



# Draft Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2024 – 2030

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## SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

This draft Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2024– 2030 (Draft LAP) has been prepared in accordance with the requirements and provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (hereafter referred to as ‘the Act’).

The Draft LAP sets out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of Portlaoise, in the context of the Laois County Development Plan 2021 – 2027 and the Eastern and Midland Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy 2019 – 2031. The Draft LAP has also been informed by Ministerial Guidelines issued pursuant to Section 28 of the Act, together with EU requirements regarding Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA).

The Draft LAP comprises a written statement and accompanying maps. The written statement shall take precedence over the map should any discrepancy arise. In the full interpretation of all objectives for Portlaoise, it is essential that both the County Development Plan (CDP) and the Draft Local Area Plan are read together. Where conflicting objectives arise between the two, the objectives of the former shall take precedence.

It should be noted that the general development management standards applicable to the plan area are included in the CDP, while policies and objectives that are specific to Portlaoise are included in the Draft LAP.

### 1.2 Town Centre Action Plan

Since 2017, the Portlaoise Town Team has played a key role in the regeneration and redevelopment of Portlaoise Town. Over that period, the Town Team has advised, led and enabled multiple Tidy Town’s projects, initiatives with local business groups, business supports, Low Carbon Town projects, uncovering and telling the story of local history and heritage, street art and public realm enhancements. The work of the Town Team is dispersed to various sub-groups to deliver the objectives of the Portlaoise Town Team Action Plan.

The *Portlaoise Town Team Action Plan 2023-2026*, in existence since 2017 and revised in 2023, has been developed within the framework of the “Town Centre First” policy, published by the Government in February 2022. This policy is a key element of the Programme for Government as it recognises the importance of Towns as a focus for enabling the social, economic and environmental development of our communities and the input of a collaborative Town Team in achieving the actions set out.

The Town Team Action Plan is also substantially informed by *2040 And Beyond – A Vision for Portlaoise* which re-examines and provides a framework for re-purposing the Town Centre.

### 1.3. Funding

One of the key functions of this Draft LAP is to provide a framework that will inform and support proposals and bids for funding and investment at regional and national level, in particular in relation to Urban Regeneration Development under the URDF Fund.

In doing this, the Draft LAP will be supported by the Laois Local Economic and Community Plan 2023-2028 and the Laois LEADER Local Development Strategy.

There are many public national investment/funding programmes, a non-exhaustive summary of these is set out below, noting that that these may change or be updated over the lifetime of the Draft LAP.

<b>Funding Programme</b>
Town Centre First Funding
Croi Conaithe
European Regional Development Fund
Historic Towns Initiative
Historic Structures Fund
Built Heritage Capital Grant
Destination Towns Initiative
Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund
Serviced Sites Fund
Repair & Lease Scheme
Buy & Renew Scheme
Sustainable Mobility Investment Programme
Climate Action Fund

## SECTION 2. PLAN COMPOSITION

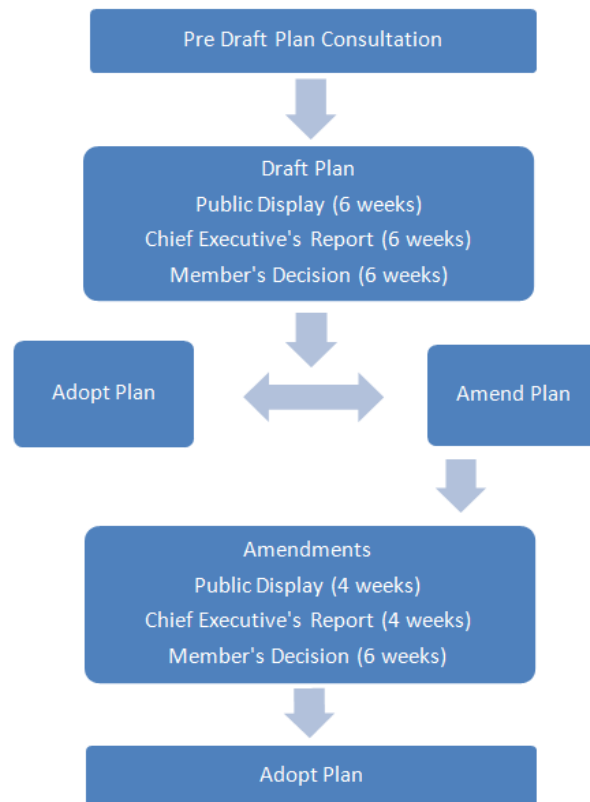
### 2.1 Legislative Requirements

Section 19 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) requires that a Local Area Plan be prepared in respect of an area which –

- (i) is designated as a town in the most recent census of population, other than a town designated as a suburb or environs in that census,
- (ii) has a population in excess of 5,000, and
- (iii) is situated within the functional area of a Planning Authority which is a County Council.

Census 2022 confirmed that Portlaoise has a total population of 23,494, an increase of 6.5% from Census 2016 when it was 22,050.

A Local Area Plan is therefore statutorily required for Portlaoise. Section 20 of the Act sets out the process for the making of a Local Area Plan as illustrated in the following diagram:



**Figure 1: LAP Process**



In accordance with Sections 19 and 28 of the Act, the Draft LAP is subject to the following environmental considerations:

## 2.2 Strategic Environmental Assessment

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is required in accordance with the SEA Directive (DIR 2001/42/EC). SEA is a formal, systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan, policy or programme.

SEA is mandatory for plans for areas with a population of 5,000 or more and is therefore required for the Draft LAP.

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

CAAS Limited Environmental Consultants have been appointed by Laois County Council to undertake the SEA as part of the preparation of the Draft LAP. In this regard, an SEA Environmental Report has been prepared informing the likely environmental impacts of implementing the policies and objectives of the plan and integrating relevant environmental considerations into the plan.

The SEA Environmental Report (SEA ER) accompanies this Draft LAP. Mitigation measures recommended in the SEA ER have been incorporated into the Draft LAP. This report sets out the likely environmental consequences of decisions regarding the location and type of developments within the plan area, mitigation measures to offset potential adverse effects of the plan and monitoring proposals.

## 2.3 Appropriate Assessment

Appropriate Assessment (AA) is required in accordance with Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the EU Habitats Directive (DIR 92/43/EEC).

Appropriate Assessment is a focused and detailed impact assessment of the implications of the plan or project, alone and in combination with other plans and projects, on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site in view of its conservation objectives.

CAAS Limited Environmental Consultants have also been appointed by Laois County Council to undertake Appropriate Assessment as part of the preparation of the Draft LAP.

## 2.4 Local Transport Plan

As part of the requirement for an evidence-based approach to planning, as set out in the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region, a Local Transport Plan (LTP) has been prepared to inform the drafting of the LAP.

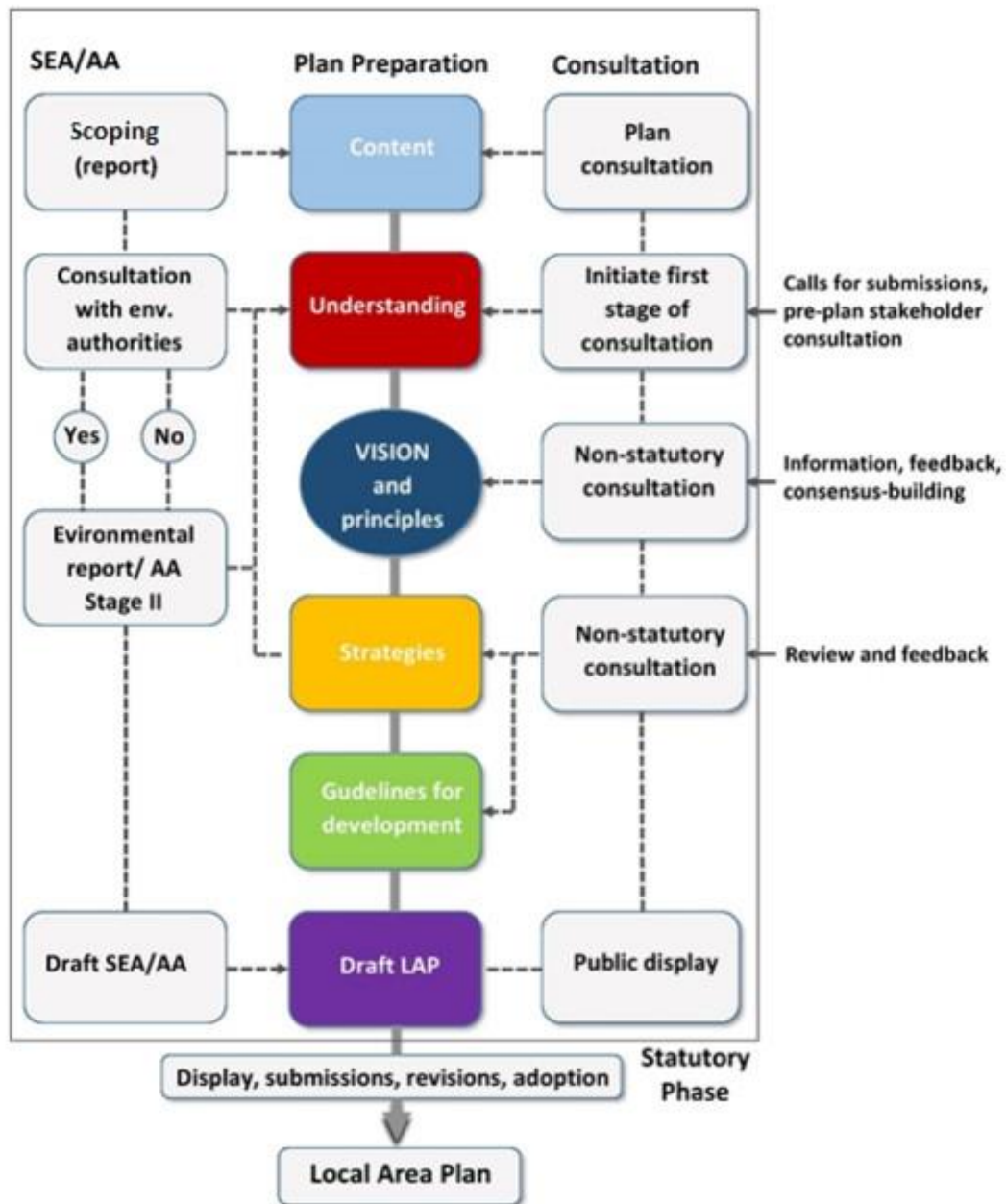
The ABTA identifies the appropriate transport solutions for the Portlaoise urban area to ensure the integration of land use and transport planning and that policy for increasing public transport and active travel mode share are realised. This is included in Appendix A of this plan with the main findings incorporated by way of policy objectives.

## 2.5 Other Plans & Guidelines

The Draft LAP has been prepared having regard to national, regional and local policy documents, in addition to Guidelines issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), including the following:

- Project Ireland 2040
- Climate Action Plan 2023
- National Development Plan 2021-2030
- National Planning Framework 2018
- Eastern and Midland Region Spatial & Economic Strategy 2019-2031
- Laois County Development Plan 2021 – 2027
- Laois Local Economic and Community Plan 2023 – 2028
- Housing for All-a New Housing Plan for Ireland 2021
- Building on Recovery: Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2016 - 2021
- Laois Heritage and Biodiversity Strategy 2021 – 2026
- Town Centre First: A Policy Approach for Irish Towns 2022
- Local Area Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2013
- Manual for Local Area Plans 2013
- National Climate Change Adaptation Framework; Building Resilience to Climate Change 2012
- Our Sustainable Future, A Framework for Sustainable Development for Ireland 2012
- Government Policy Statement on the Strategic Importance of Transmission and Other Energy Infrastructure 2012
- Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2012
- National Broadband Plan 2012
- National Renewable Energy Action Plan 2010
- Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2009
- Smarter Travel, A Sustainable Transport Future 2009 - 2020
- National Energy Efficiency Action Plan 2009 - 2020
- National Cycle Policy Framework
- Water Services Strategic Plan, A Plan for the Future of Water Services

- Water Supply Project Eastern & Midlands Region
- Eastern and South-Eastern River Basin Management Plan 2009 - 2015
- Architectural Heritage Protection – Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2011
- Actions for Biodiversity – Ireland’s National Biodiversity Plan 2011-2016
- Framework and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage 1999
- Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities
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## Figure 2: LAP Process

### 2.6 The Process to Date

The pre-draft public consultation stage of the draft Local Area Plan took place over a four-week period from 18<sup>th</sup> November 2022 through 16<sup>th</sup> December 2022 inclusive. The Council also notified the prescribed bodies, Elected Members, relevant stakeholders, the Public Participation Network and members of the Planning Strategic Policy Committee of the commencement of the review process.

A notice was published in the Leinster Express newspaper edition and on social media on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2022 commencing the review of the Portlaoise Local Area Plan and inviting submissions to a published issues paper. A public information session on the review process was facilitated by Planning Staff of Laois County Council at its offices on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022.

A dedicated page on the consultation portal ([consult.laois.ie](http://consult.laois.ie)) was established to invite submissions at the pre-draft stage of the preparation of the Local Area Plan. Submissions to the pre-draft consultation stage were facilitated through the dedicated online consultation portal, by email or post to the local authority.

### 2.7. Overview of Issues and Challenges

A non-statutory Chief Executives report on the issues arising during the pre-draft consultation period was prepared and the members were briefed on its content and recommendations.

A total of fifteen submissions were received during the pre-draft consultation period.

The submissions, some of which are inter-linked, covered a wide range of topics including:

- land use-zoning,
- provision of physical and social infrastructure,
- retailing,
- nature conservation, climate change and flood risk assessment and
- support for a methodical and evidence-based approach to land-use zoning and settlement planning which requires a rational assessment of zoned land requirements based on such criteria as regional population targets, the sequential approach, flood risk assessment, infrastructure capacity, protection of natural habitats and guidance from the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government as issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 as amended.



Portlaoise is the largest source of non-agricultural employment within the county and is dominated by the services sector with employment in central (Department of Agriculture) and local government, the E.S.B., Eir, An Post, education and the Health Service Executive.

The manufacturing sector has expanded in recent years, albeit from a relatively low base. This is particularly evident in the J17 National Enterprise Park, a 121 hectares Local Authority promoted enterprise zone at Togher in the southwestern outskirts of the town.

Due in part to its excellent communications and linkages to the Greater Dublin area, Portlaoise has experienced significant urbanisation and population growth since the late 1980s.

This has in turn placed an even greater demand on the town's infrastructure, in particular education, housing, recreational amenities and services.

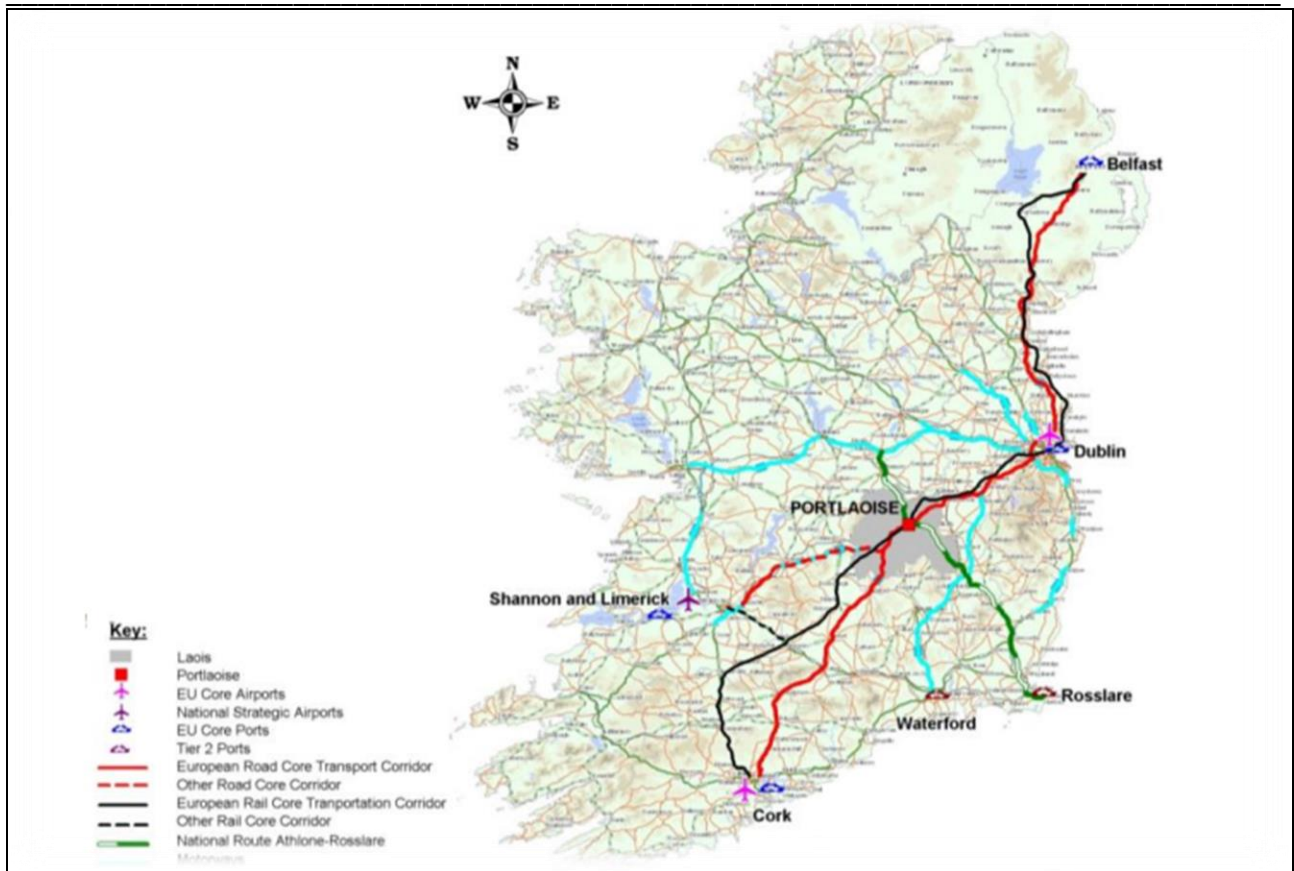
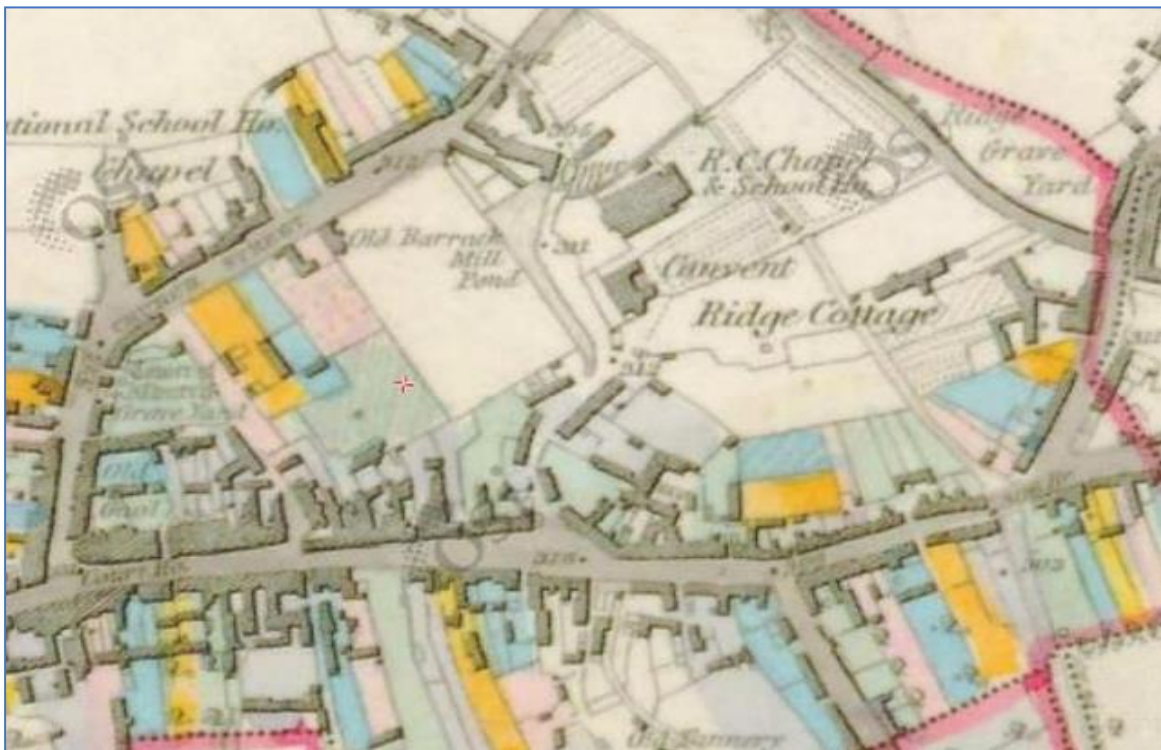


Figure 4: Portlaoise in regional and national context

### 3.2 History of Portlaoise

The present town grew around the old fort, the construction of which commenced in 1548 under the supervision of Lord Deputy Sir Edward Bellingham, who was anxious to fortify Leix following his repression of the natives and the exiling of their chieftains earlier in the year. The fort was built primarily for military and political purposes. The fort is situated on rising ground southeast of the river Triogue and with the Esker ridge forming a natural defensive barricade to the east, made it of strategic military importance. In 1570 a charter of Queen Elizabeth I raised the town of Maryborough to the rank of Borough.

In 1922 the town was renamed Portlaoise.



**Figure 5: Ordnance Survey First Edition, 1839**

### 3.3 Urban Form

The urban form of the town is dominated by a linear Main Street, terminated on each end by a Square, Market Square to the west and Lower Square to the east. The construction of the inner relief road James Fintan Lalor Avenue facilitated the southern expansion and development of the town.

The opening of Portlaoise By-Pass in 1997 has had a significant effect on the physical environment and future development of the town with 65% of through traffic removed.



In addition, travel time to Dublin was reduced to less than an hour with the opening of the Heath-Mayfield section of motorway in 2004.

The historical core of the town is focused on a zone of archaeological interest around Church Street and Church Avenue wherein lies the Courthouse and the remaining portions of the Fort Protector.



*Figure 6: Portlaoise town core*

The town centre area contains a large number of Protected Structures and is designated as an Architectural Conservation Area, reflecting its special architectural interest.

The Built Heritage of the town is discussed in further detail in Chapter 13. Built Heritage and Chapter 14. Biodiversity & Natural Heritage of the draft LAP.

Portlaoise is constrained to the east and northeast by the Portlaoise Aquifer Protection Zone, which provides the public water supply for the greater Portlaoise and Mountmellick areas.

The motorway provides a physical boundary to the south-east and south. The Dublin/Cork Railway line intersects the town in a North/East-South/West direction.



### 3.4 Spatial Planning Policy

The Irish spatial planning hierarchy is set out in the following diagram:



**Figure 7: Planning Hierarchy**

### 3.5 Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework

“Project Ireland 2040” is the Government’s overarching policy initiative to make Ireland a better country for all of us, a country that reflects the best of who we are and what we aspire to be. Project Ireland 2040 is informed by the Programme for a Partnership Government 2016, which recognizes that economic and social progress go hand in hand and is made up of the “Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework” (NPF) and the “National Development Plan 2018-2027” (NDP).

The NPF in conjunction with the NDP is the Government’s plan to cater for the extra one million people that will be living in Ireland, the additional two thirds of a million people working in Ireland and the half a million extra homes needed in Ireland by 2040.

Project Ireland 2040 seeks to achieve ten strategic outcomes, building around the overarching themes of wellbeing, equality and opportunity. The ten shared National Strategic Outcomes and Priorities of the National Development Plan will ensure a consistent approach between planning objectives under the NPF and investment commitments under the NDP.



**Figure 8: National Strategic Outcomes**

As a strategic development framework “Project Ireland 2040” sets the long-term context for the country’s physical development and associated progress in economic, social and environmental terms and in an island, European and Global context. “Project Ireland 2040” will be followed and underpinned by supporting policies and actions at sectoral, regional and local levels.

*3.5.1 Urban Regeneration and Development Fund*

The URDF was established under **Project Ireland 2040** to support more compact and sustainable development, through the regeneration and rejuvenation of Irelands cities and large towns, in line with the objectives of the National Planning Framework and National Development Plan. This will enable a greater proportion of residential and mixed-use development to be delivered within the existing urban footprints ensuring they become attractive and vibrant places in which people choose to live and work, as well as to invest in and visit.

Launched as part of the NDP 2018-2027 and with an investment of €2 billion, the revised NDP, published in 2021, extended the fund to 2030.

Under the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, Portlaoise has received €18.06 million in funding for various Call 1 and Call 2 projects. In 2023, under Call 3, Laois County Council received funding of €2m for the reuse of vacant and derelict sites within Portlaoise Town Centre.

### *3.5.2 Regeneration Demonstration Project Portlaoise*

The aim of this project was to focus on regenerating the original town centre and main street areas and how they related to the expanded town, with a view to creating more attractive, desirable places that people want to live and spend time in. The Demonstration Project, the NPF stated was to initiate community and locally led urban design and renewal initiative.

Under Call 1 and 2 of the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, investment was received to drive the development of the Cultural quarter and low carbon town initiatives in conjunction with the Portlaoise Town Team, wider community and local businesses.

This has implemented the vision for the centre of Portlaoise set out in **2040 And Beyond – A Vision for Portlaoise** and aligns with the project as outlined in the NPF, to show how quality planning, urban design and implementation can create a rejuvenated town.

### *3.5.3 Other Strategic Infrastructure Identified for Portlaoise*

*The following projects were outlined for investment in the National Development Plan:*

*Transport, Regional and Local Roads:*

- Portlaoise Southern Distributor Road - **completed in 2020.**

*Health:*

- Mental Health project in Portlaoise for a 40 bed Residential Unit.

*Courts Service:*

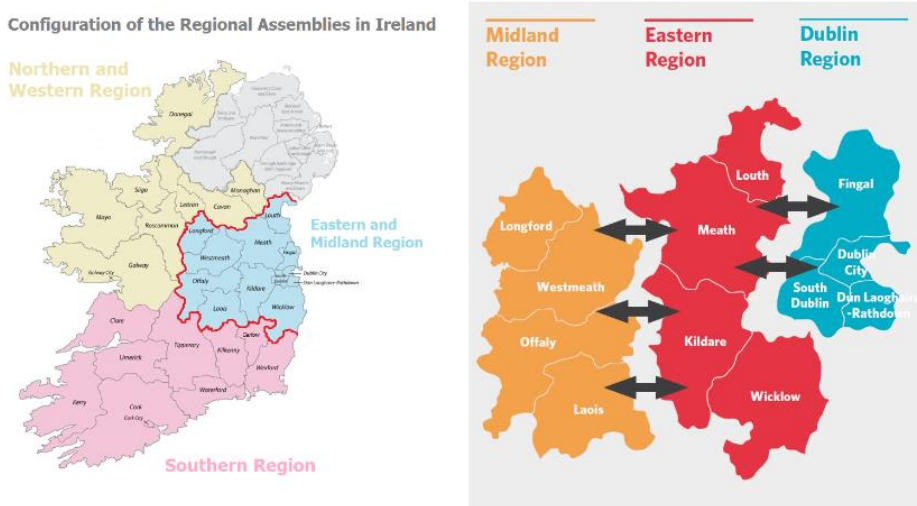
- Provision of a new or refurbished Courthouse for Portlaoise - **A site has been selected and acquired.**

*Prison Service:*

- Modernisation or replacement of the historic E Block in Portlaoise Prison.

## 3.6 Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy

Laois forms part of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) along with eleven other counties. This area further comprises three Strategic Planning Areas with counties Offaly, Laois, Westmeath and Longford forming part of the Midland Strategic Planning Area.



**Figure 9: Eastern and Midland Region**

EMRA adopted the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) in 2019 which identified the region’s key strategic assets, opportunities and challenges and sets out policy responses to ensure that people’s needs such as access to housing, jobs, ease of travel and overall well-being are met, up to 2030 and beyond.

At this strategic level it provides a framework for investment to better manage spatial planning and economic development throughout the Region.

Similar to the NPF, the RSES contains 16 Regional Strategic Outcomes and a suite of Regional Policy Objectives which are underpinned by the principles of Healthy Placemaking, Climate Action and Economic Opportunity, of which the draft Local Area Plan is statutorily required to be aligned with.

### 3.7 Integrating Climate Action into the Portlaoise LAP

Climate Action is now a key function of local government. Through its role in setting out the strategic spatial framework for the future development of the Town, the Draft Local Area Plan supports wider local and central government actions in addressing maximum co-ordination between the County Development Plan and other climate related policies and programmes.

The Draft LAP will be assessed against its impact on the receiving environment through the SEA and AA processes. The Plan aims to facilitate a holistic approach to ensuring Climate Action is at the forefront of all future development within the town, with policies and objectives in each

chapter crafted in a manner which contributes significantly towards addressing climate change and reducing the towns carbon emissions in a meaningful and tangible way.

One of the cross-cutting principles of this Draft LAP is to support a transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society, a necessary measure that is supported by the legislative and policy framework relating to climate action.

The Draft LAP seeks to simultaneously address issues of climate change, energy supply and sustainability through the adoption and implementation of policy at a local level.

### 3.8 Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy “2040 And Beyond: A Vision for Portlaoise”

In addition to the above, the “Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy “2040 And Beyond: A Vision For Portlaoise” [referred to as the Public Realm Strategy hereafter] sets out the following vision for the future development of Portlaoise town centre.

*“Portlaoise Town Centre will become a place for its people, where residents, workers and visitors alike will come to enjoy a place that is inclusive, accessible and truly sustainable from a social, economic and environmental perspective. It will be an exemplar town centre where businesses thrive and the pride of the population is reflected in public spaces.”*

In order to deliver on this Vision for Portlaoise Town Centre, a number of key actions will be required to support the following outcomes:

- The Creation of a Low Carbon Town Centre
- The Delivery of a Walkable Town Centre
- The Greening of Portlaoise Town Centre
- Exposure of Cultural Heritage within Portlaoise Town Centre
- Exposure of the River Triogue as a Pedestrian / Cycling Route
- The Reconnection of the Old and New Town
- Accommodating Living in Portlaoise Town Centre
- Provision for Working in Portlaoise Town Centre.

The town has also been designated Ireland’s first low carbon town which is supported by RPO 4.72 of the RSES and which was designated as a decarbonisation zone in 2021.

The aim of the Low Carbon Town / decarbonisation zone is to reduce the impact of the car on the public realm, encourage a shift to more sustainable transport modes, improve the occupancy, mix and vitality of uses within the town centre and develop the Triogue River Blueway as a key environmental and amenity objective and increase biodiversity

The Council has supported the opening of a Low Carbon Centre of Excellence [the Cube], assisting in attracting and developing companies with a low Carbon focus.



The development of Portlaoise over the lifetime of this plan is primarily focused on the following:

- Consolidation and regeneration of the town centre,
- Active travel,
- Reduced car dependency,
- Protection of natural and built heritage assets,
- Expansion of community and social services and
- Employment retention, diversification and creation.

The overarching aim of the Public Realm Strategy is to formalise a shared vision to focus on public spaces, buildings and walkways in a way that acknowledges the unique characteristics and heritage assets that the Town possesses and provides the foundation for the future development of a thriving town centre.

This will be achieved through a number of interventions including:

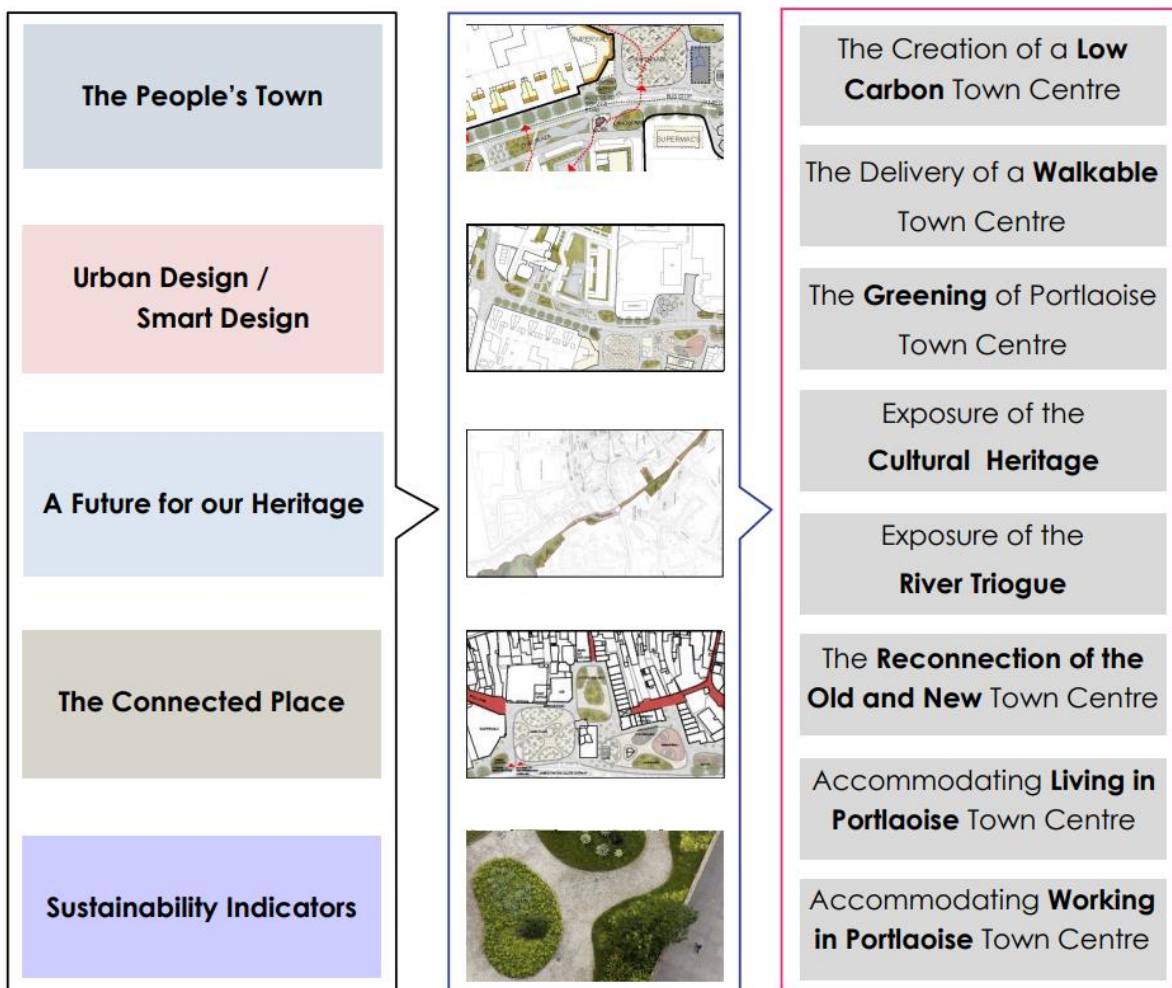


Figure 10: Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy 2040 And Beyond: A Vision for Portlaoise

3.9 Development Vision & Strategy

**Strategic Vision:**

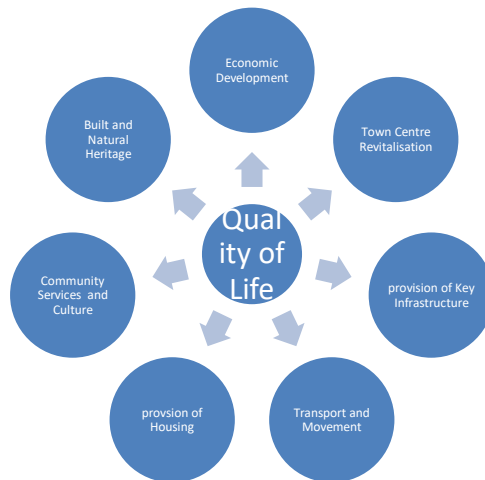
*“To fulfil the role as Key Town, by providing for low carbon, sustainable and consolidated growth in a coherent spatial manner, protecting and maximising opportunities presented by the unique natural and built environment for green and public modes of transport, recreation and employment opportunities, while delivering an exemplar quality of life for residents”.*

The Draft Local Area Plan for Portlaoise is underpinned by a strategic vision which is intended to guide the future growth of the town over the 6-year period 2024-2030. The objectives outlined below combine to form a coherent development strategy to 2030 and beyond. These goals cover economic, social, community and environmental dimensions.

The strategic vision recognises the potential of Portlaoise to align with the key growth objectives set out in higher order spatial plans and to take advantage of the strategic location of the town both regionally and nationally. Delivering on these objectives will result in an enhanced quality of life for all citizens.

Portlaoise will become a place where residents, workers and visitors alike will come to enjoy a place that is inclusive, accessible and sustainable from a social, economic and environmental perspective.

The Draft LAP and overall vision for Portlaoise is underpinned by a number of interlinked strategic aims as illustrated in the diagram below. These interlinked strategic aims will be realised through the chapters of the plan.



**Figure 11: Strategic Aims**

3.10 Policies

Planning and Development Policies	
<b>It is the policy of the Council to:</b>	
<b>PCP 1</b>	<i>Support the continued growth and sustainable development of Portlaoise to act as a growth driver in the region and to fulfil its role as a Key Town as outlined in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019;</i>
<b>PCP 2</b>	<i>Direct population into the Key Town to ensure that population growth is appropriate in scale with its identified role in the Regional and County Settlement Hierarchy;</i>
<b>PCP 3</b>	<i>Require sustainable, compact, sequential growth in Portlaoise by consolidating the built-up footprint with a focus on the redevelopment and regeneration of infill and brownfield sites;</i>
<b>PCP 4</b>	<i>Apply increased residential densities where appropriate having regard to Sustainable Residential Developments in Urban Areas (2009) and apply appropriate development management measures in ensuring growth is appropriate and in compliance with the RSES 2019;</i>
<b>PCP 5</b>	<i>Implement the actions of the ‘Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy “2040 And Beyond: A Vision for Portlaoise’ to improve the character of the town of Portlaoise;</i>
<b>PCP 6</b>	<i>Support and facilitate the transition of Portlaoise to a low carbon centre of excellence in accordance with RPO 4.72 of the RSES.</i>
<b>PCP 7</b>	<i>Protect, conserve and enhance the built, natural and cultural environment, through promoting awareness, utilising relevant heritage legislation and promoting good quality urban design;</i>
<b>PCP 8</b>	<i>Require the preparation and assessment of all planning applications in the plan area to have regard to the information, data and requirements of the Appropriate Assessment Natura Impact Report and SEA Environmental Report;</i>
<b>PCP 9</b>	<i>Require projects to be fully informed by ecological and environmental constraints at the earliest stage of project planning and any necessary assessment to be</i>

	<i>undertaken, including assessments of disturbance to habitats and species, where required.</i>
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### 3.11 Objectives

Planning and Development Objectives	
<b>It is the objective of the Council to:</b>	
<b>PCO 1</b>	<i>To support and facilitate sustainable intensification and consolidation of the town centre and in established residential areas;</i>
<b>PCO 2</b>	<i>To promote balanced economic development and employment ensuring a diverse range of economic sectors are developed and supported;</i>
<b>PCO 3</b>	<i>To promote and support the development of an enterprise and employment campus at National Enterprise Park, Togher Area. Development shall be plan led and subject to a masterplan;</i>
<b>PCO 4</b>	<i>To support and facilitate development on zoned land based on the policies and objectives of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027;</i>
<b>PCO 5</b>	<i>To focus new residential development into brownfield sites;</i>
<b>PCO 6</b>	<i>To protect, conserve and enhance the built, natural and cultural environment, through promoting awareness, utilising relevant heritage legislation and promoting good quality urban design;</i>
<b>PCO 7</b>	<i>To require the preparation and assessment of all planning applications in the plan area to have regard to the information, data and requirements of the Appropriate Assessment Natura Impact Report and SEA Environmental Report;</i>
<b>PCO 8</b>	<i>To require projects to be fully informed by ecological and environmental constraints at the earliest stage of project planning and any necessary assessment to be undertaken, including assessments of disturbance to habitats and species, where required.</i>

## SECTION 4. COMPLIANCE WITH THE COUNTY CORE STRATEGY

**Strategic Aim: Provide for the Growth of Portlaoise in Line with the National Planning Framework / Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) and Core Strategy for County Laois.**

The Core Strategy for County Laois is set out under Section 2 of the Laois County Development Plan 2021 – 2027. Section 19 (2) of the Act requires that:

*A Local Area Plan shall be consistent with the objectives of the Development Plan, its Core Strategy, and any Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy that apply to the area of the plan...”*

### 4.1 Function, Population and Scale of Portlaoise

As set out under the National Planning Framework, the Eastern & Midland Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and the Core Strategy of the Laois County Development Plan 2021 – 2027, Portlaoise is designated as a **Key Town** within the settlement hierarchy.

Key towns are defined as large economically active service and/or county towns that provide employment for their surrounding areas and with high-quality transport links and the capacity to act as growth drivers to complement the Regional Growth Centres.

In this regard, it is anticipated that Portlaoise will attract social, administrative functions and economic activity and will also act as a significant focus for future population growth.

	Persons 2002	Persons 2006	Persons 2011	Persons 2016	Persons 2022	% Change 2002-2022
<b>County Laois</b>	58,774	67,059	80,559	84,697	91,877	56%
<b>Portlaoise</b>	<b>12,127</b>	<b>14,613</b>	<b>20,145</b>	<b>22,050</b>	<b>23,494</b>	<b>94%</b>

**Table 1: Population statistics for County Laois and Portlaoise between 2002 and 2022**

County Laois has experienced dramatic population growth in the past two decades, growing by 56% over the twenty-year period between 2002 and 2022. In the same period, **Portlaoise experienced an even greater population growth rate of 94%; virtually doubling in size.** The



proportion of the county’s population living within Portlaoise has also grown steadily over this period, rising from 21% in 2002 to 26% in 2022.

Portlaoise has a relatively young population, with 54.3% of the population below 35 years of age, compared to 47.1% elsewhere in the State. Portlaoise has a lower proportion of middle-aged and older residents, with just 16.1% of the population aged 55 or older, compared to 24% elsewhere in the State.

Portlaoise also benefits from an ethnically diverse population with 22% of its population now being non-Irish. Of particular note is that almost 15% of the population is made up of EU nationals excluding the UK.

Age Cohorts	Numbers
85 +	174
80-84	236
75-79	419
70-74	613
65-69	779
60-64	943
55-59	1,188
50-54	1,436
45-49	1,768
40-44	2,277
35-39	2,324
30-34	1,702
25-29	1,294
20-24	1,253
15-19	1,580
10-14	2,084

5-9	1,876
0-4	1,548
	<b>Total = 23,494</b>

**Table 2: Population by Age Cohort, Census 2022**

Census 2022 has revealed that the upward trajectory in population growth is continuing. The population of Portlaoise has now risen to 23,494 and that of the overall county to 91,877, an increase of 6.5% and 8.4% respectively on Census 2016. In terms of age cohort data, just under half [48%] of the population is aged below 35 years of age.

As well as increasing in size, the population of Portlaoise is becoming more diverse with many new arrivals from Eastern Europe [in particular from Poland and Lithuania], UK, Africa, India and Ukraine. According to Census 2022, 6,575 residents [27%] were born outside of Ireland. This is one of the highest non-national population percentages in the country.

#### 4.2 Projected Population of Portlaoise

The ‘Core Strategy Table’ from the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 [and by extension the RSES] sets out the population projections and household allocations for Portlaoise and the other county settlements up to 2027.

The table provides details of the most recent population (2016), population projections, the housing allocation for 2021 – 2027 and for 2027 - 2031 for each settlement based on the Housing Strategy analysis, the number of housing units which must be delivered within the built-up footprint of each settlement and the quantum of land required for the delivery of the housing allocation based on a specific density for each settlement.

The targets provide for County Laois to grow to 94,700 by 2027 [an increase of 12% from the base year of 2016] and for Portlaoise to grow to **26,366** [an even greater increase of nearly 20%] over the same plan period. For Portlaoise, this equates to a projected requirement for an additional **1,725 households** over the six-year period to 2027.

	<b>County Laois</b>	<b>Portlaoise</b>
<b>CSO Population 2016</b>	84,697	22,050
<b>Projected Population 2027</b>	94,700	26,366
<b>Projected Increase</b>	10,003 [+12%]	4,316 [+19.6%]
<b>Projected Increase in Households 2027</b>	3,998	1,725

<b>Existing quantum of Residential zoned lands</b>	1,030.8 hectares	383 hectares
<b>Existing quantum of zoned lands that allow residential development</b>	571.6 hectares	171 hectares
<b>Area (ha.) zoned for Residential 2027*</b>	138 hectares	64.2 hectares

*Table 3: Extract from Core Strategy Table of Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027*

\* Comprises Mixed Use lands [15.7 hectares], Brownfield lands [26.3 hectares] and Greenfield lands [22.2 hectares].

The County Development Plan 2021-2027 identifies a **requirement for 64.2 hectares of land** in order to accommodate the planned growth of Portlaoise. There has been much activity in the residential sector in Portlaoise in recent times, notwithstanding the challenges initially caused by the Covid pandemic and more recently by the significant spike in building costs. Since the plan was adopted in 2022, approximately 550 units have been completed.

The following table summarises current residential development activity in the town. The statistics are inclusive of **both conventional planning permissions and Part 8 Consents**. A significant portion of the new builds is for the social housing market.

<b>Status</b>	<b>Numbers of Residential Units</b>
Extant Permissions not yet commenced	421
Extant Permissions on appeal to An Bord Pleanala	259
Development Commenced on foot of Permissions	383
Development Complete or Substantially Complete	625
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,688</b>

*Table 4: Residential Development Activity in Portlaoise, 2023*

#### 4.3 Future Demand

The Core Strategy Table (Table 2.16) in the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 projects a population increase of **4,316** [from 22,050 to 26,366] for Portlaoise by 2027, and an associated housing allocation of **1,725 units**.

Applying the Core Strategy housing unit target figure of 1,725 units for Portlaoise to the Draft LAP translates into a projected requirement for **2,039** units to be built over the life of the Plan (See Table 5).

As the 2024-2030 draft LAP period is 3 years beyond the 2021-2027 period of the current Laois County Development Plan, the overall unit requirement of **2,039** units has been calculated to take account of:

- The addition of a projected allocation of 864 additional units to cover the additional 3 years,
- This projected allocation is based on an average per annum calculation (1,725 units/6 years = 288 units per year).
- The subtraction of the estimated number of 550 units constructed since 2021.

Portlaoise LAP area	Residential Units
County Development Plan Core Strategy Allocation to 2027	1,725
Plus 3-Year Projected Unit Allocation to 2030	864
Less Units Constructed since 2021	550
Portlaoise Total Unit Target to 2030	<b>2,039</b>

**Table 5: Residential Unit Allocation to Portlaoise, 2023**

Based on an indicative density of 35 units per hectare, the land requirement to accommodate 2,039 units in Portlaoise by target year 2030 is **58 hectares**. The remaining lands zoned in the County Development plan – **Map 2.2 “Portlaoise”**, Volume 2, Settlement Strategy, Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 [copy hereunder] and the land-use zoning matrix set out in **Table 13.3**, Volume 1, Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 provides sufficient zoning to accommodate these requirements.

The reason for the divergence from the 64.2 hectares flagged for Portlaoise in the Core Strategy is that a varying density figure was used then as against a standard across the board figure of 35 units per hectare now. In particular, the density figure was 24.7/hectare for Mixed Use lands, 34/hectare for Brownfield/Infill lands and 35.4 for Greenfield lands.

#### 4.4 Zoning

Land use zoning for Portlaoise and Mountmellick Local Area Plan functional areas was carried out as part of the making of the overall Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 which was adopted in January 2022.

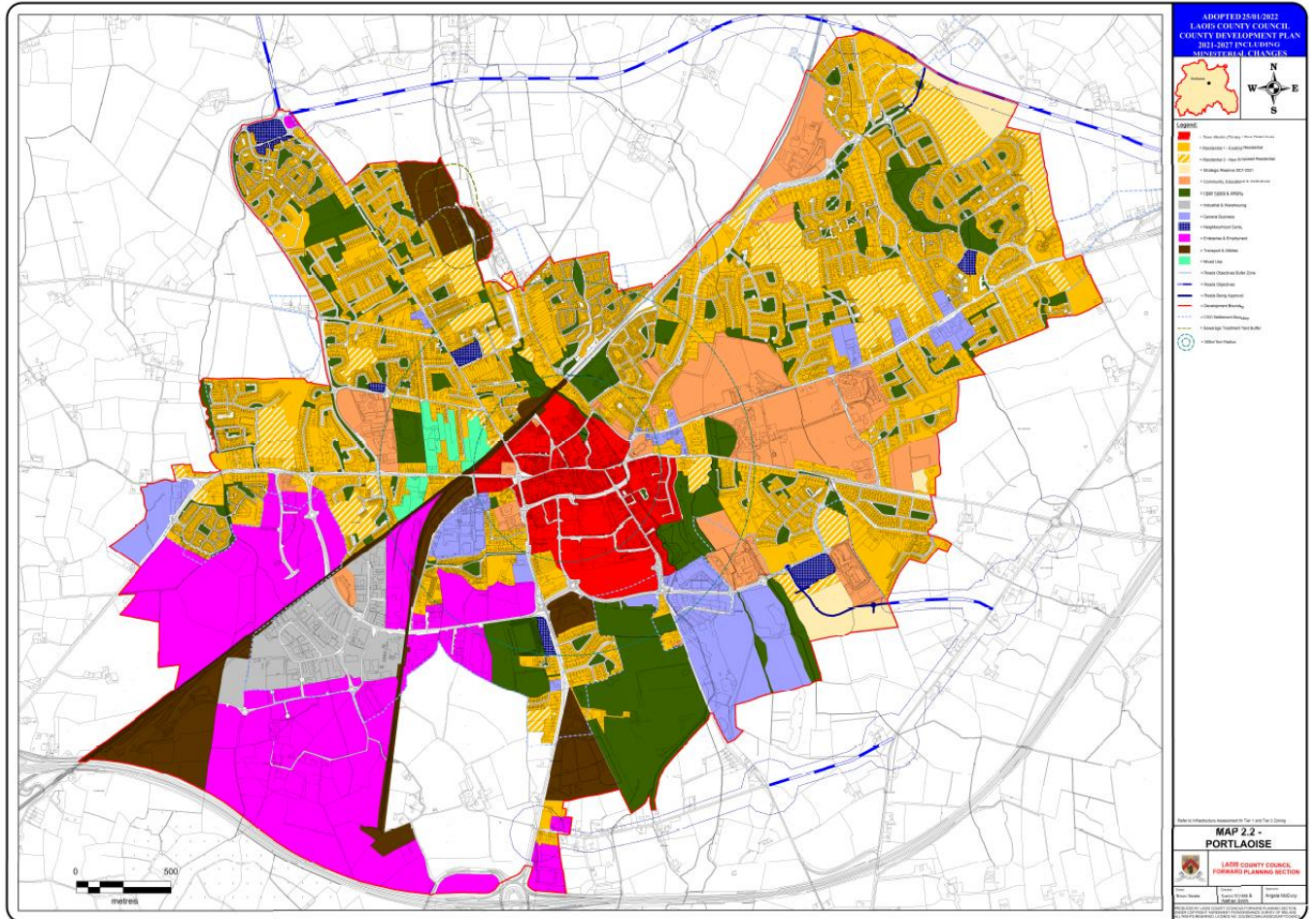


Figure 12: Zoning Map of Portlaoise LAP, adopted in Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027

#### 4.5 Future Development Priorities

The future development priorities for Portlaoise Town are as follows:

- Healthy placemaking
- Town centre consolidation
- Creation of sustainable communities through the provision of mixed tenure housing for all sectors of society
- Development and support of Economic Development opportunities
- Enabling key infrastructure
- Creation of a cultural quarter through the implementation of built and natural heritage protection



4.5.1 Healthy Placemaking

Placemaking is an essential link between spatial planning and economic strategy, facilitating improvements to the public realm and people’s quality of life and playing an increasingly important role in attracting talent and investment. The creation of healthy and attractive places requires improvements to both physical and social infrastructure and prioritises the incorporation of physical activity in people’s daily lives.

Healthy placemaking, one of three key principles in the RSES, seeks to create vibrant urban centres with a diverse mix of retail, residential and commercial functions and high-quality public spaces that are accessible across all societal needs, ages and abilities. Placemaking is also underpinned by the integration of good planning and urban design principles, as set out in Departmental Guidelines ‘Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities’ and the ‘Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS)’.



Figure 13: Key components of healthy placemaking

The Public Realm Strategy sets out a vision for the future development of Portlaoise town centre. Improvements to the public realm through a program of infrastructural works will provide a safe, attractive, and comfortable place to live, work and visit. Infrastructural improvements will prioritise pedestrians through measures such as traffic calming, street maintenance and traffic management in the historic town centre.

#### *4.5.2 Town Centre Consolidation*

The Draft LAP has been prepared in the context of a longer-term vision for Portlaoise. The Draft LAP identifies a number of opportunity sites to accommodate growth during the plan period. Site specific details for each site are set out under Chapter 6 Town Centre Revitalisation. A sequential approach will be taken to the development of the town, with lands closer to the town centre being developed prior to zoned lands on the periphery to avoid “*leapfrogging*”. Such an approach is essential to underpin the sustainable delivery of population, employment development and consolidation of the town centre over the plan period. This approach will adhere to the priority phasing outlined earlier in this chapter.

Consolidation, brownfield and infill development will also be promoted on appropriately zoned land within the plan area which accords with the policies and objectives set down in this plan.

#### *4.5.3 Sustainable Communities*

Housing development opportunities to be advanced during the plan period include the following landbanks, some of which have been identified as opportunity sites in Chapter 6 Town Centre Revitalisation.

- Convent Site, Church Avenue
- Stradbally Road Site (formerly Tyrrells)
- Centrepont
- Portlaoise South-East

#### *4.5.4 Economic Development*

Economic development underpins all chapters in this Draft LAP. The aim of the Draft LAP is to capitalise on Portlaoise’s excellent location on the motorway and rail networks and proximity to the Greater Dublin Area.

Lands have been zoned for a variety of uses such as:

- General business [36.5 hectares],
- Enterprise and employment [125.2 hectares],

- Industry [5.17 hectares].

The land-use zoning matrix in **Table 13.3**, Volume 1, Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 sets out the uses that are considered appropriate within these zones. The zoning and servicing of land at J17 for a National Enterprise Park to attract enterprise, employment and industrial uses, in the immediate vicinity of national strategic transport infrastructure, represents a unique opportunity to develop a cluster of complementary enterprises and more generally a larger, more robust and diverse economic basis for the town, county and region.

#### *4.5.5 Key Infrastructure*

Future development proposals are contingent on key infrastructure. Currently, capacity exists in the Foul Sewer Network, Waste-Water Treatment Plant and Public Water Supply.

In terms of transport, with the completion of the Southern Orbital Connector, additional car parking adjacent to the train station and active travel interventions on the N 77 Abbeyleix Road during the last LAP timeframe, the priorities for transport are now outlined in the draft Local Transport Plan (LTP) which accompanies this draft LAP (See **Appendix A**). The Draft LTP includes objectives for the delivery of active travel measures throughout the town, a Northern Orbital Route and a number of key internal relief roads including links between:

- The Dublin Road [R445] and Borris Road [L2133],
- Rathleague and Meelick,
- The Stradbally Road [N80] and Dublin Road [R445] through St. Fintan’s Hospital land.

#### *4.5.6 Environment & Heritage Protection*

The environmental sensitivities of the County identified in the SEA process for the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 have informed the Core Strategy and the role it identifies for Portlaoise.

The Draft LAP responds to environmental factors, including wastewater infrastructure constraints, areas at risk of flooding etc. It also acknowledges the importance of built and natural heritage and green infrastructure [such as the Blueway, Town in a Garden concept, Biodiversity Action Plan and Stradbally Road Masterplan] as an environmental and economic (including tourism) resource and includes significant objectives for its conservation and enhancement. These are expanded on in Chapter 14. Biodiversity & Natural Heritage.

## SECTION 5. CLIMATE CHANGE

**Strategic Aim:** To reduce our carbon footprint by integrating climate action into the planning system in support of national targets for climate policy mitigation and adaptation objectives, as well as targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions.

### 5.1 Introduction

It is the aim of the Draft LAP to achieve an efficient use of land with a focus on key urban centres, and to achieve development densities that can support vibrant, compact, walkable places that prioritise pedestrian and cyclist movement.

The focus of the Draft LAP on brownfield over greenfield development, supports an ecosystems approach, protects natural areas while also seeking to enhance existing green networks both within the natural and urban environment through the promotion and enhancement of existing pathways and green connections within the Town.



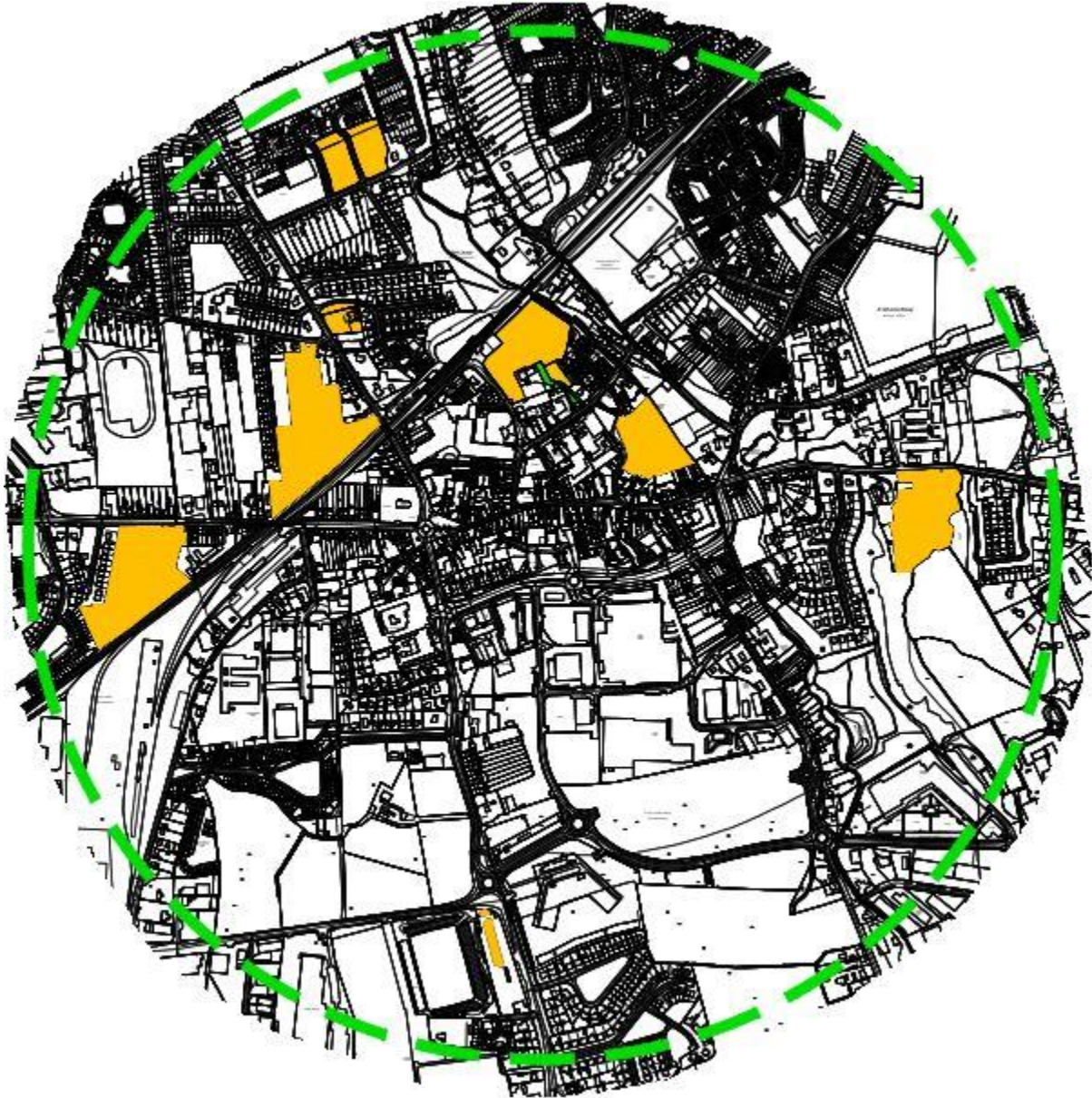
**Figure 14: Key components for positive climate change**

The potential for the delivery of energy efficient projects throughout the town is also facilitated through a more compact settlement from reducing costs and carbon emissions and guaranteeing energy resilience for the future. Creating a safe and climate resilient environment is essential in encouraging active modes of transport. Such environments can be created through a high-quality design and layout of buildings, appropriate mix of uses, densities, height and the sensitive integration of the natural and built environment. Creating a strong sense of place and enabling connections can be enhanced through a robust and resilient Green Infrastructure network employing nature-based solutions and contributing directly to climate action measures through carbon sequestration, water quality improvements and other measures. At the Neighbourhood



level the plan aims to locate people in close proximity to their place of work, services, amenity and leisure facilities thereby reducing the need for car-based travel and cumulatively resulting in significant and measurable reductions in GHG emissions.

It also supports and encourages town centre development. For example, **over the last five years Laois County Council has approved 450 no. residential units [a population equivalent of >1,000] within a 1 kms radius of the town centre.** This is a mixture of public and private housing. To date c. 50% of the units have been developed.



*Figure 15: Built or Approved residential development within 1 km of Portlaoise town centre*

This is clear evidence of the commitment of the Council to rejuvenating the traditional core of the town.



*Plate 1: New housing development on former CBS lands, Portlaoise town centre*

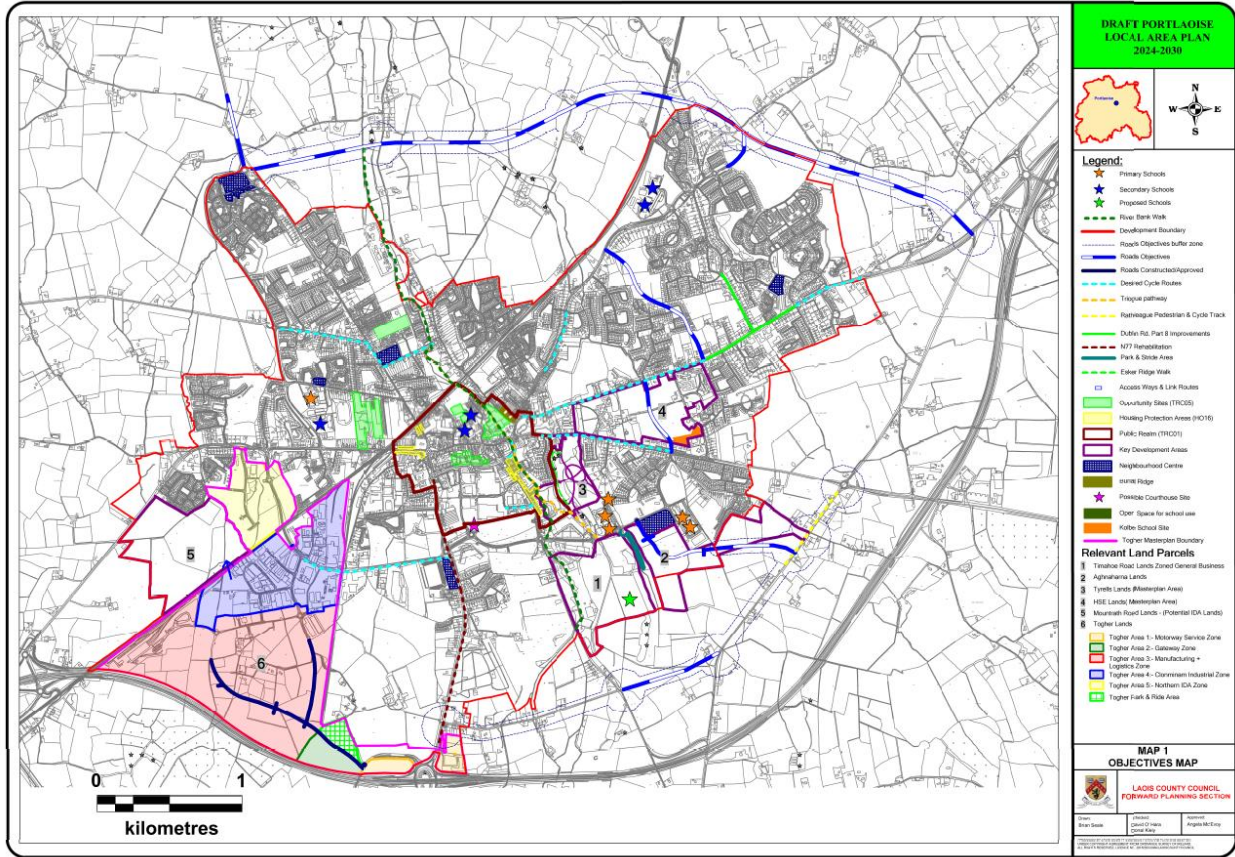


*Plate 2: New housing development on former Granary site, Portlaoise town centre*



*Plate 3: CGI of new housing development on former Granary site, Portlaoise town centre*





**Figure 16: Objectives map for Portlaoise LAP (this updated map has been inserted on the 10/04/2024).**

5.2 Laois County Council Climate Adaptation Strategy 2019 - 2024

The Laois County Council Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024 features a range of actions across six thematic areas, including: Local Adaptation Governance and Business Operations; Infrastructure and Built Environment; Land Use and Development; Drainage and Flood Management; Natural Resources and Cultural Infrastructure and Community Health and Wellbeing.

The Strategy sets out a number of ‘Adaptation Actions’ including:

- To ensure that Climate Change adaptation considerations are mainstreamed and integrated successfully into all functions and activities of the local authority ensuring operational protocols, procedures and policies implement an appropriate response in addressing the diversity of impacts associated with climate change.

- To build capacity and resilience within Laois County Council to respond to climate change and climate change/severe weather events.
- To ensure and increase the resilience of infrastructural assets and the built environment, informing investment decisions.
- To integrate climate action considerations into land use planning policy and influence positive behaviour.
- To manage the risk of flooding through a variety of responses.
- To provide for enhancement of natural environment to work positively towards climate action.
- To promote effective biodiversity management and enhance protection of natural habitats and landscapes.
- To build capacity and resilience within communities.

### 5.3 Portlaoise Decarbonisation Zone

Action 165 of the National Climate Action Plan 2019 sets Local Authorities the challenge of initially identifying and developing one Decarbonising Zone in each local authority in Ireland. A Decarbonising Zone (DZ) is defined as a spatial area in which a range of climate mitigation, adaptation and biodiversity measures and action owners are identified to address local low carbon energy, greenhouse gas emissions and climate needs to contribute to national climate action targets.

Laois County Council had been actively progressing the Portlaoise Low Carbon Town Project since the adoption of the 2040 and Beyond: A Vision for Portlaoise a Strategy for a Better Town Centre in 2017. This vision includes objectives to deliver a Low Carbon Town and a Walkable Town Centre. This proactive stance led to Portlaoise being recognised as a National Demonstration Project for Decarbonisation Zones. This along with several other key characteristics of the town resulted in the selection of Portlaoise as the Decarbonising Zone for County Laois.

It is important that Portlaoise progresses the following objectives as set out in the 2040 Vision Statement to transition to a low carbon Town:

- Remove the dominance of cars within the Portlaoise town centre,
- Address the poor pedestrian experience of the area,
- Adapt to lower emission vehicles,
- Retrofit homes and businesses.
- Increase Biodiversity throughout the town.

The Portlaoise DZ will focus on the town of Portlaoise or more particularly the geographic area covered by the statutory Portlaoise Local Area Plan.

The DZ covers circa 13.71 square kilometres represented in the map. The population consists of 23,494 inhabitants.

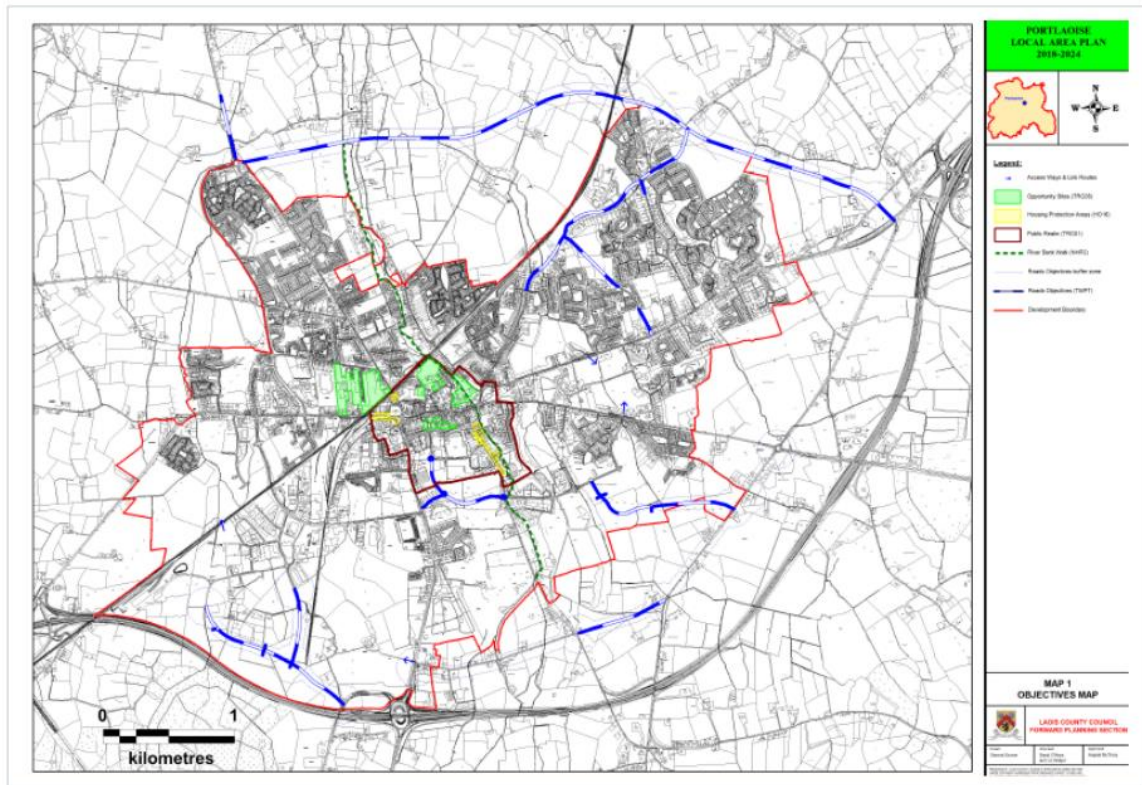


Figure 17: Portlaoise Decarbonisation Zone as outlined in red.

In addition to the specific policies and objectives contained in this specific chapter, other Chapters have included policies to address the subject of climate change, as follows:

CHAPTER	HEADING	CONTRIBUTION TO CLIMATE ACTION
Chapter 5	Town Centre Revitalisation	<i>champions compact brown field town centre development over its suburban counterpart</i>
Chapter 7	Placemaking	<i>supports ‘active land management’ by making the regeneration and development of existing built-up areas as attractive and as viable as Greenfield development through investment in infrastructure where appropriate</i>
Chapter 8	Housing	<i>promotes the reoccupation of vacant residential stock within Portlaoise Town Centre, including ‘Living Above the Shop’ units.</i>

<b>Chapter 9</b>	Economic Development	<i>seeks an integrated transport approach linked to land use objectives which encourages a reduction in the need for travel, tackling traffic congestion and promoting public transport, cycling, walking as alternative means of travel to the use of car.</i>
<b>Chapter 10</b>	Infrastructure and Environmental Services	<i>requires all new developments to include proposals for Sustainable Drainage Systems</i>
<b>Chapter 11</b>	Transport and Movement	<i>sets out the overall policy approach which is very much focused on achieving a modal shift to more sustainable modes of transport.</i>
<b>Chapter 12</b>	Community Services	<i>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.</i>
<b>Chapter 13</b>	Built Heritage	<i>positively consider proposals to improve, alter, extend or change the use of protected structures so as to render them viable for modern use, subject to consultation with suitably qualified Conservation Architects and / or other relevant experts, suitable design, materials and construction methods</i>
<b>Chapter 14</b>	Biodiversity and Natural Heritage	<i>positively consider proposals to improve, alter, extend or change the use of protected structures so as to render them viable for modern use, subject to consultation with suitably qualified Conservation Architects and / or other relevant experts, suitable design, materials and construction methods</i>

**Table 6: Climate Action Measures**

#### 5.4 Policies

Planning and Development Policies	
<b>It is the policy of the Council to:</b>	
<b>CCP 1</b>	<i>Support the implementation of International and National objectives on climate action including the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Acts (and any</i>



	<i>amending legislation), the ‘Climate Action Plan 2021’ (and any updated Plans) and ensure that Laois County Councils Climate Change Action Plan and County Development Plan are suitably aligned.</i>
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## 5.5 Objectives

Planning and Development Objectives	
It is the objective of the Council to:	
<b>CMO 1</b>	<i>Support and facilitate the creation of a Decarbonisation Zone in the Key Town of Portlaoise;</i>
<b>CMO 2</b>	<i>Achieve more compact growth by promoting the development of infill and brownfield/ regeneration sites and the re-use of underutilised land including upper floors within and close to the existing built-up footprint in preference to edge of centre locations thereby encouraging a shift towards sustainable travel modes;</i>
<b>CMO 3</b>	<i>Promote higher residential development densities at appropriate locations such as along public transport corridors, that are not located in areas sensitive to flooding, or will increase temperatures of urban areas;;</i>
<b>CMO 4</b>	<i>Support energy-efficient building design and Green Roof technology particularly on apartment, commercial, leisure and educational buildings;</i>
<b>CMO 5</b>	<i>Support enhancement of flood resilience of buildings and promote the use of permeable surfaces to decrease run-off rates;</i>
<b>CMO 6</b>	<i>Protect and enhance the towns floodplains subject to flooding as “green infrastructure” where appropriate and subject to compliance with the Habitats Directive;</i>
<b>CMO 7</b>	<i>Require the use of SuDS in accordance with the Greater Dublin Regional Code of Practice for Drainage Works for new developments (including extensions);</i>
<b>CMO 8</b>	<i>Support rainwater harvesting and grey-water recycling schemes that seek to decrease abstraction of potable surface water resources, thus reducing water stress during periods of low rainfall;</i>

<b>CMO 9</b>	<i>Plant drought-resistant plants/ trees in public amenity areas to provide shade and increase green infrastructure linkages;</i>
<b>CMO 10</b>	<i>Support the European Commission’s paper on Circular Economy Principles for Building Design and advance the reduce-reuse-recycle policy of the Circular Economy in relation to demolition of building stock;</i>
<b>CMO 11</b>	<i>Support construction of green routes/cycleways/pedestrian routes throughout the town;</i>
<b>CMO 12</b>	<i>Support and facilitate the integration of land use with transportation infrastructure, through the development of sustainable compact settlements which are well served by public transport;</i>
<b>CMO 13</b>	<i>Strengthen public transport linkages and promote their use;</i>
<b>CMO 14</b>	<i>Support localisation of jobs/shops/services to minimise the need for most common travel patterns;</i>
<b>CMO 15</b>	<i>Support the provision of electricity charging infrastructure for electrical vehicles throughout the town, both on street and in new developments, in accordance with car parking standards and best practice;</i>
<b>CMO 16</b>	<i>Promote and support the provision of Park-and-Ride facilities which improve public transport accessibility without exacerbating road congestion, or which cause increased car travel distances, at appropriate locations within the town;</i>
<b>CMO 17</b>	<i>Deliver, in conjunction with the National Transport Authority and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport a Public Transportation Hub in Portlaoise to accommodate national, commuter, regional and local bus services;</i>
<b>CMO 18</b>	<i>Ensure that planning applications for new critical infrastructure demonstrate resilience to new climatic conditions.</i>
<b>CMO 19</b>	<i>Ensure biodiversity assets are appropriately managed and safeguarded from potential adverse effects from development.</i>



## SECTION 6. TOWN CENTRE REVITALISATION

**Strategic Aim:** *To support the sustainable long-term growth of Portlaoise, in accordance with the Core and Retail Strategies of the Laois County Development Plan 2021 – 2027 and the Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy “2040 and Beyond: A Vision for Portlaoise: A Strategy for a Better Town Centre”.*

### 6.1 Introduction

The traditional town centre of Portlaoise has always been the focus for retail, commercial and residential development.

Market pressures since the 1980s have impacted on the town centre with retail and commercial leakage to an area south of the traditional core. While the two retail areas are relatively proximate, there is a real sense of disconnect especially for pedestrian traffic given their physical separation by the James Fintan Lawlor Avenue urban dual carriageway.

Under Call 2 of the Urban Regeneration Development Fund, the Council was successful in securing funding for the regeneration/ public realm improvements to the laneways, squares within the town centre from the Cultural Quarter in Fitzmaurice Place to the Portlaoise Shopping Centre. This involves the reimagining of JFL Avenue.

**According to the Geodirectory Survey**, the commercial vacancy rate in Portlaoise stood at 15.3% in Q2 2023 compared to 14.5% for County Laois, 12.8% for Leinster [excluding Dublin] and 14.1% nationally. Further afield, the Portlaoise rate compares favourably with competing towns such as Tullamore [19%], Carlow [18.2%], Thurles [18%] and Newbridge [15.6%]

While any high street vacancy is regrettable, there has been improvements in occupancy due to Local Authority business incentives and national policy changes to allow for residential change of use of commercial buildings.

The town centre has the capacity to stem this leakage through the development of key opportunity sites and by improving the attractiveness of the public realm. This plan seeks to redevelop the town centre as the focus of commercial, retail and residential development within the town.

The Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy in conjunction with a focus on consolidating the town centre will help revitalise the town and provide the framework for channelling development into brownfield sites.

## 6.2 Regeneration

The vacant commercial property incentive scheme is being introduced by Laois County Council to encourage the use of vacant commercial premises within the designated town centre of Portlaoise. The scheme incentivises new businesses to occupy vacant premises by lowering entry costs in the form of a range of grants and mentoring opportunities. The scheme is being introduced in association with Laois Chamber as a pilot scheme and aligns closely with the Government’s new Town Centre First policy.

The scheme is open to newly established retail businesses setting up within Portlaoise town centre, existing retail businesses relocating or expanding from outside Portlaoise or an existing retail business maintaining their current location and expanding into a new location within Portlaoise.

## 6.3 Active Land Management

Laois County Council is actively tackling dereliction and vacancy throughout the town through a combination of engagement with relevant parties and, where necessary, use of legislation under the Derelict Sites Act 1990 and Finance Act 2021 [which introduced the Residential Zoned Land Taxa and effectively superseded the vacant sites levy] as amended. A number of high-profile sites which were once derelict and vacant have been rejuvenated such as the former Midland Dairy property on Mountrath Road and Maltings Granary at Harpurs Lane both of which have been redeveloped for housing.



**Plate 4: Active Land Management – Maltings Granary, Harpurs Lane – Before / After**



**Plate 5: Active Land Management – The Meadows, Mountrath Road – Before / After**

#### 6.4 URDF Call 3

The third round of URDF funding support, specifically was designed to address long term vacancy and dereliction across our URDF cities and towns and the acceleration of the provision of residential accommodation. Portlaoise was successful in having funding secured for addressing derelict and vacant sites.

#### 6.5 Portlaoise Town Team Action Plan 2023-2026

Since 2017, the Portlaoise Town Team has played a key role in the regeneration and redevelopment of Portlaoise Town.

Over that period, the Town Team has advised, led and enabled multiple Tidy Towns projects, initiatives with local business groups, business supports, Low Carbon Town projects, uncovering and telling the story of local history and heritage, street art and public realm enhancements.

Portlaoise Town Team has now developed a new Action Plan, for the period 2023-2026. The key objectives of the Action Plan are as follows:

<i>Action Plan Objectives</i>	
<b>All Committees</b>	<i>To proactively pursue an occupancy level of 95% on all floors in the town centre maintaining commercial use at ground floor level and reusing upper floors as residential units.</i>
<b>Retail &amp; Services Mix</b>	<i>To support a retail and services mix that will enhance Portlaoise’s reputation as a major retail and service destination.</i>
<b>Marketing</b>	<i>To appropriately brand Portlaoise.</i>
<b>Festivals &amp; Events</b>	<i>To establish and support a programme of annual festivals and events in the town.</i>
<b>All Committees</b>	<i>To enhance the public realm and public transport network such that Portlaoise is permeable and accessible to all.</i>
<b>Tidy Towns</b>	<i>To continue the journey towards becoming the Tidiest Town in Ireland and transforming Portlaoise to a “Town in a Garden”.</i>
<b>Heritage and Street Art</b>	<i>To highlight, present and promote the history and heritage of Portlaoise.</i>

<b>Public Safety</b>	<i>To address issues which impact people’s safety and perceptions of safety in Portlaoise.</i>
<b>Climate Change</b>	<i>To develop and implement climate friendly initiatives which will make Portlaoise an exemplar Low Carbon Town.</i>

**Table 7: Portlaoise Town Team Action Plan Objectives**

6.6 Retail Strategy

The retail planning policy context for the Draft LAP is informed by [a] the Guidelines for Planning Authorities: Retail Planning (2012), [b] the retail hierarchy identified for Laois in the RSES and [c] the Laois County Retail Strategy prepared as Appendix 4 of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027.

As set out in the Laois Retail Hierarchy, Portlaoise is identified as a Major Town Centre, for which it is an action to *“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”*.

Status under Retail Hierarchy for the Region (Table 6.1 RSES)	Town	Action
Level 1	Dublin	
Level 2 – Major Town Centres and County Town Centres	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.
Level 3 – Town and/ or District Centres and Sub County Town Centres (Key service centres)	Portarlinton	Encourage retail development commensurate with existing and anticipated growth, with particular emphasis on traditional core.
	Graigucullen	Provide for shopping, amenity, commercial and community facilities of a scale and type

**Figure 18: Laois County Retail Strategy. Appendix 4 of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027**

The Core Retail Area is the focus and preferred location for retail development during the Plan period. This presents an opportunity to create diversity and distinctiveness in Portlaoise’s retail offer, as well as to provide attractive, pedestrian friendly connections between it and the new retail areas. In order to rebalance the traditional town centre as a viable and vibrant centre, the Main Street should be retained as the centre of commercial activity that delivers a range of services and functions.

The development strategy for the town centre recognizes the potential of the traditional town centre as a focus for employment generation, retail use and residential development where appropriate. The creation of an attractive urban environment is critical to attract new businesses to the town centre; this issue has been addressed through the publication of the Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy “2040 And Beyond: A Vision for Portlaoise” as outlined in the following chapter.

While Portlaoise has a vibrant retail core overall there is 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 towns 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.

It is also critical given the town’s position as a crucial urban anchor providing essential services in an otherwise predominantly rural county.



**Plate 6: Main Street Portlaoise**

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.

Improvements in the town centre public realm, specifically accessibility and integration, offers opportunities to create stronger nodes that provide a better experience and diversity of retail, as well as high quality food and drink and other complementary uses.

Residential development will also be encouraged in the town centre to contribute to the vitality of the core and to encourage economic development and further retail expansion.

Existing brownfield sites will be prioritised over more peripheral sites Innovative design and layout and a mix of tenure will be encouraged in all residential developments. These are highlighted under the opportunity sites in Section 6.9 of this chapter.

#### 6.7 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. 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.

#### 6.8 Town Centre Revitalisation Policies

Planning and Development Policies	
<b>It is the policy of the Council to:</b>	
<b>TCR P1</b>	<i>Encourage retail development within the existing town centre in line with the sequential approach to retail development as set out in the “Retail Planning - Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2012”. Proposals which would undermine the vitality and viability of the town centre will not be permitted.</i>
<b>TCR P2</b>	<i>Promote the reuse of existing town centre buildings through appropriate design and adaptation</i>
<b>TCR P3</b>	<i>Prohibit the proliferation of uses in the town centre which would detract from the amenities of the area or the vitality and viability of the town centre;</i>
<b>TCR P4</b>	<i>Promote living over the shop and conversion of town centre buildings into housing</i>



	<i>units;</i>
<b>TCR P5</b>	<i>Regenerate the town centre in accordance with “Portlaoise 2040 and Beyond A Vision For Portlaoise, A Strategy For A Better Town Centre”;</i>
<b>TCR P6</b>	<i>Encourage the maintenance of original shopfronts, or the reinstatement of traditional shopfronts where poor replacements have been installed;</i>
<b>TCR P7</b>	<i>Ensure new shopfronts have regard to existing shopfronts and complement the existing character particularly in the Architectural Conservation Area;</i>
<b>TCR P8</b>	<i>Prohibit internally illuminated fascias or projecting box signs. Concealed strip or flood lighting of fascias and traditional hand painted signs lit by spotlight may be an acceptable alternative;</i>
<b>TCR P9</b>	<i>Ensure all new developments have adequate refuse storage facilities.</i>

#### 6.9 Town Centre Revitalisation Objectives

Planning and Development Objectives	
<b>It is the objective of the Council to:</b>	
<b>TCR O1</b>	<i>Improve the quality, vitality and vibrancy of the town centre through the implementation of the Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy “2040 and Beyond: A Vision for Portlaoise: A Strategy for a Better Town Centre”</i>
<b>TCR O2</b>	<i>Promote the town centre as a priority location for commercial, civic, social and cultural development and sustainable consolidation;</i>
<b>TCR O3</b>	<i>Promote the consolidation of the town centre through the use of brownfield and backland sites without compromising streetscapes;</i>
<b>TCR O4</b>	<i>Encourage and facilitate the reuse and regeneration of derelict and vacant sites and disused buildings, especially upper floors;</i>
<b>TCR O5</b>	<i>Enable site assembly through wider use of Compulsory Purchase Orders;</i>

<b>TCR 06</b>	<i>Facilitate the redevelopment of strategic sites within the town centre such as the Convent, CBS and Parish lands, Fort Protector lands, the Maltings Site, and Main Street for a mixture of uses that will contribute to vitality of the central core area;</i>
<b>TCR 07</b>	<i>Renew, consolidate and develop the existing fabric of the town by achieving a high quality of design in new development and refurbishments;</i>
<b>TCR 08</b>	<i>Ensure the type, quantum and location of future retail floor space is consistent with the requirements and recommendations of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027, relevant regional policy frameworks and national planning guidelines;</i>
<b>TCR 09</b>	<i>Guide retail development, in accordance with the sequential approach to sustain and strengthen the town centre;</i>
<b>TCR 10</b>	<i>Promote an appropriate mix of day and night-time uses;</i>
<b>TCR 11</b>	<i>Create attractive and secure pedestrian and cycling links.</i>

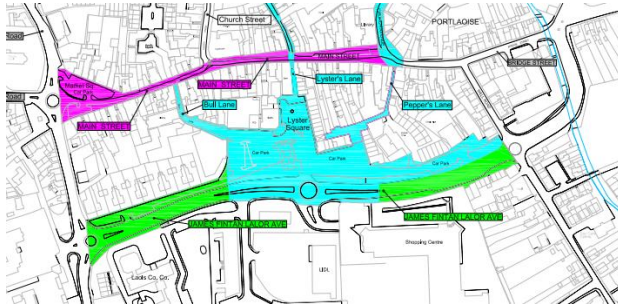
#### 6.10 Opportunity Sites

A number of potential town centre opportunity sites for re-development have been identified which would contribute to the renewal, enhancement and regeneration of the particular areas of the town in which they are located. These areas have been identified for various reasons such as dereliction, under utilisation of land and lands that would be readily adaptable for new uses. The site areas or boundaries have not been identified definitively and can be modified to include other key sites. Additionally, other opportunity sites not listed can be presented for appraisal under similar criteria. Some of the sites may be owned by different parties and would require an element of site assembly for a coherent development strategy to progress. This approach to re-development will be encouraged over a piecemeal approach.

The importance of finding sustainable replacement uses and regenerating these sites will facilitate the continued growth of one of Ireland’s fastest growing town for future generations.

The development sites represent a significant opportunity to arrest the decline of the residential population while addressing other infrastructure deficiencies.

### 6.10.1 Opportunity Site 1: Lyster Square, JLR Avenue, Portlaoise



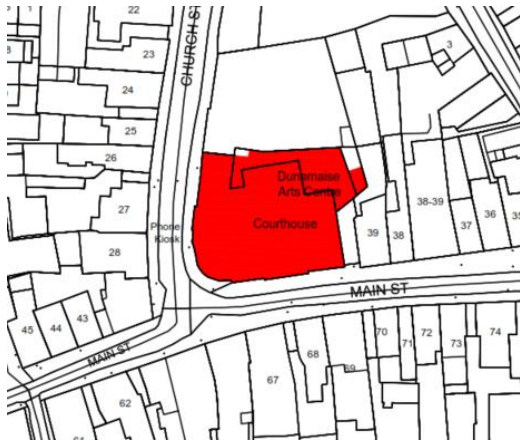
#### Zoning

The site is zoned “Town Centre” in the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027.

#### Comments

- *Brownfield public realm and mainly commercial / retail centre/ site;*
- *Large amount of surface car parking;*
- *Prime location for redevelopment of lands fronting onto James Fintan Lalor Avenue;*
- *Located within Portlaoise Architectural Conservation Area;*
- *No Protected Structures within the site;*
- *Located within Archaeological Zone;*
- *Public realm improvements would be beneficial and should be consistent with the Guiding Principles for Lyster Square as outlined in 2040 And Beyond: A Vision for Portlaoise;*
- *Landscaping proposals including tree planting and “greening” of the area;*
- *Development could be intensified to provide a key landmark or gateway building;*
- *Care should be taken that any building addresses the extensive street frontage available and be designed to an exceptional standard. Development shall comprise a high quality design, fine grained active frontage blocks providing a strong built edge to the surrounding public thoroughfare. New buildings should be permanent, timeless and contemporary structures. Car parking should be provided to the rear of the building or within the structure itself.*

### 6.10.2 Opportunity Site 2: Court House, Main Street



#### Zoning

The site is zoned “Town Centre” in the Portlaoise Zoning Map contained in the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027

#### Development Potential

- Prime location for re-development;
- Adjoining the Dunamaise Arts Centre and cultural quarter
- Close proximity to multi-storey carpark;
- Located within an Architectural Conservation Area;
- Protected Structure Status;
- Fully serviced;
- Located within Archaeological Zone;
- Public realm improvements would be beneficial and should be consistent with the Guiding Principles for the area as outlined in 2040 And Beyond: A Vision for Portlaoise.

### 6.10.3 Opportunity Site 3: Formerly Parish Lands



#### **Zoning**

*The site is zoned "Town Centre" in the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027.*

#### **Development Potential**

- *Prime location for development;*
- *Extensive Greenfield site;*
- *Frontage onto two key urban routes, R 445 and Ridge Road;*
- *Located within Architectural Conservation Area and Archaeological Zone;*
- *Protected Structure Status;*
- *Fully serviced;*

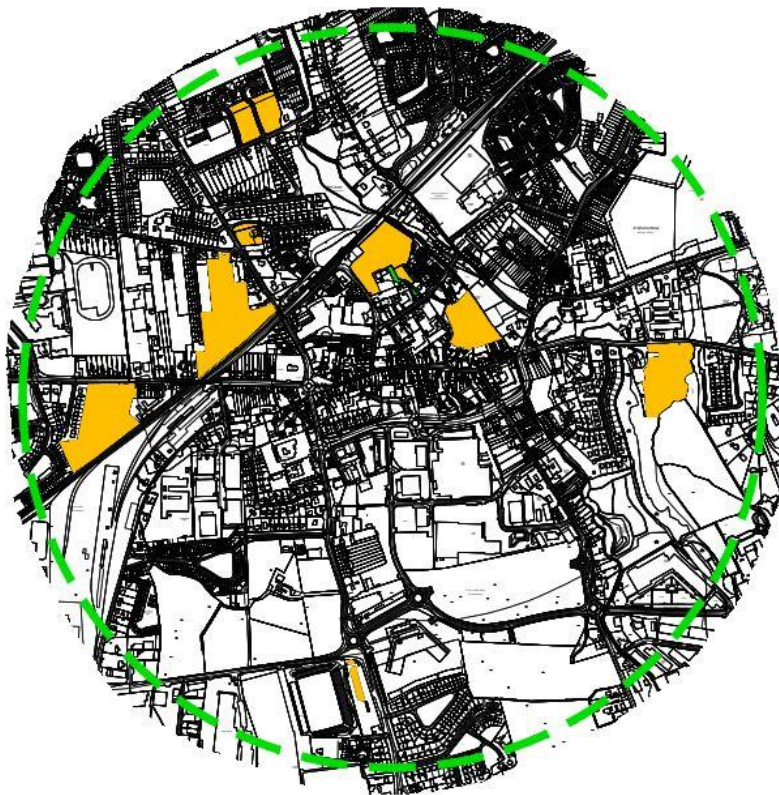


## SECTION 7. PLACEMAKING

**Strategic Aim:** To provide a green, well-connected town for all people within a compact, accessible urban environment which prioritises healthy placemaking, safe active travel and quality environments and creates a high-quality low-carbon environment for all.

### 7.1 The 15-Minute Neighbourhood Concept

The 15-minute neighbourhood is not a new idea but one with new significance, especially in response to Covid-19. The concept is about living more locally by giving people the ability to meet most of their daily needs within a 15-minute walk from home, with safe cycling and local transport options. It is about creating connected communities – understanding how our neighbourhoods work so that we can map out how a more compact and permeable urban form can provide high quality and safe links to public transport, shops, services, green spaces, cafes, doctors, childcare and to other neighbourhoods, reducing the need to travel.



**Figure 19: Portlaoise 15-minute town**

It brings together a number of policies and initiatives that are happening in relation to the following:



- Place making,
- Wellbeing,
- Empowering communities,
- Town Centre First Approach.

The ability to work locally is central to the 15-minute neighbourhood concept. The trend of working from home or from your neighbourhood is only likely to increase given the precedent set during the Covid-19 crisis and the government response 'Making Remote Work' National Remote Work Strategy. This change to work practices is for the better, it means less commuting, more time for family and leisure pursuits, and fewer transport greenhouse gas emissions. The Council will support measures or investment to facilitate this, including local work hubs.

The Council will also work with communities to retrofit existing neighbourhoods and ensure that new neighbourhoods are compact, mixed-use, green, liveable, accessible and permeable places. Reducing transport demand and encouraging modal shift away from private car use within local communities will be crucial to achieving the 15 minutes neighbourhood concept. According to the CSO for short journeys (less than two kilometres), over half [52%] of journeys were by car.



<b>PM 03</b>	<i>Provide for a high-quality public realm and public spaces by promoting quality urban design that accommodates creative patterns of use having regard to the physical, cultural, and social identities of individual settlements;</i>
<b>PM 04</b>	<i>Ensure that development proposals are cognisant of the need for proper consideration of context, connectivity, inclusivity, variety, efficiency, distinctiveness, layout, public realm, adaptability, privacy and amenity, parking, way finding and detailed design</i>
<b>PM 05</b>	<i>Provide for, protect and strengthen the vitality and viability of the town centre, through consolidating development, encouraging a mix of uses and maximising the use of land whilst promoting sympathetic reuse of structures. In considering development applications within the town centre there will be particular regard to the impact of the proposed development on the streetscape and urban layout in relation to compatibility of design, materials and use and the impact of the proposed development on existing amenities having regard to traffic and parking and the amenity and utility value of public and private spaces including open spaces;</i>
<b>PM 6</b>	<i>Ensure all urban settlements develop in such a way as to provide a sustainable mix of local services such as commercial, community and cultural activities including provision for enterprise, residential, retail, commercial, tourism, and leisure and community facilities.</i>

### 7.3 Objectives

Planning and Development Objectives	
<b>It is the objective of the Council to:</b>	
<b>PM 01</b>	<i>Identify obsolete and potential opportunity sites within the town and encourage and facilitate the re-use and regeneration of derelict land and buildings in the urban centre;</i>
<b>PM 02</b>	<i>Use specific powers, such as the compulsory purchase orders (CPO's) and statutory powers under the Derelict Sites Act 1990 and the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015, as amended, to address issues of dereliction, vacancy and underutilisation of lands in the town;</i>

<b>PM 03</b>	<i>Work with landowners and development interests to pursue the potential of suitable, available and viable land and buildings for appropriate development or renewal;</i>
<b>PM 04</b>	<i>Support ‘active land management’ by making the regeneration and development of existing built-up areas as attractive and as viable as Greenfield development through investment in infrastructure where appropriate.</i>

#### 7.4. Opportunity Sites outside Town Centre

##### 7.4.1 Opportunity Site 1: Centre Point, Mountrath Road, Portlaoise



#### **Zoning**

*The site is zoned “Mixed Use” in the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027. It is adjacent to the Town Centre with access into two public roads, Mountrath Road R445 and Haripur’s Lane L-21128.*

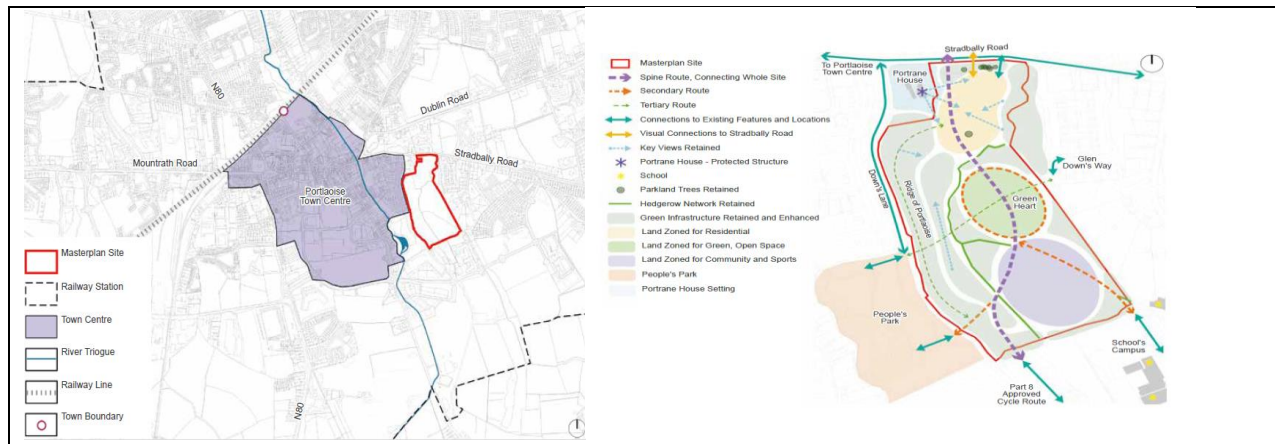
#### **Development Potential**

- *Brownfield retail site located at Mountrath Road, with access also from Harpurs Lane;*
- *Extensive surface car park;*
- *Prime location for re-development;*
- *Not located within an Architectural Conservation Area;*
- *No Protected Structures within the site;*
- *Public realm improvements would be beneficial and should seek to maximise green and blue infrastructure through landscape design;*
- *Potential for active travel permeability;*

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

Three masterplan development sites have been identified in the Draft LAP which will contribute to the renewal, enhancement and regeneration of the particular areas of the town in which they are located.

### 7.4.2 Masterplan Site 1: Tyrrells Lands, Stradbally Road



Its current zoning is a mix of Residential, Open space and Amenity, Community, Education & Infrastructure

The site is located east of Portlaoise town centre, and south of Stradbally Road N 80. The west boundary runs outside the wooded esker ridge. The woodland appears to be broadly commensurate with the wider woodland surrounding Portlaoise Retail Park, the River Triogue and the People’s Park, and residential development at The Downs.

Portrane House – a private residence and Registered Protected Structure – adjoins the northwest corner of the site. The eastern boundary is formed by a narrow watercourse and is abutted by



private greenspace associated with the residential development at Glen Downs and Glenlahan. The recently built school adjoins the southern boundary. The Ridge of Portlaoise – the remnants of an esker ridge of sand or gravel deposited during the last ice age, which extends approximately north-south through Portlaoise, forms a linear feature through the west of the site.

The esker ridge is important for wildlife and is proposed for designation as a Natural Heritage Area (pNHA). It is also of importance for geology, social and cultural reasons.

The vision for Stradbally Road is to create a new sustainable residential community that meets the needs of local people whilst being resilient to economic, social and climate change. The new community shall be fully integrated with and connected to the existing town, surrounding residential areas as well as the existing landscape and open space.

This new sustainable community will be integrated into the landscape and will be a place where walking and cycling are part of people’s daily routines.

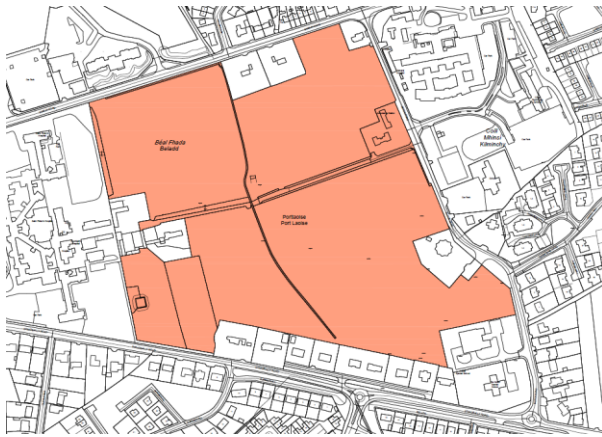
#### 7.4.2.1 Masterplan Objectives

The key objectives are to:

- To provide for new residential development, residential services and community facilities. High quality residential areas of sensitive design, which are complimentary to their surroundings and do not adversely impact on the amenity of adjoining residents.
- To preserve, provide for and improve active and passive recreational open space.
- To protect and improve existing community, educational and institutional facilities and to safeguard their future provision.

The masterplan will also provide for local civic, religious, community, educational and other facilities ancillary to neighbourhood uses and services.

### 7.4.3 Masterplan Site 2: HSE lands between Stradbally Road, Block Road and Dublin Road.



#### Zoning

The site is zoned “Community Educational Institutional” in the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027.

#### Development Potential

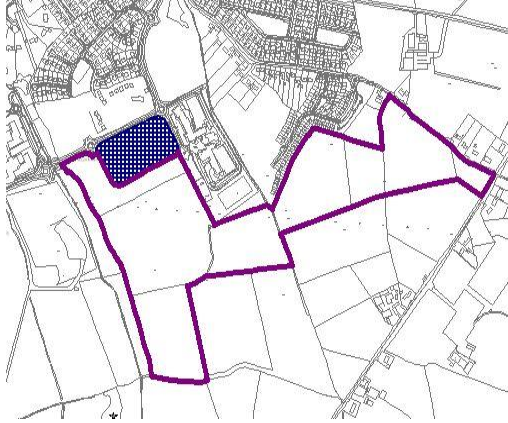
- Prime location for re-development for health care and related uses;
- Extensive Greenfield site;
- Frontage onto three key urban routes;
- Located outside Architectural Conservation Area and Archaeological Zone
- Within curtilage of Key Protected Structures;
- Fully serviced;
- Much potential for active travel permeability

#### 7.4.3.1 Masterplan Objectives

The key objectives are to:

- To provide for new residential development, residential services and community facilities. High quality residential areas of sensitive design, which are complimentary to their built and natural surroundings.
- To preserve, provide for and improve active and passive recreational open space.

#### 7.4.4 Masterplan Site 3: Portlaoise South-East



#### Zoning

The western end of the site is zoned “General Business” in the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027. The eastern end is un-zoned.

#### Development Potential

- Prime location for development;
- Extensive Greenfield site adjacent to existing and developing residential areas, retail park and schools campuses.
- Part of site earmarked for schools campus;
- Frontage onto two key urban routes, R 426 and Southern Circular R 945;
- Located outside Architectural Conservation Area and Archaeological Zone;
- No Protected Structure Status;
- Fully serviced;
- Potential for link road running south-eastwards from Southern Orbital Route R945 to Strategic Regional Route R425.
- Much potential for active travel permeability including with Stradbally Road Masterplan lands.

## SECTION 8. HOUSING

**Strategic Aim:** *To make provision for good quality and age-friendly housing that meets the needs of a diverse population and facilitates the creation of sustainable and socially inclusive communities in a way that makes Portlaoise a good place to live now and into the future.*

### 8.1 Introduction

As the key town of the County, Portlaoise is required to cater for new housing to serve population growth and new household formation, in accordance with the population targets of the Eastern and Midland Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy and the **Core Strategy of the Laois County Development Plan 2021 – 2027**.

The targets provide for County Laois to grow to 94,700 by 2027 [an increase of 12% from the base year of 2016] and for Portlaoise to grow to **26,366** [an even greater increase of nearly 20%] over the same plan period. For Portlaoise, as outlined in Chapter 4, this equates to a projected requirement for an additional **1,725 households** over the six-year period to 2027 and **2039** households to 2030 taking account of delivery of housing from 2021-2024. This equates to a housing land **requirement of 64.2 hectares of land** up to 2027 (as per the Core Strategy in the Laois County Development Plan) in order to accommodate the planned growth of Portlaoise.

### 8.2 Housing For All

Housing for All - a New Housing Plan for Ireland' is the government's housing plan to 2030. It is a multi-annual, multi-billion euro plan launched in 2021 which aims to improve Ireland's housing system and deliver more homes of all types for people with different housing needs. The government's vision for the housing system over the longer term is to achieve a steady supply of housing in the right locations with economic, social and environmental sustainability built into the system.

It is estimated that Ireland will need an average of 33,000 new homes to be provided each year from 2021 to 2030.

The four key pathways for delivery of housing over the period 2022-2026 are:

- *Supporting Homeownership & Increasing Affordability,*
- *Eradicating Homelessness, Increasing Social Housing Delivery & Supporting Social Inclusion,*
- *Increasing New Housing Supply,*
- *Addressing Vacancy & Efficient Use of Existing Stock*

### 8.3 Housing Delivery in Portlaoise

Both the Housing Strategy and Housing Needs Demand Assessment has identified both an affordable and a social housing need in Portlaoise. The Council's Housing Delivery Action Plan 2022-2026 projects

that over 595 social housing units will be provided by target year 2026 the bulk of which through Approved Housing Body Capital Advance Leasing Facility.

It is the policy of the Council to implement the provisions of the Housing Strategy in accordance with Section 95 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). In accordance with the provisions of the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015, the Planning Authority will employ Site Activation Measures, as previously mentioned under the Regeneration Section including the Residential Zoned Land Tax, derelict sites legislation, and CPO provisions to bring forward vacant and/or underutilised sites in Portlaoise for the supply of all tenures of housing.

This plan places a strong emphasis on providing quality residential developments in the existing built envelope of the town. The Town Centre zone presents significant housing opportunities through redevelopment of brownfield, infill and backland type developments. Some of these sites have been identified as opportunity sites in Section 7 of this plan. Several key opportunity sites have been identified within/ adjacent to the town centre which are in close proximity to public transport infrastructure and are suitable for higher density developments.

However, these areas are insufficient in size to accommodate the total projected population growth. Therefore, greenfield sites have also been identified which are suitable for new high quality residential developments.



*Plate 7: New housing at Maryborough Village, Mountrath Road*

To ensure the delivery of high-quality housing in a sustainable manner, residential development will be required to:



- Be located in places that can support sustainable development, places which support growth, innovation and the efficient provision of infrastructure, are accessible to a range of local services, can encourage the use of public transport, walking and cycling, and help tackle climate change;
- Increase residential density through a range of measures including reductions in vacancy, re-use of existing buildings, infill development schemes, area or site-based regeneration and increased building heights;
- Be delivered where homes and the appropriate supporting services can be delivered more efficiently and effectively at least cost to the State in the long-run;
- Have an excellent standard of design, layout and finish;
- Provide an appropriate mix of tenure types;
- Compliment the character of Portlaoise.

### 8.3 Housing for Older People

According to Census 2022, 2,221 [9.4%] of the population of Portlaoise is aged 65 or over. This percentage is likely to increase in the future given national and international trends.

The demand for nursing homes, residential care homes and sheltered housing accommodation is continuing to grow and housing developments need to be adaptable to cater for the future changing needs of the ageing population. The 'Age Friendly Ireland' Initiative is a key policy document that provides leadership and guidance in identifying the needs and opportunities of an ageing population.

Laois Age Friendly County Strategy 2023 - 2027 sets out key commitments for improvement to the areas of infrastructure, transportation, services and information.

A bespoke housing scheme for older persons comprising 40 units has been developed on the site of the former Maltings Granary adjacent to Portlaoise town centre.

The need for **Nursing Homes** and residential care homes in the town is anticipated to grow into the future and these facilities should be integrated wherever possible into the established or planned residential areas where residents can avail of reasonable access to local services. In determining planning applications for a change of use from a residential dwelling or other building to a nursing home the following will be considered:

- Whether such a use would not give rise to a traffic hazard and off-street car parking;
- The proximity to local services and facilities;
- Whether the size and scale are appropriate to the area.



***Plate 8: New housing development on former Maltings site which incorporates both a nursing home and accommodation for people with disability and for over 55's within Portlaoise town centre***

#### 8.4 Housing for People with Disabilities.

People with disabilities and mobility impairment face particular physical barriers to access and movement. The Council will ensure that development of all types provide mobility and access for people with disabilities in order to remove barriers to involvement in community, having regard to the National Disability Authority's document 'Building for Everyone: A Universal Design Approach – Planning and Policy' (2012) and Laois Public Participation Network 'Access for All Report' (2019).

#### 8.5 Traveller Community

The Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019 – 2024 for County Laois assessed the need for Traveller accommodation in the town and overall county. It sets out the Council's policy regarding the provision of Traveller accommodation. According to Census 2022, 285 members of the Travelling Community are living in Portlaoise. The bulk reside in local authority housing throughout the town with one extended family accommodated at the Oak Leaf halting site. The Council will endeavour to provide suitable accommodation for members of the Travelling Community.

#### 8.6 Minority Groups

Portlaoise is becoming an increasingly diverse County. According to Census 2022, non-Irish nationals account for 27% of the population of the town, an increase of 5% from Census 2016. In this regard,

service provision and community facilities in these areas should reflect the varying needs of the community.

8.8 Policies

Planning and Development Policies	
<b>It is the policy of the Council to:</b>	
<b>HP1</b>	<i>Ensure that sufficient zoned land is available at appropriate locations to cater for the envisaged population growth of the Core Strategy</i>
<b>HP2</b>	<i>Require all new residential developments to be consistent with the Core Strategy of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 and the settlement strategy of this plan</i>
<b>HP3</b>	<i>Promote and encourage the development of the critical mass of Portlaoise and to enhance its strategic location on the National and Regional road and rail network</i>
<b>HP4</b>	<i>Facilitate the provision of housing in a range of locations to meet the needs of the population, with particular emphasis on facilitating access to housing to suit different household and tenure needs, in a sustainable manner</i>
<b>HP5</b>	<p>To require the creation of sustainable, mixed and balanced communities and high-quality residential developments at appropriate locations with adequate amenities and facilities that meet the standards and guidance of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities, DEHG (2024)</li> <li>- Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments, Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2023)</li> <li>- Urban Development and Building Height Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DHPLG, 2018)</li> <li>- The Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets, DTTS and DECLG (2013)</li> <li>- The development management standards of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027</li> </ul>

8.9 Objectives

Planning and Development Objectives	
<b>It is the objective of the Council to:</b>	
<b>H O1</b>	<i>To ensure compliance with the provisions of Part V of the Act (as amended) and to integrate such housing so as to prevent social segregation within residential developments</i>
<b>H O2</b>	<i>To utilise the provisions of the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 (Vacant Site Levy) to facilitate the appropriate development of vacant sites (residential zoned lands) that are in need of renewal or regeneration</i>
<b>H O3</b>	<i>To encourage the sequential development of sustainable serviced residentially zoned lands in a sustainable manner subject to compliance with relevant Department Guidelines and Development Management Standards of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027</i>
<b>H O4</b>	<i>To promote a higher density at appropriate locations, particularly close to the town centre and public transport facilities</i>
<b>H O5</b>	<i>To encourage appropriate housing development on infill and brownfield sites subject to preservation of existing residential amenity, the provision of a high quality design respecting the established character, density and layout, compliance with all traffic safety, quantitative and qualitative standards of the Laois County Development Plan 2021 – 2027</i>
<b>H O6</b>	<i>To promote the efficient use of vacant brownfield lands such as the Convent, Parish lands and Centrepoint</i>
<b>H O7</b>	<i>To promote the reoccupation of vacant residential stock within Portlaoise Town Centre, including ‘Living Above the Shop’ units</i>
<b>H O8</b>	<i>To increase the residential population of Portlaoise Town Centre in accordance with the objectives of the Public Realm Strategy</i>
<b>H O9</b>	<i>To ensure an appropriate and sustainable mix of dwelling types, sizes and tenures to cater for all members of society, including homeless persons, the elderly, disabled and travellers</i>

<b>H O10</b>	<i>To ensure provision of lifetime adaptable homes that can accommodate the changing needs of a household over time</i>
<b>H O11</b>	<i>To identify, acquire and provide suitable sites, accommodation and facilities for the housing and resettlement of travelling families</i>
<b>H O12</b>	<i>To secure the provision of social infrastructure, community and recreational facilities in tandem with residential development</i>



## SECTION 9. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**Strategic Aim:** *To promote, facilitate and enable economic development and employment generation activities in appropriate locations and in a sustainable manner, to meet the needs of the local workforce and reduce excessive commuting.*

### 9.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the economic development of Portlaoise including developing a broader base of employment opportunities, inward investment, local entrepreneurship and town centre management. A sound local economy is fundamental to fostering sustainable communities and a good quality of life. This Draft LAP seeks to create the conditions to support the sustainable economic development of Portlaoise during the Plan period 2024-2030 in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders.

Portlaoise is an expanding vibrant town with a skilled workforce and the required infrastructure to promote inward investment and the creation of more local employment. Laois County Council is committed to facilitating the creation of employment within the town and this plan provides the appropriate framework for development through the provision of adequately zoned lands and policies which support economic development. The zoning objectives for each of the land-use zones provide agility to respond to the demands from those looking to invest in Portlaoise. This plan sets the right conditions to secure inward investment and interest in Portlaoise as a business location and firmly embeds an economic development agenda into all other goals making their successful delivery more achievable.

Portlaoise is identified as the driver for economic development for the County, reflecting its designation as a **Key Town** and position at the top of the County Retail Hierarchy.

The Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 sets out the strategic context for economic development of the County as informed by the Laois Local Economic and Community Plan 2023-2028 which should be read in tandem with this chapter. The Local Enterprise Office and Laois Partnership Company seek to create job opportunities and support the Councils business and enterprise functions. They interact with a wide range of stakeholders to support employment opportunities including various government departments, the IDA, Enterprise Ireland, local and regional development agencies, existing and prospective businesses.

### 9.2 Current Profile

According to Census 2022 the total labour force in Portlaoise is 11,137, an increase of 3.7% [401] from Census 2016 when it was 10,736. This represents approximately 26% of the county labour force of 43,106 persons.

The majority of the working population are employed in professional services [2,533], commerce and trade [2,302] and public administration [831] with the Irish Prison Service, Health Service Executive, Department of Agriculture, hospitals and the County Council being the largest employers. The Census indicates that the majority have professional, skilled trades and elementary occupations.

By contrast, employment levels in manufacturing industry [840] have been and are still relatively low though this situation has been improving somewhat in recent years with the opening of a number of high-profile plants such as Glanbia Cheese EU, Greenfield Global and Limerick Brakes and others scheduled to open in the near future.

Employment levels in the Portlaoise labour force are broadly similar to the rest of the State, with 52% of residents in employment, compared to 54% nationally.

However, the proportion of the labour force either unemployed or seeking their first regular job is 15% which is significantly higher than the national rate of 8% and the county rate of 9%. This is linked to the ongoing decline of traditional local employment providers such as Bord na Mona.

The majority of workers commute to work by car (5,686 persons) and have a commute of under 15 minutes (4,908 persons), while 2,030 workers have a commute of at least 1 hour. Conversely, the numbers walking [750] or cycling [166] to work or using public transport [494] are much smaller.

The fostering of key services, community infrastructure and improvements to the public realm of the town centre will facilitate the attraction of employment generating activities to the town. In addition, Portlaoise's excellent road and rail links and proximity to the Greater Dublin Area is of major benefit in attracting economic development to the town.

### 9.3 National Enterprise Park Togher

Against this backdrop, Laois County Council has invested in and developed the National Enterprise Park at Junction 17, Portlaoise on an extensive landbank at **Togher** in the south-western outskirts of the town, to accommodate high-end enterprise, employment and industrial uses.



*Plate 9: Cheese Processing Plant at Togher*

The National Enterprise Park represents a massive opportunity, crucial to the well-being and prosperity of not only Portlaoise and County Laois but the entire Midland Region.

The Council prepared an updated Masterplan for the Togher landbank in 2017 that provided a framework for the most effective presentation in terms of layout and design, land management and traffic modelling associated with the site.

The purpose of the master plan is to ensure the integrated and coordinated development of the Togher and Clonminam areas for appropriate uses as indicated in this Draft LAP and to maximise the beneficial return of public investment in the national transportation network by protecting the carrying capacity of such routes in the interest of public safety.

The vision for the masterplan is to deliver a viable economic zone, as a National Enterprise Park, focused in particular on heavy, light and ICT industry, trade warehousing, distribution, freight, logistics and other uses associated with the transport industry. This has the potential to be a major boost to the economy of Portlaoise and to contribute to the growth of the County and the Region as a whole.

The Masterplan has been designed to accommodate and attract a range of potential business and industries to the candidate sites while meeting the needs of existing employers to expand their business.

The Masterplan envisages the creation of a sustainable movement strategy for the Togher Area, facilitating links to Portlaoise Town and its existing residential neighbourhoods through softer modes of travel. In tandem with this vision, the masterplan is cognisant of the high importance of the M7 and strives towards minimizing impacts on the national road network.



**Figure 21: Togher Area Masterplan**

The masterplan aims to achieve the following goals and objectives, which are designed first and foremost to deliver the vision for the articulation of the lands as a National Enterprise Park.

- *To secure the town’s role as the regional location for economic growth in the Midlands Area;*
- *To contribute to the prosperity of Portlaoise by facilitating the provision of adequate land for enterprise, including sites at suitable locations for industrial, enterprise, commercial and where appropriate small business uses having regard to spatial planning, infrastructural, environmental and transportation requirements and compatibility with adjoining land uses;*
- *To maximise the beneficial return of public investment in the National road network by protecting the safety, carrying capacity and efficiency of such routes;*
- *To support and protect the existing economic base and seek to diversify the economy through inward investments at key growth areas within the town and the environs;*
- *To support the provision of complementary facilities and land uses to support the sustainable development potential of the Togher Area;*
- *To promote developments of high-quality that incorporates a sensitive approach to design while protecting and enhancing the surroundings;*
- *To ensure that the area is developed in an orderly and sustainable manner;*

- *To promote energy efficient and sustainable development patterns, land uses and buildings that incorporate LEED standards;*
- *To facilitate potential synergies in terms of energy, materials and logistics between the present and future uses in the area with a long-term aspiration to become an Eco Enterprise Park;*
- *To seek an integrated transport approach linked to land use objectives which encourages a reduction in the need for travel, tackling traffic congestion and promoting public transport, cycling, walking as alternative means of travel to the use of car;*
- *To provide for and promote multi-modal transportation for the delivery of goods, services and overall access to the area; and*
- *To provide a positive gateway into the National Enterprise Park and Portlaoise.*

Finally, the Masterplan is structured to provide direction and a framework for future development patterns in each area but also flexible enough to allow Laois County Council to respond to changing market conditions and developer interest.

#### 9.4 Midland Connected Hubs

Midlands hubs is a network of remote working, co-working, incubation hubs and enterprise centres located throughout the Midlands region. *In Portlaoise the following spaces offer various working options and also options for educational pursuits.*



#### Remote Working Opportunities in Portlaoise



##### ***The Cube***

Under Call 3 of the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) Laois County Council developed a Low Carbon Centre of Excellence based in Portlaoise. The Cube is a multi-point incubation hub which will develop as a Low Carbon Centre of Excellence, assisting in attracting and developing companies with a low carbon focus. The CUBE operates as a catalyst in supporting the adaptation and development of industry to meet the targets under “Climate Action 2040”. It encourages business and industry in the region to analyse their operations



	<p>in a manner that will increase efficiency and ultimately lead to carbon neutrality.</p>
	<p><b>Portlaoise Enterprise Centre</b></p> <p>Established in 2007 and located in Clonminam Business Park, the Portlaoise Enterprise Centre supports start-up and growing businesses in Laois and operates with a community-focus in the not-for-profit sector.</p> <p>The centre offers five designated desks, 16 office spaces, five light industrial units, and three meeting/training rooms. The designated desks are ideal for people who have started a business from home and are looking to make the next step.</p>
	<p><b>Vision 85 Portlaoise</b></p> <p>Vision 85 is an independently owned Business and Co-Networking Hub Located in Clonminam Business Park, Portlaoise. It provides pod, office, training and podcast room hire and encourages a community of collaboration through its ethos of Create/Network/Grow.</p>

**Table 8: Remote Working Opportunities in Portlaoise**

9.5 Tourism

The County is not widely thought of as a tourist destination for Irish or foreign tourists, due to a lack of developed tourist attractions along with a largely rural population base.

However, Portlaoise possesses a number of potential development opportunities. The town’s strategic location, excellent road and rail availability and proximity to major centres of population like Dublin, offer the potential for the development of a niche market promoting conferences and events. The

Heritage Hotel, Killeshin Hotel and the Maldron Hotel offer greater facilities for conferences and will ensure that Portlaoise can function as a conference/event centre in its own right.

There is also significant potential to develop Portlaoise as a base to visit tourist attractions in the County such as the Slieve Blooms, Rock of Dunamaise and Emo Court.

The Dunamaise Theatre and Centre for the Arts together with Laois School of Music and Outdoor events centre has an extensive programme showing the very best of contemporary and traditional theatre, music and dance.

### 9.6 Cultural Quarter

In cultural terms, Portlaoise is fast establishing a reputation as a centre for the Arts and has developed the Cultural Quarter in the historic core of the town.

Projects in the pipeline to develop the potential of Portlaoise as a tourism destination include the creation of a Heritage Visitor experience connected with the Rock of Dunamiasé and an Outdoor performance space , both located in the Cultural Quarter, Portlaoise.



**Figure 22: Portlaoise Cultural Quarter**

Portlaoise retains a series of buildings related to the Town’s 16<sup>th</sup> century foundation. These include the Fort Protector, a military fort built in 1548 as part of the conquest of the area, the Old St Peter’s Church; the ‘Store House’ embedded in the later Presentation convent, the River Triogue and the Ridge Burial Ground.



*Plate 10: St Peters Graveyard, within Portlaoise Cultural Quarter*

These early ‘foundation sites’ influenced the development of the historic town which grew around them, with Portlaoise finding its current form in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The historic centre is a designated Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) and comprises:

- The foundation sites in the north of the Town Centre (above), around which a Catholic ecclesiastical quarter developed in the 19th century;
- Main Street, which began as a market place at the Lower Square, later extending to the east and to the west;
- Market Square at the western end of Main Street, with Coote Street, Grattan Street and later the Abbeyleix Road emanating outwards;
- Historic lanes extending south from Main Street, likely marking entrances to the early Town and now connecting to the modern area around James Fintan Lalor Avenue;
- The Ridge Burial Ground and the converging roads from Dublin and Stradbally, now dominated by the church of SS Peter and Paul.

The cultural heritage embodied in the ACA is a significant resource for the Town. The varied streetscape, punctuated by imposing buildings creates a distinctive architectural character.



**Plate 11: Redeveloped Fitzmaurice Plaza in Portlaoise Cultural Quarter**

9.7 Policies

Planning and Development Policies	
It is the policy of the Council to:	
<b>ED P1</b>	<i>Support strategic enterprise and employment opportunities at other appropriate locations in Portlaoise and environs, having regard to proper planning and sustainable development and relevant development control standards</i>
<b>ED P2</b>	<i>Facilitate the continuity of and encourage the expansion of established enterprises and to promote start-up enterprises, having regard to the protection of the amenity value of neighbouring properties</i>
<b>ED P3</b>	<i>Co-operate with IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, the Local Enterprise Office and other agencies, organisations and individuals in promoting enterprise in Portlaoise;</i>
<b>ED P4</b>	<i>Support the further development of broadband in Portlaoise and to facilitate the development of Portlaoise as an E-Commerce centre</i>
<b>ED P5</b>	<i>Encourage, in co-operation with the Local Enterprise Office and Laois Partnership, the development of further small to medium scale industries and services</i>



<b>ED P6</b>	<i>Create an integrated and sustainable public and private transport system to move people and goods efficiently within and through Portlaoise</i>
<b>ED P7</b>	<i>Develop high quality business infrastructure</i>
<b>ED P8</b>	<i>Support the consolidation and expansion of the Cultural Quarter</i>

9.8 Objectives

Planning and Development Objectives	
<b>It is the objective of the Council to:</b>	
<b>ED 01</b>	<i>Facilitate the future sustainable development of Portlaoise so as to optimise the benefits of its location, in accordance with the National Planning Framework and the Eastern and Midland Region Spatial and Economic Strategy</i>
<b>ED 02</b>	<i>Promote balanced and sustainable economic development and employment, ensuring that a diverse range of economic sectors are developed and supported</i>
<b>ED 03</b>	<i>Promote employment opportunities by facilitating development on appropriately zoned lands</i>
<b>ED 04</b>	<i>Facilitate the provision and expansion of all services and infrastructure which would contribute positively to the attraction of the town to economic development</i>
<b>ED 05</b>	<i>Develop Junction 17 National Enterprise Park(Togher) and Improve the existing built environment of the Togher/Clonminam Area; in line with the masterplan</i>
<b>ED 06</b>	<i>Facilitate the improvement and expansion of established enterprises and industries</i>
<b>ED 07</b>	<i>Promote the use of the Connected Midland Hubs located in Portlaoise</i>
<b>ED 08</b>	<i>Facilitate and promote the provision of incubator units for start up businesses and SMEs</i>



<b>ED 09</b>	<i>Provide opportunities for an IT Ecosystem centred on the SIRO high speed broadband capacity</i>
<b>ED 010</b>	<i>Accommodate small employment generating activities at first floor level and vacant ground floor commercial premises on the Main Street</i>
<b>ED 011</b>	<i>Support the continued operation and reasonable expansion of non-conforming uses subject to maintenance of existing environmental, visual and residential amenity</i>
<b>ED 012</b>	<i>Identify opportunities to improve the tourism product in cooperation with relevant statutory agencies, private providers and community groups</i>
<b>ED 013</b>	<i>Facilitate the provision of standardized tourism signage and interpretation facilities for tourist attractions</i>
<b>ED 014</b>	<i>Promote Portlaoise as a tourist destination</i>
<b>ED 015</b>	<i>Facilitate the development of a tourist centre in the Cultural quarter, reusing the Hapenny School</i>

## SECTION 10. INFRASTRUCTURE & ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

**Strategic Aim:** *To enable development take place in line with the capacity of supporting infrastructure and to require the timely provision of infrastructure needed for the planned sustainable development of lands.*

Over the lifetime of this Draft LAP, there will be continued investment in a sustainable network of physical strategic infrastructure and utilities to support sustainable socio-economic growth, and to protect the quality of the environment of Portlaoise. This will be achieved through the identification of required infrastructure in collaboration with infrastructure providers, and continued investment in the right locations, and at the right time.

The provision of high-quality infrastructure networks and environmental services is fundamental to ensuring the long-term physical, environmental, social and economic development of the town.

### 10.1 Uisce Eireann

Uisce Eireann is responsible for the provision and operation of public water and wastewater services across the country. Laois County Council delivers water services in accordance with a Service Level Agreement. The Water Services Strategic Plan (WSSP) was published in 2015 by the then Irish Water, which sets out strategic objectives for the delivery of water services over a 25 year period and a context for investment and implementation plans.

Uisce Eireann and Laois County Council will work jointly to identify the water services required to support planned development in line with national and regional planning policies for inclusion in the Uisce Eireann Capital Investment Plans.



**Plate 12: Uisce Eireann Treatment Plant at Ridge Road**

Sequential development in areas with existing water services infrastructure and spare capacity is encouraged. In assessing the infrastructure requirements to service a large area of land, it is preferable to have an overall development masterplan including phases of development and timelines so that an overall strategic water services plan for the lands can be developed.

An infrastructural assessment was carried out as part of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 process in assessing the appropriateness of zoning lands within Portlaoise and the capacity of infrastructure to service them.

Within the settlement of Portlaoise 6,912 households are connected to the public mains water supply and 6,887 households are connected to the public sewer system.

## 10.2 Water Supply & Network

According to Uisce Eireann, there is limited headroom available at present, infrastructure upgrades are being progressed at present, these will facilitate additional growth. Further upgrades may be required to accommodate the full projected growth indicated in the County Development Plan.

## 10.3 Wastewater Collection & Treatment

There is sufficient capacity at Portlaoise's wastewater treatment plant to provide for growth in line with the County Development Plan population targets.

The sewer network is constrained in areas and a Drainage Area Plan has been completed for Portlaoise, identifying risks and needs across the agglomeration relating to hydraulic, environmental, structural, operational and growth constraints. While hydraulic constraints exist in some areas of the network, it is envisaged that capacity is available to cater for the population targets within the lifetime of the plan, provided growth is planned in areas of the network where capacity is available. Local network upgrades may need to be delivered in some areas to provide capacity to individual sites, these can be customer driven/funded in accordance with the requirements of the Connections Charging Policy.

Uisce Eireann is currently progressing a project to upgrade the Borris Road pumping station and gravity sewers in the network leading up to it. This upgrade will deliver an additional 1400 PE capacity and will serve the areas to the East of the Pumping Station and the Kilminchy area.

Adequate storm water drainage and retention facilities are necessary to accommodate surface water run-off from existing and proposed developments. Sustainable Drainage Systems can contribute to surface water retention and a reduction in the potential for flooding by acting as natural drainage.

#### 10.4 Surface Water Drainage & Green-Blue Infrastructure

Uisce Eireann encourages the inclusion of policies and objectives on the use of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems and Green-Blue Infrastructure in new developments including the public realm and retrofitted in existing developed areas, in line with NPO 57 of the National Planning Framework.

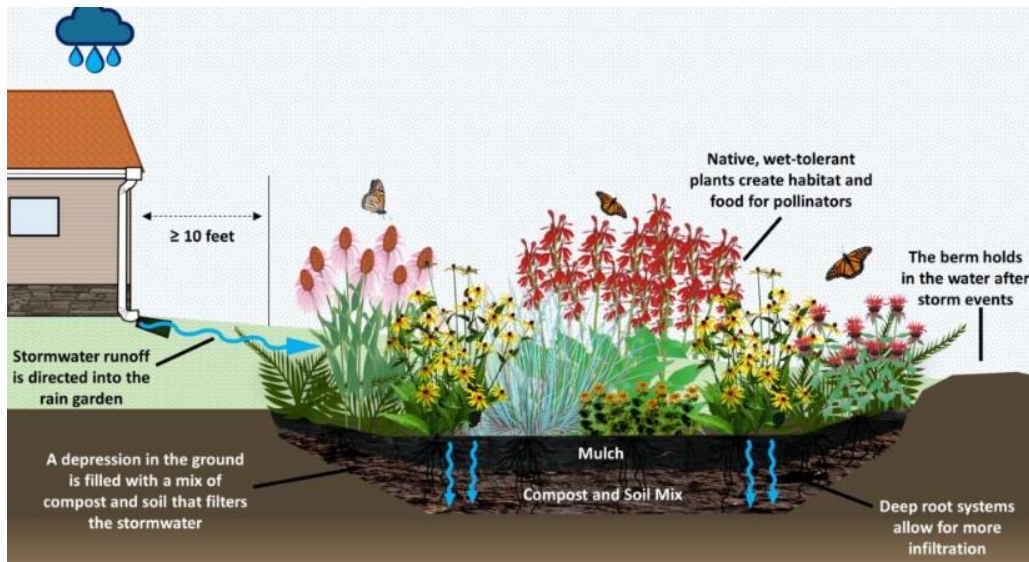


*Plate 13: SUDs in Kilminchy*

These measures can provide a cost effective and sustainable means of managing stormwater and water pollution at source, keeping surface water out of combined sewers (thus increasing capacity for foul drainage from new developments), while providing multiple benefits for example, improved air quality, amenity and noise reduction.

In order to maximise the capacity of existing collection systems for foul water, the discharge of additional surface water to combined (foul and surface water) sewers is not permitted. The removal of stormwater from combined sewers as part of roads, public realm, residential or other developments is strongly encouraged; this is particularly relevant to the achievement of compact growth objectives.

In addition, and to support sustainable use of the available hydraulic capacity in Combined Sewers, Uisce Eireann welcomes the proposal in the recent County Development Plan to promote SUDs and in particular promotion of Nature based SUDs (NbSUDs).



**Figure 23: Urban rainwater garden**

#### 10.5 Electricity, Gas, Broadband & Renewables

Portlaoise is served by a high-capacity electricity system and gas network.

EU Directive 2009/29/EC on the Promotion of Renewable Energy Sources establishes a binding target of 20% of overall EU energy production from renewable resources by 2020, as well as a binding 10% minimum target for energy from renewable resources to account for 16% of total energy consumption



by 2020. In line with these commitments, Ireland’s target for electricity from renewable energy sources is 40% by 2020. Low carbon technologies present an economic opportunity and green technology development is emerging as a major field of innovation and growth. The Council recognize the importance of developing renewable energy resources in the interest of delivering the National Climate Change Adaptation Framework.

### 10.6 Broadband

Within the settlement 5,615 households have broadband internet services. The high-speed broadband network upgrade is being implemented by SIRO, which will give significant economic and social advantage to Portlaoise as a place to set up internet-based businesses.

### 10.7 WIFI in Public Spaces

Launched in 2022, free public Wifi is now available in parts of Portlaoise Town centre following the launch of a new European initiative which promotes free connectivity within public spaces. The project is funded through the EU, to promote access to Wifi connectivity in public spaces in municipalities throughout Europe, with matching funding provided by the Department of Rural and Community Development for Wifi installation. Free WIFI is designed to enhance the public realm in the town and encourage more people to visit and do business into the town centre.



**Figure 24: WiFi locations in Portlaoise**

10.8 Policies

Planning and Development Policies	
It is the policy of the Council to:	
<b>KI P1</b>	<i>Protect both ground and surface water resources and to work with Uisce Eireann to develop and implement Water Safety Plans to protect sources of public water supply and a their contributing catchment</i>
<b>KI P2</b>	<i>Work with Uisce Eireann on developing and upgrading the water supply schemes so as to ensure an adequate, resilient, sustainable and economic supply of piped water</i>
<b>KI P3</b>	<i>Work with Uisce Eireann on upgrading the wastewater treatment plant in line with the projected future growth of the settlement of Portlaoise</i>
<b>KI P4</b>	<i>Promote and support the implementation of Uisce Eireann’s Eastern and Midlands Region Water Supply Project</i>
<b>KI P5</b>	<i>Assess all applications in the context of available and sufficient public infrastructural facilities, the protection of Surface Water and Groundwater Resources</i>
<b>KI P6</b>	<i>Promote public awareness and involvement in water conservation measures by households, businesses and industries and supports the implementation of Energy Efficiency solutions in Water and Wastewater System</i>
<b>KI P7</b>	<i>Promote and encourage the harvesting of rainwater to meet non-potable water needs</i>
<b>KI P8</b>	<i>Co-operate with and facilitate the work of national telecommunications, broadband, electricity and gas network providers in the improvement, expansion and provision of energy and communication infrastructure subject to proper planning and sustainable development</i>

10.9 Objectives

Planning and Development Objectives
It is the objective of the Council to:

<b>KI 01</b>	<i>Facilitate economic and social development through the provision of infrastructure and optimise the return of infrastructure investment</i>
<b>KI 02</b>	<i>Promote and encourage the development of the critical mass of Portlaoise and to enhance its strategic location on the National and Regional road and rail network</i>
<b>KI 03</b>	<i>Phase growth in line with the capacity of supporting infrastructure</i>
<b>KI 04</b>	<i>Facilitate Uisce Eireann in the maintenance, expansion and upgrading of wastewater disposal and water supply infrastructure</i>
<b>KI 05</b>	<i>Ensure a good quality of life, through maintaining and improving wastewater treatment and water supplies and to minimise the adverse impacts of development on the environment, through policies for the management of wastes and emissions</i>
<b>KI 06</b>	<i>Seek compliance with the standards and requirements of Uisce Eireann in relation to water and wastewater infrastructure</i>
<b>KI 07</b>	<i>Protect both ground and surface water resources and to work with Uisce Eireann to develop and implement Water Safety Plans to protect sources of public water supply and their contributing catchments</i>
<b>KI 08</b>	<i>Require all new developments to include proposals for Sustainable Drainage Systems</i>
<b>KI 09</b>	<i>Maintain, improve and enhance the environmental and ecological quality of surface waters and groundwater in accordance with the National River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2021 (DHPLG) and associated Programme of Measures</i>
<b>KI 010</b>	<i>Ensure developments will not adversely impact on the status of waterbodies in accordance with the Water Framework Directive and National River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2021 (DHPLG)</i>
<b>KI 011</b>	<i>Facilitate, promote and encourage the expansion and improvement of telecommunications, broadband, electricity and gas networks infrastructure subject to proper planning and sustainable development</i>

## SECTION 11. TRANSPORT AND MOVEMENT

**Strategic Aim:** *To enable a modal shift change in transport modes, with greater numbers of residents, workers and visitors utilising active travel such as walking and cycling and public transport, more sustainable transport patterns.*

### 11.1 Introduction

Portlaoise is centrally located in the Midlands of Ireland and in close proximity to the Greater Dublin Area. It has strategic road links to the entire country via the M7 and M8 motorways, the N77, N78 and N80 National Secondary Roads and a network of regional and local roads. The town is also located on the railway line connecting the south and west to Dublin. National and local bus routes also provide services in the town. Portlaoise is therefore readily accessible to the Greater Dublin Area, Dublin City, the M50, national airports and ports. The accessibility of the town provides key advantages for the attraction of economic and residential development.

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 NRA and RPA). In addition, the strategy and objectives of this plan are required to be consistent with the transport strategy of the NTA.

The improvement of transport infrastructure in the town is a key element of sustainable development and achieving a low carbon economy. At present traffic congestion is an issue which needs to be addressed. Vehicles dominate many of Portlaoise's streets and largely unrestricted vehicle movement is detrimental to a vibrant and livable environment. This impacts negatively on the quality and type of activities that can be accommodated in the town centre and the attractiveness to and safety of pedestrians and cyclists.

### 11.2 Transport Modes

As indicated in Census 2022, private car transport is the predominant mode of travel to work [57%] and school [49%] in Portlaoise. By contrast walking and cycling rates are far lower.

The key to getting people out of their cars and into public transport is to have a reliable, convenient, frequent and fast public transport service available and opportunities for pedestrian and cycle linkages, that bring people to the places they want to go.

While Laois County Council is not itself a public transport provider and cannot force providers to deliver services in any particular area, this plan can put in place the necessary policy framework to encourage and facilitate the improvement of public transport. Limiting and/or removing vehicles at certain locations would benefit the public realm in terms of air quality and noise and make the town centre a more attractive place to work, live and visit.

In addition, there is an identified need for upgrades and new vehicular, pedestrian and cycle connections to improve accessibility to existing residential estates, the town centre and educational facilities.

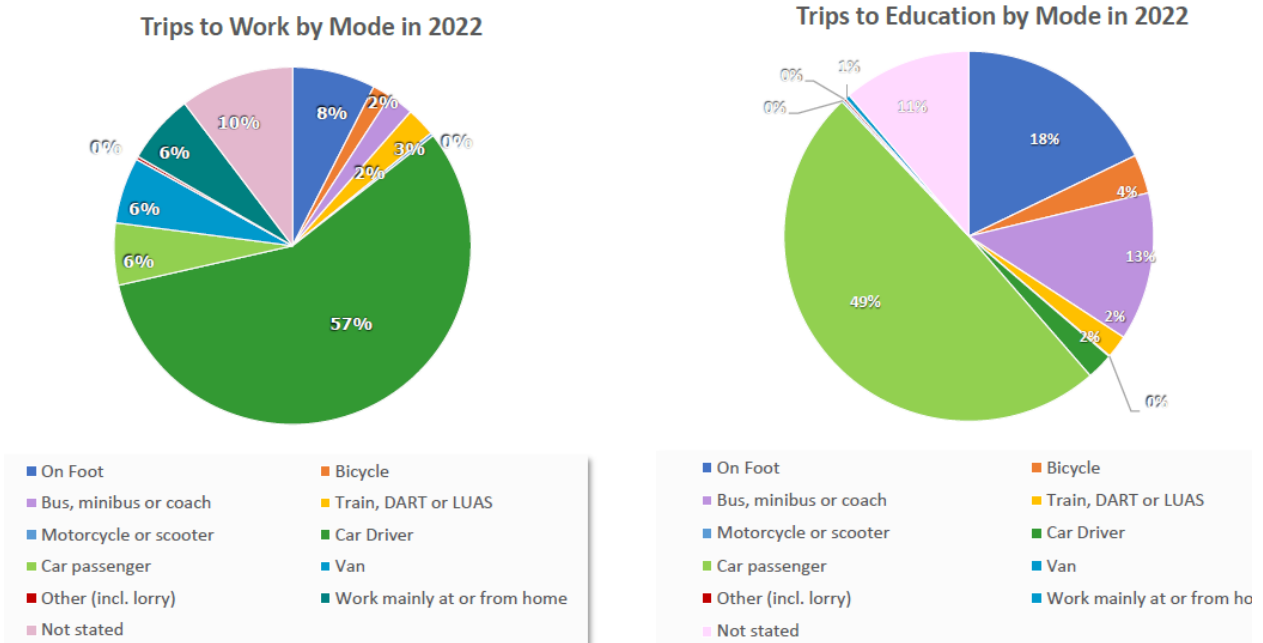


Figure 25: Commuting by means of travel to work, school or college (CSO 2022)

### 11.3 Smarter Travel

In order to achieve more sustainable travel patterns, a significant focus on reducing car dependency and increasing the permeability of the town is required. The benefits of reducing reliance on the car and improving the permeability of towns for cyclists and walkers, can be summarised as follows:

- Reduced dependency on fossil fuels, pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions;
- Increased levels of exercise with consequent health and fitness benefits;
- Builds social capital in neighbourhoods through increased social interaction;



- Higher numbers of pedestrians and cyclists increase levels of passive supervision making places safer;
- Reduced congestion on roads makes public transport more viable and
- Reduced expenditure leakage to larger towns benefits local businesses.

A key aim of this Draft LAP is therefore to promote compact, connected neighbourhoods based on street patterns and forms of development that will make walking and cycling, especially for local trips, more attractive in line with national policy such as the “*Smarter Travel, A Sustainable Transport Future*” (2009) and “*Ireland’s First National Cycle Policy Framework*” (2009) promote sustainable travel movements and encourage people to find alternative ways to travel reducing car dependency.

#### 11.4 Permeability

In accordance with the “**Permeability** Best Practice Guide” (NTA, 2015), the key principles for maintaining and providing permeability within the plan area for the lifetime of the plan are as follows:

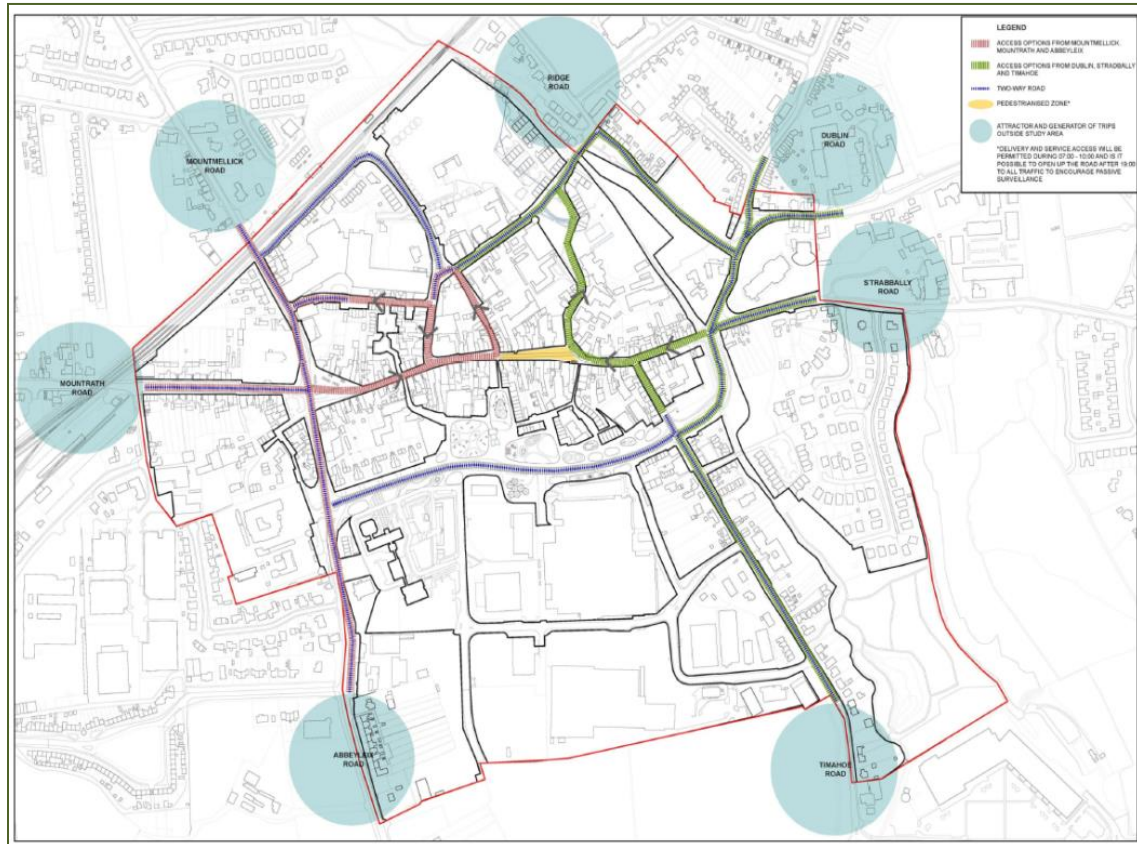
- Origins and destinations, such as schools and shops, should be linked in the most direct manner possible for pedestrians and cyclists,
- Greater priority should be given to pedestrians and cyclists,
- The physical design of links should be fit for purpose in terms of capacity and security and
- Junctions in urban and suburban areas should cater for pedestrians and cyclists safely and conveniently.



**Plate 14: Pedestrian access (1) Bridle Walk, Kilminchy, (2) Peoples Park (3) Goldencroft, Tower Hill**

In delivering the objectives of Portlaoise 2040, a vehicle movement strategy was indicated as an important enabling mechanism of the Public Realm Strategy. The aim of this strategy is to reduce traffic in the town core, where possible, create a safe environment and serve pedestrian desire lines to and

from key nodes, particularly the historic town centre, the shopping area at Kylekiproe, as well as open and civic spaces. Consideration has been given to the removal of on-street parking and the appropriateness of one-way systems to provide the safest possible environment for all users.



**Figure 26: The proposed traffic cells of the Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy**

### 11.5 Local Transport Plan

As part of the requirement for an evidence-based approach to planning, as set out in the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region, a draft Local Transport Plan [LTP] has been prepared to inform the drafting of the LAP. This is contained in **Appendix A**.

The LTP identifies appropriate transport solutions for the Portlaoise urban area to ensure the integration of land use and transport planning and realise policy for increasing public transport and active travel mode share.

The LTP is intended to underpin the future development of Portlaoise and ensure that the assessment of transport demand and its associated impact plays a central role in informing future development. The LTP will provide a shift to sustainable modes based on the road user hierarchy and will set a framework for investment in transport infrastructure within Portlaoise.

#### 11.5.1 Key Objectives of the Portlaoise Local Transport Plan

Five key transport objectives have been identified as follows:

<b>Transport Objective 1</b>	<i>Develop a multi-modal transport plan to identify interventions that enable a transition to sustainable and low carbon transport modes.</i>
<b>Transport Objective 2</b>	<i>Apply the 15-minute town concept, providing excellent links to public transport for when longer journeys are needed and supporting town centre living and working as outlined in Portlaoise 2040.</i>
<b>Transport Objective 3</b>	<i>Identify opportunities to ensure more children can travel safely to school by walking and cycling.</i>
<b>Transport Objective 4</b>	<i>Maximise the ability of natural environment assets such as River Triogue and Togher Woods to facilitate safe and permeable walking and cycling. Create new green <b>and blue</b> infrastructure.</i>
<b>Transport Objective 5</b>	<i>Enhance the vibrancy, accessibility, liveability and safety of Portlaoise through place-making and a Healthy Streets approach, producing a better balance of public space.</i>

**Table 9: Portlaoise Local Transport Plan Objectives**

#### 11.5.2 Key Principles of the Portlaoise Local Transport Plan

Some of the **key principles** identified for Portlaoise include:

- Reimagining Portlaoise’s urban core as a more people-oriented town centre as envisaged by the Portlaoise 2040 vision document is proposed. This involves reducing vehicular traffic within

Portlaoise town centre to facilitate a quieter, more attractive public realm for pedestrians and cyclists to navigate.

- Revitalising the town centre may include shared streets, along with traffic-calming measures such as speed reductions, and **prioritising movement by pedestrians and cyclists**. This has already been commenced in the reclamation of space on the Abbeyleix Road as indicated hereunder.



*Plate 15: Provision of cycleway and reduction of road width on Abbeyleix Road N77.*

- Improving **permeability** between schools and residential areas and implementing **Safe Routes to School (SRTS) measures** to encourage more children to walk and cycle to school.
- Improving **permeability** between main squares and roads by removing barriers and de-cluttering – among other actions – could further this process of reimagining Portlaoise’s town centre as a vibrant space in which people work, socialise and live.
- Providing a **dedicated cycle network** for Portlaoise town, following the cycle connections proposed for the town in the NTA’s National Cycle Network *Cycle Connects*.
- **Completing the Triogue Way greenway and** a new sustainable transport corridor leading to Togher Woods that would include attractive pedestrian and cycling infrastructure. These schemes emphasise ease of use for pedestrians and cyclists and a sense of safety and *security*

when traversing greenways around Portlaoise, making it easy for people to walk or cycle to employment, education and leisure.

- **Maximising accessibility and connectivity of Portlaoise’s rail and bus network** by improving connectivity between places where people live, work, go to school and socialise. This includes the development of the **new town bus service** within Portlaoise, which will provide residents with a high-quality and accessible bus route connecting the town centre with the outskirts of Portlaoise.
- Upgrading Portlaoise Railway Station and its surroundings as an **intermodal transport hub**, serving not only Portlaoise and its neighbouring towns with sustainable public transport options, but further servicing the entire Midlands region and beyond as a core transport nexus situated directly in the centre of Ireland.
- Maximising the impact of the town bus service, by improving the permeability of the proposed **bus stops**, ensuring that it is as easy as possible to reach bus stops.
- **Developing Park-and-Ride** facilities near the bus depots on the town’s periphery could prevent large volumes of vehicular traffic from entering the town centre for commercial activities, while **Park-and-Stride** set-down locations could prevent potentially dangerous traffic volumes in and around Portlaoise’s school or commercial areas.

The LTP makes high-level suggestions for **Park-and-Ride** and **Park-and-Stride** locations that require further study by Laois County Council, the NTA and other stakeholders.

### 11.5.3 Portlaoise Active Travel

In 2023, the National Transport Authority (NTA) allocated €290 million in Active Travel Investment Grants to local authorities to enhance the delivery of hundreds of projects across the country.

In total, the investment will fund approximately 1,200 Active Travel projects, contributing to the development of almost 1,000km of new and improved walking and cycling infrastructure across the country by 2025. This includes the delivery of segregated cycle lanes, widened footpaths, new walking and cycling bridges, and new pedestrian crossings.

Laois County Council have been allocated over €3 million for a variety of Active Travel schemes. Schemes include junction tightening, the construction of new and the upgrading of existing cycle lanes, upgrading footpaths and pedestrian crossings, as well as a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) scheme.



The following are some of the projects which are included in the NTA funding:

LOCATION	PROJECT
<i>Beladd</i>	This scheme, which is still at early stages, proposes a shared pedestrian/cycle track across HSE lands at Beladd, which will link the Stradbally Road and Dublin Road. The route is to begin at the N80/Southern Circular Rd junction up to the entrance of Fielbrook estate.
<i>Borris Road</i>	This is a rapid deployment scheme proposed to extend existing provision of segregated cycle infrastructure to circa 1.3km. Laois County Council also propose to include roundabout upgrade works at the two northern roundabouts which will see uncontrolled crossing points upgraded to controlled.
<i>Father Brown Avenue Cycling Scheme</i>	<p>The scheme proposes the removal of right turning lanes and central medians and reallocating the road space to cycling infrastructure. Part 8 approval was obtained in December 2022, and Laois County Council are now considering detailed design options.</p> <p>Delivery of this scheme is expected within 2-3 years, by 2025/2026. The project will be another step in ensuring continuity of segregated cycling infrastructure by removing gaps in the network.</p>
<i>Dublin Road</i>	<p>Part 1 of the scheme begins near the Grenville Estate and runs as far as the Kilminchy roundabout. The scheme proposes the removal of right turning lanes and central medians and reallocating the road space to cycling infrastructure. Detailed design has been completed following Part 8 approval.</p> <p>Part 2 of the scheme proposes the formalisation of the advisory cycle lanes on the Dublin Road from Grenville residential estate as far as St. Mary’s Hall, closer to town. Works are proposed to begin in 2024 and will provide a seamless route over its 2km length to the Town Centre.</p>
<i>Mountrath Road R445, Rapid</i>	The scheme proposes the formalisation of the advisory cycle lanes on the Mountrath Road between the roundabouts at the Western Orbital Road

<b>Deployment Scheme, R445</b>	to Knockmay Road. Laois County Council are assessing options, including the option of segregating cycle lanes from vehicular traffic by way of a raised cycle track. The scheme will ensure the continuity of off-road cycle facilities from the Western Orbital Road to Knockmay Road.
<b>Rathleague</b>	A new footpath at Rathleague from Bloomfield Cross to Portlaoise GAA was completed in 2023. This saw the delivery of a 3m wide shared pedestrian /cycle track with additional public lighting installed. Other safety measures were introduced on the road to highlight the GAA entrance oncoming motorists. The purpose of the scheme is to help encourage increased walking/cycling to the GAA club.
<b>Stradbally Road</b>	A scheme to review the provision of cycling infrastructure on the Stradbally Road from its roundabout junction with the Southern Circular Road to the Tyrrells site is proposed by Laois County Council. Options for the Stradbally Road Scheme involve the delivery of dedicated cycle tracks or shared pedestrian/cycle tracks. Subject to approval, the works are planned to be delivered within 3 years.
<b>Triogue Way Phase 2 and 3</b>	Phase 1 runs from Lismard Roundabout into the People’s Park as a shared pedestrian and cycle path. This phase was delivered and completed in 2022. Phases 2 and 3 will run from the People’s Park along the route of the River Triogue, through the old Convent Lands and the Linear Park where it will meet Greenmill Lane. From here it leaves the Park and travels on-road along Greenmill Lane, onto the N80 Mountmellick Road, and onto the Ballyfin Road where it finishes at the Western Orbital Road. Phase 2 is the section from Greenmill Lane to the Western Orbital Road, and Part 8 for this phase is due to be published by

*Table 10: NTA funded Active Travel Projects*

11.6 Policies

Planning and Development Policies

<b>It is the policy of the Council to:</b>	
<b>TM P1</b>	Improve and provide pedestrian linkages, cycle networks and permeability including blueways and greenways throughout the town; ensure filtered permeability is secured in all new residential estates, providing direct access to commercial developments and schools. Retrofit connectivity including between established housing areas where possible
<b>TM P2</b>	Examine the feasibility of introducing clear, direct pedestrian routes between the shopping areas, and provide pedestrian access across James Fintan Lalor Avenue and Lyster Square
<b>TM P3</b>	Provide adequate, secure and dry bicycle parking facilities at appropriate locations
<b>TM P4</b>	Ensure all footpaths provide access for disabled and mobility impaired persons
<b>TM P5</b>	Facilitate and implement appropriate measures to reduce or manage traffic associated with schools to regularize vehicular movements and alleviate congestion
<b>TM P6</b>	Reserve all lands for future relief roads free of development in conjunction with the requirements of the Road Authority
<b>TM P7</b>	Complete the inner relief road system for Portlaoise including the Portlaoise Northern Orbital Route, links between the Dublin Road and the Borris Road, Rathleague and Meelick and the Stradbally and Dublin Road
<b>TM P8</b>	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
<b>TM P9</b>	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
<b>TM P10</b>	Ensure that any development permitted along national roads is in accordance with the Spatial Planning and National Roads–Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DoECLG, 2012) or any updated version

<b>TM P11</b>	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 to Portlaoise 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
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11.7 Objectives

Planning and Development Objectives	
It is the objective of the Council to:	
<b>TM 01</b>	To cooperate with NTA and other relevant transport planning bodies in the delivery of a high quality, integrated transport system.
<b>TM 02</b>	Facilitate the economic and social development of the town through the provision and efficient use of transport infrastructure.
<b>TM 03</b>	Cooperate and facilitate Irish Rail, Bus Eireann and private operatives in the provision and frequency of public transport services, operation of services and facilities.
<b>TM 04</b>	To facilitate the provision of a “park and ride” on the CBS lands to serve Portlaoise Railway Station which incorporates car parking and a bus stop/terminus.
<b>TM 05</b>	To facilitate the provision of a “park and stride” adjacent to Lismard Business Park to serve the neighbouring school campuses.
<b>TM 06</b>	To promote the development of a transport interchange on James Fintan Lalor Avenue including bus stops and facilities in conjunction with the NTA.

<b>TM 07</b>	Encourage, promote and facilitate a modal shift towards more sustainable forms of transport in all new developments.
<b>TM 08</b>	Promote sustainable and compact forms of development which reduce reliance of private car-based transport.
<b>TM 09</b>	Concentrate people intensive development in areas easily accessible to public transport.
<b>TM 010</b>	Significantly reduce carbon emissions through traffic related interventions at James Fintan Lalor / Lyster Square.
<b>TM 011</b>	Improve the pedestrian experience by reducing car dominance on James Fintan Lalor Avenue.
<b>TM 012</b>	Improve pedestrian links, based on desire lines, from Main Street through Laneways and between the old and new shopping areas.
<b>TM 013</b>	Seek a 40% increase in bicycle use by 2040.
<b>TM 014</b>	To investigate, in conjunction with Irish Rail, the reopening and reuse of the Togher train line from Portlaoise Railway Station as part of the overall development of the Togher National Enterprise Park.



## SECTION 12. COMMUNITY SERVICES

**Strategic Aim:** *To safeguard, provide and expand community services and facilities to meet the needs of the current and future population.*

### 12.1 Introduction

The creation of sustainable and vibrant communities requires the provision of and access to education, childcare, health and support services, recreation and leisure facilities and a good quality-built environment to create a sense of place. The Council is committed to the provision, upgrade and expansion of community facilities and social infrastructure in conjunction with private, public and voluntary organisations.

As well as dramatically increasing in size, the population of Portlaoise is becoming more diverse with many new arrivals from Eastern Europe [in particular from Poland and Lithuania], UK, Africa, India and Ukraine. According to Census 2022, 6,575 residents [27%] of Portlaoise were born outside of Ireland. This is one of the highest non-national town population percentages in the country.

### 12.2 Children and Young People

Census 2022 reveals that Portlaoise has a population of 7,088 aged under 19 years which represents 30% of the overall population of the town.

This has a bearing on the present and future need for facilities such as childcare, play areas for children, sports facilities, schools and safe walking and cycling routes in the County and the importance of bringing together key voluntary providers of services to children and young people such as Comhairle Na N-Og and Laois/Offaly Children and Young Peoples Services Committee.

### 12.3 Sport, Recreation and Play

Portlaoise has a wide range of sports, recreation and play facilities. These facilities are provided through a mix of public, private and community organisations.

The built and natural environment of Portlaoise, including its public roads and footpaths, open spaces, Pairc an Phobail, the River Triogue Linear Park and Togher Wood support an array of sports, recreation and play activities such as walking, jogging, cycling. These are supplemented by gyms and leisure facilities, such as the Leisure Centre and Saint Marys Hall.

Sports and recreation clubs in Portlaoise cater for GAA, soccer, golf, rugby, swimming, athletics and basketball amongst others. Some of the key sporting clubs and facilities include: Portlaoise GAA Club, Portlaoise Soccer Club, Portlaoise Panthers Basketball Club, Portlaoise Athletics Club, Portlaoise Rugby Club and Portlaoise Golf Club.

Laois Sports Partnerships are at the forefront of the development and promotion of these sporting and recreational activities. They work with clubs, schools, and community groups to ensure that structures are in place to enable participation for all community members.

#### 12.4 New Communities

The Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) was established in 2014 by Laois County Council and performs a role in developing, coordinating and implementing a coherent and integrated approach to local and community development through the Local Economic and Community Plan 2023 - 2028 (LECP). The LECP is central to promoting economic and local community development in the county over a five-year period.

#### 12.5 Community Resource Centre



***Plate 16: Treo Nua Resource Centre, Harpurs Lane, Portlaoise***

Treo Nua Community & Family Resource Centre on Harpurs Lane was opened in 2005. It provides a wide range of programmes, supports and services for families and individuals living in Portlaoise and environs. These include family support, early learning, youth work, community development, childrens play therapy, gambling therapy and counselling.

## 12.6 Education

The provision of good quality childcare and educational facilities is important to support the development of sustainable communities and to support economic development. There are approximately 25 no. preschool facilities in Portlaoise, including a variety of full day care facilities, sessional services, preschool, crèche facilities, Montessori and after school facilities. The requirement for additional preschool facilities will be based on the capacity of existing facilities and additional requirements arising from new residential development.



***Plate 17: Schools Campus [Holy Family] at Aghnaharna***

There are 7 no. primary schools and 4 no. secondary schools in Portlaoise. Much of the education infrastructure is of recent origin. The Council has sought and will continue to work with the Department of Education and Skills to identify and develop sites for new schools as necessary.

In this regard, the County Development Plan includes for the zoning of land for new schools and expansion of existing educational facilities. The requirement for additional primary and secondary educational facilities will be monitored having regard to the development of residential land during the lifetime of the Plan. The Council will facilitate and promote the development of third level educational facilities including outreach facilities in the town.

## 12.7 Age Friendly

Laois County Council adopted the “Laois Age Friendly County Strategy 2023-2027” .The strategy sets out a number of aims and actions so that the county will be where older people are supported to live

independently in safe and secure homes and communities, suitable for their physical and social needs, with improved health and quality of life, where older people are enabled to participate in economic, social, political and community life and continue to grow, develop and contribute to society and build upon existing services and supports.

## 12.8 Library Services

A new state of the art public library opened on the site of the former Shaws retail outlet on lower Main Street in July 2023. As well as educational and cultural information, the library provides free digital access and community public space for the local community and visitors to the town. Occupying a central location, the library forms a significant element of The Cultural Quarter development in the historic core of Portlaoise showcasing and promoting the Fort Protector and Fitzmaurice Place.



***Plate 18: Portlaoise County Library***

## 12.9 Health Care

Portlaoise is the main centre of health care in the county. The Midland Regional Hospital and Saint Fintans Hospital are located on adjoining campuses in the town. There are a number of public, voluntary and private agencies responsible for the provision of healthcare facilities, with the Health Service Executive being the primary agency. There is an extensive landbank associated with the Saint Fintans Hospital campus and the Council will seek to engage with the HSE in drawing up a masterplan for the future development of such lands.



**Plate 19: Saint Fintans Hospital Complex, Dublin Road, Portlaoise**

#### 12.10 Emergency Services

Portlaoise is served by various emergency services including An Garda Síochána, the Ambulance Service, the Fire Service and Civil Defence etc.

#### 12.11 Policies

Planning and Development Policies	
<b>It is the policy of the Council to:</b>	
<b>CSC P1</b>	<i>Ensure provision of sufficient zoned lands to allow for expansion of existing and provision of new educational facilities,</i>
<b>CSC P2</b>	<i>Facilitate the development of and expansion of services, amenities and facilities to cater for all society members, ages and community groups,</i>
<b>CSC P3</b>	<i>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,</i>
<b>CSC P4</b>	<i>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,</i>



<b>CSC P5</b>	<i>Facilitate the development of new and expansion of existing active and passive recreation, leisure and play facilities to cater for all society members, ages and community groups,</i>

12.8 Objectives

<b>It is the objective of the Council to:</b>	
<b>CSC 01</b>	<i>Facilitate the provision of social infrastructure such as community, library and emergency service in appropriate locations and to provide access to new and existing community and social facilities</i>
<b>CSC 02</b>	<i>Collaborate with the relevant stakeholders and facilitate the improvement and provision of educational, childcare and healthcare facilities in appropriate and accessible locations</i>
<b>CSC 03</b>	<i>Facilitate implementation of the Laois Age Friendly County Strategy 2023-2027</i>
<b>CSC 04</b>	<i>Promote the amenities and ensure the accessibility of arts and cultural facilities within the ownership of Laois County Council</i>
<b>CSC 05</b>	<i>Facilitate the roll out of community policing and neighbourhood watch schemes</i>
<b>CSC 06</b>	<i>Collaborate on a masterplan with the HSE for its extensive landbank in the town</i>

## SECTION 13. BUILT HERITAGE

**Strategic Aim:** *To protect, conserve and manage the built heritage of the town and to encourage sensitive and sustainable development so as to ensure its preservation for current and future generations.*

### 13.1 Historic Town Centre

The historic town centre is centred on the remnants of the Fort Protector on Church Street which dates from the mid sixteenth century. The town is characterized by features of architectural and archaeological interest.



**Plate 20: Main Street, Portlaoise, c. 1910**

The conservation of the architectural heritage of Portlaoise is a key guiding principle of the “2040 and Beyond A Vision for Portlaoise”. Improved design in the public realm will emphasise the historical form of the town. Historic routes such as Pepper Lane and Lyster Lane will be interpreted as entrances into the town. Emphasizing these narrow lanes will upgrade their importance and enrich the hierarchy of spaces in the town centre, as well as strengthening the connection between old and new. These routes connect into the Lower Square, notable as the original marketplace of the town, and will reinforce its primary importance in the public realm.

The Market Square, as a large marketplace, will reclaim its role as the principal open space and public venue in the town. Streamlining design in the public realm to eliminate clutter and to design street surfaces, landscape features and traffic management interventions, not in isolation from the surrounding built environment, but in deference to it, will present the historic architecture of the town to best effect.

### 13.2 Architectural Conservation Area

Portlaoise Historic Centre has been designated as an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) as set out under Appendix 2 of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 and that should be read in conjunction with this plan.

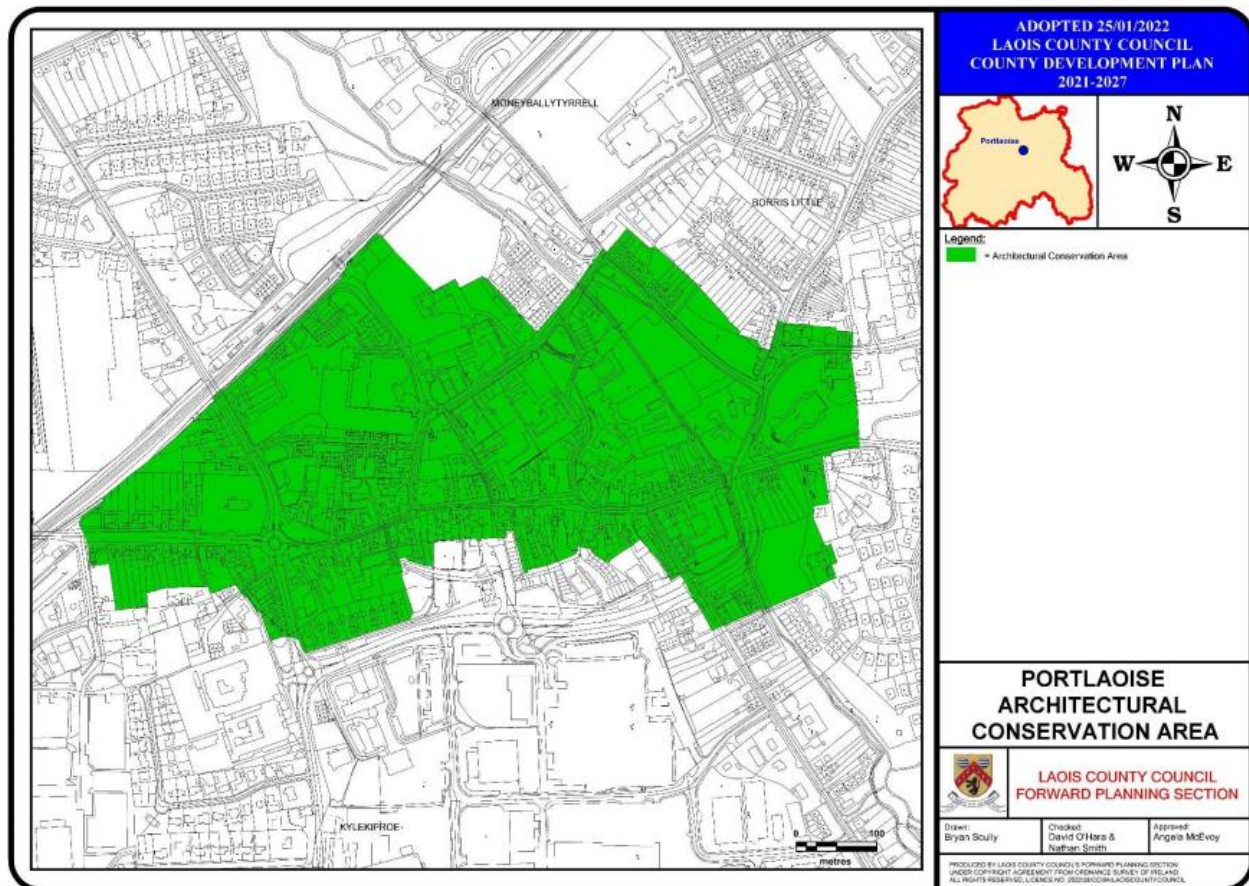


Figure 27: Portlaoise Architectural Conservation Area

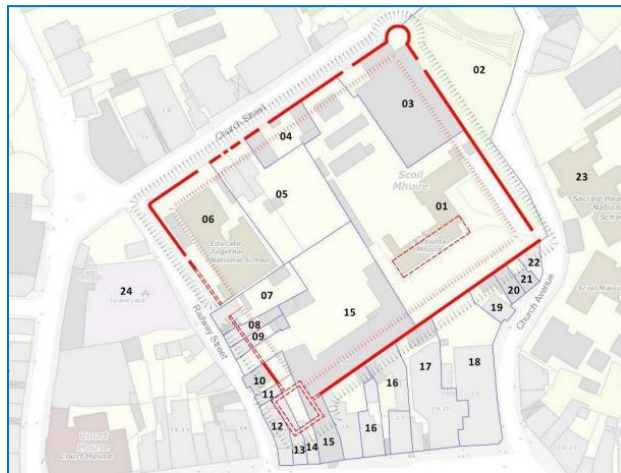
An ACA is a place, area, group of structures or townscape, taking account of building lines and heights that is of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest. Contemporary design should reinforce the historic character within the ACA and should take its cues from the historic setting in terms of scale and design. High quality architectural design will add to the built heritage and complement the receiving historic environment.

### 13.3 Record of Protected Structures

The Record of Protected Structures (RPS) is set out under Appendix 1 of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 and should be read in conjunction with this plan. The RPS includes structures of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest. A zone of archaeological significance has also been identified within the plan area.

### 13.4 Fort Protector

A **Conservation Plan for the Fort Protector** has been prepared by Laois Heritage Society which aims to create a policy framework to guide all future decisions on the development of the Fort to enable its eventual restoration as a heritage site. The proposal for an ‘Old Fort Quarter’ has the potential to promote understanding of the Fort and its historical significance and make it accessible to visitors.



**Figure 28: Overlay of Fort remains on contemporary map, (Fort Protector Conservation Plan Phase II)**

### 13.5 Policies

Planning and Development Policies	
It is the policy of the Council to:	
<b>BH P1</b>	Ensure heritage assets 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.
<b>BH P2</b>	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.
<b>BH P3</b>	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.
<b>BH P4</b>	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.
<b>BH P15</b>	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.

### 13.6 Objectives

Planning and Development Objectives	
It is the objective of the Council to:	
<b>BH 01</b>	Protect, conserve and enhance the built environment, through promoting awareness, utilising relevant heritage legislation and promoting good quality urban design.



<b>BH 02</b>	Conserve, protect and enhance the built heritage of Portlaoise, including the Architectural Conservation Area, all Protected Structures and attendant grounds, Recorded Monuments and Places and the Zone of Archaeological Significance in accordance with best conservation practice.
<b>BH 03</b>	Positively consider proposals to improve, alter, extend or change the use of protected structures so as to render them viable for modern use, subject to consultation with suitably qualified Conservation Architects and / or other relevant experts, suitable design, materials and construction methods.
<b>BH 04</b>	Ensure all development works on or at the sites of protected structures, including any site works necessary, shall be carried out using best heritage practice for the protection and preservation of those aspects or features of the structures / site that render it worthy of protection.
<b>BH 05</b>	Support the re-introduction of traditional features on protected structures where there is evidence that such features (e.g. window styles, finishes etc.) previously existed.
<b>BH 06</b>	Strongly resist the demolition of protected structures, unless it can be demonstrated that exceptional circumstances exist.
<b>BH 07</b>	Consider the change of use of protected structures, provided that it can be shown that the structure, character, appearance and setting will not be adversely affected or where it can be shown it is necessary to have an economic use to enable its upkeep.
<b>BH 08</b>	Ensure the protection within Architectural Conservation Areas, of all those buildings, spaces, archaeological sites, trees, street furniture, views and other aspects of the environment which form an essential part of their character, as set out in their character appraisals.
<b>BH 09</b>	Ensure the design of any development in Architectural Conservation Areas, including any changes of use of an existing building, should preserve and / or enhance the character and appearance of the Architectural Conservation Area as a whole.
<b>BH 010</b>	Promote schemes for the conservation and enhancement of the character and appearance of Architectural Conservation Areas.

<b>BH 011</b>	No development in the vicinity of a feature included in the Record of Monuments & Places (RMP) will be permitted which seriously detracts from the setting of the feature or which is seriously injurious to its cultural or educational value.
<b>BH 012</b>	Ensure archaeological assessment is carried out as required and promote 'preservation in situ' of archaeological remains and settings in developments that would impact upon archaeological sites and/or features.
<b>BH 013</b>	Protect previously unknown archaeological sites and features, including underwater sites, where they are discovered during development works.
<b>BH 014</b>	Facilitate public access to National Monuments in State or Local Authority care.

## SECTION 14. BIODIVERSITY & NATURAL HERITAGE

**Strategic Aim:** *To protect the natural heritage and biodiversity assets of the town and enhance the public realm and green infrastructure network connectivity by introducing more greenways and cycleways.*

### 14.1 Natural Heritage

This chapter considers the natural heritage of Portlaoise which includes the Natural Environment, Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure. As is the case with Built Heritage, Natural Heritage is a key and distinctive asset which can also be used to promote a positive image of the town.



**Plate 21: Linear Park in Portlaoise**

With respect to the Natural Environment of Portlaoise there are no European designated (EU Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC) Special Areas of Conservation or Special Protection Areas located within the plan boundary. The Ridge of Portlaoise extends to the north and south of the town along the River Triogue. The main habitats and species comprise the esker ridge and disused gravel pits, ash and hazel woodlands with species rich grasslands and are protected under the Wildlife Amendment Act, 2000.

Green Infrastructure is the physical environment within and between towns and villages, comprising a network of multi-functional open spaces, including formal parks, gardens, woodlands, green corridors, waterways, trees and open space.

The River Triogue itself is a green corridor cutting right through the centre of the town. Natural corridors such as the Triogue are of huge importance to biodiversity in an urban situation. They provide shelter and foraging opportunities for many species of wildlife.

Another very important function is provision of linkages between green areas. An example of this is the Triogue providing a nature corridor between the People’s Park in the south of the town and the Linear Park in the north of the town. There are also several artificial ponds and lakes in Portlaoise, the majority of which are associated with housing developments. Some of the artificial water bodies have developed a good diversity of species.

Portlaoise has many old and new buildings as well as mature gardens which in themselves can be habitats for rare and threatened species. Playgrounds and outdoor gyms are located at People’s Park and Portlaoise Leisure Centre. There are also a number of walking tracks, sports grounds and clubs located in the town.

#### 14.2 Portlaoise Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2028

The Portlaoise Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2028 developed by Portlaoise Tidy Towns aims to restore and protect nature in every area of the town, from housing estates to parks and from busy streets to main access roads, as well as paving the way to receive government funding. The plan builds on previous projects with Portlaoise Tidy Towns and Laois County Council, including the development of natural meadows along roads and in housing estates such as Kilminchy. Planting trees and re-establishing wetlands are also a major factor in the Biodiversity Plan.



**Plate 22: Bee friendly roundabout on Southern Circular Route**

14.3 Trees

Laois County Council recognises the benefits of trees in humanising spaces, enhancing the environment and minimising the impacts of climate change. They clean the air, provide natural flood defences, mask noise and promote a general sense of well-being. In addition, trees have considerable beneficial impacts on the lives of those who do not have immediate access to other more traditional types of open space. Trees, for example, can add colour, interest and beauty to our busy streets making the city a pleasant place in which to live, work and visit.

14.4 Policies

Planning and Development Policies	
It is the policy of the Council to:	
<b>NH P1</b>	Ensure heritage assets 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
<b>NH P2</b>	Develop a greenway/blueway walking and cycling route along the River Triogue
<b>NH P3</b>	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 the town’s heritage assets
<b>NH P4</b>	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
<b>NH P5</b>	Protect environmental quality in Portlaoise through the implementation of European, National and Regional policy and legislation relating to air quality, greenhouse gases, climate change, light pollution, noise pollution and waste management
<b>NH P6</b>	Adopt a pro-active and systematic good practice approach to tree management with the aim of promoting good tree health, condition, diversity, public amenity
<b>NH P7</b>	Make Tree Preservation Orders as appropriate



<b>NH P8</b>	Support the town in a garden concept through appropriate landscaping and tree planting in the planning and development of urban spaces, streets, roads and infrastructure projects
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14.3 Objectives

Planning and Development Objectives	
<b>It is the objective of the Council to:</b>	
<b>NH 01</b>	Identify, protect and conserve natural heritage sites, nationally designated conservation sites and non-designated sites in co-operation and consultation with the relevant statutory authorities.
<b>NH 02</b>	Seek integration of all elements of existing green infrastructure into new developments, prevent fragmentation and mitigate potential impacts on the existing green infrastructure network.
<b>NH 03</b>	Require the preservation and maintenance of suitable mature trees, hedgerows and natural heritage features in new developments.
<b>NH 04</b>	Seek to preserve, protect and maintain trees of special amenity, conservation or landscape value.
<b>NH 05</b>	Carry out and require the planting of native trees, hedgerows and vegetation in all new developments.
<b>NH 06</b>	Open up visual and physical access via the River Triogue from People’s Park as a continuous pedestrian and cycle link through the town centre, and potentially through the Convent Lands having regard to ecological considerations including protected species and habitats.
<b>NH 07</b>	Reconnect the Triogue Linear Park with the residential areas to the north of the Town Centre.
<b>NH 08</b>	Identify, protect, conserve and enhance wherever possible, wildlife habitats, stepping stones, corridors and features.
<b>NH 09</b>	Provide recreational amenities such as playgrounds and outdoor gym equipment within existing areas of open space.

<b>NH 010</b>	Protect environmental quality and implement site appropriate mitigation measures with respect to air quality, greenhouse gases, climate change, light pollution, noise pollution and waste management.
<b>NH 011</b>	Maintain riverbank vegetation along watercourses and ensure protection of a 10m riparian buffer zone on Greenfield sites and maintain free from development.
<b>NH 012</b>	Facilitate the work of agencies redressing the issue of terrestrial and aquatic invasive species.
<b>NH 013</b>	Protect, conserve and enhance the natural habitats of the Burial Ridge.
<b>NH 014</b>	Protect ancient and species rich hedgerows throughout the town.
<b>NH 015</b>	Protect trees, groups of trees and hedgerows which act as wildlife corridors in accordance with Article 10 of the EU Habitats Directive.

## SECTION 15. IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

**Strategic Aim.** *To implement in conjunction with key stakeholders, the objectives of this Local Area Plan, with a particular focus on the key strategic objectives, and to monitor their implementation in a timely manner.*

### 15.1 Implementation Strategy

This draft Local Area Plan sets out a clear and strategic vision for the development of Portlaoise Town in the period from 2024 through 2030.

This vision is in accordance with the key role identified for Portlaoise at both county and regional levels and seeks to make the town a more attractive place in which to live, work, invest and visit while also functioning as the pre-eminent business, service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the wider community.

In order for the vision to be realised it is critical that the projected population growth is accompanied by the delivery of the necessary site servicing and social infrastructure requirements. The Council is fully committed to securing and monitoring the implementation of the strategies, policies and objectives of this Plan.

The Council will continue to occupy a leadership role to progress and secure the Plan policies and objectives to achieve the sustainable development of Portlaoise.

The successful implementation of a significant number of the policies and objectives of this Local Area Plan will necessitate on-going collaboration and a sense of good-will across a range of agencies and stakeholders. The implementation of this Plan will depend also on the economic climate, political support, Council funding and the availability of funding from other sources.

### 15.2 Stakeholders

This draft Local Area Plan outlines specific policies and objectives of Laois County Council with regard to Portlaoise Town.

The overarching policies and objectives of the Laois County Development Plan 2121-2027 also apply, specifically in terms of Land-Use Zoning and Development Management Standards.

As far as practicable, every effort has been made to formulate objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable and realistic. However, a number are set within a longer timeframe, thus they may not be fully implemented over the lifetime of this Plan.

The Planning Department of the Council is the main section responsible for monitoring and implementing the Plan, mainly through the development management function. However, it is important to note that this Plan coordinates the work and objectives of other key departments within Laois County Council, such as Local Economic Office (LEO), Environment and Water Services, Roads, Housing, Tourism, Regeneration, Local Community Development and the Municipal District.

The local authority will need to utilise its wide range of statutory powers and responsibilities to achieve the objectives of the Plan. In some cases, the body responsible for the implementation of certain Plan objectives may be external, such as Uisce Éireann, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Environmental Protection Agency.

The Council will also require developers to incorporate the objectives and development management standards of this plan into their development proposals. It is also intended that the various voluntary groups will be encouraged to participate whenever possible, in the implementation of the policies objectives of the plan.

### 15.3 Funding

Many of the policy objectives of the draft Local Area Plan, particularly the key infrastructural elements, will require government funding and support.

Where appropriate, the Council will seek financing from specified sources, both the public and private sector, as well as from EU programmes and grants.

The implementation of a plan may be constrained by a number of elements, namely, the economic climate, political support, allocated local authority funding and the availability of funding from other sources. Therefore, no funding of projects is guaranteed in advance nor is the implementation of all objectives contained within the plan.

#### 15.4 Development Management

Land use zoning for Portlaoise Local Area Plan functional area was carried out as part of the making of the overall Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 which was adopted in January 2022.

Therefore, please refer to:

- [a] Chapter 13. General Location & Pattern of Development, Volume 1: Written Statement and
- [b] Portlaoise Zoning Map 2.2, Volume 2: Settlement Strategy.

#### 15.5 Strategic Environmental Assessment

The SEA Directive requires that the significant environmental effects of the implementation of plans and programmes are monitored. Monitoring can both demonstrate the positive effects facilitated by the Plan and can enable, at an early stage, the identification of unforeseen adverse effects and the undertaking of appropriate remedial action.

The occurrence of significant adverse environmental effects not predicted and mitigated by this assessment, which are directly attributable to the implementation of the Plan, would necessitate consideration of these effects in the context of the Plan and potential remediation action(s) and/or review of part(s) of the Plan.

#### 15.6 Indicators and Targets

Monitoring is based around indicators which allow quantitative measures of trends and progress over time relating to the Strategic Environmental Objectives identified in the SEA Environmental Report and used in the evaluation. Each indicator to be monitored is accompanied by the target(s) which were identified with regard to the relevant strategic actions.

Table 10.1 of the SEA Environmental Report shows the indicators and targets which have been selected for monitoring the likely significant environmental effects of implementing the Plan, if unmitigated. Monitoring is an ongoing process and the programme allows for flexibility and the further refinement of indicators and targets. The Monitoring Programme may be updated to deal with specific environmental issues – including unforeseen effects – as they arise. Many of the indicators relate to more than one of the freshwater and terrestrial environments.

### 15.7 Sources

The Plan will form part of the wider land use planning framework comprising a hierarchy of policies, plans, programmes, etc. This wider framework, including the National Planning Framework and the Eastern and Midland RSES, is subject to its own SEA (and associated monitoring) requirements. At lower tiers of the hierarchy, Local Area Plans and individual projects will be subject to their own monitoring requirements as relevant.

In implementing the Monitoring Programme, the Council will take into account this hierarchy of planning and environmental monitoring. Sources for indicators may include existing monitoring databases (including those maintained by planning authorities and national/regional government departments and agencies) and the output of lower-tier environmental assessment and decision making (including a review of project approvals granted and associated documents and the output of any EIA monitoring programmes).

Internal monitoring of the environmental effects of grants of permission in the Council would provide monitoring of certain indicators on a grant of permission basis. Where significant adverse as the result of a development to be permitted are identified, such effects could be identified, recorded and used to inform monitoring evaluation.