

LAOIS LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY – A SUMMARY

LAG PROFILE

The constitution of the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) in Laois is such that it can act as the Local Action Group for the county and holds the contract for the LEADER programme 2014 - 2020. The members of Laois LCDC have agreed by Service Level Agreement, 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.

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, but operating independently of the local authority in its decision making. The current committee is drawn from a wide range of interests in Co. Laois including Laois County Council, Irish Farmers Association, Local Enterprise Office, HSE, Dept of Social Protection, Youth and Business interests and Public Participation Network representatives from Community, Social Inclusion and Environmental pillars. The current committee has a membership of 17 with 53% private sector representation.

Laois LCDC is responsible for the implementation of the Laois Local Development Strategy, and in turn the LEADER Programme 2014 – 2020 for all of County Laois.

Membership of Laois LCDC	
Committee member	Organisation
Cllr John King	Laois County Council
Mr Paddy Buggy	Laois Public Participation Network (Social Inclusion)
Mr Robbie Quinn	Laois Public Participation Network (Community/Voluntary)
Ms Anne Goodwin	Local Development Sector
Mr Mary White	Laois Public Participation Network (Social Inclusion)
Mr Joe Thompson	Youth Sector
Mr Michael Bergin	Farming Sector
Mr. David Hackett	Dept of Social Protection
Ms Linda Tynan	Laois Offaly Education & Training Board
Ms Evelyn Reddin	Laois Local Enterprise Office
Cllr Jerry Lodge	Laois County Council
Cllr Paschal McEvoy	Laois County Council
Mr Joe Ruane	HSE
Mr Dave Fingleton	Laois Public Participation Network (Environment)
Mr PJ Campbell	Laois Public Participation Network (Community/Voluntary)
Mr Conal Bradley	Business Sector
Mr John Mulholland	Chief Executive Laois County Council

AREA PROFILE



Co Laois covers an area of 1,719km² 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. Population as per 2011 Census was 80,559 persons, with an envisaged increase in 2014 Census to over 84,000 persons. 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%.

The principal towns are Portlaoise, Portarlington, Mountrath, Mountmellick, Abbeyleix and Rathdowney. There are three Municipal Areas in the County; Portlaoise, Graiguecullen/Portarlington and Borris-in- Ossory /Mountmellick.

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%.

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 Portarlington South ED.

In describing the landscape within Laois for the new programme, Laois LCDC articulates 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
- Expansion of leisure based tourism
- The need to transition the county and rural communities to more sustainable living, energy utilisation, food production, transport options, etc as well as a need to value and utilise the natural environment in terms of people's economic and social well-being.

The Laois Local Development Strategy reflects the issues arising.

The strategic vision of the LDS in Laois is to create vibrant, innovative, sustainable and integrated rural communities in the county and in this regard, proposes doing this through a number of strategic actions developed through public consultation with a number of organisations, public bodies, local communities and individuals and delivered through a number of objectives:

1. Support and develop small businesses in Co Laois
2. Development of Tourism as a driver of Job creation and Economic Development in Rural areas
3. Ensure the vibrancy of the rural towns in Co Laois through capacity building and project support
4. Exploitation of next generation broadband for rural communities
5. Provide services and supports to the most hard to reach communities in rural county Laois
6. Support the development of a wide range of skills among rural youth including entrepreneurship and innovation
7. Promotion of Community-Based Social Change in developing a sustainable Society

Total available funding: €7,126,742 (*including Administration and Animation costs*)

Summary of Strategic Actions / Anticipated Outputs:

Strategic Action	Anticipated Output
Support and develop small businesses in Co Laois to foster job creation in rural areas of county Laois, including capital investment in new and existing innovative businesses and training for those wishing to set up innovative services and agri-diversification enterprises.	15 new businesses supported; 5 existing businesses supported to upscale. A comprehensive suite of training will be delivered to 100 participants with 10 new businesses created

<p>Development of Tourism as a driver of Job creation and Economic Development in Rural areas, and support a strong tourism organisation in the county.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 review of the existing structures in tourism in Laois • 1 new tourism plan developed • 1 tourism animator employed • 1 marketing plan actioned • 1 strong tourism group supported • Increased number of visitors to the county • 5 New tourism businesses created • 5 existing businesses to upgrade facilities increased number of visitors to the county
<p>Ensure the vibrancy of the rural towns in Co Laois through capacity building and project support; this includes training/animation for town/village plan development, grant aid for arising programmes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 towns and villages trained in developing a local enterprise culture • 50 rural town enhancement projects funded through themed calls eg street scape enhancement, tidy towns, built environment enhancement, recreation spaces, markets/festivals.
<p>Exploitation of next generation broadband for rural communities; this includes 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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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). • 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.
<p>Provide services and supports to the most hard to reach communities in rural county Laois. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. support for the development of 6 identified communities in Laois with a history of low engagement with public funding programmes 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 C. 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 identified towns and villages in Co Laois (Mountrath, Borris In Ossory, Ballinakill, Cullahill, Errill and Doonane/Crettyard) 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. • 40 community organisations upskilled. • Grant aid for 10 projects.
<p>Support the development of a wide range of skills among rural youth including entrepreneurship and innovation training and capital investment in youth facilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100 young people trained in Rural Entrepreneurship and ICT • 10 new business start-ups among rural youth • 3 youth facilities supported
<p>Promotion of Community-Based Social Change in developing a sustainable Society including Capacity Building towards Sustainable and Resilient Rural</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy / Water Resources Audit of four Rural Communities • Feasibility Study for 12 community initiatives: for

<p>Communities in the areas of food, energy and water, animation and delivery of Community Mapping of Community Assets, Activities & Actors and Capital investment in Community managed social resources.</p>	<p>example green technologies / renewable energy technologies / sustainable energy technologies / water recycling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establishment of 3 new Community Shops• Development of 4 new/existing Community Allotments• Development of 6 new/existing Farmers Markets• Animation of 10 communities in Community Mapping• 5 Community Mapping Reports: for example Natural Heritage, Bird Colonies, Waterways, Looped Ways & Trails• 5 community managed social resources: for example off-road walkways, bio-diversity corridors, wildlife trails, natural habitats.
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