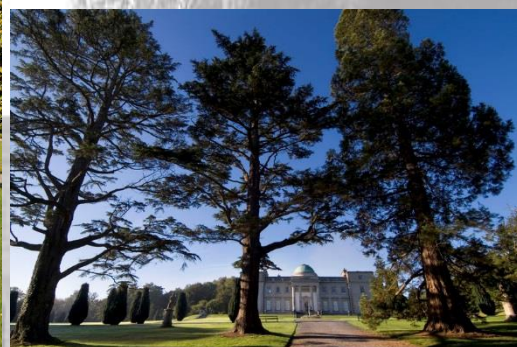




# County Laois Local Community Development Committee Local Development Strategy December 2015



**Laois County Council**  
Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise, Co Laois



"The European Agricultural Fund  
for Rural Development: Europe  
investing in rural areas".



Comhshuí, Pobal agus Rialtas Áitiúil  
Environment, Community and Local Government



**LAOIS**  
PARTNERSHIP  
COMPANY



National Development Plan  
Transforming Ireland



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## Glossary of Terms

Abbreviation/Term	Definition
B&B	Bed and Breakfast
BTWEA	Back to Work Enterprise Allowance
CAP	Common Agriculture Policy
CE	Community Employment
CEDRA	Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CLG	Company Limited by Guarantee
CLLD	Community-Led Local Development
CPG	Corporate Policy Group
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CSP	Community Services Programme
DAFM	Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine
DCENR	Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DECLG	Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DJE	Department of Justice and Equality
DSP	Department of Social Protection
EA	Electoral Area
ED	Electoral Division
EI	Enterprise Ireland
ENRD	European Network for Rural Development
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
GDA	Greater Dublin Area
GLAS	Green Low carbon Agri-environment Scheme
GYO	Grow Your Own Movement
HP	Haase and Pratschke (Deprivation Index)
HSE	Health Service Executive
ICMSA	Irish Creamery and Milk Suppliers Association
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDA	Industrial Development Authority
INTEREO	Employment Services Office
IFA	Irish Farmers Association
LAG	Local Action Group
Laois LCDC	Local Community Development Committee
LPC	Laois Partnership Company
Laois Offaly Local Link	Rural Transport Company in Laois and Offaly
LOETB	Laois Offaly Education Training Board



LDS	Local Development Strategy
LEADER	Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale Links between Actions for the Development of the Rural Economy
LECP	Local Economic and Community Plan
Laois LEO	Local Enterprise Office
MA	Municipal Areas

/continued

Abbreviation/Term	Definition
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MTES	Mid Term Economic Strategy
NBP	National Broadband Plan
NRN	National Rural Network
OPW	Office of Public Works
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSI	Ordinance Survey Ireland
Pobal	Programme Intermediary
PPN	Public Participation Network
Promoter	Promoter of a Project ( <i>Beneficiary of Funding</i> )
R&D	Research and Development
RDP	Rural Development Programme (also known as <i>Operational Programme</i> )
RDSU	Rural Development Support Unit
REDZ	Rural Economic Development Zones
RPGs	Regional Planning Guidelines
RRO	Rural Recreation Officer
RSS	Rural Social Scheme
RTP	Rural Transport Programme
SICAP	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
SAPS	Small Area Population Statistics
SEAI	Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SME	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise
SPC	Strategic Policy Group
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
T&S	Travel and Subsistence
TUSLA	Child and Family Agency
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
YWIL	Youth Work Ireland Laois

# **SECTION 1: THE LAG PARTNERSHIP**

- 1.1: ORGANISATION DETAILS OF EACH PARTNER
  - 1.2: LAG COMPOSITION
  - 1.3 LAG DECISION MAKING
  - 1.4: LAG ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES
  - 1.5: LAGS FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT
  - 1.6 LEADER STAFFING
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# SECTION 1: THE LAG PARTNERSHIP

Laois LCDC is the newly formed Local Community Development Committee for County Laois. This committee was formed as a result of the reforms set out in the Government's Action Programme for Effective Local Government, Putting People First, which was published in 2012 and the subsequent Local Government Reform Act 2014.

The committee has been constituted as per Article 32 of EU regulation 1303/2013. Laois LCDC will lead CLLD (Community Led Local Development) in Co Laois as a committee "composed of representatives of public and private local socio-economic interests, in which at the decision making level neither public authorities as defined in accordance with national rules, nor any single interest group represents more than 49% of the voting rights"

The constitution of the LCDC in Laois is such that it can act as the Local Action Group for the county and it will hold the contract for the LEADER programme.

The members of Laois LCDC have agreed that the sole implementing partner for the LEADER programme will be Laois Community and Enterprise Development Company Limited t/a Laois Partnership Company and that the financial partner for the programme will be Laois County Council. A memorandum of understanding was agreed and signed by Laois LCDC, Laois Partnership Company and Laois County Council at the Expression of Interest stage and this will be developed into a full Service Level Agreement.

Membership of Laois LCDC is drawn from the community sector, state sector and social partners while this committee as a group has not delivered a LEADER programme in the past their track record as individuals and organisations would suggest that the expertise is present within the committee. A number of the members of Laois LCDC have also been members of Laois Community and Enterprise Development Co Ltd t/a Laois Partnership Co who have successfully delivered the LEADER programme since 1995 in Laois. The CEO of Laois Community and Enterprise Development Co Ltd t/a Laois Partnership Co represents the Local Development Company on the LCDC and has prepared this strategy using the expertise of the Board and staff of Laois Partnership Company.



## **1.1 ORGANISATION DETAILS OF EACH PARTNER**

### **1.1.A LAG DETAILS**

Legal Name:	Laois Local Community Development Committee t/a Laois LCDC
Legal Structure:	Committee
Date of Establishment:	17 <sup>th</sup> September 2014
Operational Ethos:	for the purposes of developing, coordinating and implementing a coherent and integrated approach to local and community development
Frequency of Meetings:	Monthly
Contact Person:	Ian McCormack, Chief Officer, Laois Local Community Development Committee
Postal Address:	Laois County Council Aras an Chontae Portlaoise Co Laois
Email Address:	<a href="mailto:imccormack@laoiscoco.ie">imccormack@laoiscoco.ie</a>
Telephone Number:	057 8664023
Website:	n/a
Tax Registration No.:	n/a

### **1.1.B: IMPLEMENTING PARTNER DETAILS**

Legal Name:	Laois Community and Enterprise Development Company Limited t/a Laois Partnership Company
Legal Structure:	Company Limited by Guarantee
Company Registration No.:	453193
Date of Incorporation: 11 <sup>th</sup>	February 2008
Operational Ethos:	To promote, support, assist and engage in (a) social development; (b) enterprise development to facilitate rural and urban regeneration; (c) community development, designed to benefit and promote the welfare of local communities or to deal with causes and consequences of social and economic disadvantage or poverty
Frequency of Meetings:	Monthly
Contact Person:	Anne Goodwin, CEO, Laois Partnership

Postal Address: Ground Floor  
Block 2  
County Hall  
Portlaoise  
Co Laois  
R32 EHP9

Email Address: annegoodwin@laoispartnership.ie

Telephone No.: 057-8661900

Website: www.laoispartnership.ie

Tax Registration No.: 9695249A

Tax Clearance No.: 09695249-00389V

Tax Clearance Expiry Date: 30<sup>th</sup> June 2016

### **1.1.C: FINANCIAL PARTNER DETAILS**

Legal Name: Laois County Council

Legal Structure: Local Authority

Date of Establishment: 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 1899

Operational Ethos: Vehicle of governance and public service at local level -leading economic, social and community development, delivering efficient and good value services, and representing citizens and local communities effectively and accountably

Frequency of Meetings: Monthly

Contact Person: Gerry Murphy, Director of Service

Postal Address: Laois County Council  
Aras an Chontae  
Portlaoise  
Co Laois

Email Address: [gmurphy@laoiscoco.ie](mailto:gmurphy@laoiscoco.ie)

Telephone Number: 057 8664000

Website: www.laois.ie

Tax Registration No.: 0506615J

Tax Clearance No.: 00506615-31823H

Tax Clearance Expiry Date: 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015

## 1.2: LAG COMPOSITION

Laois LCDC is a subcommittee of the Local Authority comprising of representatives of the social partners, state agencies and local authority, community representative and elected members. The current committee is drawn from a wide range of interests in Co Laois including Laois County Council, IFA, Local Enterprise Office, HSE, DSP, Youth and Environmental interests and the Public Participation Network representatives.

The current committee has a membership of 17 with 53% community representation on the committee. The gender balance of the group is 29.5 % female but Laois LCDC are cognisant of the state recommendation of 40% female representation

Member of Laois LCDC	
Committee member	Organisation
<b>Cllr John King (Chairman)</b>	Elected Member
<b>Mr Paddy Buggy (Vice Chairman)</b>	Community Rep/PPN
<b>Mr Robbie Quinn</b>	Community Rep/PPN
<b>Ms Anne Goodwin</b>	CEO Local Development Company
<b>Mr Mary White</b>	Community Rep/PPN
<b>Mr Joe Thompson</b>	Youth rep
<b>Mr Michael Bergin</b>	Farming rep
<b>Mr Dave Hackett</b>	Dept Social Protection
<b>Ms Linda Tynan</b>	Laois Offaly ETB
<b>Ms Evelyn Reddin</b>	Laois Local Enterprise Office
<b>Cllr Jerry Lodge</b>	Elected Member
<b>Cllr Paschal McEvoy</b>	Elected Member
<b>Ms Mary Delaney</b>	HSE
<b>Mr Dave Fingleton</b>	Environmental Pillar
<b>Mr P J Campbell</b>	Community Rep/PPN
<b>Mr Ciaran Finane</b>	Business Rep
<b>Mr John Mulholland</b>	Chief Executive Laois Co Council

Rotation of members will operate as per the “Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Local Community Development Committees”. Appropriate arrangements will be put in place for the rotation of the representatives of the community and voluntary, social inclusion and environmental interests together with other local community and social partner interests. Rotation of the state sector or the elected members is not required

The Chief Officer, in conjunction with the Corporate Policy Group and the Chairperson, will review the membership of the LCDC not less than every 3 years or upon instructions to do so by the Minister to ensure the membership is relevant and representative of the work of the LCDC.

### **1.3: LAG DECISION MAKING**

As agreed by Laois LCDC, the Evaluation Subcommittee of Laois Partnership Company will evaluate projects on behalf of the LCDC. The projects will then go to the Board of Laois Partnership for approval and then for final approval to Laois LCDC. The final decision of all projects will be at Laois LCDC meetings.

The Evaluation Subcommittee will be independent of both the Board of Laois Partnership Company and Laois LCDC i.e. no one person can sit on either the Board of Laois Partnership Company or Laois LCDC AND the Evaluation Subcommittee.

#### **1.3.A: Decision Making: The Evaluation Subcommittee**

The Evaluation Subcommittee will consist of representatives of the banking sector and business sectors along with a member of Laois County Council economic development section, a tourism representative and a community representative.

The Evaluation Subcommittee will meet once a month to appraise all project applications including internal projects. A subcommittee member must declare any interest they might have in a project and then take no further part in the appraisal of that project to ensure impartiality in the decision making process.

A recommendation will be made for acceptance or rejection of a project. If the LCDC disagrees with a decision of the Evaluation Subcommittee the project is returned to the Evaluation Subcommittee to be reconsidered. If there is no change in the Evaluation Subcommittee's recommendation then the LCDC can only overturn the decision at a Special meeting with a two thirds majority of the LCDC. This is to ensure transparency and fairness.

#### **1.3.B: Decision Making: Laois LCDC**

The LCDC is a committee of Laois County Council however it is an independent committee with independent decision making powers. This independence is written in to section 128b of the Local Government Act 2001 (inserted by section 36 of the 2014 Act) however Laois LCDC will work under the policies and procedures of Laois County Council.

Laois LCDC will ensure that it operates to the highest governance levels and will draw up a code of governance based on "the code of governance for Community Voluntary and Charitable Organisations"

The LCDC will abide by the rules and regulations governing the LEADER programme. The LCDC is aware that those rules will take precedent over any other operating procedure

Conflicts of interest must be declared by LCDC members before the consideration of projects. Conflicts of interest must be included as an agenda item for every meeting. Any member declaring a conflict must step outside the meeting when discussion on the conflicted item is being discussed. Where the implementing partner is the project promoter then the representative of the implementing partner must absent themselves from the discussion

Where the Local Authority are the financial partner on the project then likewise members must absent themselves from any discussion

Laois LCDC members are aware of their responsibilities regarding decisions and conflict of interest and will ensure that proper controls are in place to ensure any conflicts are clearly documented and the member leaves the room for any discussion that may take place.

Local Action Groups are proscribed Public Bodies under the Ethics in Public Office Act and the LAG in Laois will ensure that members meet their requirements in this regard

### **1.3.C: Decision Making: Laois Partnership**

The Board of Laois Partnership Company will support the evaluation committee to ensure that the Local Development Strategy is delivered in line with the requirements of the LEADER programme

## **1.4: LAG ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **1.4.A: Role of the LAG: Laois LCDC**

The role of the LAG will be to

- Set the overall strategic direction of the LAG and agree the main Local Development Strategic Priorities
- Monitor and review performance of the Local Development Company as lead implementation partners as per the services level agreement between the LCDC, LA and the Local Development Company
- Delegation to the Local Development Company in this case Laois Partnership Company the sole implementation role
- Delegation to the Local Authority the financial partner role including responsibility for article 28 checks as appropriate, payment of funds and indemnification of the LAG and the designated implementing partner Laois Partnership Company
- Monitoring and review of the performance of the Local Authority as lead financial partner
- Monitoring and review of the progress of the Local Development Strategy

### **1.4.B Role of the Implementing Partner: Laois Partnership Company**

The structure of the implementing partner Laois Community and Enterprise Development Company Ltd t/a Laois Partnership Company is similar to that of the LAG and consists of the Community and Voluntary sector, Social Partners, State Bodies and elected members

The Board of Laois Partnership Company will be responsible for the full implementation of the LEADER programme as agreed by Laois LCDC

The implementing partner has taken a lead role in the development of the strategy for the LEADER programme in Laois in partnership with Laois LCDC, Laois County Council and the other LAG partners

As agreed by Laois LCDC Laois Partnership Company will have sole responsibility for the implementation of the complete LEADER programme. It is agreed that there will be no fragmentation of the programme

For Laois Partnership Company this will mean

Organising public calls for proposals

Managing the open call process

Managing and implementing the animation of the programme

Day to day working with project promoters to develop their projects

Accepting applications from project promoters

Managing the evaluation process

Presenting projects for approval to the Board of the LDC and for final approval to the LAG

Preparing of contracts for the promoter on behalf of the LAG

Management of all project files on behalf of the LAG

Compliance with all requirements regarding File management, reporting and administration on behalf of the LAG

Developing and delivering a number of LAG projects on behalf of the LAG

#### **1.4.C Role of the Financial Partner: Laois County Council**

The role of the lead financial partner will be:

- To provide advance administration funding to the implementing partner
- Approve the issuing of contracts by the Implementing partner
- Payment of grant to project promoters on behalf of the Local Action group
- Where article 28 checks are the responsibility of Laois LCDC Laois County Council will be responsible for these checks
- Requesting drawdowns of LEADER funding from DECLG.

### **1.5: LAGS FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT**

The financial partner Laois County Council will have financial management and oversight of the Local Development Strategy. Laois Partnership Company will prepare financial reports as required by the financial partner. Please see Role of the Financial Partner, above, for full details

Public Procurement:

Laois LCDC in order to ensure fair and transparent procurement when dealing with public funding must ensure that proper public procurement is undertaken

There is considerable expertise both in Laois County Council and Laois Partnership Company in public procurement and this expertise will be used to ensure that project promoters for LEADER funding tender correctly,

Laois LCDC will follow proper procurement procedures as set down in the operational rules for the Rural Development Programme. It will ensure that it has the relevant expertise to assess and verify compliance with the EU Public Procurement Directives and the National Public Procurement Guidelines.

Staff of Laois Partnership Company have received training in Public Procurement and they also have access to a specialised Public Procurement service if required

Laois County Council have expertise in-house in the council and a dedicated Public Procurement specialist who can advise the LAG

Promoters will be made aware of the requirements around Public procurement at expression of Interest stage



## **1.6 LEADER STAFFING**

The staff of Laois Partnership Company will deliver the LEADER programme as per the Service Level Agreement between the LCDC and the Implementing Partner.

There are currently 4.25 FTEs employed by Laois Partnership Company on the delivery of the LEADER Programme. With the reduced programme budget and the 20% cap on administration it is envisaged that the current staff compliment can be kept in place to deliver the programme in its entirety.

The staff compliment in the implementing partner consists of the CEO (45%), the financial administrator (100%), 1.8 project officers and 1 clerical officer.



## **PROJECT SELECTION PROCEDURES FOR LEADER**

The Project application system will be managed by Laois Partnership Company. The initial meeting following an enquiry will be with Laois Partnership Company staff who will give an initial opinion as to the eligibility of the project.

A full application will then be sought. Applications will be submitted to the evaluation committee of Laois Partnership Company

The evaluation committee of Laois Partnership Company is an independent committee of the company. Members have many years' experience in public, private enterprise, banking, tourism and community activities.

The Independence of the evaluation committee is of the utmost importance to ensure fair and transparent procedures throughout the evaluation process.

The evaluation committee will have a set of criteria in place to evaluate projects

These will include

- The rules of the programme
- The Local Development Strategy for Laois
- Financial capacity of the promoter
- The feasibility of the project
- The capacity of the promoter to deliver the project
- Community need

This list is not exhaustive and the criteria for community projects will differ from business projects. The above list is merely indicative of criteria that have been used previously.

If a project passes the criteria it will be referred to the Programme Implementers Board for a second check and then be submitted to Laois LCDC for final approval

Staff of Laois Partnership Company will ensure that the Chief Officer of Laois LCDC will receive a formal pack with a list of projects and their summary sheets along with the recommendations of the Evaluation committee.

The Chief Officer will then ensure that members of Laois LCDC will receive at least a week in advance of the monthly meeting of Laois LCDC a formal pack of projects and recommendations for consideration for final approval at their meeting.

Projects will be selected as per Objectives and actions as defined in the Local Development Strategy

40% of the budget for projects is to be allocated to "time limited" Calls for Applications.

A call will be carried out at least once per year. Laois Partnership Co will manage this process on behalf of the LCDC including

- Advertising the call via local media, social media and websites
- Capacity building and training of the promoters if required
- Accepting and processing applications
- Evaluating projects
- Ensuring that Evaluation committee recommendations are submitted to the LCDC within three months of date of receipt
- Drawing up contracts for successful applicants on behalf of the LCDC
- Notifying the unsuccessful applicants in writing
- Managing the draw down process on behalf of the LCDC

Where applications are accepted by the Implementing partner as individual applications the Implementing partner will manage the projects as detailed above without the need for advertising a time limited call.

**Laois Partnership – Sample Evaluation Committee Scoring Sheet**  
**Project No:**

**Promoter:**

**Date of**

**Meeting:**

**Time:**

Assessment Criteria	Objective	Issues Raised by Evaluation Committee	Weighting	Score
Compatibility with Local Development strategy	Do the project proposals meet the criteria set out in the LAG business plan for the relevant measure?		20	
Innovation	Is the project innovative in its nature and does it displace existing enterprises?		15	
Promoter Experience	Does the promoter have the training skills, track record, or experience to deliver?		20	
Financial Viability	Are the project costs justified and is adequate funding available to co-fund project?		20	
Sustainability	Is the service viable and will the service continue to be delivered?		10	
Requirement	Does the proposal target a specific need or address a specific gap in the market?		15	
Total			100	

**N.B Projects must receive a minimum score of 60% prior to being recommended for approval**

**Recommendations of the Evaluation Committee:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

## **1.7 RELEVANT EXPERIENCE**

### **1.7.A: Experience of The LAG: Laois Local and Community Development Committee**

The Committee membership has many years of experience as individuals in community involvement and delivering programmes within their own organisations and the bodies they represent on the committee. Many of the committee members are senior managers in their organisations and bring with them much experience in project management, financial matters and human resources.

Laois LCDC in itself does not have any staff and is reliant on staff as provided by Laois County Council

### **1.7.B Experience of The Implementing Partner: Laois Partnership Company**

As implementing partners there is expertise in Laois Community and Enterprise Development Company both at Board and at staff level. The group have worked with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government to develop systems and structures to ensure transparency and accountability within the group and it is proposed that these structures and procedures will remain in place for the implementation of the new programme on behalf of the LCDC company to administer the new National Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. The LCDC recognise that the LEADER programme will be a new venture for them and that there will be changes to controls from time to time and are happy to adapt those as required.

The staff of the local development company have also undertaken Public Procurement training and are aware of the requirements of same.

LPC has a complete set of operating procedures which all staff are aware of and must adhere to.

The company has drawn up a procedures manual and staff handbook that protects staff and operates to the highest standards. The company is a member of IBEC and avails of their HR advice and training

The company has specific guidelines and segregation of duties as per the requirements of the RDP. The Board and staff of Laois Partnership Company have considerable experience in proper procedures for the LEADER projects having delivered three LEADER programmes already.

The company has a Staff and finance committee who ensure that proper records and books are maintained and all staff issues are dealt with according to proper procedures.

The company has an external auditor and produces audited accounts annually as required by funders.

The implementing Partner Laois Partnership Company has staff who have a number of years' experience delivering the LEADER programme in Co Laois. As the implementing partner in the process Laois Partnership Company will provide its staff to deliver the LDS. Laois Partnership Company will be responsible for the staff and they will report directly to the CEO of the Company who in return will, report to the Chairman of the company

### **1.7.C: Experience of the Financial Partner: Laois County Council**

As financial partners for the delivery of the programme Laois County Council have many years' experience in managing significant amounts of public money and the reporting that goes with this. The Local Authority have put in place stringent financial controls for all their funding streams and this will also be the norm for the Rural Development Programme

The Local Authority has expertise in the Public procurement process and will support and advise the LCDC on best practice.

## **SECTION 2: LDS AREA PROFILE**

### **2.1 AREA SELECTION**

### **2.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE**

### **2.3 KEY SERVICES / PROGRAMMES**

### **2.4: AREA NEEDS ANALYSIS**



## SECTION 2: LDS AREA PROFILE

It is proposed that this Local Development Strategy will cover the whole of Co Laois which consists of the 97 Electoral Divisions (EDs). The Area of Graiguecullen which is in the town of Carlow and included the Laois ED Graigue Rural will had joint input from Laois LCDC and Carlow LCDC to ensure no duplication.

### 2.1 AREA SELECTION

Co Laois covers an area of 1,719km<sup>2</sup> or 171,990 hectares, 2.4% of the surface area of the state. 0.1% of its surface area is under water. Located in the centre of Ireland it is the only county on the island that touches a county that doesn't touch the sea. It is bordered by counties Offaly, Kildare, Carlow, Kilkenny and Tipperary.

The population of Co Laois in the census 2011 was 80,559 persons. There are no Gaeltacht areas or off shore Islands in the county.



Abbeyleix	Ballyadams	Ballyroan
Arderin	Ballybrittas	Barrowhouse
Ardough	Ballybrophy	Blandsfort
Arless	Ballycarroll	Borris
Aughmacart	Ballyfin	Borris-in-Ossory
Ballickmoyler	Ballylehane	Brisha
Ballinakill	Ballylynan	Caher

Cappalough	Kilcolmanbane	Shaen
Cardtown	Kildellig	Shrule
Castlecuffe	Killabban	Stradbally
Castletown	Killermogh	Tankardstown
Clash	Kilmullen	Timahoe
Clonaslee	Kilmurry	Timogue
Clondarig	Kilnaseer	Tinnahinch
Clonin	Kyle	Trumra
Clonkeen	Kyle South	Turra
Clonmore	Lacka	Vicarstown
Colt	Luggacurren	
Coolrain	Marymount	
Cuffsborough	Meelick	
Cullahill	Moneenalassa	
Cullenagh	Moneymore	
Curraclone	Mountmellick	
Dangans	Mountmellick Rural	
Donaghmore	Mountrath	
Donore	Moyanna	
Doonane	Nealstown	
Dunmore	Newtown	
Durrow	O'Mores Forest	
Dysartgallen	Portarlinton	
Emo	Portlaoise	
Errill	Portlaoise Rural	
Farnans	Raheen	
Fossy	Rathaspic	
Garrymore	Rathdowney	
Graigue	Rathsaran	
Graigue Rural	Rearymore	
Grantstown	Rosenallis	
Jamestown	Rossmore	
Kilcoke	Sallyford	

The county contains three distinct types of landscape. In the north-west, the Slieve Bloom Mountains dominate, with their moorland peat and related mountain soils supporting some forestry. The limestone plains that characterise the central area contain more fertile soil but also feature peat and wetlands. The undulating hills of Slieve Margy in the south-east of the county are home to wetter heavier soils. The River Barrow rises in the county and flows east and then south and forms the county's north-east boundary with Kildare. The Nore flows south through the centre of the county and then on into Kilkenny.

While the Eastern part of the county is now regarded as part of the Dublin commuter belt, there are areas of significant disadvantage and rurality in the western part of the county.

Agriculture is the predominant land use (119,910 hectares). Forestry is also a major land use with 14.31% or 24,608.17 hectares in forestry in 2007, significantly higher than the national figure of 10.51%.

The principal towns are Portlaoise, Portarlington, Mountrath, Mountmellick, Abbeyleix and Rathdowney.

There are three Municipal Areas in the County; Portlaoise , Graiguecullen/Portarlington and Borrisin Ossory /Mountmellick.

At its nearest, Co. Laois is approx 70kms from the Dublin metropolitan area. This relative proximity to the capital city, as road and rail access connections improve, is having a major effect on both the nature and extent of development, particularly in the northern and eastern parts of the County. The effect of its proximity to the Greater Dublin Area can be seen through the increase in population between 2006 and 2011 of towns such as Portarlington and Portlaoise. The population of Portarlington has grown by 148% between 1996 and 2011 and the population of Portlaoise by 132%. This is in marked contrast to the west of the county where the population of the largest town Rathdowney decreased in the same period by 9%

### **Transport Infrastructure - Road**

Laois has proximate access to the Greater Dublin Area, Dublin Airport, Dublin Port and Dun Laoghaire ferry port. The county has excellent road links to the rest of the country through the M7/N7 to Limerick/Shannon, the M8/N8 to Cork and the N80 to Rosslare.

The Portlaoise to Cullahill / Castletown Motorway PPP Scheme was completed in 2010 and provides an additional 41 km of motorway, allowing swifter access to Dublin, Cork and Limerick.

A network of Regional Roads provides further links to the adjacent counties.

### **Transport Infrastructure - Rail**

There are three railway stations in Co Laois – Portarlington, Portlaoise and Ballybrophy. All three stations are part of the core Dublin to Cork route with connections into the Tralee, Limerick and Ennis routes.

In addition to this, Portarlington connects with the Dublin to Galway / Westport / Ballina routes and Ballybrophy is a connection point for the Dublin / Nenagh / Limerick line.

Iarnród Éireann's a Strategic Rail Investments Needs Review recommends three priority phases of investment, all of which will improve the services from Laois. Initially, infrastructure improvements to reduce journey times on the Cork and Galway routes, secondly, double tracks between Portarlington and Athlone to increase capacity and thirdly, electrification of the Cork and Galway routes. The Ballybrophy – Limerick line, however, is in poor demand and will possibly either close or terminate in Nenagh rather than Limerick.

## **Transport Infrastructure - Bus**

Bus Éireann's Limerick to Dublin Airport Expressway service stops at Portlaoise. Their Waterford –Athlone-Longford Regional service stops at Stradbally, Portlaoise and Mountmellick.

Private operators run specialist commuter, airport and college services to Dublin, Kilkenny, Carlow and Athlone.

Laois Offaly Local Link provides rural/community transport services in Laois and Offaly. Funded by the National Transport Authority, it connects rural areas to Portlaoise and other large towns in the county.

A bus service known as 'Town-Link' links Portlaoise to Tullamore via Mountmellick/Portarlinton and also runs a service from Portlaoise to Rathdowney via BorrisinOssory, Abbeyleix, Durrow and Mountrath.

## **Broadband**

The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP), launched in 2012, sets out the strategy to deliver high speed broadband with at least 30Mbps connectivity being available to all homes and business throughout Ireland, regardless of location, through a combination of commercial and state-led investment.

The Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources estimates that commercial operators will provide broadband with a minimum 30Mbps to 58% of premises in Laois by 2016.

## **Pobal HP Deprivation Bands**

Like other parts of Ireland, Laois was seriously impacted by the economic downturn after 2007. In their analysis of overall affluence and deprivation between 2006 and 2011, Pobal found that the national average index fell during this period, from 0 in 2006 to -6.5 in 2011. At the same time, the deprivation score for Laois dropped from -1.2 in 2006 to -9.3 in 2011, a drop of 8.1, leaving Laois moving down from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> most affluent local authority area in Ireland (Pobal HP Deprivation Index for Small Areas (SA), 2012).

Laois is not noted for either its overall deprivation or affluence characteristics and, like other counties, has a varied distribution of both across the county. The 2011 Pobal HP Deprivation Profile for County Laois found that of the 97 Electoral Divisions in the county, 64 are marginally below average with the other 33 being marginally above average.

Overall, Laois is generally in the average category but urban areas in the towns of Mountrath, Mountmellick, Portlaoise, Stradbally, Abbeyleix, Borris-In-Ossory, and Rathdowney are more likely to experience disadvantage. The most disadvantaged Electoral Divisions (EDs) in the county are Caher (-9.7), Rathdowney (-9.4) and Dangans (-9.1), while the most affluent areas are in Ballybrittas (8.4), Vicarstown (6.3), and Nealstown (5.5.).

A more detailed picture emerges when the Small Area Population (SAP) statistics are examined which highlight the pockets of deprivation.

There are 45 small areas of disadvantage in Laois according to the Pobal Deprivation Index 2011 Census statistics. Of these, 5 are greater than -20 which is categorised as Very Disadvantaged. A further 40 are rated between -10 and -20. Six of the most disadvantaged Small Areas in Laois are located in Portlaoise Urban ED; Six in Portlaoise Rural ED; Five in Mountrath ED; Five in Mountmellick Urban ED; Five in Portarlinton South ED. The Table below outlines the 45 most disadvantaged small areas in Laois.

Very Disadvantaged SAPs 2011 (greater than -20)

107080009	Portlaoise Urban	-25.70
107073005	Mountrath	-25.50
107079037	Portlaoise Rural	-22.40
107080006	Portlaoise Urban	-22.20
107079030	Portlaoise Rural	-22.10

Disadvantaged SAPs 2011 (-10 to -20)

107079029	Portlaoise Rural	-17.50
107083002	Rathdowney	-17.50
107073008	Mountrath	-17.10
107072001	Mountmellick Urban	-17.00
107079036	Portlaoise Rural	-16.70
107019005	Borris-in-Ossory	-16.10
107042003	Doonane	-15.90
107080004	Portlaoise Urban	-15.50
107001004	Abbeyleix	-15.20
107078018	Portarlinton South	-15.20
107079002	Portlaoise Rural	-14.70
107039003	Dangans	-14.50
107073003	Mountrath	-14.50
107078025	Portarlinton South	-14.20
107091008	Stradbally	-14.20
107080007	Portlaoise Urban	-13.90
107091003	Stradbally	-13.90
107078006	Portarlinton South	-13.80
107039002	Dangans	-13.70
107072005	Mountmellick Urban	-13.70
107029006	Clondarrig	-12.90
107072008	Mountmellick Urban	-12.90
107078004	Portarlinton South	-12.70
107072002	Mountmellick Urban	-12.60
107080008	Portlaoise Urban	-12.60
107028001	Clonaslee	-12.10
107072004	Mountmellick Urban	-12.00
107001012	Abbeyleix	-11.40
107044003	Durrow	-11.20

107073010	Mountrath	-11.20
107079012	Portlaoise Rural	-11.10
107039005	Dangans	-11.00
107083005	Rathdowney	-11.00
107091001	Stradbally	-10.90
107019002	Borris-in-Ossory	-10.70
107052008	Graigie Rural	-10.70
107083003	Rathdowney	-10.60
107078013	Portarlinton South	-10.40
107073004	Mountrath	-10.00
107080001	Portlaoise Urban	-10.00

*Source: Pobal HP Deprivation Index 2012*

The SICAP programme deals with the areas of -10 and greater concentrating on pockets of population in urban areas. SICAP particularly targets disadvantaged youth and long term unemployed, the LEADER strategy will work alongside the SICAP programme and will also seek to work to improve the quality of life in disadvantaged rural areas and avoid duplication of services.

Priority will be given in Theme 2 to those areas which received very little funding in past LEADER programmes. 6 towns and villages have been identified which received very little funding from the past LEADER programmes. Interestingly enough 5 of those areas are amongst the most disadvantaged small areas in the county with a deprivation figure in parts of Mountrath of -25.5 to Errill with a deprivation figure of -3.5 and in a strategic review of the last LEADER programme the Board of Laois Partnership Company would also have identified the area of Cullahill as an area of poor community capacity as they failed to draw down any LEADER funding in the last programme. Actions have been identified in the action plan which proposes working with these areas to build their community capacity



## 2.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE

**Note all statistics quoted are from Census of Population 2011 unless otherwise stated**

### 2.2.1 Population Profile

- Population Increase 2006 - 2011**

The total population of Co Laois as outlined in the 2011 census was 80,559, representing an acute increase of 13,500 people since the 2006 census.

While the state population increased at a rate of 8.2% between 2006 and 2011, Laois has by far outpaced this marker, with a population increase of 20.1% in the same period.

Laois was the fastest growing county in Ireland in the period 2006-2011. Neighbouring counties had population increases more in line with the state average: Offaly (+8.1%) Carlow (+8.5%) Kilkenny (+9.0%) Kildare (12.9%).

- Population Increase 1996 – 2011**

This disproportionate growth forms part of a consistent trend over the past 15 years, where the state steadily increases its population by 8% between each census period, but the population of Laois grows exponentially.

*TABLE 1: Population in Numbers 1996 – 2011*

	1996	2002	2006	2011
Population - State	3,626,087	3,917,203	4,239,848	4,588,252
Population - Laois	52,945	58,774	67,059	80,559

*TABLE 2: Population Growth Trends 1996 – 2011*

	% Population Change 1996 – 2002	% Population Change 2002 – 2006	% Population Change 2006 – 2011	% Population Change 1996 – 2011
State	+8.0	+8.2	+8.2	<b>+26.5</b>
Laois	+11.0	+14.1	+20.1	<b>+52.2</b>

Laois is now home to an ever-increasing proportion of the state population, rising from 1.46% in 1996 to 1.76% in 2011.

*TABLE 3: Percentage of State Population living in Laois 1996 - 2011*

	1996	2002	2006	2011
% of State Living in Laois	1.46	1.50	1.58	1.76

- **Population Distribution and Growth Centres**

This growth in population has not occurred equally across the county. There has been a marked increase in commuters to the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) settling in the rural hinterlands of Portlaoise, Portarlington and Mountmellick, as well as Carlow and Athy hinterlands, which are inside the Laois border. The urbanisation of rural EDs is evident from TABLE 4.

While almost all (90%) of Laois EDs experienced population growth; 6 EDs more than doubled their population since 1996:

In the Portlaoise hinterland: Borris +321.2%; Clondarrig +200.0% and Portlaoise Rural +132.1%; Dangans, in Mountmellick hinterland +264.6%; Graigue Rural (Carlow town hinterland) +201.3% and Portarlington South+148.9%;

Of the 10 EDs that experienced a population decline, half were in South West of the county, including the town of Rathdowney itself:

Killermogh -11.0%; Rathdowney -8.9%; Kyle -5.4%; Kyle South -2.4%; Clonmore -1.9%;

*TABLE 4. Population change within Laois, the Midlands, the State and for selected Laois DEDs, 1996-2011*

	Population 1996	Population 2011	% Change in Population 1996 - 2011
Laois	52,945	80,559	+52.2%
Midlands (Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath)	205,542	282,410	+37.4%
State	3,626,087	4,588,252	+26.5%
Borris (Portlaoise hinterland)	364	1,533	+321.2%
Dangans (Mountmellick hinterland)	426	1,553	+264.6%
Graigue Rural (Carlow town hinterland)	1,508	4543	+201.3%
Clondarrig (Portlaoise hinterland)	501	1,503	+200.0%
Portarlington	2,630	6,547	+148.9%
Portlaoise Rural	6,323	14,676	+132.1%
Rathdowney	1,275	1,161	-8.9%
Graigue	201	182	-9.5%
Killermogh	383	341	-11.0%
Colt	234	187	-20.1%

- **Population Density**

The predominantly rural county of Laois has a population density of 46.9% persons per km<sup>2</sup>, as compared to the state figure of 67.0%.

The rate of persons per km<sup>2</sup> is highest in the commuter towns: Portlaoise Urban (1,775), Mountmellick Urban (1,321), Portlaoise Rural (674) and Portarlinton (567). Towns in South West of the county have much lower population densities of 64 (Rathdowney), 49 (Durrow) and 38 (Borris-in-Ossory) persons per km<sup>2</sup>.

- **Male-Female Analysis**

The majority of the population continues to be male at 50.4%, a statistic that is indicative of a rural population, especially when compared to the state ratio, which is 49.5%.

- **Nationality**

There were a total of 8,430 non-Irish nationals living in the county in April 2011, accounting for 10.5% of the population of Laois, this was an increase from the 2006 percentage of 8.6%. Despite this increase, the 2011 Laois percentage is still below the state average figure of 12.0%.

Polish (2,299 persons) were the largest group, followed by UK nationals (1,693 persons) and a further 2,161 from other European countries and 916 persons from Africa.

8,253 persons spoke a language other than Irish or English at home and of these 1,712 could not speak English well or at all. Polish was the most common foreign language spoken at home with 2,293 speakers.

- **Age Dependency, Younger and Older**

**Age Dependency:** The dependency rate is measured in terms of the numbers of people in the dependent age cohorts, i.e. 0-14 years and 65 years plus, as a percentage of the overall population. A high dependency rate would be expected in a rural population and therefore it is not surprising that in the 2011 census, Laois has an overall dependency rate of 53.3%, four percentage points above the state dependency rate of 49.3%.

Several Electoral Divisions in the county have age dependency ratios over 70%:Garrymore (89%); Arless (77); Aghmacart (74); Tankardstown (74); Cullenagh (72) and Ballyadams (70).

*TABLE 5: Age Dependency Ratio Trends Laois 2006 - 2011*

	0-14 years	65 years and over	All ages
Laois 2006	33.8	15.8	<b>49.7</b>
Laois 2011	37.9	15.4	<b>53.3</b>
State 2011	31.9	17.4	<b>49.3</b>

**Young people:** The notable information from this table is that the dependency ratio of young people aged 0-14 in Laois, at 37.9%, is significantly higher (almost 20% higher) than the state average of 31.9%.

Also, the increase in the rate of young dependents under 14 years in Laois has swelled from 33.8% in 2006 to 37.9% in 2011.

The rise in youth dependents ties in with Laois' headline statistic from the 2011 census, where Laois is one of only three counties in the state that is getting younger and showing a lower average age than in 2006. While the average age in the state increased by half a year to 36.1 since the 2006 census, the average age in Laois actually fell by half a year to 34.3. Similarly, while the number of pre-school children (aged 0-4) in the state increased by 17.9 % since 2006, in Laois this age group increased by 37.1 %, the largest increase for any county.

25% of the population of county Laois is aged between 0-14 years. This is above the national average figure of 21%. In four of the EDs on the Eastern fringe of the county, over one third of the population is aged under 15: Garrymore, Dangans, Arles and Ballyadams.

Older People: At 10%, Laois would have slightly less of an older population (over 65) than the national average of 12%. The ratio of older people is particularly high in the rural Electoral Divisions in the North West of the county: Nealstown, Castletown, Trumra; Clonmore; Aghmacart and Clonmore.

- **Lone Parents**

The proportion of lone parents (as a proportion of all households with dependent children) in Ireland was 21.6% in 2011. County Laois had a rate of 19.2% in 2011; i.e. marginally lower than the national average. Borris-in-Ossory (34.0%), Rathdowney (32.9%) and Mountrath (31.9%) all have rates which are high by national comparison.

## **Challenge of integrating new residents**

There are no official figures on the number of Roma in Ireland. The Roma community originates from a range of countries, and Pavee Point estimates that *'there are currently just over 3,000 members of the Roma Community living in Ireland, the majority of which are located in Dublin and Cork'*.

Laois Traveller Action Group are a representative organisation who the Partnership Company have supported for many years. Laois Traveller Action Group (LTAG) have a remit to engage with Roma. LTAG have informed Laois LCDC during consultations with them that there are no statistics available for Roma numbers in Laois, but Pavee Point will be carrying out a Needs Analysis in the second half of 2015 to ascertain the demographics etc of this group and Laois LCDC will liaise with them in relation to Laois.

The State has taken 90 Syrian refugees in 2014 under the UNHCR resettlement programme. Persons admitted under this programme will be entitled to work, establish a business or invest in the State.

Two areas in Ireland were chosen to house the 90 Syrians, one of which is Portlaoise. Under this arrangement a total of 13 families came to Portlaoise during the course of 2015 comprising of 54 individuals. Two are lone males, 11 are family units: 15 primary school students and three secondary students.

The Local Authority set up an Inter-Agency Committee to support the Syrians who will arrive during the year. The members are Laois Co Council, Department of Justice (Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration), Tusla, Laois Offaly ETB, DSP, Clúid Housing Association, the Garda Síochána, the Parish, the HSE, and the LPC.

## **Traveller Community**

According to the 2011 Census, there are 647 travellers living in Laois and 29,753 in Ireland, accounting for 0.6% of the population. More than four out of five Travellers lived in an urban area, with most living in Galway.

Unemployment in the Traveller Community stood at 84.3% in 2011, up from almost 75% five years earlier.

Out of a total labour force of 9,973, 86.6% of the 5,828 males were unemployed while 81.2% of the 4,144 women were without work.

Linked to unemployment rates are the continuing low levels of Traveller Community participation in education.

The census figures show that almost seven out of 10 Travellers were educated to primary level at most, including more than 500 teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19 years old. The number of Travellers who completed third-level education in 2011 was 115, or 1%, compared to more than 30% of the general population.

Only 3.1% continued their education past the age of 18 compared to 41% of the general population, while 17.7% of Travellers received no formal education of any kind. This compares with 1.4% of the general population.

On a more positive note, 21.8% of Travellers whose education had ceased were educated to lower second-level, compared with 15.2% in 2002.

## **People with Disabilities**

Nationally, a total of 595,335 persons, accounting for 13.0 percent of the population, had a disability in April 2011. In Laois there were 10,217 people with a disability out of a total of 80,559 people living in the county. (Census 2011). Many of these were living alone in socially isolated areas.

Census 2011 also showed that a total of 187,112 persons or 4.1 percent of the total population were providing unpaid assistance to others in April 2011. Of these carers 114,113 (61%) were women and 72,999 (39%) men. There was a total of 3,185 carers in Laois (Census 2011).

## 2.2.2: Principal Economic Status

- **Labour Force**

The total labour force in the county had increased by 18% since the 2006 census, reaching 38,597 in 2011. This represents 63.6% of the total population of Laois aged over 15, slightly higher than the state average at 61.8%.

A sectoral analysis of the workforce shows the county's dependence on the construction industry in 2006 (14%), was drastically reduced to 5% in 2011. The percentage working in 'Professional Services' also changed significantly between 2006 and 2011, growing rapidly from 16% to 22%.

'Commerce & Trade' (23%) and 'Professional Services' (22%) are the key employment sectors in the county, as per state figures.

The presence of public bodies in the county is reflected in the 9% employed in 'Public Administration', which is higher than state figure of 6%.

Agriculture remains consistently significant at 8%, employment in agriculture in Laois is three points above the state average of 5%.

*TABLE 7: Persons (pop 15+) at work by Industry 2011*

	Agriculture Forestry & Fishing	Manufacturing Industries	Building & Construction	Commerce & Trade	Transport & Communications	Public Administration	Professional Services	Other
<b>Laois 2006</b>	8	13	14	22	5	7	16	15
<b>Laois 2011</b>	8	11	5	23	7	9	22	15
<b>State 2011</b>	5	12	5	25	8	6	24	15

- **Unemployed in 2011**

In the 2006 census, Laois recorded an unemployment rate of 7.4% with Male unemployment slightly lower (6.7%) than Female unemployment (8.5%). By 2011 the county's unemployment rate had escalated to 21.4%, affecting more males than females: almost one quarter of Males (24.8%) unemployed and 16.9% of Females unemployed.

First time jobseekers were also strongly affected in Laois, with a 42% increase from the 2006 census. County Laois is recorded as the county with the biggest increase in first time jobseekers between 2006 and 2011.

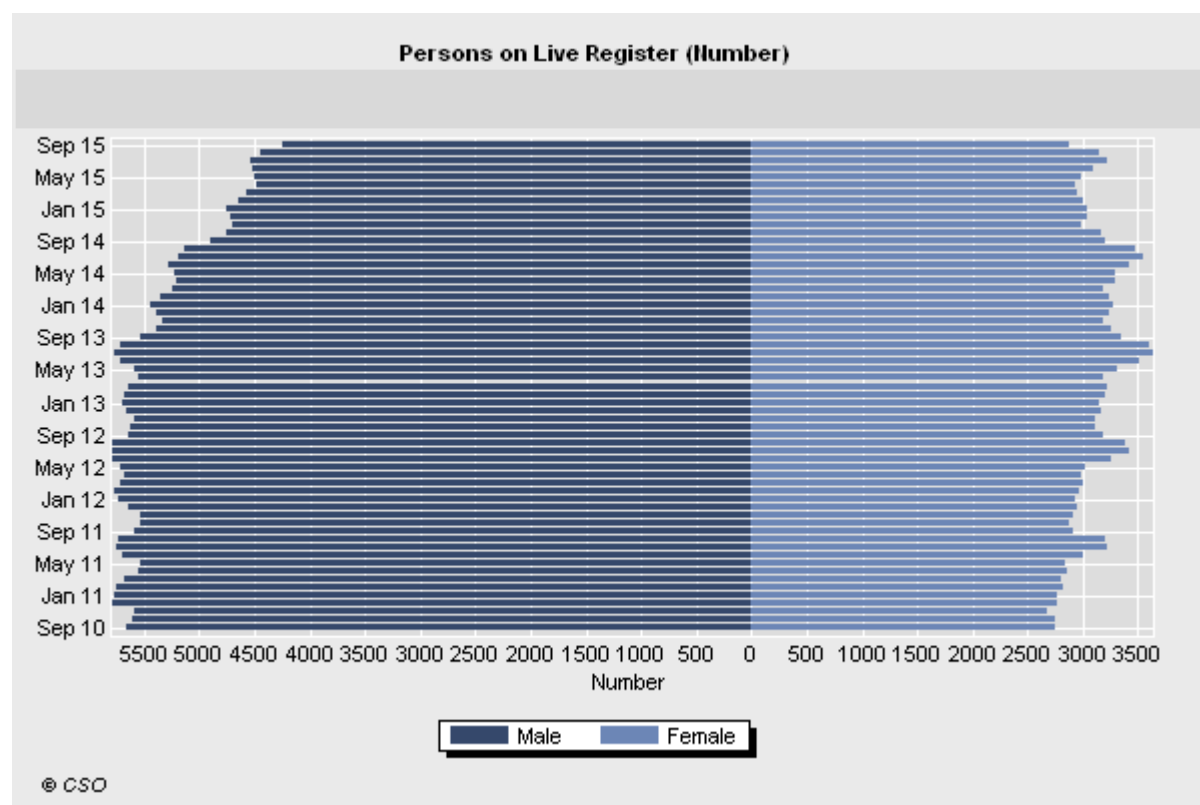
The county's unemployment rate of 21.4% in 2011 was higher than the state average of 19%.

Unemployment rates in individual EDs are significantly above those prevailing county wide, and are highest in Dangans (39.6% male, 28.6% female), followed by Doonane (40.6% male, 23.9% female) and Portlaoighise (Maryborough) Urban (35.6% male, 25.4% female).



- **Unemployed Currently**

Since 2011, the live register figures show a decrease in unemployment in Laois, albeit at a slower pace than state figures. The population pyramid below shows the persons on live register in County Laois over the five year period September 2010 to September 2015. Female unemployment has remained relatively constant, male unemployment has improved, particularly in the last 12 months.



The Quarterly National Household Survey shows a steady decrease in unemployment rate for the Midland region and the State. The decrease is occurring at a slower pace in the Midland region.

**TABLE 8: ILO Unemployment Rate (15 - 74 years) in the Midland region (Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath) and the State**

	Unemployment Rate in Midland Region % (Laois, Longford, Offaly & Westmeath)	State Unemployment rate %
April to June 2013	15.4	13.9
July to September 2013	14.5	13.0
October to December 2013	13.8	11.8
January to March 2014	14.5	12.1
April to June 2014	14.1	11.9
July to September 2014	14.6	11.3
October to December 2014	13.2	10.0
January to March 2015	12.5	10.0
April to June 2015	12.5	9.8

Source Quarterly National Household Survey, 26 August 2015

### **Youth unemployment**

In October 2015 the number of persons under the age of 25 who were claiming unemployment payment in Laois was 1024. The total number of people claiming an unemployment payment was 6858 in the same month. Youth unemployment in Laois stands at 15% of the total number of unemployed people (source CSO statbank). Nationally the unemployment rate amongst under 25s is 12.8%.

Laois has an unemployment rate amongst young people 2 percentage points above the national average.

## 2.2.3: Education

- **Level of Education Completed in 2011**

The proportion of the national adult population with primary education only decreased from 18.9% in 2006 to 16.0% in 2011. Similarly, the rate for County Laois fell from 20.1% in 2006 to 16.3% in 2011. Despite the considerable improvement at county level, there remain several rural EDs where still considerable parts of the adult population have primary education only, in particular Newtown (30.2%), Clonmore (29.7%) and Doonane (29.6%).

According to the 2011 census, 30.6% of the state's adult population had completed third level education whereas the proportion of Laois's population with third level education is significantly lower at only 24.3%. At ED level there are particularly low shares of population with third-level education in Caher (10.8%), Lacka (11.5%) and Cardtown (12.2%), but none of these is below the 10 per cent level. The lack of a full-time third level institute in the county is seen to be an important factor in this low level of tertiary education.

*TABLE 9: Educational attainment 2011*

	Up to Primary Education only	Up to Second Level Education	Up to Third Level Education
Laois 2011	16.3%	59.3%	24.3%
State 2011	16.0%	53.5%	30.6%

- **Third Level Institutes Currently Attended**

According to the Department of Education and Skills, a total of 2,166 Laois resident students were attending third level education institutions in 2014. The majority of these students were attending third level institutes in Dublin (760), followed by Carlow (352), and Limerick (305). IT Carlow (352) was the most popular, followed by University College Dublin (297), University of Limerick (164) and NUI Maynooth (160).

### **Social Class**

At national level, the proportion in the professional classes stood at 34.6% in 2011, whilst the proportion in the semi- and unskilled classes was 17.5%.

By comparison in Co. Laois, the proportion in the professional classes (31.2%) and the proportion in the lower skilled professions (19.2%) mark a class composition below the national average. Differences in the social class composition within the county broadly follow of educational attainment levels, with Dysartgallen having the highest composition (47.7% professionals, 9.4% semi- and unskilled manual classes), and Doonane having the lowest (21.7% professionals, 29.4% manual classes)

## 2.2.4: Quality of Life

- **Commuting**

Laois is a headline county for figures relating to commuting. 42% or 10,427 workers commute out of their home in Laois to work in another county. In Laois, along with Fingal, Westmeath, Meath, Kildare and Wicklow one in seven workers have travel times of an hour or longer to their job. Over 6% of Laois workers spend 90 minutes or more commuting to their place of employment.

The most popular means of travelling to work was by car (driver) with this mode accounting for 64.0 % of all journeys.

Portlaoise is designated as a *Key Transport Node* and *National Inland Port* in the National Spatial Strategy, primarily due to its central location where a number of inter-city road and railway corridors interconnect.

- **New Housing Stock**

Housing figures from the 2011 census show that almost one fifth (18.1%) of occupied dwellings in Laois were built since 2006. This statistic ranks county Laois as first in growth of new housing stock and correlates with the recent strong population growth in the county. Counties Longford (15.8%) and Cavan (15%) came next in the proportion of new homes built since 2006.

- **Housing Occupancy**

TABLE 10: Housing: The nature of occupancy 2011

	Number of Private Dwellings	Owner Occupied	Rented from Private Landlord	Rented from a Local Authority or Voluntary Body	Other
Laois 2011	27,916	74.4	13.2	9.1	3.2
State 2011	1,649,408	69.7	18.5	8.7	3.0

The table above shows that rentals from the local authority or voluntary bodies is similar to the state average, but that rentals from private landlords (13.3%) is 5 percentage points less than the state average of 18.5%.

It also shows that housing owner-occupancy in Laois stands at 74.4%, somewhat higher than the state average of 69.7%. This would imply that the Laois population is more settled in the county, and plan to remain in the county and its communities for a longer term than the overall state average.

While the rate of owner-occupied housing in Laois is a positive for stability of communities, it does not reflect the level of debt or unsustainable debt associated with the house ownership. In 2011, 1,186 mortgaged dwellings in Laois were headed by a person recorded as being out of work. This was a 508% rise since the previous census and the largest increase at county level in the state, implying that significant numbers of owner-occupiers are financially overextended.

- **Broadband & Internet Access**

Census 2011 indicates that county Laois households have computer ownership levels comparable with state average. Laois households internet access is more likely to be of a lower quality than the state average. Laois households are also more likely to have no internet access.

*TABLE 11: Computer Ownership, Broadband and Internet Access in Laois and State 2011*

	Computer Ownership	Broadband Internet Access	Other Internet Access	No Internet Access
Laois	71.0%	57.3%	12.1%	28.1%
State	72.7%	63.7%	8.0%	25.8%

Mountrath is the third worst town in Ireland for internet connectivity. 44% of households in the town have no internet. Kilrush in Clare (45%) and Rathkeale in Limerick (55%) are the only two towns in the country with lower connectivity figures.

- **Crime and Safety**

The number of crime offences recorded in the 12 Garda Stations covering County Laois in 2014 was 3,973. The highest numbers of recorded crimes were Theft (1,222), Burglary (671) and Controlled Drug Offences (549). Portlaoise Garda station had the most recorded crimes (1,929), approx. one thirds (632) of which were theft related. Stradbally Garda Station had second highest number of recorded crimes (498), almost two thirds (308) of which were drug related. *Source: Irish Crime Classification System*

## 2.2.5:Economic Activity

- **Industry**

The Business Demography 2012 Report from the CSO / Revenue Commissioners recorded 2,273 active enterprises in Laois. Of these, 2,119 employed 10 people or less; 45 employed 10 – 49 people and 13 employed 50 people or more. This shows the importance of the micro-enterprise to the economy of County Laois.

The number of active enterprises in the county has fallen consistently over the past five years, across all sized employers.

*TABLE 12: Active Enterprises in County Laois*

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
<b>Total Active Enterprises</b>	<b>2,752</b>	<b>2,579</b>	<b>2,408</b>	<b>2,366</b>	<b>2,273</b>
10 employees or less	2,506	2,381	2,226	2,202	2,119
10-49 employees	81	71	59	51	43
50+ employees	30	25	17	15	15

There is a wide range of enterprises in the county

**TABLE 13: Number & Type of Active Enterprises in County Laois 2012**

Manufacturing	208
Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	26
Construction	514
Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	568
Transportation and storage	189
Accommodation and food service activities	226
Information and communication	44
Financial and insurance activities excluding activities of holding companies	31
Real estate activities	93
Professional, scientific and technical activities	243
Administrative and support service activities	116
Education	108
ICT	47

The An Post / OSI create and manage a database of every building in the Republic of Ireland through GeoDirectory. The GeoDirectory Report for Q2 2015 shows that **Laois** had a commercial vacancy rate of 13.3%, an increase from 13% in Q3 2014. Nationally the commercial vacancy rate in Q2 2015 had decreased slightly to 12.6%. Laois has the highest commercial vacancy rate of any county in Leinster.

- **Tourism**
  - **Overseas Markets**

Laois is analysed along with Kildare, Longford, Meath, East Offaly, Louth, Wicklow and Westmeath as part of Failte Ireland's "East and Midlands Region". The Annual Regional Performance Report provides key information on overseas visitors to the region, and shows significant increase in numbers (+12%) and revenue (+30%) coming into the region between 2012 and 2013.

**TABLE 14:**

	2012	2013
Total Number of Overseas Visitors to East & Midlands	688,000	772,000
Revenue of All Overseas Visitors to East & Midlands	€220,600	€286,900

### ○ **Origination of Overseas Visitors**

Laois would have a higher dependence on British visitors and less visitors from Mainland Europe or North America, in comparison with the regional or national figures. According to a report from Failte Ireland The biggest increase in overseas visitors as a result of The Gathering was recorded in Laois, where there was a 40% surge in foreign tourists — up from 37,000 in 2012 to 52,000 in 2014, while foreign tourism revenue soared by 73% to €19m.

Total Number and Percentage Originations of Overseas Visitors to the county, region and state

**TABLE 15:**

	Laois County	Midlands & East Region	State
<b>Total Numbers</b>	<b>52,000</b>	<b>772,000</b>	<b>6,689,000</b>
% from Britain	56%	49%	43%
% from Mainland Europe	21%	28%	35%
% from North America	13%	16%	16%
% from Other Areas	10%	7%	6%

### ○ **Purpose of Overseas Visitors**

Only 40% of the Midlands & East overseas visitors are visiting as holidaymakers, placing the region at the bottom of the league table as a holiday region. The other six regions have percentages between 52% and 71% holidaymakers.

Another 43% of overseas visitors to the Midlands & East region stated that their purpose was to visits to friends and relatives, again this figure is significantly different from the other regions and highlights Midlands & East disproportional reliance on the visits to friends and relatives market.

TABLE: 16: Purpose of Overseas Visitors to the Seven Failte Ireland Regions in 2013

	East & Midlands	South East	Shannon	South West	West	North West	Dublin
% of Overseas Visitors classed as Holidaymakers	40	62	63	65	71	50	52
% of Overseas Visitors classed as Business	12	10	8	14	4	12	19
% of Overseas Visitors classed as Visiting Friends / Relatives	43	25	26	18	20	35	23
% of Overseas Visitors classed as Other	4	2	3	3	4	2	6

Drilling down into the origin of visitors to the region and the purpose of their visit, shows that while the volume of visitors from Britain is very important, their purpose is probably not as a holidaymaker. It also verifies that visitors from Mainland Europe and North America are much more likely to visit the region for holiday purposes.

TABLE 17: 2012 and 2013 Origin of Overseas Visitors to East & Midlands Region, and the Purpose of their Visit

	2012	2013
<b>% of Overseas Visitors classed as Holidaymakers</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>40%</b>
% of British visitors classed as Holidaymakers	22%	24%
% of Mainland Europe visitors classed as Holidaymakers	53%	51%
% of North American visitors classed as Holidaymakers	58%	64%
% of visitors from Other Areas classed as Holidaymakers	45%	51%



- **Domestic Market**

The CSO Household Travel Survey analyses Laois along with Offaly, and shows that the number of Domestic/ Irish Residents Visiting the Laois & Offaly area has grown solidly over the past five years, as has the number of bed nights by these visitors. The positive effect of the community heritage project “The Gathering 2013” is verified by these statistics. *TABLE 18:*

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Number of Trips by Irish Residents to Laois & Offaly	108,000	124,000	118,000	146,000	141,000
Number of Nights by Irish Residents in Laois & Offaly	235,000	244,000	232,000	298,000	302,000

- **Visitors to tourist attractions**

Only two tourist attractions from Laois feature in the Fáilte Ireland - Visitors to Tourist Attractions 2009-2013. The visitor numbers are growing constantly in both Emo Court and Donaghmore Museum.

*TABLE 19:*

Name of Attraction	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Emo Court House & Gardens	6,092	5,589	5,776	8,506	11,397
Donaghmore Workhouse Museum	1,345	1,260	1,634	1,814	1,928

- **Agriculture**

- **Farm Size**

According to the CSO census of agriculture taken in June 2010 there are 3,312 farms in Laois. The average farm size is 37.0 hectares which is somewhat bigger than the state average of 32.7 hectares.

### ○ Specialisation

The overwhelming majority (60%) of Laois farms (1,962) specialise in beef production, followed by 361 specialising in dairying and 268 in tillage. 626 farms are mixed.

Specialist beef farming is consistently holding its dominance in the farming sector in Laois, while the number of specialist dairy farms is significantly decreasing, as is the number of specialist sheep farms.

*TABLE 20. Numbers of farms in Laois, classified by type*

	Specialist Tillage	Specialist Dairying	Specialist Beef Production	Specialist Sheep	Mixed	Other	Total
1991	284	845	1,732	128	896	45	3,930
2000	264	572	1,805	85	638	31	3,395
2010	268	361	1,962	67	626	28	3,312

### ○ Age Profile

The age profile of Laois farmers is broadly similar to the state average, where 26% of farmerholders are aged over 65, and only 6% of farmerholders are aged under 35. This unbalanced age profile is consistent with 1991 and 2000 census of agriculture figures.

*TABLE 21. Number family farms in Laois classified by age of holder.*

	<35	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	total
1991	614	763	907	863	771	3,918
2000	487	789	806	646	664	3,392
2010	221	636	853	745	851	3,306

### ● Forestry

County Laois has an active and well developed forestry sector. Forests now cover approximately 14.7% of the county, which is well above the national average of 10.5%. While timber production within the county is currently dominated by Coillte, private forests now account for 38.6% of the county's forest cover. Source: National Forest Inventory 2012. This shift in resource ownership will begin to alter the dynamics of timber supply within the county over the next decade.

### ● Equine

According to the "Directory of the Turf", there are 8 stud farms in Laois, located in Abbeyleix, Mountmellick, Ballyroan, Ballacolla, Durrow, Attanagh, Pike of Rushall and Coolrain and there are 11 racehorse trainers in county Laois, located in Abbeyleix (2), Portarlinton, Mountrath, Errill (2), Ballacolla (2), Coolrain, Ballinakill and The Swan.

## 2.3 KEY SERVICES / PROGRAMMES

### Key Services and Programmes

The LCDC as part of its remit is to ensure that there is no duplication of services in the county to ensure the best use of resources. In order for this to work in the Local Development Strategy the key services and programme the key local services and programmes are listed below

#### 2.3.1 ENTERPRISE

A number of organisations offers supports to businesses in Co Laois including IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, the Local Enterprise Office, Laois Partnership Co, the Employment Services office of the Department of Social Protection

**Laois Partnership Company** delivers SICAP in Co Laois under contract to Laois LCDC. SICAP is the new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme. It aims to tackle poverty, social exclusion and long-term unemployment through local engagement and partnership between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations and public sector agencies. It was rolled out on 1st April 2015 and will run until December 2017. It is the successor programme to the outgoing Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP).

SICAP in Laois as part of its work offers support to long term unemployed people to set up their own business. The company works with DSP to support individuals to apply for the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance(BTWEA)

Laois Partnership Company also delivers the Rural Social Scheme in Co Laois an income support scheme for farmers in receipt of Farm Assist or Job seekers Allowance. There are 25 places in Laois on RSS. They also deliver the TUS scheme for Laois and the County Childcare CE scheme both labour activation programmes. Job club for the county

**Department of Social Protection** have a number of supports for both employers and unemployed individuals who wish to get back into the workforce

JobsPlus is an employer incentive which encourages and rewards employers who employ jobseekers on the Live Register. This incentive replaces the Revenue Job Assist and Employer Job (PRSI) Exemption Scheme from 1 July 2013. It is designed to encourage employers and businesses to employ people who have been out of work for long periods. Eligible employers who recruit full-time employees on or after 1 July 2013 may apply for the incentive.

The Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) scheme encourages people getting certain social welfare payments to become self-employed. If you take part in the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance scheme you can keep a percentage of your social welfare payment for up to 2 years. A new Back to Work Scheme called the Short-Term Enterprise Allowance started in May 2009. There is no qualifying period for the Short-Term Enterprise Allowance. You can get immediate access to the allowance if you meet the qualifying conditions

**Microfinance Ireland (MFI)**, as a not-for-profit lender, has been established to deliver the Government's Microenterprise Loan Fund. Unsecured loans from €2,000 up to €25,000, Term from 3 to 5 years. A number of individuals in the county have received Microfinance funding to set up their own businesses including a number referred through the enterprise and employment officer in the SICA Programme within Laois Partnership Company.

**The Local Enterprise Office** is for people interested in starting up a new business or already in business including; entrepreneurs, early stage promoters, start-ups and small business looking to expand.

**Enterprise Ireland** is the government organisation responsible for the development and growth of Irish enterprises in world markets. Their main aim is helping Irish enterprises to get into global markets.

**IDA Ireland** seeks to attract Foreign Direct Investment into the country and Laois is serviced by the IDA Ireland Midlands region which includes the counties of Longford, Westmeath and Longford as well as Westmeath

The IDA operate a 46 acre business park in Portlaoise that is available for foreign companies who wish to set up in Laois.

There are three community enterprise centres in Laois one in Portlaoise, one in Portarlington and one in Mountmellick. These centres have units for rent for new business start-ups and offer other supports through the centre management. Mountmellick Development Association through LEADER funding has developed a suite of commercial kitchens in their centre in Mountmellick for rent. Portlaoise Enterprise Centre has hot desking for start-ups. Portarlington Enterprise Centre is currently developing a training hub for business users.

Portlaoise and Portarlington enterprise centres share a fulltime business development manager funded by Enterprise Ireland. Mountmellick Development Association also have a business development manager in place part funded by Enterprise Ireland. A number of dedicated enterprise units are available for rent through private promoters in Portlaoise, Portarlington, Graiguecullen, Mountrath, Rathdowney, Stradbally and Mountmellick.

A number of business networks exist in the principle towns in the county. There are also several sector specific groups in the county including the Glenbarrow Beef Producer Group, Laois Arts and Crafts Group, the Forestry Producer Group, Tour Guide association and a number of others.

**Laois Chamber of Commerce** ceased functioning during the recession when the decline in membership made it unsustainable. There is currently a move to revitalise it.

**Skillsnet** Skillsnet was established in 1999 and is funded from the National Training Fund (NTF) through the Department of Education and Skills (DES). Skillnets actively supports and works with businesses in Ireland to address their current and future skills needs. There are no skillsnet networks specifically based in Co Laois however a number of the industry specific networks have done training in the county.

**Teagasc:** Teagasc is the National body providing advisory and training services to farm families in Co Laois. Laois is in the Laois/Kildare/Meath/Louth/Dublin region. The region has 7 offices and 28 advisors. There is one office in Laois based in Portlaoise with 6 advisors in place.

### **Community Services Programme:**

The **Community Services Programme (CSP)** gives grants to community businesses that deliver services and create employment for people from disadvantaged groups. Funded by the **Department of Social Protection** and managed by Pobal, it supports some 425 community companies and co-operatives nationally.

In Laois there are currently 6 CSP funded programmes in the county including Laois Services to the Elderly a community services funded business which offers a repair and maintenance service for older people run by Laois Partnership Company. The Den a community based Childcare facility in Killeslin, Abbeylisk Heritage Company, Mountmellick Community Sports hall, Treo Nua Community Centre Portlaoise and Portarlington Community Centre

## RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ZONES (REDZ)

The 2014 CEDRA report identified the need for local strategic economic development plans for newly defined zones of rural economic activity, known as REDZ. Two of these zones are primarily located in Laois, the Portlaoise REDZ which contains Portlaoise, Portarlinton, Mountmellick, Mountrath, Stradbally and Durrow and the Rathdowney REDZ which is Rathdowney and its hinterland. Portions of Laois are also included in the Tullamore, Birr, Roscrea, Carlow and Athy REDZs.

In September 2015, Laois County Council, Laois Partnership, Local Enterprise Office Laois and Carlow IT were jointly awarded €50,000 to run a diverse range of Start Your Own Business training courses to benefit young people and target the long term unemployed in the Rathdowney REDZ. This pilot initiative has potential to be rolled out in other areas of Laois with issues around high unemployment and low self-employment.

### 2.3.2 TOURISM

**FAILTE IRELAND** is the National Tourism Development Authority. Their role is to support the tourism industry and work to sustain Ireland as a high-quality and competitive tourism destination. They provide a range of practical business supports to help tourism businesses better manage and market their products and services. They also work with other state agencies and representative bodies, at local and national levels, to implement and champion positive and practical strategies that will benefit Irish tourism and the Irish economy. They promote Ireland as a holiday destination through our domestic marketing campaign and manage a network of nationwide tourist information centres that provide help and advice for visitors to Ireland. –the tourism office in Portlaoise is managed by Laois County Council currently with support from Community employment scheme participants

**Laois Tourism Company** is the county tourism body in Laois. The membership is made up of tourism providers, community organisations and state agencies with a tourism remit Laois County Council's tourism officer provides administration support to the organisation. The group have hosted a number of high profile festival including the Regional final of the Rose of Tralee, the World Street performance festival, the World Fleadh and the International Golf Classic.

They promote the tourism product of Laois and encourage networking and co-operative actions between members for example the Laois Garden Trail.

**South Laois Tourism** is a community tourism network for the south Laois/North Kilkenny region. It seeks to promote the region and its activities as a tourism hub. It has developed a number of projects including the South Laois Cycle Trail, the Ballagh challenge cycling Festival.

**Slieve Bloom Rural Development Society** is a community organisation set up to market the Slieve Blooms as a tourism destination. It straddles Laois and Offaly and organises a number of successful events including the Slieve Bloom Walking Festival, the Slieve Bloom Storytelling Festival and weekly guided walks in the Slieve Blooms for visitors and locals.

**Laois Offaly Walks Partnership** is a committee organised by Laois and Offaly Local Authorities made up of state agencies and community organisations who are involved in developing walks and leisure activities. They work strategically across county borders to develop, upgrade and promote the walking product with a particular focus on the Slieve Blooms

## **AGRI FOOD RELATED TOURISM INITIATIVES**

The 2014 CEDRA report identified the importance of agri-food tourism projects in advancing rural economic development. Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath local authorities were jointly awarded €€€ to assist food producers in the Midland Region to enhance their marketing portfolio and secure additional sales to both the retail and services sectors.

## **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BARROW NAVIGATION**

The 2010 Barrow Tourism, Recreation and Commercial Product Development Study was commissioned by the LEADER companies and local authorities in Laois, Kildare, Kilkenny, Carlow and Wexford, along with Fáilte Ireland and Waterways Ireland. The report identified the need for Infrastructure Development, Development of Activity Hubs and Tourism Trails, Boating and Cruising Development, Raising the Tourism Profile of the Barrow, Development of Nature and Wildlife Sites, Enhancement of Barrow Way Trail and Development of Angling Tourism. The partners are working jointly, across several funding streams, to action these recommendations.

**Laois Partnership Company** administer the Rural Recreation Scheme in Laois and Offaly. This programme provides a full time Rural Recreation Officer who not only delivers the Walks scheme for Laois and Offaly but also drives the development of outdoor leisure products in both counties.

The Executive Committee Barrow Navigation was set-up in 2009 to harness the potential of the Barrow in advance of the 220th anniversary of the Barrow Navigation project. The committee comprises of state agencies, tourism operators and community representatives. They are involved in promoting the Barrow as a tourism destination.

Laois Walks Group is a network of representatives of community groups that develop and upgrade the walking product in their local area. They organise the annual Laois Walks Festival which takes place during the month of July.

The Laois Festival Network encourage cooperative actions between festival organisers in the county.

The Laois Tour Guides Group provides a platform for tour guide operators in the county to link with each other.

### **2.3.3 EMPLOYMENT SERVICES**

**DSP** operate an Intereo Office in Portlaoise which offers employment supports to unemployed individuals in Co Laois. Supports are also offered to employers who wish to employ people off the Live Register. There are three local Social Welfare Offices in the county in Portlaoise, Portarlington and Rathdowney

**Laois Partnership Company** deliver Job Club on behalf of the Department of Social Protection. This is an interview and CV preparation service for long term unemployed people. There is also a job club in Portarlington sponsored by Portarlington Community Development Association delivering the same service.

Under the Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme (SICAP) Laois Partnership Company delivers an unemployed mentoring service for Long Term unemployed people particularly those living in the most marginalised areas in Co Laois.

Laois has yet to see the opening of a Job path office in the county. Jobpath in this region was contracted to Turas nua a partnership between Farm Relief Services and Working Links (UK). The aim of JobPath is to support people who are long-term unemployed and those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed to secure and sustain paid employment.

The nearest Jobpath office is in Roscrea Co Tipperary

### **2.3.4 PUBLIC PARTICIPATORY NETWORK**

Laois has a vibrant community and voluntary sector. The Public Participatory Network (PPN) has 18 members on its secretariat representing the Social Inclusion, Community and Environmental Pillars. They have five representatives on Laois LCDC and there are 275 community & voluntary groups affiliated to it from all parts of the county.

There is a wide range of local development associations, tidy towns groups and hall committees throughout the county. In many local areas there are voluntary social service organisations that deliver support services to older people in the community. A number of Community Alerts groups exist in the county also.

The GAA is active across the entire county as is the ICA and the IFA. The GAA, Parish committees and the ICA own and operate many community facilities which are actively used by other organisations.

Many of these community facilities have been refurbished and redeveloped with assistance from previous LEADER programmes

There is one Family Resource Centre in Laois based in Knockmay, Portlaoise.

There is also a wide range of voluntary groups gathered around social exclusion issues such as disability, Traveller issues, and issues for immigrants and others including Laois Traveller Action Group, Laois Domestic Abuse Service,

The Men's Shed movement has gained traction over the past number of years in the county with groups in Portlaoise, Rathdowney, Mountmellick in existence and a number of groups in the process of being formed.

A volunteer service has been set up through Laois Partnership Company to match organisations looking for volunteers to those willing to become volunteers. There are 55 organisations registered with the service currently and 400 volunteers registered.

A number of these groups engage in community-based enterprises and have been supported by the LEADER programme, this is especially true of Mountmellick Development Association (MDA) and Portarlinton Community Development Association (PCDA). MDA leases enterprise facilities in Mountmellick while PCDA is a partner with Laois County Council and Laois Partnership Company in the running of an enterprise centre in Portarlinton.

### **2.3.5 YOUTH SERVICES**

Laois Offaly ETB offers Youthreach centres in Portlaoise and Mountmellick. These centres offer educational opportunities for early school leavers or those at risk of early school leaving.

There is a Youth officer in Laois Offaly ETB which acts as the link between all the youth organisations in the county and the ETB. The youth officer support youth clubs/groups in their training needs and help them maintain the highest standard for volunteer led youth work in Laois. They also administer the youth club grant scheme in Laois

Youth work in the county is provided by a number of organisations. Youth Work Ireland Laois, Ossory Youth Services and Foroige provide the main service run youth clubs and youth projects in the county. Mountmellick Youth Development Centre is run through the Mountmellick Development Association targeting disadvantaged youth as does Laois Partnership Co who run youth activities in disadvantaged areas across the county.

Sporting organisations such as the GAA, IRFU and the FAI are very strong in Co Laois and provide recreational opportunities and informal leadership training for young people and their mentors throughout the county.

The Department of Justice and Equality funds two Garda Youth Diversion projects in Co. Laois one in Portlaoise and one in Portarlinton. These community based programmes aim to prevent people referred from the Juvenile Liaison Officer due to anti-social behaviour from taking part in criminal activities.

A number of after school services are also run by Mountmellick YDC, Laois Partnership Company and Portarlinton Community Development Association

Youth cafes have been set up by groups of volunteers in Stradbally, Camross Timahoe, Rathdowney, Abbeyleix and Portlaoise. Funding was secured through the Department of Children for Portlaoise, Rathdowney and Timahoe with Stradbally and Abbeyleix being in receipt of funding through the last LEADER programme. The youth cafes are run on a part time basis throughout the week.

Music Generation Laois is funded by Music Generation Ireland, the Ireland funds, U2, Laois County Council, Laois Offaly ETB and Laois Partnership Co is used to promote the development of music amongst young people in Co Laois.

The Local authority is supporting children and youth work through the children and young people's task group and Comhairle na nOg. Comhairle na nÓg are child and youth councils in the 34 local authorities of the country, which give children and young people the opportunity to be involved in the development of local services and policies.

There are 6 branches of the Irish Boy scouts and 4 branches of the girl guides in Laois. The organisations offer the opportunity for young people to learn develop and have fun in a safe and secure environment operating under international best practice.

Coder Dojo clubs supported by Laois Partnership Company and others have been established in Ballyfin, Portarlinton and Abbeyleix. These clubs offer opportunities for young people to learn IT skills in a structured environment.

Playgrounds have been developed in all the major towns but some of the smaller towns and villages now have play areas including Stradbally, Ballylinan, Timahoe, Coolrain, Barrowhouse, Killeen and Castletown. Some have received funding through the local authority and a number through the LEADER programme.

SICAP which is delivered by Laois Partnership Company in Laois offers supports to disadvantaged young people in the county but concentrated in the most disadvantaged areas which are mostly in Portlaoise.

The HSE have a number of services for young people including the child and adolescent psychologist service based in Portlaoise.

The Anna Liffey Project provides services to under 18 year olds suffering from addiction problems in County Laois and Merchants Quay Ireland provide services to the families of young people affected by substance misuse

### **2.3.6 SERVICES FOR OLDER PEOPLE**

There are 11 active retirement groups in Laois registered with Active Ireland and they consist of older people who come together to organise events and social outings for older people in their areas.

The community guards in the county offers a monthly visiting service to older people living alone.

Laois Partnership Company operates Laois Services to the Elderly a community services programme funded by the Department of Social Protection (DSP)



Laois Partnership Company operates a county wide befriending service but a number of towns and villages also run a local service visiting older people in their homes. Older people are identified through Laois Services to the Elderly(LSTEP) and the district nurses.

A number of social services exists in the larger towns providing meals on wheels and social outings for the most restricted members of the older community.

Under the auspices of Laois County Council; Laois is currently developing an Age Friendly County Strategy to promote Laois as an Age Friendly County

The Rural transport Programme operates in Laois through the Laois Offaly Local Link and is a vital service for older people in rural areas.

### **2.3.7 ARTS AND CULTURE**

Laois was one of the first counties in the country to employ a full-time arts officer and this commitment to the arts and culture has paid off in terms of a vibrant arts and culture sector in the county.

#### **Facilities**

The sector was boosted by the establishment of the Dunamase Arts Centre, Portlaoise in 1999. The centre houses a theatre and exhibition space and provides a high-quality venue for national and local artists. The Community Arts Centre in Mountmellick is also a thriving local arts venue and host venue for the annual Mountmellick Drama Festival.

Various community buildings located throughout the county host local art events, including concerts, amateur dramatics and educational workshops. Along with the exhibition space at the Dunamase Arts Centre, Áras an Chontae, the Arthouse in Stradbally and a number of the Public libraries also host regular exhibitions.

#### **Education**

Abbeyleix Further Education Centre provides a nationally accredited two-year Vocational Skills Training Programme. Laois School of Music, established in 2001, is a hub of musical education for the midlands region. Music Generation Laois a partnership between Laois County Council, Laois Offaly ETB and Laois Partnership Company was formed in late 2011 from funding through Music Generation. Laois was one of the first six counties in Ireland to get this funding. This funding is used to promote access to all types of music education for children and young people in Ireland. It is building on the work of Laois School of Music this is part funded by the Ireland Funds and U2.

A number of arts education courses are offered to individuals/community groups by organisations such as Laois Offaly ETB, Laois County Council Artist Residency Programme and the Irish Country Women's Association.

#### **Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann**

There are six branches of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí in the county teaching and celebrating Irish traditional music.

#### **Festivals**

Festivals and events in the county include the Electric Picnic, Laois Walks festival, JFL Autumn School, Durrow Scarecrow Festival, Slieve Bloom Storytelling Festival, the Slieve Bloom Hillwalking Festival, The Stradbally Steam Rally, the Gordon Bennet Rally, Festival Francais in Portarlinton, local St. Patrick's Day parades and the Ballylinan Passion Play as well as two agricultural shows held annually in Clonaslee and Rathdowney.

The County hosted the Rose of Tralee Regional finals for the last 5 years and the National Ploughing Championships for the past three years.

## Arts and craft groups

Co Laois benefits from a very strong arts and crafts culture which has evolved from traditional disciplines such as 'Mountmellick Work' to include new and diverse skills such as film-making and pyrography. The Laois Arts and Craft Group has 20 members and provides local support for craft workers in the county. It aims to create a national brand for Laois as a craft-rich county. There are 43 members of the Craft Council of Ireland based in Laois.

## Heritage

Laois is very proud of its eclectic heritage from the great Seven Septs of Laois to the Huguenots and the Quakers and our history as a planted county. The county is rich in recognised heritage sites and sites that are not so well known. The natural heritage of the county in terms of flora, fauna and its natural features are explored and celebrated regularly by the people under the direction of Laois Heritage Forum a subcommittee of the Council. The county also has a dedicated Heritage Officer. The nature of our planned villages which is unique to Laois and Offaly is important.

### 2.3.8 ARTISAN FOOD PRODUCTION

The artisan food sector has developed significantly over the last LEADER programme. Adding value to farm produce is an important contributor to farm family income. Sectors that have shown development are:

direct selling of fruit, vegetables, home-baking and meat at farmer's markets and country markets in Portlaoise, Abbeyleix, Durrow, Stradbally and Mountrath

co-operative marketing of Laois beef through the Glenbarrow scheme

added value to farm produce for the following farmers:

- dairy farmers - farmhouse cheese, farmhouse ice-cream, organic milk
- egg farmers - free range eggs
- poultry farmers - free-range chicken
- beef farmers - free range beef, organic beef
- fruit farmers - jams and preserves
- 

Under the past LEADER programme a number of farm shops were supported

A new community based LEADER funded food centre was opened in 2015 in Mountmellick by Mountmellick Development Association. This includes four commercial kitchens and a training kitchen which are available to rent on a part time or full time basis by small food producers. This centre of food excellence will drive the development of the artisan food sector in Laois.

### 2.3.9 ENVIRONMENT

A county network of environmental group exists. Laois Environmental Action Forum (LEAF) was set up in 2010 by Laois Environmental Network (LEN) and Laois County Council to raise awareness, network and support all things environmental and sustainable in Laois through connecting, educating and supporting.

There are a number of environmental groups in the county Birdwatch Ireland, Irish Wildlife Trust, Abbeyleix Bog Group, Mountmellick Environmental Group and the Mens shed Projects

There are 31 individual Tidy Towns groups in Co Laois registered with the Laois Federation of Tidy Towns. These groups conserve and enhance the environment in their local communities.

Laois Farm Forestry producer group was established in 2009 to support and develop the skills of small scale farm forestry owners.

## **Coillte**

Coillte is a commercial company operating in forestry, land based businesses, renewable energy and panel products.

The company employs approximately 1,000 people and was established in 1988. It owns over 445,000 hectares of land, about 7% of the land cover of Ireland.

Coillte manages its forests to deliver social, economic and environmental benefits.

## **Mountaineering Council of Ireland, Irish Trails Office**

The National Trails Office was established in 2007 by the Irish Sports Council to coordinate and drive the implementation of an Irish Trails Strategy, and to promote the use of recreational trails in Ireland.

## **Waterways Ireland**

Waterways Ireland manages, maintains, develops and promotes over 1000km inland navigable waterways principally for recreational purposes. The waterways under the remit of the body are the Barrow Navigation, the Erne System, the Grand Canal, the Lower Bann, the Royal Canal, the Shannon-Erne Waterway and the Shannon Navigation.

### **2.3.10 HEALTH**

The county is served by a general hospital in Portlaoise and ten health centres spread throughout the county. The public services for older people consist of full time care in St Vincent's Hospital, Mountmellick, St Brigid's, Shaen and the District Hospital in Abbeylax. However changes to these services are likely with a view that some of the smaller hospitals might be closed. St. Vincent's provide Day Care facilities for older people and a range of voluntary social services throughout the county are supported by the HSE to provide meals on wheels and other outreach to older people. The HSE is a major employer within the region.

There are two Primary Care Centres in Co Laois currently in Portarlinton and Mountmellick. There are plans for Primary Care Centres in Portlaoise and Rathdowney and a shared centre in Graiguecullen between Laois/ Offaly HSE area and the Carlow/Kilkenny area.

There are a number of Health centres based around the smaller towns in the county and a number of Primary care teams servicing the Health needs of the county

### **2.3.11 EDUCATION**

#### **Current Education Providers**

The Department of Education and Skills record that 68 primary schools in Laois cater for a school population of 10,869. Primary schools in Laois are primarily of a Catholic ethos (59) with the remainder classed as Church of Ireland (7) Inter-Denominational (1) and Multi-Denominational (1).

There are 8 second level schools in the county with 4,592 students. Three of these are Laois-Offaly Education and Training Board schools, three are community schools and two are schools with a Catholic ethos.

There is no full-time third level institution in Co Laois. Carlow and Athlone Institutes of Technology and the Tipperary Institute are the nearest third level colleges to the county. Laois Third Level, in Portarlinton provides third level undergraduate and post graduate courses to adult and continuing education students on a part-time basis.

Laois Offaly Education and Training Board (ETB), provides a range of educational programmes and services throughout the county for young people and adults. It provides learning programmes and supports to approximately 1,850 adults in Co. Laois through accredited and non-accredited courses. These include Adult Literacy, Community Education, VTOS, BTEI, Post Leaving Certificate Courses (PLC), Youth Reach and Traveller training. A free Adult Education Guidance Information Services (AEGIS) is also provided. Laois Offaly ETB also works with local youth organisations and groups to support the development of youth work.

Laois Partnership Company delivers the Back to Education Initiative in Portlaoise offering QQI accredited training. There is also a SOLAS/ETB funded Local Training Initiative in Organic Horticulture delivered by Laois Partnership Company in Portlaoise.

A number of the schools have night class programmes.

Department of Education and Skills (DES) provides education supports to individuals through its DEIS programme (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools). DEIS provides programmes and supports to increase the attendance and educational achievements of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. There are at present one primary school Scoil Bhride, Knockmay, Portlaoise and one secondary school, Portlaoise College in the DEIS programme in Laois

The National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) is responsible for ensuring that every child attends a school or receives an education. It is delivered through the school completion programme and the education and welfare service.

There is a community based IT training facility in Mountmellick and Laois Partnership Co offers mobile IT training in rural areas.

### **2.3.12 CHILDCARE**

There are 85 providers of childcare services and 10 Mother and toddler groups in Laois according to Laois County Childcare Committee directory of services for 2014-2015. These include community childcare initiatives, private crèches and playschools. Laois Partnership Company currently delivers the CE childcare scheme for County Laois on behalf of the Department of Social Protection. The County Childcare Committee provides support and advisory services to childcare providers in the county.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs is responsible for the a number of programmes which focus on social inclusion through the provision of the County Childcare Committee, Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCSS), Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE), Community Education & Training Supports (CETS)

### **2.3.13 CRIME AND JUSTICE**

Following the closure of Ballacolla and Ballinakill Garda Stations in January 2013, there are currently 12 Garda Stations covering county Laois: Abbeyleix, Arles, Ballylinan, Borris-in-Ossory, Clonaslee, Durrow, Mountmellick, Mountrath, Portarlinton, Portlaoise, Rathdowney & Stradbally. Only five counties have less Garda Stations per county: Sligo (11), Carlow (8), Longford (8) Monaghan (8) and Leitrim (7).

There were 151 Gardai working in the county in 2013. Only four counties have less Gardai per county: Offaly, Longford, Carlow and Leitrim. When you calculate the number of Gardai relative to the population of county Laois, it is only 18.8 Gardai per 10,000 people. Only five counties have less Gardai per 10,000 population: Offaly, Kilkenny, Wexford, Meath and Kildare.

County Laois, therefore, ranks badly for both the number of Garda stations and Gardai operating in the county (visibility of cover) and for the rate of Garda presence per population (rate of cover). This is compounded by the fact that neighbouring counties such as Carlow, Offaly, Kilkenny and Kildare also have poor Garda strength (if not worse) and creating an overall region of apparently weak Garda coverage.

## **2.4: AREA NEEDS ANALYSIS**

### **Conclusion area description**

Laois deprivation levels fell by 8.1 points since the last census

The most deprived electoral divisions are for the most part in rural communities in the west of the county namely Caher, Rathdowney, Mountrath and Borris in Ossory. Doonane in the east of the county has also high levels of deprivation. These rural areas of deprivation are prime targets for intervention by the RDP

#### **2.4.1 CONCLUSION POPULATION**

The population changes in Laois over the last fifteen years have changed the face of the county and indeed the nature of the county. The shift in population and the growth of centres of population particularly in the eastern part of the county close to the rail links and the motorway indicate that east Laois is now very much part of the Greater Dublin Area. The weaker population structures are mainly found in the western part of the county. The rapid increase in youth in the county has created a surge in dependency rates.

The challenges posed by this include:

Increased pressure on infrastructure and services, particularly for younger people and their families

Increased urbanisation of traditionally rural EDs

Lower level of voluntary community engagement due to long commuting times

#### **2.4.2 CONCLUSION LABOUR**

The county has a strong labour force, ready to work when employment opportunities are created. Unemployment levels are improving from the extreme levels seen in 2013, but at a much slower pace than the national average. Males and first time job seekers were greatest affected by the unemployment crisis.

While there are a number of employment services available to unemployed individuals they are only available on a regular basis in Portlaoise, Portarlinton and Rathdowney.

Youth Unemployment is a particular problem in Co Laois which needs to be addressed before these young individuals become unemployable

#### **2.4.3 CONCLUSION EDUCATION**

Education levels and subsequent social classification are a key weakness in the county and could be regarded as a threat in terms of the capacity of the county to collectively embrace the changes in the economy that are happening in terms of the transfer of low-skill jobs out of the country to lower wage economies. In light of the Government's policy in relation to 'fourth level' education, it has to be a cause for concern that Laois is still struggling with traditional third level.

The proportion of adults with primary education only in Newtown (30.2%) and Doonane (29.6%) is particularly startling, given their proximate access to Carlow Institute of Technology. This is further reinforced by the position of Doonane at the bottom of the league table as regards social class composition.

#### **2.4.4 CONCLUSION QUALITY OF LIFE**

The surge of new housing in the county implies that there is a corresponding influx of new individuals and families that require integration into their local communities.

Lack of adequate Broadband in Co Laois is negatively impacting on quality of life as well as being a major barrier to economic development

Theft and Burglary are prevalent crimes in the county.

Laois has a wide range of vibrant community and voluntary organisations in most areas however there are a number of areas where the capacity of the community is weak and needs to be developed

There is a need to build the capacity of a number of marginalised groups in the county particularly travellers, new communities, lone parents and people with disabilities and their carers.

#### **2.4.5 CONCLUSION ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Laois has a strong micro-enterprise culture which needs to be nourished to sustain local employment.

There are a number of state and community organisations offering supports and incentives to new business start-ups. The absence of a Chamber of Commerce in the county is a cause for concern

Laois has a commercial building capacity ready to be exploited by potential entrepreneurs and employers.

Tourism in Co Laois is growing but is very dependent on the UK market and on the diaspora visiting friends and relatives in the county. Community initiatives such as “the Gathering 2013” work really well in Laois as people without ties to the county don’t rate it as a holiday destination

Tourism in County Laois currently is somewhat disjointed with several umbrella groups working individually

Trends of decline in farmer numbers will continue and programmes such as the RDP are essential in assisting farmers to adapt to the changed situations.

#### **2.4.6 CONCLUSION ENVIRONMENT**

There is a strong tradition of Tidy Towns in the county and through education they are embracing biodiversity and environmentally friendly initiatives.

Community driven environmental projects will add to the tourism product in the county

### **2.5: Summary Analysis**

Laois has many advantages, it has a vibrant growing population, it is located at the centre of the country which brings with it major infrastructural advantages in terms of road and rail services. It is within easy reach of Dublin while retaining its essentially rural nature. The county has potential to be a hub in terms of transport, distribution and tourism.

Some of these strengths are also weaknesses in that the population growth has put much pressure on the infrastructure of the county with schools reporting large class sizes in areas experiencing rapid population growth.

However the key challenges that lie ahead for Laois are to be found in whether it can generate the capacity to meet the demands of a changing economy.

## **SECTION 3: PARTICIPATIVE PLANNING**

**3.1: PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

**3.2: SWOT ANALYSIS**

**3.3: AGREED LDS PRIORITIES**

## SECTION 3: PARTICIPATIVE PLANNING

### 3.1: PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The consultation process was managed by Laois Community and Enterprise Development Company staff as per the agreement between the three partners in the process i.e. the LCDC, the Local Authority and the Local Development Company. Staff of the Local Development Company who worked with the LCDC on the preparation of this strategy also attended the initial public consultations for the LECP with a view to feeding the views expressed at those meetings into the Local Development Strategy.

Planned Consultation commenced in June 2015 however prior to then staff attended the PPN/LECP information sessions held around the county.

There is a feeling among communities and individuals that they are over consulted by a number of organisations and they were anxious to see action on the ground.

The consultation process for this plan was based around the measures and actions as outlined in the new Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (RDP). A mix of individual and group consultations was organised with the various relevant sectors and with relevant individuals in the sectors.

A subcommittee of the LCDC was formed to support the process of developing the strategy. The members of the subcommittee were

Mr Michael Bergin Farming rep on Laois LCDC

Ms Linda Tynan Laois Offaly ETB on Laois LCDC

Mr Paddy Buggy PPN representative on Laois LCDC

Mr Robbie Quinn PPN representative on Laois LCDC

Ms Anne Goodwin Local Development Company representative on Laois LCDC

Following the initial meeting held on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 2015 it was agreed that contact could be undertaken through emails for the initial stages of the development of the strategy. It was agreed by the members that they would support the RDP staff with contact for consultations.

Public invitations to engage in the consultation process were placed in the local newspapers along with letters to a wide range of groups and organisations in the county. Social media and the Laois Partnership Company website as well as a significant emailing to community contacts, project promoters and state bodies was also undertaken. Laois GAA were also approached through their county structure to circulate consultation documents. Meetings with individuals and groups were arranged by the local development company staff.

The guidance document on the new rural development programme 2014-2020 Particularly emphasis in the consultation process was given to contacting those geographical communities who did not access a lot of LEADER funding in the past. The Local Development Company identified six towns and villages in the county that had not accessed community funding under the last LEADER programme, despite significant efforts by the Board and staff of the Local Development Company. These towns and villages were named as Mountrath, Borris-on Ossory, Errill, Cullahill, Doonane and Ballinakill.

The deprivation statistics for Mountrath Borris in Ossory and Doonane, particularly the lone parent ratio and level of educational attainment would indicate that these electoral divisions should be prioritised. Conversely the absence of Errill, Cullahill and Ballinakill in the county wide community structures/ business networks etc. would indicate that these communities are significantly marginalised from main stream decision making structures thus making it less likely that they will avail of funding opportunities and other services.



Collective consultation meetings were organised for various sectors as follows:

- Members of Laois LCDC
- The Tourism Sector and Laois Tourism
- The Community & Voluntary Sector
- The Farming Sector and the IFA
- The Public Participatory Network
- The Board of Laois Community & Enterprise Development Company Limited
- The staff of Laois Community & Enterprise Development Company Limited
- Relevant staff in Laois County Council from the Environment, Tourism, Planning and Heritage sections
- The environmental pillar of the PPN
- The RSS/TUS clients based in rural areas
- Age Action Ireland
- Local elected representatives

A number of local meetings were organised around the county. These were organised through the local community groups and were open to the public. Meetings were held in the month of September in the three municipal areas of Borris in Ossory/Mountmellick, Portlaoise and Graiguecullen/Portarlinton.

As the county currently has no Chamber of Commerce business consultations were held with project promoters who had been funded through the LEADER programme in the past and also those who have enquired about LEADER funding in the new round of funding. Consultations were also held with business leaders in the community.

Written and online submissions were received from, Inland Fisheries Ireland, Mountmellick Youth Development Centre, Mountrath Community Forum, Borris in Ossory Community Alert, Laois Tourism Company Ltd, Durrow Development Forum, the Environmental officer Laois Co Council, Portarlinton Community Development Association, Laois IFA, Tourism Officer Laois County Council, Laois Comhaltas, Doonane Community group, Killeshin Community Council, Mountrath Development Association, Age Action Ireland, Laois Age Friendly Alliance, Abbeyleix Bog Project, Graiguecullen Community Development Group, ABC (Abbeyleix Business & Community Group), Inland Fisheries Group, Durrow Development Forum, Laois Museum Group, Laois Tour Guides Forum, Romanesque Development Limited, Castletown Tradfest, Raheen Heritage Group, Ballyfin Community Alert, CCÉ, Portlaoise, Killeshin Community Centre/Killeshin Community Centre Committee, Laois Kayak & Canoe Club, Kilcavan GAA, Regional Centre of Excellence for Disabled Sports Steering Group, Men's Shed Ballylinan, Cullahill TV, Shanahoe Community Alert, Laois Farm Forestry Group, Ballyroan Development Group, Travel Guides Ltd

A number of individual submissions were made also.

The collective consultations took the form of a presentation on the new RDP, its outline and priorities and a brief socio-economic overview of Co Laois. Participants were then asked to work in groups and explore one of the measures proposed and its accompanying set of action areas as outlined in the new programmes and describe the current needs in the county in relation to this measure and recommendations for action in the plan. The outcomes of the process were documented and fed into the plan.

The key outcomes from the meetings were

- No foreign direct Investment in the county
- East/West divide in the county
- No third level institute in the county

- Loss of services in rural communities
- Broadband capacity
- Crime in rural areas
- Tourism as a driver for economic development in rural areas
- Regeneration of isolated rural communities
- Jobs for young people in rural areas

A summary of findings is presented below. Key needs identified by groups and individuals included:

**1. Sustainability of rural living is threatened**

Long commuting

- Loss of services in rural communities
- Rural dwellers are second class citizens
- Anti-social behaviour and rural crime a huge issue
- No jobs in rural areas particularly for youth

**2. Need for support and services to foster enterprise creation and development**

- Rural towns need to see business opportunities developed through programmes such as REDZ
- Broadband provision needs to be a priority in this county
- Need to re-establish the chamber of commerce

**3. Development of tourism**

- A new strategic plan is required for tourism in the county
- The tourism providers need to take more responsibility for the county tourism organisation
- The County Tourism Organisation needs a staff resource to promote and develop the membership of the organisation in order to become self-sustaining .
- Developing itself as a hub, the county is ideally placed to offer tourists a combination of local hospitality and day-trips to the bigger tourist destinations such as Dublin and the West
- Laois needs a stronger profile in “Ireland's Ancient East “ by Failte Ireland
- Build on the development of leisure activities including walks and cycling routes from previous LEADER programmes

**4. Rural youth**

Facilities and opportunities for rural youth are required in response to the increasingly younger population in the county

A need to engage rural youth into community activities to enable them be part of a sustainable and resilient community

Need to support a culture of self-employment for rural youth

Substance abuse is becoming an issue for rural youth

## **5. Training and integration**

- There is a need to access expertise and support in forming new enterprises and developing new skills
- There is a need to provide ICT training in rural communities to allow rural areas embrace new technology
- There is a need to link agencies providing training
- Training must be accredited with quality assurance from bodies such as QQI , City & Guilds or industry accredited
- Many rural dwellers were dependent on the construction industry for employment these individuals may now need retraining and/or upskilling
- The barriers for rural dwellers to engage in education particularly need to be addressed including access to transport, childcare, training and English literacy (for non nationals)

## **6. Environmental issues**

- Rural Towns and villages need to be revived as focal points for their community's social infrastructure, income generation capability and for employment opportunities. ,
- Waste management and the greening of the county provide opportunities
- There is an opportunity for communities to respond to green issues
- There is potential for innovative solutions/jobs in the whole environmental area

## **7. Infrastructure**

- Poor rural transport continues to be an issue
- Lack of next generation broadband coverage is a key infrastructural weakness

## **8. Integration between agencies**

- There is a sense of over consultation with communities by agencies
- The new community structures need to be demystified
- Is there duplication or are there key areas being missed?
- Agencies are seen to be isolated from one another
- What is the role of the LCDC in all of this?

## 3.2: SWOT ANALYSIS

### 3.2.1: Strengths

**Location:** Laois is located at the centre of Ireland, at the crossroads of Ireland. While the centre of many countries evokes images of isolation in the case of Laois it means being located in a place where the major road, rail and telecommunications networks of the country intersect. It is within easy reach of Dublin, the greater Dublin area is home to one-third of the population, with huge consumer and job markets. It is within easy reach of Dublin Airport, Limerick, Shannon Airport and the tourist destinations of the Midlands, West and South-East.

**Infrastructure:** Laois is served extremely well by top-grade national road and rail infrastructure. Trains stop at the three Laois rail stations 78 times every day, the M7 and M8, the major new motorways to the mid-west and south-west pass through the county while the N80 is a main arterial route between the North-West, Midlands and the South-East. The National Fibre Optic Network (NTFON) is constructed in a 'figure of eight' around Ireland and Stradbally is one of the 16 key national points of presence on this network.

**Growing Population:** Population growth is a key indicator of strength and viability. Laois was the fastest growing county in Ireland between the last two censuses of population 2006 and 2011. It is also one of three counties where the population is getting younger and this can only be regarded as a huge expansion of the human resource in the county in terms of diversity, talent and possibility. This substantial increase in critical mass is also key to economic and social prosperity.

**Environment & Natural Resources:** The natural resources of Laois include unspoilt rivers such as the Barrow, the Nore, the Owenass and the Silver Rivers. The unspoilt Slieve Bloom Mountains, the rich farmlands that make up 48% of the land area of Laois along with the extensive boglands are among the rich resources of the county. Laois has the highest number of privately owned forestry in the country. Well organised network of environmental groups that collaborates and interacts with each other on projects.

**Strong Community Engagement:** Laois Partnership Co, Laois County Council and the former community forum has invested much time, effort and funding in developing community capacity. The new PPN structure has more than 250 affiliate members, an indicator of a vibrant community sector. There is a wide range of voluntary organisations working with all age groups in social services, sports, personal development, local development and cultural activities.

**Community Facilities:** There is a sizeable stock of community facilities in the county. A number of these facilities are in excellent condition thanks to local effort and LEADER support.

**Agriculture:** Agriculture in Laois remains a vibrant part of the economy and the social fabric of the county. 48% of the land mass of the county is regarded as good agricultural land. According to the CSO census of agriculture in 2000 there are 2,759 while a more recent Teagasc estimate put the number at 2,425.

**Arts & Culture:** Laois has a vibrant arts sector in performance and the visual arts. The county plays host to renowned national and international music festivals as well as other annual cultural and heritage events.

**Heritage:** There is a strong consciousness of heritage in the county; it boasts an eclectic mix of traditions from the old Celtic nobility of the O'Moore's to the Huguenots and the Quakers. The county has three museums, regular heritage events, a heritage trail and a number of educational events. There is a wealth of underdeveloped heritage sites throughout the county along with the incredible natural heritage in the flora and fauna of the mountains, the rivers, the pastureland and bogs.

**Growth Triangle:** The triangle of Portlaoise, Portarlinton and Mountmellick has experienced huge growth over the last decade and has the potential to be a powerhouse of growth for the county.

### 3.2.2: Weaknesses

**Employment Structure:** the unemployment levels are unacceptably high a throwback from the bust and boom of the Celtic tiger. Many local jobs in Laois are centred around construction and manufacturing. These sectors are very vulnerable as can be seen from the recent trends in the Live Register. It is a matter of urgency to broaden the skill base and the jobs base. The unemployment rate is dropping at the second slowest rate in the country

**Passing Through:** Being at the crossroads of the country can be a disadvantage when people view the crossroads as a place to pass through rather than stop. Laois needs to develop itself as a hub and a destination for jobs, tourism, enterprise and business.

**Educational Attainment:** The low level of third level attainment in the county will not tempt employers with high-end jobs to locate to Laois. Failure to tackle poor educational attainment will cost the county. The lack of a full time third level Institute in the county is seen as a contributing factor to this weakness.

**Tourism:** The 'passing through' phenomenon affects tourism more than any other sector in the county. Laois is recognised as a place one drives through but it is not recognised as a place to visit. The tourism organisation needs strengthening with providers taking more control over the organisation

**Youth:** There is no coherent inter-agency youth work strategy in a county with a growing young population. Youth supports are ad hoc and the youth services are underfunded.

**Non-Adaptive Agriculture:** There is little evidence of in-depth research into the status of agriculture in the county. There is much anecdotal evidence of issues that should cause concern such as non-viable farms being farmed on a full-time basis.

**Commuting:** Laois has a high level of commuters. People who commute long distances to work are less likely to have the time or the opportunity to engage and become involved in their communities. It is also detrimental to overall quality of life in the county.

**Rural Services:** There is much evidence of a consistent decline in rural services such as the closure of rural shops and post offices. Recent years saw the closure of a number of rural post offices, bank branches and Garda Stations further diminishing services to rural dwellers. Rural life is becoming more difficult for older people and younger people without access to cars.

### 3.2.3: Opportunities

**Hubs & Transport:** The Laois County Development Plan envisages great possibilities for Laois and Portlaoise in particular as a key national transport centre with the 'capacity to develop related economic and logistic activity'.

**Tourism Hub:** With its location and a growing stock of excellent accommodation, Laois could position itself as an ideal tourist hub introducing visitors to the local tourist product and facilitating day trips to the more visited tourist areas in the West South-West, South-East and Dublin. It would involve proactive personal engagement with the tourists but would result in the bed-nights being spent in Laois. Eco-tourism potential is unexploited in the county given the wide array of natural heritage amenities that exist

**Events Capital:** The location of Laois and the fact it is so well serviced by road and rail allied to the growth in excellent hotels and facilities should mean the county is ideally placed to be the event, festival and conference capital of Ireland.

**Address Educational Deficit:** Every report on the needs of Laois refers to the educational deficit especially in relation to third level participation. There is a need and an opportunity to take on a county-based initiative to address this deficit. Such an initiative should seek to build cross-sectoral support and could involve a series of local 'back to education' projects for mature students, support for second level students and scholarships. Such an initiative could be a model for other counties.

**Diversification:** The success of the craftspeople and the small food producers during the lifetime of the last programme indicates that diversification works. The market for niche food is opening up as more and more people become aware of their products especially where there is a good farmers market.

**Small Food Sector:** Healthy good food is becoming a greater priority with people. The small food sector in Laois could be expanded.

**Innovation:** The fact that Laois is not the home to a powerful all-pervasive industry means that there is plenty of scope for innovation. There are lots of great ideas out there.

**Green Opportunities:** actions to combat climate change will create opportunities for jobs in the green economy and in town/village rejuvenation projects. County Laois needs to be to the forefront of this movement

**Next Generation Broadband.** The roll out of the National Broadband Programme offers opportunities for employment in the most rural areas of Co Laois

### 3.2.4: Threats

**Employment Options:** Aside from public sector employers, Laois has no flagship FDI or indigenous employers. Many of the business and industrial facilities around the county lie idle.

**Low Skills Base:** The downturn in construction and the vulnerability of the manufacturing sector means that up to 26% of the labour force in the county could be affected.

**Educational Attainment:** Low third level attainment in the county leaves Laois ill-prepared to attract high-end jobs and exposes the workforce to the more competitive job markets of the Global East.

**Dormitory Status:** The dormitory status of the east of the county is not conducive to active communities and civic engagement.

**Rural Crime:** the improvements in road infrastructure has made the county more vulnerable to being targeted by professional thieves. This threatens the quality of life for people in rural areas

**Poor Approach to Development:** There is a lack of a real business approach to development and an absence in leadership to bring it about.

**Global recession:** another down turn in the economic situation could adversely affect the Irish economy and consequently the economy of our county

**Broadband:** the speed, coverage and rollout of next generation broadband through the National Broadband Programme could further compound the Digital Divide between towns of high population and isolated rural areas in the county.



### 3.3: AGREED LDS PRIORITIES

In describing the landscape within Laois for the new RDP, Laois LCDC is articulating its clear understanding of the key issues affecting rural development within Laois. In summarising these needs the following emerge as priority needs within Laois:

- Enterprise creation and support
- Tackling the education deficit and the preparation of people for high-end job markets
- Development of tourism
- Training
- IT Infrastructure (especially next generation broadband, rural transport, signage)
- Capacity of communities to respond to their own development needs especially those hard to reach communities
- Facilities and Services for Rural Youth
- Security in rural areas
- Expand leisure based tourism

Arising from the consultation the need to prioritise economic development was key to the wellbeing of the county. Creating jobs in Laois for Laois people was seen in all the consultation as the most important issue going forward in light of

- Higher than average unemployment rates
- Commuting distances for people at work
- Very little Foreign Direct Investment in the County
- Younger population with very few job opportunities
- 

The Local Development Strategy reflects the issues arising from the consultation

## **SECTION 4: LAOIS LDS ACTION PLAN**

4.1: OBJECTIVE 1: SUPPORT AND DEVELOP SMALL BUSINESSES IN COUNTY LAOIS

4.2: OBJECTIVE 2: DEVELOP TOURISM AS A DRIVER OF JOB CREATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS

4.3: OBJECTIVE 3: ENSURE THE VIBRANCY OF THE RURAL TOWNS IN COUNTY LAOIS THROUGH CAPACITY BUILDING AND PROJECT SUPPORT

4.4: OBJECTIVE 4: EXPLOIT NEXT GENERATION BROADBAND FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

4.5: OBJECTIVE 5: PROVIDE SERVICES AND SUPPORTS TO THE MOST HARD TO REACH COMMUNITIES IN RURAL COUNTY LAOIS

4.6: OBJECTIVE 6: SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF A WIDE RANGE OF SKILLS AMONG RURAL YOUTH INCLUDING ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION

4.7: OBJECTIVE 7: PROMOTE COMMUNITY-BASED SOCIAL CHANGE IN DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

## SECTION 4: LAOIS LDS ACTION PLAN

### LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

Laois LCDC have developed a vision for County Laois based on the strategic objectives of the Local Economic Community Plan in Laois and the consultation with groups and individuals in Co Laois over the past number of months.

The LEADER programme has been delivered in County Laois since 1996 and has supported rural communities and individuals living in rural areas to start-up businesses, provides services and make a better quality of life for themselves and their families

The past seven years have been the most challenging for rural communities in Co Laois as a result of the toughest recession since the 1980s.

The main issues from the consultation with communities are

- Lack of jobs in rural areas particularly for young people
- Reduction of services in rural areas
- Access to adequate Broadband as a driver for job creation
- Tourism as a driver of job creation
- The environment and the limited resources thereof

The actions in this LDS are devised as a result of the consultation with local groups, organisations and individuals in Co Laois.

Laois LCDC acknowledges that the LEADER programme is pilot in its nature and can adapt to changing local circumstances. They reserve the right to update their strategic actions should the need arise.

#### LDS strategic Vision

The vision of the LDS in Laois is to create vibrant, innovative, sustainable and integrated rural communities in the county.

Laois LCDC proposes doing this through a number of strategic actions developed through public consultation with a number of organisations, public bodies, local communities and individuals.

The strategic vision will be deliver a number of objectives as identified by the local population

Obj 1: Support and develop small businesses in Co Laois

Obj 2: Development of Tourism as a driver of Job creation and Economic Development in Rural areas

Obj 3: Ensure the vibrancy of the rural towns in Co Laois through capacity building and project support

Obj 4: Exploitation of next generation broadband for rural communities

Obj 5: Provide services and supports to the most hard to reach communities in rural county Laois

Obj 6: Support the development of a wide range of skills among rural youth including entrepreneurship and innovation

Obj 7 ; the promotion of Community-Based Social Change in developing a sustainable Society

## 4.1: OBJECTIVE 1: SUPPORT AND DEVELOP SMALL BUSINESSES IN COUNTY LAOIS

Title of Local Objective: support and develop small businesses in Co Laois to foster job creation in rural areas of county Laois

LEADER theme/sub theme: Economic Development

Rationale for Objective: Laois has a high level of unemployment since 2008. Although decreasing in recent years the rate of decrease is one of the slowest in the country. (Source C O Donoghue Teagasc rural development conference 2015) The county is also one of only three counties where the population is getting younger and there will be a need to support businesses to meeting the needs of a young population

Link to the LECP: HG3 Support Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Financial allocation: €1m

No of strategic actions 3

Local Objective	Local Objective 1 strategic Action 1.1
<b>Title:</b>	Capital investment in new and existing innovative businesses in County Laois particularly those wishing to set up in rural areas.
<b>Link to LECP</b>	HG3 Support Innovation and Entrepreneurship
<b>Primary Target Groups:</b>	Private Business Promoters, small and Medium entrepreneurs with innovative ideas, community/social enterprises and new business start-ups in rural areas
<b>Geographic Area:</b>	All of County Laois
<b>Organisation to deliver actions:</b>	LPC
<b>Collaborating Organisations</b>	LEO, EI, LCC
<b>Timeframe:</b>	2016-2020
<b>Anticipated Outputs/indicators &amp; Targets:</b>	5 new businesses supported 5 existing businesses supported to upscale

Local Objective	Local Objective 1 strategic Action 1.2
<b>Title:</b>	Capital investment in new and existing artisan Food businesses
<b>Link to LECP</b>	HG3 Support Innovation and Entrepreneurship
<b>Primary Target Groups:</b>	Private Business Promoters, small and Medium entrepreneurs with innovative ideas and new food business start-ups in rural areas
<b>Geographic Area:</b>	All of County Laois
<b>Organisation to deliver actions:</b>	LPC
<b>Collaborating Organisations</b>	LEO, EI, Teagasc, IFA, Bord Bia
<b>Timeframe:</b>	2016-2020
<b>Anticipated Outputs/indicators &amp; Targets:</b>	5 new or existing businesses supported

Local Objective	Local Objective 1 strategic Action 1.3
<b>Title:</b>	training for new business start-ups placing particularly those individuals wishing to set up innovative services and agri-diversification enterprises
<b>Link to LECP</b>	HG8 Create an integrated and holistic Approach to Education, Training and Employment
<b>Primary Target Groups:</b>	Individuals and communities wishing set up businesses particularly rural tourism and agri diversification
<b>Geographic Area:</b>	All of county Laois
<b>Organisation to deliver actions:</b>	LPC
<b>Collaborating Organisations</b>	LOETB, LEO, IFA
<b>Timeframe:</b>	2016-2020
<b>Anticipated Outputs/indicators &amp; Targets:</b>	A comprehensive suite of training will be delivered to 100 participants with 10 new businesses created

## 4.2: OBJECTIVE 2: DEVELOP TOURISM AS A DRIVER OF JOB CREATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS

Local Objective 2: Development of Tourism as a driver of Job creation and Economic Development in Rural areas

LEADER Theme: Rural Tourism

Rationale: Laois is regarded as a passing through county with tourists rarely staying for long periods despite an abundance of wonderful outdoor spaces. The tourism product is underdeveloped and under marketed despite a number of high profile events being held in the county annually

Link to LECP: HG 2 Diversify and Strengthen a Sustainable Laois Economy

Financial allocation €1m

No of strategic actions 3

Local Objective	Local Objective 2 strategic Action 2.1
<b>Title:</b>	Put in place a new Plan for the development of Tourism and support a strong tourism organisation in the county
<b>Link to LECP</b>	HG 2 Diversify and Strengthen a Sustainable Laois Economy
<b>Primary Target Groups:</b>	Tourism providers, Laois tourism members, new tourism start-ups, rural communities
<b>Geographic Area:</b>	All of county Laois
<b>Organisation to deliver actions:</b>	LPC, Laois Tourism
<b>Collaborating Organisations</b>	Failte Ireland, Laois Co Co,
<b>Timeframe</b>	2016-2017
<b>Anticipated Outputs/indicators &amp; Targets:</b>	1 review of the existing structures in tourism in Laois  1 new tourism plan developed

Local Objective	Local Objective 2 strategic Action 2.2
<b>Title:</b>	Animation and delivery of new tourism plan, capacity building of existing groups and delivery of increased tourism numbers to co Laois
<b>Link to LECP</b>	HG 2 Diversify and Strengthen a Sustainable Laois Economy
<b>Primary Target Groups:</b>	Tourism providers, Laois tourism members, new tourism start ups, rural communities
<b>Geographic Area:</b>	All of county Laois
<b>Organisation to deliver actions:</b>	LPC
<b>Collaborating Organisations</b>	Faite Ireland, Laois Co Co, Laois Tourism
<b>Timeframe</b>	2016-2020
<b>Anticipated Outputs/indicators &amp; Targets:</b>	1 tourism animator employed 1 marketing plan actioned 1 strong tourism group supported Increased number of visitors to the county

Local Objective	Local Objective 2 strategic Action 2.3
<b>Title:</b>	Grant aid of new and existing tourism products in the county particularly activity based tourism businesses
<b>Link to LECP</b>	HG 2 Diversify and Strengthen a Sustainable Laois Economy
<b>Primary Target Groups:</b>	Tourism providers, Laois Tourism members, new tourism start ups, rural communities.
<b>Geographic Area:</b>	All of county Laois
<b>Organisation to deliver actions:</b>	LPC
<b>Collaborating Organisations</b>	Faite Ireland, Laois Co Co, Laois Tourism
<b>Timeframe</b>	2016-2020
<b>Anticipated Outputs/indicators &amp; Targets:</b>	5 New tourism businesses created 5 existing businesses to up grade facilities

### 4.3: OBJECTIVE 3: ENSURE THE VIBRANCY OF THE RURAL TOWNS IN COUNTY LAOIS THROUGH CAPACITY BUILDING AND PROJECT SUPPORT

**Local Objective 3:** ensure the vibrancy of the rural towns in Co Laois through capacity building and project support

**LEADER Theme:** Rural Towns

**Rationale:** The opening lines of the Commission for Economic Development in Rural Areas is a quote from Professor Suzy Jarvis

*“If we are to pull Ireland out of recession faster, and also reduce the brain drain leaving the country to seek out work, then we now need to home in on the regions..... We need to provide 'on the ground' supports for people in rural communities. This is so they can create ideas and spot opportunities to develop enterprises. The positive spin-offs could be new job creation at the local level, taking people off the dole, and generating local wealth that feeds back into rural economies (CEDRA 2013)*

#### Laois Main Settlements

Town	Population 2011
Portlaoise	18,315(Portlaoise Urban & Rural)
Portarlinton	6,547(Portarlinton south)
Mountmellick	3,980(Mountmellick Urban & Rural)
Rathdowney	1,161

(source CSO)

In 2011 the population of County Laois stood at 80,559 of which 28,442 live in the main town as listed above. 64% of the population of the county live in small towns, villages and rural areas of less than 1,000 people. These villages have seen significant decline as a result of the recession. If we are to keep people living in these towns and villages we need to invest in social capital and business creation.

**Link to LECP:** HG 10 Enhance and sustain our towns and village centres and their function as focal points for their rural hinterland.

**Financial allocation:** €1 m

**No of strategic actions:** 3



Local Objective	Local Objective 3 strategic Action 3.1
<b>Title:</b>	Training and animation local rural towns and villages to develop a plan for their own future sustainable economic development
<b>Link to LECP</b>	HG 10 Enhance and sustain our towns and village centres and their function as focal points for their rural hinterland
<b>Primary Target Groups:</b>	Towns and villages in Co Laois
<b>Geographic Area:</b>	All of county Laois
<b>Organisation to deliver actions:</b>	LPC
<b>Collaborating Organisations</b>	PPN, Laois Co Co, community finance organisations, credit unions, Chambers Ireland, LEO, LOETB
<b>Timeframe</b>	2016-2018
<b>Anticipated Outputs/indicators &amp; Targets:</b>	10 towns and villages trained in developing a local enterprise culture

Local Objective:	Local Objective 3 Strategic Action 3.2
<b>Title:</b>	Capacity Building towards Sustainable and Resilient Rural Communities – Food
<b>Link to LECP:</b>	HG10 Enhance and sustain our town and village centres and their function as focal points for their Rural hinterlands
<b>Primary Target Groups:</b>	Community Groups; Rural Dwellers; Smallholders, Low-Income Farmers
<b>Geographic Area:</b>	Rural Towns and Villages of County Laois
<b>Organisation who will deliver the Action:</b>	LPC
<b>Collaborating Organisations:</b>	LEO, Teagasc, Bord Bia, HSE, IFA, ICA, GYO
<b>Timeframe for Delivery of Action:</b>	2016-2020
<b>Anticipated Outputs/Indicators &amp; Targets:</b>	Establishment of 3 new Community Shops

	Development of 4 new/existing Community Allotments  Development of 6 new/existing Farmers Markets
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Local Objective	Local Objective 3 strategic Action 3.3
<b>Title:</b>	Grant aid programme for projects arising from the capacity in strategic action 3.1
<b>Link to LECP</b>	HG 10 Enhance and sustain our towns and village centres and their function as focal points for their rural hinterland.
<b>Primary Target Groups:</b>	Community organisations in Co Laois
<b>Geographic Area:</b>	All of county Laois
<b>Organisation to deliver actions:</b>	LPC
<b>Collaborating Organisations</b>	PPN, Laois Co Co, community finance organisations, credit unions,
<b>Timeframe</b>	2017-2020
<b>Anticipated Outputs/indicators &amp; Targets:</b>	50 rural town enhancement projects funded through themed calls e.g. street scape enhancement, tidy towns, built environment enhancement, recreation spaces, markets/festivals.

#### 4.4: OBJECTIVE 4: EXPLOIT NEXT GENERATION BROADBAND FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

**Local Objective 4:** Exploitation of next generation broadband for rural communities

**LEADER theme:** Rural Broadband

Rationale: following our community consultation for this round of funding, the lack of adequate broadband in rural areas has been highlighted as a major barrier to economic development in rural areas of County Laois. While the LEADER programme is not equipped to fund large infrastructural development the programme can be used to build the capacity of rural communities to self help

**Link to LECP:** HG 2 Diversify and Strengthen a Sustainable Laois Economy

**Financial allocation** €200,000.00

**No of strategic actions** 2

Local Objective	Local Objective 4 strategic Action 4.1
<b>Title:</b>	Capacity building of community groups and rural businesses to find innovative solutions to access and utilise next generation broadband for rural areas in co Laois
<b>Link to LECP</b>	HG 10 Enhance and sustain our towns and village centres and their function ass focal points for their rural hinterland.
<b>Primary Target Groups:</b>	Community organisations and private rural dwellers in Co Laois
<b>Geographic Area:</b>	All of county Laois
<b>Organisation to deliver actions:</b>	LPC
<b>Collaborating Organisations</b>	Connected Communities EU programme, LCC, Private Broadband providers
<b>Timeframe</b>	2016-2018
<b>Anticipated Outputs/indicators &amp; Targets:</b>	Up to 4 community groups and rural businesses supported. Grant aid for Capital equipment to develop two community ICT training centres (one fixed and one mobile)

Local Objective	Local Objective 4 strategic Action 4.2
<b>Title:</b>	Training and information activities of community groups and rural businesses to find innovative solutions to access next generation broadband for rural areas in co Laois
<b>Link to LECP</b>	HG 10 Enhance and sustain our towns and village centres and their function ass focal points for their rural hinterland.
<b>Primary Target Groups:</b>	Community organisations, youth groups and private rural dwellers in Co Laois
<b>Geographic Area:</b>	All of county Laois
<b>Organisation to deliver actions:</b>	LPC

<b>Collaborating Organisations</b>	Connected Communities EU programme, LCC, Private Broadband providers.
<b>Timeframe</b>	2016-2020
<b>Anticipated Outputs/indicators &amp; Targets:</b>	Training delivered to 50 community groups including four youth groups to utilise next generation broadband that will become available through the National Broadband Scheme or communities to access broadband through existing schemes.

## 4.5: OBJECTIVE 5: PROVIDE SERVICES AND SUPPORTS TO THE MOST HARD TO REACH COMMUNITIES IN RURAL COUNTY LAOIS

**Local Objective 5:** provide services and supports to the most hard to reach communities in rural county Laois

**LEADER theme:** Social Inclusion in Rural Areas

**Rationale:** Through the last LEADER programme it was noted that a number of towns and villages in Co Laois failed to access funding. This was due to poor community capacity in the areas. Laois LCDC have identified a number of small towns and villages who will be targeted through this LDS to build their capacity and to strengthen their resilience

**Link to the LECP:** HG4 Enhance Civic Participation and Empower communities

**Financial Allocation:** €1,000,000.00

**No of strategic Actions:** 3

Local Objective	Local Objective 5 strategic Action 5.1
<b>Title:</b>	Support for the development of 6 identified communities in Laois with a history of low engagement with public funding programmes.
<b>Link to LECP</b>	HG4 Enhance Civic Participation and Empower communities
<b>Primary Target Groups:</b>	Community organisations in Co Laois
<b>Geographic Area:</b>	The six identified communities in the county namely; Mountrath, Borris In Ossory, Ballinakill, Cullahill, Errill and Doonane/Crettyard,
<b>Organisation to deliver actions:</b>	LPC
<b>Collaborating Organisations</b>	PPN, LCC
<b>Timeframe</b>	2016-2018
<b>Anticipated Outputs/indicators &amp; Targets:</b>	6 identified towns and villages in Co Laois with completed audit and needs analysis of community services in their area leading to improved community structures and community capacity and increased engagement with public funding programmes.

Local Objective	Local Objective 5 strategic Action 5.2
<b>Title:</b>	Grant aid for improved facilities for social inclusion initiatives with priority given to the initiatives that involves the target groups of older people, people with disabilities, children, young people, travellers, migrants, refugees, unemployed people, new communities and people living alone in rural areas and improve the quality of life and security of those living in rural areas
<b>Link to LECP</b>	HG 10 Enhance and sustain our towns and village centres and their function as focal points for their rural hinterland.
<b>Primary Target Groups:</b>	All Community organisations in Co Laois
<b>Geographic Area:</b>	County Laois
<b>Organisation to deliver actions:</b>	LPC
<b>Collaborating Organisations</b>	PPN, LCC
<b>Timeframe</b>	2016-2018
<b>Anticipated Outputs/indicators &amp; Targets:</b>	Grant aid for 10 projects in Co Laois

Local Objective	Local Objective 5 strategic Action 5.3
<b>Title:</b>	Training for community organisations in a number of relevant topics e g charities regulations, health and safety for community groups, Social Enterprise IT, social media and other topics as identified by PPN
<b>Link to LECP</b>	HG4 Enhance Civic Participation and Empower communities
<b>Primary Target Groups:</b>	Community organisations in Co Laois
<b>Geographic Area:</b>	All of county Laois
<b>Organisation to deliver actions:</b>	LPC
<b>Collaborating Organisations</b>	PPN, LCC
<b>Timeframe</b>	2016-2018
<b>Anticipated Outputs/indicators &amp; Targets:</b>	40 community organisations upskilled

## 4.6: OBJECTIVE 6: SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF FACILITIES FOR AND SKILLS AMONG RURAL YOUTH INCLUDING ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION

**Obj 6: support the development of a wide range of skills among rural youth including entrepreneurship and innovation**

**LEADER sub theme: Rural Youth**

**Rationale :** Youth unemployment in Ireland although decreasing is high at 21.1% in March 2015 compared with the national overall unemployment rate of 9.8%(source Eurostat)

Laois is one of only three counties in Ireland where the population is getting younger. This presents significant challenges for the county both in terms of education and employment. In August 2015 of the 7,568 individuals signing on in Social Welfare offices in Co Laois 1210 were under the age of 25. This is a 16% unemployment rate amongst under 25s in the County.

It is recognised both at National and EU level that the youth unemployment rate across the European Union is unacceptably high particularly amongst more socially excluded groups. While SICAP works with a cohort of disadvantaged urban youth there is a gap in the service provision for rural young people. The Local Development Strategy will seek to provide some supports for youth in rural areas.

**Link to the LECP:** HG9 develop and promote ways of living and doing business that support a sustainable environment and resilient communities

**Budget:** €325,000.00

**Number of strategic actions: 2**

Local Objective	Local Objective 6 strategic Action 6.1
<b>Title:</b>	Training for rural youth in entrepreneurship and ICT
<b>Link to LECP</b>	HG9 develop and promote ways of living and doing business that support a sustainable environment and resilient communities
<b>Primary Target Groups:</b>	Youth organisations in Co Laois
<b>Geographic Area:</b>	All of county Laois
<b>Organisation to deliver actions:</b>	LPC,
<b>Collaborating Organisations</b>	PPN, LCC, YWIL, Foroige other youth organisations and youth cafes
<b>Timeframe</b>	2016-2020
<b>Anticipated Outputs/indicators &amp; Targets:</b>	100 young people trained in Rural Entrepreneurship and ICT  10 new business start-ups among rural youth

Local Objective	Local Objective 6 strategic Action 6.2
<b>Title:</b>	Capital investment for youth facilities in the county
<b>Link to LECP</b>	HG9 develop and promote ways of living and doing business that support a sustainable environment and resilient communities
<b>Primary Target Groups:</b>	Youth organisations in Co Laois
<b>Geographic Area:</b>	All of county Laois
<b>Organisation to deliver actions:</b>	LPC
<b>Collaborating Organisations</b>	PPN, LCC, YWIL, Foroige other youth organisations and youth cafes
<b>Timeframe</b>	2016-2020
<b>Anticipated Outputs/indicators &amp; Targets:</b>	3 youth facilities supported



## 4.7: OBJECTIVE 7: PROMOTE COMMUNITY-BASED SOCIAL CHANGE IN DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

**Objective 7;** the promotion of Community-Based Social Change in developing a sustainable Society

**LEADER Subtheme:** rural environment

**Rationale:** the strength of a rural community is not only in its social capital but also in its environmental capital. Capacity needs to be built in communities to support them with projects that encourage sustainable use of natural resources, create local supply chain and employment opportunities, improve health and well-being and overall create resilient local communities

**Link with LECP:** HG 10 Enhance and sustain our towns and village centres and their function as focal points for their rural hinterland.

**Budget:** €800,000.00

**Number of Strategic Actions:** 3

Local Objective:	Local Objective 7 Strategic Action 7.2
Title:	Capacity Building towards Sustainable and Resilient Rural Communities – Energy & Water
Link to LECP:	HG10 Enhance and sustain our town and village centres and their function as focal points for their Rural hinterlands
Primary Target Groups:	Community Groups; Rural Dwellers
Geographic Area:	Rural Communities of County Laois
Organisation who will deliver the Action:	LPC
Collaborating Organisations:	Laois County Council, Irish Water, EPA, SEAI, Midland Energy Agency
Timeframe for Delivery of Action:	2016-2020
Anticipated Outputs/Indicators & Targets:	Energy / Water Resources Audit of four Rural Communities  Feasibility Study for 12 community initiatives: for example green technologies / renewable energy

	technologies / sustainable energy technologies / water recycling
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<b>Local Objective:</b>	Local Objective 7 Strategic Action 7.3
<b>Title:</b>	Animation and Delivery of Community Mapping – Community Assets, Activities & Actors
<b>Link to LECP:</b>	HG10 Enhance and sustain our town and village centres and their function as focal points for their Rural hinterlands
<b>Primary Target Groups:</b>	Community Groups; Rural Dwellers
<b>Geographic Area:</b>	All of County Laois
<b>Organisation who will deliver the Action:</b>	LPC
<b>Collaborating Organisations:</b>	NPW, Heritage Council, Laois County Council, Birdwatch Ireland, Waterways Ireland, Irish Peat Council, Heritage Forum
<b>Timeframe for Delivery of Action:</b>	2016-2020
<b>Anticipated Outputs/Indicators &amp; Targets:</b>	Animation of 10 communities in Community Mapping  5 Community Mapping Reports: for example Natural Heritage, Bird Colonies, Waterways, Looped Ways & Trails

<b>Local Objective:</b>	Local Objective 7 Strategic Action 7.4
<b>Title:</b>	Capital Investment in Community Managed Social Resources
<b>Link to LECP:</b>	HG10 Enhance and sustain our town and village centres and their function as focal points for their Rural hinterlands
<b>Primary Target Groups:</b>	Community Groups; Rural Dwellers
<b>Geographic Area:</b>	All of County Laois

<b>Organisation who will deliver the Action:</b>	LPC
<b>Collaborating Organisations:</b>	Irish Trails Office, Mountaineering Ireland, GAA, Coillte, schools
<b>Timeframe for Delivery of Action:</b>	2016-2020
<b>Anticipated Outputs/Indicators &amp; Targets:</b>	5 community managed social resources: for example off-road walkways, bio-diversity corridors, wildlife trails, natural habitats

## **SECTION 5: STRATEGIC INTEGRATION**

### **5.1: CROSS-CUTTING OBJECTIVES**

### **5.2: POLICY CONTEXT**

## SECTION 5: STRATEGIC INTEGRATION

### 5.1: CROSS-CUTTING OBJECTIVES

As outlined in the operational programme governing the Rural Development Programme LEADER measure three cross cutting objectives form common goals across the RDP and add value to the Local Development Strategy as they are premised on the development of a well-balanced, sustainable and innovative society. A cross-cutting objective illustrates a trend which signifies the necessity to consider something in all operations. In practical terms, this means cross-cutting themes should be made part of the development policy on all its levels: goals, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Laois LCDC proposes to deal with the three cross cutting objectives in the following ways: the LCDC will seek to encourage and assist the researching, development, application and sharing of knowledge and technologies which further our economic, environmental, human health and social well-being in our county. Through the Local Development Strategy it will provide advice, training and support to project promoters toward making responsible resource, land use, environment, social and economic development decisions for the county. Each of the three cross cutting objectives will be built in to our evaluation process

**Innovation:** Innovation in particular will be a key part of our eligibility checks as the Rural Development Programme is underpinned by non-displacement of any marketplace.

**Environment:** The Environmental pillar which sits on the Board of the LCDC has a key role to play in ensuring that environmental and climate interests are protected. Conversely the Local Development Strategy will seek to exploit the potential for tourism development through the promotion of our unique environmental assets and resources.

**Climate Change:** Rapid reductions in greenhouse gas emissions must take place in the immediate future if we are to minimize the adverse effects of climate change on our economic, social and natural systems. Achieving this goal requires putting in place practical, progressive low-emission development strategies that promote integrated clean energy solutions and broader sustainable development objectives. Laois LCDC proposes that the Local Development Strategy should anticipate, and prevent or mitigate, significant adverse economic, environmental, human health and social effects of decisions and actions, having particular careful regard to decisions whose impacts are not entirely certain but which, on reasonable and well-informed grounds, appear to pose serious threats to the economy, the environment, human health and social well-being.

## 5.2: POLICY CONTEXT

The economic, community & environmental dimensions of the Local Development Strategy were constructed having regard to the raft of Policies and Strategic Statements that relate to the County. This process was used to ensure that the actions would be complimentary to those of the flanking agencies, thereby reducing the possibility of duplication.

This sections identifies key EU, National and Regional policies that have an impact on the Local Development strategy. Laois LCDC have identified a number of policy documents which they have referred to when developing the strategy. This list is not exhaustive and the 10 key documents have been identified as those which align most closely to the Rural Development Programme

The development of the LDS was undertaken having regard to the range of key policies and strategic statements ranging across: -

- ❑ International Level;
- ❑ European Level;
- ❑ National Level;
- ❑ Regional Level; *and*
- ❑ Local Level.

Of prime importance within the economic dimension amongst these are

### 5.2.1 International Level

The OECD report *Effective Local Strategies to Boost Quality Job Creation, Employment and Participation* emphasises that job creation can be stimulated through a stable macroeconomic framework and structural policies which encourage innovation, skills and business development. The importance of local level actors is stressed in developing integrated approaches to growth, maximising employment opportunities and helping to tackle inequalities and social exclusion in their communities.

Of particular relevance to Laois, the OECD report summarises the main innovations in growth strategies, investment tools and mechanisms, leadership and systematisation of economic development efforts acting as contributory factors, resulting in the following elements that contribute to success: -

- ❑ Competitive local business climate and stable framework conditions;
- ❑ Rationalisation of complex policies and programmes into simple-to-pursue frameworks;
- ❑ Transport infrastructure;
- ❑ Higher education facilities;
- ❑ Practical economic geographies;
- ❑ Private rented housing sector;
- ❑ Evidence-based approach to local economies;
- ❑ Greater capacity for autonomous decision making; *and*
- ❑ Relevant tax incentives.

### 5.2.2 Youth Guarantee

The OECD *Action Plan for Youth: Giving Youth a Better Start in the Labour Market* informed the design and delivery of a *Youth Guarantee* in Ireland, and the three key elements are captured in the *Options for an Irish Youth Guarantee*: -

- ❑ Targeting of young people;
- ❑ The Youth Guarantee package; *and*
- ❑ Relevant supporting policies.

### 5.2.3 Europe 2020

The European Commission's overarching political strategy, **Europe 2020**, is a ten-year growth and jobs strategy that will support employment, productivity and social cohesion in Europe. The *Strategy for Growth* offers five targets for achievement by 2020: -

1. Increasing the employment rate of the population aged 20-64 to 75%;
2. Investing 3% of gross domestic product in research and development;
3. Reducing carbon emissions by 20% (and by 30% if conditions permit), increasing the share of renewable energies by 20% and increasing energy efficiency by 20%;
4. Reducing the school dropout rate to less than 10% and increasing the proportion of tertiary degrees to 40%; *and*
5. Reducing the number of people threatened by poverty in the EU by 20 million.

### Social Protection and Social Inclusion

The two priority Flagship Initiatives, *The Platform against Poverty and Social Inclusion* and the *Agenda for New Skills and Jobs*, supports efforts to reach the targets set to assist at least 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion and to increase employment of the population aged between 20 – 64 to 75%.

The Social Investment Package (*SIP*) key policy areas include education, quality childcare, healthcare, training, job-search assistance and rehabilitation.

### Employment

Europe 2020 notes that European employment, social affairs, and equal opportunities policies contribute to improving people's living conditions with a view to achieving sustainable growth and greater social cohesion. The key points of focus are: -

- ❑ Increasing Labour Market Participation;
- ❑ Developing a Skilled Workforce;
- ❑ Improving Education and Training Systems;
- ❑ Combating Social Exclusion;
- ❑ The Agenda for New Skills and Jobs; *and*
- ❑ Supporting Entrepreneurs and the Self-Employed

### Enterprise

Europe 2020 identifies the following key components within its enterprise vision: -

- ❑ Competitiveness;
- ❑ Technology;
- ❑ Small businesses; *and*
- ❑ Harnessing the potential of job rich sectors.

## Rural Development

The Europe 2020 Strategy outlines plans to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive economic growth through a variety of goals. In line with EU2020 and the overall CAP objectives, three long-term strategic objectives can be identified for EU rural development policy: -

- ❑ Improving the competitiveness of agriculture;
- ❑ The sustainable management of natural resources and climate action; *and*
- ❑ A balanced territorial development of rural areas.

The economic development of rural areas names three specific areas of intervention: -

1. Facilitating diversification, creation of new small enterprises and job creation;
2. Promoting local development in rural areas; *and*
3. Enhancing accessibility to, and use and quality of ICT in rural areas.

### 5.2.4 National Policy Level

The Irish Government, in its Medium Term Economic Strategy 2014 – 2020 (MTES) outlined how it will continue to build the Irish Economy through achieving sustainable economic growth, strong public finances and enduring job creation. Related policies and strategies aim to reduce inequality and improve poverty outcomes with a particular emphasis on child poverty. The Strategy recognises that economic growth, social cohesion and environmental sustainability must be advanced in a mutually supportive way. The Strategy is based on three pillars:

- ❑ Ensuring Debt Sustainability;
- ❑ Financing Growth; *and*
- ❑ Supporting Employment and Living Standards.

## Action Plan for Jobs 2015

The Action Plan for Jobs is a whole-of-Government initiative established in 2012, under which all Government Departments and Agencies work together to deliver on five strategic ambitions: -

- ❑ To support 100,000 additional jobs by 2016;
- ❑ To get Ireland back to a top-five ranking in international competitiveness;
- ❑ To stimulate the domestic economy and generate employment in locally traded sector;
- ❑ To build an indigenous engine of growth that drives up the export market share of Irish companies;
- ❑ To build world-class clusters in key sectors of opportunity; *and*
- ❑ To achieve full employment of 2.1m people in 2018.

The Midland Action Plan for Jobs was launched in 2015 and key actions identified in the plan for the Midlands are to



- Position the Midlands as a centre of Excellence for Advanced Manufacturing Processes and Technologies
- Position the Midlands to become a Regional Hub for Energy
- Develop a strategy to strengthen the emerging clusters in Internationally Traded Services and Food
- Develop activity based tourism and use the marketing momentum behind Ireland's Ancient East to integrate its tourism services into a strong and coherent offering that will grow visitor numbers to the region

### **Youth Guarantee**

Ireland's *Youth Guarantee* resolves to: -

- ❑ Develop the Intreo activation process for young people;
- ❑ Deliver opportunities to young people through education and training programmes;
- ❑ Earmark a quota of places/opportunities on employment schemes for young people;
- ❑ Vary the eligibility conditions for access to schemes in favour of young people;
- ❑ Expand the number of opportunities for young people; *and*
- ❑ Introduce new options for young unemployed people.

### **5.2.5 Children and Young People**

In April 2014 a new Children and Young People's Policy Framework *Better Outcomes: Brighter Futures* was published outlining 160 commitments, ranging from: -

- ❑ Focusing on early interventions and quality services to promote best outcomes for children;
- ❑ Working better together to protect young people who are marginalised or at risk;
- ❑ Setting a target of lifting 70,000 children out of poverty by 2020;
- ❑ Improving childhood health and wellbeing in line with the goals of '*Health Ireland*';
- ❑ Enhancing job opportunities for young people – building on the '*Action Plan for Jobs*' and '*Youth Guarantee*'; *and*
- ❑ Delivering better supports for families and parenting.

The Strategy prioritises key crosscutting transformational goals that require concerted and co-ordinated actions to ensure the realisation of respective outcomes: -

- ❑ Supporting parents;
- ❑ Earlier intervention and prevention;
- ❑ Listening to and involving children and young people;
- ❑ Ensuring quality services;
- ❑ Strengthening transitions; *and*
- ❑ Collaboration and co-ordination across government.

### 5.2.7 Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) is designed ‘*to reduce poverty, promote social inclusion and equality through local, regional and national engagement and collaboration.*’ The Programme is being delivered through three high level goals: -

**Goal 1:** To support and resource disadvantaged communities and marginalised target groups to engage with relevant stakeholders to identify and address social exclusion and equality issues;

**Goal 2:** To support individuals and marginalised target groups experiencing educational disadvantage; *and*

**Goal 3:** To engage with marginalised target groups/individuals to move them closer to the labour market; improve work readiness; support them in accessing employment and self-employment; and creating social enterprise opportunities.

The SICAP target groups that have been identified in Laois are: -

- ❑ Children and families from disadvantaged areas;
- ❑ Lone parents;
- ❑ New Communities (including refugees and asylum seekers);
- ❑ People living in disadvantaged communities;
- ❑ People with a disability;
- ❑ Roma;
- ❑ The underemployed (including those not on the live register);
- ❑ Traveller Community; *and*
- ❑ Young unemployed people from disadvantaged areas

### 5.2.8 CEDRA

In recognition of the severe impact of the downturn in the economy on rural Ireland, the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Ireland (CEDRA) was established in October 2012. CEDRA’s task was to identify strategic initiatives that would ensure rural areas contribute to sustained and sustainable national economic growth and development into the future. The process confirmed that ‘*there is an abundance of natural, physical, human and capital resources and a wide variety of high quality, including dormant assets in many rural communities that could be leveraged to support national economic growth and the development of these communities*’.

### 5.2.9 Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020

Ireland's Rural Development Programme emerged through a multi layered policy foundation framework that included Europe 2020 and Ireland's National Reform Programme<sup>1</sup>, and to which rural development priorities and targets are also linked. Community Led Local Development (CLLD) approach to rural development will underpin priority actions for the coming programme period 2014 to 2020.

In line with Priority 6 within the EU's Rural Development long term strategic objectives: *The promotion of social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas*, key themes have been identified to progress Ireland's local development strategy as follows:

#### 1. Rural Economic Development / Enterprise Development and Job Creation

Supporting the development of the rural economy is seen to be fundamental to progress. Key themes guiding local rural development strategies are identified as rural tourism, enterprise development, broadband, and rural towns.

#### 2. Social Inclusion (Building Community Capacity, Training and Animation)

Whilst economic development is key to rural development, social cohesion is seen to need support, particularly in respect of social exclusion and marginalisation.

#### 3. Rural Environment

An integrated and targeted approach to local development will be supported through the design of Local Development Strategies (LDS) focussing on innovation, climate change and environment.

### 5.2.10 Food Harvest 2020

The agri-food and fisheries sector is considered as one of Ireland's most important indigenous industry. The sector plays a particularly important role in the socio-economic fabric of rural and coastal communities. The role of farming in managing the natural landscape provides a platform for the development of rural areas that are economically viable, socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable.

The Food Harvest 2020 report – A Vision for Irish Agri-Food and Fisheries, launched in July 2010 falls in with the current CAP framework. The strategy sets out to support sustainable **growth** in the sector by: -

- ❑ Developing a **smart** sector, investing in ideas, knowledge and skills and encouraging innovation and creativity thereby enhancing levels of productivity and competitiveness;
- ❑ Capitalising on **green** opportunities whilst demonstrating Ireland's commitments to the principles of sustainability and the implementation of world-class environmental practices; *and*
- ❑ Meeting obligations under EU Directives such as the Water Framework and the Habitats and Birds Directives.

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<sup>1</sup> The National Reform Programme provides an update under the Europe 2020 Strategy.

### 5.3 Regional Policy Level

#### 5.3.1 RPG for the Midlands 2010 - 2022

The Midlands region encompasses the Counties of Laois, Offaly, Longford, Westmeath. The RPG sets out to achieve sustainable growth through regional planning guideline policies under the following key strategic areas: -

- ❑ Climate Change;
- ❑ Economic Strategy;
- ❑ The Settlement Strategy;
- ❑ Rural Development;
- ❑ Physical Infrastructure;
- ❑ Green Infrastructure;
- ❑ Social Infrastructure; *and*
- ❑ Flood Risk Appraisal.

Appraisal of the critical elements involved in ensuring sustainable and good planning is key to the strategy, all within the context of protection of sensitive and environmentally important locations.

### 5.4 LDS vs LECP

The Laois Local Development Strategy has been designed to complement the Laois LECP in the context of the adopted locational policies for the county. It is intended that this should help to forge a stronger link between rural development and economic development in the county and ensure that the LDS role is focussed strongly towards pro-actively supporting and promoting economic activity.

The Laois LECP seeks to prioritise the following

- Market Laois to foster inward investment
- Diversify & strengthen the Economy
- Support Innovation & Entrepreneurship
- Enrich Civic Participation & Empower Communities
- Promote Equality & Inclusiveness across all sectors
- Recognise & Support the diverse needs of people
- Develop a strong county identity and quality of life
- Integrated approach to education, training and employment
- Develop & Promote ways of living & doing business that supports a sustainable Environment & Resilient Communities
- Enhance Towns & Village Centres

The strategic actions within the Local Development Strategy are linked to the high level goals detailed with the LECP

## **SECTION 6: NETWORKING AND COOPERATION**

**6.1: LOCAL NETWORKING**

**6.2: REGIONAL AND NATIONAL NETWORKING:**

**6.3: INTERNATIONAL NETWORKING**

**6.4: CO-OPERATION**

## **SECTION 6: NETWORKING AND COOPERATION**

### **6.1: LOCAL NETWORKING**

Laois LCDC is made up of members of a number of agencies and community groups. This affords a significant networking opportunity within the county.

Members are also members of other county networking bodies and use these opportunities to give and receive relevant information.

Community members on the LCDC are nominated by their peers on the Public Participatory Networks. They represent the PPN on the committee and as such must be a two way conduit for information.

Rotation of the community membership of the Laois LCDC every three years ensures that as a wide a number of community and voluntary organisations within the county as possible are involved in the decision making processes.

Regular PR campaigns will encourage more of the community and voluntary organisations to become involved in the PPN.

Work through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) will encourage community organisations from the most disadvantaged areas and groups in the county to engage with the PPN and other countywide community structures.

### **6.2: REGIONAL AND NATIONAL NETWORKING:**

There has been a history of LAGs at regional level networking through formal and informal structures. A number of joint projects have been initiated through networking in former programmes including work on the Slieve Blooms walking routes.

A number of initiatives are already planned for through the inter territorial and cooperation measure within the Rural Development Programme.

The LAG will also participate in the support unit which is proposed by the Department for 2016 both at National and at Regional level

### **6.3: INTERNATIONAL NETWORKING**

The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) is the hub that connects rural development stakeholders throughout the European Union (EU). The ENRD contributes to the effective implementation of Member States' Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) by generating and sharing knowledge, as well as through facilitating information exchange and co-operation across rural Europe.

The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) also supports a National Rural Network (NRN) that brings together the organisations and administrations involved in rural development. At EU level, the ENRD supports the networking of these NRNs, national administrations and European organisations.

In previous programmes the LAG has been involved with ELARD which is the network of LAGs throughout Europe and also the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD).

Laois LCDC will be actively involved at European level and also in the transfer of knowledge to other LAGs across the European Union.

### **How will Laois LAG actively influence Rural Development Policy:**

The membership of the LAG is made up of a number of influencers at local level. The LAG will use these key influencers to lobby on behalf of rural areas at National level.

The LEADER programme being pilot in its nature allows for innovative solutions to problems in rural areas. The LAG in Laois will work at national level through the Rural Development support unit using case studies of innovative projects completed in Laois to influence National Policy.

It will also use innovative examples to influence Rural Development Policy at European Union level through ELARD and the European Network for Rural Development.

## **6.4: CO-OPERATION**

In previous programmes the LAG in Laois was involved in a number of inter territorial and transnational projects with colleagues within Ireland and across Europe.

The LAG will continue to build on projects commenced in the last LEADER programme including the work commenced on the Barrow river proposals involving colleagues in Kildare, Carlow, Wexford and Kilkenny and the local authorities in each of the counties, the communities along the Barrow and Waterways Ireland.

The LAG would also support further development in joint marketing groups with colleagues in other LAGs including joint marketing of food, tourism, forestry and crafts. It would also support the continuation of the LEADER Food and Craft Village at the National Ploughing Championships and the representation of Laois Food and Craft Producers at the championships.

There is a willingness in the LAG in Laois to work with our colleagues in Offaly to develop joint capital projects in the Slieve Blooms and at the Derrycastle Lake project in Portlaoise. In both cases this will build on the development of a tourism product in both areas with the local communities. There is a willingness for both LAGs to work together on these projects

A transnational project between the LAG in Laois in the last programme and the LAG in Artois Lys in northern France involving walking tourism will be further developed in the next programme.

The LAG also wish to develop links with likeminded groups across Europe involved in innovative projects in developing tourism, connectivity and small enterprise development.

A number of towns in the county are twinned with towns in other European Countries for example Portlaoise with the town of Coulounieix-Chamiers in France and the ecclesiastical site at Aghaboe has ancient links with Salzburg in Austria.

County Laois is twinned with Franklin Tennessee USA in particular through the O Moore college of Design in Franklin and its links to Abbeylaxey.

The LAG would hope to build on these connections through the cooperation budget

## **SECTION 7: MONITORING, REVIEW AND EVALUATION**

**7.1: MONITORING:**

**7.2: REVIEW**

**7.3: EVALUATION**



# SECTION 7: MONITORING, REVIEW AND EVALUATION

## 7.1: MONITORING:

The two levels at which programme monitoring will be carried out are:

1. Project Level Monitoring
2. Monitoring of LAGs

The LAG will monitor and review the programme in line with the guidelines set out in the programme documentation and the operational rules.

The first point of review will be the RDP online reporting system. All new projects will be inputted on the RDP online reporting system by projects officers in the implementing partners. Each project will be linked to the Local Development Strategy and a local Objective within that strategy.

Information on the Reporting system will be captured at three stages

1. At application stage basic information will be captured i.e. name of promoter, type of project, numbers employed currently etc.
2. At assessment stage the application will be linked to a local objective and thus into a LEADER subtheme.
3. At Output stage. Once the project is complete indicators as required will be completed. A qualitative report on the project will also be placed on the file

The Online system will be monitored by the CEO of the Implementing partner to ensure that it is kept up to date. The LAG will have access to the system to ensure that records are being correctly inputted and the implementing partner has agreed to furnish the LCDC with reports at their monthly meeting.

It will be the responsibility of the LAG to ensure that funded projects comply with LEADER reporting requirements.

All projects will have common performance indicators relating to a particular sub-theme. Performance indicators will facilitate monitoring and measuring Programme effectiveness. Each project will be measured on an annual basis.

Particular emphasis will be placed on the progress made under the strategy in contributing to LEADER's cross cutting objectives.

An annual report will be submitted to the LAG by the implementing partner detailing the work being done by the implementing partner, projects funded through the year and outcomes.

Once the project is complete the online reporting system will be updated by the implementing partner in order to facilitate prompt payment where possible. In some cases where outputs may not be realised for a period of time after the project is complete the implementing partner will ensure that the outputs will be submitted no later than 12 months from the date of final payment

## 7.2: REVIEW

The LEADER Programme is pilot in its nature and as such can respond quickly to changing circumstances.

From 2017 the LAG will prepare and submit an annual report to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

This report will cover information on the LCDC, its workings and decision making structures. Successes and Challenges, Progress. It will also showcase three case studies annually.

The Local Development strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis by the LAG. This is to ensure that the strategy is still relevant and that the needs identified initially for the strategy are still pertinent to the community.

The LAG wish it noted that it will also review at any point in the programme as it wishes in order to respond to a newly identified need in the county.

## 7.3: EVALUATION

The evaluation of the strategy will be two fold

Stage 1 will be a mid-term evaluation to ensure implementation of the strategy has been both effective and efficient. This will be done internally by a subcommittee of the LAG through review of the indicators on the online system, questionnaires to the project promoters, case studies and contact with relevant parties such as the Department and its agents

Stage 2 the final evaluation will be undertaken by external consultants contracted under public procurement. The purpose of this evaluation will be to look at the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme and to inform the planning process for the next round of funding.

The impact of pilot actions undertaken in the strategy will be prioritised as will the impact of the strategy on the LEADER cross cutting objectives

### 7.3.1 GOVERNANCE/CO-ORDINATION

The LCDC programme evaluation subcommittee will draw up a specification that will be reviewed and approved by the LAG.

The specification will be placed on e-Tenders and the LAG will appoint appropriately qualified consultants to review both the early cycle progress and the end of programme review. The consultants will report directly to the LAG, and the evaluations will be made public through the LAG, the Implementer's and the Department's and its' agents websites.

### 7.3.2 RESOURCES REQUIRED

A collective budget of €30,000 for both evaluations maybe required, however, as it will be an open tender, this figure maybe slightly lower.

#### 7.4: DATA PROTECTION

As the implementer is processing all the files, subject to the service level agreement with the LAG, the implementer will act as the Data Controller on behalf of the LAG. The Implementer will adopt additional data control procedures as requested by the LAG, and the designated officers of the LAG will have full access to all RDP Data. The Administrator of the Implementer will be responsible for Data Control.

As Data Controller on behalf of the LAG, the implementer will: -

- ❑ Obtain and process the information fairly;
- ❑ Keep it only for one or more specified and lawful purposes;
- ❑ Process it only in ways compatible with the purposes for which it was supplied;
- ❑ Keep it safe and secure;
- ❑ Keep it accurate and up-to-date;
- ❑ Ensure that it is adequate, relevant and not excessive;
- ❑ Retain it no longer than is necessary for the specified purpose or purposes; *and*
- ❑ Give a copy of his/her personal data to any individual, on request

