

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE LAOISE LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL



ANNUAL REPORT 2011



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CATHAOIRLEACH'S STATEMENT

It gives me great pleasure as Cathaoirleach to present Laois County Council's Annual Report for 2011.

This Annual Report provides an opportunity to highlight the achievements of the Council in 2011 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 the staff in delivering these services.

Laois County Council's Tourism Office continued to actively promote Laois throughout 2011 by holding events which attracted large numbers of people to the county including the Laois International Golf Challenge, the Gordon Bennett Rally, the Rose of Tralee Regional Finals, the Street Performance World Championships and the Heartland Motor Rally.

Stradbally Arthouse was officially opened in May and will contribute to the community through the holding of conferences and exhibitions.

The opening of the Riocht na nÓg playground at the Old Boys School in Castletown involved partnership with the local community and provides joy and fun to all who participate.

One of the major highlights in 2011 was the official opening of the new Portlaoise Resource Centre, Treo Nua on the 14th October 2011 providing additional facilities to the social and community infrastructure of Portlaoise.

The Laois County Development Plan 2011 – 2017 which provides a framework within which the Planning Authority makes its planning decisions came into effect from 8th November 2011.

Laois County Council will continue to promote and develop the County and provide quality services to the communities we serve.



John Bonham
Cathaoirleach

COUNTY MANAGER'S FOREWORD

It is with great delight that I welcome the publication of Laois County Council's Annual Report for 2011.

In an environment where there is such economic difficulty, this report gives us an opportunity to be positive. Despite budgetary constraints, Laois County Council continued to deliver quality services to the community.

Laois County Council continues to be actively involved and plays a pivotal role 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.

Tourism and the promotion of the County continued in 2011 and the county hosted a number of high profile events which attracted a large number of visitors to our county. The County achieved further success with Abbeyleix being successful in being awarded the top prize in the annual Co-operation Ireland All Island Pride of Place Awards.

Our network of roads in the Portlaoise area was further improved in 2011 with the completion of the final section of the link between Stradbally Road and Timahoe Road which opened to traffic in June 2011. Specific Improvement Schemes including the Borris Road upgrade provides major safety improvements for road users between major residential areas and the new schools on the Borris Road.

Laois County Council continues to face further challenges and it is only through the dedication and commitment of the Elected Members and the Staff that these challenges can be overcome. Evidence of employees commitment and effort is highlighted through the achievement of the Excellence through People award in 2011. I am certain that with continued partnership, that this County will continue to be a strong and vibrant county.



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 2011 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 2011.

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.)



Alan Hand
(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

- 13th January, 2011 – Civic Reception in honour of Michael Mulhare, member of the Irish Under-23 Cross Country Team, winners of the Gold Medal at the 2010 European Cross Country Championships held in Albufeira, Portugal

- 20th May, 2011 – Cathaoirleach's Reception in honour of the Irish Countrywomens Association in recognition of their 2011 National Conference in Portlaoise.



Civic Reception in honour of Michael Mulhare, member of the Irish Under-23 Cross Country Team, winners of the Gold Medal at the 2010 European Cross Country Championships

Irish Language Scheme 2009 – 2012

Laois Local Authorities Irish Language Scheme was confirmed by the Minister for Community Rural and Gaeltacht 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. In 2011, the Council continued to meet the commitments contained in the Scheme.

If you wish to contact the Council in Irish, please send an e-mail to gaeilge@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 2011, a total number of 1,108 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 3% and became applicable from 1st January, 2011.

The total amount paid out in 2011 in respect of Higher Education Grants was €3,830,790.

Health & Safety

Safety Advisor: Jim Bolger

The Safety Management System (SMS) was further developed by tailoring documentation to ensure compatibility with the OSHAS 18801 standard. The enhanced system is available electronically on our intranet system.

Employee safety skills were enhanced through the provision of workplace FETAC accredited safety and health training. Workplace inspections were conducted on a cross-directorate basis and ancillary safety statements were reviewed and amended as appropriate.

Partnership

The following were the members of the Workplace Partnership Committee as at 31st December, 2011.

Management Nominees	Union Nominees
John Daly	Tom Saunders,
Joint Chair	Joint Chair
Gerry Murphy	Anne Marie Maher
Angela McEvoy	Bernie Kilbride
John O'Donoghue	Tom O'Carroll
Gerry Maher	Valerie O'Reilly

The Partnership Committee held 7 meetings during 2011.

The County Manager held two Staff Briefing Meetings in February and December, 2011, to inform staff of the challenges facing Laois County Council.

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 2011

Applications on hand at 31/12/2010	Nil
Applications received during 2011	26
Decisions taken during 2011	18
Applications Withdrawn	2
Applications withdrawn and dealt with outside FOI	2
Applications on hand at 31/12/2011	4

Nature of Information Sought

Personal (to applicant)	5
Non-personal	1

Appeals

Appeals to Information Commissioner	Nil
Appeal to High Court	Nil

Source of Requests

Journalists	1
Business	Nil
Oireachtas Members	Nil
Local Authority Members	Nil
Others/General Public	25

Register of Electors 2011/2012

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	54,568	55,230
European Parliament Constituency	European Electors	Potential European Electors
Leinster	55,755	237
Local Electoral Areas	Number of Electors	Postal and Special Voters
Borris in Ossory	13,941	Gardaí 2
Emo	9,209	Defence Forces 221
Luggacurren	9,521	Diplomats 1
Mountmellick	8,962	Physically Disabled 28
Portlaoise	<u>15,435</u>	Occupation Etc. 8
Total:	57,068	Special Voters 32
Borough or Town Council	Local Government Electors	
Mountmellick Urban	2,977	
Portlaoise Urban	<u>8,299</u>	
Total	11,276	

CONFERENCES ATTENDED IN 2011

Conference	Venue	Date	Delegates	Expend.
European Legislation on Human Rights / Irish Legislation & Irish Case Law	Galway	14 – 16 Jan	1	€496.94
Compliance with Planning Permission	Galway	21 – 23 Jan	2	€1,135.62
Economic Conference	Limerick	28 – 29 Jan	3	€1,028.62
A.M.A.I. Spring Seminar	Bantry	11 – 12 Feb	3	€1,809.12
Colmcille Winter School	Letterkenny	18 – 20 Feb	1	€855.56
Implications for the Voluntary Sector	Tralee	18 – 20 Feb	1	€615.21
The Local Government Planning Service	Limerick	11 – 13 Mar	5	€2,303.10
EPA Climate Change	Dublin	15 Mar	1	€45.61
Equal Status Legislation	Westport	18 – 20 Mar	8	€4,983.32
Effective Time & Priority Management	Dundalk	18 – 20 Mar	1	€547.03
Association of City & County Councils	Tullamore	24 – 25 Mar	3	€683.50
How to be an Effective Chairperson	Rosscarbery	1 – 3 Apr	5	€2,749.23
Irish Water, Sewerage & Waste Exhibition	Dublin	7 Apr	1	€124.86
Kerry Environmental Training Seminar	Tralee	7 – 10 Apr	6	€3,776.24
The Future of Local Politics	Rosscarbery	15 – 17 Apr	5	€2,772.75
L.A.M.A. Spring Seminar 2011	Dundalk	29 – 30 Apr	3	€1,403.42
European Influences on Local Government	Galway	13 – 15 May	2	€1,107.66
Public Speaking & Promotional Design	Rosscarbery	13 – 15 May	3	€1,715.22
Procurement Expenditure & Revenues	Letterkenny	27 – 29 May	1	€705.71
Exploring Local Government Reform	Galway	27 – 29 May	6	€3,140.05
Resource Wise (EPA)	Letterkenny	1 Jun	1	€143.86

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

Conference	Venue	Date	Delegates	Expend.
Renewable Energy	Donegal	3 – 5 Jun	6	€3,929.69
Elected Member Responsibilities	Galway	10 – 12 Jun	3	€1,167.86
Seán MacDiarmada Summer School 2011	Kiltyclogher, Co. Leitrim	17 – 19 Jun	6	€2,975.09
Science Technology	Cork	23 Jun	1	€375.49
Reforming Public Service	Dublin	7 Jul	1	€60.11
Time Management & Media Skills	Rosscarbery	8 – 10 Jul	1	€578.01
MacGill Summer School 2011	Glenties	24 – 29 Jul	10	€9,288.16
Current issues in Education	Galway	25 – 27 Jul	2	€1,071.81
Risk Assessment & Insurance	Galway	29 – 31 Jul	5	€2,398.41
Local Government Planning Service	Skibereen	12 – 13 Aug	1	€547.58
Reform of Local Government	Westport	12 – 14 Aug	4	€2,373.06
Parnell Summer School 2011	Wicklow	14 – 19 Aug	2	€1,545.71
Renewable Energy	Tralee	19 – 21 Aug	7	€4,193.16
Enhancing Promotional Material MS Office	Clonakilty	2 – 4 Sep	2	€1,003.68
A.M.A.I. Annual Conference	Trim	8 – 10 Sep	3	€1,496.51
L.A.M.A. Autumn 2011	Dungarvan	23 – 24 Sep	8	€2,826.70
Effective Representation	Tralee	23 – 25 Sep	4	€2,405.27
Waste Water Laws	Donegal	30 Sep – 2 Oct	8	€4,992.87
Intertrade Ireland Innovation Conference	Belfast	4 Oct	1	€441.05
Getting a Grip – Substance Misuse	Killarney	6 – 7 Oct	4	€2,462.72
Social Housing	Westport	14 – 16 Oct	1	€529.94
The Role of the Regional Authority	Galway	21 – 23 Oct	2	€702.68
Douglas Hyde	Roscommon	4 Nov	1	€254.29
The Nordic Models	Dublin	4 Nov	1	€190.85
Waste Water	Tralee	11 – 13 Nov	1	€539.57
Water Pollution	Donegal	18 – 20 Nov	3	€1,949.80
Midland Regional Authority Conference	Athlone	23 Nov	1	€51.84
Innovation & Entrepreneurship	Galway	24 Nov	1	€208.50
Clare Tourism	Ennistymon	26 Nov	4	€2,081.90
Biodiversity Showcase	Dublin	30 Nov	1	€60.11
Health & Safety and The Councillor	Clonmel	9 – 10 Dec	1	€340.69
C.A.P. Reform	Tralee	9 – 11 Dec	4	€1,974.78
Local Government Charges Act 2009	Galway	16 – 18 Dec	4	€1,367.48
TOTAL				€88,528.00

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 2011

- Official opening of the new Portlaoise Resource Centre, Treo Nua, on 14th October, 2011 by Minister Phil Hogan.
- Completion of long-term leasing arrangements with a number of approved housing bodies resulting in 30 social units under the Social Leasing Initiative.
- Successful delivery of 212 grants for disabled and elderly people living in Laois.

Report on SPC

The Housing & Social SPC met in April, May and November, 2011. The following policies were agreed and approved during 2011:

- Tenant Purchase Scheme for Long-Standing Tenants
- Allocations Scheme
- Control of Horses Byelaws (amended)

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 2011, a total of 66 properties were delivered under the Rental Accommodation Scheme.

Social Leasing Arrangements

With Departmental approval, Laois County Council entered into Agreements with a number of Approved Housing Bodies for the long-term leasing of units at various locations in County Laois. A total of 44 properties have been delivered to date under this arrangement.

Housing Construction & Acquisition

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

Rural Dwellings	4 units
Transfer from affordable	6 units
Part V units	14 units
TOTAL	24 units

The Capital Allocation for 2011 was €1,776,135.

Summary of Programme

Houses under construction at 31/12/10	15
Houses commenced in 2011	9
Houses completed in 2011	24
Houses in progress at 31/12/11	0

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

Portlaoise Resource Centre

The highlight of 2011 was the official opening of the new Portlaoise Resource Centre, Treo Nua, on 14th October, 2011 by Minister Phil Hogan. The new centre is a state of the art community resource facility in the Knockmay area built on a shared services model. The building includes a local HSE primary care clinic, a large crèche, after-school rooms, Family Resource Centre offices, a Laois County Council office and a range of training rooms, including a fully equipped computer room, general meeting rooms, shop and a cafe.



The three anchor tenants of the building are the Family Resource Centre, the HSE and Laois County Council. A range of other agencies, including FAS, VEC, Laois Partnership and the Gardai are also committed to providing services through the training facilities and the community meeting rooms. This multi-million euro facility is an important addition to the social and community infrastructure of Portlaoise. In addition to Laois County Council's significant capital investment into this facility, capital funding was also received from Pobal, DoECLG, Family Resource Centre, HSE, Laois Partnership and Portlaoise Town Council as follows:

Laois County Council:	€2,000,000
Family Resource Centre:	€562,000
HSE:	€350,000
Pobal:	€450,000
DoECLG:	€640,000
Laois Partnership:	€150,000
Portlaoise Town Council	€80,000

The local community have been very supportive of this project from the outset. Their views have been instrumental at every stage of the planning and design of this new centre, ensuring that the best possible decisions have been made to benefit the community as part of the wider regeneration of Knockmay. The result is a flexible space that will be used to its full potential for a variety of activities and services for people of all ages, their families and the local community. The day-to-day management of the facility is overseen by a Board of Management, Treo Nua Ltd., which is made up of representatives from Laois County Council, HSE, Family Resource Centre, Laois Partnership, Scoil Bride National School and the local community.

Maintenance of Local Authority Stock

In 2011, the Housing Section continued to improve the business procedures relating to the maintenance and re-letting of Council stock through effective prioritisation and use of the financial and human resources available. This has resulted in significantly improved customer service, response times and a more transparent management of the service. The DoECLG funding for energy upgrades and once-off adaptation grants allowed the Housing Section to also make significant structural improvements to a substantial number of its properties.

At 31st December 2011 the Council has 2,043 dwellings in its rented stock, 97.75% of which were let at the end of the year. During 2011 a total of 3,071 repair requests were received by the Maintenance Section of which 2,957 were completed (96.29%).

Part V - Housing Strategy

In 2011 the Housing Department continued to monitor development and engage with developers in the County to reach agreement for compliance with Part V of the Planning & Development Act 2000 (as amended) and the Council's current Housing Strategy for the provision of the 17.5% requirement for social/affordable housing in new residential developments using all available options in tandem with prevailing housing market conditions. Agreements were finalised in respect of three developments in the County.

Voluntary Housing Sector

Laois County Council has a distinguished record in working with voluntary bodies for the provision of voluntary housing units. At 31/12/11 there were 271 units provided under the Capital Loan & Subsidy Scheme and 239 units provided under the Capital Assistance Scheme.

Affordable Housing

In 2011 the Department of Environment, Community & Local Government approved the transfer of 6 affordable units in Portlaoise to social stock. There are currently houses for sale in Maryborough Village, Portlaoise for as low as €89,000. Further details can be found on www.laois.ie.



Maryborough Village, Portlaoise

Private Site Scheme

A number of private sites are still available in Castletown, Ballyroan and Clonaslee. The purchase price of these sites are:

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

Interested parties should contact the Housing Department for details.



Activity under Various Schemes

Extensions to Local Authority Dwellings:

Approved	1
Completed	1

Improvement Works in Lieu of Local Authority Housing:

Commenced	0
Completed	1

Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability:

Applications received	81
Total No. of Grants Paid	73
(Totalling €)	503,163

Mobility Aids Housing Grant Scheme:

Applications received	69
Total No. of Grants Paid	54
(Totalling €)	223,430

Housing Aid for Older People Scheme:

Applications received	150
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Total No. of Grants Paid	85
(Totalling €)	443,500

Tenant Purchase Scheme:

Applications Received	53
Houses Sold	12

Housing Loans:

No. of Loans Advanced	6
(Totalling €)	874,583

Housing Rents

The Council's housing stock now stands at 2,043 with an average rent of €41.00 per unit. Rents are reviewed regularly on a case by case basis as the situation arises.

Traveller Accommodation

The current Programme was adopted by the Council in January, 2009 and runs from 2009 to 2013. The Programme 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 2011, 6 families were accommodated in standard Local Authority Housing.

Significant progress was made in 2011 in securing Departmental funding for a new Group Housing Scheme in Portarlinton with approval to go to tender issuing in August, 2011.

Estate Management

2011 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 2011

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

1st Prize: Doonane Residents Association, Crettyard

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 : New Mill Court, Residents Association, Portarlinton.

Award certificate and cheque for €150.00

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

Ballymorris Manor, Portarlinton.

Award certificate and cheque for €150.00

In 2011, there were 78 Resident Associations supported by the Housing Department.

National Service Indicators (Effective 01/01/2011) - Progress Report for position 31/12/2011

H: Housing

H.1. Housing Vacancies:

Total Number of dwellings in local authority stock	2043
Total Number of dwellings excluding those subject to major refurbishment projects	2041
Overall % of dwellings that are empty (excluding those subject to major refurbishment):	2.25%
% of empty dwellings unavailable for letting	47.8%
% of empty dwellings available to letting	52.2%

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. 10 weeks

Time taken from works @ (a) being completed to the date of the first rent debit. 5 weeks

H. 3	Number of repairs completed as a percentage of the number of valid repair requests received.	96.29%
	Number of repairs completed	2,957
	Number of valid repair requests received	3,071
H. 4	Traveller Accommodation	
	Total number of traveller families accommodated as a percentage of the targets set in the Local Traveller Accommodation Programme.	85.71%
	Number of Traveller families accommodated	6
	Target number of Traveller families to be accommodated in the year, as set out in the local Traveller Accommodation Programme	7
H.5.	Enforcement of standards in private rented sector.	
	Total number of registered tenancies	2,637
	Number dwelling units inspected	263
	Number of inspections carried out	330
	Number of dwellings inspected as % of registered tenancies (i.e. B as % of A)	9.97%
H. 6	Grants to adapt housing for the needs of people with a disability	
	Average time taken to notify applicants of decision under Mobility Aids Grant Scheme on receipt of a valid application.	2.9 weeks
	Average time taken to notify applicants of decision under Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability on receipt of a valid application.	4.32 weeks
H. 7	Tenant Training	
	Percentage of total new local authority tenants who have completed pre-tenancy training	0%

HUMAN RESOURCES

Recruitment Statistics

A total of 464 people were employed by Laois County Council at 31st December, 2011.

During 2011, Laois County Council held 9 competitions, in relation to which the following statistics have been extracted:

Total Applications received: 205

	Male	Female
Applicants	194	11
Successful Applicants	55	7

Permanent Appointments/Promotions 2011:

	Male	Female
Appointments	1	0
Promotions	3	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 2011. At year-end, 9 employees were availing of the Career Break Scheme, 26 employees were availing of the job/work sharing scheme, 24 employees availed of the Parental Leave Scheme and 16 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 2011. The out-turn was 4.13%.

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

2010	2011
4.13%	4.56%

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

	2010	2011
Certified	5.09%	4.07%
Uncertified	0.55%	0.62%

Local Service Indicator

Number of Training Days provided to staff (excluding Retained Fire Fighters) – 1008

Industrial Relations

Despite a difficult year nationally, Laois County Council maintained good industrial relations during 2011 with no major disputes arising. The Council, in accordance with the Public Service Agreement 2010 – 2014 and in consultation with the relevant Trade Unions, continued to implement measures designed to improve efficiencies and demonstrate cost savings. In May, 2011, the Progress Report for Laois County Council outlined savings of over €3 million which equated to pay savings of €1.2 million, non pay of almost €1 million and €900,000 costs avoided.

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, Third Level Open Learning Programme and various Seminars/Workshops as they arise.

Total expenditure on training was €386,336 (inclusive of expenditure for Fire Services). A very comprehensive training programme was delivered throughout 2011. A sample of the training programmes provided is as follows:-

- Dignity at work
- Work Place Safety
- CSCS 180 degree Excavator Training
- Safepass
- Signing, Lighting & Guarding at Roadworks
- Driver CPC
- Manual Handling Instructors Course
- Energy Efficiency
- Essentials of Employment Law
- Child Protection
- Ladder Training

Open Learning Programme

Laois County Council endeavours, subject to available resources, 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 2011 are as follows:-

- IPA - Certificate, Diploma & Degree in Local Government Studies
- DCU/LGMSB – Masters in Business Administration
- UCD/Loughborough University Higher Diploma in Health and Safety at Work / Masters in Occupational Health & Safety Management
- Open University M.A. in Town and Country Planning

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 in 2011 the standard level was successfully achieved for a further period of two years. This prestigious award is a great achievement on behalf of employees. It is an external validation conducted by FÁS and highlights the commitment and effort of all employees to their own learning and development as

well 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 2011:

- Flexible Working Hours Scheme 2011
- Shorter Working Years Scheme 2011
- Training Policy & Programme 2011

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 the target as set out by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. During 2011, Laois County Council, in conjunction with Midland Employment Support Agency/other agencies, 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 2011 the project team made significant progress in the implementation of the project. Time and Attendance was rolled out to all outstanding office based staff (Engineers, Technicians and Senior Management). A major exercise was carried out with the support of the Superannuation Officer whereby all staff were issued with a Benefit Statement printed

from the CORE Superannuation module.

Other significant tasks completed during the year included migration of our hosting environment to the LGMA's new hosting facility in CityWest and the completion of a benefits realisation exercise as an LGMA pilot for the sector. The project team also committed significant time and effort to supporting the HR, Payroll and Superannuation functions in relation to CORE.

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

In 2011, despite continued severe budgetary constraints, the ICT department remained at the forefront of technological and communications advancement within the local authority area. As in previous years, the emphasis was on improved service provision, coupled with cost reduction, where possible, while at the same time improving communications within the organisation itself and with the general public. In addition to the normal routine work of the Department, the following cost reduction and service level improvement initiatives were completed.

Review of Telephone & Communications Costs

A thorough review of telephone usage and costs was undertaken during 2011 with the intention of achieving cost savings where possible while also increasing efficiency. As a result of that review, the number of phone lines in use was reduced throughout the organisation. A competitive tendering procedure was undertaken to secure the most cost effective line rental and call charges for the Council. As a consequence of this procedure, significant reductions in telephony and related costs have been achieved.

Major Emergency Planning

Over the course of 2011 facilities within County Hall for management of Major Emergency situations were consolidated and upgraded. This included the provision of additional equipment and procedures including new Emergency contact facilities for the Public managed from a dedicated Emergency Control Room in Áras an Chontae.

Security of ICT Systems & Equipment

Work on managing and improving security on the Council's Information and Communications systems continued throughout 2011. The Council's ICT

Department and Data Protection Controller take the issue of data security extremely seriously. Considerable staff resources are devoted to maintaining data securely, and also in appropriate recovery procedures in the event of hardware or other failures. During 2011, an audit of security practices was undertaken by an external agency and any areas requiring upgrade or strengthening were addressed. Access controls and configurations were tightened while laptops and portable data devices were encrypted.

Management of Systems & Equipment

Budgetary constraints require that all ICT equipment is managed and maintained as efficiently as possible both to extend its lifespan and to ensure that it runs at peak efficiently. A considerable amount of time and effort has been invested in upgrading the existing stock of desktop PCs and other equipment rather than devote scarce financial resources to the purchase of new equipment.

Because of the age profile of some of the equipment, significant additional time and effort is now spent on maintenance and upgrade work.

Property Interest Register

In April 2011, the Management Team put a team in place to implement the Property Interest Register (PIR) project. The objective of this project is to map and detail all land and buildings owned by Laois County Council in Laois. The project involves inputting all available historical data into a computerised system as well as implementing a managed system whereby the PIR system is updated with new and updated property information on an ongoing basis. The PIR is now available under the SIA (Spatial Intranet Application) mapping system with a variety of thematic menus. This allows users to get the maximum from the data.

To date the PIR team have successfully entered over 1450 records into the PIR system and have put in place a process whereby any section dealing with property transactions must inform the PIR team with the relevant details and a map of the land.

Social Media

Twitter

Social networking has become a valuable tool in promoting, communicating and educating the public in all our service areas. Our main twitter account @LaoisCouncil has over 800 followers. We use this account to announce service updates like road closures, water shortages, Higher Education Grant updates, finance charges and news and events from all other sections (Arts, Sports, Tourism, and Libraries). @LaoisLibraries is updated by the Library section and all local library activities are posted.

You Tube

We have presence on YouTube, under the profile LaoisCoCo where we upload videos for Tourism, Arts and Music.

Facebook

Laois County Council

<http://www.facebook.com/LaoisCountyCouncil>

This is our main Facebook page for the organisation. We update it with news and information from all departments.

Laois Libraries

<http://www.facebook.com/LaoisLibraries>

Our Library Department update this with news and events from each of the local libraries.

Laois County Fire & Rescue Service

<http://www.facebook.com/laoisfire>

The Fire section keeps users informed of local incidents, rescues and training events.

Laois Environment

<http://www.facebook.com/LaoisEnvironment>

Keep Laois Clean – our environment section use their Facebook page to keep us informed of competitions, community events, clean ups and recycling information.

Laois Tourism

<http://www.facebook.com/laoistourism>

Our Tourism Officer uses this page as a useful marketing tool to promote the County of Laois.

Laois Heritage Forum

<http://www.facebook.com/laois.heritage.forum>

Maintained by the Heritage Officer who has found this page very successful in raising awareness of all aspects of built, natural and cultural heritage of County Laois.

Our Social Networking endeavours were nominated for the “Most Innovative Authority” category in the Local Authority Members Association (LAMA) Awards 2012.

Website

The Council's website continues to be a most successful point of contact with members of the public.

Laois.ie had 3660 visits per week last year, 53% were returning visitors and 47% were new visitors.

Our most popular pages were Planning and the online payments page “PayforIT”, where we’ve added the new Household Charge payment.

The Contact Us Form is still very popular with users preferring to report problems online.

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

Membership of Laois County Development 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.
John Bonham, 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 (Retired 2011)
Anne Goodwin, Laois Partnership Company
Paddy Buggy, Laois Partnership Company
Sonya Duggan, Laois Childcare Committee(Retired 2011)

State Agencies:

Mary Delaney, HSE Midlands
Anne O' Keffe, Laois VEC
Pat Campbell, FÁS (Retired 2011)
Con Feighery, Teagasc
Barry Egan, Enterprise Ireland
Chief Supt. Frank Moore, An Garda Síochána
Kevin Kidney, Fáilte Ireland (retired 2011)

Social Partners:

James G O'Hanlon, Business Sector
Brendan O'Brien, Trade Union Sector
Maria Groarke, Laois Community Forum
Kathleen Gorman, Laois Community Forum
Theresa Carter, Environmental Pillar
Michael Bergin, Farming & Agricultural Sector

In 2011, Laois County Development Board continued its work and held 6 meetings to progress the three objectives of its Strategy Review, including 2 special meetings in respect of consultation on Laois County Development Plan 2012 – 2018 and endorsement of local development agency plans for submission to Central Government. The objectives in the Laois CDB Strategy Review are:

- 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 2011 to progress these actions.

Social Inclusion Measures Working Group

The Social Inclusion Measures Working Group continued to meet throughout the year. A Networking Day on the theme of "Supports and Issues for Older People" was held on 20th October in the Parish Centre, Portlaoise. The following speakers made various presentations on the day:

Finola Colgan, (Mental Health Ireland)
"Positive Ageing & Well Being"

Padraig Farrelly (Crime Prevention Officer, An Garda Síochána)
"Home & Personal Safety"

Joan Freeman (Pieta House)
"Preventing Self Harm & Suicide"

Laois Local Drugs Network

Laois Local Drugs Network Committee continued to meet throughout 2011. The work of the Local network is to help raise awareness of combating substance misuse in the county. In 2011, the Network developed an awareness handbook for parents in relation to drug and alcohol misuse and young people.

A diversionary Art/Graffiti Project was delivered during the summer of 2011, with young people living in O'Moore Place, Portlaoise by Youth Work Ireland (Laois) and Laois Partnership, facilitated and funded by Laois Local Drugs Network, the result of which can be seen as a mural on display in the estate for the public to view. The Network also rolled out their "rulers for schools" drug awareness campaign for distribution in secondary schools in association with

other agencies and held its own networking event for representative agencies and organisations on the Network to share information and examine linkages between all the partners.

Community & Enterprise Section continued in 2011 to facilitate and provide supports for:

- Laois Ethnic Minority Support Group
- Laois Traveller Interagency Committee
- Lone Parents Networking
- Older Persons
- Marginalised and Seldom Heard in the community



Laois Comhairle Na nÓg 2011

Laois Comhairle na nÓg (Laois Youth Council) enjoyed a very successful year in 2011, with the recruitment of several new young people to the Comhairle. So what has Laois Comhairle done in 2011 to represent young people in Laois and to help their voice be heard?

The Comhairle members, in any way they can, try to represent the views of young people in our county, through representing schools, clubs and youth organisations on the Comhairle and by working to highlight issues that affect them and maybe try to change things in a realistic way for young people, by conveying their views to the adult decision makers in the county. They want to assist in making small changes that will help young people in their lives. During 2011, the issues worked on by Laois Comhairle were:

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

The Comhairle was facilitated by experts in the work during the year and also presented to the County

Development Board. The Comhairle also launched their "Teens of Laois" website www.teensoflaois.ie in 2011. The launch was a great success and attracted much media coverage at county and national level.

Other things Laois Comhairle na nÓg has been involved in 2011 were:

- Consultation on the design for the new Youth Café in Portlaoise
- Representing young people on the VEC Youth Committee
- Attendance at conferences, including a Positive Mental Health Conference hosted by Westmeath Comhairle na nÓg.
- Attendance at launch of Dáil na nÓg Report on changes to the curriculum at junior cycle in secondary schools.
- Involvement in preparation for and PR of local events for National Recreation Week in October 2011.
- Promotion of the body image survey among young people on behalf of Dáil na nÓg.

Over 140 young people attended the Annual General Meeting of Comhairle na nÓg held in Portlaoise College on 10th November, 2011. Themes discussed by the young people at this year's meeting were:

- Skills for leaving home
- Racism among young people
- Body image
- Internet safety / cyber bullying

Following consultations with all those who attended, various issues were decided by the Comhairle members to work on in the next year/two years.

Dáil Na nÓg 2011



The National Dáil na nÓg event took place on 18th November, 2011 in the Croke Park Conference Centre and was attended by 5 delegates from Laois Comhairle - Ger Quinn, Meaghan Dunne, Klaudia Malec, Shannon Reid and Aaron Peters.

Issues discussed at the national event included “strengthening the voices of young people through Comhairle na nÓg”, which will be examined and progressed by the newly elected National Comhairle na nÓg Executive (replacing the former National Dáil na nÓg Council) in 2012.

County Joint Policing Committee

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.

The Annual Public Meeting of the County Laois Joint Policing Committee was held on 10th October, 2011. Several members of the public attended and posed questions to the Committee and responses were given by An Garda Síochána and Laois County Council. Themes for this year’s public meeting were:

- Drugs & Education
- Protecting & Respecting our Environment
- Safety in our community

Questions were received from 6 community groups and dealt with at the meeting on issues in respect of drink driving legislation, loose horses, Garda resources and closure of Garda stations, ASBO’s, school visits programme, littering, Community Alert/Neighbourhood Watch schemes, reporting crime, young people’s issues, drug awareness and support and road safety.

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:

Portlaoise:

Phil Mulhare, Sylvia Rouget, Andy Sutton, Maria Groarke

Emo:

Margaret Guijit-Lawlor, Michael Cobbe, Vacancy

Luggacurren:

Mary Wheatley, , Kathleen Gorman, Vacancy

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 Priorities 2011 were:

- To continue to represent the community/voluntary sector at County Development Board and local development agency level
- To continue to promote social inclusion in all sectors of the community
- To acknowledge the endeavours of those community and voluntary groups in the county and to promote same
- To improve communication between the Forum and community/voluntary groups at local area level
- To deliver the actions committed to by the Forum in the County Development Board Strategy Review 2009 – 2012
- To highlight awareness throughout the county of important issues, e.g., positive mental health and suicide prevention, also governance in community/voluntary sector and principles of fundraising
- To assist the Forum Members through training in presentation and social media networking to enable further publicity of the Forum throughout the county and nationally
- To improve public relations and enhance the image of the Forum through promotion of its work in local and national media

The Forum was well represented at County Development Board level by Kathleen Gorman and Maria Groarke and at local development level by Paddy Buggy. The Forum was also represented on each Council SPC, Town and County Joint Policing Committees and several other forums such as Laois Heritage Forum, Laois Partnership and Laois County Childcare Committee.



Socially inclusive events & projects

The Forum continued its work to promote social inclusion across the county through holding three successful older persons networking days in Crettyard, Vicarstown and Ballinakill and also by supporting projects such as a sewing and gardening project being carried out by local volunteers with ethnic minority groups living in the county.

Other supports included involvement in the National Recreation Day event in Portlaoise entitled “Over the Moon” - a community based festival designed by youth groups for the enjoyment of families with young children - and support for the continuation of disability awareness programmes in secondary schools in the county in association with Laois Sports Partnership.

Collaborative Projects 2011

The Forum continued to collaborate with other local development organisations on awareness events and projects, including:

- Active Communities – piloted in Stradbally, in association with Laois Sports Partnership, HSE, Laois Partnership and Laois VEC
- ASAP Drug & Alcohol Awareness Event, in conjunction with HSE, Laois GAA, Laois Sports Partnership and Laois Partnership. Also the drug awareness “rulers for schools” project, in collaboration with the partner agencies on Laois Local Drugs Network
- “Be Winter Ready” Campaign, in conjunction with the organisations and agencies represented on the Major Emergency Planning Committee for Laois and local community organisations
- Laois Mental Health Collaborative Group operating under the auspices of the County Development Board, but a topic which was highlighted by the Forum in the previous year and spearheaded by its members to achieve the establishment of this group in the county

Charities Act Information Event

Following its success the previous year, Laois Community Forum held a further information event in Portarlinton in October, 2011, 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 on the Charities Act 2009 and good governance in the sector.

Communications & Networking

Members of the Forum attended the various conferences during the year and the Forum also facilitated some of its registered groups, whose representatives attended one-day training courses provided through The Wheel and other such community development organisations. Capacity building groups also included the distribution of the Forum’s newsletter with tips on getting “Winter Ready”, good governance and positive mental health, as well as many articles on groups doing much work within their own communities and further afield. The Forum continued to establish itself as the voice of the community, meeting Presidential candidate, Sean Gallagher earlier in his campaign.

The Forum continued during 2011, to promote its work and the work of the Community & Voluntary sector through its website and Facebook page, through its



newsletter and representation of the Forum at all major events in the County, including those organised and held by the Forum itself, such as the Community & Voluntary Awards, Area Meetings with community groups and a Charities Act Information session. Coverage of all these events in local press also went to promote the name of Laois Community Forum and its work during the year.

Area Meetings 2011

The Forum’s highlight of 2011 with regard to establishing linkages was the hosting of 4 meetings between the Forum and community group representatives at area level. Successful meetings were held in Mountmellick, Arles, Ballacolla and Portlaoise, with several issues being discussed and several networking opportunities discovered, including the opportunity to pilot a networking of residents’ committees in Portlaoise Town, as a way of

capacity building them to address any estate management issues they may have and to find ways of accessing relevant information which may assist them.

The Forum continued to work with An Garda Síochána in 2011, developing this template for pilot residents' groups networking meeting, which is set to take place in March of this year. Further collaboration also continues to take place in relation to assisting community alert and neighbourhood watch groups in the county, with advice and support being given by both the Forum and An Garda Síochána.

2011 Community & Voluntary Awards recognises community heroes

The heroes of local communities across the county were celebrated by Laois Community Forum on 16th November when over 200 people gathered in the Killeslin Hotel, Portlaoise for the 3rd Annual Community & Voluntary Awards hosted by Laois Community Forum, aimed to recognise the tremendous contribution made by community and voluntary groups to life in County Laois.

The Forum, comprising 18 members who represent community and voluntary groups countywide, welcomed 65 nominees in six categories and 18 individuals nominated for their outstanding contribution to their local community, the unsung heroes of our county. All nominees were recognised as having made a significant difference within and beyond their local community, through giving of their time, co-operation, their imagination and their hard work to achieve rewards of successful clubs, events and fundraising within the community. Each group and individual was congratulated on the night and presented with a certificate acknowledging their contribution to the community and voluntary effort in Laois.

The night was opened with a performance by Stradbally Youth Theatre, performing their own creation entitled "Elsewhere".

Award Winners and Runners-up were:

Arts & Culture

Winner: Open Door Theatre Group
Runner-up: Maureen Culleton Dance Group

Children & Young People

Winner: Stradbally Youth Theatre
Runner-up: 4th Laois Scout Group
Portarlinton

Sport & Leisure

Winner: Stradbally Playground Committee
Runner-up: Portlaoise 50+ Active Age Group

Heritage & Environment

Winner: South Laois Tourism
Runner-up: Abbeyleix Bog Project

Community Services & Support

Winner: Portarlinton Tidy Towns Association
1st Runner-up: Mountmellick Active Retirement Group
2nd Runner-up: Borris-in-Ossory Social Services Committee

Of the 18 people nominated, Sr. Mary O'Grady was honoured by the Community Forum as Unsung Hero 2011 and was presented with her award by Chairperson of the Forum, Sheelagh Coyle.

Ms Coyle congratulated all the nominees, who are all, as she put it, heroes in their own community, for the hard work and commitment they put into their local areas and people, developing and enhancing them day after day, particularly to be celebrated this year, 2011 being the European Year of the Volunteer, when communities all over Europe are being acknowledged for their volunteerism and the positive attitude of volunteers, working together with a common desire to make our communities stronger. Ms Coyle thanked



her fellow Forum members for their commitment and hard work and thanked Laois County Council for its constant support.

Cllr John Bonham, Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council, praised and congratulated Laois Community Forum for being the voice of the community in Laois, stating the importance of that voice being heard strongly and on behalf of all working in the sector, developing ways of working that will empower groups and individuals in the community, especially in the present climate of change and expansion. Ian McCormack, Acting Director of Services, thanked the Forum for their work in this area and congratulated all the attendees, nominators and nominees. He stated that the hard work attitude and desire of volunteers to enhance and protect their communities should constantly be acknowledged; the community & voluntary sector in Laois is an example of all that can be achieved with such a positive way of thinking.

Laois Community Forum welcomes all groups to register with them and you can do so by contacting Tel. (057) 8674336, by email to LaoisCommunityForum@laoiscoco.ie or download a registration form at www.laoiscommunityforum.ie.

Pride of Place 2011

Laois takes Top Prize in All-Island Pride of Place Competition

Abbeyleix won top prize in the annual Co-operation Ireland All-Island Pride of Place Awards announced at the gala ceremony in Gorey, Co. Wexford on 5th November. Phil Hogan T.D., Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government along with Co-operation Ireland Chairman Christopher Moran and Pride of Place Committee Chairman Tom Dowling presented the group with their award.

Winning in Category Five, for populations greater than 2000, the Judges said; "This is a marvellous community. It caters for all that a community would be proud to cater for. The presentations were excellent and the tour confirmed the heightened expectations of the judges. The town with its stunning architectural heritage looked wonderful and there was compelling evidence of great synergy between the organisations on the day. With all its facilities and positive approach by the community this is an example to all bypass towns".

During the evening, the Minister paid tribute to all the participating groups who work tirelessly to create and promote pride in their cities, towns and villages.

The All-Island Pride of Place Competition recognises and celebrates the vital contributions that community partnerships make to society. The focus is on people coming together to shape, change and enjoy all that is good about their local area. It differs from other similar projects in that they specifically recognise the involvement of the local community in all aspects of rural and urban regeneration including, promoting social cohesion, involvement in planning, the promotion of heritage and environmental awareness.



The Competition is run by Co-operation Ireland in conjunction with the Pride of Place Steering Committee. Peter Sheridan Chief Executive of Co-operation Ireland said:

"I congratulate all the winners of this year's Pride of Place Awards. The accolade is recognition of the commitment and hard work groups undertake for the good of their local community. Although there can only be one winner in each category, this Awards Ceremony is an occasion to acknowledge the efforts of all groups, throughout the island, who were nominated by their local authority. In effect getting to this point is success in itself". Abbeyleix was one of two entries in the competition in 2011. The other entry, Portlaoise Leisure Centre, entered in the single issue category - Community Health Initiative, took the judges by storm when the local community, elected members and officials, staff and management showcased the Leisure Centre as a place which is used not just as a community space, but also to promote good health and well-being through the programmes rolled out by the Centre itself and in association with Laois Sports Partnership.

The judges were treated to accounts by local people of how the Leisure Centre has changed lives, helped them to achieve such accolades as Paralympic and

International Boxing titles, as well as local and national achievements in athletics and triathlon events. The Centre, in partnership with Laois County Council and Laois Sports Partnership showed its centrality and its success in including all groups in the community, taking the initiative with programmes of health and physical activity.

Cllr John Bonham, Cathaoirleach, Cllr John Moran Chairman of Laois County Development Board 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.

Other Activities

Community & Enterprise Section also collaborated with the following agencies/organisations on various projects and initiatives throughout 2011:

- Laois Partnership Company
- Laois Sports Partnership
- Laois Trip
- Laois County Enterprise Board
- Laois County Childcare Committee
- BLOCK and PORT Garda Diversion Projects
- Portlaoise Youth Cafe Consortium
- Laois Local Drugs Network
- LABEL (Laois Third Level Centre)
- Laois VEC Youth Committee
- Citizens Information Centre
- Midlands Regional Drugs Task Force
- Midland Traveller Conflict & Mediation Committee

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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
- Luke Hyland Consulting Engineers
- Laois County Enterprise Board
- AOS Si Marketing

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

Clonminam Business Park Upgrade

The upgrade, when completed, will contribute to the integrated and coherent development of the area, reinforce the commercial vitality of the area and make an important contribution to attracting and sustaining employment opportunities.

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. Future developments on this site will harness the potential of Portlaoise's geographical position in the centre of the country.

TOURISM

Events & Festivals

Laois County Council's Tourism Office continued to actively promote County Laois as the events destination in the Midlands throughout 2011. 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 2011 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 16th to 19th May and attracted golfers from all over Ireland, Northern Ireland, Wales, England and Italy.

The event was very successful with a full programme of golf over the 4 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 Killenard. The overall Winners for 2011 came from Strabane, Northern Ireland. 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 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 2011 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 2011

The Rose of Tralee International Regional Finals 2011 was a very successful event, which took place on the June Bank Holiday weekend. The festival was blessed with glorious weather and 53 Roses from all over Ireland participated in the Regional Finals. There was also an international dimension this year, with 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. 100 Rosebuds and Escorts 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. 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.

Street Performance World Championship, Portlaoise

The Street Performance World Championship, which was held in June 2011 in Portlaoise, proved to be a resounding success. Over 4,500 people attended the event in Portlaoise on Saturday, enjoying the range of exotic performances by the Street Theatre Crew and 'Where's Wally' world record attempt. The overall

reaction was positive and the organisers were delighted with the way the people of Portlaoise embraced the event.

Heartlands Motor Rally

This event coincided with the Street Performance World Championships and added to the festival atmosphere in Portlaoise in June, 2011. The Rally attracted 130 competitors and a huge following of rally enthusiasts for the 2 day event. County Hall was the venue for service and scrutiny and was awash with competitors, cars and merchandising stalls as big crowds turned out for the event.

Other events/activities which the Tourism Department were involved in 2011 included:

- Halloween Howls Comedy Festival
- Abbeyfest
- Ossory Show
- Durrow Howya Festival
- French Festival
- Production of Garden Brochure

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
- 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 2011. 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 survey was carried out during 2011:

- A survey of Graveyards in County Laois

Raise Awareness and Promote Enjoyment of the Heritage of Laois

In 2011, 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 2011 to raise awareness of heritage issues included:

- A week-long programme of family events, guided walks, talks, slideshows and fun-days was organized for national Heritage Week in August
- Workshops in memorial recording delivered by Eachtra in association with Laois Partnership have been held in Aghaboe and Clonaslee with great success. Workshops with TY students in Rathdowney and Clonaslee are also being held, training them in the modern technology used in recording graveyards – GPS, Iphone apps etc

In addition to events, the following publications were produced during 2011:

- Publication of the book 'Thatch – Voices from the Traditional Houses of County Laois'. The Book was launched on 21st November, 2011 by Minister Jimmy Deenihan, T.D. Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
- Interpretive signs for Abbeyleix with attractive illustrated maps at prominent sites in the town were launched in 2011

COMMUNITY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & COUNTY PROMOTION, ARTS, SPORTS & LIBRARIES

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Sustainable Communities Plan for Abbeyfeix was prepared in consultation with the community A Laois Garden Trail booklet was produced in partnership with Laois Tourism <p>Promote Best Practice in Heritage Management & Promote Active Conservation of heritage.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Funding for the restoration project at Donaghmore workhouse was secured in 2011. Preliminary discussions have also commenced in sourcing funding for conservation work at Borris in Ossory Courthouse.</p> <p>The following projects were undertaken in 2011 with support from the Heritage Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey of the Graveyards of County Laois A Laois Garden Trail booklet was produced in partnership with Laois Tourism
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Heritage Performance Indicators

Performance Indicator	2011	2010	2009	2008
No. actions from the Laois Heritage Plan implemented: (A maximum of 8 actions per year are part-funded by the Heritage Council)	4	3	3	8
No. meetings of Laois Heritage Forum held: (The Laois Heritage Forum generally meets quarterly, with working groups meeting more often as required)	2	3	4	3
Number of biodiversity surveys carried out:	0	1	1	3
Number of built/cultural heritage surveys carried out:	1	2	0	2
Number of publications on Laois Heritage produced/supported: (These publications are in addition to project reports produced following surveys etc.)	3	4	0	1
Number of Talks/Training Courses/Seminars organised or supported:	50	46	40	39

ARTS SECTION

Laois School of Music reached a milestone 10th birthday in 2011. Celebrations started with a Performance and Education project in collaboration with the RTE Concert Orchestra, which included 45 participants from LSM playing alongside professional musicians from the Concert Orchestra. Music Generation, Irelands National Music Education Programme, was awarded to Laois in December, 2011 for a 3 year period (2012-2014) after a rigorous application process. The development and learning experiences of the Laois School of Music contributed greatly to this successful outcome.

Laois Youth Theatre

Laois Youth Theatre worked in Portlaoise, Stradbally,

Mountrath, Portarlinton and Rathdowney during the year. Events included participation in the Portlaoise St Patricks' Day Parade, workshops with Raymond Keane of the Barabbas theatre Company, artist in residence with the Dunamais Arts Centre and participation in the City of Clowns event in the Dunamais theatre.



Members also took part in the Street Performance World Championships in Portlaoise and participated in the National Festival of Youth Theatres in Kilkenny. In collaboration with Pan Pan Theatre Company, members performed in "Rehearsing the Dane" in the Dunamaise Theatre and in November the members and tutors took part in the Halloween Festival event at the Plaza, Portlaoise.

Stradbally Arthouse

The Arthouse Stradbally was officially opened in May by Minister Jimmy Deenihan, Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. Costing in excess of €1.2 million, the project was assisted with funding of €440,000 from Access funding. The complex includes artists' studios and living accommodation, an exhibition gallery, an equipped music rehearsal space, a kiln, a meeting room and a garden space with a commissioned Percent for Art wall mounted artwork by James Hayes. To the front of the building is a limestone sculpture by Henk Korthuys, commissioned in conjunction with an international residency scheme at McKeon Stoneworks, Stradbally. Events during the year included open days, conferences, exhibitions, youth theatre performance, filming by TG4, community art workshops for children and adults and events for National Poetry Day, National Culture Night and Laois Year of Craft.



The Artists in Schools Scheme

The Artists in Schools Scheme ran in 9 schools in 2011. This Scheme allows students to have an in-depth experience with the professional artist and gives them the opportunity to experience different art mediums. Cups and Crowns Educational Theatre presented "The Magnificent Mind of Daisy Dunne" and workshop in Presentation NS, Portarlinton.

Bealtaine Festival – for Older People

The Arts Office presented a programme of events for older people in May including drama performances by Carnation Theatre Group and performances by the Laois ICA Federation Choir in two hospitals for older people and Creative Writing workshops for active age groups in the community. A brochure listing the programme of events throughout the county was published by the Arts Office.

Midland Collaborative Projects

2 Midlands arts and culture magazines were published in 2011 and distributed throughout the Midlands Region. Midland Masterclasses - The Laois programme included a masterclass in Still Life Drawing and Memoir/Autobiographical writing.

Writer-in-Residence

The residency programme with writers Ann Egan and Jean O'Brien included a writing course for adults and young writers in Áras an Chontae, Library events and workshops with Active Age Groups in the county. A new Laois Anthology of work with writings from this programme entitled "Leaves 2011" was published and launched as part of the Leaves Literature Festival in November.

Summer Arts programme

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

The workshops were held in different parts of the county and included the following art practices: pottery, arts and crafts and creative writing.

'Leaves' - Laois Literary Weekend

The weekend Literary Festival held in November included a launch event in Áras an Chontae, workshops in schools, a reading in Portlaoise Library and two literary evenings in Stradbally Hall with writers John Banville, Dermot Healy, Jean O'Brien and Anne Haverty.

National Culture Night

Events held at the Arthouse Stradbally included workshops, a jewellery design display, a clown and magic performance, traditional music groups and a classical guitar performance by Laois School of Music. The evening also included a poetry and

painting collaboration with Jean O'Brien, poet and Ray Murphy and a follow on exhibition. Other events included library readings, dance and literary events. A full brochure of events was published by the Arts office.

Other activities included

- Arts Act Grants Awards
- Tyrone Guthrie Centre Bursary
- Exhibitions
- Percent for Art Projects included - M7 Motorway Project
- National Poetry Day Event
- National Music Day
- Support of Festivals - Mountmellick Drama Festival, Slieve Bloom Storytelling Festival and Voices Across Cultures.

Performance Indicators 2009 2010 2011

No. of Arts Grants Allocated:	61	45	49
Per 1,000 population:	3098	2714	2430
No. of Youth Theatre:	4	4	4
Summer Arts Workshops:	18	18	18
Laois School of Music -			
No. of Students:	400	380	380

SPORT & LEISURE SECTION

The Sport and Leisure Section of Laois County Council delivered many successful events and activities during 2011. Most notable were:

Play Provision

Centre of Well-being Opens in Stradbally

A waist-twister, a shoulder-builder and an air-walker are amongst the exercise stations in a new outdoor gym, which was officially opened on 10th June 2011 in Stradbally by Michael Ring TD, Minister of State, Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport. The gym was developed by Stradbally Playground Committee in association with Laois County Council and Stradbally Tidy Towns. The project was funded by Laois Partnership Company under the Rural Development Programme and Stradbally Playground Committee with the site provided by Laois County Council.

The outdoor gym, an extension to the popular Stradbally playground, consists of many elements. The gym is specially designed to safely exercise all parts of the body and each piece of equipment is accompanied by detailed instructions. The facility

uniquely contains a toddler play area which will facilitate parents and grandparents to exercise while the toddlers in their charge play safely within view. The 'Centre of Well-being' in Stradbally offers locals a chance to enjoy exercise in a safe environment while, at the same time, reaping the benefits of fresh air, sunshine and good company. We believe the gym, which can be used by all ages, will be of benefit to the whole community.

According to Cllr. James Deegan, Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council and Chairperson of Stradbally Playground Committee, the group decided to develop the outdoor gym to provide an opportunity for the wider Stradbally community to enjoy outdoor exercise in a new and different way. Cllr. Deegan said: 'In many European countries and indeed in other parts of the world, it's a common sight to see groups of people coming together in outdoor settings to exercise. This not only keeps people fit, but also offers important social benefits.'

New Playground in Castletown

Ríocht na nÓg Playground was opened in 2011 at Old Boys School, Castletown, and was named by Shauna Kirwan. This project was initiated by the local community with the assistance of Laois County Council and Laois Partnership Company. The ribbon was cut by Shauna Kirwan and five other children representing local schools in the area - Castletown, Paddock and Pike of Rushall. The playgrounds were designed to accommodate toddlers up to 12 years, with a variety of equipment to suit all abilities. All playground facilities are open every day during daylight hours and it is hoped that these facilities will continue to bring endless joy and fun to all for many years to come.

National Bike Week 2011

Many successful events were held during National Bike Week, which ran from 18th to 26th. Among the events was the Abbeyleix Spoke Project with Abbeyleix Tidy Towns and Laois County Council, where primary schools in Abbeyleix and the surrounding areas cycled out to Abbeyleix Esate and then met back in Fr Breen Park for fun activities which included a slow bike race, balancing on a wedge and many more.

Safety played a big part and there was a Workshop in Portlaoise Leisure Centre with Portlaoise Community Gardai Cycling Challenge along with bike checks. As part of the school road safety programme,

St Frances School Portlaoise, Maryborough NS Portlaoise and Derrmalogue NS participated in a workshop giving information on safety when cycling and how to carry out safety checks.

Laois County Council / FAI Football in the Community Programme

Community Football Programmes

The football in the community programme has been running across the county in both rural and urban areas for the last number of years, nominated by both local residents and Councillors. The programme is aimed at children who may not play soccer with a club or want to enjoy soccer on their own doorstep. The development officer, assisted by local volunteers, will implement weekly coaching sessions for one hour over an 8 week period to give children the opportunity to take part in organised sport within their local community. All community programmes are free of charge and open to both boys and girls. Communities involved are Knockmay, Borris-in-Ossory, Rathdowney, Mountrath, St Brigid's, Portlaoise and Collier's Wood.

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 and costs just €30. The programme works on the basic skills of soccer including passing, dribbling, shooting and goalkeeping. The activity is non competitive with each child having a football during practice to ensure they get a large amount of contact time with the football which has been proven to help players develop.

Football in Schools

The FAI caters for all levels of school children in a variety of programmes. Buntus programme, run through the LSP, trains teachers to help them deliver soccer as part of the P.E curriculum. Almost all of the schools in Laois have completed this programme. Only one school remains to complete the course in 2012.

The Primary school 5 aside runs in April/May of each year and is a national competition. Each school can enter teams in Boys, Girls or mixed sections. A large number of the schools entering the Laois competition are classed as small schools. The finals day for the

winners of A schools and the remaining B and C schools take place in Portlaoise with the assistance of Portlaoise College students. With 49 teams taking part there was a record number of participants reaching over 400 in 2011.

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. This competition is for boys and girls in 3rd and 4th class. 120 participants took part in the competition in 2011 which was played in Portarlinton Community Centre.

Secondary School Futsal competition runs in November/December and is aimed at children in 1st year. This is a national competition with the winners of each county represented at regional level. Schools participating are Mountrath Community School, Portlaoise College, Scoil Chriost Rí and CBS Portlaoise. Scoil Chriost Rí and Mountrath Community school represented Laois at the Leinster Finals held in Gormanstown, Co.Meath.

Transition Year course is available to any school with transition year students. This year Heywood Community School had 72 participants and C.B.S. Portlaoise had 36 participants.

Late Night Soccer

This programme was set up mainly to give young adults aged from 15-18 an activity to take part in late on a Friday night. The programme is run in association with the Gardaí and the Garda diversion programmes in the town where the league is set up. Portarlinton had 26 participants.

Women/Girls Soccer

Soccer Sisters Programme

This programme is devised by the Women's Unit of the FAI to help give girls aged 7-12 the opportunity to take part in soccer. Many girls in Laois are currently not being catered for by clubs. With the soccer sisters and drop in session more girls are getting the opportunity to play soccer. Linking in with clubs is vital as a number of clubs have taken on teams from the girls that attended the programme

Women's Soccer Leisure League

This league is run for women over the age of 18 and is run over one hour for a period of 8 weeks. The league is aimed at women who may have never

played soccer or any sport before. It is run in May/June each year and there were 24 participants in 2011.

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. In 2011 the programme had 36 participants.

Summer Soccer Schools

Summer Camps were held throughout Laois. Weekly skills programmes held from Monday to Friday with over 300 participants taking part in 2011. The programme is rolled out in soccer clubs in Laois from 10.30 a.m. to 3.00 p.m. with participants receiving a full kit, football and certificate.

Coach Education

2011 was the most successful year for Coach Education in Laois with 4 Kick Start One courses taking place. Two were club based, one based in Portlaoise College and one for the Community Coaching course based in Portlaoise. One strength and conditioning course and one small sided games workshop was held with over 30 participants.

FETAC Level 5 Training Course being run in the Midland Prison with 10 participants. This gives participants a qualification in soccer based on practical assessment.

Emerging Talent Programme

This is a programme where the best players across the Midlands train once a week at Portlaoise Leisure Centre and take part in matches against other centres. The programme runs for 32 weeks a year and caters for 3 age groups. Once players are over age for the centre they then move on to Inter league squads and if they have excelled further they can be invited into the Regional squad based in Tullamore.

LIBRARIES

Introduction

The public Library Service performs an essential role in our communities by providing access to information, knowledge, lifelong learning and leisure reading in an inclusive manner. The Laois library service is delivered through a network of 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.

Stradbally Library and Arthouse

Stradbally Library and Arthouse was officially opened by Ministe Jimmy Deenihan in May 2011. The Library space has been totally refurbished with 8000 new items of stock including DVDs, adult and childrens stock and 5 internet points on fast broadband connection. The public library will provide a vital resource for communities in Stradbally and the surrounding areas. This is the latest library to be opened by Laois County Council as part of its Library Development Programme. It is another example of Laois County Councils' commitment to the provision of modern library buildings and services to meet the needs of local communities in areas such as education, information and recreation.

The combination of a public library and art studios in the one complex is unique where the library will host activities and events in partnership with the Arts Section such as art workshops, lectures and talks. It is a good example of the Library and Arts Section providing shared services for the good of the community.

Since opening in May, 2011 the Library has registered 412 members and issued over 6,400 items with a total of 766 internet sessions. There have also been weekly children's activities. Some of the highlights to date were One Book, One Stradbally in June, 2011, Heritage week events in August and Culture night in September.

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 2011 was €70,000 with an additional book grant of €26,151 from the Library Council.

Events and Activities

Laois County Library held a large variety of events and activities in all Branch Libraries throughout the county in 2011. 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 storytelling.

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 2011. Mountrath and Mountmellick Libraries had a visit from Irish History Live and gave animated history sessions for children in Abbeylax, Mountmellick and Rathdowney libraries. Well known illustrator Gordon Darcy held wildlife drawing sessions in Mountmellick, Stradbally and Portlaoise Libraries. Archivist Sinead Holland gave genealogy talks in Mountrath and Portlaoise libraries.

Mountrath Library

Mountrath Library continued with events and children's activities during 2011. Monthly class visits and book displays continued with arts and crafts for younger readers. Fás computer classes are continuing. For Easter there was Easter Crafts for younger readers. For Children's Book Festival, there was cupcake making, magic shows and family tree talks. The weekly knitting club is held every Friday morning in the library and is proving very popular. Adults and children's bookclubs are held every month in the library.

Abbeylax Library

Abbeylax Library continues to have weekly art classes for children and monthly events. The Art Gallery

continues to be a premier location in the county for art exhibitions with 11 art exhibitions during the year featuring Tom Joyce, Peter Holmes-Sellers, Anthony Powell and Gloria Davis.

Portlaoise Library

Portlaoise Library had a busy year of events and these include monthly adult book clubs, weekly class visits by local and surrounding schools, FÁS e-learning, weekly Irish Classes 'Ciorcal Comhrá' and competitions. Anne Egan held creative writing classes in May and Laois ICA held a display of their traditional crafts in March. An Irish Evening was held on 9th March with Irish dancing, singing and music with an attendance of over 200.

For Children's Book Festival there were magic shows, storytime, family tree talks, while authors Anita Hendy, Olive O'Brien and Oisín McGann read stories. The 'Wood of Life' exhibition was a very popular event, to which local schools were invited. National Poetry Day was celebrated with readings by Poet Rita O' Brien, while culture night was celebrated by adult story teller Jack Lynch who told tales to an enthusiastic audience. Christmas carols and Christmas crafts were held in December.

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. Highlights of the year include; Launch of Tom Phelans book 'Nailer', Culture Night with choir singing, art classes and author visit Monica McInerney; Library first birthday party; Slieve Bloom Storytelling festival, Author visits by Anita Hendy and Oisín McGann for Children's Book Festival; Christmas carols and Christmas crafts. The Art Gallery was fully booked in 2011 with exhibitions by Niki Purcell, Noel Barry Derek Fitzpatrick and featured local art groups from Geashill and Kilbride.

Bibliotherapy- Mind and Body book Therapy

Laois County Libraries launched 'Bibliotherapy-Mind and Body Book Therapy' in 2011. This is an initiative between the HSE, The Irish College of General Practitioners and Local Authority Library Services introducing the mind and body book therapy scheme to support people with emotional and psychological difficulties to gain insight into and treat the problems that are upsetting or disturbing them. These highly recommended books cover a range of everyday issues experienced by people e.g. stress, depression,

bereavement, self esteem, addictions, etc and are available in selected libraries in County Laois. Leaflets providing details of books, websites and help-lines are available in your local library and will be distributed to the HSE and doctors surgeries throughout Laois.

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 2011 the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform provided €12,000 for the purchase of library stock.

National Service Indicators

L: Library Services

L. 1 Public Opening Hours

Average number of opening hours per week for full-time libraries: 34.07

Average number of opening hours per week for part time libraries (where applicable): 9.42

No of full time libraries that have Lunchtime openings: 1

No of full time libraries that have evening openings: 4

No of full time libraries that have Saturday openings: 4

L. 2 Total No of visits to full time libraries : 259,000

L. 3 (i) Annual expenditure on stock per head of population county wide: 1.44

(ii) Number of items issued per head of population (county/city wide)
for books 3.58

for other items 0.9

L. 4 Number of Internet sessions provided 15,636

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/
Caroline Goucher

ENVIRONMENT

Senior Engineer: John O'Donoghue
Brendan Clarke

Report on Strategic Policy Committee

The Planning & Development & Environment Strategic Policy Committee (S.P.C.) held 4 meetings during 2011 to discuss and approve strategy and policy documents such as the Review of the Litter Management Plan, the County Development Plan and Local Area Plans. The Committee also received progress reports and updates on Creating New Residential Areas, the Study of Peak Oil & Gas in Ireland, Unfinished Housing Developments in County Laois, Marketing, Sale & Distribution of Fuels (Amendment) Regulations, 2011, Major Emergency Management, Quarries Legislation and Farm Inspection Manual outlining the objectives and measures of success under the various categories.

Community Initiatives



Clean Up Laois Week

In association with An Taisce's National Spring Clean, Clean up Laois Week took place from 4th to 8th April, 2011. 127 groups, consisting of numerous volunteers, schools and tidy towns members registered and a

total of 38 tonnes of handpicked litter was collected. This is the equivalent of approximately 150 domestic wheelie bins full of litter/rubbish. Resulting rubbish was collected and disposed of by the Environmental Enforcement Officers. This is a fantastic achievement which could not be done without the assistance and dedication of the people living and working in Laois.

Grant Schemes

Under the Community Grant Scheme 2011, funding was awarded to 58 groups for various projects to benefit the environment and enhance local amenities. Various projects around the county were funded under the Community Project Fund. This fund allocates € 1,000 to each elected member of Laois County Council to finance worthwhile projects in their own areas.

Tidy Towns

Laois Federation of Tidy Towns has 30 groups registered. 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. Assistance was provided to the groups in the form of the Tidy Towns Grants, Summer Wheelie Bin Scheme, 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.

Marks awarded at National level continue to improve year on year. Congratulations to all as results for 2011 proved very positive. Three medals were awarded in County Laois with Portlaoise awarded a Silver Medal and Castletown and Abbeyleix awarded Bronze Medals. County Awards went to Ballacolla and Abbeyleix and Castletown was the overall winner in the Laois area. Portarlington won an Endeavour Award.

In association with the Laois Federation of the I.C.A., the Environment section 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 2011). 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/Waste Enforcement

Large scale illegal dumping is a cause for serious concern in County Laois. Laois County Council organised an Illegal Dumping Campaign in 2011. Billboards displaying local areas subjected to illegal dumping were placed in two of the main towns – Portlaoise and Mountrath. The Council's website highlights the areas around the county where illegal dumping is occurring and encouraging the public to be more vigilant in these areas in particular. Press releases outlining illegal dumping are regularly submitted to the local media for publication. In December 2011, the Environment Section also took the necessary steps to restrict all vehicle access to Derrybeg Bog, Trumera, Mountrath due to ongoing illegal dumping.

Waste Enforcement also carried out a billboard campaign highlighting the issue of 'Bogus Waste Collectors'. A significant quantity of waste material is collected illegally by door-to-door collectors. This initiative was carried out to highlight to the public the necessity to be aware of persons carrying out leaflet drops into homes providing information of 'free' scrap metal collections or 'waste disposal' at reduced costs. Such an activity creates economic profit for the 'Bogus Collector'. However, often the waste collected is then illegally dumped in the bogs and forestry areas within the remit of the county. Laois County Council reminds all householders / business proprietors of the importance of using only authorised waste collectors otherwise they may pay the price i.e. as well as paying for the pick-up, you may also find yourself receiving a litter fine or further prosecution.

The Environment Section continued to promote their freephone confidential litter hotline 1850 323230 and during 2011, 878 environmental complaints were received – 636 were litter-related representing an overall increase of 7%.

During 2011, 182 litter fines issued for varying offences. 39 cases were sent to our legal team to initiate legal proceedings – 21 resulted in successful convictions in court and 11 Notices were served on landowners for failing to keep their private lands clean and free of litter.

Dog Fouling

There has been a notable increase in dog fouling in recent years and this is posing a serious health and litter nuisance for the town/village areas in particular.

Considerable investment in promoting awareness of this offence has been carried out including, signage, provision of bins, ongoing production and distribution of responsible dog fouling leaflet, billboard and media advertisements, out-of-hours monitoring and anti-dog fouling campaigns. This will continue in 2012.

Garda Assistance

Meetings have been held with members of the Garda Síochána who, as a result of changing legislation, now have the same powers as the Litter Wardens in relation to littering offences and would be particularly helpful outside normal working hours. We do recognise that public order offences are priority for this Sector and appreciate the assistance with roadside checkpoints and site visits in particular.

Irish Business Against Litter - IBAL

An Taisce are responsible for the national anti-litter name and shame league which encompasses 53 cities/towns in Ireland. Due to its population, Portlaoise town falls within the remit for judging. Unfortunately in recent surveys, Portlaoise town has fared badly in litter terms i.e. ranked in 48th position. Initially the surveys were restricted to the core of town but it has now expanded to include other areas such as housing estates, approach roads and business parks. Every effort is made to take on board the comments of the surveyors on the 10 sites inspected with a view to making substantial improvements.



Energy Efficiency

Overview of Energy Usage in Laois County Council

The main electrical energy users in Laois County Council are Water Treatment (32%), Waste Water Treatment (16%) Public Lighting (44%) and buildings (8%). the remainder of energy consumption relates to natural gas, oil and fuel for fleet vehicles.

In 2010, SEAI's Monitoring and Reporting project estimated Laois County Council's energy consumption to be 18,350,556 MWh of energy, consisting of :

- 11,103 MWh of electricity
- 7,247 MWh of fossil fuels
- 75 MWh of renewable fuels

Actions undertaken in 2011 (Total Savings: 841 MWh)

In June 2011, Laois County Council prepared an eighteen month energy plan to deliver annual savings of 3% across all major energy consuming departments:

Laois County Council undertook a range of initiatives to improve our energy performance, including:

- Performance upgrades to a number of water and waste water treatment plants which resulted in over 460 MWh of savings,
- Lighting improvements - 120 MWh of savings
- Energy Management measures at various locations 242 MWh of savings.

Actions planned for 2012

Many other measures are planned for 2012.

Performance Indicators

E. Environmental Services

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

(i)	Dry recyclables	100%*
(ii)	Organics	36.86%*

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:	20.09%
(ii)	Tonnage of Household Waste (collected at kerbside) which is sent for recycling	3275
(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)	2778

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

- tonnage	12,504
- percentage of household waste collected	76.69%

*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 sites	Total Number of Facilities	Number of locations per 5,000 population
Glass	47	2	49	3.05
Cans	47	2	49	3.05
Textiles	6	2	8	0.50
Batteries	-	2	2	0.12
Oils	-	2	2	0.12
Cardboard	-	2	2	0.12
Magazines	-	2	2	0.12
Plate Glass	-	2	2	0.12
Metal	-	2	2	0.12
Plastic	-	2	2	0.12
WEEE	-	2	2	0.12
Newspaper	-	2	2	0.12
Wood	-	2	2	0.12
Flourescent lamps	-	2	2	0.12
Hedge Trimmers	-	2	2	0.12
Tyres	-	2	2	0.12

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:	0
- Number of litter wardens (both full and part time per 5,000 population):	0.19
- Number of on the spot fines issued:	183
- Number of on the spot fines paid:	96
- Number of notices issued (under Sections 9,15, 16, 17 and 20 of the Litter Pollution Act 1997);	11
- Total number of prosecutions taken (all prosecutions under the Litter Acts 1997-2003):	39
- Number of prosecution cases taken because of non-payment of on-the-spot fines:	39
- Total number of prosecutions secured (all prosecutions under the Litter Acts 1997-2003):	21
- Number of prosecutions secured (relating to non payment of on-the-spot fines):	21
- % of areas within the Local Authority that are:	
Unpolluted (i.e. litter-free)	17%
Slightly polluted with litter	75%
Moderately polluted with litter	8%
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):	878
- Number of complaints investigated:	878
- Number of complaints resolved where no further action was necessary:	746 (excl. 13 pending)
- Number of enforcement procedures taken:	119

E.9 Percentage of Schools participating in Environmental campaigns

- Primary Schools	90%
- Secondary Schools	100%

PLANNING

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

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 2011 was 537. However, it should be noted that 129 of the total applications received were invalid and required the applicant to submit a new application. The main reasons for invalidation of planning files were for public notices being out of date, agents name omitted from maps/drawings, no north point shown on maps and distances not shown on site layouts.

The following table gives a breakdown of valid planning applications received and decisions made during 2011.

Number of valid applications received	408
Number of decisions made	430
Number of applications granted	393
Number of applications refused	37

2011 Performance

Invalid applications returned to applicant	23%
Referrals to Area Offices (working days)	14

27 applications were appealed to An Bord Pleanála in

2011.

Customer Service Initiatives

2011 saw the continuation of the scanning of planning applications as they are received by the Planning Authority. Throughout 2011, the public were able to access all planning applications on-line within two weeks of the Planning Authority receiving them.

199 Pre-planning meetings were held in 2011, 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.

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

The Planning website continues to be a very popular attraction with 75,015 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 2011-2017 (including Environmental Report and AA/ SFRA) was adopted on 11th October, 2011 and came into effect from 8th November, 2011. The Plan provides a strategic framework and policy context within which the Local Authority makes its planning decisions. During 2011, Public Consultations were held in Durrow, Mountmellick, Killeslin, Ballylinan and Mountrath in respect of the Draft County Development Plan.

As part of the Council's input into National and Regional policy, submissions were made to the DoEHLG in relation to the Draft Retail Planning Guidelines 2011 and also to the Midland Regional Authority project on a Coordinated Sustainable Transport Strategy for the Region.

A Joint Spatial Plan for the Greater Carlow / Graiguecullen Urban Area is being coordinated between Carlow Local Authorities and Laois County Council.

An issues paper was put on public display in March, 2011 inviting submissions to the Joint Spatial Plan

and meetings with community groups were held in April, 2011. This joint spatial plan is made up of a Town Plan for Carlow Town and Local Area Plans for Graiguecullen and Carlow Environs. These plans will go on display in early 2012.

A Joint Local Area Plan for Portarlinton is being coordinated between Offaly County Council and Laois County Council. An issues paper was put on public display in September, 2011 inviting submissions to the Joint Local Area Plan and meetings with community groups were held in September, 2011. The Draft Plan will be on public display in early 2012.

Submissions were also invited to the review of the Portlaoise and Mountmellick Local Area Plans with public consultation with interested groups during September 2011. These Draft Plans will be on public display in early 2012.

Conservation

In relation to the Built Heritage, a review of the Record of Protected Structures was carried out in tandem with the County Development Plan review. Additions in relation to thatch buildings, bridges and industrial heritage and Buildings in Portlaoise and deletions were made to the RPS.

7 Architectural Conservation Areas (ACA's) were identified in the County Development Plan process for Portlaoise, Abbeyleix, Durrow, Timahoe, Ballinakill, Castletown and Clonaslee.

Further works carried out in 2011 included Saint Peters Church Of Ireland, Mountrath Road, Portlaoise, RPS 170, received a grant under the Buildings at Risk Fund. This fund is administered by the Department of the Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

12 Declarations (S.57) in relation to protected structures were processed in 2011.

A seminar on the theme 'Built Heritage – Protected Structures and Architectural Conservation Areas', was held on 29th January, 2011, at the newly refurbished Stradbally Courthouse. The seminar provided both information on the importance of protected structures and assistance available to owners in maintaining their properties.

Derelict Sites

Utilising the powers available to it under the Derelict Sites Act 1990 as amended, the Planning Authority continued to adopt a pro-active approach to dealing with the problem of dereliction throughout the county in 2011.

Fifteen new cases of dereliction were identified in the course of the year, the bulk (9 no.) of which are located in the main urban centres of Portlaoise and Portarlinton with the remainder in Mountrath (3), Mountmellick (1), Graiguecullen (1) and Ballinakill (1).

The specific action taken in relation to these properties under the Derelict Sites Act 1990 as amended is summarised as follows.

15 no. Section 8(2) Notices of Intention served. The Section 8.2 Notice is similar to a Warning Letter used in Enforcement. It is basically a warning to the owner of the property that the Council is considering formally placing the site in question in the Derelict Sites Register.

12 no. Section 8(7) Notices of Entry served. The effect of this notice is to formally place the site in question on the Register.

12 no. Section 11 Notices of Schedule of Upgrading Works served. This notice sets out the nature and extent and timeframe of remedial works to be undertaken in order to undo the state of dereliction present.

12 no. Section 22 (3) Notices served. This notice indicates the market value of the site and must be established to allow derelict site levies be imposed if necessary. The levy (which is determined at 3% of the open market value of the property) is one of the main sanctions available to the Council under the legislation and is utilised if the owner has not or refuses to carry out the required upgrading works on the site.

Separately, levies in the total sum of €58,350 were charged on owners of derelict properties. These levies relate to properties which were entered on the Register in calendar year 2010. Where levies have not been paid, cases have been referred to the Council's solicitors to initiate Court action in order to secure payment of the debt. This process is ongoing.

(iii) Planning Enforcement

Introduction

The Planning Authority, in accordance with the statutory requirements under the Planning and Development Acts, 2000 - 2011, seeks to ensure compliance to planning permissions and also to prevent unauthorised development.

Unauthorised Development

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

Functions

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

General Procedural Steps

On receipt of a 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 2011 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 annually 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:	187
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Number of Buildings covered by Valid Commencement Notices:	158
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Number of Buildings Inspected:	46
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Number of Buildings Inspected as a % of buildings covered by valid Commencement Notices:	29%
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(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 8 estates taken in charge in 2011.

A register of unfinished Housing estates was compiled by Laois County Council in 2011. 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 work ourselves or indeed enter into an agreement with the bond holder to carry out the works. In 2011, Laois County Council called in the bond on a number of estates in the county and substantial work was carried out. Examples of such estates are:

- Barrowvale, Graiguecullen
- Grallow Woods, Abbeylax
- Brotherton, Sleaty Road, Carlow
- Ballacollig, Mountmellick

Similarly, where the developer has failed to complete the estate in accordance with the permission granted, Laois County Council has the power to encourage the developer to engage with the local authority by initiating enforcement proceedings. Laois County Council has had considerable success in this regard in 2011.

Planning and Building Control - Service Indicators

Planning Applications – Decision making

Individual Houses 31/12/11

Number of applications decided	85
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	30
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	55
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	73.24
% of grants	89%
% of refusals	11%
% 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%

New Housing Development 31/12/11

Number of applications decided	5
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	4
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	76
% of grants	40%
% of refusals	60%
% 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 31/12/11

Number of applications decided	337
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	244
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	92
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	73.67
% of grants	89%
% of refusals	11%
% of cases where the decision was confirmed, with or without variations, by An Bord Pleanala	44%
% of cases where the decision was reversed by An Bord Pleanala	56%

Other: Requiring EIA 31/12/11

Number of applications decided	3
Number of decisions which were decided within 8 weeks	1
Number of decisions which required the submission of further information	2
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	107
% of grants	67%
% of refusals	33%
% 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 31/12/11

Total number of cases subject to complaints that were investigated	142
Total number of cases subject to complaints that were dismissed	32
Total number of cases subject to complaints that were resolved through negotiations	36
Number of enforcement procedures taken through warning letters	85
Number of enforcement procedures taken through enforcement notices	23
Number of prosecutions	6

Opening Hours and Consultations 31/12/11

Average number of opening hours per week	32.5
Number of pre-planning consultation meetings held	199
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)
No of new buildings notified that were inspected by the Local Authority	46

LAOIS WATER SAFETY

Water Safety Awareness Week 2011

As Part of Laois' commitment to Water Safety Awareness, Laois Water Safety ran a schools programme which visited schools around the county to raise awareness about water. The main aim of the presentation was to give children a safe message about swimming and water safety during the summer holidays. Emphasis was on water safety in the home and particular emphasis on farm water safety which is very appropriate with so many children living on and visiting farms during the holidays. The children were shown how to use a ring buoy and their importance on lakes, rivers and ponds around the county. Both the teachers and children in the schools were very receptive to the presentations.

Water Safety Classes

Laois Water Safety successfully delivered Spring and Autumn Water Safety Classes at Portlaoise Leisure Centre. Certificates were presented to all participants in May, 2011 by Noel McCarthy, Chairperson of Laois Water Safety.

Summer Swim Weeks 2011

Laois Water Safety held two outdoor Swim Week Programmes in 2011 at Ballinakill Outdoor Heated Pool in July and in the Nore River at Castletown in August. The weather was not favourable but that did not dampen any spirits with all candidates attending every day.

Paws Programme

Laois County Council, in association with Laois Water Safety, continued to successfully support and deliver Swimming Lessons combined with Water Safety to 50 primary schools in County Laois.

Chairperson Steps Down

During the year at the AGM of Laois Water Safety, Arthur Drennan stepped down as Chairperson after 31 years of dedicated service and he was honoured later in the year with a presentation and made Life Time President of Laois Water Safety.

LAOIS COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Chief Fire Officer: Martin Collins

Fire Service Operations

The operational service responded to 687 incidents in 2011. Of these, 414 were fires and the remaining were special service calls; 86 road traffic accidents, 11 incidents of flooding and 176 other miscellaneous incidents.

New Fire Appliance

A new Class B fire appliance was delivered in May and has gone to Stradbally Fire Station. It carries a full range of fire-fighting and rescue equipment and will serve the Stradbally area as well as a portion of the M7 motorway from New Inn (Junction 15) to Tougher (Junction 17). The programme of updating fire brigade equipment was continued with the purchase of crash rescue equipment, communications equipment and breathing apparatus equipment. In addition, all fire stations are now equipped with an automated external defibrillator (AED).

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 three times during the year and distributed to all relevant

personnel. 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 Workshop

On 17th June, 2011 Laois County Council held an Inter Agency Major Emergency On Site Co-Ordination Workshop involving the three Principle Response Agencies i.e. Laois Local Authorities, An Garda Síochána and the Health Service Executive. The workshop ran successfully and the feedback from both the participants and the umpires was positive.



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.

Health & Safety

The Fire Service's Health, Safety and Welfare Management Programme was finalised on 19th January, 2011. Laois County Fire and Rescue service rostered senior fire officers convened 37 times throughout the year to assess the programme and monitor its targets. Laois County Fire and Rescue Service retained the services of Dr Eddie Murphy to provide our Critical Incident Stress Management C.I.S.M. Service to all fire service personnel.

Laois Wildland Fire Liaison Group

In January, agencies including An Garda Síochána, Coillte, the National Parks & Wildlife Service, Bórd na Móna, Laois Civil Defence and Laois Farm Forestry Growers joined Laois County Fire & Rescue Service in forming the Laois Wildland Fire Liaison Group. This group has been set up to coordinate measures for dealing with forest, gorse and bog fires incidents in Laois and is the first of its kind in Ireland.

Laois County Fire & Rescue Service organised the group's first training day on April 15th which brought the partner agencies together to train with the fire service in areas including safety, the National Incident Command System, firefighting techniques and water delivery.

Fire Safety Certificate and Planning Applications

In 2011, Fire Safety Certificates for 47 commercial developments were processed and advice was provided to the Planning Section in respect of 65 planning applications.

Licensing of Premises

Applications in relation to 82 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 2011. Inspections were carried out as required with reports forwarded to the courts service.

Inspection of Premises

Fire safety inspections of 58 premises were carried out during 2011. Enforcement action was taken in a number of cases where deficiencies were identified.

Pre-Incident Planning

The Pre-Incident Planning programme was expanded to all stations in 2011. This programme aims to

increase the amount of premises information available to fire crews at incidents.

Community Fire Safety

The Schools programme was delivered to 1617 Third Class students in the county. Fire Safety presentations were also delivered to a number of community groups during the year. Open nights were held at all 8 fire stations during Fire Safety week which took place from 3rd to 10th October.

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

During 2011 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

2011 Road Grant Allocations

In 2011, Laois County Council received a total allocation of €46,078,217 for National & Non -National roads in the county. €9.5m of this funding was provided by the Department of Transport under the Regional and Local Roads Investment Programme through the National Roads Authority.

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

The M7/M8 PPP Motorway Scheme was officially opened on 28th May, 2010. The National Roads Authority, under their PPP 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. Up to 50 staff are employed through CRG in the ongoing operation and maintenance of the M7/M8 PPP Scheme.

The completion of this project greatly benefits local communities and provides a key element in the national road infrastructure. The strategic location of County Laois together with the M7/M8 PPP Scheme provides the basis for new economic opportunities. In addition to our close proximity to Dublin, the shorter journey times to Cork and Limerick further enhance business and tourism and will promote Laois as a location for industrial, manufacturing and technological business expansion.

M7 Castletown to Nenagh(Derrinsallagh to Ballintotty) Motorway Scheme

The M7 Castletown to Nenagh (Derrinsallagh to Ballintotty) Scheme opened to traffic on 22nd December, 2010. The opening of this Scheme was a significant milestone as it was the final section of the 180 km Dublin to Limerick Major Inter-Urban (MIU) Corridor and the completion of the M7 marked the completion of the National Roads Authority's Major Inter-Urban (MIU) Corridor network.

The completion of this project contributes further towards the competitiveness of the Midlands region and paves the way for increased economic growth and prosperity.



Funding was provided by the Department of Transport for the following schemes under the Regional and Local Road Investment Programme through the national Roads Authority:

Specific Improvement Schemes

Laois County Council received funding from the Department of Transport for the following schemes in 2011:

Borris Road - €970,000

This project involves the upgrade of the Ratheven end of the Borris Road, including a realignment of the Shaen Road and Rathnamanagh Road junction, the construction of a tie-in of the Ratheven and Rosssdaragh Estates to the Hermitage Roundabout and the realignment of the Colliers Lane approach to the Hermitage Roundabout. The scheme involved the acquisition of lands through Compulsory Purchase Order and construction of carriageways, footpaths, cyclepaths, including road drainage, telecommunications infrastructure, public lighting works and ancillary services. This scheme provides a major safety improvement for road users between

major residential areas and the school and broader public road network.

Other Specific Improvement Schemes -Allocation

R425 Rathleague, Portlaoise	€211,000.00
R435 Glosa Bridge	€45,000.00
L1531 Ballyhegaddon Bridge	€65,000.00
L2110 Two Mile Bridge	€18,250.00
L2110 Clontyglass Bridge	€16,505.00
L2014 Derrylamogue Bridge	€15,000.00

Road Safety Remedial Measures

In 2011 Laois County Council received allocations to carry out Road Safety Remedial Measure Schemes at various locations throughout the County. €1,014,476 was spent on National Road Schemes and €172,770 was spent on Non- National Road Schemes.

The National Road schemes were as follows:

N77 Tonduff	€13,657
N77 Abbeyleix Fire Station	€38,278
N77 Durrow	€246,254
N80 Mountmellick Road, Portlaoise	€277,133
N80 Maidenhead	€15,632
N80 Dunamais	€112,976
N80 Mountmellick South	€251,294
M7 Ghost Driver Signs	€59,252

The above schemes involved realignments, improvements, super-elevation, traffic calming measures, public lighting improvements, footpaths, pedestrian crossing facilities and the provision of signage. The M7 Ghost Driver Signage scheme provided for additional signage at M7 Interchanges to combat drivers inadvertently driving onto wrong carriageway.

The Non-National Road schemes were as follows:

Scheme	Allocation
Lea Cross	€140,815
Knockaroe Cross	€19,968
Craughan Cross	€7,000
Mall Cross	€4,987

The above schemes involved realignments, improvements, super-elevation and the provision of signage at the junctions.

Road Safety

4 secondary schools took part in the Drive for Life Programme. An additional 3 national schools took part

in the Safe Cycling Program in 2011, although the number pupils taking part this year decreased slightly from 431 to 413.

The demand for high visibility waistcoats and reflective arm bands for distribution to primary schools increased this year, with additional request for this safety equipment due to the Green Schools Travel Flag programme. The increased demand was provided in co-operation with Laois Sport Partnership.

Promotion of road safety education with primary school pupils and Parent Councils continues with the Road Safety Officer visiting National Schools within the county. A radio campaign was run in January, highlighting the importance of 'Be Safe, Be seen' and the use of hi-visibility clothing/materials during the winter months.

The Midland Road Safety Show took place on 15th October in the Civic Plaza. The highlight of the event saw a mock road traffic collision taking place, with the occupants of both vehicles attended by the Ambulance Services and removed from the vehicles by Portlaoise Fire Brigade. The multi-body event included Bus Eireann, RSA, Laois Civil Defence, Kildare County Council, An Garda Síochána, Laois County Council and various local driving instructors and car dealers. Attendance on the day was estimated at 1,000.

National Secondary Pavement and Minor Improvement Works

Pavement and minor improvement works were carried out in 2011 on the following roads:

N77 Durrow to County Boundary - €653,000: Pavement overlay or replacement in town centre and from town to county boundary. Weather interrupted the works which are due to be completed in the first quarter of 2012.

N80 Mountmellick Road, Portlaoise - €575,000: Replacement of pavement sections on N80 Mountmellick Road, from Harpurs Lane to Fairgreen, with significant drainage improvements.

N80 Portlaoise to Offaly County Boundary - €672,000: Sections of N80 in Portlaoise and at Kyletalesha, Mountmellick and Moneyquid. This work is due to start in the first quarter of 2012.

The value of these works was €1,900,000.

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 2011, under the Multi-Annual Roadworks Programme 2011-2013, Strengthening and Surface Dressing works were carried out to Regional and County Roads throughout the county. A total of 42 km of Regional and County Roads were strengthened and a further 46 km were surface dressed in 2011.

Regional Road Signage Programme

During 2011, 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 2012.

Development Charge Funded Schemes

A number of schemes funded through Development Charges were progressed in 2011.

Portlaoise Northern Orbital Route

It is expected that sections of this road will be delivered through the 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. Works commenced on the delivery of the final section of the link between Stradbally Road and Timahoe Road and this link opened 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. Laois County Council is seeking dedicated funding to progress the completion of the route independent of private development of the lands.

Other Schemes

The following schemes were identified to be developed to planning approval stage:

Carlow Northern Relief Road Extension, due to go to Part 8 planning in the first quarter of 2012,

Portarlinton Western Relief Road, due to be prepared for planning application under Strategic Infrastructure Act in 2012.

Local Improvement Schemes

An allocation of €118,000 was received from the Department of Transport in 2011 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 2011 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:

88km

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

0.5km

WATER SERVICES

Senior Engineer, Water Services: Michael O'Hora

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. Construction of a new water treatment plant at Derrymoyle, Graiguecullen, commenced in July, 2011 and is due to be completed by the end of January, 2012. This will allow Laois County Council have an independent source of quality drinking water for the Graiguecullen area thus eliminating the need to purchase water from Carlow.

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.

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 and certificates obtained for 15 small treatment plants in the county.

The EPA stipulates conditions 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 annual review of the programme was published in July, 2011.

Portlaoise Main Drainage Scheme

In November, 2011 the Portlaoise Main Drainage Scheme received the 2011 Engineers Ireland Excellence Award in the 'Environmental Infrastructure' category. The award was sponsored by the ESB and the Environmental Protection Agency. The award was for the management of a public wastewater treatment facility or collection/distribution system that demonstrated excellence in the performance of environmental infrastructure in terms of value for money, treatment performance and waste prevention.

Portarlington 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 2011.

The current 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. A new water supply source for Portlaoise / Mountmellick was also commissioned in April, 2011. This was the second borehole in Eyne and this will also assist in securing the water supply following the last two severe winters. Following the WSIP Annual Review in July, 2011, Department approval was received for 3 new advance works contracts which will improve the security and quality of the water supply. A detailed budget submission was subsequently made to the Department to progress these contracts.

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. Department approval to proceed to tender was received in August, 2011. Expressions of Interest were sought in July, 2011 and 11 Contractor submissions were received by the deadline in September, 2011. Contract documents for the Network contract were updated and submitted to the Department in December, 2010 for approval to proceed to tender. Department approval to proceed to tender was received in October, 2011. Expressions of Interest were sought in December, 2011.

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. The contract for the Clonaslee ICW was advertised in February, 2011. The contract was subsequently awarded to Killeen Civil Engineering and construction started on site in August, 2011.

Laois Grouped Villages Sewerage Scheme

In the 2010-2012 programme, the Department sanctioned this project as a 'Scheme at Planning'. This scheme covers the five villages of Newtown, The Swan, Ballinakill, Errill and Ballyroan. A submission was made to the Department in October, 2011 for approval to prepare a Preliminary Report for these villages.

Mountmellick Sewerage Scheme

The Preliminary Report and Environmental Impact Study (EIS) for Mountmellick Sewerage Scheme Phase II were received from Nicholas O'Dwyer Consulting Engineers in October, 2009. The Preliminary Report recommends further phasing of the scheme. The Environmental Impact Statement

was submitted to An Bord Pleanála and the Preliminary Report was submitted to the Department in May, 2010. An Bord Pleanála requested additional information in 2011 and scheduled an Oral Hearing for January, 2012.

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. The Preliminary Report recommends further phasing of the scheme. The Environmental Impact Statement was submitted to An Bord Pleanála and the Preliminary Report was submitted to the Department in May, 2010. An Bord Pleanála requested additional information in 2011 and scheduled an Oral Hearing for January, 2012.

Water Conservation

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

- The preparation of an updated Watermain Rehabilitation Strategy for the county focussing 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.

Department approval of this submission was received in March, 2011. The county-wide telemetry contract was subsequently tendered in November, 2011 and the Watermain Rehabilitation Strategy was subsequently completed and submitted to the Department for approval in September, 2011.

Rural Water Programme

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

- Group Water Schemes
- Small Public Water and Sewerage Schemes
- Individual Water Supply Grant Scheme (private wells)

TRANSPORTATION & WATER SERVICES

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 2011

New Group Water Schemes €68,824

To Clonanny G.W.S., and Ballylethane G.W.S.

Taking In Charge of Group Water Schemes €393,200

To Clonkeen G.W.S., Ballyfin G.W.S., Springhill G.W.S. and Sleaty Road G.W.S.

Upgrade of Existing Group Water Schemes €302,277

To Cullohill G.W.S., Errill G.W.S., The Heath G.W.S., and Ballacolla G.W.S.

Subsidy Grants €372,746

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

Small Water & Sewerage Schemes €1,445,153

Funding is provided for capital projects for the

provision of upgrading of small water and sewerage schemes that complement existing rural water measures.

In 2011, work was carried out on the following schemes:

- Graiguecullen Water Supply
- Ballyroan Water Supply
- Portlaoise Water Supply
- Lough Borehole Derryguile Watermain
- Mountmellick Temporary Treatment Plant,
- Borris in Ossory Wastewater Treatment Plant
- The Mall Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Energy Efficiency Initiative - €80,094.58

Funding was provided by the Department to underpin the implementation of measures to meet the government target for a 33% reduction in energy consumption in the local government sector by 2020. Funding was awarded to Portlaoise Water Treatment, Durrow Water Supply and Mountmellick Waste Water Treatment.

Special Environmental Compliance Objective - €43,263.07

Funding was provided for small towns and villages to ensure compliance with environmental statutory requirements. Ballyroan Wastewater Scheme was the only town in Laois to receive funding under this measure.

Individual Water Supply Grant Scheme €65,422

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.

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, Killeshin, 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 2011.

Cemetery Grants

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

A total of 105 grant applications were received in 2011 and €28,300 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 €74,000 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 2011

E.1 Unaccounted for Water (UFW): 34%

(as a % of total water supplied under the water supply schemes that the Local Authority is responsible for.)

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)

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 2011, the total number of commercial users was 2,817 of which 2,727 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 2011. The charge for metered water in 2011 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 2011

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 2011, 3,185 non principal private residences were registered (receipts of €670,800).

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 2011 was 74,099.

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 €160 a year for the greenest cars to €2258 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 2011 were €10,655,874 compared to €11,350,487 in 2010. The number of vehicle licences (discs) issued in 2011 was 53,658, compared to 55,014 in 2010.

Driving Licences

Receipts for 2011 were €176,315 (including duplicates) compared with €173,895 in 2010. The number of driving licences issued in 2011 was 10,392, compared with 10,750 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 6,036 vehicles during the year, compared to 6,239 for 2010. 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 vehicles 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 31/12/2011

% of Motor Tax transactions which:

Are dealt with over the counter:

89.20% (57,077) of Laois MTO Transactions

Are dealt with by post:

10.80% (6,809) of Laois MTO Transactions

Are dealt with on-line:

40.59% (27,769) of vehicle owners eligible to pay Tax on-line

(34% figure for on-line overall business)

Average number of

Public Opening hours per week: 28.85 hours

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

a) on the same day:	98.97% (6,837)
b) on the 2nd or 3rd day:	0.54% (37)
c) on the 4th or 5th day:	0% (0)
d) over 5 days:	0.49% (34)

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

a) on the same day:	61.18% (6,103)
b) on the 2nd or 3rd day:	37.48% (3,739)
c) on the 4th or 5th day:	1.04% (104)
d) over 5 days:	0.30% (30)

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Revenue Collection 31/12/2011 31/12/2010

Housing Loans

a) Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due:	81%	86%
b) Percentage of arrears:		
(i) Less than 1 month	2%	
(ii) 1 – 2 months	4%	23%
(iii) 2 - 3 months old	3%	13%
(iv) more than 3 months old	91%	64%

Rents

a) Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amounts due	94%	93%
b) Percentage of arrears		
(i) less than four weeks	12%	13%
(ii) 4 - 6 weeks	8%	11%
(iii) 6 - 12 weeks	12%	12%
(iv) greater than 12 weeks	68%	64%

Commercial Rates

Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due:	77%	81%
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Non-Domestic Water Charges

Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due:	55%	51%
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Annual Financial Statement

Revenue Account	Gross Expenditure 2011 €	Income 2011 €	Net Expenditure 2011 €
Programme Group			
Housing & Building	10,619,262	11,501,131	(881,870)
Road Transportation & Safety	15,809,011	11,775,416	4,033,594
Water & Sewerage	10,028,705	3,242,773	6,785,932
Development Incentives & Controls	3,884,229	653,665	3,230,565
Environmental Protection	8,951,896	4,401,509	4,550,387
Recreation & Amenity	3,932,671	879,430	3,053,242
Agriculture, Education, Health & Welfare	6,377,760	5,696,071	681,688
Miscellaneous	4,275,482	2,305,215	1,970,266
Total Expenditure/Income	63,879,016	40,455,211	
Net cost of programmes to be funded from Rates & Local Government Fund			23,423,805
Rates			10,044,575
Pension Levy			1,086,370
Local Government Fund - General Purpose Grant			14,056,983
Surplus for Year before Transfers			1,764,123
Transfers from/(to) Reserves			(1,744,585)
Overall Surplus for Year			19,538
General Reserve @ 1st January 2011			(519,500)
General Reserve @ 31st December 2011			(499,962)

Capital Account

Balance @ 01.01.2011	(15,575,606)
Grants	41,035,385
Other Income	19,525,640
Transfer from/to Revenue	1,744,584
Expenditure	(51,747,541)
Balance @ 31.12.2011	(5,017,537)

Manager: Michael Rainey

Town Clerk: John Clarke

Town Engineer: Farhan Nasiem

Annual General Meeting

At the Annual General Meeting of Portlaoise Town Council held on Friday, 17th June 2011, Councillor Matthew Keegan was elected as Mayor. Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald was elected as Vice-Mayor.

Members on Boards/Committees

Community, Economic Development, Culture & Heritage Committee

Councillor Rotimi Adebari
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 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 2011 - €97,525

In 2011, Portlaoise Town Council provided support to the following:

- St Patrick's Day Parade Committee
- Portlaoise Tidy Towns
- Naoimh Brid Music Class Portlaoise
- Portlaoise Athletic Club
- Portlaoise Christmas Lighting Association
- Rossvale Residents Association
- Laurel Place Residents Association

- Fairgreen Residents 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 link road between the Timahoe/Stradbally Roads
- Upgrade of the Mountmellick Road
- Realignment and upgrade of the Borris Road
- The official opening of the Treo Nua, Portlaoise Resource Centre
- The hosting of the regional Rose of Tralee finals
- The hosting of the Leinster Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann
- Road, footpath and public lighting improvements throughout the town

MOUNTMELICK TOWN COUNCIL

Manager: Declan Byrne/Ian McCormack

Town Clerk: Pamela Tynan

Town Engineer: Dermot Leonard

Annual General Meeting

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

Budget 2011: €57,265

Strategic Policy Committees

In June 2011, 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.

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 Stephen Lynch, 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.

Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland

Councillors Patrick Bracken and Stephen Lynch represented Mountmellick Town Council at the Spring and Autumn Seminars 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.

Work at Irishtown

Major work was carried out at Irishtown. These works included new footpaths at Esker Gate/Derryguile, new lighting, new railings, new footpaths at the tennis courts and new footpaths from Park Terrace to the bridge at Irishtown.

Work at Ballincollig

Through the Planning Department, the following works were carried out at Ballincollig; new parking bays, new footpaths, new railings and gates, new green areas, shrubs, trees, ramps, drainage and new overlay.

Environmental Works/Grants

During 2011 various Environmental Enhancement Works were carried out throughout the town. These works included the following:

- All flower containers were planted with summer 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
- New public benches were purchased and erected at various locations around the town
- New flower containers were purchased and placed around the town

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

Mountmellick Joint Policing Committee

Mountmellick Joint Policing Committee held quarterly meetings in March, June and December. There was one public meeting held in September in the MDA Museum. Issues discussed included the new Drink Drive Limits under the terms of the Road Traffic Act 2011, anti social behaviour, boy racers, crime, drugs and alcohol and Garda visibility. 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.

Presentations

Ann Marie Kelly – Environmental Awareness Officer

Ann Marie Kelly, Environmental Awareness Officer, Laois County Council, gave a detailed presentation to the Members outlining her role and current initiatives being implemented. Ms Kelly answered various questions raised by the Members. The Members complimented Ms Kelly and Laois County Council on their work in promoting and enforcing a greener county. During a lengthy discussion concerns were expressed about dog fouling. Various suggestions were made including increased signage and bigger signs around the town, more enforcement and the introduction of bye-laws to prohibit dogs from certain parts of the town

Ann Goodwin, CEO, Laois Partnership Company

Ms Goodwin gave a brief overview of Laois Partnership Company, which offers one unified structure for the delivery of economic, social and cultural services to small businesses, community groups and individuals in County Laois. The work is largely delivered through the Rural Development Programme, the Local and Community Development Programme, FETAC Certified Training, Back to Education Initiative, After School and Creche Facilities, FÁS Community Employment Scheme and FÁS Jobs Club. Ms Goodwin gave the members information on the new Tus programme. She advised that this is a labour activation programme with 100 places in County Laois. She answered various questions from the members.

Michael Rainey, Senior Executive Officer, Housing Department, Laois County Council

Mr Rainey gave a brief overview of the new Tenant Purchase Scheme and the new Housing Needs Assessment regulations. The new Tenant Purchase

Scheme 2011 gives people who have been a tenant of Laois County Council for over 10 years the opportunity to purchase their house at a reduced price. The maximum discount available is 45%. The members welcomed the new scheme. Mr. Rainey also outlined the changes to the new Housing Needs Assessment regulations. Some of the changes include that an applicant is only allowed on one housing list in the country, there is no priority in area of choice and the income thresholds have changed.

Retirement of Declan Byrne – Former Town Manager

2011 saw the retirement of Declan Byrne as Town Manager of Mountmellick Town Council, after 42 years service. Mr. Byrne started in Mountmellick Town Council in 2000 and at the September meeting the members wished him well in his retirement. The members complimented Mr Byrne on his career and all the work he had contributed to in the town. Some of the improvements in the town since Mr. Byrne started are the new Civic Offices, the employment of a full-time Town Clerk, the development of a new library, the opening of a new playground, the community centre at the old cinema, the commencement of development of an amenity area at the old library site and various improvement works in the town.

Mountmellick Water Supply

As part of the 'Portlaoise/Mountmellick Water Supply Improvement Scheme' further advanced works were carried out in 2011 to bring a second well at Eyne into operation. This improved both the security of the water supply in terms of quantity and also the quality of the town water supply. The low water pressure issue has now been addressed in the Mountmellick area. The upgrade of the distribution water main from Derryguile Reservoir to Esker Gate was put into service on 17th November, 2011. We are now achieving minimum operating pressure of 2.00 Bar at peak demand throughout the network. All of Mountmellick's water is now supplied from the Eyne well field.

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. The application for approval for this scheme is still under review with An Bord Pleanála. A further information response was furnished to An Bord Pleanála in October, 2011.

Tidy Towns

In the National Tidy Towns competition this year, Mountmellick was the overall winner in Category D. In the Mountmellick Tidy Towns awards, the Town Council received an award for Best Public Building for the Civic Offices and Library.

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.

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.

Mountmellick Library

Mountmellick Library since its opening in May 2010 has been a tremendous success and makes a valuable contribution to the community. The library plays an important role in education, literacy, access to information technology and leisure reading. The current membership stands at over 1,600.

Mountmellick Amenity Area – Irishtown

Work on this project commenced in December 2011 and will be completed in the Spring of 2012. This project (when complete) will further enhance the town and help to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Mountmellick and surrounding areas.

Social Club

2011 was another very successful year for the Social Club which currently has a membership of 262. Numerous events were held in 2011.

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 April, which was a great success. The Quiz Trophy found a new home in Roads with the winning team comprising Stan Cullen, Brian O'Sullivan, Diarmuid Lalor and a lost IT member Joe Lambe.

Summer Party

The Summer Party was held in Áras an Chontae on 23rd June. A great crowd attended and the evening ended in a sing song.

Philadelphia, Here I Come

This event took place in the Dunamais Theatre on 4th September. A good number of social club members attended and had a great night.

October Night out

There was a great night out in the Square bar with plenty of chat and food.

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 10th December in the canteen. There was a big crowd over 160 children and there was great entertainment, especially Jecca the Clown who mesmerized the kids! 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 16th December in the Killeslin Hotel, Portlaoise, with the band Epic providing the music and disco on the night. The party was a great night out as usual.

Golf Society

Pat Farrell captained the Golf Society in 2011. His Captain's Prize was held in Mountrath Golf Club. There was a good turn out on the day and his prize was won by John Fennell.

The Kennedy Cup was played this year in conjunction with the Pang Trophy in Tullamore Golf Club. The Kennedy Cup was won by Eddie Kelly and the Pang Trophy was won by Larry Gittens, Fint Kealy and Cathal Farrell.

The golfer of the year competition was won by Ken Farrell.

Larry Gittens is the incoming Captain for 2012 and Eddie Kelly is the incoming Secretary for 2012.

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	4
Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee	Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald Councillor Alan Hand Councillor Pat Bowe Councillor William Aird Councillor Mary Sweeney Councillor Kathleen O' Brien Councillor Paul Mitchell Councillor John King	3
Kyleelisha Landfill Monitoring Committee	Councillor Patrick Bracken Councillor James Daly Councillor Martin Phelan	4
Laois School of Music Steering Committee	Councillor Mary Sweeney	5
Audit Committee	Councillor John Moran Councillor Jerry Lodge	3
Joint Policing Committee	Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald Councillor Seamus McDonald Councillor Brendan Phelan Councillor Patrick Bracken Councillor Ray Cribbin Councillor Tom Mulhall Councillor Michael Lalor Councillor Mary Sweeney Councillor David Goodwin Councillor Paul Mitchell Councillor John King Councillor James Daly Councillor Ben Brennan	3
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
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 Alan Hand, Councillor Tom Mulhall Councillor Paul Mitchell, Councillor James Deegan
Association of County & City Councils	Councillor Seamus McDonald Councillor David Goodwin Councillor Ben Brennan
Midland Regional Authority	Councillor Patrick Bracken, Councillor Brendan Phelan Councillor James Deegan, Councillor Martin Phelan Councillor James Daly, Councillor John Bonham
E.U. Operational Committee	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
Portarlington Leisure Centre	Councillor Ray Cribbin, Councillor Paul Mitchell Councillor Tom Mulhall
Portlaoise Leisure Centre	Councillor Alan Hand, Councillor William Aird Councillor Jerry Lodge
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
Laois County Development Board	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, Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald

APPENDIX I

Laois Third Level Initiative	Councillor Paul Mitchell & Councillor Jerry Lodge
Laois VEC	Councillor Alan Hand, 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
Management Company for Treo Nua at Knockmay	Councillor Kathleen O'Brien
Laois Tourism	Councillor John Bonham, Councillor Martin Phelan

APPENDIX II

PAYMENTS TO MEMBERS 2011

Monthly Allowance	€115,793.17
Conference Allowance	€88,930.97
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

www.laois.ie

E-Mail: corpaffairs@laoiscoco.ie

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
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
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
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