



# Laois Climate Action Plan 2024-2029

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## Appendix B

### Pre Consultation

## **1.1 PRE-CONSULTATION**

As part of the climate action plan preparation process, each local authority was required to plan and make appropriate provisions for stakeholder engagement, as well as account for the outcomes of stakeholder engagement.

The Early Stakeholder Engagement serves several important purposes:

1. Enhances effective communication and the sharing of information, fostering a deeper comprehension of issues, exploring potential solutions, and considering diverse viewpoints.
2. Gathers valuable insights and contributions from stakeholders, enriching the process of shaping and informing the climate action plan.
3. Establishes collaborative partnerships to implement actions and mobilize citizen support for future decision-making.
4. Enhances the integrity and transparency of the plan-making process by involving a broad spectrum of stakeholders.

Laois County Council undertook extensive pre non statutory consultation to assist in the formulation of the draft Climate Action Plan.

In May 2023, Laois County Council conducted a comprehensive consultation initiative with the aim of informing three critical plans: the Local Development Strategy (LDS), the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP), and the Local Authority Climate Action Plan (LACAP).

This initiative was purposefully designed to seamlessly integrate public input procedures for the LACAP, LECP and LDS. It represented an exceptional chance to harmonize and align these strategies, particularly considering the sustainability components now deeply ingrained within both the LECP and LDS. Moreover, as these strategies directly inform locally funded community and development initiatives, ensuring harmony and cooperation moving forward is paramount.

The consultation exercise was designed to be as inclusive as possible and to facilitate a range of opportunities and formats by which our communities could contribute.

The principal methods of engagement included:

### **1.2 Online Survey**

Hosted at [www.laoisconsultation.ie](http://www.laoisconsultation.ie), our consultation survey was live for two weeks, from 5-19 May 2023. It was responded to by 509 individuals, achieving a statistically significant sample. The profile of respondents was distributed across our Municipal Districts and captured a representative profile. Where almost two thirds of respondents were residents, just over 8% were representatives of a business and almost 11% were representatives of a voluntary or community organisation. The survey provided a comprehensive and contemporary insight into the issues and challenges perceived as facing the County as well as views on the success or otherwise of programmes delivered to date and perceived as impacting on our communities.

### **1.3 Community Workshops**

We ran a series of 6 in-person community workshops across Laois between 16 – 25 May 2023. The timing and location of these workshops was structured to allow as many people as possible to attend. In addition, we also ran a virtual workshop via Zoom on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2023. In total these workshops were attended by 113 local citizens who participated in a range of exercises that were designed to capture insights and ideas which have directly fed into this LDS and specially the SWOT, Local Objectives and Strategic Actions described in this and subsequent sections.

Online advertisements were placed on Laois Today and Leinster Express and Midlands 103 both online and radio adverts. In addition 64 letters were sent via email to stakeholders and followed up phone calls to ensure good turnout.

During our series of community workshops, a number of points were raised relating to the climate and environment. These outputs were also recorded by Graphic Artist, Oisín McCann and are contain in Appendix 4

#### **Rathdowney Workshop**

- A community-owned energy project was seen as a potential positive, offering the potential of cheaper green energy.
- More electric car charging infrastructure was felt to be needed in Rathdowney to support the rise of electric cars.
- The local bogs and rivers were seen as an excellent opportunity to create blueways and greenways, as well as potentially an eco-park.

#### **Mountmellick Workshop**

- New walkways and greenways around the town were called for, helping to facilitate active travel and acting as an attraction for visitors. Participants also called for more cycle lanes to be introduced throughout the town, again to facilitate active travel.
- A Parking / Traffic Plan was seen as necessary, to address private vehicle congestion within the town while still ensuring that those who needed to use a car could do so.
- Participants called for more bus stops & shelters and better signposting, to make it easier for people to use public transport.

#### **Abbeyleix Workshop**

- Respondents called for the creation of new greenways and a blueway in the areas around the town.
- There were calls for a sustainability plan for Abbeyleix, alongside the funding and personnel to help deliver it.
- A community energy plan was called for, to help make energy costs more affordable and to help shift to sustainable energy.

- Community bikes and dedicated cycle lanes were called for, to help normalise cycling as an everyday means of travel.
- An electric vehicle hub where people can co-share electric cars and also benefit from charging points was suggested.

#### **Virtual Workshop**

- Respondents called for the creation of sustainable green corridors across the county.
- There were also calls for investment in community gardens to help deliver more sustainable local produce.

#### **Portarlinton Workshop**

- Cycle paths along and bridges across the River Barrow.
- Bus services and public transport are needed to better connect Portarlinton to neighbouring villages and towns.
- Some respondents suggested that public transport should be made free.
- Public Rights of Way should be invested in, to encourage more people to get active.
- Respondents suggested a pedestrianised town centre, with dedicated space and services to support artisanal/pop-up markets.

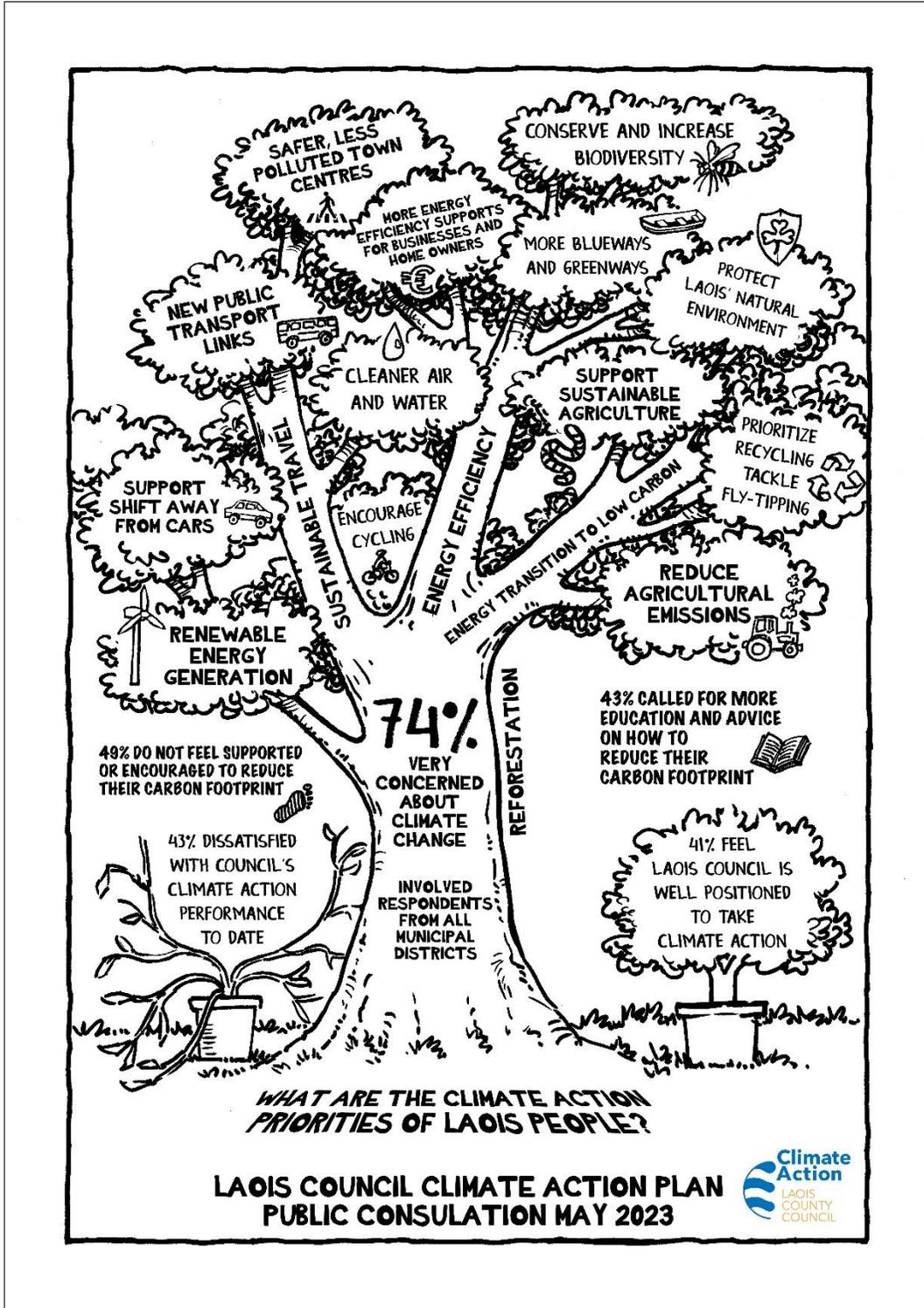
#### **Portlaoise Workshop**

- Respondents said that public and active travel:
  - Must be affordable
  - Must be easier to use network for both younger and older people
  - Bus Depot / Travel Hub needed
  - Joined-up links.
  - Bike hire
  - Accessible services
- Respondents called for investment in community gardens.
- There were calls for a greening project for each village/town.

#### **Ballylinan Workshop**

- Respondents called for the creation of a greenway/blueway on River Barrow.
- Education re river quality was seen as a priority – enhancing use of rivers as outdoor and educational resource.

Figure 1.1 Graphic Illustration of Online Pre-Consultation Results



Source: Oisín McCann

#### **1.4 Engagement with Local Authority Staff**

All local authority sections were actively involved in the development of the Climate Action Plan. This plan will encompass a broad spectrum of actions to be implemented across various services and functions provided by the local authority. Harnessing the insights and expertise of our staff will yield practical and effective actions, ensuring a higher level of commitment during the implementation phase. Furthermore, this engagement will provide valuable insights into ongoing projects within the local authority that are integral to shaping the climate action plan, such as transportation programs, land-use and development plan reviews, as well as current and planned infrastructural and community projects. The climate action team will play a pivotal role in facilitating this engagement.

The training sessions were facilitated by retired Chief Executive and Climate Action Advisor Jack Keyes, with Ms. Suzanne Dempsey, Climate Action Coordinator from 8<sup>th</sup> May -12<sup>th</sup> May, playing a pivotal role in organizing and presenting the material. The training sessions accommodated up to 20 participants each, spanning four days. Participants were selected from various specific sections to allow for discussions on sector-specific issues.

The level of participation and the positive attitude displayed by all participants were commendable. Notably, the common challenge of resource constraints did not emerge as an excuse for inaction. While knowledge levels varied, they were generally reasonably high across the board. The dedication of our staff to Laois County Council was evident throughout.

Each group proposed a set of actions for consideration within their respective sections. Where time allowed, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and target dates were also developed. A total of 59 staff members attended the training sessions and contributed enthusiastically to the identification of actions to be considered as Laois County Council formulates its Climate Action Plan for 2024-2029.

In addition, the Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs) facilitated engagement between the Local Authority network and national-level entities and sectoral interests, including the Department of the Environment and other relevant Government departments related to sectoral adaptation plans and the national Climate Action Plan. These efforts aimed to support local authorities and streamline engagement processes.

The CAROs carried out five facilitated sectoral engagement workshops as follows:

Theme	Date
Heritage & Biodiversity (in conjunction with Heritage Council)	25th April 2023
Transportation	22nd May 2023
Built Environment and Land use Planning	23rd May 2023
Community Development and Enterprise	30th May 2023
Land use Change (incl. Agriculture and Water)	31st May 2023

**Table 1.1 Stakeholder Sectoral Engagement Workshops facilitated by CARO**

Stakeholders included:

- Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC)
- Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD)
- Department of Transport (DoT)
- Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH)
- Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports, and Media (DTCAGSM)
- Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine (DAFM)
- Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR)
- National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS)
- National Transport Authority (NTA)
- Zero Emission Vehicles Ireland (ZEVI)
- Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII)
- Arts Council of Ireland
- Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI)
- Office of Public Works (OPW)
- Local Government Management Agency (LGMA)
- Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI)
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- Inland Fisheries (IF)
- Mét Éireann (ME)
- Uisce Eireann
- Regional Assemblies, represented by Southern Regional Assembly (SRA)

- Climate Action Regional Offices (CARO)
- Local Enterprise Office Network (LEO)
- Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO)
- Local Authority Services National Training Group (LASNTG)
- Electric Ireland Superhomes
- The Heritage Council
- Office of the Planning Regulator
- Accelerating Change Together (ACT)



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