermot Bolger. For Abbeyfest there were also puppet shows and face painting for younger readers. For Children's Book Festival there was a visit by author Niamh Sharkey and a Fancy

Dress Storytime. The library was delighted to have the 'Enchanted' exhibition on display for children's book festival. The Art Gallery continues to be a premier location in the county for art exhibitions with 9 art exhibitions held during the year.

Portlaoise Library

Portlaoise Library had a busy year of events and these included monthly adult bookclubs, weekly class visits, FÁS e-learning and competitions. Grow Your Own held some group meetings in Portlaoise Library. For Children's Book Festival there was an art exhibition by St Francis School, a visit by the Donkey Sanctuary and author visits by Niamh Sharkey and Dolores Keavney.

Mountmellick Library

Mountmellick Library has had a busy schedule of events since opening in May, 2010. The library has become a great success since opening and is now a central attraction for the community in Mountmellick and surrounding areas. There have been weekly class visits, bookclubs for adults and children, storytime and weekly games clubs.

The Art Gallery has been fully booked since May featuring local artists Tom Joyce, Anne Sands and Mountmellick Photographic Society.

Prison Service

The library service works with the staff of the Midlands and Portlaoise Prisons to provide a service modelled as closely as possible on the public library. The prison libraries provide access to books, newspapers, magazines and other multi-media stock as well as a space in which to pursue educational, cultural and leisure interests. Stock purchase and library activities particularly seek to include vulnerable groups and to foster literacy and reading in the prisons. The library helps inmates deal with their sentences in a positive way and also to plan and work towards a new life after release.

In 2010 the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform provided €23,000 for the purchase of library stock and also recouped to Laois County Council the salaries of two library staff who work full-time in the Midlands and Portlaoise prisons.

National Service Indicators

L: Library Services

L. 1 Public Opening Hours

Average number of opening hours per week for full-time libraries:	35.3
Average number of opening hours per week for part time libraries (where applicable):	8.58
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: 64.6

L. 3 (i) Annual expenditure on stock per head of population county wide:	1.34
(ii) Number of items issued per head of population (county/city wide) for:	
- books	3.28
- other items	0.83

L. 4 Number of Internet sessions provided per 1,000 population: 162

Planning & Development and Environment Strategic Policy Committee

Director of Services: John Daly

Chairperson: John Joe Fennelly, M.C.C.

Members

Ray Cribbin, M.C.C.
Tom Mulhall, M.C.C.
Patrick Bowe, M.C.C.
Patrick Bracken, M.C.C.
David Goodwin, M.C.C.
Stephen Lynch, T.C.

Sectoral

Michael McEvoy
Sheelagh Coyle
Jason Redmond
Senan Gardiner

ENVIRONMENT

Senior Engineer: John O'Donoghue

Report on Strategic Policy Committee

The Planning & Development & Environment Strategic Policy Committee (S.P.C.) held 4 meetings during 2010 to discuss and approve strategy and policy documents such as the Landscape Character Policy, Sustainable Building Policy and Wind Energy Policy. The Committee also received progress reports and updates on Litter Management, Review of the County Development Plan and Community Involvement Proposals for Rural Roadside Cleanups outlining the objectives and measures of success under the various categories.

Community Initiatives

Clean Up Laois Week

Clean up Laois Week ran from 12th to 16th April 2010. Organised in conjunction with An Taisce's Spring Clean and now in its seventh year, this is one of the Council's biggest clean up initiatives and 2010 saw the largest number of groups participating.



Clean Up Laois Week 2010

Packs consisting of litter pickers, gloves and bags were handed out to registered groups and the rubbish collected on the clean ups was removed and disposed of by the Environmental Enforcement Officers. Many clean ups consisted of items that had been illegally dumped. Once again the Portlaoise Against Litter Committee (P.A.L.) were actively involved.

Another new initiative for 2010 took place in October, when a second clean up Laois week was arranged.

Tidy Towns

Laois Federation of Tidy Towns was established in 1998 and at present has 26 registered groups. These groups have been conserving and enhancing the local environment in their community and are an invaluable resource. Laois County Council is actively working with the Tidy Towns Committees to help invest in their future and ensure continued growth and development.



*Mountrath - Overall winner 2010
Local Tidy Towns Competition*

Assistance was provided to the groups in the form of the Tidy Towns Grants, Summer Wheelie Bin Scheme, participation in Clean Up Laois Week, the Laois Federation of Tidy Towns Competition and Awards. At National level, marks awarded to Laois towns and villages continue to improve.

Grants

Under the Community Grant Scheme, funding was awarded to 69 groups for various projects to benefit the environment and enhance local amenities. An additional 40 projects were funded under the Community Project Fund. This fund allocates €1,500 to each elected member of Laois County Council to finance worthwhile projects in their own areas.

10 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.

In association with the Laois Federation of the I.C.A., Laois County Council arranges the 'Art from Waste' competition for primary schools annually.

Environment Awareness & Education

Environment Awards

One of the highlights of the year is the annual Environment Awards which acknowledge and reward the numerous community groups throughout the county for their involvement in the Laois Federation of Tidy Towns, the Inter Community Litter Challenge and the Community Action Project. Each year these projects go from strength to strength and this is a huge testament to the work undertaken by voluntary groups working at a local level across the county.

Schools Programme

The Council have expanded their schools programme which coincides with an increase in the number of schools that have received the prestigious Green Flag Award (48 at the end of 2010). The various initiatives include the Green Schools Programme, Tidy Primary Schools competition, Eco Media Secondary Schools project as well as organising guest speakers and groups to visit schools to discuss various environmental themes which link in with the Green Schools programme e.g. water conservation, energy management etc. Teacher seminars are also held which assist in the promotion of the Green Schools programme.

Climate for Change

Laois County Council engaged Gavin Harte of ESD Training to deliver his 'Climate for Change' talk as part of the national awareness campaign on Climate Change. Gavin's audience included Laois County Council staff, Tidy Towns Groups, the general public and Secondary School students. The presentation (which consists of photographs, video clips and animations) highlighted the impact of our daily activities and how these contribute to Climate Change. Gavin's style of presentation ensured all the audience were engaged from beginning to end.

This is just one of the many initiatives organized by the Council to build in sustainability into all aspects of the Council's daily activities.

The EcoCert Programme

Now in its second year, the EcoCert programme, which is a partnership between Laois, Offaly and Waterford County Councils, Waterford City Council, the Environmental Protection Agency and environmental consultants Econcertive, has further developed. Additional seminars were held and dedicated information has been included on Laois County Council's website. The programme is aimed at small businesses and other organisations to simultaneously reduce their costs and improve their environmental performance.

Litter Management

In a bid to tackle the ongoing litter problem, the Litter Pollution Act was introduced in 1997 giving local authorities the power to prosecute those found littering and placing the onus on third parties to prevent the creation of litter. The Act was subsequently modified to give the Gardaí similar powers to the local authorities as well as increasing the penalties for littering offences.



Litter Wardens

Despite substantial investment and resources in street cleansing, education/ awareness and enforcement, this county continues to have a visible litter problem. Litter affects everyone and requires all communities working together to combat the problem i.e. via local clean-ups, anti-litter campaigns, local awareness, working with key stakeholders and maximising resources devoted for this purpose.

See Something! Say Something! is the message from the Environmental Protection Agency and the Environment Section of Laois County Council promotes this motto. This Section have their own

freephone confidential litter hotline (1850 323230) and would encourage members of the public to be vigilant in reporting illegal acts of dumping/littering. The hotline is promoted at every opportunity and especially through the distribution of free anti-litter merchandise i.e. trolley tokens, cigarette stubbis, cartidi bins and car wallets. In 2010, 822 environmental complaints were received from the public – 621 were litter-related.

In 2010, the Enforcement Section carried out their duties for various breaches of the Act resulting in the serving of 303 on-the-spot fines issued for varying offences. Unpaid fines (71) were referred for legal proceedings resulting in 32 successful convictions. Landowners are responsible for keeping private lands free of litter and 18 Section 9 Notices were served in this regard.

Irish Business Against Litter - IBAL

Portlaoise is the only town in the county which qualifies for assessment under these national anti-litter league - surveys which are conducted twice yearly by An Taisce. 10 sites are visited and graded for presence/absence of litter.

In 2010, Portlaoise town fared badly in this league. Therefore, every effort will be made to improve our ratings in 2011.

Environmental Protection

Environmental Protection staff are involved in the implementation of legislation and policy regarding air quality, water quality and noise pollution as they apply in County Laois. Activities include:

- Implementing environmental monitoring programs
- Implementing and enforcing regulations
- Issuing, monitoring and enforcing discharge and emissions licenses
- Investigating pollution incidents and finding sources of pollution
- Responding to environmental complaints from the public.
- Preparing environmental policy

Water Quality

The South Eastern River Basin District and the Shannon International River Basin District Management Plans 2009 - 2015 were adopted by the members of Laois County Council in 2010 before final adoption by the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government. These plans set out water quality objectives for each water body in the county.

Implementation of these plans is continuing.

In 2010, Environmental Protection staff continued with the monitoring of Laois surface and ground waters under the Water Framework Directive monitoring program. Extensive analyses of rivers in the county were also carried out under the Small Stream Risk Scores monitoring program.

A total of 139 farm inspections were carried out in 2010. These inspections were carried out in focussed catchments including the Triogue, Mountrath, Derrykearn and Cappacacloghy catchments. Analyses of river water samples in the catchments assisted in identifying areas where pollution may have been occurring.

A total of 47 complaints concerning water pollution were received and investigated in 2010. As a result of these complaints, 7 Notices were issued under Section 12 of the Local Government (Water Pollution) Acts 1977 to 1990. The Council is currently taking legal proceedings against a number of parties for non compliances with statutory notices.

Activity	No.
Water Framework Directive Monitoring Program (Carried out by EPA):	276
Small Stream Risk Scores:	36
Farm Surveys River Catchment Monitoring:	132
Sampling of Licensed Discharges:	20
Total	464

Table: No. of samples tested in 2010.

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. Three new licenses were issued in 2010 giving a total of 16 licenses in the county.

Air Quality

Two air emissions licenses exist in the county. Only one however is operational. 48 complaints were received and investigated in 2010 concerning air quality. The nature of these complaints varied between burning of refuse, dust from construction and quarrying activities and odours.

Noise Pollution

19 complaints were received in 2010 concerning noise. 8 of these complaints were domestic in nature. In these cases the Council encourage people to discuss the problems such as dogs barking and loud music first with the person responsible for these loud noises and come to an agreed solution. The other 11 complaints were of various natures such as licensed premises, building works, commercial and alarms.

Waste Management

A total of 45 recycling bring banks were in place throughout the county by the end of 2010. Portarlinton Civic Amenity Centre (Recycling Centre) was opened to the public in June, 2009. The contract for the management and operation of the facility was awarded to AES Ltd. for 2 years with effect from June, 2009. The facility is open on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday of each week.

Landfill

Cell 14 was full in mid July, 2010. Filling of waste into Cell 15A commenced in mid July, 2010, following EPA approval. There was approximately 86,000 tonnes remaining capacity in cell 15 at the end of 2010.

Capping works were completed in cell 14 in September, 2010. Construction of Cell 15 was completed in June, 2010.

Public Parks

The Peoples Park and the River Triogue Park and Linear Walk in Portlaoise Town continue to provide recreational open space for residents and visitors alike. This year the Parks were full of wildlife despite the falls of snow and heavy rain during the year. Small garden birds, swans, ducks, a little grebe and heron are regular visitors, enjoying the tranquillity on the lake. The adult fitness and exercise equipment in each of the two parks is benefiting many people who use the different pieces of equipment on a daily basis. This fitness equipment aids in the recovery process from illness or surgery.



People's Park River and Lake

National Tree week was again an opportunity for many schools, resident associations and Tidy Towns groups to avail of free sapling trees from Laois County Council. These saplings were provided by the Tree Council of Ireland in conjunction with sponsors O2 and Coillte.

Performance Indicators

E. Environmental Services

E. 3 Percentage of households provided with segregated waste collection for:

- | | | |
|------|-----------------|---------|
| (i) | Dry recyclables | 100% * |
| (ii) | Organics | 9.69% * |

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: | 25.5% |
| (ii) | Tonnage of Household Waste (collected at kerbside) which is sent for recycling: | 3,744 |
| (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): | 3,450 |

E. 5 Household waste collected which is sent to landfill:

- tonnage	10,656
- Percentage of household waste collected	74.5%

* Based on householders who avail of kerbside collection in the county

E. 6 Recycling Facilities

Category	Column A	Column B	Column C	Column D
	Number of Bring Sites	Number of Civic Amenity Cites	Total Number of Facilities	Number of Locations Per 5,000 Population
Glass	45	2	47	3.50
Cans	45	2	47	3.50
Textiles	6	2	8	0.60
Batteries	-	2	2	0.15
Oils	-	2	2	0.15
Cardboard	-	2	2	0.15
Magazines	-	2	2	0.15
Plate Glass	-	2	2	0.15
Metal	-	2	2	0.15
Plastic	-	2	2	0.15
WEEE	-	2	2	0.15
Newspaper	-	2	2	0.15
Wood	-	2	2	0.15
Flourescent Lamps	-	2	2	0.15
Hedge Trm.	-	2	2	0.15
Tyres	-	2	2	0.15

E. 7 Litter Prevention & Environmental Protection

Number of Litter Wardens

- total number of full time litter wardens:	3
- total number of part-time litter wardens:	3
- number of litter wardens (both full and part time per 5,000 population):	0.45
- Number of on the spot fines issued:	303
- Number of on the spot fines paid:	152
- Number of notices issued (under Sections 9, 15, 16, 17 and 20 of the Litter Pollution Act 1997):	19
- Total number of prosecutions taken (all prosecutions under the Litter Acts 1997-2003):	71
- Number of prosecution cases taken because of non-payment of on-the-spot fines:	71
- Total number of prosecutions secured (all prosecutions under the Litter Acts 1997-2003):	32
- Number of prosecutions secured (relating to non payment of on-the-spot fines):	32

- % of areas within the Local Authority that are:

Unpolluted (i.e. litter-free):	13.6%
Slightly polluted with litter:	70.4%
Moderately polluted with litter:	16.0%
Significantly polluted with litter:	0.0%
Grossly polluted with litter:	0.0%

E. 8 Environmental Complaints and Enforcement

- Total number of cases subject to complaints concerning environmental pollution (relation to waste, litter, water pollution, noise pollution, air pollution): 818
- Number of complaints investigated: 818
- Number of complaints resolved where no further action was necessary: 705 (excl. 12 pending)
- Number of enforcement procedures taken: 101

E.9 Percentage of Schools participating in Environmental campaigns:

- Primary schools 82%
- Secondary schools 100%

PLANNING

Director of Services:	John Daly
Senior Planner:	Angela McEvoy
Senior Executive Officer, Planning:	Kieran Kehoe

Report on Strategic Policy Committee

There were four meetings of this committee in 2010. The following policies were agreed and referred to the Corporate Policy Group for consideration prior to being presented to the elected members at the monthly council meeting.

- Wind Energy Policy
- Sustainable Building Policy

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.

The Planning Department can be broken down into 5 separate areas:

- (i) Development Management
- (ii) Forward Planning
- (iii) Planning Enforcement
- (iv) Building Control
- (v) Taking in Charge of Estates

(i) Development Management

The number of planning applications received in 2010 was 650. However, it should be noted that 125 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 2010.

Number of valid applications received	523
Number of decisions made	501
Number of applications granted	453
Number of applications refused	48

2010 Performance

Invalid applications returned to applicant	19%
Referrals to Area Offices (working days)	14

Validation of Planning Applications

There were 820 planning applications validated in 2010 of which 721 were valid and 99 were invalid (19% invalidation rate).

The main reasons for invalidation of planning files were for public notices being out of date, agents name omitted from maps/drawings and distances not shown on site layouts.

25 applications were appealed to An Bord Pleanála in 2010.

Customer Service Initiatives

2010 saw the continuation of the scanning of planning applications as they are received by the Planning Authority. Throughout 2010, the public were able to access all planning applications on-line within two weeks of the Planning Authority receiving them.

313 Pre-planning meetings were held in 2010, at which members of the public had an opportunity to discuss planning matters with a planner prior to submitting a planning application. The Planners also facilitated the public by holding a number of pre-planning meetings on site.

14 Section 5 Certificates were issued by Laois County Council in 2010.

The Planning website continues to be a very popular attraction with 31,298 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.

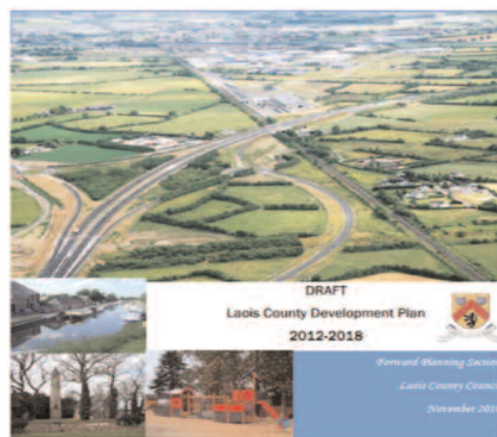
As a Planning Authority, we have a duty to make a Development Plan for our functional area and to review it every six years. The new replacement development plan must be prepared within a two year timeframe i.e. by January, 2012. The plan will then be in place until 2018.

The legal basis for the making of a Development Plan is laid out in the Planning and Development Acts 2000 - 2010. The Development Plan is particularly important because of its role as a guide to future development in the County. All development must comply with the requirements of the Plan.

The Review of the Laois County Development Plan 2006 - 2012 commenced on the 31st December, 2009. An issues paper was circulated to initiate the process.

The publication of a notice on 31st December 2009, stating the intention to prepare a new Draft County Development Plan marked the formal commencement of the two year review process. A number of meetings were held with interested bodies, the Public and the County Council members between 31st December, 2009 and 1st March, 2010. Service Providers were also consulted on their strategic plans and operational programmes.

The issues raised through the Consultation process were considered and formed part of the Draft Laois County Development Plan 2012-2018, which was put on public display on 19th November, 2010 for a period of 10 weeks. The Draft Plan contains a Draft Housing Strategy 2012-2018 and Draft Retail Strategy 2012-2018.



The Draft Plan was accompanied by a Draft Environmental Report, prepared in accordance with the Planning & Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004, an Appropriate Assessment, pursuant to Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC and a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment.

Amendment to Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2006-2012

An amendment to the Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2006-2012 was carried out under Section 20 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). The purpose of the amendment was to ensure that future development accords with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area and to reflect best planning practice so as to ensure continued alignment with the provisions of national, regional and local planning policy.

The amendment incorporates the following:

1. The production of 2 masterplans for significant areas of Portlaoise
 - (a) Portlaoise Northern Environs Masterplan
 - (b) Togher National Enterprise Park Masterplan
2. New Governmental Guidelines and changes in legislation
3. Best practice as to the location of retailing in Portlaoise
4. Non conforming uses

Conservation

The Conservation Grant Scheme is funded by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government annually and administered by Laois County Council.

In 2010, €71,000 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.

An owner or occupier of a protected structure may request the local authority to issue a Section 57 / Declaration indicating the types of works that could be carried out without affecting the character of the structure or any element of the structure which contributes to its special interest.

These works would not require planning permission. 5 such Section 57's / Declarations in relation to Protected Structures in County Laois were issued in 2010.

Derelict Sites

On 13th December, 2010, a Progress Report on Derelict Sites in County Laois was given to the County Council. It is the intention of the Forward Planning Section to concentrate on high profile, standout sites throughout the county. While most of these are located on the main thoroughfares in the larger urban centres of Portlaoise, Mountmellick, Stradbally and Portarlinton, dereliction in rural areas will also be tackled where necessary e.g. derelict Rushes Inn site on N78 near Crettyard.

The Electoral Area breakdown is as follows:

% of Dereliction on an Area Basis

Borris-in –Ossory	28%
Emo	23%

Portlaoise	23%
Mountmellick	14%
Luggacurren	12%

Examples of Derelict Sites being restored:

Irishtown, Mountmellick



Before



After

(iii) Planning Enforcement

Introduction

The Planning Authority, in accordance with the statutory requirements under the Planning and Development Acts, 2000 - 2010, seeks to ensure compliance to planning permissions and also to 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 ap-

pear to be well founded. A standard complaint form is available on line.

General Procedural Steps

On receipt of a bone fide written complaint, an investigation is carried out and a decision taken on validity of the complaint. The following Enforcement steps may be 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 a Warning Letter, then further Enforcement action may follow by service of an Enforcement Notice.

The Enforcement Notice gives a timescale for compliance and if it is not adhered to, this will result in further action such as referral to our legal advisor. It also seeks to recoup both legal and administrative costs incurred by Laois County Council in respect of the case.

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 2010 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. One such outdoor event is the 'Electric Picnic' which has been held yearly in Stradbally since 2004.

(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:	221
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Number of Buildings covered by Valid Commencement Notices:	218
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Number of Buildings Inspected:	54
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Number of Buildings Inspected as a % of buildings covered by valid Commencement Notices:	25%
--	-----

(v) Taking-in-Charge of Estates

Laois County Council is responsible for the taking in charge of estates once a request is received from a developer and/or a residents association. 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.

There were 10 estates taken in charge in 2010.

In 2010, Laois County Council was chosen as the pilot county for a study conducted by the NBA on behalf of the Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government. In this study, 70 estates in the county were surveyed. This was followed up by a national survey on estates undertaken by the DOELGH also in 2010. These studies have provided a database of information on the number of estates in the county and the level of work required to complete them. It is the aim of Laois County Council to work in cooperation with both the developers of the estates and the residents to ensure the estates are completed in accordance with the planning permission granted. Where the developer has failed in his responsibilities, Laois County Council has the power to call in the bond on the estate and use this money to carry out the works ourselves. In 2010, Laois County Council called in the bond on a number of estates in the county.

Planning and Building Control - Service Indicators

Planning Applications – Decision making

Individual Houses 31/12/10

Number of applications decided	163
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	62
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	101
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
Average length of time taken (in days) to decide a case where further information was sought	72
% of grants	85%
% of refusals	15%
% of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations, by An Bord Pleanala	50%
% of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanala	50%

New Housing Development 31/12/10

Number of applications decided	4
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	0
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	4
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
Average length of time taken (in days) to decide a case where further information was sought	79
% of grants	75%
% of refusals	25%
% of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations, by An Bord Pleanala	100%
% of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanala	0%

Other: Not Requiring EIA 31/12/10

Number of applications decided	333
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	216
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	117
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	1
Average length of time taken (in days) to decide a case where further information was sought	74
% of grants	93%
% of refusals	7%
% of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations, by An Bord Pleanala	74%
% of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanala	26%

Other: Requiring EIA

31/12/10

Number of applications decided	1
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	0
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	1
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
Average length of time taken (in days) to decide a case where further information was sought	100
% of grants	100%
% of refusals	0%
% of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations, by An Bord Pleanála	0%
% of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanála	0%

Enforcement

31/12/10

Total number of cases subject to complaints that were investigated	130
Total number of cases subject to complaints that were dismissed	12
Total number of cases subject to complaints that were resolved through negotiations	14
Number of enforcement procedures taken through warning letters	139
Number of enforcement procedures taken through enforcement notices	35
Number of prosecutions	11

Opening Hours and Consultations

31/12/10

Average number of opening hours per week	32.5
Number of pre-planning consultation meetings held	313
Average length of time (in days) from request for consultation with local authority planner to actual formal meeting for pre-planning consultation	7 (working days)
Buildings inspected as a % of new buildings notified to the Local Authority	25%

LAOIS WATER SAFETY

Water Safety Awareness Week 2010

Laois Water Safety ran several events for Water Safety Awareness Week from 24th to 31st May. On 24th May, the annual awards night were held in Portlaoise Leisure centre. 26 schools were visited throughout the week giving an interactive presentation on water safety. The Summer Youth Swimming Pass was launched in Portarlinton Leisure Centre on 27th May and on 29th May the new Nipper Club started in Portlaoise Leisure Centre for 10 weeks. All events were widely supported and the week was very successful in raising Water Safety Awareness.

Laois Water Safety carried out school visits to 26 schools to raise their awareness around water. The main aim of the presentation was to give the children a safe message about swimming and water safety during the summer holidays. The children

were also shown how to use a ring buoy and the importance of them on lakes, rivers and ponds around the county. All children in the schools were very receptive to the presentations. Wolfhill N.S. were the winners of the poster competition.



Water Safety Awareness Week - Ballyroan N.S.

On 24th May, Laois Water Safety held their annual presentation of Water Safety certificates in Port-

Laois Leisure Centre. Both Arthur Drennan, President of Laois Water Safety and Ann Marie Maher, Laois Water Safety Officer, spoke and congratulated everyone on their achievements and reiterated the importance of safety around water throughout the summer months. It was greatly attended by all who were receiving certificates and a great night was had by all.

Water Safety Classes

Laois Water Safety ran a spring and an autumn programme from Portlaoise Leisure Centre. There was also a summer programme for adults and juniors at Ballinakill Outdoor Swimming Pool. Juniors are aged 11 – 16 years and adult classes are for those aged over 16. 140 people (adults and juniors) attended the classes in 2010. In addition, Laois Water Safety qualified 25 pool lifeguards. Classes were delivered by a team of 10 voluntary instructors.

Nipper Club

On 29th May, Laois Water Safety started a new Nipper Club in Portlaoise Leisure Centre. The club is for 8 – 14 year olds and ran over 10 weeks. The children developed water safety skills, improved agility, speed and strokes and also competed in water safety pool competitions.

Annual Water Safety Development Officer's Conference 2010

Laois County Council hosted the Annual Water Safety Developments Officers Conference in April, 2010. Development Officers countrywide experienced the first class facilities at Portlaoise Leisure Centre and the Barrow Line section of the Grand Canal at Vicarstown.

Safe Waters

Laois County Council continued its programme of ring buoy inspection and installation at various sites around County Laois. There has been a notable increase in the reporting of missing ring buoys since the commencement of the www.ringbuoys.ie programme.

Catholes Sports Day

With the support of Laois Water Safety in conjunction with Laois Partnership, an event was held at the Catholes on 15th August to relive the sports days of the 1940's and 1950's. In the past this was run by the LDF. The locals now who would have partici-

pated in this event as children are in their 60's and 70's. The event included a diving competition and sports events with musical entertainment. Laois Water Safety provided Lifeguards to supervise the water area.

PAWS (Primary Aquatic Water Safety)



Water Safety Development Officer, Ann Marie Maher, continued the promotion the PAWS (Primary Aquatic Water Safety) in 2010. 5,500 children attended the PAWS programme delivered at Portlaoise Leisure Centre and 1,500 children attended the programme delivered at Portarlington Leisure Centre.

LAOIS COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Fire Service

The operational service responded to 765 incidents in 2010. Of these, 453 were fires and the remaining were special service calls; 97 road traffic accidents, 30 incidents of flooding, 13 hazardous substances in transport and 159 other miscellaneous incidents.

Technical Rescue Unit

A new technical rescue unit vehicle was delivered in December which will carry specialist rescue equipment.



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

Major Emergency Management

Laois County Council's major Emergency Management Committee continued to assemble every six weeks to discuss our major Emergency Management within County Laois.

The Major Emergency Plan was amended in March and distributed to all relevant personnel. All relevant sections amended the MEM Section Response Plans, Emergency Sub Plans and Risk assessments.



*Major Emergency Management
Controller of Operations Tent*

There were continued works on the Council's Chamber area. The area has been adapted to function as an Inter Agency Local Co-ordination Centre in the event of a Major Emergency being declared. The centre has been provided with all necessary equipment and communications as specified within the Guidance Document for Local Coordination Centres.

Additional equipment and communications were provided for the 'On Site' Controller of Operations Team. Laois County Council complied with all Department requests regarding both internal training for Council Staff and Inter Agency Training provided by the Department.

Major Emergency Exercise

On 23rd April, 2010 Laois County Council held an Inter Agency Major Emergency exercise involving the three Principle Response Agencies i.e. Laois Local Authorities, An Garda Síochána and the Health Service Executive.

The exercise involved the participation of approximately 100 personnel from all three principal response agencies. Laois Local Authorities supplied the 'On Site' Co-ordination facilities which accommodated representatives from the Local Authority, An Garda Síochána and the Health Service Executive at the proposed emergency site. Additionally,

the five rooms currently allocated to Major Emergency Management in Áras an Chontae accommodated the Local Co-ordination Group and the support teams of the three principal response agencies.

A fictional exercise scenario, involving an overturned chemical tanker, a large occupancy passenger coach and multiple cars, was used on the day of the exercise. The pictures of the proposed incident were created by Laois County Fire and Rescue Service and distributed on the day of the exercise to the participants at the site of the proposed Major Emergency i.e. Togher roundabout. The exercise then proceeded to practice the three agencies in providing an effective and coordinated response to a major emergency.

The exercise ran successfully and the feedback from both the participants and the umpires was very positive. The exercise was well received in particular by the participants and there were many learning outcomes for all involved.

Training

As well as basic training for new entrants to the service, fire brigade staff underwent specialist training in the following areas - pump instructor course, working at heights, breathing apparatus, Irish Rail, driver training and compartment fire behaviour.

A wildland firefighting workshop was held on 26th November at Portlaoise Fire Station. This brought stakeholders including Coillte, Bord na Móna, National Parks & Wildlife Service and Laois Forestry Growers together to train along with the fire service for incidents such as forest, gorse and bog fires. It is planned to develop this cooperation further in 2011 with the formation of the Laois Wildland Fire Liaison Group.

Health & Safety

To mitigate against one of the Fire Services main risks, a new working with heights system was successfully rolled out to all stations during 2010.

Training in the new National Standard Operating Guidelines commenced during 2010 and will continue during 2011.

Critical Incident Stress Management (C.I.S.M.)

Laois County Fire and Rescue Service retained the services of Dr Eddie Murphy to provide our C.I.S.M. Service to fire service personnel.

Fire Safety Certificate and Planning Applications

In 2010, Fire Safety Certificates for 53 commercial developments were processed and advice was provided to the Planning Section in respect of 184 planning applications.

Licensing of Premises

Applications in relation to 94 premises licensed under the Intoxicating Liquor Acts, Public Dance Halls Act and the Gaming & Lotteries Act were notified to Laois County Fire and Rescue service during 2010. Inspections were carried out as required with reports forwarded to the courts service.

Inspection of Premises

Fire safety inspections of 53 premises were carried out during 2010. Enforcement action was taken in a number of cases where deficiencies were identified.

Pre-Incident Planning

A Pre-Incident Planning development programme was undertaken in 2010 to increase the amount of premises information available to fire crews at incidents. Requests for information were sent to 30 premises in the Durrow and Abbeyleix areas, it is planned to extend this project county wide in 2011.

Community Fire Safety

The Schools programme was delivered to 1491 Third Class students in the county. Fire Safety presentations were also delivered to a number of community groups during the year.

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.

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 supplying water to the community.

Warden Service and Radiation Monitoring

Radiation detecting and monitoring.

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 2010 we assisted at events such as the St. Patrick's Day Parade, Electric Picnic 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, e-mail lpreston@laoiscoco.ie or visit our website at www.laoiscivildefence.org

Transportation & Water Services Strategic Policy Committee

Director of Services: Gerry Gibson

Chairperson: Martin Phelan, M.C.C.

Members	Sectoral
Brendan Phelan, M.C.C.	Francis Gorman
Ben Brennan, M.C.C.	Pat Culleton
Jeremiah Lodge, M.C.C.	Noreen Byrne
Kathleen O'Brien, M.C.C.	Miriam Hamilton
Seamus McDonald, M.C.C.	
Matthew Keegan, T.C.	

ROADS

Senior Engineer, Roads: Michael O'Hora

2009 Road Grant Allocations

In 2010, Laois County Council received a total allocation of €88,235,850 for National & Non - National roads in the county. Of this, €10.6m was available for expenditure on Regional and Local Roads.

M7 Portlaoise – Castletown/M8 Portlaoise – Cullahill PPP Motorway Scheme

The M7 Portlaoise – Castletown/M8 Portlaoise – Cullahill PPP Motorway Scheme was officially opened on 28th May 2010, by An Taoiseach, Brian Cowen, T.D.



Laois County Council commenced planning on the scheme in 2000 and the M7/M8 Environmental Impact Statement was published in December, 2003. An Bord Pleanála approved the current scheme in October, 2004.

The National Roads Authority, under their Public Pri-

vate Partnership Programme, working with Laois County Council, granted the concession contract to Celtic Roads Group (CRG) Portlaoise Ltd., to design, build, finance, operate and maintain the M7/M8 PPP Scheme. CRG comprises BAM PPP, Iridium and NTR plc.

The capital investment is €491 million, comprising both private sector and Exchequer funding. The preliminary design was part funded by the European Union from Trans-European Transport (TEN-T) Networks budget.



Up to 50 staff will be employed through CRG in the ongoing operation and maintenance of the M7/M8 PPP Scheme and will be based at its premises at Fatharnagh, outside Portlaoise. Midlink Ltd. will provide operations and maintenance support to CRG.

M7 Castletown to Nenagh(Derrinsallagh to Ballintotty) Motorway Scheme

The 36 km M7 Castletown to Nenagh Motorway Scheme opened to traffic on 22nd December, 2010 and represented a significant milestone as it was the final section of the 180 km Dublin to Limerick Major Inter-Urban (MIU) Corridor to be completed.

The M7 Castletown to Nenagh Motorway Scheme stretches from the townland of Derrinsallagh in County Laois, south of Borris-in-Ossory, to the townland of Ballintotty, east of the Nenagh By-Pass, in North Tipperary.

It joins the existing M7 Dublin to Limerick Motorway at the M7 Portlaoise to Cullahill Motorway via a new Borris-in-Ossory Interchange (Junction 21) and travels in a westerly direction, south of the existing N7 for 12km through Counties Laois and Tipperary, passing the Monaincha Bog and crossing the River Nore. A second interchange is located south of Roscrea (Junction 22) in North Tipperary. The motorway then continues further south for 12km to by-pass Moneygall in County Offaly, where the third

interchange is located (Junction 23). After the Mon-eygall Interchange (J23) the motorway travels north of the existing N7, for 12km, crossing the River Clash and by-passing Toomevara, after which it joins the existing M7 Nenagh to Limerick Motorway, at the most easterly junction of the Nenagh By-Pass in North Tipperary.



The M7 Castletown to Nenagh Motorway was delivered by Laois County Council on behalf of itself, Offaly and North Tipperary County Councils. Laois County Council, through the Kildare National Roads Design Office, carried out all of the preliminary phases of planning and design for the project and managed it through the construction phase.

Specific Improvement Schemes

Laois County Council received funding from the Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government for the following schemes in 2010:

Kilmullen Bridge - €1,000,000

The scheme involves the realignment of the R420 Portarlinton to Monasterevin Road and includes a bridge over the main Dublin/Limerick-Cork railway line. In December, 2005, An Bord Pleanála held an oral hearing in respect of draft compulsory purchase order for this scheme.

The scheme was approved in 2006 and lands were acquired in 2007 and 2008. Contract documents were signed with the successful contractors John Cradock Ltd. in March, 2009 and a bridge agreement with Iarnród Éireann was finalised January, 2009.

This scheme was completed in January, 2010.

Borris Road - €220,000

This project involves the upgrade of a stretch of

road to provide for the construction of a new footpath to link existing footpaths on the Borris Road. The Borris Road was required to carry substantially higher volumes of pedestrians when two secondary schools opened on Borris Road, near the north-eastern end of the proposed works in September, 2010. Footpaths had extended to either side of the works, previously requiring pedestrians to walk on a busy road, which became much busier after the schools opened. To safeguard these users, the existing footpaths were connected with a 2.0m footpath, removing the hazard of traffic and pedestrians sharing the same road area.

The scheme involved the acquisition of lands and construction of a footpath linking two existing footpaths on the Borris Road, and included road drainage and public lighting works. This scheme provides continuous footpath facilities between the town and the new secondary schools.

Colliers Lane/R445 Dublin Road Junction Improvement - €180,000

This project involved the upgrade of a congested junction in Portlaoise that was required to carry substantially higher volumes when two secondary schools open on Borris Road, near the north-western end of Colliers Lane in September, 2010. Traffic modelling indicated considerably higher delays on Colliers Lane from September, 2010 compared to the previous significant delays encountered at this junction.

The scheme involved the construction of a mini roundabout with ramped controlled pedestrian crossings on the approaches to the junction, and included road drainage and public lighting works. The improvements were required to increase the efficiency and safety of the existing road network to cater for traffic and pedestrians generated by the new secondary schools on the Borris Road.

Road Safety Remedial Measures

In 2010, Laois County Council received €427,000 to carry out Road Safety Remedial Measure Schemes at various locations throughout the county on National and Non-National Road Schemes.

The National Road schemes that were delivered included signage and skid resistance improvements at Carlow Northern Relief Road and a Traffic Calming scheme on the N80 approaches to Stradbally.

The Non-National Road schemes included the construction of a roundabout to replace an existing priority junction at Canal road/Station Road, Portarlinton, the provision of lining, road markings and signs to improve road safety at Tolerton Hall bends and Ballintubbert junction, removal of a ditch to improve visibility at Kilcotton Cross, realignment of Cromoge Cross junction to introduce a staggered junction arrangement and vertical realignment and resurfacing of Rathleash bend.

Road Safety

3 secondary schools took part in the Drive for Life Program, preparing the next generation of young drivers on our county's road network. The Safe Cycling Program has increased in popularity year on year with a record number of 431 primary schools pupils taking part this year. The distribution of high visibility waistcoats and reflective arm bands for primary schools continues, with additional requests for this safety equipment due to the Green Schools, Travel Flag programme. Promotion of road safety education with primary school pupils and Parent Councils continues in the county.

National Secondary Pavement and Minor Improvement Works

Pavement and minor improvement works were carried out in 2010 on the N80 from Arles to Ballickmoyler, including junction realignment and drainage improvements at Ballickmoyler, on the N77 from Clonaddadoran to Abbeyleix and from Ballymullen to Durrow. An interurban cycle path will be delivered under the Ballymullen to Durrow scheme. Weather interrupted the works which are due to be completed in the first quarter of 2011. The value of these works was €2,930,000.

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 included 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 barriers/fencing.

In 2010, 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 334

km of Regional and County Roads were strengthened and a further 454 km were surface dressed in 2010.

Regional Road Signage Programme

During 2010, the Council continued to deliver the Regional Road Signage programme with upgrades to directional signage on the majority of roads completed. This work is expected to be completed on all Regional Roads in 2011.

Development Charge Funded Schemes

A number of schemes funded through Development Charges were progressed in 2010.

Portlaoise Northern Orbital Route

It is expected that sections of this road will be delivered through development of zoned lands.

Portlaoise Southern Circular Route

The CPO process was commenced and approved by An Bord Pleanála in December, 2008. Notices to Treat were issued in 2010 and negotiations with landowners will commence in 2011. Works commenced on the delivery of the final section of the link between Stradbally Road and Timahoe Road and this link is expected to open to traffic in 2011. The remainder of the scheme may be delivered by private developers within the context of planning permissions granted along the route of the scheme. Aldi (Ireland) Ltd. has completed development of their site under planning permission and constructed the Kylekiproe Connector section of the route that passes through their lands.

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 was completed in 2009. The CPO for this scheme commenced in 2010 and was confirmed by An Bord Pleanála in early 2011. Phase 1 of the Works, including a new roundabout for access to the new schools' site, tie in to the Hermitage Roundabout, Ashley Gardens and a temporary tie-in to the existing Borris Road was completed in 2010, following the signing of an access licence agreement between the Council and the Minister of Education and Science in November, 2009. Funding was sought and granted from the Department of Transport to deliver the next Phase of

the scheme at Ratheven in 2011. This phase of work is expected to be completed in September, 2011 and subsequent phases will follow subject to funding, including the realignment of the remainder of the Borris Road to the Grange Roundabout and the upgrade of the Colliers Lane/Dublin Road junction.

Northgrove Bridge

Laois County Council removed the part of the existing structure and deck at Northgrove Bridge. The construction cost to Laois county Council was approximately €200,000.



The bridge was officially opened by Cathaoirleach James Deegan and Leas-Chathaoirleach Michael Lalor on 30th July, 2010.

Other Schemes

The following schemes were developed to secure Part 8 planning approval:

- Temperance St., Abbeyleix – Not approved at a special meeting of the Council held on 8th November, 2010
- Corrig Road, Stradbally – Scheme not included on Agenda for any meeting. Scheme remains available to include on Agenda.

Local Improvement Schemes

An allocation of €118,000 was received from the Department of Transport in 2010 in respect of the above and 5 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 2010 with an allocation of €220,000 provided and a total of 8 projects were successfully undertaken in conjunction with local communities.

National Service Indicators

R: Roads

R.1 Number of kilometres of local and regional roads improved and maintained under the Restoration Programme per annum:

78.64 km

Number of kilometres of local and regional roads constructed under the specific improvements grants scheme per annum:

0 km

WATER SERVICES

Senior Engineer, Water Services: Brendan Clarke

The Water Services functions are divided into four sections:

- Ongoing Operation and Maintenance of Water and Wastewater Schemes
- Capital Investment Programme
- Rural Water 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 approximately 24,000 cubic meters of water per day. The volume of unaccounted for water currently stands at 34%, which is better than the national average.

Severe Weather Conditions during Christmas & New Year 2010/2011

County Laois experienced major disruption to its water services during the Christmas and New Year period. Problems began to arise early on 26th December and continued into the New Year. Council staff worked throughout the Christmas and New Year period identifying where the major faults and leaks occurred, repairing same and replacing over 4,000 meter boxes. The problems caused by such severe weather conditions caused a lot of distress and hardship for many people in the county. The Water Services staff worked with the Civil Defence, Senior Social Worker, Gardai and Fire Services in meeting the needs of people throughout the county, particularly elderly or vulnerable people. Council staff worked hard and long hours in difficult conditions throughout this period to carry out repairs and to ensure that water supplies were maintained or restored as promptly as possible.

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) No. 2 Regulations, 2007.

The overall compliance by Laois with the drinking water standards in public water supplies is excellent. Water quality has continued to improve year on year.

Waste Water

An Taoiseach Brian Cowen T.D. officially opened the expanded and improved Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP) at Ridge Road, Portlaoise and the network throughout the town of Portlaoise on 8th October, 2010.



An Taoiseach was joined by Cllr James Deegan, Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council, Cllr Jerry

Lodge, Cathaoirleach of Portlaoise Town Council, Peter Carey, County Manager and local elected representatives, including Deputies John Moloney, Sean Fleming and Charlie Flanagan and county officials on a tour of the facility, where they were shown a number of key features of the plant



The Sewer Network Improvement Works Contract commenced in May, 2006 and was successfully completed in February, 2008 by Murphy International Ltd. Work on the Wastewater Treatment Works and Sludge Hub Centre commenced in January, 2007 under a Design Build Operate contract, awarded to AECOM/Bowen Consortium. The construction was substantially completed in March, 2009.

The Portlaoise Waste Water Treatment Plant & Network will provide significant benefits for the town of Portlaoise and its environs and also for the county as a whole. Performance validation tests on the Wastewater Treatment Plant were completed in February, 2010 and the tests on the Sludge Processing Plant were completed in July, 2010. The taking-over certificate was issued in August, 2010.

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.

There are over 100 licences issued by Laois County Council to businesses in the county and the discharges from these businesses are monitored on a regular basis throughout the year.

EPA Waste Water Discharge Licence

Under the Wastewater Discharge (Authorisation) Regulations 2007, Laois County Council must apply to the EnVironmental Protection Agency (E.P.A.) for

licences to operate our Wastewater Treatment Plants. Applications in respect of all 29 Waste Water Treatment Plants in the county were submitted to the EPA from 2007 to 2009 and to date licences have been granted for Portlaoise and Clonaslee Plants.

The EPA stipulates conditions in the Licence to ensure compliance with the standards for various discharge parameters and conformity with obligations under various EU Environmental Directives. The EPA will periodically review Licences granted by it.

Capital Investment Programme

Capital Projects Office

The Capital Projects Office is responsible for delivering the major Water and Wastewater schemes that the Department for the Environment Heritage & Local Government has approved under the Water Services Investment Programme 2010 - 2012. This latest programme was published on 19th April, 2010.

Portarlinton Water Supply Improvement Scheme

Contract documents for the main scheme were submitted to the Department in December 2009 for approval to proceed to tender. Further information was submitted in February 2010. Five construction companies were previously selected by a prequalification process. The new programme puts the main scheme in the category of 'Schemes at Planning Stage 2010 – 2012'. Advance works at Lough and LaBergerie were proposed in August, 2010 followed by a formal submission to the Department in October, 2010.

Portlaoise & Mountmellick Water Supply Scheme

The detailed design and preparation of contract documents for the main scheme were progressed in 2010. The site investigation contract for the main scheme started on site in April, 2010 and was successfully completed in October, 2010.

The new programme puts the main scheme in the category of 'Schemes at Planning Stage 2010 – 2012'. Advance works for a second well at Eyne, a new rising main to Kilminchy Water Treatment Plant (WTP) along with additional treatment capacity at Kilminchy and works on the Catholes trunk mains were proposed in August, 2010 followed by a formal submission to the Department in October, 2010. Construction work on the provision of a second well at Eyne commenced in December, 2010.

Laois Grouped Towns Sewerage Scheme

Contract documents for the Treatment Plants (DBO) contract were updated and submitted to the Department in October, 2010 for approval to proceed to tender. Land acquisition agreements and Part 8's for all WWTP sites have been completed. A shortlist of contractors has been prepared based on a full pre-qualification process which was completed in April, 2009. Contract documents for the Network contract were updated and submitted to the Department in December, 2010 for approval to proceed to tender. Following the issuing of the EPA Wastewater Discharge Licence for Clonaslee and discussions with the Department, an Integrated Constructed Wetland (ICW) proposal for Clonaslee was progressed in 2010. This included the successful completion of a two-stage feasibility study, the advertising of Part 8 planning application and the preparation of Contract Documents for the ICW in November, 2010.

Laois Grouped Villages Sewerage Scheme

In the 2010-2012 programme, published in April, 2010, the Department sanctioned this project as a 'Scheme at Planning'. This scheme covers the five villages of Newtown, The Swan, Ballinakill, Errill and Ballyroan.

Mountmellick Sewerage Scheme

Construction on Mountmellick Sewerage Extension Scheme Phase 1 commenced in March, 2009, was substantially completed in December, 2009 and the defects maintenance (snagging) period was up to December, 2010. The scheme involved the construction of a stormwater attenuation tank at the WWTP, new inlet works, administration building, a new pumped main from Emmett Terrace pumping station as well as upgrades to three pumping stations in Mountmellick. The works were carried out by Sorensen Civil Engineering Ltd.

The Preliminary Report and Environmental Impact Study (EIS) for Mountmellick Sewerage Scheme Phase 2 was received from Nicholas O'Dwyer Consulting Engineers in October, 2009. The Preliminary Report recommends further phasing of the scheme. Statutory Bodies were consulted and a public information open-day was held at the end of October, 2009. The Environmental Impact Statement was submitted to An Bord Pleanála and the Preliminary Report was submitted to the Department in May, 2010.

Portarlinton (incl. Emo/Ballybrittas/Killenard) Sewerage Scheme

The Preliminary Report and EIS for Portarlinton Sewerage Scheme were received from Nicholas O'Dwyer Consulting Engineers in October, 2009. Statutory Bodies were consulted and a public information open-day was held at the end of October, 2009. The Environmental Impact Statement was submitted to An Bord Pleanála and the Preliminary Report was submitted to the Department in May, 2010.

Water Conservation

A submission was made to the Department in October, 2010 for:

- The preparation of an updated Watermain Rehabilitation Strategy for the county. This will focus initially on the county's largest population centres to be updated at a later stage when full telemetry data becomes available
- Procurement of a countywide telemetry contract
- Procurement of an initial Watermain Rehabilitation Contract concentrating on the Portlaoise and Portarlinton areas. Further information requested was submitted to the Department in November, 2010.

Rural Water Programme

The Council's Rural Water Programme comprises of the following measures:

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

Group Water Schemes (G.W.S.)

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

There are currently 62 operational Group Water Schemes in Laois.

Summary of Grants paid in 2010

New Group Water Schemes €24,511

To Clonanny G.W.S., Ballycleary G.W.S.

Subsidy Grants €310,240

To the various G.W.S. in the county.

Taking In Charge of Group Water Schemes €139,000

To Reary G.W.S., Ratheniska G.W.S., Beleady G.W.S.

Advance DBO Works €21,200

In respect of Ballacolla Network Phase 3,

Upgrade of Existing Group Water Schemes €75,200

To Cullohill G.W.S., Errill G.W.S., Ballylehane G.W.S.

Small Water & Sewerage Schemes

Funding is provided for capital projects for the provision of upgrading of small water and sewerage schemes that complement existing rural water measures.

In 2010, €1,016,065 was spent on the following schemes:

- Graiguecullen Water Supply
- Abbeyleix Water Supply
- Ballyroan Water Supply
- Portlaoise Water Supply
- The Swan Water Supply
- Tolerton Well
- Lough Borehole
- Ballyroan Sewerage Scheme
- Provision of Chlorine Monitors

Individual Water Supply Grant Scheme

A grant of 75% of cost subject to a maximum grant of €2,031.58 is payable for upgrading a private individual water supply when no alternative group or public supply is available. Grant aid of €73,280 was paid under this Scheme in 2010.

Rural Water Monitoring Committee

The Rural Water Monitoring Committee was setup in 1998. The Committee meets quarterly to agree and monitor the Rural Water Programme.

The Committee is comprised of representatives from the Irish Farmer's Association, the Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association, The County Federation of Group Water Schemes, The National Federation of Group Water Schemes and Members and officials of Laois County Council.

Provision and Maintenance of 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, Killeslin, Mountmellick, Mountrath, Moyanna, Portlaoise, Raheen, Rathdowney, Rosenallis, Shanahoe, Sleaty, Stradbally and Timahoe.

Cemetery Registrars are employed for each Council Cemetery with responsibility for the sale of plots and the maintenance of the burial ground register.

An important part of the Water Services section is the maintaining of records. The transfer of manual data from registers to electronic format continued in 2010.

Cemetery Grants

The Council encourages the work of the local burial ground committees by means of a grant each year.

A total of 113 grant applications were received in 2010 and €50,075 was paid out. Valuable work is being carried out by these voluntary committees in the upkeep of local cemeteries.

Cemeteries are categorised 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 €91,000 was spent on the maintenance and upkeep of the public toilets in Portlaoise, Mountrath and Stradbally.

Dangerous Structures and Places

The Council is empowered to deal with structures or places which pose a danger to the public or which pose or are likely to pose danger to any person or property.

A Notice may be served on the owner of such place/structure requiring works to be carried out. If necessary, the Council can also carry out the works and recoup the costs.

National Service Indicators

E. Water - January to December 2010

E.1 Unaccounted for Water (UFW) as a % of total water supplied under the water supply schemes that the Local Authority is responsible for:

34%

E.2 Percentage of drinking water analysis results in compliance with statutory requirements with regard to:

Public Schemes: 99.7%

Private Schemes: 97%
(where appropriate)

Local Indicator

Number of discharge licences issued in 2010:

11

Head of Finance: Gerry Murphy

Financial/Management Accountant: Julie Bergin

The Finance Department is responsible for the following services:

Motor Tax, Accounts Payable, Revenue Collection, Payroll and Superannuation, NPPR, 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 2010, the total number of commercial users was 2,842 of which 2,704 were metered. A fixed charge applied to the remaining customers. The water Metering Project for all non domestic customers and the meter scanning programme for invoicing metered customers continued during 2010. The charge for metered water in 2010 was €1.00 per 1000 litres and €1.45 per 1000 litres for 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 2010

Total number of late payments in excess of €250:	0
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Local Government VAT Liability

Section 117 of the Finance Act 2010 introduced the requirement for Local Authorities to account for VAT on certain activities with effect from 1st July, 2010. A review of the activities of Local Authorities was carried out by Revenue Commissioners to determine which activities were liable to VAT. Local Authorities now charge VAT on certain activities such as – Off street parking, Landfill, Recycling Centres. They can reclaim VAT in relation to these activities. The Financial Management System (Agresso) has been updated to account for this. A VAT return is completed bi monthly to account for the VAT.

NPPR – Non Principal Private Residence

The Local Government charges act 2009 introduced a €200 annual charge on non principal private residences. This is payable by the owners to NPPR on behalf of the local authority in whose area the property concerned is located. Payment can be made through the NPPR website www.nppr.ie or it can be paid by submitting the NPPR registration form and payment to the cash office of your local County Council.

The liability date for the NPPR charge is 31st March each year. The due date for payment is 31st May. Penalties of €20 per month will be incurred after 30th June.

In 2010, 3,154 non principal private residences were registered (receipts of €651,935).

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 number of transactions carried out by Laois MTO in 2010 was 75,806.

New CO2 Rates

Motor tax for new vehicles registered on after the 1st July, 2008 will be determined on the basis of seven CO2 bands.

Taxes will range from €104 a year for the greenest cars to €2000 for cars with the highest emissions ratings. Motor tax rates will be graduated as one moves up the CO2 bands.

Revised Vehicle Registration Procedures

The Revenue Commissioners have appointed the National Car Testing Services (NCTS) to carry out vehicle registration functions on their behalf. They can be contacted at 1890 927 787 or on line at www.nct.ie/vrt.

Vehicle Licences

The total receipts for 2010 were €11,350,487, compared to €12,070,810 in 2009. The number of vehicle licences (discs) issued in 2010 was 55,014, compared to 56,095 in 2009.

Driving Licences

Receipts for 2010 were €173,895 (including duplicates) compared with €117,365 in 2009. The number of driving licences issued in 2010 was 10,750, compared with 8,620 in 2010. A Theory Test is mandatory for all first applicants for Learner Permits. The telephone number to call for a Theory test is 1890 606 106.

Vehicle Testing

Certificates of Roadworthiness for commercial / goods vehicles were issued in respect of 6,239 vehicles during the year, compared to 6,340 for 2009. 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. Initial test is after 4 years and then every 2 years thereafter. Vintage cars are the only vehicle exempt from this test.

Opening Hours

The Opening Hours of the Motor Tax Office are 9.30 a.m. to 3.30 p.m. Monday to Friday, including lunchtime.

Service Indicators at 31/12/2010

% of Motor Tax transactions which:

Are dealt with over the counter:

89.91% (59,100) of Laois MTO Transactions

Are dealt with by post:

10.09% (6,632) of Laois MTO Transactions

Are dealt with on-line:

38.83% (25,808) of vehicle owners eligible to pay Tax on-line

(31.85% figure for on-line overall business)

Average number of

Public Opening hours per week: 28.61 hours

Number of Vehicle Licence Postal Applications and % of overall postal applications which were dealt with:

a) on the same day:	99.29%	(6,585)
b) on the 2nd or 3rd day:	0.39%	(26)
c) on the 4th or 5th day:	0%	(0)
d) over 5 days:	0.32%	(21)

Number of driver licence applications (with monetary value) and % of such applications which were dealt with:

a) on the same day:	56.19%	(5,580)
b) on the 2nd or 3rd day:	42.84%	(4,254)
c) on the 4th or 5th day:	0.60%	(60)
d) over 5 days:	0.37%	(37)

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Revenue Collection 31/12/2010 31/12/2009

Housing Loans

Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due: 86% 90%

b) Percentage of arrears:

(i) 1 month old	23%	3%
(ii) 2 – 3 months old	13%	14%
(iii) more than 3 months old	64%	83%

Commercial Rates

Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due: 81% 84%

Non-Domestic Water Charges

Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due: 51% 59%

Annual Financial Statements

Revenue Account	Gross Expenditure 2010 €	Income 2010 €	Net Expenditure 2010 €
Programme Group			
Housing & Building	9,528,200	10,333,832	(805,633)
Road Transportation & Safety	16,962,606	13,201,663	3,760,943
Water & Sewerage	10,307,811	3,766,271	6,541,540
Development Incentives & Controls	4,275,375	805,993	3,469,382
Environmental Protection	9,030,660	4,916,107	4,114,553
Recreation & Amenity	3,988,735	794,009	3,194,726
Agriculture, Education, Health & Welfare	5,874,912	5,325,018	549,894
Miscellaneous	4,346,266	2,750,404	1,595,861
Total Expenditure/Income	64,314,564	41,961,446	

Net cost of programmes to be funded from Rate & Local Government Fund	22,421,267
Rates	9,240,132
Pension Levy	1,130,419
Local Government Fund - General Purpose Grant	15,343,129
Surplus for Year before Transfers	3,292,413
Transfers from/(to) Reserves	(3,290,309)
Overall Surplus for Year	2,104
General Reserve @ 1st January 2010	(521,604)
General Reserve @ 31st December 2010	(519,500)

Capital Account

Balance @ 01.01.2010	(18,361,045)
Grants	112,013,901
Other Income	10,259,013
Transfer from/to Revenue	3,290,309
Expenditure	122,777,784
Balance @ 31.12.2010	(15,575,606)

Manager: Gerry Gibson

Town Clerk: John Clarke

Town Engineer: Tom O'Carroll

Annual General Meeting

At the Annual General Meeting of Portlaoise Town Council held on 22nd June, 2010, Councillor Jerry Lodge was elected as Cathaoirleach. Councillor Matthew Keegan was elected as Leas Cathaoirleach.

Members on Boards/Committees

Community, Economic Development, Culture & Heritage Committee

Councillor Rotimi Adebare
Councillor Alan Hand

Transport & Water Services Committee

Councillor Jerry Lodge
Councillor Kathleen O'Brien
Councillor Matthew Keegan

Housing & Social Policy Committee

Councillor Willie Aird
Councillor Brian Stanley
Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald

Monthly Meetings

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

Main Services Provided

School Warden Services, Community & Environmental Initiatives, Public Convenience, Civic Receptions & Town Twinning.

Budget 2010 - €99,350

In 2010, Portlaoise Town Council provided support to the following:

- St Patrick's Day Parade Committee
- Portlaoise Tidy Towns
- Broomville Residents Association
- Mill Court Residents Association
- Naoimh Brid Music Class Portlaoise

- United Nations Veterans Association Portlaoise
- Rath Gailine Residents Association
- St Peters Church Community Hall
- Triogue Manor Residents Association
- Portlaoise Athletic Club
- Portlaoise Christmas Lighting Association

Conferences

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

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

Highlights during 2010

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

- The opening of the Portlaoise Main Drainage Scheme.
- The opening of two new secondary schools in Portlaoise.
- Realignment and upgrade of the Borris Road.
- The continued development of the Knockmay Regeneration Project.
- The hosting of the Regional Rose of Tralee Finals.



*International Rose of Tralee
Regional Finals 2010*

- The return of the Magnet Festival to Portlaoise.
- Public, Voluntary & Affordable Housing Developments.
- Road and footpath improvements throughout the Town.

Manager: Declan Byrne

Town Clerk: Pamela Tynan

Town Engineer: Dermot Leonard

Annual General Meeting

At the Annual General Meeting of Mountmellick Town Council, Councillor Ollie Payne was elected as Cathaoirleach. Councillor Stephen Lynch was elected Leas Cathaoirleach.

Budget 2010: €58,960

Representation on other Bodies

Place Names Committee

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

Mountmellick By-Laws Committee

Cathaoirleach Ollie Payne, former Cathaoirleach Rosemary Whelan, Councillor David Goodwin, Councillor Seamus McDonald, Councillor Marc Connolly, Councillor Pat Bowe and Councillor Patrick Bracken represented Mountmellick Town Council/Laois County Council on the By-Laws Committee, addressing all traffic management issues in the town.

Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurances

Councillor Marc Connolly represented Mountmellick Town Council on the Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurances committee.

Strategic Policy Committees

In June, Mountmellick Town Council Councillor Stephen Lynch was elected to the Strategic Policy Committee for Planning, Development and Environment and replaced Councillor Marc Connolly.

In October, Councillor Bobby Delaney was elected to the Strategic Policy Committee for Planning, Development and Environment and replaced Councillor Rosemary Whelan.

The two new representatives will serve on the Strategic Policy Committees from 2010 – 2014.

Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland

Councillors Patrick Bracken and Stephen Lynch represented Mountmellick Town Council at the Spring Seminar and Leas Cathaoirleach Stephen Lynch represented the Town Council at the Autumn Seminar of the Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland.

County Development Board and Laois Partnership Committee

Councillor Paddy Bracken represents Mountmellick Town Council on the County Development Board and Laois Partnership Committee. It was agreed that Mountmellick Town Council hold the position on the County Development Board and Laois Partnership Company up to December, 2011 on behalf of both Mountmellick Town Council and Portlaoise Town Council.

Presentation by Aidan McCane - Tenant Liaison Officer

Aidan McCane gave a presentation to the members on 4th March, 2010. Mr McCane outlined his duties and work programme which included an assignment to Cullenwood and Kirwan Park in Mountmellick. He stated his duties included the carrying out of general inspections in the two estates and reporting on same to relevant officials in the Housing Department of Laois County Council. He stated he also dealt with infringements of tenancy agreements, anti social behaviour issues and supports to people experiencing particular difficulties.

He also advised that in relation to these matters he liaised closely with the Health Service Executive, the Gardai and the Environmental Health Section. He advised that a large part of his work was the provision of support to residents associations.

Presidential Visit

Laois had the honour of hosting a visit from President Mary McAleese on 5th March. She began her tour of Laois in Portarlinton where she officially opened the Community Centre and Crèche and met with members of the local community. She then visited Mountmellick Voluntary Housing Scheme for the Elderly and was greeted by the Cathaoirleach and members of Mountmellick Town Council. The President then proceeded on to visit Clonaslee Vocational School. The President finished her tour of the county with a visit to the Camross Community Centre.

Meeting with John Moloney T.D., Minister for Disability & Mental Health

Minister Moloney met with the members of Mountmellick Town Council in July to discuss St Vincents Hospital. The main issue was St Josephs Ward and the Day Care Unit. Minister Moloney assured the members that the Day Care Unit would be operating fully again later in the year. He advised that St Josephs Ward should be opened by 2012 allowing for the staff moratorium and reduction in spending by the HSE. Minister Moloney also indicated that the closure of St Vincent's Hospital or the Day Care Unit is not envisaged in the future.

Mountmellick Town Council Footpath Proposals 2010

Work on the following footpaths, as agreed by the Town Council, was completed successfully in 2010: Footpaths at O'Moore Street, Harbour Street, Pattisons Estate, Irishtown, Acragar and Davitt Road.

Mountmellick Joint Policing Committee

Mountmellick Joint Policing Committee held quarterly meetings in March, June and December. There was one public meeting held on 30th September in the MDA Museum which was very well attended by the public. Issues discussed included traffic claming measures, traffic signage, anti-social behaviour, litter and illegal dumping and parking enforcement. The committee consists of the 9 Elected Members, 2 Garda Officials, 3 persons representing the Community and Voluntary Sector and the Town Manager and Town Clerk.

Mountmellick Pay and Display Parking

Mountmellick Pay and Display Parking was successfully introduced into Patrick Street and Parnell Street in July, 2010. The Traffic Warden is responsible for enforcing the Pay and Display Parking Bye-Laws in Mountmellick.

The following improvements were achieved during 2010:

- Two new Bus Bays provided in Sarsfield Street
- Marked parking bays along Parnell Street
- New disabled parking bays in O'Moore Street, Pearse Street, O'Connell Square and Sarsfield Street

New Mountmellick Library

Mountmellick Library and Art Gallery, the latest new library in County Laois, was officially opened on 20th May, 2010 by John Moloney, T.D., Minister for Disability and Mental Health.



The new library incorporates renovation of the old courthouse and a new extension to the rear and side of the building. The design concept was developed to provide a library space of contemporary character while preserving the essential essence of the original building. Situated in the Courthouse in O' Moore Street, Mountmellick, the new Library and Art Gallery is placed in an ideally accessible and very central location and is within walking distance from schools, residential areas and shops.



The library, which is at ground floor and mezzanine level, measures 690 m2 and is the largest library in the county, houses over 25,000 items including books, CD's, DVD's, etc. There are 18 public internet points, laptop plug-in points, WIFI, broadband, self-check, interactive technology and online OSI maps. Extensive study and seating areas are available throughout the library which leads on to a stepped open-air terrace to the rear for extended library use.

A coffee/tea facility and seating area is located within the library and a large dedicated Art Gallery leads off the first floor learning area. A programme

of monthly art exhibitions has been arranged by the library staff to facilitate local, regional and national artists to display and sell their works.

The design team was led by Milligan, Reside, Larkin Architects Ltd. and construction was by Garoon Construction Ltd. The new library in Mountmellick will introduce a multicultural and citizen-focused service to the whole community in Mountmellick and delivers a broad range of library and County Council services as well as a welcoming space for all members of the community.

Environmental Works/Grants

During 2010 various Environmental Enhancement Works were carried out throughout the town. These works included the following:

- All flower containers were planted with summer and winter plants.
- All flower pots were painted in co-operation with FÁS
- Shrubs were planted at the river side at Convent Bridge in co-operation with FÁS
- Four new public benches were purchased and erected at various locations around the town
- New flower containers were purchased and placed around the town
- The Credit Union sponsored new flower boxes which were erected in Sarsfield Street
- New railings were purchased and erected at the bridge in Irishtown and at the entrance to Pattison Estate
- The walkway between Convent Bridge and Irishtown Bridge was repaired and made safe

In addition, Mountmellick Town Council made a contribution to the Christmas Lights Committee.

Mountmellick Water Supply

As part of the 'Portlaoise/Mountmellick Water Supply Improvement Scheme', commencements of further advanced works were scheduled for the end of November, 2010 to bring into operation a second well at Eyne. This will improve both the security in terms of quantity and also the quality of the town's water supply. Contract documents for the main scheme are due to be completed in the second quarter of 2011. The main scheme is currently at the planning stage in the Water Services Investment Programme 2010-2012.

Mountmellick Sewage Upgrade

Mountmellick Sewerage Upgrade Phase 1 was completed in late year. Mountmellick Sewerage Upgrade Phase 2 is a longer term project involving provision of a wastewater treatment plant to cater for the projected population of the Mountmellick area for the next 20 years and possible extensions to the network.

In relation to Phase 2, the Preliminary Report and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) were completed in 2009. The EIS was submitted to An Bord Pleanála in May, 2010 and the Preliminary Report has been submitted to the Department for approval to proceed to the procurement/construction stage.

Tidy Towns

In the National Tidy Towns competition this year, Mountmellick achieved an extra three points over last year which was very positive. In the Mountmellick Tidy Towns awards, a Merit Award for O'Connell Square was received and an award for Best Public Building for the Civic Offices and Library.

Community Arts Centre

The CYMS, which was originally built in 1951, was extensively renovated in 2010. The Community Arts Centre Committee, made up of representatives from the parish, the Credit Union and the community, initiated this project. Substantial sponsorship from the Credit Union underpinned the project as well as a grant from Laois County Council and a grant from Laois Partnership. The renovations were carried out by CNN Construction as well as FÁS Community Employment Scheme.

The main theatre has seating capacity of 290 downstairs while the beautiful Balcony Theatre upstairs seats 136. This theatre was officially opened on 21st May and the Cathaoirleach and members of the Town Council were in attendance. This is a very important amenity for the town of Mountmellick and its environs.

Priority List

The members of Mountmellick Town Council revised the Priority List for the town. This list highlights the short, medium and long term issues which need to be addressed in the Mountmellick area.

The Town Manager, Town Clerk, Town Engineer and all elected members worked together throughout the year to deliver the various goals and objectives set out.

Pride of Place

The All-Island National Pride of Place Awards were held in Trim, Co. Meath, and Mountmellick was the 'Pride of Place' for Laois in the 2010 National Competition. The awards were presented to all successful groups by Noel Dempsey T.D., Minister for Transport and Christopher Moran, Chairperson of Co-Operation Ireland.

The Minister paid tribute to all the participating groups who work tirelessly to create and promote pride in their cities, towns and villages, highlighting the importance of the volunteer in the current climate. Pride of Place is an initiative of Co-operation Ireland, which aims to recognise the efforts of local people to create pride in their area and to celebrate the vital contribution that community groups make to society. The competition focuses on people coming together to shape, enhance and enjoy all that is good about their area.

Runners-up in their Category (Population over 2,000) were Mountmellick Christmas Tree Committee who showcased the town's most cherished project which celebrates over 50 years in existence, heralding a 60 ft tree and crib, a beacon of light and a symbol of community co-operation and spirit in the town of Mountmellick.

The project entails massive community commitment in the construction and preparation for its annual 'switch-on' night. The community also benefits from a visit by Santa Claus, facilitated by the committee, bringing toys for the under 10's of the communities of Mountmellick, The Rock and Clonaghadoo. The senior citizens are not forgotten either; free fuel is delivered by the committee annually to older people in the wider community during the Christmas Season. Accepting the award on behalf of the group were members of the committee, including founder members, Ger Lynch and Brian Lynch. Leas Cathaoirleach Stephen Lynch represented the Town Council at this event.

Business Meetings

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

Social Club

2010 was another very successful year for the Social Club which currently has a membership of 262. Numerous events were held in 2010.

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 Motor Tax with the winning team comprising Rebecca Gillespie, Theresa Bergin, Michael O'Loughlin and Michelle Dowling.

Punchestown Race Festival 2010

On Friday, 23rd April, a bus left County Hall at 1.00 pm and headed to Punchestown Races. A great afternoon/evening was had by all.

Summer Party



The Summer Party was held in Áras an Chontae on 17th June, with Eunice and her staff preparing and serving the food, which as usual was first class. It was a beautiful warm day and the committee hired outdoor furniture. A great crowd attended and stayed well into the evening.

Winter Party

On Thursday, 21st October, the Square Bar was the venue for the Winter Party. Eunice and her staff served hot food and each member received drinks vouchers to get them started. A great crowd attended and a good evening of chat 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 the 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 11th December in the canteen. This year the party was open to members only. There was great entertainment, especially the puppet show which mesmerized the kids and the face painters went down a treat. Santa and one of his elves arrived by Fire Engine, thanks to John Ging. Thanks to all who helped make it a fantastic day.

Christmas Party

The Annual Christmas Party was held on 17th December in the Killeshin Hotel, Portlaoise. The band on the night was Epic and the disco was provided by DJ Brochan. The party was a great success with 125 members attending.

Golf Society

Ger O'Mahony captained the Golf Society in 2010. His Captain's Day was held in Portarlinton Golf club in July and a great day was had by all. The Captain's prize was won by Barry Larkin. The Kennedy Cup was won by Pat Keogh at the staff outing held in Tullamore Golf Club. Golfer of the year was won by Larry Dunne. Pat Farrell is the captain for 2011.

Peter Scully and Joan Dowling, our long serving Hon. Treasurer and Hon. Secretary, have stepped down after providing many years loyal service. The incoming committee for 2011 would like to thank them for the great work they have done for the Society over the years.

APPENDIX I

Title, purpose and number of members of each Committee and Joint Committee and the number of meetings of each Committee, Joint Committee and Joint Policing Committee held during 2010.

The following members were elected to the Committees/Outside Bodies outlined hereunder at the Annual General Meeting of Laois County Council held on 19th June, 2009.

COMMITTEES

Name of Committee	Members Elected	Number of Meetings
Rural Water Monitoring Committee	Councillor Ben Brennan Councillor John Bonham Councillor Tom Mulhall	3
Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee	Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald Councillor Brian Stanley Councillor Pat Bowe Councillor William Aird Councillor Mary Sweeney Councillor Kathleen O' Brien Councillor Paul Mitchell Councillor John King	1
Kyleelisha Landfill Monitoring Committee	Councillor Patrick Bracken Councillor James Daly Councillor Martin Phelan	1
Laois School of Music Steering Committee	Councillor Mary Sweeney	3
Audit Committee	Councillor John Bonham Councillor Jerry Lodge	4
Joint Policing Committee	Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald Councillor Seamus McDonald Councillor Brendan Phelan Councillor Patrick Bracken Councillor Ray Cribbin Councillor James Deegan Councillor Tom Mulhall Councillor Michael Lalor Councillor Mary Sweeney Councillor David Goodwin Councillor Paul Mitchell Councillor John King Councillor James Daly Councillor Ben Brennan	5
Placenames Committee	Councillor Ben Brennan Councillor Ray Cribbin Councillor John Bonham Councillor Kathleen O' Brien Councillor David Goodwin	0

OUTSIDE BODIES

Name of Committee	Members Elected
Barrow Drainage Board	Councillor Pat Bowe, Councillor David Goodwin

APPENDIX I

Name of Committee	Members Elected
River Goul Drainage Committee	Councillor Brendan Phelan, Councillor Martin Phelan Councillor John King
Dungar Joint Burial Board	Councillor Brendan Phelan, Councillor Seamus McDonald, Councillor Michael Lalor, Councillor John King
Portarlington Joint Burial Board	Councillor Ray Cribbin, Councillor Patrick Bracken Councillor Brian Stanley, Councillor Tom Mulhall Councillor Paul Mitchell, Councillor James Deegan
Association of County & City Councils	Councillor Seamus McDonald Councillor David Goodwin Councillor Martin Phelan
Regional Board of Failte Ireland (East & Midlands)	Councillor Martin Phelan
Midland Regional Authority	Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald, Councillor Brendan Phelan Councillor James Deegan, Councillor Martin Phelan Councillor James Daly, Councillor John Bonham
E.U. Operational Committee	Councillor James Daly, Councillor John Bonham
B.M.W. Regional Assembly	Councillor James Deegan, Councillor James Daly
Laois Arts Theatre Company Ltd	Councillor Rotimi Adebare Councillor Kathleen O' Brien Councillor Mary Sweeney
Abbeyleix Heritage Trust	Councillor John Bonham
Local Authority Members Association	Councillor Michael Lalor
Laois County Enterprise Board	Councillor Pat Bowe, Councillor Tom Mulhall Councillor James Daly, Councillor William Aird
Laois Transport for Rural Integration Programme	Councillor Michael Lalor
South East River Basin District Advisory Council	Councillor Tom Mulhall, Councillor John King
Shannon River Basin District Advisory Council	Councillor Tom Mulhall, Councillor Martin Phelan
Anti-Poverty Strategy Steering Group	Councillor Rotimi Adebare, Councillor Kathleen O' Brien Councillor Mary Sweeney
Portarlington Leisure Centre	Councillor Ray Cribbin, Councillor Paul Mitchell Councillor Tom Mulhall
Portlaoise Leisure Centre	Councillor Brian Stanley, Councillor William Aird Councillor Mary Sweeney
Portlaoise Enterprise Centre	Councillor Jerry Lodge, Councillor William Aird Councillor Mary Sweeney
Portarlington Enterprise Centre	Councillor Paul Mitchell, Councillor James Deegan
Midlands Energy Agency	Councillor John Bonham

APPENDIX I

Name of Committee	Members Elected
Homeless Forum	Councillor Mary Sweeney, Councillor Kathleen O' Brien
Laois County Development Board	Councillor James Daly, Councillor John Moran Councillor Michael Lalor, Councillor Martin Phelan Councillor John Joe Fennelly
Dublin Mid-Leinster Regional Health Forum	Councillor Ben Brennan, Councillor Kathleen O' Brien Councillor William Aird
Laois Advocacy Against Domestic Abuse Limited	Councillor Mary Sweeney
Midland Regional Drugs Task Force	Councillor William Aird
LABEL	Councillor Paul Mitchell
Laois VEC	Councillor Brian Stanley, Councillor Rotimi Adebare, Councillor Pat Bowe, Councillor Mary Sweeney, Councillor Paul Mitchell, Councillor John Bonham, Councillor William Aird, Councillor John King, Councillor Kathleen O' Brien
Laois Partnership	Councillor Pat Bowe, Councillor Tom Mulhall, Councillor Michael Lalor
Portlaoise Community Action Project	Councillor Jerry Lodge, Councillor Mary Sweeney, Councillor Brian Stanley
Management Company for New Community Centre at Knockmay	Councillor Kathleen O' Brien
Laois Tourism	Councillor John Bonham

In House Committees

Name of Committee	Members Elected
Heritage Forum	Councillor Martin Phelan

APPENDIX II

PAYMENTS TO MEMBERS 2010

Monthly Allowance	€116,566.92
Conference Allowance	€84,095.69
Telephone allowance	€1,866.05
Representational Allowance	€476,601.00 (inc. Chairperson's & Vice Chairperson's Allowance & CDB Chair Allowance)
SPC Allowance	€24,000.00

HOW TO CONTACT US

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Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise	Tel: (057) 8664000
Accounts Payable, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664063
Arts Office, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8674342
Cash Office, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8674308
Central Area Office, Mountrath Road, Portlaoise	Tel: (057) 8664168
Civil Defence HQ, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664000
County Development Board, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8674338
Driving Licences, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664110
Environment, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8674322
Graigecullen Area Office, Sleaty Road, Graigecullen	Tel: (059) 9165960
Higher Education Grants, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664137
Housing, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664110
Human Resources, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664219
Landfill Site, Kyletalesha, Portlaoise	Tel: (057) 8620653
Library Headquarters, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8674315
Motor Tax Office, Block 2, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664009
National Roads Project Office, Clonboyne, Portlaoise	Tel: (057) 8664850
Planning, Block 1, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664039
Portarlinton Area Office, 1 Park Lane, Portarlinton	Tel: (057) 8636533
Register of Electors, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664105
Roads, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664142
Sports & Leisure, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664007
Water Charges, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664119
Water Services, Áras an Chontae	Tel: (057) 8664120
Western Area, The Old Barracks, The Square, Rathdowney	Tel: (0505) 48360