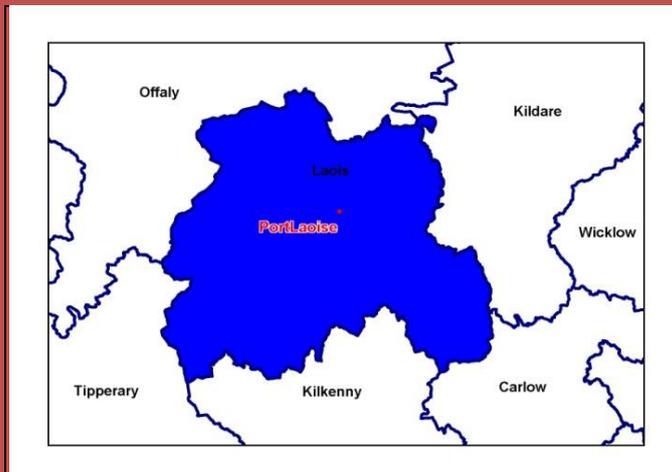


# PORTLAOISE LOCAL AREA PLAN 2012-2018



Laois County Council  
October 2012



## **Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2012-2018**

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## **Foreword**

The Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2012-2018 was formally adopted by Laois County Council on **22<sup>nd</sup> October 2012**.

This Plan is a statutory Local Area Plan made pursuant to the provisions of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2011, as amended.



*Plate 1: Overhead view of Portlaoise from south with M7 interchange in foreground.*

## Preface

This Local Area Plan is made in accordance with the requirements of the Planning & Development Act 2000-2011 as amended. The Local Area Plan (LAP) for Portlaoise consists of a written statement and accompanying maps, and sets out policies, strategies and objectives. This Plan pertains to the administrative area of the Portlaoise Town Council and to the Town's immediate environs, which are in the administrative area of Laois County Council. This Plan supersedes the Local Area Plan 2006-2012 amended in April 2010.

This Plan aims to set up an overall strategy for the proper Planning and Sustainable Development of the urban area of the Principal Town of Portlaoise.

Section 10 of the Planning & Development Act, 2000 sets out mandatory objectives, which shall be included in a Development Plan. These are summarised as follows:

- The zoning of land for the use solely or primarily of particular areas for particular purposes where to and to such extent as the proper Planning and sustainable development of an area requires the uses to be indicated;
- The provision or facilitation of the provision of infrastructure;
- The conservation and protection of the environment;
- The integration of the Planning and sustainable development of the area with the social, community and cultural requirements of the area and its population;
- The preservation of the character of the landscape and the character of architectural conservation areas;
- The protection of structures, or parts of structures, which are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest;
- The development and renewal of areas in need of regeneration;
- The provision of accommodation for Travellers;
- The preservation, improvement and extension of amenities and recreational amenities;
- The provisions of the Major Accidents Directive
- The provision or facilitation of provision of services for the community;
- The protection of the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Gaeltacht, where applicable.

In addition, objectives for a wide range of purposes as set out in the Third Schedule of the Act may be included in the Development Plan.

This Plan should also be read in conjunction with relevant policies and objectives of the Laois County Development Plan 2011-2017, where appropriate. This is necessary so that due account is taken of the Town and its place in the Regional and County Hierarchy of Urban settlements.

The policies of the Laois County Development Plan 2011-2017 are over-riding unless stated otherwise in this Plan.

The Plan therefore:

- ✓ Outlines the strategic context within which the Local Area Plan for Portlaoise is set. This is in terms of the policy framework, the development issues and the strategic vision for the area of the Development Plan;
- ✓ Sets out policy statements, and responses to development issues, which effect the future development of the Principal Town of Portlaoise, its environment and the welfare of its population;

- ✓ Lists the specific objectives, which Laois County Council intends to implement within the period of the Plan;
- ✓ Outlines development standards for new development and restoration of the built fabric of the Town, which are intended to help guide the quality, nature and location of such development;
- ✓ Sets out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of this Local Area Plan. This contains information on the likely significant effects on the environment on implementing the policies and objectives of this plan.
- ✓ Sets out an Appropriate Assessment (AA) of this Local Area Plan. This contains information on the likely significant effects on NATURA 2000 sites on implementing the policies and objectives of this plan.
- ✓ Sets out a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) of this Local Area Plan. This contains information on the likely significant effects on flood risk pertaining to implementing the policies and objectives of this plan.

In general, the Local Area Plan is designed to stimulate sensitive development in appropriate areas and to ensure protection of the built heritage of the Town as a total entity, including its Townscape, architecture, public spaces and streets. It is within the framework of the plan that public services will be provided and investment decisions made.

Maps contained within this Plan are to be used to give a graphic indication of the proposals of the plan. The maps do not purport to be accurate survey maps from which dimensions or other survey data can be obtained. *If any conflict arises between the written statement and any of the maps contained within this Local Area Plan for Portlaoise, the written statement shall always prevail.*

### **The Local Area Plan Process**

Sections 18-20 of the Planning and Development Act 2000-2011 outline the statutory process for the preparation of and adoption of Local Area Plans. According to Section 19[2] of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended, the Local Area Plan must be consistent with the objectives of the prevailing County Development Plan, namely Laois County Development Plan 2011-2017.

The Local Area Plan shall consist of a written statement and a plan or plans indicating the objectives in such detail as may be determined by the planning authority for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area to which it applies, including details on community facilities and amenities and on standards for the design of development and structures.

The publication of a notice on **30<sup>th</sup> August 2011**, stating the intention to prepare a new Portlaoise Local Area Plan marked the formal commencement of the review process.

#### First Stage

There are a number of key stages in the process of making a local area plan. The initial stage involved a preliminary, non-statutory, consultation period during which submissions were invited on issues to be included in the Draft Local Area Plan. This took place during September 2011.

A number of meetings were held with interested parties, the general public and the town council and county council electoral area members. Prescribed bodies were notified and service providers and semi-state organisations such as ESB Networks, Eirgrid, Telecom Éireann, Bord na Móna, Iarnród Éireann, Bus Éireann, Laois Trip, Laois VEC and the National Broadband Scheme were consulted on their future plans and operational programmes for the town. There were also meetings with key internal Council sections such as Road Design and Water Services on the subject of overall infrastructure provision in the town.

While not statutorily required, a managers report on issues arising during the pre-draft consultation period was prepared.

Second Stage

This stage was followed by preparation of the actual *draft* Local Area Plan and a 6 week public display and consultation period extending from 20<sup>th</sup> April to 1<sup>st</sup> June 2012 during which a total of 21 no. valid submissions or observations relating to the draft Plan were made. Topics referred to in the submissions included land use zoning, flooding, infrastructure, demographics and nature conservation.

The 6 week public consultation period was followed by preparation of the [second] managers report which listed the persons who made submissions or observations, summarised the issues raised and indicated the opinion and recommendation of the manager in relation to such issues.

Third [Final] Stage

At the Laois County Council meeting of **30<sup>th</sup> July 2012**, the draft Plan was amended by way of formal resolution pursuant to section 20[3] of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended

The amendments to the draft Plan were put on public display for a 4 week period, from 15<sup>th</sup> August to 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012; a total of 6 no. valid submissions were received. This was followed by preparation of the third managers report which listed the persons who made submissions or observations, summarised the issues raised and indicated the opinion and recommendation of the manager in relation to such issues.

The Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2012-2018 was formally adopted at a special meeting of **Laois County Council on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2012**.



Plate 2: Overhead view of Portlaoise from north-east.

## ***Chapter 1: Strategic Context***

Portlaoise is the principle Town and administrative centre for the County of Laois. It is centrally located in the heart of rural Ireland and serves as the intersection of a number of national Routes. It is also accessible on the main rail link between Dublin, Cork and Limerick. The present Town grew around the old fort, the construction of which commenced in 1548 under the supervision of Lord Deputy Sir Edward Bellingham who was anxious to fortify Leix following his repression of the natives and the exiling of their Chieftains earlier in the year. The fort was built primarily for military and political purposes. Its situation on rising ground southeast of the river Triogue and with the Esker ridge forming a natural defensive barricade to the east made it of strategic military importance. In 1570 a charter of Queen Elizabeth 1 raised the Town of Maryborough to the rank of Borough. In 1922 the Town was renamed Portlaoise.

### ***Urban Form***

The Urban Form of the Town is dominated by a linear Main Street terminated on each end by a Square; the Market Square in the west and Lower Square in the east. The construction of an inner relief road, James Fintan Lalor Avenue, facilitated the southern expansion and development of the town. The opening of Portlaoise By-Pass in 1997 had a significant effect on the physical environment and future development of the Town; 65% of through traffic was removed from the streets and travel time to Dublin has been reduced to less than an hour with the opening of the Heath-Monasterevin section of motorway in 2004. The historical core of the Town is focused on a zone of archaeological interest around Church Street/Church Avenue wherein lies the Courthouse and the remaining portions of Fort Protector.

Portlaoise is constrained to the east and northeast by the Portlaoise Acquifer Protection Zone, which provides the public water supply for the greater Portlaoise and Mountmellick area. The motorway provides a physical boundary to the south east and south. The Dublin/Cork Railway line intersects the Town in a North/East-South/West direction.

### ***Portlaoise in Context***

Portlaoise is the largest source of non-agricultural employment within the County and has a significant service sector with employment in Local Government, decentralisation of Central Government, Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform, E.S.B., Telecom Eireann, An Post and the Health Service Executive.

Portlaoise is strategically located at a National, Regional and Local level. The Town is located on the M7/M8 National Motorway Network which enables easy access to Cork, Limerick and Dublin including Dublin Port and Airport. The N80, National Secondary route runs through Portlaoise and provides access to Carlow, Waterford and Rosslare in the south eastwards direction. To the north the N80 provides access to the Tullamore, Mullingar, Athlone, Midlands Gateway and further access to the west/northwest of the Country.

Portlaoise has experienced a considerable urbanisation and expansion in recent years and currently there is a growing population in the Town environs. Due to its proximity to Dublin, the Town is experiencing pressure for residential, retail and commercial development. A growing population has placed an even greater demand on the Town's infrastructure, e.g. shopping, education, residential and recreational facilities.

Portlaoise is located on the Dublin to Cork railway line with easy connections to other parts of the national railway network usually through one change of train. Continued improvements to the

railway network will benefit Portlaoise. This trend is likely to continue into the foreseeable future with further significant improvements proposed for the railway network.

The location and access advantages of Portlaoise have been recognised in the National Spatial Strategy which designated the town as a National Transport Node and Inland Port (Togher) . Zoning within this area caters for distribution, a limited amount of retail warehousing and bulky durable goods, factory warehousing, showrooms, bus and coach stops, heliport, motorway services and industrial development, Innovative/service Park, opportunity sites and Event Centre. A Matrix of land use in this area is contained in Chapter 7.

## POLICY CONTEXT

The purpose of this Local Area Plan is to set out policies and proposals for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area in accordance with the requirements of Legislation, National and Regional Ministerial Guidelines and Directives and other relevant policies. This Local Area Plan was prepared within a wider policy context and exists within a hierarchy of plans and strategies from National to Local level. Such plans/strategies at present include:

- ❖ Laois County Development Plan 2011-2017;
- ❖ Laois County Council Corporate Plan 2009-2014;
- ❖ Laois County Heritage Plan 2007-2011;( and subsequent revisions)
- ❖ Laois County Council Housing Strategy 2011-2017;
- ❖ The Accommodation of Travelling Families in County Laois 2005-2008;
- ❖ Laois Retail Strategy 2011-2017;
- ❖ Portlaoise Land Use and Transportation Study 2000;
- ❖ Economic/Promotional Strategy for County Laois;
- ❖ Appraisal of development opportunities at Portlaoise Motorway Interchanges;
- ❖ Laois Arts Plan 2006-2011;
- ❖ Homelessness – An Integrated Strategy for County Laois;
- ❖ County Laois Play Strategy 2004-2008;
- ❖ Laois County Childcare Strategy 2002 – 2006;
- ❖ County Development Board Strategy.

### Hierarchy of Spatial Policy



## NATIONAL CONTEXT

The main National Plans, policies and guidelines, which must be considered, are:

- **The National Development Plan 2007-2013** entitled *Transforming Ireland – A Better Quality of Life for All* which aims for balanced regional development and has identified County Laois as having a strategic role in the Midlands Region.
- The **National Spatial Strategy (NSS)** which sets out Government policy in relation to achieving balanced regional development and has identified the strategic centrality and prominence of County Laois and indeed Portlaoise Town as having strong National Development Potential as a major transport hub and distribution centre, fulfilling the role of inland port.
- **Sustainable Development: A Strategy for Ireland 1997**, which provides a framework for the achievement of sustainability at a local level.
- The **National Climate Change Strategy 2007-2012** was published in April 2007, developing from the 2000 Climate Change Strategy, and it builds on the commitment to sustainable development set out in *Towards 2016* taking into account the review contained in Ireland's Pathway to Kyoto Compliance (2006). Its purpose is to demonstrate how Ireland is to meet its 2008-2012 Kyoto commitments and to identify further policy measures needed for the period from 2012 and after 2020.
- **Transport 21** Launched in 2005, this policy initiative sets down how an intended sum of €34.4 billion will be spent on Ireland's transportation system. It covers national roads, rail and bus services and regional airports. It relates to the period from 2006 to 2016, comprising two investment programmes – a national programme and a separate programme for the Greater Dublin area. The programme seeks to meet the transport needs of the country's citizens and also underpin our competitiveness into the future.
- **Smartertravel >>> A Sustainable Transport Future – A new transport policy for Ireland 2009-2020** provides guidance on the provision of a high quality and sustainable travel and transport infrastructure, that supports the movement of both people and goods.
- **The National Anti Poverty Strategy**, which promotes social inclusion.
- **Ministerial Guidelines and Directives** including those on Housing Strategies, Retail Planning, Childcare, Residential Density, Architectural Conservation, Landscapes, Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines and Strategic Environmental Assessment Guidelines. Due regard will be taken of all future amendments during the plan period.
- **Local Agenda 21** identifies the principles for the involvement and participation of local communities in the local democratic process. Laois County Council is committed to the objectives of Local Agenda 21 as indicated in the guidelines "Towards Sustainable Local Communities".
- **The National Biodiversity Plan 2002** which aims at the conservation including where possible the enhancement and sustainable use of biological diversity in Ireland and to contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity globally.
- **The National Heritage Plan 2002** sets out a clear and coherent strategy and framework for the protection and enhancement of heritage over the next 5 years.

At a Regional Level the main strategies to be considered are:

- **Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines 2010** which provides a strategy for the Midlands Region up to 2020 which aims at enhancing the critical mass of the region by combining the strengths of the gateway as envisaged in the National Spatial Strategy by including the county Town of Portlaoise into the polycentric model for growth in the region.
- **Midlands Waste Management Strategy 2006** which provides a framework for the management of waste in the Midlands Region in accordance with current national and EU waste legislation/policy.

## **NATIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY**

The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) is a twenty-year planning framework for Ireland and is aimed at achieving a better balance of social, economic, physical development and population growth between the regions. Balanced regional development is a fundamental part of the programme for Government and the commitment to prepare the Spatial Strategy was first contained in the National Development Plan 2000-2006.

*The National Spatial Strategy has identified Portlaoise as having good development potential as a Transport Hub and Distribution Centre and as an Inland Port given its location on several national roads and rail routes in the National Spatial Strategy. It also states that 'Portlaoise can be enhanced in competitive terms to drive development at County level'. The strategy and the provisions of the future spatial structure indicates how each region will participate in the NSS and the policies for the location of development are set out in the NSS document*

An update report on the NSS was published by the DoECLG in October 2010, entitled 'Implementing the National Spatial Strategy: 2010 Update and Outlook'. The report does not replace the NSS but sets out key areas of progress and implementation and also areas where challenges still remain, since the NSS was published. The update report states that the level of housing development will be low for the next number of years. In relation to towns of strategic importance such as Portlaoise the report states that:

***Effective co-ordination of essential physical and social infrastructure such as transport, water services, schools and amenities is, together with effective planning, central to the creation of sustainable communities.***

***Integrated co-ordination in the provision of such essential infrastructure is a positive mechanism to drive plan-led development of prime and strategic brown-field and green-field locations in many of the NSS Gateways, Hubs and other key towns.***

***As part of the process of overseeing implementation of the NSS, the Department has been monitoring progress in infrastructure co-ordination of developing areas. Taking account of experience since 2002, the Department intends to publish a further analysis of and guidance on the co-ordinated development of the areas described above.***

In addition, the report acknowledges the effect that the economic downturn has had on towns and notes that it is **important to maintain employment opportunities** in these areas.

This plan includes policies and objectives that support the vision for Portlaoise set out in the NSS. In particular, the land use zoning map accompanying this plan provides for additional lands to accommodate business/employment use and public/community/ educational use, both of which are considered necessary to allow for opportunities to **rebalance the type of growth** that has taken place in Portlaoise over the past decade.

## **MIDLAND REGIONAL PLANNING GUIDELINES 2010**

The Midland Regional Planning Guidelines (MRPGs) 2010-2016 have been informed by the NSS and designate Portlaoise as a Principal Town. This role has been re-emphasised in the Laois County Development Plan 2011-2017.

The MRPGs have also identified five development areas and Portlaoise is located within the Southern Development Area (SDA).

Included in the MRPGs is a **Policy Framework for Land Use zoning** which has been factored into the plan making process for this Local Area Plan. One of the key areas for Planning Authorities to address is to **ensure that the over provision of zoned land is avoided**. In this regard the land use zoning map has been amended to match closely the projected needs of Portlaoise from 2011-2017.

The MRPGs state there is potential for growth in employment generation in this area due to the workforce availability and that a key priority should be to resist any further large-scale residential development and to avoid over-development of towns. The provision of necessary social and community infrastructure to serve resident populations should be a priority. In response to the provisions of the MRPGs, the development strategy includes Laois County Council's response to dealing with the delivery of population and housing through the amended land use zoning map, the policies and objectives included in this plan and also through the development management process.

The strategic centrality and prominence of Portlaoise is recognised in the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) and the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines (MRPGs) which envisage the town as having strong National Development Potential as a major transport hub and distribution centre. Major road/rail infrastructure investment has taken place in the recent past and continues to take place, further maximising the accessibility of the town. The bulk of residential development will be channelled into Portlaoise. This development strategy prioritises economic development for the Principal Town of Portlaoise, which has a prime position on the national road network to economically sustain the critical mass of the Southern Development Area and reap the benefits of the improved Motorway corridors and public transport networks.

The consistent, appropriate, sequential growth and development of Portlaoise is to remain the focus and the priority for the SDA in order to ensure that its role as a Principal Town is fully maximised and can therefore strongly support and contribute to the delivery of a successful Urban Core, and in particular, a successful Midland Linked Gateway.

It is also of strategic importance that the capacity and efficiency of existing motorway and rail links to Dublin are protected. The allocation of large tracts of serviced land at Togher as a National Enterprise Park for enterprise, employment and industrial uses in the immediate vicinity of national strategic transport infrastructure represents a unique opportunity to develop a cluster of complementary enterprises and a diverse economic base for the County and the region. This fulfils objectives as set out in the National Spatial Strategy and Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010. The ability of this location to service the needs of large Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) should be maximized and will be developed during this plan period.

The MRPGs stress that small urban centres must be strengthened to support rural hinterlands. Ballyroan is one such village that has an important role to play in supporting a solid population base and a rural hinterland. Residential development will be controlled within this centre to ensure that housing requirements will be in character with the scale of existing development. This can be achieved through adequate zoning of lands, provision of services and a facilitatory approach to appropriately scaled urban development.

Similar to the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines (MRPGs) 2004, the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010 to 2022 identifies Portlaoise as being a Principal town within the Southern Development Area. Since 2002, the region has experienced a period of rapid population and housing growth but has since seen a rapid fall off in development as a result of the 2009 downturn, this will potentially result in socioeconomic challenges in the future. The MRPGs state there is potential for growth in employment generation in this area due to the workforce availability and that a key priority should be to resist any further large-scale residential development and to avoid over-

development of towns. The provision of necessary social and community infrastructure to serve resident populations should be a priority.

#### **PORTLAOISE AND THE MIDLAND REGIONAL PLANNING GUIDELINES**

The Midland Regional Authority prepared the Regional Planning Guidelines in accordance with the provisions of the NSS and the Local Authority will have regard to these in relation to the development of the Portlaoise Local Area Plan.

The Local Area Plan designates areas for potential development purposes. Development must take place in an orderly, phased and sustainable basis and zoning designation is not indicative of the availability of infrastructural services. Zoning designation and permitted development are impacted upon by a number of critical objectives namely the need to safeguard and protect the Town's main water source, to increase infrastructural capacity at the treatment works, the ultimate assimilative capacity of the River Triogue, the facilitation of the Town's proposed orbital routes and others contained in the Strategic Environmental Assessment. The capacity of the River Triogue to accept treated discharge from the treatment works is a limiting capacity in the development of Portlaoise. This capacity is limited to a population equivalent of 39,000 persons.

#### **LAOIS COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2011-2017**

The principal towns are part of the broader polycentric settlement model, centred on the linked gateway. Portlaoise is designated as a Principal Town within the Region in the Midland regional planning guidelines 2010. It is a large urban centre and economic drivers in the south Midlands with distinct local economies and strong links to the adjacent regions. In order to fulfil this role, the Principal town will be a significant focus for future population growth in the County settlement hierarchy.

In terms of functions, Portlaoise has other service roles including Public Service, education, and tourism, financial and retail for a large hinterland. From an employment perspective, Portlaoise continues to be an important contributor to the County's economy, especially with respect to the public sector with Department of Agriculture, Prison Service and Regional Hospitals located therein. The Planning framework for Portlaoise is set out in the Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2006-2012 as amended in April 2010. The following policies have been stated in the Laois CDP 2011-2017 with regard to Portlaoise:

- DPS 3 / P16* Direct population into the Principal town to ensure that population growth is appropriate in scale with its identified role in the Regional and County settlement hierarchy as indicated in this chapter;
- DPS 3 / P17* Apply increased residential densities up to 35 per hectare where appropriate to do so having regard to *Sustainable Residential Developments in Urban Areas (2009)*;
- DPS 3 / P18* Apply appropriate development management measures in ensuring growth is appropriate and in compliance with the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010.

#### **PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT ACTS 2000-2010**

The Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 (the 2010 Act), was signed into Irish law in the week commencing 19<sup>th</sup> July 2010. The 2010 Act seeks to ensure that the provisions of development plans and local area plans are consistent with national and regional development objectives set out in the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) and in Regional Planning Guidelines (RPG). In the past, local authorities were obliged to "have regard" to the NSS and RPG, but not to necessarily comply with them.

The 2010 Act has altered this situation with the legal requirement that local area plans must **be consistent** with the development plan and its 'Core Strategy' which in turn should be consistent with the relevant Regional Planning Guidelines and the National Spatial Strategy.

### **Strategic Environmental Assessment**

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a systematic process for predicting, evaluating and mitigating, at the earliest appropriate stage, the environmental effects of a national, regional or local plan before it is adopted. Its purpose is to give the public and other interested parties an opportunity to comment and to be kept informed of decisions about a specific plan and how they are made. It allows the integration of environmental considerations into environmental decision making at an early stage.

Environmental assessment is a procedure that ensures that the environmental implications of decisions are taken into account before the decisions are made. Environmental Impact Assessment, or EIA, is generally used for describing the process of environmental assessment which is limited to individual projects such as waste incinerators, housing developments or roads while Strategic Environmental Assessment, or SEA, is the term which has been given to the environmental assessment of plans, and other strategic actions, which help determine what kind of individual projects take place. SEA is a systematic process of predicting and evaluating the likely environmental effects of implementing a proposed plan, or other strategic action, in order to insure that these effects are appropriately addressed at the earliest appropriate stage of decision-making on a par with economic and social considerations.

The kind of development that occurs in Portlaoise and where it occurs will be significantly determined by the implementation of the Local Area Plan. By anticipating the effects and avoiding areas in which growth cannot be sustainably accommodated and by directing development towards more compatible and robust receiving environments real improvements in environmental management and planning can occur in the Town.

The SEA process is a requirement of European Law. Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of Ministers, of 27<sup>th</sup> June 2001, on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment, referred to hereafter as the SEA Directive, introduced the requirement that SEA be carried out on plans and programmes which are prepared for a number of sectors, including land use planning. The SEA Directive was transposed into Irish Law through the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (Statutory Instrument Number (SI No.) 435 of 2004) and the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (SI No. 436 of 2004). Both sets of Regulations became operational on 21 July 2004.

### **Appropriate Assessment**

Appropriate Assessment (AA) specifically aims to ensure that the plan will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of European sites, whereas Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) has a broader objective to ensure land-use plans contribute to sustainable development by integrating social, environmental and economic considerations into plan preparation and incorporating the requirements of the SEA Directive (2001/42/EC).

Appropriate Assessment is a requirement of Article 6(3) and 6(4) of Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, also known as the Habitats Directive. This states:

*6(3) Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site (Natura 2000 sites) but likely to have significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to Appropriate Assessment of its implications for the site in view of the sites conservation objectives. In the light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public.*

*6(4) If, in spite of a negative assessment of the implications for the site and in the absence of alternative solutions, a plan or project must nevertheless be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of social or economic nature, the Member State shall take all compensatory measures necessary to ensure that the overall coherence of Natura 2000 is protected. It shall inform the Commission of the compensatory measures adopted. Where the site concerned hosts a priority natural habitat type and/or a priority species the only considerations which may be raised are those relating to human health or public safety, to beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment or, further to an opinion from the Commission, to other imperative reasons of overriding public interest.*

The statutory agency responsible for Natura 2000 sites is the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government. The European Court of Justice (December 13<sup>th</sup> 2007) issued a judgment in a legal case against Ireland that found that Ireland has failed in its statutory duty to confer adequate protection on designated areas. Following on from this the Circular Letter 1/08 & NPWS 1/08 on Appropriate Assessment of Land Use Plans (from the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government) states that all plans and projects will be subject to critical assessment to ensure that they comply with all relevant legislation. In December 2009 “*Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland: Guidance for Planning Authorities. Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government*” was published. This guidance document was prepared jointly by the NPWS and Planning Divisions of DoEHLG, with input from local authorities. ***New legislation in the form of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 has since been enacted bringing Appropriate Assessment into planning law.***

## Chapter 2: Development Strategy

In the lifetime of the previous plan and before the town of Portlaoise experienced exceptional development pressures, the legacy of its own growth includes a significant increase in population. As a consequence the rate of service provision did not keep pace with the population growth and in this regard, the overall vision of this Local Area Plan provides for the expansion of service provision within the town in terms of employment, social and community infrastructure. Intrinsic to this is the future development for the town centre, rebalancing the retail core and conserving the town character.

### VISION

*To set out a framework for the physical development of the Town of Portlaoise so that growth may take place in a sensitive, co-ordinated and orderly manner, while at the same time conserving the Town's character and intrinsic value.*

The development vision set out for the Town of Portlaoise in this Plan incorporates the following provisions:

- The Town will be developed in a coherent manner in order to achieve a sustainable outcome;
- Development will be limited to lands within the boundary with no further sporadic development being allowed outside it;
- The general thrust of development in this plan period will be consolidation within the zoned area and maximum use of existing infrastructure.

### STRATEGIC AIMS

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

- ✚ To facilitate the future sustainable development of Portlaoise so as to optimise the benefits of its location, in accordance with the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) and the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines;
- ✚ To promote balanced and sustainable economic development and employment ensuring that a diverse range of economic sectors are developed and supported;
- ✚ To facilitate the provision of social and recreational infrastructure and to provide access to new and existing community and social facilities;
- ✚ To facilitate the provision of housing in a range of locations to meet the needs of the Town's population, with particular emphasis on facilitating access to housing to suit different household and tenure needs, in a sustainable manner;
- ✚ To facilitate the economic and social development of the Town through the provision of adequate transport infrastructure and to optimise the return of investment on infrastructure while preserving the natural and built heritage;
- ✚ To ensure a good quality of life, through maintaining and improving waste water treatment and water supplies and to minimise the adverse impacts of development on the environment, through policies for the management of wastes and emissions;

- ✚ To protect, conserve and enhance the built, natural and cultural environment, through promoting awareness, utilising relevant heritage legislation and promoting good quality urban and rural design;
- ✚ To ensure the orderly development of the Town through the implementation of development control policies and standards for a range of developments;
- ✚ To promote the balanced and sustainable development of Town for a range of residential, services, educational and employment opportunities;
- ✚ To facilitate the achievement of the commitment given to Portlaoise in the National Spatial Strategy and Regional Planning Guidelines;
- ✚ To promote and encourage the development of the critical mass of Portlaoise and to enhance its strategic location on the National and Regional road and rail network;

## STRATEGY

To ensure that Portlaoise can develop in a coordinated sequential and appropriate manner and at a rate that is consistent with policies and objectives at a national level (NSS) and at a regional level (Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010) and at County Level (Laois County Development Plan 2011-2017). The strategy will set out how the Council will address population growth and associated housing requirements in a manner which is consistent with such policies and objectives.

## PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT ACT 2010

A number of the new provisions within the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 relate to the plan making process. Of relevance for the content of this Local Area Plan are the 2 main strategy implications:

1. The requirement for the County Development Plan to include a Core Strategy which is consistent with national and regional objectives e.g. the NSS and the MRPGs.
2. The requirement for a Local Area Plan to be consistent with the Core Strategy of the County Development Plan **and** to be consistent with national and regional objectives e.g. the NSS and the MRPGs.

The implication of the above for this local area plan is that its strategy provisions must be consistent with national objectives and in particular, at a regional level, the MRPGs.

## POPULATION REQUIREMENTS

### Population Trends

Portlaoise has witnessed major population growth since the beginning of the millennium. From Census 2002 to Census 2006, the population of the urban area grew by 20.5%. It grew by a further 26.7% between Census 2006 and Census 2011.

Town	2002	2006	% Change 02-06	2011	% Change 06-11
Portlaoise	12,127	14,613	20.5%	18,270	26.7%

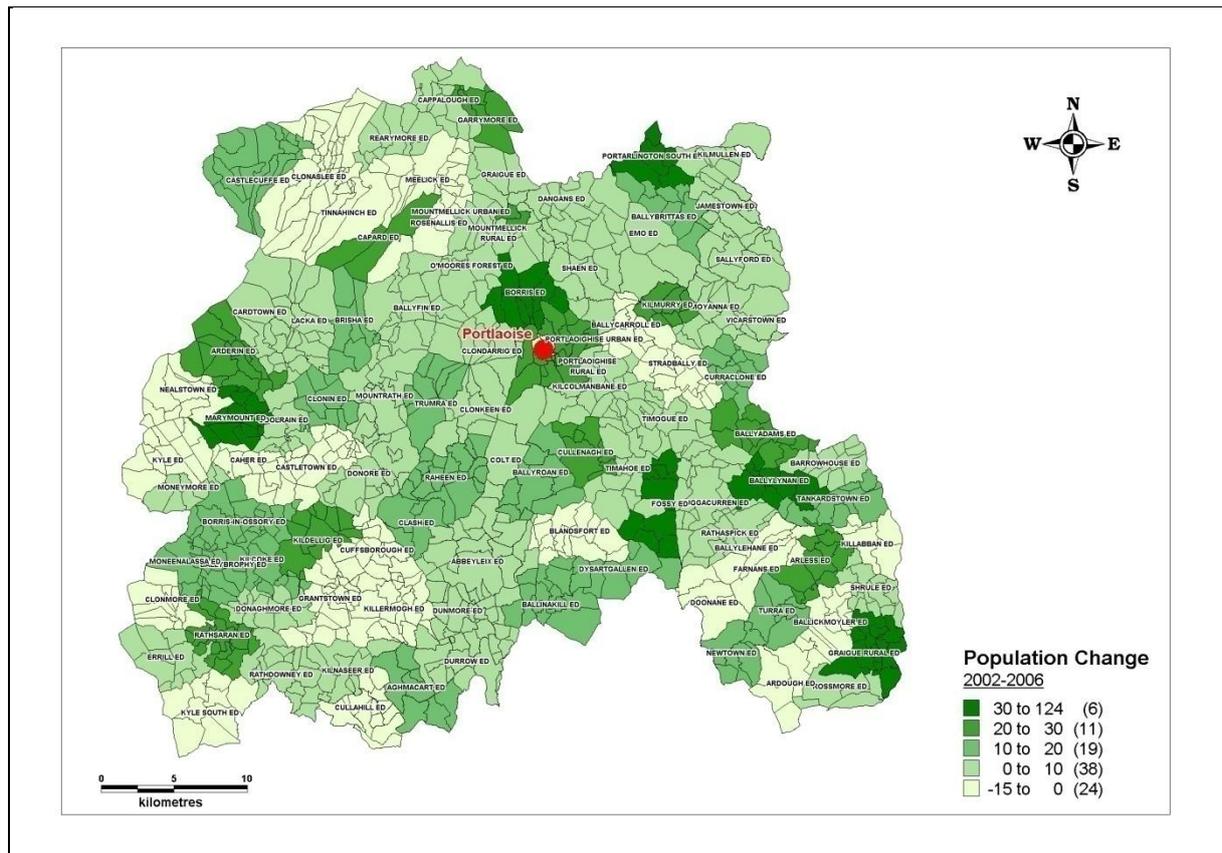
CSO: 2002,2006,2011

**Table 2: Population and Actual and % Change 2006 and 2011 by Electoral Division, Statistical Indicator and Year**

	2011
<b>071 Portlaoighise (Maryborough) Rural, Co. Laois</b>	
Population 2006 - persons (Number)	11,075
Population 2011 - persons (Number)	14,614
Population 2011 - males (Number)	7,604
Population 2011 - females (Number)	7,010
Actual change in population 2006-2011 (Number)	3,539
Percentage change in population 2006-2011 (%)	32.0
<b>072 Portlaoighise (Maryborough) Urban, Co. Laois</b>	
Population 2006 - persons (Number)	3,281
Population 2011 - persons (Number)	3,656
Population 2011 - males (Number)	1,785
Population 2011 - females (Number)	1,871
Actual change in population 2006-2011 (Number)	375
Percentage change in population 2006-2011 (%)	11.4

Figures in the above table for 2011 are preliminary figures only.

**Map 1: Population change by DED in County Laois, 2002-2006**



The Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines (MRPG) 2010 set out an overall population projection for the Midlands region up to the year 2020. By 2020, the MRPG envisage a population of 325,000 living in the Midlands Region. The Towns population projection for 2006 is 14,000. This growth was unprecedented and can be attributed to strong net in-migration and the higher rate of household formation and pressure from the greater Dublin area. According to CSO data, the average household

size is 2.91 and it is reasonable to assume that average household sizes will continue to decline towards the European average of about 2.5 persons per household over the next 20 years or so. This is primarily a reflection of the increasing number of one and two person households and the trend towards household formation at younger ages. The strong net in-migration has been largely related to the economic growth period of the late 1990's, particularly in the Dublin Metropolitan Region, and house price relativity between the areas. The **total** projected **population growth** for County Laois for the period 2006-2018 is **10,000**. This is calculated in strict adherence as is required by way of the core strategy of the County Development Plan 2011-2017 with the population projections of the MRPGs. The population projections of the MRPGs [and the projections for the three subdivisions of County Laois for 2018] are summarized as follows:

**Table 3: County Laois Population Projections as per adopted MRPGs, 2010**

	2006	2016	2018	2022
Midland	251,664	297,300		317,100
County Laois	67,059	75,931	(77,059)	79,314
Portlaoise	14,356	17,481	(18,106)	19,356
County Balance	52,703	58,450	(58,953)	59,958

### HOUSING LAND REQUIREMENT

The Laois County Development Plan 2011-2017 identifies a strategic housing land requirement for the Plan period 2011-2017 is 273 hectares in order to meet the RPG targets for future population growth for the County as a whole including the principal town of Portlaoise. This requirement is broken down as follows:

- 67 ha for the principal town of Portlaoise;

**Table 4: Housing Land Requirement as per Laois County Development Plan, 2011-2017**

	Population 2006 (CSO)	Projected Population 2018	Projected Population Growth to 2018	Projected increase in Households to 2018	Density (per ha)	Housing Land Requirement to 2018 (Inc. 50% headroom)	AREA (ha) proposed to be Zoned for Residential Development 2012 - 2018	Existing Sewerage Treatment Plant capacity expressed in PE
County Laois	67,059	77,059	10,000	4,167				
<b>Southern Development Area (MRPGs)</b>								
Portlaoise	14,356	18,106	3,750	1563	35	67	67	39,000

### 2011 Census Results

The exceptional population growth that occurred in Portlaoise in inter-censal period 2002-2006 has continued through to 2011. The actual population figures for Portlaoise Urban are pending final publication. However growth rates are anticipated to be in line with the MRPG's and each counties core strategies.

The principal town is part of the broader polycentric settlement model, centred on the linked gateway. Portlaoise is designated as a Principal Town within the Region in the Midland regional planning guidelines 2010. It is a large urban centre and economic drivers in the south Midlands with distinct local economies and strong links to the adjacent regions. In order to fulfil this role, the Principal town will be a significant focus for future population growth in the County settlement hierarchy.

In terms of functions, Portlaoise has other service roles including Public Service, education, and tourism, financial and retail for a large hinterland. From an employment perspective, Portlaoise continues to be an important contributor to the County's economy, especially with respect to the public sector with Department of Agriculture, Prison Service and Regional Hospitals located therein. The Planning framework for Portlaoise is set out in the Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2006-2012 as amended in April 2010.

### **STRATEGY APPROACH**

A number of opportunity sites have been identified in the Development Strategy for Portlaoise. Many of these sites are located within the town centre. Much of the retailing development that has occurred to date has occurred on the edge of the historic core of Portlaoise. This development Strategy seeks to redress the imbalance and focus on regenerating the historic core of Portlaoise.

### **TOWN CENTRE**

The rebalancing of the town centre is a key aim of this Local Area Plan. The development strategy for the town centre is set out below which recognises the potential of the Town Centre as being a focus for employment generation, retail use and residential development where appropriate and in line with the Strategy Approach in this chapter. The Town Centre is in a position to assist in fulfilling Portlaoise's role as a 'Principal Town' in the MRPGs and as a 'Principal Town' in the Laois County Development Plan through facilitating and accommodating development opportunities which will enhance the service offer for the town and for the wider hinterland.

### **EMPLOYMENT**

Employment generating uses in Portlaoise are critical to redressing the balance of development that has taken place. The town has experienced significant population growth and should be in a position to capitalise on the available skilled workforce. In addition to the additional business/employment lands included on the land use zoning map, flexible policies and objectives are also included in Chapter 3 which demonstrates Laois County Council's commitment to assisting and facilitating in the creation of additional employment for Portlaoise.

### **COMMUNITY SERVICES**

As stated throughout this Draft Local Area Plan for Portlaoise, exceptional population growth in the town took place between 2002 and 2006. In order to sustain vibrant communities within the town and to improve the quality of life for the residents of Portlaoise in particular, community and social facilities must match the needs of people currently living in Portlaoise.

In conjunction with this plan's focus on the consolidation of the town centre, the completion of ongoing developments and the flexible approach in relation to employment, the provision of community and social facilities is also a priority.

Notwithstanding the existing community and voluntary groups who work within Portlaoise and the surrounding area, Laois County Council acknowledges that this area requires improvement and will

cooperate with and engage with the relevant agencies and bodies to facilitate delivery of community and social facilities (Refer to Chapter 8).

## RESIDENTIAL

The Local Area for Plan for Portlaoise 2006-2012 had excessive amounts of land zoned for residential use. The Planning Authority has had regard to the following considerations in determining the residential zoning for this plan period:

1. The Strategic Aims set out in Chapter Two;
2. The policy context as set out above;
3. The higher end population estimate of c. 18,106.
4. The resultant estimate for number of housing units and
5. The resultant estimate for c. 67 hectares of residential land.

The approach for residential development in Portlaoise over this plan period is as follows:

1. Prioritise the completion of ongoing developments;
2. In conjunction with achieving no. 1 above, address lands with planning permission adjacent to developments where works are ongoing;
3. Consider Key Strategic Sites for future development.

Due to the significant amount of growth already experienced in Portlaoise, there are a number of potential sources for residential development to come on stream. These must be considered when addressing the housing land requirement need of c. 67 hectares:

- Ongoing developments and associated lands adjacent.
- Unzoned Land (with planning permission).
- New Residential Development

## MANAGEMENT

The **sequential approach** will be applied to any residential development proposals in Portlaoise as such an approach is essential to underpin the sustainable delivery of population and housing requirements over the plan period. The sequential approach relates to development taking place from the centre out, avoiding 'leapfrogging' of more appropriate lands and consolidating existing developed areas. The Planning Authority will have regard to the following, where relevant, in determining the suitability of applications relating to residential development:

1. Population and housing unit requirements for the plan period - the Planning Authority will also consider whether the number of resultant units shall contribute to cumulatively exceeding the required amount of housing units and population for Portlaoise.
2. Land use zoning.
3. Progression of the following:
  - a. The completion of developments which are ongoing.
  - b. Unzoned lands with planning permission.
  - c. New residential development proposals.
4. Existing development on lands adjacent.
5. Current no. of unoccupied units within the plan boundary, where information is available

## MONITORING

During the lifetime of this plan, it is anticipated that monitoring is essential to managing the delivery of appropriate development in the town of Portlaoise. In particular, the Council will monitor and review the implications of the following for Portlaoise:

- **MRPGs 2010-2016**
- **Laois County Development Plan**
- **Progression of Developments that are ongoing**

## OBJECTIVES OF THE PLAN

This Local Area Plan is based on a number of general goals which are designed to improve the quality of life of the population of the Town and surrounding hinterland and which the council will endeavour to implement during the period of the Plan. These have been mentioned earlier. The following are more specific policies in relation to the delivery of the Strategy:

1. To enhance the role of Portlaoise as an important centre of socio-economic activity in the Midlands and as the main administrative centre of County Laois.
2. To facilitate the provision of sufficient and adequate employment opportunities to cater for the needs of the population of the Town and its hinterland through the expansion of the manufacturing and services bases of the Town and environs;
3. To establish a vision that maximises the strategic centrality of Portlaoise whilst giving due cognisance to quality of life issues. The vitality and viability of the Town centre is critical to this vision.
4. Establish a framework for the enhancement of civic character.
5. To encourage the continued commercial development of the Town and to further its role as a shopping and commercial centre for the region;
6. To ensure that sufficient and suitably located land is allocated to satisfy the needs of different functions of the Town in the future;
7. To ensure that the necessary public utilities and services are available in the future to satisfy the need of Portlaoise and surrounding areas.
8. To secure a safe and comprehensive roads system capable of satisfying the requirements of both motor traffic, cyclists and pedestrians in the Town and to provide for adequate car parking facilities;
9. To foster the development of the Town's role as an Education Centre and to seek the establishment of a third level educational institute;
10. To seek expansion and development of the Town as a Regional Centre for relocation of Government Offices and as an Administrative Centre for the Health Services;
11. To facilitate the provision of improved amenities within the Town and to secure the appropriate re-development and renewal of obsolete areas;
12. To preserve the residential content of those Town centre streets and existing estates which have traditionally had a high residential content, and to protect them from the encroachment of commercial activities;
13. To facilitate the redevelopment of strategic sites within the Town centre such as the Secondary school site, Grain Store, and Main Street for a mixture of uses that will contribute to vitality of the central core area;
14. To facilitate the development of Portlaoise as a tourism base and as a location for National Conferences;
15. To ensure that access for people with disabilities is considered in all developments in accordance with the provisions of the current Building Regulations;
16. To renew, consolidate and develop the existing fabric of the Town of Portlaoise by achieving a high quality of design in new development and refurbishment;

17. To provide linkages of telecommunications, roads, infrastructure, utilities with the gateway triangle throughout the Midlands Region and Nationally and Internationally
18. To ensure that adequate recreational and open space and community facilities (schools, crèches etc) are provided in designated new residential areas, to meet the needs of a growing population.

The development of Portlaoise over the lifetime of this plan shall be focused on employment generation, the consolidation of the town centre, the completion of ongoing developments and the provision of community and social services (where feasible).

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

- DS 01 implement the development strategies for Portlaoise in order to be consistent with, and in accordance with, policies at a national level, regional level and at a county level.
- DS 02 facilitate and promote Portlaoise's role as a 'Principal Town' as designated in the MRPGs, and as a 'Principal Town' in the Laois County Development Plan 2011-2017.
- DS 03 support and encourage the appropriate growth of Portlaoise over the plan period and will facilitate such growth where it can be demonstrated that such proposals are consistent with national, regional and local level policy and in line with the sequential approach.
- DS 04 prioritise the completion of development where works are ongoing in Portlaoise. In this regard, Laois County Council will, where necessary, engage with developers, landowners and agencies involved to resolve outstanding issues and reach a satisfactory conclusion.
- DS 05 have regard to future DoECLG/Government guidance in relation to the satisfactory completion of developments where works are ongoing.
- DS 06 monitor and manage the delivery of population and housing in Portlaoise, in line with national, regional and county level objectives, through the development strategy in this plan and also through the development management process. In this regard, it is Council policy to cooperate with the Midland Regional Authority, in relation to Portlaoise, as part of the monitoring and review approach.

## Chapter 3: Enterprise & Employment

### INTRODUCTION

Under the National Spatial Strategy, Portlaoise is designated as a 'local capital' and a 'key national transport node, providing a complementary role to the Midland Gateway of Athlone/Tullamore /Mullingar as indicated in the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines.

Portlaoise is one of a number of strategically placed, medium sized Towns in the Midlands region, which have significant attractions for investment. These attractions include its proximity to the Institutes of Technology in Athlone and Carlow, and University of Maynooth, the major hospitals in Tullamore and Mullingar, and its location on the strategic road & rail corridors of Athlone to the West, Limerick and Cork to the South and Dublin to the East making it a prime location for the establishment of a National Transport Node.

Portlaoise as the main administrative and commercial centre in the County, provides the widest range of facilities (government, retail, recreational and medical). Portlaoise is also growing rapidly, and has become a viable commuter Town from Dublin.

While extensive commuter based development has occurred in Portlaoise, in order to grow to its full economic potential the Town must be developed in terms of its economic self-sufficiency and support the development of surrounding areas. To do this it needs to sustain a good employment base and a wide range of shopping facilities and social infrastructure.

A multi million extension project is underway at the Midland Regional Hospital in Portlaoise, which coupled with the prison infrastructure (Portlaoise Prison and Midlands Prison) existing Government Offices and pending decentralisation of the Department of Agriculture, and the decision by Iarnród Éireann to locate the National Train Maintenance Depot at Togher, enhances the public service function in Portlaoise and will bring jobs and investment to the Town.

The installation of the broadband (Metropolitan Area Network) continues to facilitate the Town's development in attracting high-technological industries and enterprises. The IDA has a business technology park located in Portlaoise and the broadband infrastructure will increase the competitiveness level of the Town and also facilitate the uptake of E-Commerce as a business process.

### CURRENT EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

According to census 2006, construction, manufacturing and retailing are the pre-eminent sources of employment in Portlaoise accounting for just over 40% of the overall total. Detailed data for sectoral employment in census year 2011 are not yet available from CSO.

The on-going recessionary conditions have exerted major pressure on employment levels in the town. The construction sector has borne the brunt of the downturn with males in the younger age-cohorts being particularly badly affected. It is estimated by the CSO that nationally more than 60% of the year-on-year fall in male employment is attributable to this sector. On a pro-rata basis the impact in Portlaoise is actually worse.

Also, the town's traditional industries such as peat harvesting, food production and textiles are either static, in decline or have closed altogether. As a consequence, the numbers signing on the live register in Portlaoise Social Welfare Office have **risen** dramatically to 4,000, as at January 2012.

## ECONOMIC GROWTH

### Planning for Economic Growth

The Planning Authority can assist the development of all economic sectors by the implementation of policies relating to economic structure and built environment such as:

- ✚ The provision of an adequate and efficient transportation system.
- ✚ The zoning of sufficient and appropriately located lands for industrial and commercial development.
- ✚ The provision of water services and other urban infrastructure.
- ✚ The provision, in conjunction with other agencies, of enterprise centre provision and training infrastructure related to small and medium sized enterprises (SME).
- ✚ The zoning of adequate residentially zoned lands and the creation of an attractive urban environment to facilitate residency of the projected labour force.
- ✚ Developing the public realm and amenities of Portlaoise so that the quality of life of employees and residents can be improved.

**Table 5: Structure of Labour Force (2002), Portlaoise Town**

Agriculture	54	1%
Industry	1246	24%
Services	3096	59%
Other	523	9%
Unemployed & 1 <sup>st</sup> Time Job	356	7%
<b>Total Labour Force</b>	<b>5,275</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Total Labour Force

Based on the current structure of the labour force and the pending decentralisation of the Department of Agriculture, it is envisaged that future employment will be focused to a large extent on the service sector. The number of people signing on the Live Register stood at 3503 for the Portlaoise area in August 2009.

### Togher National Enterprise Park

Under the National Spatial Strategy, Portlaoise was designated a 'local capital' and a 'key transport node' and 'National Inland Port', providing a complementary role to the designated 'gateway' Towns and hubs and with the potential of creating a range of services and opportunities for employment. This 'designation' accorded Portlaoise a 'special status' and presented Laois County Council with an opportunity for economic development based on logistics activities. Land was identified during the period of the 2000 Laois County Development Plan for such development in the Togher area of Portlaoise. Zoning within this area caters for distribution, a limited amount of retail warehousing for bulky durable goods, factory warehousing, showrooms, bus and coach stops, motorway services and industrial development, innovative/Services Park, opportunity sites and Event Centre. Development of a retail nature, which would impact adversely on the Town centre, will not be allowed. The Development of this flagship Transport Node has the potential to be a major boost to the economy of Portlaoise and to contribute to the growth of the County and the Region as a whole.

The Retail element of the Development has the potential to attract National Bulk Warehousing and higher order goods. The success of this development will have a major impact on much needed job creation in the Town and environs, in the construction phase and the operation phase. The

development by Iarnród Éireann, of a National Train maintenance depot in the Transport Node will also create employment. In addition it will have a knock-on effect on service industries in the area.

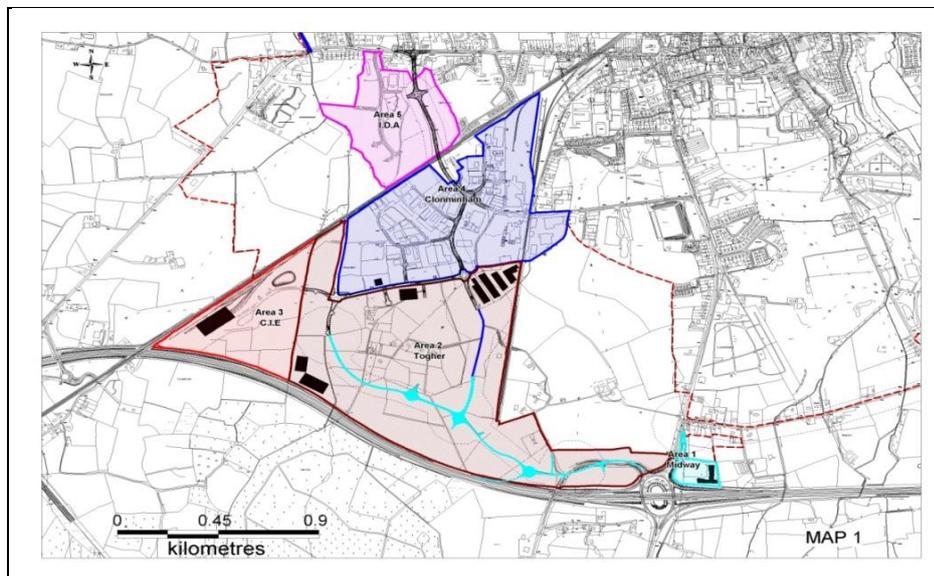
### **TOGHER – NATIONAL ENTERPRISE PARK MASTERPLAN**

A Masterplan was prepared for the Togher National Enterprise Park in 2009 in association with the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) and the National Roads Authority (NRA) and has been developed around a number of key components that have been identified to ensure the proper planning of the scheme. These components are:

- the realisation of the economic and employment potential of commercial freight businesses
- the development of the local road infrastructure within Portlaoise, and connecting it to the strategic road network, to provide efficient and effective connections between the commercial and operational interests within the site, and mitigate any impacts of the scheme on strategic national road infrastructure
- the provision of complementary facilities and land uses to support the sustainable development potential of the Togher Area;
- the addition of further land and development opportunities to provide critical mass response to the market opportunity and maximise employment generation potential, and
- the improvements both in the built environment and in the hard and soft landscaping.

The design guide prepared in association with the Masterplan lays down standards and principles which will ensure high quality/low maintenance finishes and a consistency in design which will reinforce the identity of Togher National Enterprise Park. The Masterplan is appended to this Local Area Plan.

### **Map 2: National Enterprise Park at Portlaoise Interchange**



The over arching goal for the Togher area is to create an area which will capitalize on the existing assets to unlock the full economic potential of the area. In order to fulfil this goal a number of challenges need to be overcome. Those challenges are

- Improving the existing built environment
- Minimise any adverse impact on the operation, efficiency and safety of the Togher Interchange and National Road Network

- Ensure a mix of uses that is compatible with the Transportation node and Inland Port Concept

The vision for the Togher area Masterplan is also dependent on incremental environmental /landscaping improvements to the existing industrial park – Clonminam Business Park and extending new compatible uses from that area. Within the overall Masterplan area a combination of uses is necessary to support the growth of the inland port concept. The Togher Inland port has been created as a suitable location to promote trade, commerce and exchange in a non-nautical setting.

Similarly it is intended to develop Portlaoise as a national location at road/rail intersections with optimum opportunities for trade, commerce and supply chains. Owing to the fact that the site is zoned for enterprise and employment with the overarching Inland Port notation, a number of economic / commercial activities can be considered.

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

- EE 01 accord priority to the development of a National Transport Node and Industrial Port at the Portlaoise Interchange for retail warehousing and distribution, motorway services, industrial development and an event centre;
- EE 02 improve the existing built environment within the Togher Clonminam Area
- EE 03 minimise any adverse impact on the operation, efficiency and safety of the Togher Interchange and National Road Network
- EE 04 ensure a mix of uses that is compatible with the Transportation node and Inland Port Concept
- EE 05 ensure that the objectives of the Togher Masterplan are met in preparing proposals for development within the Masterplan area.
- EE 06 assess applications for the development of the Togher Masterplan Area according to whether proposals achieve:-

- i. The protection of features of natural heritage value;
- ii. the protection of ground water resources;
- iii. The protection of any features of geological or geomorphological interest;
- iv. The protection of any features of archaeological interest;
- v. The need for all developments to contribute in an integrated manner to the overall development layout for the area including the provision and layout for all infrastructural services;
- vi. The design and qualitative aspects of any proposed development.

**EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The allocation of large tracts of serviced land at Togher as a National Enterprise Park for enterprise, employment and industrial uses in the immediate vicinity of national strategic transport infrastructure represents a unique opportunity to develop a cluster of complementary enterprises and more generally a larger, more robust and more diverse economic base for the County and the Region. Town centre cores provide focal points for retail trade, commercial uses and service provision and play a lead role in driving the economic development of the County. High footfall in town centres gives rise to multiplier trade effects. A large number of independently owned small and medium sized businesses are located in town centres across the County.

**Table 6: Tiered Strategy of Clustering Industrial and Enterprise Development in County Laois**

Tiered Strategy of Clustering Industrial and Enterprise Development in Laois			
<b>Tier 1</b>	Togher National Enterprise Park	National	Inland Port Road and Rail Infrastructure Established heavy industry Incubator Centre Large catchment area Capacity for industrial/ enterprise development – FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES Supported by NSS, RPGs, NRA, IDA policies
<b>Tier 2</b>	Portlaoise and Togher (outside Togher)	Principal and Key Service Town	Road and Rail Infrastructure Established heavy industry Incubator Centres Large catchment area Capacity for industrial/ enterprise development

The aim of Laois County Council is for the provision of zoned and serviced lands to cater for the industrial, manufacturing, technological and service needs of the Town over the plan period within the bounds of proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

- EE 07 develop Togher, as a National Enterprise Park, focused in particular on trade warehousing, distribution, logistics and other uses associated with the transport industry. Other suitable uses include offline motorway services, retail warehousing, offices and conference facilities, leisure uses such as hotels, catering and indoor sporting facilities. Provision is also made within Togher for the development of significant heavy, light and ICT industry uses as well as general enterprise uses In order to deliver the Togher National Enterprise Park, develop an implementation programme including direct marketing campaigns in order to drive economic development.
- EE 08 encourage sustainable balance between economic, social, cultural and environmental development;
- EE 09 give consideration in responding to strategic enterprise and employment opportunities at other appropriate locations in Portlaoise & environs, having regard to proper planning and sustainable development and relevant development control standards;
- EE 10 support the planned Government decentralisation to Portlaoise;
- EE 11 facilitate the continuity and encourage the expansion of established enterprises and to promote start-up enterprises, having regard to the protection of the amenity value of neighbouring properties;
- EE 12 co-operate with IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, the County Enterprise Board and other agencies, organisations and individuals in promoting enterprise in Portlaoise;
- EE 13 facilitate the provision of a number of incubator units for small enterprises at affordable rents at the Portlaoise Enterprise Centre;
- EE 14 support the further development of broadband (Metropolitan Area Network) at Portlaoise and to facilitate the development of Portlaoise as an E-Commerce centre;
- EE 15 encourage, in co-operation with the Laois County Enterprise Board and the Leader Company, the development of further small to medium scale industries and services;
- EE 16 create an integrated and sustainable public & private transport system to move people and goods efficiently within and through Portlaoise;
- EE 17 develop high-quality business infrastructure.

## TOURISM

According to Failte Ireland, Laois attracted 38,000 overseas visitors in 2004, which generated approximately €9million in revenue to the local economy. The County is not widely thought of as a tourist destination for Irish or foreign tourists, due to a lack of developed tourist attractions along with a largely rural population base. However, Portlaoise possesses a number of development opportunities with regard to Tourism. Portlaoise's strategic location, excellent road and rail availability and proximity to major centres of population like Dublin, offer the potential for the development of a niche market promoting conferences/events. The Heritage Hotel, Killeshin Hotel and the Maldron Hotel offer greater facilities for conferences and will ensure that the Town can function as a conference/event centre in its own right.

There is also significant potential to develop Portlaoise as a base whereby delegations to conferences in the South and East can use Laois as an intermediate destination away from Dublin on the way to their final location and as a base to visit tourist attractions in the County such as the Slieve Blooms, Rock of Dunamaise and Emo Court or other major tourism destinations in the County including Dublin/Wicklow to the east, Galway/Clare/Sligo, to the west, Cork/Kerry to the south and the whole of the Northern region.

In cultural terms, Portlaoise is fast establishing a reputation as a centre for the Arts. The Dunamaise Theatre and Centre for the Arts has an extensive programme showing the very best of contemporary and traditional theatre, music and dance. The Arts centre includes a large exhibition space that has been used not only for fine art and photography but also to display local arts and crafts.

### It is the Policy of the Council to:

- EE 18 encourage the development of the tourism industry by the provision and extension of existing amenities in cooperation with the appropriate statutory agencies, private tourism sector and community groups;
- EE 19 promote Portlaoise as a tourist destination, especially for over night stays and conference tourism;
- EE 20 protect the amenities of the Town from insensitive or inappropriate development particularly any development which threatens the tourism resources of the Town;
- EE 21 protect and enhance the cultural, historical and architectural heritage and streetscapes of the Town such as St. Peters Church, the spire of which was designed by James Gandon, the Courthouse and the Dunamaise Theatre and Arts Centre;
- EE 22 rationalise and improve sign posting of local attractions;
- EE 23 co-operate with Portlaoise Tidy Towns and other community organisations in enhancing the Towns appearance;
- EE 24 support the sports and leisure activities in the Town and its environs;
- EE 25 encourage the provision of indoor and activities based tourism facilities and events which extend the tourist season;
- EE 26 All tourism related development shall be subject to the protection of the factors which make the area attractive to tourist in the first place;
- EE 27 develop major Tourist/Event attraction in Portlaoise;
- EE 28 implement the objectives of the Laois County Council Arts Plan insofar as it relates to Portlaoise



*Plate 3: Enterprise Centre in Clonminam [left] and Clonminam Industrial Estate [right].*



*Plate 4: Iarnrod Eireann train-care depot in Togher [left] and Iarnrod Eireann plant and stock yards at Old Knockmay Road [right].*

## Chapter 4: Town Centre, Retailing & Renewal

The Retail Planning Guidelines (DOEHLG, 2012) require that retail strategies be prepared for Council functional areas. The strategies to be included in all future development plans are to comprehensively address the following matters:

- Confirm the retail hierarchy, the role of centres and the size of the main Town centres;
- Define the boundaries of the core shopping areas;
- Identify the additional floor space requirements
- Prepare policies and action initiatives to encourage the improvement of Town centres
- Identify the criteria for assessment of retail developments.

### It is the policy of the Council to:

TC01 have regard to the Retail Strategy 2011-2017 adopted by Laois County Council, and any subsequent revisions and Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities in determining planning applications for retail development.

The County Retail Strategy forms the basis on which the Planning Authority will formulate appropriate development plan objectives and policies for retail development in its area and will be used in the determination of applications for planning permission. In the Retail Strategy, Portlaoise was identified as the major Town centre in terms of retail function.

### County Retail Hierarchy and Strategic Direction of Retail Development in Laois

Status under County Hierarchy	Town	Action	Status under RPGs
Major Town Centre	Portlaoise	Reinforce and extend high order retail functioning with particular emphasis on historic core. Enhancing retail appeal of the County by strengthening retail functions of Portlaoise	Principal Town

The Strategic policy framework that underpins the specific retail policies addresses the specific requirements and guidance of the Retail Planning Guidelines. It comprises:

- County Retail Hierarchy
- Sequential Approach
- Core Retail Area

The Sequential Approach is incorporated in the strategic policy framework to guide the location of new retail development in the Development Plan. It recognises the importance of sustaining the retail importance, vitality and viability of the Town. Proposals for major retail schemes in Portlaoise are required to take due cognisance of this as follows:

- In the first instance, the priority should be in locating new retail development within the Town centre.
- If Town centre locations are not readily available within a reasonable and realistic timescale then town centre secondary sites should be considered. In the Retail Planning Guidelines, these are defined as sites that are within 300-400 metres of the Core Retail Area.
- Only after the options for Town centre and town centre secondary are exhausted should out of centre locations and sites be considered.

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

TC02 guide retail development, in accordance with the Sequential Approach, to enable the vitality and viability of the Town centre and neighbourhood centres to be sustained and strengthened

**County Laois Retail Strategy 2011-2017**

The future demand for retail floorspace in County Laois was examined as part of the review of the County Development Plan 2011-2017. Retail floorspace demand is influenced to a large extent by projected population and personal income growth and therefore understanding national, regional and local population trends is important. Population considerations within this review governing the preparation of the Retail Strategy are based on the publication of the 2006 census as well as recent updates from the Midland Regional Authority and the Dept. of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

**Table 7: County Retail Hierarchy**

County Laois Retail Hierarchy		
Retail function	Centre	
Major Town Centre	Portlaoise	
County Town Centres	Portarlinton	
	Mountmellick	
	Rathdowney	
	Mountrath	
	Stradbally	
	Durrow	
	Abbeyleix	
District Centre	Carlow Environs	
Neighbourhood Centres	Fairgreen , Mountmellick Road, Portlaoise	
	Kilminchy , Dublin Road, Portlaoise	

**HEALTH CHECK OF PORTLAOISE**

Main Street with offshoots onto Hinds Square, Lyster Square, Grattan Street, Church Street, Railway Street, Bridge Street, Borris Road and Mountmellick Road formed the traditional shopping heart of the town. The composition of retail provision in this area is still characterized by a relatively large number of independent operators including Shaws Department Store. In recent years however, the retail focus has changed. A large amount of new retail floorspace has been developed in Kylekiproe, Abbeyleix Road, the neighbourhood centres in Fairgreen and Kilminchy and in a number of petrol stations on approach roads to the town. The emergence of Kylekiproe as a major retail area to such an extent that it is now rivalling and surpassing the Main Street in terms of commercial focus and investment has been facilitated to a large extent by the opening in the mid 1980's of an inner relief road-James Fintan Lalor Avenue. The availability of much larger site areas to accommodate on-site parking and easier access for deliveries are other contributory factors. The Laois Shopping Centre containing Penneys and Tesco as its anchor, a newly opened Dunnes Stores, Lidl, and Aldi Stores and retail warehousing are all based in Kylekiproe.

Simultaneously, Main Street and associated streets are in a state of stagnation and decline. Despite the proximity of Main Street to Kylekiproe, one of the main problems is a real sense of disconnect

between the two areas especially for pedestrian traffic. Notwithstanding the provision of a pedestrian crossing, navigating James Fintan Lalor Avenue continues to be a major issue for would be shoppers going from Kylekiproe back to Lyster Square and Main Street or vice versa. Ultimately, it is hoped that with the imminent departure of the schools [with their extensive curtilages] from Tower Hill and Fitzmaurice Place to the new campus planned for Borris Road, extensive development opportunities will arise in the traditional town centre, thereby redressing the balance to some extent at least.

It is generally accepted that all town centres will experience some level of vacancy caused by changes in ownership, amalgamation of sites, expiration of leases and shop fit outs. At present vacancy levels in the town centre are relatively low

The Health Check assessment indicates that Portlaoise is, by far, the chief shopping destination in County Laois. It has a wide range of convenience and comparison retailing, financial institutions and service providers, signifying that it is a healthy, vibrant and vital town centre. Attention now needs to be focused on combating the declining fortunes of the traditional high street shopping area.

Having regard to the above, the retail strategy for Portlaoise will seek firstly to promote retail development as follows:

- i. Core Retail Area
- ii. Town Centre Secondary
- iii. Edge of Centre
- iv. Neighbourhood centres
- v. General Business

#### ***Core Retail Area (the traditional shopping area of Portlaoise Town)***

It is commonly the case that retailing in the older parts of settlements struggle to compete with new developments on edge of centre and out of centre locations. The reasons for this are self evident and are largely a product of locational factors at the micro level, coupled with the impact of broad overarching forces at the macro level.

The planning authority recognizes the critical importance of maintaining and enhancing of the vitality and viability of the urban core of Portlaoise. The Council acknowledge that an Urban Framework Plan for the redevelopment of the existing institutional and Council lands in the Town Core has been prepared and that this document will form the basis to guide the redevelopment of the town centre core of Portlaoise and enhance the urban landscape of the town to create a vibrant place for people to work, shop, live and socialize.

Public and private bodies concerned with promoting the vitality and viability of town centres should explore other complementing strategies and policies for the town centre.

There are largely three mutually inclusive aims of town centre management (TCM):

- ✓ To develop the town centre by enhancing the physical environment;
- ✓ To manage the town centre for the purpose of efficiency; and,
- ✓ To promote the town centre as a place to visit and do business.

From a planning perspective, the overriding theme to TCM is the emphasis placed on environmental upgrading. Indeed, environmental improvement is now synonymous with TCM and is perceived as being instrumental to the restoration of town centre confidence and the reinforcement of a town centre's distinctiveness and spirit of place.

Environmental improvement embraces the concepts of pedestrianisation, traffic calming, physical upgrading (especially shopfronts) and street maintenance involving both hard landscaping (paving, street furniture, signage, lighting, wirescape) and soft landscaping (tree planting and planters) as well as improvement to air quality, traffic management, flood risk assessment, surface water quality, capacity, quality and adequacy of service infrastructure (drinking water / waste water) etc as appropriate and relevant. Overall, the aim of environmental improvement schemes is to cultivate a distinctive sense of urban space in the traditional part of Portlaoise town centre. This will enhance its appeal for the development of new service, entertainment, leisure and residential uses (apartment living). It will also boost its attraction as a focal location for the congregation and interaction of the town's inhabitants.

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

TC03 protect and enhance the special physical and social character of the existing Town centre and to provide for and improve retailing and commercial activities.

**Town Centre Secondary**

Town Centre Secondary zoning is introduced to recognise the significant level of retail development which has occurred within 400m of the Town Centre. The purpose of this zone is to provide for and improve retailing and commercial activities and acknowledge the existing/permitted retailing and commercial activity. Any specific development proposal must have due regard to the location of the site within the wider Town context, submit a retail impact assessment where applicable and be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

TC04 provide for and improve retailing and commercial activities.

**Edge of Centre**

Edge of Centre zoning is introduced in line with the sequential approach as outlined in the Retail Planning Guidelines 2005. Edge of Centre locations are over 400m from the Town Centre. It is considered that these sites are ideally suited for Retail Warehousing, defined as large stores specialising in the sale of bulky household goods such as carpets, furniture, electrical goods and bulky DIY items, which generally, cannot be located in the town centre due to their requirements for space and parking facilities. Retail warehousing will be permitted in principle, depending on its scale and nature, provided that such development does not detract from the town centre's retailing function and provided that it is in accordance with the Council's adopted Retail Strategy.

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

TC05 provide for retail warehousing in accordance with the adopted Retail Strategy and in support of the town centre.

**Neighbourhood centre (New retail development linked to housing proposals)**

Given the number and scale of new housing proposals across the town of Portlaoise and Environs and the pressure that this is exerting on the planning authority, it is appropriate to consider the application of a broad-brush ratio of retail floorspace to population index so as to attempt to manage this form of retail development.

This is especially warranted in the light of the number and size of residential applications with retail components to their layout. In some cases, the level of retail floorspace applied for would appear to be entirely arbitrary in its conception and ill-fitting when viewed within the context of the existing level of shopping provision.

Bearing this in mind, it is proposed to index new neighbourhood retail floorspace levels to anticipated levels of additional population growth. Based on the observed level of retail floorspace per capita in County Laois, it would seem reasonable to apply a general requirement ratio of 1 gross retail sq. m. for every person.

Hence, if a housing development is anticipated to accommodate a population of 1,000 people, then there may be scope to develop a new neighbourhood shopping facility of approximately 1,000 gross sq. ms. Typically, such retail provision would include a small convenience store and a number of retail service units, such as a hairdressers, hot food outlet, etc. In the interest of protecting the business of the town centre it is recommended that the sale of comparison goods be precluded from operating at these centres.

Furthermore, in the interest of preserving the residential amenity of the inhabitants and given the propensity of such developments to attract antisocial gatherings, retail provision of this type should preferably be located on the main priority road from which access to housing is achieved. Roadside prominence of this type will also allow for a greater degree of passive surveillance. Using this ratio of floorspace to population index as a guide, the onus should then be placed on the developer to provide a Retail Supporting Statement.

Six Neighbourhood Centres are shown in the Portlaoise Local Area Plan. The purpose of these Neighbourhood Centres is to serve the local community through the provision of retail facilities and other services. Ideally these should be within walking distance of the area they are intended to serve. The retail element of these local centres will be controlled so as not to negatively impact on the existing town centre. These controls will usually take the form of setting a maximum retail floor area for the shop units to be provided in these neighbourhood centres. The largest size of a convenience store shall be restricted to no more than 500 sq. ms. in a Neighbourhood Centre. This is as defined by the Retail Planning Guidelines 2005 - *Convenience Outlet – Single level, partially self service store with no adjacent car parking, selling food and other convenience items, with a net sales area of not more than 500 square metres, and a product range less than that carried by a supermarket. Such stores are characterised by longer opening hours than supermarkets.*

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

TC06 provide for the development of a new/existing neighbourhood centre to serve the needs of new/existing residential areas

**General Business**

This allowed for a variety of uses which included retail uses. This use zone now will only allow for retail warehousing type uses and limited small scale convenience, particularly those associated with petrol stations, etc.

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

TC07 provide for additional commercial activities and to recognize existing retail/permitted retailing. New retail developments within these areas shall be limited to small scale

convenience (<100 sq. ms.) stores in order not to detract from the town centre or from neighbourhood centres,

### URBAN RENEWAL

The Council continues to be concerned that there are a number of derelict sites, which are in need of re-development in Portlaoise. Where appropriate the Council will secure and encourage the renewal of obsolete and derelict areas close to the Town centre, which utilise undeveloped backlands. The Council has undertaken a survey of derelict sites in the Town as is required under the Derelict Sites Act, 1990. It is an objective of the Council to update the derelict sites register.

#### It is the policy of the Council to:

- TC08 seek the redevelopment and/or renewal of derelict sites throughout the Town, which are listed in the council's Derelict Sites Register;
- TC09 encourage and facilitate backland development, where this development strengthens the commercial or residential functions of the Town centre or areas close to the centre, provided that such development is done in a co-ordinated fashion and does not adversely affect the intrinsic character of the historic centre of the town
- TC10 ensure that all urban renewal is compatible with the historic centre of Portlaoise;
- TC11 work in unison with local, voluntary and business organisations and others in a programme of urban regeneration;
- TC12 utilise Government and EU funded programmes for investment in the physical environment of the Town, for example, the EU Operational Programme of Local Urban and Village Development, Urban Renewal Areas, etc. The potential for such projects is indicated in specific amenity objectives;
- TC13 identify and reserve suitable sites for community/public use as part of urban renewal schemes.

### OPPORTUNITY SITES

Five potential opportunity or re-development sites have been identified within the defined boundaries of Portlaoise which would contribute greatly to the renewal, enhancement and regeneration of the particular areas of the town in which they are located. These areas have been identified for various reasons such as dereliction, under utilisation of land and lands that would be readily adaptable for new uses.

The Council have identified a number of potential locations however, their site areas or boundaries have not been identified definitively and can be added to, within reason, to provide for logical site boundaries or the inclusion of other key sites. Additionally, other opportunity sites not listed in this section can be presented for their appraisal under similar criteria as those opportunity sites. Some/all of the individual or delineated sites may be owned by different parties and would require an element of site assembly for a coherent development strategy to progress. This approach will be encouraged by the Council particularly over a piecemeal approach to re-development.

Areas can be renewed by improving the appearance of the public realm, creating new linkages through existing open spaces and also by reducing block sizes with innovative infill development and advancing specific sites for re-development.

Some urban renewal projects of this nature have been undertaken in recent years including:

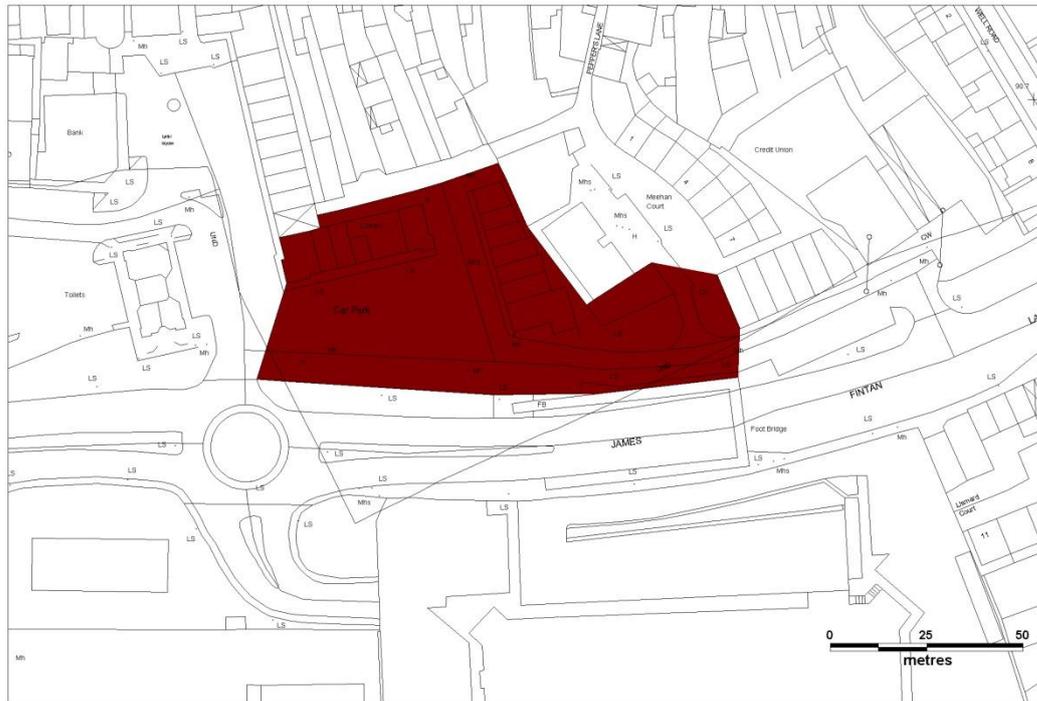
- (i) Mixed-use development at James Fintan Lawlor Avenue
- (ii) Aldi development, Kylekiproe

Many specific opportunities for renewal exist within the town centre of Portlaoise. These opportunities include better interaction with the Train Station and the historical main core of the town. The following areas have been identified

- (i) Lyster Square
- (ii) Fitzmaurice Place including the schools sites
- (iii) Centre point, Mountrath Road
- (iv) The Maltings Site, Mountmellick Road
- (v) Dunnes Stores Mountmellick Road

Development briefs relating to enterprise areas of the town centre have also been prepared as part of this Plan.

Opportunity Site 1: Lyster Square

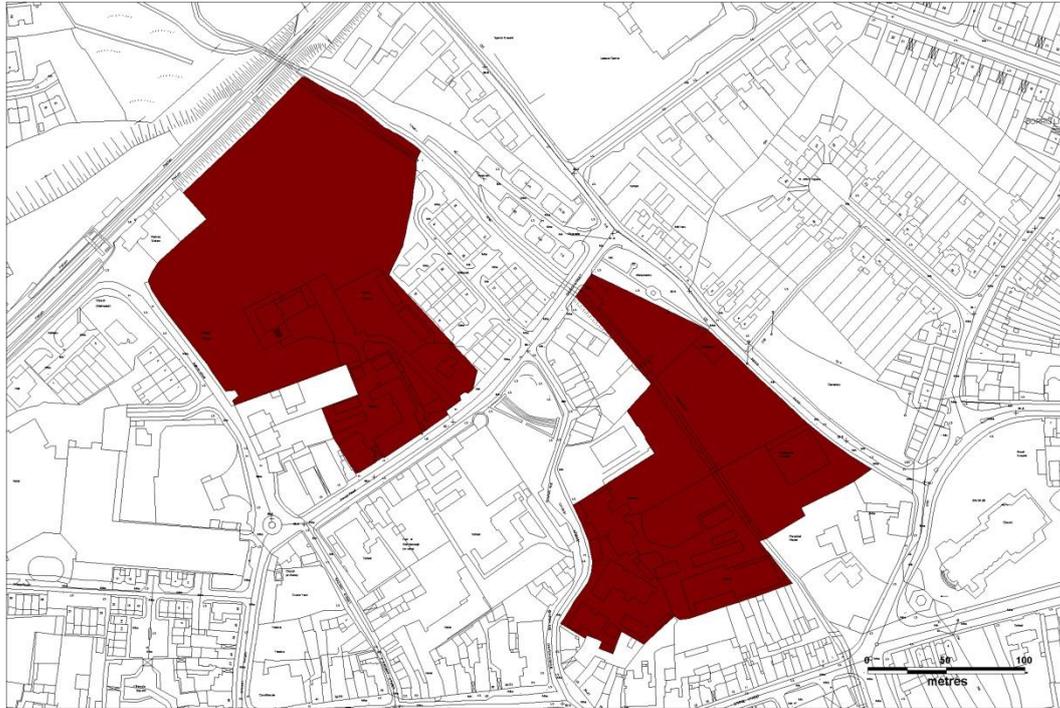


Zoning: Town Centre Primary

Comments:

Brownfield retail site  
Surface car park with retail units fronting onto it  
Large amount of surface car parking on site  
Prime location for redevelopment opportunity fronting onto James Fintan Lalor Ave, the prime internal access route through Portlaoise town.  
Included within ACA however no Protected structures within the site  
Located within Archaeological Zone  
Would benefit from public realm improvements  
An opportunity exists to intensify development at this location to provide a key landmark or gateway building, to create a sense of place within the town centre;  
Care should be taken that this building addresses the extensive street frontage available and be designed to an exceptional standard on all elevations. Development shall comprise of high quality design, fine grained active frontage blocks providing a strong built edge to the surrounding public thoroughfare. New buildings should be permanent, timeless and contemporary structures. Car parking should be provided to the rear of the building or within the structure itself.

**Opportunity Site 2: Fitzmaurice Place including the schools sites**



**Zoning: Town Centre**

**Comments:**

Former school sites (Presentation Sisters and CBS) occupy a substantial portion of this site

Site also includes Laois County Council yards

Fort of Maryborough is located within site – archaeological issues need to be addressed

Both Schools are protected and located within the Portlaoise Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) so architectural Conservation principles shall be taken into account in new design

River Triogue flows through the Presentation sisters site and development shall incorporate this in a sensitive manner

A Masterplan has been prepared for the Presentation Sisters Site which if implemented, would bring substantial benefits to the vitality and vibrancy of the Town Centre

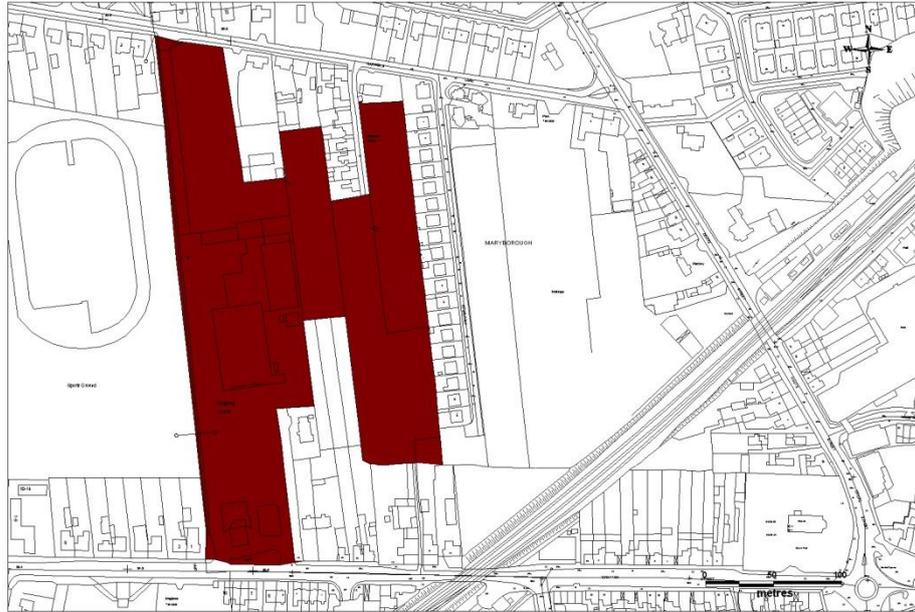
Site is located within Flood Zone

**Objectives**

*The preparation of an urban vision and development framework that will guide future development;*

- + the creation of an integrated urban form with clear linkages and integration with the traditional town centre area;*
- + The revitalization of the traditional town centre;*
- + Creation of a distinct sense of place and a vibrant new urban quarter;*
- + Facilitate the relocation of existing educational properties on the site;*
- + Creation of a sustainable land use mix of appropriate scale, density and massing;*
- + Facilitation of a network of pedestrian routes linked with hard and soft landscape open spaces;*
- + Consideration of the architectural heritage and allowance for appropriate and sustainable land uses within existing heritage buildings such as a library facility, heritage centre , museum;*
- + Facilitation of a future heritage trail;*
- + Maximization of the amenities of the River Triogue whilst being cognisant of and complying with existing policies / objectives for adequate protection of surface water and groundwater bodies ;*
- + The development of new high quality amenity spaces.*

**Opportunity Site 3: Centre Point Site, Mountrath Road**



**Zoning: Town Centre Secondary**

**Comments:**

Brownfield retail site with petrol station located at Mountrath Road frontage and also access available from Harpers Lane / Mountmellick Road N80  
Extensive Surface car park with retail units fronting onto major traffic artery  
Prime location for redevelopment opportunity  
Not Included within ACA and no Protected structures within the site  
Would benefit from public realm improvements as part of a redevelopment proposal  
An opportunity exists to intensify development at this location to provide a key landmark or gateway building from the Mountrath Road Approach into the town centre;  
Care should be taken that this building addresses the extensive street frontage available and be designed to an exceptional standard on all elevations. Development shall comprise of high quality design, fine grained active frontage blocks providing a strong built edge to the surrounding public thoroughfare. New buildings should be permanent, timeless and contemporary structures. Car parking should be provided to the rear of the building or within the structure itself.

Opportunity Site 4: **The Maltings Site, Mountmellick Road**



Zoning: Town Centre Secondary

Comments:

Brownfield site which had planning permission for a substantial mixed use development extending over 5 storeys. If implemented, it is anticipated that authorised development would bring substantial benefits to the vitality and vibrancy of the Town Centre.

Outstanding locating adjoining the N80 and Portlaoise Railway Station

Extensive site curtilage available and cleared for redevelopment

Prime location for redevelopment opportunity

Not Included within ACA

Protected structures located within the site

Would benefit from public realm improvements as part of a redevelopment proposal

An opportunity exists to intensify development at this location to provide a key landmark or gateway building from the Mountmellick Road Road Approach into the town centre;

Care should be taken that this building addresses the extensive street frontage available and be designed to an exceptional standard on all elevations. Development shall comprise of high quality design, fine grained active frontage blocks providing a strong built edge to the surrounding public thoroughfare. New buildings should be permanent, timeless and contemporary structures. Car parking should be provided to the rear of the building or within the structure itself.

Large amount of surface car parking on site

Would benefit from public realm improvements

**Opportunity Site 5: Dunne's Stores Site, Mountmellick Road**



**Zoning: Neighbourhood Centre**

**Comments:**

Operating as a retail (convenience and limited comparison) store  
Extensive Surface car parking available  
Outstanding locating adjoining the N80  
Extensive site curtilage available and cleared for redevelopment  
Prime location for redevelopment opportunity  
Not Included within ACA  
No Protected structures located within the site  
Would benefit from public realm improvements as part of a redevelopment proposal  
An opportunity exists to intensify development at this location to provide a key landmark or gateway building from the Mountmellick Road Approach into the town centre;  
Care should be taken that this building addresses the extensive street frontage available and be designed to an exceptional standard on all elevations. Development shall comprise of high quality design, fine grained active frontage blocks providing a strong built edge to the surrounding public Site within 1% flood risk zone

## Chapter 5: Transport

### INTRODUCTION

County Laois is centrally located in the Midlands of Ireland. Strategically positioned close to Dublin, Laois has excellent road linkages to the rest of Ireland, which include the M7 and M8 motorways, N77, N78 and N80 National Secondary Roads and a subsidiary network of Regional and Local roads. Laois also has a major strategic asset in the form of railway lines, which connect the South and West of Ireland to Dublin with stations in Portarlington, Portlaoise and Ballybrophy. Laois is also well served by national and local bus routes. In addition, Laois' central location geographically means that most cities and towns and their related economic hubs are within easy reach. This presents a significant opportunity for the future development of the county.

In terms of transport it is vital that adequate and efficient links to the Midland Gateway Towns as well as to the major air and sea ports are available. The development of the National Motorway and Railway Networks will help to make this goal achievable. On a countywide level, there should be efficient connections between Portlaoise (as the County Town) and the rest of the county. This is essential to keep development within the county and to discourage the outflow of shopping from the county to surrounding counties. At the local level, there is a need for a greater use of sustainable transport methods such as walking, cycling and Town bus services, where this is practical.



*Plate 5: Section of M7 Motorway and Interchange on southern side of Portlaoise*

### TRANSPORTATION

#### Background

The transport system is an important component in meeting the physical, social and economic needs of any Town. It ensures the mobility of people and goods and facilitates the development of industrial investment and tourism. Laois County Council will seek to encourage patterns of economic growth which can be achieved with maximum transport efficiency and the least possible environmental impact, so that economic growth does not generate an unlimited increase in the demand for transport, with consequent adverse environmental effects. Portlaoise is a key transportation node within the context of County Laois. The location of Portlaoise and its close proximity to Dublin and international links have resulted in a concentration of development pressures within the Town boundary. The Plan therefore seeks to encourage and facilitate the provision of infrastructure services to meet the demand for development and future population increases in an environmentally friendly manner.

**Smartertravel >>> A Sustainable Transport Future: A new transport policy for Ireland 2009-2020** provides guidance on the provision of a high quality and sustainable travel and transport infrastructure, that supports the movement of both people and goods. The following actions are considered relevant:

*Action 2 seeks to ensure better integration of land use planning and transport policies in the relevant planning guidelines. The following objectives should be incorporated into future planning guidelines:*

- *A general requirement that significant housing development in all cities and towns must have good public transport connections and safe routes for walking and cycling to access such connections and local amenities*
- *Integration of cycling and public transport*
- *Specification of a maximum permitted level of car parking for commercial sites, which have suitable public transport facilities and are within walking/ cycling distance to amenities*
- *A general restriction of the future development of out-of-town retail centres except in exceptional circumstances and consideration of a similar requirement that parking charges be introduced for most existing centres*

### **Portlaoise Integrated Framework Plan For Land Use and Transportation**

The development of a high quality, sustainable and integrated transport system requires an understanding of the roles it can provide at a regional and local level. It also involves recognition of the shifts that are required, especially towards public transportation, and of the land use responses needed to ensure efficiency, economic returns on investment, minimal environmental impact and strengthening the quality of life in an area.

Laois County Council prepared an Integrated Framework Plan for Land Use and Transportation (LUTS) for Portlaoise. The purpose of this study was to set out an integrated framework plan for the future development of the Town.

### **Portlaoise Land Use and Transportation Study**

The land use strategy identified in the Portlaoise L.U.T.S. was that the Town develops in an independent and self-sustaining manner. This strategy requires, amongst other things, the development of a significant employment base, with the orderly and well managed expansion of the Town's residential population complimented by a managed and orderly provision of infrastructure and services.

The realisation of the objective of developing Portlaoise will require amongst other things:

1. Development of Orbital road links to increase integration of residential and employment areas and reduce pressure on the Town centre;
2. Develop a Town centre including retail and other appropriate uses to cater for increased population. This will require redefining the centre area with an emphasis on people and pedestrians rather than car 'traffic';
3. Provide for local and neighbourhood shopping areas;
4. Provide new schools in or adjacent to residential areas;
5. Develop a hierarchy of amenity and open space areas;

The Transport Strategy recommended:

- Rail based Park and Ride at a new rail station;
- A new central bus interchange to serve intercity buses as well as to provide a local focus;

- New cross-town bus services linking the main centers of business, leisure, employment, education and residences;
- Parking strategy for the Town center which includes for the provision, management and enforcement of parking spaces and regulations;
- Traffic calming measures along the radial routes inside the orbital road;
- Traffic management in the Town center to compliment urban regeneration projects including making it more pedestrian friendly;
- Incorporation of traffic calming and speed reducing features into the layout and design of new developments;
- The provision of a network of cycle routes particularly focusing on safe routes to schools;
- The provision of proper standard width footpath including safe crossing facilities for pedestrian taking special care to provide for the needs of the mobility impaired;
- The introduction of a road safety audit and a Traffic and Transport Assessment as a prerequisite for the development of all new roads and transportation projects.

It is the policy of Laois County Council to develop a safer, more efficient and integrated transport system within Portlaoise, with improvements to the road network, other forms of the transport network including cycleways and pedestrian friendly environment. In particular, emphasis will be placed upon upgrading the public transport system, providing new and improving existing facilities and increasing usage levels.

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| TT01 | design and complete the Orbital road system for Portlaoise, particularly the Portlaoise Southern Circular Route between the R426 Timahoe Road and the R922 Abbeyliex Road;   |
| TT02 | promote and encourage the development and growth of Portlaoise in line with the principles of sustainable development and facilitate the implementation of measures identified in the Portlaoise LUTS.   |
| TT03 | promote an appropriate balance of employment, residential and service facilities (schools, shopping, community facilities etc) and land uses that will increase the self-sufficiency of the Town and support its role as a designated Inland Port; |
| TT04 | encourage Iarnród Éireann, Bus Éireann and private companies to improve the frequency and quality of public transport facilities to, from and within the Town;   |
| TT05 | support the improvement of public transport services generally by reserving land in suitable locations for infrastructural and other requirements of the public transport sector (where such needs have been identified);                          |
| TT06 | promote land use planning measures which aim for transportation efficiency, economic returns on transport investment, minimisation of environmental impacts and a general shift towards the use of public transportation throughout the Town;      |
| TT07 | increase the level of access within Portlaoise to a choice of transport modes and, in particular, to promote forms of development that reduce dependence on private car transport;   |
| TT08 | provide for the future transportation needs of Portlaoise Town in a sustainable manner;  |
| TT09 | integrate land use planning and transportation planning;   |
| TT10 | consolidate development in areas which are served by a viable public transport system and a good road network;   |
| TT11 | concentrate developments which generate large numbers of trips, such as offices, shops, higher density residential areas and labour intensive employment along existing and proposed transportation corridors;                                     |
| TT12 | ensure that the design and layout of new developments enable, facilitate and encourage access by pedestrian, bicycle and public transport;   |

TT13	ensure all future development is suitably located to ensure the viability of the public transport system;
TT14	facilitate and encourage cycling as a more convenient, popular and safe method of transport, through the designation of a cycle network, linking population, commercial, community facilities and transport nodes;
TT15	identify and implement, where appropriate, safe walking and cycling routes to schools and other educational facilities;
TT16	restrict suburban generated development along the approach roads into the Town, in the interests of traffic safety, utilities and services provision and proper planning;
TT17	carry out improvements on the existing road system to relieve congestion and improve safety;
TT18	co-operate with the public transport authorities and any other relevant bodies in the improvement of the public transport system and establish the feasibility of a park and ride system in Portlaoise;
TT19	ensure, in so far as possible, that all transport facilities and services operational in the Town are accessible for people with disabilities including provision of car parking facilities;
TT20	have regard to the condition, location and accessibility of heritage items in the planning and provision of transportation services.

It is an **objective** of the plan that new roads will be provided to allow for the continued development of the Town in an orderly fashion as follows:

- O/TT01 Portlaoise Southern Circular Route;
- O/TT02 Upgrade and realignment of Borris Road to Rathevan including footpaths, cycleways and public lighting;
- O/TT03 Upgrade of Ridge Road;
- O/TT05 Portlaoise Northern Orbital Route;
- O/TT06 Portlaoise Western Orbital Route;
- O/TT07 M7 Eastbound off ramp serving the National Enterprise Park;
- O/TT08 Reservation and construction of access points and distribution roads in the areas indicated on Objectives Map;
- O/TT09 Provision and enhancement of parking facilities in the Town centre as indicated on Objectives Map;
- O/TT10 Secure the upgrading of Town/urban roads as part of comprehensive redevelopment plans;
- O/TT11 To reserve and develop access points as indicated on the Objectives Map No 9.1. Locations off the orbital roads are diagrammatical and can change.

### **Portlaoise Traffic Model**

In May 2007, Laois County Council commissioned Atkins Consulting Engineers to develop and calibrate a new traffic model for the Land Use and Transportation Strategy for Portlaoise. This was achieved by the collection of comprehensive and robust traffic data through traffic counts and roadside interviews. The model uses the SATURN suite software and is referred to as the Portlaoise SATURN model. The benefits for Portlaoise are as follows:

- The model is used as a traffic management tool to optimise the existing and future transport network.
- The model is used to predict the benefits that the provision of further development will accrue to Portlaoise, thereby optimising future land use;
- The model is used to predict the impact that any development or land use will have on the existing road network and any future extensions to that network. All new large scale developments and other

developments deemed by the Council to have a significant impact on the transport network is required to use the model to demonstrate the impacts these developments will have;

- The model can interface with the National Model for the traffic modelling on national routes and consequently can predict accurately the impact a particular development can have on the local and national road network.

All new large scale development and other significant developments in Portlaoise shall be designed to improve transport connectivity in the vicinity and to neighbouring areas of the town. In particular, accessibility and safety for pedestrians and cyclists should be improved and new public routes should be created. All new pedestrian routes, open spaces and public realm improvements shall take account of the needs of mobility impaired users. Improvements to the national road network will be subject to further discussion and approval by the National Roads Authority and the Roads Section of Laois County Council.

### Public Transport

Key public transport corridors exist within Portlaoise and its environs. It is the aim of Laois County Council to facilitate a modal shift in transportation from car based modes to more sustainable forms of integrated public transport. In order to ensure developments are sustainable, land use and transportation planning (including non-motorised modes) has to be coordinated and integrated. Future development layout should be designed to reduce the trip generation, especially by cars. Laois County Council seeks to reduce car dependency and promote a balanced transportation strategy.

#### It is the policy of the Council to:

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| TT21 | have regard to the policies and recommendations as outlined in the LUTS Study Plan for Portlaoise;  |
| TT22 | provide, facilitate and regulate the provision of parking spaces conveniently located to serve the various land uses;   |
| TT23 | allow ease of access between houses, work places, schools, commercial and recreational areas;   |
| TT24 | progressively improve all urban roads and footpaths and maintain these to a high standard, having regard to the availability of finance for the work and amenity and Townscape requirements;      |
| TT25 | ensure that all roads, footpaths and car-parks are constructed with the needs of the physically disabled in accordance with Part M of the Building Control Regulations 2000 and 2010;             |
| TT26 | continue to provide for and extend the system of safe pedestrian routes linking residential areas and the Main Street with schools, shops and open spaces;  |
| TT27 | include cycle-ways in the planning of new residential areas and also throughout the existing road network, and seek to develop cycle route networks throughout the Town;                          |
| TT28 | have regard to the condition, location and accessibility of heritage items in the planning and provision of transportation services;  |
| TT29 | improve existing bus and taxi facilities on James Fintan Lalor Avenue. Improved bus interchange facilities will also be provided so as to encourage modal shift from private to public transport; |
| TT30 | support the development of bus stops and bus shelters by transport operators serving the town;  |
| TT31 | ensure a safe and comprehensive roads system capable of satisfying the requirements of both vehicular and pedestrian traffic within and through the Town.   |

## Pedestrian and Cycle Networks

**Smartertravel >>> A Sustainable Transport Future: A new transport policy for Ireland 2009-2020** provides guidance on promoting cycling and walking. Urban walking networks are strengthened by increasing opportunities for walking and removing constraints as part of planning for more attractive public realms, including:

- ✚ Providing safe pedestrian routes;
- ✚ Providing routes, which serve employment and education trips and that link with public transport;
- ✚ Reprioritising traffic signals to favour pedestrians instead of vehicles, reducing waiting times and crossing distances at junctions;
- ✚ Creating level grade crossings for pedestrians and cyclists across junctions;
- ✚ Creating larger traffic-free areas in urban centres;
- ✚ Unless it is inappropriate, ensuring that 30 km/h zones are designated in central urban areas which will continue to accommodate motorised traffic;
- ✚ Widening footpaths where there are high pedestrian flows, particularly close to public transport nodes;
- ✚ Clearing footpaths and cyclepaths of unnecessary street furniture, e.g. rationalisation of signage poles etc.;
- ✚ Improving the surface quality of footpaths and cyclepaths;
- ✚ Providing appropriately designed safe, well-lit, direct, continuous facilities;
- ✚ Signposting pedestrian routes to important intra-urban destinations such as public buildings and public transport nodes;
- ✚ Enforcing the law relating to encroachment on pedestrian spaces by motor vehicles, cyclists, skips and other obstructions.

An integrated and coherent non-motorised transport network, that is multi-functional and safe for all users, of all ages, will be considered during the period of the plan. This network will be integrated with local activity centres such as the Town centre, residential areas, green areas, recreational and employment centres.

### It is the policy of the Council to:

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| TT32 | provide for the construction of cycle-ways, where feasible, throughout the Town and in particular in new residential areas and public open space;  |
| TT33 | ensure that all new residential developments are designed with cyclists and pedestrians in mind and facilitate safe and direct cycle access to local services and public transport nodes. Design should be in accordance with the National Cycle Manual and the Traffic Management Guidelines. |



Plate 6: Bicycle rack at Gaelscoil, Mountrath Road [left] and walking and cycling paths through Trioque Park [right].



Plate 7: Section of Portlaoise Western Orbital Route

## Chapter 6: Infrastructure

### Wastewater Treatment

The provision of a high quality wastewater infrastructure and water supply is **fundamental** to ensuring the long-term physical, environmental, social and economic development of Portlaoise. In conjunction with the unprecedented growth of the town since the mid 1990's, there has been a concurrent increase in demand for water and foul and surface water drainage facilities.

To meet this demand and to make provision for the future sustainable social and economic development of the town, in line with its designation as a Principal Town and National Transport Node under the National Spatial Strategy and Midland Regional Planning Guidelines, the Portlaoise Main Drainage Scheme was commissioned by Laois County Council.

Involving the construction of 14 kms of new foul sewers and 10 kms of new surface water sewers, the project which was completed in 2009 resulted in the overall, treatment capacity at Portlaoise waste water treatment plant being increased to 39,000 pe.

Considerable expansion of capacity has taken place over the past number of years in relation to water supply, foul and surface water infrastructure and wastewater treatment capacity. There are plans to extend the Wastewater Treatment System capacity to accommodate 39,000 population equivalent (P/E) in order to cater for existing and planned development within the catchment.

#### Laois County Council is committed to the following objectives:

O/INF 01	Water and Sewage systems will be upgraded and provided where necessary subject to finance being available;
O/INF 02	To improve the provision of wastewater services in those areas of the Town where deficiencies exist at present;
O/INF 03	To preserve the capacity of the wastewater network for lands zoned in this plan;
O/INF 04	To ensure the development of separate networks for both foul and surface water;
O/INF 05	To promote the changeover from septic tanks to mains connections in all cases where this is feasible;
O/INF 06	To preserve free from development, the wayleaves of all public sewer and water mains;
O/INF 07	To improve the quality of surface water courses in the Town area;
O/INF 08	Refurbishment of the existing sewers in the sewerage network;
O/INF 09	To ensure Sustainable Drainage Systems are provided in all new developments.

#### It is the policy of the Council to:

INF01	provide a reliable system for the safe and adequate disposal of wastewater in a manner which is sustainable and which is within the resources of the Council;
INF02	provide the necessary drainage facilities to serve the needs of all development within the Town and to prevent pollution;
INF03	ensure that sufficient capacity exists to cater for existing consumers, the needs of the projected population increase, and facilitate future industrial and commercial development;
INF04	encourage only as much development, both in terms of quantity and type of development as can be provided for, based on the utility services available. To promote Sustainable Drainage to reduce flood risks and maintain and enhance water quality, in accordance with the Laois County Council Storm Water Management Policy;
INF05	require Section 50/consent from the Office of Public Works to changes in any watercourse within a development boundary in accordance with the Arterial Drainage Act 1945.



*Plate 8: Upgraded waste-water treatment plant at Ridge Road, Portlaoise*

### **Water Supply**

Portlaoise is currently served by groundwater sources. The major groundwater source is the Portlaoise Limestone Aquifer with existing wells located in Straboe, Derrygarron, Ballydavis and Eyne. The existing demands are estimated at approximately 10,475m<sup>3</sup>/d. When due allowance for domestic, commercial, industrial, institutional and agricultural demand is made the future water demand is expected to increase to 20,000m<sup>3</sup>/day by 2025. Under the Laois County Council Water Services Investment Programme, future plans for Portlaoise area include construction of 10 new wells, 12 kms. of new watermains, new reservoirs at Emo, Straboe, and Acragar and extended capacity at Kilminchy Water Treatment Plant.

The Council recognises the importance of an adequate water supply and drainage system for development in Portlaoise. It is an objective of the County Council, during the period of this plan to enhance the service with the addition of a new Water Scheme. This will ensure an adequate water supply for development in Portlaoise for the period of the Plan.

### **Water Quality**

A number of surface water bodies are protected by way of SAC designation. Sensitive aquifers which form part of the groundwater network also require protection and careful management. The following aquifers have been identified for protection in consultation with the Geological Survey of Ireland. Map 1.12.1 of the Laois County Development Plan 2011-2017 indicates the County Aquifers Protection Plan.

#### **It is the policy of the Council to:**

- INF06 implement the provisions of the South East River Basin District Management Plan 2009-2015
- INF07 continue to provide an adequate quantity and quality supply of water suitable for domestic, industrial, agricultural and other uses;
- INF08 increase the capacity of the current water supply service with the addition of a new Portlaoise Water Scheme. This will facilitate development growth in a manner which can be supported by the water network;
- INF09 promote water conservation measures within the Town and its environs by requiring the installation of water meters in all new residential units and in units where planning permission is required for an extension;
- INF10 protect the water supply source at Meelick;
- INF11 implement the 'Polluter Pays Principle' for non-domestic usage;

- INF12 comply with the European Union Drinking Water Directive 98/83/EC;
- INF13 continue to undertake improvements and extend the existing infrastructure of the water network;
- INF14 have regard to the condition location and accessibility of heritage items in the planning and provision of services (telecommunications, water, and sanitary services);
- INF15 protect groundwater quality by way of aquifer protection zones, as necessary to protect the water supply source at Derrygarron, Straboe and Eyne;
- INF16 provide a link water main from the Mountmellick Road to the Borris Road;
- INF 17 undertake consultation with the Inland Fisheries Ireland, the EPA, the National Parks and Wildlife Service or other agencies, as necessary when considering proposals with potential to adversely effect water quality.

### **Solid Waste Management Strategy**

Laois County Council adopted the Waste Management Plan for the Midlands Region 2005-2010. The Plan highlights current levels of waste and sets objectives whereby overall levels will be reduced and stabilised in order to comply with both national and European legislative guidelines. The guidelines set down a hierarchy of preferential modes of waste management, focusing on prevention, minimisation, re-use/recycle, and disposal with energy recovery and disposal of residual waste.

#### **It is the policy of the Council to:**

- INF18 promote the principles of reduce, reuse & recycle;
- INF19 promote the implementation of the Waste Management Plan (2005-2010) for The Midlands;
- INF20 promote the development of facilities in accordance with the waste hierarchy principle, this involves a shift towards preventative and waste minimisation measures;
- INF21 encourage the recycling of construction and demolition waste and the reuse of aggregate and other materials;
- INF22 promote the 'polluter pays principle' in the Portlaoise functional area;
- INF23 encourage the provision of recycling facilities (i.e. bottle banks, bring centres etc.) at suitable locations in the Town, to facilitate domestic recycling initiatives;
- INF24 promote and facilitate communities to become involved in environmental awareness activities and community-based recycling initiatives or environmental management initiatives that will lead to local sustainable waste management practices.

### **TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

#### **Infrastructure Background**

Local Authorities have been given a central role in the implementation of Ireland's Broadband Strategy. The Metropolitan Area Networks (Installation of fibre networks) is positioned to reach all of the major industrial and commercial areas of selected Towns. The MAN provides the essential infrastructure that heavy broadband users need in order to have the services they require delivered to their door. The position in relation to Broadband in Portlaoise with regard to the Metropolitan Area Network Schemes is as follows:

#### **Portlaoise MAN (Metropolitan Area Network) Project**

The infrastructural works of the above project have been completed. E-net operates, develops, maintains and markets the network on behalf of Laois County Council. The continued development and improvement of the telecommunications network is essential if Portlaoise is going to maintain its

competitive advantages into the future. Improved systems will attract businesses to the Town. Laois County Council acknowledges the importance of the telecommunications sector to the local and regional economy. Broadband allows for small and medium sized businesses to be permanently connected to the Internet.

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

- INF25 support the Government Guidelines on 'Telecommunications Antennae & Support Structures -Guidelines for Planning Authorities', (July 1996);
- INF26 encourage co-location of telecommunications facilities where feasible;
- INF27 safeguard significant landscape views from the visual intrusion of large scale telecommunications infrastructure;
- INF28 ensure that telecommunications infrastructure is adequately screened, integrated and/or landscaped so as to minimise any adverse visual impacts on the environment;
- INF29 extend the telecommunications network in Portlaoise and facilitate access to it by all sections of the community.

**ELECTRICITY**

The provision of a continued reliable and suitable capacity electricity system is vital for the future development of Portlaoise. Traditional and high tech industries require such an electricity system. Retailers and homes also require a reliable electricity system.

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

- INF30 continue to facilitate the development of this supply within the Town, subject to amenity and preservation requirements, as set out in this Plan;
- INF31 support the continued development and renewal (where required) of the existing electricity system for Portlaoise.

**GAS**

The provision of piped gas to the town helps to ensure reliable energy sources are available to meet the needs of Portlaoise.

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

- INF32 facilitate the expansion of gas pipelines around the town;
- INF33 protect the existing gas pipe work.

**FLOOD MANAGEMENT**

Following the "*Planning System and Flood Risk Management*" guidelines [DoEHLG, 2009] development should always be located in areas of lowest flood risk first, and only when it has been established that there are no suitable alternative options should development (of the lowest vulnerability) proceed. In such instances, consideration of suitable flood risk mitigation and management measures is necessary. It may be technically feasible to mitigate or manage flood risk at site level, however the potential impacts on the surrounding community must also be considered.

The Planning Guidelines recommend a sequential approach. This works well where there are no constraints to development and there is an ample source of developable land.

Flooding is a natural process that can happen at any time in a wide variety of locations. The health, social, economic and environmental impacts of flooding can be significant and have a wide community impact.

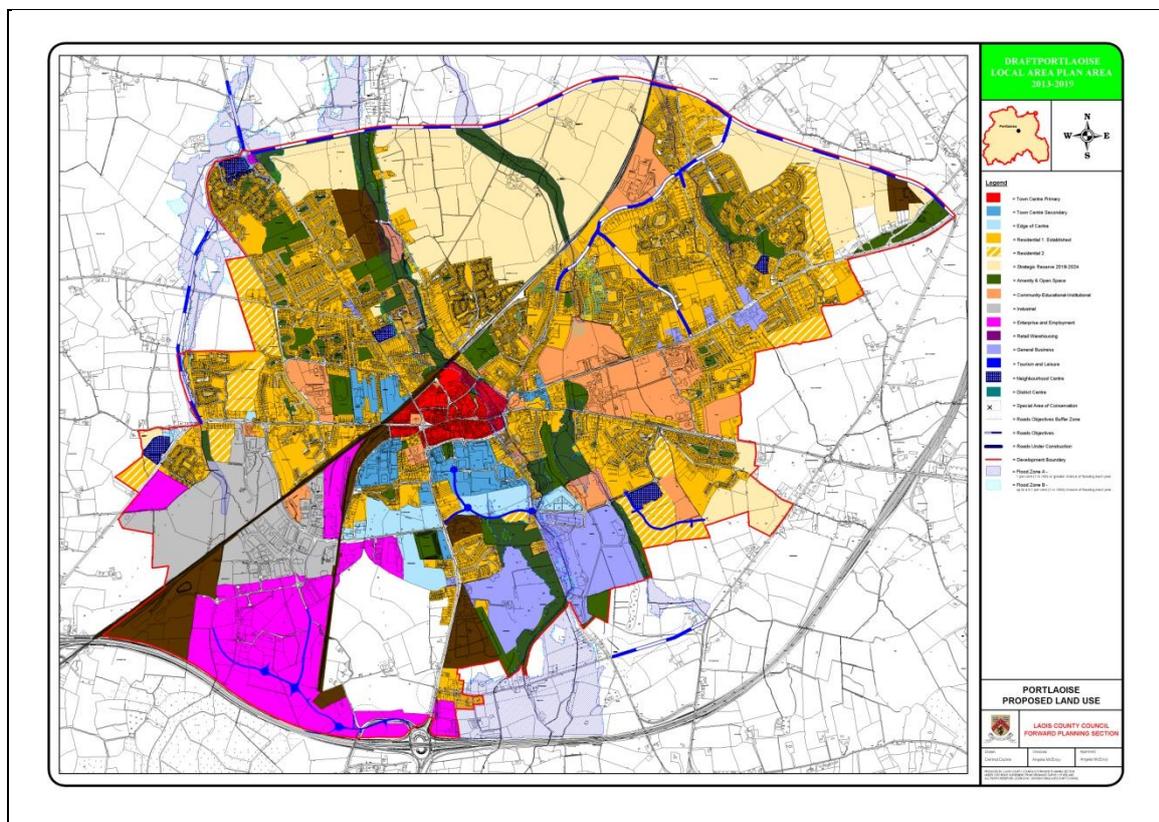
Laois County Council and Portlaoise Town Council recognise that flooding, or the risk of flooding, constrains development in key areas of Portlaoise especially the town centre and the southern and north western suburbs. The Councils will strive to ensure that proper flood risk identification, assessment and management avoidance are integrated with the planning system to safeguard and provide for the future sustainable development of the town.

There is a history of flooding of the Rivers Triogue and Boghlone in Portlaoise. **Significant** flood events have occurred at regular intervals including in 2000, 2003 and 2005. The Local Authorities of Laois, Kildare and Offaly, acting through the joint committee known as the **Barrow Drainage Board** are responsible for maintaining the Barrow and its tributaries [including the Triogue] from its source in the Slabh Bloom mountains to the Horse Bridge in Athy.

The OPW has three hydrometric stations relevant to the Portlaoise Local Area Plan area. These are: Indicated in **Table 8** below:

Station No	Station Reference	River	Catchment	Organisation
14101	Kyleclonhobert	Boghlone	Barrow	LAO
14102	Kyletalesha	Stream	Barrow	LAO
14014	Portlaoise	Triogue	Barrow	LAO

**Map 3: Flood Potential Areas for Portlaoise Local Area Plan area overlain on zoning map**



## Flood Risk Policies and Objectives

The policies and objective of the planning authority will include consideration of the following:

- The Planning System and Flood Risk Management, Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2009;
- The content of the Portlaoise SFRA; the Flood Zones and their use as a planning tool;
- The triggers for review of the SFRA;
- The recommendations of the SECFRAM upon completion. The study will result in recommended mitigation and management measures, with an expected publication date by end 2015.

## Specific Development Planning Applications

The following outlines the key requirements relating to the management of development in areas at risk of flooding;

- All development proposals, regardless of location, will require an appropriately detailed flood risk assessment. As a minimum this will include a "Stage 1 - Identification of Flood Risk"; where flood risk is identified a "Stage 2 - Initial FRA" will be required and depending on the scale and nature of the risk a "Stage 3 - Detailed FRA" may be required. The requirement for all applications to have an accompanying stage 1 assessment is important, as for example a large site located in flood zone C may be appropriate in terms of vulnerability, but might be at potential risk of surface water flooding
- All development proposals for large sites, i.e. an area greater than 0.5Ha, will require a FRA to consider surface water management.
- All development proposals, within or incorporating areas at moderate to high flood risk, that are vulnerable to flooding will require the application of the development management justification test in accordance with Box 5.1 of the Planning Guidelines, The Planning System and Flood Risk Management.

Any proposal that is considered acceptable in principle shall demonstrate the use of the sequential approach in terms of the site layout and design and, in satisfying the Justification Test, the proposal will demonstrate that appropriate mitigation and management measures are put in place.

## Management of Surface Water

Development has the potential to cause an increase in impermeable area and an associated increase in surface water runoff rates and volumes. This can lead to potential increase in flood risk downstream due to overloading of existing drainage infrastructure.

Managing surface water discharges from new development is crucial in managing and reducing flood risk to other development downstream. The management of surface water is an important concern for large development sites i.e. those greater than 0.5 Ha and a flood risk assessment should be completed to consider surface water issues.

### It is the policy of the Council to:

INF34 promote storm water retention facilities for new developments and to incorporate design solutions that provide for collection and recycling of surface water in accordance with Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems as recommended in the Flooding Guidelines for Planning Authorities published by the DoEHLG in 2008 and Laois County Council's Roads and Drainage Standards.

### **Overland Flow Routes**

Underground drainage systems have a finite capacity and regard should be given to events larger than the design capacity of the network. This should be considered along with potential surface water flows that may enter a development site from the surrounding area. Master planning should ensure that existing flow routes are maintained, through the use of green infrastructure. Floor levels should at a minimum be 300 mm above adjacent roads and hard standing areas to reduce the consequences of any localised flooding.

### **Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS)**

A specific requirement of the EU Water Framework Directive is that surface water discharge is controlled and managed so that any impact on its receiving environment is mitigated. This can be achieved through the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS). SUDS can reduce the rate of runoff through a combination of infiltration, storage and conveyance (slowing down the movement of water). Sustainable drainage can be achieved through the use of green infrastructure such as green roofs and pervious pavements, rainwater harvesting, soakaways, swales and detention basins, ponds and wetlands.

The effectiveness of flow management scheme within a single site is heavily limited by the land use and site characteristics including (but not limited to) topography, geology and available area. As such, surface water design and management must be carried out at a site specific level for any proposed development.

### **Flood Mitigation Measures at Site Design**

Any development proposal in an area at moderate or high risk of flooding that is considered acceptable in principle must demonstrate that appropriate mitigation measures can be put in place and that residual risks can be managed to acceptable levels.

To ensure that adequate measures are put in place to deal with residual risks, proposals should demonstrate the use of flood-resistant construction measures that are aimed at preventing water from entering a building and that mitigate the damage floodwater causes to buildings. Alternatively, designs for flood resilient construction may be adopted where it can be demonstrated that entry of floodwater into buildings is preferable to limit damage caused by floodwater and allow relatively quick recovery.

Further detail on flood resilience and flood resistance are included in the Technical Appendices of the Planning Guidelines, The Planning System and Flood Risk Management.<sup>1</sup>

#### **It is the policy of the Council to:**

- INF35 support the carrying out of catchment-based Flood Risk Assessments and Management Plans for the Barrow, Nore and Shannon catchments as these relate to County Laois and ensure that CFRMP and management measures have the potential to impact negatively on Natura 2000 sites are subject to Appropriate Assessment;
- INF36 protect water sinks because of their flood management function, as well as their biodiversity and amenity value and encourage the restoration or creation of water sinks as flood defence mechanisms, where appropriate;
- INF37 ensure the use of sustainable urban drainage systems for new developments in accordance with the Council's drainage hierarchy;

<sup>1</sup> The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities, Technical Appendices, November 2009

INF38 adopt a precautionary approach to flood risk in its development management decisions.

INF39 ensure protection of Natura 2000 sites supporting rivers and streams by avoiding development on floodplains and ensure flood risk assessment policies, plans or projects are compliant with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive and avoid or mitigate negative impacts on Natura 2000 sites.

## Chapter 7: Environmental Management

### Climate Change

Climate change is recognised as a significant global environmental problem. In response to this the Kyoto Protocol has set targets on Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions. National policy The *National Climate Change Strategy 2007-2012* highlights the need for a radical strategy to meet the climate change commitments made in the Kyoto Protocol.

The National Bio-Energy Action Plan and South East Bio-Energy Implementation Plan 2008-2013, both contain targets for the development of renewable energy, while the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan 2009-2020 sets out objectives relating to the development of a secure, efficient and low-carbon energy supply.

Changes to Planning and Development Regulations that relate to micro-generation of renewable energy are noted. New Planning & Development Regulations came in to effect in July 2008 which makes the provision of wind turbines, combined heat and power (CHP) Plants, solar panels and biomass boiler units in association with industrial, commercial or public buildings exempt from the requirement to obtain planning permission subject to certain conditions. The provision of the following items for domestic use is exempt from the requirement to obtain planning permission subject to certain considerations (Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2007):

- Stand-alone wind turbines
- Building mounted wind turbines
- Building mounted solar panels
- Stand alone solar panels
- Ground source heat pumps
- Air source heat pumps
- Biomass (includes fuel storage tanks /structures)

#### It is the policy of the Council to:

<b>ENV 01</b>	encourage the production of energy from renewable sources subject to general planning considerations, and in particular the micro-generation of renewable energy which is considered of particular relevance within the Portlaoise Urban Areas;
<b>ENV 02</b>	support the National Climate Change Strategy and, in general to facilitate measures which seek to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases including the delivery of sustainable land use patterns;
<b>ENV 03</b>	seek to improve the energy efficiency of its existing building stock, and to promote energy efficiency and conservation in the design and development of all new buildings.

### Sustainable Design and Construction

The methodology and details associated with the sustainable construction and use of buildings is complex, is undergoing rapid change and technological advancement. Although some technical elements below are administered by way of building control regulations, some are suitable for administration under the planning application process. Sustainable design and construction techniques may be considered during each stage in the life-cycle of a building: site selection,

sourcing of materials, building and open space design, appliance specifications, workmanship and maintenance, re-use, demolition or restoration.

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

**ENV 04** encourage the use of sustainable design and construction techniques for all development works;

**ENV 05** proposed developments for over 100 housing units or for commercial or retail floor space exceeding 2000 sq metres shall be accompanied by a sustainability statement which will evaluate the proposals under the following headings:

**(i) Land use efficiency**

Re-use of buildings; re-use of brownfield sites; efficient use of land generally, reduce building footprints, compact development of lands in proximity to sustainable transport nodes, commercial services and municipal infrastructure;

**(ii) Reduction in water consumption and surface water generation**

- rainwater and grey water harvesting systems;
- use sanitary goods with water-efficient settings;
- minimising and delaying surface runoff by using green roofs, permeable hard standings, water features or increasing proportion of open space devoted to soft landscaping;

**(iii) Reduction in energy consumption**

- siting buildings in wind-sheltered locations, away from cold air pockets, in locations that benefit from good sunshine;
- orientating buildings and arranging windows to maximise solar gain and natural light balanced against the need for shade and comfortable spaces;
- careful working of internal spaces positioning rooms such as kitchen-dining rooms or cafeterias in areas that benefit from good sunlight and positioning offices and bedrooms in more shaded locations;
- constructing thermally massive walls that are super-insulated with thermal breaks, use windows with low-E values;
- use of energy efficient lighting systems;
- use A-rated white goods, harness sustainable energy by using solar tubes, photovoltaic panels, geothermal energy systems, wind turbines;
- installation and maintenance of high performance stoves or boilers that use timber or pellets from sustainable sources, combined heat and power units (CHP), create air-tight buildings with heat recovery ventilation systems;
- reduction in noise and light pollution; avoidance of micro-climatic effects such as the creation of wind tunnels in urban environments;

**(iv) Consideration of green house gas emissions, sustainable and local materials, and embodied energy**

- recycling of building materials;
- use of sustainable and low-toxicity materials that are reclaimable, recyclable or rotatable such as sheep wool or straw bale insulation, lime-mortars, natural slate roofs in order to reduce waste and avoid Sick Building Syndrome;
- preference for materials with low embodied energy such as locally sourced timber-framed buildings, windows and fascia boards over concrete structures, uPVC windows and box fascias;

- construction of carbon neutral buildings; use of native species that thrive without high fertiliser or pesticide inputs in Landscaping Plans and the use of trees to sequester carbon;

**(v) Reduction in Waste Generation**

- provision of sufficient space for the storage, separation and composting of waste;
- preparation of Waste Management Plans related to major construction works;
- preparation of end-of-life dismantling or Restoration Plans; use of anaerobic digestors;
- low input municipal wastewater treatment systems;
- in rural areas, maintenance of septic tanks and where appropriate, installation of ecological sewerage treatment systems such as reed bed systems that do not require mechanical or electrical inputs.

**(vi) Support Ecology and Biodiversity**

The incorporation of ecologically friendly elements into Landscaping Plans for public open space to commercial, civic or residential development is encouraged such as:

- the ornamental use of log piles or wood pyramids to function as micro-climates for invertebrates
- the use of seed, fruit or berry bearing species for birds and butterflies
- the avoidance of pollen-free plant varieties for bees and butterflies
- the provision of bird and bat boxes for nesting and roosting
- the provision of artificial ponds or wetlands areas can form part of SUDS, as well as providing an opportunity for aquatic flora and fauna
- create new ecological linkages or stepping stones such as green verges to footpaths, hedgerows, tree belts, ditches, green roofs etc

**Soil Quality**

Soils are generally resistant to pollution. However, unlike other environmental receptors once polluted soils are not resilient and remediation can include excavation and removal of contaminated material. The most common chemicals involved are [hydrocarbons](#), [solvents](#), pesticides and [heavy metals](#). Contaminated soil can adversely affect human health and the natural environment.

Commonly-used measures to prevent soil pollution include the use of bunds around domestic and commercial fuel storage tanks, hard surfaces and interceptors to refuelling areas and impermeable base liners to protect underlying soil

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

<b>ENV 06</b>	ensure that developments that may potentially adversely affect soil quality do not proceed unless mitigatory measures are used;
<b>ENV 07</b>	require the submission of land contamination surveys and decontamination proposals as necessary, when considering brownfield development proposals on lands that are potentially contaminated
<b>ENV 08</b>	undertake consultation with the EPA or HSA or other statutory agencies in relation to the remediation of contaminated lands

**Seveso II Directive**

The EC Control of Major-Accident Hazards Directive (the Seveso II Directive, also known as the CoMAH Directive) places special responsibilities on operators of sites that have major accident potential. It also requires that land-use planning take into account this potential. There are currently no Seveso sites within the Greater Carlow Graiguecullen Urban Area.

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

- ENV 09** in accordance with Seveso II, the Councils will ensure that the objective of preventing major accidents and limiting the consequences of such accidents are taken into account in the consideration of relevant planning applications, in particular in respect of:
- The siting of new Seveso establishments
  - Modifications to existing Seveso establishments
  - Development in the vicinity of a Seveso establishment, which, by virtue of its type or siting, is likely to increase the risk or consequences of a major accident;
- ENV 10** consult with the HSA or other relevant statutory agencies in order to obtain technical advice in respect of Seveso establishments before decisions are taken and such technical advice will be taken into consideration in the determination of planning applications.

**The Noise Environment**

In recent decades industrial processes have generally become cleaner and generate lower emissions including noise and vibrations, the importance of protecting noise sensitive environments such as residential areas remains an important function of planning policy.

Noise associated with construction works is considered to be temporary in nature and is generally not a material consideration in the assessment of planning applications. Noise mitigatory measures include soundproofing of industrial buildings or the specialist glazing of residential developments.

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

- ENV 11** utilise zoning objectives and employ industrial or enterprise buffer zones to achieve a balance between noise generating uses including certain industries and noise sensitive uses including residential areas;
- ENV 12** request additional information as necessary where the Councils consider development proposals may result in an inappropriate balance between noise sensitive and noise generating uses and require the use of appropriate mitigation measures;
- ENV 13** restrict development generating noise in excess of best practice standards.

**Light Pollution**

Light pollution consists of excessive or obtrusive artificial light. Light pollution can disrupt ecosystems, adversely effect residential amenity and where lighting is excessive is a wasteful use of energy resources.

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

<b>ENV P14</b>	ensure new street lighting schemes to residential areas, the town centre and public open spaces are human in scale, with fixture designs that limit upward or horizontal light, in order to create safe and comfortable environments for the pedestrian, while limiting glare and ensuring energy efficiency;
<b>ENV P15</b>	applications for the floodlighting of sports pitches, tourist attractions or other high-order structures will be carefully considered and will indicate horizontal and vertical luminance levels (lux levels)of the fixtures and include details of when the lighting are to be used. Floodlights are to have fully-shielded light fixtures with cowl accessories;
<b>ENV P16</b>	reduce road-lighting along major roads where lighting exceeds road safety requirements.

## Chapter 8: Housing, Community & Social Issues

### INTRODUCTION

Portlaoise will require new housing to cater for continued population growth, new household formation and to replace existing and future unfit dwellings in the Town. The Plan includes land that has been zoned to cater for the need for new housing during the Plan period and to provide a choice of housing locations for both current and future residents. Financial constraints will determine the rate of public sector house building, whilst, in the private sector, the market dictates both the demand for and supply of new housing, including locational preferences.

It is the policy of the Council to implement the provisions of the Housing Strategy in accordance with the provisions of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000. The strategy forms part of and shall be read in conjunction with this Plan. The Council will encourage the consolidation of the Town through the redevelopment/ replacement of existing unfit dwellings and the restoration of buildings where appropriate.

Small pockets of infill development and individual replacement housing units within the Town centre will be encouraged, as will higher density development in locations where it will have minimal impact on the amenity of its surrounds. The provision of a range of housing forms, types and locations will ensure that the needs of persons seeking housing in the area can be met.

#### **Aims**

- To ensure that there is sufficient land available in appropriate locations for all possible new housing supply requirements related to population projections;
- To have clear policies regarding proposals to build new houses and to encourage the improvement of the housing stock;
- To seek an acceptable balance and mix in the provision of social and private housing in order to promote an appropriate social and demographic balance in the Plan area;
- To ensure that there is a stock of housing built or improved to modern standards, sufficient to accommodate every household;
- To encourage new developments to locate within the existing development boundary.

### HOUSING STRATEGY

Laois County Council Housing Strategy is in place from **2011-2017** and forms part of the Laois County Development Plan 2011-2017. The analysis, which underpinned the Strategy, suggested that there was a social and affordable housing requirement in Laois amounting to 12% of all housing.

#### **Provision of Social Housing and Affordable Housing**

The National Development Plan 2000-2006 identified a need to increase social housing output in order to meet rising demand. The increased output will be met by the Council in a number of ways through the following measures:

- Affordable housing/Joint Venture/Shared Ownership Schemes;
- Local Authority House Building Programme;
- Sale of Developed Sites Scheme;
- Voluntary Housing Sector and the Rental Subsidy Scheme;
- Capital Assistance Scheme;
- Disabled Grants Scheme;
- Essential Repairs and others Measures;

- Homeless Forum Initiative.

### ***Programme for Local Authority Provision***

There is a four-year multi annual housing provision plan for the period 2004-2008 in place. Social housing is provided through the following measures:

- New build on existing County Council owned land;
- Purchase of second hand houses;
- Turnkey schemes;
- Infill schemes in existing estates;
- Development of derelict sites;
- Development of Brownfield sites;
- Development in conjunction with other housing agencies;
- Part V acquisitions.



*Plate 9: Recent housing development in Portlaoise suburbs.*

## **SPECIAL NEEDS HOUSING**

### ***Homeless Persons***

Laois County Council will actively promote integrated social solutions, including accommodation provision, to relieve the problem of homelessness (as defined in the Housing Act 1988) and will promote the provisions of the Laois Housing Strategy with regard to aspects for housing for homeless persons in Portlaoise.

### ***The Elderly***

Laois County Council has been active in the provision and upgrading of accommodation for the elderly within its housing stock. Voluntary agencies have also had a lead role in providing for this sector of the community with many successful schemes up and running around the county. With an ageing population and increasing demand for housing the elderly, the Council is conscious of the need to increase provision.

Greater emphasis is now placed on the provision of lifetime adaptable housing; the provision of housing units in centrally located areas whereby there is access to all amenities such as shops, medical facilities, churches, etc. Provision through sheltered housing schemes is also an option that is encouraged. The special needs of the elderly, such as security, medical care, and personal safety,

amongst others, is fundamental to the adequate provision and locational aspects of accommodation for this group within society.

### ***People with Disabilities***

The Voluntary Housing sector and other agencies are active in terms of identifying and meeting the needs of those with disabilities. The County Council is working in partnership with various, voluntary sector groups and associations, to facilitate further identification of needs and provision of housing for those with disabilities. The housing needs of those on waiting lists and existing tenants with disabilities are generally, being met through the Disabled Persons Grants Scheme, which provides financial assistance for the adaptation of accommodation. The Voluntary sector also caters for these needs.

Laois County Council recognises the need to promote better awareness of people with disabilities. These principles are enshrined in the Declaration “The City and the Disabled” in Barcelona in March 1995 to which the Council is committed.

### ***Accommodation for Travellers***

Accommodation options considered by Laois County Council for members of the traveling community include group housing, standard local authority housing, residential caravan parks and rural housing. The Council has a policy of providing accommodation in local authority housing, particularly new estates, for travellers. Travelling families are allocated houses in accordance with the Scheme of letting priorities adopted by the Council in accordance with Section 11 of the Housing Act 1988. Laois County Council has a policy of actively encouraging travellers to avail of the various social housing options. The County Council recognises the distinctive culture, lifestyle and requirements of the travelling community.

### ***Infill Housing***

Where infill housing or higher density development is proposed it should reflect the existing character of the street and/or immediate area in terms of height, proportion and materials used. Generally, proposals will be required to maintain existing building lines and to respect existing roof pitches, fenestration and other details. Proposals to increase height over neighboring properties in the Town centre area will be considered on their merits, but such proposals elsewhere will not normally be permitted. Residential growth in Portlaoise will facilitate the improvement of its economic base of retail and commercial outlets as well as improving the viability of public services, social infrastructure and educational facilities that serve the Town and its extensive rural hinterland.

### ***Balanced Communities – Providing for a Mix of House Types, Sizes and Tenure***

It is an objective of the County Council to ensure that a mixture of house types and sizes are provided in each residential development. House design and layout reflect the requirements of different categories of households, particularly those with special needs. An indication of house types required for social housing is available with the triennial “assessment of need” undertaken by the Housing Section of Laois County Council.

### ***Housing and Estate Management***

The Estate Management Section of Laois County Council helps establish and supports residents associations, meets with the residents associations, holds pre tenancy courses, holds summer camps (affordable summer camps for children of local authority estates). The Estate Management Section also offers grants to assist residents associations in the development of their estates.

**UNFINISHED HOUSING ESTATES**

The National Housing Development survey methodology used the Department’s existing knowledge of housing construction sites across the country and was developed on the basis of a pilot study carried out in County Laois. This indicated the amount of unfinished units within the town of Portlaoise. Work is progressing on finishing off estates within the town and the Council is committed implement the DEHCLG Guidance manual on “Managing and Resolving Housing Developments”. This will include maintaining a dedicated Unfinished Estates Team and continuing to maintain an up to date Register of all Unfinished Estates in County Laois. It also recommends the use of statutory powers available to the Local Authority as a means of resolving outstanding issues. The Planning Authority will promote the development of “Site Resolution Plans” involving all stakeholders such as developers, financial institutions, receivers, bond companies, HAS and most importantly the residents of the estates. This to implementing the DEHCLG Guidance manual on “Managing and Resolving Housing Developments”. This will include maintaining a dedicated Unfinished Estates Team and continuing to maintain an up to date Register of all Unfinished Estates in County Laois. It also recommends the use of statutory powers available to the Local Authority as a means of resolving outstanding issues. The Planning Authority will promote the development of “Site Resolution Plans” involving all stakeholders such as developers, financial institutions, receivers, bond companies, HAS and most importantly the residents of the estates.

<b>It is the policy of the Council to:</b>	
HCSI 01	implement the Laois Housing Strategy 2011-2017 which requires that up to 12% of land zoned for residential developments or for a mix of residential and other uses, is reserved to meet social and affordable housing needs;
HCSI 02	promote the provision of social and affordable housing accommodation in accordance with the proposals as set out in the Housing Strategy 2006-2012.
HCSI 03	zone land in Portlaoise sufficient to meet house building requirements, both public and private, over the Plan period and in the future.
HCSI 04	facilitate the Housing Authority’s programme for housing, including the provision of new housing, renovation/refurbishment of existing buildings and the provision of suitable accommodation and facilities for travelling families.
HCSI 05	ensure that housing proposals do not cause traffic or environmental problems or damage visual amenity.
HCSI 06	require that new residential accommodation meets the necessary standards of health, sanitation and design.
HCSI 07	encourage residential development within the Town’s development envelope and to discourage ad hoc ribbon development on the outskirts of the Town.
HCSI 08	encourage increased densities at appropriate locations in the Town centre, building on the existing Town structure and strengthening the vitality of the Town.
HCSI 09	ensure that development does not cause or contribute towards the sterilisation of land.
HCSI 10	promote estate management in all schemes in Portlaoise, in order to support the formation of sustainable communities.
HCS 11	In dealing with such developments to implement the DEHCLG Guidance manual on “Managing and Resolving Housing Developments”. This will include maintaining a dedicated Unfinished Estates Team and continuing to maintain an up to date Register of all Unfinished Estates in County Laois. It also recommends the use of statutory powers available to the Local Authority as a means of resolving outstanding issues. The Planning Authority will promote the development of “Site Resolution Plans” involving all stakeholders such as developers, financial

institutions, receivers, bond companies, HAS and most importantly the residents of the estates.

The Key objectives of Laois County Council in respect of housing are as follows:

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| O/ HCSI 01 | To ensure the implementation of the Housing Strategy and to integrate housing provided under Part V of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2004 into private development in a layout that prevents segregation and promotes good design and layout. A minimum of 12% social and affordable housing will be required on all sites that are zoned for residential development or a mixed-use site that includes residential. |
| O/ HCSI 02 | To carry out the Council's responsibilities under the Housing Acts and to provide Local Authority dwellings, affordable units, voluntary co-operative housing and private sites as the need arises and as finances permit.  |
| O/ HCSI 03 | To promote high standard of architecture in the design of new housing developments and to encourage a variety of house types, sizes and tenure in individual schemes and variety, interest and social mix in private and social housing developments.   |
| O/ HCSI 04 | To promote the development of passive and low energy buildings and encourage developers to design and build houses/buildings towards an "A" rating standard as set out by the national building energy rating (BER) methodology.  |
| O/ HCSI 05 | To actively promote the provision of community, educational, social and recreational facilities in parallel with future housing development.  |
| O/ HCSI 06 | To encourage suitable infill housing developments on appropriate sites in the Town.   |
| O/ HCSI 07 | To facilitate the future development of lands in Portlaoise already identified to provide future Local Authority housing.   |
| O/ HCSI 08 | To ensure that all proposals for housing developments are assessed and comply with the Development Control and Development Standards sections of this Plan.   |
| O/ HCSI 09 | To identify, acquire and provide suitable sites, accommodation and facilities for the housing and re-settlement of travelling families.   |

The Council will have regard to the following considerations in the assessment of all housing proposals:

- The need for land to be used economically;
- The capacity of the infrastructure to cater for future population;
- The adequacy of present and future community facilities;
- Appropriate density;
- Adequate privacy for individual houses, flats etc;
- The safety of proposed layouts and the capacity of existing roads to absorb future development;
- Adequate provision for car parking, open space, landscaping and planting in line with Development Control standards ;
- Assimilation with existing development and the preservation of attractive features on site;
- Laois County Council, in carrying out its housing functions, will have regard to Government policy as established in 'Social Housing – The Way Ahead' (Department of the Environment 1995) and to the Housing Strategy for County Laois. The broad aim of these documents is to ensure that every household has a dwelling suitable to its needs, located in an acceptable environment and at a price or rent they can afford.

## COMMUNITY

Building strong, inclusive communities is a key element in achieving sustainable development objectives. Sustainable communities require, not only economic development, but also provision of and access to education, health and community support services, amenities and leisure services and a good quality built environment. Communities also require opportunities to meet, interact and form bonds, essential prerequisites to the development of a sense of place and belonging.

The rapid growth experienced by Portlaoise has led to an influx of new residents into the Town. Opportunities for interaction between new residents and established members of the community can often be few with the result that social bonds and sense of community takes longer to develop. The long-term impact of this can be isolation from the community and consequently from the structures and institutions which provide services to that community.

### Social Inclusion and Social Capital

Local Authorities have a mandate to promote Social Inclusion through all aspects of their activities. Creating a more inclusive society by alleviating social exclusion, poverty and deprivation is one of the major challenges facing society nationally and locally. Laois County Council is committed to reducing levels of social exclusion by way of policies, which specifically respond to the need for:

- Equality of access to public and social services for all members of the community;
- Regeneration of disadvantaged urban and rural areas;
- Targeted policies to improve equality of access to infrastructure for specific groups in Society;
- Creation of opportunities for increased participation in policy making for marginalized groups in society;
- Co-ordinated provision of public services and facilities;
- Creation of local employment opportunities;
- The development of social and affordable housing, particularly those that provide opportunities for family members to remain in proximity to each other.

#### It is the policy of the Council to:

HCSI 12	prioritise the reinforcement of social inclusion and the development of social capital in all facets of decision-making processes;
HCSI 13	work with other relevant organisations, through the County Development Board, to facilitate the provision of public and social services in a coordinated manner;
HCSI 14	promote the delivery of services by means of supporting IT kiosks and information points in libraries, schools and local shops/post offices;
HCSI 15	promote the development of integrated urban transport services to meet the needs of all sections of the community;
HCSI 16	develop and implement models of participatory planning, involving communities;
HCSI 17	develop more inclusive methods of consultation, in particular with marginalised and excluded groups;
HCSI 18	support and encourage the establishment of consultation structures, particularly those associated with the County Development Board, which enhance and enable communities to engage in policy making;
HCSI 19	facilitate opportunities for interaction between members of the community and for the community to participate in decision-making in order to promote social integration and cohesion.

### Community Facilities

These include a diverse range of facilities such as community halls, meeting rooms, the library service etc. A prime example is that of Treo Nua in Knockmay which is used by many different public and community services.

#### It is an objective of the Council to:

- O/ HCSI 10 Facilitate and assist in the provision of community facilities in appropriate locations within the town of Portlaoise.
- O/ HCSI 11 Develop proposals for a County Museum within the Principal Town of Portlaoise;
- O/ HCSI 12 Investigate the possibility of the development of the remains of Fort Protector as a Cultural Exchange Centre incorporating Branch Library, County Council Archive etc;
- O/ HCSI 13 Develop active and passive recreational facilities as indicated on the zoning map on the Stradbally Road and Dublin Road;
- O/ HCSI 14 Promote the further expansion of Riverside Park;
- O/ HCSI 15 Maximise the potential of new school facilities to cater for the greater community ;

#### It is the policy of the Council to:

- HCSI 20 investigate, in co-operation with relevant agencies, the possibility of maximising the use of existing educational facilities for community and non-school purposes;
- HCSI 21 co-operate with the Department of Education and Skills, the Vocational Educational Committee for Co. Laois and School Management Boards in the provision of school places and sites;
- HCSI 22 ensure the provision of community, educational, cultural, recreational and amenity facilities in tandem with residential, commercial and other development

### EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES

Enrolment figures in respect of the existing primary and post-primary schools in Portlaoise for academic year 2010/2011 are indicated in Tables 8 and 9 below.

**Table 9: Enrolment in primary schools in Portlaoise for academic year 2010/11**

School Name	Enrolment
Sacred Heart	368
Maryboro	72
Saint Pauls	400
Scoil Naomh Mhuire	398
Scoil Bhríde	731
Gaelscoil Phort Laoise	205
Portlaoise Educate Together	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,213</b>

**Table 10: Enrolment in post-primary schools in Portlaoise for academic year 2010/11**

<b>School Name</b>	<b>Enrolment</b>
Saint Mary's CBS	459
Scoil Christ Ri	523
Portlaoise College	291
<b>Total</b>	<b>713</b>

In terms of planning for the provision of education infrastructure in Portlaoise, the **primary** role of the Planning Authority is to identify and reserve sufficient lands at the most **optimum** locations within the study area.

In addition, the Planning Authority will continue to liaise with and advise the Department of Education and Skills and other relevant stakeholders, both denominational and non-denominational, in the development of adequate education centres serving the population of the town and outlying catchments.

In general, where new schools are required, they should be located close to, or within the main residential areas of the town so that as many students [and teachers] as possible can walk or cycle to school. The opportunity should be taken to locate the schools so that they naturally contribute to the development of a sense of community.

School and other educational premises represent a valuable resource in terms of land and buildings, which generally are only used on a partial basis. The dual use of educational facilities, where it does not conflict with the delivery of the education service can contribute to meeting the wider needs of the community, by helping to satisfy demand for a variety of activities.

Residential development over the last 10 years in particular has put a number of the schools (both primary and secondary schools) in Portlaoise under pressure in terms of classroom size etc. New schools are required to take account of the school going population. This Local Area Plan for Portlaoise will set out where it is considered that schools should be located for the future needs of the Town. New school sites will have to ensure that there is enough land available to allow for the future development of the school, to ensure that sports and play can be facilitated

Lands have been identified in this Plan for the development of new primary schools in the Portlaoise area. These lands are shown in the areas zoned for Public Facility/ Education/ Institution. Other areas may also be used for the location of schools. A number of schools have a need for additional accommodation, play, sports and car parking facilities. Improvements in standard of accommodation and facilities in existing schools are envisaged for the Plan period. The Council will co-operate with the relevant stakeholders and Government Departments to ensure that there are adequate school places to accommodate school going population.

Third level education is inadequately served in Portlaoise at present. Portlaoise College offers the widest range of Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) Courses in the Midlands:

- (1) Direct Employment Opportunities
- (2) Third Level Education – both in Ireland and the UK

The County Council will facilitate where possible the development of third level educational facilities. Table 11 clearly shows that the County as a whole has a poor participation rate in third level education.

**Table 11: Third Level Participation Rates at County, Provincial & National Level.**

	Total aged 15 years and over	3 <sup>rd</sup> Level non degree	3 <sup>rd</sup> Level degree or Higher	Total 3 <sup>rd</sup> Level	3 <sup>rd</sup> Level Participaion Rate
Co. Laois	<b>45,118</b>	<b>3,251</b>	<b>3,659</b>	<b>6,910</b>	<b>15.3%</b>
Province	<b>1,664,380</b>	<b>138,419</b>	<b>241,691</b>	<b>380,110</b>	<b>22.8%</b>
State	<b>3,089,775</b>	<b>250,429</b>	<b>396,408</b>	<b>646,837</b>	<b>20.9%</b>

The rapid growth of population in the Town over the recent past has put increased pressure on educational infrastructure to meet demand and future population projections.

<b>It is the policy of the Council to:</b>	
HCSI 23	promote, in conjunction with the relevant authorities, the provision of new schools and sites;
HCSI 24	develop opportunities for career development and retraining as well as develop links between the industrial and educational sectors;
HCSI 25	support and facilitate research and development initiatives within Portlaoise;
HCSI 26	facilitate the provision of adequate, quality infrastructure for education and training throughout the Town, accessible for all members of the community;
HCSI 27	facilitate the provision of dedicated facilities for adult and community education in recognition of the growing demand for life-long learning opportunities and the perceived shortage of such facilities at present;
HCSI 28	ensure that new or additional educational facilities are designed, located and have adequate management arrangements in place so as to enable the greatest possible use by the wider community, consistent with the needs of the educational establishment;
HCSI 29	work with the education institutions to facilitate their expansion and redevelopment proposals in the most sustainable way possible so that the benefits of participation in adult education, further education and training courses by the long term unemployed, people from marginalized groups and communities (persons from disadvantaged backgrounds, persons with mobility impairment) can be achieved;
HCSI 30	require the provision of School Impact Reports in conjunction with planning applications in order to assess the impacts of proposed development on existing educational infrastructure;
HCSI 31	ensure that schools should be located in such a manner that they do not negatively impact on residential areas. Careful consideration shall be given to the location of the play and outdoor assembly areas;
HCSI 32	ensure that school design takes into account the need to provide adequate bus and 'drop off areas', cycle ways etc;
HCSI 33	relocation of schools in terms of Town centre land-use;
HCSI 34	actively encourage links with the surrounding Colleges and Institutes and market their skills and courses to the advantage of the County in attracting inward investment;
HCSI 35	actively encourage expansion of Outreach Campuses in County Laois which will complement Local Enterprise Development;
HCSI 36	facilitate the continued development of technical and vocational training and foster links between the surrounding Third Level Institutions.

Laois County Council actively seeks to work with the VEC, FAS, IPA and other such bodies to facilitate a broad range of educational and training facilities and to ensure that information on these educational facilities is made available in accordance with the requirements of the relevant educational authorities.

Laois County Council will work with the relevant bodies to implement the following:

- To reduce the rate of early school leaving;
- To increase retention rate at school;
- To expand adult education and second chance education and training;
- To widen access to third level education;
- To encourage life long learning;
- To developing age appropriate after-school programmes and facilities in conjunction with the relevant bodies

### **CHILDCARE FACILITIES**

National policy on childcare provision is to ultimately increase the number of childcare places available and improve the quality of childcare services in the community. The provision of childcare facilities is now one of the most important necessities for improving economic and social well-being. In addition the National Anti Poverty Strategy identifies access to and the provision of childcare facilities as a way of combating poverty and social exclusion. The Childcare Facility Guidelines for Planning Authorities emphasise the role of planning in the promotion of increased childcare provision.

The Council recognises the importance of providing childcare facilities within existing and proposed local communities in line with the Childcare Facility Guidelines for Planning Authorities published by the Department of the Environment and Local Government (June 2001). The regulation of such facilities is in accordance with the Childcare (Pre School Services) Regulations, 1996. The Council will encourage nursery provision, safe outdoor and indoor play areas, crèches and other facilities for the under fives. In considering planning proposals the Council will support voluntary and other agencies in providing services for the under fives, especially those aimed at stress areas and disadvantaged and minority groups.

#### ***Locations for Facilities: (Childcare)***

The Council recognises that the following are appropriate locations for childcare facilities;

- Larger housing estates and new housing areas shall be provided at a rate of one childcare facility with 20 places for every 75 dwelling units;
- New and existing residential areas, particularly, detached houses or substantial semi-detached properties with space for off street parking and /or suitable drop off and collection points for customers and also space for an outdoor play area;
- Light Industrial zones/technology and Business parks and other locations where there are significant numbers working;
- Neighbourhood and District Centres, where facilities are to be located within local mixed-use service centres;
- Locations adjacent to public transport corridors and which can provide safe pull in or parking areas for customers and staff, promoting sustainable modes of transport;
- In the vicinity of schools allowing parents to make one trip in dropping off school going children and children attending childcare facilities.

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| HCSI 37 | encourage the provision of childcare facilities in appropriate locations, including residential areas, Town centre and neighbourhood centres and in areas of employment. Such facilities will normally provide open space play areas, good accessibility and off street car parking and will be subject to the normal proper planning and development considerations; |
| HCSI 38 | continue to implement the Laois Childcare Strategy;   |
| HCSI 39 | require the provision of appropriate purpose build childcare facilities as an integral part of proposals for new residential development of more than seventy-five residential units. In applications for phased developments, proposals for crèches should be submitted as an integral part of the overall development.  |

**HEALTH AND PUBLIC SERVICES**

There are a number of public, voluntary and private agencies responsible for the provision of healthcare facilities in the county, with the Health Service Executive being the primary agency responsible for delivering health and personal social services. The main hospitals for the county are located in Portlaoise and Mountmellick and most institutions are expected to undergo some degree of development, change of focus and possibly redevelopment over this plan period.

Portlaoise is the main centre of health care in the County at present. It is considered that the continued growth in the population, change in demographics and changes in the mortality rate, have all contributed to a need for the expansion of health care facilities. The Health Service Executive owns substantial amounts of land in Portlaoise and whilst it may appear that there is an excess of land, thought needs to be given to the long-term health requirements of Portlaoise.

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| HCSI 40 | facilitate the provision of healthcare facilities, which will develop the system of healthcare and to also facilitate the provision of appropriate community based care facilities subject to proper planning considerations; |
| HCSI 41 | provide for the integration of community based healthcare facilities in both existing and new communities and to ensure that they are accessible to those with special needs such as the elderly and those with disabilities; |
| HCSI 42 | support and facilitate the improvement of public service infrastructure and facilities in the Town, in particular public Hospital, Health Centres and local clinics, Garda Stations and installations.                        |

**FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES**

The emergency services include An Garda Síochána, the Ambulance Service, the Fire Service, the Civil Defence etc. All of these bodies have an important role to play and their functions should be aided where possible.

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| HCSI 43 | provide a modern and effective fire and emergency service; |
| HCSI 44 | assist the emergency services in whatever way possible.    |

**LIBRARY FACILITIES**

Portlaoise Branch library is located in Lyster Square and offers the following services - adult lending, children and young adult sections, reference, foreign language novels, audio books

large print fiction, language learning resources, internet access, photocopying, access to Ordnance Survey historic maps, printing, music, CDs, DVDs, adult and children magazines.

It is the intention of the Council to provide new accommodation for the Library service within the principal town in a more accessible location.

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

HCSI 45	expand library facilities over the period of the plan to cater for the increasing demand due to an expanding population;
HCSI 46	relocate the existing library to an appropriate location with adequate access for all.

**Open Space, Sports and Recreation Facilities**

The Council will try to safeguard existing indoor leisure, recreational and sports facilities, including those operated publicly and privately. Changes to other uses will be resisted and changes between recreational uses assessed having regard to the relative merits of alternative activities. Developers will be encouraged to provide new facilities for community use, especially in mixed-use scheme proposals. New proposals should be in suitable locations and be compatible with neighbouring development. Proposals will be subject to other policies of the Plan, particularly those relating to open space.

The Council will carefully examine any enlargement, extension or development of recreational and leisure establishments or places of entertainment and will control such schemes if it considers the amenity of local residents may be seriously and adversely affected

Development of community facilities are closely linked with quality of life issues. Quality of life issues will be addressed by the realisation of Council plans and programmes with respect to the Arts, Heritage, Tourism, Sports/Recreational and Economic Development. Realisation of this objective will necessitate a close liaison and working relationship with the County Development Board and commitment to their Strategy and to the principle of Social Inclusion.

Open space provision in Portlaoise comprises both public open space and privately owned and run sports grounds and playing pitches. Fitzmaurice Place to the North of Church Avenue provides a significant open space feature within the Town centre core. Although currently under utilised, the plaza has potential to become an important pedestrian hub in the context of the redevelopment of the area. Privately owned sports grounds and playing pitches provide a significant and valuable amenity within the Town. In particular, the playing facilities at Portlaoise GAA Club, Portlaoise Rugby Club and Portlaoise Soccer Club continue to offer sporting amenities of a high standard. The Triogue River provides a water feature within the Town. This feature has potential to be developed as a linear park enhancing the public amenity value of this feature.

Laois County Council recognises the importance of sporting, recreation and leisure activities to the quality of life. The Council is committed to the implementation of a pro-active sports and recreation policy that encompasses:

- Promotion and development of a hierarchy of quantitative and qualitative open space areas that will facilitate passive and active recreational pursuits;
- To work with the various clubs. Laois Sports Partnership, private interests etc, in the promotion and development of sporting/recreational facilities for the Town;
- To extend the existing Town linear river park and provide adequate open space recreational areas in the proposed housing area to the North-East.

**It is an objective of the Council to:**

O/ HCSI 16	Development of active and passive recreational facilities as indicated on the zoning map on the Stradbally Road and Dublin Road;
O/ HCS 17	Further expansion of Riverside Park;

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

HCSI 47	develop land for open space and amenity provision to ensure that residents and visitors gain the highest level of benefit possible from the environment of Portlaoise;
HCSI 48	ensure a balance of public open space and amenity provision through out the Town;
HCSI 49	link open spaces and amenity developments so as to secure integration of provision as far as possible;
HCSI 50	ensure that the provision of open space in new housing developments makes a significant contribution to the recreational needs of adjoining residents;
HCSI 51	examine the potential of, and promote the use of the Triogue River as a local amenity feature;
HCSI 52	co-operate with Sporting Organisations who wish to expand or develop facilities;
HCSI 53	upgrade and extend the Town's amenities (Additional and improved open space will be provided throughout the plan area. This will allow combination of passive and active recreational uses. Standards will be prepared for this open space provision);
HCSI 54	facilitate the improvement of public open space in various housing estates in conjunction with local residents;
HCSI 55	develop a riverside walk along the River Triogue will be progressed during the course of this plan;
HCSI 56	continue to work with the Tidy Towns Group, Portlaoise Chamber of Commerce and other business/community groups for the enhancement and beautification of the Town and specific areas;
HCSI 57	provide a network of cycle ways, focused on the schools;
HCSI 58	continue a tree planting programme around the Town;
HCSI 59	continue programme of landscaping and improving the entrances to the Town;
HCSI 60	prepare an Open Space Strategy for the Town of Portlaoise.

**Crime Prevention**

Informed, positive planning, particularly when co-ordinated with other measures, can make a significant contribution to tackling crime. Sustainable communities are communities which succeed economically, socially and environmentally, and respect the needs of future generations. They are well-designed places where people feel safe and secure; where crime and disorder, or the fear of crime, doesn't undermine quality of life or community cohesion.

Designing out crime and designing in community safety should be central to the planning and delivery of new development. Planning out crime also makes sense financially. Once a development has been completed the main opportunity to incorporate crime prevention measures will have been lost. The costs involved in correcting or managing badly-designed development are much greater than getting it right in the first place.

Planning can contribute directly to crime prevention through the following tools:

-  Development plan policies

- ✚ Supplementary planning guidance
- ✚ Pre-application discussions and negotiations
- ✚ Development management decision-making
- ✚ Planning conditions and planning obligations

There are seven attributes of sustainable communities that are particularly relevant to crime prevention. The attributes have emerged from in-depth research into crime prevention and urban design practice and theory. These are set out below:-

- ✚ Access and movement: places with well-defined routes, spaces and entrances that provide for convenient movement without compromising security
- ✚ Structure: places that are structured so that different uses do not cause conflict
- ✚ Surveillance: places where all publicly accessible spaces are overlooked
- ✚ Ownership: places that promote a sense of ownership, respect, territorial responsibility and community
- ✚ Physical protection: places that include necessary, well-designed security features
- ✚ Activity: places where the level of human activity is appropriate to the location and creates a reduced risk of crime and a sense of safety at all times
- Management and maintenance: places that are designed with management and maintenance in mind, to discourage crime in the present and the future

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

HCSI 61 ensure that development proposals adopt suitable designing out crime standards.

**It is an objective of the Council to:**

O/HSI 18 co-operate with An Garda Síochána in roll-out of community policing and neighbourhood watch schemes.

**Burial Grounds**

The Portlaoise burial grounds are located adjoining the N80 on the south-eastern outskirts of the town. The Council has responsibility in the provision of burial grounds including as necessary, the acquisition of lands and the undertaking of any necessary works on these lands. The local area plan will ensure that adequate land is reserved to accommodate such a use in accordance with the future needs of the town.

**Social, Community and Cultural Events**

Annual social, community and cultural events, such as Saint Patricks Day parade and the Gordon Bennett Classic Car Trail take place in Portlaoise. The Council will continue to support such events in accordance with planning regulations and health and safety requirements. The locations for these events will take into account the needs of local residents including noise levels, traffic management and car parking arrangements, security, and liaison with Gardaí, health and safety issues and litter prevention.

**It is the policy of the Council to:-**

HCSI 62 ensure that all arts and cultural facilities in the ownership and management of the Council are accessible to the wider community and to promote the role of these facilities as focal points for the community;

HCSI 63 protect the cultural heritage of historical burial grounds within the town and to encourage their management and maintenance in accordance with good conservation principles;

HCSI 64 provide or assist in the provision where required of burial grounds and extensions to existing burial grounds at appropriate locations throughout the town.



*Plate 10: Portlaoise GAA grounds and O'Moore Park [left] and Portlaoise Rugby grounds [right]*



*Plate 11: Gaelcoil off Mountrath Road [left] and new schools campus on Borris Road [right].*



*Plate 12: Treo Nua Resource Centre, Knockmay [left] and new Secondary Schools Campus off Mountrath Road [right].*

## Chapter 9: Natural Heritage

### Introduction

A rich diversity of flora, fauna and wildlife habitats make up the biodiversity of County Laois. The natural environment of Portlaoise is a material asset that should be protected and enhanced. Some sites have been designated by the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government as Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) or Special Areas for Conservation (SACs) as a result of their international and national wildlife importance. However, Laois County Council also recognises the integral value of locally important sites, and the wildlife and biodiversity of the wider countryside and acknowledges the importance of implementing policies to protect our entire natural heritage. It is also essential that the natural assets of the town be protected and where possible enhanced as part of any development in the town.

The Plan recognises the benefits of walking and proposes a number of walkways. In particular the development of walkways along the river Triogue are identified. Potential walkways have also been identified through undeveloped lands which provide for direct pedestrian connections to services and facilities and can also act as looped walks. Any planning applications for development on these lands shall facilitate these pedestrian links.



*Plate 13: River Triogue in Portlaoise [left]; man-made lake in Kilminchy [right].*

Both passive and active open space is required in Portlaoise. The Triogue Park provides for passive recreation. Active recreation is catered for by a number of facilities and clubs. Portlaoise Leisure Centre provides for indoor sports facilities. Both GAA and soccer facilities are located within the town. The Council will require developers to make provision for sport and recreational infrastructure commensurate with the needs of the development as an integral element of their proposals. Such provision should include direct provision on or off site, or a development levy to enable the Council to make appropriate alternative provision.

### Natural Environment Objectives

It is an objective of Laois County Council to:

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| O/NH 01 | Comply with the objectives of the Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines 2010 and subsequent revisions, once adopted                                      |
| O/NH 02 | Undertake flood risk assessment in line with “the Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities” issued in November 2009 |

O/NH 03	Preserve the viability of existing open spaces in the town and their associated recreational activities, in co-operation with the voluntary sector.
O/NH 04	Extend the walkway and amenity area along the River Triogue.
O/NH 05	Continue to co-operate with other agencies including the voluntary sector to further improve recreational and amenity facilities in the town.
O/NH 06	Ensure that proposed housing developments incorporate appropriate open space provision for the benefit of local residents.
O/NH 07	Preserve, maintain and incorporate into new development proposals, where appropriate, the existing stands of mature trees which contribute to the overall character of the town of Portlaoise.
O/NH 08	Provide amenity walks within and through the town to link the various natural and heritage features.
O/NH 09	Seek to reinforce and enhance the natural qualities of the Triogue river corridor and where new development is proposed encourage development with frontage facing the river.
O/NH 10	Identify, protect and conserve sites of natural heritage importance, nationally designated conservation sites and non designated sites in co-operation and consultation with the relevant statutory authorities;
O/NH 11	Ensure that the provisions of the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 are met, and
O/NH 12	Liaise with neighbouring counties to ensure that all natural resources, which cross county boundaries, are managed in a strategic and sustainable way.

### **Plans and Programmes**

#### **It is the policy of the Council to:**

NH 01 take into account and Implement the plans and programmes that have been identified in the Laois Heritage plan and subsequent revisions.

### **Appropriate Assessment**

Under the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), the Planning Authority must ensure that any plan or project in itself or in combination with other plans or projects will not proceed unless it has no significant effect on the conservation objectives of Natura 2000 sites.

The evaluation of whether a plan or project will effect the conservation objectives of an cSAC (Natura 2000 site) is known as a Appropriate Assessment or Natura Impact Directive Assessment. A specific methodology relates to Appropriate Assessment and is set down in *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland Guidance for Planning Authorities* (2010). It involves a screening process and if the screening process determines that a full Appropriate Assessment is necessary, this will often involve devising mitigatory measures or consideration of alternative proposals if the plan or project is to proceed. The cost associated with the AA requirement is borne by the proponent of the Plan.

High level spatial plans such as the South East and Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines have been subject to the AA process. This Draft Local Area Plan was also subject to an Appropriate Assessment process (Appendix 3 of the Environmental report). All future projects and some planning applications will be subject to Appropriate Assessment, with most applications requiring no more than a screening process.

### Designated Sites and Appropriate Assessment Policies

#### It is the policy of the Council to:

<b>NH 02</b>	ensure all planning applications are screened to determine whether a full Appropriate Assessment is necessary in accordance with <i>Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland Guidance for Planning Authorities</i> (2010);
<b>NH 03</b>	ensure full Appropriate Assessments carried out on behalf of developers are undertaken by competent and qualified professionals in accordance with <i>Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland Guidance for Planning Authorities</i> (2010);
<b>NH 04</b>	development will not be permitted that would be likely either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, to give rise to significant adverse effects on Natura 2000 sites having regard to their conservation objectives;
<b>NH 05</b>	protect the National Heritage Area from developments that would adversely effect its special interest;
<b>NH 06</b>	consult with the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Inland Fisheries Ireland as relevant when considering applications that may have an adverse effect on the special interest of designated sites or the biodiversity of non-designated sites.

#### Biodiversity and Non-Designated Sites

The Planning Authorities acknowledge that it is important to maintain and enhance the quality of the natural environment in its entirety as wildlife are not confined to designated sites and also its conservation is important for amenity purposes.

Biodiversity is short for biological diversity and refers to the variety of life on earth including animals, trees, plants, fungi and micro-organisms. Urban habitats are sometimes considered less important than rural areas for biodiversity, however the boundaries of the Portlaoise Urban Area extend into the rural hinterland and in addition urban environments can also include rich ecological areas and networks. Areas rich in biodiversity might include: public open space, private gardens, institutional open space, groups of trees, hedgerows, marginal land adjacent to playing fields and golf courses, road verges and ditches, railway embankments and the banks of rivers and streams.

Sites of national importance for wildlife are designated as Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) under the Irish Wildlife Act 2000. Sites of international conservation importance are designated Special Protection Areas (under the Birds Directive) or Special Areas for Conservation (under the Habitats Directive). Together, SPAs and SACs make up the Natura 2000 network of wildlife sites. The majority of these sites are in private ownership, and most are farmed.

Responsibility for location and designation of NHAs and Natura 2000 sites and subsequent production of Site Management Plans rests with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of

the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. However, the protection of these areas through the planning process and through the promotion of awareness and the collective concern of communities is the responsibility of Laois County Council.

**Table 12: Natural Heritage Area in Plan area**

Site Name	Site Code	Main habitat or species
Ridge Of Portlaoise	000876	Esker ridge, ash/hazel woodland, species-rich grassland, disused gravel pits

**Table 13: Designated sites which are within 5 km of the Plan area**

Site Name	Site Code	Main habitat or species
Clonreher Bog NHA	002357	
The Great Heath of Portlaoise NHA	000881	
Dunamaise Woods	001494	

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

<b>NH07</b>	maintain and enhance the quality of the natural environment in its entirety, and in particular woodland areas, hedgerows, tree-lined areas and riparian areas;
<b>NH08</b>	undertake habitat mapping of the Portlaoise Urban Area, prepare a Local Biodiversity Plan for the Area, undertake tree surveys and designate local sites of geological importance in consultation with the Geological Survey of Ireland as financial and human resources allow;
<b>NH 09</b>	ensure that landscaping schemes relating to business parks, residential development and other types of development foster biodiversity, as well as landscaping works in existing public open spaces;
<b>NH 10</b>	foster the provision and protection of a network of ecological stepping stones and linkages and where practicable integrate this network with public open space provision in the interests of biodiversity and public amenity;
<b>NH 11</b>	protect bankside vegetation along the Triogue watercourses and ensure the protection of a riparian buffer zone measuring at least ten metres along the watercourses on greenfield sites in the interests of biodiversity as well as public amenity;
<b>NH 12</b>	work with other agencies to address the issues of terrestrial and aquatic invasive species in the Portlaoise Urban Area as these species pose deleterious threats to native vegetation, wildlife and eco-systems.

The Council shall seek to co-operate with statutory and other relevant agencies to identify and protect, a representative sample, of the county's wildlife habitats of local or regional importance, not otherwise protected by legislation. In addition, the Council will seek to protect and enhance important landscape features including rivers, streams, ponds, springs, bogs, fens, trees, woodlands and scrub, hedgerows and other boundary types such as stone walls and ditches. These are important because:

- They form part of a network of habitats, corridors and stepping stones essential for wildlife to flourish, thus providing a high quality natural environment for all;
- They protect and enhance surface water and ground water resources and are essential as part of the integrated approach to the management of water resources, necessary to ensure the highest water quality into the future, as set out in the Water Framework Directive ( Directive 2000/60/EC establishing a framework for community action in the field of water policy);
- They improve the quality of the landscape.

### **Hedgerows**

Laois County Council recognises the importance of hedgerows in terms of both ecological and visual amenity throughout Laois. There will be a presumption against removal of hedgerows during developments, and where removal is necessary, that planting of an equivalent length of native hedgerow will be required as a condition of planning.

#### **It is the policy of the Council to:**

- NH 13 protect and preserve existing hedgerows and to encourage planting of native hedgerow species;
- NH 14 require that hedgerows and other distinctive boundary treatments such as stone walls be retained as far as possible in rural areas. However front boundary treatments may be required to be set back over the full frontage of the site where it is necessary to ensure safe entry and exit from a site and/or if it is necessary to facilitate road realignment anticipated to take place within a reasonable period of time. The length involved will be minimised and the provision of a similar type of boundary such as a masonry wall or native species hedge will be required, and
- NH 15 ensure that the provisions of the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 in relation to the cutting of hedgerows are strictly upheld, and that hedgerows are not cut in the bird nesting season (between March and September).

### **Landscape**

The aspects of our natural, built and cultural heritage that make up our landscape are intertwined. Landscape appraisals deal with land management including tillage farming, afforestation or quarrying, natural heritage features such as rivers and their flood plains and the built environment including structures, streets and open spaces. Landscape is dynamic and undergoes constant change. It responds to our society, economy and values.

Human beings strongly influence landscapes in particular in and around urban areas such as the Portlaoise Urban Area. Landscape also responds to natural processes including slow processes such as ecological succession, processes of sediment erosion and deposition associated with river basins as well as dramatic, periodic events such as floods. In light of the wide-ranging and intertwined elements that influence landscape, a holistic approach to its management is appropriate.

#### **Landscape Character Assessment**

The inclusion of landscape objective is a statutory requirement of a Development Plan in accordance with the European Landscape Convention (2000). A Landscape Character Assessment is contained within Appendix 6 of the Laois County Development Plan which has identified a number of

Landscape Character Types within the County. This will inform the policy framework as well as the development management decision-making process.

### Landscape Policies

#### It is policy of the Council to:

- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| <b>NH 16</b> | enhance the urban landscape of Portlaoise Town having regard to urban gateways, key open spaces, important landscape features such as the Rivers Triogue and landmark structures. This will be subject to clear demonstration that there will be no impact on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site in accordance with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive or significant adverse effects on other environmental receptors; |
| <b>NH 17</b> | protect significant views of identified landmark structures within the Portlaoise Urban Area;   |
| <b>NH 18</b> | ensure the effective management of lands adjoining the River Triogue to maximize views and interaction with these important landscape features. This will be subject to demonstration that there will be no impact on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site in accordance with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive or significant adverse effects on other environmental receptors.   |

### Place Names

Place names are an important part of our cultural heritage, providing a link to the past and reflecting the natural, built and cultural heritage of a locality. It is important that place names of all new developments reflect local topography, history, culture, ecology or significant people or events and incorporate traditional and Irish language place names from the locality

#### It is the policy of the Council to:

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| <b>NH 19</b> | preserve historic place names and historic street names;   |
| <b>NH 20</b> | ensure that the names of all new developments include local historical, heritage or cultural associations; |
| <b>NH 21</b> | encourage the use of bi-lingual or Irish language place names and signs.                                   |

## Chapter 10: Built Heritage

### INTRODUCTION

The built, natural and cultural heritage of Portlaoise is a valuable resource for the county. In addition to its intrinsic value, this heritage contributes much to the social, cultural and economic development of the Town. This in turn contributes to quality of life, aesthetic value, amenity and recreation.

#### Objectives

##### It is the objective of Laois County Council:

O/ BH 01	To develop the cultural heritage of Portlaoise;
O/BH 03	To identify, conserve, protect and enhance the built heritage of Portlaoise;
O/BH 04	To encourage and facilitate the protection of flora and fauna, monuments, buildings, structures and sites which are identified as regional, nationally or internationally important;
O/BH 05	To encourage awareness of Portlaoise Built heritage by collecting and disseminating information;
O/BH 06	To ensure that all new development is of a high standard;
O/BH 07	To undertake urban design plans during the lifetime of the Local Area Plan, for specific areas.
O/BH 08	Preserve the integrity of existing archaeological monuments in their settings including the integrity of Town defences.
O/BH 09	Ensure that development in the vicinity of a site of archaeological interest shall not be detrimental to the character of the archaeological site or it's setting by reason of its location, scale, bulk or detailing.
O/BH 10	Retain the existing street layout, historic building lines and traditional plot widths where these derive from medieval or earlier origins.
O/BH11	Require the preparation and submission of an archaeological assessment detailing the potential impact of any development on both upstanding monuments, and buried structures and deposits. The report will also include a visual impact assessment to ensure adequate consideration of any potential visual impact the proposed development may have on any upstanding remains;
O/BH 12	Facilitate owners of Protected Structures in obtaining Declarations and encourage planning best practice in all work to be undertaken.

#### Existing Plans and Strategies

In implementing the Portlaoise Local Area Plan due regard will be had to the County Development Plan 2011-2017 and to all relevant regional, national plans and strategies.

#### Integration of Heritage Protection

Almost every aspect of the development of Portlaoise has a potential impact on the built or natural heritage. In preparation of this Local Area Plan, the principles of Heritage Appraisal have been applied.

#### Integration of Heritage Policy

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

BH 01 ensure that consideration and conservation of heritage is an integral part of coherent policies for the physical, economic and social development of Portlaoise.

**ARCHAEOLOGY**

Archaeological heritage is a unique and special resource. Prestigious monuments from Ireland's ancient past have survived on the landscape side by side with modern development. The role of Laois County Council is to protect the treasures of the past, while continuing to address the practical requirements of a modern society. It is possible to avoid conflict between the old and the new by being aware of both the ancient and the modern at the pre-planning stage of development.

The European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (Valetta, 1992) was ratified by Ireland in 1997. It requires that archaeological heritage is given due consideration. This convention also includes the setting and context of archaeological sites as part of the archaeological heritage that requires protection. Ireland is a signatory of this convention. Monuments recorded in the Portlaoise Local Area Plan are included in the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP), a statutory list published by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Through this Plan, the aims of Laois County Council with regard to archaeological heritage are to:

- Protect and enhance archaeological monuments and their settings, including Town walls, or ancillary fortifications.
- Facilitate appropriate guidance in relation to the protection of the archaeological heritage in the area covered in the Plan.
- Provide guidance to developers and property owners regarding the archaeological implications of a proposed development.
- Promote pre-planning consultations in relation to the archaeological heritage with the Planning Authority and with The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.
- Endeavour to ensure the dissemination of the results of archaeological excavation in a timely manner.
- Have regard to the recommendations of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, and other prescribed bodies as appropriate, both in respect of whether or not to grant planning permission and in respect of the conditions likely to be attached., if permission should be granted. In addition, regard will be had to the DoEHLG publication "Framework and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage".

**Archaeology**

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

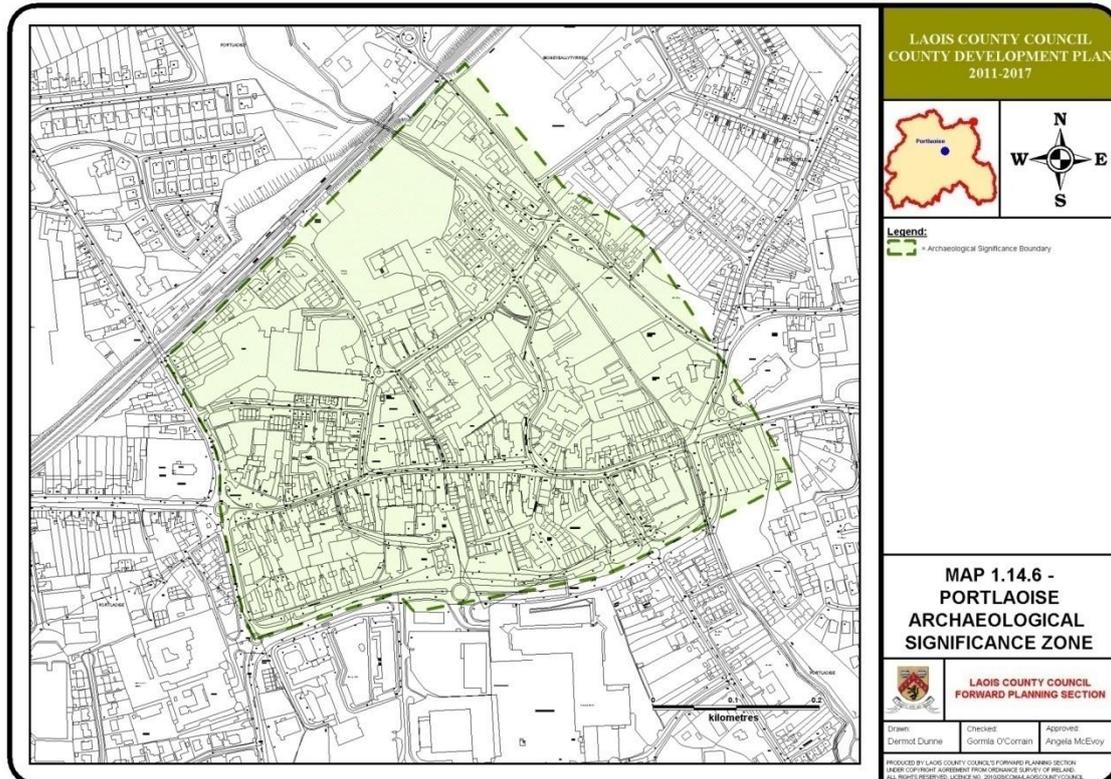
BH 02 ensure the preservation (either preservation in-situ or, preservation by record) of all archaeological monuments included in the Record of Monuments and Places as established under Section 12 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act, 1994, and of sites, features and objects of archaeological interest generally.

BH 03 ensure the protection and conservation of heritage objects and their setting where settings are appropriate.

**Zones of Archaeological Potential**

A site of archaeological potential has been identified in Portlaoise as indicated on Map. 1.14.6 in the Laois County development Plan 2011-2017.

**Map 4: Portlaoise Archaeological Zone**



**It is the policy of the Council to:**

- BH 04 ensure protection of Zone of Archaeological Potential, as identified in the Record of Monuments and Places;
- BH 05 have regard to archaeological heritage when considering proposed infrastructure developments (including transport, telecommunications, sewerage and water) located in close proximity to Recorded Monuments or Zones of Archaeological Potential;
- BH 06 ensure that all archaeological excavations are undertaken to the highest standard and the resultant information made publicly available. Developers will be required to have regard for Archaeology & Development: Guidelines for Good Practice for Developers (ICOMOS, 2000) in planning and executing development in sensitive areas.

**Industrial Archaeology**

The industrial archaeology of Laois was the subject of a major survey by the Laois Heritage Forum in 2003. The results of this survey and future field surveys will be used to inform the implementation of the County Development Plan and the formulation of future policies. Laois County Council will afford appropriate protection to such industrial archaeological sites as may come to light following future surveys.

**ARCHITECTURE**

**Architectural Conservation Area**

The history of the town is embedded in individual historic or special buildings, groups of buildings, building features, open spaces and the street pattern. Collectively the tangible layering of these

structures can deepen the understanding among town residents of the cultural heritage of their home place. If well-presented and maintained, ACAs can foster civic pride amongst residents and admiration from visitors.

*Heterogenous building grain, heights and elevational treatments*



*Surviving historic building fabric: painted timber door with decorative fanlight; timber sliding sash window with crown glass; decorative painted console*

The urban centre of Portlaoise is more than the sum of its parts - it can not be conserved effectively simply by adding its significant buildings to the Record of Protected Structures. An ACA would define a wider entity, also embracing the open spaces of the town.

The incremental loss of features of the historic environment erodes this value and depreciates the character of a town, and this leads to a feeling of decline and low self image.

In particular the Fort Protector is a rare built element of the first significant English Plantations in Ireland and as such a heritage site of enormous significance and potential. It is currently subdivided into multiple titles and its importance cannot be appreciated. It is essential that this site should not be regarded as a backlands area of the town and its key historical significance as the genesis of the settlement of Portlaoise actively recognised. Great care should be taken to prevent irreversible development which would damage this enormous asset to the identity of Portlaoise. If the Fort Protector were to be restored to a high conservation standard, this unique structure could become a cultural and economic resource of benefit to the town. It is noted that currently there are no significant cultural attractions nationally that treat the plantation of Ireland in detail and that historic accounts of the plantation of Laois/Offaly are detailed and colourful.

Conservation of the adjacent former St. Peter's Church and graveyard, and of the hugely significant former Presentation Convent, which faces the Fort wall, would create an historic precinct of great heritage value and interest, with the capacity to greatly raise the profile of the town.

The special architectural character of the Portlaoise ACA also resides in the grouping of some eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century buildings along Main Street, Coote Street, Grattan Street and Bridge Street; the heterogenous heights, grain, roof pitches, architectural order and elevational features of buildings along Main Street, Bridge Street and Coote Street, the urban spaces at Market Square and adjacent to the Fort Protector and individual fine landmark buildings such as the Kingfisher Restaurant and O'Loughlin's Hotel or fine terraces such as along Church Street or Coote Street. The layering of structures of different dates and orders tangibly show the origin and evolution of the town.

**Appendix 2** of the Laois County Development Plan 2011-2017 provides the full text of the Portlaoise ACA.

Within an ACA, there are restrictions on certain works to exteriors of structures. In addition to the usual requirements of planning law, the designation means that works that would materially affect the special character of the ACA will need planning permission. In practice, this would mean that the

removal of historic building fabric and its replacement with modern materials will require planning permission.

For example the removal of sliding sash windows and their replacement with uPVC windows will require planning permission. If uPVC windows are already in place, their replacement will not require planning permission. Other works that would require permission include:

- the stripping of render from a building to expose stonework
- the cladding of a building with stone or timber
- the removal of cast iron rainwater goods, the removal of a natural slate roof covering
- the removal of chimney stacks or changes to the roof profile
- the removal of limestone sills
- changes to the window proportions
- the addition of porches
- other extensions that would impact on the front elevation of the buildings
- the removal of historic shopfronts or elements thereof
- the installation of roller shutter blinds
- the removal of historic boundary walls or railings.

Planning permission is not required for regular maintenance works and repairs, as long as original materials are retained where they exist and where replacement is necessary (for example due to rot) that it is on a like-for-like basis.

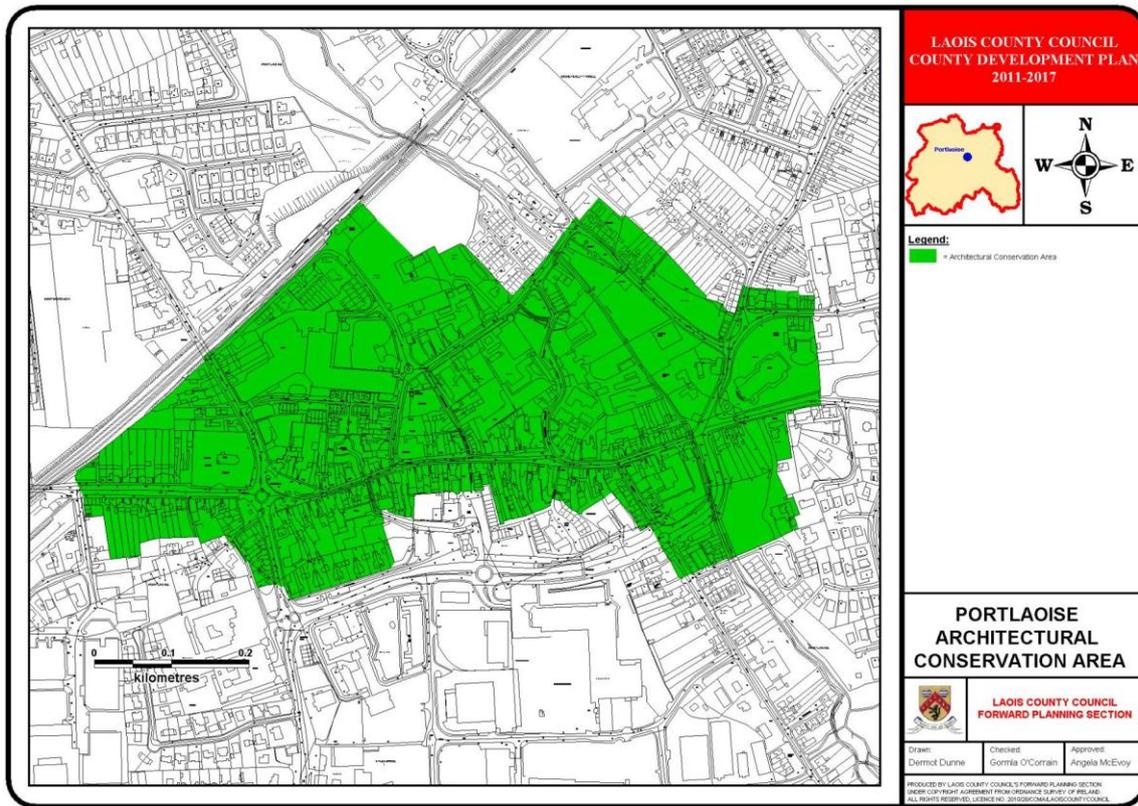
The intention behind the designation is not to stop change, but to manage the nature of the change in order to respect and enhance the features and characteristics that make a particular area special. The demolition or insensitive alteration of structures that make a positive contribution to the ACA will not be permitted. Some structures within the boundaries may be of little architectural interest and are included within an ACA boundary only because of their location within the streetscape. Buildings of little architectural merit may be subject to wholesale redevelopment as part of a planning permission. However, any replacement building should be designed with due regard to the special characteristics of the ACA. Suitably designed infill or bankland development that contributes to the special character of the ACA will also be encouraged. Works to the public realm within ACAs e.g. footpaths, street furniture, parking schemes will be required to respect the special character of the area also.

Current threats to the special character of Portlaoise ACA include:

- stripping of render from elevations, demolition of chimney stacks
- removal of carriageway entrances
- removal of doorways to the upper storeys of buildings along the main street
- replacement of natural slates with artificial materials,
- replacement of cast iron rainwater goods with uPVC,
- replacement of timber sliding sash windows with uPVC,
- loss of historic shopfronts and related advertisements
- insensitive infill development
- wholesale demolition of historic buildings.
- the most serious threats to the special character of Portlaoise ACA include underuse, vacancy and dereliction

A number of landmark structures within the ACA including the Presentation Convent, the Maltings Complex, Old St Peter's Church and the Fort Protector need active uses to secure their longevity.

**Map 5: Architectural Conservation Area**



**Architectural Conservation Area**

**It is the policy of the Council to:**

- BH 07 consider favourably development proposals within an ACA that would either preserve or enhance the special character or appearance of the ACA. In considering applications for changes of use, the Council will be concerned with maintaining the character of that area;
- BH 08 manage change within Architectural Conservation Areas by preserving what makes the ACA special, allowing for alterations and extensions where appropriate, enhancing the quality of the ACA by identifying opportunity sites<sup>2</sup>;
- BH 09 support owners of properties within ACA's through providing advice and guidance in relation to development proposals.

<sup>2</sup> Opportunity sites could be buildings that make a positive contribution to the character of the ACA but are in poor condition, vacant, under-utilised or unsympathetically altered or an opportunity site could be gap site or an incongruous building that detract from the appearance of the ACA and is suitable for wholesale redevelopment.

### **Protected Structures**

Protected Structures are listed in the Record of Protected Structures (RPS), within the County Development Plan 2011-2017. The Record of Protected Structures in Portlaoise forms the Appendix A of the Plan. The Council will seek to protect structures of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest in Portlaoise.

The record will be periodically reviewed and updated as new information becomes available. This will include information gathered through the implementation of Laois Heritage Plan, for example on the industrial archaeology (mills etc) of the County.

### **Criteria for inclusion**

The existing Record of Protected Structures has been updated to incorporate the recommendations of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in relation to the Architectural Inventories of County Laois and Portlaoise Town (NIAH).

### **Alterations to Protected Structures**

The inclusion of a structure in the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) does not preclude appropriate use or development. However, no works, which would affect the character of the structure, or any element of it, which contributes to its special interest, may be carried out to a Protected Structure without prior planning approval with the Planning Authority. In addition to the exterior of the building, the interior and any structures lying within the curtilage of the structure are also protected.

### **Section 57 Declarations under the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2011**

An owner or occupier of a Protected Structure may make a written request to the Planning Authority to issue a Declaration as to the type of works, which it considers would or would not materially affect the character of the structure or any element of the structure that contributes to its special interest.

### **Protected Structures**

#### **It is the policy of the Council to:**

- BH 10 refuse permission for the demolition of a Protected Structure, except in exceptional circumstances, generally only those in which it can be shown that a greater public interest will be served through the demolition of the building, outweighing the loss to the architectural heritage. In situations where permission is granted to alter or demolish, either partially or totally, a Protected Structure, a full record of the Structure and its significant elements will be required, to best conservation practice;
- BH 11 look favourably on proposals for change of use of a Protected Structure where this would secure the future conservation of the building and where proposals are in keeping with the character of the building;
- BH 12 ensure that any interventions to Protected Structures are undertaken in accordance with best conservation practice and using sustainable and appropriate materials;
- BH 13 ensure the protection, conservation and where necessary restoration of the Architectural Heritage of the County for future generations;
- BH 14 protect structures in the Record of Protected Structures (RPS);
- BH 15 ensure the retention and repair of all historic windows and doors;

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| BH 16 | where planning applications are submitted for protected structures whose historic windows have been lost, reinstatement with exact replicas to correct historic detail should be imposed;   |
| BH 17 | ensure the retention, repair and suitable presentation of all historic shop fronts;   |
| BH 18 | ensure the retention or reinstatement of slate roof coverings to protected structures. In Planning applications this shall be implemented as a planning condition;  |
| BH 19 | ensure the retention of characteristic chimneystacks to all historic buildings in the town, including those which are not protected structures. Removal seriously upsets the visual balance of the buildings and damages the streetscape of the town; |
| BH 20 | ensure the retention or reinstatement of lime rendered facades to correct historic detail. Facades which were not historically painted should be left unpainted. Garish chemical paints in gloss finish should not be allowed;                        |
| BH 21 | ensure the retention and repair of all significant site features site features such as boundary walls, railings, gates, piers, etc. Where such features have been lost, a policy of reinstatement should be followed;                                 |
| BH 22 | encourage the removal of large obtrusive signs or advertising billboards across large areas of the facades;   |
| BH 23 | strictly ensure that all elements from which the building derives its significance are retained in the adaptation of the building to this reuse.  |

### ***Vernacular Architecture***

It is an objective of Laois County Council to carry out surveys of vernacular architecture to ensure identification and adequate protection of buildings, particularly vernacular buildings, which are currently under-represented in the Record of Protected Structures.

#### *Consultation & Advice*

Laois County Council will consult with appropriate prescribed bodies, including the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Heritage Council and An Taisce when assessing applications for planning in or impacting on Protected Structures

Laois County Council will have due regard to the recommendations of the appropriate prescribed bodies when making decisions regarding planning applications in these situations, both in deciding whether to grant planning permission, and in respect of the condition to which planning permission, if granted, should be attached.

The Council will have regard to architectural heritage when considering proposed infrastructure developments (including transport, telecommunications, sewerage and water) located in close proximity to Protected Structures or Architectural Conservation Areas.



Plate 14: Church of Ireland, RPS 170; Restaurant on Main Street, RPS 175: and O'Loughlins Hotel, Main Street, RPS 200 b.



Plate 15: Midland Regional Hospital, RPS 180; Saint Peter's Church Graveyard, Railway Street, RPS 186 B; "Rosetta", Dublin Road, RPS 188 A.

## Chapter 11: Urban Design & Development Management Policy

### INTRODUCTION

In order to ensure the proper planning and sustainable development of Portlaoise it is essential that development should conform to a number of requirements, which are set out in this chapter under the following main headings:

- New Urban Residential Development;
- Changes of use, extensions and alterations to Dwellings;
- Commercial, Office and other Developments;
- Conservation and Archaeology;
- Community Development;
- Accessibility;
- Development Contribution Planning Scheme.

The Development Control Policies and Standards have been formulated to take into account a number of contextual guidelines and regulations in addition to the policies and objectives set out in the County Development Plan and which include the following: -

- The Planning & Development Act 2000-2002 and Associated Regs 2001;
- The Planning & Development Act 2000 Part V – Housing Supply 2000;
- Residential Density Guidelines 2009;
- Retail Planning Guidelines 2005;
- County Retail Strategy 2011-2017
- County Housing Strategy 2011-2017
- Childcare Facilities 2001;
- Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines (Draft);
- Telecommunications Antenna and Support Structure Guidelines 1996;
- Architectural Conservation Guidelines 2004;
- European Community (E.I.A.) Regs. (Various) 1987 to date;
- Seveso II Directive (1996) and subsequent amendments.

### URBAN DESIGN

Urban design considers the relationships between buildings and the spaces around them. This section aims at identifying principles, which should give understanding as to how successful spaces work. This section provides the basis for assessing planning applications on urban design grounds and is based on international best practice.

In order to achieve sustainable communities and a high quality built environment, which is one of the over riding goals of the Portlaoise Local Area Plan, a number of principles must be established and applied to all development proposals in Portlaoise.

The following principles have been identified as being important to successful build environments

- Local Setting and Context
- Building Layout
- Ease of physical and social integration
- Identity and Legibility
- Vitality (Use Content)

- Visual Quality

### ***Local Setting and Context***

Local Setting and Context is important in the development of all places and spaces and will vary from place to place. It is important to identify the established pattern of development within the location in order to successfully address the character, scale, height, proportion and detail of adjoining and adjacent buildings. Each area will have their own distinctive form and character. New developments should respect this and reflect it, to some degree in their proposals, taking into account the natural heritage of the area also.

### ***Building Layout***

New development proposals should arrange buildings so that they provide continuity and enclosure onto the public realm, creating a coherent urban fabric that encourages security and vitality. New developments should also be designed to create active frontages that contribute towards the creation of streets. This should include the creation of mixed-use areas, which provide a range of different uses such as shops and homes, which present a vibrant landscape. Design should seek to minimise the risks of anti-social behaviour through appropriate layout, boundary features and means of enclosure.

### ***Ease of Physical and Social Integration***

Streets provide the network for people to move within urban areas; public spaces fronted onto by buildings are also the arena for public activities. Streets should generally link with other streets at both ends and routes should be as short and direct as possible to encourage people to walk to their destinations easily. The character of any proposal should be based around the creation of positive public spaces with roads incorporated and not generated by the road design requirements.

### ***Identity and Legibility***

New developments can be designed to reinforce the character and identity of existing places or to create a strong identity in new areas. The creation of new identities for urban areas is dependent on its urban form. Urban form includes such factors as size and heights of buildings, the urban grain, building lines, the use functions of an area, the identity of the Community, the areas history and the areas historic buildings. These factors suggest a particular identity for an area, which should be respected by new developments.

Legibility means that development is structured in a way that creates distinctive places and spaces that may be easily read and that are easy to move around. A legible layout is based on designing at a human scale in response to the positive features of a site and how it relates to the wider area, rather than technical demands. Such a layout will avoid the creation of homogenous characterless areas resulting from the use of identical buildings, which produce feelings of disorientation and monotony. A differentiation of building form in a layout, such as noticeable increase in density, in a particular direction, may indicate the presence of a main road or the direction of an urban centre. Landmark buildings can provide more legible layouts if used in an appropriate context.

### ***Visual Quality***

Good quality building design is vital in creating a visual and cultural identity of an area. The primary objective is to create buildings that are of high visual quality, capable of long life and adaptability to other uses. The Council aims to promote the use of high quality contemporary and innovative design that respects the context and sense of place. The Council also promotes the use of local building

traditions, which can be used to compliment new exciting design. A variety of heights are encouraged in appropriate locations in order to establish landmarks and address create a sense of place.

### **Townscape**

#### **It is the policy of the Council to:**

UD 01 protect, conserve and where necessary restore or enhance the quality, character and distinctiveness;

UD 02 promote good architectural design in relation to the replacement of buildings in the town.

### **RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT**

Both quantitative and qualitative criteria are included in requirements for new residential developments set out below. These requirements will form the basis for evaluating planning applications for new residential development with a view to improving the quality of development in the Town.

Housing Development in an urban context will be guided by the guidelines for Planning Authorities on residential density and the need for good quality of design in terms of buildings and layout and the desire to improve quality of life.

These requirements are informed by a number of key principles to:

- Build on the positive elements of the Town's character through new high quality residential development;
- Provide a good quality of life for persons living in and visiting the Town;
- Create new residential areas with a distinctive sense of place;
- Create new sustainable residential areas which allow for new and improved access to public transport and local facilities and make the best use of development land and infrastructure;
- Use a range of design "tools" or methods, guidelines and standards, to achieve better residential development;
- Encourage the concept of energy efficiency and re-use of on-site materials;
- Encourage high densities through innovative design in appropriate locations.

### **Sustainable Residential development in Urban Areas**

The Minister for the Environment & Local Government issued Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Residential Density in September 1999.

**The Minister for Environment, Heritage & Local Government issued Guidelines for Sustainable Residential Developments in Urban Areas in 2008 and Best Practice Urban Design Manual Part 1 and 2.** These Guidelines provide a framework for the sustainable development of residential areas. The guidelines should be used to guide the preparation and assessment of planning applications for residential development in urban areas. In terms of energy efficiency, the guidelines promote settlement patterns that can help minimise transport-related energy consumption, increase the use of energy efficient technology and best practice, thereby reducing energy consumption of the community.

### **Housing Strategy 2011-2017**

A Housing Strategy has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2000.

Every applicant for permission for residential development, other than for exempt residential development, must specify in the planning application how he or she proposes to meet the requirements of the housing strategy in relation to the development for which permission is being sought.

Such proposals will be taken into account in determining planning applications for such development. Planning applications for residential development will therefore be assessed on the basis of the Housing Strategy, the land use zoning, the design and layout, accessibility to public transport, housing mix, the provision of special needs housing and the provision of social and affordable housing.

### **Urban Residential Development – Design and Layout, Controls and Safeguards**

It is the policy of Laois County Council to encourage the well planned and economic provision of housing on serviced lands. Developers are advised to consult with Laois County Council in advance of purchasing lands for residential development and discuss proposals at the earliest stage. The following criteria will be taken into account when assessing applications incorporating higher densities:

- Size of Site;
- Proximity to Town centre facilities and to existing public transport corridors;
- Quality of Proposed Layout and Elevation Design;
- Mix of Dwelling Types;
- Ancillary Facilities;
- Quality of Proposed Open Space and General Landscaping;
- Quality of Pedestrian Linkages between Open Spaces and to and from Local Facilities;
- Levels of Privacy and Amenity;
- Traffic Safety;
- Energy Efficiency;
- Management Arrangements;
- Childcare Facilities;
- Site Ecology;
- Local or Action Area Plans;
- Facilities for Children and the Elderly.

**Smarter Travel >>> A sustainable transport future** encourages the incorporation of the following objectives in the preparation of residential/commercial schemes

- A general requirement that significant housing development in all cities and towns must have good public transport connections and safe routes for walking and cycling to access such connections and local amenities
- Integration of cycling and public transport
- Specification of a maximum permitted level of car parking for commercial sites, which have suitable public transport facilities and are within walking/ cycling distance to amenities
- A general restriction of the future development of out-of-town retail centres except in exceptional circumstances and consideration of a similar requirement that parking charges be introduced for most existing centres.

### **Layout of Housing Schemes**

#### **Best Practice Urban Design Manual Part 1 &2 2008.**

This Design Guide accompanies the Department's guidelines 'Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas' and introduces 12 criteria for sustainable residential development:

- 1 Context:** How does the development respond to its surroundings?
- 2 Connections:** How well connected is the new neighbourhood?
- 3 Inclusivity:** How easily can people use and access the development?
- 4 Variety:** How does the development promote a good mix of activities?
- 5 Efficiency:** How does the development make appropriate use of resources, including land?
- 6 Distinctiveness:** How do the proposals create a sense of place?
- 7 Layout:** How does the proposal create people friendly streets and spaces?
- 8 Public Realm:** How safe, secure and enjoyable are the public areas?
- 9 Adaptability:** How will the buildings cope with change?
- 10 Privacy and Amenity:** How does the scheme provide a decent standard of amenity?
- 11 Parking:** How will the parking be secure and attractive?
- 12 Detailed Design:** How well thought through is the building and landscape design?

These guidelines highlight the role of urban design in creating and maintaining successful residential schemes measured in terms of:

- sense of place
- ease of movement
- connectivity
- quality of public realm
- variety
- efficiency
- inclusivity
- adaptability

No substantial residential scheme to proceed without adequate provision for retail, school, health, public transport and community facilities-either in place or to be provided in tandem

- Higher densities must be accompanied in all cases by high qualitative standards of design and layout
- “Leap-frogging” effect to be avoided
- Scale of new development to be in proportion to existing development

In the interests of a good housing scheme layout, incorporation of the following into new development will be sought:

- Division of the estate into groups of houses, giving each group a sense of spatial enclosure;
- Pedestrian routes and footpaths which provide access to local shops, bus stops etc.;
- Orientation in accordance with sustainable development concepts, taking account of existing views, overlooking, overshadowing and energy efficiency;
- Separation of through traffic from local housing traffic;
- Layout which discourages on-street parking;
- Curves and changes in surface colour and texture of the road layout which discourages speeding and promotes pedestrian priority;
- Houses situated in order to ensure that overlooking and privacy issues are addressed;
- Road widths, which reflect the number of houses being served. A reduction in width may be appropriate where small numbers of houses are being served;
- Rear Garden Depths of 15m in respect of Greenfield sites. Exceptions of a reduced standard will be permitted where deemed appropriate and in infill urban housing and proximity to public/private open space facilities;
- New houses should be encouraged to use alternative energy systems such as solar panels and or under floor heating systems to allow for energy conservation where appropriate;

- The Council will promote the development of passive and low energy buildings and encourage developers to design and build houses / buildings towards an “A” rating standard as set out by the national building energy rating (BER) methodology.
- Recycling ‘Bring banks’ should be included.

### ***Layout of Apartment Developments***

The **Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities September 2007** aim to ensure the design and layout of new apartments will provide satisfactory accommodation for a variety of household types and sizes, including families and children. The quantitative standards outlined in these guidelines will be applied as a minimum for apartment developments especially with regard to minimum floor areas, living space areas, bedroom areas, storage space and balcony areas.

### ***Layout of Apartment Developments***

The layout of apartment developments should:

- Incorporate common spaces, terraces and courtyards, steps which are of good design and will encourage use by residents;
- Provide for access for all disabilities;
- Incorporate spaces which are designed so as to provide a safe and pleasant environment, which are multifunctional and allow for fire brigade access, parking and passive recreation;
- Provide concealed refuse bin storage areas, bicycle storage areas and washing and drying facilities for, and accessible to each of the apartments;
- Present a live edge to the street by locating doors and windows onto the street frontage;
- In the case of residential accommodation over shops or other business premises, a separate access should be provided for the upper floor accommodation;
- In addition to planning requirements, building control and fire prevention requirements must be met;
- Underground car parking will be encouraged where appropriate;
- Encourage dual aspect orientation;
- Provide private open space for each apartment;
- Dual aspect design

The overriding concern should be the quality of the proposed residential environment and higher densities should only be acceptable if the criteria, which contribute to this environment, are satisfied. In this regard, the planning authority will consider the preparation of Design Guides illustrating good examples of residential layouts at increased densities, appropriate to local circumstances. These considerations will be incorporated into a review of residential guidelines appropriate to County Laois.

### ***House and Apartment Design***

A high quality of house and apartment design will be sought. All new housing and apartment developments should:

- Reflect the existing character of the street by respecting the proportion, pattern, massing, density and materials of surrounding buildings;
- Maintain existing building lines, roof pitches and window proportions;
- Incorporate variations in window design, roof type etc. around a common theme, in housing estates of more than 20 houses;
- Provide access for ‘wheelie bins’;
- Provide facilities to incorporate satellite dishes where appropriate.

Any policy, which promotes the incorporation of higher residential densities, must take into account the need for proper internal space planning which ensures adequate standards in relation to overall dwelling and individual room sizes.

The “Guidelines on Residential Developments in Urban Renewal Designated Tax Incentive Areas” (Department of the Environment 1995) will be applied as a minimum for apartment developments. With regard to local authority dwellings, the Council will have regard to the “Social Housing Design Guidelines” which were issued in 1999.

The Planning Authority will encourage the provision of dwellings in higher density developments, which are capable of being extended. Aside from the normal single storey extensions, the conversion of the attic space for additional floor space will be promoted as a method of providing extra living/sleeping space or storage without increasing site coverage.

The Council encourages the use of hardwood for windows and doors in all new structures rather than uPVC, which is considered to be environmentally unsustainable.

### ***Masterplans***

Where large scale developments are proposed, the developer should submit a Masterplan of the site in conjunction with surrounding lands. This provides the knowledge and assistance in that the layout of the site can develop in an integrated coherent fashion with adjacent lands.

### ***Housing Estate Completion***

Developers will be required to give security to the County Council in the form of an adequate cash deposit, bank bond or insurance company bond or other such security, to ensure satisfactory completion and maintenance of the estate. Developments should be phased to ensure that new residents have the benefit of proper access and services when the houses are occupied. A Construction Management Plan shall be submitted with planning applications for large-scale developments. At the commencement of any development the developer will be required, both in the interests of existing residential amenity and in the interests of health and safety to complete work on the boundaries/perimeters of the site in accordance with the permission granted. The phasing of such work will be submitted and agreed with the Planning Authority. The Planning Authority insists that “Taking in Charge” requests are made immediately upon completion and/or in phases.

### ***Infill Housing***

In-fill housing should reflect adjoining premises and where appropriate attention should be paid to the existing character of the street including proportions, height of structures, massing and materials as well as existing building lines, roof pitches, height and window detailing. A minimum distance of 2.5m between semi-detached and detached housing is required. In general, this distance should be equally divided between dwellings so as to allow for a usable side entrance.

Where proposed development of significant height is located close to existing development the Planning Authority may require daylight and shadow projection diagrams to be submitted. The recommendations of ‘Site Layout Planning for Daylight and Sunlight: A Guide to Good Practice’ (BRE 1991) or ‘B.S. Lighting for Buildings Part 2 1992: Code of Practice for Daylighting’ should be followed in this regard.

### ***Backland development***

The Council will encourage the provision of comprehensive backland development where the opportunity exists. The following should be taken into consideration for backland development:

new dwellings that closely overlook the rear curtilage of existing dwellings will not normally be permitted.

### ***Street Lighting & Public Utilities***

Street lighting should be at least to the standards set out in the ESB publication Public Lighting in Residential Developments. Pedestrian links must also be illuminated. Lighting levels within a new development must create a secure environment. Dark corners and alleyways should be avoided. The use of low pressure sodium lighting and full cut off lighting shall be encouraged for environmental, economic and road safety reasons. Lampposts in prominent positions can help to define an area and promote a sense of place among the residents.

To preserve the amenity and visual character of an area, and in the interests of public safety, all services including electricity, public lighting cables, telephone and television cables shall be provided underground in all new developments. Provision should be made for the unobtrusive siting of transformer stations, pumping stations and other necessary service buildings. Pole mounted equipment (such as transformers) will not be permitted.

## ***CHANGE OF USE AND ALTERATIONS TO DWELLINGS***

### ***Extension to Dwellings***

The design and layout of extensions to houses should have regard to the amenities of adjoining properties, particularly as regards privacy. The character and form of the existing building should be respected and external finishes and window types should match the existing. Extensions should:

- Follow the pattern of the existing building as much as possible;
- Be constructed with similar finishes and with similar windows to the existing building so that they will integrate with it;
- Have a pitched roof, particularly when visible from the public road or when the building is two or three stories high. It is difficult to obtain a satisfactory external appearance with flat roofs:
- Dormer extensions should not obscure the main features of the existing roof, i.e. should not break the ridge or eaves lines of roof. Box dormers will not be permitted where visible from a public area;
- Traditional style dormers should provide the design basis;
- Front dormers should normally be set back at least three-tile courses from the eaves line and should be clad in a material matching the existing house;
- Care should be taken to ensure that the extension does not unduly overshadow windows, or have windows in flank walls, which would reduce a neighbour's privacy.

### ***Sheltered Housing Extensions***

Sheltered Housing extensions shall be an integral part of the main dwelling unit capable of reintegration for single-family use. The following criteria must be met:

- Where a bona fide need for such a unit exists;
- Where the unit acts as a physical extension to the main house with full integration between the existing house and proposed extension;

- Where such a unit is located at ground floor level;
- Where the unit is capable of re-integration for use as part of the main dwelling following its cessation of use as a sheltered dwelling;
- Entrances should be via the main dwelling unit, where own door entrances are proposed these should be located to the side or rear of the dwelling.

### **Conversion of Existing Houses to Flat Accommodation**

The subdivision of houses and housing above business premises and housing on primary traffic routes may be permitted. Permission to convert to flats will not normally be granted unless:

- The minimum size of unit is 38 square metres for a 1-bed unit;
- There are areas available for necessary amenity purposes, parking etc;
- Development meets the requirements of the building regulations, and
- Each flat has a refuse bin storage areas and washing/drying facilities which are accessible to the occupants of that unit.

Proposals for conversion into flats should take account of standards set out in the "Guidelines on Residential Development in Designated Tax Incentives Areas" published by the DOEHLG.

### **Public Open Space**

Public open space should be well designed from a visual perspective as well as being functionally accessible to the maximum number of dwellings within a residential area. A well-designed open space will be based on the principles of adequate overlooking, supervision and accessibility.

The emphasis should be placed on the retention of existing natural features and good proportions. Narrow tracts of open spaces are non-functional, hard to maintain, therefore unacceptable and will not be considered in assessing the adequacy or otherwise of open space provision in a new residential development.

In new development areas provision for open spaces should be identified at an early stage. It is important to plan for hard surface play areas. A hierarchy of open space provision in residential areas to meet the needs of children in different age groups will be encouraged.

Appropriate pedestrian and cycle linkages between open spaces should be clearly indicated on the site layout plan.

Opportunities for providing new public open space may be limited due to site constraints and the need to protect the established pattern of streets and spaces.

Public open space will be required at the rate of 10% of the gross site area with a minimum unit of open space of 200 sq. ms. and 10 ms. as a minimum dimension of any side. A minimum of 80sq.m of public open space per dwelling will be required in new residential developments. Where this cannot be provided or where it is not appropriate to provide this, a contribution to local amenity facilities in lieu of the shortfall will be required. The provision of public open space should be cross referenced with County Laois Play Strategy which gives guidance on the types of recreational facilities required for all age groups with residential layouts.

Planning applications for major schemes should include a landscaping plan and a planting schedule. Proposals for the management of open space should also be included. As a first preference, consideration should be given to the use of native species of trees and shrubs.

### **Private Open Space**

In Town centre and urban areas the quality of private open space will be crucial to successful residential development.

In apartment developments, private open space should be provided in a number of ways including, balconies, winter gardens, indoor amenity spaces, shared internal courtyards and roof gardens. In Townhouse and mews developments private open space should be provided in small rear yards and balconies.

A detailed landscape plan should be submitted with any application for development containing shared semi-private open space. In Suburban Areas focus must be placed on the quality of private open space rather than quantity alone.

## **LANDSCAPING**

### ***Soft Landscaping***

Planting and landscaping can be used to incorporate new buildings into their surroundings and provide privacy between dwellings. New planting should consist of local plant types indigenous to the area and be incorporated into the site so as to enhance the overall appearance. When selecting plant species for landscaping, consideration should be taken of the proposed location of the site and its attendant character such as soil conditions, pollution, safety, maintenance requirements, the possibility of vandalism of the site, and aesthetic potential.

### ***Hard Landscaping***

Hard landscaping design, including paving and street furniture, is an important element in defining the character of the spaces between buildings and public open spaces. Hard landscaping works can help to:

- Provide a visual link to the surroundings;
- Define and enclose space, and delineate public from private space;
- Provide securing to private areas;
- Distinguish between pedestrian, cycle and vehicle movement;
- Provide suitable play space for children;
- Materials must be appropriate, durable and of a good quality. Careful consideration must be given to the design of hard surfaces such as streets, squares, open spaces, paved areas, footpaths and driveways;
- The textures and colours of the materials chosen must be sympathetic to the locality and be an integral part of the design;
- Walls, fences, metal railings and gates used to define spaces and their usage have a major impact on the visual character of the development. These should be carefully selected with local distinctiveness in mind and will need to be an integral part of the overall design concept;
- The siting of street furniture should not provide undue obstacles for people with disabilities;
- The integration of art into public domain can contribute positively to the urban form creating local distinctiveness and enhancing a public space. Major development schemes will be expected to contribute to public area in the locality;
- Following underground works, it is an objective of Laois County Council to ensure the reinstatement of material or the replacement with materials of similar style and quality.

### ***Site Coverage***

In order to prevent adverse effects of over development in urban locations site coverage of: 50% for residential development, 66% for Industrial, retail and commercial developments would be

appropriate. Within the Town Centre Zone, the maximum site coverage shall be 80% for all development. However, flexibility will be applied in the interests of achieving a more sustainable use of inner urban/town centre land.

A particular site coverage standard shall be acceptable only where it is consistent with other standards such as car parking, plot ratio, open space requirements etc.

### **Plot Ratio**

Plot Ratio standards are used to prevent the adverse effect of over development on the layout and amenity of buildings, to ensure an adequate sense of enclosure and the efficient and sustainable use of serviced land. Plot ratio is defined as the gross floor area of buildings on a site divided by the gross site area and is used to depict the intensity of use on the site. In calculating the area of site adjoining road widths are excluded. In the built up areas of the town, it is desirable that an adequate proportion of sites be reserved for off loading, air circulation, refuse storage etc. Generally 20% of a site where a commercial, institutional or industrial development is proposed will be required to be left uncovered. Generally the maximum plot ratio standard shall be 1.0 for all development. Within the town centre the maximum plot ratio shall be 2.0.

## **COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **General Considerations**

The general principles guiding the location of commercial development in the county have been set out in preceding chapters. In assessing planning applications a number of considerations will be taken into account: -

- Conformity with the land use policies in respect of Commercial Development;
- The design, quality and mix of uses being proposed particularly in Town centres where redevelopment and changes of use need to be orientated towards creating a vibrant and lively, quality directed commercial core;
- The requirement that design quality protects but also enhances the architectural character of the Town, particularly in relation to landmark structures and viewpoints;
- The potential impact to be generated in terms of traffic movement, parking provision and desirability thereof and whether or not consideration has been given to access and commuter movements;
- Whether or not the proposed development will have a significant detrimental effect on the amenities of the surrounding areas;
- The energy efficiency and overall sustainability of the development which includes practical considerations, such as servicing, deliveries, waste/recycling and overall management thereof;
- Whether or not a land contamination assessment is necessary and is required as part of the Planning Authority requirements, and
- Whether or not an E. I. S. has been deemed necessary and provided as part of the Planning Authority requirements.

### **Small Scale Businesses in Residential Areas**

The scale and nature of operations will be taken into account. Uses such as the repair of vehicles will not normally be permitted in a residential area. The level of customers/callers will be taken into account. The Planning Authority shall consider such small scale business where:

- The use of the house for business purposes is secondary to its use as a dwelling and the floor area of the business should reflect this.
- Adequate parking is provided
- No loss of residential amenity to the adjoining residences in terms of general disturbance, noise, traffic generation etc.

Permission will be subject to the normal environmental and planning criteria. Any subsequent change or proposed expansion of the business will need to be reconsidered by the Planning Authority to assess whether the premises are still acceptable.

### ***Warehouses and Industrial Uses/Business Campuses***

The guiding policy considerations are set out in Chapter 3 on Enterprise and Employment. In cases where these developments generate heavy traffic, they may not be sited where they would encourage movement of heavy vehicles through residential areas.

The criteria for assessment of such developments will include:

- The nature/activities/processes of the proposed development and site location factors;
- The compatibility with adjoining uses;
- The traffic implications and alternative access, servicing and sustainable mobility plans/commuting arrangements;
- The quality of building design;
- The site layout including car parking arrangements;
- Landscaping Plans;
- The energy efficiency and overall sustainability of the proposed developments.

### ***Industrial Development***

A landscaped buffer zone will be a requirement of planning permission for any Industrial/Warehousing development where it adjoins another zoning or where it would seriously injure the amenities of adjoining land uses.

### ***Public Houses/Late Night Clubs/Disco***

Night clubs and disco bars play a role in urban areas providing a night use which adds to the attraction of a town. They will not, however, be permitted in residential areas. Noise levels at the boundaries of these establishments will be monitored as circumstances require and mitigation measures will be required at the time of the submission of the planning application.

### ***Filling Stations***

Applications for filling stations should take account of the following:

- Access to filling stations will not be permitted closer than 35 metres to a road junction;
- Frontage on public roads must be at least 20 metres in length;
- All pumps and installations shall be set back at least 5 metres from the road;
- A wall, of a minimum height of 0.5 metres, must separate the forecourt from the public footpath;
- All external lighting should be cowled and directed away from the public roadway to prevent traffic hazard;

- A proliferation of large illuminated projecting signs will not be permitted at filling stations. Generally only one such sign will be permitted;
- Turbo-drying or car washing facilities will be located so as not to interfere with residential amenities;
- Any shop being provided shall be ancillary to the principal use of the premises as a filling station and shall be a maximum size of 100sq.m. excluding storage;
- An undue concentration of filling stations shall not be permitted, as in the past oversupply has led to closures with resulting unsightly derelict filling stations;
- Late night opening will only be permitted if it does not impact adversely on nearby residences;
- A landscaping plan will form part of any planning application.

### **Taxi/Hackney Cab Bases**

The importance of taxi and cab services as a means of transport in the Town is recognised. However, cab bases will not be permitted where they are likely to interfere with traffic flows or on street parking. The Council fully endorses that taxi and cab bases should be fully accessible to people with disabilities.

### **Hot Food Take-Aways**

Within the commercial core of the Town a proliferation of hot food “take-aways” will not be encouraged. Additional takeaways will not be permitted where there is a loss of office and retail frontage, in order to preserve the character of these areas. Regard will be had to the impact of hot food take-aways on the residential amenities in an area. ‘Stand alone’ take-aways, not attached to restaurants, will not be encouraged. The Planning Authority may impose restrictions on opening hours of hot food take-aways where these are permitted.

### **Gaming Arcades**

Within the commercial core of the Town Gaming Arcades will not be permitted at ground floor. At all other locations regard will be had to the impact of gaming arcades on the residential amenities in an area and on the loss of retail/office frontage. The Planning Authority shall impose restrictions on opening hours of Gaming Arcades where these are permitted.

### **Childcare Facilities**

The provision of childcare facilities is subject to the Child Care Act and the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations 1996. The Planning Authority recognises the need for properly run and conveniently located childcare facilities throughout the county. It is the policy of the County Council to implement the Planning Guidelines on Child Care Facilities, 2001.

Applications for childcare facilities in a residential area will be assessed on the basis of their impact in terms of noise, loss of residential amenity, traffic generation and general disturbance. In general, the factors to be considered in determining application for a childcare facility are as follows:

- Have regard to the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations, 1996, in relation to the planning implications of these Regulations;
- Suitability of the site for the type and size of facility proposed;
- Availability of outdoor play area and details of management of same;
- Convenient to public transport nodes;
- Safe access and convenient parking for customers and staff;
- Number of such facilities in the area;

- Intended hours of operation (in certain residential areas, 24 hour operations could be problematic);
- The Council fully endorses that childcare facilities should be convenient to public transport nodes in order to achieve sustainability.
- Encourage the provision of childcare facilities which are flexible and capable of being managed for a number of different uses and to encourage the further use of existing facilities

### **Access for People with Disabilities**

Where buildings are intended for public access they should be accessible to people with a disability and their facilities should be so designed as to accommodate people with a disability without difficulty. Part M of the Building Regulations 2000 aims to ensure that buildings should be accessible and usable by everyone. Dwellings should be designed and constructed so that:

- People with disabilities can safely and conveniently approach and gain access;
- People with disabilities can have access to the main habitable room. At this level, it is considered adequate to provide for access to habitable rooms on the storey containing the main living room;
- At entry level a WC should be provided, or where there are no habitable rooms at entry level, in the storey containing the main living room, with adequate provision for access and use of the WC by people with disabilities;
- Design consideration for public buildings and areas should include the provision of tactile surfaces, new technologies and appropriate signage light and symbols as well as appropriate hierarchy of lighting to meet different types of accessibility issues. When access is being planned for people with disabilities it should be through the same entrance as others;
- Access considerations will be extended to the public realm with the position of street furniture and other elements being assessed on an ongoing basis. The sitting of street furniture such as bins etc. should be where it does not substantially reduce the width of pavement available.

### **SIGNAGE & ADVERTISING**

#### **Advertising Hoardings: Billboards Location**

The Council will not normally permit the erection of large non-local advertisement structures or hoarding in the open countryside or along main traffic routes. These large-scale structures are detrimental to the amenities of the area and also give rise to creation of a traffic hazard.

Outdoor advertising hoardings will normally be restricted and will not be permitted:

- Close to a listed building, a public open space or an important view;
- In predominantly residential areas, especially on prominent gable walls;
- Where a proliferation of them already exist;
- On street elevations;
- On buildings in the central commercial core;
- On stone walls in suburban areas;
- Where they may cause a road hazard;
- Where there may be a detrimental visual implication.

#### **Advertising on Buildings**

In general advertising on buildings should conform to the following:

- Be sympathetic in design and colouring both to the building on which they will be displayed and their surroundings;
- Not obscure architectural features such as cornices or window openings;
- Illuminated signs or other advertising structures will not be allowed above the eaves or parapet level on buildings in any part of the county;
- Shop front advertising should be designed as an integral part of the shop.

### **Fingerpost Signs**

The erection of fingerpost signs will require a licence or planning permission from The Planning Authority and should comply with the following:

- Directional signs for major tourist attractions and community purposes will be considered but product advertising will not be permitted;
- Signs must be of a standard size and colour which will be decided by the Council;
- Signs, which interfere with road safety, and the County Council or N.R.A directional signs will not be permitted.

The basic planning control principle is to reduce visual environmental clutter to the basic necessities and to improve the overall quality of the physical environmental character of the town.

### **Shopfronts and Commercial Facades**

The Planning Authority's objective is to maintain, and over a period of time, raise the general quality of advertisement and shopfront design and to limit the quantity of advertisements where excess would spoil the character of particular shops or streetscapes. It is with this objective in mind that the following design guidelines will be applied in assessing Planning Applications, and it is intended that they will promote active co-operation between traders, designers and the County Council in implementing these guidelines.

The scope of these guidelines encompasses not only shops, but also all other business frontages such as restaurants, pubs, banks and offices.

Statutory protection is given to buildings of special architectural merit or historic interest, which have been listed in the Development Plan. The fundamental effect of listing is that works, which otherwise would be exempted development, require planning permission. Any alterations to shopfronts that are part of such should be consistent with the age and style of the buildings.

In general the need to change old shopfronts will be closely examined, as it is the policy of Laois County Council to preserve and retain traditional shopfronts of Townscape importance. The condition of the existing frontage should be expertly examined, as the replacement of shopfronts in a poor condition may be a premature solution. A careful repair can make good a neglected shopfront without incurring the cost of a new shopfront. In addition, refurbishment of shopfronts can often offer an opportunity to strip away later additions and to re-establish the proportions and details of the original framework.

The repair, restoration and replacement of shopfronts must be sympathetically carried out to protect the architectural character of the Town/area in question. It may be necessary to accept that modern shop fronts are not appropriate in certain old buildings or traditional shopping parades. Where new shopfronts are acceptable in these situations the quality of design and finish should be of the highest standard and accurate facsimiles of period fronts may be necessary.

Where existing shopfronts are of no special merit, total replacement is acceptable and a modern design to a high standard will be encouraged provided it respects good architectural and conservation principles.



*Plate 16: Traditional shopfronts in Portlaoise town centre.*

### **Fascia Signage and Illuminative and Projecting Signs**

As a general principal fascia signs and protecting signs should be simple in design, not excessive in number, illumination or size. The following basic guidelines will be applied in assessing Planning applications:

- Plastic derived fascias with product advertising will not be permitted;
- Quality signage is strongly encouraged in all circumstances;
- Projecting signs should be of 2.4m clearance above street level;
- Internally illuminated fascias will not be permitted;
- Overall illumination of fascia signage or shopfronts or distinctive architectural features should be discreet and limited to spot-lighting, up-lighting or disguised minimalist strip lighting;
- The use of banners, flags, billboards and other forms of commercial and cultural advertising will be strictly controlled in Town centres and essentially restricted to those outlets of a cultural – entertainment activity.

### **Security Screens**

The following standards in respect of Security Screens shall be applied:

- Planning permission is required for the erection of roller shutters;
- External roller shutters will not generally be permitted in the county;
- Box housing for shutters, mounted externally or concealed behind a large projecting fascia is a material alteration which is unlikely to be permitted in any shopping street;
- Security screens located inside the shop window or to the rear of the display area do not require planning permission as a general rule and are encouraged;
- Demountable metal-grills or wrought iron-work grills may also be acceptable.

### **Canopies**

Planning permission is required for the erection of canopies. Canopies of traditional design and materials, which are retractable, will be favoured. In all circumstances canopies should not illustrate

products unrelated to the primary activity of the premises and also should not be a hazard to pedestrians, visitors or shoppers.

### **Bus Shelters/other structures**

Advertising on bus shelters will be permitted in locations, which do not detract from the primary purpose of the transport shelter. General advertisements and promotional design advertisements on telephone kiosks within Town centres will not be permitted.

### **TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

An efficient telecommunications system is important in the development of the economy. The Council policy in relation to telecommunications is in *Chapter 4: Enterprise and Employment*. However, in considering location requirements the Council take into account the following factors outlined in the Department of the Environment's Planning Guidelines for Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures 1996 and Planning and Development Regulations 2001.

Telecommunication installation will not be favoured in residential areas, on land on which development may be restricted or prevented for amenity reasons, or in parts of the county, which are architecturally important; and affect security installations.

Nor will they be favoured unless it is clear that the developer has made reasonable efforts to share with other users of existing or proposed sites in the vicinity of the proposed mast. Evidence of this will be required.

If the proposal is contrary to any of the above, the County Council will need to be satisfied that the installation is of strategic importance if permission is to be granted. A report as to the public safety implications of the proposal should accompany any planning application. Regard should be had to locating new masts in existing industrial areas, where their visual impact would be less.

In assessing telecommunications facilities and structures, Planning Authority will have regard to the technical advice of the Irish Aviation Authority where such proposed locations may have an inappropriate or detrimental impact on flight paths.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSEMENT**

In compliance with E.U. Directives, Environmental Impact Statements (E.I.S.) are required for projects, which are likely to have significant affects on the environment. E.I.S.'s are obligatory for certain major developments and may be required for a wide range of other developments. The E.U. (E.I.A.) Regulations, 1989-99, specify the types of development and threshold levels for which E.I.S.'s are required.

### **MAJOR ACCIDENT DIRECTIVE, SEVESO II**

Unlike the earlier Seveso 1 Directive (82/501/EEC), Seveso II includes provisions in relation to land use planning. Article 12 of the Directive requires Member States to ensure that the objectives of preventing major accidents and limiting the consequences of such accidents are taken into account in land use policies and/or other relevant policies. These objectives must be pursued through controls on the following:

- The siting of new establishments.
- Modifications to existing establishments.
- Development in the vicinity of an establishment, which, by virtue of its type or siting, is likely to increase the risk or consequences of a major accident.

- Article 12 of the Directive provides that appropriate consultation procedures must be put in place so as to ensure that, before decisions are taken, technical advice is available to Planning Authorities in respect of relevant establishments. The Health & Safety Authority provides such advice.

Such technical advice will be taken into account in the consideration of any such application for planning permission.

## **PROTECTED STRUCTURES & ARCHAEOLOGY**

### ***Protected Structures and other Buildings of Significant Heritage Interest***

The following information is required to be submitted with each application for permission for restoration, refurbishment, demolition development or change of use: -

- An Architectural Assessment Report as per the 2001 Draft Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines.
- A comprehensive schedule of proposed work that follows the guidelines set out in the Draft Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines 2001.

### ***Archaeological Investigations***

*Zones of Archaeological Potential have been identified for Portlaoise. There are also archaeological implications outside of these areas. In general the following guidelines will apply. Developments, which impact on archaeological record, will be treated as follows:*

The archaeological remains of potentially significant sites within the Zone of Archaeological Potential will be preserved or investigated;

- Outside of the Zone of archaeological Potential, where in the opinion of the Planning Authority developments involve major ground disturbances, particularly in the vicinity of known monuments, planning conditions in relation to archaeology may also be applied;
- The Council will require that archaeological investigation be undertaken prior to the commencement of development. All such investigations must be undertaken by a qualified archaeologist in consultation with Laois County Council and the Office of Public Works;
- When deciding to grant permission for developments within the Zone of Archaeological Potential, the Council may impose conditions which render the developer liable for the cost of the archaeological investigation or the preservation of the archaeological record;
- Conditions may be imposed which modify the development, in order to facilitate the archaeological investigation or preserve the archaeological record.

Developers will be encouraged to supply an archaeological assessment and a method statement outlining construction procedures as part of their planning application. This is intended to facilitate assessment of the proposal.

## **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

As a general principle the location and provision of Community Development facilities is a pre-requisite to the enhancement of viable, enjoyable, sustainable and attractive local communities. In assessing planning applications for leisure facilities, sports grounds, playing fields, play areas, community halls, organisational meeting facilities, medical facilities, childcare facilities new school provision and other community orientated developments, regard will be taken of considerations such as:

- Overall need in terms of necessity, deficiency, and opportunity to enhance or develop local facilities.
- Practicalities of site location in terms of uses, impact on local amenities, desirability, and accessibility.
- Conformity with the requirements of appropriate legislative guidelines: such as childcare and education facilities.

## CAR-PARKING STANDARDS

### Residential Parking Standards

Parking is an integral element of overall land use and transportation policy within the Town. The purpose of the parking standards is to ensure that an appropriate level of parking is provided to serve new development. Where a developer cannot provide the specified number of car-parking spaces within the site, a financial contribution in lieu will be required towards the cost of providing such spaces off the site or planning permission will be refused. The issue of car parking in Portlaoise has become a critical factor in deciding on the appropriateness of developments in the Town centre. Strict consideration will be given to the amount of parking spaces likely to be generated by new developments and the ability to provide that amount of parking on site.

**Table 14: Parking standards for residential developments**

Location	Parking space per unit
Town Centre Apartments / Mews Type developments	1.5
Dwelling House (Town Centre)	1.5
Dwelling House (Suburban)	2

Group and clustered parking will be required where spaces cannot be provided on individual sites.

Construction and layout standards for multi-storey and underground car parks are set out in the document, 'Design Recommendation for Multi-Storey and Underground Car Parks' (current edition), published by the Joint Committee of the Institute of Structural Engineers and the Institution of Highways and Transportation.

Car Parking should be considered having regard to potential of the site to accommodate it, the needs of the residents and proximity to local public transport and local services. It should be located where it will not detract from the quality of the street or the development and it should satisfy appropriate layout standards.

### Other Car Parking Standards

Units for which one car parking space is to be provided are set out in table below. Development Contributions will be required in cases where there is a shortfall in on site car parking.

**Table 15: Areas Other than Residential for which Parking Space is Required**

Land Use	
Apartment	1.25 spaces per apartment
Café	1 space per 10 sqm
Caravan, Camping sites	1 per caravan/tent space
Cinema, Dancehall, Disco	1 space per 5 seats
Community Hall	1 space per 5 seats

Crèche/ Playschool	1 space per staff member plus 1 space per 4 children
Cultural Uses/ Library	1 space per 50 sqm
Dwelling	2 spaces per unit
Funeral Home	1 space per 10 sqm
Garden Centre	1 space per 50 sqm
Guest House/Hostel/Hotel	1 space per bedroom
Health Centre	1 space per staff and 3 spaces per consulting room.
Hospitals	1 space per bed
Industry	1 space per 50 sqm
Medical and Related consultants	1 space per staff and 3 spaces per consulting room.
Motor Sales	1 space per 100sqm
Nursing Home	1 space per 2 bedrooms
Offices < 100 sqm	1 space per 20 sqm
Offices > 100 sqm	1 space per 25 sqm
Place of Worship/Funeral Home	1 space per 10 sqm
Playing Fields	25 spaces per pitch
Pub	1 space per 10sqm
Recreational Buildings (Commercial & Community)	1 space per 20sqm
Restaurant	1 space per table/4 seats
Retail Warehouse	1 space per 50 spm
School	2 per classroom
Retail < 100sqm (Comparison)	1 space per 50 sqm
Retail > 100sqm (Comparison)	1 space per 30 sqm
Retail < 100 sqm (Convenience)	1 space per 25 sqm
Retail > 100 sqm (Convenience)	1 space per 20 sqm
Sport/Leisure Complex	1 space per 25 sqm
Warehouse (Wholesale)	1 per 50 sqm
Workshops	1 per 50 sqm

The lack of any or inadequate car parking for a development is sufficient reason, in its own right, to refuse planning permission.

### **Cycle Provision**

Cycle Provision (Access and storage) will be particularly important in respect of developments for apartments, public services, hospitals, colleges and community facilities and details of such provision will be required as part of any planning application for such development.

### **OTHER REQUIREMENTS**

#### **Requirements and Contribution for Parking, Sanitary Services and Amenity**

Contributions towards expenditure by the County Council for works, including expenditure on roads, water and drainage schemes, open spaces and other amenities, which facilitate development, will be required. The Planning Authority may grant an exemption from contribution in accordance with Development Contribution Scheme in the following cases:

Churches, community halls, development for public social purposes, provision of sporting facilities (excluding licensed premises attached to clubhouses) and extensions to dwellings;

Renovation, to a high standard of a protected structure or other building of architectural interest currently in poor condition, provided the renovation is faithful to the building's design and period.

The details and basis for the determination of the contributions will be set out in a Development Contribution Scheme in accordance with the provision of section 48 of the Planning and Development Act 2000.

### ***Undergrounding and Concealing of Services***

In new housing and in other forms of urban developments all services including E.S.B., telephone and television cables shall be placed underground. Service buildings or structures should be sited as unobtrusively as possible and must be screened. Care should also be given to the treatment of maintenance boxes, electrical boxes and bin storage on facades so that such items are concealed as unobtrusively as possible.

### ***Required Distances from Sewerage Treatment Works***

Proposals to develop in close proximity to existing or proposed sewerage treatment plants and Pumping stations will be assessed having regard to:

- The nature of the effluent being treated;
- Prevailing wind direction;
- Noise;
- Type of treatment process employed;
- Sludge treatment;
- Visibility and screening of treatment plant

Development will not be allowed within the buffer zone around the existing waste water treatment works or 50m of a foul pumping sewer station. This distance may be increased if significant environmental issues are likely to arise and will be judged on a site by site basis. The buffer area may be used to fulfil open space requirements. Road gullies in an area of extreme vulnerability will be required to include measures to prohibit contaminated surface water from entering ground water sources.

### ***Naming Streets, Housing Estates***

Naming of streets and residential estates shall reflect the local place names and local people of note, heritage, language or topographical features as appropriate and shall incorporate old place names from the locality as much as possible. The use of bi-lingual and Irish-Language signs will be encouraged. Naming and numbering of residential estates shall be approved in advance by the Place names Committee of the Planning Authority. Along with suggested estate names, developers must submit reasons for their choice. A Council Committee has been formed to advise on naming of new residential developments. Signage should be of appropriate size and material and shall be erected in a timely manner.

The use of Management Style Companies is not considered generally acceptable for the traditional form of residential layout and is to be discouraged. Their use is only considered necessary in exceptional circumstances. The Planning Authority expects requests for taking in charge estates to be made at expeditiously as possible.

## Chapter 12: Land-Use Zoning

The Land Use Zoning Objectives for this Plan are set out in the policies and illustrated on the accompanying maps. The purpose of land use zoning is to indicate to property owners and to the general public the types of development, which the Council considers most appropriate in each zone. In the promotion of redevelopment and urban renewal, this allows the developer to plan investment with some certainty. In the control of development, zoning seeks to limit competing and incompatible uses in order to promote greater environmental quality.

The Town centre zoning is intended as a means of encouraging the redevelopment of under-utilised or derelict land but also to safeguard the amenity of residential enclaves and to protect certain areas with high amenity value.

Zoning of lands outside the Town centre, on the other hand, is intended primarily to guide and facilitate the physical development of land for specific purposes, to protect existing amenities and to allow for changes in land use over time in an orderly fashion. In considering the extent and types of use zoning objectives, the following factors have been taken into consideration;

- i. The present development area and trends in development since 2000;
- ii. Current use zoning objectives as contained in the Portlaoise Town Plan 2000;
- iii. The amount of committed and uncommitted land within the existing development area;
- iv. The accessibility, availability and location of land for development
- v. The location and adequacy of existing social infrastructure (schools, community facilities etc);
- vi. The character of the Town with regard to the scale and pattern of development;
- vii. The need to promote proper planning and sustainable development in accordance with National, Regional and Local Policies;
- viii. Physical features and amenities of the Town;
- ix. The present and future situation regarding the provision of essential physical infrastructure – especially water, wastewater and roads;
- x. The presence of an important aquifer and the need to facilitate the orbital road system

The following land use zoning objectives have been established for Portlaoise in the following table

### **Table No 14: Land Use Zoning for Portlaoise**

USE	OBJECTIVE	PURPOSE
<p><b>Town Centre (Primary / Core Retail Area)</b></p>	<p>To protect and enhance the special physical and social character of the existing Town centre and to provide for and improve retailing and commercial activities.</p>	<p>The purpose of this zone is to protect and enhance the special character of Town and village centre and to provide for and improve retailing, residential, commercial, office, cultural, public facilities and other uses appropriate to the centre of a developing urban core.</p> <p>It will be an objective of the Council to encourage the use of buildings and backlands and especially the full use of upper floors, preferably for residential purposes. Warehousing and other industrial uses will not generally be permitted in the urban core of towns and villages.</p> <p>Proposals for new development in areas at risk of flooding as identified on the land use maps within this zone will be subject to the development management justification test as outlined in “The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines”2009.</p>
<p><b>Town Centre Secondary</b></p>	<p><b>To provide for and improve retailing and commercial activities.</b></p>	<p>The purpose of this zone is to provide for and improve retailing and commercial activities and acknowledge the existing/permitted retailing and commercial activity. Any specific development proposal must have due regard to the location of the site within the wider Town context, submit a retail impact assessment where applicable and be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.</p> <p>Proposals for new development in areas at risk of flooding as identified on the land use maps within this zone will be subject to the development management justification test as outlined in “The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines”2009.</p>
<p><b>Edge of Centre</b></p>	<p><b>To provide for commercial activities including retail warehousing in accordance with the adopted Retail Strategy and commercial development.</b></p>	<p>Retail Warehousing, defined as large stores specialising in the sale of bulky household goods such as carpets, furniture, electrical goods and bulky DIY items, which generally, cannot be located in the town centre due to their requirements for space and parking facilities. Retail warehousing will be permitted in principle, depending on its scale and nature, provided that such development does not detract from the town centre’s retailing function and provided that it is in accordance with the Council’s adopted Retail Strategy.</p> <p>Proposals for new development in areas at risk of flooding as identified on the land use maps within this zone will be subject to the development management justification test as outlined in “The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines”2009.</p>

USE	OBJECTIVE	PURPOSE
Residential 1	<i>To protect and enhance the amenity of developed residential communities</i>	<p>This zone is intended primarily for established housing development but may include a range of other uses particularly those that have the potential to improve the residential amenity of residential communities such as schools, crèches, small shops, doctors surgeries, playing fields etc.</p> <p>It is an objective on land zoned for residential 1 to protect the established residential amenity and enhance with associated open space, community uses and where an acceptable standard of amenity can be maintained, a limited range of other uses that support the overall residential function of the area.</p> <p>Within this zoning category the improved quality of existing residential areas will be the Council's priority.</p> <p>In established residential areas in areas at risk of flooding as identified on the land use maps, where the replacement or the reconstruction of an existing dwelling is considered appropriate for wider planning reasons the planning authority should require that Development management justification test is carried out in accordance with the "The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines"2009;</p> <p>There will be no increase in the number of residential units or households</p> <p>There will be no adverse impact on the function of the floodplain , watercourse or conveyancing routes;</p> <p>Residual risk is addressed and reduced where possible, for example through relocation of buildings, and /or flood resilience /resistance measures applied to the site and buildings.</p>

USE	OBJECTIVE	PURPOSE
Residential 2	<i>To provide for new residential development, residential services and community facilities within the Plan period 2011-2017</i>	<p>This zone is intended primarily for housing development but may include a range of other uses particularly those that have the potential to foster the development of new residential communities such as schools, crèches, small shops, doctors surgeries, playing fields etc.</p> <p>It is an objective, on land zoned for residential 2 to promote development mainly for housing, associated open space, community uses and where an acceptable standard of amenity can be maintained, a limited range of other uses that support the overall residential function of the area.</p> <p>Within this zoning category the improved quality of residential areas and the servicing of orderly development will be the Council’s priority. New housing and infill developments should be of sensitive design, which are complimentary to their surroundings. No piecemeal development can take place unless it does not conflict with the possible future development of the reserved development areas of the town. Adequate undeveloped lands have been zoned in the Plan for residential use to meet the requirements for both public and private house building over the Plan period</p>
Strategic Reserve	<i>To provide lands for future development in line with national and regional targets over the next Plan period 2018-2024</i>	<p>Regarding lands included in the Strategic Reserve land bank, it is important to highlight that the inclusion of such lands will <b>not</b> in any way infer a prior commitment on the part of Laois County Council regarding their future zoning during the review of the subsequent development plan for the plan period 2018-2024. Such a decision will be considered within the framework of national and regional population targets applicable at that time and the proper planning and sustainable development of the County.</p> <p>In areas at risk of flooding as identified on the land use maps, where the development is considered appropriate for wider planning reasons the planning authority should require that Development Management Justification test is carried out in accordance with “The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines 2009”.</p> <p>There will be no increase in the number of residential units or households. There will be no adverse impact on the function of the floodplain, watercourse or conveyancing routes; Residual risk is addressed and reduced where possible, for example through relocation of buildings, and/or flood resilience/resistance measures applied to the site and buildings.</p>
Community & Educational & Institutional	<i>To provide for and improve local neighbourhood, community, ecclesiastical, recreational and educational facilities</i>	<p>This zoning of lands provides for local civic, religious, community, educational and other facilities ancillary to neighbourhood uses and services.</p> <p>Proposals for new development in areas at risk of flooding as identified on the land use maps within this zone will be subject to the development management justification test as outlined in “The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines”2009.</p>

USE	OBJECTIVE	PURPOSE
<b>Tourism</b>	<i>To provide for and improve tourist amenities in the County</i>	The areas included in this zoning objective are intended to meet with the needs of the tourist in the County. Uses such as accommodation of all types and ancillary services such as food and beverage establishments will be encouraged within the use zone.
<b>Open Space and Amenity</b>	<i>To preserve, provide for and improve active and passive recreational public and private open space</i>	The areas included in this zoning objective cover both private and public open space and are dispersed throughout urban centres of every size. The Council will not normally permit development that would result in a loss of open space.
<b>Industrial &amp; Warehousing</b>	<i>To provide for and improve industrial and warehousing development</i>	<p>This zoning provides for industrial and warehousing uses. Other uses, ancillary or similar to industry and warehousing will be considered on the merits of each Planning application and may be acceptable in this zone. Where employment is a high generator of traffic, the location of new employment at appropriate scale, density, type and location will be encouraged to reduce the demand for travel. The layout of new employment sites will have to have regard for alternative sustainable modes of transport. Site layout should emphasize the necessary connections to the wider local and strategic public transport, walking and cycling networks. Residential or Retail uses (including retail warehousing) will not be acceptable in this zone.</p> <p>Where any Industrial/Warehousing land adjoins other land uses, Laois County Council will require that a buffer zone is provided for and landscaped accordingly in accordance with the Development Control Standards chapter of this Plan.</p> <p>To provide for industrial development, in particular for heavy industry associated with environmental emissions, including noise and odour and with intensive or hazardous processing and also provide for light industry, technology related office development and general office development that exceed 400 square metres.</p> <p>In areas at risk of flooding as identified on the land use maps, where the development is considered appropriate for wider planning reasons the planning authority should require that Development Management Justification test is carried out in accordance with “The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines 2009”.</p> <p>There will be no increase in the number of residential units or households. There will be no adverse impact on the function of the floodplain, watercourse or conveyancing routes; Residual risk is addressed and reduced where possible, for example through relocation of buildings, and/or flood resilience/resistance measures applied to the site and buildings.</p>

USE	OBJECTIVE	PURPOSE
<b>General Business</b>	<b>To provide for and improve commercial activities.</b>	<p>The purpose of this zone is to provide for commercial activities and acknowledge the existing/permitted retailing. Any specific development proposal must have due regard to the location of the site within the wider Town context and be in accordance with the proper Planning and sustainable development of the area.</p> <p>Proposals for new development in areas at risk of flooding as identified on the land use maps within this zone will be subject to the development management justification test as outlined in “The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines”2009.</p>
<b>Neighbourhood Centres</b>	to serve the needs of new/existing residential areas.	<p>This zoning provides for the development of a new/existing neighbourhood centre to serve the needs of new/existing residential areas. A mix of retail, community and recreational development will be sought in this zone. Only limited residential development will be considered in new developments sufficient to ensure the satisfactory working of the neighbourhood centre.</p> <p>Neighbourhood Centres are intended to serve the immediate needs of the local working and residential population and complement, rather than compete with the established town centre.</p> <p>Six Neighbourhood Centres are shown in the Portlaoise Local Area Plan. The purpose of these Neighbourhood Centres is to serve the local community through the provision of retail facilities and other services. Ideally these should be within walking distance of the area they are intended to serve. The retail element of these local centres will be controlled so as not to negatively impact on the existing town centre. These controls will usually take the form of setting a maximum retail floor area for the shop units to be provided in these neighbourhood centres. The largest size of a new convenience store shall be restricted to no more than 300 sq.ms in a Neighbourhood Centre.</p>

USE	OBJECTIVE	PURPOSE
Enterprise and Employment	<i>To provide for Enterprise and Employment Activities.</i>	<p>The purpose of this zone is to provide for activities which will generate employment and encourage enterprise. This zoning provision at the Eastern section of the town provides for a balance of enterprise sites in the town. This site will act as an opportunity site for enterprise. Business Park type development will be encouraged in this location.</p> <p><b>The Enterprise and Employment land zoning incorporates the Togher area to the South West of Portlaoise. It is an objective in this area to develop a flagship Togher <i>National Enterprise</i> Park which has the potential to be a major boost to the economy of Portlaoise and to contribute to the growth of the County and the Region as a whole and by realising the objectives of the NSS and the MRPG.</b></p> <p><b>It is the policy of the Council to ensure that there is adequate land available to facilitate opportunities for employment creation, and the council will accommodate commercial and enterprise uses that are incapable of being situated in a town centre location, provided that such development does not detract from the town centre’s commercial function. Warehousing, commercial, enterprise and ancillary services should be provided in high quality landscaped campus style environments, incorporating a range of amenities.</b></p> <p><b>The uses in this zone are likely to generate a considerable amount of traffic by both employees and service traffic. Sites should therefore have good vehicular and public transport access. The implementation of mobility management plans will provide important means of managing accessibility to these sites.</b></p> <p>Proposals for new development in areas at risk of flooding as identified on the land use maps within this zone will be subject to the development management justification test as outlined in “The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines”2009.</p>

<b>USE</b>	<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	<b>PURPOSE</b>
<b>Transport and Utilities</b>	To provide for the needs of all transport users and other utility providers.	Car parks and commercial development associated with the provision of public transport services are considered appropriate in this zoning. This zoning also provides for and preserves land in the ownership of the Council or other bodies charged with the provision of services such as electricity, telecommunications, water, wastewater etc. to the town. The Planning Guidelines allow for consideration of the development of essential infrastructure such as primary transport and utilities distribution (including electricity generation) within flood zones as identified provided that it cannot be located elsewhere. Reconstruction or replacement and minor extensions or alterations to such infrastructure will not be required to satisfy the justification test. However and appropriate level of flood risk assessment should be carried out in accordance with “The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines”2009.

**Zoning Matrices**

Uses other than the primary use for which an area is zoned may be permitted provided they are not in conflict with the primary use-zoning objective. The Zoning Matrix illustrates the acceptability or unacceptability of various uses for each of the zoning objectives. The land use zoning matrix is intended to provide guidance to potential developers. It is not intended to supplant the normal planning process. An indication that a proposal would be ‘permitted in principle’ from the matrix should not be taken to imply a granting of permission, or indeed that a planning application may be necessarily successful. Individual applications are a matter for the Planning Authority to decide and the final decision rests with them, taking into consideration the merits of individual cases and circumstances that may be relevant at a specific time or at a specific location. The matrix relates to land use only and important factors such as density, building height, design standards, traffic generation, etc., are also relevant in establishing whether or not a development proposal would be acceptable in a particular location.

<b>Y= Will Normally be Acceptable</b>	<b>A use, which will normally be acceptable, is one, which the Local Authority accepts in principle in the relevant zone. However, it is still subject to the normal planning process including policies and objectives outlined in the Plan.</b>
<b>O= Are Open for Consideration</b>	A use, which is open for consideration, means that the use is generally acceptable except where indicated otherwise and where specific considerations associated with a given proposal (i.e. scale) would be unacceptable, or where the development would be contrary to the objective for a given area. Not a Material Contravention.
<b>N= Will Not Normally be Acceptable</b>	Development, which is classified as not normally being acceptable in a particular zone, is one, which will not be entertained by the Local Authority except in exceptional circumstances. This may be due to its perceived effect on existing and permitted uses, its incompatibility with the policies and objectives contained in this Plan or the fact that it may be inconsistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. The expansion of established and approved uses not conforming to land use zone objectives will be considered on their merits.

**Table 15: General Zoning Matrix \*Specific Zoning Objectives**

Land Use

	TC Primary	TC Secondary	Edge of centre	Enter & Employ	General Bus	Neigh Centre	Residential	Residential 2	Tourism	Com/ed/instit	Open Space	Industrial	Transport/Utilit
Apartment	Y	Y	O	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	O	N	N	N
Car Park	Y	Y	O	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
Animal Housing	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	O
Cafe	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	O	O	Y	O	N	O	N
Caravan Camping	N	N	N	N	N	N	O			O	N	N	O
Cemetery	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	O	Y	Y	N	N	O
Cinema, Dancehall, Disco	O	O	O	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Community Hall	O	O	O	O	O	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N
Craft Industry	Y	Y	Y	Y	O	O	O	Y	Y	O	N	Y	N
Crèche/ Playschool	Y	Y	O	O	O	Y	Y	O	Y	O	N	O	N
Cultural Uses/ Library	Y	Y	Y	O	O	Y	O	Y	Y	O	N	N	O
Dwelling	N	N	O	N	N	N	Y	O	Y	N	N	N	N
Funeral Home	O	O	O	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	O	N	N	N
Garages, Panel Beating, Car Repairs	N	N	N	O	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
Garden Centre	O	O	O	O	O	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Guest House/Hostel/Hotel	Y	Y	O	O	O	N	O	N	N	O	N	N	N
Halting Site	N	N	N	N	N	N	O	O	Y	O	N	N	N
Health Centre	Y	Y	O	O	O	Y	O	O	N	O	N	N	N
Heavy Commercial	N	N	N	O	N	N	N	O	N	N	N	Y	N
Vehicle Parks													
Hot Food Takeaway	O	O	O	N	N	O	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Industry	N	N	N	O	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
Industry (Light)	O	O	O	Y	O	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
Medical and Related consultants	Y	Y	O	O	O	O	O	N	N	O	N	N	N
Motor Sales	O	Y	Y	Y	O	N	N	O	N	N	N	N	N
Nursing Home/Sheltered Housing	N	N	O	N	N	N	O	N	N	O	N	O	N
Offices < 100 sqm	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	O	O	O	N	O	N	Y	N
Offices > 100 sqm	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	O	N	O	N	O	N	O	N
Park Playground	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	O	Y	N	N	Y	Y	O	N
Petrol Station	Y	Y	Y	O	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	O	N
Place of Worship	Y	Y	N	N	N	O	O	N	N	Y	N	N	N
Playing Fields	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	O	O	O	Y	N	N
Pub	Y	Y	Y	N	O	O	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
Recreational Building (Commercial)	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	N	Y	O	O	N	N
Recreational Building (Community)	Y	Y	Y	O	O	Y	Y	O	Y	Y	O	N	O
Restaurant	Y	Y	Y	O	O	Y	O	Y	Y	O	N	O	N
Retail Warehouse	Y	O	Y	O	Y	N	N	O	O	N	N	N	N
School/Educational Facilities	Y	Y	Y	N	N	O	O	N	N	O	N	N	N
Scrap Yard	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	O	N	N	N	O	N
Retail < 100sqm (Comparison)	Y	Y	O	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Retail > 100sqm	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	O	N	N	N	N

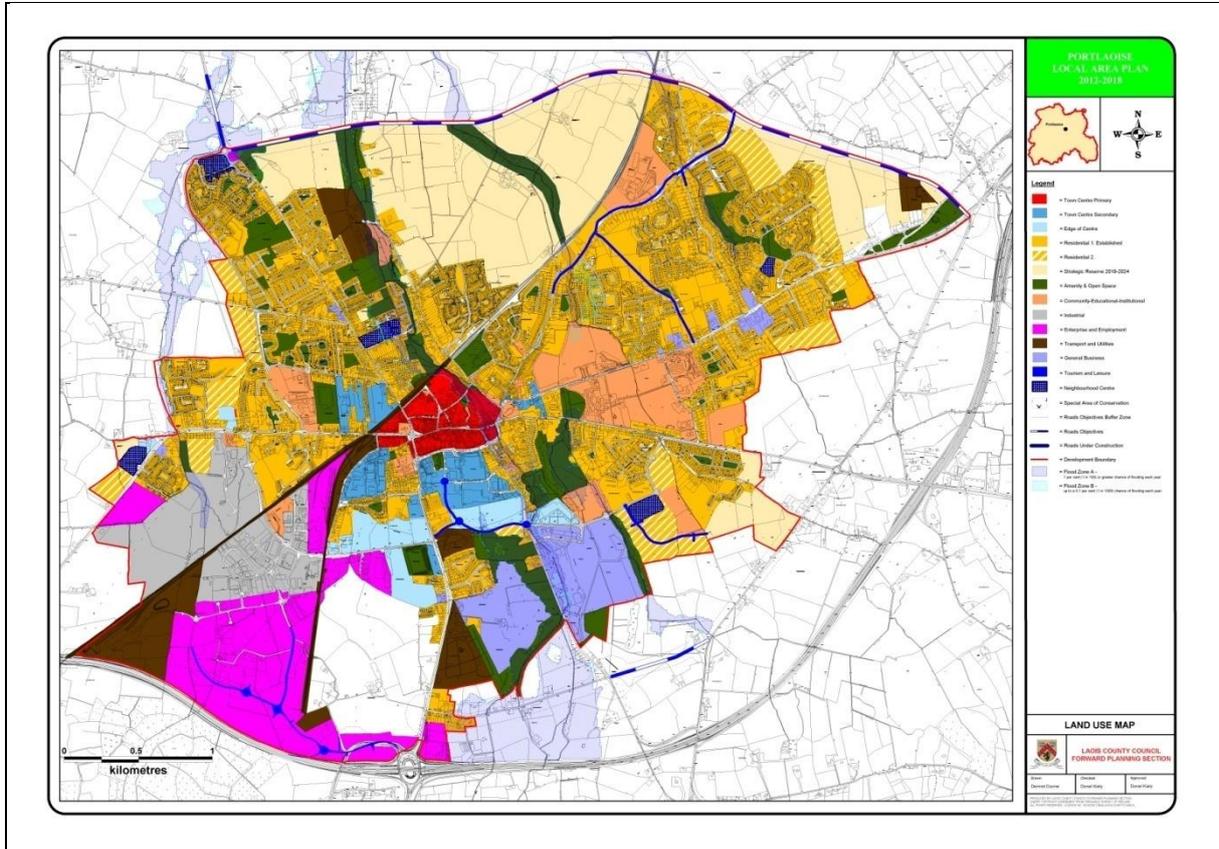
(Comparison)													
Retail < 100 sqm (Convenience)	Y	Y	O	O	Y	Y	O	N	N	N	N	N	N
Retail > 100 sqm (Convenience)	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	O	O	N	N	N	N
Sport/Leisure Complex	Y	Y	Y	Y	O	O	O	N	N	O	N	N	N
Utility structures	Y	Y	Y	Y	O	O	O	O	Y	O	N	Y	N
Warehouse (Wholesale)	N	O	O	Y	O	N	N	O	O	N	N	Y	N
Workshops	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
								N	N				

- Y Normally permitted
- N Not Acceptable – Material Contravention
- O Considered under certain circumstance (not a material contravention)

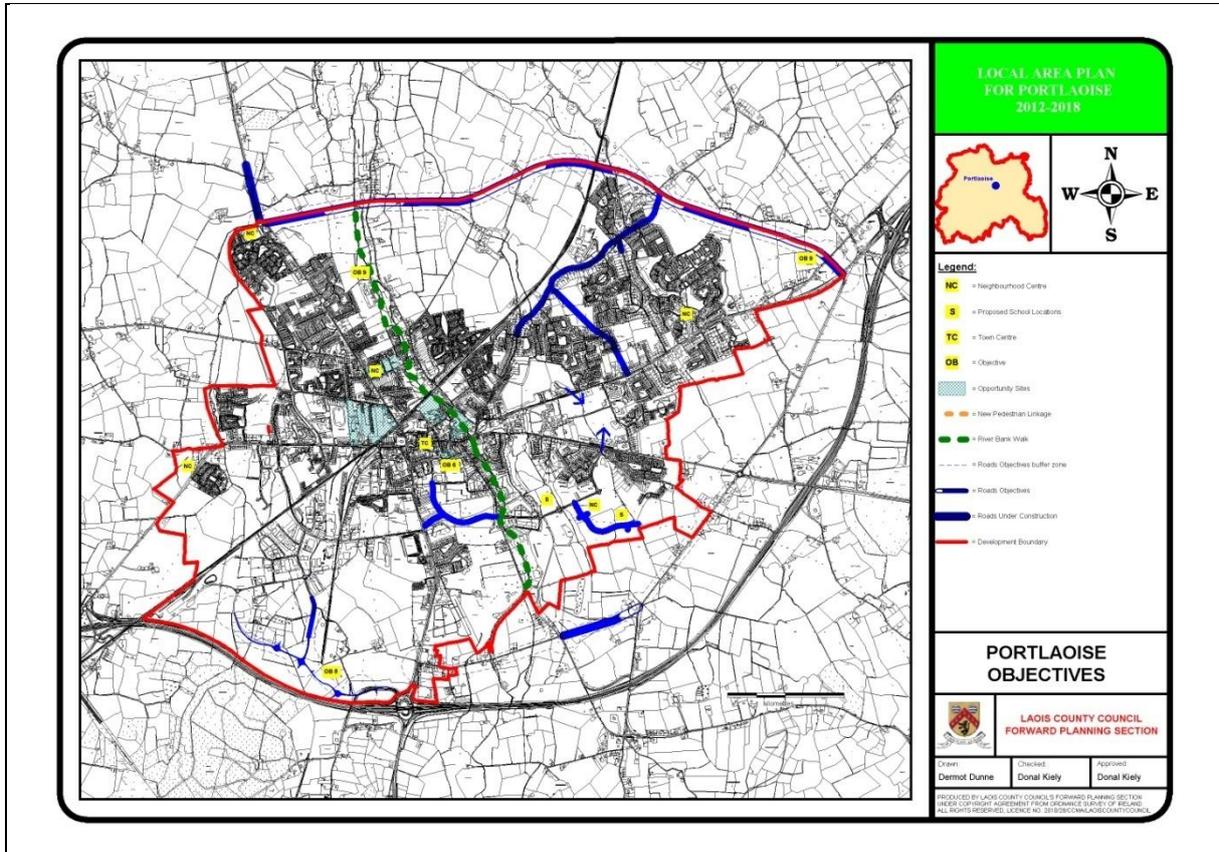
*It is intended that the land-use zoning matrix will facilitate and afford sufficient flexibility to develop the land for a range of uses.*

TC Primary –	Town Centre Primary
TC Secondary -	Town Centre Secondary
Edge of centre -	Edge of centre
Enter & Employ –	Enterprise and Employment
General Bus –	General Business
Neigh Centre –	Neighbourhood Centre
Res. 1 -	Residential 1
Res. 2 –	Residential 2
Comm/Ed/Instit –	Community Educational, Institutional
GB –	General Business
Open Space –	Open Space/amenity
Industry –	Industry
Transport & Util -	Transport & Utilities

**Map 6: Land-use Zoning Map for Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2012-2018**



**Map 7: Objectives Map for Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2012-2018**



## Appendix 1: Specific Objectives

The following is a list of specific objectives for the development of Portlaoise over the period 2012-2018.

Objectives relevant to particular areas of the Plan are shown on the Objectives Map.

- OB1:** Lands are to be identified and reserved for the **future educational needs** in the town. Such needs to include primary, secondary and third level education levels.
- OB2:** Lands are to be identified and reserved for a **future neighbourhood centre** within this area.
- OB3:** A town centre strategy is to be developed that will allow for the future growth and continued use of the town centre as the primary retail and social focus of the town and County Laois in general.
- OB4:** Telecommunication and electricity network cables etc. should be under grounded, except where this is not technically possible in the Plan area.
- OB5:** A site is to be identified for the provision of a **public transport interchange facility** for the town. Lands have been reserved for a Park and Ride facility in the Togher area.
- OB6:** Existing bus and taxi facilities will be improved on James Fintan Lalor Avenue and new facilities will be provided in Togher. Improved bus interchange facilities will be provided here so as to encourage modal shift from private to public transport.
- OB8:** New roads will be provided to allow for the continued development of the town in an orderly fashion as follows and will incorporate SUDS<sup>3</sup> in the Design and construction:
- a) Portlaoise Northern Orbital Route
  - b) Portlaoise Western Orbital Route
  - c) Western Circular
  - d) Southern Orbital Route
  - e) Southern Circular
  - f) Eastern Circular
  - g) Upgrade of the Borris Road
  - h) Upgrade of the Ridge Road
  - i) N80 Northern Link
  - j) M7 Eastbound off ramp serving the National Enterprise Park
  - k) Provision of roundabouts on Mountmellick Road, Dublin Road
  - l) Provision and enhancement of parking facilities in the Town centre as indicated on Objectives Map No 9.1
  - m) Secure the upgrading of Town/urban roads as part of comprehensive redevelopment plans
  - n) To reserve and develop access points as indicated on the Objectives Map No 9.1. Locations off the orbital roads are diagrammatical and can change.
- OB9:** Development will only be permitted where Water and Sewage Systems are available and adequate and will be upgraded and provided where necessary subject to finance being available.
- OB10:** Additional and improved open space will be provided throughout the Plan Area. This will allow a combination of passive and active recreational uses.

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<sup>3</sup> Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems

- OB11:** Suitable employment opportunities will be encouraged to locate and expand in the Plan area. It is an objective of this plan that residents of Portlaoise can find suitable employment within the Plan Area/ County.
- OB12:** New housing developments to be designed and completed to best practice standards.
- OB13:** New housing developments should consist of a mix of housing types, such as terraces, semi and detached houses. This is to cater for the needs of people who have different housing needs.
- OB14:** The Council will continue to work with the Tidy Towns Group, Portlaoise Chamber of Commerce and other business/ community groups for the enhancement and beautification of the town and specific areas.
- OB15:** The development of a riverside walk along the Triogue will be progressed during the course of this plan.
- OB16:** The Council will continue to assist and promote the Governments policy on decentralisation.
- OB17:** Proposals for a County Museum will be developed, resulting in the opening of such a museum over the plan period. Its location, function and exhibits will be identified.
- OB18:** Development of a 'plaza' type development at Lyster Square and the opportunity this area possesses to create a distinctive urban space within the town centre.