



LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL
Comhairle Chontae Laoise

LAOIS COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN
2017-2023

VOLUME 1: Written Statement

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Forward Planning Department,
Laois County Council*

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

1.0 Introduction

This section sets out the background to the Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023 review with regard to the legal requirements as set out in the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended and how the plan can be used. This Plan was prepared in accordance with the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended and replaces the Laois County Development Plan 2011-2017.

The main purpose of the plan is to set out a framework for the sustainable spatial and physical development of the County Laois while considering the conservation and protection of the built and natural environment. It also aims to carefully consider all the needs of society, its individuals and groups. Key to this is ensuring that equal opportunities are promoted under all the various themes of the plan.

The Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023 sets out a clear vision for County Laois which is as follows:

“County Laois will be a cohesive and sustainable community of people enjoying distinct but interrelated urban and rural environments, where the natural environment is protected, cultural and built heritage is safeguarded, where opportunities for existing residents and future generations to live, work, visit and enjoy safely and as equals, without compromising the environmental integrity of our county”.

In order to achieve this, the County Development Plan has three main objectives:

- To provide a framework for acceptable uses within the county, defining acceptable forms of development and where they should be directed;
- To provide a detailed basis for the promotion and management of development;
- To implement National and Regional development policy provisions at a county level.

1.1 Review Process and Statutory Context

Under the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended each planning authority is obliged to prepare a development plan for its functional area every six years, the review of this should commence four years after its adoption. Accordingly, the review process of the 2011-2017 Laois County Development Plan began in October 2015 when extensive notification of the review process was given and notice was published and forwarded to the relevant bodies.

1.1.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment [SEA]

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a formal systematic evaluation of the likely significant effects of a proposed plan or programme on the environment. It is carried out in parallel to the preparation of the County Development Plan in accordance with the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (SI No. 436 of 2004). The main environmental issues which are considered during this process are as follows:

- Biodiversity (flora and fauna);
- Landscape (geology);
- Agriculture forestry and soils;
- Population;
- Water quality;
- Air quality;
- Waste management;

- Material and cultural assets; and
- Climate.

The evaluation of the likely environmental consequences of alternative strategies for the accommodation of the future development of County Laois is also part of the SEA Process.

1.1.2. Appropriate Assessment (AA)

An Appropriate Assessment is an assessment of the potential effects of a proposed plan on its own or in combination with other plans or projects on one or more Natura 2000 sites (these are Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for birds, Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for habitats and species). The findings of the assessment must be taken into account by the competent authority namely Laois County Council, in reaching its decision to adopt the County Development Plan 2017-2023.

1.1.3 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)

In accordance with the *Planning System and Flood Risk Management: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DEHLG, 2009)*, the purpose of the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) is “to provide a broad (area wide) assessment of all types of flood risk to inform strategic land use planning decisions. SFRA’s enable the local authority to undertake the sequential approach, including the justification test, allocate appropriate sites for development and identify how flood risk can be reduced as part of the development plan process”.

The context of flood risk in Laois will be considered with specific reference to people, property, infrastructure and the environment at risk of flooding. This will be examined in the context of a range of sources of flooding including fluvial, pluvial, groundwater, sewer and artificial reservoirs and canals. In accordance with the *Planning System and Flood Risk Management: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DEHLG, 2009)*, a two stage assessment of flood risk was undertaken for settlements zoned for development within the County Development Plan 2017-2023.

1.1.4 Consultation

Prior to the preparation of this Plan, notification of the review of the plan process was issued to all statutory prescribed bodies, local community and voluntary groups through the Public Participation Network (PPN), Planning and Economic Development Strategic Policy Committee (SPC), statutory undertakers and service providers, and the general public. The general public were consulted through a social media campaign, newspaper notices and public workshops. Four public workshops were carried out in October and November 2015 across the county in each of the Municipal Districts:

- Portlaoise Town
- Portlington
- Rathdowney
- Killeslin

Submissions were invited on the development of the county from all the interested persons, bodies and organisations.

Following this preliminary consultation phase the Chief Executive’s Report on the submissions received was presented to the elected members in January 2016. This report summarised the issues raised and outlined the Chief Executive’s recommendation on changes to policy in the new plan.

Following consideration of the Chief Executive’s report the elected members had 10 weeks to issue directions regarding the preparation of the new Draft County Development Plan 2017-2023. In issuing directions, elected members were restricted to considering the proper planning and sustainable development of the county. After this period the Draft Plan was prepared.

1.1.5 How to Use the Plan

The format, layout and content of the Plan have been guided by the *Development Plans: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DoEHLG, 2007)*. Every effort has been made to co-ordinate and cross reference sections in order to provide a comprehensive and easy to read guide for the public, community groups and developers on particular types of development.

1.1.6 Structure of the Plan

The Plan consists of a written statement, accompanying maps and includes policies, strategies and objectives for the county at large and for specific settlements. The Plan pertains to the administrative area of County Laois and is presented in two sections.

Volume 1 contains the written statement which is set out as follows:

Section 1	Sets the context for the development plan
Section 2	Introduces the vision for the county and the Core Strategy to be put in place to achieve this vision
Section 3	Housing Strategy
Section 4	Social infrastructure, recreation and amenities
Section 5	Economic development
Section 6	Infrastructure Strategy
Section 7	Heritage Strategy
Section 8	General location and pattern of development and the specific development management requirements for new developments

All sections should be read in conjunction with the Development Management Standards contained in Section 8.

The following Appendices are attached to Volume 1:

Appendix 1:	Record of Protected Structures,
Appendix 2:	Architectural Conservation Areas,
Appendix 3:	Housing Strategy 2017-2023,
Appendix 4:	Retail Strategy 2017-2023,
Appendix 5:	Wind Energy Strategy 2017-2023,
Appendix 6:	Landscape Character Assessment 2017-2023,
Appendix 7:	Rural Design Guidance 2017-2023,
Appendix 8:	List of Native Trees.

Volume 2 Contains the Settlement Plans for County Laois which have been informed by the Settlement Strategy in Volume 1. These plans illustrate the land use zoning for the towns and villages. Table 2 outlines the areas which are covered by Settlement Plans.

Volume 3 Includes the following: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)–SEA Statement Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA).

1.1.7 Local Government Reform

There have been significant changes in the local government sector since the adoption of the last development plan for Laois. These include the introduction of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 and the transfer of the water function from the local authorities to Irish Water and the restructuring of the regional authorities. Many of the changes have current and future implications for this Plan. The changes which have occurred include:

- The dissolving of Portlaoise and Mountmellick Town Councils;
- The provision of 3 no. municipal districts;
- The establishment of the Local Community and Development Committee;
- The planning and oversight of local and community development programmes;
- The increased role of the local authorities in the remit of economic development and enterprise support with the foundation of the Local Enterprise Office (LEO) and the preparation of Local Economic and Community Plans [LECPs];
- Strategic planning for investment in water services will be provided by the Water Services Strategic Plan prepared by Irish Water, which will be translated into capital investment plans. These plans will be shaped by wider policy requirements including spatial planning and the contents of the National Spatial Strategy, Regional Planning Guidelines and County Development Plans.

1.2 Planning Context

In preparing the Plan the Council must have regard to relevant national and regional plans, policies, strategies, best-practice guidelines and codes of practice which relate to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. It must have regard to the development plans of adjoining authorities. The Plan must also take account of the mandatory requirements which are to be included in development plans as set out in the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended.

The Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) requires that a **Development Plan shall**, so far as is practicable, **be consistent with National and Regional Plans, Policies and Strategies** which relate to proper planning and development and is also required to have regard to Guidelines by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government.

The national plans, policies and guidelines, which were considered in the preparation of this Plan included:

The National Development Plan 2007-2013 aims for balanced regional development and has identified Laois as having a strategic role in the Midlands Region.

The **National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020** 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 as having strong national Development potential as a major transport hub and distribution centre.

Sustainable Development: A Strategy for Ireland 1997 provides a framework for the achievement of sustainability at a local level.

Building Ireland's Smart Economy-A Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal 2008, sets out an ambitious set of actions to reorganise the economy, to secure the prosperity of current and future generations. It sets out a framework to address the current economic challenges and to build a 'Smart Economy' with a thriving enterprise sector, high-quality employment, secure energy supplies, an attractive environment, and first-class infrastructure.

Smarter Travel-A Sustainable Transport Future: A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020 sets out actions on how we can reverse current unsustainable transport and travel patterns and reduce the health and environmental impacts of current trends and improve our quality of life.

National Cycle Policy Framework 2009-2020 is a framework policy designed to encourage a cycling culture.

National Broadband Plan 2016 sets a framework for developing broadband provision throughout Ireland.

National Climate Change Strategy 2007-2012, sets a framework for limiting Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions to 13% above 1990 levels by the first commitment period 2008-2012 as part of our contribution to the overall EU target.

Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 provides for five yearly National Mitigation Plans to specify the measures necessary to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

National Energy Efficiency Action Plan 2009-2020 identifies policies and measures with potential to contribute towards national targets of 20% energy efficiency savings by 2020.

Grid Development Strategy 2007-2025 sets out a strategy for the development of a high capacity Grid Network.

National Heritage Plan 2002 sets out a clear and coherent strategy and framework for protection and enhancement of Ireland's heritage.

National Biodiversity Plan 2011-2016 aims to secure the conservation, including where possible the enhancement and sustainable use of biological diversity in Ireland and to contribute to conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity globally.

Department of Agriculture 2020 Strategy addresses economic development potential of agri-food, forestry, fishing and focuses on agricultural commodities, food and sustainability and innovation.

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy 2013 promotes social inclusion.

Government Policy on Architecture 2009-2015 addresses the contribution good design makes to the quality of life of individuals and society and sets out policies and actions for achieving sustainable architecture.

Section 28 Guidelines. There are a number of guidelines across a wide variety of subject matters [including access, architecture, flooding, retailing] issued by the Minister under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended. Laois County Council in its capacity as Planning Authority shall have regard to these guidelines in the performance of its functions.

At a regional level the main strategies to be considered in the preparation of the Plan are:

- Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022
- Eastern-Midlands Regional Waste Management Plan 2015-2021
- Shannon International River Basin Management Plan 2009-2015
- South Eastern River Basin Management Plan 2009-2015
- Midlands Action Plan for Jobs 2015

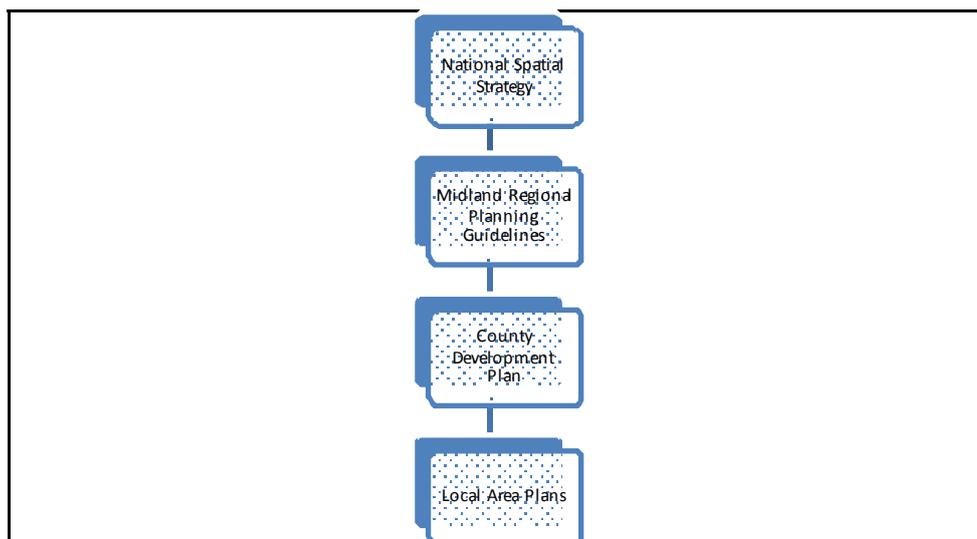
Section 28 Department Planning Guidelines

Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines	Relevant Section within Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023
Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland – Guidance for Planning Authorities (2009)	Separate Natura Impact Report prepared by CAAS Ltd
Architectural Heritage Protection - Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2011	Section 7 - Heritage
Childcare Facilities Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001)	Section 4 - Social, Community and Recreational Strategy
Sustainable Urban Housing - Design Standards for New Apartments (2007)	Section 8 - General Location and Pattern of Development
Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2015)	Section 8 - General Location and Pattern of Development
Development Plans Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2007)	All sections
Provision of Schools and the Planning System (2008)	Section 4 - Social, Community and Recreational Strategy
Guidelines for Planning Authorities Retail Planning (2012)	Section 5 - Economic Development and Appendix 4 - Retail Strategy
Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012)	Section 6 - Infrastructure
Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Guidelines (2004)	Separate SEA Environmental Report prepared by CAAS Ltd
Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (2009)	Section 8 - General Location and Pattern of Development
The Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009)	Section 6 - Infrastructure
Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities – Design Guidelines (2007)	Section 8 - General Location and Pattern of Development

Wind Energy Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2006)	Appendix 5 - Wind Strategy
Architectural Heritage Protection for Places of Worship Guidelines for Planning Authorities	Section 7 - Heritage
Telecommunications and Support Structures – Guidelines for Planning Authorities July 1996	Section 6 - Infrastructure
Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2005)	Section 2 – Development Plan Strategy (Core Strategy)
Development Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2007)	Section 8 – General Location and Pattern of Development
Quarries and Ancillary Activities Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2004)	Section 5 - Economic Development

1.2.1 National and Regional Context

This Plan should be read in the hierarchical context of legislation and plans that exist at international, national and regional level (see following diagram).



National Spatial Strategy (NSS) 2002-2020

The NSS was introduced in 2002 and sets out the spatial planning framework for the country. The strategy consists of a twenty-year planning framework designed to achieve a better balance of social, economic, and physical development and population growth between regions in Ireland, and to assist in the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP). Its focus is on people and places, and on building communities. Through closer matching of where people live and where they work, different parts of Ireland will be able to sustain a better quality of life, a strong competitive economic position, and an environment of the highest quality. The NSS has established a platform upon which policies can be put in place to ensure that more balanced development is achieved, within a well-planned spatial structure of attractive, competitive and innovative places.

In 2010 the document *Implementing the National Spatial Strategy: 2010 Update and Outlook-Harnessing Potential, Delivering Competitiveness, Achieving Sustainability* was published by the Department of the Environment.

This document reaffirmed the Government's commitment to the NSS but included a statement of new priorities and objectives, taking account of the experience since 2002 and new environmental, budgetary and economic challenges. Many of the measures proposed make up current planning legislation and are relevant to this Plan. These include:

- Much closer alignment and integration between strategic planning decisions and settlement policy with the prioritisation of significant capital investment;
- Support for the Government's Smart Economy Policy;
- Better harnessing of the potential of rural areas and creation of new employment, particularly in the sustainable use of natural resources in agriculture, forestry, fisheries, renewable energy and tourism sectors, but also in other areas such as knowledge based or creative sectors which are not location critical;
- The introduction of Core Strategies thus increasing the strategic role and relevance of RPGs;
- Support for the Government's Smarter Travel Policy.

A new National Planning Framework (NPF) will be produced during the lifetime of this Plan as a successor to the National Spatial Strategy [NSS]. This is likely to have implications for Laois, including any future designations, levels and types of development anticipated/permitted and levels of government funding that will be made available.

National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-2013

The NDP sets out a Regional Development Strategy which supports the NSS, and is the key financing mechanism for the promotion of balanced regional development, characterised by the principles of sustainable economic growth, greater social inclusion and balanced regional development. It aligns with the objectives of the NSS and prioritises capital investment to deliver more balanced social, economic, and physical development between the regions. One of its general goals is to integrate regional development within the framework of gateway cities and hub towns to achieve economic growth in the regions and provide for major investment in the rural economy.

Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022

The Midland Regional Planning Guidelines (MRPGs) were adopted in July 2010 and document the regional spatial planning context for the region, which includes the counties of Longford, Laois, Westmeath and Offaly. National policy contained in the National Spatial Strategy (NSS), is translated to a regional level into the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines, which will guide policy making decisions at a local level through the development plans.

For the first time the MRPGs, in accordance with the NSS, introduce population targets for Laois which are also indicated in terms of future housing land requirements for the county. This coupled with the requirements of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010, ensures that development plans are now consistent with the Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs), whereas development plans were previously only required to have regard to the RPGs. The Core Strategy contained as part of this Plan is therefore central to ensuring such compliance with the RPGs.

1.2.2 MANDATORY REQUIREMENTS OF THE COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

1. Be consistent as far as possible with National Plans, Strategies and Policies which relate to proper planning and sustainable development
2. Have regard to the effects implementing the plan will have on adjoining local authorities
3. Set out the overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of County Laois
4. Contain a written statement and a plan or plans indicating the development objectives for County Laois
5. A range of objectives as follows –
 - a) The zoning of land for the use solely or primarily of particular areas for particular purposes (whether residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, recreational, as open space or otherwise, or a mixture of those uses), where and to such extent as the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, in the opinion of the planning authority, requires the uses to be indicated;
 - b) The provision or facilitation of the provision of infrastructure including—
 - (i). Transport, energy and communication facilities,

- (ii). Water supplies and waste water services (regard having been had to the water services strategic plan for the area made in accordance with the Water Services Act 2007),
 - (iii). Waste recovery and disposal facilities (regard having been had to the waste management plan for the area made in accordance with the Waste Management Act 1996), and
 - (iv). Any ancillary facilities or services;]
- c) The conservation and protection of the environment including, in particular, the archaeological and natural heritage and the conservation and protection of European sites and any other sites which may be prescribed for the purposes of this paragraph;
 - d) The encouragement, pursuant to Article 10 of the Habitats Directive, of the management of features of the landscape, such as traditional field boundaries, important for the ecological coherence of the Natura 2000 network and essential for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species;
 - e) The promotion of compliance with environmental standards and objectives established—
 - (i). For bodies of surface water, by the European Communities (Surface Waters) Regulations 2009;
 - (ii). For groundwater, by the European Communities (Groundwater) Regulations 2010;which standards and objectives are included in river basin management plans (within the meaning of Regulation 13 of the European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations 2003);
 - f) The integration of the planning and sustainable development of the area with the social, community and cultural requirements of the area and its population;
 - g) The preservation of the character of the landscape where, and to the extent that, in the opinion of the planning authority, the proper planning and sustainable development of the area requires it, including the preservation of views and prospects and the amenities of places and features of natural beauty or interest;
 - h) The protection of structures, or parts of structures, which are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest;
 - i) The preservation of the character of architectural conservation areas;
 - j) The development and renewal of areas, identified having regard to the core strategy, that are in need of regeneration, in order to prevent—
 - (i). Adverse effects on existing amenities in such areas, in particular as a result of the ruinous or neglected condition of any land,
 - (ii). Urban blight and decay,
 - (iii). Anti-social behaviour, or
 - (iv). A shortage of habitable houses or of land suitable for residential use or a mixture of residential and other uses;]
 - k) The provision of accommodation for travellers, and the use of particular areas for that purpose;
 - l) The preservation, improvement and extension of amenities and recreational amenities;
 - m) The control, having regard to the provisions of the Major Accidents Directive and any regulations, under any enactment, giving effect to that Directive, of—
 - (i). Siting of new establishments,
 - (ii). Modification of existing establishments, and
 - (iii). Development in the vicinity of such establishments,for the purposes of reducing the risk, or limiting the consequences, of a major accident;
 - n) The provision, or facilitation of the provision, of services for the community including, in particular, schools, crèches and other education and childcare facilities;
 - o) The protection of the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Gaeltacht including the promotion of Irish as the community language, where there is a Gaeltacht area in the area of the development plan;
 - p) The promotion of sustainable settlement and transportation strategies in urban and rural areas including the promotion of measures to—
 - (i). Reduce energy demand in response to the likelihood of increases in energy and other costs due to long-term decline in non-renewable resources,

- (ii). Reduce anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, and
- (iii). Address the necessity of adaptation to climate change;
In particular, having regard to location, layout and design of new development;
- q) The preservation of public rights of way which give access to seashore, mountain, lakeshore, riverbank or other place of natural beauty or recreational utility, which public rights of way shall be identified both by marking them on at least one of the maps forming part of the development plan and by indicating their location on a list appended to the development plan, and
- r) Landscape, in accordance with relevant policies or objectives for the time being of the Government or any Minister of the Government relating to providing a framework for identification, assessment, protection, management and planning of landscapes and developed having regard to the European Landscape Convention at Florence on 20 October 2000.

1.3 County Profile

Laois is an inland county in the south midlands of Ireland covering an area of 171,990 hectares which equates to 2.4% of the national landmass. Occupying a strategic position near the centre of the country, County Laois is land locked and shares borders with five adjoining counties; Carlow, Kildare, Kilkenny, Offaly and Tipperary. Administratively, since January 1st 2015 it is now part of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly and in terms of travel patterns, County Laois [the northern and eastern half of the county especially] is increasingly under the influence of the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, has twelve constituent local authorities split into three Strategic Planning Areas as follows:

Table No 1: Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly SPA

Dublin

Fingal, Dublin City, South Dublin, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown

Eastern	Louth, Kildare, Meath, Wicklow
Midlands	Longford, Laois, Offaly, Westmeath

County Laois is only c. 70 kms from the Dublin metropolitan area. This relative proximity to the capital has had a major effect on both the nature and extent of development and the associated traffic movements, particularly in the northern and eastern parts of the county. The travel time between Laois and Dublin continues to decrease as a consequence of improved road and rail infrastructure between the two places.

Figure 1: Configuration of the Regional Assemblies in Ireland



1.3.1 National Context

In physical terms, the landmass of County Laois consists of a central plain containing most of the productive agricultural land, surrounded by a number of upland areas including the Slieve Bloom Mountains in the northwest, Killeslin Plateau in the south east and Cullahill Mountain in the south. Though not as extensive as in counties Offaly and Kildare, there are significant cutaway peatlands in the county mainly situated between Portlaoise, Mountlath and Abbeyleix.

Figure 2 Laois in the national Context



Approximately 0.01% of County Laois is covered by water. The principal rivers are the Barrow, Nore and Erkina which flow in a northwest-southeast trajectory and there are minor man-made lakes at Ballyfin, Grantstown and Heywood. The Grand Canal passes through the north east of the county and links to the wider River Barrow navigation system. All of

these watercourses offer much potential by way of natural and cultural heritage, tourism, leisure and recreational pursuits.

1.3.2 Population and Demographic Profile

County Laois was the fastest growing county in Ireland between 2006 and 2011. Strong population growth is a longstanding trend in the county. Over the last 20 years, its population growth rate has been higher than the wider midlands region or the State. Further significant growth is anticipated.

Table 2: County Laois Population Change 2002-2011

Location	Persons 2002	Persons 2006	Persons 2011	% change 06-11
County Laois	58,774	67,059	80,559	20%
Principal Town				
Portlaoise	12,127	14,613	20,145	38%
Key Service Town				
Portarlinton	2,756	4,395	5,847	33%
Service Towns				
Mountmellick	3,361	4,069	4,735	16%
Graigucullen	1,199	2,520	3,966	57%
Abbeyleix	1,383	1,568	1,827	16%
Mountrath	1,331	1,435	1,661	16%
Stradbally	1,178	1,056	1,154	9%
Local Service Towns				
Rathdowney	1,111	1,212	1,208	-0.3%
Durrow	717	811	843	4%
Town, Villages and Open Countryside				
Remainder of the County	33,611	35,380	39,176	11%

Source: CSO

Portlaoise with 25% of the population continues to maintain its position of primacy in the settlement hierarchy of the County, growing by 38% since Census 2006. Other strong performers during the 2006-2011 intercensal period were Portarlinton [plus 33%] and Graigucullen [plus 57%].

By comparison, the rates of increase in other settlements are more modest; Abbeyleix, Mountmellick and Mountrath each recording increases of 16%, Stradbally 9% and Durrow 4% while Rathdowney experienced a marginal decline of 0.3%.

With the exception of the Stradbally data what is increasingly apparent in general terms at least, is a continued major divergence between the north and east of the county [that part of the county most linked to the Greater Dublin Area] where there the fastest growth rates are occurring and the west and south of the county which is experiencing far more subdued growth if at all.

While Laois is still a predominantly rural county, the aggregate urban population is steadily increasing in line with regional and national trends. According to Census 2002, 33% of the county population lived in urban areas. By Census 2006, this had risen to 40% and rose again to 47% in Census 2011.

In the context of a declining agricultural base and net rural outward migration, the trend towards increased urbanisation is likely to continue notwithstanding the downturn in the economy post 2008.

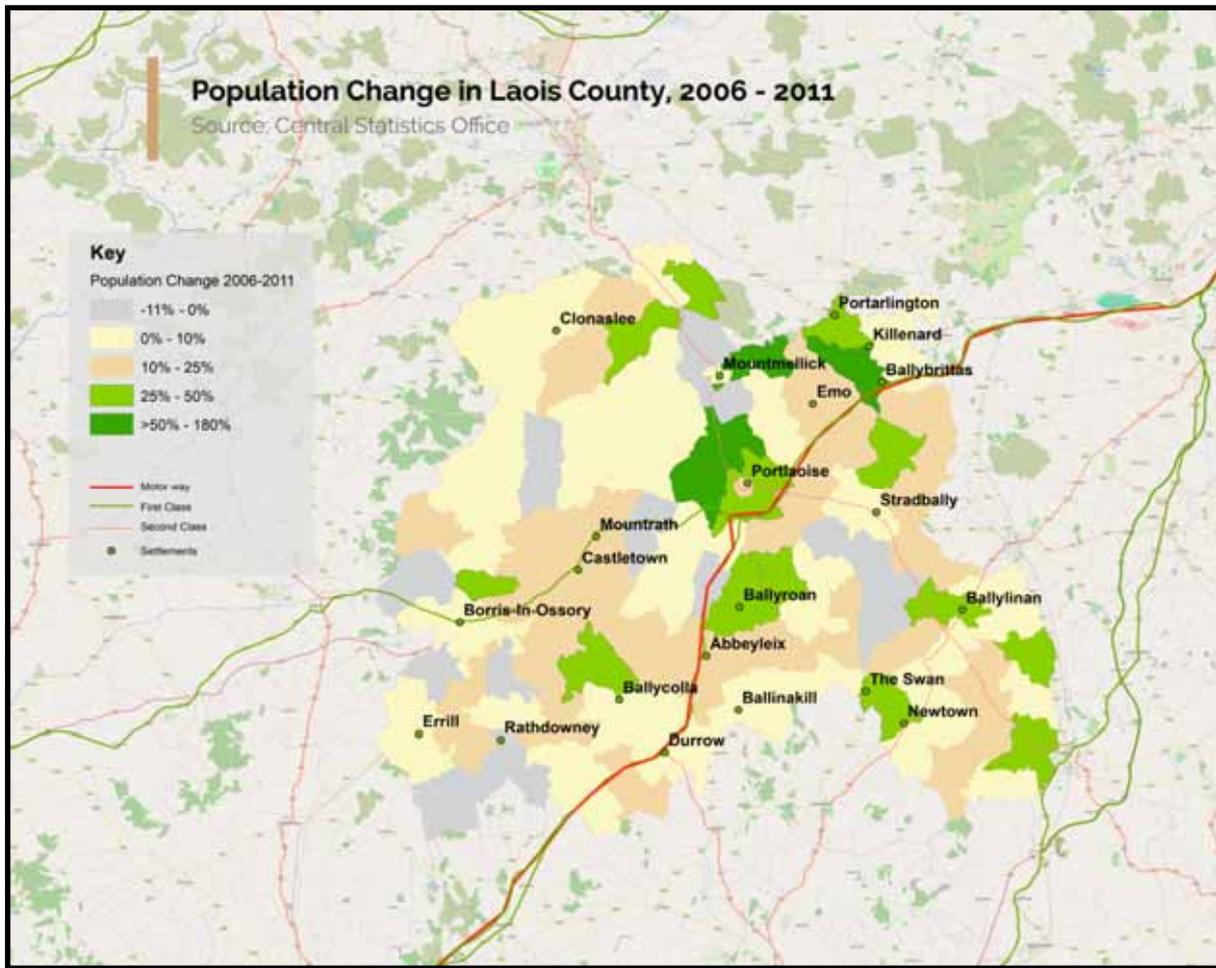
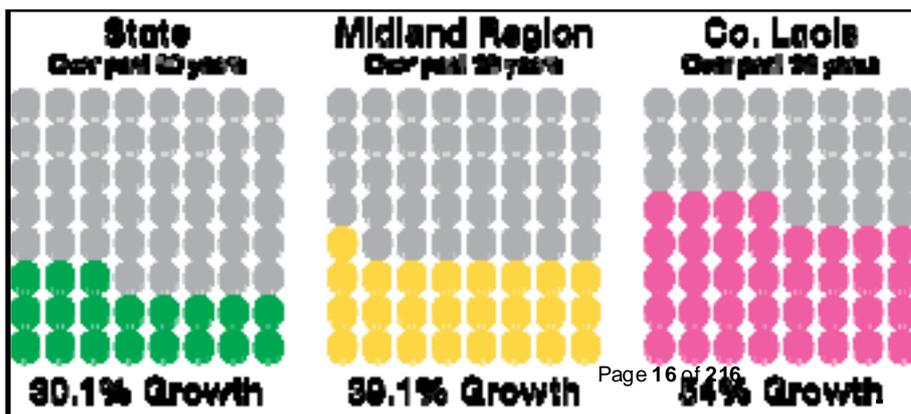


Figure 3: Population change 2006-2011





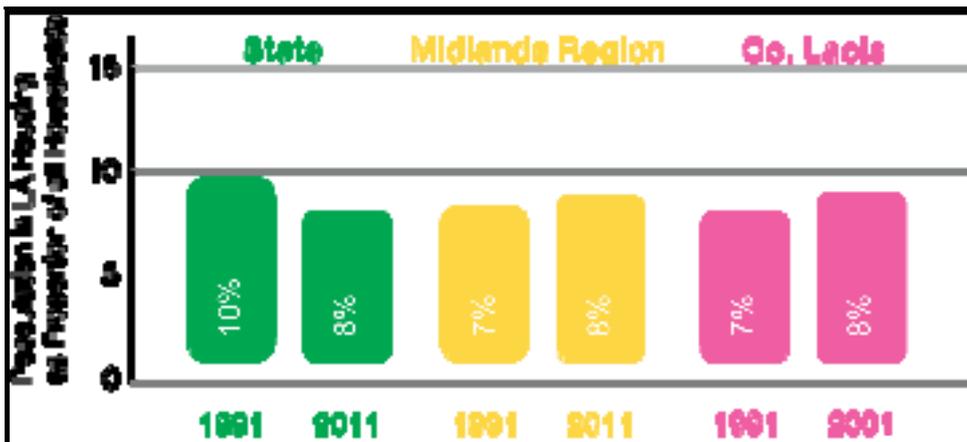
County Laois has the highest population of 0-18 year olds, as a proportion of its overall population. Nearly 39% of the Laois population is aged under 25, this compares to 36% of the Midlands population and 34% of the State's population.



11.7% of the population is either very disadvantaged or disadvantaged. County Laois has a balanced rural/urban population. It is becoming more urbanised but rural life and the rural economy remain important. Average farm sizes and farm incomes in County Laois are higher than the Midlands or State average.

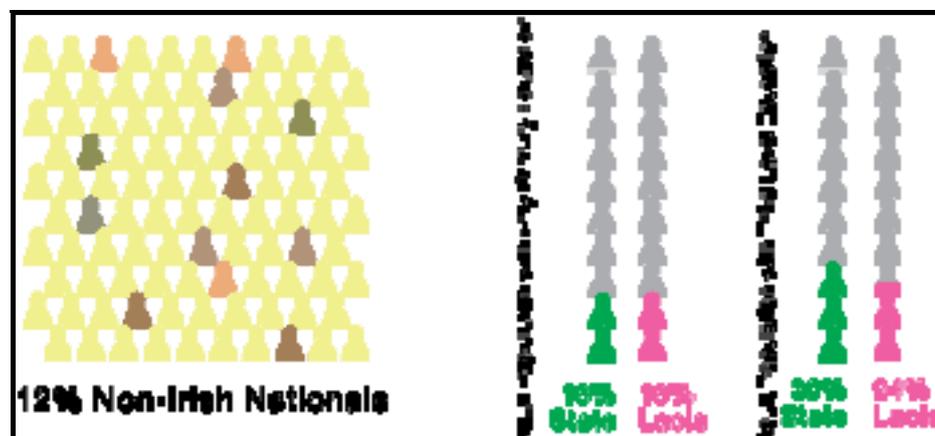


County Laois has the same percentage of Local Authority Housing as the State or Midlands Region.



1.3.2.1 Ethnicity

County Laois is becoming more diverse in terms of the nationality and ethnicity of its residents.



1.3.3 Education

The 2011 Census showed that, of those aged 15 years and over whose full-time education had ceased, 16% were educated to at most primary level only, a further 59% attained second level, while 24% were educated to third level. Among those who had completed their full-time education in April 2011, younger people were significantly better educated than their older counterparts, illustrating the on-going gains in educational attainment.

The educational attainment of Laois residents is likely influenced by the profile of available job opportunities. For employment reasons, many Laois-born residents may choose to live elsewhere after completing their higher education. Educational attainment is greater in the eastern part of Laois that experiences a high level of out-of-county commuting and lower in western areas that are associated with in-county working.

A high number of people living in the eastern half of the county have third-level qualifications compared to the western half. A higher number of people living in the eastern half commute out-of-county to work in adjoining counties and the GDA.

The following table represents the number of national and secondary schools within the county.

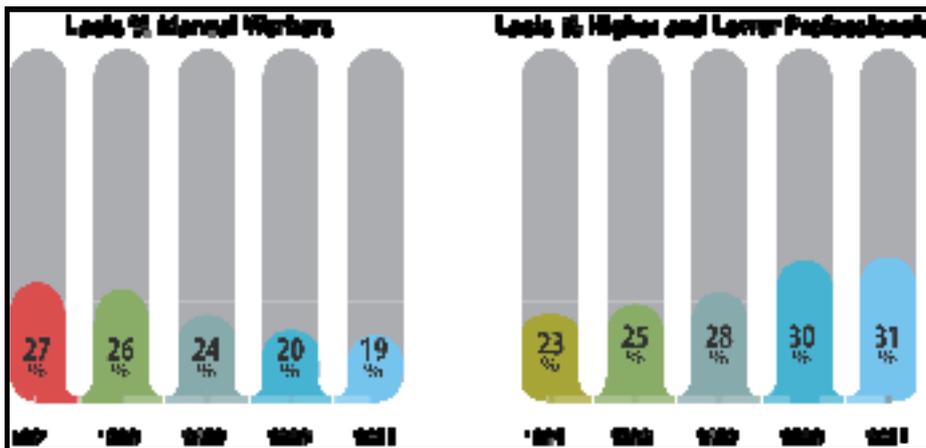
Table 3: Number of National and Secondary Level Schools

	National Schools	Secondary Schools	Total number
County Laois 2014/15	68	8	76

Source: Based on most recent statistics from Department of Education.

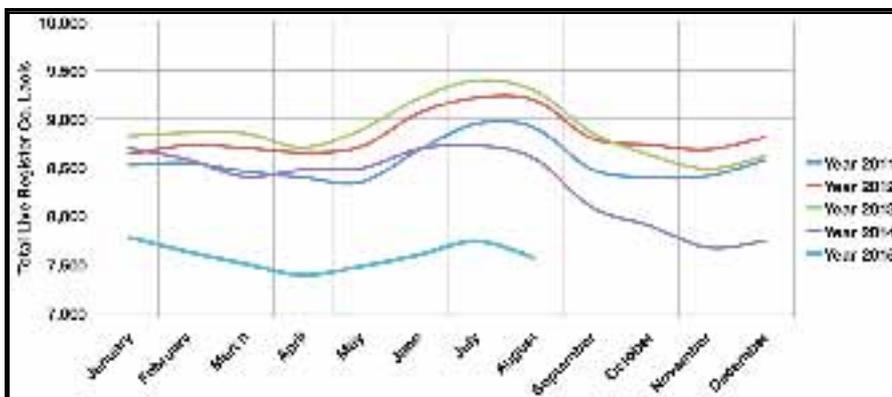
1.3.4 Socio-Economic Context and Employment Profile

In 2011, County Laois had a high percentage of manual workers compared to the State (17.5%) but was comparable to the Midlands Region (19%). The county had a lower rate of higher and lower professional classes compared with the State (35%), and a higher rate than the Midlands Region (31%).



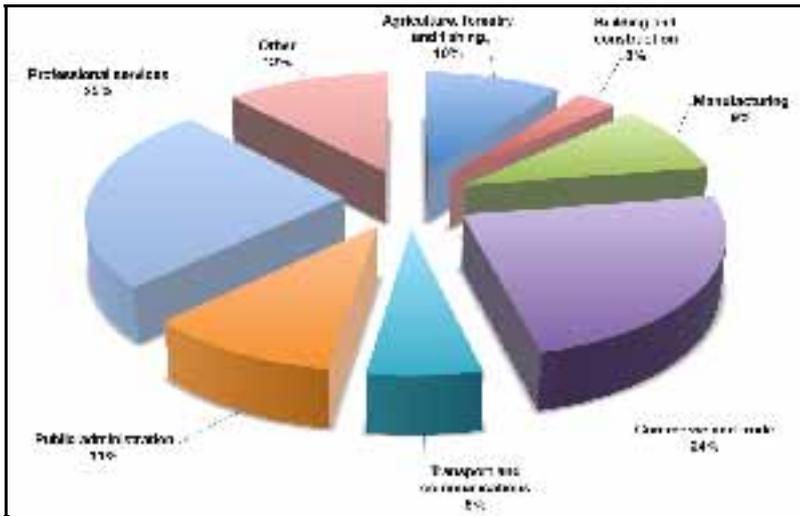
Live Register

In 2011, the unemployment rates in individual Electoral Divisions (EDs) reached levels well above those prevailing county-wide, and were highest in Dangans (39.6% male, 28.6% female), followed by Doonane (40.6% male, 23.9% female) and Portlaoise (Maryborough) Urban (35.6% male, 25.4% female). Recovery in employment figures has been slower in County Laois than the State average. One of the main reasons for this is the relatively high proportion of the workforce formerly employed in construction, a sector which has declined massively post 2008. In County Laois only 32% of people of working age with a disability are at work, compared to 61% of the same cohort of people without a disability. Unemployed people with disabilities are not on the live register and so cannot avail of some labour activation programmes.



Workers by Industry

County Laois has a growing services sector, especially in the retail and wholesale area. The public sector is an important employer in Laois. Employment levels related to manufacturing are low in Laois relative to the Midlands or the State. Manufacturing employment is falling in Laois in line with wider employment trends in this sector, while agriculture still remains an important sector in the county. The designation of Portlaoise as an national transport hub in national and regional policy remains crucial from the point of view of attracting significant inward investment and job opportunities to the county.



Commuting

In 2011, 66% of commuters in County Laois were car drivers, compared with 57% in the State. Only 1% of commuters in County Laois used bicycles, compared with 3% in the State. County Laois has the highest rate of outbound commuters in the Midlands, with Dublin and Kildare being the most popular destination.



1.3.5 Development Trends

The policy interventions of the previous County Development Plans and the designation of towns and villages across the County, has led to a more focussed concentration of applications of larger developments in areas where infrastructure and services exist, or have the potential to, in the medium to long-term.

This has been particularly noticeable in terms of directing industrial/ commercial and larger-scale residential development to the larger settlements of Portlaoise, Portllington, Mountmellick and Graiguecullen.

1.3.6 2-Year Review

In accordance with Section 15 [2] of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended, the Chief Executive of Laois County Council shall not more than two years after the making of the Plan, give a report to the members of the Local Authority on the progress achieved in securing the objectives of the Plan.

SECTION 2: DEVELOPMENT PLAN STRATEGY (CORE STRATEGY)

2.1. CORE STRATEGY

2.1.1 Introduction

The Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 amends Section 10 of the Principal Act by introducing the requirement of a *“core strategy that shall show that the development objectives in the development plan are consistent, as far as practicable, with national and regional development objectives set out in the National Spatial Strategy and regional planning guidelines”*.

The Core Strategy of this Development Plan provides relevant information to demonstrate consistency with both the NSS and MRPGs and sets out core aims that, in turn, define and shape the following:

- preferred growth locations,
- population distribution and
- land use zoning.

2.1.2 Strategic Aims

The purpose of the Plan is to enhance the quality of life for the current and future population of Laois and manage the county in the interests of the common good. This will be achieved by providing for good quality housing, economic opportunities, physical and social infrastructure while protecting our natural and cultural heritage and the environmental quality of the county in accordance with the strategy outlined below. The following are the aims of the Planning Authority in delivering the vision for the county during the period 2017-2023:

Aim 1: Provide for the growth of County Laois towards a target population of up to **89,790 by 2023**, this to be structured in a balanced manner between the Principal Town of Portlaoise (up to 25,382) and the county balance (up to 64,408), encompassing:

- [i] the consolidation of the Key Service Town of Portlaoise,
- [ii] the measured growth of the five Service Towns [Abbeyleix, Graiguecullen, Mountmellick, Mountrath and Stradbally], two Local Service Towns [Durrow, Rathdowney], and villages of population not exceeding 800 and
- [iii] the maintenance of viable rural communities in the hinterlands of these towns and villages;

Aim 2 Develop the full potential of each part of County Laois to contribute to the optimal performance of the county as a whole economically, socially, culturally and environmentally;

Aim 3 Build on the regional-level linkages between County Laois and other parts of the Eastern and Midlands Region and adjoining regions such as the South-East Region and Mid-West Region by supporting the implementation of regional spatial and economic strategies, such as the Regional Planning Guidelines, collaborating on support for critical enabling infrastructure, such as inter-regional road and rail linkages, and co-operating on areas of mutual planning interest;

Aim 4 Facilitate the future sustainable development of County Laois so as to optimise the benefits of its location in accordance with the **National Spatial Strategy (NSS)** and the **Midland Regional Planning Guidelines [MRPGs]** and other **Section 28 Guidelines** as published by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government;

Aim 5 Facilitate the provision of housing in a range of locations to meet the needs of the county's population, with particular emphasis on facilitating access to housing to suit different household and tenure needs in a sustainable manner and in appropriate location as outlined in the following chapters;

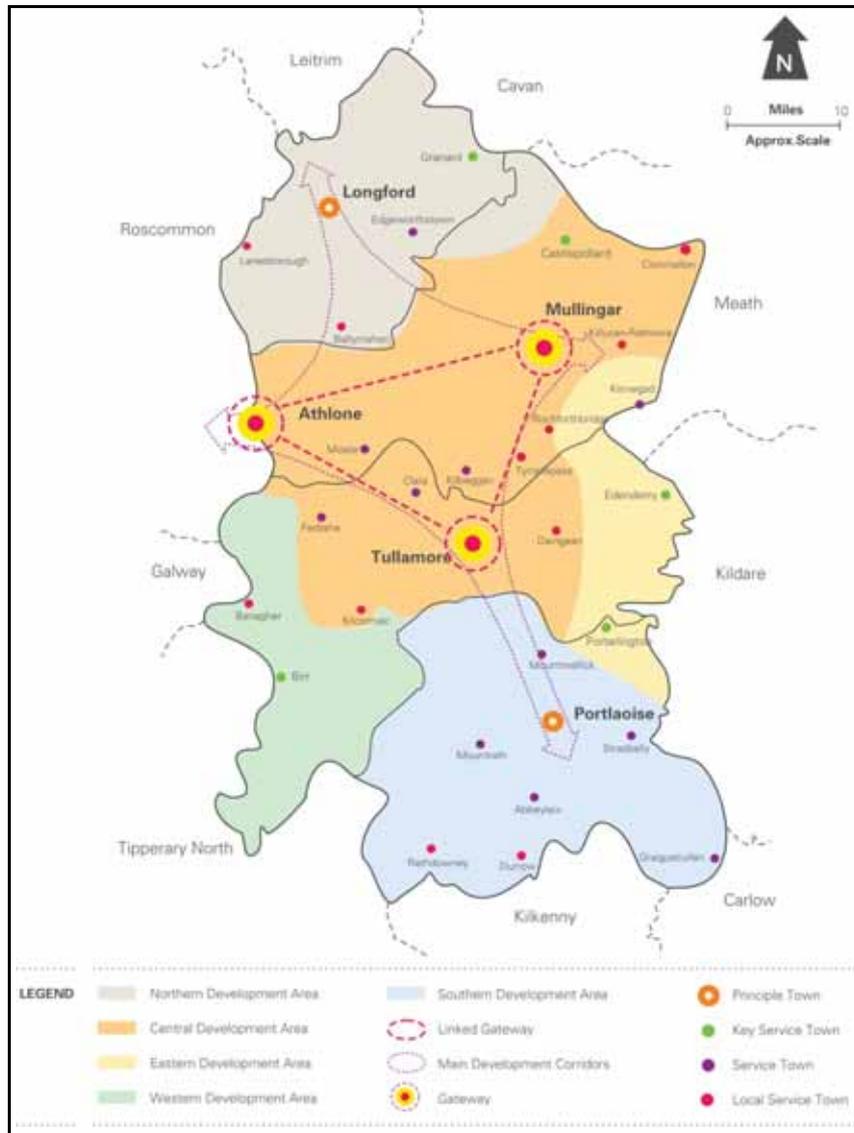
- Aim 6** Promote and encourage the development of critical mass in Portlaoise and enable more economic development opportunities and the provision of services in a cost effective manner;
- Aim 7** Target Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to appropriate zoned locations in the principal town of Portlaoise and the key service town of Portlinton and build on the economic strengths and tourism opportunities of County Laois in a balanced and sustainable manner focusing on the opportunities as outlined in the following sections;
- Aim 8** Facilitate the provision of and improvements to social and recreational infrastructure and ensure universal access to all to such facilities throughout the county for all its residents;
- Aim 9** Facilitate the economic, social and green sustainable development of the County through the provision of adequate transport infrastructure including walking and cycling infrastructure and initiatives and optimise the return of investment on infrastructure while preserving the natural and built heritage;
- Aim 10** Ensure a good quality of life and good health for the residents of Laois 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 waste and emissions and management and protection of our water quality and seek to achieve our obligations under the Water Framework Directive;
- Aim 11** 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;
- Aim 12** Support the development of key infrastructure such as telecommunications, electricity, gas to enable economic development;
- Aim 13** Ensure that development is promoted, supported or facilitated by the Laois County Development Plan, provides for climate change including for the increased risk of flooding and the promotion of renewable energy where possible.;

2.1.3. Core Strategy Policy Context

National and Regional Policy Context

The Midland Regional Planning guidelines (MRPG's) made in accordance with the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) define a regional development model that is based on a spatial hierarchy centred on a linked gateway of Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar as identified in the NSS and supported by the principal towns of Longford and **Portlaoise**.

Figure 4: County Laois in a regional context



2.1.4 Core Strategy Alignment with others Plans and Programmes

Local Economic Community Plan (LECP)

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 provides for a stronger clearer role for local government in economic and community development. Local government as the main driver for economic and community development was identified in the *Action Programme for Effective Local Government-Putting People First [DoECLG, 2012]*. This process is implemented in the actions adopted in the Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021 (LECP) for County Laois in March 2016. Oversight of the community and social infrastructure element lies with the Local Community and Development Committee (LCDC).

The LECP 2016 addresses a wide range of community issues, including:

- Educating skills and training;
- Developing infrastructure to address social exclusion, poverty, disadvantage;

- Reverse social and economic decline and realise the growth potential and sustainability of communities;
- Synergies with supports for children and young people;
- Enhancing the capacity of communities to improve their wellbeing;
- Enhancing support for local volunteering, engagement and active citizenship.

The policies and objectives of this section compliment the actions and objectives of the LECP in that it is intended to provide a land use framework that will underpin many of those objectives and actions.

Housing Strategy

Under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended, each planning authority is required to review and include a Housing Strategy within the development plan to cover the plan period. The Housing Strategy for Laois that also outlines the requirements for Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended is contained within Appendix 2 of this Plan. The policies and objectives of Section 3 of this Plan relate to the Housing Strategy.

Retail Strategy

The Laois County Retail Strategy is contained in Appendix 3 of this Plan and the relevant policy in this regard is contained in Section 4 *Economic Development* of this document. The Retail Strategy identifies a retail hierarchy for County Laois, in line with the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines whilst recognising the existing retail function of the settlements defined. It also estimates the amount of spare capacity available in the convenience, comparison and bulky goods sectors.

Local Area Plans

Local Area Plans are mandatory in certain circumstances as indicated in Section 19 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended which states that the mandatory population threshold for preparing local area plans (LAP'S) is 5,000 persons.

Portlaoise, Portarlinton and Mountmellick fall within the parameters of this requirement and so it is an objective of the Planning Authority that these towns have Local Area Plans. Graiguecullen (Carlow Environs) whilst falling beneath the population threshold for the requirement of the Act shall be the subject of a Local Area Plan owing to the shared nature of the urban area with Carlow local authorities. Local area plans for these four settlements were adopted in 2012 and run to 2018.

It is an objective of the Council:

- OBJ1** To undertake a review of the housing strategy subsequent to the adoption of the future Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy [RSES] by the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly.
- OBJ 2** To review the Portlaoise Local Area Plan (2012-2018) and Mountmellick (2012-2018) and the joint Local Area Plans for Portarlinton(2012-2018) and the Joint Spatial Plan for Greater Urban Area of Carlow / Graiguecullen (2012-2018) [in association with Offaly County Council and Carlow County Council respectively] during the period of the Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023. New residential development in the local area plan areas shall only proceed in an orderly and structured fashion and be in accordance with the overall core strategy as set out in the Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023.

Where appropriate the policies of the County Development Plan 2017-2023 will be developed in more detail at a local level through the preparation of Local Area Plans and Framework Plans, urban design strategies, masterplans and design briefs. Proposals are put forward in the Plan identifying some strategic opportunity areas of the county, which would benefit from such an approach. These areas are selected based on their need for regeneration, renewal or pressure for development.

2.1.5 Core Strategy Rationale

This section sets out the methodology used for the Core Strategy to ensure that the Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023 will be consistent [as is required] with National Spatial Strategy, the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines and Government guidelines.

- The Core Strategy assigns regional prescribed population targets as set out under the Regional Planning Guidelines building upon the objectives of the Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023;
- A target population for the year 2022 has been allocated to County Laois by the Midland Regional Authority through the Midlands Regional Guidelines 2010-2022 and the regional technical working group;
- Portlaoise is addressed under the Core Strategy as it is the principal town in the county settlement hierarchy;
- The core strategy identifies a population target of **89,790** by the year 2023 of which a target population of 25,382 is identified for the principal town of Portlaoise;
- The targeted population of County Laois is accommodated under the Core Strategy.

2.1.6 Laois Core Strategy Map

The Core Strategy Map (Figure 5) provides a visual representation of the settlement distribution throughout the county and identifies the settlement hierarchy in the context of transport and infrastructure available, including the county's national primary and secondary routes along with regional and local roads and the county's railway line.

The map provides a geographical illustration of how Laois is envisaged to develop over the Plan period in line with the availability and integration of services, transport, infrastructure and economic activity whilst also preserving its natural environment and amenities.

The Council envisages a county experiencing strong and resilient growth of different but complementary character in different areas. A cluster of larger settlements centred on Portlaoise in the northeast that will capitalise on a regionally significant confluence of major transportation, energy and water service supplies. There will also be a smaller one centred on Graiguecullen in the south east.

Rural areas will see the emergence, expansion and consolidation of a series of strong sectors of specialisations in tillage and dairying. The rivers and uplands will offer opportunities for intensification/diversification into a mixed economy based on dispersed rural settlement as well as lower intensity agriculture, forestry as well as recreation and some tourism.

Zone A comprises of Portlaoise/Portarlington/Mountmellick in the north/north east of the county and Graiguecullen Urban environs beside Carlow Town and it is envisaged that there will be Strong Growth in these towns during the Plan period. In this scenario these areas will act as nuclei for strong and sustained growth of both settlement and enterprise due to stability and coordination.

In the medium to long term, Portlaoise will continue to be strengthened having regard to the town's designation in the National Spatial Strategy and Regional Planning Guidelines as a Principal Town as well as a National Transport Node to which much future investment will be channelled.

The **Togher National Enterprise Park** consists of a 101 hectares [250 acres] land bank on the southern outskirts of Portlaoise with access from the Togher interchange on the M7. Some employment opportunities emerged during the last plan period with the opening of the National Traincare Depot. However, the potential to fully unlock this area as a driver for county and regional growth given its location in the immediate vicinity of road (M7/M8/N80) and rail corridors of national strategic importance and alignment with regional and national planning policy has yet to be fully realised. A Masterplan was prepared for this strategic area in 2009 and subsequently adopted as an amendment to the Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2006-2012 in April 2010.

It continues to be an objective within this area to support employment generation (including upskilling and training) to create more self-sustaining development for the population currently residing in the area and commuting to Dublin for employment.

It is also of strategic importance that the capacity and efficiency of existing motorway and rail links to Dublin are protected, to this end commercial and economic opportunities within this area will be channelled to the existing settlements of Portlaoise, Portarlinton, Mountmellick and Graiguecullen.

Zone B comprises of the M7 and M9 Strategic Transportation Corridor Environs and key development area that encompasses Vicarstown, Killenard Emo, Ballyfin as this is the natural hinterland for the main towns. Each of these areas have potential to add to the tourism economy of the county by way of providing quality accommodation and /or tourist experience such as the Barrow Blueway, Emo Court and Demesne and Ballyfin House.

A further area classified zone B exists in the immediate hinterland of Graiguecullen / Carlow town taking in the village of Killeslin which has seen much development over the last plan period. Diversification in the rural economy has started to occur in this area with the growth of artisan food producers and the ambition towards community led economic development.

Residential development will be controlled so as 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 a appropriately scaled urban development.

Orderly Transitions

These identified areas will provide orderly transitions between areas of intensifying urban and areas of rural development /natural amenity.

Zone C is made up of lowland mixed farmland and settlements with links to Strategic Transportation Corridors and key development areas. It is envisaged that there will be continued growth in the rural economy through specialist agriculture, diversification into complementary food production, rural tourism development opportunities. These stronger rural areas will prosper with intensifications in areas of specialist tillage – especially near major settlements and transportation corridors.

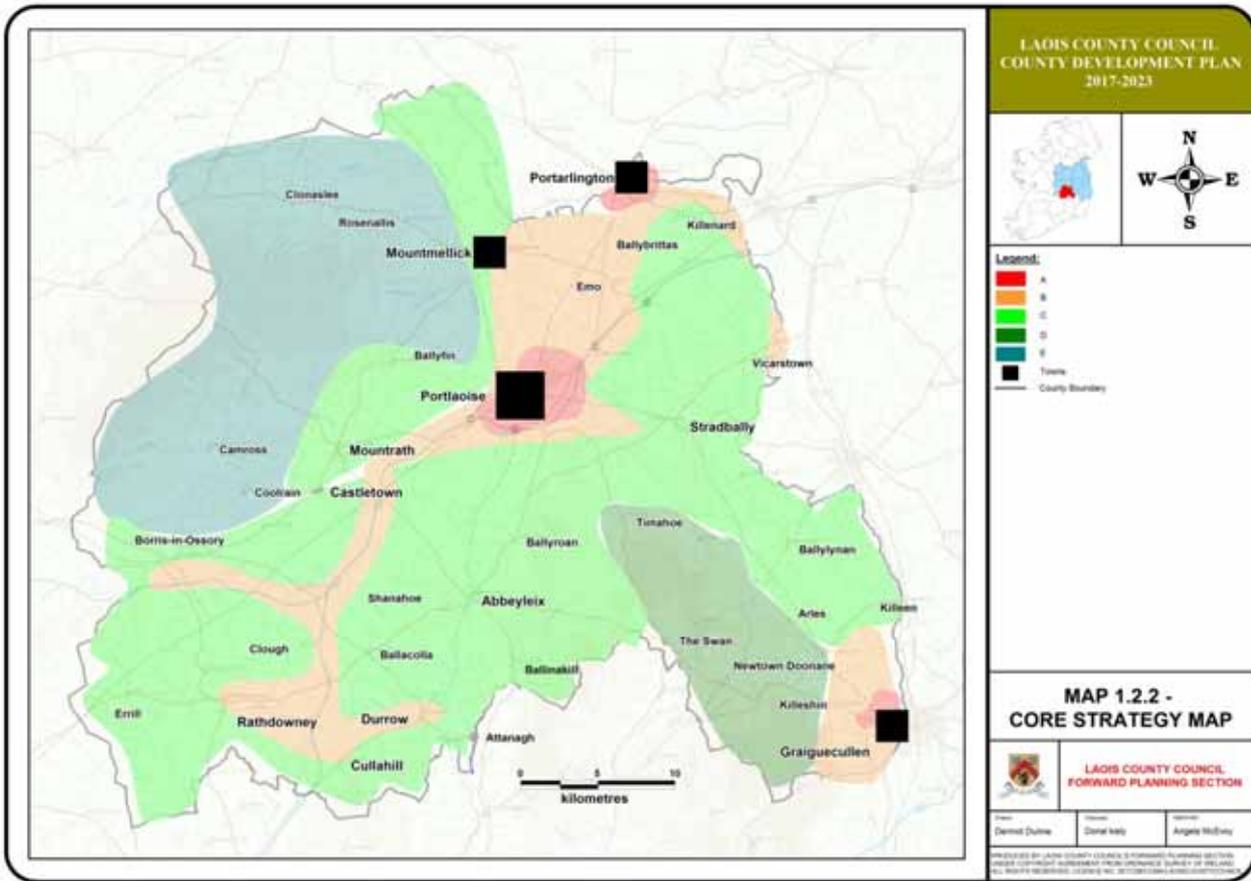
Zones D (Timahoe/Swan) and **Zone E** (Slieve Blooms) have very definite rural and natural amenity with mixed farming and forested uplands. This scenario will lead to low levels of change in this zone – apart from increased pressure due to the development of tourism pursuits based on the natural amenities of these zones – walking, cycling, boating.

Visitor attractions such as Abbeyleix Heritage House, Timahoe Round Tower and the Rock of Dunamase are indicated on the “**Irelands Ancient East**” Initiative to encourage the growth of the tourism product within this County. It is anticipated that related and complementary tourism could flourish in this zone subject to environmental and proper planning sustainable development standards.

The Slieve Bloom Mountains are one of the most important and attractive heritage assets in Laois. They contain the largest and most intact area of mountain blanket bog in the country. They feature an interesting complex of esker ridges of ecological importance, host rare birds such as the predatory hen harrier, peregrine, merlin and red grouse, are a biogenetic reserve of European importance, and a wetland of international importance. The Slieve Blooms are a distinctive element of the Laois landscape and contain the source of the River Barrow. Existing amenity areas, walking routes and car parks are in place and there are plans a re to create an off road cycling network and related facilities.

The development of a **Mountain Biking Trail** on Coillte lands through the Slieve Blooms has the potential for complementary and further tourism related development in the towns and villages that are located in the foothills of the Slieve Blooms.

Figure 5: Core Strategy Map



2.1.7 Regional Planning Guidelines Population Targets

In accordance with Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022, the Midlands Regional Authority (MRA) allocated population targets at a County, Gateway and Principle Town level. These are indicated in Table 4 here under for target year 2016.

Table 4: Midland Region Population Projections to Target Year 2016, as set by MRPGs 2016-2022

County	Gateway Towns	Principle Towns
Laois	75,931	Portlaoise-17,481
Longford	39,392	Longford-10,747
Offaly	82,114	Tullamore-20,207
Westmeath	99,863	Athlone-22,022
		Mullingar-27,357

2.2 POPULATION TARGETS 2017-2023

This strategy seeks to achieve balanced development within the county whilst supporting both rural and urban settlement in accordance with national and regional policy. The MRPGs set a 2016 population target of 75,931 people for County Laois and 17,481 for the Principle Town of Portlaoise. However, high levels of housing delivery and significant in-migration to the county has resulted in the 2016 target being exceeded in advance of the forecasted period. Census 2011 records the population of County Laois at 80,559 and that of Portlaoise at 20,145. A revised population target for 2016 of 83,656 people has subsequently been agreed with the Midland Regional Authority and this target provides the basis for housing modelling carried out in this strategy.

Census 2016

The preliminary Census 2016 returns released on Thursday 14th July 2016 have determined the population to be 84,732 people. This is 1,076 higher than what was projected under M2F1 Recent scenario; a 1.3% variance. The variance in this regard is *quite low* and within acceptable margins under the projection methodology. The variance appears to be due to a higher than anticipated net gain in inter-regional migrants. However, the data is not yet available to specify from where these new entrants came. One possibility is a slightly lower than expected loss towards the Dublin Region. It must also be clarified that the preliminary figures represent the de facto population. This equates to the total number of people recorded on Census night, including those visiting from elsewhere and tourists. Therefore, until the figures have been finalised by the CSO, it will not be possible to conclude a definitive increase in the resident population.

2.3 HOUSING LAND REQUIREMENT 2017-2023

In terms of population projections to the target year of 2023 for County Laois as a whole, the Principal Town of Portlaoise and the county balance [containing Service Towns, Local Service Towns, Key Service Town, Villages of population not exceeding 800 persons and Open Countryside], this Development Plan is consistent with the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines, albeit with some necessary adjustments to take account of the two year time differential between the two documents.

Similarly, for determining the housing land requirements which follow on from the population projections, the Plan mirrors the approach of the MRPGs.

The distribution of future population growth into the various settlements of County Laois is essentially based on each settlement's role and position in the overall spatial hierarchy. As recommended in the MRPGs, the pre-eminence of Portlaoise, with its innate strengths, particularly in the transport sphere, and enhanced links to the Gateway Towns is recognised.

A key objective of the Plan is to integrate and reconcile predicted requirements for residential land with actual provision on the ground having regard to, among other factors, the spatial distribution of development lands throughout the county and the need to support sustainable settlement patterns which in the longer term can be provided with essential physical and social infrastructure.

The Settlement Strategy for County Laois is influenced to a substantial degree by the nature and extent of the county's infrastructural provision across a series of headings including road and rail transport accessibility (for example, the M7/M8 motorway presents both major opportunities and challenges for the county), social capital (good progress in childcare, primary and second level education provision, third level outreach facilities), water supply and foul drainage provision.

The Settlement Strategy also has regard to considerations relating to the environment and heritage of County Laois, being informed by the SEA process and Appropriate Assessment [under the Habitats Directive] of the potential implications of development on Natura 2000 sites.

The **total projected population growth** for County Laois for the period 2011-2023 is 9,231, **from 80,559 to 89,790**. The starting point in any assessment of demand for housing over the Development Plan period 2017-2023 is projected

population growth for this period. In accordance with the M2F1¹ population projection scenario as set out in the Housing Strategy, the population of the county is projected to increase by 9,231 people between 2011-2023, which reflects a 11% increase over that period.

Census 2011 results indicate that Laois has a population to household ratio of 2.872. This ratio has been applied to each year of the forecasted period. By applying the relevant household size to projected population increases, it is possible to forecast required household numbers to 2023.

As summarised in Table 3.2 of the Housing Strategy 2017-2023 (See Appendix 3), the number of households in County Laois is expected to increase from 28,057 in 2011 to 31,272 in 2023, an increase of 3,215 houses, or the equivalent of a per annum average of 268 units. A total of 2,136 additional houses will be required within the life of the Plan, or the equivalent of a per annum average of 305 units.

Housing Permitted and Completed

Between 2004 and 2014 a total of 10,585 units were completed in County Laois. Table 4.1 of the Housing Strategy 2017-2023 (See Appendix 3) below compares predicted demand arising from the counties' previous Housing Strategy with actual completion figures, obtained from the DECLG. It illustrates a significant fall in housing completion rates in recent years, which fell from a peak of 2,244 in 2006, to 188 in 2013. The outstripping of predicted demand by actual supply between 2004 and 2008 mirrors the nationwide trend of accelerated housing output during this period. However, since that time supply has been significantly below demand with only 189 units completed in 2014.

Housing Targets

The revised population forecasts establish a housing target for Laois of 3,211 units by 2023 (from 2012), the equivalent of 267 units per annum. Using the 2012 figures as the baseline, a total of 2,134 units must be delivered over the intervening years to the end of the plan period in 2023.

Laois County Council has an obligation to ensure that sufficient zoned residential land is available throughout the lifetimes of the Development Plan and beyond to meet anticipated needs and allow for an element of choice in the market. The document *Development Plans: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2007, DECLG)* formalises this requirement, by stipulating that enough land should be made available to meet residential needs for the next 9 years.

Land Supply

County Laois has approximately 335.9 hectares [829.6 acres] of zoned land purely for residential development which has not yet been built out³. This consists of approximately 125.9 hectares [311 acres] in Portlaoise alone. Based on the applicable densities contained in the residential zonings (as contained in the Residential Land Availability Survey 2014), the existing zoned land is estimated to be capable of providing 5,162 units.

Translating this into population capacity, these residential lands could potentially cater for approximately 14,815 persons, based on an estimated average household size of 2.87⁴. As set out above, the revised housing target for Laois is **2,136 units** throughout the life of the plan. This Development Plan identifies a strategic housing land requirement for the Plan period 2017-2023 of **240 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:

- **78 hectares** for the principal town of Portlaoise;
- **162 hectares** for the rest of the county.

¹ Moderate natural growth, net positive international migration, recent inter – regional migration and standard mortality. F1 sees the total fertility rate decrease to 2.1 by 2026 and remain constant thereafter, “recent” sees the high pattern of the inter regional flows observed in the year to April 2011 applied up to 2031.

² Note: 2.87 represents the average household size using Census 2011 de facto population and total households. This was adopted in order to align the historic information with the projected data & period.

³ This excludes mixed use zonings within Portlaoise

⁴ The average household size as per Census of Population 2011 (assumed ratio between de facto population and total households).

The total of 235 hectares [580.4 acres] will accommodate the following population increases in the period up to 2023:

- For the Principal Town of Portlaoise, an increase of **5,237** persons
- For the remaining county balance, an increase of **3,994** persons.

The housing land requirement for the county (excluding the principal town) of 157 hectares [387.8 acres] is based on an average density across the county of 14 residential units per hectare and an allowance of headroom to ensure choice in the market for development land equating to a 50% increase on actual housing land requirement, in line with the *Development Plans: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DEHLG 2007)*. The density used for Portlaoise is 35 units per hectare in accordance with the MRPGs. Table 5 - The Core Strategy Table summarises both the population projections and housing land requirements, across all of the settlements as well as rural areas, in County Laois for the Plan period 2017-2023

2.3.1 Considerations

(i) Extant planning permission

A detailed review of extant planning permissions has been carried out. It has concluded that there are a number of unknowns in relation to the delivery of units. While the Council works closely with associated parties to assist in bringing forward these sites for development, external market forces may prohibit this. It is considered that there is a relatively small number of these permissions to wither over the plan period. Many of those that have acquired extension of durations on permissions during the last plan period 2011-2017 pursuant to Section 42 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), may also not come forward during this Plan period.

(ii) Vacant housing stock

The 2011 National Housing Development Survey states that there were 586 vacant units in 2011 which represented 26 number vacant units per 1,000 households. The ***Resolving Unfinished Housing Developments: Annual Progress Report on Actions to Address Unfinished Housing Development, December 2013*** (Housing Agency, DoECLG) determined that there were 318 vacant units in Laois.

The Resolving Unfinished Housing Developments: Annual Progress Report on Actions to Address Unfinished Housing Development, December 2014 (Housing Agency, DoECLG) outlined that in 2013 there were 56 developments surveyed by inspectors. It was determined that 41 were to remain on the Unfinished Housing Development (UFHD) Database.

In 2014, of those remaining 41, it was determined that after inspection, 34 were to remain on the database. Therefore, there was an overall drop of 22 developments on the list in those two years. The survey also outlines that Laois has one of the highest number of vacant units per number of households in the Country. Laois has 9.03 number of vacant units per 1,000 households, compared to a national average of 3.36. The only counties that have higher rates are Roscommon and Leitrim. However, the figures have dropped significantly since 2011.

Each unfinished residential development has distinct characteristics, context and mitigating issues, and responses, therefore, must be tailored to these circumstances. Laois County Council is positively engaging with all relevant parties to address related matters and while it is difficult to estimate the future outcomes of ongoing work at this stage, it is envisaged that solutions may contribute positively to future housing supply in the County in the medium to long term.

(iii) Demographics – migration and population profile

The levels of pick up in the housing market in Laois reflects a return to trends of positive net in-migration to the county. An assessment of the changing demographic profile of the county indicates that there will be a need for a greater number and mix of housing types in the future.

(iv) Core Strategy Table

The Core Strategy (Table 5) indicates the distribution of future population and housing across the county's settlements. The position of each town in the settlement hierarchy has been clearly linked to the quantitative population allocations as set out under the Core Strategy Table. The Core Strategy Table illustrates clearly how the population targets as set out for County Laois at Table 4.3 of the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines are to be distributed across the county proportionate to a settlements positioning in the settlement hierarchy.

(v) Zoning Maps

Following the population allocations set out in the Core Strategy Table 5, zoning maps are provided in the Settlements Plans to reflect these figures and to indicate the quantum and locations of future development for the plan period. It is considered that the lands identified for residential development are sufficient to meet the population targets set out in the Core Strategy Table and reflect each settlement's role in the Laois County Settlement Hierarchy. The amount and location of lands required within each settlement was determined using an evidence based approach which considered the following :

- a) Need;
- b) Policy context;
- c) Flood risk;
- d) Sequential approach;
- e) Capacity of water, drainage and roads infrastructure;
- f) Supporting infrastructure and facilities;
- g) Physical suitability;
- h) Environmental and heritage policy.

(vi) Lands available within town / village centres

In accordance with the principles of the Core Strategy, the town centre/ village centre zoning is the preferred choice for residential development, however there are limiting factors which may be applicable e.g. the historic formation of many of the main towns in County Laois, flooding implications (as identified in the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA), inadequate access, limited and fragmented land holdings and the requirement to facilitate retail development in these locations in accordance with the sequential test under the Retail Planning: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DECLG, 2012).

(viii) Established Residential

To improve legibility, existing residential developments have now been mapped. This zoning 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, doctor's surgeries, small scale residential and playing fields.

(ix) Lands identified as Strategic Reserve

Regarding lands included in the Strategic Reserve land bank, it is important to highlight that the inclusion of such lands will **not** in any way imply 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 2023-2029. 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.

2.4 Core Strategy Table

In compliance with the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022 and the requirements for a Core Strategy under the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), Table 5-the Core Strategy table-illustrates the distribution of target population throughout each of settlements in County Laois. Building on the Settlement Strategy, the Core Strategy Table provides a quantitative expression for the spatial development of the county over the Development Plan period. The Core Strategy Table gives a summary of the amount of land zoned for housing purposes under the Plan in order to meet the population targets and future housing land requirements as set out under the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines.

Table 5: Core Strategy Table

	CSO POP 2011	PROJECT ED POPULAT ION 2023	Projecte d Populati on Growth Up to 2023	PROJECTE D increase in Household s up to 2023	DENSIT Y (per ha)	HOUSING LAND REQUIREMENT Up to 2023 (Includes 50% headroom)	Area (ha) proposed Zoned Residential Development 2017-2023
County Laois	80,559	89,790	9,231	3216			
PRINCIPAL TOWN							
Portlaoise	20,145	25,382	5,237	1,824	35	78	78
KEY SERVICE TOWN							
Portarlinton	7,788	8,567	779	271	12	34	34
SERVICE TOWNS⁵							
Mountmellick	4,735	5,478	739	257	14	27	27
Graigucullen	3,966	4,584	618	215	14	23	23
Abbeyleix	1,827	2,112	285	99	14	10	10
Stradbally	1,154	1,334	180	62	14	6	6
Mountrath	1,661	1,920	259	90	14	9	9
Sub-total						75	75
LOCAL SERVICE TOWNS							
Rathdowney	1,208	1,395	187	65	14	7	7
Durrow	843	974	131	46	14	5	5
Sub-total						12	12
Villages less than 800 population			929	324	12	41	41
Open Countryside							
TOTAL			9,231	3,216		240	240

2.5 SETTLEMENT STRATEGY

The fundamental purpose of the county's Settlement Strategy will be to promote appropriate levels of sustainable development within the existing zoned settlements throughout the county. This strategy will help to deliver a range of house types, facilities, infrastructure, amenities and an efficient transport system. This in turn will facilitate linkages between settlements, support their expansion and consolidation, and in so doing, will help create high quality living environments. The strategy will provide for the creation of a settlement hierarchy reflecting the development role of each settlement type, and assist the Council in formulating realistic objectives, that can be delivered through the policies of the Plan.

The county Settlement Strategy is aimed at ensuring that towns and villages offer attractive and affordable housing options to meet the housing needs of urban and rural communities. Sensitively scaled and phased residential developments, with an appropriate housing-mix, will be encouraged in settlements to create sustainable communities and to help deliver the critical mass of population needed for the provision and support of educational, community and social services, improved amenities and sustainable employment opportunities.

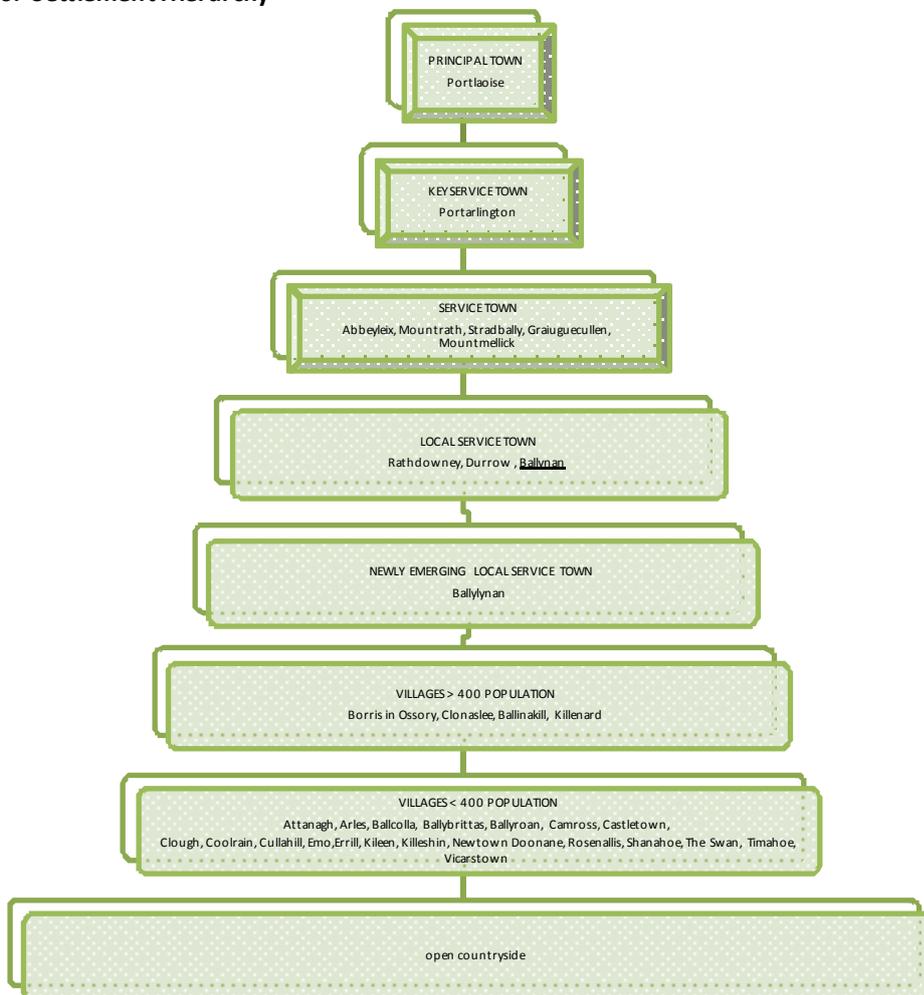
This approach to delivering the Settlement Strategy will promote compact urban forms, make optimum use of infrastructural and community facilities, and reduce unnecessary and unsustainable travel demand patterns. It will also assist in mitigating excessive levels of pressure for urban generated development in rural areas, especially those closest to the environs of towns, and thereby enhance the availability and affordability of sites and housing in rural areas to meet the housing needs of the established rural community.

2.5.1 Settlement Hierarchy

The Settlement Hierarchy for the county has been assigned in line with the spatial structure as set out in the Regional Settlement Hierarchy defined in the MRPG's and categories areas for development within the county on a priority basis across six tiers.

The development objectives for each of the settlements is set out in Volume 2 of the County Development Plan 2017-2023. In total, 30 no. settlements are identified in this Development Plan.

Figure 6: Settlement Hierarchy



It is the policy of the Council to:

- CS1 Encourage housing development to locate in designated towns and villages as indicated in the Settlement Strategy, where social and infrastructural services exist or will be provided as resources become available and ensure that all development takes place in tandem with the provision of adequate service such as water supply and wastewater treatment;

- CS2 Protect designated areas and high amenity value in the county as important elements of rural character and ensure that any plan or project associated with the provision of new housing is subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening in compliance with the Habitats Directive, and subsequent assessment as required
- CS3 Encourage appropriate levels of residential development in smaller settlements particularly where there is a basic nucleus of community facilities and services which may include all or some of the following - school, post office, local shop and church.
- CS4 Minimise the amount of urban generated rural housing particularly in areas of development pressure close to urban areas;
- CS5 Protect the designated areas of natural heritage, and high amenity value in the county as important elements of rural character;
- CS6 Promote high quality house design in both urban and rural contexts with appropriate siting, landscaping, materials and fenestration;
- CS7 Ensure access control and safeguard the capacity of the national road network in accordance with the *Spatial Planning and National Roads: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012)*;
- CS8 Use the water services small schemes programme and group sewerage schemes programme in conjunction with local development groups and/or private individuals and developers to facilitate the development of waste water treatment facilities and water supplies in small settlements;
- CS9 Facilitate the development of wastewater treatment facilities and water supplies in small settlements through co operation with developers and community groups.
- CS10 Provide for active and efficient use of derelict sites, vacant premises, neglected lands, disused (brownfield) or underused lands that are zoned and served by existing public infrastructure and facilities, to consolidate the urban form, improve streetscapes, support housing delivery and smarter travel as well as strengthen the vitality and vibrancy of urban areas, by way of the development management process and other mechanisms including the imposition of levies under the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 and Derelict Sites Act 1990, the preparation of opportunity site briefs and the consideration of incentives in the preparation of Development Contributions Scheme(s).
- CS11 Encourage the re-use of the existing building stock in an appropriate manner in line with standard conservation principles and the Council's policy on sustainable development in order to integrate proposed development into the existing streetscape and to reduce potential construction and demolition waste.
- CS12 It is an objective of this Council to increase the delivery of housing units in areas of need and to encourage and facilitate the appropriate development and renewal of areas that are in need of regeneration in order to prevent (i) Adverse effects on existing amenities in such areas, in particular as a result of the ruinous or neglected condition of any land (ii) Urban blight or decay (iii) Anti-social behaviour, or (iv) A shortage of habitable houses or of land suitable for residential use or a mixture of residential and other uses.
- CS13 Contribute towards compliance with EU Directives - including the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC, as amended), the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC), the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (85/337/EEC, as amended) and the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (2001/42/EC) – and relevant transposing Regulations.
- CS14 Ensure that lower levels of decision making and environmental assessment consider the sensitivities identified in the SEA Environmental Report that accompanies the Development Plan,

- CS15 Assess proposals for development in terms of, inter alia, potential impact on existing adjacent developments, existing land uses and/or the surrounding landscape. Where proposed developments would be likely to have a significant adverse effect on the amenities of the area through pollution by noise, fumes, odours, dust, grit or vibration, or cause pollution of air, water and/or soil, the Council shall ensure the introduction of mitigation measures in order to eliminate adverse environmental impacts or reduce them to an acceptable operating level.

2.5.2 Designated Settlements

The following paragraphs and policy statements outline the Settlement Hierarchy for the county based on the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines refined to reflect the functional roles of these settlements at county level.

Principal Town-Portlaoise

Portlaoise is designated as a Principal Town, part of the broader polycentric settlement model, centred on the linked gateway of Athlone- Tullamore-Mullingar in the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010. It is the largest urban centre and economic driver in the south Midlands with distinct local economies and strong links to the adjacent regions. Census 2011 records the population of Portlaoise at 20,145 an increase of 38% on Census 2006, making it one of the fastest growing towns in Leinster over that period. In order to allow Portlaoise develop as the Principal Town within the county, it is essential that future population growth is the focus of this Plan.

Employment in Portlaoise is dominated by the services sector with significant numbers employed in local government, the Dept. Of Agriculture, Portlaoise and Midlands Prisons, Midlands Regional Hospital, ESB, Telecom Eireann, An Post, the various primary and post-primary schools and the VEC. On the other hand, traditional forms of employment in manufacturing and milling have declined steadily in recent years while the construction industry, which was a major employment source for the past decade, has contracted dramatically in line with the severe economic downturn post 2008. The growing significance of culture and tourism for the local economy is also evident. The historic core of the town centred on the Dunamais Theatre, Church Street, Church Place, Fitzmaurice Place and the remnants of Fort Protector offers much potential in this regard.

The planning framework for Portlaoise is set out in the Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2012-2018, which will be reviewed within the life time of this Plan.

The **Togher National Enterprise Park** consists of a 101 hectares [250 acres] land bank on the southern outskirts of Portlaoise with access from the Togher interchange on the M7. Some employment opportunities emerged during the last plan period with the opening of the National Traincare Depot. However the potential to fully unlock this area as a driver for county and regional growth given its location in the immediate vicinity of road (M7/M8/N80) and rail corridors of national strategic importance and alignment with regional and national planning policy has yet to be fully realised.

In the medium to long term, Portlaoise will continue to be strengthened having regard to the town's designation in the National Spatial Strategy and Regional Planning Guidelines as a **Principal Town** as well as a **National Transport Node** to which much future investment will be channelled.

A Public Realm Strategy / Vision Statement for Portlaoise Town is currently being prepared to inform the next local area plan and local public realm projects having regard to its historic context and future opportunities.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- CS16 Continue to promote and facilitate the development of Portlaoise as a Principal town / National Transport node as outlined in the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010;
- CS17 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;

- CS18 Apply increased residential densities up to 35 per hectare where appropriate having regard to Sustainable Residential Developments in Urban Areas (2009);
- CS19 Apply appropriate development management measures in ensuring growth is appropriate and in compliance with the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010;
- CS20 Implement the actions of the Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy / Vision Statement 2016 to improve the character of the town of Portlaoise;
- CS21 In Portlaoise, seek the improvement of pedestrian and cycling linkages between:
- (i) Portlaoise Railway Station
 - (ii) Lyster Square/Main Street/Kylekiproe
 - (iii) Portlaoise Leisure Centre
 - (iv) Portlaoise College and running track
 - (v) Borris Road schools

Key Service Town

Key Service Towns act as important drivers for local economies in areas that are comparatively more remote from the main population centres of the region. Well established economic, administrative and social functions are provided in these settlements at levels commensurate with their position in the urban hierarchy. The development of these towns will be closely linked to the development of the principal towns and linked gateway.

Portarlinton is the Key Service Town in County Laois and functions as a support to the development of Tullamore, (part of the ATM Gateway) and Principal Town of Portlaoise. Portarlinton is located on the Dublin Cork/ Dublin Galway rail line. It has the critical mass to support its own services and industry.

The exceptional population growth that occurred in Portarlinton in inter-censal period 2002-2006 has continued through to 2011. According to census data for 2011, Portarlinton [the combined urban area] now has a population of 8,930 which is 46% higher than in 2006, which itself was 50% higher than in 2002. Much of the population increase is attributable to in-migration from Dublin commuters, attracted to the town by affordable house prices and the availability of excellent rail links to the capital.

It is recognised that Portarlinton must strengthen and widen its economic base so as to retain its population, and promote a balanced spatial structure to ensure its continued vitality and development. However, it is also acknowledged that the continued expansion of the town must be regulated to ensure that community, social and retail developments keep pace with recent rapid phases of mainly residential development.

Portarlinton offers an attractive opportunity to facilitate further enterprise and employment given the existence of substantial serviced industrial land banks [such as the former Avon complex on Station Road] and the benefit of frequent train services travelling north, south, east and west. It is an objective of this Plan to activate enterprise and employment opportunities in order to sustain the resident population of the town and wider hinterland.

Land use planning in Portarlinton is guided by the Portarlinton Joint Local Area Plan 2012-2018 which will be reviewed during the lifetime of the Plan in conjunction with Offaly County Council.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- CS22 Direct population growth in line with the settlement hierarchy;
- CS23 Promote higher densities at appropriate locations, owing to position on public transport network where appropriate to do so having regard to *Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Developments in Urban Areas (DEHLG, 2009)* and ensure that any plan or project associated with the provision of new housing **is subject** to Appropriate Assessment Screening in compliance with the Habitats Directive, and subsequent assessment as required;

- CS24 Apply appropriate development management measures in ensuring growth is appropriate and in compliance with the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022;
- CS25 In Portarlinton, seek the improvement of pedestrian and cycle linkages between Portarlinton Railway Station and (i) Market Square/Main Street (ii) Portarlinton Leisure Centre (ii) Colaiste Iosagain;
- CS26 Develop a street-lit, urban-based walking trail (Sli na Slainte), that benefits from good passive surveillance within Portarlinton Town and review and revise other Sli na Slainte routes as appropriate.

Service Towns

The Service Towns are so designated, because they are important resources for their hinterlands, providing community and infrastructural facilities and services and the population base to maintain them. These towns perform important retail, residential, service and amenity functions for local, essentially rural hinterland and support the upper tiers of the urban hierarchy, including the principal towns.

Many of these towns have experienced high levels of population growth over the last census period, in some cases without the necessary supporting services. The development of these towns needs to be increasingly aimed at consolidating growth within the Service Town and better matching it to the development of social and physical infrastructure.

Mountmellick has a role to play in supporting both the principal town of Portlaoise and the Gateway town of Tullamore. Land use planning in Mountmellick is guided by the Mountmellick Local Area Plan 2012-2018.

Graigucullen is located in the extreme south eastern tip of the county and is heavily linked and connected to Carlow and the adjacent southeast region for the majority of its services. Land use planning in Graigucullen is guided by the Graigucullen Local Area Plan 2012-2018.

Abbeyleix, Stradbally, Mountrath are also Service Towns dispersed around the county on the national and road network. These towns are considered appropriate for managed population growth over the plan period, together with employment opportunities, business, industry and tourism and infrastructural development. A limiting factor in the growth of these settlements will be the availability of infrastructure, specifically wastewater treatment facilities. The "Six Towns" Wastewater Scheme Project initiated by Laois County Council in 2012 has provided an upgrade to the wastewater treatment plants in these three service towns [as well as Clonaslee, Darrow and Rathdowney] thus removing a major impediment to their future growth.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- CS27 Direct population growth in line within the settlement hierarchy;
- CS28 Promote densities on average 12 per ha (higher densities will be considered at appropriate locations—particularly in town centre locations subject to good urban design and proximity to public transport facilities) having regard to *Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Developments in Urban Areas (DEHLG, 2009)* and ensure that any plan or project associated with the provision of new housing is subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening in compliance with the Habitats Directive, and subsequent assessment as required which has the potential to significantly effect a Natura 2000 site is assessed with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive in order to avoid adverse impacts on the integrity of the site;
- CS29 Ensure that population growth is appropriate in pace and scale and diversity of uses and services within its identified role in the settlement hierarchy.

Local Service Towns

Local Service towns are remote from the linked gateway and principal towns of the region. However they have an important role to play in performing local residential, retailing, social and leisure functions and providing appropriate local services to a wider rural hinterland. They have attractive streetscapes, physical settings and heritage buildings that present a strong visual character.

Rathdowney has been established as a Local Service Town which provides a lower range of services and facilities for the population of the immediately surrounding hinterland. It is a focus for social interaction in the west of the county, and provides linkages to the smaller settlement nodes [such as Errill and Donaghmore] in its district. A limiting factor in the growth of these settlements will be the availability of infrastructure, specifically wastewater treatment facilities. The wastewater treatment plant in Rathdowney has been upgraded as part of the “Six Towns” Wastewater Scheme Project initiated by Laois County Council in 2012.

Durrow has also been identified as a Local Service Town which provides a lower range of services and facilities for the population of the immediately surrounding hinterland. It is a focus for social interaction in the south of the county, and provides linkages to the smaller settlement nodes in its districts. A limiting factor in the growth of these settlements will be the availability of infrastructure, specifically wastewater treatment facilities. The wastewater treatment plant in Durrow has been upgraded as part of the “Six Towns” Wastewater Scheme Project initiated by Laois County Council in 2012.

Ballylinan has a recorded population of 1,084 in Census 2011 an increase of 44% on Census 2006 putting it ahead of Durrow in the league of towns within the county settlement structure. It provides a lower range of services and facilities in the north eastern quadrant of the county for its population and that of its rural hinterland. A limiting factor in the growth of this town will be the availability of infrastructure, specifically wastewater treatment facilities.

Having regard to their existing and envisaged size, their general structure as small country settlements, their range of housing requirements and their semi urban character, their plans include statutory zoning of particular land for particular purposes. Provision is also made for phasing of zoning within these settlement plans i.e. more land zoned than necessary to allow for non release of lands for development over the plan period.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- CS30 Conserve, enhance and strengthen the local service town structure within County Laois ensuring that the appropriate scale of growth is supported;
- CS31 Manage population growth through the development management process;
- CS32 Promote densities, relative to the scale of the settlement, located as near as is practicable to the town centre area, (higher densities will be considered at appropriate locations – particularly in town centre locations, subject to good urban design and proximity to public transport facilities having regard to *Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Developments in Urban Areas (DEHLG, 2009)* and ensure that any plan or project associated with the provision of new housing is subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening in compliance with the Habitats Directive, and subsequent assessment as required;

Villages > 400 population

Some of these settlements especially Killenard have experienced significant growth during the last census period 2006-2011. They have an important role to play in performing local residential, retailing, social and leisure functions and providing appropriate local services to a wider rural hinterland. They have attractive streetscapes, physical settings and heritage buildings that present a strong visual character. These villages provide opportunities for future expansion/provision of services such as community centres, local shop, pub, petrol outlet and have the potential to attract a population seeking to live in a rural environment. Development growth should be low density, relative to the scale of the settlement, located as near as is practicable to the core area. Due to their existing and envisaged size, their general structure as small country settlements, their range of housing requirements and their semi urban character, their plans include statutory zoning of particular land for particular purposes. Provision is also made for phasing of zoning within

these settlement plans i.e. more land zoned than necessary to allow for non release of lands for development over the plan period.

Borris in Ossory, Ballinakill, Killeenard and Clonaslee are villages that have experienced such growth during the last plan period.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- CS33 Direct population growth in keeping with the settlement strategy;
- CS34 Conserve and enhance and strengthen villages > 400 population;
- CS35 Encourage social and community uses within villages > 400 population that sustain the population;
- CS36 Promote densities, relative to the scale of the settlement, located as near as is practicable to the village centre area having regard to *Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Developments in Urban Areas (DEHLG, 2009)* and ensure that any plan or project associated with the provision of new housing **is subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening in compliance with the Habitats Directive, and subsequent assessment as required.**

Villages < 400 population

These areas have a limited service base and are to a large extent founded on the local primary school catchment area. These villages provide opportunities for future expansion/ provision of services such as community centres, local shop, pub, petrol outlet and have the potential to attract a population seeking to live in a rural environment. Development growth should be low density, relative to the scale of the settlement, located as near as is practicable to the core area.

It is the policy of the Council to

- CS37 Conserve and enhance and strengthen villages < 400 population;
- CS38 Direct population growth in line with settlement strategy;
- CS39 Encourage social and community uses within villages < 400 population that sustain the population;
- CS40 Promote densities, relative to the scale of the settlement, located as near as is practicable to the village centre area having regard to *Sustainable Residential Developments in Urban Areas (DEHLG, 2009)* and ensure that any plan or project associated with the provision of new housing is subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening in compliance with the Habitats Directive, and subsequent assessment as required.

Rural settlements

These settlements are very small, sometimes embryonic rural settlements with a very small amount of development to date. These settlements are defined by their loose gathering of one-off houses and some public services dispersed within the settlement such as a church, school, shop, playing pitch and speed limits. Examples of these settlements include Ballaghmore, Kilbricken, Donaghmore, The Rock and Wolfhill.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- CS41 Conserve and enhance and strengthen rural settlements where there is an existing social infrastructure network;

CS42 Manage population growth through the development management process.

Rural Areas / open countryside

Open countryside is all lands outside of the settlements as identified above. The Council's rural development strategy is based on promoting sustainable rural development aimed at maintaining vibrant and viable rural communities while also seeking to protect the amenity, recreational and heritage value of the rural landscapes and countryside of the county. The Planning Authority recognises that the continued trend towards single houses in the open countryside is unsustainable and has implications for the key rural resources of agricultural land, water quality, landscape, heritage and road networks as well as undermining the growth and use of existing services and facilities in the towns and villages. In addition the proliferation of one-off rural houses does not strengthen rural communities in the long term. The strengthening of rural communities can only be achieved in the long term through making settlements more attractive places to live and providing employment opportunities. To this end the Planning Authority will favour appropriate development within the designated villages and settlements over urban generated rural housing.

The Council recognises and accepts the importance of rural housing in meeting local housing needs and in sustaining rural services such as primary schools, post offices and village shops. The Council also accepts the genuine desire of people who are born and raised in the countryside who wish to reside within their own community. Having regard to national guidelines and research and analysis of trends throughout the county, the Council will endeavour to accommodate 'rural generated housing' in all areas whilst recognising the need to protect certain rural areas from urban generated development.

2.6 RURAL HOUSING STRATEGY

Laois County Council's rural housing policy has had careful regard to national advice and guidelines as set out in the National Spatial Strategy and *Sustainable Rural Housing: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DEHLG, 2005)* and also including the Habitats Directive with regard to Appropriate Assessment and the *Planning System and Flood Risk Management: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DoEHLG, 2009)*.

The Council's rural development strategy is based on promoting sustainable rural development aimed at maintaining vibrant and viable rural communities while also seeking to protect the amenity, recreational and heritage value of the rural landscapes and countryside of the county.

The implementation of the Settlement Strategy, as set out in Section 2 and the conservation and protection measures in Section 7-Heritage Strategy are considered to be essential towards achieving this aim. The designation of settlements for development enables the Council to promote the strengthening of villages and settlements and to provide for the development of rural communities.

The approach taken towards the accommodation of residential development in the countryside has been twofold. In the first instance small scale settlements were identified. These are small scale settlements or small villages with an established identity that were considered suitable for the development of small scale housing schemes and/or single dwelling houses.

The second part of the approach was to determine the capacity of the countryside to absorb one-off housing having regard to issues in terms of environmental sensitivity, population trends, vacancy rates and the existing level of development in the area. In this regard the following actions were taken:

1. Environmentally sensitive areas including; – Special Areas of Conservation, Natural Heritage Areas, Special Protection Areas, Scenic Areas were identified and mapped.
2. Population trends have been mapped in terms of each Electoral Division (ED). The period taken was from 2006 to 2011.
3. Local areas within each ED that are clearly under significant development pressure for example north-east County Laois, the environs of the main urban settlements.

In County Laois the following three rural housing area designations apply:

- Areas under Strong Urban Influence,
- Stronger Rural Areas and
- Structurally Weak Areas.

The policy in relation to rural housing is, in certain areas, based on the local need factor which required applicants to demonstrate that they are functionally or socially related to the rural community in which the proposed site was located. Other areas, where population stagnation or decline has been occurring, are not subject to housing need to the same extent or at all.

While the Council acknowledges the role of rural housing in sustaining rural communities, it also recognises that uncontrolled and excessive one-off urban generated housing in the countryside is not sustainable in the long-term and measures need to be put in place to regulate this form of development.

A concern arises that if ‘one-off rural housing’ is permitted at the current levels, then irreparable damage will be done to the environment including water quality and landscape character and the legitimate aspirations of those brought up in the countryside to continue to live within their own communities is likely to be jeopardized.

One-off housing refers to individually designed, detached houses primarily located on large un-serviced sites in the open countryside. The overriding aim of the Council’s approach to one-off houses in the countryside is guided by the *Sustainable Rural Housing: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DEHLG, 2005)*

This approach seeks to accommodate within rural areas, people who are functionally or socially part of the rural community and to resist demand for urban generated housing in the countryside.

The Council will resist one-off housing proposals, where such development involves the creation of a new direct access point or the generation of increased traffic flows from existing direct access/egress points to the national road network where speed limits greater than 60km/h apply, in accordance with Policy Trans 7.

2.6.1 Rural Area Types

In accordance with the NSS and *Sustainable Rural Housing: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DEHLG, 2005)* document, the county has been defined into different rural area types based on different development demands and needs. These areas are described below and the extent of each is shown on the Rural Settlement Strategy Map.

The Council recognises the needs of local rural people who wish to live or work in the area in which they grew up. The following three criteria arise in assessing applicants under this category:

- The applicant must come within the definition of a ‘Local Rural Person’
- The proposed site must be situated within their ‘Local Rural Area’
- The applicant must have a ‘Local Rural Housing Need’

Table 6 – Rural Area designation

RURAL AREA DESIGNATION	DEFINITION	CRITERIA
RURAL AREAS UNDER	Those rural areas within easy commuting distance of the main urban centres in County Laois and adjacent	It is an objective to recognise the individual housing needs of people intrinsic to the rural areas located within the areas defined as ‘rural areas under

<p>STRONG URBAN INFLUENCE</p>	<p>counties including the GDA⁶ which are experiencing pressure from the development of urban generated housing in the open countryside. These areas are essentially:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The north and eastern areas in the County • 5 km buffer zones around the Principal town, Key service Town and Service Towns of Graiguecullen and Mountmellick • National, Strategic Regional Routes and Regional Routes as defined in Section 7 <p>Continued high levels of single rural houses in these locations would inhibit the growth of the County's urban areas which would result in a failure to achieve the growth targets. It would also cause further deterioration of rural amenities.</p> <p>The key development plan objectives in these areas seeks to facilitate the genuine housing requirements of the rural community as identified by the planning authority in the light of local conditions while on the other hand directing urban generated development to areas zoned for new housing development in towns and villages.</p>	<p>strong urban influence'. Such needs may be accommodated on lands within the rural area under strong urban influence, subject to the availability of a suitable site and normal proper planning and sustainable development criteria.</p> <p>It is an objective of the Council only to permit single houses in the area under strong urban influence to facilitate those with a local rural housing need⁷ in the area, in particular those that have lived in a rural area.</p> <p>In order to demonstrate a genuine rural housing need, any of the following criteria shall be met:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) (a) the application is being made by a long term landowner or his/her son or daughter seeking to build their first home on the family lands; or b) (b) the applicant is engaged in working the family farm and the house is for that persons own use; or c) (c) the applicant is working in rural activities⁸ and for this reason needs to be accommodated near their place of work; or d) (d) the application is being made by a local rural person(s) who have spent a substantial period of their life living in the local rural area, and, who for family and/or work reasons need to live in the rural area.
<p>STRONG RURAL AREA</p>	<p>The rural areas that traditionally have had a strong agricultural base, that are restructuring to cope with changes in the agricultural sector and have an extensive network of smaller rural towns, villages and other settlements. In these areas, the focus of urban generated housing should be in the network of settlements to support the development of services and infrastructure and to take pressure off development in the open countryside.</p>	<p>It is an objective to recognise the individual housing needs of people intrinsic to the rural area located within the rural areas defined as strong rural areas.</p> <p>It is an objective of the Council to permit single houses in the strong rural areas to facilitate those with a rural housing need in the area.</p> <p>In order to demonstrate a rural housing need, any of the following criteria should be met:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) the application is being made by a long term landowner or his/her son or daughter seeking to build their first home on the family lands; or b) the applicant is working in rural activities and for this reason needs to be accommodated near their place of work; or c) the application is being made by a local rural person(s)⁹ who for family and/or work reasons wish to live in the local rural area in which they have spent a substantial period of their lives and are seeking to build their first home in the local rural area¹⁰.
<p>STRUCTURALLY WEAK RURAL AREAS</p>	<p>The rural areas generally exhibit characteristics such as persistent and significant population decline as well as a weaker economic structure based on indices of income, employment and economic growth. These rural areas are more distant from the major urban areas and the associated pressure from urban generated housing.</p>	<p>To help stem decline and strengthen structurally weak areas, it is an objective of the Council that in general, any demand for permanent residential development should be accommodated, subject to meeting normal planning and environmental criteria.</p>

Figure 7: Rural Area Designations

⁶ Greater Dublin Area

⁷ An applicant who satisfies a 'Local Rural Housing Need' is defined as a person who does not or has never owned a house in the 'local rural area' and has the need for a permanent dwelling for their own use in the rural area.

⁸ Such rural activities will normally encompass persons involved in full time farming, forestry, in land water ways or related occupations as well as part time occupations where the predominant occupation is farming/ natural resource related. Such circumstances could also encompass persons whose work is intrinsically linked to rural areas such as teachers in rural schools or other persons whose work predominantly takes place in rural areas.

⁹ A 'Local Rural Person' is a person who is living or has lived in the local rural area for a substantial period of time prior to making the planning application

¹⁰ The 'Local Rural Area' for the purpose of this policy is defined as the area generally within a 10km radius of the applicant's family home.

There is growing concern that the tendency to replace, rather than upgrade, older rural dwellings is depleting the stock of vernacular rural dwellings and vernacular structures, the preservation of which is increasingly viewed as an important element of the built heritage of County Laois. They usually occupy mature, well secluded settings and as such, sit very comfortably within the landscape. With carefully designed extensions and sensitive restoration, these houses can be brought up to a standard capable of meeting modern day demands. Hence, the Council will encourage applicants and owners along this path in the interests of preserving valuable vernacular heritage.

Accordingly, it is the Council's policy to seek to retain vernacular dwellings and structures and promote their sympathetic renovation and continued use rather than replacement. For this reason there will be a presumption against the demolition of vernacular dwellings and structures where restoration or adaptation is a feasible option.

The requirement to demonstrate local rural housing need shall be waived in cases of retention and upgrade of vernacular dwellings.

Permission for demolition will only be considered where it is demonstrated that a vernacular dwelling is not reasonably capable of being made structurally sound or otherwise improved. If a dwelling is not considered to be vernacular or does not make an important contribution to the heritage, appearance or character of the locality, planning permission will be considered for a new dwelling. In cases where a dwelling has been recently destroyed by fire or through an accident, planning permission will be considered for a replacement dwelling.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- CS43 Provide for sustainable rural housing in the county in accordance with the *Sustainable Rural Housing: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DEHLG, 2005)* ¹¹, *EPA Code of Practice: Wastewater Treatment Systems for Single Houses (2009)* and ensure that any plan or project associated with the provision of new housing is subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening in compliance with the Habitats Directive, and subsequent assessment as required;
- CS44 Ensure that the provision of rural housing will not detract from the county's natural and built heritage, economic assets and environment and the planning authority will have regard to the relevant development plan objectives;
- CS45 Apply a presumption in favour of granting planning permissions to applicants for rural generated housing where the qualifying criteria set down in objectives are met and where standards in relation to siting, design, drainage and traffic safety set down in the Plan are achieved;
- CS46 Encourage the retention and sympathetic refurbishment, with adaptation if necessary, of traditional dwellings in the countryside in sympathy with the character of the existing building in preference to their replacement;¹¹
- CS47 Facilitate the provision of accommodation for older people and dependant relatives attached to the existing family home subject to compliance with the following criteria:
- i. be attached to the existing dwelling;
 - ii. be linked internally with the existing dwelling;
 - iii. not have a separate access provided to the front elevation of the dwelling;
 - iv. be of appropriate size and design;
 - v. be capable of being served by adequate foul drainage facilities;
 - vi.
- CS48 Promote good rural design through the implementation of Rural House Design Guidelines prepared by Laois County Council in Appendix 7;

¹¹ Planning permission will only be granted for replacement of a dwelling where it is demonstrated that it is not reasonably capable of being made structurally sound or otherwise improved, where the building is not of architectural merit. In this instance consideration will be given to the replacement of an existing dwelling with a new dwelling at the same location, subject to appropriate design, scale of building and normal planning considerations. Local rural housing need shall not apply in this instance..

CS49 Outside the settlements which are zoned and designated in the Settlement Strategy, all proposed development which is vulnerable to flooding and is located in flood zones A and B must pass the development management justification test.

2.7 IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

The purpose of this section is to show clear mechanisms for the implementation of the Core Strategy in order to demonstrate how its provisions will be achieved. This in turn should be monitored to assess whether the policies and objectives are delivering the Core Strategy. In order to ensure the effective implementation and monitoring of the Core Strategy in accordance with the requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended and the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022, it is considered that in addition to the policy and objectives already indicated as part of this Core Strategy, there is need for additional policy and objectives to ensure the successful realisation of the Core Strategy and provide a more robust implementation framework.

It is the policy of the Council to:

CS50 Promote and facilitate the development of the county in accordance with the provisions of the Core Strategy, including directing development in line with the Settlement Hierarchy and promoting development at an appropriate scale that is reflective of the terms of the Core Strategy Table and zoning maps.

Central to the above, is the fact that a proportion of lands zoned throughout the county are currently zoned as part of other statutory land use plans, including the Local Area Plans. The Core Strategy complies with the national and regional population targets and emphasises that the Development Plan is the fundamental link with national, regional and local policies. In meeting the requirements of the future population target, the Plan must ensure that the availability and orderly development of suitably zoned lands, housing in the countryside and infrastructure provision are sufficient to accommodate the population targets within the lifetime of the Plan.

In this regard policy is required to give priority to the Core Strategy and to ensure compliance with the Core Strategy and the zoning maps and policies contained as part of the Appendices to this Plan. Having regard to the above, the following policy and objectives shall be considered:

It is the policy of the Council to:

CS51 Ensure that the population targets and future housing land requirements as defined by the zoning maps and policies contained as part of this Core Strategy, can effectively be realised in the following Local Area Plans which shall be reviewed:

- I. Portlaoise;
- II. Portlington;
- III. Mountmellick and
- IV. Graiguecullen.

CS52 Monitor and maintain a record of residential development permitted in settlements designated under the Settlement Hierarchy in order to ensure compliance with the population allocations defined by the Core Strategy Table;

CS53 Apply the Settlement Hierarchy to determine the scale, rate and location of proposed developments and apply appropriate development management measures to ensure compliance with the Settlement Hierarchy and Strategy, including the population targets for the county as prescribed in the Core Strategy Table.

In addition to the above, there are other factors that will markedly contribute to the ability of the Core Strategy to be delivered. Central to this is an acknowledgement of the current situation within the county with regard to unfinished housing estates and live planning permissions part of which may be located on lands identified as 'Strategic Reserve'. It is

considered important that the Council ensure an appropriate standard of housing development by facilitating the completion of estates.

In addition, there is need to recognise where previous market choice has led developers with regard to the availability of lands for development. This is of particular importance when considering the level of development and land transfers that took place over the previous ten years compared with the slow-moving nature of the market at present. In this regard the following policy shall apply;

It is the policy of the Council to:

CS54 Ensure that all activated and committed planning permissions, including those located on lands identified as 'Strategic Land Reserve', will be prioritised where it is determined that they support the completion of an unfinished housing estate.

The development of a robust implementation framework allows the Core Strategy to be self monitoring through the incorporation of policy to ensure this.

2.7.1 Future and Longevity of the Core Strategy

It should be noted that the Department will be engaging with the CSO in developing updated National and Regional Population Forecasts, which will be adopted as an update of the current RPGs. Following this, the population targets and future housing land requirement figures for the county will be revised and the County Development Plan will be updated in due course to reflect these revised figures.

SECTION 3: HOUSING POLICY

3.1 HOUSING STRATEGY

3.1.1 Introduction

The previous Laois County Development Plan 2011-2017 was prepared during a period of unprecedented growth in the national property market followed by a major recession post 2008. A review of the Housing Strategy was commissioned by Laois County Council in August 2015 and carried out in consultation with Future Analytics Consultants to reflect the fundamental changes that have taken place in the economy,

High levels of market uncertainty and the changing nature of housing demand, including mitigating factors such as income, demographics and credit conditions are key aspects which underline the current housing market. The methodology applied in the Housing Strategy considers these aspects in detail providing a robust and credible basis for the assessment of future housing needs in Laois in line with the population targets as set out under the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midland Regional 2010-2022.

3.1.2 Housing Strategy Synopsis and Policy

This section has evolved from the analysis of the housing issues that have emerged during the preparation of the strategy. Firstly, it outlines a number of broad principles that inform the overall approach to the strategy. Secondly, it formalises these aspects through a number of recommended housing objectives. The preparation of this section has necessitated a review of existing housing policy contained in the current development plan and the recommendations set out below are designed to build upon and complement that reviewed.

Key Principles of the Housing Strategy

- To work to deliver the revised county population target of **89,790** by 2023 (stemming from the M2F1 population projection scenario), having regard to the county's established Settlement Hierarchy as set out in the Laois County Development Plan;
- To promote socially balanced and inclusive communities in all housing areas across Laois;
- To provide for varying identified needs in the county with respect to housing typology, size and mix;
- To monitor the housing strategy, allowing for adequate consultation with those who are central to the implementation of the policies in the strategy.

The Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) sets out clear requirements for the monitoring and review of local authority housing strategies. Section 95 subsection (1) (b) requires that a planning authority's development plan should include objectives to ensure that the housing strategy is implemented. These objectives should relate to:

- The existing and likely future need for social housing;
- The need to ensure the availability of housing for persons who have different levels of income;
- The need to provide different types and sizes of housing, to match, in so far as possible, the different types of households to be provided for;
- The special needs of the elderly and those with disabilities must be provided for; and
- The need to counteract social segregation in the provision of housing.

In light of the above, this Housing Strategy sets out the following housing objectives, which are to be incorporated into the respective plans of the Laois County Council:

General Objectives Relating to Social and Specialist Housing

It is an objective of the Council to:

- HP1 Facilitate the provision of housing units to sufficiently cater for social and specialist housing needs over the plan period, as established in the County Housing Strategy;
- HP2 Ensure that sufficient and suitable land is zoned in the Development Plan for residential use to meet the requirements of the Housing Strategy and to ensure that a scarcity of such land does not occur at any time during the period of the Development Plan and ensure that any plan or project associated with the provision of new housing **is subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening in compliance with the Habitats Directive, and subsequent assessment as required;**
- HP3 Ensure a choice of house types and sizes in appropriate locations to cater for all categories of households;
- HP4 Provision of social and specialist housing shall be progressed through partnership working with voluntary and co-operative housing organisations, the Health Service Executive, as well as through agreements with private developers;
- HP5 In the interest of counteracting undue social segregation, the Laois County Council will ensure that an appropriate balance between incomes, social, specialist and private (including private rented) housing is provided within communities. Decisions on leasing take up, RAS and on Part V percentage ratios on specific sites will be based on the existing housing profile and needs of the area.
- HP6 It is the policy of the planning authority to reserve 10% of all lands being developed in the urban area for residential use over the plan period for the purpose of addressing the requirement for social housing under Part V.
- HP7 As outlined above, percentage reservation for Part V shall be decided on the basis of individual site assessment. Criteria to be taken into account will include the type and location of the housing units required by the planning authority at a given time, as defined by the priority housing list by the Housing Section and the existing mix of housing classes in the area;
- HP8 Subject to the availability of resources, assess all local authority housing schemes in the county and determine if any would benefit from a regeneration plan to address problems associated with the physical design and layout, such as lack of natural surveillance, piecemeal provision of open space, excess provision of open space, lack of services and facilities, lack of permeability, isolation and peripherality;
- HP9 Subject to the availability of resources, ensure that all houses in the ownership of the Local Authority, which are over 20 years old, are assessed for remedial and/or refurbishment works;
- HP10 Explore mechanisms to address the issue of incomplete developments through a variety of mechanisms including dialogue with developers, existing/adjoining residents, financial institutions, NAMA, State and Semi-State Agencies;
- HP11 Encourage developers of privately owned estates, where there are high levels of vacancy, to consider releasing units under the Social Leasing Programme;
- HP12 Promote estate management in all schemes across the county in order to support the formation of sustainable communities;
- HP13 Encourage residential use of vacant upper storey space over commercial premises on the main thoroughfares of the urban centres;
- HP14 Encourage the conversion of suitably located derelict properties and disused buildings such as former schools to residential use and in so doing, provide additional residential units in areas suitable and attractive for such development.

General Housing Policies

It is the policy of the Council to:

- HP1 Plan positively for future housing requirements in the county in accordance with the revised population targets. In doing so, the Council will facilitate the expansion of existing settlements in a planned and coordinated fashion, ensuring that adequate provision of necessary infrastructure comes forward alongside development;
- HP2 Seek the provision of a mix of housing types to ensure sustainable and balanced communities in town and village areas. This will include the provision of housing for the elderly, persons with disability, lone parents and travelling families. To facilitate this, the Council will require larger schemes to include a mix of house types and sizes, having regard to the prevailing nature of household formation and change, demographic change and related considerations in the county;
- HP3 Seek a high quality of design in all housing development having due regard to Government policy relating to sustainable development, which aims to reduce the demand for travel within existing settlements, and the need to respect and reflect the established character of rural areas;
- HP4 Ensure that the Register on Unfinished Housing Estates (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government) is taken into account during the preparation of all land use plans in the interests of proper planning and sustainable development;
- HP5 Continue to work with developers and residents of private residential developments to address public safety and environmental improvements within these estates, as necessary.

Traveller Accommodation

- HP6 Seek to provide appropriate accommodation for Travellers through the continued implementation of the Council's Traveller Accommodation Programme;

Housing for the Homeless

- HP7 Promote targeted provision of accommodation for homeless persons;

Housing for the Elderly

- HP8 Promote and support the development of housing for older people and those with disabilities, including the concept of independent living and the development of 'lifecycle housing' i.e. housing that is adaptable for people's needs as they change over their lifetime;
- HP9 Meet the needs of the elderly by providing accommodation in central, convenient and easily accessible locations to facilitate independent living where possible;
- HP10 Encourage nursing homes and sheltered housing accommodation to be located within settlements to provide for easy access both for staff and visitors in order to enhance overall quality of life, increase their links with, and accessibility to, local amenities and to adopt a presumption against rural locations;
- HP11 Provide for the housing needs of those with disabilities through the provision or adaptation of appropriate accommodation.

3.2 Housing Strategy Implementation

To ensure the successful implementation of this Housing Strategy, it is necessary to keep it under review. Therefore, not more than two years after the making of the Development Plan, the Chief Executive of Laois County Council will give a report to the elected members on the progress achieved in implementing the Housing Strategy and the Development Plan objectives. Where the report indicates that new or revised housing needs have been identified, the Chief Executive may recommend that the Housing Strategy be amended and the Development Plan varied accordingly.

The Housing Strategy has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended as a basis to address the following key issues:

- The identification of housing need within County Laois;
- The identification of social and specialist housing needs within the County;
- The identification of supply side requirements to satisfy identified needs, including the consideration of appropriate land zoning in Laois;
- The consideration of specific policy response to the above.

The preparation of this strategy has included the assessment of all relevant and up-to-date publications and data resources, which have been analysed in detail to provide a robust basis for future policy development and implementation. In addition to meeting the statutory requirement for its production, this strategy ensures that the proper planning and sustainable development of Laois provides for the housing needs of existing and future populations in an appropriate manner.

3.3 Implementation of the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015

The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 provides for the imposition of a Vacant Site Levy within areas where housing is required and areas in need of renewal.

3.3.1 Vacant Housing Sites

By reference to criteria set out in the 2015 Act as they apply to Laois (set out below), Laois County Council has determined that a need for housing exists in the Towns of Portlaoise, Portarlinton, Mountmellick and Graiguecullen. The Planning Authority may determine that a need for housing exists in additional Laois Towns during the Plan period.

- The projected increase in the number of households as per Core Strategy and Housing Strategy during the period 2017-2023 is significant – Portlaoise (1,824), Portarlinton (271), Mountmellick (257), Graiguecullen (215).
- The cost of house prices and the cost of renting are increasing indicating increased housing need.

LAP Town	Rent (Source: average monthly rent prtb.ie)	Purchase (Source: Q3 2016 DAFT Report)
Portlaoise	€597.76 – 2015 €548.21 - 2014	Not disaggregated by town over time.
Portarlinton	€537.23 – 2015 €482.28 - 2014	County figures per Daft Report (Q3 2016) Average Price:
Mountmellick	€499.20 – 2015 €468.67 - 2014	€152,362 Yr-on-Yr: +11.5% Quarter-on-Quarter:
Graiguecullen	€600.26 – 2015 €584.98 - 2014	+3.6% From Trough: +46.9%

- (c) Cited area of choice on social housing waiting list (September 2016) indicate housing need in these Towns – Portlaoise (944), Portarlinton (377), Mountmellick (322), Graiguecullen (63). Note: up to 3 choices of a area per household relates.
- (d) The number of habitable houses available for purchase and for rent is less than 5% of the total number of habitable houses in the area, indicating housing need.

LAP Town	Source: daft.ie on 30/09/16 No. properties for sale + rent > or < 2011 Population / Household Size (2.87) / 20
Portlaoise	190 (sale) + 18 (rent) < 350 5% of 7019 - Pop: 20,145
Portarlinton	48 (sale) + 4 (rent) < 136 5% of 2714 - Pop: 7,788
Mountmellick	32 (sale) + 1 (rent) < 82 5% of 1650 - Pop: 4735
Graiguecullen	3 (sale) + 1 (rent) < 69 5% of 1382 - Pop: 3,966

3.3.2 Vacant Regeneration Sites

Laois County Council has identified the following Regeneration Area in Portlaoise as being in need of renewal. Additional Regeneration Areas may be identified in Portlaoise or in other Laois towns during the Plan period.



Due to its location, the area benefits from extensive existing public infrastructure including roads, water infrastructure, Portlaoise train station and schools (primary, secondary, further education), existing facilities include a running track, public park, family resource centre in the vicinity, as well as the commercial and civic services available in the Town Centre. Appropriate development of sites in this Regeneration Area has the potential to make efficient use of public infrastructure and facilities, deliver homes, enable smarter travel and sustainable communities as well as contribute to the implementation of the Council’s Core Strategy, Housing Strategy and Retail Strategy in Portlaoise, as set out in this Plan.

The Regeneration Area currently includes disused lands in neglected condition; its streetscapes are marred by inactive gap sites or derelict buildings that detract from its character, appearance and amenity. There are indications of anti-

social behaviour in the Area and its vicinity, especially along Harpu's Lane with a number of derelict houses along that Street. In the opinion of the Planning Authority the existence of vacant sites within the Regeneration Area exacerbates anti-social behaviour in the area. Appropriate development of sites in this Regeneration Area has the potential to provide passive surveillance and active land uses, enlivening and enhancing the character, appearance and amenity of the area.

Vacant Site Policies

It is the policy of the Council to:

- HP12 Maintain the Laois Register of Vacant Sites, entering or deleting Sites from the Register in accordance with the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 and related Departmental Guidance;
- HP13 Identify additional Regeneration Area(s) and/or make determinations that a need for housing exists in additional Laois Towns during the Plan period as appropriate;
- HP 14 Implement the provisions of the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 by entering vacant housing sites on the Laois Register of Vacant Sites and thereafter imposing levies in accordance with the Act within lands zoned Residential 1 or Residential 2 in Portlaoise, Portarlinton, Mountmellick, Graiguecullen and any other Laois towns with an identified housing need, as appropriate;
- HP15 Implement the provisions of the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 by entering vacant regeneration sites, located within the Portlaoise Regeneration Area identified herein, or within any other identified Regeneration Area, on the Laois Register of Vacant Sites and thereafter impose levies in accordance with the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015;
- HP16 Facilitate the development of all classes of dwelling units within the Regeneration Area identified herein in Portlaoise notwithstanding zoning restrictions relating to some classes of dwelling units set out in the zoning matrix of the Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2012-2018, this policy shall become defunct once the Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2012-2018 is superseded.

SECTION 4: SOCIAL, COMMUNITY AND RECREATIONAL STRATEGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Community development infrastructure refers to a complex and broad range of actions and measures involving a wide range of practitioners and bodies with the common aim of improving various aspects of local communities. There are however two key strands to the development of 'sustainable communities'

- Facilitating communities in developing skills, capacities and projects needed to enable them to have a greater say in the management of their own futures; and
- Facilitating access to the goods, services and power structures within society for all and particularly for those that are marginalised and powerless (social inclusion).

The County Development Plan will play the following role in delivering these **high end goals**:

1. Facilitating the delivery of infrastructure through;
 - The reservation of land for the development of new and /or enhanced social and community infrastructure in the county and within the local area plan towns;
 - Managing the expansion of residential development commensurate with the community infrastructure available;
 - Requiring delivery of new community infrastructures as part of development proposals;
 - Cooperating with other service providers in the delivery of new infrastructure.
2. Facilitating improved physical access to community infrastructure and services through
 - Improving the coordination of transport options by public transport, bike , foot;
 - Requiring all new facilities to have universal access for all;
 - Enhancing communications infrastructure.
3. Facilitating the maintenance, restoration and upgrading of cultural and natural heritage of communities, environmental upgrading and general actions to enhance the environmental, amenity and physical attributes of communities.

Amenities within the county include natural and recreational amenities as well as social and community infrastructure. These facilities provide many cultural, social, economic and environmental benefits and provide a positive contribution towards quality of life within the county.

Laois Sports Partnership and County Council are to continue to facilitate the development of quality and inclusive sport and recreation facilities, programmes and projects through capacity building.

4.2 SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY

Building strong, inclusive communities is an integral component to achieving sustainable development objectives. Apart from housing and employment opportunities, sustainable communities require the provision of and access to a myriad of support infrastructure in the areas of education, childcare, health and community support services, recreational and leisure facilities and a good quality built environment. Communities also require opportunities to meet, interact and form bonds, all essential prerequisites to the evolution of a sense of place and belonging.

New local government and community driven structures such as Laois Local Community Development Committee and Laois Public Participation Network address the need for creating sustainable communities within County Laois. The importance of developing communities and providing local facilities for community, voluntary, social inclusion and environmental groups to meet and progress their work in the areas of arts, sports, economic, community and social inclusion initiatives is essential in improving the quality of life for residents in our county. This is vital in helping to attract economic investments to local areas, promoting tourism and providing local services such as childcare, care for youth and the elderly and the supporting the socio economically and/or rurally isolated in our community.

It is an objective of the Council to:

- OBJ1** Develop a process for the implementation of the Barcelona Declaration so as to ensure its effective implementation across the county in both existing services and new developments;
- OBJ2** Ensure that all new development shall be designed in order to allow for universal access for all people;
- OBJ3** Support the Local Community Development Committee in the delivery of the objectives in the Local Economic and Community Plan 2016 - 2021 with regard to the provision of and access to sustainable community services and facilities;
- OBJ4** Liaise with Community & Enterprise Section in relation to any development proposal that is likely to have a significant impact on community development in the county and ensure that all new development shall be designed in order to allow for universal access for all people;
- OBJ5** Seek to investigate the feasibility of developing a Greenway Network throughout County Laois, and linking County Laois to regional and national Greenway Networks;
- OBJ6** Explore the potential for rural recreational tourism in conjunction with Tourism bodies, Waterways Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, National Trails Office and National Parks and Wildlife to diversify the range of tourist experience and extend the tourist season.

4.2.1 Education

Education is critical to achieving the full socio-economic potential of the study area.

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 general, where new schools are required, they should be located close to, or within the main residential areas of urban settlements 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. Proximity to open space areas should also be a factor for consideration as this would allow ready access to these amenities and other aligned facilities by the schools and in the strategic long-term may future-proof these schools for possible future expansion should that be necessary.

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.

Section 28 Guidelines entitled The Provision of Schools and the Planning System: A Code of Practice [DoEHLG, 2008] is the pre-eminent guiding document against which applications of this type will be considered.

The Department of Education and Skills Technical Guidance Document TGD-025 Identification and Suitability Assessment of Sites for Primary Schools 2012 will also be consulted.

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) and Department of Education and Skills projections indicate that birth rates will remain relatively high for the foreseeable future at least, resulting in a growing percentage of those in the standard school-going age cohorts of 0-18. This in turn has implications for provision of childcare facilities and primary and secondary level schools infrastructure. In terms of adult education, it is necessary to develop a co-ordinated strategy in conjunction with Laois VEC, FAS, IPA and other related bodies to increase service provision in this key sector across the county.

In view of these trends and to avoid unnecessary duplication or displacement of existing services, Laois County Childcare Committee recommends that a more flexible approach be taken towards the national recommendation of 1:75 and that future residential applications be assessed more on a case by case basis having regard to the socio-economic profile and

level of infrastructure already available or approved in a given area. It also favours greater levels of consultation between itself, the Council and prospective developers.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- SOC1 Ensure that existing school sites are protected for educational use and lands adjacent to existing schools are protected for future educational use to allow for expansion of these schools, if required, subject to site suitability and agreement of school management and ensure that any plan or project associated with the expansion of existing developments is subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening in compliance with the Habitats Directive, and subsequent assessment as required;
- SOC2 Facilitate the development of primary, second-level, third-level outreach, vocational and lifelong learning facilities and digital capacity for distance learning including fourth level education, lifelong learning and Up-skilling generally to meet the needs of the County including mature adults i.e. back to school in existing educational infrastructure;
- SOC3 Ensure the provision and implementation of primary and secondary education facilities in concert with the planning and sustainable development of residential areas in order to maximise the opportunities for use of walking, cycling and use of public transport;
- SOC4 Support the development of multi-campus educational facilities;
- SOC5 Ensure new and refurbished buildings are as self-sustaining as possible, endeavouring to avoid fossil fuel dependence in light of peak oil and climate change;
- SOC6 Support the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) within the lifetime of the Plan in the implementation of the Local Economic and Community Plan with regard to education, skills and training required to create a sustainable economic environment;
- SOC7 Encourage, support and develop opportunities to open up new and existing schools to wider community use;
- SOC8 Co-operate with the Department of Education and Skills in the necessary provision of primary and post primary educational facilities throughout the county by reserving lands for such uses in the respective Local Area Plans and Settlement Plans where necessary and ensure that adequate services such as water supply and wastewater treatment are in place prior to development taking place;
- SOC9 Collaborate with communities to establish the educational needs as they arise with the adaptation to a lower energy society;
- SOC10 Facilitate new educational needs to stimulate understanding and innovation of natural power sources as a pre-requisite essential to facilitating industry;
- SOC11 Encourage, promote and facilitate the provision of childcare facilities in accordance with national policy and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government Planning Guidelines on Childcare Facilities: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DoEHLG, 2001);

- SOC12 Ensure the provision of quality affordable childcare throughout the county in consultation with the Laois County Childcare Committee, and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Tusla Child and Family Agency;
- SOC13 Require the provision of childcare facilities of an appropriate type and scale in suitable locations throughout the county. In particular, the development of childcare facilities at the following locations will normally be required;
- i. areas of concentrated employment and business parks;
 - ii. neighbourhood centres;
 - iii. integrated into large retail developments and retail warehouse parks;
 - iv. in, or in the vicinity of, schools or major educational facilities;
 - v. adjacent to public transport nodes;
 - vi. in, or adjacent to, community centres and
 - vii. within new and existing residential development.
- SOC14 Encourage the provision of childcare facilities in tandem with proposals for new residential developments. Generally, one childcare facility with places for 20 children shall be provided for each 75 family dwellings in accordance with national guidelines [unless it can be demonstrated otherwise, to the satisfaction of the Council, having regard to the existing geographic distribution of childcare facilities and the demographic profile of the area];
- SOC15 Permit childcare facilities in existing residential areas provided that they do not have a significant impact on the character or amenities of an area, particularly with regard to car parking, traffic generation and noise disturbance. Where proposed facilities relate to properties which have been designed and built as dwellings, and are surrounded by other houses, a significant residential element should be retained;
- SOC16 Promote and encourage the provision of a network of childcare facilities that reflect the distribution of the residential population in the county and to minimise travel distance and maximise opportunities for disadvantaged communities;
- SOC17 Encourage, promote and facilitate the provision of education infrastructure and related facilities in accordance with Section 28 national guidelines entitled The Provision of Schools and the Planning System: A Code of Practice [DoEHLG, 2008].

4.2.2. Health Care Facilities

Healthcare and medical facilities are provided by public, private and voluntary agencies within County Laois. The Health Service Executive (HSE) is the primary organisation responsible for the delivery of health care and personal social services to the people of the county. The primary role of Laois County Council with regard to health care is to ensure that there is an adequate policy framework in place which includes for the reservation of lands should additional services be required and that the health care facilities would be permitted subject to good planning practice. The Planning Authority will reserve sites within town and village boundaries for health care facilities in consultation with the HSE.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- SOC18 Co-operate with the Health Service Executive and other statutory and voluntary agencies in the provision of appropriate health care facilities covering the full spectrum of such care from hospitals to the provision of community based care facilities subject to proper planning considerations and the principles of sustainable development;

- SOC19 Ensure that adequate lands and services are available for the improvement, establishment and expansion of health services and ensure that adequate services such as water supply or wastewater treatment are in place prior to development taking place;
- SOC20 Encourage the integration of healthcare facilities within new and existing communities and to discourage proposals that would cause unnecessary isolation or other access difficulties, particularly for the disabled, the elderly and children;
- SOC21 Consider change of use applications from residential to health care facilities / surgeries **only** where the privacy and amenity of adjacent occupiers can be preserved and the proposal does not have a detrimental effect on local amenity by way of an increase in traffic, car parking or noise. The full conversion of semi-detached terraced type dwellings will not be permitted;
- SOC22 Have particular regard to public transport access in considering proposals for major hospital facilities or the re-location of major hospital facilities to a new location. This should include both public transport access from the catchment area of the hospital and, where the facility serves a specialist or national need, from outside of the catchment;
- SOC23 Encourage, support and facilitate the provision of a range of services for the aged population.

4.2.3 Cultural Facilities

The library service of Laois County Council plays an increasingly important educational, community, information and outreach role in the county. It has also become an important venue for cultural activities. In terms of future projects, replacement libraries are planned for Portlaoise, which is under increased pressure as a result of the huge population growth.

The County Laois Arts Development Plan 2014-2017 sets out measures to encourage heightened awareness and interest in the arts and increase public participation by all sectors of the community including those previously not involved. The Arts Plan also includes objectives in relation to public art.

Arts and cultural facilities are wide ranging across the County and include - Dunamais Arts Centre in Portlaoise, Mountmellick and Attanagh museums, Laois Arthouse in Stradbally and outdoor music venues such as the internationally acclaimed Electric Picnic site in Stradbally Hall. Libraries such as Portlaoise, Portarlinton, Stradbally, Mountmellick, Abbeyleix, Mountrath and Durrow serve as key arts and culture outlets within the County.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- CUL1 Continue to expand and improve the library service to meet the needs of the community, in line with the objectives and priorities of the Library Development Plan and subject to the availability of resources;
- CUL2 Provide new library facilities in the Principal Town of Portlaoise during the lifetime of the Plan;
- CUL3 Investigate the delivery of library services to rural villages using public private partnerships and electronic networking, subject to availability of resources;
- CUL4 Provide and improve access for the disabled in both existing and planned library and cultural accommodation;
- CUL5 Develop links between existing library facilities for third level education and outreach facilities in relation to distance learning;

- CUL6 Continue to recognise the importance of the arts in areas of personal development, community development, employment and tourism and to endeavour to create further opportunities in each of these areas;
- CUL7 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 centres as focal points for the community;
- CUL8 Continue the physical enhancement programme of arts spaces in libraries countywide, including visual art galleries, performance and workshop facilities, subject to availability of resources;
- CUL9 Promote the provision of public art, including temporary art and sculpture, through such mechanisms as the government supported Percent for Art Scheme and the development management process;
- CUL10 Encourage and support the creation and display of works of art in public areas, including appropriate locations within the streetscape, provided no unacceptable environmental, amenity; traffic or other problems are created.

4.2.4 Historic Graveyards and Burial Grounds

Burial Grounds are an important part of local heritage and often contain standing artefacts or sites of earlier structures. Listed Burial Grounds are protected under Section 12 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994. Consultation with the NMS of the DoAHG is necessary prior to undertaking works.

The majority of the older/historic burials grounds are listed in the RMP and protected as archaeological monuments by the National Monuments Acts 1930-2004.

Under the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) the Council can include objectives to reserve land for burial grounds. The individual Settlement Plans and Local Area Plans will examine the adequacy of the existing facilities to cater for the Plan period and will reserve lands within each development centre for burial facilities as required. In addition to the actual provision of burial grounds, another important planning issue is to recognise and protect the heritage value of the existing cemeteries, often located in the grounds of old churches. Cemeteries had been provided on a parish basis in Ireland and very frequently were in the vicinity of and associated with the ruins of churches that had existed in previous centuries. These burial places were controlled locally, in the case of Catholic burial grounds by the parish priest and his parishioners. Some of these may be national monuments or in the curtilage of protected structures. The Aghaboe Abbey complex is a good case in point.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- BG1 Facilitate the provision of new burial grounds and the extension of existing cemeteries as appropriate to cater for the needs of a multi-cultural county and ensure the protection of groundwater dependant Natura 2000 sites which rely on the continued supply of groundwater resources to secure the key environmental conditions that support the integrity of the site and through protection of groundwater standards by the Water Framework Directive;
- BG2 Explore the use of environmentally sound burial sites;
- BG3 Protect, preserve, enhance, conserve and maintain the cultural heritage of archaeological/historic graveyards and historic burial grounds(including those identified in the RMP), and continue to encourage and promote local involvement and community stewardship in the care, maintenance, rehabilitation, management and conservation of these graveyards in accordance with legislation and best conservation and heritage and principles;
- BG4 Encourage local community groups to develop, manage and maintain new burial facilities.

4.2.5 Emergency Services

Fire services and civil defence are important safety services provided by Laois County Council. The fire service also has a responsibility in relation to fire safety standards in the design of new and improved buildings, changes of use and also in relation to the fire safety aspects of the daily use of buildings which are accessed by the public. Under the Building Regulations, separate applications are sent to the Fire Service to obtain a Fire Safety Certificate and this is obtained prior to construction.

There are eight fire stations at strategic locations throughout the county; Portlaoise (the headquarters of the network), Portlington, Abbeyleix, Rathdowney, Mountmellick, Stradbally, Durrow and Mountrath.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- ES1 Continue to support the provision of a modern and effective fire service for the county;
- ES2 Facilitate the accommodation of fire service facilities in locations that allow ease of access and safe functioning with respect to the road network and ensure new and refurbished developments are as self-sustaining as possible, endeavouring to avoid fossil fuel dependence in light of peak oil;
- ES3 Continue with the programme for fire station development and improvement at the stations.

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

- Development plan policies;
- Supplementary planning guidance;
- Pre-application discussions and negotiations;
- Development control 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:

- CP1 Support the provision of Garda liaison facilities within community facilities as resources allow;
- CP2 Ensure that development proposals adapt “Designing out Crime” standards as indicated in Section 8 Design and Development Management Standards;
- CP3 Co-operate with an Garda Síochána’s Older Person Strategy to ensure contact and safety of elderly and rurally isolated citizens through the support of local CCTV, community alert/ neighbourhood watch schemes.

4.3 NATURAL AND RECREATIONAL AMENITIES

The Council has recognised the need to maximise opportunities for play facilities for children both within the natural and built environments. Laois County Council has made a major commitment to this sector with funding coming from a number of internal and external sources including development contributions, the FAI and the Dept. of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Recreation, leisure and sport are important components of a good quality of life and have major land use implications. Adequate and accessible provision of open space, sport and recreational facilities including swimming pools and public parks is an important consideration in assessing the quality of life in a town or area. It is likely to become more important as densities in central areas increase and pressure from competing land uses becomes more intense. Open space policies will be considered in the context of these provisions as required in the Development Management I Standard section of the Plan.

Countryside recreation refers to a wide range of activities including horse riding, cycling, walking, picnicking, off-road biking, nature trails, bird watching, painting, photography, field studies, orienteering, para-gliding and hang-gliding, rock climbing, *back-packing*, *caving*, *mountaineering*, *hill walking* and adventure sports, *camping in the wild*, archaeological guided walks and water related activities such as swimming, boating, canoeing and kayaking, wildlife and heritage trails, bird and animal watching, rafting, hill walking, mountain running, mountaineering, swimming and boating. Laois County Council continues to work with the adjoining Counties to further develop and coordinate countryside recreation activities in an environmentally sustainable manner. It is recognised that the countryside of County Laois provides an important resource in outdoor recreational facilities not only for its own population but also for those visiting the county. The Council recognises the significance of natural amenities as a major resource for visitors and local people.

The “National Countryside Recreation Strategy” was finalised in 2006. It defines the scope, vision and a suggested framework for the implementation of countryside recreation as agreed by Comhairle na Tuaithe. This strategy will inform Laois Sports Partnership in the preparation of a strategic plan for physical recreation in County Laois.

The preservation and enhancement of natural amenities and recreation amenities is an integral part of the development of the county, both in terms of providing an attractive and accessible resource for the county’s population and in terms of attracting inward investment from tourism and increasing the marketability of Laois as a location for industry, business and commercial activity. The Council recognises the importance of amenities and recreational amenities in the social, economic and cultural well-being of the county and aims to protect, preserve and enhance these amenities through the following policy areas.

Given that Portlaoise has been designated as a National Transportation Hub in the National Spatial Strategy and its supremacy as a Principal Town within the Midland Regional Settlement Strategy and the Settlement Strategy as indicated in this Plan, Laois County Council will investigate the potential to develop a regional sports centre that would incorporate a range of facilities currently lacking in the region.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- NRA 1 Encourage and facilitate, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, the development of green infrastructure that recognises the synergies that can be achieved with regard to the following:

- i. Provision of open space amenities;
 - ii. Sustainable management of water;
 - iii. Protection and management of biodiversity;
 - iv. Protection of cultural heritage;
 - v. Protection of protected landscape sensitivities.
- NRA 2 Encourage and support local sports and community groups in the provision and development of outdoor and indoor sporting and community facilities;
- NRA 3 Support local sports groups and community groups in the development of facilities through the reservation of suitable land and the provision of funding where available and appropriate;
- NRA 4 Cater for the sporting and recreational needs of all sectors and ages of the community and promote the integration of those with special needs into the sporting and recreational environment;
- NRA 5 Protect leisure and recreation facilities from change of use or redevelopment to other uses unless a comparable facility can be provided to serve the same area;
- NRA 6 Recognize the role played by natural amenities as a major resource for visitors and local people and support, protect and promote public access to mountains, Natura 2000 sites, nature reserves rivers, lakes and other natural amenities that have been traditionally used for outdoor recreation and to the countryside generally and ensure that any plan or project associated with open space planning, recreation or tourism is subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening in compliance with the Habitats Directive, and subsequent assessment as required;
- NRA 7 Work in co-operation with Laois Sports Partnership in exploring the potential for clustering facilities to provide a regional sports centre in a strategic location;
- NRA 8 Support, promote and facilitate the provision and the development of outdoor activities and seek to preserve, improve and extend recreational amenities at appropriate locations;
- NRA 9 Recognise the role played by natural amenities and landscape, as part of our heritage and as a major resource both for visitors and local people, support and protect public access to our natural heritage including mountains, uplands moorlands, forests, rivers, lakes, valleys, nature reserves, scenic areas, areas of natural beauty and to the countryside generally;
- NRA 10 Develop the potential of County Laois as an Outdoor Activity Hub.

4.3.1 Open space provision

Open space can provide a variety of functions, including passive recreation, active recreation, visual amenity, ecology, drainage regulation and socio-economic needs. It is important that the provision of open space considers all of these needs.

Much of the open space suitable for sporting activities in the county belongs to privately managed clubs and organisations. Organisations such as the GAA, soccer clubs, rugby clubs, athletic clubs, together with schools, convents and colleges provide invaluable facilities throughout the county.

However, like many other counties, our towns and villages are currently in need of improved open space and parklands. Development of an appropriate range and standard of facilities for sports and formal recreation will be encouraged.

Proposals on suitable sites for open space and parklands, which are well related to their local catchment populations and to footpath and transport networks, and are capable of being serviced by public transport, will normally be permitted.

It is policy of the Council to:

- NRA11 Prepare an Open Space Plan for the county having regard to the town parks, riverside walks and other amenity spaces and resources and ensure that any plan or project associated with open space planning or tourism **is subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening in compliance with the Habitats Directive, and subsequent assessment as required;**
- NRA12 Update the County Play and Recreation Strategy in consultation with the National Play & Recreational Strategies;
- NRA13 Develop a balance in the location and types of open space provided throughout the County and to ensure the development of high quality open space areas, for both active and passive use, and formal and informal activities and ensure that flood risk management measures are incorporated into the provision of recreation and amenity infrastructure;
- NRA14 Ensure that open space is provided to enhance the character of residential areas;
- NRA15 Require developers to make provision for sport and recreational infrastructure 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;
- NRA16 Encourage developers to pool land for the purposes of open space requirements to allow for the provision of multipurpose amenity areas (e.g. playing pitches) as well as small ancillary open spaces within residential areas;
- NRA17 Investigate the feasibility of providing riverside walks and fishing areas, and where appropriate, ancillary facilities to ensure that these are user-friendly and investigate the feasibility of developing other unique recreational offerings such as mountain biking at appropriate sites, in order to harness the tourist / recreational potential of the county and ensure that any plan or project associated with open space planning or tourism **is subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening in compliance with the Habitats Directive, and subsequent assessment as required;**
- NRA18 Encourage community gardening, allotments and other use of open space to facilitate lower carbon living education and practice;
- NRA19 Encourage open space use by community groups, schools and tidy towns to promote inter generational and cross cultural skill sharing on edible landscapes, community composting, and rain water harvesting;
- NRA20 Preserve the major natural amenities of the county (i.e. Slieve Bloom Mountains and River Valleys) and to provide parks and open spaces in association with them along with facilitating walking and cycling routes linking the mountains, river valleys and major parks and ensure that any plan or project associated with open space planning, recreation or tourism **is subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening in compliance with the Habitats Directive, and subsequent assessment as required;**
- NRA21 Investigate the feasibility of developing walking and cycling routes [such as the Slieve Bloom Mountains Biking Project, Durrow Green Network Cycle Trail to reflect recreational value and to implement strategic green corridors and ensure that any plan or project associated with open space planning, recreation or tourism is subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening in compliance with the Habitats Directive, and subsequent assessment as required.

4.3.2 Sport and Recreation Provision in County Laois

Laois Sports Partnership was established in 2001 as part of the Irish Sports Council initiative aimed at improving the delivery of sport at a local level. The Local Sports Partnership (LSP) initiative aims to increase participation in sport and optimise the use of local resources. Many of the sports facilities within the County are in private ownership. Laois County

Council will continue, where appropriate, to facilitate the provision of further facilities to which public access will be available, where possible. Sporting facilities should be well managed and accessible.

The Council will have regard to the Departments of Health and Children & Youth Affairs' policy document *Teenspace National Recreational Policy for Young People* (2007) and more recently, "*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*" a *National Policy Framework for children and young people 2014 – 2020*. It is recognized that a multi agency approach is required to deliver the needs of the young people of the County. Such needs include skate parks, youth cafes; hang out areas where young people can socialize with one another. The Council will be guided by this multi-agency Plan in the development of local play policies over the lifetime of the Plan.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- NRA22 Discourage development, which would result in the loss of playing fields, parks, children's play space, amenity open space or land zoned for recreational or open space purposes, an exception may be considered where the following requirements are demonstrably met:
- i. a clear excess of playing fields or open space provision within the area. This should take into account the long term needs of the community, the type of recreational and amenity value of such provision;
 - ii. alternative provision is made which is both accessible and of equal or greater quality and benefit to the community;
 - iii. the continued use and proper maintenance of the facility can best be achieved by the redevelopment of a small part of the site that will not adversely affect its sporting, recreational or amenity value;
- NRA23 Seek opportunities to improve the quality and capacity of existing leisure facilities and where appropriate the Council will use its powers under the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) to require development contributions to achieve the redevelopment of existing facilities;
- NRA24 Require developers to make appropriate provision for sport and recreation infrastructure, commensurate with the needs of the development, as an integral element of their proposals.
- NRA25 Prohibit development proposals for sports facilities involving the use of motor vehicles, aircraft or firearms unless the following criteria are fulfilled:
- i. There will be no unacceptable disturbance to local residents. There will be no unacceptable disturbance to farm livestock and wildlife;
 - ii. There will be no conflict with the enjoyment of areas used for informal recreation;
 - iii. The ambient noise level in the area of the proposed development is already high and the noise likely to be produced by the proposed activity will not be pre-dominant;
 - iv. In certain cases, the Council may only consider it appropriate to grant a temporary permission so as to allow the impact of noise levels and other forms of disturbance and nuisance to be more fully assessed.
- NRA26 Encourage the development of areas for both young and older people to frequent such as youth cafes and mens sheds whereby the premises can be used throughout the day by each age group;
- NRA27 Improve the provision of public playgrounds¹² to allow for recreational areas for the elderly and the youth in appropriate locations across the county with particular emphasis on those areas with greatest need;
- NRA28 Provide play facilities adjacent to other community facilities, in so far as is practicable;

¹² Supervised and covered playgrounds will be considered as appropriate subject to development control standards and environmental criteria;

NRA29 Devise and adopt, in co-operation with other relevant agencies, a “Play and Recreational Plan for County Laois” setting out strategy for the provision, resourcing and implementation of improved social and play opportunities for children and the youth of the County.

4.4. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES FOR LEISURE FACILITIES

The Council will support the following specific projects, planned over the course of the County Development Plan 2017-2023 in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders such as Laois Sports Partnership, Laois Partnership, and the communities where the facilities are located as indicated in Table 7 Below:

Table 7: Specific Objectives for Leisure Facilities within County Laois 2017-2023

Planned Leisure Facilities in County Laois 2017-2023	It is an objective of the Council to:
OBJ1	Investigate the feasibility, subject to compliance with the Habitats and Birds Directives of the development of a National Cycling Trail Centre in the Slieve Blooms
OBJ2	Support the development of floodlighting and fencing of grass pitch, extension to sports hall, skate park at Portlaoise Leisure Centre
OBJ3	Support the development of a national natural playground in Emo
OBJ4	Support the development of village playgrounds as appropriate
OBJ5	Support the development of Local Authority Housing Recreational Areas as appropriate;
OBJ6	Support the development of an outdoor adventure centre at Portarlinton Leisure Centre;
OBJ7	Support the development and redevelopment of Slí na Sláinte walking routes in towns and villages;
OBJ8	Support the ongoing development of an athletic track, including provision of dressing rooms and tartan resurface in Portlaoise;
OBJ9	Work with other state agencies in the provision of Youth Café facilities in the main population centres;
OBJ10	Investigate the feasibility, subject to compliance with the Habitats and Birds Directives of further upgrading to the Slieve Bloom Walks;
OBJ11	Investigate the feasibility, subject to compliance with the Habitats and Birds Directives of a Blueway (4.5k.m.) between Woodenbridge to Castle darrow;
OBJ12	Investigate the feasibility, subject to compliance with the Habitats and Birds Directives of a Blueway development between Castle town to Durrow (linking the River Nore);
OBJ13	Investigate the feasibility, subject to compliance with the Habitats and Birds Directives of a River Barrow Blueway development;
OBJ14	Upgrade of existing parks infrastructure as necessary

SECTION 5: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

5.1 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

This section deals with the economic development of Laois including town/village centre management, retail, tourism, inward investment, local entrepreneurship and the rural economy. A sound local economy is fundamental to fostering sustainable communities and a good quality of life. This Development Plan seeks to create the conditions to support the sustainable economic development of County Laois during the plan period 2017-2023.

This section deals with the economic development of Laois including town/village centre management, retail, tourism, inward investment, local entrepreneurship and the rural economy. A sound local economy is fundamental to fostering sustainable communities and a good quality of life. This Development Plan seeks to create the conditions to support the sustainable economic development of County Laois during the Plan period 2017-2023. The Council will engage and collaborate with all relevant stakeholders to ensure the economic potential of the tourism sector is secured for the benefit of the local economy. In addition to the economic benefits associated with the sector, Laois County Council is committed to protecting, promoting and enhancing the natural resources of the County making it a nicer place to live and visit.

This section is informed by the Laois Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2016-2021 and its national and regional economic policy review (Appendix G - LECP). The statutory LECP sets out specific and time-bound actions to promote the economic development of the county. A range of national, regional and local organisations and groups are responsible for delivering LECP economic actions in Laois. Annual monitoring of the LECP's implementation is built into related legislation.

This Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023 sets out the strategic context for the LECP and will support its implementation in a number of ways. The Development Plan specifies the planning policy framework used to assess planning applications. This gives developers and entrepreneurs certainty in relation to how planning applications will be assessed and guidance on how to align their proposals with planning policy. Planning measures to proactively facilitate economic development include:

- i. the preparation of opportunity site briefs,
- ii. the identification of additional retail floorspace required in Laois and
- iii. favourable policies in relation to town centre management.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- ECN1 Build on the role of Portlaoise as the driver for the economic development of County Laois reflecting its designation as Principal Town and its position at the top of the County Retail Hierarchy;
- ECN2 Develop Togher, on the southern outskirts of Portlaoise, as a National Enterprise Park as designated in the National Spatial Strategy and Midland Regional Planning Guidelines;
- ECN3 Enhance and sustain the economic health of our town and village centres and their function as focal points for their rural hinterlands;
- ECN4 Support the marketing of Laois for Inward Investment and as a visitor destination within the Ireland's Ancient East initiative through the Laois LECP;
- ECN5 Facilitate the diversification and strengthening of a Sustainable Laois Economy which will include an improvement of the visitor experience;
- ECN6 Facilitate land-based or resource-based economic activities in rural areas and more generally ways of living and doing business that support a sustainable environment and resilient communities;
- ECN7 Support entrepreneurship in County Laois and jobs-focused education and training programmes.

5.2 INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL ZONING

Laois County Council is proposing extensive industrial and commercial land-use zonings in the Plan.

The Council is mindful of the need to ensure that economic development and employment opportunities within the county are maximized so as to cater for the dramatic increase in population that has occurred over the past two decades in particular.

The type and quantum of such zonings are as follows and are listed in order of size:

- Industrial: 242 hectares
- Enterprise and Employment: 229 hectares
- General Business 141 hectares
- Transport and Utilities: 76 hectares
- Tourism: 42 hectares
- Retail Warehousing: 20 hectares

This is a total of 750 hectares [1,852 acres].

By way of comparison this exceeds by a factor of 3, the amount of land earmarked for residential development [240 hectares] in the Core Strategy Table on page 29 of the Plan.

In addition other zonings which are more generic in name allow for a certain level of economic development. For example the land use light industry is considered as “open for consideration” [without invoking a material contravention procedure] in Town and Village Centres zonings.

As expected the bulk of the industrial and associated zonings are located in accordance with the settlement strategy which in turn adheres to advice from the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines as to the optimum siting of population growth and employment generation. The Principal Town of Portlaoise, the Key Service Town of Portarlinton and the Service Towns of Abbeyleix, Graiguecullen, Mountmellick, Mountrath and Stradbally collectively account for 487 hectares [65%] of the overall total.

The Council is also mindful of the economic development opportunities presented as a result of recent large scale road and rail infrastructure projects throughout the county such as the M7 and M8 Motorway and various rail upgrades.

This has been of major benefit to Portlaoise following on from its designation in both the NSS and RPGs as an Inland Port and National Transport Node. In recognition of this designation, the Council has been pro-active and has serviced and zoned a large landbank at Togher, due south of the town centre and directly adjacent to the M7, for various enterprise and employment activities. The ability of this site to facilitate Foreign Direct Investment development opportunities will be maximised during the Plan period.

Moreover, the Council has allocated economic development and employment generating land use zonings in a number of smaller settlements that benefit from being in close proximity to the improved road and rail transport network. These locations include Borris-in-Ossory, Ballacolla, Ballybrittas and Rathdowney.

5.3 Economy of County Laois

Similar to the wider regional and national picture, the local economy has undergone rapid changes of fortune over the last ten years. The current outlook for the Laois economy is positive. There has been consistent improvement in employment levels in Laois since mid-2013. Relative to the national average, Laois has a young population and high labour-force participation rates. Similar to the wider Midlands and national trends, Laois’ services sector continues to grow its share of the local economy in employment and productivity terms.

Figure 8: Employment by Industrial Sector in Laois 2011

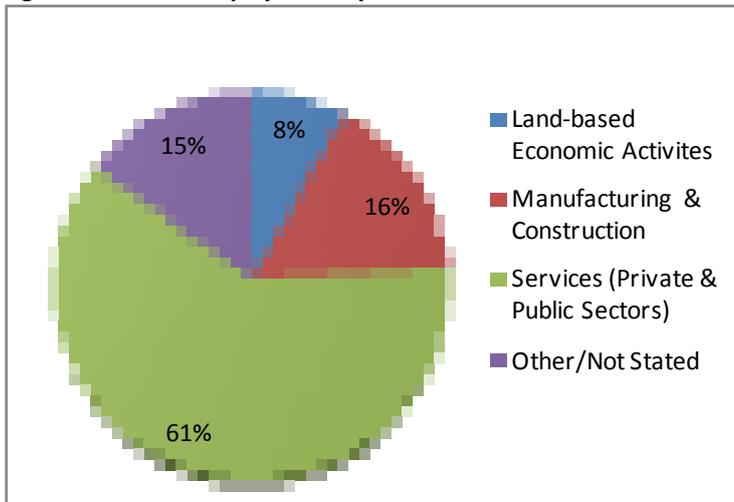
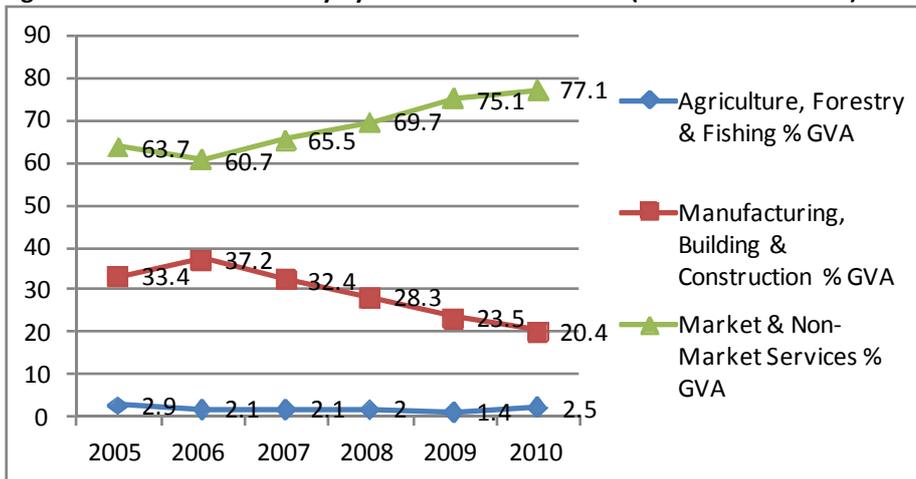


Figure 9 Productivity by Sector in the Midlands (Gross Value Added)



Since 2012, data for the Midlands has shown employment growth across all sectors, particularly in the areas of farming and services (numerically). These trends are likely to have been replicated in Laois on publication of the 2016 Census results.

Table 8: Quarterly National Household Survey

Quarterly National Household Survey – QNQ40 Midlands Jobs	Q1 2012-2015 Increase no.s	Q1 2012-2015 Increase %
All Sectors	9,200	8.8%
A – Forestry, Forestry & Fishing	2,800	38.9%
B-E Industry	1,500	9.7%
F Construction	1,300	16.5%
G-U Services	3,500	4.7%

5.4 SERVICES SECTOR

Strong population growth and a trend towards urbanisation have generated increased demand for services. The public service and retail/wholesale trade are the biggest employers in Laois. Increased demand for education workers and for retail workers is strongly linked to population growth. Portlaoise is the county’s Principal Town and provides the bulk of

retail and commercial services available in the county. 57% of the quantum of County Laois jobs are based in Portlaoise and 1 in 4 Laois residents live there.

Table 9 Composition of the Workforce of County Laois

Broad Industrial Group	% of Laois workforce in 2006	% of Laois workforce in 2011
Wholesale and retail trade	13.53%	15.71%
Hotels and restaurants	4.30%	4.93%
Transport, storage and communications	5.50%	5.66%
Banking & financial services	2.70%	3.27%
Real estate, renting and business activities	5.74%	6.61%
Public administration & defence	7.34%	8.67%
Education	5.78%	8.18%
Health and social work	10.16%	11.40%
Other community, social and personal activities	3.42%	4.13%

5.5 MANUFACTURING AND SERVICES ENTERPRISES (NATIONALLY/INTERNATIONALLY TRADED)

Employment in manufacturing in Laois is low relative to the Midlands Region and the state average. However, it remains locally significant despite a long-standing international trend of declining employment levels in manufacturing. A very small number of Laois-based service and manufacturing jobs are agency-supported (IDA, Enterprise Ireland).

Laois has a limited share of high-value-added/high-technology manufacturing and service provision. However, a small cluster of clean-technology firms operate in the county including Enva Ireland and LSM Engineering based in Portlaoise.

Clean technology is an umbrella term for industries concerned with resource, material or energy efficiency as well as sustainable waste and water management, energy generation/storage and mobility. There may be opportunities to further develop this sector in revenue terms in Laois, having regard to its transport connectivity to domestic and international markets, infrastructural capacity (water, gas, and electricity), labour pool and land availability.

Table 10: % of Workforce involved in Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Construction

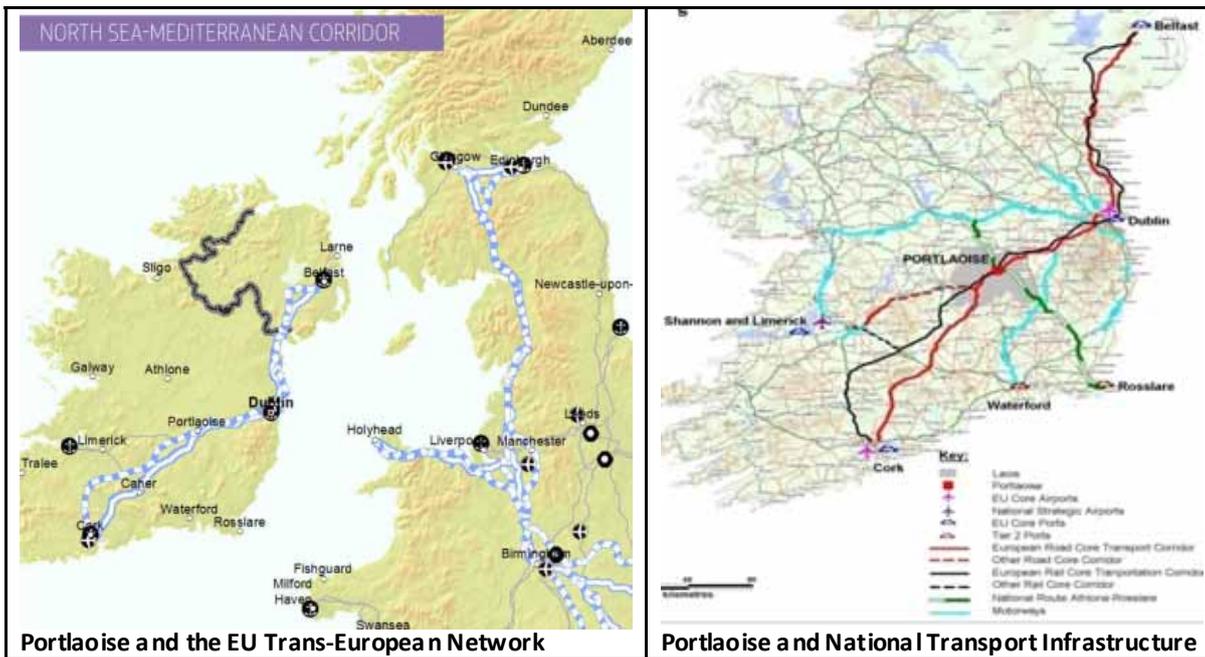
Broad Industrial Group	% of Laois workforce 2006	% of Laois workforce 2011
Manufacturing industries	11.05%	9.04%
Electricity, gas and water supply	0.64%	0.86%
Construction	14.40%	5.88%

Some of Laois’ manufacturing activities add value to local produce, for example the Dawn Meats factory in Rathdowney, Sheeran’s timber manufacturing plant in Mountrath, Laois Sawmills in Portlaoise and Glanbia’s Oats Mill in Portlaoise all utilise locally-produced commodities. The manufacturing of concrete and stone products, using locally-quarried aggregate and stone, is a feature of the manufacturing sector in Laois. Adding value to locally-produced commodities within the county is a way of increasing the value, sustainability and importance of the commodity sector to the Laois economy. Similarly, but on a smaller scale, the manufacture of niche or specialist food products using local agricultural produce provides for sustainable rural development.

Modest growth in employment in the construction sector is anticipated as the economy improves and following the employment collapse in this sector between 2006 and 2011.

National and regional policy supports the development of a landbank outside Portlaoise known as Togher for a range of service enterprises including transport, logistics and conferencing. Though policy support has been in place for several years, the envisaged development never materialised. Economic recovery may bring about fresh interest in taking advantage of Portlaoise transport connectivity and the enabling policy support.

Figure 10: Portlaoise and its connectivity in the national and European Context



The modern economy is characterised by rapid changes with new and sometimes unexpected areas of commercial opportunities emerging, while some traditional enterprises lose their competitive advantage. It is anticipated that further employment growth in Laois will be strongly associated with private sector enterprises in the services sector. Zoned brownfield and greenfield lands provide opportunities for a range of uses including office-based uses.

5.6 ENTREPRENEURSHIP

A drop of 20% in the number of private enterprises headquartered in Laois occurred between 2008 and 2012, as well as a 40% reduction in employment in these enterprises (Business Demography 2012). Income levels of self-employed workers in Laois declined by 35% compared to a decline of 12% in employee incomes between 2008 and 2012 (County and Regional Incomes 2012). These figures suggest a strong focus on supporting innovation and entrepreneurship is needed in Laois. Around 80% of businesses operating in Laois are micro in scale (Data Ireland 2012). Developing capacity in innovation and entrepreneurship is therefore an important objective for LEO Laois, Laois Partnership Company, Carlow IT as well as Portlaoise and Portarlington Enterprise Centre.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- ECN 8 Support the implementation of LECP Economic Actions to market Laois for Inward Investment and for diversifying and strengthening a sustainable Laois economy, such as the preparation of a suite of opportunity site briefs suitable for large-scale enterprise/commercial uses and the promotion of Laois' centrality, its transport connectivity and Portlaoise's location along a Trans-European Core Network Corridor and its designation as a national transport node;
- ECN 9 Work in partnership with agencies such as Enterprise Ireland, Connect Ireland and IDA Ireland to find suitable sites or premises for prospective enterprises considering locating in Laois;
- ECN 10 Ensure the provision of enabling infrastructure (potable/waste water, electricity, gas) keeps pace with the needs of existing and prospective enterprises and protect lands reserved for enabling infrastructure development;

- ECN11 Encourage the clustering of mutually supportive land uses to maximise synergistic business relationships and develop specialist labour skills in particular in the clean technology sector and enterprises that locally-produced commodities as inputs;
- ECN12 Ensure a sufficient quantum and range of serviced employment lands is zoned and available to accommodate appropriate enterprise development;
- ECN13 Direct labour intensive enterprises to town centre/edge of centre locations and brownfield sites and favour brownfield sites over greenfield sites for general enterprise development in the interests of sustainability and orderly development;
- ECN14 Work in partnership with agencies such as Enterprise Ireland, LEO Laois, Laois Partnership Company, the Portlaoise Enterprise Centre and the Portarlinton Enterprise Centre to provide enterprise incubator spaces and support enterprise formation and scaling, subject to the Development Management Standards contained in Section 8.
- ECN15 Support home-based economic activities subject to environmental, traffic and residential amenity considerations and not undermining the land use zoning objectives of employment lands;
- ECN16 Foster the cultivation of entrepreneurship among children, the provision of jobs-focused further education programmes and entrepreneur-focused training and mentoring to business owners in partnership with the Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board, LEO Laois, Laois Partnership Company, Department of Social Protection and Laois library network.

5.7 HOME BASED ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

County Laois fails to provide enough jobs to support its population. 42% of Laois workers with a fixed place of work commute out of the County for work with Dublin (30%), Kildare (27%), Carlow (15%), Offaly (10%) and Kilkenny (7%) the most popular destinations (2011). Just 20% of Laois-based jobs are performed by inbound commuters. The net outbound commuting of Laois residents to all surrounding counties (excluding Offaly) for employment indicates the need for the creation of additional jobs in the county in the interests of a sustainable economy, smarter travel and a good quality of life.

Many electoral divisions in east Laois experience out-of-county commuting in the order of 60%. Outbound commuting in electoral divisions with high populations, such as those relating to Portarlinton (over 60%), and Graiguecullen (60%) as well as Portlaoise (40-50%) and Mountmellick (40-50%) is particularly notable.

High commuting patterns in eastern parts of the county correlate with higher rates of third-level education suggesting that commuters possess high-end skillsets and an employment profile distinct from in-county workers. Looking at the profile of workers resident in the larger towns, Portarlinton and Graiguecullen have a higher proportion of employers and managers than Portlaoise or the state average. This perhaps again reflects a high-skill base among the commuting cohort. Mountmellick has the lowest proportion of employers and managers of the large Laois towns and the highest proportion of lower professionals and semi-skilled workers.

The creation of additional higher-skilled employment in the county may provide opportunities for Laois residents to work locally with economic as well as social and environmental benefits accruing as a result. For example, Portarlinton has a high % of residents with third-level education and a high % of commuters. Though it has over twice the population of Mountmellick, a similar numbers of jobs are based in Portarlinton as Mountmellick. Harnessing the full potential of Laois' rich pool of skills and talent is important to its future economic development.

It is an objective of the Council to:

- ECN17 Seek to provide opportunities for highly-skilled outbound commuters to work locally through local employment opportunities, tourism opportunities, the development of an e-working centre or working-from-home

Looking at Retail Excellence Ireland’s review of towns (based on customer/traders surveys in the town centre), Graiguecullen residents enjoyed the use of a strong town across the border in Carlow. Portlaoise and Mountmellick performed equally in the third quartile and Portarlington performed the poorest. Portlaoise, Portarlington and Mountmellick performed well in relation to people’s views of:

- Safety and security in the town centre;
- The family-friendliness of the town centre;
- Town centre presentation and maintenance.

The towns performed poorly in relation to:

- Things to do and see in the town centres;
- Lots of events and promotions being run in the town centres.

Portlaoise scored well in relation to the number of quality retail stores to choose from and the large number of quality restaurants and pubs to choose from and it performed poorly on the price of car parking. Portarlington scored poorly as a first-choice shopping destination and just over 50% of those surveyed thought the town has a unique and positive image. Around 75% of those surveyed thought Mountmellick has a unique and positive image, that there was abundant car parking available and that it is competitively priced. The retail, restaurant and pub choice in Mountmellick was considered poor.

Table 11: Assessment of performance of Laois Towns

ASSESSMENTS OF LAOIS TOWNS Source → Area ↻	Pop (2011)	DKM’s Q2 2015 Commercial Vacancy Rate (no. commercial address points)	Teagasc Rural Town Index of Economic Strength (unemployment/migration data): 1 (strong) – 302 (weak)	REI Town & City Review 2012 (weighting 30% Trader/70% Customer) quartile ranking: 1 st (strong) 4 th (weak)
Portlaoise	20,145	16.1% (802)	151	3 rd Quartile
Portarlington	7,788	20.9% (202)	186	4 th Quartile
Graiguecullen/ Carlow	3,966	16% Carlow	68 Graiguecullen	1 st Quartile Carlow
Mountmellick	4,735	15.4% (152)	270	3 rd Quartile
Abbeyleix	1,827	N/A	113	N/A
Stradbally	1,661	N/A	221	N/A
Mountrath	1,154	N/A	183	N/A
Rathdowney	1,208	N/A	N/A	N/A
Durrow	843	N/A	N/A	N/A

It is the policy of the Council to:

- ECN 19 Support the implementation of LECP Economic Actions and LECP Community Actions related to the maintaining and enhancing the vitality and vibrancy of Laois Town and Village Centres in particular focusing on Portlaoise;
- ECN 20 Maintain the function of towns as drivers for the economic development of their rural hinterlands and in particular foster the economic development of the Portlaoise and Rathdowney Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ);
- ECN21 Encourage the maintenance of town/village centre buildings and improve the quality of the public realm in town/village centres making them more attractive and safe to locals and visitors, as well as more pedestrian and cycle-friendly. Prepare Public Realm Strategies, where appropriate, liaising closely with residents, visitors and other relevant stakeholders;

- ECN22 Assist in site assembly and facilitate appropriate new development in town/village centres by way of alterations and extensions, infill development as well as demolition and redevelopment subject to planning considerations such as architectural heritage and flood risk;
- ECN23 Maintain compact and permeable town/village centres, conserve any special architectural interest of town/village centres and foster active frontages at ground floor level to ensure bustling town and village centres;
- ECN24 Retain and foster a mix of uses in town/village centres including commercial, community-based, civic, educational, recreational, Tourism and religious to bolster the central role of town/village centres in the day-to-day lives of Laois people;
- ECN25 Support the hosting of markets (including farmers markets), events or festivals in town/village centre locations and the running of town-based cultural/learning facilities such as the Dunamase Theatre, the Stradbally Arthouse and Laois' library network in the interests of vitality and vibrancy.
- ECN26 Provide for night-time economy in town centres including public houses, nightclubs, restaurants and takeaways, subject to considerations of undue concentration/proliferation, and mitigate any adverse effects of these uses and other uses on the residential amenity of town centre residents;
- ECN 27 Encourage residential uses in town/village centres, such as living over the shop through the flexible application of parking, amenity space and internal space standards where these standards cannot be practicably met on-site;
- ECN 28 Recognise and support the role of town/village-based community groups including trader groups that make a significant contribution to town/village centre management;
- ECN 29 Encourage start-up businesses and tourism businesses to set-up in town and village centre locations;
- ECN30 Provide short-stay parking in town centres to support business and tourism activities, balancing the need to encourage people into the town centre against sustainable transport and land-use efficiency considerations.

5.9 RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

A Retail Strategy has been prepared to coincide with the preparation of the County Development Plan 2017-2023. The Retail Strategy was carried out by Future Analytics Consulting Ltd., in consultation with Laois County Council, in accordance with provisions set out in the *Retail Planning: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DECLG, 2012)*. The document is available at Annex 2 of this Plan.

Retail is an important employment sector in Laois. More generally shopping is a lynchpin for the vitality of town and village centres. More than 75% of retail floorspace is located in Portlaoise and it is necessary to retain that primacy to reduce leakage to other counties. Proposals for retail development will be considered in the context of the retail hierarchy and sequential approach set out in the Laois Retail Strategy 2017-2023, the quantum of new convenience and comparison floorspace identified as appropriate therein, the Retail Planning Guidelines and the policies below.

5.9.1 Key Objectives of the Retail Strategy

The Retail Strategy covers Portlaoise and the remaining County area. General policies and objectives for other towns and villages are included in the strategy. The key objectives of the retail strategy were heavily informed by the Retail Planning Guidelines. These key objectives are as follows:

- a. Define the retail hierarchy in the county and related retail core boundaries;
- b. Undertake a health check appraisal of the key retail centres in Laois, to ascertain the need for interventions in these areas;
- c. Identify the broad requirement for additional retail floorspace development in the county over the plan period, to support the established settlement hierarchy, and;

- d. Provide guidance on policy recommendations and criteria for the future assessment of retail development proposals over the Development Plan Period 2017-2023.
- e. retention and enhancement of the vitality and vibrancy of the town centre core areas as shopping destinations
- f. adhere to the sequential test approach principle in determining applications for retail development

5.9.2 Strategic Guidance

Both the quantitative assessment (capacity assessment) of additional retail floorspace requirements for the county and the qualitative review (health checks) of the various retail centres in the county outline how the principal towns within Laois are performing at present.

One of the functions of the strategy update is to review the broad quantum of additional retail floorspace that is required for the county over the period so as to maintain and enhance the positive economic performance of Portlaoise and the county. The Retail Strategy will indicate where the additional retail floorspace should be located. In this context, the location and extent of new retail development must have regard to the planning framework for the county and will be assessed against the criteria contained in the *Retail Planning: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DECLG, 2012)* and the Development Management Standards contained in Section 8.

Central to the provision of additional retail floorspace is the need to reinforce the Retail Hierarchy of the county, in existing town and village centres. Therefore, it is vital that Portlaoise, as the Principal Town continues to develop its retail function to meet expanding shopping needs and to ensure a healthy and competitive retail environment.

To achieve the key objectives of the strategy due cognisance must be taken of the strategic policy framework that underpins the updated specific policies and proposals in this document. This framework is set by:

- i. Portlaoise's position in the national Retail Hierarchy;
- ii. Identifying the County Retail Hierarchy;
- iii. The spatial distribution of new retail development with the County Retail Hierarchy;
- iv. The core retail areas;
- v. The sequential approach; and
- vi. A consideration of need.

5.9.3 Portlaoise's Position in the National Retail Hierarchy

Portlaoise is the primary settlement and largest population centre within County Laois. Census 2011 records the population of Portlaoise at 20,145 an increase of 38% on Census 2006, making it one of the fastest growing towns in Leinster over that period. Centrally located within the county, and having the advantage of excellent quality local, regional and national linkages, the town has become a settlement of regional importance.

The value of the town and the support function which it provides to its residents as well as those of its hinterland has been recognised at both a national and regional context. The Retail Planning Guidelines, recognises that the town provides a regional important retailing function. The importance of the town within a local and regional context has also been recognised by the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines, which has defined the town as being a Principal Town, the term also adopted as part of the Core Strategy.

5.9.4 Identifying the County Retail Hierarchy

The purpose of the Retail Hierarchy is to indicate the level and form of retailing activity appropriate to the various urban centres in the county. Taking a criteria-based approach enables the Council to protect each centre's overall vitality and viability whilst allowing each centre to perform its overall function within the county's settlement hierarchy. It is the core concept of the Retail Hierarchy that the principal urban area is supported by Key Service Towns and to a lesser extent local service towns and villages.

The Retail Strategy focuses primarily on the upper levels of the hierarchy. It is important to note that this is not to deter or discourage smaller scale retail development and investment in the smaller villages. Rather, it is important to set a clear

hierarchy which identifies where the distribution of new retail floorspace should be delivered and which is appropriate in scale and character to the hierarchical role of the centre. The Laois County Retail Hierarchy is set out as follows:

Table 12: Laois Retail Hierarchy

Status under Hierarchy	County Town	Action
Major Town Centre MRPGs: Principal Town	Portlaoise	Reinforce and grow high-order retail functioning with particular emphasis on historic core defined by the Primary Retail Area. Enhance the retail appeal of Laois by strengthening retail functions of Portlaoise.
County Town Centre MRPGs: Key Service Town	Portarlinton	Encourage retail development commensurate with existing and anticipated growth, with particular emphasis on traditional core
County Town Centre MRPGs: Service Towns	Mountmellick Abbeyleix Mountrath Stradbally	Sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of the central parts of the town in conjunction with the utilisation of strategic backland areas.
County Town Centre MRPGs: Local Service Towns	Durrow Rathdowney	Provide and retain essential shopping facilities in smaller rural settlements to serve local residents and the wider hinterland.
Newly Emerging Local Service Town	Ballylynan	Provide and retain essential shopping facilities in smaller rural settlements to serve local residents and the wider hinterland.
District Centre MRPG Service Town:	Graigucullen	Provide for shopping, amenity, commercial and community facilities of a scale and type to serve residents living within the district without undermining Carlow Town Centre.
Neighbourhood Centres	Kilminchy , Dublin road Portlaoise, Fairgreen, Mountmellick Road Portlaoise, Mountmellick Road, Portlaoise , Mountrath Road, Portlaoise Summerhill, Portlaoise , sandy Lane, Portarlinton, Graigue Village Centre, Killeshin Road , Graigucullen Numbers Road Graigucullen	Provide for shopping, amenity, commercial and community facilities of a scale and type to serve neighbourhood residents without undermining the town centre.
Villages	Includes zoned villages only	Provide and retain essential shopping facilities in smaller rural settlements to serve local residents and the wider hinterland.

5.9.5 Spatial Distribution of Additional Retail within the County Retail Hierarchy

The Laois County Retail Strategy provides a strategic policy framework, in accordance with the provisions of the Retail Planning Guidelines, for the spatial distribution of new retail development in the county. While such a framework inherently emphasises strategic guidance on the location and scale of major retail development, it must ensure that the strategy does not inhibit appropriate scale retail development in identified centres within the county, specifically in smaller settlements. Thus, it is implicit in the key objectives of the strategy that such developments should be encouraged and facilitated where possible to enhance the sustainability, vitality and viability of smaller centres within the county.

5.9.6 Core Retail Areas

The Council will promote greater vitality in town centres through the implementation of a sequential approach to the location of all subsequent retail development. This sequential approach prioritises development within the town centres or core retail areas at the expense of more peripheral edge-of-centre or out-of-centre locations, which traditionally have poorer functional and spatial linkages with the core. This approach recognises the importance of core areas as the most suitable locations for higher order fashion and comparison goods, as they are easily accessible for the majority of the catchment population and also provide a compact and sustainable critical mass of commercial activity and public amenities, thereby reducing the need to travel.

Portlaoise’s Core Retail Area is to be the focus and preferred location for retail development during the Plan period. Portlaoise has a vibrant retail core but has a notable deficiency in high-end, modern comparison retail floor plates. The lack of high value comparison anchors in the town core has undoubtedly contributed to the growth of expenditure leakage from the town’s catchment area as the retail profiles of competing centres have developed at a faster pace. In order for Portlaoise to compete effectively with other urban centres of a similar scale, it is imperative that sufficient high-end comparison shopping is in place in the town core area.

It is essential in terms of the sustainable development of the town going forward that this high-end comparison shopping provision is retained and substantially enhanced within the town core area and that leakage to the periphery is prevented. A proactive approach to urban design will be taken and substantial redevelopment in the core area should utilise opportunities to facilitate attractive and vibrant environments designed at a human scale, with enhanced pedestrian permeability, visually engaging, secure and inviting public realms that promote and encourage passive and active recreation.

5.9.7 The Sequential Approach

The Retail Planning Guidelines state that the order of priority for the sequential approach is to locate retail development in the town centre and only to allow retail development in edge-of-centre or out-of-centre locations where all other options have been exhausted.

Figure 12: Order of Priority – Sequential Approach



All applications for retail developments at edge-of-centre or out-of-centre will be subject to the sequential test as outlined in the Retail Planning Guidelines. Where an application for a retail development edge of centre and out of town centre is lodged to the planning authority, the applicant shall demonstrate that all town centre options including but not limited to opportunity sites have been assessed and evaluated and that flexibility has been adopted by the retailer in regard to the retail format.

5.9.8 Consideration of Need

Developing the retail offer of the county, especially in respect of high end high street comparison shopping, is vital if

Laois is to remain competitive and arrest the levels of both convenience and comparison expenditure leakage to centres outside of the county.

This is particularly important for Portlaoise if it is to enhance its strategic role as outlined in the Midland’s Regional Planning Guidelines, as an integrated link and a principal town in the broader polycentric model for the Region including the linked gateway. It is also critical given the town’s position as a crucial urban anchor providing essential services in an otherwise predominantly rural county.

Apart from Portlaoise, the other retail centres in the county are small both in terms of population size and quantum of retail floorspace. The improvement of the retail offer of these centres needs to be encouraged and facilitated. Concurrently, in order to reduce expenditure leakage to other areas, the strategic priority must be to focus on enhancing the retailing environment of Portlaoise.

The Retail Planning Guidelines advise that Retail Strategies should “*assess the broad requirement for additional development over the plan period... these assessments of future retail requirements are intended to provide **broad guidance** as to the additional quantum of convenience and comparison floorspace provision. They should not be treated in an **overly prescriptive** manner, nor should they serve to inhibit competition*”. For this purpose, it is not the intention of this strategy to present figures as some form of cap on retail permissions in the County, but rather to guide the general scale of overall retail provision.

TABLE 13 Additional Retail Floorspace Requirements for County Laois 2017-2023

Retail Category Floor Space Type	Square Metres
Additional Convenience	8,767
Additional Comparison [non-bulky]	5,478
Additional Comparison [bulky]	6,167

Future additional retail provision within Portlaoise and its environs should address the insufficiency of the centre’s high end high street comparison retail offer and traffic congestion problems in the centre.

5.9.9 Consideration of Vacancy

Based on market insights, a frictional vacancy rate of 13.8% was held across the respective categories to foster competition in the market and the residual total was fed in the calculated demand model. Identified demand over the plan period was subsequently rationalised on the basis of this vacancy to determine a adjusted floorspace requirements.

In undertaking the review of the Laois County Retail Strategy, Laois County Council has sought to take a proactive approach to addressing the issue of retail floorspace vacancy, while remaining cognisant of their responsibility to facilitate growth in retail and general economic activity within the county. The Retail Strategy has taken a cumulative approach to depleting vacant floorspace, while accommodating additional floorspace where it is required.

5.9.10 Retail Policies and Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

OBJ1 Ensure that County Laois possesses a clear policy framework that will inform both the conception and assessment of retail development proposals and help to guarantee that the strategic and local convenience and comparison retailing needs of the county are met;

OBJ2 Ensure the orderly development of future retail developments in County Laois to keep the retail strategy under review, having regard to the changes in the retail sector and have regard to any such review in determining applications for retail development;

- OBJ3** Maintain, and where possible, enhance the existing competitiveness of the county's main centres by facilitating the development of additional retail floorspace where it can be clearly established that such development will result in tangible improvements to the retail offering of the county;
- OBJ 4** Acknowledge the importance of the principal, key service and service towns in providing a wide range of both convenience and comparison and visitor shopping in locations close to centres of population and larger, more remote retail hinterlands;
- OBJ 5** Acknowledge the importance of local service towns, villages and rural serviced settlements and hinterlands in suburban and rural locations in meeting local and visitor shopping needs.
- OBJ6** Encourage the improvement to the designs of local retail centres in suburban areas and rural villages , including the provision of facilities in the public realm;
- OBJ7** Encourage reductions in floorspace vacancy, taking account of suitability, obsolescence, and the identification of alternative uses for existing vacant floorspace within the urban centres of the county;
- OBJ 8** Encourage and Facilitate the reuse and regeneration of derelict sites and buildings for retail uses with due cognisance to the sequential approach as indicated in the regional planning guidelines;
- OBJ9** Facilitate the regeneration of areas with scope for improvement or where there may be a high level of vacancy, obsolescence or emerging issues of dereliction, subject to the provisions of the Sequential Test;
- OBJ10** Address the issue of retail expenditure leakage out of the county to competing centres by looking to develop the retail offering in the county within key retail sectors where this leakage occurs.
- OBJ11** Engage with the relevant stakeholders and incentivise to ensure that the environmental attractiveness of town/local centres is enhanced; and

It is the policy of the Council to:

- RET 1** Acknowledge the importance of town centres in providing a wide range of both convenience and comparison shopping close to significant centres of population;
- RET2** Permit retail development of a size and scale which is appropriate to the level of the town/settlement area, including its population, as defined within the County retail hierarchy. This policy will aim to consolidate and reinforce all existing retail enterprises within the County, and permit the development of additional retail floorspace where such development is deemed to be appropriate by Laois County Council;
- RET3** Ensure that all retail development permitted is in accordance with the Retail Planning: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DECLG, 2012) and the Laois County Retail Strategy;
- RET4** Ensure that the retail needs of the County's residents and visitors are met as fully as possible within the county taking due cognisance of the regional retail and settlement hierarchy;
- RET5** Protect the location of existing retail uses in town and village centres, the re-location of these uses to edge-of-centre or out-of-centre locations will not be accepted;
- RET 6** Maintain the retail use of ground-floor premises in town and village centres, change-of-use will only be favourably considered where the replacement use achieves an active street frontage, generates a high-degree of pedestrian movement, operates during day-time hours and contributes to the vitality and vibrancy of the town/village centre;
- RET 7** Acknowledge **the role of Portlaoise as the primary retail centre** in the County and the focus for comparison retail development, subject to the criteria of the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012. In principle, this will not

preclude the consideration of proposals in locations where mitigating and robustly justified special circumstances apply;

- RET8 Encourage and facilitate the preservation and enhancement of the retail role of smaller villages and centres around the County;
- RET10 Encourage the consolidation of other non retail based services within the town centres of the County utilising existing vacant retail floorspace where necessary;
- RET11 Promote the reuse of vacant retail floorspace. Where no viable retail use can be sustained, alternative uses will be assessed on their own merits against the requirements of the proper planning and sustainable development of the areas within which they are located, require applicants to undertake an assessment of the quality and suitability of existing and available floorspace in the County relative to the circumstances of their proposals;
- RET12 Enable the development of 5,478 sq ms of additional comparison [non-bulky] shopping floorspace, 6,167 sq. ms. of additional comparison [bulky] shopping floorspace and 8,767 sq. ms. of additional convenience shopping floorspace in County Laois in accordance with the Laois Retail Strategy 2017-2023 and Retail Planning Guidelines, to strengthen the retail offering available to Laois residents, reduce leakage and balance the need to protect the vitality and vibrancy of town centres against the need for competition;
- RET13 Ensure retail developments on edge of centre sites or out of town centre sites will only be considered when it has been clearly demonstrated that all viable, available and suitable sites in the town centre have been fully investigated and considered in accordance with the Retail Planning Guidelines and in particular the sequential test;
- RET14 Improve the public realm of town centres through the encouragement of high quality civic design, including but not limited to the provision of attractive street furniture, lighting and effective street cleaning. Prepare Public Realm Strategies, where appropriate, liaising closely with residents, visitors and other relevant stakeholders;
- RET15 Undertake measures to improve the accessibility of town centres by developing a pedestrian and cyclist friendly environment, which improves safety and limits traffic congestion where possible;
- RET16 Encourage and facilitate retail innovation, where appropriate, to help diversify the County's retail profile and offer. Where possible, this retail innovation should be directed towards existing urban centres and settlements in the first instance, but will not preclude the development of retail enterprises in other locations, where the retail innovation in question cannot be sustained within any alternative location. Such development proposals will be assessed on their own merits, and must satisfy the assessment criteria of the Retail Planning Guidelines;
- RET17** Require a Retail Impact Assessment to be carried out for development proposals in the following general circumstances:
- a) Proposals featuring greater than 1,000sqm of net floorspace for both convenience and comparison type developments in the Principal Town of Portlaoise;
 - b) Proposals featuring greater than 500sqm of net retail floorspace for both convenience and comparison type developments in all other settlements;
 - c) Or where the Planning Authority considers the development may impact on the vitality and viability of a town centre.

The Retail Impact Assessment shall include, at minimum, the criteria set out in the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012.

- RET18:** Ensure that all proposed retailing projects and any associated improvement works or associated infrastructure such as parking facilities, individually or in combination with other plans and projects, are **subject to Appropriate**

Assessment to ensure there are no likely significant effects on the integrity of any Natura 2000 sites¹³ in the County.

5.9.11 Framework for the Assessment of Future Retail Developments

The Retail Strategy indicates the criteria under which proposals for new retail developments will be considered. The aim of the strategy is to provide Laois with a modern retail experience to the highest of standards. It is intended that all proposed new retail developments will be assessed against the criteria that are set out in both the Retail Strategy 2017-2023 and the Development Management Standards in Section 8.

5.10 RURAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

The rural landscapes of Laois are shaped by economic activities such as forestry, quarrying and in particular farming as well as housing. Unlike in urban areas where industrial uses that generate noise and odour can be clearly separated from emission-sensitive residential uses through zoning, this robust system of separating uses does not happen in the same way in rural areas and conflicting uses can occur in close proximity. Just over half of Laois residents live in rural areas. Rural economic sectors remain very important in Laois. According to Census 2011 data, 8% of Laois' workforce is engaged in farming and forestry; this is higher than the State average (5%). Less than 1% are engaged in quarrying and peat extraction. The growth in employment in these land-based sectors in the Midlands between 2012 and 2015 reinforces the continuing importance of this sector to the local economy.

The Council will seek to facilitate rural economic development opportunities in accordance with policies and objectives set out hereunder and also having particular regard to the requirements of Policy Trans 7, which restricts development along the national road network.

Table 14: % of the Labour Force engaged in the Rural Economy

Broad Industrial Group	% of Laois workforce 2006	% of Laois workforce 2011
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	7.59%	8.14%
Mining, quarrying & turf production	0.95%	0.67%

Source – CSO 2011

Table 15: Numbers involved in NACE Sectors

QNHS – Midlands QNQ40	Q1 2012-15 Increase no.s	Q1 2011-15 Increase %
All NACE Sectors	9200	8.8%
A – Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing	2800	38.9%

Source – CSO 2011

Agriculture

In the Agricultural Census 2010, 72% of land in Laois was used for farming purposes, while 14.7% is associated with forestry. The future development of agriculture is underpinned by the State agency Teagasc programmes in relation to Foodwise Agri-Food Strategy 2025 and the Forestry Programme 2014–20 in its Advisory and Education Strategic Plan for the Region 2015–2020.

The Council recognises the importance of agriculture for sustaining, enhancing and maintaining a viable rural economy. The Council will support and facilitate agricultural restructuring and diversification within the framework of the 2020 Strategy (Department of Agriculture 2010), in order to integrate the sector more closely with rural development, in pursuit of environmental and social objectives. This approach accords with national policy as set out in the National Sustainable Development Strategy. The Council supports the emphasis in the National Development Plan on investment, on measures for improving farm structures, including farm waste management, animal welfare, food quality and

¹³ In accordance with requirements under Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the EU Habitats Directive.

environmental protection, complementing the substantial investment in REPS. The optimum and environmentally sensitive use of land no longer required for agriculture will be a key issue over the Plan period. Where appropriate Laois County Council will support the production of energy crops on set aside land throughout the County.

Afforestation

Forests and woodlands are a natural resource which can provide commercial, recreational, environmental, amenity and aesthetic benefits. There is considerable potential to develop this sector in County Laois from its current relatively low base. The Council recognises the importance of forestry, its value added potential, and the opportunities it offers for on-farm diversification. Emphasis on forestry has increased because of its role in economic development and employment and the potential of forestry to sequester carbon, thereby offsetting the production of green house gases such as methane, nitrous oxide and carbon dioxide. Nonetheless, the benefits arising from carbon sequestration must be balanced against the need to carefully manage forestry [especially coniferous plantations] so that it does not result in damage to visual amenity, residential amenity, soil and water quality or biodiversity. State ownership accounts for 63% of afforestation in County Laois.

Peatlands

The development of the county's peat resources will be promoted and facilitated by the Council also which recognizes the potential of peatland areas for tourism, amenity, educational and research purposes. They could also potentially accommodate large scale alternative energy production in the form of solar and wind.

Peatlands are one of the world's most important ecosystems. Covering a mere 3% of the world's terrestrial surface, peatlands contain 550 gigatonnes of carbon, making them the most important long term carbon sinks in the terrestrial biosphere. This ability of peatlands to store CO₂ and other greenhouse gas means they have a net cooling effect on the global climate. Our management of peatlands has to be sustainable. The rewetting and restoration of peatland has the capacity to secure existing carbon stock and reinitiate the carbon sequestration capacity of degraded peatlands.

Mining and Aggregates

The Council recognises that the aggregate and concrete products industry contribute to the development of the national, regional and local economies by the proper use and management of natural resources for the benefit of the community and the creation of employment opportunities. These products are required as essential building materials in the social and economic development process including the provision of housing and infrastructure. Laois County Council will seek to safeguard these valuable resources for future extraction.

The *National Guidelines on Quarries and Ancillary Activities for Planning Authorities (DOEHLG, 2004)* is the guiding document against which applications for quarries and ancillary activities will be considered.

Aggregate extraction can only take place where suitable aggregate resources exist; they are a 'tied' resource. It is considered, therefore, that planning policies should be carefully constructed to avoid adverse effects on aggregate resources and the related extractive industries and added value production that are essential for the built environment, infrastructure and future economic development.

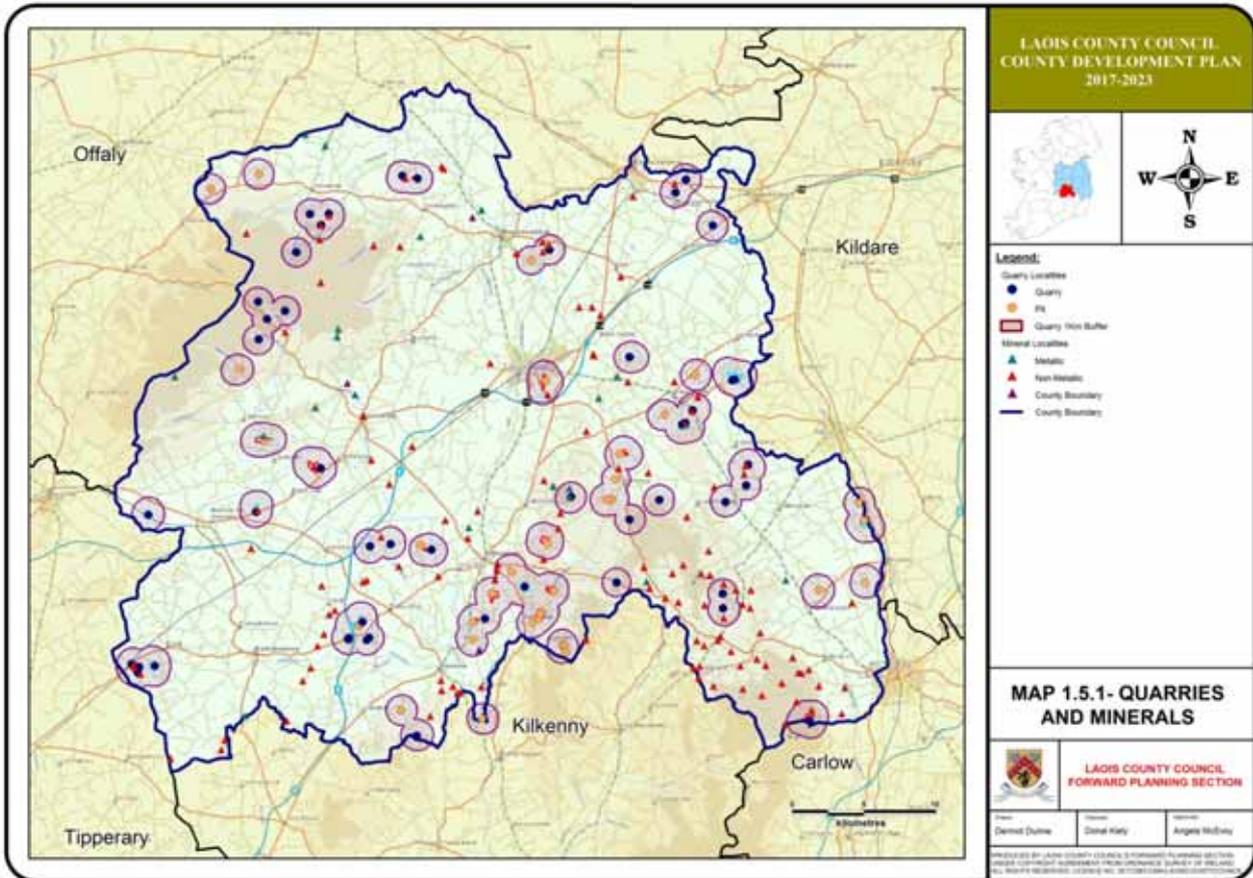
Like many forms of development, extractive industries have the potential to cause harm to the environment, heritage and the landscape if not appropriately designed and managed. However, aggregates are a necessary resource and are of great importance to the economy and society. In addition, well managed and designed quarry sites minimise environmental effects. There is also the potential for habitat creation through the restoration of quarry sites following the cessation of operations.

The following National Guidelines (as may be superseded and/or updated) should be complied with:

- i. Environmental Management(EPA 2006);
- ii. Quarries and Ancillary Activities: DOECLG Guidelines 2004);
- iii. Environmental Code(ICF 2006);

- iv. Geological Heritage Guidelines(ICF & GSI 2008);
- v. Archaeological Code of Practice((ICF & DOECLG 2009);
- vi. Sections 261 & 261A Planning and Development Acts 2000 – 2013.

Figure 13: Quarrying Sites in County Laois



Land-based/resource-based economic policies

It is an objective of the Council to:

OBJ12 Plan and prepare for the future use of large industrial peatland sites when peat harvesting finishes in conjunction with NPWS, Coillte and ESB/Bord na Mona and other stakeholders.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- RUR1 Support the expansion, diversification and intensification of agriculture and the agri-food sector by facilitating appropriate related development subject to environmental and planning considerations;
- RUR2 Support and facilitate agri-tourism and the work of farming / local bodies within the county in the promotion of the rural economy, including agriculture development, tourism adaptation, rural diversification and in the development of new initiatives to support farming.
- RUR3 Support In principle the appropriate expansion of the forestry sector and related manufacturing activities subject to environmental, traffic and planning considerations; support an increase in the broadleaf component of any planting programme to a minimum of 33%;

- RUR4 Encourage, subject to compliance with the Habitats and Birds Directives, access to forestry including private forestry for amenity and educational purposes including the provision of walking routes, cycling routes, mountain biking routes, mountain trails, nature trails and orienteering;
- RUR5 Support the appropriate sustainable management of peat extraction and related manufacturing activities subject to environmental, traffic and planning considerations and ensure that any plan or project associated with peatland development is subject to the appropriate assessment screening in compliance with the Habitats Directive, and subsequent assessment if required;
- RUR6 Reconcile the need for resource-based economic activities to conduct a reasonable operation and the needs of residents in rural areas to access a good quality of life and access to rural areas;
- RUR7 Have regard to Laois' Landscape Character Assessment, as well as more general Planning considerations, such as transport, environmental sensitivities, habitat considerations, the need for buffer zones around water bodies in its determination of planning applications related to land-based economic activities;
- RUR8 Support in principle the expansion of the aggregates and concrete products industry which offers opportunity for employment and economic development generally subject to environmental, traffic and planning considerations and ensure that any plan or project associated with extractive industry is subject to appropriate assessment screening in compliance with the Habitats Directive and subsequent assessment as required, applicants for planning permission shall have regard to the GSI-ICF Quarrying Guidelines;
- RUR9 To support the necessary role of the extractive industries in the delivery of building materials for infrastructural and other development and to recognize the need to develop extractive industries for the benefit of society and the economy;
- RUR10 To secure the long-term supply of value-added products (such as concrete products and asphalt, which are often, but not always, produced in conjunction with aggregate extraction);
- RUR11 Support in principle the processing of minerals to produce cement, bitumen or other products in the vicinity of the source of the aggregate, where the transport network is suitable to reduce trip generation;
- RUR12 Investigate the feasibility of mapping the full extent of aggregate resources of the county during the lifetime of the County Development Plan 2017-20213 and seek to prevent the sterilisation and inappropriate development of aggregate and mineral resources in order to ensure a sustainable supply of these non-renewable resources;
- RUR13 Protect rural amenities, natural archaeological and natural heritage, visual amenities, eco-systems, conservation areas, landscape and scenic views from adverse impacts of agricultural practices and development particularly in high amenity areas and ensure that it is appropriate in nature and scale, and ensure it does not have an undue negative impact on the visual/scenic amenity of the countryside and identify mitigating measures where required. Integrate into the landscape, including the minimal use of signage;
- RUR14 Protect access routes to upland walks and rights of way;
- RUR15 Not to permit the convergence of the forest edge and the skylines and avoid geometric shapes particularly in uplands and monitor forestry applications in elevated and prominent landscapes and being conscious of the potentially negative visual impact of forestry development on landscape quality, conservation and harmony and on the surrounding area in terms of its nature and scale (including clear-felling activity), protect from injury scenic and exposed/elevated landscapes, scenic routes, views, prospects and vistas (including to water and valley approaches to the hills), Geological sites, National Monuments, heritage features, Aquatic zones, and in Primary and Secondary Amenity Areas;

Ensure that exclusion zones are applied to sites of archaeological importance and areas of archaeological potential. The Council will seek to have such planting and felling conducted in a manner which takes into account best practice in forestry planting and felling in the context of landscape design so that it integrates into the landscape;

RUR16 Discourage new forestry development, except for broadleaf in Sensitive Rural Landscapes and Visually Vulnerable Areas, along designated Scenic Routes (Broadleaf forestry will be open to consideration in these areas);

RUR17 Forest development should follow current best practice and adhere to/be in accordance with Forest Service Guidelines and in respect of Landscape Guidelines where landscape objectives should focus on compatibility and enhancement of existing local landscape character. It should have regard to* FS “Code of Best Forest Practice (2000)”.

5.11 TOURISM

The Government has placed tourism at the centre of its economic recovery plan. In this regard, the Government’s tourism strategy, *‘People, Place and Policy Growing Tourism to 2025’*, (DTTS, 2015) has recently been published. The Strategy provides a focus on maximising the export contribution and employment in the tourism sector and seeks to develop destination experiences centred on the natural, built and culture heritage of the country.

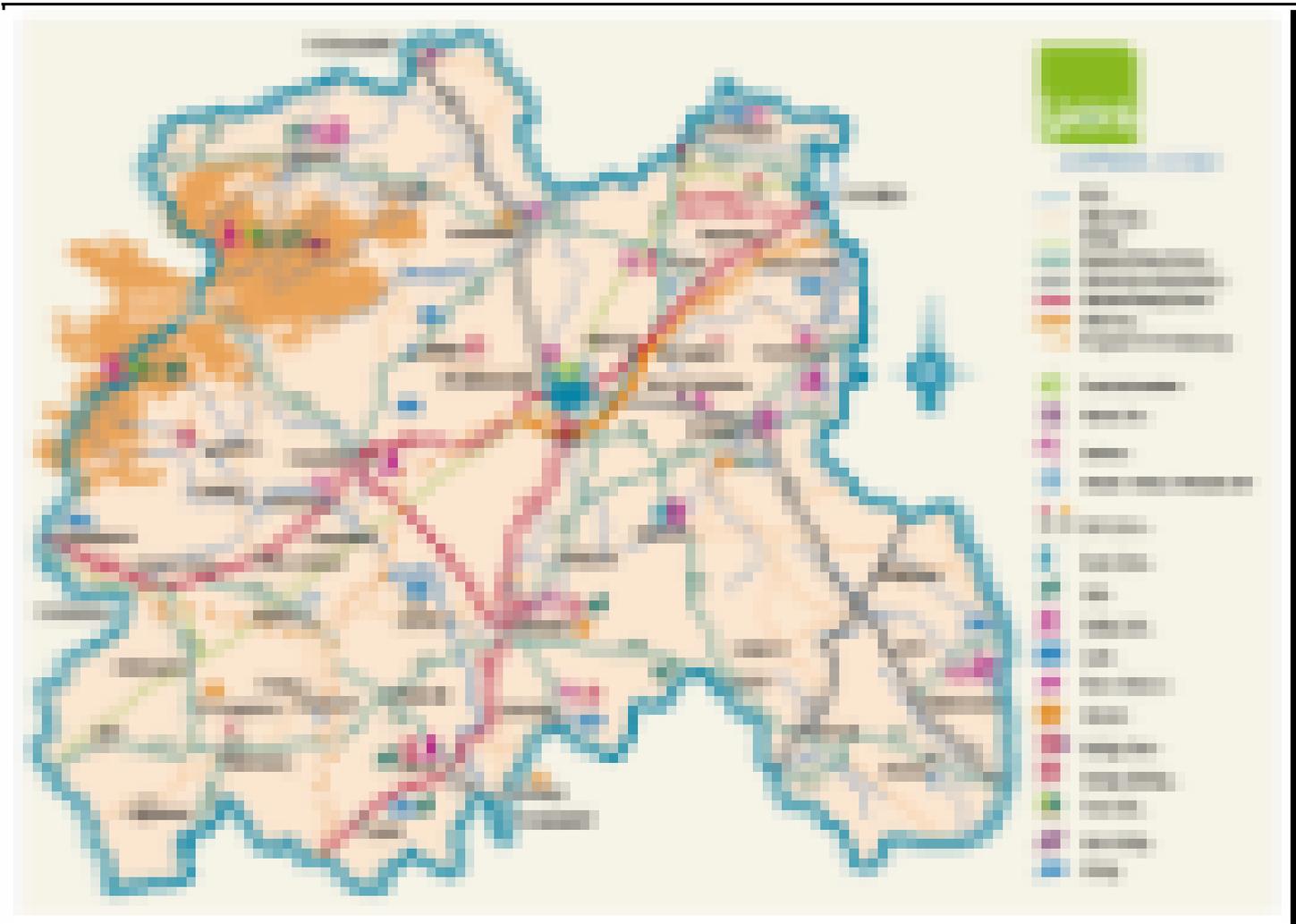
County Laois is home to a number of nationally renowned visitor attractions including; the Rock of Dunamase, The Round Tower Timahoe Aghaboe Abbey; the Slieve Bloom Mountains, the Rivers Nore and Barrow as Important Tourism Attractions.

Laois is also one of the counties that is included in Ireland’s Ancient East, an umbrella destination brand that will ensure that the area is presented in a cohesive and unified manner which provides significant future opportunity for the county.

The aim of the branding is to inspire visitors to travel to the Ireland’s Ancient East by appealing to their interest in local culture and heritage. Under the Ireland’s Ancient East Programme, signage has been installed at the following sites: Emo Court, the Rock of Dunamase, Heywood Gardens, Timahoe Round Tower and Abbeyleix Heritage House. It is the aim of Laois County Council to facilitate and encourage signage at further sites of importance including Donaghmore Workhouse and Agricultural Museum, Aghaboe Abbey, Killeshin Romanesque Church and others.

County Laois has also much to offer visitors in terms of its wide variety of parks, urban culture and attractive and vibrant towns and villages. Fáilte Ireland has recognised the Slieve Bloom Mountains as unique and distinctive experience.

Figure 14: Tourist Attractions in County Laois



The Council intends, as an economic development priority, to prepare a 'County Laois Destination and Experience and Marketing Plan' for the county. This will focus on building projects in key destinations and the implementation of a targeted marketing brand in order to develop a high quality visitor destination and experience in Laois.

Fáilte Ireland data indicates that County Laois attracted approximately 57,000 overseas visitors in 2015. This demonstrates Laois' potential as a tourism destination. Initiatives such as Ireland's Ancient East aim to further increase the numbers of visitors to the county.

There is significant potential to grow the tourism sector in County Laois. The number of visitors to fee-paying and free visitor attractions in Laois, between 2012 and 2015 increased substantially.

Despite the downturn in visitor numbers and revenue in recent years, tourism still makes an important contribution to the economy of Laois, with income derived from tourist activity distributed across a wide range of economic sectors. Tourism can also be of particular significance in the diversification of the rural economy and in the regeneration of towns and villages.

The growing trend towards activity based tourism and adventure tourism provides a significant opportunity for County Laois. It is essential that resources upon which these activities are based are protected from inappropriate development and that Laois County Council works in partnership with a range of organisations to capitalise on and maximise the potential of such opportunities.

This will focus on building projects in key destinations and the implementation of a targeted marketing brand in order to develop a high quality visitor destination and experience in Laois. This Plan will identify projects that will bring this brand to life and link with the wider Ireland's Ancient East brand.

Laois County Council is well placed to capitalise on the growing demand for experiential holidays in a perceived 'wild' setting with outdoor activity opportunities on offer throughout the county with an emphasis on walking and angling. Participation in adventure activities is becoming increasingly popular amongst visitors from overseas and from within the island of Ireland. This includes the popular activities such as;

- walking and cycling and other activities including
- game and coarse angling,
- kayaking & canoeing,
- golf and equestrian pursuits.

This focus, in partnership with stakeholders and local community groups, has led to the development of projects such as cycle-ways, greenways and the development of linear and looped walking trails. These projects can be developed in a sustainable way, in harmony with a high quality environment. The Council recognises that these routes cannot come into existence or remain in existence without the full co-operation of the owners of private property on the routes.

The Council may seek to continue to identify and facilitate opportunities for harnessing the potential of the scenic areas, lakes and waterways in a manner that is compatible with the natural heritage and environment of the area. There are also likely to be further opportunities in creating water-based trails or 'Blueways' over the period of the Plan which the Council may support where appropriate.

Laois is increasingly being marketed as an events and conferencing destination by reason of its accessibility and centrality. High-profile events include Electric Picnic - Music and Arts Festival (41,000 festival goers in 2015) and the National Ploughing Championships (279,000 attendees and 1,400 exhibitors in 2014). Conferencing/business meetings constitute a significant proportion of Portlaoise hotels trade.

Analysis of the overseas visitor data for the East and Midlands Region reveals that a high proportion were: Irish-born, repeat visitors, or were visiting friends/family. The per capita spend of the overseas tourist who is visiting friends/family is similar or higher than the per capita spend of the traditional holiday-maker. A low percentage of visitors had travelled to the region for the first time. This suggests that while the East and Midlands Region may not be well-known as a tourism destination, once people visit they are inclined to return. It also indicates that many overseas visitors to the area have a strong connection to the region. The high number of solo visitors and visitors to friends/family would suggest that these tourists may spend a lot of time with local people.

Ireland's Ancient East, established in 2016, has a target growth in visitor numbers of 600,000 (21%) to the region and an additional visitor revenue of €204 million (28%). To offer visitors a compelling motivation to visit the east of Ireland, Fáilte Ireland has developed a new umbrella destination brand called Ireland's Ancient East. The brand is rooted in the rich history and diverse range of cultural heritage experiences that are particularly prevalent in the East, South and Midlands regions of Ireland. The new destination brand has been designed to appeal to the key customer segments – namely the Culturally Curious and the Great Escapers – and to present this large geographic area in a cohesive and unified manner. Ireland's Ancient East offers a personal experience of 5,000 years of Europe's history. A journey of discovery in a lush green landscape that attracted warring settlers for millennia, illuminated by stories told by the best story tellers in the world. The key strategic objectives of the Ireland's Ancient East initiative are:

- To drive growth in international visitor numbers, tourism revenue and associated tourism employment in the regions which currently underperform in these areas.
- To move Ireland's east and south from a transit and day tripping zone to a destination which attracts international overnight visitors. • To develop a world class visitor experience, this delivers fully on the brand promise. To differentiate Ireland's east, south and midlands destination, within the international tourism marketplace, on the basis of the quality of its heritage experiences and a clear and memorable narrative, this links all experiences within it. Additional contextual information (Para.5.10).

- To disperse visitor traffic across the geography by encouraging the exploration of both the well-known attractions (in some cases congested) and lesser known sites and experiences (hidden gems).
- To ensure Ireland's Ancient East is delivered in accordance with the principles of sustainable tourism, ensuring that economic, social and environmental benefits are delivered in a balanced way.

During the life-time of this Plan there will be a phased roll-out of the branding strategy, with investment in tourism signage and the enhancement of the visitor experience across the programme area. The strategy will develop Ireland's Ancient East as a destination that is easy for the independent visitor to explore, interpret, understand and appreciate. The implementation strategy will deal with on the ground information as well as promotional aspects of the brand and the accessibility of sites, possibly including mechanisms for pre-booking, ticketing and improved management. The strategy will enhance the visitor experience by promoting innovation in product development including the delivery of information through foreign languages and using digital technology where appropriate.

5.12 Sustainable Tourism

Fáilte Ireland promotes the incorporation of the principles of sustainability in the County Development Plan. The following five principles have been prepared to encapsulate the need to achieve a balance between appropriate tourism development and economic, environmental and social sustainability.

Developments will be assessed having regard to compliance with these, and the associated policies.

Principle 1: Tourism, when it is well managed and properly located, should be recognised as a positive activity which has potential to benefit the host community, the place itself and the visitor alike. Sustainable tourism planning requires a balance to be struck between the needs of the visitor, the place and the host community.

Principle 2: Our landscapes, our cultural heritage, our environment and our linguistic heritage all have an intrinsic value which outweighs their value simply as a tourism asset. However, sustainable tourism planning makes sure that they can continue to be enjoyed and cherished by future generations and not prejudiced simply by short term considerations.

Principle 3: Built development and other activities associated with tourism should in all respects be appropriate to the character of the place in which they are situated. This applies to the scale, design and nature of the place as well as to the particular land use, economic and social requirements of the place and its surroundings.

Principle 4: Strategic tourism assets – including special landscapes, important views, the setting of historic buildings and monuments, areas of cultural significance and access points to the open countryside, should be safeguarded from encroachment by inappropriate development.

Principle 5: Visitor accommodation, interpretation centres, and commercial / retail facilities serving the tourism sector should generally be located within established settlements thereby fostering strong links to a whole range of other economic and commercial sectors and sustaining the host communities.

Sustainable tourism facilities, when properly located and managed can, especially if accessible by a range of transport modes, encourage longer visitor stays, help to extend the tourism season, and add to the vitality of settlements throughout the year. Underlying these principles for Sustainable Tourism, the definitions of economic, environmental and social sustainability, against which any tourism project should be assessed, are defined as follows:

Economic sustainability must be considered to ensure that the tourism sector is managed. The key strengths of the County include landscape, heritage, natural environment, and lifestyle and amenity pursuits. The sector is highly affected by seasonality and there are extremes in visitor numbers at key attractions contrasted with smaller attractions which struggle to maintain visitor numbers. These 'peaks and troughs' should be carefully managed to ensure the protection of natural resources. Tourism innovation should also be encouraged – particularly where it brings about environmental benefits. Finally, for projects to be economically sustainable they should meet the needs of the permanent and also visitor population alike, so the preparation of robust business plans for all such developments will ensure proposals are viable and sustainable.

Environmental sustainability will be central to the development and protection of a viable tourism sector and this is a key consideration in a County where tourism attractions are located in environmentally sensitive areas and close to historic areas where the quality of the built heritage and environment must be protected from inappropriate development – whether tourism related or not. The ‘mainstreaming’ of policy guidance tools such as the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) will undoubtedly address any deficits in relation to many of these key policy areas.

Social Sustainability is arguably more difficult to assess. Many of the potentially negative impacts of tourism development can however be addressed through careful consideration of the social and cultural nature of the receiving environment. The impacts that large-scale developments can have on existing local communities’ policies can be assessed having regard to the impact of visitor numbers on local quality of life, culture and heritage – with a particular emphasis placed on unique areas such as culturally sensitive areas where small impacts over time may have a significant cumulative effect.

The Council will consult with TII in relation to any tourism and recreational proposals in order to ensure that any such proposal would not affect the national road network, having particular regard to the requirements of Policy Trans 7.

5.13 Laois’s Tourism Strategy

The areas of tourism that shall be promoted during the lifetime of the Plan (subject to investigations of feasibility and compliance with environmental legislation) include the following:

- I. The Slieve Bloom Mountains for walking, cycling and mountain biking
- II. Heritage attractions such as the Rock of Dunamase, Aghaboe Abbey, Stradbally Hall, Timahoe Round Tower, Abbeyleix Heritage House and others such as Emo Court and Donaghmore Famine Workhouse Museum, which have the potential for attracting a greater numbers of visitors;
- III. Events and Festivals has proven to be a successful and a key driver of the Laois local economy and a means of revitalising and maintaining local culture as well as showcasing the people and places of Laois. The annual Electric Picnic event at Stradbally Hall and the hosting of the National Ploughing championships have showcased Laois’s competency in this area;
- IV. Local arts, crafts and food which provide a local connection and help to celebrate the diversity of the county as a destination; Food tourism is an expanding sector around the globe and Laois is well positioned to capture some of this market;
- V. Rural tourism plays a significant role in the rural economy of the county, in partnership with stakeholders and local community groups, which can lead to the development of projects such as looped walks, cycleways, and the development of walking trails. These projects can be developed in a sustainable way, in harmony with a high quality environment;
- VI. Business tourism is a particularly high-spending sector and is of great importance to the county and to assist in the promotion of the business tourism sector, Fáilte Ireland has issued a publication ‘A Guide to Running Green Meetings and Events’ which includes a set of best practice guidelines which could be used by those involved in the management of hotels and conference centres throughout the county.
- VII. Towns and villages in the county provide a range of visitor attractions, facilities and services and rely on revenue from tourism. Towns and villages have the potential to deliver high quality accommodation and secondary facilities such as restaurants, cafés, pubs, craft outlets and other leisure facilities which support the tourism industry and drive revenue generation in the county.;
- VIII. Forest tourism for recreation such as walking, running, bird-watching and mountain-biking will be investigated particularly with a view to improving the accommodation range such as ‘glamping’ pods alongside adventure centres/hubs.
- IX. The Rivers Barrow and Nore;

Key Heritage Assets	Archaeological Assets	Architectural Assets	Natural Assets
	Monastic heritage including Abbey at Aghaboe, intact Round Tower at Timahoe and fine Romanesque doorway at Killeshin	Emo Court and Gardens	Slieve Blooms Nature Reserve with walks at: Monicknew Glenbarrow The Cut
	Viking Longphort known as Dunrally Fort close to Vicarstown	Heywood Gardens	Timahoe Esker Nature Reserve with walk
	Rock of Dunamaise with Norman Influences	Castledurrow, Ballyfin, Abbeyleix, Stradbally Hall, Roundwood House demesnes	Grantstown Nature Reserve with walk
	Maryborough Fort and St Peter's Church and graveyard associated with Plantation of Laois-Offaly	Fine Georgian Square: O'Connor Square Mountmellick	Waterways: Nore, Erkina and Barrow including its source and smaller streams. Grand Canal Small lakes at Ballinakil, Brittas House, Ballyfin
	Tower houses at Lea, Cullahill and Ballaghmore	Proposed Architectural Conservation Areas at Portlaoise, Abbeyleix and Durrow	Wetlands walks at Slieve Blooms, Killamuck, Portarlinton and the Derries
	Fortified houses at Brittas House,		
	Industrial Archaeology Donaghmore Workhouse and Agricultural Museum	Historic town and villages such as Portarlinton, Mountrath Market Square, Clonaslee, Ballinakil, Emo, Timahoe and Stradbally	Woodlands open to the public: Oughaval Wood, Carrick Wood Dunmore Wood Garryhinch Wood Brittas Wood Togher Wood Capponellan Forest and Lake Walk
	Mill Buildings at Mountmellick, Castletown, Donaghmore		
	Exhibits at Stradbally Steam Museum, Work Museum Mountmellick and Heritage Centre Abbeyleix		

Heritage Trails, Sli Dala, ancient travelling route extant in places	Coolbanagher Church, Emo	Subtle landscape of rolling hills, river basins and their floodplains, expansive flat areas, upland areas
Midland Regional Hospital		On road and off-road walking and cycling routes open up the countryside to rural tourism 8.1.1 Walks mapped on Laois Tourism www.laoistourism.ie Sli na Slainte Coillte

Some key issues for tourism and recreation in the county over the period of the plan will be protection, promotion and linkages. It is essential that tourism and recreation assets are protected for future generations and the plan contains a range of policies in that regard. The Council should seek to promote the development of tourism in a manner that is compatible with, and that enhances and showcases the landscape in which it is set.

It is policy of the Council to:

- TM 1 Facilitate the implementation of LECP Economic and Community Actions related to event management, festivals and conferencing, such as the promotion of Laois transport connectivity and its track record in hosting large scale outdoor events and conferences, the undertaking of feasibility studies in relation to Laois’ potential to host major sporting events and the development of an Indoor Centre of Excellence for Disability Sports as well as the promotion of the Scarecrow Festival in Durrrow and the Laois Walking Festival;
- TM 2 Facilitate the implementation of the LECP Economic and Community Actions related to **tourism development** such as the development of a Laois Walking and Cycling App with navigation functions, the translation of existing heritage audio guides and the development of an artisan food proposition associated with Ireland’s Ancient East Programme;
- TM 3 Direct the provision of tourist related facilities, such as information offices and cultural centres, into town and village locations to support and strengthen the existing economic infrastructure of such centres. In all cases, the applicant must submit a robust assessment setting out the sustainability of any proposal with respect to economic, environmental and social sustainability, as defined herein;
- TM 4 Support in principle the development or expansion of a tourism proposition around the Slieve Bloom Mountains, Laois’ Inland Waterways, Laois’ historic towns and villages, heritage-based tourism, activity-based tourism, geo tourism, eco-tourism, food-based tourism, diaspora-based tourism and spiritual tourism. Proposals for sustainable tourism development will be required to demonstrate a need to locate in a particular area and demonstrate compliance with the Development Management Standards;
- TM 5 Promote, subject to compliance with the Habitats and Birds Directive, the sustainable development of **low impact experiential tourism** including orienteering, angling, equestrian activities, bird watching, canoeing and kayaking, caving, paragliding, botany, photography, painting and yoga & meditation, in appropriate locations in order to diversify the range of tourist experiences available in the county and extend the tourism season;
- TM 6 Support the development of the arts, crafts and food sectors and liaise with the Crafts Council of Ireland, Laois Partnership, Laois LEO, Fáilte Ireland, and other interested bodies to facilitate growth within this sector;

- TM 7 Support and facilitate Laois as a destination for business tourism by maximising the county's strong and competitive brand value and working with key stakeholders;
- TM 8 Support and promote the existing festivals and cultural events which take place in the county and facilitate the establishment of new events where viable to increase the profile of the county as a key tourism destination and enjoyable place to be;
- TM 9 Improve the visual appearance of towns and villages, protect their character and maximise their tourism potential by the continuance of environmental and public realm programmes, design control, development initiatives and the removal/improving of dereliction where necessary;
- TM 10 Promote and facilitate the development of rural tourism such as including but not limited to open farms, on-farm craft villages and visitor centres and the reuse and refurbishment of vernacular buildings (houses or farm/industrial buildings) for tourist related facilities, including holiday home accommodation; where these are not detrimental to the character, scenic value and rural amenity of the surrounding area, including protecting and maintaining biodiversity, wildlife habitats, water quality, rural landscape character, scenic amenities and nature conservation. Proposals will be required to demonstrate a need to locate in a particular area and demonstrate compliance with the Development Management Standards set out in Section 8;
- TM 11 Work in collaboration with Coillte, neighbouring local authorities, Fáilte Ireland, community organisations and other interested parties to develop new forest accommodation, with required ancillary facilities, access, signage and trails for walking, cycling, mountain-biking and horse-riding;
- TM 12 Continue to work in collaboration with Fáilte Ireland and other key stakeholders on the development of the Ireland's Ancient East branding strategy, to implement the programmes and plans of the Ireland's Ancient East initiative over the lifetime of the plan to maximise the tourism potential of the county. As part of that process Laois County Council will liaise with Fáilte Ireland on the development of the overarching strategy, as well as any smaller scale plans or programmes that are prepared to give effect to that strategy. Laois County Council will consult with Fáilte Ireland as required, on assessment of any such plans, programmes or policies to ensure that they are adequately screened or assessed in full compliance with Directives including the SEA Directive and the Habitats Directive;
- TM 13 Facilitate Fáilte Ireland initiatives for the development of tourism experiences in the County that are fit for purpose and deliver on the Ireland's Ancient East brand promise, within the context of the land use management and infrastructural provision in the County.

IRELANDS ANCIENT EAST

- TM 14 Continue to work in collaboration with other key stakeholders to implement the programmes and plans of the ***Ireland's Ancient East*** initiative over the life time of the plan to maximise the tourism potential of the county;
- TM 15 Encourage the clustering of tourism enterprise in town and village centres in the interest of sustainable tourism development and the enhancement of the public realms of town and village centres to maximise their tourism potential; in all cases, the applicant must submit a robust assessment setting out the sustainability of any proposal with respect to economic, environmental and social sustainability, as defined herein.
- TM 16 Collaborate with Fáilte Ireland, the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) and other key stakeholders in the development and implementation of a signage programme associated with ***Ireland's Ancient East*** to include branded orientation signage and roadside signage;
- TM 17 Facilitate the enhancement of appropriate visitor infrastructure and facilities in Laois associated with Laois ***Ireland Ancient East*** sites and other places with tourism potential such as Maryborough Fort, Donaghmore Workhouse, Ballinakill village and Darrow Town;

WALKING / CYCLING

- TM 18 Support in principle and investigate the feasibility of, subject to compliance with the Habitats and Birds Directive, developing and marketing off-road Slieve Bloom Mountain Biking Trail by Coillte and Durrow Green Network Cycle Trail in co-operation with relevant stakeholders including Durrow Development Forum;
- TM 19 Develop on-road cycle trails in the Slieve Blooms along existing lightly-trafficked roads in partnership with cycling clubs, Offaly County Council, Laois Sports Partnership, Laois Partnership Company and the National Trails Office;
- TM 20 Facilitate the sustainable provision at appropriate locations of a network of quality pathways and associated car parks for walkers and cyclists and horse-riders that are attractive and free of vehicular traffic;
- TM 21 Co-operate with National Trails Office (management standards), Fáilte Ireland, National Way Marked Way Advisory Committee, Coillte, the Heritage Council and other relevant bodies, in order to support the sustainable development, maintenance and enhancement of walking routes at appropriate locations throughout the county, including but not limited to, drying rooms for walkers and repair facilities for cyclists subject to compliance with the policies and objectives of the Plan particularly as they relate to the protection of the natural environment subject to compliance with the Habitats and Bird Directives;

BLUEWAY/ WATERWAYS DEVELOPMENT

- TM 22 Promote and investigate the feasibility of, subject to compliance with the habitats and Birds Directives, sustainable developing and improving of facilities and infrastructure supporting water based tourism activities, (including shore side interpretive centres and jetties). Development proposals outside settlement centres will be required to demonstrate a need to locate in the area and will be required to ensure that the ecological integrity and water quality of the river or lake, including lakeshore and riparian habitats, is not adversely affected by the development;
- TM 23 Support in principle and investigate the feasibility of, subject to compliance with the habitats and Birds Directives, developing and marketing the Barrow Blueway by Waterways Ireland and if consented facilitate related commercial opportunities in Vicarstown, Portarlinton, Graiguecullen and Portlaoise as well as opportunities to link the Barrow Blueway with Portarlinton or Portlaoise;
- TM 24 Promote Vicarstown and Portarlinton Leisure Centre as activity hubs along the Barrow Way in accordance with the Failte Ireland 's Barrow Product Development Study;
- TM 25 Seek to maintain existing walking and cycling trails as well as facilities associated with angling and examine the feasibility of setting up additional walking/cycling trails or canoe/bridle trails and support the development and funding for general enhancements along trails and in collaboration with the National Trails Office, provide up to date information on trail locations and routes;
- TM 26 Subject to compliance with the Habitats and Birds Directives, support in principle the development and marketing of the Erkina River Blueway Trail in association with all relevant stakeholders including Woodenbridge Paddlers Association and facilitate related commercial opportunities in Durrow as well as opportunities to link with other tourist and recreational facilities in the area.

HERITAGE ASSETS

- TM 27 Ensure heritage assets (built and natural) that are the focus for tourism development are appropriately managed and their special interest conserved from potential adverse effects from visitors or development in general and that best practice standards in relation for the environmental management of tourism enterprises are adhered to;

- TM 28 Take responsibility for the development of a more sustainable tourism industry which minimises adverse impacts on local communities, the built heritage, landscapes, habitats and species; leaving them undiminished as a resource for future generations, while supporting social and economic prosperity;
- TM 29 Support and promote, with the co-operation of landowners, public access to heritage sites and features at appropriate locations whilst ensuring heritage related development does not result in negative impacts on the fabric or setting of Laois's heritage assets;
- TM 30 Support and promote, with the co-operation of key stakeholders, the development of the Fort of Maryborough in Portlaoise and ensure that any development will not result in negative impacts on the fabric or setting of the site;
- TM 31 Develop a management plan for specific busy tourist sites in order to facilitate the effective accommodation of large numbers of tourists at sensitive locations;
- TM 32 Support the implementation of Ireland's Ancient East by facilitating the provision of visitor information– in line with the policies and objectives with respect to heritage sites; and integrating the objectives of Ireland's Ancient East with transport programmes in the County;
- TM 33 Encourage and support the provision of foreign language interpretation interventions in order to ensure the appropriate interpretation and appreciation of the county's heritage asset;
- TM 34 Encourage and support the provision of a wider range of accommodation types throughout the county in order to ensure that the county is an attractive location to spend increased amounts of time for a wide range of visitors.

ACCOMMODATION

- TM 35 Encourage and promote tourism related facilities and accommodation within existing settlements and in rural areas where there is a clear and demonstrated need and benefits to the local community and where the development is compatible with the policies set out for the protection of the environment;
- TM 36 Encourage and facilitate the provision of access to visitor accommodation, venues and activities and the availability of information on accessibility to those with varying levels of mobility and access issues;
- TM 37 Support best-practice environmental management including energy efficiency, waste management, procurement and recycling in accommodation providers and tourism enterprises in the County.

SECTION 6: INFRASTRUCTURE

6.1 TRANSPORTATION

The timely provision of a full range of transportation services is critical if County Laois is to continue to develop as an attractive location for business and residential development. Achieving spatial balance by developing the potential of areas will depend on enhancing capacity for the movement of people, goods, energy and information between different places. The attractiveness of particular locations depends on their relative accessibility and connectivity which in turn depends on the quality and quantity of the transport infrastructure. Although Laois County Council is only directly responsible for the development of some transportation modes, the Council will continue to provide those elements of the transportation system which are within its remit and to facilitate the development of those elements provided by others.

Laois County Council recognises that the current trends in transportation are unsustainable, in particular the relentless increase in private car traffic. The Council is strongly committed to the promotion of sustainable means of travel including public transport, walking and cycling, and the encouragement of modal change from private car use to these more sustainable alternatives. In planning for transport development, the Council will ensure that the needs of people with differing abilities are taken into account. The Council seeks to reduce the degree of commuting in the first instance by facilitating the creation of additional jobs within the County for the resident population.

The integration of good land use planning with transportation is fundamental to efficient and sustainable planning. For instance, a combination of urban design, land use patterns and transportation systems that promote walking and cycling will help create active, healthier and more liveable communities.

The Council will continue to provide for all components of the transportation system which are within its own remit and will encourage and facilitate the development of those other elements provided by external agencies, such as the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII, made up of the former National Roads Authority (NRA) and the Railway Procurement Agency (RPA).

6.1.1 POLICY CONTEXT

Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, 2013)

This Manual (DMURS) consolidates and expands upon recent Government guidelines for planning authorities on residential development and Smarter Travel with detailed advice and standards on road/street design, improvement and management in urban areas. The Manual:

- Establishes the principle that the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users should be prioritised in the public transport network;
- Seeks to ensure that the roads/streets are designed and managed in a way which creates a better sense of place;
- Promotes permeable and legible street networks;
- Sets out that; a plan-led approach should be used to apply the principles of the Manual; applications for development should detail compliance with the Manual; Planning Authorities should form multi-disciplinary teams to assess development proposals.

Smarter Travel—A Sustainable Transport Future: A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020 [Department of Transport, 2009]

The aim of the Smarter Travel document is that by 2020:

- Future population and economic growth will have to take place predominantly in sustainable, compact urban and rural areas which discourage dispersed development and long commuting;
- Work-related commuting by car will be reduced;
- Car drivers will be accommodated on other modes such as walking, cycling, public transport and car sharing or through other measures such as e-working;

- The total kilometres travelled by the car fleet in 2020 will not increase significantly from current total car kilometres;
- The road freight sector will become more energy efficient, with a subsequent reduction in emissions;
- Transport will make a meaningful contribution to Ireland's commitment under the proposed EU effort-sharing arrangement in relation to climate change and real reductions on current levels of emissions will be achieved.

Smarter Travel - National Cycle Policy Framework 2009-2020 [Department of Transport, 2009]

The Framework supports the following actions:

- Develop a cycle culture in Ireland so that by 2020, 10% of journeys will be by bicycle;
- Introduction of cycle-friendly routes to schools and for commuters, leisure cyclists and visitors;
- Investment in new, safe cycle parking facilities in towns and cities around the country;
- Introduction of a new approach to the design of urban roads to better recognise the needs of cyclists and pedestrians;
- Retrofitting major road junctions and roadways in key cities and towns to make them cycle friendly.

National Cycle Manual, [National Transport Authority, 2011]

This document offers guidance on integrating the bike into the design of urban areas. Its objective is to plan for and encourage more people to choose and use a bicycle.

Spatial Planning and National Roads-Guidelines for Planning Authorities, [DoEHLG, 2012]

These Guidelines set out planning policy considerations relating to development affecting national roads including motorways, national primary and national secondary roads. In summary, the guidelines require that planning authorities:

- Have due regard to the protection of investment in and the strategic function of national roads;
- Protect alignments for future national roads projects;
- Restrict the numbers of new access points to national roads
- Restrict proposals which intensify use of existing access points and junctions, particularly on stretches of national road outside of the 60kmh speed limit zones;
- Co-operate with TII regarding the management of national roads.

The National Climate Change Strategy 2007-2012

The National Climate Change Strategy sets out the measures required to enable Ireland to meet its share of the EU's commitments under the Kyoto Protocol. It recommends a broad mix of measures aimed at achieving a modal shift to public transport, walking and cycling, as well as increased efficiency in both personal and freight transport.

It is the objective of the Council to:

TRANS 1 Support the sustainable transport principles outlined in Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future (Department of Transport, 2009);

TRANS 2 Upgrade and improve the hierarchy of road transportation links between towns and villages to cater for existing trip generation numbers and patterns and provide for anticipated trip generation numbers and patterns as envisaged by the settlement strategy and economic development strategy;

TRANS 3 Where roads are being improved and upgraded the opportunity will be taken where possible to address inadequate existing mitigation measures or impeded passage, for example the inclusion of mammal underpasses or dry ledges where there is poor culvert design);

TRANS 4 To integrate land use policies and transportation in a manner which reduces reliance on car based travel and promotes more sustainable transport choices;

TRANS5 To guide development to ensure that it is positioned in a location which minimizes the need to travel and coordinates particular land uses with their accessibility requirements;

TRANS6 Ensure that all proposed plans or projects relating to transportation (including walking, cycling, rail, bus and roads) and any associated improvement works, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, are subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening to ensure there are no likely significant effects on the integrity (defined by the structure and function) of any Natura 2000 site(s) and that the requirements of Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the EU Habitats Directive are fully satisfied. Where the plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site, or there is uncertainty with regard to effects, it shall be subject to Appropriate Assessment. The plan or project will proceed only after it has been ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site or where in the absence of alternative solutions, the project is deemed imperative for reasons of overriding public interest, all in accordance with the provisions of Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the EU Habitats Directive.

6.1.2 Roads

A hierarchy of roads exists with the Plan area including sections of motorways, national roads, regional roads, local roads and urban roadways. There has been significant investment into the road infrastructure and therefore it is important to protect and maintain the carrying capacity of the road network within the county.

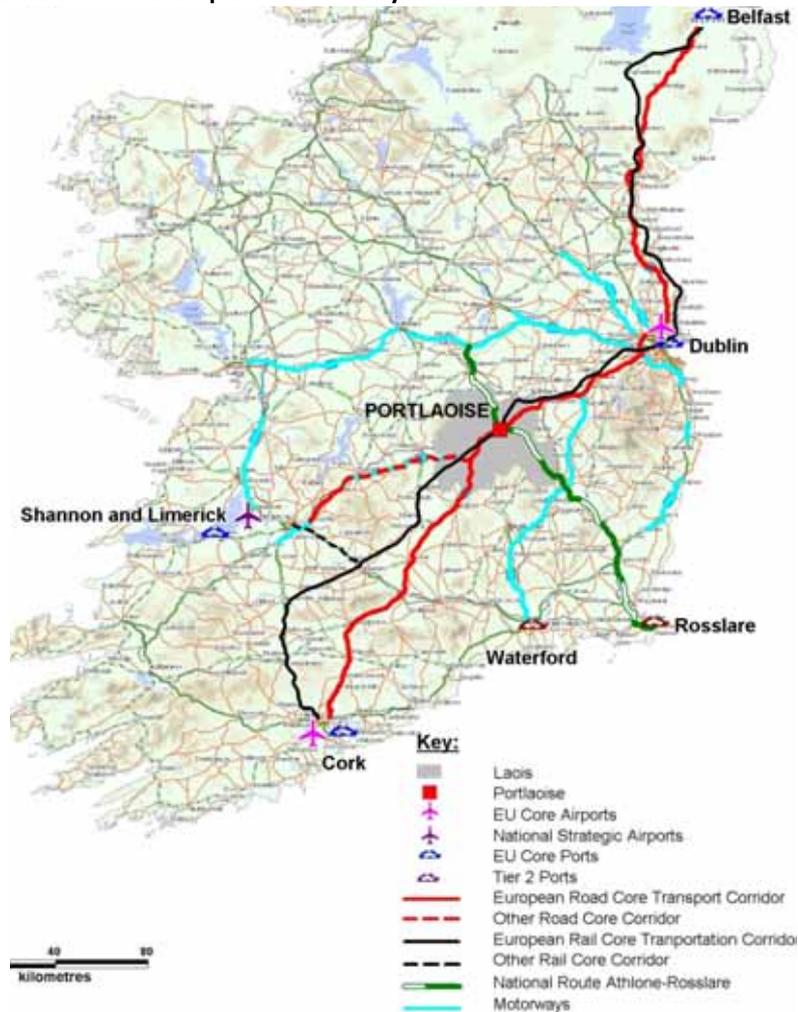
6.1.2.1 Motorway Network

County Laois occupies a strategic location on the National Road network with the M7, M8, N80, N77, N78, traversing the county. The primary purpose of the national road network is to provide strategic transport links between main centres of population and employment. The M7 and the M8 have been identified as part of the Trans-European Transport Network and also as Strategic Radial Corridors in the National Spatial Strategy (NSS). The N80 is identified as a Strategic Linking Corridor in the NSS and the N77 and N78 are identified as important interregional routes in the Midlands Regional Authority Regional Planning Guidelines 2010 – 2022.

In relation to the motorway network in County Laois, it is the policy of the Council to:

- TRANS 1 Prohibit development seeking access onto the Motorway network and associated junctions;
- TRANS 2 Examine the feasibility of the M7/M8 Interconnector and maximise the beneficial return of public investment in the national motorway network by protecting the carrying capacity of the M7/M8, including associated junctions, through County Laois;
- TRANS 3 Co-operate with Transport Infrastructure Ireland [TII] in the upgrade of existing Interchange[s] on the National Routes where appropriate and to restrict development immediately adjacent to Interchange[s] to provide for the future enlargement of Interchange;
- TRANS 4 Advance Togher, Portlaoise as the primary location for off-line motorway services and other uses in line with the Togher National Enterprise Park MasterPlan (adopted by Laois County Council in April 2010);
- TRANS 5 Seek to prevent and control the spread of invasive plant species along the roads network;
- TRANS 6 Support sustainable travel in the tourism sector by the promotion of public transport use and by undertaking enhancements to overall accessibility thereby making the County easier for visitors to navigate. Integrate the County's transport and tourism strategies to promote increasingly sustainable travel patterns among visitors to the County.

Figure 15: County Laois Location and Transport Connectivity



6.1.2.2 Non-Motorway National Routes

In terms of road transport, some of the country’s most significant sections of national route network traverse County Laois. These include:

- **Rosslare–Carlow-Moa te National Secondary Route N80.**
- **N77 linking Portlaoise to Kilkenny via Durrow and Ballyragget**
- **N78 from Athy to Castlecomer passing through Ballyly nan and Newtown Doona ne**

While not as critical in the overall context as the N80, the latter two are nonetheless important connectors of the eastern and southern ends of the County to the wider regional and national communications network. The Council is aware of the vital importance of the national routes to the economic and social development of the County and the Country at large.

National policy in relation to access onto National Primary and Secondary Routes is set out in the *Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines (DoECLG, 2012)*. The Guidelines set out planning policy considerations relating to development affecting national roads including motorways, national primary and national secondary roads outside of minimum speed zones for towns and villages.

The Council will seek to collaborate with TII in relation to national routes through the county, in particular in relation to high risk locations.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- TRANS 7 Avoid the creation of any new direct access points from development or the generation of increased traffic from existing direct access/egress points to the national road network to which speed limits greater than 60kmh apply*;
- TRANS 8 Support and provide for improvements to the national road network, including reserving corridors for proposed routes, free of development, so as not to compromise future road schemes;
- TRANS 9 Prevent inappropriate development on lands adjacent to the existing national road network, which would adversely affect the safety, current and future capacity and function of national roads and having regard to possible future upgrades of the national roads and junctions;
- TRANS 10 Ensure that any development permitted along national roads is in accordance with the *Spatial Planning and National Roads—Guide lines for Planning Authorities (DoECLG, 2012)* or any updated version;
- TRANS 11 Facilitate a limited level of new accesses or the intensified use of existing accesses to the national road network on the approaches to or exit from urban centres that are subject to a speed limit zone between 50 kmh and 60 kmh otherwise known as the transition zone. Such accesses will be considered where they facilitate orderly urban development and would not result in a proliferation of such entrances, leading to a diminution in the role of these transitional zones. The Council will have regard to the nature of the proposed development and the volume of traffic to be generated by it and the implications for the safety, capacity and efficient operation of the national road. A Road Safety Audit, prepared in accordance with the *Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (NRA, 2010)*, shall be submitted where appropriate;
- TRANS 12 Control the signage on and adjoining national roads in accordance with the *Spatial Planning and National Roads – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DoECLG, 2012)* and the National Roads Authority’s policy statement on the *Provision of Tourist and Leisure Signage on National Roads (March 2011)* and any updated versions of these documents;
- TRANS 13 Support all measures to ensure HGVs use the motorway network;
- TRANS 14 Consider permitting access for replacement dwellings for persons who [or their families] own the original house and site for a minimum of 10 years [documentary evidence in this regard to be submitted] subject to the following provisions:
- The original dwelling is in-situ and is habitable;
 - The cost of refurbishment of and/ or extension to the original dwelling is prohibitive;
 - The applicant complies with the provisions of the local need factor of the rural housing policy as outlined in Section 2.6. 1;
 - An alternative site with access onto a minor road is not available;
 - The proposed development can be accommodated without the creation of a specific traffic hazard;
 - Where possible an existing entrance is used;
 - The Councils road standards are fully met;
 - The site is of minimum size of 0.202 hectares [0.5 acres];
- If necessary, a replacement septic tank drainage system in accordance with the requirements of the EPA Code of Practice: Waste Water Treatment and Disposal Systems Serving Single Houses (p.e ≤10) 2009 shall be installed on the site.

6.1.2.2 Regional Roads

The regional road network in the county is subdivided into Strategic Regional Roads and Regional Roads. In the case of strategic regional roads and regional roads, especially those which have a high carrying capacity, the Council shall adopt a restrictive policy in relation to new development in the interests of traffic safety.

Strategic Regional Roads

There are 17 Strategic Regional Roads in County Laois linking the main county towns to the national routes and M7 and M8 motorways. These are shown in the table below.

Table 16: Strategic Regional Roads in County Laois

Road No.	Road Location and Description
R419	Junction with R445 (Great Heath) to County Boundary (Portarlinton)
R420	Junction with R419 (Portarlinton) to Junction with R445 (Killinure)
R421	County Boundary (Ballynahown) to Junction with R422 (Coolagh Cross Roads)
R422	Junction with R419 (Coolagh Cross Roads) to Junction with R446 at New Inn
R423	Junction with R446 (Mountrath) to Junction with N80 (Derryclooney)
R425	Junction with N77 (Abbeyleix) to Junction with R445 (Rathbrennan)
R426	Junction with N80 (Portlaoise) to Junction with R430 at the Swan
R427	Junction with R425 (Cashel) to Junction with N80 (Stradbally Town)
R428	Junction with N80 (Stradbally) to County Boundary (Blackford)
R430	Junction with R445 (Mountrath) to County Boundary (Carlow)
R433	Junction with N77 (Abbeyleix) to County Boundary (Knockahaw)
R434	Junction with R445 (Sentryhill) to Junction with N77 (Durrow)
R435	Junction with R445 (Borris-in-Ossory) to County Boundary (Rosssdaragh)
R445	County Boundary (Ballaghmore) to County Boundary (Killinure)
R639	Junction with N77 (Durrow) to Kilkenny County Boundary (Old Town)
N77	Junction with M7 Junction 17 Togher to Junction with N80 Portlaoise
R941	Junction with N77 (Knockmay) to Junction with N80 (Clonreher)

It is the policy of the Council to:

- TRANS 15 Manage and maintain the strategic regional road network in the county in a manner which safeguards the strategic function of road network;
- TRANS 16 Prohibit unnecessary access onto strategic regional routes in areas where speed limits in excess of 50 kph applies;
- TRANS 17 Consider permitting access for single dwellings for full time farmers or farmers and / or their children, subject to the following provisions:
- i. An alternative site with access onto a minor road is not available;
 - ii. The proposed development can be accommodated without the creation of a specific traffic hazard;
 - iii. Where possible an existing entrance is used;
 - iv. The Council's road standards are fully met.
- TRANS 18 Consider permitting access for developments of a commercial nature, where a clear need for the development is established, which could not be met in other locations, and where there is no suitable alternative access to a local road possible. The Council will have regard to the specific nature of the

enterprise in question and the likely number and type of traffic movements associated with proposed development in the assessment of such proposals.

Regional Roads

The remaining regional roadways that are not listed in Table 16 are classified as standard regional roadways. The Council shall also adopt a restrictive approach in relation to new development along these roadways also.

It is the policy of the Council to:

TRANS 19 Restrict development requiring access onto Regional Roads where speed limits in excess of 50kph apply, This restriction will not necessarily apply in the following cases:

- In the case of applications for single-dwelling units for a farmer or a farmer's son or daughter, permission may be considered, where evidence submitted clearly demonstrates that an alternative site accessed from a local road is not available and where the Council's road standards can be met. Also, the farm in question is of minimum size of 37 hectares [91 acres];
- In the case of applications for commercial developments unsuited to existing allocated development areas such as enterprise parks and town centres, such as waste disposal facilities, large-scale wind farms, solar farms or quarries and associated aggregate processing and manufacturing, where the development will not adversely affect road safety.
- In the case of development relating to established farm activity where the development will not adversely affect road safety.

6.1.2.3 County Roads and Urban Roads/Streets

County roads (or local roads) form the bulk of the road network in County Laois (a total of 1,718 km) and serve an important economic role because of the dispersed nature of the population in the county. They also have valuable social and community functions. Laois County Council has responsibility for the carrying out of maintenance and improvement works on these roads, financed from their own resources and supplemented by state grants. Sight distance requirements for the above roads are outlined in the Council's Road Design Section document titled *Roads and Parking Standards (2007)*.

Urban roads and streets are located in towns and villages and provide essential access from residential areas to retail streets, commercial lands and amenity areas. Detailed advice and standards on road/street design, improvement and management is contained in the *Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DTTS and DECLG, 2013)*. In urban areas visibility splays for entrances will be determined on a site specific basis subject to traffic safety and the need to avoid undue disturbance to adjoining properties.

It is the policy of the Council to:

TRANS 20 Encourage and facilitate investment in the local road network;

TRANS 21 Subject to availability of resources, provide for and carry out improvements to sections of local roads that are deficient in respect of realignment, structural condition or capacity, and to maintain that standard thereafter;

TRANS 22 Require development proposals accessing onto local roads to comply with the Council's road standards contained in the Road Design Section document titled *Roads and Parking Standards (2007)* and to any subsequent revisions thereto;

TRANS 23 In retrofitting and developing new roadways the planning authority and developers shall have regard to *Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DTTS and DECLG, 2013)*;

- TRANS 24 Ensure that the Council’s own development and those of other developers and agencies has regard to the *Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DTTS and DECLG, 2013)*. Proposals shall:
- a. Consider the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users ahead of the needs of private car drivers;
 - b. Seek to create more attractive places on roads/streets which communities can understand and enjoy;
 - c. Seek to ensure that the design of the road/street is influenced by its function and the contexts of the places that road/street passes through, and that permeable and legible street networks are promoted;
 - d. Have regard to the detailed advice and standards within in the Manual including:
 - i. Speed limits and traffic and congestion management;
 - ii. Street landscaping;
 - iii. Active street edges;
 - iv. Control of traffic noise and pollution;
 - v. Signage and line marking;
 - vi. Street furniture and lighting;
 - vii. Material and finishes;
 - viii. Historical contexts;
 - ix. Pedestrianised and shared surface areas.

Priority Road Projects

Table 17: Priority roads projects in County Laois 2017-2023

Laois County Council will facilitate the carrying out of the following priority road projects during the lifetime of the Plan period 2017-2023

Principal Town

- OBJ1 Portlaoise Southern Orbital Route;
- OBJ2: M7 Junction 17 Off Ramp at Togher National Enterprise Park, Portlaoise;
- OBJ3 : Togher, Portlaoise Link Road Phase 2;
- OBJ4: N80 Mountmellick Road , Portlaoise Improvements;
- OBJ5 : R445 Mountrath Road, Portlaoise Improvements;

Key Service Town

- OBJ6: Portarlinton Relief Road;

Service Towns

- OBJ7 : Carlow Northern Relief Road Extension;

Local Service Towns

- OBJ8: Rathdowney Traffic Improvements Phase 2

County Wide

- OBJ9 :M7/M8 Interconnector
- OBJ10: N80 including Mountmellick By-pass and Maidehead Re-alignment;
- OBJ11: Improvements to N77
- OBJ12: Improvements to N78
- OBJ13 : Interurban Cycle facilities on former National Routes;
- OBJ 14: Ongoing Bridge Maintenance.

6.1.2.4 Roadside Service Stations, On-line and Off-line Service Stations

Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) is directly involved in securing on-line motorway service areas in accordance with the provision of the Road Act 1993, as amended. They have no development or operational role in relation to private sector facilities in the vicinity of the national road network, even though the developments in question might include service for motorists. A private sector off-line service station is located at Mayfield (Junction 16) on the M7. A further facility is located at Ballacolla (Junction 3) on the M8. This facility does not have the level of facilities required for a Level 1 Service Area¹⁴ and the TII consider that the scheme would be viewed in combination with the off-line services existing at Cashel (Junction 8), to meet the Level 1 Service Area criteria.

The *Spatial Planning and National Roads – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DoECLG, 2012)* state that it is important that off-line service facilities do not become a destination for local customers which would undermine government policy and threaten the viability of towns and village centres and the proliferation of such facilities should be avoided. The Guidelines also state that roadside service facilities at non-motorway national roads and junctions where the maximum speed limit exists have the potential to create safety risks and affect the level of service available to road users.

It is the policy of the Council to:

TRANS 25 Consider proposals for petrol filling stations/service stations/truck parking facilities subject to compliance with the following general principles and the design standards contained in the development management standards in Section 8 of the Plan:

- a. Such developments at or near national roads shall be assessed having regard to NRA Guidance contained in *Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DoECLG, 2012)* and the *NRA Service Area Policy (2014)*, or as amended.
- b. The provision of such facilities on those sections of regional roads and local roads where the maximum speed limit applies will generally be discouraged, unless an overriding need for the development in that location is clearly demonstrated.
- c. The proposed development would not result in traffic safety hazards, serious traffic congestion, or the undue obstruction of other road users.
- d. The proposed development would not result in adverse impacts on the environment and local amenities.
- e. The proposed development would not result in an undue proliferation of such facilities.
- f. The proposed development would not undermine the vitality of retail services in local villages in contravention of the retail objectives of this Plan.
- g. The proposed development shall not contravene other policies of this Plan.

TRANS 26 Advance Toghher, Portlaoise as the primary location for off-line motorway services and other uses in line with the Toghher National Enterprise Park Masterplan (adopted by Laois County Council in April 2010).

6.1.2.5 Guidance on Road Assessment

Traffic and Transport Assessments

Developers will be required to undertake Traffic and Transport Assessment (TTA) for development proposals, which may generate significant additional trips/travel, including road traffic, with potentially significant implications for national and non-national roads. TTAs are used to assess the transport impacts of a proposed development, incorporating any subsequent measures necessary to ensure roads and junctions and other transport infrastructure in the vicinity of the development remain fit for purpose and encourage a shift towards sustainable travel modes. Thresholds for TTAs are contained within the Traffic and Transport Assessment Guidelines 2014. The TTA should also address urban design impacts of proposed public and private transport proposals and also deal with delivery and monitoring regimes for various aspects.

¹⁴ Type 1 Service Area (full service area) will be a “large scale service area providing an amenity building (including a convenience shop, restaurant, washrooms and tourist information), fuel facilities, parking and picnic area” (NRA Service Area Policy, 2014).

Mobility Plans

Mobility management plans/travel plans are proposals which will minimise the impact of the traffic generated by their development. They include mitigation measures which will take account of the findings of a TTA. They bring together transportation requirements; employers, staff and site management issues in a coordinated manner. Measures that should be included are integration with public transport, promotion of car sharing/pooling, parking pricing and control and the encouragement of cycling and walking by the provision of cycling and walking routes and secure cycle parking.

Road Safety Audits

Road Safety Audits are generally required when a development requires a new access to a national road or significant changes to an existing access. They are concerned with identifying measures to maintain safety standards. Guidance for the preparation of road safety audits is included in the NRA [TII] *Design Manual for Roads and Bridges*.

It is the policy of the Council to:

TRANS 27 Require the submission of a Traffic and Transport Assessment including mobility management plans in accordance with the guidelines in the Traffic and Transport Assessment Guidelines 2014, for developments with the potential to create significant additional demands on the traffic network by virtue of the nature of their activity, the number of employees, their location or a combination of these factors and for significant developments affecting the national and non-national road network;

TRANS 28 Require a Road Safety Audit for developments that require a new access to a national road or significant changes to an existing access in accordance with the guidance included in the NRA [TII] *Design Manual for Roads and Bridges*.

6.1.2.6 Car Parking

Car parking requirements are to comply with standards contained in Table 18 (see below). The Council will require developers to provide designated car-parking for people with disabilities, the amount required will depend on the building type. The Council's approach to parking is therefore framed by the following aims:

- To improve and enhance parking facilities in the major towns and villages of the county, in order to relieve and prevent traffic congestion and generally enhance the amenity of its major settlements.
- To pursue a policy of access for those with limited mobility in terms of parking provision.
- This section should be read in conjunction with Policy AM 1 which deals with the provision of parking at specific amenity sites.

Electric Vehicles

In 2008, the Government launched an Electric Transport Programme with a target that 10 percent of the national road transport fleet be electrically powered by 2020. Shifting the emphasis away from fossil fuel towards electrically powered vehicles would require changes to the grid system, with the installation of charging points across the country, plus chargers at parking meters and in homes. Developing the infrastructure for alternatively fuelled vehicles will be a vital step in encouraging consumers to make more environmentally friendly transport choices. The Development Management Standards contained in Section 8 outline the car parking standards required for electric cars.

Where settlements are covered by a Local Area Plan or Village Policy Statement, the provision for parking shall comply with the relevant document.

It is the policy of the Council to:

TRANS 29 Ensure that the provision of adequate parking facilities shall form part of the assessment of any application for development. Where it is not possible to provide parking for the proposed development

within the site, charges will be levied for parking provided on street or by the Local Authority in accordance with an approved Development Contribution Scheme;

TRANS 30 Ensure that in the cases of certain activities where it can be demonstrated to the Planning Authority that there is a clear time demarcation between uses, dual use of parking spaces may be permitted. Such assessments shall be determined on a site by site basis and according to their merits;

TRANS 31 Ensure adequate space shall be made for the servicing of the facility, including loading and unloading of vehicles, which should be provided for within the site curtilage and should not interfere with the operation of adjacent public thoroughfares;

TRANS 32 Ensure parking for people with disabilities shall normally be required at the following rates in conjunction with proposed new developments:

Buildings not normally visited by the public:

- Minimum of one space of appropriate dimensions in every 26 standard spaces, up to the first 100 spaces, thereafter, one space per 100 standard spaces or part thereof.

Shops and buildings with public access:

- Minimum one space of appropriate dimensions in the first 26 standard spaces, minimum 3 in 26-60 standard spaces, five in 60-100 standard spaces and additional three per every 100 standard spaces in excess thereof.

Spaces shall be a minimum of 3m wide and clearly marked with a highly visible symbol.

Spaces should be located at the nearest point possible to the entrance to the facility served.

TRANS 33 Ensure that cycle Parking will normally be required in development schemes and the Council shall promote and encourage the provision of cycle spaces in public car-parks and appropriate locations in towns and villages throughout the county. Where appropriate, cycle spaces shall be provided in prominent and secure locations convenient to building entrances;

TRANS 34 Investigate the provision of coach and bus parking in appropriate areas of the towns and villages of the county;

TRANS 35 Discourage unauthorised parking of commercial vehicles on public roads including hard shoulders;

TRANS 36 Ensure parking provision shall normally be provided in accordance with the standards contained in Table 18: Land Use Parking Space Requirements;

TRANS 37 Support the Government's Electric Transport Programme by facilitating the roll-out of charging infrastructure for electric vehicles.

Parking Standards

The Council shall normally require parking provision to the following standards in conjunction with new development and alterations to existing premises.

Table 18: Land Use Parking Space Requirements

Land Use	Parking standard requirement
Houses	2 per Dwelling ¹⁵
Apartments/Flats	1.26 - 2 per Unit
Retail	1 per 26m ² gross floor space
Offices	1 per 20m ² gross floor space
Financial Institutions	1 per 20 m ² gross floor space
Retail warehousing	1 per 36 m ² gross floor space
Cash and Carry Outlets	2 per 90 m ² plus adequate loading/unloading and circulation facilities
Industry	1 per 60 m ² gross floor space or 1 per 4no. employees, whichever is greater
Warehousing	1 per 100 m ² gross floor space or 1 space per 4no. employees, whichever is greater
Hotels, B&B's, Guesthouses*	1space per bedroom
Bars and Lounges*	1 per 7 m ² gross floor space within speed limit 2 per 7 m ² gross floor space outside speed limit
Dance Areas, Dance Halls and Function Rooms	1 per 3 m ² gross floor space
Restaurants	1 per table
Take away	6 per unit
Commercial Garage	1 per 30 m ²
Service Station	1 per 300 m ² gross floor space + shop requirements
Showrooms	1 per 100 m ² gross floor space+ shop requirements
Hospitals	1 per bed
Nursing homes	1 per 2 bedrooms
Surgeries/Clinics	2 per consulting room
Funeral home	1 per 10 m ² gross floor space
Childcare/crèche/ montessori	1 per employee + 0.26 per child
Schools	2 per classroom plus sufficient bus circulation and off-loading facilities to cater for school-going population
Community Centre/Sports Club	1 per 14 m ² gross floor space or 2 per 90 m ² gross floor space plus 2% whichever is greater
Golf and Pitch and Putt Courses	2 per hole
Golf Driving Range	1 per bay
Bowling Alley*	1 per lane
Theatre/Cinema/Stadia/Churches*	1 per 6 seats
Non-Retail Service Outlet e.g. Hairdressers, Bookmakers etc	3 per 100m ² gross floor area

¹⁵ It is encouraged that parking spaces must be provided on site of the dwelling.

** Note: Bars and lounges, dancing areas, accommodation and function rooms to be calculated separately. Any development type not listed above shall be determined by the Planning Authority.*

6.1.3 Pedestrians and Cyclists

Government policy, as set out in the publications “*Smarter Travel – A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020*” and the “*National Cycle Policy Framework 2009-2020*”, clearly places an emphasis on walking and cycling as alternatives to vehicular transport. The National Cycle Policy Framework states that by 2020, 10% of journeys should be by bicycle. *The Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets [DTTS and DECLG, 2013]* advocates assigning higher priority to pedestrian and cycling without unduly compromising vehicular movement. The importance of the provision of walking and cycling infrastructure for transportation is twofold. Firstly, it will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, noise and pollution. Secondly, walking and cycling help to achieve a health population. An essential element of any integrated transport system is to provide for the needs of cyclists and pedestrians.

The Council will endeavour to encourage walking and cycling through the provision of the necessary infrastructure and also provide a mix of land uses which generate short trip distances to combat sedentary transport patterns. All new development proposals shall be required to provide for well integrated pedestrian and cycling networks.

6.1.3.1 Laois Walking and Cycling Strategy

A Walking and Cycling Strategy was undertaken during the last plan period. The following Specific Objectives relating to this are as follows:

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- OBJ1 Designate and work towards the delivery of strategic cycling links in Laois on an on-road or off-road basis*
- OBJ2 Tie-into major walking and cycling projects being undertaken by key stakeholders in Laois*
- OBJ3 Make Laois Towns more pedestrian and cycle-friendly*
- OBJ4 Promote Laois as a walking and cycling destination to domestic and overseas visitors*
- OBJ5 Establish Walking and Cycling Committee to drive the inter-agency implementation of this Strategy*
- OBJ6 Ensure the implementation of this Strategy is subject to robust environmental management measures and assessment, as appropriate*
- OBJ7 Support the principle of delivering a cycling link between the towns of
 - A.1 Tullamore – Mountmellick
 - A.2 Mountmellick - Portlaoise
 - A.3 Portlaoise - Stradbally
 - A.4 Stradbally - Graiguecullen/CarrowRouting any link away from the N80 and tying into the Barrow Way*
- OBJ8 Seek the establishment of cycle links between the towns of
 - B1. Portlaoise, Kildare Town, Newbridge and Naas
 - B2. Portlaoise and Athy
 - B3. Portlaoise and Kilkenny via Abbeyleix and Durrow;*
- OBJ9 Support the development of on-road cycle lanes to link towns and villages located along the R445 & R639 and if permitted proceed with works
 - C1. Portlaoise – Monasterevin
 - C2. Borris-in-Ossory – Roscrea
 - C3. Durrow – Cullahill;*

Figure 16: Walking Trails

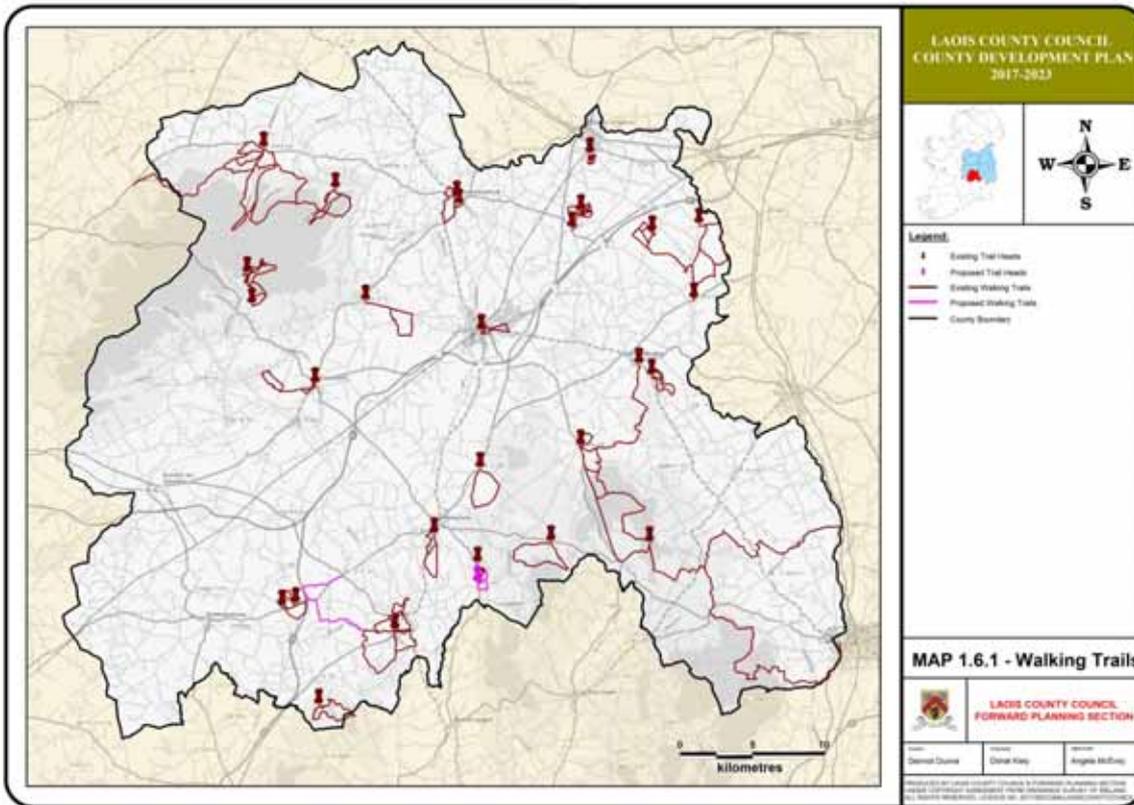
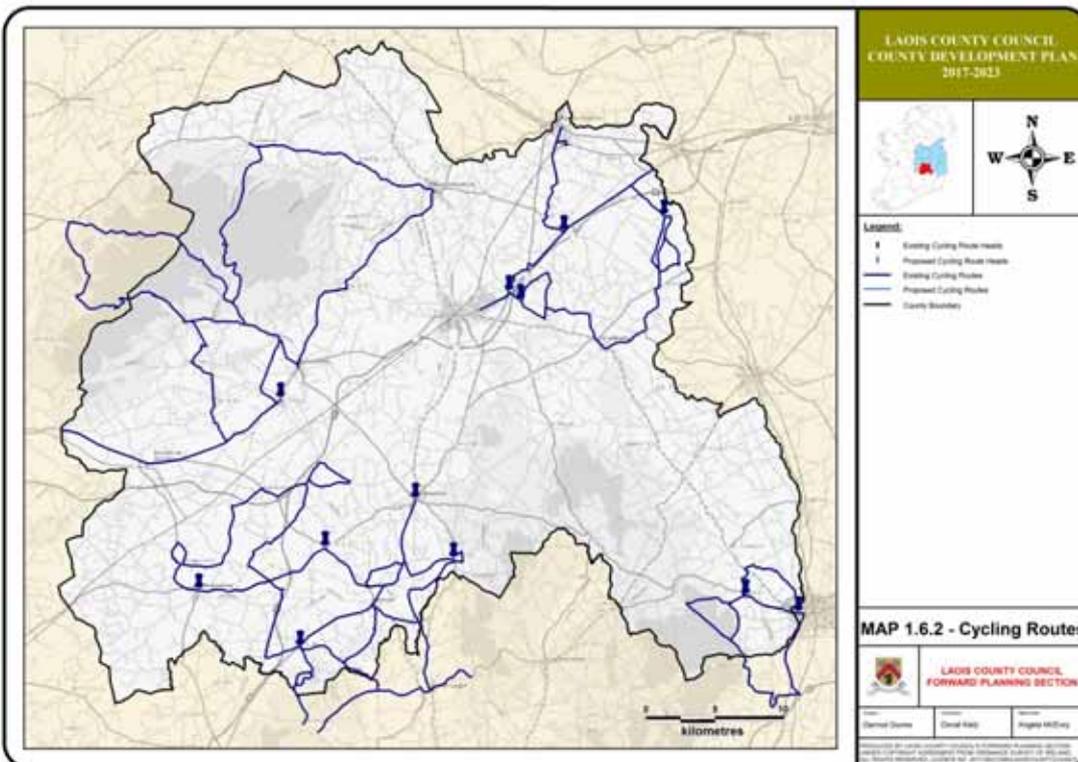


Figure 17: Cycling Routes



It is the policy of the Council to:

- TRANS38 Support community-led or authority/agency- led projects that would deliver identified strategic cycling links, where appropriate;
- TRANS 39 Promote walking and cycling as sustainable transport modes and healthy recreation activities throughout the county;
- TRANS 40 Encourage and facilitate safe walking and cycling routes in the county, as a viable alternative to the private car, in accordance with initiatives contained within '*Smarter Travel, A Sustainable Transport Future 2009-2020*';
- TRANS 41 Support the installation of infrastructure measures (for example new/wider pavements, road crossings and cycle parking facilities), retrofitted if necessary, which facilitates, and encourages safe walking and cycling;
- TRANS 42 Promote cycling and pedestrian friendly development layouts, provide facilities at public transport nodes, towns and villages, plan for and make provision for the integration of cyclist and pedestrian needs when considering new development proposals,
- TRANS 43 Investigate the possibility of developing and utilising existing abandoned road/ rail infrastructure for the purposes of walking and cycling.

Barrow Blueway (See Tourism Policies in Section 5)

- TRANS 44 Designate and promote the Barrow Navigation as an Activity Hub;
- TRANS 45 Designate on-road cycling trails to link the Barrow Navigation with Portlaoise, Stradbally and Portarlinton and to link the Barrow Navigation with the Killeshin Plateau. Trails to include points of interest such as Emo Court, the Rock of Dunamaise, Killeshin Romanesque Doorway and the Dancing Boards viewing point;

Slieve Bloom Walking and Cycling Activity Hub (See Tourism Policies in Section 5)

- TRANS 46 Investigate the feasibility of developing a National Scale Centre for Off-Road Mountain-Biking in the Slieve Bloom Mountains, subject to planning permission & the Habitats' and Birds Directives;
- TRANS 47 Investigate the feasibility of designating and promoting the Slieve Blooms as a Walking and Cycling Activity Hub;
- TRANS 48 Continue to audit, maintain and promote walking trails and walking events in the Slieve Blooms, subject to planning permission & the Habitats' and Birds Directives;
- TRANS 49 Designate the following graded on-road cycling trails in the Slieve Blooms; install related signage and improve road surfaces along these trails, as resources allow; produce trail maps and market the trails , subject to the Habitats' and Birds Directives;
- H1. Cut Cycle Climb
 - H2. Wolftrap Cycle Climb
 - H3. Glendine Cycle Climb
 - H4. Mountrath-Clonaslee Trail
 - H5. Camross Coolrain Trail
 - H6. Castletown Mountrath Trail

South Laois Walking and Cycling Hub

- TRANS 50 Designate and promote South Laois as an Activity Hub;
- TRANS 51 Support ancillary or complementary recreational uses in the area, such as the establishment of canoe trails, bridle trails and angling;
- TRANS 52 Develop on-road cycle trail with a Rathdowney Trailhead to facilitate sporting and general cycling as well as link points of interest including Donaghmore Workhouse and Museum, Aghaboe Abbey, views of Gortnaclea Castle, Clough Village, Grantstown Lake **and River Erkina**;
- TRANS 53 Establish a new Woodenbridge Walking Trail linking Durrow and Ballacolla, subject to the Habitats' Directive;
- TRANS 54 Promote the physical and health benefits of walking, for example through Get Into Walking Workshops, the Annual Laois Walks Festival and other community /stakeholder organised walking events in Laois;
- TRANS 55 Foster the development of initiatives such as walking buses to serve schools and continue the Green Schools Programme, cyclist safety and cycling to school during schools-based Road Safety Workshops;
- TRANS 56 Support the development of safe routes to secondary schools on a schools-led basis, to include both infrastructural and promotional elements to achieve change in commuting patterns;
- TRANS 57 Audit the popularity and suitability of walking trails periodically and take action to delete, retain or modify trails as appropriate;
- TRANS 58 Foster the development of additional walking routes with trailheads in or close to Laois towns and villages, using National Trails Office toolkits, where an under-provision of walking trails exists, for example in Rathdowney and Borris-in-Ossory;
- TRANS 59 Encourage the provision of facilities to support commuting by bike by large employers, such as workplace shower rooms and lockers via workplace workshops;
- TRANS 60 Support the designation of forest cycling areas in Laois such as at cycle club trails at **Durrow**, Cullenagh, Fossy and Cullahill Mountain.

6.1.4 Public Transport

Key public transport corridors exist within County Laois. 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 layouts should be designed to reduce trip generation, especially by cars. Laois County Council seeks to reduce car dependency and promote a balanced transportation strategy.

Rail

County Laois is well served by a number of mainline and commuter train services. Mainline infrastructure consists of the main Dublin/Cork line with stations at Portarlinton, Portlaoise and Ballybrophy. The Galway/Westport line via Athlone branches off at Portarlinton and at Ballybrophy there is a branch line to Limerick via Nenagh. In addition, there are extensive daily commuter services between Portlaoise and Portarlinton and the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) which have played a central role in the residential expansion of these towns. Recent roll-out of rail related infrastructure in the County includes provision of car parking facilities exist at Portarlinton and Portlaoise stations and the development of a national train service depot located at Togher, Portlaoise. Further opportunities exist to develop a light rail link between the main line service at Portlaoise and the Togher National Enterprise Park in order to develop a large inter modal facility.

Laois County Council will fully encourage and facilitate the provision of bus, cycle and pedestrian facilities and linkages in the vicinity of rail stations to support the Smarter Travel 2009-2020 policy.

A modern, efficient and dependable passenger and freight rail network has a crucial role to play in terms of promoting County Laois for business, industrial, residential and recreational purposes. There are other benefits too in terms of greater sustainability, reduced congestion and car generated pollution.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- TRANS 61 Support the maintenance and enhancement of rail infrastructure and associated facilities in County Laois, particularly the
- i. Examination of options for how to increase the capacity of the Dublin to Galway line in compliance with the requirements of the Habitats and Birds Directives ;
 - ii. Develop a light rail link between the main line service at Portlaoise and the Togher National Enterprise Park in order to develop a large inter modal facility;
- TRANS 62 Support provision of additional rail links within the midlands region or other regions adjoining County Laois;
- TRANS 63 Encourage co-ordination by providers to promote linked up services enabling complete coverage of the county independent of private vehicular transport and promote the provision of appropriately sited and designed facilities, bus shelters and bus lanes which facilitate increased public transport usage; all of which contribute to the development of integrated sustainable transport systems.

BUS

Bus Éireann operates daily mainline services to and from the main population centres of County Laois. Intra-regional services are provided to Limerick, Dublin, Cork, Waterford, Tullamore and Athlone.

This level of national and regional service is augmented by a number of private operators with dedicated student orientated services to third level colleges in Athlone and Carlow. Aircoach runs a direct service from Cork to Dublin Airport with collection points in Portlaoise.

At a more local, rural level, Laois TRIP provides door to door and semi-fixed route services mainly in the west of the County connecting these outlying rural areas to Portlaoise and other large towns in the county.

The Town-Link service links Portlaoise to Portlinton, Mountmellick, Borris-in-Ossory, Rathdowney, Ballacolla, Durrow, Abbeyleix and Ballyroan. A local hop-on, hop-off service serving many of the towns new outlying housing areas is provided in Portlaoise.

Other bus services are run by the Department of Education and the Health Service Executive in relation to their own functions.

In terms of an overall assessment of bus services in the county, the consensus is that while connections to the national network are generally adequate, the level of service for regional connections is more problematic while that at local level is seen as sporadic and intermittent.

In advance of the planned park and ride station at Togher, consideration should be given to the establishment of an inter modal facility, at least on an interim basis, at the existing bus stop at James Fintan Lalor Avenue in Portlaoise town centre which needs to be enhanced by the provision of a physical timetable of all services, enlarged pull-in bays and appropriately sized and designed bus stops.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- TRANS 64 Encourage the establishment of an inter modal facility, in Portlaoise;

- TRANS 65 Encourage the provision of shared bus stop facilities in appropriate locations in urban centres such as train stations as designated in the County Settlement Hierarchy to facilitate public and private operators;
- TRANS 66 Support the provision of bus services:
- i. Connecting principal towns in Laois with Dublin, Dublin Airport, Kilkenny, Carlow, Roscrea, Tullamore and other towns;
 - ii. Connecting principal and key towns within the County;
 - iii. Provided as part of the Rural Transport Initiative which serve to improve access to principal and service towns and counteract rural isolation;
- TRANS 67 Work with rural transport providers facilitate and promote sustainable options for rural transport given the increased running costs.

6.2 WATER SUPPLY AND WASTEWATER SERVICES

6.2.1 Public Water Supply

There is a total of 28 Public Water Supply Schemes in Laois supplying drinking water to 14 Towns, 7 Villages, a number of small rural settlements and a considerable rural area. On a daily basis, Laois County Council manages on behalf of Irish Water (IW) the production of a total of 23,000 m³ of potable water in accordance with the European Union (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014 which serves a population of approx 61,000 people. Laois is unique in that 98.5% of all PWS comes from groundwater. In general, the quality of groundwater in Laois is of good status and requires far less treatment in order to ensure compliance with the EU (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014.

It is the policy of the Council to:

PWS 1 Protect both ground and surface water resources and to work with Irish Water to develop and Implement Water Safety Plans to protect sources of public water supply and their contributing catchment.

6.2.2 Public Wastewater

In relation to wastewater, there are a total of 14 Licensed Wastewater Treatment Works (WWTW) in Laois – those are agglomerations treating greater than 500 population equivalent (p.e.) and a total of 13 WWTWs with Certificates of Authorisation issued by the EPA under the Wastewater Discharge (Authorisation) Regulations 2007 – less than 500 p.e. A total of 17,000 m³ of wastewater is treated in these Licensed WWTWs on a daily basis.

Integrated Constructed Wetlands

The Integrated Constructed Wetlands (ICW) concept provides an alternative strategy to conventional practice for treatment of wastewater. By adopting and implementing a strategy that integrates the management of land, water and biological resources, whilst promoting conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way, the ICW concept addresses the objectives of the EU Water Framework Directive. The intention of the ICW concept is to optimize water management and integrate the benefits from its associated wetland infrastructure to deliver a wide range of environmental returns, such as the protection and enhancement of biodiversity, the delivery of good ecological status, the protection of fisheries and improved landscape aesthetics.

An integrated constructed wetland was developed by Laois County Council for the settlement of Clonaslee in 2012.

It is the policy of the Council to:

WS1 Facilitate the delivery of Irish Water's Capital Investment Plan 2014-2016 and Investment Plan for 2017-2021 and all subsequent Irish Water Investment Plans and ensure that all lands zoned for development are serviced by adequate water services;

WS2 To permit the provision of private wastewater treatment facilities to serve a single dwelling house only where it demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority that the proposed wastewater treatment system is in accordance with the Code of Practice: Wastewater Treatment and Disposal Systems Serving Single Houses (EPA, 2009) and subject to complying with the provisions and objectives of the EU Water Framework Directive, relevant River Basin Management Plan and the Habitats Directive;

WS3 Promote use of wetland systems for treatment of waste-water in accordance with the *Integrated Constructed Wetlands Guidance Document for Farmyard Soiled Water and Domestic Wastewater Applications (DEHLG, 2010)*.

6.2.3 Procedures of the Water Supply and Wastewater Services Department

Irish Water has prepared a Capital Investment Plan (CIP) outlining the indicative investment priorities in water services infrastructure for the three year period 2014-2016. The CIP represents the transition between the capital programmes previously overseen and largely funded by the DECLG and Irish Water’s full price control period investment plans to be regulated by the Commission for Energy Regulation.

The CIP is dominated by contractual commitments entered into previously by Local Authorities, and which have now transitioned to Irish Water. In the 2014-2016 period, Irish Water will fund these contracts to completion and bring forward programmes and prioritised projects to commence. At the same time, it will progress a large portfolio of projects that are at the planning and design stage, reviewing their scope, budgets and, where appropriate, timing to favour maximising the performance of the existing assets through intensified capital maintenance that might allow deferral of major capital investment. Throughout the duration of the CIP, Irish Water have given an undertaking that they will continuously review the programmes, adjusting priorities to take account of emerging information and needs in order to optimise the investments being made.

Capital Investments in Laois

Having regard to the IW Capital Investment Plan CIP 2014 to 2016 and the Emerging Capital Investment Plan 2017 to 2021, the following projects and programmes are the priority objectives during this Plan period:

Table 19: Public Water Supply Objectives

Portlaoise PWS:

OBJ1 Complete the Upgrade to the Disinfection System and extend Manganese Treatment at the Kilminchy Water Treatment Plant to ensure that the development of new production boreholes to meet increased demand is not limited by the capacity of the Water Treatment Plant;

OBJ2 Develop new borehole sources and augment storage at Kilminchy WTP;

OBJ3 Complete Roll-Out of new PLCs on all boreholes and connect plant and boreholes to county-wide SCADA;

OBJ4 Complete Portlaoise Evidence Based Cryptosporidium Risk Assessment 2015;

OBJ5 Ensure that the Portlaoise Water Supply Improvement scheme is included in future Irish Water Capital Investment Programme’s as a project to meet increased demand within Portlaoise

Portarlinton PWS,

OBJ6 Ensure that the Water Supply Improvement planned for La Bergerie is completed;

OBJ7 Additional storage is provided to ensure that there is 28 hrs emergency backup including the requirement on the Offaly side of Portarlinton;

OBJ8 Network Model to be completed (which will include the Killenard and Ballybrittas areas) to advance the design

and planning of necessary network improvements

Durrow 2 PWS and Ballinakill 2 PWS Fermoy Groundwater Source:

OBJ9 Complete drilling of exploratory borehole. Depending upon results on aquifer safe yield, Water Chemistry in particular Nitrates and Water Quality, if successful, to develop a new production borehole in accordance with EPA DW Advice Note 14 (2013) and bring into production.

OBJ10 Based on estimated safe yield, investigate the potential development of a Regional scheme with the potential to replace Ballinakill 1 PWS (Cloghogue), Ballinakill 2 PWS, Durrow 1 PWS (Convent) and Durrow 2 PWS.

Projects County-Wide:

OBJ11 Laois Water Conservation Stage 3 – Replacement of 8.5km of leaking water mains

Programmes County-Wide:

OBJ12 Review and amend Laois Source Protection Scheme and review of Cryptosporidium Risk Assessments

OBJ13 Complete survey of all Borehole sources in Laois and implement plan to bring all boreholes to the standard required under the EPA’s DW Advice Note 14 (2013)

OBJ14 Upgrade to Disinfection systems as required

OBJ15 Water Conservation: Proceed to validate District Metering Areas (DMAs) by completing repairs/replacement of 200 defective boundary Sluice Valves and engagement in National Planned Active Leakage Detection and Find & Fix and Pressure Management

OBJ16 Complete Roll-out of SCADA to all Water Supply Infrastructure as required.

OBJ17 Progress the Taking in Charge (TIC) of Public Group Water Schemes in accordance with IW/LA Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to be rolled out nationally following successful Pilot Programme.

OBJ18 Progress the TIC of Private Estates connected to the Public Water Infrastructure in accordance with the IW/LA TIC of Private Estates (MoU)

OBJ19 Service Reservoir Refurbishment Programme

OBJ20 Engage with IW in the roll-out of its National Sludge Management Programme

OBJ21 Engage with IW to update the data in the IW Geographical Information System

OBJ22 It is the objective of the Council to work with Irish Water to facilitate the timely delivery of ongoing and future upgrades of water supply and wastewater services to meet the future needs of the County and the Region.

Table 20: Public Wastewater Objectives

Portlaoise Wastewater Agglomeration:

OBJ1 Complete the IW Pilot Drainage Area Plan (DAP) and subject to funding and resources, based on the results of this pilot and risk assessments to implement more complete monitoring of Section 16 Discharge Licences to reduce the volume and concentration of effluent load being discharged to the public sewer thus freeing up capacity in the WWtW which is operated by Aecom on as a Design, Build and Operate model;

OBJ2 Repair damaged or substandard sewers to relieve blockages in the network;

OBJ3 Improve Storm Water Management at the WWtW to relieve surcharging in the network in the vicinity of the Mountmellick Road;

OBJ4 Ensure that any required upgrades to the Portlaoise Wastewater treatment Plant is included in future Irish Water Capital Investment Programme’s as a project to meet increased demand within Portlaoise

Portarlington Waste water Agglomeration:

OBJ5 Complete the Advanced Contract for Portarlington Wastewater Treatment Works WWtWs;

OBJ6 Complete the review of the Portarlinton Network Model and plan for improvements as required
Mountmellick Wastewater Agglomeration:
OBJ7 Complete the upgrade planned to the Wastewater Treatment plant. OBJ8 Complete the review of the Mountmellick Network Model and plan for improvements as required
Castletown Wastewater Agglomeration:
OBJ9 Replace the Castletown WWtW by providing new pumping station in Castletown and pump effluent to discharge into the Mounrath System and from there to be treated at the Mounrath WWTW operated by Response Engineering under a DBO Contract.
Projects County-Wide
OBJ10 Complete the roll-out of Flow Monitoring and Composite Samplers on all licensed plants OBJ11 Improve Inlet works including screens at Borris-in-Ossory WWtW, Ballyroan WWtW, The Swan WWtW and Newtown-Doonane WWtW
Programmes County-Wide
OBJ12 Complete on a Risk Assessment Basis the roll-out of DAPs across the Networks within the 14 Licensed agglomerations OBJ13 Engage with IW in the roll-out of its National Sludge Management Programme OBJ14 Engage IW in the roll-out of improvements to WWtWs in those plants with COAs OBJ15 Provide improved storm water storage OBJ16 On a priority basis, roll-out upgrades to pumping stations OBJ17 Complete Roll-out of SCADA across all Wastewater Infrastructure as required OBJ18 Engage with IW to update the data in the IW Geographical Information System

It is the policy of the Council, subject to provision of a adequate funding and resources, to:

- WS4 Work with IW on developing and upgrading the water supply schemes so as to ensure an adequate, resilient, sustainable and economic supply of piped water meeting targets in relation to quality as set out in the IWs WSSP is available for domestic, commercial, industrial, fire safety and other use for the sustainable development of the county in accordance with the settlement structure identified in this Plan. All Capital projects and programmes associated with the provision of water supply or wastewater and surface water treatment must be assessed in accordance with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive in order to avoid adverse impacts on Natura 2000 sites ;
- WS5 To promote and support the implementation of Irish Water's Eastern and Midlands Region Water Supply Project;
- WS6 Concentrate infrastructure improvement and provision in those areas of the County which offer the greatest potential for residential, industrial and commercial development, as identified in the County Settlement strategy;
- WS7 Assess all applications in the context of available and sufficient public infrastructural facilities, the protection of Surface Water and Groundwater Resources. Laois County Council will not permit developments of greater than one dwelling which propose developer provided infrastructure in areas remote from Public Water or Waste Water Schemes;
- WS8 Promote public awareness and involvement in water conservation measures by households, businesses and industries;

- WS9 Promote and encourage the harvesting of rainwater to meet non-potable water needs;
- WS10 Supports the implementation of Energy Efficiency solutions in Water and Waste Water Systems;
- WS11 Promote, by implementation of Source Protection measures and ensuring that all Groundwater Boreholes are constructed in accordance with the EPAs DW Advice Note 14 (2013), the concept of natural water treatment within the Environment thus minimizing the level of Treatment required at Water Treatment Works to comply with the EU (DW) Regulations 2014 and the WFD;
- WS12 Work with IW to upgrade public wastewater collection and treatment systems in towns and villages in the County meeting the targets set out in the IWs WSSP to serve existing and future populations in accordance with the County Settlement Strategy identified in this Plan, the Water Framework Directive thus improving the quality of surface and ground waters in County Laois;
- WS13 Promote the development of additional treatment capacity at existing Plants where required by new developments ensuring compliance with the measures of the relevant river basin management plans;
- WS14 Promote use of wetland systems for treatment of waste-water in accordance with Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government guidelines *"Integrated Constructed Wetlands –Guidance Document for Farmyard Soiled Water and Domestic Wastewater Applications"* [2010];
- WS15 In conjunction with Irish Water, implement relevant recommendations set out in the EPA (2015) publication Focus on Urban Waste Water Treatment in 2014 (and any subsequent update);
- WS16 Collaborate with Irish Water in contributing towards compliance with the relevant provisions of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Regulations 2001 and 2004 and the Waste Water Discharge (Authorisation) Regulations 2007;
- WS17 Collaborate with Irish Water in contributing towards compliance with the European Communities (Drinking Water) Regulations (No. 2) 2007 and compliance of water supplies comply with the 48 parameters identified in these Regulations;
- WS18 Have regard to the EPA (2015) publication Drinking Water Report 2014 (and any subsequent update) in the establishment and maintenance of water sources in the County;
- WS19 Undertake in conjunction with Irish Water, recommendations made by the EPA arising from any failure to meet drinking water standards and any enlistment on the EPA's Remedial Action List;
- WS20 Support the roll-out of IWs Lead Strategy Mitigation plan in Laois and administer the Lead Mitigation Grants Scheme in accordance with the Domestic Lead Remediation (Financial Assistance) Regulations 2016;
- WS21 Support the efforts of Carlow County Council to secure the funds necessary to upgrade the Waste Water treatment plant at Mortarstown, Carlow.

6.2.4 Rural Water and Wastewater

While certain functions of the Council have transferred to Irish Water, Laois County Council remains responsible for ensuring that the water supplied by any other water supplier which includes the Public and Private Group Water Schemes, Small Private Water Supplies and individual Water Supplies is wholesome and clean and meets the requirements of the EU (DW) Regs 2014.

Rural water supplies are exposed to disparate sources of contamination including domestic and agricultural and other uses. The crucial importance of ground water resources and abstraction points is recognised by the Council. Careful protection of water resources from pollution in the interests of the common good and public health is a priority of the

Council. The control of pollution and prevention of contamination of groundwater and watercourses will be assessed in developments which discharge to groundwater or watercourses within the requirements of the Water Pollution Acts 1977 to 1990. Effluents must be treated and discharged in a satisfactory manner.

The Council requires that all single dwelling treatment systems are designed to comply with the County Laois Groundwater Protection Scheme and are constructed in accordance with the EPA Code of Practice for Wastewater Treatment Systems for Single Houses (2010) and any subsequent updates of this document from the EPA. All percolation areas for any systems must be certified by a competent person carrying appropriate indemnities as being fit for the purpose.

The issue of treating waste water effluent to the highest possible standards is a growing problem. The CSO Census in 2011 showed that out of a total of 27,916 permanent private households in County Laois, 15,718 houses [56.3%] were connected to the public sewer while 10,401 [37.3%] were connected to individual septic tanks. The remaining 1,797 households [6.4%] were listed as "individual treatment-not septic tank, other, no facility and not stated" on the CSO data. Accordingly, if the septic tanks are not functioning properly, this has the potential to cause pollution to ground water and/or run-off to surface waters.

Domestic Waste Water Treatment systems are inspected in accordance with the EPA's National Inspection Plan.

Multi Annual Programme 2016–2018

The Multi Annual Programme was introduced by the Department in 2016.

Group Water Schemes

Under the European Union (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014, Laois County Council is the Supervisory Authority for 80 Group Water Schemes. 50 of these schemes are connected to a public water supply, while 30 use privately sourced groundwater. The CSO Census 2011 estimates that a total of 3,349 households are serviced by these schemes. The Council monitors private water supplies from 31 Group Water Schemes in order to ensure that these water supplies comply with the regulations.

Small Private Supplies

Under the European Union (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014, Laois County Council is the Supervisory Authority Small Private Supplies with a Commercial or Public Use. Laois County Council has responsibility for ensuring compliance with the Regulations of 87 small private supplies with a commercial or public use. This includes 14 National Schools and 4 Private Housing Estates.

Private Wells

Private boreholes are used when access to the public water supply or a group water scheme is not possible. CSO figures from the 2011 Census showed that there were 5,810 private wells in the County. The EPA estimates that up to 30% of private wells in Ireland are contaminated by E. coli arising from animal or human waste. Laois County Council administers a Grant Scheme for the provision or upgrade of private wells and treatment systems. In all circumstances the applicant will need to clearly demonstrate that a suitable site is available and that sewage treatment can be accommodated without negative impact on the proposed water source.

Rural Water and Wastewater

It is the policy of the Council, subject to provision of a adequate funding and resources, to:

WS22 Protect and develop, in a sustainable manner, the existing Group Scheme groundwater sources and aquifers in the County and control development in a manner consistent with the proper management of these resources, in accordance with the County Source Protection Zones;

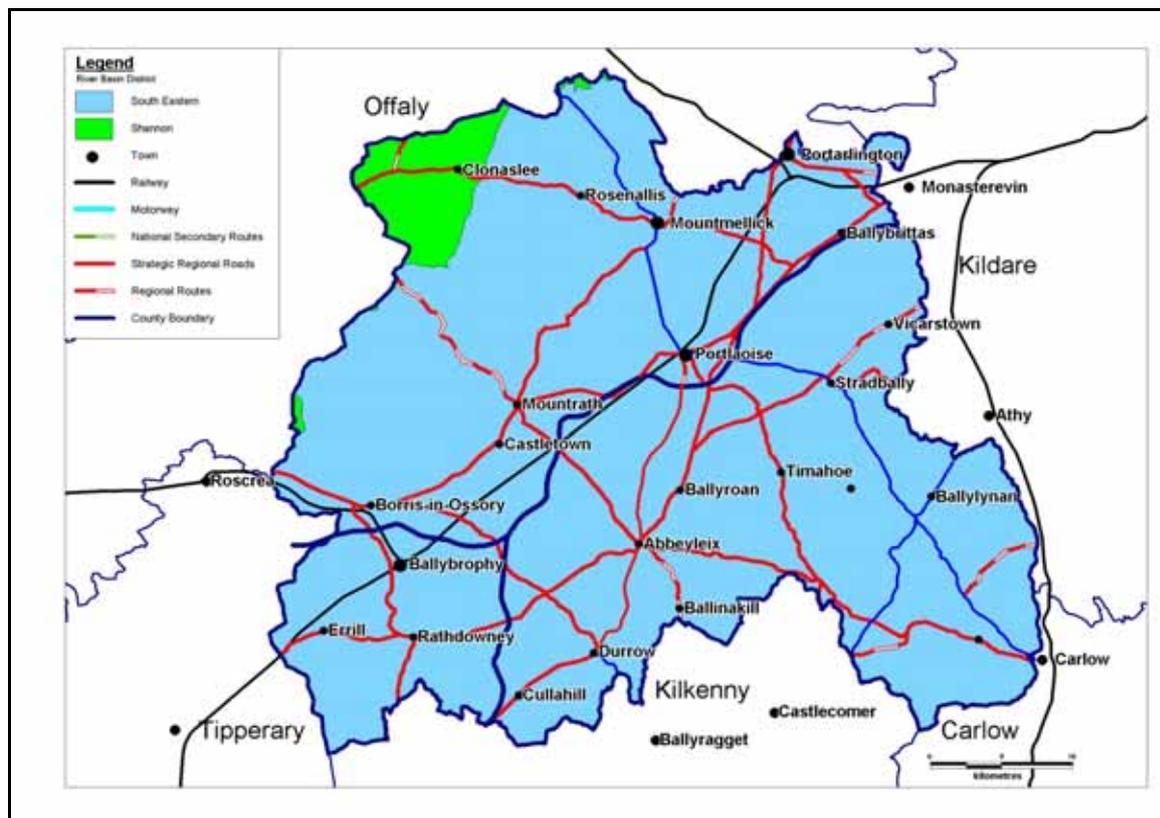
- WS23 Implement the measures under the Rural Water Multi-Annual Programme so as to improve the quality, reliability and efficiency of water supplies for rural dwellers and to progress the Taking in Charge of Public Group Water Schemes;
- WS24 Provide well grants for private wells where best practice is employed for the protection of drinking water against contamination to safeguard public health;
- WS25 Require the provision of wastewater treatment for single houses in line with the EPA Code of Practice 2009 and groundwater protection schemes;
- WS26 Progress the Taking in Charge of Public Group Water Schemes, particularly “Orphaned” Schemes in consultation with IW and in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) under development.

6.2.5 The Water Framework Directive

In response to the increasing threat of pollution and the increasing demand from the public for cleaner rivers, lakes and beaches, the EU developed the Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) (WFD). The WFD establishes a framework for the protection of all waters including rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastal waters, groundwater, canals and other artificial water bodies for the benefit of everyone. The protection of water for wildlife and their habitats is also included under the WFD. Management of water resources must be planned and implemented, through River Basin Management Plans, in a way that achieves the best possible balance between the protection and improvement of the water environment and the interests of those who depend on it for their livelihood and quality of life.

For the purposes of implementing the WFD, Ireland was divided into eight river basin districts that are drained by a large river or number of rivers. The Nore and Barrow catchments and a tributary of the Shannon catchments are in County Laois. Administratively the South Eastern River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) covers the catchments to the River's Nore, Barrow, Suir, Slaney and a number of smaller rivers around the coast, along with the coastal waters bordering these river catchments. The Shannon catchment is covered by the Shannon International RBMP. Both Plans were adopted by Laois County Council in March 2010 and approved by the minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in July 2010. These Plans set out the standards and objectives for water quality in the river basin. RBMPs relate to all waters including rivers, canals, groundwater, lakes and protected wetlands.

Fig.18: River Basin Districts in Laois



Work is now underway to prepare the second cycle of River Basin Management Plans. The Eastern, South Eastern, South Western, Western and Shannon International River Basin Districts will be merged to form one national River Basin District. It is expected that the second cycle of RBMPs will be in place by the end of 2017.

6.2.5.1 Water Quality

The protection of our surface and groundwater resources is one of the most fundamental challenges facing Laois in the future as good quality water is essential in supporting diverse and varied ecosystems, sustainable communities and a developed economy. In light of conclusive scientific data, it is clear that the chemical quality and availability of groundwater and the chemical and biological quality of surface water are under significant pressure.

The Nore Freshwater Pearl Mussel, known as *Margaritifera durrovensis* is found in the River Nore in Laois. This species is unique to the River Nore and is not found anywhere else in the world. It has been critically endangered for some time. The quality of its habitat is failing (evidence of heavy siltation, macrophyte and filamentous green algal growth) and its population demographic profile is weak (insufficient number of juveniles present to provide sustainable replacement of current adults). A Sub-Basin Management Plan for the Nore freshwater pearl mussel has been prepared, which indicates the sensitivity of the species and includes environmental objectives. Similarly, a number of protected areas (Natura 2000 sites) in Laois are water sensitive including river, bog and fen.

The status of existing water bodies are reported by the EPA. Water quality in County Laois remains quite good when compared to the national picture. In terms of ecological status, 64% of river stations in the county are at least good status compared with 65% nationally. The general physico-chemical data indicates nearly 90% of rivers in Laois having an average BOD concentration below the Environmental Quality Standard (EQS) for good quality. However, ortho-phosphate and nitrate have fluctuated and over half of Laois's rivers had nitrate concentrations that exceeded the EQS.

Various sections of the Council will be fundamental to the success of meeting the targets set down in the South Eastern and Shannon International RBMPs. Important elements in delivering targets include the regime of planning permissions, waste permits and discharge licenses and enforcement of planning law, waste management law and water pollution law as well as the provision of municipal wastewater treatment and drinking water, municipal landfills, the management of the county road network and related drainage network. Activities outside the remit of the Council such as agricultural and forestry development exempted from planning permission may have a significant impact on whether targets are met.

The Council will work together with government agencies such as EPA, Inland Fisheries Ireland, Coillte and Bord na Móna, and with the community including the farming community to protect the environment through the effective management of environmental resources.

The Council will implement the Programme of Measures for the two River Basin Districts relevant to County Laois and any other water quality management plans prepared for the county or the region.

6.2.5.2 Water Quality Protection

The Council operates under the Water Pollution Acts 1977 and 1990 which enables Local Authorities to:

- Prosecute for water pollution offences;
- Attach appropriate pollution control conditions in the licensing of effluent discharges from industry, etc., made to waters;
- Issue notices requiring a person to cease the pollution of waters and requiring the mitigation or remedying of any effects of the pollution in the manner and within the period specified in such notices;
- Seek court orders, including High Court injunctions, to prevent, terminate, mitigate or remedy pollution/its effects;
- Prepare water quality management plans for any waters in or adjoining their functional areas;
- Make bye-laws regulating certain agricultural activities where the Local Authority considers this to be necessary so as to prevent or eliminate pollution of waters, issue notices requiring farmers to prepare nutrient management plans with the aim of ensuring that nutrients applied to land from chemical fertilisers and organic farm wastes, e.g. slurries, take account of nutrients already available in the soil and are consistent with recommended application rates, crop requirement and the need to avoid water pollution.

Since 1st January, 2014 Irish Water is responsible for attaching appropriate pollution control conditions in the licensing of effluent discharges from industry, etc. made to sewers. Inland Fisheries Ireland, as part of their fisheries management function, is also in a position to take prosecutions for water pollution offences. The Environmental Protection Agency is responsible for water pollution insofar as activities licensable by the Agency may be involved; these concern complex industrial activities, as well as large intensive pig and poultry production units - operations having a potential to cause significant pollution which are controlled under the Environmental Protection Agency Act, 1992.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- WS27 Implement the provisions of water pollution abatement measures in accordance with National and EU Directives and other legislative requirements in conjunction with other agencies as appropriate;
- WS28 Improve the water quality in rivers and other watercourses in the county, including ground waters;
- WS29 Minimise the impact on groundwater of discharges from septic tanks and other potentially polluting sources. The Council will comply with the Environmental Protection Agency's 'Code of Practice: Wastewater Treatment and Disposal Systems Serving Single Houses' (2009).

6.2.5.3 Groundwater Protection

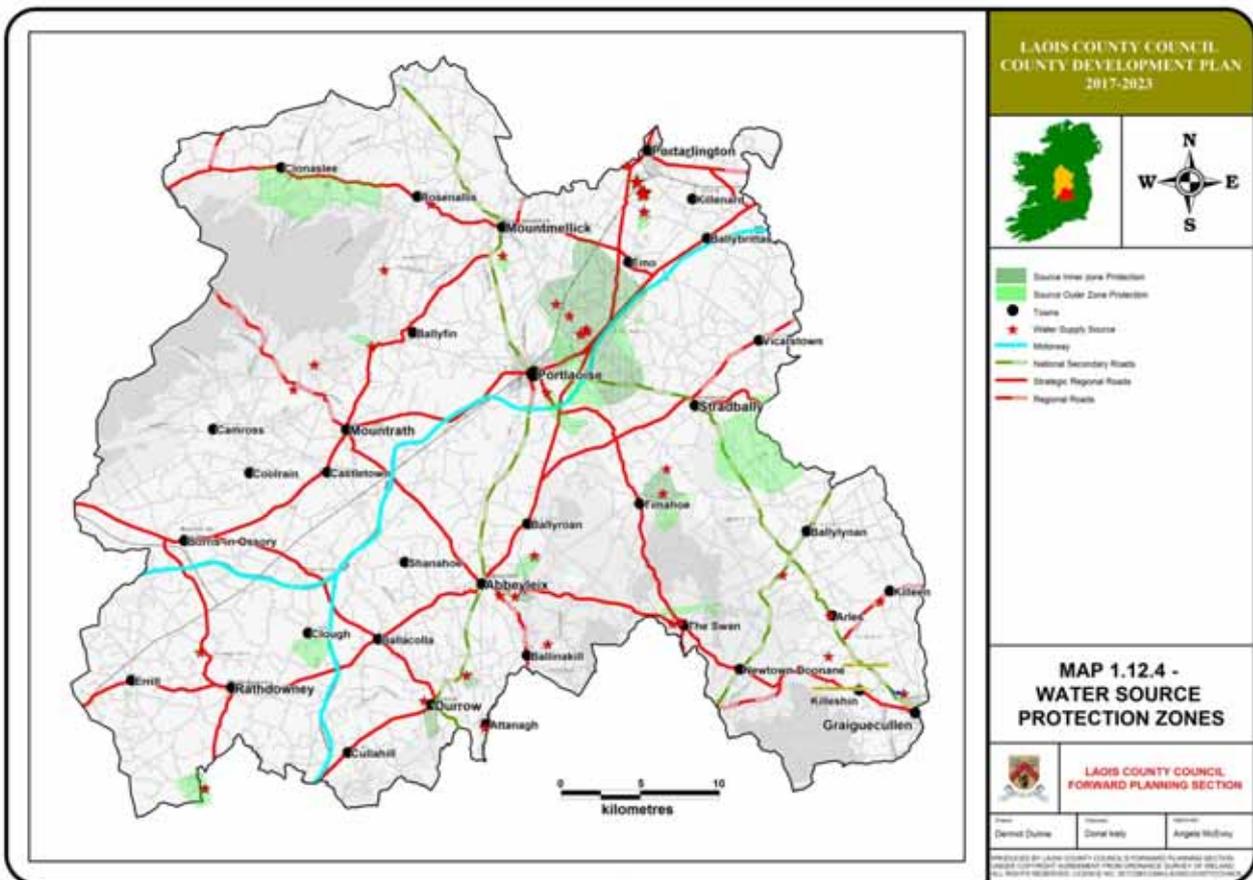
Groundwater provides the water requirements of the vast majority of households and businesses in county Laois via public, group scheme and private wells. Groundwater also contributes water to the river system as base flow, and so its quality is intrinsically linked to surface water quality. Groundwater is a resource that is under increasing risk from human activities. The main threats are posed by:

1. Point contamination sources e.g. farmyard wastes (mainly silage effluent and soiled water), industrial discharges, activities related to quarrying and extraction, septic tank effluent, leakages, spillages, the improper use of pesticides and leachate from waste disposal sites.
2. Diffuse sources e.g. spreading of fertilisers (organic and inorganic) and pesticides.

A number of surface water bodies are protected by way of Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designation. Sensitive aquifers that contribute to the groundwater resources of the county also require protection and careful management. The Geological Survey of Ireland has completed a Groundwater Protection Scheme for County Laois. The overall aim of a Groundwater Protection Scheme is to preserve the quality of groundwater, for drinking water, surface water ecosystems and terrestrial ecosystems, for the benefit of present and future generations.

The Groundwater Protection Scheme provides guidance for Laois County Council in decision-making on the location, nature and control of developments and activities in order to protect groundwater. Some areas may not have suitable hydrogeological conditions to accommodate discharges to groundwater such as a conventional septic tank or a proprietary wastewater system; in addition a high density of septic tanks in an area may cause a reduction in water quality.

Figure 19: Laois’s Groundwater Protection Scheme



Source Protection Areas for Groundwater sources, particularly for public, group scheme and industrial supplies, are of critical importance. Consequently, Source Protection Areas are delineated around groundwater sources to provide protection by placing tighter controls on activities within those areas. Source Protection Areas are divided into Inner Protection Areas and Outer Protection Areas. Development within Source Protection Areas shall be subject to stringent requirements in accordance with the Groundwater Protection Scheme and the Water Services Acts 2007 & 2012.

In County Laois, the main pressures on waterbodies are from nutrients related to agriculture. The objective of the Nitrates Directive is the prevention of the pollution of ground water and surface waters by nitrates from agricultural sources. The Council works with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to achieve the maximum protection of waters from nitrate and phosphorous pollution, and will seek compliance with any bye-laws made under the Local Government (Water Pollution) (Amendment) Act 1990 in relation to agricultural activities in those parts of the county, which have been prescribed in the byelaws.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- WS30 Protect and develop, in a sustainable manner, the existing groundwater sources and aquifers in the County and control development in a manner consistent with the proper management of these resources, in accordance with the County Source Protection Zones;
- WS31 Ensure the protection of groundwater dependant Natura 2000 sites which rely on the continued supply of groundwater resources to secure the key environmental conditions that support the integrity of the site and through the protection of groundwater standards as defined by the relevant River Basin Management Plan. Where no detailed Plan for protection of a specific source is available wastewater discharge will not be permitted within a radius of 300 metres of that source;
- WS32 Ensure the protection of groundwater dependant Natura 2000 sites which rely on the continued supply of groundwater resources to secure the key environmental conditions that support the integrity of the site and through the protection of groundwater standards as defined by the relevant River Basin Management Plan. All Capital projects and programmes associated with the provision of water supply or wastewater and surface water treatment must be assessed in accordance with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive in order to avoid adverse impacts on Natura 2000 sites;
- WS33 Consult as necessary with other competent authorities with responsibility for environmental management;
- WS34 Comply with the provisions of the Water Framework Directive 2000;
- WS35 To assist and co-operate with the EPA and the Lead Authorities in the continued implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive;
- WS36 To ensure, through the implementation of the River Basin Management Plans and their associated Programmes of Measures and any other associated legislation, the protection and improvement of all drinking water, surface water and ground waters throughout the county;
- WS37 To work in co-operation with relevant organisations and major stakeholders, to ensure a co-ordinated approach to the protection and improvement of the county's water resources;
- WS38 To continue efforts to improve water quality under the Local Government (Water Pollution) Act 1977, (as amended) and by implementing the measures outlined under the Nitrates Directive (91/676/EEC) and complying with the requirements of the Surface Water Legislation Environmental Objectives (Surface Waters) Regulations 2009, the European Communities (Groundwater) Regulations 2010; which standards and objectives are included in the River Basin Management Plans, and other relevant Regulations;
- WS39 Have regard to the Groundwater Protection Scheme and to comply with the Water Services Act 2007 (as amended) in decision-making on the location, nature and control of developments and activities in order to protect groundwater;
- WS40 Ensure that Source Protection Areas are identified for any public and group scheme water supplies or multiple unit housing developments with private water supplies;

- WS41 Ensure that all industrial development is appropriately located, to seek effluent reduction and 'clean production' where feasible, and require that waste water treatment facilities are adequate, and that effluents are treated and discharged in a satisfactory manner;
- WS42 Encourage the use of catchment-sensitive farming practices, in order to meet Water Framework Directive targets and comply with the relevant River Basin Management Plan 2009-2015;
- WS43 Ensure that developments that may adversely affect water quality will not proceed unless mitigation measures are employed, such as settlements ponds, interceptors etc;
- WS44 New developments which include on-site wastewater treatment in an Extreme Vulnerability Inner Source Protection Area shall be restricted to the following categories:
- a) A dwelling for a full-time farmer;
 - b) An existing inhabited dwelling in need of replacement;
 - c) A second family dwelling on a farm where this is required for management of the farm
- Permission may be granted in the above instances subject to the following stipulations:
- a) That an alternative site outside the Extreme vulnerability Inner Protection Area is not available
 - b) The existing water quality of the source is not subject to any significant nitrate and /or microbiological contamination
- WS45 Promote public awareness of water quality issues and the measures required to protect both surface water and groundwater bodies.
- WS46 Control intensive agriculture development e.g. intensive pig unit productions in order to minimise their impact on soil and ground water quality. Developments involving intensive pig units shall be required to show compliance with the following requirements:
- i. The developer shall demonstrate that all lands available and suitable for spreading are in close proximity to the pig unit;
 - ii. Satisfactory arrangements for storage, management and spreading of slurries are provided.

6.3 SURFACE WATER, DRAINAGE AND FLOODING

6.3.1 Surface Water & Drainage

A major by-product of development in both urban and rural areas in County Laois is surface and storm water run-off. The management of surface and storm water is important so as to avoid increased flood or pollution risk in the storm water network, rivers and streams in the county's towns, villages and rural areas. The Council will require compliance with best practice guidance for the collection, reuse, treatment and disposal of surface waters for all future development proposals. Sustainable Drainage Systems, commonly known as SuDS is an approach that seeks to manage the water as close as possible to its origin by various engineering solutions that replicate natural drainage processes, before it enters the watercourse. The incorporation of SuDS techniques allows surface water to be either infiltrated or conveyed more slowly to water courses using porous surface treatments, ponds, swales, filter drains or other installations. SuDS provide an integrated approach which addresses water quantity, water quality, amenity and habitat. The Council will require the application of SuDS in development proposals, for example through reducing the extent of hard surfacing, and using permeable pavements.

The use of SuDS will be required in new developments to minimise the risk of flooding and contamination and to protect environmental and water resources. The Council will seek to ensure applicants incorporate sustainable drainage systems for significant developments in both urban and rural areas and will encourage them for all other developments. In the case of developments in rural areas that are not serviced by a storm sewer network, or where the network has insufficient capacity, uncontaminated surface water must be disposed of within the curtilage of the site through the use

of appropriately sized soak pits. The Council will protect wetlands (bogs and fens) from drainage works where planning permission is required.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- SW1 Ensure that all storm water generated in a new development is disposed of on-site or is attenuated and treated prior to discharge to an approved storm water system;
- SW2 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 Planning System and Flood Risk Management: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DoEHLG, 2009) and Laois County Council's Roads and Drainage Standards, or as amended.

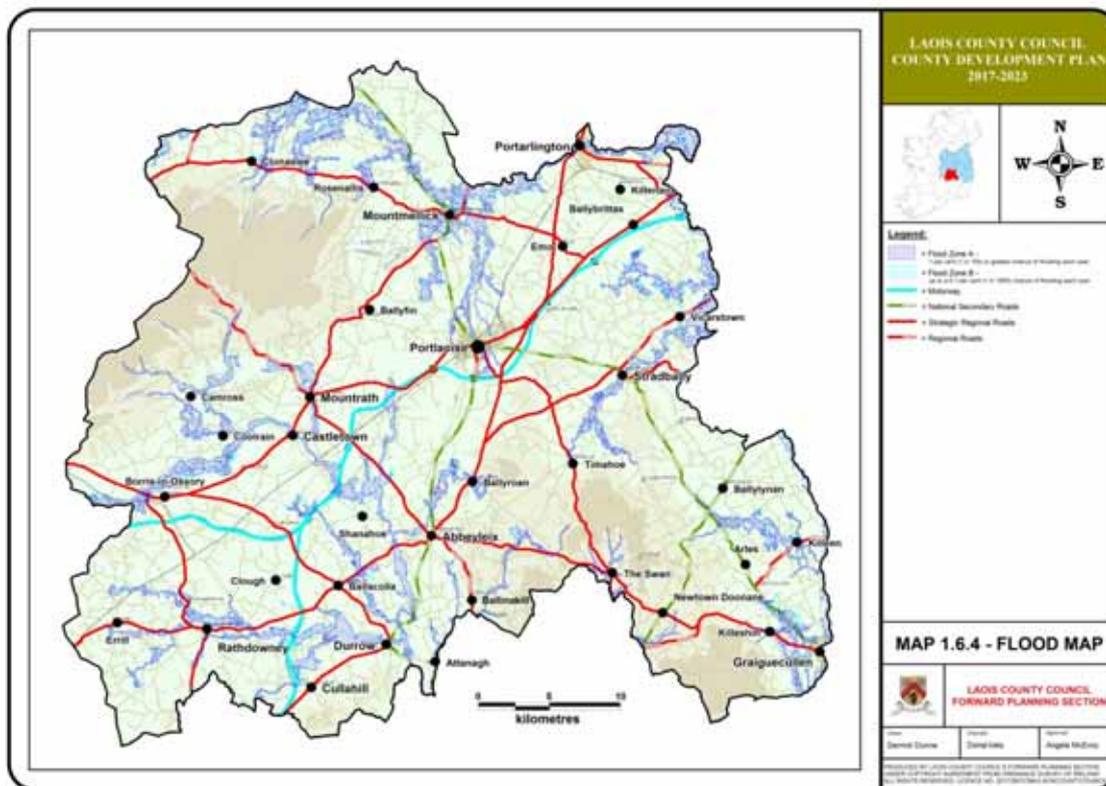
6.3.2 Flooding

Flooding is a natural process that can happen at any time in a wide variety of locations. It has significant impacts on human activities, and in addition to economic and social damage, floods can have severe environmental consequences. The Council's aim is to minimise the level of flood risk to people, business, infrastructure and the environment, through the identification and management of existing, and particularly potential future, flood risks. Flood risk will be incorporated in an integrated, proactive and transparent manner in line with evolving best practice into decision making processes for future development and use of land in the county.

The Council has prepared a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment following which the county has been divided into two zones according to their risk of flooding. Map 18 indicates flood zones A and B in County Laois. In making its zoning decisions and planning application decisions, the Council will rely on the best available flood-risk data and will be mindful of the unpredictable nature of climate change.

The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) for County Laois will be reviewed [and amended if necessary] following the publication [in Q4 of 2016] of the updated flood risk mapping currently being prepared as part of the national Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management [CFRAM] Studies.

Figure 20: Flood Map



6.3.2.1 Sequential Approach

The Planning System and *Flood Risk Management: Guidelines for Planning Authorities'* (DEHLG, 2009) prescribe the use of a sequential approach to ensure that new development is directed towards land that is at a low risk of flooding. The sequential approach makes use of flood risk assessment and of prior identification of flood zones for river flooding. It is essential that the risk potentially arising from other sources of flooding should also be taken into account in all areas and stages of the planning process. The planning implications for each of the flood zones are as follows:

Flood Zone A-High Probability of flooding

Most types of development would be considered inappropriate in this zone. Development in this zone should be avoided and/or only considered in exceptional circumstances where the requirements of the Justification Test set out can be met.

Flood Zone B-Moderate Probability of flooding

Highly vulnerable development would generally be considered inappropriate in this zone, unless the requirements of the Justification Test can be met. Less vulnerable developments might be considered appropriate in this zone subject to a flood risk assessment to the appropriate level to demonstrate that flood risk to and from the development can and will be adequately managed.

Flood Zone C-Low Probability of flooding

Development in this zone is appropriate from a flood risk perspective (subject to assessment of flood hazard from sources other than rivers and the coast) but would need to meet the normal range of other proper planning and sustainable development considerations.

It is an objective of the Council to:

FD 01 undertake a review [and amendment if necessary] of the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for County Laois following the publication of the flood mapping which is being produced as part of the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Studies by the OPW.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- FD1 Ensure that flood risk management is incorporated into the preparation of all local area plans through the preparation in accordance with the requirements of the Planning System and Flood Risk Management-Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DoEHLG 2009);
- FD2 Ensure that all development proposals comply with the requirements of the Planning System and Flood Risk Management-Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (DEHLG 2009) and to ensure that the Justification Test for Development Management is applied to required development proposals and in accordance with methodology set out in the guidelines;
- FD3 Prioritise plans for flood defence works in the towns as indicated in the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment in order to mitigate against potential flood risk;
- FD4 Ensure new development does not increase flood risk elsewhere, including that which may arise from surface water runoff;
- FD5 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.

6.3.3 Climate Change

In line with global trends, Ireland's climate is changing and the scientific consensus is that more changes are inevitable. Climate change is now recognised as the most significant and threatening global environmental problem. The impacts and predicted future impacts of over dependence on non-renewable energy sources are costly; as they are likely to include significant increases in rainfall resulting in increased risk of flooding, rising sea levels, an increase in storm events and high levels of air pollutants.

The Development Plan seeks to simultaneously address issues of climate change, energy supply, sustainability and competitiveness through the adoption and implementation of policy at a local level. The Plan also aims to facilitate, promote and achieve a reasonable balance between responding to Government policy on renewable energy and enabling energy resources to be harnessed in a manner that is in accordance with the principles of proper planning and sustainable development.

Everyone can play a part in tackling climate change by improving energy efficiency, investing in renewable energy and adopting sustainable transport and development practice. The Council recognises that significant changes are required to address the necessity of adaptation to climate change and that the Council is a key agent for change and raising awareness at local level.

With regards the shift towards the use of renewable energy sources, whilst County Laois may seem very small in the context of global greenhouse gas emissions, the phrase "think globally....act locally" is important.

The National Mitigation Plan is currently being prepared by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCA) and relevant aspects of this plan will be incorporated into Laois County Development Plan by way of variation, as relevant and appropriate, on completion of the plan.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- CC1 Support and facilitate the national objectives for climate adaptation and will work with the EPA, the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly and adjoining planning authorities in implementing future guidance for climate change proofing of land use plan provisions as is flagged in the National Climate Change Adaptation Framework (DECLG, 2012);
- CC2 Prepare a Climate Change Adaptation plan following the adoption of the Development Plan, in line with relevant Government guidelines;
- CC2 Integrate as appropriate, the National Climate Change Adaptation Framework 2012 and any related Guidelines which may arise during its implementation in the service areas of Laois County Council.

6.4 ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

6.4.1 Waste Recovery and Disposal

Laois County Council has actively been involved in facilitating the delivery of a more sustainable approach to waste management within the county. Key to this is the implementation of the Eastern-Midlands Regional Waste Management Plan 2015-2021.

The strategic vision of the regional waste plan is to rethink the approach to managing waste, by viewing waste streams as valuable material resources. Three strategic targets have been set in the plan covering the areas of prevention, recycling and land-filling.

- 1% reduction per annum in the Quantity of Household Waste per capita over the period of the Plan.
- Achieve a Recycling Rate of 50% of managed municipal waste by 2020
- Reduce to 0% the direct disposal of unprocessed* residual Municipal waste to landfill (from 2016 onwards) in favour of higher value pre-treatment and indigenous recovery practices.

The delivery of these targets will require the local authorities and industry to work together.

Bring Facilities and Civic Amenity Facilities

There are currently 46 bring banks within the County for the collection of aluminium cans and glass. There are also a number of privately owned/operated textile banks throughout the County and two civic amenity sites in operation for the disposal of recyclable materials and waste electrical and electronic equipment. In accordance with the aforementioned aims, the Council will seek to develop such facilities over the life span of this plan. Accordingly, the Council's policy is as follows;

It is the policy of the Council to:

- ES1 Facilitate and promote the implementation of the Eastern-Midlands Regional Waste Management Plan 2015-2021 within its functional area.
- ES2 Continue to facilitate and promote the provision of civic amenity sites, including "bring centres" for the purposes of providing a collection point for the recycling of domestic waste, subject to siting, location, compatibility with adjacent land uses and other relevant development control criteria.

6.4.2 Waste Control

Laois County Council's Strategy on litter as set out in the Laois County Council Litter Management Plan 2015-2017, is to increase public awareness by increased education, and to promote a litter free environment through the implementation of enforcement action through the relevant legislation. The Council shall continue its education and awareness programmes in local schools and shall promote schemes and initiatives which aim to reduce litter pollution in the County.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- ES3 Investigate the feasibility of using the former County landfill site at Kyletalesha for alternative activities such as energy production, nature conservation and other suitable activities;
- ES4 Enforce the provisions of the 1997 Litter Pollution Act where appropriate and necessary. This states that "no person shall deposit any substance or object so as to create litter in a public place or in any place that is visible to any extent from a public place";
- ES5 Promote the implementation of the Litter Management Plan 2015-2017 for County Laois;
- ES6 Continue to pursue its programme of stray/nuisance dog and horse control within the County;
- ES7 Construction wastes arising will be managed and disposed of in a way that ensures the provisions of the Waste Management Acts and new Waste Management Plan. Construction Waste Management Plans will be implemented where relevant to minimise waste and ensure correct handling and disposal of construction waste streams in accordance with the Best Practice Guidelines on the Preparation of Waste Management Plans for Construction and Demolition Projects, Department of the Environment, July 2006.

6.4.3 Air Quality

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the body responsible for the monitoring of air quality in Ireland. The Council is the regulatory authority under the Air Pollution Act 1987 and the Air Pollution Act 1987 (Licensing of Industrial Plant) Regulations 1988. Under the above legislation Laois County Council's role is to protect, enhance and control air pollution and to ensure the provision of the highest standards. The Council is empowered to improve air quality and prevent pollution by having regard to the Air Quality Standards Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 180 of 2011). These regulations implement Directive 2008/50/EC on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe.

The Council has adopted policies in relation to air quality having regard to its importance to a good quality of life, public health and environmental sustainability. Air pollution can negatively affect human health and eco-systems with the main threat to air quality being emissions from road traffic. The policy approach of the Council to integrate land use planning and transportation will reduce emissions from vehicles. The most sensitive areas in relation to air quality are built-up urban areas and major transport developments. The Council will have regard to the EU Framework Directive on Air Quality Assessment relating to air quality standards. Regard shall also be had to the EPA document "Air Quality in Ireland".

It is the policy of the Council to:

- ES8 Ensure good air quality throughout the county by requiring developments of a certain nature to carry out assessments of the impact of the development on air quality;
- ES9 Encourage the use of appropriate mitigation measures, such as dust dampeners, chimney stack scrubbers, etc to minimize the potential impacts of developments on air quality;
- ES10 Encourage more sustainable modes of transport and a more balanced modal split to reduce carbon emissions;

- ES11 Promote the preservation of best ambient air quality compatible with sustainable development in accordance with the EU Ambient Air Quality and Cleaner Air for Europe (CAFE) Directive (2008/50/EC) and ensure that all air emissions associated with new developments are within Environmental Quality Standards as out in the Air Quality Standards Regulations 2011 (SI No. 180 of 2011) (or any updated/superseding documents).

6.4.4 Noise

Noise control is governed by the Environmental Protection Agency Act 1992 and the Environmental Protection Agency Act (Noise) Regulations 1994 (S.I. No. 179 of 1994). The definition of environmental noise includes “noise which causes a nuisance, or would endanger human health or damage property or harm the environment”. Noise that is continuous, repeated or loud can have significant impacts on the quality of life of individuals, communities and the environment, in particular, wildlife. The protection of noise sensitive land usage, such as residential uses, is important in order to foster a good quality of life. The Planning Authority of Laois County Council will seek to minimise noise through the planning process by ensuring that the design of future developments incorporate measures to prevent or mitigate the transmission of noise and vibration, where appropriate.

Noise Action Plan

Laois County Council adopted the 2014-2018 Noise Action Plan in 2013, which is in accordance with Environmental Noise Regulations (SI 140 of 2006). The aim of the plan is to avoid, prevent and reduce, on a prioritised basis the harmful effects, including an annoyance due to the long term exposure to environmental noise.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- ES12 Require an assessment of impact of the developments on noise levels, having regard to the provisions of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Acts 1992 and 2003 and the EPA Noise Regulations 1994 when assessing planning applications;
- ES13 Ensure that relevant planning applications comply with the provisions of any Noise Action Plan or noise maps relating to the area;
- ES14 Restrict development proposals causing noise pollution in excess of best practice standards;
- ES15 Regulate and control activities likely to give rise to excessive noise, other than those activities which are regulated by the EPA;
- ES16 Ensure new development does not cause an unacceptable increase in noise levels affecting noise sensitive properties. Proposals for new development with the potential to create excessive noise will be required to submit a construction and/or operation management plan to control such emissions;
- ES17 Require activities likely to give rise to excessive noise to install noise mitigation measures and monitors. The provision of a noise audit may be required where appropriate.

6.4.5 Light Pollution

The control of light pollution is important in the interests of nature conservation, residential amenity and energy efficiency. While adequate lighting is essential to a safe and secure environment, light spillage from excessive or poorly designed lighting is increasingly recognised as a potential nuisance to surrounding properties, a potential hazard to road safety, a threat to wildlife and can reduce the visibility of the night sky. Urban and rural locations can suffer equally from this problem. Lighting columns and other fixtures can have a significant effect on the appearance of buildings and the environment and where proposals for new lighting require planning consent, the Planning Authority will ensure that they are carefully and sensitively designed. Developments that seek to make the best possible use of natural light are inherently more cost effective than those that require lighting during normal daylight hours.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- ES18 Encourage the maintenance of dark skies in rural areas and limit light pollution in urban and rural areas;
- ES19 Ensure that lighting is carefully and sensitively designed;
- ES20 Ensure that external lighting and lighting schemes are designed so that light spillage is minimised, thereby limiting light pollution into the surrounding environment and protecting the amenities of nearby properties and wildlife, including protected species.

6.4.6 Soil Quality

The large percentage of permanent pasture land has protected Ireland's soils from serious degradation, with the notable exception of peatlands. There is, however, increasing pressure on soil, particularly from land use changes, intensification of agriculture, erosion and overgrazing, afforestation, industry and urbanisation. These developments have significant impacts on soil quality and require careful management to protect soils and the wider environment.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- ES21 Ensure good soil quality throughout the county by requiring developments of a certain nature (as specified in the relevant environmental legislation) to carry out assessments of the impact of the development on soil quality;
- ES22 Recognise the significant impacts of land use, land use change and sludge generation and treatment in relation to carbon loss/stocks and recognise the function of soil assessment and management, carbon sinks, carbon sequestration and restoration of degraded lands in planned settlement and development strategies;
- ES23 Require developers to carry out a land contamination survey to determine the condition of the land where lands may have been at risk;
- ES24 Continue to consult with the EPA in the remediation of contaminated lands;
- ES25 Ensure that industrial, water and wastewater sludge is managed in a manner that is traceable and enhances soil quality in the short and long term.
- ES26 Ensure the implementation of the specific guidance on radon prevention measures for new homes as contained within the existing Building Regulations (including any updated/superseding regulations that may be published within the life time of this Plan).

6.5 CONTROL OF MAJOR ACCIDENT HAZARDS DIRECTIVE (SEVESO III DIRECTIVE)

The Chemicals Act (Control of Major Accident Hazards involving Dangerous Substances) Regulations 2015 (S.I. No. 209 of 2015) (the "COMAH Regulations"), implement the Seveso III Directive (2012/18/EU). While this replaces the Seveso II Directive, the legislation continues to include provisions relating to land use planning. The purpose of the COMAH Regulations is to lay down rules for the prevention of major accidents involving dangerous substances, and to seek to limit as far as possible the consequences for human health and the environment of such accidents, with the overall objective of providing a high level of protection in a consistent and effective manner. These objectives must be pursued through controls on the following:

- i. The siting of new establishments;
- ii. Significant modifications of existing establishments.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- ES27 Ensure that any COMAH sites in County Laois are managed in accordance with the provisions of the Seveso III Directive;
- ES28 Have regard to the following in assessing applications for new developments (including extensions);
- i. The Major Accidents Directive Seveso III Directive (2012/18/EU);
 - ii. The potential effects on public health and safety;
 - iii. The need to ensure adequate distances between such developments and residential areas, areas of public use and any areas of sensitivity;
- ES29 Any proposals for developments within the vicinity of major accident hazard sites shall have cognisance of the required minimum separation distances as required by the Major Accidents Directive. In this regard all future proposals of this nature shall be forwarded to the Health and Safety Authority.

6.6 ENERGY AND COMMUNICATIONS

The availability of energy is of critical importance to the continued development and expansion of employment in County Laois. Ireland has a target of meeting 40% of its energy demand from renewable resources by 2020 and Laois County Council seeks to develop the county as a low carbon economy by making provision for the harnessing, storage and use of renewable energy. The promotion of renewable energy sources and maximising energy efficiency are central to the need to address climate change and reduce Green House Gases (GHGs).

The two main energy networks serving Laois are electricity and gas. With vastly increased residential development and a drive for more industrial, commercial and employment generating uses, it is hugely important to ensure that the capacity of these energy networks is sufficient to meet these demands. In relation to both renewable and non-renewable power generation, County Laois is well placed to encourage and facilitate the development of power generation facilities, mainly because of the county's proximity to Dublin and the passage of a number of gas mains and trunk elements of the national grid through or in very close proximity to the county.

It is an objective of the Council to:

- OBJ1 Prepare a Renewable Energy Strategy for County Laois during the lifetime of the Plan;
- OBJ2 Support the Midlands Energy Agency in the promotion of energy efficiency initiatives within the county;
- OBJ3 Facilitate the achievement of a secure and efficient energy supply and storage for County Laois;
- OBJ4 Promote County Laois as a low carbon county as a means of attracting inward investment and to facilitate the development of energy sources which will achieve low carbon outputs;
- OBJ5 Co-operate and liaise with statutory and other energy providers in relation to power generation in order to ensure adequate power capacity for the future needs of the county;
- OBJ6 Protect areas of recognised landscape importance and significant landscape views from construction of large scale visually intrusive energy transmission infrastructure, alternative routing or transmission methods shall be used in this instance.
- OBJ7 To facilitate a sustainable and diverse mix of developments which limit the net adverse impacts associated with global warming such as promoting renewable energy, the growth of local farm produce and the promotion of sustainable modes of public transport.

6.6.1 Renewable Energy

Renewable energy comes from natural sources that are continuously replenished by nature. The main sources of renewable energy are the wind, the sun (solar energy), water (hydropower), heat below the surface of the earth (geothermal energy) and biomass (wood, biodegradable waste and energy crops). The Council shall during the lifetime of the Plan prepare a Renewable Energy Strategy which will take cognisance of Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland's Authority (SEAI) document *Methodology for Local Authority Renewable Energy Strategies (LARES)*.

Wind, solar, hydro and geothermal energy do not produce GHG emissions or emissions of air pollutants such as particulates, sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide. Use of these renewable resources can have considerable co-benefits for human health and ecosystems. Meeting energy requirements from renewable resources can provide significant economic and employment benefits at local to national scales.

The potential feasible renewable energy options for County Laois include but are not limited to a balanced mix of:

- Hydro energy;
- Bioenergy;
- Solar power;
- Wind Energy;
- Geothermal energy;
- Micro Renewable Energy.

6.6.1.1 Hydro Energy

Hydroelectricity is electricity derived from the power harnessed from the flow of falling water, typically from fast-flowing streams and rivers. Small-scale micro hydro power is both an efficient and reliable form of energy. With the right site it is a viable way of providing power to houses, workshops or businesses that need an independent supply. The Council will seek to respond positively to applications in the context of a sustainable energy policy. In responding to applications, the Council will seek to ensure that the free passage of fish is provided for by incorporating a fish pass where considered necessary in consultation with the relevant Fisheries Board and the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources

It is the policy of the Council to:

HE 1 Ensure that new hydro energy schemes take into account the impact on public rights of way and walking routes.

6.6.1.2 Bioenergy

Bioenergy is energy extracted from biomass which includes biological material such as plants and animals, wood and waste.

Bioenergy is produced through many different processes: combustion and anaerobic digestion being the most common and widely used. Combustion is the process whereby biomass (for example wood chips) is burned to produce process heat or to heat space or hot water. Anaerobic digestion involves the bacterial transformation of biomass (for example animal manure) to methane gas or biogas. The biogas can be used to fuel a stationary gas engine or gas turbine to produce electricity, or burned in a boiler to provide heat or to raise steam. Biogas can also be compressed and used as a transport fuel. The majority of current biomass derived energy comes from wood combustion to produce heat.

The Council supports the potential of growing biomass crops on cutaway bogs and at other suitable locations. The Council supports the use of Combined Heat and Power (CHP) Plants which would be fired by environmentally friendly low carbon fuels such as biomass.

6.6.1.3 Solar Power

Solar energy development in County Laois in general has been limited to domestic installations for solar thermal energy. However, it is anticipated that there will be significant growth in ground mounted solar installations over the coming

years. The principal reason for this is that solar PV systems which produce electricity directly from solar radiation are becoming more widespread as their advantages become apparent and as installation costs fall.

Due to its long hours of daylight, particularly in the summer, Ireland has good potential to capture energy from the sun. In terms of sunlight County Laois normally typically receives c. 1000 kWh/m²/year. The sunniest months are May and June. During these months, sunshine duration averages between 5 and 6.5 hours per day over most of the county. For optimally located PV systems, each installed kW can be expected to produce in the order of 850kWh (units) of electricity per year in Ireland. A 4kW system would thus produce approximately 3,400kWh / year for consumption.

Ground-Mounted Arrays

The following site selection criteria for ground mounted arrays generally apply:

- Typically suited to low-lying lands due to the need for level sites,
- Accessibility/proximity to electricity networks. In general, it is not viable to locate solar farms over 1km from network infrastructure,
- Extensive site curtilage,
- South facing aspect with either flat terrain or sloping gently,
- Land free from obstacles that may cause shading.
- Landscape and visual impact;
- local ecology;
- archaeological considerations;
- avoidance of material glint and glare on neighbouring residential properties and
- transportation and aviation safety considerations.

As they are relatively new, solar farms are not specifically identified in the classes of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) development listed either in the EIA Directive or in Schedule 5 to the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 as amended.

The Council is supportive of the development and expansion of the ground mounted solar energy sector throughout the county subject to normal planning and environmental considerations. However there will be a presumption against their location in sensitive areas including Natura 2000 sites, flood plains and on productive agricultural land.

Landfill Gas

Laois County Council recognises the potential of the former local authority landfill site at Kylelesha [between Portlaoise and Mountmellick] for the development of a gas utilisation project. Landfill gas utilization is a process of gathering, processing, and treating the methane gas emitted from decomposing waste to produce electricity, heat, fuels, and various chemical compounds.

Methane is highly flammable and is one of the major greenhouse gases responsible for climatic change. However, landfill gas (LFG) emissions can be minimized through effective recovery systems, which harness the gas and use it as a renewable and valuable fuel. In addition to electrical power generation, LFG can also be used for combined heat and power (CHP), kiln firing and as a heating or vehicle fuel. LFG is similar to natural or fossil gas and can be fed into the natural gas network.

6.6.1.4 Wind Energy

The development of wind power has accelerated over the last few years as the technology becomes more cost competitive. The Council seeks to achieve a reasonable balance between an overall positive attitude to renewable energy and enabling the wind energy resources of the county to be harnessed in a manner that is consistent with proper planning and sustainable development.

There are a number of issues which must be taken into consideration when dealing with applications for wind energy development. These include visual impact, landscape protection, impacts on residential amenity, impact on wildlife and

habitats, connections to the national grid and impact of construction and ancillary infrastructure including access roads and grid connections.

The Council will have regard to the Wind Energy Development Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DEHLG, 2006) in relation to the siting and development of wind turbines and the information required as part of a planning application.

The Council's approach to wind energy has been prepared to inform developers, landowners and the public of the most appropriate sites for the location of wind energy proposals. This approach accords with the guidelines on Wind Energy Development to identify preferred areas and areas where the wind farms should not be considered. This followed an analysis of areas suitable for wind energy development within the County. This assessment utilised a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) approach examining a range of factors relating to wind energy development including: wind energy potential (through the Wind Speed Atlas, www.seai.ie), proposed and existing grid connections, natural heritage designations, landscape sensitivity. The strategy identifies the following:

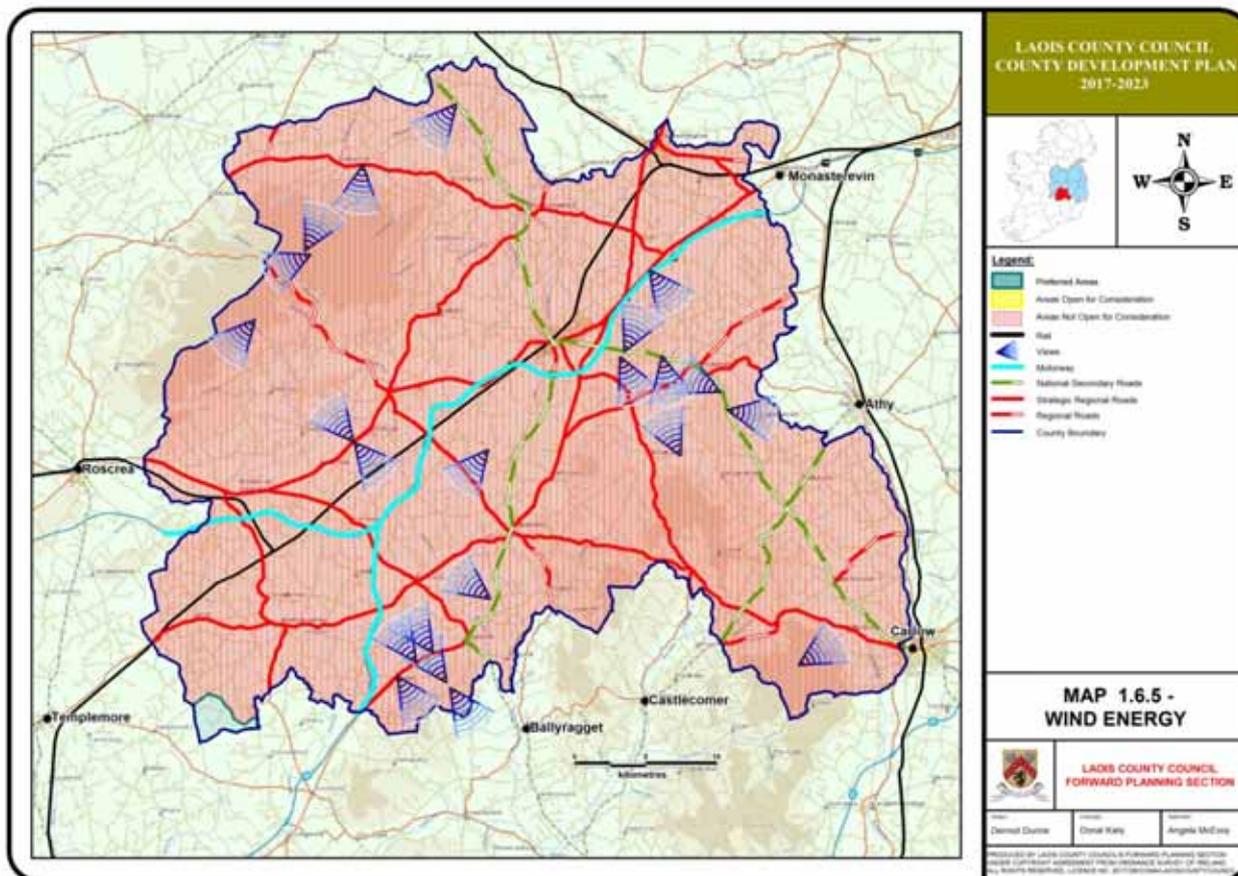
Preferred Area - These areas are considered suitable for windfarm development because of sufficient wind speeds, access to grid network, and established patterns of enquiries.

Area Open for Consideration – These are the only areas, outside the preferred areas, open to consideration for appropriate wind energy proposals. They have been identified having regard to a range of factors, including wind energy potential (through the wind speed atlas www.seai.ie), existing grid connections, proposed grid connections, natural heritage designations and landscape sensitivity, the road infrastructure is adequate and where likely conflict with natural heritage designations can be protected.

Area not for consideration – Areas where wind energy proposals will not be favoured have been identified due to the significant environmental, heritage and landscape constraints. These include; SAC and SPA (Natura 2000) Sites, NHAs, unspoiled areas of EHSAs, Areas of Fresh Water Pearl Mussel, important views and prospects. It is considered that these areas have little or no capacity for wind energy development.

Site suitability is an important factor having regard to possible adverse impacts on public rights of way.

Figure 21: Wind Energy Map



6.6.1.5 Geothermal Energy

Geothermal energy refers to heat energy stored in the ground. Solar thermal radiation is absorbed by the surface of the earth each day. This heat can be extracted by using a ground source heat pump which transfers the heat stored in the earth or in ground water to buildings in winter and the opposite in summer for cooling. The Council will encourage the provision of ground source heat pumps, also known as geothermal heat pumps. These are used for space heating and cooling, as well as water heating for both residential and commercial developments.

6.6.1.6 Micro Renewable Energy

The Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) provide exemptions from planning permission for domestic wind turbines, solar panels and heat pumps within the curtilage of a house, subject to certain conditions. The Regulations also provide exemptions for micro renewable generators within the curtilage of industrial buildings, business premises and agricultural holdings including CHP plants, wind turbines, solar panels, heat pumps and biomass boiler units. It should be noted that where an individual wish to install any class of micro renewable technology that does not fall within the exemptions they are required to apply for planning permission. Also the existing restrictions on exempted development as set out in Article 9 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) apply.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- EN1 Encourage and favourably consider proposals for renewable energy developments and ancillary facilities subject to compliance with normal planning and environmental criteria; in order to meet national, regional and county renewable energy targets and to facilitate a reduction in CO2 emissions and the promotion of a low carbon economy, and in compliance with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive;

- EN2 Raise awareness of the need to reverse fossil fuel dependency, to mitigate the effects of peak oil and reduce carbon emissions, to mitigate the effects of climate change;
- EN3 Promote and facilitate wind energy development in accordance with Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Wind Energy Development (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2006) and the Wind Energy Strategy which forms part of this Plan, and subject to compliance with normal planning and environmental criteria;
- EN4 Promote and encourage the development of energy from renewable sources such as hydro, bio-energy, wind, solar, geothermal and landfill gas subject to compliance with normal planning and environmental criteria and the development management standards contained in Section 8;
- EN5 Promote and encourage the provision of micro-renewable energy;
- EN6 Ensure that the assessment of energy development proposals will have regard to the impacts on public rights of way and walking routes;
- EN7 Ensure a setback distance of 1.5 km of Wind turbines from schools, dwellings, community centres and all public roads in all areas open for consideration for wind farm development;
- EN8 Promote PV Solar for domestic or local use on rooftops of domestic dwellings, industrial, agriculture and public buildings;
- EN9 Planning applications shall comply with DECLG Guidelines (2006) or any future guidelines and the best international practices and standards;
- EN10 Identify existing public rights of way and preserve them as public rights of way. Take into account, when assessing planning applications, the impact on public access to the countryside including **public rights of way**, recreational amenities and the openness and visual amenity of the countryside.

6.6.2 Energy Efficiency and Energy Performance for Buildings

Maximising Ireland's Energy Efficiency: The National Energy Efficiency Action Plan 2009-2020 (NEEAP) (Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, 2009) recognises that energy efficiency is the most cost effective means of reducing dependence on fossil fuels and abating GHG emissions. Saving energy is the easiest, quickest and most effective way to answer the challenge of society's growing energy dependence, while helping to reduce damage to the environment. By using less energy, we reduce the need to generate energy from any source, fossil or renewable. Improving energy efficiency also provides economic opportunities through the development of new markets for green technologies and services and security of supply.

Laois County Council is committed to developing sustainable building practices in terms of energy efficiency and low environmental impact in County Laois. The Council recognizes that good design is the key to achieving the optimum energy performance of buildings at no extra cost. The benefits are clear; lower energy bills for the consumer and a healthier environment for the wider community.

As part of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (2002/91/EC) Directive, a Building Energy Rating (BER) certificate is required once a building is offered for rental or sale. The BER measures the energy performance of a building and provides homeowners with the information required in order to improve the thermal efficiency of their dwelling.

Part L of the Building Regulations deals with the conservation of fuel and energy in buildings. The Regulations state that a building shall be designed and constructed so as to ensure that the energy performance of the building is such as to limit the amount of energy required for the operation of the building and the amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions associated with this energy use insofar as is reasonably practicable. This can be achieved using a combination of measures including the use of renewable energy sources, limiting heat loss and availing of heat gain through the fabric of the dwelling and using energy efficient space and water heating systems. While the Building Regulations require that new

buildings achieve minimum standards of energy efficiency, higher levels are worthwhile; an energy efficient building can yield considerable savings in heat and electricity costs over its lifetime. Improving the energy performance of buildings is also a cost-effective way of fighting against climate change and improving energy security, while also creating job opportunities, particularly in the building sector.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- EN8 Require all new building developments to meet low energy performance targets. Each building's energy performance, as calculated by the Building Energy Rating (BER), will have a minimum energy efficiency that meets the requirements of Part L of the Building Regulations. New buildings should incorporate renewable energy technologies in order to help achieve the rating required;
- EN9 Promote innovative building design and layout that demonstrates a high level of energy conservation, energy efficiency and use of renewable energy sources;
- EN10 Encourage the integration of micro renewable energy sources into the design and construction of single and multiple housing developments.

6.6.3 Electricity

EirGrid's strategy GRID 25 sets out the future requirements of the electricity network up to 2025. The subsequent GRID25 Implementation Plan 2011-2016 (IP) is a practical strategic overview of how the early stages of Grid25 are intended to be implemented.

Grid25

GRID25, the grid development strategy, was published in 2008 and is now due for review. EirGrid therefore published a draft strategy entitled *Your Grid, Your Views, Your Tomorrow: Ireland's Draft Grid Development Strategy* for consultation in March 2015.

The aim of *Your Grid, Your Views, Your Tomorrow* was to start a dialogue about the need for grid development, and to seek opinions and suggestions from anyone impacted by the plans. The draft strategy consultation ran from the 27 March to the 5 June 2015. Feedback on the draft strategy is currently being reviewed with the aim of informing the preparation of a Grid Development Strategy to be published in 2016. The draft strategy can be viewed at the following link: [EirGrid-Draft-Grid-Development-Strategy](#).

The draft strategy considers the facilitation of renewable energy in the East Region. This is addressed in p.52 of Appendix 1, which states that *"To meet Dublin demand growth it is necessary to install additional transformer capacity and increase circuit capacity to the north and south of the city, and into the city itself. These projects will strengthen the network for all electricity users, and in doing so will improve the security and quality of supply"*.

Grid25 Implementation Programme

With regard to the Grid25 Implementation Programme, it should be noted that EirGrid is currently preparing a new Grid Implementation Plan and associated SEA. The revised Grid Implementation Plan will replace EirGrid's original "Grid 25 Implementation Programme 2011-2016", and is a regional spatial 6 year Development Plan for grid development.

White Paper on Energy Policy Framework 2015 2030

Building on the 2007 White Paper *'Delivering a Sustainable Energy Future for Ireland'*, the 2015 White Paper sets out Ireland's energy future and confirms the core objectives of sustainability, security of supply and competitiveness. Chapter 7.3 of the White Paper recognises the need for the development and renewal of energy networks to meet economic and social goals. It endorses the strategic programmes of the energy infrastructure providers, subject to their adherence to national and international standards for design and construction, and to community consultation.

The Transmission Network and Landscape

The issue of compatibility of land-uses and landscape areas with high voltage powerlines is a subject which EirGrid is very cognisant of. For this reason in 2012, EirGrid appointed Consultants to undertake an evidence-based study on the actual visual and landscape effects of the presence of transmission infrastructure over a range of Ireland's typical landscapes. The Study included towers and substations located in different Landscape Character Types (LCTs) around Ireland and included locations in County Laois. The findings of the studies have been concluded and can be viewed on its environmental webpage: <http://www.eirgridgroup.com/about/in-the-community/environment>

It is the policy of the Council to:

- ELEC 1 Support the reinforcement of the electricity transmission grid to improve energy supply to the county. Where strategic route corridors have been identified, the Council will support the statutory providers of national grid infrastructure by safeguarding such corridors from encroachment provided these corridors do not have adverse impacts on residential amenity or the environment. Applicants shall ensure that planning applications involving the siting of power lines and other overhead cables fully consider impacts on the landscape, national monuments, archaeology and views of special amenity value. Where impacts are inevitable, mitigation measures to minimise such impact must be provided. Development shall be consistent with best practice, with regard to siting and design.
- ELEC 2 Ensure the provision, where feasible, of electricity cables been located underground, especially in the urban environment, and generally within areas of public open space;
- ELEC 3 Support the statutory providers of national grid infrastructure by safeguarding such strategic corridors from encroachment by other developments that might compromise the provision of energy networks where strategic route corridors have been identified;
- ELEC 4 Facilitate the provision of and improvements to energy networks in principle, provided that it can be demonstrated that:
- I. The development is required in order to facilitate the provision or retention of significant economic or social infrastructure;
 - II. The route proposed has been identified with due consideration for social, environmental and cultural impacts;
 - III. The design is such that will achieve least environmental impact consistent with not incurring excessive cost;
 - IV. Where impacts are inevitable mitigation features have been included;
 - V. Proposals for energy infrastructure should be assessed in accordance with the requirements of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive.
 - VI. Ensure that the ability of the area to absorb overhead transmission lines is considered with reference to the National Landscape Strategy 2015.
 - VII. Cognisance will be taken of the Code of Practice between the DoECLG and Eirgrid(2009).
 - VIII. Ensure that landscape and visual assessment of planning application shall focus on the potential to impact upon landscape designations and important designated sites.

6.6.4 Gas

The present gas infrastructure in County Laois is available in Ballylinan, Portarlinton, Portlaoise and Stradbally. The Bord Gáis customer base in the county comprises of domestic, commercial and industrial users.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- GAS1 Support and facilitate the development of enhance gas supplies and associated networks, to serve the residential, commercial, industrial and social needs of the county.

6.6.5 Telecommunications

The development of high-quality telecommunications infrastructure is critical to advance the economic and social development of the county. The development of telecommunications infrastructure is essential to attracting investment and facilitating economic development. The Council is committed to enhancing the telecommunications network and infrastructure throughout the county. However, this must be managed to ensure a balance between the provision of telecommunications infrastructure in the interests of social and economic progress, and sustaining residential amenity and environmental quality.

6.6.5.1 Broadband

The availability of a high-quality and high speed broadband network will, increase economic development potential by facilitating a transition to a knowledge-based ‘smart economy’, it promotes sustainable development by encouraging remote working and reducing commuting and it can promote social inclusion and an enhanced quality of life for all.

National Broadband Scheme Government policy is focused on ensuring that everyone, irrespective of where they live, should have access to high quality, competitively priced broadband services.

The rollout of the National Broadband Scheme is focused on delivering basic, affordable broadband to target areas across the country in which services were deemed to be insufficient. The following map illustrates the areas in Laois which were covered by the scheme.

Rural Broadband Scheme

The Rural Broadband Scheme has been established to enable a basic broadband service to be provided to individual rural premises which are not capable of obtaining a broadband service from existing internet service providers. The scheme included extensive parts of the county.

Figure 22: Areas Covered by National Broadband Scheme (NBS)

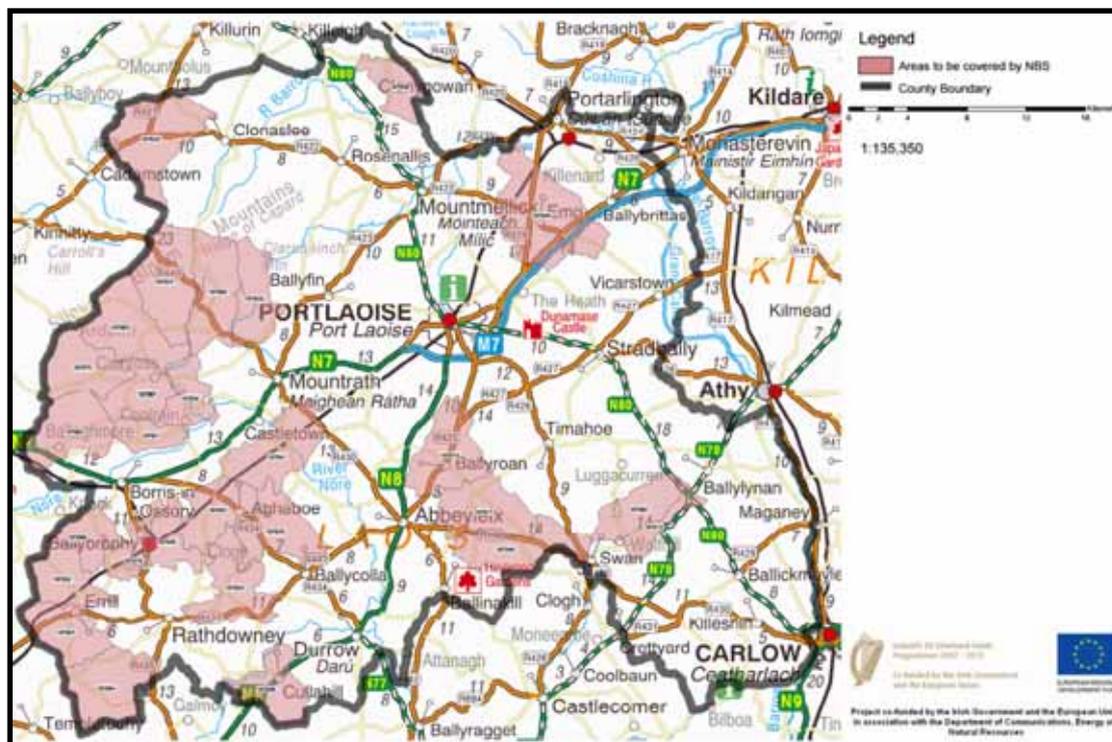
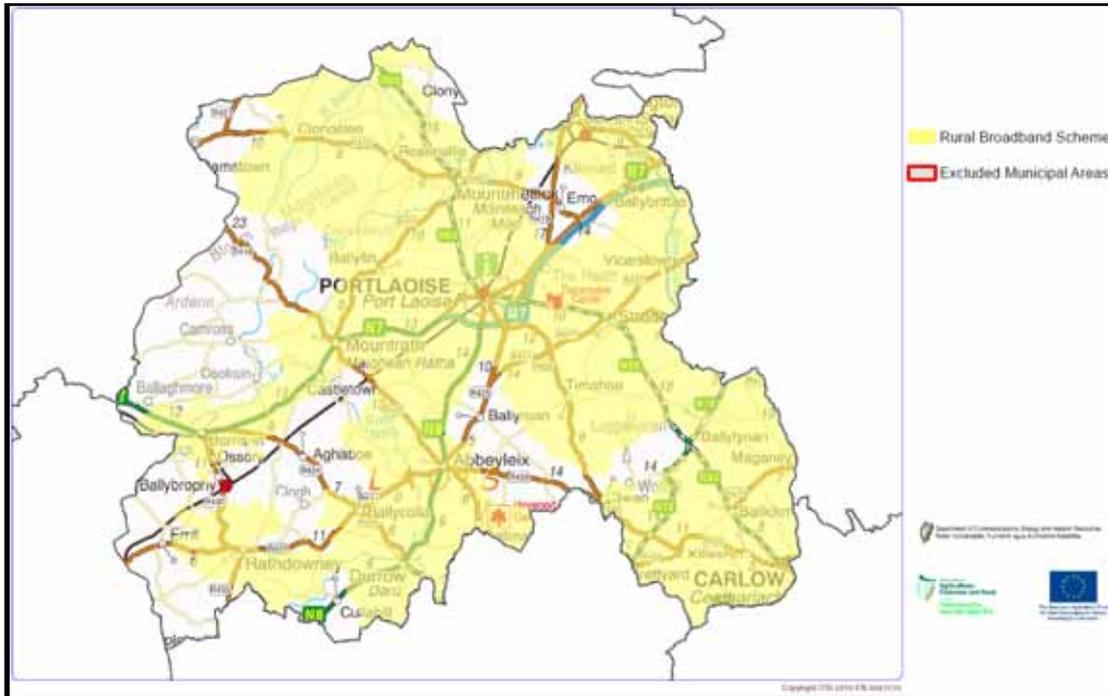


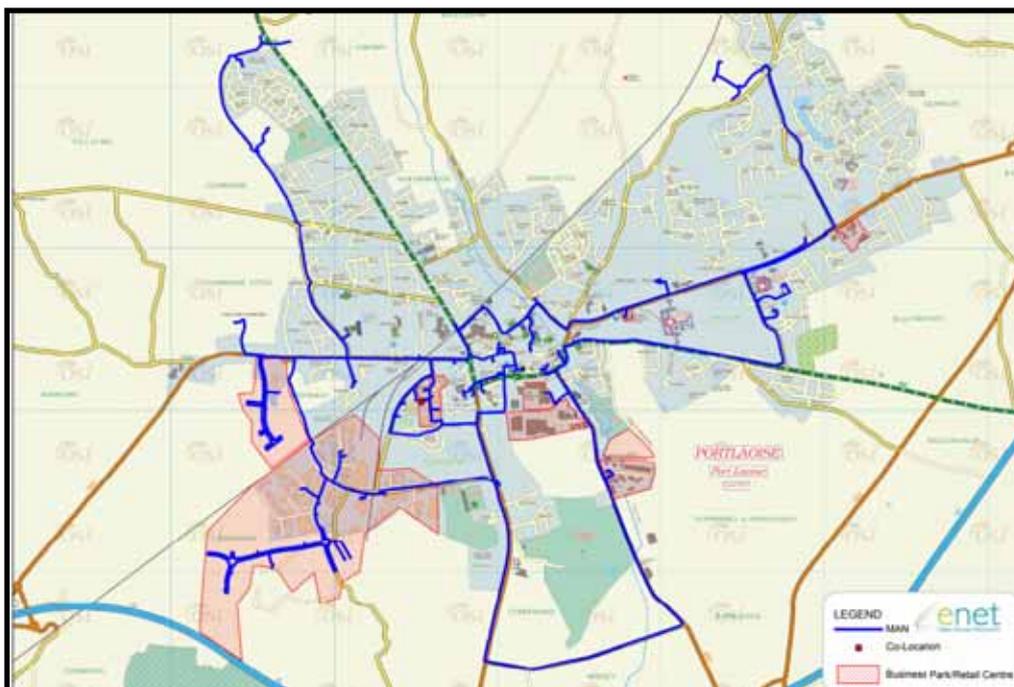
Figure 23: Rural Broadband Area



Metropolitan Area Networks

The Metropolitan Area Network (MAN) is a publicly owned network of ducting and fibre optic cables laid in a ring formation in a metropolitan area. The MAN can be used to provide services including telecoms, internet access, television and CCTV to businesses and citizens. The town of Portlaoise received a MAN in Phase 1 of the national rollout of the scheme.

Figure 24: MAN Network Portlaoise



Fibre

Eir are currently undertaking a rural fibre extension. They are rolling out Fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC) that will enable homes and businesses to achieve speeds of up to 100Mb/s and Fibre to the Home (FTTH) which delivers speeds up to 1Gb/s. In Laois by the end of 2016, the following exchanges are planned to be upgraded to fibre technology.

Table 21: Planned Upgrades to Fibre Exchange

LIVE	IN BUILD	PLANNING
Abbeyleix	Kilminchy (eVDSL)	Ballybrittas (additional cabinet)
Ballacolla	Mountrath (additional cabinets)	Ballylinan
Ballybrittas	Borris In Ossory	Clonaslee
Kilminchy	Durrow	Crettyard
Moneyballytyrrell	Rathdowney	Rathmore
Mountmellick	Stradbally	Rosenallis
Mountrath		
Portarlinton		
Portlaoise		
The Heath		

It is the policy of the Council to:

- TELE1 Encourage and facilitate the coordinated development and extension of broadband infrastructure throughout the county, by state or private operators as a means for improving economic competitiveness and social inclusion subject to compliance with normal planning and environmental criteria and the development management standards contained in Section 8;
- TELE2 Support the rollout of the National Broadband Scheme and the Rural Broadband Scheme in conjunction with the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources;
- TELE3 Support and work with Laois Partnership in the Laois Broadband Partnership in developing future broadband networks;
- TELE4 Ensure that ducting for broadband fibre connections is provided during the installation of services, in all new commercial and housing schemes and during the carrying out of any work to roads or rail lines;
- TELE5 Encourage the provision of WiFi zones in public buildings.

6.6.5.2 Telecommunications Masts and Antennae

An efficient telecommunications system is important in the development of the economy of which the provision of masts and associated antennae are an essential element. The Council will have regard to the document titled *Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DoELG, 1996)* when considering applications for masts and antennae.

The location of masts can be a contentious issue and one which will be carefully considered by the Planning Authority.

In general:

- It shall be the preferred approach that all new support structures meet fully the co-location or clustering policy of the guidelines and that shared use of existing structures will be required where there are a number of masts located in any single area.

- Due to the physical size of mast structures and the materials used to construct them, they can [especially latticework versions] severely impact on both rural and urban landscapes. When dealing with applications, great care will be taken to minimise damage through discreet siting and good design and access arrangements.
- The design of the mast structures should be simple and well finished; monopoles are preferred to latticework types. They should employ the latest technology in order to minimise their size and visual impact. Mast structures are most visible and exposed within open lowland terrain and in upland areas. Where practical, masts should be placed in forestry plantations provided that the antennae are clear of obstruction. The developer will be required to retain a cordon of trees around the site, which will not be felled during the lifetime of the mast. In un-forested areas, softening of the visual impact can be achieved through judicious design, and through the planting of trees and shrubs, as a screen and backdrop. Disguised masts e.g. as trees, will be encouraged in appropriate locations.
- All masts approved will be for a temporary 5-year period only. This will allow review and reassessment in relation to numbers and concentrations, technology and the general dynamic nature of both the industry and the receiving environment within which these masts are sited.
- Where the antennae and their support structures are no longer being used by the original operator and no new user has been identified they should be demolished, removed and the site reinstated at the operator's expense. This will be a condition of any permission and a bonding arrangement to this effect will be put in place.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- TELE5 Facilitate the delivery of high-capacity telecommunications infrastructure at appropriate locations throughout the county having regard to the guidelines for “*Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures*” and any updated documents issued by the DoECLG or relevant authority;
- TELE7 Co-operate with telecommunications service providers in the development of infrastructure, having regard to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, normal planning and environmental criteria and the development management standards contained in Section 8;
- TELE8 Developers may be required to provide telecommunications structures with environmentally acceptable designs, including camouflaging/disguising techniques to integrate the structure into the surrounding landscape;
- TELE 9 Adopt a presumption against the location of structures in vulnerable landscapes as identified in the Landscape Character Assessment (Appendix 6) and in areas where views are to be preserved and in areas adjacent to national monuments, sites of archaeological heritage or protected structures;
- TELE10 Existing Public Rights of Way will be identified prior to any new telecommunication developments (including associated processes) which will be prohibited if they impinge thereon or on recreational amenities, public access to the countryside, communities or the natural and built environment;
- TELE 11 Promote and facilitate the sharing of facilities. Co-location and clustering of new masts and support structures on existing sites will normally be required, unless a fully documented case is submitted explaining the precise circumstances which mitigate against co-location and clustering. Where it is not possible to share a support structure, the applicant should, where possible, share the site or an adjacent site so that the antennae may be clustered. In sensitive landscape areas the presumption will be that applications must meet the co-location requirements. Where it has been proven that there is a need for new/expanded coverage in a particular area, the applicant shall show that all existing masts and support structures have been examined to determine if the attachment of new antennae to existing structures can provide the coverage required, the applicant shall submit either a Discovery Series Map or similar map type (to be agreed with planning authority) to the scale of 1:50,000 the location of all telecommunication structures within a radius of 1km of the proposed site, indicating the coverage area of the proposed facility and a technical evaluation of the capabilities of these masts to take additional antennae and provide the coverage required. Avoid a proliferation of masts and aerials in the upland areas (names mountain area) in order to protect their amenity value and their unspoilt character.

Applicants shall indicate whether or not they are willing to share the proposed masts with other telecommunication operators. Comply with the Code of Practice of Sharing Radio Sites issued by the Commission for Communication Regulation;

TELE 12 Demonstrate compliance with the requirements of the DOECLG Guidelines on “Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures (1996) “and the Circular Letter of 2012(PL07/12)(as may be amended) and other publications and material as may be relevant;

TELE 13 Access roads will be permitted only where they are absolutely necessary. The applicant shall be required to demonstrate that the greatest care has been taken in terms of minimising visual impact on landscapes, particularly sensitive or historic landscapes, natural environment by ensuring that they do not scar the landscapes and that they follow the natural contours so as to minimise their visual intrusion and should be bordered with scrubs and that they are designed and landscaped to avoid visual and environmental disruption of the landscape. It shall be a condition of permission that the land is reinstated at the end of the construction period. In the event that a developer requires that an access track be retained, the developer shall indicate the justification for doing so as part of the planning application and indicate the frequency of visits which will be required to service the site and facility.

SECTION 7: HERITAGE

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The Council is committed to the conservation and preservation of the environment and will seek to continue to protect natural resources of the county through the enforcement of policies and relevant legislation. Any proposed development affecting areas of natural and/or manmade environment must be carried out in an acceptable manner and be in compliance with the policies of the Plan.

7.2 LAOIS HERITAGE PLAN 2014-2019

The Laois Heritage Plan 2014-2019 is the third Heritage Plan for the county and it outlines a 5-year programme of work – action based – to be overseen by Laois Heritage Forum and supported by the Heritage Council. The Plan delivery is coordinated by the Laois Heritage Office and lists a number of actions to be carried out over the Heritage Plan period. The Council will continue to work with the Heritage Forum in relation to achieving its targets over this Development Plan period.

7.3 CONTEXT

Part IV of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) relates to protected structures and architectural conservation areas (ACA's). The Council shall implement Part IV of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) on foot of the findings of the Heritage Plan 2014 and the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) for County Laois. In addition to the statutory framework for affording protection to monuments, buildings and groups of buildings, this section is also informed by the following guidelines produced by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DOAHRRGA):

- Framework and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage [1999]
- Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2011)

7.4 BUILT HERITAGE

The monuments, buildings, streets and spaces in the towns, villages and rural areas of Laois together make up the rich built heritage of County Laois. The built heritage of County Laois has a very considerable contribution to make to the identity of the county itself and also to the wider region. There are some outstanding and very exceptional structures within County Laois, including the Monastic Settlement in Aghaboe, Fort Protector in Portlaoise, Donaghmore Workhouse, Heywood Gardens, Coolbanagher Church, Emo Court and Gardens, Ballyfin House and Demene, Castledurrow Demesne, Abbeyleix Demesne, Stradbally Hall and Roundwood Demesne. In addition, there are many fine groups of buildings including historic and village town centres for which Architectural Conservation Areas have been designated in Abbeyleix, Ballinakill, Castletown, Clonaslee, Durrow, Portlaoise and Timahoe. Other townscapes of significant and special architectural interest include O'Connell Square Mountmellick, Market Square Mountrath, Portlinton Market Square and French Church Street and Stradbally Main Street.

The Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) sets out the Planning Authority's obligations in relation to structures that are worthy of preservation. The protection of special historic buildings and special groups of historic buildings is important as these structures form a rich part of the cultural heritage and economic and social history of County Laois as well as displaying fine craftsmanship and technical advances.

The Council supports the conservation, marketing, interpretation and appreciation of significant architectural assets in the county. Some of these assets comprise individual structures with distinct architectural integrity, groups of buildings, streetscapes, demesne landscapes intrinsically linked to the special interest of country houses, the arrangement of buildings in and around spaces such as in vernacular farmyards and at market squares, the sympathetic evolution of individual structures displaying different architectural trends.

There are two primary mechanisms to protect the county's architectural heritage:

- If a structure is considered to be of significant importance, the Council may designate it as a protected structure. A protected structure must be of architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, technical and social interest. At present there are over 900 structures in the County Laois Record of Protected Structures (RPS).
- If a group of buildings is considered special and is of significant importance, the Council may designate it as an Architectural Conservation Area. At present there are seven Architectural Conservation Areas in County Laois.

It is an objective of the Council to:

- OBJ1** Encourage the understanding of, access to and promotion of County Laois' historic architectural heritage and archaeological heritage;
- OBJ2** Recognise the importance of archaeology and National Monuments as part of our heritage and provide public access, subject to reasonable conservational restrictions, reasonable considerations of public safety and avoidance of adverse effects on extant land uses, to Archaeological Sites and National Monuments in state, Council or private ownership. Traditional access routes will be designated as public rights of way. In other cases, routes will be acquired either by agreement with landowners or way of compulsory powers. Appropriate signage will be put in place”;
- OBJ3** Protect the intrinsic value, character, integrity and settings of monuments and places in the Record of Monuments and Places (RMPs) and any forthcoming statutory register and protect Zones of Archaeological Potential against inappropriate development;
- OBJ4** Protect all structures listed in the Record of Protected Structures, that are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical character or interest in County Laois;
- OBJ5** Designate Architectural Conservation Areas in Ballyroan, Mountmellick, Mountrath, Stradbally and Portlington [the latter in conjunction within Offaly County Council] over the Plan period;
- OBJ6** Enable and ensure the preservation and enhancement of the special character of existing and forthcoming Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs) of County Laois and their settings;
- OBJ7** Protect the setting and promote the importance of the Rock of Dunamase as a cultural and tourism asset;
- OBJ8** Secure the protection of the Dunrally Viking Fort;
- OBJ9** Maximise the potential of the Fort of Maryborough, also known as the Fort Protector in Portlaoise, as a heritage/cultural and community and tourism site;
- OBJ10** To work with stakeholders including the OPW, the Heritage Council, the Arts Council, local communities and businesses to support the development of heritage and cultural tourism in County Laois;
- OBJ11** Implement, promote and support, in partnership with all relevant stakeholders (including the County Heritage Forum, the Heritage Council, community groups and the wider public) the aims and objectives contained in the Laois County Heritage Plan 2014-2019 and any revision thereof and take cognisance, in assessing planning applications and preparing development plans, the provisions of the Plan.

7.5 PROTECTED STRUCTURES

A Record of Protected Structures was prepared and is available in Appendix 1 of the Plan. The structures are considered representative of the diversity of the architectural heritage of the county that are of various categories of interest, including architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, technical and social.

The achievement of a proper balance between the special interest of a Protected Structure and proposals to alter or extend it to ensure its utility as a structure is always challenging and should be based on specialist expertise. The special character of a Protected Structure cannot be replaced and unsympathetic and unsuitable alteration can result in the loss of the special interest of the structure. Many Protected Structures can sustain a degree of sensitive alteration or extension; however, a small number of structures may be sensitive to even slight alterations.

7.5.1 Works to a Protected Structure

Repairs undertaken on a like-for-like basis will not usually require planning permission; where repairs materially affect the character of a Protected Structure or affect any element of its special interest, these works do require planning permission.

In determining planning applications, the Council will consider the cumulative effect of minor works on the character of the Protected Structure, the preservation of less obvious elements such as the historic layout of a structure or the technical interest of the surviving structure as well as visual features such as decorative facades, staircases, decorated plaster ceilings and internal panelling.

Proposals for Works to Protected Structures should be:

- prepared by suitably qualified persons;
- accompanied by appropriate documentation as outlined in the *Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities [DAHG, 2011]* to enable a proper assessment of the proposed works and their impact on the structure or area;
- in keeping with the character of the building and designed to preserve and enhance the special architectural or historical character and any features they possess;
- of a premium quality of design and sympathetic in terms of scale and form to the original building and in the use of materials and other details of the period and style;
- carried out in accordance with best practice guidelines for Planning Authorities and supervised by an appropriately qualified person.

7.5.2. Section 57 Declaration

In the case of Protected Structures, owners are often uncertain about what works require permission. In this instance a Section 57 Declaration under the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) may be sought. A Section 57 Declaration allows an owner or occupier of a protected structure to 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 a Protected Structure. Works that materially affect the character of a Protected Structure require planning permission.

7.5.3 Demolition of a Protected Structure

Total or substantial demolition of a Protected Structure or any significant element of the Protected Structure will not be acceptable in principle, save in exceptional circumstances where demolition and redevelopment would produce substantial strategic benefits for the community which would decisively outweigh the loss resulting from demolition.

7.5.4 Buildings at Risk

Where the restoration or refurbishment of a Protected Structure or a key Architectural Conservation Area building that is in poor or fair condition is proposed and it is to be carried out to best practice conservation standards for a purpose compatible with the character of the building, relaxation of development management standards on unit sizes, amenity space or parking will be considered by the Council.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- BH1 Protect structures or parts of structures of special interest or character by maintaining a Record of Protected Structures (RPS) (see Appendix 1), structures which form part of this record are afforded special statutory protection;
- BH 2 Consult with the DAHG in considering planning applications that may affect Protected Structures or architectural conservation areas. The Council will have regard to comments made by the Department and relevant guidelines such as the *Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DAHG, 2011)*;
- BH 3 Encourage owner's awareness of the legal implications of owning a Protected Structure and support owners of Protected Structures by providing advice and guidance in relation to development proposals;
- BH 4 Encourage owners or prospective owners to seek Section 57 Declarations in order to provide certainty about the extent of works that can be undertaken without planning permission;
- BH 5 Safeguard Protected Structures from works that would adversely affect or erode their special character and where proposals are made to extend a protected structure or to site new buildings within the curtilage of a Protected Structure, ensure Protected Structure status is used as a stimulus to the imaginative and considered design of new elements;
- BH 6 Encourage the full use of Protected Structures, subject to the compatibility of the use with the character of the Protected Structure;
- BH 7 Ensure a proper balance between the retention of the special character of a Protected Structure and proposals to alter or extend it to ensure its utility as a structure, thereby conserving its special interest. It is well recognised that any structure that has no viable use is unlikely to have a viable future and the function and usage of all structures evolve over time. "Modern" living standards in terms of utility, water, sanitary and telecommunications services will be accommodated, in addition to transport, requirements and evolving spatial standards. However, it is important to ensure that the special interest of a Protected Structure is not gradually eroded by minor alterations;
- BH 8 Favourably consider proposals for tourism and recreation development, which involve the reinstatement, conservation and / or replacement of existing disused buildings, and to adopt a positive interpretation of plan policies to encourage such development.

7.6. VERNACULAR BUILDINGS

Traditionally each country, region and locality had its own distinctive styles for everyday buildings, suited to its particular climate and environment and built using materials which were readily available in the locality. These styles reflect the way of life of the people of the area and are known as vernacular.

Vernacular architecture is the expression of the culture of a community and refers to the traditional building forms and types using local materials, skills and building techniques which form a vital component of the landscape. This includes traditional domestic buildings such as thatched cottages but also include other traditional structures such as shop fronts, farmsteads, outbuildings, aspects of the industrial past, including lime kilns, mills, forges and their products, such as gates. These structures reflect the unique local history and character of a place.

There are many traditional buildings in the Laois countryside with architectural heritage value which have been left to deteriorate and waste away. Traditional farm buildings can make a significant positive contribution to the Irish landscape. Many were laid out using local tried and tested materials, built to patterns and arrangements that made optimum use of resources. They reveal a great deal about the way the countryside has evolved and the changing fortunes of farming through the ages. A survey of thatched buildings was recently carried out which identified the remaining thatched dwellings within the county.

In the interest of sustainability, it is considered that the re-use and adaption of existing buildings is preferable to their demolition and should be regarded as the first priority in any development project.

The Government Policy on Architecture 2009–2015 asks all public authorities to address the re-use of the existing building stock, regardless of protected status or otherwise.

“Traditional Buildings on Irish Farms” produced by the Heritage Council in conjunction with Teagasc is a valuable reference document that acknowledges traditional farm buildings and their value in the Irish Landscape and to the heritage of the country.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- BH 9 Recognise the importance of the contribution of vernacular architecture which may not be protected to the character of a place and promote where feasible the protection, retention and appropriate revitalisation and use of the vernacular built heritage, including structures that contribute to landscape and streetscape character and discourage the demolition of these structures;
- BH 10 Promote the re-use of old buildings for rural development opportunities. A range of small-scale uses for old buildings may be possible without substantial alteration such as including but not limited to arts and craft workshops or tourism and self-catering accommodation, small-scale manufacturing industry, such as including but not limited to cheese making, small-scale engineering and furniture making.

7.7 ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION AREAS

Section 81 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) describes an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) as: ***“An area, place, group of structures or townscape of special architectural historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest, or an area that contributes to the appreciation of a Protected Structure”.***

Once designated, protection is afforded to ACAs by restricting development that can be undertaken without planning permission and through the planning application consideration process. Architectural Conservation Areas have already been designated in Abbeyleix, Ballinakill, Castletown, Clonaslee, Durrow, Portlaoise and Timahoe (See Appendix 2 of this Plan).

The Council will examine the potential for designating additional ACAs in Mountmellick, Mountrath, Stradbally and Portarlinton during the lifetime of this Plan. In considering the designation of additional ACAs, the Council will have regard to the following factors:

- The sensitivity of areas of special interest to inappropriate development;
- Availability of resources;
- Local support for the designation;
- National architectural heritage protection guidelines or government circulars.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- BH 11 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 12 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 sites¹⁶;

¹⁶ 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.

- BH 13 Support owners of properties within ACA's through providing advice and guidance in relation to development proposals;
- BH 14 Ensure that applications for new development within or affecting an ACA (infill development, conversions, alterations, extensions, shopfronts, advertisements) pay attention to detailed matters such as finishing materials, rainwater goods, fenestration details, any external illumination, scale, layout, built form, proportions, building lines and relationship of proposals to the site and surrounding area;
- BH 15 Ensure new buildings are designed with due consideration to their architectural context regardless of whether a historical or contemporary approach to design is taken;
- BH 16 Demolition of buildings or substantial parts of structures in cases where those structures make a positive contribution to the special character of the ACA will not be acceptable in principle. Only in exceptional circumstances, where the redevelopment would produce substantial benefits for the community which would decisively outweigh the loss resulting from demolition, would demolition of this nature be considered. Replacement structures of a lesser quality, appropriateness or interest than the existing one will not be accepted.

7.8 HISTORIC GARDENS

County Laois has a rich heritage of gardens and designed landscaped gardens. These consist of private gardens, public parks and the landscapes associated with country estates and demesnes. These landscapes often include tree-lined avenues, formal ornamental woods, water-features, planned gardens, a bowling green, grass lawns, terraces and other formal features. In some cases, the house and buildings are gone, but the demesne and designed landscape remain.

Laois County Council recognises the importance of these historic gardens and designed landscapes and their role in providing the setting for protected structures and thus seeks to ensure that they are properly protected from encroaching or adjacent development. The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) has conducted a field survey which has listed a number of historic gardens in County Laois such as Heywood Gardens near Ballinakill.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- BH 17 Ensure that new development will not adversely affect the site, setting or views to and from historic gardens and designed landscapes;
- BH 18 Require that any proposals for new development in an historic garden or demesne include an appraisal of the landscape, designed views and vistas, and an assessment of significant trees or groups of trees, as appropriate.

7.9 ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE

Archaeology is an irreplaceable link with the past and is to be found in virtually every townland in County Laois. Only a proportion of the material remains of the past have survived, as many sites have disappeared from the landscape. Of those that do survive, some are visible in the landscape while others only survive beneath the current ground surface or have been remodelled within more modern buildings.

Laois County Council recognises the importance of preserving and protecting this resource and fostering a greater public appreciation of it among both residents of the county and visitors. The archaeology of County Laois varies greatly in form, date and condition and includes structures, constructions, groups of buildings, developed sites, all recorded monuments as well as their contexts, and moveable objects, situated both on land and underwater.

The Archaeological Heritage is comprised of:

- i. Recorded sites and features of historical and archaeological importance included in the Record of Monuments and Places as established under Section 12 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act, 1994,
- ii. Major sites of archaeological importance in State Ownership or Guardianship (as outlined in Table 22).
- iii. National Monuments which are the subject of Preservation Orders in Laois (as outlined in Table 23).
- iv. All previously unknown archaeology that becomes known (e.g. through ground disturbance, fieldwork, or the discovery of sites underwater).

It is an objective of the Council to:

- OBJ1** Secure the preservation (in-situ or by record) of all sites and features of historical and archaeological interest;
- OBJ2** Secure the preservation (in situ) of existing archaeological monuments including the integrity of town defences, town walls, embankments, town gates, bastions or ancillary fortifications or portions thereof. Preservation by record may also be appropriate in some circumstances [as determined by the Planning Authority] in accordance with Framework and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage;
- OBJ3** Ensure that development in the vicinity of a site of archaeological interest shall not be detrimental to the character of the archaeological site or its setting by reason of its location, scale, bulk or detailing;
- OBJ4** Achieve a satisfactory buffer area between the development and town defences in order to ensure the preservation and enhancement of the amenity associated with the presence of town defences within the historic urban pattern;
- OBJ5** Have regard to the preservation and enhancement of the line of town defences when considering development proposed in their vicinity. Disturbance, removal and alteration of the line of town defences shall not be considered appropriate within the historic cores of Ballinakill, Castle town, Dunamaise, Killabban, Portlington and Portlaoise;
- OBJ6** Retain the existing street layout, historic building lines and traditional plot widths where these derive from medieval or earlier origins;
- OBJ7** 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;
- OBJ8** When considering proposals for extractive Industry, the applicant shall have regard to
- the Archaeological Code of Practice agreed between Irish Concrete Federation and National Monuments Division;
 - the Code of Practice for Bord Na Mona
 - and other Archaeological Codes of Practice <https://www.archaeology.ie/codes-of-practice>.
 - Currently the Code of Practice with TII is at an advanced stage (pers. comm.).
- OBJ9** Prepare a visual impact statement of the area around the Rock of Dunamaise and detail the potential impacts of development in the area;

7.9.1 The Record of Monuments and Places (RMP)

The Record of Monument and Places (RMP) is a statutory audit of archaeological monuments provided for in the National Monuments Acts. It consists of a county by county set of marked-up Ordnance Survey maps and a manual listing basic

information in relation to each monument or area included in the RMP. Monuments in the RMP are protected under the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994. The RMP is revised periodically.

Table 22: National Monuments in State Care in Laois

Name	Description	Townland	COUNTY	Legal Status	RMP Number	National Monument Number
Aghnahilly	Ringfort	Aghnahilly	Laois	Ownership	LA013-063	540
Coorlaghan	Ringfort	Coorlaghan	Laois	Ownership	LA037-002	567
Dunamase Castle	Castle	Dunamase	Laois	Ownership	LA013-052	615
Errill	Church & Cross	Errill, Ballagharahin	Laois	Ownership	LA027-024---, LA027-025	113
Fossy	Church	Fossy Lower	Laois	Ownership	LA019-016	114
Killeshin	Church	Killeshin	Laois	Ownership	LA032-020002	115
Sleaty	Church & Crosses	Sleaty	Laois	Ownership	LA032-018001-, LA032-018003-, LA032-018007-	116
Timahoe	Church & Round Tower	Timahoe	Laois	Ownership	LA018-031002-, LA018-031005	114

Table 23: Monuments protected by Preservation Orders in County Laois

Preservation Order No	Monument Name	RMP Number	Townland	Effective Date
3/95	Clogrennan	LA034-008---	Clogrennan	1995
197	Lamberton Fort	LA018-012---	Lamberton Demesne	1957
190	Motte	LA024-006001-	Ballyroan	1952
4/81	Motte & Bailey	LA024-015001- LA024-015002-	Ballinclogh	1981
9/77	Ringfort	LA028-011---	Garryduff	1977

7.9.2 Rock of Dunamaise

The Rock of Dunamaise is a site of particular historical, archaeological and cultural importance in County Laois. While the monument is owned by the State through the Office of Public Works (OPW), it is appropriate that the Plan sets out special measures to conserve and enhance this site, and to make it more accessible to the public. The Council is committed to the conservation of the Rock of Dunamaise and will work closely with DOAHRGA to ensure its protection for future generations.

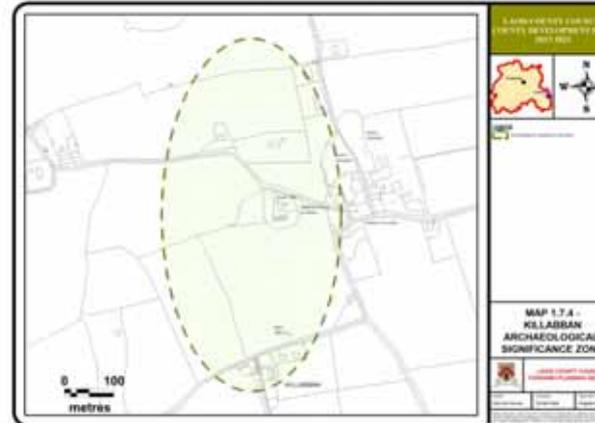
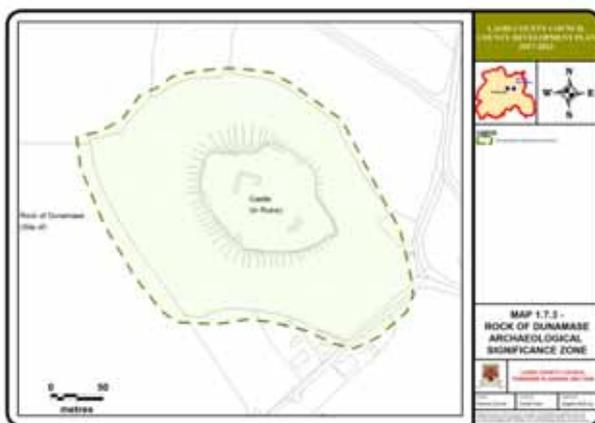
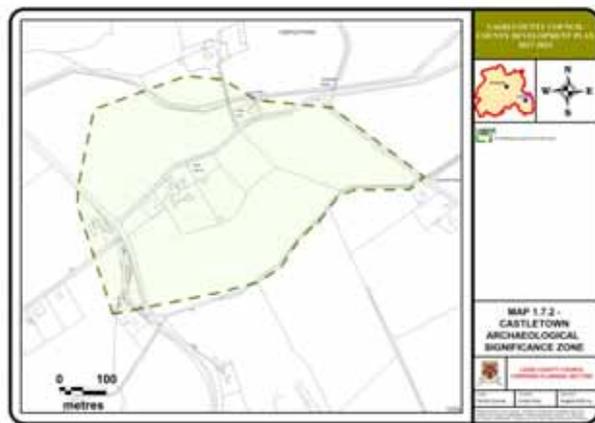
It is the policy of the Council to:

- ARCH1 Work closely with the relevant State bodies on the conservation of the Rock of Dunamaise to ensure its protection for future generations;
- ARCH2 Continue to develop the Council's educational role with regard to the built heritage and to promote awareness and understanding of the built heritage;
- ARCH3 Seek visual impact statements for developments within the area around the Rock in order to assess the potential impacts of development in the area;
- ARCH4 Promote and develop the importance of the Rock of Dunamaise as a cultural and tourism resource.

7.9.3 Zones of Archaeological Potential

Historic Towns which have been identified by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government for general protection are towns which were first identified in the Urban Archaeological Survey of Laois and which have been included in the RMP. Within Laois these historic towns include Ballinakill, Castletown, Dunamase, Killabban, Portlino and Portlaoise. The guideline boundaries for these towns are illustrated within the RMP. The areas within the historic boundaries are known as Zones of Archaeological Potential, and are areas where intense archaeology is present. The following zones of archaeological potential have been identified by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government:

- Ballinakill
- Castletown
- Dunamase
- Killabban
- Portlino
- Portlaoise





Any proposed development (due to its location, size or nature) with the potential to affect the archaeological heritage resource will be subject to an Archaeological Impact Assessment. This includes proposals close to archaeological monuments, extensive in area) or length and development that requires an Environmental Impact Assessment. Other areas of high archaeological potential may exist outside the boundaries of conventionally recognised monuments especially in wetlands and former wetlands.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- ARCH5 Ensure protection of Zones of Archaeological Potential, as identified in the Record of Monuments and Places;
- ARCH6 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;
- ARCH7 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 to Archaeology and Development: Guidelines for Good Practice for Developers (ICOMOS, 2000) in planning and executing development in sensitive areas;
- ARCH8 Continue to develop the Council's educational role with regard to the built heritage and to promote awareness and understanding of the built heritage.

7.9.4 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. In considering the protection of the industrial heritage of the county ancillary heritage such as millraces will also be protected.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- ARCH9 Support the conservation, interpretation and appreciation of significant archaeological assets and industrial archaeological in the county;
- ARCH10 Protect the integrity, character, value and settings of Recorded Monuments and Places and the settings of National Monuments from inappropriate development;
- ARCH11 Ensure the appropriate management of Zones of Archaeological Potential;

- ARCH12 Facilitate and enhance public access to and understanding of the archaeological resource of the county;
- ARCH13 Support the preservation or conservation of historically significant street patterns, building lines and plot widths in its towns and villages as well as the preservation of features such as town walls, historic revetments, and public realm features such as granite kerbing, historic drinking fountains, cobbles, vent pipes whether or not they benefit from protection in their own right;
- ARCH14 Protect and enhance archaeological monuments and their settings including town walls, town embankments and ditches, town gates, bastions or ancillary fortifications;
- ARCH15 Promote public awareness of the rich archaeological heritage in the area;
- ARCH16 In areas of archaeological potential, where groundworks are proposed, the Council favours the preservation in-situ of archaeological remains, where areas of archaeological potential are located in town centres or villages, preservation of archaeological remains by record will be considered.
- Where it is proposed to undertake groundworks to lands within an area of archaeological potential or in the vicinity of a recorded monument, the Council will require:
- i. the preparation of an archaeological field evaluation by a licensed archaeologist. This assessment comprises an account of the archaeological and historical background of the site, an evaluation of the nature, importance, extent and locations of archaeological remains and of the likely impacts of the development proposals on archaeological remains. Trial trenches are excavated as part of the evaluation process.
 - ii. the submission of a method statement indicating how the development will be carried out in order to minimise the impact on sub-surface archaeological remains. This could comprise (i) a statement advising how the location of archaeological remains informed the decision on where to locate structures within the site (ii) a no-dig specification in relation to hardstanding areas and boundary walls (iii) non-invasive foundations, such as hand-excavated foundation pads for lightly-loaded structures rather than trench foundations.
 - iii. the retaining of a licensed archaeologist to carry out a full archaeological excavation, of all areas that are subject to groundworks and the preservation of archaeological remains by record prior to commencement of development and the furnishing of a copy of the excavation report to the Council and the local library.
 - iv. the retaining of a licensed archaeologist to supervise the carrying out of groundworks during the development process and when deemed necessary by the archaeologist, the cessation of groundworks pending the excavation of any potentially significant archaeological remains by the archaeologist, and the furnishing of an excavation report on same to the Council and the local library.
- ARCH17 Contribute, as appropriate, towards the protection and preservation of underwater archaeological sites.

7.10 NATURAL HERITAGE

A wide diversity of flora, fauna and wildlife habitats make up the biodiversity of County Laois. Some sites have been designated by the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the DOAHRRGA as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas [SPAs] and Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) as a result of their international and national wildlife importance. Laois County Council also recognises the integral value of the locally important sites and the wildlife and biodiversity of the wider countryside and acknowledges the importance of implementing policies to protect our natural heritage.

County Laois has a rich and varied landscape with historic features dating back to prehistory and many well-known tourist attractions that are related to its heritage. The county retains a strong connection with traditional agriculture and the landscape supports a wide range of ecological habitats despite recent rapid growth of its settlements. It is the interaction of these elements that will influence landscape character for future generations.

The landscapes in County Laois are constantly evolving in response to natural forces and human activity. There have been several phases of history which have left their marks on the landscape and which are evident today such as the following elements which include passage tombs and pre Christian earthworks, early Christian ecclesiastical buildings, Norman castles and walled settlements, 17th–18th Century demesnes and field patterns and 18th–19th Century buildings and structures.

It is an objective of the Council to:

- OBJ 1 To maintain, protect and where possible enhance the conservation value of existing European and national designated sites (SAC, SPA, NHA) in the county and any additional sites that may be proposed for designation during the period of this Plan;
- OBJ 2 Promote and protect the Slieve Blooms as a significant natural heritage asset in terms of landscape, ecology and geology;
- OBJ 3 Encourage the conservation, understanding of, access to and promotion of County Laois' natural heritage;
- OBJ 4 Use the Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) to protect parts of the Laois landscape that are of scenic importance and sensitive to change;
- OBJ 5 Ensure the protection of terrestrial, aquatic and soil biodiversity throughout the county and protect against invasive species;
- OBJ 6 Where the opportunity arises, the Council will seek to create a green network of spaces and corridors in order to provide for richer ecological networks and also amenity areas by linking up existing fragmented green spaces and focusing on linear features such as hedgerows, canal and river banks, railway embankments and walking paths and promote a feasibility study on opportunities for incorporation of green infrastructure;
- OBJ 7 Implement the key objectives and associated actions identified in the county Heritage Plan and any revision thereof.

7.11 BIODIVERSITY

Biodiversity refers to species, habitats and genetic diversity. It includes all plants and animals (including humans), fungi, algae and all other microscopic life forms as well as their habitats and their interaction with other species within that habitat. Biodiversity forms the basis of the county's landscapes, provides for food and clean water supplies, opportunities for waste disposal, nutrient recycling and flood storage.

Habitat surveys and other scientific information indicate that ecologically rich areas in Laois include hedgerows, drainage ditches, eskers, wetlands, relic woodland and semi-natural woodland. The Council notes that protected species occur outside designated areas. The Council will seek by way of specific policies to enhance biodiversity and create enriched ecological networks.

The protection of hedgerows is important to prevent the suburbanisation of rural landscapes, to protect the historic character of rural landscapes and to protect the ecological richness of hedgerows and their function as an ecological highway between rich ecological areas, as indicated by the Council's habitat surveys.

It is policy of the Council to:

- BIO1 Comply with the objectives of the National Biodiversity Plan 2011-2016 (and any future National Biodiversity Plan which may be adopted during the period of this plan) as appropriate to County Laois;
- BIO2 Contribute, as appropriate, towards the protection of designated ecological sites including candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs); Ramsar Sites; Wildlife Sites (including Natural Heritage Areas, proposed Natural Heritage Areas and Nature Reserves); Salmonid Waters; Flora Protection Order sites; and Freshwater Pearl Mussel catchments (the River Nore Freshwater Pearl Mussel sub-basin management Plans should be referenced in this regard);
- BIO3 Contribute towards compliance with relevant EU Environmental Directives and applicable National Legislation, Policies, Plans and Guidelines¹⁷.

7.12 GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Green infrastructure refers to the network of linked high quality green spaces and other environmental features within both urban and rural settings. This strategically planned and delivered network should be designed and managed as a multifunctional resource capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities. In developing green infrastructure, opportunities should be taken to develop and enhance networks for cycling, walking and other non-motorised transport. Green infrastructure includes parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, allotments and private gardens.

Habitats surveys have been carried out for all the towns and villages. Priority habitats have been identified in the Settlement Strategy town and village plans and this information will provide guidance in relation to the provision of green infrastructure on a town by town, village by village basis.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- NH1 Ensure that the conservation of biodiversity in protected areas and in the wider countryside is integrated into all aspects of the operation of the Council;
- NH2 Ensure that the following guidance is taken into account when assessing planning applications for extractive industry “Notice Nature Biodiversity Guidance for Extractive Developments”;
- NH3 Ensure that landscaping plans incorporate features or measures to foster biodiversity and enrich ecological networks;
- NH4 Preserve the County’s extensive network of hedgerows and eskers which are of landscape and ecological importance;
- NH5 Preserve intact bogs and fens from drainage works for their biodiversity value as well as their functioning as water sinks and for carbon sequestration;
- NH6 Implement the Habitats’ Directive requirement to preserve other types of ecological linkages or stepping stones, such as railway embankments, road verges and ditches, riparian lands etc;

¹⁷ the following and any updated/superseding documents:

- EU Directives, including the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC, as amended)^[1], the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC)^[2], the Environmental Liability Directive (2004/35/EC)^[3], the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (85/337/EEC, as amended), the Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) and the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (2001/42/EC).
- National legislation, including the Wildlife Act 1976^[4], the European Communities (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 1989 (SI No. 349 of 1989) (as amended), the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000, the European Union (Water Policy) Regulations 2003 (as amended), the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (SI No. 477 of 2011) and the European Communities (Environmental Liability) Regulations 2008^[7].
- National policy guidelines (including any clarifying Circulars or superseding versions of same), including the Landscape and Landscape Assessment Draft Guidelines 2000, the Environmental Impact Assessment Sub-Threshold Development Guidelines 2003, Strategic Environmental Assessment Guidelines 2004 and the Appropriate Assessment Guidance 2010.
- Catchment and water resource management Plans, including the Shannon International and the South Eastern River Basin Management Plans 2009-2015 (including any superseding versions of same).
- Biodiversity Plans and guidelines, including Actions for Biodiversity 2011-2016: Ireland’s 2nd National Biodiversity Plan (including any superseding version of same).
- Ireland’s Environment 2012 (EPA, 2012, including any superseding versions of same), and to make provision where appropriate to address the report’s goals and challenges.

- NH7 Work with other agencies to address the issue of invasive species within water courses in the County;
- NH8 All projects and plans arising from this plan¹⁸ (including any associated improvement works or associated infrastructure) will be screened for the need to undertake Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive. A plan or project will only be authorised after the competent authority has ascertained, based on scientific evidence, Screening for Appropriate Assessment, and a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment where necessary, that:
1. The Plan or project will not give rise to significant adverse direct, indirect or secondary effects on the integrity of any European site (either individually or in combination with other plans or projects); or
 2. The Plan or project will have significant adverse effects on the integrity of any European site (that does not host a priority natural habitat type/and or a priority species) but there are no alternative solutions and the plan or project must nevertheless be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature. In this case, it will be a requirement to follow procedures set out in legislation and agree and undertake all compensatory measures necessary to ensure the protection of the overall coherence of Natura 2000; or
- The Plan or project will have a significant adverse effect on the integrity of any European site (that hosts a natural habitat type and/or a priority species) but there are no alternative solutions and the plan or project must nevertheless be carried out for imperative reasons for overriding public interest, restricted to reasons of 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. In this case, it will be a requirement to follow procedures set out in legislation and agree and undertake all compensatory measures necessary to ensure the protection of the overall coherence of Natura 2000.
- NH9 Conserve, enhance, manage and protect, facilitate, improve the green infrastructure network, in consultation with relevant stakeholders and develop new Green infrastructure by recognizing the synergies that can be achieved with regard to the protection and management of heritage.

7.12.1. Designated Sites

The National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government is responsible for designating areas of special biodiversity interest in the context of national and European legislation. These areas include Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) and Statutory Nature Reserves.

The county contains:

- 8 Special Areas of Conservation, SACs (See Map 23)
- 2 Special Protection Areas, SPAs (See Map 24.)
- 2 Natural Heritage Areas, NHAs and 28 proposed Natural Heritage Areas (See Map xx)
- 3 Statutory Nature Reserves (See Map 25).

“Natura 2000 sites” is the collective name given to Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Areas of Protection (SPA). These sites contain habitats or species of special European importance.

7.12.2 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)

Special Areas of Conservation are prime wildlife areas, considered to be important on a European as well as Irish level. The legal basis on which SACs are selected and designated is the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), transposed into Irish law in The European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011-2015. The Directive lists certain habitats and species that must be protected within SACs. Irish habitats include raised bogs, blanket bogs, turloughs, sand dunes,

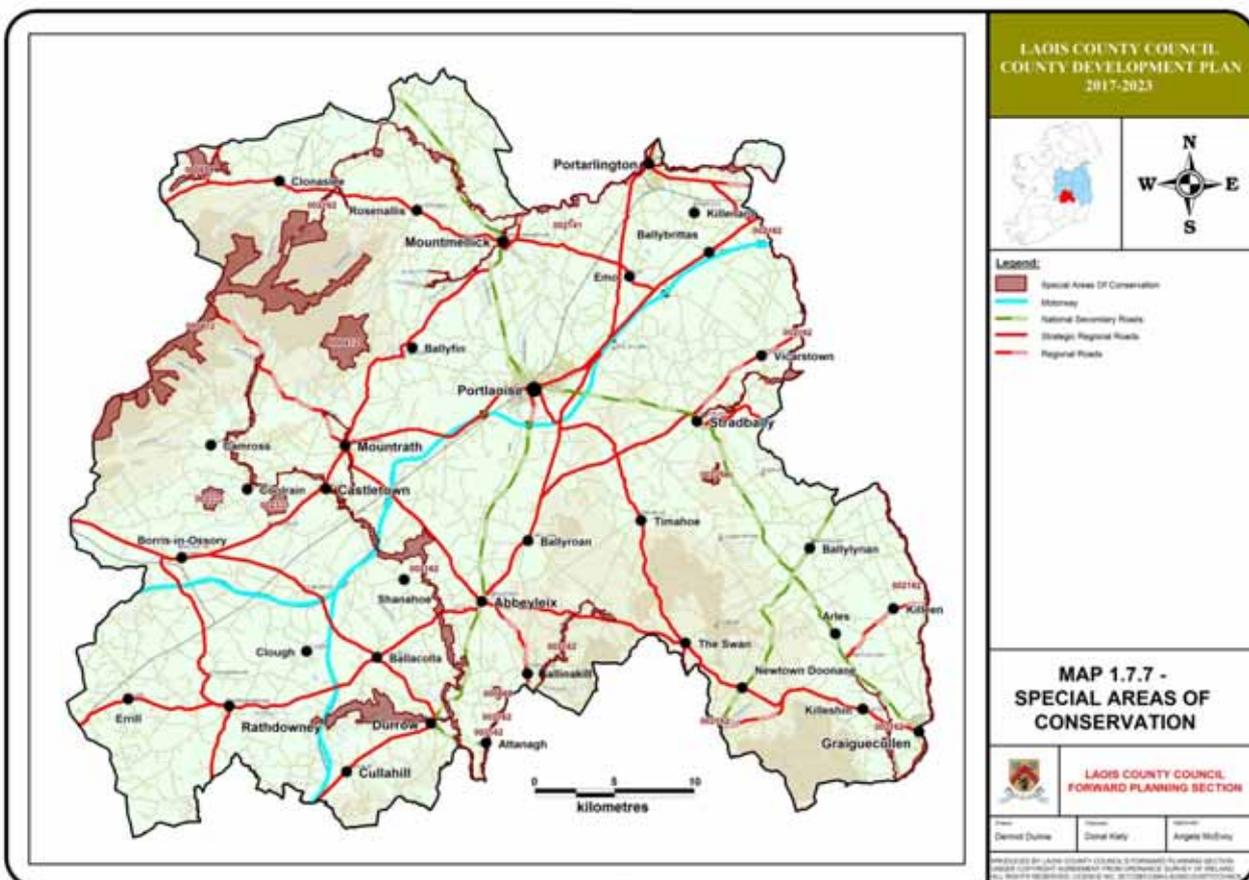
¹⁸ Such projects include but are not limited to those relating to: agriculture; amenity and recreation; contaminated sites; electricity transmission; flood alleviation and prevention; forestry; mineral extraction; renewable energy projects; roads; telecommunications; tourism; wastewater and discharges; and water supply and abstraction.

machair, heaths, lakes, rivers, woodlands, estuaries and sea inlets. The species which must be afforded protection under the Habitats Directive include inter alia all our bat species, Salmon, Pearl Mussel, Common Frog, Pine Marten, Mountain Hare and Otter. There are eight SACs to date in County Laois.

Table 24 Special Areas of Conservation in County Laois

Site Name	Site Code
Ballyprior Grassland	002256
Clonaslee Eskers and Derry Bog	000859
Coolrain Bog	002332
Knockacoller Bog	002333
Lisbigney Bog	000869
Mountmellick	002141
River Barrow And River Nore	002162
Slieve Bloom Mountains	000412

Figure 25: Special Areas of Conservation



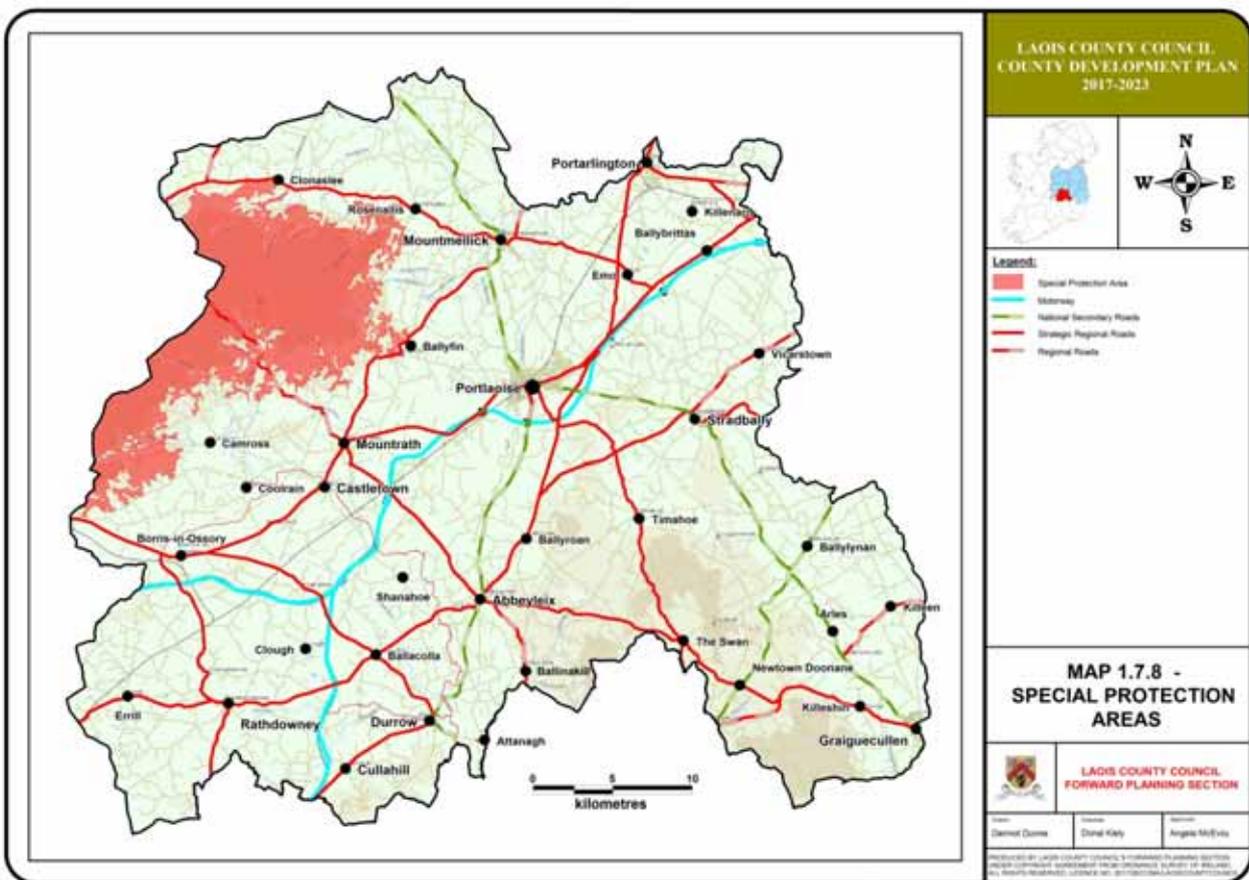
7.12.3 Special Protection Areas (SPAs)

These are sites designated under the EU Birds Directive 79/409/EEC as a result of their importance for birds. There are two SPAs to date in County Laois, the Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA designated for the Hen Harrier, but also important for Merlin, Peregrine and Red Grouse and the River Nore SPA whose feature of interest is the Kingfisher.

Table 25 Special Areas of Protection in County Laois

Site Name	Site Code
Slieve Bloom Mountains	004160
River Nore	004233

Figure 26: Special Protection Areas



7.12.4 Appropriate Assessment

Appropriate Assessment is a requirement of Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of Council Directive 92/43 /EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild flora and fauna, also known as the Habitats Directive. The requirement for an appropriate assessment is not defined by the nature of the scale of the proposed development but solely by its potential to negatively impact on a Natura 2000 site. It is the responsibility of the proponent of a plan or project to carry out an AA at each stage of the proposed development in accordance with Article 6. Appropriate Assessment is not and should not be regarded as a prohibition on new development or activities but involves a case by case examination of the implications for Natura 2000 sites and its conservation objectives in a recorded step wise procedure.

7.12.5 Natural Heritage Area (NHAs)

To date, only a selection of raised and blanket bog NHAs have been given formal legal protection. In County Laois, these sites are:

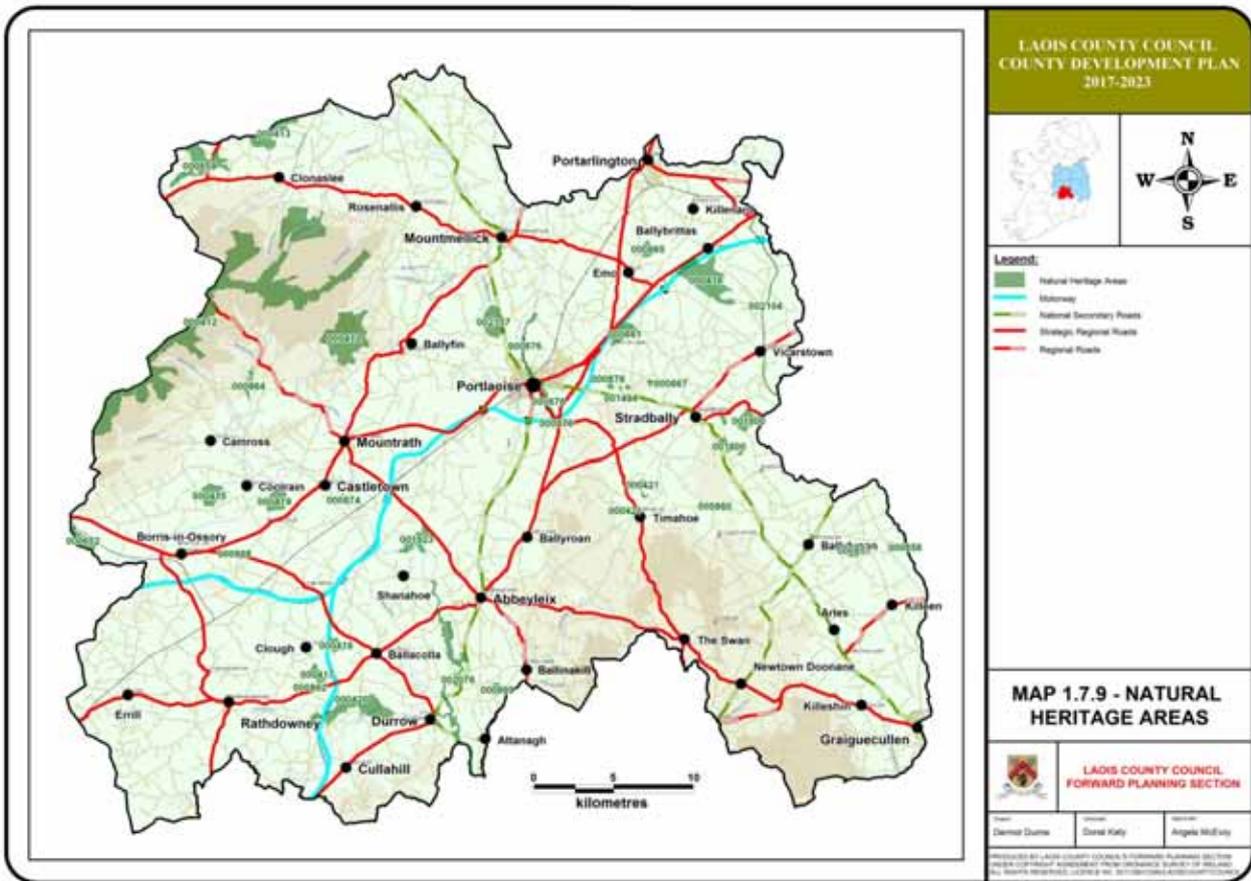
- 000652-Monaincha Bog / Ballaghmore Bog NHA
- 002357-Clonreher Bog NHA.
-

The remaining 28 proposed NHA (pNHA) sites in County Laois are given limited legal protection through; inter alia, recognition in the County Development Plan (See Table 26).

Table 26: Proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs) in Co Laois

Site Name	Site Code	Main habitat or species
Annaghmore Lough Fen	000413	Calcareous fen with willow and birch scrub
Ballylynan	000857	Grassland, wet meadows
Barrow Valley At Tankardstown Bridge	000858	River, canal, grassland, marsh
Clonaslee Eskers And Derry Bog	000859	Esker, raised bog
Cloppook Wood	000860	Ash/hazel woodland, limestone hill
Coolacurragh Wood	000862	Birch/alder woodland, fen peat
Coolrain Bog	000415	Midland raised bog (with Knockacoller Bog, these two bogs are the most southerly intact examples of true Midland Raised Bogs in the country)
Cuffsborough	000418	Grassland used by Greenland White-fronted geese
The Curragh And Goul River Marsh	000420	Wet meadow, river, winter feeding site for Greenland White-fronted Geese
Delour River Nr Lacca Manor	000864	Oak/birch woodland, river, wet grassland
Derries Wood	000416	Disturbed raised bog, disused gravel pit, conifer Plantation, lake, reedbed, important insect populations
Dunamaise Woods	001494	Limestone hills, oak/ash woodland
Emo Court	000865	Semi-natural mixed (oak/ash with beech) woodland, lake, parkland, amenity grassland
Forest House Wood	000874	
Grand Canal	002104	Canal, wetland, grassland
Granstown Wood and Lough	000417	State-owned nature reserve. Lake in transition through fen to alder/willow. Important invertebrate fauna
Kilteale Hill	000867	Limestone hill, hazel/ash woodland
Knockacoller Bog	000419	Midland raised bog, Birch and alder woodland. One of the few intact bogs south of the Slieve Blooms
Lisbigney Bog	000869	Raised bog
Mannin Wetland	00868	Species-rich fen
Ridge Of Portlaoise	000876	Esker ridge, ash/hazel woodland, species-rich grassland, disused gravel pits
River Barrow And River Nore	002162	River, wetland, woodland
River Nore/Abbeyleix Woods Complex	002076	River, site for Freshwater Pearl Mussel (international importance), Twaite Shad (Vulnerable), wet grassland, mixed deciduous woodland of great antiquity and species diversity, with specimen oak
Rock of Dunamaise	000878	
Shanahoe Marsh	001923	
Slieve Bloom Mountains	000412	Old Red Sandstone mountains, mountain blanket bog, Peregrine Falcon, Hen harrier, red grouse
Stradbally Hill	001800	
Timahoe Esker	000421	Esker ridge, Hazel/Ash woodland

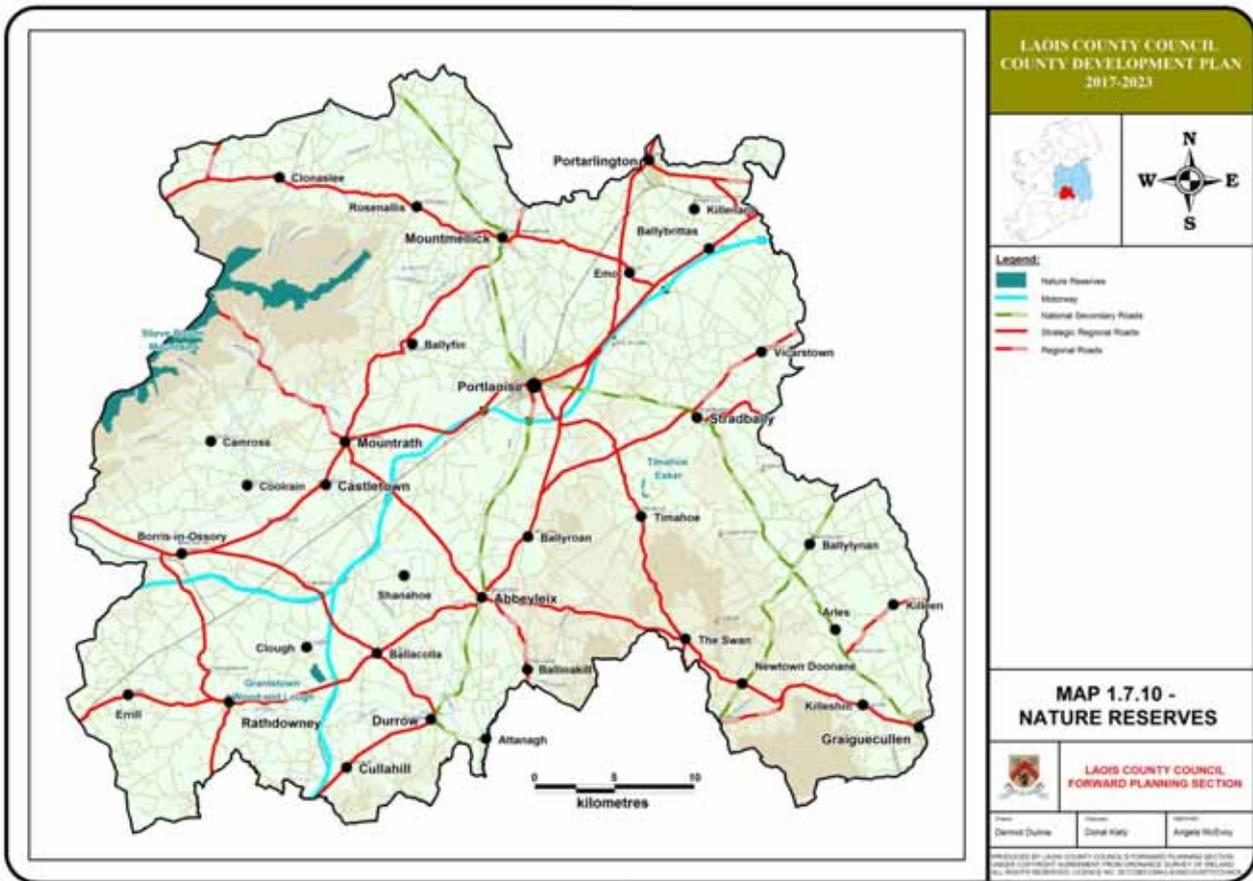
Figure 27: Natural Heritage Areas



7.12.6 Statutory Nature Reserves

A Statutory Nature Reserve is an area of importance to wildlife, which is protected under Ministerial order. Most are owned by the State. However, some are owned by organisations or private landowners. All three Statutory Nature Reserves in Laois are State-owned.

Figure 28: Nature Reserves



Grantstown Wood and Grantstown Lough Nature Reserve and Coolacurragh Wood

These reserves are situated about 8km north-west of Durrow, County Laois and provide rare examples of wet woodland on base-rich soils, while Grantstown Lough is a classic example of a lake which has gradually infilled through fen to alder carr. Animals and plants of interest include Kingfishers, Cormorants and Otter, The wood is composed of native tree and shrub species, especially Oak, Ash, and Birch, along with Hawthorn, Guelder Rose, and Spindle.

Slieve Bloom Mountains Nature Reserve

This high mountain blanket bog, unlike many other bogs in Ireland, has been spared severe burning and grazing. It formed about six thousand years ago when the climate became wetter and bog began to blanket the mountain slopes. Animals and plants of interest include Ling Heather, Deer Grass and Sphagnum Moss. The mountains are important for populations of Red Grouse and Hen Harrier.

Timahoe Esker Nature Reserve

This is one of the few esker ridges left in the country which still carry native woodland. It is planned to expand the native woodland using appropriate management techniques.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- NH9 No projects giving rise to significant cumulative, direct, indirect or secondary impacts on Natura 2000 sites arising from their size or scale, land take, proximity, resource requirements, emissions (disposal to land, water or air), transportation requirements, duration of construction, operation, decommissioning or from

any other effects shall be permitted on the basis of this plan (either individually or in combination with other plans or projects^[6]);

- NH10 Assess, in accordance with the relevant legislation, all proposed developments which are likely to have a significant effect (directly or through indirect or cumulative impact) on designated natural heritage sites, sites proposed for designation and protected species;
- NH11 Protect Natural Heritage Areas (NHA) from developments that would adversely affect their special interests;
- NH 12 Recognise and protect the significant geological value of sites in County Laois and safeguard these sites, in consultation with the Geological Survey of Ireland and in accordance with the National Heritage Plan and “Geological Heritage Guidelines for the Extractive Industry”;
- NH 13 Support and co-operate with statutory authorities and others in support of measures taken to manage designated nature conservation sites in order to achieve their conservation objectives;
- NH 14 Promote development for recreational and educational purposes that would not conflict with maintaining favourable conservation status and the meeting of the conservation objectives for designated sites;
- NH15 Engage with the National Parks and Wildlife Service to ensure Integrated Management Plans are prepared for all Natura sites (or parts thereof) and ensure that plans are fully integrated with the County Development Plan and other plans and programmes, with the intention that such plans are practical, achievable and sustainable and have regard to all relevant ecological, cultural, social and economic considerations and with special regard to local communities.

7.12.7 Non Designated Sites

Laois County Council acknowledges the importance of maintaining and enhancing the quality of the natural environment in its entirety as wildlife heritage is not just confined to designated areas.

Most of the county’s biodiversity is interwoven throughout the landscape and includes woodlands, hedgerows, earthen banks and ditches, rivers, lakes and wetlands, areas of upland blanket bog, heath and raised bogs and unimproved grasslands, as well as the plant and animal species that are found in these wild places. Rare and protected sites and species cannot survive independently of their surroundings. The wider landscape provides vital links and corridors to allow the movement of plants and animals between protected sites.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- NH16 Maintain and enhance the quality of the natural environment in its entirety as wildlife heritage is not just confined to designated areas;
- NH17 Minimise the impact of new development on habitats of natural value that are key features of the County’s ecological network. Developments likely to have an adverse effect on recognised sites of local nature conservation importance will be required to demonstrate the impacts on the ecological value of the site and will not be approved unless it can be clearly demonstrated that there are reasons for the development that outweigh the need to safeguard the nature conservation value of the site;

^[6] Except as provided for in Section 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, viz. There must be:

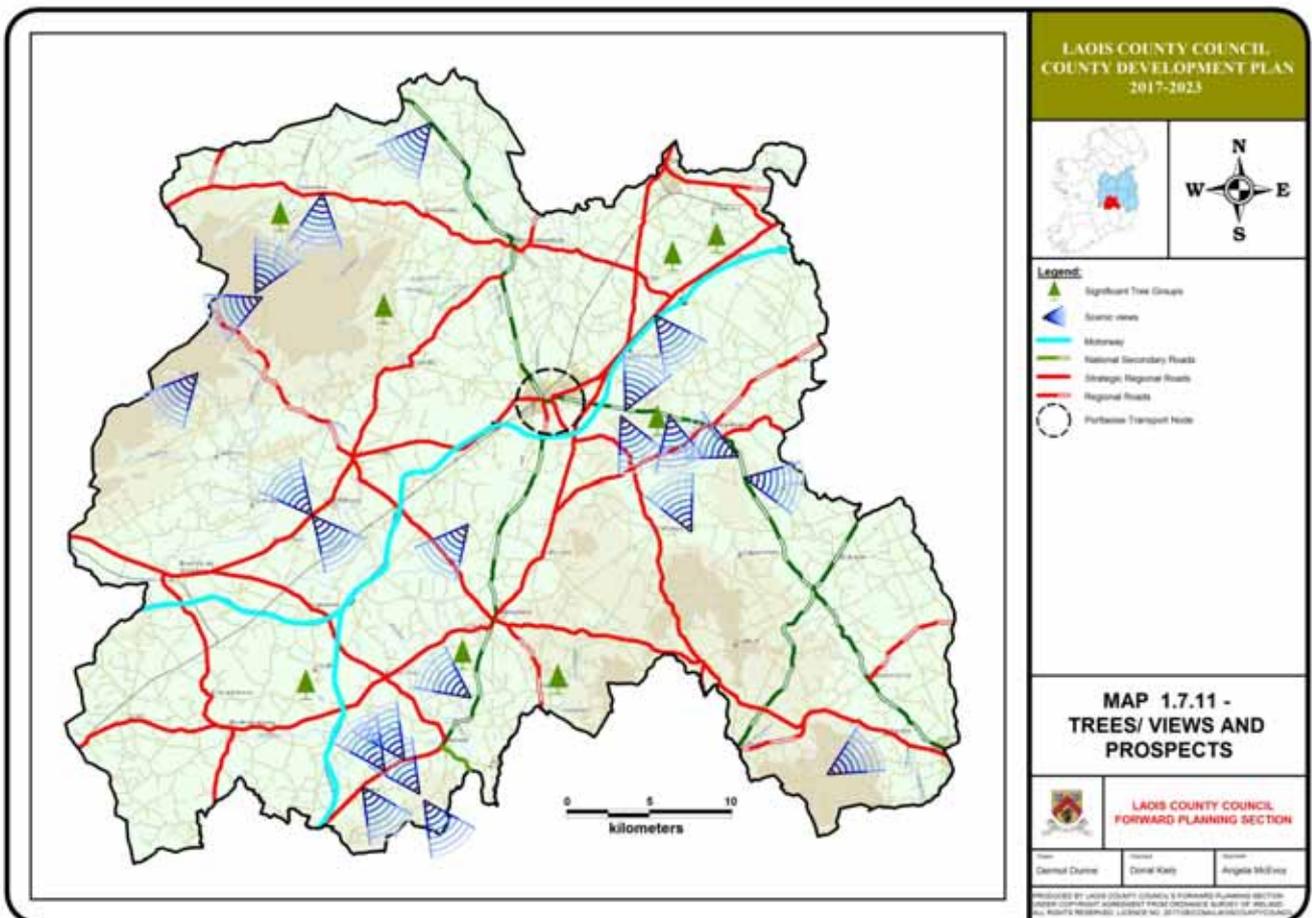
- a) no alternative solution available,
- b) imperative reasons of overriding public interest for the project to proceed; and
- c) Adequate compensatory measures in place.

- NH18 Ensure that proposals for development protect and enhance biodiversity, wherever possible, by minimising adverse impacts on existing habitats and by including mitigation and/or compensation measures, as appropriate, which ensure that biodiversity is enhanced;
- NH19 Apply the precautionary principle in relation to development proposals with potential to impact on County Biodiversity Sites or of local nature conservation interest by requiring an ecological impact assessment to ensure that any proposed development will not affect the integrity and conservation value of the site;
- NH20 Ensure that no ecological networks, or parts thereof which provide significant connectivity between areas of local biodiversity, are lost without remediation as a result of implementation of the Plan.

7.13 TREES AND WOODLANDS

Trees and woodlands make a positive contribution to the county’s landscape biodiversity and townscapes. In addition they provide wildlife habitats, soften hard urban edges and provide scale and backdrops to streets and buildings. They also filter out noise, dust and pollutants and prevent flooding by retaining moisture.

Figure 29: Trees, Views and Prospects



A survey of native woodland areas in Ireland was carried out in 2003-2006. This was commissioned by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The survey provided a systematic evaluation of the conservation value of Irish woodland. A number of the sites in County Laois will be considered for Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) during the Plan period 2017-2023.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- NH21 Undertake a study within the lifetime of the Plan to document and map trees that require preservation and designate accordingly;
- NH22 Protect individual trees, groups of trees and woodland in the interests of landscape conservation (including townscapes) and nature conservation as part of the development management process;
- NH23 Promote the preservation, enhancement and creation of native and semi natural woodlands;
- NH24 Encourage and use native species of trees within landscaping in private and public developments;
- NH25 Prepare Tree Preservation Orders for individual trees, groups of trees or woodland areas where expedient and in the interests of visual amenity, biodiversity and the environment;
- NH26 Encourage development proposals that enhance the landscape through positive management and additional planting and or sensitive re planting of native tree species.

7.14 HEDGEROWS

Hedgerows provide effective farmland barriers and boundaries, as well as vital habitats and landscape corridors for a vast array of native plants and wildlife. Most hedgerows were planted over the last 300 years or so following the enactment of legislation in the 18th century requiring landowners to enclose their land. However, heritage hedgerows which are considerably older than the majority of hedgerows often have strong links with native woodland that date back thousands of years and are of even greater biodiversity and historical value.

There is an extensive network of hedgerows throughout County Laois. There will be a firm presumption against the removal of hedgerows to facilitate development including where sight lines are deficient. In cases where removal is necessary, the planting of an equivalent length of native hedgerow will be required as a condition of planning permission.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- NH27 Protect existing hedgerows from unnecessary removal in order to preserve the rural character of the countryside and promote biodiversity;
- NH28 Insist on the use of native species when planting new hedgerows;
- NH29 Ensure cutting of hedges within the control of the Council only takes place at permitted times unless absolutely necessary in the interests of safety.
- NH30 Recognise the historical and archaeological importance of townland boundaries, including hedgerows, and promote their protection and retention.

7.15 WATERWAYS AND WETLANDS

The rivers and streams, lakes, wetlands and groundwater occurring within County Laois are home to a variety of habitats and species. Wetlands associated with rivers and streams, such as wet grasslands and marshes, are important for biodiversity but have other benefits as well. They reduce the flow of pollutants to both surface water and ground water and ease the impacts of flooding by retaining floodwaters and releasing them slowly back into our waterways. Rivers and streams also provide recreational benefits for local communities. Groundwater is important for supplying water and maintaining wetlands and river flows in dry periods.

The Slieve Bloom Mountains are designated as a Ramsar Site¹⁹. In addition, there are a number of wetland areas which should continue to be protected.

Wetland habitats are an important source of biodiversity and contain species such as otters (*Lutra lutra*), Salmon (*Salmo salar*), Kingfishers (*Alcedo atthis*), Freshwater crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*) and Lamprey species, all protected under the Wildlife Acts of 1976 and 2000 and/or listed on the annexes of the EC Habitats Directive and Birds Directive. County Laois is particularly important for the Nore Pearl Mussel "*Margaritifera durrovensis*" and special mention is made of this species throughout the Plan and SEA. The species is protected under the Freshwater Pearl Mussel Nore Sub-Basin Management Plan [2009].

BARROW LINE OF THE GRAND CANAL

The Grand Canal is a man-made linear waterway and is a key element of green Infrastructure and has a unique setting of historic character. The towpath provides an uninterrupted corridor for pedestrians and cyclists.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- WW 1 Promote and develop the towpaths along the Barrow Line in co-operation with Waterways Ireland and neighbouring local authorities;
- WW 2 Investigate the possibility of developing long distance walking routes, within the lifetime of the Plan, along the disused Mountmellick Line;
- WW 3 Facilitate the development of the Grand Canal for cycling, walking and nature study;
- WW 4 Support the development of the amenities and recreational potential of the River Barrow, in co-operation with the NPWS, IW, adjoining Councils and other relevant authorities.

7.16 RIPARIAN BUFFER ZONES

Riparian zones are particularly vulnerable to damage from inappropriate development. While this Plan does not expressly prohibit development in a riparian zone, developments taking place in the zone must ensure the protection of these vulnerable areas. A key requirement of an integrated watercourse protection strategy is the set-aside of sufficient land along the river margin or corridor.

The buffer zone if sufficiently large and managed will:

- Filter out pollutants and sediments from overland surface runoff
- Provide a refuge for animals with close affinity to rivers
- Create habitat necessary for aquatic life
- Provide amenity and recreation to local people and visitors to the area
- Enhance flood alleviation

Where developments are proposed adjacent to waterways, the Planning Authority will require a setback distance of a minimum of 15 metres from the waterways edge. This requirement may be subject to change depending on the nature and design of the development. Riparian corridors are defined as those areas that are physically or visually linked to the waterway and are multi-functional in nature.

¹⁹ Ramsar site is a site designated internationally for the conservation of wetlands, particularly those of importance to waterfowl under The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, the so-called Ramsar Convention.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- NH31 Protect riparian corridors by reserving land along their banks for ecological corridors and maintain them free from inappropriate development;
- NH32 Require that development along rivers set aside lands for pedestrian routes and cycleways that could link to the broader area and established settlements in the area;
- NH33 Ensure that no development including clearance and storage of materials takes place within a minimum distance of 10-15m from each bank of any river, stream or watercourse;
- NH34 Ensure that all proposed greenfield residential and commercial developments use sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) in accordance with best current practice;
- NH35 Work with State Agencies, landowners, local communities and other relevant groups to protect and manage inland waters, river corridors and their floodplains from degradation and damage, and to recognise and promote them as natural assets of the urban and rural environment.
- NH36 implement the relevant parts of the Planning and Development (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2011 and the European Communities (Amendment to Planning and Development) Regulations 2011 which require planning permission to be applied for where the area impacted by works relating to the drainage or reclamation of a wetland exceeds 0.1 hectares or where such works may have a significant effect on the environment. Such planning applications would need to be supported by an Appropriate Assessment where necessary.

7.17 NORE FRESHWATER PEARL MUSSEL

The Nore Freshwater Pearl Mussel Species is protected under the Freshwater Pearl Mussel Nore Sub-Basin Management Plan (2009). The critically endangered status of *Margaritifera durrovensis* of the Nore requires the careful management of land uses and activities in the vicinity of the River Nore. Activities requiring planning permission that may give rise to sedimentation, nutrient enrichment or other adverse environmental effects will be assessed carefully by the Council. Applications will not be accepted unless proposals will have no significant effects on this protected species. Applications may be subject to an Appropriate Assessment pursuant to the Habitats Directive.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- NH37 Protect the Nore Pearl Mussel through the measures set out in the Freshwater Pearl Mussel Nore Sub-Basin Management Plan (2009).

7.18 INVASIVE SPECIES

Invasive non-native plant and animal species represent a major threat to biodiversity in County Laois. They can impact negatively on native species, can transform habitats and threaten whole ecosystems. There is potential for the spread of invasive species during excavation and construction works. To minimise the risk of accidental transfer of non-native species, it will be necessary to adhere to current best practice protocol for avoiding the spread or transfer of all invasive species and plants, in particular Japanese Knotweed, Giant Hogweed and Zebra Mussel.

Laois County Council will strive to prevent their spread and to seek eradication where possible, as opportunities and resources allow.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- NH38 Prevent the spread of invasive species within the Plan area, including requiring landowners and developers to adhere to best practice guidance in relation to the control of invasive species;

NH39 Seek the control and/or eradication of invasive species as appropriate within the Plan area as opportunities and resources allow. Targeted invasive species control should be informed by current distribution of species, degree of threat posed and resources available to control and/or eradicate them.

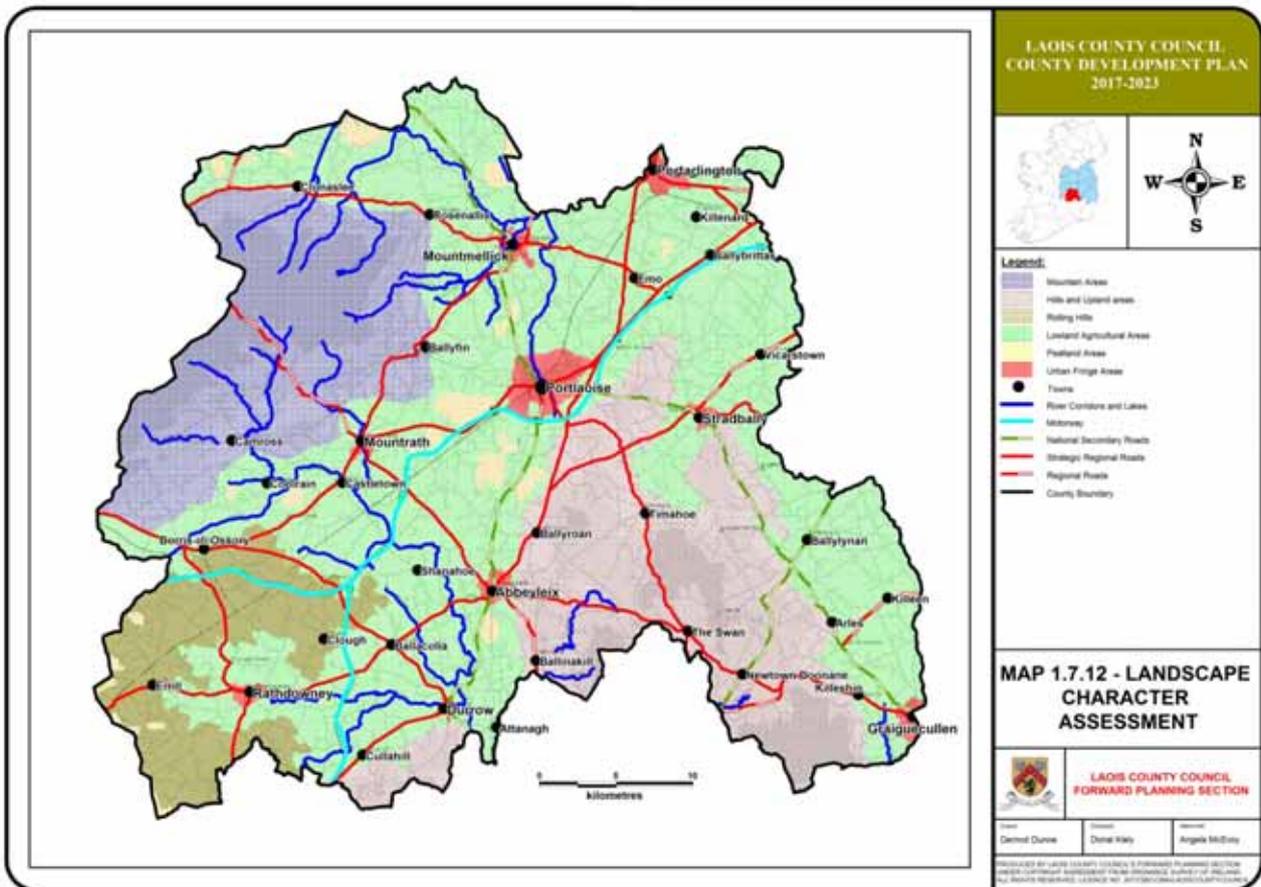
7.19 LANDSCAPE

Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is a process that describes, maps and classifies landscapes objectively. Defining landscape character enables an understanding to be formed of the inherent value and importance of individual landscape elements and the processes that may alter landscape character into the future.

Laois County Council has prepared a **Landscape Character Assessment** to identify specific areas that are characterised by sensitive landscapes. (See Map 28) Sensitive areas include upland areas, visually open and expansive areas and areas in the vicinity of natural heritage or built heritage assets or scenic views. The Assessment will help developers select less sensitive sites for development.

Landscape Character Types are distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogenous in character. They are generic in nature in that they may occur in different localities throughout any defined area. Nonetheless, where they do occur, they commonly share similar combinations of geology, topography, land cover and historical land use. For example, blanket bog uplands are distinct landscape character types and are recognisable as such whether they occur in County Laois or other counties.

Figure 30: Landscape Character Assessment



County Laois has been divided into seven Landscape Character Types (LCTs) and it is the policy of the Council to:-

LCT1 Hills and Upland Areas

- LS01 Preserve and enhance the rich heritage assets of these LCTs which provide visible evidence of all four key phases of the County's history;
- LS2 Protect the positive contribution that views across adjacent lowland areas and landmarks within the landscape make to the overall landscape character;
- LS3 Respect the remote character and existing low-density development in these LCTs;
- LS4 Implement improvements to the visitor attractions of these areas;
- LS5 Define popular walking routes such as Cullahill Mountain and create new routes to additional areas of interest;
- LS6 Continue to encourage the improved management of field boundaries such as hedgerows and stone walls and hunting copses/ wooded copses;
- LS7 Facilitate the development of sustainable rural industries that encourage interaction between urban and rural landscapes and dwellers, e.g. farmer's markets;
- LS8 Actively propose the designation of the Slieve Blooms as a Special Amenity Area and seek an Order to that effect.

LCT2 Lowland Agricultural Areas

- LS9 Promote good agricultural practices to create a sustainable rural economy;
- LS10 Provide incentives for smaller rural/family farms to manage their land to avoid loss of hedgerows and field patterns;
- LS11 Maintain and enhance the 18th and 19th century estate landscapes and associated parkland & woodland to develop them as a tourism resource;
- LS12 Diversify the urban fringe by developing mixed-use amenity areas, which will create a landscape buffer creating a transition between urban and rural areas;
- LS13 Define the urban fringe with planting of native species and mixed woodland to tie in to existing rural landscape;
- LS14 Reflect the 18th and 19th century field patterns in the scale of new development;
- LS15 Restoration of historic boundaries, walls to original standard with coursing and materials to match existing;
- LS16 Ensure that the design of all single one-off houses is fully compliant with Rural House Design Guidelines;

LCT3 River Corridors and Lakes

- LS17 Recognise the importance of river corridors for scenic value, ecology, history, culture and for recreational purposes such as walking, cycling and various on-water activities;
- LS18 Maintain the rivers throughout the county whilst ensuring that all works are carried out subject to appropriate environmental assessment in accordance with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive, in respect of any proposed development likely to have an impact on a designated natural heritage site, site proposed to be designated and any additional sites that may be designated during the period of this Plan;
- LS19 Preserve riverside historic features and their landscape settings. Conserve valuable habitats focused on and around river corridors and estuaries including European and national designations;

- LS20 Maintain current agricultural practices that are responsible for the current strong landscape character in these LCTs;
- LS21 Continue and encourage the improved management of field boundaries such as hedgerows and stone walls and hunting copses/ wooded copses;
- LS22 Reinforce the appearance of urban fringe areas adjacent to river corridors;
- LS23 Develop trans-county tourism river linkages;
- LS24 Recognise the potential constraints on development created by river flood plains and the value of these flood plains as increasingly rare habitats;
- LS25 Reflect existing vegetation species and patterns in new planting schemes in these LCTs;
- LS26 Avoid unsustainable exploitation of watercourses, e.g. for abstraction and dilution of effluent, to the point that these water courses lose their ecological and amenity value;
- LS27 Ensure that the design of all single one-off houses is fully compliant with Rural House Design Guidelines;
- LS28 In partnership with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Waterways Ireland and other relevant stakeholders facilitate public access to waterway corridors. Maintain and enhance the natural character of rivers, lakes and canals by reserving land to facilitate walking, cycling and other non-noise generating recreational activities;
- LS29 Encourage new developments in urban/built up areas, to front onto rivers/canals and where possible develop new public walkways along rivers and canals;

LCT4 Mountain Areas

- LS30 Preserve and enhance the rich heritage assets of this LCT;
- LS31 Protect the positive contribution that views across adjacent lowland areas and landmarks within the landscape make to the overall landscape character;
- LS32 Respect the remote character and existing low-density development in this LCT;
- LS33 Implement improvements to the visitor attractions of these areas;
- LS34 Develop, in conjunction with Offaly County Council and other relevant stakeholders, the tourism potential of this LCT;
- LS35 Restrict new development [housing, agricultural] to below the 225 metres contour line;
- LS36 Ensure that the design of all single one-off houses is fully compliant with Rural House Design Guidelines;
- LS37 Introduce strict design guidance in respect of coniferous afforestation. In particular, no new or replacement coniferous afforestation to be allowed on summit of mountain, generally above the 250 metres contour line. This restriction will not apply in the (unlikely) event of broadleaf afforestation being proposed;
- LS38 Continue to encourage the improved management of field boundaries such as hedgerows and stone walls and hunting copses/ wooded copses.
- LS39 Actively propose the designation of the Slieve Blooms as a Special Amenity Area and seek an Order to that effect.

LCT5 Peatland Areas

- LS40 Recognise the importance of peatlands for ecology, history, culture and for alternative energy production;
- LS41 Conserve valuable habitats including any European and national designations;
- LS 42 Introduce design guidance in respect of commercial forestry in order to integrate this landuse into the landscape;
- LS43 Ensure that the design of all single one-off houses is fully compliant with Rural House Design Guidelines;
- LS44 Support the identification of projects that have the potential to achieve commercial value such as industrial developments, renewable energy, tourism developments etc. while at the same time promoting high environmental standards and supporting Biodiversity objectives;
- LS45 Support the restoration of peatlands on suitable sites.

LCT6 Urban Fringe Areas

- LS46 Promote agricultural practices that are responsible for improving landscape character in this LCT;
- LS47 Conserve valuable habitats including any European and national designations;
- LS48 Diversify the urban fringe by developing mixed-use amenity areas, which will create a landscape buffer creating a transition between urban and rural areas;
- LS49 Define the urban fringe with planting of native species and mixed woodland to tie into existing rural landscape;
- LS50 Promote design for all single one-off houses in line with the Rural House Design Guidelines;

LCT7 Rolling Hill Areas

- LS51 Promote agricultural practices to create a sustainable rural economy;
- LS52 Provide incentives for smaller rural/family farms to manage their land to avoid loss of hedgerows and field patterns;
- LS53 Conserve valuable habitats including any European and national designations;
- LS54 Diversify the urban fringe by developing mixed-use amenity areas, which will create a landscape buffer creating a transition between urban and rural areas;
- LS55 Define the urban fringe with planting of native species and mixed woodland to tie into existing rural landscape;
- LS56 Promote the design of all single one-off houses in line with Rural House Design Guidelines;
- LS57 Maintain and enhance the 18th and 19th century estate landscapes and associated parkland & woodland to develop them as a tourism resource;
- LS58 Reflect the 18th and 19th century field patterns in the scale of new development;
- LS59 Restoration of historic boundaries, walls to original standard with coursing and materials to match existing.

7.20 AMENITY VIEWS AND PROSPECTS

County Laois contains a number of valuable views and prospects which offer a very attractive cross-sectional view and overall impression of differing landscapes as one traverses the county. The protection of these views and prospects will be done on a case by case basis through the development management process when considering individual planning applications. Development that would seriously hinder or obstruct such views and prospects will not be allowed.

Table 27: Designated Amenity Views and Prospects in County Laois

Site Code	Site Name
001	Killeshin Rossmore
002	The Windy Gap
003	Aharney
004	Slieve Bloom Mountains
005	Rock of Dunamaise
006	Grange, Mountmellick
007	The Heath
008	Raheen
009	Killamuck
010	Raheenleagh
011	Castletown
012	Clonaslee
013	Oughaval Woods, Stradbally

It is the policy of the Council to:

- AV1 Protect the views and prospects as indicated in the table above;
- AV2 Discourage development which would materially affect these amenity views and prospects;
- AV3 Ensure that appropriate standards of location, siting, design, finishing and landscaping are achieved.

7.19.1 Cross Border Sites

Like all Midland counties, much of the natural heritage of Laois traverses the county boundaries, such as:-

- Slieve Bloom Mountains with County Offaly;
- River Nore with County Kilkenny;
- River Barrow with County Offaly, County Kildare, County Carlow;
- Grand Canal with County Kildare.

The management and sustainable development of these natural resources depends on close cooperation between the relevant authorities. It is important therefore to ensure that developments which may benefit one county are not permitted to go ahead to the detriment of another. An example of this may be over abstraction of a Laois river by a local authority downstream to the detriment of the Laois portion of river.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- CBS 1 Co-operate with adjoining local authorities and other agencies in relation to cross border sites such as the Slieve Blooms and waterways and ensure a coherent and strategic approach to their sustainable development and conservation.

7.21 PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY

As the population of the county grows and people become more aware of the importance of our built and natural heritage, the issue of access to the countryside and to heritage sites has become increasingly important. The formal process for designating rights of way is outlined in Section 14 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

It is the policy of the Council to:

- PRW 1 Preserve public rights of way which give access to, mountain, lakeshore, riverbank or other place of natural beauty or recreational utility. These public rights of way shall be identified both by marking them on at least one of the maps forming part of the development plan and by indicating their location on a list appended to the development plan within one year of the adoption of the Plan;
- PRW2 Protect and maintain existing public rights of way in County Laois;
- PRW3 Create new rights of ways or extend existing rights of way either by agreement with relevant landowners or by way of compulsory powers;
- PRW4 Ensure that existing rights of way are maintained, sign-posted and kept free from obstruction and take legal action if necessary, to prevent any attempt to close them off;
- PRW5 Protect and promote Greenways and consider designating them as public rights of way and look favourably upon planning applications which include proposals to improve the condition and appearance of existing rights of way;
- PRW6 Development will not be permitted where a public right of way will be affected unless the level of amenity loss is minimised by:
- (i) the footpath/bridleway being diverted is by the minimal practical distance; and
 - (ii) the route continuing to be segregated from vehicular traffic.
 - (iii) Appropriate legal procedures have been undertaken to extinguish the existing right of way and to establish the new right of way to replace it.
- PRW7 Existing Rights of Way and established walking routes shall be identified prior to any new planting, new infrastructural development and any new energy/telecommunications developments.

7.22 GEOLOGY

Geology is an intrinsic component of the natural heritage of Laois. The Geological Survey of Ireland established the Irish Geological Heritage Programme in 1998. The programme identifies and selects the very best national sites for NHA designation, to represent the country's geology. It also identifies many sites of national or local geological heritage importance, which are classed as County Geological Sites (CGS). These sites will be protected primarily through their inclusion in the County Development Plan.

The Council recognises that Geology is an intrinsic component of natural heritage within the Planning Acts and Regulations and the Heritage Act 1995 to be protected and promoted for its heritage value and for its potential for recreational and geo-tourism initiatives and that it must ensure that geological heritage is adequately addressed in Development Plans.

While the most important geological sites and geomorphological scientific sites will be designated as NHAs the National Heritage Plan (2002) has recommended the recognition and protection of other important sites known as County Geological Sites. The Irish Geological Programme (a partnership between the GSI and NPWS) identifies CGs, that although of national, regional and local importance will not receive the statutory protection of NHA sites.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- GEOL1 Work with stakeholders to protect, preserve, enhance, maintain, manage, conserve, recognise and, where appropriate, restore the character conservation value and integrity of these sites for their amenity, scientific, heritage and historic values (including County Geological Sites listed in Table 28, proposed NHA's, areas near site and areas of geomorphological interest];
- GEOL2 Protect geological NHAs as they become designated and notified to the Local Authority, during the lifetime of the Plan;
- GEOL3 Encourage, where practicable and when not in conflict with ownership rights, access to geological and geomorphological features.
- GEOL4 Encourage and facilitate the development of geo-tourism by conserving and managing geological resources, and by the development of a Rock Trail (named), Geoparks or other similar geo-tourism initiatives.

Figure 31: Geological Sites

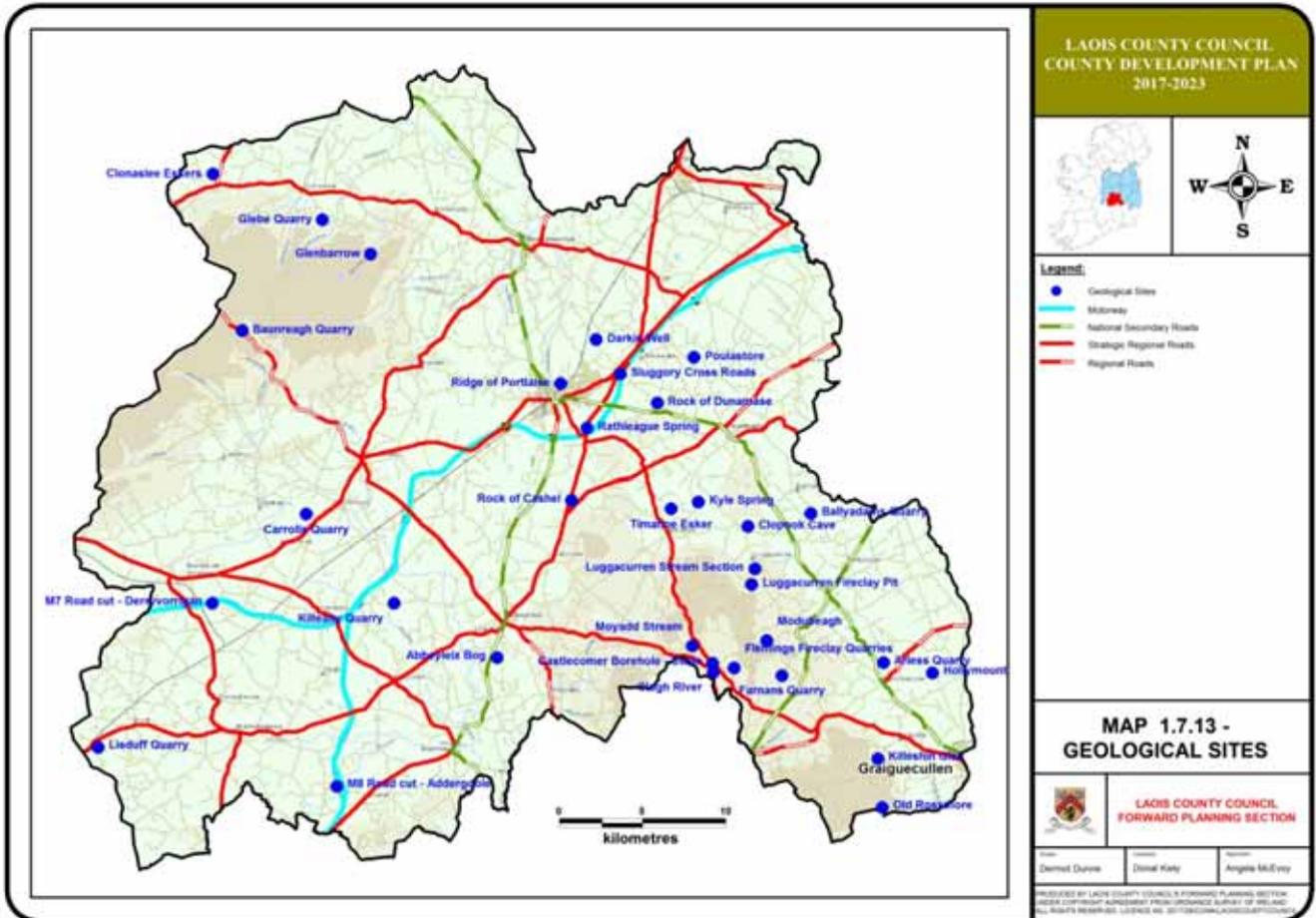


Table28: County Geological Sites

Site Name	Principal characteristics	Townland(s)/district	Summary description
Castlecomer Artesian Borehole - Swan	Artesian Well	Moyadd / Swan	Artesian well
Arless	Contact between Clogrenan and Luggacurran Shale Formations	Rathillig / Arless, south of Athy	Base of Namurian
Arless Quarry	Contact between Clogrenan and Luggacurran Shale Formations	Rathillig / Arless, south of Athy	Small disused quarry. Shows basal Namurian contact
Ballyadams Quarry	Quarry	Ballyadams formation?	Quarry
Carrolls Quarry	Ballysteen Limestone Formation	Knockacoller / Castletown	Typical representative of Ballysteen Limestone Formation. Quarry contains some cherty limestone and dolomite.
Clogh River	braided river channel	Swan	Series of dry braided river channels are found along the tightly meandering Clogh River. Braided or transitional to braided river may be influenced by input of sediment from mining waste
Clonaslee Eskers	Esker ridges	Garryhedder, Coolagh, Castlecuffe, Larragan, Ballykineen Lower	A complex series of ridges that bends around Slieve Bloom to become the Ridge of Portlaoise. Should be considered on its' own, however, as it has its own orientation and topography which is distinct from the Portlaoise Ridge. (Part of the Kinnity-Clonaslee Esker extending from Co. Laois to Co. Offaly)
Flemings Fireclay Quarries (at Swan)	Fireclays	Slatt Upper, Slatt Lower / Swan	Double fireclays. The term fireclay was introduced by Richard Griffith
Hollymount	Important Neogene site	Hollymount / Carlow	This is an important Neogene (Miocene - Late Pliocene) site. dark non-marine clays & sands >50m with Miocene - Late Pliocene flora. Only proven Miocene in ROI?
Hollymount	Miocene - Late Pliocene	Hollymount / Carlow	This is an important Neogene (Miocene - Late Pliocene) site. dark non-marine clays & sands >50m with Miocene - Late Pliocene flora. Only proven Miocene in ROI?
Killeshin Glen	Killeshin Siltstone Formation	Coorlaghan, Keeloge / Killeshin	The Killeshin Siltstone Formation is mainly grey argillaceous or silty mudstones (Higgs 1987) poorly bedded with occasional plant remains, dark grey to black shales occur occasionally containing goniatites and lamellibranchs
Killeshin Glen	Fossiliferous Rocks, Goniatites	Coorlaghan, Keeloge / Killeshin	A valuable stream section through Upper Namurian fossiliferous rocks in which goniatites are frequent.
Kyle Spring	Wells	Kyle/Timahoe	springs
Luggacurran Stream Section	Namurian stratigraphical section through Castlecomer Plateau	Luggacurran	Two stream sections provide almost continuous exposure in the Namurian of the Castlecomer Plateau
Luggacurran Stream Section	Namurian stratigraphical section through Castlecomer Plateau	Luggacurran	Two stream sections provide almost continuous exposure in the Namurian of the Castlecomer Plateau
Modubeagh Mine Spring	coal mine discharge spring with steps	Swan	An old coal mine northeast of Wolfhill Colliery. Reportedly has a capped well which was piped to Athy as a water supply. Reportedly has steps built to precipitate iron from mine adit spring

Site Name	Principal characteristics	Townland(s)/district	Summary description
Moyadd Stream	Westphalian stratigraphical section	Moyadd / Swan	An excellent example of the typical lithologies of the basal Coal Measures is shown in this stream section. Many of the beds are fossiliferous.
Old Rossmore	Anthracite	Rossmore, Clogrenan	Anthracite
Rathleague Spring	warm spring	Rathleague Derry	warm spring
Ridge of Portlaoise	Esker ridges	Townparks, Ballycullenbeg, Strahard, Debicot, Acragar, Cloncosney, Derrydavy, Kyletalesha, Knocknagroagh, Cooltoran, Ballytegan, Gorteen, Maryborough, Borris Little, Borris Great, Beladd, Downs, Rathleague, Meelick, Capoley, Ballycarnan	A glacial esker ridge. It has a road on top. This long, narrow ridge is an excellent example of a straight, uncomplicated esker which does not have a complex topography. It lies 90 degrees to the Kinnity-Clonaslee esker, but was formed in the same tunnel system.
Rock of Cashel	deposition features, crinoids and brachiopods	Cashel	Small outcrop of limestone with characteristics of deposition in turbid environments. The rock is highly fossiliferous with crinoids and brachiopods
Rock of Dunamase	Small Limestone hills: Hums.	Park or Dunamase	One of a series of small limestone hills, erosion features known as 'hums' above a plain. Youngest Brigantian strata in the area. Rock of Dunamase - representative site for Stradbally Hills. Site is large enough to include the glacial sediments around it.
Rossmore	Coal Seams visible in sandstone quarry	Rossmore Bog, Clogrennan	A good exposure of a coal seam occurs in a quarry near Rossmore.
Rossmore (Castlecomer coalfield)	Underground Coal Mine, Opencast Working.	Rossmore	underground coal mine with nearby opencast working (close to roadside grotto). On the edge of the Castlecomer Plateau, this is the only locality on the Leinster Coalfield where coal exposure might be maintained.
Timahoe Eskers	Esker ridges	Esker, Coolnabracca, Kyle, Orchard Lower, Clondoolagh, Fallowbeg Lower, Guileen, Clopook, Fallowbeg Middle	One of the best examples of esker ridges in the country showing branching and other characteristic features. A nice anatomising ridge, associated with moraine and fan features in a nice topographic setting.

7.22 ESKERS

The Council recognises the unique importance of esker landscape and its archaeological and historic value. All proposals for sand and gravel extraction will be determined by considering the need to conserve the environment and the extent to which proposed developments would be damaging. There is a presumption against new quarry development on eskers. The Council recognises that the exploitation of deposits can have seriously damaging environmental impact on the esker network.

It is the policy of the Council to:

- ESK1 Protect, preserve and conserve the landscape and natural heritage and geo-diversity values of esker systems from inappropriate development. Ensure that any plan or project affecting eskers are adequately assessed with regard to their potential impact on the environment;
- ESK2 Assess applications for quarrying activity and gravel extraction and other development in proximity to eskers, with respect to their landscape importance or amenity value and the need to conserve them free from inappropriate development and to conserve their environmental character values and the extent to which proposals would damage these qualities.

SECTION 8: GENERAL LOCATION AND PATTERN OF DEVELOPMENT

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of zoning is to indicate to property owners and the general public the types of development which the Planning Authority considers most appropriate in each land use category. Zoning is designed to reduce conflicting uses within areas, to protect resources and, in association with phasing, to ensure that land suitable for development is used to the best advantage of the community as a whole.

Section 10(8) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) states that there shall be no presumption in law that any land zoned in a particular development plan (including a development plan that may have been varied) shall remain so zoned in any subsequent development plan.

The land use zoning matrix gives guidance as to the acceptability of a list of uses under each zoning objective.

8.2 ZONING PRINCIPLES

In accordance with the overall strategy of the Plan, the county's zoning strategy is based on three important principles:

- A. Sufficient lands should be zoned at appropriate locations throughout the county to facilitate the land use requirements for the period 2017-2023;
- B. Promote the redevelopment of brownfield sites within urban centres;
- C. Ensure that appropriate locations are sought for new developments.

The land use zoning matrix details the most common form of land uses in accordance with the county's zoning objectives. These are considered as to their acceptability under the following categories:

Table 29 Land Use Zoning Acceptability

Y= Will Normally be Acceptable	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.
O= Are Open for Consideration	Land uses that are listed as 'open for consideration' may be acceptable to the Planning Authority subject to detailed assessment against the principles of proper planning and sustainable development, and the relevant policies, objectives and standards set out in this Plan. Such uses may only be permitted where they do not materially conflict with other aspects of the County Development Plan.
N= Will Not Normally be Acceptable	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 zoning objectives will be considered on their merits.

8.2.1 Established Use and Non-Conforming Uses

Throughout the county there are uses which do not conform to the zoning objective for the area. These are principally uses which were already in existence on the 1st of October 1964. Extensions to and improvement of premises accommodating these uses may be permitted where the proposed development would not seriously injure the amenities of the area or prejudice the proper planning and development of the area. In some cases, the Planning Authority may encourage relocation of permitted incompatible uses, for example by exchange of sites.

Existing uses which do not conform to the zoning objectives outlined will continue to operate. A reasonable expansion of non-conforming uses will generally be accepted notwithstanding the zoning objectives. The intensification of a non-conforming use will be considered with regard to zoning objectives as well as general Planning considerations.

8.2.2 Transitional Areas

While the zoning objectives indicate the different uses permitted in each zone, it is important to avoid abrupt transitions in scale and use at the boundary of adjoining land use zones. In these areas, it is necessary to avoid developments, which would be detrimental to the amenities of the more environmentally sensitive zone. For instance, in zones abutting residential areas particular attention must be paid to the uses, scale, density and appearance of development proposals and to landscaping and screening proposals in order to protect the amenities of these residential areas.

While the zoning objectives indicate the different uses permitted in principle in each zone, it is important to avoid abrupt transitions in scale and use in the boundary areas of adjoining land use zones, where such a transition would have an adverse effect on the amenities of more environmentally sensitive zones. For instance, in enterprise zones abutting residential development within predominantly mixed use zones, particular attention must be paid to the use, scale and density of development proposals in order to protect the amenities of residential property.

8.2.3. Phased Development

The Council considers it desirable that development takes place in an orderly manner but recognises it would be unduly restrictive to insist that development takes place in a rigidly phased manner.

8.2.4 Zoning

The Council recognises that land may not become available for development purposes in an orderly, phased manner and that therefore an allowance must be made over and above the acreage required to accommodate the anticipated development during the Plan period. The area zoned within the development boundary takes account of this fact and permits a more flexible approach to development. Developments in rural areas that would undermine appropriately zoned lands or policies in forgoing chapters will not be permitted.

Development cannot take place without the requisite standard of infrastructural services, and the presence of land use zoning objectives does not necessarily imply that infrastructural services or capacity exist but rather that a particular land use is appropriate to a specific location. The uses considered appropriate to each zone is shown in the land use matrix.

Table 30: Zoning Objectives and Purposes

LAND USE ZONING	OBJECTIVE	PURPOSE
Town/ Village Centre	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>The purpose of this zoning is to enhance the vitality and viability of town and village centres through the development of under-utilised land and brownfield sites and by encouraging a mix of uses to make the town and village centres an attractive place to visit, shop and live in. The character of the town and village centres shall be protected and enhanced.</p> <p>The Council will encourage the full use of buildings and backlands; in particular, the full use of upper floors in buildings, preferably for residential use.</p>
Residential 1	To protect and enhance the amenity of developed residential communities.	<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, doctor's 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. Within this zoning category the improved quality of existing residential areas will be the Council's priority.</p>
Residential 2	To provide for new residential development, residential services and community facilities.	<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, doctor's 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 complementary 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 2017-2023</i>	Regarding lands included in the Strategic Reserve land bank, it is important to highlight that the inclusion of such lands will not 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 2023-2029. 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.
Community, Educational and Institutional	To protect and provide for local neighbourhood, community, ecclesiastical, recreational and educational facilities.	The purpose of this zoning is to protect and improve existing community, educational and institutional facilities and to safeguard their future provision. The land use will provide for local civic, religious, community, educational and other facilities ancillary to neighbourhood uses and services.
Tourism	To provide for and improve tourist amenities in the county.	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 land use zone.
Open Space and Amenity	To preserve, provide for and improve active and passive recreational public and private open space.	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.
Industrial and	To provide for and	The purpose of the zoning is to provide for heavy industry associated with

Warehousing	improve industrial and warehousing development.	environmental emissions, including noise and odour and with intensive or hazardous processing and also provide for warehousing, light industry, technology related office development and general office development that exceed 400 square metres. 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 shall have regard for alternative sustainable modes of transport. Proposed 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. Where any industrial/warehousing land adjoins other land uses, Laois County Council will require that a buffer zone is provided for and landscaped in accordance with the Development Management Standards of this Plan.
General Business	To provide for and improve commercial activities.	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.
Enterprise and Employment	To provide lands for enterprise and employment use, more specifically low input and emission manufacturing, campus-style offices, storage uses, wholesaling and distribution, commercial services with high space and parking requirements that may not be suitable for town centre locations.	The purpose of this zone is to provide for activities which will generate employment and encourage enterprise. Warehousing, commercial, enterprise and ancillary services should be provided in high quality landscaped campus style environments, incorporating a range of amenities. 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 be required for such developments as they provide important means of managing accessibility to these sites.

Transport and Utilities	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.
Constrained Land Use Zoning Objective FOR Natura 2000 site -	to ensure that the Plan, and any lower tier plans or projects arising, will not impact on this type of designated site.	In order to be granted permission, other than demonstrating compliance with other Plan provisions (including those relating to the protection of the environment), proposals for development will need to undergo Appropriate Assessment.

Table 31: Land use Zoning Matrix

Land Use	Village / Town Centre	Residential 1	Residential 2	Enterprise & Employment	General Business	Neigh Centre	Com/Education/Institutional	Open Space	Tourism	Horticulture	Industrial	Transport and Utilities
Apartment	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	O	N	N	N	N	N
Car Park	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
Animal Housing	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	O
Café	Y	O	O	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	O	O	N
Caravan Camping	N	O	O	N	N	N	O	N	Y	N	N	O
Cemetery	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	O
Cinema, Dancehall, Disco	O	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
Community Hall	O	Y	Y	O	O	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	N
Craft Industry	Y	O	O	Y	O	O	O	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Crèche/ Playschool	Y	Y	Y	O	O	Y	O	N	Y	O	O	N
Cultural Uses/ Library	Y	O	O	O	O	Y	O	N	Y	N	N	O
Dwelling	O	Y	Y	N	N	N	O	N	Y	N	N	N
Funeral Home	O	N	N	N	N	N	O	N	N	N	N	N
Garages, Panel Beating, Car Repairs	N	N	N	O	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
Garden Centre	O	N	N	O	O	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
Guest House/Hostel/Hotel	Y	O	O	O	O	N	O	N	Y	N	N	N
Halting Site	N	O	O	N	N	N	O	N	N	N	N	N
Health Centre	Y	O	O	O	O	Y	O	N	N	N	N	N
Heavy Commercial Vehicle Parks	N	N	N	O	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
Hot Food Takeaway	O	N	N	N	N	O	N	N	Y	N	N	N
Industry	N	N	N	O	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
Industry (Light)	O	N	N	Y	O	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
Medical and Related Consultants	Y	O	O	O	O	O	O	N	N	N	N	N
Motor Sales	O	N	N	Y	O	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Nursing Home/ Sheltered Housing	O	O	O	N	N	N	O	N	N	N	O	N
Offices < 100sq m	Y	O	O	Y	Y	O	O	N	N	Y	Y	N

Land Use	Village / Town Centre	Residential 1	Residential 2	Enterprise & Employment	General Business	Neigh Centre	Com/Education/Institutional	Open Space	Tourism	Horticulture	Industrial	Transport and Utilities
Offices > 100sq m	Y	N	N	Y	Y	O	O	N	N	N	O	N
Park/Playground	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	O	Y	Y	Y	O	O	N
Petrol Station	Y	N	N	O	Y	N	N	N	N	N	O	N
Place of Worship	Y	O	O	N	N	O	Y	N	O	N	N	N
Playing Fields	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	O	Y	Y	Y	N	N
Pub	Y	N	N	N	O	O	N	N	Y	N	N	N
Recreational Building (Commercial)	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	N	Y	N	N	N
Recreational Building (Community)	Y	Y	Y	O	O	Y	Y	O	Y	O	N	O
Restaurant	Y	O	O	O	O	Y	O	N	O	O	O	N
Retail Warehouse	Y	N	N	O	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
School/Educational Facilities	Y	O	O	N	N	O	O	N	N	O	N	N
Scrap Yard	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	O	N
Retail < 100sqm (Comparison)	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	O	O	N	N
Retail > 100sqm (Comparison)	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
Retail < 100sq m (Convenience)	Y	O	O	O	Y	Y	N	N	O	O	N	N
Retail > 100sq m (Convenience)	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
Sport/Leisure Complex	Y	O	O	Y	O	O	O	N	Y	O	N	N
Utility structures	Y	O	O	Y	O	O	O	N	O	Y	Y	Y
Warehouse (Wholesale)	N	N	N	Y	O	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
Workshops	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N

8.3 DESIGN

Urban and rural design is concerned with enhancing the character of existing places and creating new places. When places are designed well, they are comfortable places to spend time, feel safe, are well-organised, are interesting to the eye and fit into their setting. With the drive at national level towards higher densities in urban areas, building design is increasingly challenging and important. With our landscapes experiencing significant change, it is as important as ever, that buildings in the countryside do not erode the essential character of our landscapes, but rather sit comfortably and are appropriate for a rural setting.

It is an objective of the Council to:

- DS1 Deliver a high-quality built environment throughout Laois, by consolidating the urban structure, and reinforcing and enhancing the existing character of Laois' towns and villages and focusing on place-making in new urban or suburban developments;
- DS2 Ensure new structures are designed with special attention to the specific characteristics or features of the development site, its setting and the surrounding area, be it urban or rural;
- DS3 Encourage an improvement of the environmental quality of the existing streetscape in urban and suburban areas and ensure the delivery of streetscapes that are well-considered and designed, having regard to the principal functions of the urban or suburban street: place, movement, access, room for parking, drainage, conveyance of utilities and street-lighting;
- DS4 Create and maintain a network of high-quality public open spaces in urban and suburban areas to foster social inclusion, community cohesion, good health and quality of life, as well to provide meeting places, play areas, sporting facilities, walking and cycling routes and wildlife habitats.

8.3.1 Urban Design

In considering applications for new residential housing estates, any extensions to town or village centres, or new mixed use developments the proposals will be examined against the following robust principles, which are key to the making of good quality places.

In its decision-making the Council will also have regard to the detailed design guidance contained in the DoEHLG's Urban Design Manual (2009). The character of a town or village as experienced by residents or visitors depends in large part upon the public realm. Streets constitute the largest component of the public realm; the perception of them is a major element in the overall experience of a place. Streets that are well-designed and maintained in a good state of repair, that provide for comfortable pedestrian traffic, create a positive ambience and contribute to a sense of civic pride. An attractive village or town centre will draw people in and once there encourage people to spend time, reinforcing its vitality and vibrancy.

Concerns about personal security can deter people from walking, especially when dark. Issues that can contribute to an individual's fear of crime include: poor lighting, narrow laneways, blind corners, vacancy or dereliction of buildings, absence of passive surveillance of a path, graffiti, and dense vegetation adjacent to paths. Pedestrians will generally take the shortest most convenient route regardless of the location of footpaths.

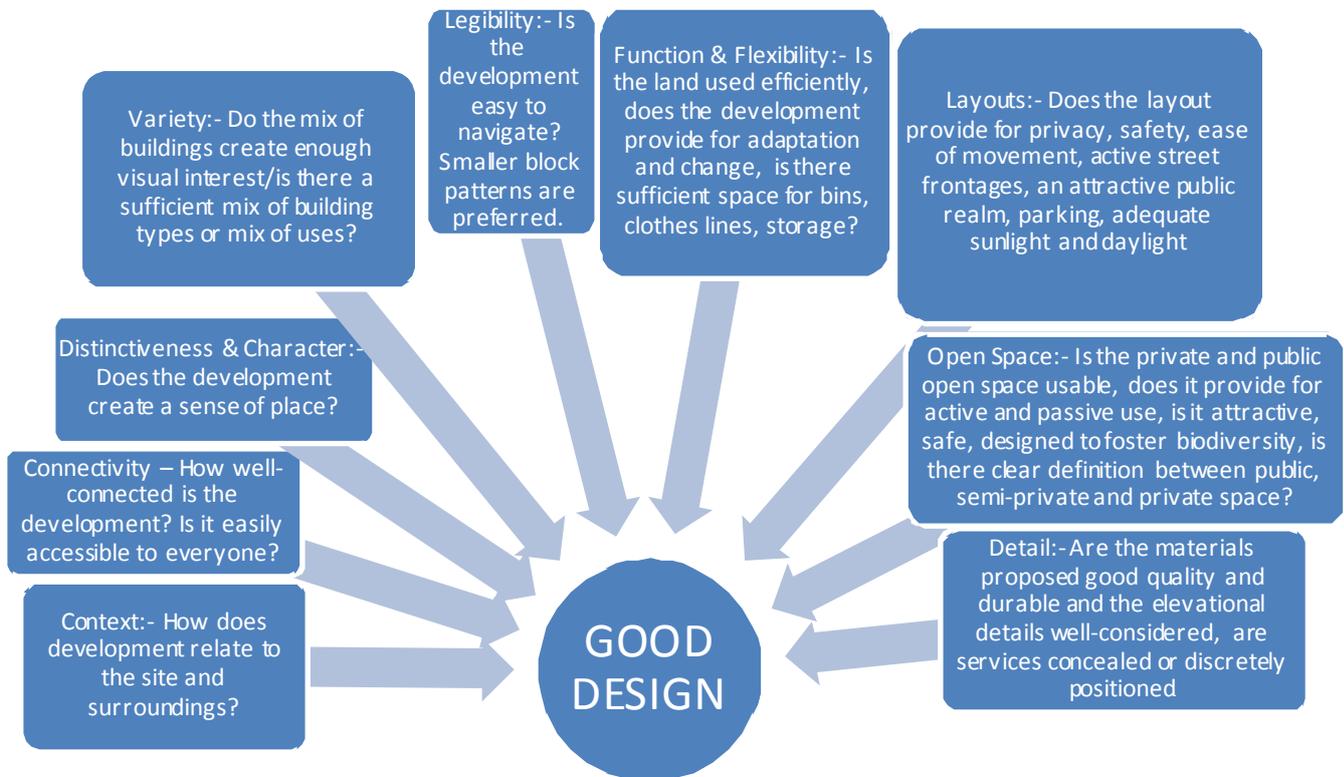


Figure 32: Good Design Criteria

The following criteria should be considered when designing new buildings and layouts:

- Pedestrian paths should be well-lit and signposted;
- Pedestrian paths should be routed to maximise surveillance from surrounding buildings;
- New buildings, their designs should provide for passive surveillance of footpaths nearby;
- Blind corners should be avoided, where blind corners exist convex mirrors should be provided to allow the user to see what is around the corner;
- Medium or high-level dense vegetation should not be planted immediately adjacent to paths unless secured by fencing;
- Where provided, cycle routes should be safe, direct, coherent, attractive and comfortable;
- Where developments face onto river / canals, the following design criteria should be taken into account:
 - Any proposals to increase the extent of public access;
 - The nature of any recreational use proposed; and
 - Any conflict or compliance with proposals for walking or cycling routes.

Streetscape describes the space between buildings on either side of a street, and the elements contained within, such as paving materials, road surfaces, street furniture, lighting, signage and landscape treatment. The following principles are considered important to the design and maintenance of streetscapes:

Function – minimise clutter, remove redundant elements. Commercial use of footpath for tables and chairs relating to restaurants or bars can contribute to the vibrancy of a town centre or village and are appropriate where footpaths are sufficiently wide.

Quality - although resources are always limited, better quality materials and components will look better and last longer, returning better value when a whole life cycle approach is considered. The use of durable materials and a high standard of workmanship are encouraged.

Consistency – Materials in the public realm and elements of street furniture should be consistent where possible to produce a coherent streetscape. Different operators that shape the public realm should coordinate as much as possible.

Sensitive to existing character: The visual, spatial and historical characteristics of a street should inform the carrying out of any environmental improvements. Historic elements of the streetscape such as post boxes, drinking troughs and memorials are familiar landmarks within a local area. Sympathetic treatment of these elements and their settings is important. Formal arrangement and styling of street furniture are suited to formal streets; a more informal approach should be taken to organic or vernacular areas. A contemporary or historicist approach to the design of public lighting schemes, surface treatments, street furniture or signage can be equally valid, depending on the local context. Dark, neutral or muted colour schemes for materials work best and simple, timeless designs are often the most appropriate. Soft landscaping can contribute shade, softness and character to the built environment.

Safety and Balancing of Interests: It is important to create a safe environment where walking and cycling represent viable alternatives to private vehicle use. In towns and villages, there is a balance to be struck between the allocation of space to private car users to allow for fast transit and high throughput and the allocation of space for wider footpaths, footpaths on either side of the street and the provision of dedicated cycle paths.

Accessible to Everyone: Footpath surfaces should be firm, even and slip-resistant and mobility measures such as tactile paving and dished kerbs should be provided in accord with relevant standards and best practice guidelines. The provision of public seating areas in town centres can be useful to elderly people as well as other users. Pedestrian networks should be continuous.

Legibility: This means a place that has a clear image and is easy to navigate around. Signage, lighting, recognisable routes and landmarks all contribute to a sense of place and help users orientate themselves and navigate through an area.

8.3.2 Design and Greenfield Urban Development

The following guidance relates to lightly trafficked new streets serving greenfield development for example a new residential estate or a new enterprise park. Although the principles may be applied to other road types where appropriate.

Buildings first: Generally, layouts of buildings and spaces should be considered first, and not be dictated by carriageway alignment.

Hierarchical Network of Streets: Principal arterial routes that serve the new developments should be wide and provide for designated vehicular, pedestrian and cycle travel; A reduction in street width, the use of footpaths on both sides of the street and the sharing of streets by pedestrian and car traffic is appropriate for collector/distributor streets which serve multiple buildings; the use of home zones where streets or small open spaces are shared by pedestrians, cyclists and cars are suitable for mews-style developments or where buildings are sited around small public spaces and will also be considered on a pilot basis. The street width should relate to building heights and the characteristics of the street.

Enclosure of Streets: The extent of the street should be clearly defined and enclosed whether by a building line, where site coverage by buildings is high or by landscaping where site coverage by buildings is low.

Permeability: Pedestrians and cyclists should have more than one route to get to a destination. Block sizes, open spaces and circulation networks that permit convenient, safe and comfortable linkages are desirable with new routes connecting to existing networks and movement patterns.

Traffic Calming: The use of curving streets and junctions with turning radii that require low speeds are preferable over hard traffic calming infrastructure such as speed bumps. Changes in road surface materials can alert drivers to areas where they do not have right of way.

Streets as Public Spaces: Streets make up a large proportion of our public realm, so it is important they are designed as spaces for people as well as spaces for movement. Landscaping, street furniture, finishing materials can contribute interest or character to a street making it a pleasant public space to use and move through.

8.3.3 Design and Rural Development

Laois County Council has produced Rural Housing Guidance (Appendix:7) for all those who are thinking of building a house in the countryside. It has been prepared to show the importance of good siting and sensitive design for one-off houses in the rural areas of County Laois. The aim of the Guidance is:

- To describe the site planning and design issues that need to be addressed; and
- To clearly set out what is acceptable and what is **not** acceptable in terms of one-off houses in County Laois.

Laois County Council recognises the need to improve the quality of house design in the countryside and, in particular, that new houses are better related to their surroundings. The Guidance does this by identifying crucial site planning and design principles that need to be taken into account when considering building a new house.

This does not mean that all one-off houses should look the same. Instead the Council promotes a creative interpretation of the key principles so that individual and contemporary house designs are achieved.

The Council will require all planning applications for one-off houses to demonstrate how these guidelines have been taken into account. Proposals which fully reflect the guidelines are likely to reduce requests for further information, while those that do not are unlikely to be successful.

It is the policy of the Council to:

DS5 Encourage the creation of attractive, usable, durable and adaptable structures, spaces and places in order to foster the development of sustainable and cohesive communities;

DS6 Encourage successful coordination of proportions, material, colour and detail. Proposed new buildings should be fit-for-purpose and use internal and external space efficiently. Particular attention will be given to form, emphasis, building lines, eaves and rooflines as these elements have a significant effect on the impression of a building.

8.4 PRE-PLANNING CONSULTATION

The Council in accordance with Section 247 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) provides an opportunity for applicants to engage in discussions with the Planning Authority, prior to making a planning application.

Applicants are encouraged to avail of this service, particularly for large scale developments such as residential estates, quarries and wind farms, to ensure planning applications are processed in a timely manner. It should, however, be noted that such discussions will not prejudice any subsequent decision made by Laois County Council.

8.5 DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT STANDARDS

Table 32 Development Management Standards

URBAN RESIDENTIAL		
DM01	Residential housing development (towns and villages)	<p>Applications for residential development will be assessed against the design criteria set out in Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009) and the companion Urban Design Manual: A Best Practice Guide (2009).</p> <p>The Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DTTS and DECLG, 2013) provides guidance in relation to the design of urban roads and streets, encouraging an integrated design approach that views the street as a multi-functional space and focuses on the needs of all road users.</p>
DM02	Residential apartment development	<p>Applications for apartments will be assessed against the design criteria set out in the Sustainable Urban Housing: A Design Guide for New Apartments – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2015).</p> <p>The Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DTTS and DECLG, 2013) provides guidance in relation to the design of urban roads and streets, encouraging an integrated design approach that views the street as a multi-functional space and focuses on the needs of all road users.</p>
DM03	Density of residential development	<p>The number of dwellings to be provided on a site should be determined with reference to the document Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009). Within these Guidelines a range of residential densities are prescribed, dependent on location, context, scale and availability of public transport.</p>
DM04	Landscaping and public open space in residential developments	<p>Public open spaces shall be clearly defined and be of high quality design and finish which is easily maintained, easy to access from all parts of the development, easy to use including by people with disabilities, has good lighting and natural surveillance and is enjoyable to use, walk and cycle around all year round. These spaces should include informal play spaces, safe well-lit pathways which will facilitate children learning to cycle, adults able to walk safely and encouraging social interaction between local residents.</p> <p>A detailed plan for hard and soft landscaping should be submitted for each development. It should propose planting in public and private areas. Landscaping should contribute to the overall attractiveness of the development and be easily maintained.</p>

		In large infill sites or brown field sites public open space should generally be provided at a minimum rate of 10% of the total site area;																
DM05	Amenity and facilities	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>No. of Dwellings</th> <th>Amenity Required</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td rowspan="2"><25</td> <td>Landscape d passive recreational area (sitting out and setting)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Active amenity open space (Ball Games)</td> </tr> <tr> <td rowspan="4">26-99</td> <td>Landscape d passive recreational area (sitting out)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Active amenity open space (Ball Games)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Areas for younger children (Play area/ground) (min.100m2)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>OR -Multi Use Games Area (tennis/basketball)</td> </tr> <tr> <td rowspan="5">100+</td> <td>Landscape d passive recreational area (sitting out)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Active amenity open space (Ball Games)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Areas for younger children (Play area/ground) (min.200m2)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>-Multi Use Games Area (tennis/basketball)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>-Grass sports pitch/ playing fields or -Multi Use Games Area (tennis/basketball)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	No. of Dwellings	Amenity Required	<25	Landscape d passive recreational area (sitting out and setting)	Active amenity open space (Ball Games)	26-99	Landscape d passive recreational area (sitting out)	Active amenity open space (Ball Games)	Areas for younger children (Play area/ground) (min.100m2)	OR -Multi Use Games Area (tennis/basketball)	100+	Landscape d passive recreational area (sitting out)	Active amenity open space (Ball Games)	Areas for younger children (Play area/ground) (min.200m2)	-Multi Use Games Area (tennis/basketball)	-Grass sports pitch/ playing fields or -Multi Use Games Area (tennis/basketball)
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	-Grass sports pitch/ playing fields or -Multi Use Games Area (tennis/basketball)																	
DM06	Private open space in housing residential development	<p>All houses (terraced, semi-detached and detached) should have an area of private open space behind the building line.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>House size</th> <th>Minimum requirements</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1 and 2 bedroom</td> <td>60sq m</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3, 4, 5 bedroom</td> <td>75sq m</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Private open space shall be designed to maximise sunlight, privacy and shelter from winds and shall normally be located to the rear of dwellings. Narrow or awkward spaces, spaces which are not private and spaces also used for parking will be excluded from private open space area calculations.</p>	House size	Minimum requirements	1 and 2 bedroom	60sq m	3, 4, 5 bedroom	75sq m										
House size	Minimum requirements																	
1 and 2 bedroom	60sq m																	
3, 4, 5 bedroom	75sq m																	

		<p>In general, a minimum distance of 2.2m should be achieved between opposing first floor windows at the rear of dwellings. In general, it is encouraged that a 15m rear garden is provided, with innovative design and layout a lesser requirement may be considered.</p> <p>The Council will only consider exceptions to the standards in exceptional circumstances where an otherwise high quality design solution is proposed, which has full regard to the characteristics and context of the site.</p>										
DM07	Private open space in apartment developments	<p>It is a specific planning policy requirement that private amenity space shall be provided in the form of gardens or patios/terraces for ground floor apartments and balconies at upper levels.</p> <p>These spaces must be of a certain minimum depth of at least 1.5m, to be useful from an amenity viewpoint, e.g. to accommodate chairs and a small table.</p> <p>Vertical privacy screens should be provided between adjoining balconies and the floors of balconies should be solid and self-draining.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2">Minimum floor areas for private amenity space in apartments</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Studio</td> <td>4 sq m</td> </tr> <tr> <td>One bedroom</td> <td>5 sq m</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Two bedroom</td> <td>7 sq m</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Three bedroom</td> <td>9 sq m</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Minimum floor areas for private amenity space in apartments		Studio	4 sq m	One bedroom	5 sq m	Two bedroom	7 sq m	Three bedroom	9 sq m
Minimum floor areas for private amenity space in apartments												
Studio	4 sq m											
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DM08	Overshadowing of dwellings and open space	<p>High buildings or when new buildings are located close to adjoining structures may significantly overshadow dwellings and open space. Daylight and shadow projection diagrams should be submitted for such proposals. The recommendations of 'Site Layout Planning for Daylight and Sunlight: A Guide to Good Practice', (B.R.E. 1991) or B.S. 8026 'Lighting for Buildings, Part 2 1992: Code of Practice for Day lighting' should be followed in this regard.</p>										
DM09	Internal space standards in housing developments	<p>The design and layout of individual dwellings should provide a high quality living environment for residents. Designers should have regard to the targets and standards set out in Table 5.1 of the Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities Guidelines, DCHLG (2007) with regard to minimum room sizes, dimensions and overall floor areas when designing residential accommodation.</p>										

DM10	Minimum floor areas and internal space standards for apartments	Designers shall have specific regard to the standards laid out in the Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2015).
DM11	Boundary treatments	<p>The side boundaries of rear gardens shall be 1.8m-2m in height and shall be formed by high quality boundary treatments such as concrete block walls or concrete post and rail fencing.</p> <p>Two-metre-high concrete walls shall be provided between all areas of public open space and gardens to the rear of dwellings. The walls shall be suitably rendered and capped in a manner acceptable to the Council.</p>
DM12	Refuse/Recycling/Fuel	The Council will require that all developments include convenient and well-designed proposals for the storage of waste and recycling receptacles (3 receptacles per home) and safe fuel storage. Secure pedestrian access shall be provided to the rear of terraced homes.
DM13	Bring banks	<p>Bring bank facilities will generally be required at appropriate locations in the following developments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant new commercial developments, or extensions to same; • Mixed use developments, proposals should provide recycling facilities to serve residents; • One bring centre per residential development of 1,250 persons.
DM14	Naming of Estates	<p>Naming and numbering of residential estates shall be approved in advance by the Placenames Committee of the Planning Authority. Developers must submit the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposed place name; • Reasons for their choice. <p>Naming of streets and residential estates shall reflect the local place names and local people of note, heritage, language or topographical or landscape 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.</p> <p>Signage should be of appropriate size and material and shall be erected in a timely manner.</p>

RURAL DWELLINGS		
DM15	New dwelling houses in rural areas	<p>A range of criteria will be used to assess if a rural site is acceptable in principle for a dwelling house. The criteria are detailed in Appendix 7: Rural Design Guidance.</p> <p>New dwellings in the countryside require the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 metres of road frontage, unless a considerable set-back from the roadway exists; • minimum 0.202 hectares (0.5 acres) of site area; • floodlighting of single family dwellings or the lighting of private roads in rural areas will not be accepted.
DM16	Infill development in a rural area	<p>Limited infill development shall be permitted in rural areas where the proposed site shall coalesce the existing linear pattern of development and shall not be located at the end of a line of houses but on a vacant site within the existing linear form of developments subject to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant satisfies the local need criteria contained in Table 6; • Evidence is provided that no other sites are available on the applicants or family landholding that can be developed; • Wastewater treatment can be provided for the proposed dwelling in line with the EPA Code of Practice (2009); • Maintains the existing building line and established lengths of site frontage with adjacent dwellings; • Complies with the road standards in the ; • Has a minimum 0.202 hectares (0.5 acres) of site area; • The house design proposed is in line with the advice contained within the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Landscape Character Assessment contained in Appendix 6 ○ The Rural Design Guide contained in Appendix 7
DM17	Replacement dwellings in rural areas	<p>The demolition of a dwelling house in the countryside and the construction of a new dwelling house in its place shall be considered where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The structure proposed for demolition is habitable and in a vernacular tradition, a replacement structure will only be accepted where the replacement dwelling is of equal or superior merit. • Refer to Rural Design Guidance in Appendix 7 for policy on siting, design and landscaping.

DM18	Wastewater treatment (unsewered properties)	<p>The Council will ensure that;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • only on-site wastewater treatment systems that are of a suitable design and located in a suitable area will be permitted; • the provision of wastewater treatment for single houses meets with the requirements of the EPA Code of Practice 2009; • the use of alternative wastewater treatment systems for un-sewered properties, such as wetlands and reed beds and the need for tertiary treatment of wastewater will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
OTHER RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT		
DM19	House extensions/alterations in urban and rural areas	<p>Extensions and alterations to dwellings should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Be of a scale and position which would not be unduly incongruous with its context; 2) Harmonise with the principal building and fit into the site and surrounding area in terms of scale, bulk, form and materials. 3) The design and finish of the proposed extension need not necessarily replicate or imitate the design and finish of the existing dwelling. More contemporary designs and finishes often represent a more architecturally honest approach to the extension of a property and can better achieve other objectives, such as enhancing internal natural light; 4) Not have an adverse impact on the amenities of adjoining properties through undue overlooking, undue overshadowing and/or an over dominant visual impact; 5) Be positioned to ensure the privacy and adequate sunlight and daylight to key habitable rooms; 6) Site coverage should be carefully considered to avoid unacceptable loss of private open space.
DM20	Infill development in urban and rural areas	<p>Infill development is encouraged in principle where it does not adversely affect neighbouring residential amenity (for example privacy, sunlight and daylight), the general character of the area and the functioning of transport networks.</p>
DM21	Ancillary self-contained residential unit (granny flat)	<p>The Council will consider the provision of accommodation for older people and dependant relatives attached to the existing family home subject to compliance with the following criteria:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The unit shall be attached to the existing dwelling;

- 2) The unit shall be linked internally to the existing dwelling;
- 3) It shall not have a separate access at the front elevation of the dwelling;
- 4) It shall be of an appropriate size and design;
- 5) Should be capable of being served by adequate wastewater treatment.

COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

DM22 General consideration In assessing planning applications for commercial development a number of considerations will be taken into account:

- 1) Conformity with the land use policies in respect of commercial development;
- 2) 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;
- 3) The requirement that design quality protects but also enhances the architectural character of the town, particularly in relation to landmark structures and viewpoints;
- 4) The potential impact of traffic generation, parking provision and desirability thereof and whether or not consideration has been given to access and commuter movements;
- 5) Potential impact on the amenities of the surrounding areas;
- 6) The energy efficiency and overall sustainability of the development which includes practical considerations, such as servicing, deliveries, waste/recycling and overall management thereof;
- 7) Whether or not a land contamination assessment is necessary and is required as part of the Planning Authority requirements;
- 8) Whether or not an E.I.S. and/or N.I.S or AA has been deemed necessary and provided as part of the Planning Authority requirements;
- 9) The requirements for bring banks in line with council requirements;
- 10) Demolition within town centres will not normally be permitted unless fully justified by structural assessment and positive redevelopment proposals within the context of preceding objectives outlined above.

DM23 **Commercial development (other than shopping and office development) warehouses and** The criteria for assessment of such developments will include:

- 1) The nature/activities/processes of the proposed development and site location factors;

	<p>industrial uses/business campuses</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2) The compatibility and impact with/on adjoining uses; 3) The traffic implications and alternative access, servicing and sustainable mobility plans / commuting arrangements; 4) The quality of building design; 5) The site layout including car parking arrangements; 6) Landscaping plans; 7) The energy efficiency and overall sustainability of the proposed developments; 8) Details in relation to surface water/stormwater management systems;
<p>DM24</p>	<p>Retail development</p>	<p>Applications in relation to retail development will be assessed against the criteria contained in the Retail Planning: Guidelines for Planning Authorities produced by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (2012) and the Laois County Retail Strategy contained in Appendix 4 and the policies of the plan contained in Section 4.</p>
<p>DM25</p>	<p>Commercial development in rural areas</p>	<p>Development proposals in the open countryside should satisfy a high standard of siting and design, while being properly located to ensure their assimilation into their rural setting. The following considerations should be taken into account:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Buildings should be kept simple and should be finished with materials appropriate to a rural setting such as rap plaster, stone and slate; 2) Buildings should reflect the scale and pattern of the rural development in the vicinity; 3) Building height should be restricted to that required for the normal operation of the premises, buildings of excessive height will not be permitted; 4) Buildings should be sited to make use of existing hedgerows and topography to provide natural screening, buildings in open landscapes should be avoided; 5) Access roads and driveways should respect existing site contours; 6) Car parking should be located to the rear of the building and in compliance with the car parking standards in Table 18; 7) Advertising signs should be kept to a minimum; 8) Large advertising signs at the road frontage will be resisted; 9) Hedgerows or stone walls should be used for boundary treatments;
<p>DM26</p>	<p>Industrial activities</p>	<p>Where proposed industrial facilities, waste disposal facilities, mineral extraction developments, or other developments that may have a significant impact on surface water quality, ground water quality, or on the water table, the developer</p>

		<p>will be required (whether as part of an EIS or an Environmental Report) to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) submit an assessment of the impact of the development on water quality and the water table; mitigatory and monitoring measures should also be included, as appropriate; 2) Development proposals that could cause pollution, a reduction in biological or chemical water quality or changes in the water table will not be accepted unless appropriate mitigatory measures are proposed, such as settlement ponds, oil and chemical interceptors, bunding of storage tanks and refuelling areas, capping where ground water is exposed as a result of extraction etc.
DM27	Home based economic activity	<p>Home based economic activity is defined as 'working from home'. In dealing with applications for such developments the Planning Authority will have regard to the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The nature and extent of the work; 2) The effects on the amenities of adjoining properties particularly as regards hours of operation, noise and general disturbance; 3) The anticipated levels of traffic generation (a traffic and car parking statement shall accompany any application for such a change of use); 4) The details concerning the generation, storage and collection of waste; 5) Quality signage proposals – plastics and neon signage on buildings will not be permitted <p>Permissions for such partial change of use will be restricted to use by the applicant and may be temporary, for a three-year period, in order to enable the Planning Authority to monitor the impact of the development. Permission will not normally be granted for such changes of use in apartments.</p> <p>Conversion of part of a dwelling to a medical or dental surgery, childminding or childcare facilities will normally be permitted where the dwelling remains as the main residence of the practitioner and where a local need has been demonstrated.</p> <p>Conversion of the ground floor of a dwelling to a surgery with a separate apartment on the upper floor may be permitted where there are no other more suitable premises available.</p>
DM28	Childcare Facilities	<p>The Planning Authority recognises the need for properly run and conveniently located childcare facilities throughout the county. Childcare facilities will be assessed in accordance with the <i>Childcare Facilities: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001)</i> and the <i>We Like This Place: Guidelines for Best Practice in the</i></p>

	<p><i>Design of Childcare Facilities (2005).</i></p> <p>As per Circular Letter PL 3/2016 the Council will exclude matters relating to childcare facility standards outlines in Appendix 1 of the</p> <p>Childcare Facilities: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001) – regarding the minimum floor area requirements per child.</p> <p>The Planning Authority will have regard to the following in the assessment of proposals for childcare and educational facilities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Suitability of the site for the type and size of facility proposed; 2) Availability of outdoor play area and details of management of same; 3) Convenience to public transport nodes; 4) Safe access and convenient parking for customers and staff; 5) Local traffic conditions; 6) Number of such facilities in the area; 7) Intended hours of operation (in certain residential areas, 24 hour operations could be problematic).
<p>DM29 Public Houses/Night Clubs/Disco-bars/Dance Floors/Casinos</p>	<p>Night clubs and disco bars play an important role in urban areas providing a night use which adds to the attraction of a town.</p> <p>They will not, however, be permitted in residential areas.</p> <p>In dealing with applications for such developments the Planning Authority will have regard to the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The effects on the amenities of adjoining properties particularly as regards hours of operation, noise and general disturbance; 2) The anticipated levels of traffic generation (a traffic and car parking statement shall accompany any application for such a change of use); 3) The generation, storage and collection of waste; 4) Quality signage proposals – plastics and neon signage will not be permitted. <p>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.</p>
<p>DM30 Petrol filling stations</p>	<p>Applications for filling stations should have regard of the Retail Planning: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DECLG, 2012) and the Spatial Planning and National Roads: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (NRA/TII, 2012) also take account of the following:</p>

- 1) Be located within urban areas within speed limits;
- 2) Access to filling stations will not be permitted closer than 35 metres to a road junction;
- 3) Frontage on primary and secondary routes must be at least 20 metres in length;
- 4) All pumps and installations shall be set back at least 5 metres from the roads;
- 5) A wall, of a minimum height of 0.5 metres, must separate the forecourt from the public footpath;
- 6) All external lighting should be controlled and directed away from the public roadway to prevent traffic hazard;
- 7) A proliferation of large illuminated projecting signs will not be permitted at filling stations - Generally only one such sign will be permitted;
- 8) Turbo-drying or car washing facilities will be located so as not to interfere with residential amenities;
- 9) Petrol filling stations can include an associated shop (no more than 100 sq.ms. (net retail floorspace) that provides for the sale of convenience goods.
- 10) 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;
- 11) Late night opening will only be permitted if it does not impact adversely on nearby residences;
- 12) A landscaping Plan will form part of any Planning application.

DM31	Taxi/Hackney bases	cab	<p>The importance of taxi/hackney services as a means of transport in all towns is recognised. However, taxi/hackney bases will not be permitted where they are likely to interfere with traffic flows or on street parking. A proliferation of hackney bases will not be permitted in any one location.</p> <p>In dealing with applications for such developments the Planning Authority will have regard to the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The effects on the amenities of adjoining properties particularly as regards hours of operation, noise and general disturbance; 2) The anticipated levels of traffic generation (a traffic and car parking statement shall accompany any application for such a use. It should be shown that satisfactory off-street parking facilities are provided when the vehicles are not in use. 3) Taxi and hackney bases shall have universal access for all. 4) Quality signage proposals are required, plastic and neon signage will
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not be permitted		
DM32	Hot food take-a way	<p>The development of hot food take-aways will be strictly controlled and a proliferation of this use will not be encouraged.</p> <p>This type of development will generally only be considered in towns and villages where the development would not result in the loss of retail and office frontage. The Council may impose restrictions on opening hours.</p> <p>The opening of new fast food/takeaway outlets in close proximity to schools or children's play areas will be restricted so as to protect the health and wellbeing of children.</p> <p>In dealing with applications for such developments the Planning Authority will have regard to the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The effects on the amenities of adjoining properties particularly as regards hours of operation, noise, odour and general disturbance; 2) The location; standalone take-aways not attached to restaurants will not be encouraged, where an existing residential unit is above or the proximity to a school or children's play area; 3) The anticipated levels of traffic generation (a traffic and car parking statement shall accompany any application); 4) The generation, storage and collection of waste; 5) Quality signage proposals, plastic or neon signage will not be permitted.
AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT		
DM33	General consideration for agricultural buildings	<p>Agricultural developments have the potential to impact on the environment and the landscape. The traditional form of agricultural buildings is disappearing with the onset of advanced construction methods and wider range of materials. Some new farm buildings have the appearance of industrial buildings and due to their scale and mass can have serious major visual impacts.</p> <p>In dealing with applications for agricultural developments the Planning Authority will have regard to the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Require that buildings be sited as unobtrusively as possible and that the finishes and colour used will blend the development into its surroundings. 2) The proposed developments shall meet with the requirements of the

Department of Agriculture with regard to storage and disposal of waste.

- 3) The Council accepts the need for agricultural buildings and associated works (walls, fences, gates, entrances, yards) to be functional but they will be required to be sympathetic to their surroundings in scale, material and finishes.
- 4) Buildings should relate to the landscape. Traditionally this was achieved through having the roof a darker colour than the walls.
- 5) Appropriate roof colours are dark grey, dark reddish brown or a very dark green. Where cladding is used on the exterior of the farm buildings dark colours should be used.
- 6) All agricultural buildings should be located an adequate distance from any watercourse to reduce the risk of contamination.

RECREATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

DM34	Development associated with water sports	<p>The Council will normally only permit proposals for development associated with water sports adjacent to inland lakes and waterways where all the following criteria are met:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The proposed facilities are compatible with any existing use of water, including non-recreational uses; 2. It will not result in damage to sites of nature conservation importance or features of archaeological and built heritage; 3. The development can be satisfactorily integrated into the landscape or townscape surroundings; 4. The development will not have an unacceptable impact on the visual amenity especially with Natura 2000 sites; and 5. The development will not result in the over intensification of use leading to pollution, excessive noise and nuisance.
DM35	Floodlighting of recreational facilities and public open space	<p>In assessing planning applications for the floodlighting of sports pitches, tourist attractions or other high-order structures regard will be taken of considerations such as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The horizontal and vertical luminance levels (lux levels) of the fixtures; 2) details of when the lighting are to be used; 3) Floodlights are to have fully-shielded light fixtures with cowl accessories to ensure that upward light emittance is low; 4) Street lighting schemes to residential areas and public open spaces should be modest in scale, with fixture designs that limit upward or horizontal light, in order to create safe environments, while limiting glare and

enhancing efficiency.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

DM36	Community Development	<p>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.</p> <p>In assessing planning applications for leisure facilities, sports grounds, playing fields, play areas, community halls, organisational meeting facilities, medical facilities and other community orientated developments, regard will be taken of considerations such as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Overall need in terms of necessity, deficiency, and opportunity to enhance or develop local facilities; 2) Practicalities of site location in terms of site location, uses, impact on local amenities, desirability, and accessibility; 3) The potential for multi-use by other groups/members of the community. 4) Conformity with the requirements of appropriate legislative guidelines.
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SHOPFRONTS

DM37	Shopfronts - General Design	<p>The design and quality of shopfronts play an importance role in the experience of a town centre environment. It is important that they should not compromise the local character, scale and architectural quality of the host building. The Council has designated buildings with important shopfronts as protected structures and some shopfronts fall within architectural conservation areas; conservation policies will relate to these shopfronts.</p> <p>Generally, the Council will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Seek the retention of traditional shopfronts; 2) Encourage the reinstatement of shopfronts, where they have fallen into disrepair; 3) Consider contemporarily-designed bespoke shopfronts in new commercial areas or on historic buildings if existing shopfronts are of poor quality; 4) Ensure new shop fronts provide ramped or level access to facilitate access for all. <p>Traditional shopfronts are comprised of the following principal elements and proportions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) the stallriser at the base of the shopfront, according to a general
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		<p>traditional rule of thumb should occupy approximately a third of the height of the shopfront</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">2) the shop window for the display of retail goods or the services provided3) the fascia board, according to a general rule of thumb should not exceed approximately a fifth of the height of the shopfront and is used to display an advertisement for the shop and commercial use.
DM38	Shopfront Advertisements	<p>The Council expects the standard of advertisement to be of high quality and not to detract from the appearance of the shopfront or the street. As a general rule, subtle and simple schemes with regard to colours, size, design and lettering work best.</p> <p>In dealing with applications the Planning Authority will have regard to the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Where a business occupies more than one building, the fascia advertisement should not extend uninterrupted across two or more shopfronts.;2) The fascia advertisement should not extend beyond the pilasters/vertical shop front surround and not obstruct any other architectural detail, such as the cornices, corbels or first floor window sills;3) Shop advertisements generally do not require illumination other than street lighting or lighting of shop windows. Only late opening premises, such as public houses and restaurants, should require additional illumination;4) Modern boxed fascia advertisements, which project from the face of the building, with internal illumination are not acceptable. Neon and fluorescent lighting is not acceptable. If necessary, external illumination should be kept to a minimum and discreetly positioned; spot lighting, recessed trough lighting and halo lighting are generally acceptable;5) The fascia board should normally state only the name or trade of the business and the street number. Avoid oversized lettering and the application of too much additional information as this can create visual clutter. Letters should generally not exceed 60 percent of the height of the fascia;6) Painted wooden, matt finished advertisements or individually applied brass or chrome letters are preferred over large areas of highly polished finishes, glossy plastic or perspex advertisements;7) Lettering or sign writing should usually be applied directly to the fascia. Avoid adding new fascia boards to an existing one;8) Projecting hanging signs are a traditional form of additional advertising of commercial premises, they can complement the colour and design of the fascia, it can add interest and originality to a building and street scene;9) No more than one hanging sign per shopfront and they should keep an adequate vertical clearance from the pavement and not project over any carriageways;

		10) The erection of speakers on the exterior of commercial or residential premises will not be permitted.
DM39	Canopies, smoking shelters and outdoor seating areas	<p>The council will ensure canopies, outdoor seating and displays add to the attractiveness and vibrancy of an area and do not disrupt movement along footpaths. A high standard of overall design will be required, relating to the scale, design and position of canopies. The following will apply:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Straight canopies are generally acceptable provided the footpaths are sufficiently wide and a dearing head height is provided; 2) Dutch canopies may be acceptable depending on location; 3) Advertisements placed on canopies will not generally be accepted. <p>Outdoor seating can contribute to the vitality and vibrancy of a town centre. Outdoor seating to the front of premises either on private forecourt or on the public footpath is subject to a Planning Authority license and will be considered generally acceptable if</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sufficient space is available; • access arrangements are not impacted upon; • minimal impact on the amenities of nearby residents. <p>The provision of beer gardens or smoking shelters at public houses will be considered having regard to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The location of the beer garden or smoking shelter; • The impact on adjacent properties; • the hours of use, which may be restricted if it is considered that the noise generated would adversely affect the amenities of nearby residents.
ADVERTISEMENTS		
DM40	Advertisements on public roads	<p>Permanent advertising signs on public land along the public road network for example finger post signs and signs for businesses are subject to a license under Section 254 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).</p> <p>Planning permission is required for signs on private land along public roads, other than those exempted by the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended).</p> <p>In dealing with applications the Planning Authority will have regard to the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Compliance with the Spatial Planning and National Roads: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012) and the Transport Infrastructure Ireland's policy statement on the Provision of Tourist and Leisure Signage on National Roads (March 2011) and any updated versions of these documents, when the development concerns a national roadway.

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2) Signs should be of a different colour scheme to that of tourist signage; 3) Within urban speed limits signs will not be permitted for businesses; 4) Signs for rural businesses shall not compete with road signs or otherwise endanger traffic safety. They will only be considered at an appropriate junction on a regional road and one sign at each junction leading to the business; 5) Signs will not be permitted where there is a proliferation of signage within a small area that leads to visual clutter and which may constitute a traffic hazard; 6) For reasons of road safety, signs for commercial enterprises must not distract from road signs, changes to road layout or traffic lights/crossings; 7) Signs for tourism attractions and facilities will only be considered white or brown signs.
DM41	Bill boards Advertisements	<p>The exhibition of billboard advertisements will be</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) permitted only where approved advertisements structures are in place.
TRANSPORT RELATED STANDARDS		
DM 42	Urban Roads and Streets	Applications for residential development will be assessed against the design criteria set out in the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DTTAS and DECLG, 2013) which provide guidance in relation to the design of streets and present a series of principles, approaches and standards that are necessary to create safe and successful residential streets.
DM 43	Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities	All applications which involve a direct access onto the national road network shall have regard to the requirements of the Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities
DM 44	Roadway standards: Sightlines on the road network	All applications with access onto the public road network shall have regard to the technical criteria contained in the Council's Roads and Parking Standards (2007) document or any subsequent document.
DM45	Measuring sightlines	Sightlines shall be measured from a point 3m back from the edge of the public road at the centre point of the proposed access/egress to points on the nearside of the public road in both directions.
DM46	Set back distances from the roadways	All applications with access onto the public road network shall have regard to the technical criteria contained in the Council's Roads and Parking Standards (2007) document or any subsequent document with regards to the setback distances from

		roadways.								
DM47	Parking in front gardens	<p>The cumulative effect of removal of front garden walls and railings damages the appearance of suburban streets and roads. Consequently, proposals for off street parking need to be balanced against loss of amenity. Where permitted, “drive-ins” should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not have outward opening gates; • Have a vehicular entrance of generally not less than 4m; • Have an area of hard standing (parking space of 2.5m x 5m); • Retain the balance as garden; • Have gates, walls or railings. 								
DM48	Car parking dimensions	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Car parking bay</td> <td>5m x 2.5m</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Car parking bay (disabled user)</td> <td>5m x 3.75m</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Loading bay</td> <td>6m x 3m</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Circulation aisles</td> <td>6m wide</td> </tr> </table>	Car parking bay	5m x 2.5m	Car parking bay (disabled user)	5m x 3.75m	Loading bay	6m x 3m	Circulation aisles	6m wide
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Circulation aisles	6m wide									
DM49	Car parking for electric cars	<p>The Electric Transport Programme (2008) contains a target for 10% of the national road transport fleet to be electrically powered by 2020. To facilitate the use of electric cars in line with national policy, non-residential developments shall provide facilities for the charging of these cars at a rate of up to 10% of the total car parking spaces. The remainder of the parking spaces should be constructed to be capable of accommodating future charging points, as required.</p> <p>Service areas for electric cars should be sited as unobtrusively as possible including maintenance boxes, electrical boxes.</p>								
DM50	Design of surface car parks	<p>Particular care must be used in the design of surface car parks in order to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Avoid an oppressive effect on the public realm and to provide for pedestrian mobility; 2) Create a pleasant environment through the use of soft landscaping including tree planting and planter boxes within large car parking areas, variation in the choice of surfacing material and the delineation of pedestrian routes; 3) Ensure disabled parking to be located as close to the destination entrance as possible and highlighted by way of signage and colour variation. 								
DM51	Bicycle provision standards	<p>The following table gives guidance on the minimum number of spaces which should be provided at new developments.</p>								

Apartment developments	2 private secure spaces per 100 sq. m (design should not require bicycle access via living area) 1 visitor bicycle space per two housing unit
Offices	10% of employee numbers, (subject to a minimum of 10 bicycle places or one bike space for every car space, whoever is the greater)
Schools	10% of pupil registration numbers, minimum 10 places Consider separate teacher/employee parking
Other developments	1 bike space for every car space
Shops	1 space for every 100 sq. m
Public transport pick-up points (rail, bus)	205% of daily boarders at that point/station, subject to minimum of 10 bicycle places
Off-street parking (incl. Multi-storey)	10% of total car spaces, subject to a minimum of 50 spaces
Events	5% of forecast attendees

All bicycle parking spaces shall be designed in accordance with the requirements of the National Cycle Manual, NTA (2011).

DM52	Road assessments	<p>The Council will require that a Road Safety Audit (RSA) is submitted for development proposals which give rise to potentially significant new traffic levels where those developments require a new access/egress, or significant changes to an existing access/egress, to a national road.</p> <p>Traffic Impact Statements will be required for all major traffic generating development as defined by Transport Assessment Guidelines (2014) published by the NRA/TII. The Planning Authority may also require such assessments where a particular development may have a significant impact on the county road network. All such statements should be prepared in accordance with the Traffic and Transport Assessment Guidelines (2014).</p> <p>A Workplace Travel Plan or Mobility Management Plan outlines a series of measures to encourage sustainable travel modes and reduce car borne traffic</p>
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within a development. Initiatives might include proposals to encourage cycling and walking, carsharing (including car clubs), carpooling, flexible working hours, cycling and public transport use. Workplace Travel Plans are required for larger sized developments as defined in Chapter 2 of the Achieving Effective Workplace Travel Plans - Guidance for Local Authorities (NTA, 2013). Travel plans should be prepared in accordance with this document.

LANDSCAPING

DM53 Landscaping plans A detailed landscaping plan for hard and soft landscaping will generally be required for each development.

Landscaping Plans should provide for:

- 1) The creation of a coherent landscaping scheme appropriate to the type and scale of development and its surroundings
- 2) The creation of paths through significant areas of open space
- 3) The retention of any existing valuable features including trees, hedgerows, ponds, and areas of wildlife or ecological value
- 4) The use of native trees, shrubs and plants in the planting schedules, planting schedules which include invasive species will not be accepted (a schedule of invasive species and native plants are included in Appendix 8). Preferred native deciduous tree species to be used are hawthorn, whitethorn, rowan, ash, oak, hazel, sycamore and holly. Beech (*fagus sylvatica*) shall not be used.
- 5) The linking up of site landscaping with adjacent open spaces, green spaces, foot or cycle paths; or linking up site landscaping with adjacent linear landscape features such as lines of trees or hedgerows
- 6) The use of planting belts to absorb developments into the landscape, taking account of important views
- 7) The creation of a pleasant environment for users, including sunny and shady areas.
- 8) The screening of development from neighbouring properties and from public roads for privacy
- 9) Earthen berms in combination with planting belts are favoured to screen commercial developments such as quarries, waste disposal facilities or other large developments from the surrounding landscape.

DM54 Hedgerows Hedgerows define rural landscapes and are valuable for terrestrial forms of wildlife. They are particularly important for birds and woodland plants. They provide commuting and feeding corridors for bats. Where they are found in settlements they are significant habitats and corridors for biodiversity.

Good hedgerows can easily be identified by their structure and location in the

landscape. Best quality hedgerows will have all the following characteristics:

- i. A few mature trees,
- ii. A three tier structure (with trees, shrubs and herbs)
- iii. Few gaps and
- iv. Will not have been cut into a box shape. Shrubs (almost always) include hawthorn, blackthorn or and possibly dog rose.
- v. The herb layer is found under the shrub layer. It should form a strip of tall grassland along the margin of the hedgerow.

In dealing with applications for new developments, the Planning Authority will have regard to the following:

- i. Retention of a connected network of good quality hedgerows;
- ii. The value of hedgerows as green infrastructure (landscape, biodiversity, shelter, supporting services to agriculture/horticulture;
- iii. The avoidance of the unnecessary removal of hedgerows;
- iv. If it is necessary to remove a hedgerow, developers should be reminded of their obligations under the Wildlife Acts not to remove or interfere with them during the bird nesting season, between March 1st and 31st August. Also, replacement or compensatory planting of hedgerows using indigenous species such as whitethorn or blackthorn only will be required;
- v. Proposals to integrate hedgerows into the layout of a new linear feature such as a road/ pedestrian/cycle track;
- vi. Depending on the potential risks of anti-social activity or requirements for a more garden look the margins of these new hedgerows/woodlands/new shrubberies could be planted with colourful non natives (for amenity) or spiny shrubs to deter vandals.
By occasionally mowing the grass margin of hedgerows (or part of it), they will look managed. As litter will accumulate in long grass along their margins arrangements will have to be made to carry out regular clean ups;
- vii. Encouragement should be given to develop a new linear feature of biodiversity value such as a hedgerow or dry stone wall, particularly if this type of habitat is found adjacent to the development site;
- viii. The use of native tree and shrub species similar to those found in adjacent hedgerows in new or replacement hedgerows;
- ix. The wholesale removal of hedgerows to facilitate the achievement of adequate sightline visibility for one-off houses in the countryside will not be encouraged.

WATER MANAGEMENT

DM55	Flood Risk Assessments	Flood risk management will be carried out in accordance with the <i>Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities, Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (2009)</i> . Development proposals on lands that may be at risk of flooding should be subject to a flood risk assessment, prepared by a suitably qualified person, in accordance with the guidelines.
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		Proposals for minor development to existing buildings in areas of flood risk (e.g. extensions or change of use) should include a flood risk assessment of appropriate detail.
DM56	Sustainable Drainage Systems	<p>Detailed proposals for Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) should be submitted which demonstrate that the development would not result in surface water discharges affecting neighbouring lands without agreement and/or the public road.</p> <p>The following should be taken into consideration:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Store rainwater for later use (rainwater harvesting); 2) Use infiltration techniques such as porous hard surfaces, soft landscaping and green roofs; 3) Attenuate rainwater in ponds, swales or open water features for gradual release; 4) Attenuate rainwater by storing in tanks or sealed water features for gradual release; 5) Discharge into storm water collection system or watercourse (subject to license) having regard to capacity and quality of discharge; 6) Soakaways are suitable for single family dwelling houses but are not suitable for urban areas.
CONSERVATION AND ARCHAEOLOGY		
DM57	Protected Structures	<p>The following information is required to be submitted with respect to applications for permission for restoration, refurbishment, demolition development or change of use of protected structures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An Architectural Assessment Report as per the <i>Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities</i> (2011) Department of the Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht carried out by a suitably qualified person; • A comprehensive schedule of proposed work that follows the guidelines set out in the <i>Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities</i> (2011) Department of the Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht.
DM58	Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs)	<p>The following information is required to be submitted with respect to applications for permission for restoration, refurbishment, demolition development or change of use of buildings /structures with Architectural Conservation Areas (ACA):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An Architectural Assessment Report as per the <i>Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities</i> (2011) Department of the

		<p><i>Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht</i>, carried out by a suitably qualified person;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A comprehensive schedule of proposed work that follows the guidelines set out in the <i>Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities</i>” (2011) Department of the Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht.
DM59	Archaeological investigations	<p>In general the following guidelines will apply where developments may have an impact on the county’s archaeological record:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The archaeological remains of potentially significant sites within the Zone of Archaeological Potential will be preserved or investigated; 2. 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; 3. 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; 4. 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; 5. Such development shall be assessed in the context of the following documents:- Accord with the Framework and Principles for the Protection of Archaeological Heritage (DoAHG, 1999). The National Monuments Acts 1934-1994. Have regard to Heritage Council’s Archaeology and Archaeology and Development Guidelines for Good Practice for Developers (2000).
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS		
DM60	Major Accident Directive, Seveso II	<p>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:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. The siting of new establishments. ii. Modifications to existing establishments. iii. 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.

DM61	Environmental Impact	<p>Certain developments may require the submission of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in accordance with the provision of Schedule 5 and 7 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended).</p> <p>The assessment must include an examination, analysis and evaluation and it must identify, describe and assess in an appropriate manner, in light of each individual case and in accordance with Articles 4 to 11 of the EIA Directive, the direct and indirect effects of a proposed development on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) human beings, flora and fauna, (b) soil, water, air, climate and the landscape (c) material assets and the cultural heritage, and (d) the interaction between the factors mentioned in paragraphs (a), (b) and (c). <p>The Planning Authority will have regard to the Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála on carrying out Environmental Impact Assessments (DECLG, 2013) and any updated version of these Guidelines when assessing relevant cases.</p>
DM62	Natura 2000 sites	<p>The Council will ensure that any plan or project and any associated works, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, are subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening to ensure there are no likely significant effects on the integrity (defined by the structure and function) of any Natura 2000 site(s) and that the requirements of Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the EU Habitats Directive are fully satisfied.</p> <p>Where this plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site it shall be subject to Appropriate Assessment.</p> <p>The plan or project will proceed only after it has been ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site or where in the absence of alternative solutions, the plan/project is deemed imperative for reasons of overriding public interest, all in accordance with the provisions of article 6(3) and 6(4) of the EU Habitats Directive.</p>
MISCELLANEOUS		
DM63	Development contributions for parking, sanitary Services and amenity	<p>The details and basis for the determination of the contributions are set out in a Development Contribution Scheme 2013-2017 or any subsequent schemes adopted thereafter in accordance with the provision of section 48 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).</p>

DM64	Bond/financial security	Depending on the nature of the development, the Council may require, as a condition of planning permission, the lodgement of financial security to ensure that the permitted development is satisfactorily completed. The amount of the security will be determined by the Council. The security will be held by the Council until all works are satisfactorily completed to the exacting standards of the Council, or until the development is taken in charge by the Council.
DM65	Undergrounding and concealing of services	In new housing and in other forms of urban development, all services including E.S.B, telephone and television cables shall be <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
DM66	Distances from wastewater treatment plants	Proposals to develop in close proximity to existing or proposed sewerage treatment plants and pumping stations will be assessed having regard to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The nature of the effluent being treated; 2) Prevailing wind direction; 3) Noise; 4) Type of treatment process employed; 5) Sludge treatment; 6) Visibility and screening of treatment plant; 7) Development will not be allowed within 100m of a treatment works or 25m of a pumping station. This distance may be increased if significant environmental issues are likely to arise and will be judged on a site by site basis. 8) The buffer area may be used to fulfil open space requirements.
DM67	Telecommunications	To facilitate the evaluation of development proposals for the erection of antennae and support structures, applicants/developers/operators will be required to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Submit a reasoned justification as to the need for the particular development at the proposed location in the context of the operators overall Plans to develop a network in County Laois and strive to reduce the number of telecommunication structures by ensuring that Com Reg's Code of Conduct is implemented. 2) Indicate what other sites or locations in the County were considered; 3) Submit evidence of consultations, if any, with other operators with regard to the sharing of sites and/or support structures;

- 4) Where masts are located in areas of high amenity, landscapes of exceptional or high value or international or national importance and high sensitivity as indicated in the Landscape Character Assessment, there shall be a presumption to provide a "Landscape Impact Report" to allow proper assessment of the visual impact. Surrogate (coniferous trees) shall be considered.
- 5) Masts will only be permitted if supported by an acceptable Visual Impact Report.
- 6) Furnish a statement of compliance with the International Radiation Protection Association (IRPA) Guidelines (Health Physics, Vol. 54, No. 1(Jan) 1988) or the equivalent European Standard 50166-2 which has been conditioned by the licensing arrangements with the Department of Transport, Energy and Communications;
- 7) Cumulative effect of dishes in the area should be considered.
- 8) Furnish evidence that an installation of the type applied for complies with the above Guidelines.
- 9) Cables and wire connections shall be located underground where feasible.
- 10) Where appropriate, masts, antennae and fencing should be in harmony with their surroundings and should be of dull or neutral sky grey colour so as to be less visually obtrusive. Green or black is the preferred colour at ground level.
- 11) Subject to visual and landscape considerations, support structures will normally be required to be designed to facilitate the attachment of additional antennae to facilitate co-location. The number of ancillary buildings/containers shall be kept to the minimum and the need for each structure must be clearly justified. They should be located in accordance with the provisions of the DoECLG Guidelines 1996 (or as may be amended).
- 12) Restoration plans shall be submitted with the application for when antennae and their support structures are no longer being used and no new user has been identified.

ACCESSIBILITY

DM68	Accessibility for developments (residential, commercial, community)	<p>The Council will require that the design of buildings and the layout of developments incorporate measures to ensure accessibility.</p> <p>Access requirements for parents and carers, people with disabilities, the elderly and others who may be temporarily impaired must be incorporated into the design of buildings, public spaces, car parking, footpaths and general facilities and services.</p> <p>Universal design will be encouraged in all new developments. Developers must have regard to or comply with (as appropriate) the following criteria in the preparation of development proposals:</p>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Part M of the Building Regulations and the requirement for Disability Access Certificates (DACs); ii. Buildings for Everyone: A Universal Design Approach (National Disability Authority, 2012); iii. Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas: Guidelines for Planning Authorities and its companion document Urban Design Manual (DEHLG, 2008); iv. Applications for significant development should be accompanied by an Access Statement carried out in accordance with Appendix 6 of Buildings for Everyone: A Universal Design Approach (National Disability Authority, 2012).
DM69	Aggregate extraction, processing and associated processes	<p>Applications for new development for aggregate extraction, processing and associated processes,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Have regard to the Landscape Character Assessment / Sensitivity Rating and its recommendations b) Include screening proposals c) Submit a detailed landscape and visual assessment must be submitted with proposals and will be used to determine the extent of the area of visual influence. The Planning Authority will impose strict conditions on planning permissions requiring appropriate mitigation measures to reduce impacts on the surrounding area. d) require that development is phased and each phase is rehabilitated to the highest possible standards before the next phase is commenced and the applicant must submit a detailed restoration programme on the manner and timing of restoration and aftercare/re-use e) Carry out processing and storage of extractive aggregates in a manner which minimises the impact on the natural environment. f) Recognise that the aggregates and concrete products industry have a particularly sensitive role in relation to the environment and any development of aggregate extraction, processing, delivery and associated concrete production must be carried out in a manner which minimises adverse effects on the environment and has due regard for visual amenities. g) Provide details and plans of any other buildings, plant and structures to be erected.