



*Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí*  
Offaly County Council

## **BUDGET 2023**

# **SUPPLEMENTARY DIRECTORATE REPORTS**



# OFFALY COUNTY COUNCIL

## DIRECTOR OF SERVICES REPORTS

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## **CORPORATE SERVICES**

### **Service Planning, Service Indicators and Annual Reporting**

Section 134A of the 2001 Act (as inserted by Section 50 of the 2014 Act) requires that Local Authorities prepare Annual Service Plans. Progress on the Annual Service Plan 2021 was published in Offaly County Council's Annual Report for 2021. The Annual Service Plan 2022 was prepared in quarter 1 and reflected the 2022 Budget. Monthly progress on the 2022 Annual Service Plan formed part of the Chief Executive's monthly report to the Council. Performance against prescribed service indicators was published in September 2022 in NOAC's 'Local Authority Performance Indicator Report 2021'.

### **Internal Audit**

The Internal Audit Unit have completed the majority of the agreed Internal Audit Plan for 2022 (with the aim of having all audits completed by year-end). All discretionary audits were completed and submitted within the Department Deadlines. All completed Audit Reports were circulated to the Management Team and the Audit Committee and have been approved. Follow-up checks on the implementation of recommendations of previous Audits were also undertaken as outlined within the Audit Plan. The Internal Audit Unit made significant progress this year with implementing the Internal Audit Strategic Plan for OCC with the aim to have this implemented over three years. All Internal Audit documents were updated including Internal Audit Manual Procedure, Internal Audit Charter, Audit Committee Charter and the Risk Register. The Internal Audit Unit provided administrative support to the Audit Committee in the fulfilling of its duties in 2022, including preparing the agendas and relevant documentation for the hosting of 3 Audit Committee meetings (to date).

### **Communications**

A new Communications Officer was appointed during 2022 to administer, promote and implement a new communications policy and procedures for the Council. Significant progress has been made in relation to increasing use of social media channels and highlighting the ongoing work of the Council. Work is also ongoing on updating the Council's website.

### **Meetings Administration**

Corporate Services staff supports the efficient and effective administration of meetings of the County Council, Corporate Policy Group, Management Team and Joint Policing Committee.

## **Register of Electors**

The Register of Electors is updated in accordance with relevant legislation.

## **Ethics Register**

The annual Ethics Register was published and made available in accordance with relevant legislation.

## **Customer Care Action Plan**

The Council supports its Customer Charter and updates same as required in accordance with best practice guidelines.

## **Ombudsman, Data Protection, Freedom of Information & Access to Information on the Environment**

All queries and requests were dealt with in accordance with the relevant information and within the given timeframes during 2022

## **Service Indicators**

Corporate Services coordinated the Council's 2021 Service Indicators return to the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC)

## **Information Management and Storage**

Corporate Services encourage the use of electronic communication while ensuring sufficient and accurate paper records are kept to meet our obligations.

## **Swimming Pools**

Corporate Services administer funding for swimming pools.

## **Team Development**

Staff meetings were held on a regular basis throughout the year.

## **Canteen and Crèche Facilities**

The canteen and crèche services continued to be supported by staff during the year.

## **Corporate Services Priorities for 2023**

Where resources provide Corporate Services will:

- Administer meetings of the County Council, Corporate Policy Group, Management Team and Joint Policing Committee.

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- Maintain the Register of Electors.
  - Support Swimming Pool Committees.
  - Implementation of priority actions from our Access Plan in compliance with the Disability Act 2005.
  - Hold regular staff meetings.
  - Coordination of the Authority's submission of the Service Indicators in accordance with the national timeframe.
  - Explore cost efficiencies that may be achieved with regard to advertising, stationery, postal and other services.
  - Continue to implement a robust Internal Audit service to provide assurance on the proper administration and governance of the Council's activities
  - Continue to develop and implement the Council's new Communications role within the Corporate Services Section to inform and promote the Council's work and activities to the public
  - Ensure that data is managed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations.

## **HUMAN RESOURCES**

### **Key Objectives and Priorities**

Recruit, retain and support a competent staff complement to deliver organisational priorities and act as a driver for organisational management development and change

### **Legislative Context**

Both national and EU legislation continue to impact on the day-to-day work of the department both from an operational and financial perspective including:

- Health, Safety & Welfare at work
- Payment of Wages
- Working Time Directive
- Equality
- Disability
- Data Protection & GDPR

### **Key Activities & Expenditure**

- Recruitment
- Employee welfare and supports including Covid-19 support measures
- Industrial Relations

- Staff training and development
- Development and implementation of workplace policies including a new Blended Working Policy
- Implementing requirements of Public Service Agreements
- Performance Management Development System (PMDS)

Offaly Co. Council employs c. 439 fulltime staff. Almost 90% of the budget allocation for the HR department is nondiscretionary and assigned to salaries and statutory subscriptions and levies to agencies such as the IPA and LGMA and maintenance and licensing contracts for CORE HR system.

The expenditure is broadly broken down into three main spending areas:

- Staff Recruitment
- Safety, Health and Welfare of Staff
- Staff Training and Development

Significant recruitment continued during 2021 with 22 competitions held during the year, which involved the processing of over 500 applications. This trend continued into 2022 with 25 competitions to date and a number of competitions to be completed by year-end.

Funding provided by the members for staff training in the 2022 budget allowed the continuance of the scheme of financial assistance for staff undertaking third level studies. This funding was welcomed and appreciated by staff with 22 employees benefitting from the scheme this year.

The HR Department also closely monitors attendance management and sick leave and the proactive approach taken by the department has resulted in Offaly's sick leave indicator for 2021 of 3.74%.

### **Key Priorities 2023**

- Workforce Planning taking into account the current age profile of staff and on-going sectoral changes and reform
- Targeted recruitment based on organisational needs and priorities and robust business cases
- Driving organisational change and development in line with national and local policies
- Managing increasing levels of industrial relations issues
- Continue to invest in the training and personal development of our staff to ensure effective implementation of the on-going local government reform agenda

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## Information Systems

The Information Systems department manages the Council's entire ICT hardware and software infrastructure. The infrastructure is spread across approximately fifty locations in the County and is utilised by close to 440 users.

In 2022 the Information Systems department completed a number of technology-based initiatives and maintained a modern, reliable and secure ICT infrastructure for the organisation.

The main projects were:

- To complete upgrade of Server Infrastructure and Network / Wireless Connectivity - which will future proof the Council's IT infrastructure and ensure ongoing delivery of services.
- To migrate to Cloud Disaster Recovery which will assist with Business Continuity in line with Government Strategy.
- To prepare for Blended working by upgrading staff laptops that enables staff to use a single device, which has operational, cyber security and environmental benefits. Also to assist in implementing a Blended working application facility.
- Digital Transformation – Develop, implement and promote technology as a means for the Council to collaborate, engage and promote internally and externally.
- Continue work on cyber-security in line with the CIS security control standards and increase staff awareness to help combat against emerging cyber threats. Procure a managed service for Firewall maintenance and managed threat response along with Office 365 online backup.
- Continued support for NWCPO, Libraries, Water & Waste Water sites, Fire stations & Digital Hubs.
- Upgrade of Financial Management System and Library Management System.
- Upgrade of Audio-Visual equipment throughout the organisation including major upgrade to AV system in the council chamber.
- Upgrade connectivity to OGCI0 for SIP call routing.
- Continue to work with Government in relation to the National Broadband Plan and implementation of Offaly's Digital Strategy.
- Offaly.ie – Upgrade of VisitOffaly.ie which will be live in 2022, and migration to test environment for Offaly.ie
- Working on initiatives that support climate action, such as reducing energy consumption of IT equipment and rollout of MS Teams calling to further facilitate remote working.

In 2023, the work programme for the IS Department will include work on the following projects:

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- Implementation of Blended working procedures in line with the organisation's Blended working Policy.
  - Phase out Citrix technology and move to Windows Virtual Desktop (WVD) in Azure.
  - Upgrade MS Office products on all devices from MS Office 2016 to MS Office 365.
  - Upgrade MS Teams to Teams Calling for all Offaly staff.
  - Go-live with offaly.ie website.
  - Implement e-Planning in conjunction with the national roll-out
  - Digital Transformation – continue digital transformation initiatives such as an approvals hub for internal forms. Transformation is the integration of digital technology into all areas of our business, fundamentally changing how we operate and deliver value to customers.
  - Replace webpay for Agresso with MyCoCo.
  - Procure and rollout new endpoint virus protection and MTR solution.
  - Upgrade Legacy systems in conjunction with NWCPO and other departments.
  - Upgrade communications links to Edenderry, Birr and some other areas to fixed line infrastructure from current wireless connectivity.
  - Upgrade network access in Áras an Chontae from all ethernet points to a mix of corporate Wifi and Ethernet.

## **Broadband / Digital**

Offaly County Council Broadband Officer acts as a dedicated point of contact within County Offaly for engagement with telecommunications providers and assists with preparing the rollout of the National Broadband Plan within the county. The Broadband Officer plays a vital role in developing telecommunications and broadband services throughout Offaly. This is achieved by working closely with industry and participating with Regional and National Action Groups.

Offaly County Council Digital Strategy 2020-2022 ensures that the benefits of infrastructure development under the National Broadband Plan are fully realised from an economic and social perspective. This strategy aims to enable Offaly to leverage broadband and digital technologies for rural regeneration. The Broadband Office will also liaise with council departments, colleagues, councillors, local communities, and funding channels to link and coordinate activities and projects supporting the Digital Strategy. The Broadband / Digital Officer for Offaly can be contacted at [broadband@offalycoco.ie](mailto:broadband@offalycoco.ie)

In 2022 the main projects were:

- Implementation of Offaly Digital Strategy 2020-2022 - Infrastructure, Citizen, Enterprise & Digital Council;



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- Remote Working Hubs - Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) – 5 BCPs received €162,982.31 under Connected Hubs funding to develop these locations as remote working hubs and to have them listed on the connectedhubs.ie website. These 5 location are:
    - Ballycommon Telework and Training Centre
    - Killavilla Community Centre
    - Coolderry Community Hall
    - Kilconfert Community Centre
    - Moneygall Community Hall
  - Further rollout of Free Public WiFi in Offaly to include additional community centres and public spaces.
  - Engagement with National Broadband Ireland - 1303 premises in South Offaly can now order a fiber service from NBI. NBI continue to survey in other areas in Offaly and we are working to escalate delivery in Offaly.
  - Infrastructure - mobile services black spots - working with Industry and community groups to improve mobile phone coverage in areas in Offaly. Recent locations include Kilclonfert and Ballycommon.
  - STEM VEX Robotics Programme – Successful event In May 2022 in O'Connor Park where we had over 1,500 Offaly students competed in the Offaly VEX Robotics Championships 2022.
    - New STEM Educational Officer employed and working with schools / teachers / students.
    - DojoMór - Coding Event for Children 7-17 – Offaly involved with eight third level colleges – Oct 2022.
  - Edenderry Smart Town - e-denderry : IoT - Internet of Things | LoRaWan Connectivity | Smart Town Technology project is ongoing and we have numerous pilots and proof of concepts completed.
    - Ongoing work with Cellnex our Technical Partner on this project to develop more opportunities.
    - Feasibility study completed and presented to at Edenderry Municipal District.
    - Worked with Edenderry Community First Responders (CFR) on rollout of smart Automated External Defibrillators (AED's) in the town.
  - Collaboration with Education and Learning Providers to support Digital Education and Training opportunities.

### Key Actions for 2023

- Offaly Digital Strategy - Work to commence on Offaly's second Digital Strategy in 2023.
- Be the single point of contact for engagement with telecommunications operators and government departments in the delivery of telecommunications infrastructure, including the National Broadband Plan.
- Manage the successful rollout of the National Broadband Plan, and implementation of actions identified in the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce Report, in County Offaly.
- Project manage the implementation of actions defined in the Digital Strategy and leading on certain actions as appropriate.
- Engage with businesses, community groups, schools and other sectors to foster the development of digital opportunities.
- STEM Education – Continue to develop the programme in Offaly with Industry Partners
- Further develop Public Wi-Fi locations which are now available in over 100 locations through the county and we plan develop initiatives to promote the use of this service.
- Continue to work in creating sustainable digital hubs in communities. These hubs provide workspaces with high-speed telecommunications capacity for the use of workers, entrepreneurs and local communities.
- Further develop e-denderry as a smart town/community.
- Apply for funding for Digital Initiatives under various schemes.
- Establish collaborative strategic Digital group in the County.
- Data Centres – Looking at opportunities for Offaly.

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## Housing

### Overview

*Housing for All – A new Housing Plan for Ireland*, the Government's Housing Plan to 2030 was published in September 2021. The programme includes four key strands:

- Support Home Ownership and Increasing Affordability;
- Eradicating Homelessness, Increasing Social Housing Delivery and Supporting Social Inclusion;
- Increase new Housing Supply;
- Addressing Vacancy and Efficient Use of Existing Stock.

Each strand contains multiple actions, 213 in all, which will deliver a range of housing options for individuals, couples and families. The emphasis is on the delivery of new housing units. Each Local Authority was assigned multi-annual targets - Offaly's multi-annual target of new build units between 2022 and 2026 is 463 units. Offaly's *Housing Delivery Action Plan* submitted to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage outlines the delivery programme proposed over the appropriate period, 2022-2026.

### Activities to the end of Quarter 3 - 2022

#### Social Housing 2022

There were 532 households in Offaly on the social housing list at the end of September 2021. A further 685 households were in receipt of Housing Assistant Payments, 132 supported via Rental Accommodation Schemes and 169 in various leasing arrangements.

To the end of September 2022, 154 individuals and families were allocated Local Authority, Approved Housing Bodies or RAS / leasing tenancies across the county.

#### Construction Programme

*Housing for All – A new Housing Plan for Ireland*, provides for an overall build (via direct LA, AHB, Turnkey, Part V) of 463 units between 2022 to 2026. Offaly will successfully deliver, if not surpass this programme delivery during this timeframe.

Direct Construction Programme

Construction inflation and disruption to the supply of goods continued to impact on the delivery across many of the housing programmes.

There are 143 social houses, for allocation to qualified applicants on Offaly County Council's Social Housing Support List, at the various stages of the construction and they will be ready for allocation

by the end of 2022 and throughout 2023. These developments are in Banagher, Birr, Belmont, Moneygall, Edenderry and Tullamore. The units are a mix of Local Authority direct builds, Turnkey developments and Approved Housing Body developments. An additional 125 houses are at the various stages of departmental approval process and will see further housing delivered in Tullamore, Clara, Ballycumber and, Portarlington.

An Expression of Interest for Turnkey developments was held during summer 2022 and consultations with the developers and the Department are on-going and it is hoped that this approach will realise up to 40 housing units.

### **Part V Programme**

5 Part V units were completed and allocated in 2022 to date. A further 33 Part V units have been agreed with developers and these will be delivered as these private housing schemes progress. *Housing for All* increased the requirement in Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 to provide a mandatory 20% (previously 10%) for social and affordable units.

### **Construction in Partnership with Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs)**

Offaly County Council, in accordance with Government Policy, continues to work in partnership with AHBs to progress construction and acquisition programmes. The Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) part-funding can be provided by the Department and the Capital Assistance Programme (CAS) 100% funding can be provided by the Department for the acquisition or construction of units by an Approved Housing Body. The Local Authority will have nomination rights on these schemes, which will contribute to the reduction of the housing waiting list.

### **House Acquisitions & Turnkey Developments**

The acquisition of housing units is 100% funded through the Department's Capital Programme subject to unit cost ceilings. Due to progress on the national capital programme the Local Authority acquisition programme will be scaled back as we progress through the Housing for All programme. Notwithstanding, the Council have, at end of October, acquired 9 houses and a further 6 houses with bids agreed.

### **Returning Vacant Stock to Productive Use (Pre-lets)**

Pre-let and void works have been completed on 45 council owned properties to the end of October 2022. The Council's ability to continue to return vacant units to use quickly and to a high standard will be determined by the financial resources available. Part funding from central government to return vacant units has steadily reduced and it is likely that there will be an increased reliance on

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the LA's own resources for this activity in the future. Construction inflation and availability of contractors has continued to impact on pre-let works in 2022.

### **Local Authority stock (Disabled Persons Grants) & Housing Grants for Private Home Owners (Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability)**

The total approved budget in 2022 for private home owners is €1,600,000, i.e., €1,280,000 from the Department and 20%, i.e., €320,000, is funded from the Council's own resources. Covid-19 restrictions, construction cost inflation and disruption to the supply of goods have resulted in successful applicants experiencing delays in the completion of works. The Council continues to work with them to ensure that the funding is maximised in 2022.

The Department also provides part funding (90%) towards accessible works on Council stock, e.g., provision of a ramp, level access shower and ground floor extensions. The 2022 budget for Disabled Person Grants is €658,800 (down from 2021's budget of €932,000). The Local Authority contribution is 10% for these grants and provision needs to be made for this programme in the future.

Both the Disabled Persons Grants on Council owned stock and the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability, i.e., Private Homeowner Grant Scheme, continue to be oversubscribed.

### **Maintenance of Local Authority Housing Stock**

Offaly County Council housing stock, recently having surpassed 2,000 units, will continue to increase in the coming years. Accordingly, additional resources will need to be provided for to ensure that stock is adequately maintained and to ensure that regulatory checks are held in a timely manner.

There were over 2,590 requests for repairs and maintenance by local authority tenants in the first three quarters of 2022. Each request is logged on the i-house software system and forwarded to the relevant Clerk of Works for follow up. The expenditure for housing repairs and maintenance in Q1 to Q3 2022 was € €628,511.

2022 saw an increased planned maintenance budget of €410,000. The budget was allocated across the three municipal districts and will benefit up to 253 Offaly County Council owned properties. The nature of works addressed are varied and include the upgrade and replacement of heating systems, smoke and carbon alarms, windows, fascia and soffit and boundary treatments. Inflationary costs has impacted on the Council's capacity to meet all planned maintenance works.

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## **Buy and Renew Schemes & Repair and Lease Scheme**

The Buy and Renew Scheme allows the Local Authority or an Approved Housing Body to buy houses that are derelict and bring them back to the required standard for social housing rental. Cost ceilings for such acquisition and repair projects are as per the Department's acquisition ceilings for standard house acquisitions or alternatively they can be progressed through the 4-stage process.

The funding available to private landlord's to repair a property in accordance with the Repair and Lease Scheme was increased to €60,000 in Q3, 2021. The landlord is required to make the unit available for social housing tenants on a lease arrangement. The cost of repairs is then offset against the landlord's rental income over time. The scheme is targeted towards the owners of vacant properties who cannot afford to bring their properties up to the required standard for rented properties. The Council anticipates having 7 units available for allocation from units delivered under this Scheme in 2023.

## **Retrofit Programme**

Offaly County Council was allocated funding for the retrofitting of local authority owned housing stock. The retrofitting of homes will result in warmer, more comfortable homes. After the works, the Building Energy Ratings (BER) of homes will typically have gone from an E- or D- rating to a B2. It is anticipated that retrofitted homes fitted with a heat pump will be cheaper to heat and will provide improved air quality conditions through better ventilation.

59 homes have been retrofitted in 2022 to date. These units are funded through the Midland Retrofit and the National Retrofit programmes. A further 82 houses across the county have been surveyed and tendered. The Council is currently assessing these tenders and are in advanced discussions with the Department in relation to progressing same in 2023.

The Retrofitting programmes have experienced significant delays, initially being paused in accordance with Covid-19 restrictions and more recently as a result of inflationary costs, availability of contractors and supply of goods.

## **Local Authority Home Loan**

The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan was replaced by the Local Authority Home Loan in 2022. Applicants must be first time buyers; meet income limit criteria; and demonstrate a capacity to repay the loan. 13 applications have been received to date – 1 is currently on hand; 3 have received approval, 6 declined, and a further 3 applications have either been withdrawn or deemed not qualified.

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## **Tenant Purchase Applications**

Changes to the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme 2016 were introduced and became effective in Q3, 2022. Minimum income requirements (revised downward from €15,000p.a. to €12,500 p.a.) and time receiving social housing supports were the main changes to the Scheme. Housing are reviewing the process and examining the criteria through which this Scheme can be supported in Offaly.

## **Housing Rents**

Following consultation with the Housing Strategic Policy Committee a revised Differential Rent Scheme was introduced and became effective from 3rd September 2022. The rent continues to be based on the household income, is capped at 22% of the household income, and, that a maximum rent applied to all categories within the Scheme. The 2022 Differential Rent Scheme will now be based on the All In Unit Price Costs, which are circulated annually by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

A rent review was held on all leasing, RAS and HAP tenancies in 2022. It is proposed to hold a rent review of tenants in Local Authority units in 2023.

The debt collection function associated with housing rents and loans transferred from the Housing Department to the Central Revenue Collection function from the end of 2016.

## **Homelessness**

The number of homeless presentations continued to be high throughout 2022. Notice to Quit by private rented landlords, unaffordable private rents and the lack of private rented supply were the main reasons for presentation.

The Council's HAP Placefinder works closely with those in emergency accommodation and those at risk of becoming homeless to help them source private rented accommodation. At the end of September there were 23 single adults and 18 couples and families from Offaly's Social Housing Support List being supported in emergency accommodation.

Sofia Housing, in a joint initiative with Midlands Simon Community, acquired Clonamore Hotel in Q3, 2020. The facility will be developed as an enhanced centre for the provision of supported accommodation for homeless people. Under the terms of a landmark agreement Midlands Simon Community will operate the facility, with a team of qualified social care workers providing support on a 24/7 basis. Refurbishment works commenced in Q3, 2022 and are scheduled to finish in February /March 2023. The facility will provide professional supports for up to 17 individuals from the Midlands Region of Offaly, Westmeath, Laois and Longford.

Throughout 2022, Offaly County Council continued to secure units and forward nominations to the Housing First Programme, operated in the Midland's Homeless Region by the Peter McVerry Trust

(PMcVT).. Those nominated to the Housing First Programme are allocated single bed units and receive wrap-around supports from PMcVT.

### **Traveller Accommodation**

The Local Traveller Accommodation Committee continued to meet during 2022 to progress the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019-2024 initiatives.

Following a consultation process undertaken, as per the circular letter, with all those who had an input into the original plan and following receipt of those submissions the LTACC agreed unanimously that the plan be retained as is and that a collective effort be made to deliver the final elements of the plan – noting that at this point in time, significant progress has been made.

A Traveller Tenancy Support Officer, funded by the Department, commenced in January 2022 and provided enhanced supports to the Traveller community in the context of pre-tenancy preparation and post tenancy sustainment.

Offaly Traveller Interagency Group, established under the auspices of Offaly LCDC, continued to meet during 2022.

### **Estate Management & Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy**

As mentioned earlier, the increased number of housing units will increase the number of tenant engagements and the Council's Community Liaison Officers continue to work with existing Residents Associations and to re-establish Resident Associations in Local Authority estates. The Housing Section partnering with the Library, Arts and Heritage services made significant progress to develop programmes to improve their estates and to build their capacity to work together.

The Estate Management Fund for 2022, approved by the Elected Members was allocated to each of the Municipal Districts and a number of enhancement projects were progressed.

The interagency committee, which was established under the aegis of the Joint Policing Committee in 2021 meet on a quarterly basis. The committee is comprised of Elected Members from each of the three Municipal Districts, and is supported by representatives of An Garda Síochána and various sections of the Council (Housing, Environment, Municipal District).

The Council continued to refer a number of anti-social behaviour cases to the County Solicitor in 2022 and these were successfully addressed by the Courts.

### **Strategic Policy Committee 2022**

The Housing Strategic Policy Committee met on three occasions to date in 2022 to review various housing policies and oversee Policy Development.

The Committee received briefings on a number of areas including the Domestic Violence Supports and update on the provision of Safe Homes; Strategic Plan for People with a Disability 2022 to 2026;



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Differential Rent Scheme; and a report on the mid-term review of the Traveller Accommodation Programme. The SPC also received a report on Offaly's Response to Ukraine Refugee Crisis.

### **Priorities for 2023**

- Implementation of *Housing for All – A new Housing Plan for Ireland* under the four strands in line with the supporting Regulations and Department Circulars.
- Progressing with the delivery of the multi-annual targets of new build units between 2022 and 2026, i.e., 463 units, and in line with *Offaly's Housing Delivery Action Plan*.
- Increasing social housing supply through all available means, including
  - Progression of Council owned construction projects through the department stage approvals, including procurement, planning, construction and completion.
  - Appraisal and progression of new direct build proposals, repair and lease scheme, and return of voids.
  - Continue to work with Approved Housing Bodies to increase social housing supply.
  - Seek to increase the Council's capital housing lands in areas of housing need.
- Progress the Retrofit Programme in line with departmental guidelines.
- Offaly County Council will seek to recruit those staff identified for the delivery of the Housing for All programme.
- Implement the Housing First Programme in accordance with the Service Level Agreement with the Peter McVerry Trust.
- Review and record status of Local Authority Housing stock for planning and maintenance purposes.
- Seek to maximise the resources available to improve housing stock to meet tenant's needs via programmes such as energy efficiency, voids, DPGs and Traveller Accommodation funding.
- Progress the *Traveller Accommodation Plan 2019-2024* including advancing Group Housing projects.
- Increase the number of private rented inspections.
- Continued on-going administration of the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme.
- Administration and management of the Tenant Purchase Scheme.
- Progress Local Authority Home Loan applications in a timely manner.
- Initiate and administer a Rent Review on Rental Accommodation Scheme, Social Leasing tenants and those in receipt of Housing Assistance Payments.
- Capacity building and support for Local Authority Residents' Associations through an Estate Management Programme in consultation with the Municipal Districts.
- Implement a programme of review and revision of Local Authority tenancy issues.

- On-going review of the structure, efficiency and effectiveness of Offaly County Council's Housing Service in the interests of customers and staff.
- Develop best use of technologies to maximise online services for customers and begin the process of reducing paper files retained and moving to a paperless record management system.

## Library Service

Offaly County Library Service continues to deliver on the objectives of the national five-year strategy for public libraries: *Our Public Libraries 2022- Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities*.

Offaly Libraries successfully delivered an Interim Development Plan: *Creating Collaborative Communities, Offaly Libraries Development Plan 2022-2023*, which was adopted by Offaly County Council in January 2022.

As society adjusts to a post-pandemic reality, library staff continue to encourage users back into our spaces and work to embed libraries at the heart of our communities through social inclusion, partnerships and innovative events. We continue to promote quality services on offer through monthly newsletters, interactive cultural programmes and via various social media platforms.



Strategic national programmes underway include:

**Reading and Literacy Development** (Right to Read Festivals)

**Learning and Information Services** (eResources and Work Matters at Your Library)

**Community and Culture Provision** (Healthy Ireland, Creative Ireland & Age Friendly)

## New Services, Community Engagement, Social Inclusion Actions:

### ICT & Digital Resources Developments

- **New Library Management System** (LMS) successfully launched March 2022
- **New library website** in development
- **Eduroam** – available in all libraries helping third level students stay connected
- **LOTE Online for Kids**: database of children's books in World Languages
- **Times Tables Rock Stars**: teaches mathematics through play – all Offaly Primary Schools can avail of a free access before March 31<sup>st</sup>
- **Busy Code**: introduces children to coding and programming in a fun and accessible way
- **Britannica Library**: filled with digital learning content

- **Who Next...?** Suggests books for children based on their preferences, helping to embed the habit of reading
- **Who Else Writes Like?** Find an author similar to your favourite author, via our website



### **2022 Departmental Grant Awards to Offaly Libraries:**

- **€170,000 My Open Library funding by DRCD** for the upgrade of MOL technologies in **Banagher, Ferbane, Tullamore and Kilcormac libraries**. This funding will allow huge improvements in our technology systems and improve the user experience of MOL services for years to come. This project is 10% matched funded by Offaly County Council.
- **A grant of €21,800 from the Dormant Accounts Fund for Library Supports for Socially excluded and disadvantaged communities** which is funding the **STEAM programme** and an **Autumn Parenting Programme**, delivered in partnership with Laois Libraries. This project is 10% matched funded by Offaly County Council.
- **€4,370** in funding was received from **CYPSC** for **Sensory Offaly**
- **€5,625** in funding was received for **Healthy Ireland at Offaly Libraries**



### **Library Buildings Developments**

- **Edenderry Library** - Design Team contracts signed for new community library and arts space in September 2022
- **Sensory Room, Tullamore** - Officially launched in April 2022
- **Local Studies & Reading Room** - Completed
- **Daingean Library** - refurbishments completed
- **Banagher Library** - refurbishments due for completion early 2023





An Roinn Forbartha  
Tuaithe agus Pobail  
Department of Rural and  
Community Development



## New Library Programmes 2022

### Curated Events Programmes at Offaly Libraries

Delivered Online and In Branch

- **Sensory Offaly:** 7 Workshops planned for both online and in person delivery Autumn 2022
- **School STEAM Programme:** 17 in class workshops, 4 online events plus 36 Class Activity Sets available for collection
- **Parenting Programme:** Autumn series currently underway with 25 online events delivered in partnership with Laois Libraries
- **Seachtain na Gaeilge 2022:** 60 participants in 'Tráth na gCeist' as well as 208 views on our Irish story times online
- **Healthy Ireland at Offaly Libraries:** Workshops and talks delivered online throughout the year.

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## **Innovative Events & Virtual Programmes:**

Restrictions due to COVID-19 meant that traditional methods of event and programme delivery had to move online. We are pleased to see the return of our traditional events held in branch now blended with the accessibility of online events:

- **Cruinniú na nÓg 2022 & Offaly Libraries Comic Con;** day of creativity with **24 workshops and 7 development projects** with local schools. Our award winning Offaly Libraries Comic Con returned with **over 900 visitors and 226 participants** in activities on the day.
- **Sensory Offaly:** Sensory rooms on offer in two branches with an expansive range of Sensory Toys, Books and Assistive Technology available to borrow. We have had **687 visitors** to date.
- **Age Friendly Libraries & Positive Ageing Week:** a series of activities promoting lifelong learning for older persons in Offaly was well attended this September.
- **Parenting Programme:** with Dormant Account Funding, Offaly Libraries are currently offering a varied programme of online Parenting Support Talks this Autumn 2022
- **Right to Read:** Offaly Libraries continues to offer exciting events within the four pillars: *Spring Into Storytime, Summerstars, Children's Book Festival* and *Family Time at Your Library*.
- **Work Matters:** Business and Jobseeker support working with LEO, OLDC, LOETB & CIS. In 2021 our series of online and in branch events enjoyed a turnout of **192 participants**.
- **Healthy Ireland at your Library:** working with LGMA, Dept. of Health and local Healthy Ireland partners. Currently offering a diverse range of Healthy Ireland talks online.
- **Creative Ireland:** working with Heritage, Arts, and Community to deliver events.
- **First 5 Little Library Initiative – Phase 3 has seen 411 book bags collected**

## **Community Response in support of Ukrainians**



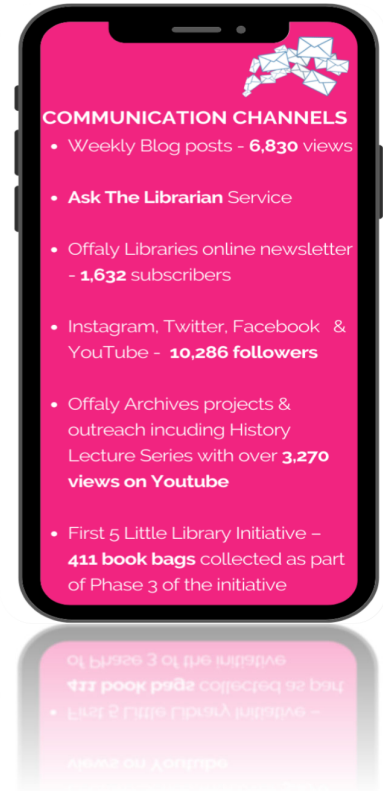
There are many services offered by **Offaly Libraries** as part of the wider Offaly County Council Community Response Forum **in support of the people of Ukraine.**

**New titles in Ukrainian** are continuously added to our shelves and our online catalogues. Library digital services also have multi-lingual offerings, including Ukrainian. A **new library service leaflet in Ukrainian** that contains information on how to become a library member as well as the locations and contact information of library branches within

Offaly has been circulated. Details of free Wifi, free use of computers and access to printing and scanning facilities are also included.

**Priorities for 2023 include:**

- Progression of the capital development of a new community library and arts base in Edenderry
- Complete library improvements in Banagher
- Increase promotion of library services especially through online channels including monthly newsletter, interactive cultural programmes & social media
- Libraries at the heart of communities; continue to promote social inclusion and develop innovative partnerships and community and cultural events
- Increase library engagement by developing traditional and digital collections, services and library technology
- Strengthen the partnership between Offaly Archives Service and Offaly Libraries
- Review and evaluate library service activities to the benefit of the community
- Increase active membership – encourage users back into library spaces & increase engagement



## Community & Culture

### Local Community Development Committee (LCDC)

The Offaly Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) was established under the Local Government Reform Act 2014 for the purpose of developing and implementing a coherent and integrated approach to local and community development.

The 19 member LCDC has broad representation from public and private interests including business, local development, education, enterprise, agriculture, voluntary and local authority members. Offaly LCDC hold monthly meetings and current membership is as follows:

STATUTORY INTERESTS (9)			
Local Authority Elected Members	Declan	Harvey	Offaly County Council
	John	Leahy (Chair)	Offaly County Council
	Noel	Cribbin	Offaly County Council
Local Authority Officials	Anna-Marie	Delaney	Chief Executive Offaly County Council
	Orla	Martin	Head of Enterprise, LEO
State Agencies	Anne-Marie	Keane	Laois/Offaly ETB
	Con	Feighery	Teagasc
	Celine	Kirwan	Dept. of Social Protection
	Ann	Sheerin	Community Services Manager, HSE
NON STATUTORY INTERESTS (10)			
Community & Voluntary	Sinead	McDonagh	PPN Community & Voluntary
	Sylvia	Sweeney (Vice-Chair)	PPN Community & Voluntary
Social Inclusion	Deirdre	Arnold	PPN Social Inclusion
	Olive	O'Sullivan	PPN Social Inclusion
Environment	Rebekah	Keaveny	PPN Environment
Local Development & Community	Brendan	O'Loughlin	CEO - OLDC
Other civic society or 'local and community' interests	Mark	Cronin	Construction Industry Federation
	Richard	Scally	President, Offaly IFA
	Fechin	Daly	Construction Industry
	Philip	O'Brien	Offaly Tourism Marketing (CLG)

The Offaly Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) is responsible for coordinating, planning, overseeing and implementing local development initiatives including inter alia the following:



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- Prepare, adopt and implement the community elements of the Local Economic and Community Plan
  - Management and implementation of the Offaly Local Development Strategy and approval of the Rural Development LEADER Programme 2014-2020 and Transitional LEADER Programme 2021-2022 funding
  - Management and implementation of the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2023
  - Co-ordinate the management and implementation of the programmes that have been approved either by the local authority or by agreement between the LCDC and other public bodies
  - Ensure effectiveness, co-ordination, consistency and the avoidance of duplication between publicly funded local and community development programmes
  - Optimise resources for the benefit of local communities and improve the efficiency

### **Rural Development LEADER Programme 2014-2020 and Transitional LEADER Programme 2021-2022**

LEADER is a community-led approach to local development funded through Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. The LEADER Rural Development Programme promotes social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development and provides support and funding for individuals and rural communities to become involved and take ownership for the development of their own areas. The main tool for the application of the LEADER approach to area development and involving local representatives in decision-making is the Local Action Group (LAG).

Offaly Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) is the designated LAG and has responsibility for the delivery of LEADER Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and the Transitional LEADER Programme 2021-2022 and for approval of all LEADER funding. The Implementing Partner is Offaly Local Development Company.

The Rural Development LEADER Programme 2014-2020 project allocation for Offaly was almost €6.5 million. The Transitional LEADER Programme 2021-2022 was introduced to bridge the gap between EU programming periods. The additional Transitional LEADER Programme project allocation for Offaly is €1,780,874 and includes €1,232,913 Transitional funding and €547,961 European Union Recovery Instrument Funds (EURI).

Under the Programme in excess of €7.1million LEADER project funding has been approved to date for investment in innovative community and private enterprise projects throughout the county. Claimed expenditure in excess of €5.3 million has been paid to project promoters to date.



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## **Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2023**

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2023 is the primary social inclusion programme of Government and provides funding to tackle poverty and social exclusion at a local level through engagement and partnerships between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations and public sector agencies. SICAP is funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development with co-funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL). PEIL's priority areas for investment revolve around the activation of the unemployed, social and labour market inclusion, education and youth employment.

Offaly Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) is the Contracting Authority for SICAP and oversees, co-ordinates and manages the delivery of SICAP and directs funding to the Programme Implementer. The Programme Implementer is Offaly Local Development who delivers SICAP at a local level. The Programme aims to address high and persistent levels of deprivation and to target and support those who are disadvantaged, hardest to reach and less likely to use mainstream services through targeted and innovative locally led approaches.

There are two overall goals in SICAP - Supporting Communities and Supporting Individuals with key performance indicators to be achieved. There are thirteen SICAP target groups. These are - Disadvantaged Children and Families; People living in Disadvantaged Communities; Disadvantaged Young People (aged 15-24); People with Disabilities; Disadvantaged Women; Roma; Emerging Needs Groups; Travellers; Lone Parents; the Disengaged from the Labour Market (Economically Inactive); Low Income Workers/Households; The Unemployed; New Communities.

The SICAP budget is allocated on an annual basis and continued funding is subject to satisfactory performance reviews and key performance indicators being met. The Offaly SICAP budget allocation for 2022 is €900,768. An additional €63,526 in funding was allocated to Offaly SICAP in recognition of the ongoing contribution being made by the programme to the local community responses to people arriving from Ukraine.

### **Offaly Volunteer Group Awards and Volunteer Recognition Event**

Offaly County Council held its Offaly Volunteer Group Awards and Volunteer Recognition Event on 19<sup>th</sup> May, 2022 during National Volunteering Week.

The nominations received reflected the variety of outstanding community supports and efforts that groups delivered across County Offaly during the pandemic. The awards acknowledged and

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celebrated the incredible work and extremely valuable contribution of volunteers and community groups in Offaly throughout the pandemic. A number of volunteer representatives individually nominated through Volunteer Ireland for recognition of their efforts during COVID-19 were also present and awarded Certificates.

This event was held to coincide with an awards ceremony hosted by Minister of State, Joe O'Brien, T.D., in Dublin Castle where the efforts of volunteers over the course of the pandemic were celebrated and acknowledged. The Minister's speech was livestreamed at the Offaly event.

Both the Cathaoirleach of Offaly County Council, Cllr. Declan Harvey, and Director of Services, Ms. Sharon Kennedy, paid tribute and recognised the contribution and efforts of individuals and groups across Offaly who volunteered their time to help the most vulnerable in our communities during the pandemic.

### **Offaly Comhairle na nÓg**

Comhairle na nÓg was set up under the National Children's Strategy in the 31 Local Authorities throughout the country, to give children and young people a voice in the development of local services and policies. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making 2015-2020, highlight the importance of ensuring that children and young people are given a voice in decisions that affect their lives. Comhairle na nÓg is a key structure in giving young people a voice in decision-making at local and national level.

This year the Comhairle na nÓg Executive have chosen to work on the topic of Disability with particular focus on transport in relation to disability. This topic will be further developed in the coming year with the support of the Steering Committee and engagement taking place with relevant agencies and groups.

Members of Offaly Comhairle na nÓg Executive provided a presentation on the effects of de-carbonisation in the Midlands to delegates from the Just Transition Institute of Greece and the University of Western Macedonia who visited Offaly County Council for a 2 day Exchange EU Study Visit in September.

The Community Department were successful in their application to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage for funding to develop proposals that support and encourage the increased participation of women and diversity in the 2024 local elections. Members of Offaly Comhairle na nÓg Executive were invited to contribute to the general awareness campaign and participated in the promotional video.

Other highlights for 2022 include the National Executive Meeting held in DCEDIY buildings, a Tour of the House of the Oireachtas and participation in the LOETB: Youth Work Plan - Preliminary Youth Consultation.

The Offaly Comhairle na nÓg AGM 2022 took place on 11<sup>th</sup> October. This was the first in-person AGM since the pandemic. The CNN showcased their work and networked with one another, discussed their chosen topic and voiced their opinions.

### Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP)

A review of the LECP 2016-21 was completed in 2021. During 2022 the Department issued Guidelines and a number of online informational webinars were held to assist the completion of the next LECP. An Advisory Steering Group (ASG) was established in May 2022 to assist in preparing, drafting, adopting, implementing and monitoring of the LECP. The membership comprises:

Name	Representing
Brendan O'Loughlin, OLDC, Chair	Offaly Local Development Company
Councillor Eamon Dooley	Chair of Land Use, Planning and Economic Dev. SPC
Councillor John Clendennen	Chair of Community, Culture & Emergency Services SPC
Stephane Duclot	DOS for Land Use, Planning and Economic Development
Sharon Kennedy	DOS for Housing & Community Services
Anne Marie Keane, LOETB	LCDC Nominee
Ann Sheerin, HSE	LCDC Nominee
Rebekah Keaveney, Green Offaly	LCDC Nominee
Orla Martin	Head of Enterprise
Ann Dillon/Lourda Giles	LCDC Chief Officer
Lorraine Mitchell	Senior Executive Planner (Forward Planning)

The LECP Guidelines require the preparation of both economic elements and community elements. Early in 2022 the LEO Office tendered for a consultant to prepare an Offaly Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan, which will inform the new LECP. The tender was won by OCO Global who consulted widely including eighty business stakeholders, students and education providers. Baseline data was collected and a number of key recommendations were made. The new LECP will be finalised and adopted in 2023.

### Community, Cultural & Emergency Services SPC

The 9 member SPC meets on a quarterly basis and has representation from local authority members, sectoral interests and PPN representatives. Membership of the SPC during 2022 was as follows:

Sector	Members Name	Organisation
Local Authority Elected Members (5)	Cllr John Clendennen, Chair Councillor Clare Claffey Councillor Mark Hackett Councillor Liam Quinn* Councillor Ken Smollen *Chair until June 2022	Offaly County Council
Sectoral Representatives (1)	Thomas Woulfe	Agriculture/Farming
PPN Representation (3)	Lauren McGrath Madeline Corboy VACANT	Youth & Environment Social Inclusion Voluntary / Community

The SPC met four times in 2022: 25<sup>th</sup> February; 8<sup>th</sup> June; 23 September and 25<sup>th</sup> November. During 2022 policies were developed for adoption by the SPC including (1) Event Management Guidelines; (2) Policy to support Women and Diversity in Local Government and Decision Making Structures and (3) Offaly Playground Strategy.

### Offaly Community Response Forum:

Following the military invasion of Ukraine on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022 the Government requested that each local authority establish a Community Response Forum (CRF), modelled largely on the previous Community Forum which worked very efficiently to coordinate the response to the COVID 19 pandemic. The Offaly CRF first met on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2022, and has met almost every fortnight since then.

The meetings provide useful sharing of information and invaluable co-ordination of communication of support services between agencies. The main purpose of the Community Response Forum is to provide a co-ordinated response to support the refugees arriving from Ukraine. The demand-led nature of the potential numbers of refugees arriving in Offaly however, requires that the model and role of the Forum is constantly reviewed.

Issues being dealt with by the Forum include:

- Sharing of Information
- Personal Public Service Numbers (PPSN)
- Medical Cards
- School Placements
- Covid 19 Vaccinations
- Needs Identification (SICAP)
- Accommodation
- Essential Supplies
- Integration Activities
- Language Education
- Employment

The membership includes:

Offaly County Council	An Garda Síochána
Health Service Executive	Local Link Laois Offaly
Offaly Local Development Company	Offaly Library Service
Offaly Volunteer Centre	Family Resource Centres
Túsla	Citizens Information Service
County Childcare Committee	SVP
Department of Social Protection	Laois Offaly ETB
Civil Defence	

The Birr Outdoor Education Centre owned by Laois Offaly ETV was used as a temporary Rest Centre for refugees with the main centres of accommodation in Offaly being Tullamore, Portarlington, Birr and Moneygall.

### Offaly Age Friendly Alliance

Offaly Age Friendly Alliance was established on 27<sup>th</sup> Sept 2017, following on from the signing of the Dublin Declaration on Age Friendly Communities in Europe 2013. The first Age Friendly Strategy was launched in June 2018. The Age Friendly Programme has evolved to include:

- Alliance meets 4 – 6 times per year
- OCC Interdepartmental Team meets 6 times per year
- The Midlands Regional Age Friendly Manager, Eileen Hughes, oversees and supports the work of the AF's initiatives in Offaly, Laois, Longford, Westmeath & Roscommon
- Age Friendly Housing Technical Specialist: Noelle McGinley
- Age Friendly Programme Manager Offaly: Bridie Costello Hynes

In 2021 a review of the Age Friendly Strategy 2018 – 2021 was carried out which examined the actions progressed from 2018 – 2021. The majority of actions have been completed at this stage and work commenced on a new Strategy in 2022 with consultations with older people taking place in Tullamore, Kilclonfert and Shinrone. The main consultation took place in Tullamore and members of the Alliance and Interdepartmental team facilitated on the 8 WHO themes. Work also commenced on developing Clara as a Pilot Age Friendly town. This is an ongoing project in conjunction with the Town Centre Plan.

### Public Participation Network (PPN)

The Offaly Public Participation Network (PPN) was established in 2015 following the Local Government Reform Act 2014. It is the main link through which the Local Authority connects with the community, voluntary, social inclusion and environmental sectors. The PPN Secretariat meets monthly in person to guide and direct the work of the PPN on behalf of the Membership.

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The PPN distributes information from a local and national perspective and shares information broadly across the Community sector reflecting the needs of its members. Groups are supported in joining the PPN, accessing MD grants, Town & Village renewal projects, the Community Enhancement Programme and Clár funding. A plenary is held in Spring, following on from the MD meetings and again in Autumn.

Groups are also assisted with Revenue/Tax registration and Tax Clearance in order to draw down grants. In Spring & Autumn the PPN hosts Municipal District meetings. The PPN recently upgraded the website and it also has a presence on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

In person and online training events are undertaken during the year on a range of topics including funding, committee skills, online communications and budget projections. Informing and representing the PPN membership, and developing the capacity of members are key elements of the PPN remit. These priorities will continue to be provided for the membership which now exceeds 650 in Offaly, although this may change once the re-registration of groups is complete. There are a further 100 interested parties on the mailing list. Offaly PPN are members of the Midland Regional PPN which meets quarterly to network and deliver on cross county projects. The PPN National Conference took place in Portlaoise in 21<sup>st</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> Oct 2022. This was the first National Conference since 2019.

### **Community Activities Fund**

Offaly County Council was allocated €277,102 in funding from the Dept. of Rural & Community Development under the Community Activities Fund in 2022. This was a once-off fund allocated under the Department's Community Enhancement Programme and administered by Offaly LCDC and the Community & Culture Section of Offaly County Council. Not-for-profit community or voluntary groups were eligible to apply. Priority was given to non-pay operating costs e.g. utility bills, rental/lease costs, insurance bills during the period 1st July 2021 to 30th June 2022. Repairs and improvements to facilities and purchase of equipment were also eligible. The LCDC approved grants to 136 groups on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2022. Offaly LCDC also decided to support struggling community playgrounds by ring fencing €64,557 of the fund towards these groups.

### **Tidy Towns Network**

This network is in place since 2011 and is a collaborative project of the Community and Heritage sections of OCC. The Tidy Towns competition was held virtually in 2021 but was back to its normal format in 2022, with a closing date of 20th May 2022. Twenty one groups from Offaly registered in 2022. It is hoped that Tidy Towns Network meetings will resume again in 2023 to build on the great success achieved by Offaly groups in recent years.

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## **Pride of Place 2022**

The annual IPB Pride of Place competition organised by Co-operation Ireland in partnership with IPB Insurance, promotes and celebrates the best in community development, and recognises the enormous efforts of volunteers in making their local neighbourhoods better places to live, work and socialise. Offaly County Council nominated the following three local communities in 2022:

1. Mucklagh Community Development CLG (representing the Tullamore Municipal District area) in the Population: 1,000 to 2,000 category;
2. Geashill Tidy Towns (representing the Edenderry Municipal District area) in the Creative Place category; and
3. Pullough Village (representing the Birr Municipal District area) in the Community Resilience category.

Each community hosted IPB Pride of Place judges in July. Winners and runners up in each category will be announced at an Awards ceremony in January 2023.

## **Offaly Community Watch Network/Community CCTV**

Offaly Community Watch is a network of Community Alert and Neighbourhood Watch groups that is in operation since 2011. It is facilitated by the PPN, Local Garda Sergeant and Muintir na Tire Regional Worker. The Network normally meets 3 times per year with a regular attendance, which includes the PPN reps from the JPC.

The Community CCTV Grant Aid Scheme run by the Department of Justice and Equality is designed to provide support to local communities wishing to install and maintain Community CCTV security systems in their area. Funding of 60% of the total capital cost up to a maximum of €40,000 is available for new community CCTV schemes. In Offaly, the following schemes have held Project Team meetings to progress their applications:

- Belmont Community CCTV Scheme
- The Arthur Elliott CCTV Scheme formerly known as Coolderry/ Kilcolman/ Aghancon CCTV Scheme
- Rahan Community CCTV Scheme
- Portarlinton Business Association CCTV Scheme
- Edenderry Business CCTV scheme

Standard procedures for the Operation of the Scheme are being developed in Offaly, based on the model agreed in Laois where a CCTV scheme has been approved in Mountmellick.

## **Traveller Interagency Group**

The Offaly Traveller Interagency Group was established in September 2021 and has met quarterly since then. The membership of the Group includes: Offaly County Council Community, Housing & Environmental Section staff; Offaly Traveller Movement; Birr Travellers & Settled Peoples Group;

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OLDC/SICAP; Department of Social Protection; Túsla; Health Service Executive; Offaly Community Childcare Committee; Laois Offaly ETB; An Garda Síochána and Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (TUS). In 2022 meetings were held on 1<sup>st</sup> March, 10<sup>th</sup> June, 23 December and 2<sup>nd</sup> December.

## Offaly Sports Partnership

Established in 2003, Offaly Sports Partnership is a multi-sectoral subcommittee of Offaly LCDC, hosted by Offaly County Council and core funded by Sport Ireland. The long term shared vision of Offaly Sports Partnership is of a county with a vibrant sport culture, which is inclusive of all people. Its mission is to actively support measures to increase and sustain participation in sport in Offaly.

Offaly Sports Partnership believes that all people, irrespective of ability; age; cultural background; educational attainment; ethnicity; family status; gender; marital status; physical, mental and intellectual capabilities; religious beliefs; or sexual orientation are entitled to enjoy the benefits of improved physical and mental health derived from their participation in sport and physical activity.

In 2022, Offaly Sports Partnership employed a staff of five: -

- i. Eamonn Henry, Coordinator
- ii. Olivia Murphy, Administrator
- iii. Jean Brady, Sports Inclusion Development Officer supporting the participation of people with disabilities in sport and physical activity
- iv. Denise Coghill, Community Sports Development Officer coordinating the delivery of community based sport and physical activity programmes in the county; and
- v. Liam O Reilly, ACE Coordinator supporting the participation of disadvantaged children in sport and physical activity through schools programmes and club / community links

The Healthy Offaly Coordinator, Dermot Egan, is also attached to the Sports Partnership; and this post is funded through the Healthy Ireland framework.

With a return to some semblance of normality across 2022, Offaly Sports Partnership began the process of recommencing delivery of in person sport and physical activity programmes as follows:-

- Adapted sport and physical activity programmes for children with additional needs including After Schools Programmes and Summer Camps
- Covid19 Return to Sport grants for 25 clubs and organisations
- Club Development grant supports for 31 clubs
- HER Outdoors week across four locations on the Grand Canal for over 275 girls and women in August



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- Mass participation events such as the Operation Transformation National Walk Day in Lough Boora; Bike Week in May; Africa Day athletics in the Tullamore Harriers for 350 primary school pupils; SPORTSHALL Athletics for primary schools; and Diversity Games for primary and secondary schools
  - Physical activity, recreational sport and active living programmes for adults, older adults, people with disabilities, women and girls, and other underrepresented groups
  - Physical activity, recreational sport and active living programmes delivered by the South Offaly and Daingean Sports Hubs
  - Remote sprint challenge for 2,400 primary school pupils
  - Sport & physical activity summer camps for children and young people
  - Women in sport week in March during which 10 activities were rolled out by local clubs and the Sports Partnership catering for over 700 women and girls

Offaly Sports Partnership secured funding from a variety of sources (e.g. Sport Ireland; Health Services Executive; the Dormant Accounts Disbursement Fund, etc.) in 2022, with much of this funding supporting delivery of the aforementioned programmes of physical activity and sport.

## **Healthy Ireland**

The Healthy Offaly Team was created by Offaly LCDC in 2018 to implement actions contained in the LECP 2016-2021. The team is made up of representatives from key statutory organisations responsible for the promotion of health enhancing activity in Offaly.

The Healthy Offaly Plan includes objectives under five key themes including physical activity, mental health, sexual health, healthy weight and alcohol / substance misuse and tobacco.

Actions were delivered in the areas of physical activity for children; building healthier communities with a focus on rural Offaly; grow your own and healthy eating (meals on wheels); and community eco spaces as places of health and wellbeing. In addition, two supplementary actions - Community Engagement and a Community Mental Health Fund provided funding to voluntary groups and social enterprises to deliver mental health supports within the Community.

Round 4 of the Healthy Ireland Fund commenced in September 2022, with a minimum fund of €195,000 covering the period 2022-2025. From September 2022 the role of Healthy Ireland Co-ordinator, Dermot Egan, reverted from covering Westmeath and Offaly to covering Offaly alone. Under Round 4 there is a shift to outcomes led activity which are evidence based, supported by a local Healthy Offaly Strategy. A new independent assessment committee was formed to assess all funding applications received & recommend local funding for 2023. The Healthy Offaly Subcommittee had responsibility for overseeing the annual implementation of approved actions.

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## Arts Office

Offaly County Council's Arts Office is responsible with investing and developing high quality, imaginative arts activity, with and for the people of Offaly and visitors to the county. In doing so, the arts office advocates for and clearly communicates the significant role that the arts play in enriching the wellbeing of society, of our citizens, and in enhancing the public realm. This is achieved through our strategic planning processes, with an annual programme that is delivered in cooperation with artists, cultural producers, community groups and local stakeholders and, involving regional and national partners. Offaly arts office assists with the development of a range of key countywide arts programmes such as: *FilmOffaly*, *Music Generation*, *Hullabaloo Children's Arts Festival*, *Anam Beo - Arts and Health*, *Culture Night*, along with providing ongoing support and advice to the many artists, creative practitioners, festivals, and community groups undertaking arts and culture projects across the county.

## 2022 - Key achievements

### Youth Arts

2022 saw the start of the implementation of the research report '*The Makings: Fostering Youth Creativity*', which examined both current and potential arts provision for young people in Offaly, with the purpose to recommend a framework for developing and implementing a new strategic approach for young people's arts provision in the county over the coming five years. Findings from '*The Makings: Fostering Youth Creativity*', will inform the next Arts Strategy, due to commence end 2022 and into 2023.

### Youth ARTS Commissions

In direct response to the findings of *The Makings – Fostering Youth Creativity*, the Arts Office developed a Youth Arts Commission which ran from 2021-2022. The initiative - *Making it with Nature* was a youth led exploration of our understanding and relationship with nature and biodiversity, led by artist Caroline Conway, a presentation of which was held at Birr Theatre and Arts Centre. In 2022 a new call was made for artists to work with youth groups and communities to develop a number of projects that will enable engagement between professional artists and young people (13+) facilitated by youth organisations, youth leaders and schools. The goal being to build secure relationships with relevant partners for the development of Youth Arts in the county, the voice of the young people is priority. The projects will run into 2023.

### HULLABALOO! Offaly's Children's Arts Festival

Hullabaloo! Children's Arts Festival came back into our venues with an extravaganza of creativity, art making and fun experiences. Now, in its 16th year, Hullabaloo! Offaly's dedicated arts festival

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for children under 12 ran in November in Birr, Clara, Edenderry and Tullamore. 'Hullabaloo!' is all about Creativity with workshops and family performances to stimulate curiosity and originality bringing the best artist facilitators from all across Ireland. Imaginations are ignited and talents shine at Hullabaloo! Whilst children have fun and experience a miscellany of high-quality creative enterprise. With a monster 83 events in this jam-packed programme, there was something for everyone from screen printing, juggling, mosaics, writing, drama and paper folding/origami to music, abstract art, drawing, hip-hop dance, finger puppets, and painting with wax. Seven family events across a breadth of art forms from circus, film, music, theatre and puppetry were made available to audiences with a focus on inclusion in the programme, with performances that would reach as many and wide an audience as possible, programmed for the four towns. A specially curated programme of events was put together for Tullamore audiences in advance of the much-anticipated opening of Esker Arts Centre.

### **Mini Movies**

Approximately 100 young people took part in our Mini Movies programme from three schools in Banagher and Cloghan. The programme was facilitated by Julie Forrester and consisted of learning skills in stop motion animation. The films were launched and featured in OFFline Film Festival.

### **In the Open | Faoin Spéir**

The Arts Office were awarded funding from the Arts Council to generate a sustained and curated programme of multidisciplinary, inclusive arts activity in public or open spaces in towns and communities that took place between 2021 and 2022. This was a collaborative partnership, led by Offaly County Council's Arts Office, including Birr Theatre and Arts Centre and Birr Festivals Collective. With the aim to develop an exciting and innovative curated programme of outdoor events, planned for Birr, Lough Boora, (in conjunction with the Sculpture Park) and Tullamore, in anticipation of the opening of Esker Arts 2022.

The programme ran throughout the months of March – April, with a number of events taking place in Tullamore, Birr and Lough Boora, including. Events included *Behind these Walls*, an incredible projected illumination at Tullamore Gaol, *Music in the Park*, drum circles with Music Generation, and dance performances by Amy Dolan and her dance troupe. In Lough Boora Parkland the project *New Wilds, Spectacular Weekend* at Lough Boora saw a host of workshops for local schools and community groups and Birr Young Voices, *Soundscapes in Nature*. The programme also hosted an exhibitions at Áras an Chontae and Tullamore Library, and an installation by artist Joe Caslin at Tullamore train station, working with Tullamore asylum seekers around identity and celebrating connectivity with new communities in the county.

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## **FILMOFFALY**

FilmOffaly continued to attract investment from national and international film-makers.

The Arts Office **FilmOffaly Award** 2021 winner Mixed Bag Media's film **Personal Space** was premiered at the 2022 OFFline Film festival. The 2021 FilmOffaly award which was produced in 2022 included a strong mentorship element to the programme, which enabled local film professionals to work under the mentorship and experience of the production company Mixed Bag Media.

The Arts Office put out a call for a researcher to carry out a **Review of Film in Offaly**. The review which will be conducted 2022-23 will examine the development of film production and the film sector in Offaly to date and will offer recommendations for the potential growth of Film in Offaly going forward. The report will focus on the developments of the film commission FilmOffaly, the Offaly County Council Arts Office and Creative Ireland Film and animation programmes, and other key film activity that takes place in the county. The purpose being to demonstrate the value of Film to the county as a social, cultural and economic driver.

## **Culture Night – Offaly**

Culture Night 2022 consisted of 15 large-scale events across Offaly at 13 venues with over 90 artists involved. The night attracted almost 800 people with huge engagement on social media with a dedicated campaign on the Culture Night Offaly Facebook Page reaching 26, 023 people. There were four specially commissioned art works for Culture Night, 'Follow The Leader' by Donlon Dance Company, Tullamore, 'Palimpsest' by Eileen Casey and Emma Barone in Birr, 'The Black River Of Herself' by Shiela and Patrick Hough in Banagher and 'Near|Strength Of Men' with Eugene O'Brien and guests in Edenderry. In its twelfth year, Culture Night Offaly had a focus on diversity, inclusion and community in the eclectic cultural programme that reflected the cultural exuberance within the county. The first fully in-person programme delivered since 2019 attracted huge media interest and community participation from all sectors with culturally diverse events and an event with Offaly Travellers proving hugely popular. Two events 'The Black River of Herself' (Banagher) and 'Near|Fir' (Edenderry) made national news several times, being selected as top pick's in The Irish Times, Journal.ie and RTÉ out of 1,700 events nationwide. Culture Night featured prominently across all local media, making front page of the Offaly Topic.

As well as fifteen events programmed across the County, the big reveal in recent weeks, was the announcement that Offaly's Lough Boora would be the location for RTÉ's live National Culture Night broadcast. Tullamore's Tolú Makay opened the show, in an exciting collaboration between RTÉ, Offaly Arts Office and Music Generation Offaly Westmeath. A choir performing during this year's Culture Night celebration featured children from Music Generation Offaly's Tullamore-based partner primary schools in St. Joseph's N.S. and Scoil Eoin Phóil. Joined by members of the Singfest Regional Choirs, this unique intergenerational choir sang the stunning 'Aye' with

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Tolú Makay, Felispeaks and the RTÉ Concert Orchestra. The performance can be enjoyed on the RTÉ player for those who missed the live show. Culture Night is co-funded by the Arts Council.

### **Áras Exhibition Programme**

The exhibition programme for the Atrium continued to be suspended as a result of Covid 19 restrictions during 2022 and will be reviewed in 2023 with a new policy that will align with the opening of Esker Arts

### **Music Generation Offaly | Westmeath**

MGOW has had a very busy 2022. Starting with year with a continuation of online workshops and classes with face-to-face activity where possible, as restrictions eased, there was a renewed focus on resuming groups and sessions in our school and community partners. From guitar classes, to band development, sessions sprang back into action and over summer 2022, there were camps and groups meeting in Edenderry, Tullamore, Clara and Birr. Young musicians took part in a range of festivals and events including the Edenderry Festival, The Old Fort Festival Portlaoise and of course the Fleadh in Mullingar.

Singfest was back, our first gathering since 2020, and we were delighted to welcome over 350 young singers to our music tent in the grounds of Belvedere House. We were also delighted to showcase some of our young singer songwriters in a unique 'gig' when they had the chance to perform alongside their musician educators. One of the highlights of 2022 has to have been being part of the live broadcast from Lough Boora as part of this year's Culture Night activities. In order to take part, a new, intergenerational choir was pulled together and over the course of 4 rehearsals participants learnt, perfected and enjoyed spending time together before our first outing to a rehearsal at RTÉ's studio 1 in Dublin and of course the broadcast itself from Lough Boora. It was a wonderful opportunity for families and friends to enjoy singing again, and a unique opportunity for generations to sing together. The icing on the cake was getting to sing such a lovely song with Tolu and the RTÉ Concert Orchestra.

### **Creative Places Edenderry**

The Arts Office in conjunction with the national charitable agency, Creative Lives continued to develop the ambitious three-year funding stream led by Creative Lives in partnership with Offaly County Council Arts Office and Edenderry Municipal Council. This ground up developmental project has the potential to galvanise and transform the creative and cultural scene in Edenderry. The project includes a steering committee inclusive of Creative Lives, Offaly County Council Arts Office and Edenderry Municipal District, together with Offaly County Library Service, Creative Edenderry, North Offaly Community Development Network and Edenderry Community Cabin. The ambition of the partners is to facilitate the emergence of a strong cultural identity for the area and

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support sustainable networks and opportunities for cultural engagement and participation. It will aim to achieve this through open, collaborative methods engaging with the community at grassroots level. The project will work in alignment with plans for the new library and art space. In 2022 the programme continued to work with local artists and community groups with the project coordinator stating that one of the strong messages that had emerged from the conversations with the local community is how much they value their own local artists. One such initiative that supported local artists was the 'Dancing Shoes' project, which was able to support a number of dancers from Offaly and farther afield to offer dance workshops to all ages. The workshops offered free of charge. Following these workshops there have already been two new dance classes that have been set up in the town by local dancers. Creative Lives also continued to work with existing initiatives such as the Edenderry Festival and Hullabaloo Festival to collaborate on opportunities for artists and creative engagement.

## **Arts Office Supports**

### **Arts Act Grants**

Sixteen groups from the arts, community and voluntary sectors received grants towards arts activities in their community. The projects were selected based on their ability to provide an innovative and high quality engagement with arts activity within particular community settings and sectors.

### **Festival Arts Grants**

The county arts service disburses grants on an annual basis to a wide selection of arts and cultural festival taking place in Offaly. In 2022, Offaly County Council provided financial assistance, advice and promotional assistance to; Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival, OFFline Film Festival, Traditude, Tullamore International Summer Organ Series, Scripts, Birr Festival of Music and Voice, Tullamore Trad Fest and That Beats Banagher. The Arts Office also lead-out with other festivals such as Hullabaloo Children's Arts Festival in partnership with Birr Theatre and Arts Centre.

### **Arts in Health**

Offaly County Council Arts Office continued to support Anam Beo, Offaly's Arts and Health organization, which promotes arts inclusion through the delivery of comprehensive arts projects for older people in community and care settings. In 2022 *Conversations On Your Doorstep* projects continued to adapt and evolve to suit individuals and groups, to include, *This is Me*, *Music Conversations from Your Chair*, *Occasions* and more. While the ongoing HSE care setting lockdowns are challenging, the artists were able to collect audio recordings, drawings, collages, stories and written testimonials from residents with the help of key staff in Riada House, Tullamore, Birr Community and Nursing Unit and Ballycumber Active Age Group. Projects such as *The Dinner Club*

and 7 have also been showcased at international film festivals and Birr Offline Film Festival. *Still Lives, Still Alive* is an ongoing project with Photographic Artist Veronica Nicholson & five members of Tullamore Camera Club. This body of work collectively explored the participant's surroundings in the everyday. Their group work *Cornucopia* was donated to residents at Ofalia House in Edenderry with a presentation of their work. Their success was celebrated with a supporting booklet, publication, exhibition at Edenderry library and a town centre billboard during Bealtaine and the summer.

Another project *A Town Reads Mitchell* used poems from *The Living Chalice* by Susan Langstaff Mitchell (1866-1926). This was a celebratory cultural & community arts experience supported by Offaly County Council's Creative Ireland Programme. The subsequent poetry trail panels in the surrounding urban area of Birr are a legacy to the social engagements where local townspeople were recorded as they experienced Mitchell's poems.

### **Creative Ireland Projects**

The Arts Office continued to lead on a number of Creative Ireland projects including, Creative Edenderry, Community Open-Call projects, Animation Residency, Lough Boora Sculpture Park.

### **Animation Residency**

Offaly County Council Arts Service, through the Creative Ireland programme, continued to support the Animation Film Residency that enables two film animators to undertake a residency in Birr. This six-month residency offers ongoing mentorship and post-production services and an opportunity to create and showcase new work to audiences of filmmakers and the general public at the OFFline Film Festival.

### **Professional & Voluntary Groups/Individuals**

The Arts Office is a resource for artists and organisations that require advice, direction and information on developing and promoting a project or their practice. This element of the Arts Service continued to be busy in 2022. This element of the service is based on best practice principles in all forms of arts development and is intended to give rise to increased confidence in quality methods and professional approaches.

### **Professional Artists Support Grants**

In 2022 the arts office continued to provide assistance to professional artists from and living in Offaly. Nineteen awards designed to support the development of artist's professional practice were awarded to artists.

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## **Professional Development and Training for Artists**

The Arts Office continue to provide a number of online supports through training opportunities for artists including opportunities provided by external professional agencies such as Visual Artist Ireland. Other supports include the Association of Local Authority Arts Officers collaborating with the Arts Council on, Platform 31 which is a national opportunity that supports an artist from each county to develop their practice in new ways, while be part of a collective of peer practitioners, advisors and mentors. Platform 31 2022 was awarded to Offaly's published writer Ian Maleney.

## **Birr Writers Residency**

The continuation of the successful annual partnership with the St Brendan's House (Tin Jug Studio) in Birr saw five writers awarded with the writers residency in 2022, that included one extra award for a writer to work in schools through Irish as part of their residency.

## **Online Communication Strategy**

The Arts Office continue to engage the public and artists through our online and social platforms, Facebook, twitter and our extensive email distribution databases.

# **Capital Projects**

## **Arts Infrastructure Strategy**

The Arts Infrastructure Strategy for the County continued to be progressed by People Places Consulting: Caoimhín Corrigan and Siobhán O'Malley. The strategy will explore how all the Arts Infrastructure (existing and planned) can be developed in a collaborative and harmonic manner, resulting in a cohesive, complimentary and self-sustaining network of arts infrastructure that is beneficial to the whole county.

## **Birr Theatre & Arts Centre**

Birr Theatre & Arts Centre continued to provide an extensive arts programme through its annual performance season, its learning and outreach community projects and as an incubation and administrative hub for a considerable number of prestigious arts festivals in Offaly: Birr Vintage and Arts Week, OFFline film festival, Scripts- Offaly film and playwriting festival; Birr Festival of Music and Voice and, as co-producer with Offaly County Council of the Hullabaloo! Children's Arts Festival. During the early part of 2022 Birr Theatre & Art Centre continued to face challenges as a consequence of Covid-19, but rose to the challenge taking care to maintain their presence to their audience, while supporting local artists on the ground. Offaly County Council provided increased funding of €45,000.00 to Birr Theatre and Arts Centre in 2022.



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## **Esker Arts Centre**

The new art centre project continued to make great progress throughout 2022. The development of the new art centre was based upon the agreement from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht confirming the support through Access Funds of €2 million. In addition to this funding €2.5 million was pledged by Offaly County Council. The Board of Tullamore Community Arts Centre pledged to raise a further €500,000 by way of fundraising. The Arts Centre was named 'Esker Arts' in 2022 and a new company, Esker Arts CLG was established to operate the centre. An Artistic Director and other key posts were appointed in 2022. The centre is now due to be completed and opened end 2022- early 2023. The Arts Office continued to assess best practice operational and planning options for the Art Centre and will work closely in terms of strategic development with the new artistic director upon opening.

## **Lough Boora Sculpture Park**

In 2022, the continuing partnership between Offaly County Council (OCC) and Bord na Móna (BNM), endorsed through a Memorandum of Agreement, which set out the basis of a collaborative partnership approach; saw the continued working of the Lough Boora Sculpture Park Management Committee. The purpose of the Management Committee is to establish a framework that will enable evolving an exceptional artistic vision for sustaining and developing the *Sculpture Park* at Lough Boora Discovery Park. This will be to establish the future curatorial direction of the Sculpture Park, at the same time as developing a model of governance and management structures that will be required to support this objective. In 2022 an online seminar took place at the end of May, registering over 240 people for the event, that included national and international speakers across the arts, tourism and business, presenting a film of local participants who had engaged in artist workshops, expressing their own views on the future potential of Lough Boora Sculpture Park. The seminar was the culmination of work being carried out by a partnership between Offaly County Council and Mayo County Council's Arts Office with Visual Artist Ireland and funded by the Arts Council under their Invitation to Collaboration funding stream. The purpose being to explore the intersection between art in the landscape, culture, environment, tourism and social engagement. The research debates the multi-dimensional opportunities across various sectors and shares knowledge from local, national, and international examples of potential and explores co-collaborative ways of working that can inform future initiatives in Ireland and beyond. The Arts Office plan to continue this exploration by applying for continuation funding from the Arts Council for this project for 2023.

## **Edenderry Library and Arts Space**

The Arts Office continued to work in collaboration with the county librarian in the development of plans for a multi-purpose arts space to be incorporated into the planning of the new library for

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Edenderry, this will include developments that take place as part of the Creative Places Edenderry project.

## **Fire Service**

### **Activities in 2022**

Offaly County Council Fire & Rescue Service provided an effective and professional response to emergencies on a 24/7, 365-day basis throughout 2022. Offaly County Council Fire & Rescue Service respond to an average of 600 incidents and 700 station callouts throughout the county.

The Section 26 Fire and Emergency plan formed the basis for the Fire Service work program 2022. The 2022 budget of €3.2 million maintained the Fire Service.

Significant resources have been made available for training within the Fire Service with an expected spend of €150,000 for training alone in 2022. In addition, the Councils commitment to training for fire fighters, and research into the latest equipment and technology, ensures that our fire crews are best equipped to respond quickly, safely and effectively to the full range of emergency incidents that we attend.

During 2022 Offaly County Council Fire and Rescue Service was awarded the 'ISO 45001 Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) Management System' accreditation, which is the world's first international standard for OH&S. ISO45001 aims to provide a safe and healthy workplace for our staff, visitors to our fire stations, contractors, and other parties with whom we interact. It provides a framework, which allows us to continually improve our OH&S performance.

In achieving ISO 45001 certification, Offaly County Fire and Rescue Service is being officially recognised by the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) for demonstrating a high-quality OH&S management system.

Offaly County Council Fire Service is also responsible for the assessment of all Fire Safety Certificates, Dangerous Substances, and Disabled Access Certificate applications, and providing advice on planning referrals, The Service also processes licence applications, undertakes fire safety inspections of public premises and manages fire safety promotion campaigns. Offaly Fire service is actively involved in the Community Smoke Alarm Project and also delivered the Fire Safety Schools program to all primary schools in the county.

The Building Control function of Offaly County Council is integrated into the fire service. This includes the inspection and monitoring of new works to monitor for compliance with all the requirements of the Building Regulations.

Both the Local and the Regional Major Emergency Plans were maintained, reviewed and revised by the Major Emergency Development Committee, the Regional Working Group and the Regional Steering Group.

The Breathing Apparatus Training Centre in Tullamore is utilised for the training of Offaly Firefighters and is leased by other Fire Authorities and non-Local Authority organisations. Funding of €2.1 million has been approved in 2022 to fund the construction of a purpose built regional training centre. Construction is expected to commence in early 2023.

During 2022 Offaly County Council Fire and Rescue Service was also awarded the 'ISO 9001 Quality Management System' accreditation by NSAI.

ISO 9001 is the world's foremost quality management standard, used by hundreds of thousands of organisations in over 170 countries around the globe. It sets out the essential requirements for a practical and effective quality management system which is, in essence, a system for minimising risk.

ISO 9001 certification helps us to continually monitor and manage quality, identify areas for improvement, and provides a framework for improving our processes and procedures.

## **Civil Defence**

Civil Defence provides an emergency response capability and supported the community and events throughout early 2022. Civil Defence had a very busy operational year in 2022 covering many various Duties & Events within the county, running various local courses, and also assisting a neighbouring Civil Defence Unit within our Region.

## Planning & Development

### Development Management

Offaly County Council administers the planning function for the entire county. The number of planning applications within the county has slightly decreased during 2022 but still remains at a significantly higher level than in 2014.

	Estimate to end 2022	Total 2021	Total 2014	Increase from 2014 to 2021
<b>Planning Applications</b>	697 (517 to end September)	831	310	168 %

	Total received to end of September 2022	Total 2021	Total 2014	Decrease from 2014 to 2021
<b>Extension of Duration Application &amp; Assessments</b>	13	13	42	69%

### Overview:

Following on from 2021, the Planning Department has experienced another demanding year with the knock-on effects of Covid 19 remaining a key issue in terms of the delivery of the various planning functions. While the numbers of planning applications across the various development types has decreased slightly, the overall demand on planning services remains significantly high.

To date in 2022, the Planning Section has received and processed a significant volume of pre-planning meetings requests and development queries. With the lifting on Covid restrictions the number of face to face pre-planning meetings has increased, however to date, the majority of pre-planning meetings are conducted online means via Zoom or Windows Teams etc., or by telephone and email. While the planning counter has been open to general queries and viewing files since the full lifting of Covid 19 restrictions in May 2022, many queries are still received by phone and email.

As the pace of the roll-out of the national broadband scheme has increased, so too has the number of Section 254 applications received by the Planning Department from National Broadband Ireland (NBI). This trend is set to continue for the remainder of 2022 and into 2023.

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The Planning Department is also continuing with its scanning project, which allows for current and historical files to be viewed over the internet. This has proved important in terms of compliance with Access to Information on the Environment Regulations. Q1 of 2023 will bring the start of 'e-planning' to Offaly. This is a national initiative to allow the submission of planning applications electronically.

In addition to the above mentioned, the other main areas of focus for Development Management in 2022 were as follows:

**(a) Housing:**

The Planning Department has received and processed a number of large-scale housing developments throughout the County. Tullamore has experienced an increase in the number of housing developments with 3 no. planning applications in excess of 50+ dwellings, submitted for the year to date. The key county towns of Birr, Edenderry and Portarlinton have also seen an increase in the volume of housing proposals submitted. Furthermore, the Planning Department has received an increased number of planning applications for multiple housing unit proposals located in the towns of Clara, Ferbane, Daingean and Banagher.

The number of rural one-off houses and small minor domestic extensions/additions planning applications has remained constant throughout 2022 to date.

**(b) 'Green Energy' Applications:**

Similar to 2021, the Planning Department has experienced an upward trend in the volume of large scale green energy-related developments and pre-plan meeting requests submitted during 2022. These include a number of large solar farm proposals, battery energy storage facilities, biomass storage facilities, large-scale greenhouse proposals, gasification plants and a pilot hydrogen plant proposal. In particular, there has been a continued rise in the number of solar farm planning applications (totalling in excess of 350 hectares) lodged/assessed in 2022.

**(c) Strategic Housing Developments (i.e. over 100 houses):**

The Strategic Housing Development Planning Legislation was replaced in December 2021 by legislation for Large Scale Residential Developments.

**(d) Large-Scale Residential Developments (LRD)**

Since the start of 2022, Housing Developments over 100 units in size have reverted to being adjudicated by Local Authorities. This process has introduced statutory provisions, in

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particular in relation to pre-planning and has impacts on resources in both the planning and other sections which input into planning applications. To date, a number of pre-planning requests with respect to LRD proposals in have been received by the Planning Department. In addition, the first LRD application is to be lodged to the Planning Department in October. It is anticipated that further LRD applications will be submitted by the end of the current year.

**(e) Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) Applications:**

On foot of pre-planning meetings for developments such as large scale wind farms, grid connections applications and substations proposals, it is expected that an increased volume of Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) applications may be lodged to ABP for developments in County Offaly by the end of 2022 or the start of 2023. These applications will require detailed referrals/report to be issued to the Board and will require significant staff resources

**(f) Unfinished Housing Developments & Taking in Charge Applications**

The Planning Department, in conjunction with the Housing, Roads, Water Services and Environment Departments continues to implement the DECLG's Managing and Resolving Unfinished Estates Guidelines. 33 no. estates have been removed from the Department of Housing Planning & Local Government's Survey of Unfinished Housing Developments since 2012 resulting from developers undertaking the necessary works, site development inspections and meetings, facilitation (i.e. targeted release of bonds) and pursuing site resolution plans during this period.

A number of new proposals to take in charge private housing estates have been received this year. Currently there are 8 no. estates being prepared under the Local Authority's taking in charge policy, for presented to the elected members for consideration.

In addition, there are a number of housing estate, which are in the process of being finalised with a view to the Council taking them in charge. This process is ongoing and it should be noted that this is resource and funding dependent and that no additional funds have been issued at a national level for taking in charge of private housing estates or the completion of unfinished housing estates in recent years.

**(g) Vacant Sites Register – the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act, 2015.**

The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 introduced the vacant site levy, to incentivise the development of vacant or idle sites in urban areas. A Vacant Sites Register was created but no sites have been entered on the register to-date as OCC considered that many of the potential sites were also those which were actively forming part of URDF & RRDF applications. The Vacant Sites Register will be replaced by the Residential Zoned Land Tax,

which is being introduced under the Finance Act 2021.

**(h) Leave to Apply for Substitute Consent and Substitute Consent Applications**

In 2022, the Planning Department received 3 no. referrals from the Board in relation to Leave to Apply for Substitute Consent applications for historical peat extraction. These referrals required a significant technical input and staff resources in order to process and issue within the prescribed referral period. Furthermore, if the Board permit the Substitute Consent applications, this will require significant multi-disciplinary resources and management in order to process the Substitute Consent referral with the prescribed time period.

**(i) Enforcement & Compliance**

Enforcement activity in the year 2022, in comparison to previous years, is outlined in the table below.

	To end September 2022	To end September 2021	Total 2021
<b>Warning Letters and (Enforcement Notices) issued</b>	<b>36 (9)</b>	<b>23 (1)</b>	<b>30 (2)</b>

The investigation, regularisation and prosecution of complaints of unauthorised development/s is on-going and continues to be a challenge within the limited resources currently available. It is noted that there has been a marked increase in the number of unauthorised mobile homes, which could be as a direct result of the current housing shortage.

**Forward Planning**

**(a) County Development Plan**

The Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 was adopted 10<sup>th</sup> September 2021 and came into effect 6 weeks later on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2021. It details the overall strategy of the council for the proper planning and sustainable development of the county over a 6-year period. This Plan is being implemented through many of the functions of the local authority.

**(b) Local Area Plans (LAPs)**

The preparation of the Birr LAP commenced in 2022, with the draft going on public display on 15<sup>th</sup> September until 28<sup>th</sup> October during which submissions could be made.

The review of the Edenderry LAP also commenced in 2022, with the pre-draft consultation stage held during September. The draft Edenderry LAP will go on public display by 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2023.

Both LAPs will include Local Area Plans prepared in-house with the purposes of integrating landuse and transportation.

**(c) Residential Zoned Land Tax (RZLT)**

The RZLT was announced in Central Government's Budget 2022 and was introduced into Part 22A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 by the Finance Act 2021. The principal purpose of the RZLT is to encourage the timely activation of zoned and serviced residential development land for housing. The Ministerial Guidelines titled '*Residential Zoned Land Tax – Guidelines for Planning Authorities June 2022*' clarifies the requirements for planning authorities in relation to RZLT. In order to implement this tax measure, local authorities are required to undertake mapping to identify lands in scope for the tax, with provisions allowing those landowners identified as being within the scope to make submissions and appeal. The draft map of these lands will be placed on public display from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2022 until 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023. Submissions can be received by 11<sup>th</sup> January 2023. A supplementary map must be prepared by 1<sup>st</sup> May 2023. There is a mechanism to appeal against inclusion to An Bord Pleanála on both instances. The administration of the tax will be undertaken by the Revenue Commissioners, with the tax in effect by 2024.

**(d) Miscellaneous**

- Forward Planning will prepare submissions on draft consultation Guidelines and statutory returns relevant to Forward Planning.
- Forward Planning will input into the Tullamore Regeneration Framework and the Tullamore Grand Canal Harbour masterplan.
- Implementation of County Development Plan objectives and Strategic Environmental Assessment objectives.
- Annual Development Plan Monitoring Report (as per draft Development Plan Guidelines) (goes to elected members and on website) – input from Development Management and Forward Planning.



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## **Office of the Planning Regulator Review**

Under its statutory Programme of Planning Reviews under section 31AS of the Planning & Development Act, the OPR initiated its review process of Offaly County Council in April 2022 and the formal notification came in June 2022. The planning section spent large parts of the summer months providing information for the review and staff from the OPR's office visited the council for 2 days in August. The report will issue in due course.

## **Greenways**

€8,500,000 in greenway related funding has been secured since 2018, including approx. €500,000 match funding from Offaly County Council.

## **Connecting People – Connecting Places, Offaly's Walking & Cycling Strategy**

The greenway development since 2017 has been building on the foundation of *Connecting People Connecting Places*, September 2015, which outlines the overall vision for walking and cycling in the county. The Grand Canal Greenway, which is the 'spine' element of the strategy and of the *Midlands Cycling Destination – Offaly*, Feasibility Study 2016 is almost complete. However, recent years have been extremely challenging as regards building up a 'pipeline' of planning-ready or shovel-ready projects and further project development delivery will likely be largely dependent on resources from outside the Council.

**Grand Canal Greenway** – the objective is to extend quality, family friendly cycling and walkways along the Grand Canal towpath from Edenderry to Shannon Harbour, including the Kilbeggan Branch. The Council has since 2018 worked in partnership with Waterways Ireland, South Dublin County Council and Kildare County Council to develop a greenway along the entire length of the Grand Canal, from Dublin to Shannon Harbour. Delivery of funding under the **National & Regional Greenway Fund** moved from the Department of Transport to Transport Infrastructure Ireland in late 2021.

In summary, circa 54km of the Grand Canal (main line) Greenway is now in place with 13kms of this 'shared' with road vehicles. In the future, it is planned that this shared element will be reduced to 12kms on very quiet rural roads. Work is underway (Oct 2022) to relocate 5.5km of the greenway route from the south bank of the Canal between Hennesey's B. and Pullough to the much quieter and partially off-road north bank.

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A further circa. 14kms of Greenway (Kilbeggan Branch line) is in place between Ballycommon and Kilbeggan with 7km of this in Co Westmeath. 3kms of this is 'shared' road space.

### **Carbon Tax Fund 2021 – Feasibility Studies**

Offaly County Council received funding for 2 no. feasibility studies under this 2020 fund. The study of the '*Monastic Greenway*' from Shannon Harbour to Athlone *via* Shannonbridge and Clonmacnoise will deliver a Scoping Document in late 2022. Delivery to full feasibility stage under the detailed requirements of Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) greenways planning and the Public Spending Code will require future sources of funding.

The second study has examined the potential of a greenway link from Kilbeggan to Mullingar, thus completing a greenway link from Tullamore to Mullingar. This will be delivered to Stage 1 under the TII Project Management Guidelines in Q4 2022 and thereafter will be taken on by the National Roads Office (NRO) in Westmeath for further examination.

### **Lough Boora Connections – National Just Transition Project**

c.€800,000 was secured in 2021 in respect of a project to upgrade cycle and walking paths in Lough Boora Discovery Park as key linkages between the Grand Canal Greenway and the Discovery Park Visitor Centre. This project is approx. 75% complete as at October 2022.

### **Midlands Cycling Destination - Offaly**

Work is continuing to examine the potential for delivering on the *Feasibility Study for the Development of a Major Cycling Destination in the Midlands of Ireland*, otherwise known as the *Midlands Cycling Destination – Offaly*. This was listed as a key objective in the *Outdoor Recreation Plan for Public Lands and Waters in Ireland 2017-2021*, prepared by various state agencies with public lands in their ownership. Just Transition Funding (National Scheme) was secured in July/Aug 2021 for the development of the Implementation Strategy. Due to resourcing and funding issues, this aspect has not progressed and in May 2022 the Council made an application (through Failte Ireland) for substantial EU JTF funding to progress same. Project management of this Implementation Strategy would be very resource-intensive as it is essentially a study with the entire county as its site area and also because of the associated public and stakeholder consultation, environmental and other assessments, budget management etc. which would be required.

Funding to construct the 'urban' section of the Grand Canal Greenway through Tullamore (1.2km) to include a Canal Waterfront Boardwalk, has been allocated under the **Urban Regeneration and Development Fund 2018**, subsequent to a detailed application by the Council. It is anticipated that this will be a showpiece of the Grand Canal Greenway.

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## **Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike (MTB) Trails**

During 2022, construction of the Slieve Bloom Mountain Bikes Trail continued in both counties Laois and Offaly with 32kms built in Offaly and 13km in Laois (as of Sept. 2022). Council staff continue to sit on a steering group with Coillte in respect of this project's continued development.

Offaly County Council was successful in securing €500,000 funding (with match funding of €250,000 from the Council and other sources) under **Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) 2020**. The project encompasses:

- (i) the 'Route to the trails' link from Kinnitty village – Part 8 planning in place and planned to commence Q4 2022,
- (ii) a 2km Novice Loop in Kinnitty Forest – planed to commence Oct. / Nov. 2022 and
- (iii) 'Rediscovering Castle Bernard's historic bridges and waling routes' – underway and largely complete as of October 2022.

## **Architecture & Conservation**

The Architects Department provides a cross departmental service throughout the County Council, particularly in areas of **Planning, Conservation and Public Realm**. The Architects Department continues to make a significant contribution to the County Development Plan in the running of the Record of Protected Structures (RPS). This includes the upkeep of the multifaceted database, Section 57 Declarations and all planning permission files related to protected structures. Advice and assistance is also given on a regular basis to owners and community groups regarding proposals for the upkeep or reuse of existing protected structures.

Additional projects for planning consist of providing technical advice on large scale planning applications; the production of site specific documents relating to possible future developments.

**Built Heritage Investment Scheme €126,400:** More applications were received in 2022 for this scheme than any other year and almost 50% more received funding. 20 projects were completed varying from roof, window and lime render repairs across the county involving significant total spend of €361,702.95 with total grant of €126,400.

**Historic Structures Fund:** Three projects received funding from the Department and grant allocations involved out, Lowland House (€38k) – window repairs, Tullamore Gaol (€25) - railings and wall repair and Cloneyhurke House (€38k) – arch, steps and render repair.

**Creative Ireland €15,000:** As well as being part of the 5-person team managing the Creative Ireland annual programme, the Architects Department oversees conservation works to a Folly

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project with a Creative Ireland allocation of **€10,000** since the publication of the book *Flights of Fancy, Follies Families and Demesnes in County Offaly* in 2017. The project this year consisted of the structural repairs to Bloomfield Mausoleum. The Vernacular Architecture projects **€3,600**, involved historically accurate windows to a former thatched house in Banagher.

**Follies Trust €3,500:** Repairs of Bloomfield Mausoleum €3,500

**Birr Destination Town €650,000:** Working with Birr MD and Heritage Office and Failte Ireland funding. Working with the team on the design and Planning Application by Howley Hayes Cooney for the new entrance to Birr Demesne/The Green link – project to commence on site before year-end.

**Birr Courthouse:** Working with Heritage Office and Birr 2020 regarding uses and plans for future RRDF application.

**Heritage Council Stewardship Funding NEW: €15,000** approved for OCC, 4 Offaly projects. Funding includes edits and printing costs for new publication - Traditional Architecture in Offaly by Rachel Mc Kenna, to printer October 2022, c.286 pages. Hawkswood Dowry Chest – repairs €1,300. Lime Workshop Birr Heritage School.

**Community Monuments Fund €100,000:** Emmel Castle roof repairs underway to be monitored by Architect, €85,000 funding. Department meeting on site – secured additional €15,000 funding for this project bringing it to the maximum grant of €100,000

## Heritage

The Heritage Office works with the Offaly Heritage Forum to deliver the **Offaly Heritage Plan 2017-22**. The 5<sup>th</sup> Offaly Heritage Plan was adopted at the September Council meeting for the years 2023-27. The forum meets four times a year and its members are from state agencies, council staff and NGOs.

The National Heritage Council provides funding towards the running of the Heritage office (25%) and also gives an allocation towards the delivery of the Offaly Heritage Plan of €37,000. This year the funding went towards the streetscape surveys in Birr and Tullamore and Communications. The Heritage office has one full time officer and part time administration support.

**Decade of Centenaries** funding of €56,000 was received in 2022 and a comprehensive programme of publications, videos, blogs, and material hosted on the website has been developed in

partnership with Offaly History. There has also been a programme to support Crinkill Tidy Villages mark the 100 years since the closure and burning of Birr Barracks and to support a number of YouTube videos curated by Stephen Callaghan.

**Creative Ireland** - Creative Ireland 2017-22 places creativity at the centre of public policy focusing on projects that are collaborative involving the arts, heritage and libraries with strong community reach. The Heritage Officer is the county coordinator working with the team from the Arts Office, Architect, Library Service, Community and Local Development and the Local Enterprise Offaly. In 2022 €202,000 has been allocated to the diverse range of programmes and a new five-year programme has been drafted.

**Offaly Archives Service** – along with the county librarian the heritage officer is on the SLA working group with Offaly History to support the delivery of the Offaly Archive Service.

**Just Transition Medieval Churches Conservation and Pollination Project €880,000**

This is a joint project with Laois County Council from 2021 to 2023, conserving a medieval church in each MD and managing the area for pollinators. The three Offaly churches are Kilmurryely in Birr MD, Kilbride in Tullamore MD and Monasteroris in Edenderry MD. Much preparatory work is done and conservation works will commence in Monasteroris in Q4 2022 with the two other churches following in 2023.

**Community Monuments Fund c. €350,000** - Offaly received support for conservation works at four sites in Offaly in 2022, Emmel Castle, Seir Kieran Monastic Site, Castlearmstrong and Kilcomin church near Shinrone. Conservation works have been arranged at all four sites. In addition Offaly County Council supported the geophysical survey of the enclosure at Seir Kieran and a video documenting progress.

**Maintenance of Medieval Churches and Burial Grounds** - A maintenance programme has been put in place for medieval churches that have been conserved including Lynally, Lemanaghan, Drumcullen, Kilbride Clara, Croghan.

**Clonmacnoise** – the OPW have appointed consultants for the Clonmacnoise master plan and the heritage officer will represent the Council on the steering group.

**Publications** – In 2022 Offaly County Council will publish *Traditional Architecture in Offaly* by Rachel McKenna and the *River Camcor* by John Feehan. Support was given to *St Manchan's Shrine* by Griffin Murray and Kevin O'Dwyer; *John de John Frazer* published by Offaly History and *Alderborough*

Nursery by the O'Rourkes through the Creative Ireland programme. A book on the memorials at *Kilcomin Graveyard* by Stephen Callaghan is in the final stages of preparation.

**Biodiversity** - Under the **Local Biodiversity Action Plan** funding was allocated towards the following projects:

**Syngefield Demesne** – planting of native trees as part of the Camcor River walk and to increase the biodiversity of the area while respecting the landscape demesne features.

**Invasive Species** - Offaly has two main invasive alien species which are being tackled by the County Council. The species Himalayan Balsam was noted spreading on the Camcor and Little Brosna Catchment and work continued to removal the plant. The second species is Japanese knotweed which has been tackled by Offaly County Council for the past decade. Work continues to combat this destructive plant and to try and contain it, involving annual treatment and a mapping programme along with contacting private landowners where the species is noted.

**In Your Nature** podcast series and awareness informercials on Midlands 103.

A **County Barn Owl survey – phase 2** -undertaken by BirdWatch Ireland to monitor and survey barn owls.

**Appointment of Biodiversity Officer** – was approved by the Heritage Council with funding and recruitment has commenced. This is a major milestone for delivering the biodiversity remit within Council

**Lough Boora Sculpture Park** -The heritage officer is on the working group of 3 Council and 3 Bord na Mona representatives to manage the sculpture park and is involved in the reports currently being undertaken.

**Camcor River Study** – the Heritage Officer is part of the team working with Birr 20:20 community group on this study on managing the Camcor and its banks between Springfield Bridge and Croghan Bridge planning a walking route from the town.

**Tidy Towns Network** – providing support to Tidy Towns including Birr in the *Best Kept* Competition and Geashill in the *Pride of Place* competition.

**Access to heritage** -The very successful series of *Wildflowers of Offaly* and *Story of the Bogs* YouTube videos continued in 2022 along with support for the **In Your nature** podcast by BirdWatch

Ireland. The Offaly Naturalist's Field Club summer school was once more held in July 2022 and focused on the Camcor River.

**Heritage Week** - the 9 days of events were back in person with over 40 events hosted predominantly by community groups. The **Annual Offaly Heritage Seminar** is planned for Friday 18<sup>th</sup> and Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2022.

**3d scans** of many of the high crosses and monastic sites in Offaly are now hosted on Sketchfab which is easily accessible. This new Offaly Heritage site is complemented by many Offaly sites featured on the Archaeology of Ireland Sketchfab page.

## **Legislation / Guidelines received in 2021 and / or expected in 2022**

### **Legislation 2022**

Planning and Development Act (Exempted Development) Regulations 2022

Planning and Development Act 2000 (Exempted Development) (Number 2) Regulations 2022

EU (Planning and Development) (Displaced Persons from Ukraine Temporary Protection) Regulations 2022

### **Guidelines 2022**

- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities DHLGH
- Guidance on technical land-use planning advice – for planning authorities and COMAH establishment operators, by HSA
- Guidelines on the information to be contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports, by EPA
- Residential Zoned Land Tax – Guidelines for Planning Authorities
- Development Plans Guidelines for Planning Authorities

### **Strategies / Plans etc. 2022**

Town Centre First – A Policy Approach for Irish Towns by DHLGH and DRCD

National Sustainable Mobility Policy, Dept. of Transport, 2022

### **Circulars 2022**

- Circular Letter PL 02/2022 re: Planning and Development Act (Exempted Development) Regulations 2022 (S.I. 75 of 2022)

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- Circular Letter: EUIPR 01/2022 re Adoption of updated Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities and Update to the Government's Website with information on SEA
  - Circular PL 01/2022 re: Timeline for determining compliance condition submissions from developers
  - Circular Letter EUIPR 02/2022 re: the Planning and Development Act 2000 (Exempted Development) (Number 2) Regulations 2022
  - Circular Letter NRUP 03/2022 re Development Plan Guidelines
  - Circular Letter NRUP 04/2022 re Planning and Development, and Maritime and Valuations (Amendment) Act 2022 – commencement of amendments affecting Ministerial Directions on development plans and local area plans in the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)
  - Circular Letter EUIPR 3/2022 re EU (Planning and Development) (Displaced Persons from Ukraine Temporary Protection) Regulations 2022
  - Circular Letter PL06/2022 re Planning Applications – Site Layouts, plans, maps and drawings.

**Expected in 2023:**

- Places for People – National Policy on Architecture (stated in Town Centre First Policy)
- A National Strategy for People with a Disability (stated in Town Centre First Policy)
- Revised windfarm guidelines
- Sustainable rural housing guidelines updated (in Q4 2021 according to page 87 Housing for All)
- Guidelines on water framework directive
- Density guidelines
- Guidance on the reuse of existing buildings for residential purposes
- Revised / amended childcare facilities guidelines
- Sustainable and Compact Settlement Guidance – Q4 2021 (according to page 78 of Housing for All)
- The General Scheme for the Land Value Sharing and Urban Development Zones Act
- The Development of Residential Care Homes and Primary Care Centres
- Revised Apartment guidelines – in 2025 (according to page 86 of Housing for All)
- Revised building height guidelines - in 2025 (according to page 86 of Housing for All)
- Revised Development Management Guidelines – in 2022 (in Q4 2021 according to page 87 Housing for All)



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- Guidance on achieving the most appropriate tenure mix within communities, including guidance on engagement with communities – Q2 2022 (according to page 123 of Pillar 5 of Housing for All)

### Areas of Activity for 2023

In addition to the normal activities of Development Management, Forward Planning, Architecture, Conservation & Heritage, Enforcement, Derelict Sites, Vacant Sites, Unfinished Housing Developments and Taking in Charge of developments, the following are the main major items of activity envisaged for 2023:

- Residential Zoned Land Tax (RZLT); submissions and appeals relating to the Draft Map, Supplemental Map and associated submissions and appeals, Final Map.
- Adoption of Birr Local Area Plan 2023-2029.
- Adoption of Edenderry Local Area Plan 2023-2029.
- Commence review of the Portarlington Joint LAP 2018 – 2024.
- Commence preparation of Tullamore Local Area Plan 2024-2030.
- Variations of County Development Plan relating to Birr and Tullamore zoning objectives map after adoption of respective LAPs.
- 2 Year Progress Report on the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027.
- Attempting to progress the delivery of the *Major Cycling Destination in the Midlands of Ireland*, otherwise known as the *Midlands Cycling Destination – Offaly*, in conjunction with Bord Na Móna, Coillte, Waterways Ireland, adjoining Local Authorities and funding agencies, in particular Failte Ireland.
- Continue to make progress on resolving Unfinished Housing Developments
- The ongoing investigation, regularisation and prosecution of complaints of unauthorised development/s through enforcement.
- Monitoring of residential development by maintaining a continuous record in accordance with objective CSO-01 of the CDP.
- Input into various and emerging tourism and amenity projects/initiatives.
- Large Scale Residential Developments – statutory and time bound procedures for pre-planning meetings and the subsequent administration and assessment of all housing applications of all sizes.
- Conduct a review of the list of registered / Section 261 quarries in the County (subject to resources).
- The processing of Leave to Apply for Substitute Consent and Substitute Consent referrals from the Board with respect to historical peat extraction .

- Assessment of the NBI Broadband Roll-out through Section 254 Applications submitted across the County
- Managing the electronic submission of planning applications through the roll out of the National e-planning Portal

## Regeneration

The Regeneration Team continues to engage with the communities, stakeholders and local representatives to establish and develop possible projects for funding under the various regeneration schemes. The team coordinates with all sections within Offaly County Council to deliver successful, existing projects. Project development is ongoing to prepare for future calls of the various funding streams.

### **Town Regeneration Officer:**

Offaly County Council has appointed a Town Regeneration Officer. Town regeneration officers will be crucial in managing the implementation of the Town Centre First Policy at a local level and ensuring the development and implementation of Town Centre First plans. A national Town Centre First office will drive the delivery of many of the recommendations outlined in the policy and support the coordinated roll-out of the policy by local authorities, town regeneration officers and town teams.

### **Town Centre First, Clara 2021:**

Urban Agency Architects Ltd. were appointed as the successful tenderers, on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2022, to prepare the Clara Town Centre First Plan.

The Clara Town Team has been established with members representing the following groups supported by Offaly County Council:

- Community Council
- Heritage Society
- GAA
- Tidy Towns
- Family Resource Centre
- Roman Catholic Church
- Church of Ireland
- Local Primary Schools
- Local Business Owners
- Local Councillors

- Chamber of Commerce

The initial stages of the plan-making process has commenced with the Project Team from Urban Agency, representatives from Tullamore MD and Offaly County Council's Regeneration Team meeting with the Clara Town Team, on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> August 2022.

The Consultants are currently in the process of preparing the Inception Report for the plan, based on information and data gathered at this meeting and directly from Offaly County Council. Presentation of the Inception Report, including the Communication and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy, will mark the completion of the First Stage of a Six Stage process.

## Rural Regeneration Development Fund

### Rural Regeneration & Development Fund (RRDF) 2021

**Edenderry** – Based on the completion of a comprehensive Blundell Master Plan publication a successful application was awarded for a RRDF Category 2, application "Edenderry Regeneration Phase II" to include the demolition of the Old Tesco site, 33/34 JKL Street, now complete, design consultancy services for a new community library and arts base, Sean Harrington Architects now appointed and land acquisition, ongoing including assessment of community/social/leisure uses for this land.

Edenderry Regeneration Phase II – pending RRDF 2021					
Total cost	€2,686,760	Grant secured	€2,149,408	Match funding	€537,352

### Rural Regeneration & Development Fund (RRDF), Category 1 ('Shovel ready'), 2019

The Edenderry Regeneration Phase I, Link Street application was successful as a Category 1 RRDF project in 2019 and is now complete an operational. This project consisted of the construction of a new Link Street, between Granary Court and Fair green to open up access to backlands of opportunity sites, Old Tesco Site, William Wallers Store and OPW lands as well as improving connectivity and permeability for Edenderry Town

Edenderry Regeneration Phase I – awarded RRDF 2019					
Total cost	€ 769,277.43	Grant awarded	€ 576,958.07	Match funding	€ 192,319.36

## Rural Regeneration & Development Fund (RRDF), Category 2 2020

Banagher Regeneration was successful and is progressing. Consultants have been appointed to provide for an Architectural and Tourism Master Plan for Banagher Marina and Environs and the second public consultation of this process is now complete. Further project elements were explored with the DRCD and the Royal Shannon Hotel is now being acquired for development as a civic led building with a reflective increase in the grant also approved.

Banagher Regeneration – awarded RRDF 2020					
Total cost	€ 606,047	Grant awarded	€ 454,535.25	Match funding	€ 151,511.75

## Rural Regeneration & Development Fund (RRDF), Category 2 2021

Ferbane Regeneration – was successful in securing a grant for the acquisition of St Joseph's Convent and costs for the Design Team to develop the Convent and lands into a multipurpose community/social/enterprise building. In consultation with the community meanwhile uses in the convent are being explored.

Ferbane Regeneration – pending RRDF 2021					
Total cost	€ 683,000	Grant pending	€ 546,400	Match funding	€136,600

There are no calls currently for RRDF applications. Next calls are expected in 2023.

## Town & Village Renewal

### (a) Town and Village Renewal 2019

11 no. TVR applications were submitted in 2019, the following 5 were successful

Municipal District	Project	Total Cost	Grant awarded	Match funding
Edenderry	Blundell Park, Edenderry – amenity enhancement	€250,000	€200,000	€50,000
Birr	The Green, Birr – public realm enhancements	€250,000	€200,000	€50,000
Birr	Crinkle – public realm enhancements	€125,000	€100,000	€25,000
Birr	Shinrone – Phase II of public realm enhancements	€125,000	€100,000	€25,000
Tullamore	Mount Bolus – Public realm enhancements	€125,000	€100,000	€25,000

Offaly County Council has completed both Birr projects and Mount Bolus, Shinrone and Blundell Park, Edenderry are nearing completion.

**(b) Town and Village Renewal 2020**

During 2020, the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, was tailored to address the emerging challenges associated with COVID-19. This introduced a new strand of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme for 2020 that focused on immediate interventions that could be delivered in the short-term to assist towns and villages to adapt to COVID-19. This new Strand is titled the "Accelerated Measures in Response to COVID-19" and consisted of 3 rounds of funding to which the following projects were successful:

**Round 1 (submitted 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2020) "Accelerated Measure in Response to COVID-19" - Grants awarded**

Municipal District	Project	Grant awarded	Match funding	Total Cost
County	Shop Front Scheme covid 19 TVR 2020 R1	€40,000	€5,000	€45,000
County	Covid Capacity Scheme covid 19 TVR 2020 R1	€25,000	€3,000	€28,000
Birr	Shannonbridge Tourist office public realm works covid 19 TVR 2020 R1	€25,000	€3,000	€28,000

**Round 2 (submitted 14<sup>th</sup> Aug, 2020) "Accelerated Measure in Response to COVID-19" - Grants awarded**

Municipal District	Project	Grant awarded	Match funding	Total Cost
County	Broadband connection points x6 Covid 19 TVR 2020 R2	€40,000	€5,000	€45,000
Edenderry	Edenderry, O'Connell Sq. Covid 19 TVR 2020 R2	€40,000	€5,000	€45,000
Birr	Birr geodome tents x4 festival equipment	€25,000	€3,000	€28,000
Tullamore	Killeigh Green public realm Covid 19 TVR R2	€25,000	€3,000	€28,000
Birr	Clareen public realm covid 19 TVR 2020 R2	€25,000	€3,000	€28,000
Birr	Lusmagh public realm covid 19 TVR 2020 R2	€25,000	€3,000	€28,000

**Round 3 (submitted 28<sup>th</sup> Aug, 2020) "Accelerated Measure in Response to COVID-19" - results awarded**

Municipal District	Project	Grant awarded	Match funding	Total Cost
Tullamore	Tullamore Millennium sq enhancement	€40,000	€5,000	€45,000
Edenderry	Daingean Town Square enhancement	€40,000	€5,000	€45,000
Tullamore	Clara River picnic amenity area	€25,000	€3,000	€28,000
Birr	Ferbane pop up Urban garden	€25,000	€3,000	€28,000

Birr	Ballycumber River walk	€25,000	€3,000	€28,000
Edenderry	Geashill Picnic area	€25,000	€3,000	€28,000

These projects are now all complete.

The general Town and Village Scheme 2020 increased the maximum number of applications permitted per Local Authority from 6 to 10 based on the July stimulus package. 10 no. applications were prepared and submitted to the Department on 30<sup>th</sup> Sept, 2020 and the following were successful:

Municipal District	Project	Grant awarded	Match funding	Total Cost
Tullamore	Mountbolus phase II public realm enhancements	€100,000	€12,000	€112,000
Tullamore	Mucklagh public realm enhancements	€100,000	€12,000	€112,000
Edenderry	Cloneygowan public realm enhancement of the green	€100,000	€12,000	€112,000
Edenderry	Kilmalogue public realm enhancements	€100,000	€12,000	€112,000
Edenderry	Daingean phase II public realm enhancements	€100,000	€12,000	€112,000
Birr	Ferbane public realm enhancement of Fairgreen	€200,000	€23,000	€223,000
Birr	Pollagh public realm enhancements	€100,000	€12,000	€112,000

Offaly County Council are progressing these project currently with a completion expected in 2023.

**(c) Town and Village Renewal 2021**

In 2021 6 no. applications were prepared and submitted to Department in July 2021 and the following were successful

Municipal District	Project	Grant awarded	Match funding	Total Cost
Tullamore	Killeigh Community Centre Development	€250,000	€35,000	€285,000
Birr	Ballyboy amenity and public realm	€100,000	€15,000	€115,000
Edenderry	Clonbullogue pedestrian bridge and amenity enhancement	€100,000	€12,000	€112,000
Edenderry	Walsh Island Project development measure	€36,000	€4,000	€40,000

Offaly County Council are progressing these project currently with a completion expected in Q4 2023.

**(d) Town and Village Renewal 2022**

In 2022 9 no. main scheme applications were prepared and announcements are pending.

Municipal District	Project	Grant pending	Match funding	Total Cost
Birr	Kilcormac – redevelopment of Old Fiesta Hall	€500,000	€60,000	€560,000
Birr	Shinrone – redevelopment of Old Shinrone Library	€250,000	€30,000	€280,000
Birr	Birr Market Square Plaza	€250,000	€30,000	€280,000
Tullamore	Tullamore Park Water Feature and River Enhancement Projects	€250,000	€30,000	€280,000
Tullamore	Rahan amenity and footway enhancements	€250,000	€30,000	€280,000
Edenderry	Edenderry Canal Harbour refurbishment	€250,000	€30,000	€280,000
County	Marketing County Digital Hubs county side	€50,000	€6,000	€56,000
Birr	Moneygall project development measure	€50,000	€6,000	€56,000
Edenderry	Daingean Town Hall project development measure	€50,000	€6,000	€56,000

A new strand of TVR in 2022 was a **Building Acquisition Measure**, which allowed a grant for the Council to acquire maximum of 2 vacant/derelict town centre properties for redevelopment for community use only. In consultation with the Community Development groups in Moneygall and Ballyboy 2 such properties were selected and a Letter of Understanding has been signed with the DRCD to acquire a property in Ballyboy and Moneygall subject to terms and conditions.

There are no calls currently for TVRS applications. Next call is expected in 2023.

### Streetscape Enhancement Measure

Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> August, 2022 Minister Humphreys announced the successful nominated towns under the Streetscape Enhancement Measure 2022. Clara is Offaly's town for this Measure in 2022. Only one town per Local Authority is eligible. This Measure supports streetscape improvements such as painting (including murals), signage replacement, shopfront improvement, lighting, and canopies. The Regen team in consultation with Clara Tidy Towns have successfully received approximately 60 applications, 40 of which have been selected and are now pending with the Department.

## *Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure Scheme*

### Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure Scheme 2020

The following project was submitted and was successful in 2020.

Municipal District	Project	Grant awarded	Match funding	Total Cost
Birr	Measure 3 Kinnitty – -‘Route to the Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trails’ -‘Kinnitty Woods Novice-Grade MTB Loop’, and -“Rediscovering Castle Bernard’s Historic Bridges”.	€500,000	€235,330	€735,330

To date, the following has been achieved

- Part 8 now in place
- Tender advertised for “route to the trails” from Kinnitty village
- Novice loop to be constructed by Coillte, ready to commence
- Rediscovering Castle Bernard’s Historic Bridges project complete

### Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure Scheme 2021

The following ORIS applications were submitted in 2021.

Municipal District	Project	Grant awarded	Match funding	Total Cost
Tullamore	Clara River Walk	€200,000	23,000	€223,000
Edenderry	Derrycastle – Project Development Measure: Funding for the preparation of 10-year plan for the site as a basis for future amenity and rural development applications.	€50,000	€20,000	€70,000

Both project applications were successful and are now progressing.

There are no calls currently for ORIS applications. Next call is expected in 2023.

### **Derelict Sites**

A new staff structure has been put in place to tackle property dereliction and vacancy in Offaly’s towns and villages. The unit will update the derelict site register, prioritise town centre and villages with a high level of vacancy, manage and coordinate the various funding schemes to assist property owners of such properties.



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The new rate of Derelict sites levy was risen to 7%, under the provisions of the Planning & Development (Amendment) Act 2018. Some of the properties on the register have been examined by Housing Department with a view to determining if they can be acquired and brought back into use.

### **Croí Cónaithe**

On 14<sup>th</sup> July, 2022 Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage Darragh O'Brien TD announced the new Croí Cónaithe (Towns) Fund. The new fund will provide grants of up to a maximum of €30,000 for the refurbishment of vacant properties for occupation as a principal private residence. Where the refurbishment costs are expected to exceed the standard grant of up to €30,000, a maximum top-up grant amount of up to €20,000 will be available where the property is confirmed by the applicant to be derelict (i.e. structurally unsound and dangerous) bringing the total grant available for a derelict property up to a maximum of €50,000.

Derelict/Vacant unit have received 40 queries about the fund since it was officially launched.

Applications received to date

- 13 application forms with supporting documentation.
- 1 successful application has been approved, 2 pending approval.
- 10 other applications were not approved due to being outside the criteria or due to incomplete application forms.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> September the fund was expanded to allow the provision of funding for applicants to purchase existing serviced sites.

### **Vacant Sites Register – the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act, 2015.**

The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 introduced the vacant site levy, which is intended to incentivise the development of vacant or idle sites in urban areas. In accordance with the Act:

- Work planned for early 2020 on Vacant Sites had to be deferred due to the covid 19 pandemic.
- The next steps are to identify vacant sites, engage with landowners, register vacant sites, and apply a vacant sites levy which now stands at 7%.
- It is noted that that the Government's 2021 *Housing For All* plan proposes to discontinue the Vacant Sites Levy in favour of other mechanisms to bring underused land into development.

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## **Enterprise/Economic Development/Tourism**

In spite of challenging conditions, Offaly Enterprises continue to demonstrate their resilience and ambition. Some LEO Offaly Enterprises making headlines in 2022 include:

- **Interior Acoustics Ltd.**, Winner of Offaly County Enterprise Awards and Best Start-Up at National Enterprise Awards
- **The Factory**, Winner of Offaly County Enterprise Awards Sustainability Award; Winner of Small Green Organisation of the Year Award (Green Awards); Winner of the Small & Medium Business SEAI Energy Awards
- **Biosol**, Winner of Irish Times Innovation Awards – Manufacturing & Design Category, and Winner of Best New Start-Up Offaly County Enterprise Awards
- **Wild Irish Foragers**, RDS Spring Awards – Innovation & Sustainability, Blas na hEireann Chef's Larder Award
- **Garryhinch Wood Exotic Mushrooms**, Blas na hEireann Chef's Larder Award

The Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Offaly is working to deliver Offaly County Council's Mission Statement "To lead sustainable economic, social and community development in Offaly".

LEO Offaly manages the Enterprise, Economic Development and Tourism Functions within Offaly County Council. In 2022, the Section experienced a number of staff changes. There are five members of staff in the Local Enterprise Office, 2 members of staff in Offaly Tourism and 2 Business Development Managers in Offaly Innovation & Design Centre CLG reporting to the Head of Enterprise. The Head of Enterprise reports to the Director of Services for Economic Development and Planning.

### **Key Enterprise Objectives for 2022:**

- Active engagement with clients to support them through pandemic, BREXIT and energy crisis
- Improved business efficiencies, innovation, export and sustainability
- Entrepreneurship Promotion – Student Enterprise, Female Entrepreneurship, Second Career/Senior Enterprise
- Deliver Local Enterprise Development Plan 2021-2024

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## **Key Enterprise Highlights 2022:**

### **Active Engagement with Offaly Enterprises to support them through pandemic, BREXIT and energy crisis**

*LEO Offaly staff proactively reach out to clients and Offaly enterprises to hear about business issues, and to advise the business owners of relevant supports. Business owners are receiving support through targeted mentoring, enterprise and management training, funding, and networking. LEO Offaly also provides consultancy days to assist with business strategy and development. LEO Offaly is actively encouraging business owners to engage with their LEO office when times are going well, and when there are difficulties.*

### **Improved business efficiencies, innovation, export and sustainability**

In 2022, LEO Offaly has been working closely with Enterprise Ireland, TUS and Intertrade Ireland on a range of initiatives to help businesses

- Increased Efficiencies – Green for Micro, LEAN for Micro
- Innovation – Feasibility Study Grants, Agile R&D, IP Start, New Frontier, Innovation Boost, Innovation Vouchers, Business Innovation Partnerships
- Export - Enter the Eurozone, Technical Assistance for Micro-Exporters (TAME), Trade Accelerator Programme, Elevate, Acumen
- Digitalisation – Digital Start, Trading Online Vouchers, You're the Business,

In addition, LEO Offaly is working in collaboration with stakeholders on a number of initiatives arising from the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan, and Midlands Regional Transition Team. These include development of the ICT Cluster and Engenuity Engineering Cluster.

Enterprise Ireland Strategy 2022-2024 strengthens alignment of LEOs with Enterprise Ireland. There will be an increased focus on LEOs developing export-led enterprises.

### **Entrepreneurship Promotion – Student Enterprise, Female**

#### **Entrepreneurship, Second Career/Senior Enterprise**

**Student Enterprise** - LEO Offaly is one of a few Local Enterprise Offices nationally that runs Student Enterprise Programmes at both Primary and Secondary levels. In 2022, for the Primary Level, there were 12 participating schools and 40 participating pupils. At Secondary Level, there were 10 participating schools and 438 participants. Cian Conway of Tullamore College achieved 3<sup>rd</sup> place in *My Entrepreneurial Journey Competition Junior Category National Student Enterprise Awards*.

**Female Entrepreneurship** – In 2022, for the first time in 3 years, National Women's Enterprise Day will feature in person events. LEO Offaly in partnership with the Midland LEOs have a Regional event to promote, develop and support female entrepreneurship.

**Second Career/Senior Enterprise** – LEO Offaly provides a range of training programmes specifically targeted at the over 50s considering self-employment. In 2022, these included an Age Friendly Business Workshop, and courses on VAT Returns & Submissions, Income Tax and Accounting and VAT issues.

### **Deliver Local Enterprise Development Plan 2021-2024**

The implementation of the above plan requires LEO Offaly deliver a wide range of initiatives. The following are in addition to information and advisory services, training and mentoring, financial and other supports:

- Local Enterprise Week – March
- Offaly County Enterprise Awards – March
- Student Enterprise Programme (Secondary Level) - March
- National Student Enterprise Awards - May
- Most Enterprising Student Competition (Primary Level) - May
- National Enterprise Awards - June
- Tullamore Show - August
- National Ploughing Championships – September
- National Women's Enterprise Day – Regional October
- Look for Local - November



### **Offaly Job Fair – Collaborative Action**

Over 650 job seekers from all over the Midlands and further afield flocked to the first ever Offaly Job Fair held in the Tullamore Court hotel on Saturday 2nd July. There were 36 employer stands and over 500 hundred jobs on offer.

The Tullamore and District Chamber of Commerce together with support from the Local Enterprise Office Offaly, Offaly Local Development Company, LOETB, the Technical University of the Shannon and Tullamore and District Rotary Club organised the event.



## **Minister Damien English, T.D. Visit to LEO Offaly**

Minister of State for Business, Employment and Retail, Damien English, T.D., made a visit to Offaly in July where he met with council officials and members of the Local Enterprise Office Offaly team as well as some of our client companies

Minister English said:

*"The importance of the LEO network to local businesses cannot be overstated. They provide a vital service in supporting companies whether it is through training, mentoring or with other important supports. Our new Regional Enterprise Plans are very much region specific, building on local strengths, and in this regard, the LEOs have a hugely important*



*role to play in their success and in helping to drive economic activity here in Offaly."*

### **Key Economic Objectives for 2022:**

- Commission & oversee 5 year Economic Strategy & Action Plan for Offaly 2022-2027
- Develop infrastructural assets – business parks, Grand Canal Dock
- Progress Rhode Green Energy Park
- Develop and expand Co-Working Hubs

### **Economic Highlights 2022:**

#### **Offaly Economic Development Strategy & Action Plan 2022-2027**

Following procurement process, OCO Global Ltd. was awarded the contract to carry out the work. As part of the process, the company engaged and consulted with 70+ enterprises and stakeholders. The strategy & action plan will be completed by Q4, 2022.

#### **Grand Canal Dock Tullamore –**

Following procurement process and confirmation from Dept., the winning tenderer has been selected to deliver the Development Options and Masterplan for Grand Canal Dock Tullamore.

**Industrial Sites** – Further sites sold in Ferbane Industrial Park. Exploring options to purchase more land in Ferbane, and exploring options for new Business Park in Tullamore

**Rhode Green Energy Park:** Two Feasibility Studies nearing completion. Infrastructural works in Park due to commence. New funding award of €49,000 towards developing a framework for an Industrial Eco-Park. LEO Offaly continues to provide Secretariat duties for North Offaly Development Fund CLG, and Head of Enterprise is a Director in the company.

## Co-Working Hubs



In 2022, there was further refurbishment of The Junction Business Innovation Centre through the drawdown of Connected Hubs Grants. Following a procurement process, a Project Manager to drive the Just Transition Fund expansion in the Junction Business Office Suites was appointed.



Stream BIRR was expanded to include additional co-working space with 9 desks and a meeting room. There are 5 tenant offices occupied. Stream BIRR was awarded SIRO Vodafone 1 GB broadband. There have been a number of collaborations between stream BIR, I-LOFAR, DIAS and TUS. These collaborations have provided funding for research graduates based in Birr, working on I-LOFAR data.

E-hive, stream BIRR and The Junction are now TUS Learning Gate Hubs. This will enable TUS students access the co-working hubs for online courses, networking and study. LEO Offaly continues to provide Secretariat duties for North Offaly Development Fund CLG, and Head of Enterprise is a Director in the company.

## Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning Strategy Policy Committee (SPC)

LEO Offaly provides the Secretariat for this Committee. In 2022, 2 meetings were held and the SPC worked through its adopted work programme, covering topics such as:

1. Stakeholder engagement for Offaly Economic Strategy & Action Plan

- 
2. Offaly Heritage Plan
  3. Offaly Tourism updates
  4. Regeneration Schemes and Greenways updates.

### **Local Economic Community Plan (LECP)**

LEO Offaly is responsible for the development and delivery of the Economic goals and actions for the above plan. The Head of Enterprise is a member of the LECP Advisory Steering Group Committee attending regular meetings to progress the writing of the Plan. The Plan will be launched in 2023.

Subject to resources, LEO Offaly will in 2023

- Provide timely and relevant supports to new and existing clients
- Focus on improved business efficiencies, innovation, export and sustainability
- Promote Entrepreneurship across all ages– Student Enterprise, Female Entrepreneurship, Second Career/Senior Enterprise
- Deliver Local Enterprise Development Plan 2021-2024
- Collaborate with stakeholders and industry to deliver the Offaly Economic Strategy & Action Plan 2022-2027
- Co-Ordinate and collaborate with stakeholders to deliver the Economic Element of the Local Economic & Community Plan 2022-2028
- Explore opportunities for developing a new Industrial Park in Tullamore and/or acquiring new industrial lands elsewhere in the County
- Assist in the development of Offaly Tourism to address new Product Development and capability development of Tourism Providers

### **Tourism**

The summer of 2022, while not back to 2019 levels, was a good season for the industry. Although many Irish people travelled abroad, the domestic market remained strong and we started to welcome back international visitors across both leisure and business. Many festivals and events returned, increasing footfall for local businesses and supporting jobs and revenue generation.

Offaly Tourism team continued to work closely with the tourism and hospitality sectors, in promoting Offaly, increasing visitor numbers and dwell time.



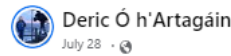
## Media Coverage

The tourism team strongly focused on public relations in 2022, earning great exposure on print media, social media and TV.

The Ireland AM crew descended on Birr for the Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival in July.

Also in July, Helen McGuirk, journalist with the 'Newsletter' newspaper in Northern Ireland visited with her family.

A lovely four-page spread was published in the travel section of this very popular N.I. daily newspaper.



Great fun in Birr; Offaly with all the crew. Be sure to check out their fantastic festival this weekend **Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival**



The September edition of the largest Irish-interest magazine in the world, 'Ireland of the Welcomes' featured a wonderfully written, six-page article on Offaly. Writer Domhnall O'Donoghue visited for 3 days in June and had a lovely experience, which he so eloquently detailed in a great article, to a large worldwide audience.

Birr featured in an excellent piece in the Sunday Times in September. Front page of the 'Home' section of the Sunday newspaper featured Birr, a two-page spread inside plus a website feature. The article detailed why Birr is such an attractive place to live, work and visit, including local testimonials to strengthen the message.

# PHOENIX from the ASHES

From saints to sailors, distilleries to distennoses, County Offaly has it all — including an inspiring resilience, writes Domhnall O'Donoghue

**E**xpelling business, County Offaly's participants, the remnants of the first that dominated were hewn here in 1782 — the result of a war that had no business ending with a chimney in what is thought to be history's first air disaster.

Despite their smoking devastation, Offaly's distilleries to later phobos and, quite literally, rise from the ashes before commencing the rebuilding. Through the worst case of mass in this mythological land, which confuses resurrection and his other death.

The fighting spirit is also evident in the history of the town's most famous export — whiskey (D.M. Enright's story — and named after the saint of Saint Edward's Whiskey, the scholar for moral duties, instrumental to success — his local whiskey retail operations in the town's reputation being recognized in County Cork.

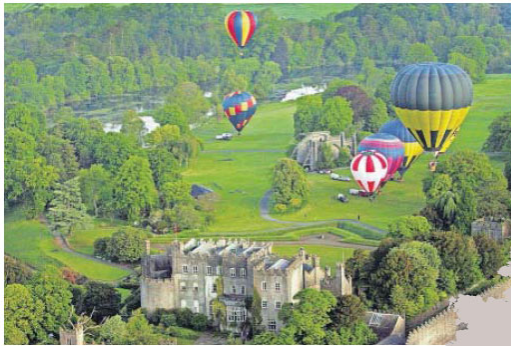
However, after centuries of oppression, William Connaught's spirit of the town, Offaly's 19th-century town, distilleries like — bringing with it a growing, multi-million Euro distillery and distilleries, being the pioneers in the second half selling Irish whiskey globally, with north of 100,000 cases sold annually.

**SLAINTE!**  
Despite the early loss of their ancestor's business, the people here of the town's resilience with an Irish coffee, using the long-accepted practice of ingredients — whiskey, coffee, sugar and cream. One of our heroes, I do this history, resilience and spirit of Offaly's D.M. Enright's story — including the distilleries, export, and even-selling worldwide, where some of our heroes live the calling.

Visions reveal that the distilleries could not be taken or taken — an introducing whiskey to the world. They returned to







Left: hot-air balloons float over Birr Castle. Right: Jonathan Haslam and Jessica Roeske with their organic produce. Below left: jeweller Cathal Barber in his workshop

## Going places



“I love the Vintage Week festival, it's a real draw for the diaspora, with more coming home than even at Christmas

The Irish Hot Air Ballooning Championships returned to Birr with much fanfare in September. The championships are in their 50<sup>th</sup> year and brought worldwide visitors to Birr for the weeklong festivities. The weather may have not been as hoped but Sinead Hussey from RTÉ visited to see what fun could be had! A news feature was broadcast on RTÉ News @ 1pm, 6.1 News & 9pm news on Friday 30<sup>th</sup> September along with a feature on the RTÉ website.



## Sky is the limit in Birr for Hot Air Ballooning Championships

Updated / Friday, 30 Sep 2022 22:51





**Getting away from it all – down on the farm**

Farmers are opening their doors to tourists keen to enjoy an authentic rural experience. **John Whelan** discovers

...and of course, usually, fresh and delicious. The story can be told in a series of photos. The good news is that it's not just the rural farm experience if you couldn't get some homemade jams and scones on the morning. You won't need a watch here, as the farm runs like a clockwork. The day is announced at sunrise by the farm's clockwork making the grounds full and capturing the scenery. Now the cows will graze on the fields for the morning, and the day is announced by a clock, and it's in the name with the clock of the farm. The farm is better in a village, only two fields away in this hidden part of the Norman Way. The clock here behind it all in the morning. It's a happy moment from the day.

The unique experience on staying on a farm was captured John Whelan on the Sunday Independent on 9th October. John featured Offaly's wonderful Mount Briscoe Organic farm, where their exceptional offering did not disappoint. With close to 700,000 readers, it was great exposure for one of our world-class experiences.

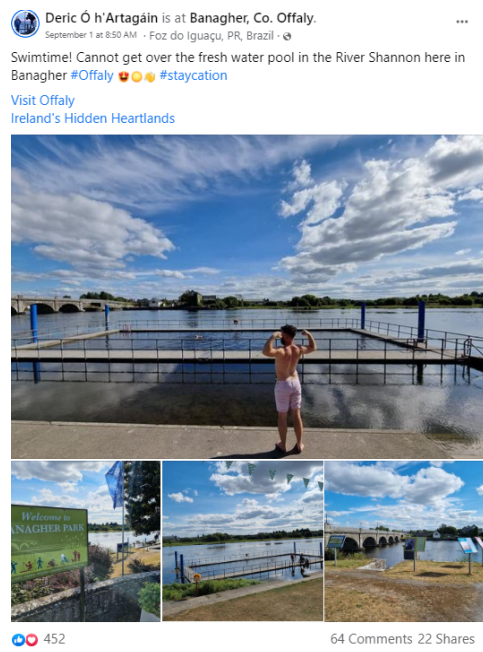
**Radio Campaign**

Once again, a national radio campaign ran for a period of two weeks on Today FM & Newstalk, in May & June, boosting Offaly's profile nationwide. This included a completion giveaway over a weekend on the very popular Alison Curtis Show. A further ad campaign was broadcast on iRadio for a two-week period in June, targeting a younger demographic.

**Digital Marketing**

Offaly Tourism continued to grow its social media presence in 2022, with Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts using the #visitoffaly. Working with a social media consultancy firm, our following and reach has grown significantly YOY. The total number of followers over the social media platforms is in excess of 16,000; an increase of 59% in the last three years.

High profile influencer Deric O' h'Artagain returned to Offaly in August to samples some of our attractions. Deric has a following of over 90k on Facebook and Instagram and it was great opportunity for us to reach a large targeted audience, who are interested in the outdoors.





**Print Advertising**

Offaly specific adverts and editorial were organised for a number of publications in 2022; Your Daily Adventure Guide; 'Your Ireland' Supplement, Celtic Media Group; Summer Breaks in Ireland, Nationalist Paper Group.



**New**

**Visit Offaly Website**

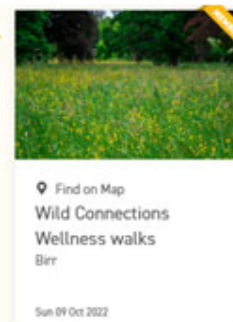
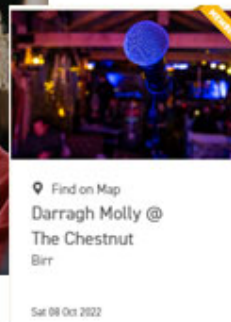
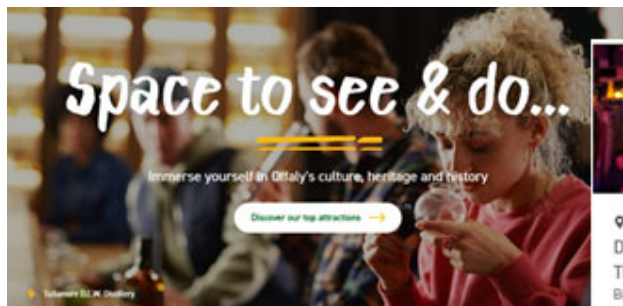
A fresh new look website, [www.visitoffaly.ie](http://www.visitoffaly.ie) went live in September 2022.

The modern, crisp design highlights the best of Offaly in a simple yet effective way.

New imagery showcases locations, businesses and attractions throughout the county, whilst the events guide informs visitors and locals alike on 'what's on' throughout the year. The website also includes blogs, itinerary ideas and trade members section.



**Welcome to Offaly**



**New Offaly Tourism Strategy 2023 – 2027**

The tourism team are undertaking the process of preparing a new Tourism Strategy for the County. CHL Consultants are the appointed consultants working on the strategy document, which will be in place for five-years, from 2021 to 2027. The new Strategy will guide the recovery, growth and development of the tourism sector in Offaly. We aim to have a clearly articulated, measurable and actionable strategy to enable recovery and sustained growth within the tourism sector in Offaly.

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## **Tullamore Show**

With great excitement, the Tullamore Show returned in August after a hiatus of two years. The attractive 'Experience Offaly' Pavilion stood proud, as it welcomed visitors from far and wide, showcasing the best of Tourism, Artisan Food and Crafts. A wonderful opportunity to reach 60,000 visitors and the 'Visit Offaly' stand enticed with a great holiday giveaway.



## **Offaly Tourism Marketing Meetings**

Despite the situation with COVID-19, Offaly Tourism Marketing meetings continued virtually and hybrid throughout 2022. Chaired by Grainne O'Malley there was four meetings held - 26<sup>th</sup> January, 17<sup>th</sup> May, 4<sup>th</sup> October and 22<sup>nd</sup> November. The AGM also took place on 22<sup>nd</sup> November, with a further two directors meetings held in 2022.

The meetings are a great opportunity for the trade to engage directly with the tourism team, giving valuable feedback for marketing activities, campaign development etc.

## **Beyond 2022**

- Completion of the Fáilte Ireland's 'Destination Towns' project in Birr
- New Offaly Tourism Strategy due to be adopted in Q1 2023,
- Works continuing on the Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trails and sections will open throughout 2023 once completed.
- Clonmacnoise Masterplan in progress, expected to be delivered in 2023
- Banagher Marina Master Plan launching in Q4 2022, framing tourism development for Banagher into the future.



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## Just Transition

The Department of Environment, Climate & Communications (DECC) published a ***draft Territorial Just Transition Plan for Midlands Ireland*** at the end of December 2021. Submission were sought on the draft by February 14<sup>th</sup> 2022. The East and Midlands Regional Assembly (EMRA) was announced as the Managing Authority for the forthcoming European Just Transition Fund.

The draft ***Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP)*** was informed by three reports completed by the European Commission's DG REFORM profiling the Irish Midlands and assessing the impact of decarbonisation on the region. All reports and the draft TJTP are available on the gov.ie website.

- Report on Governance and Stakeholder engagement
- Report on the Transition Process towards Climate Neutrality
- Report on Challenges, Needs and Recommended Actions

The draft TJTP was also informed by the EU supported START Technical Assistance programme, which published four reports. These are available on the europa.eu website.

- A Regional Profile
- Midlands Engagement process
- Future employment and skills in the Midlands
- Midlands pathway to Transition

An internal team of senior Offaly County Council staff drawn from Planning, Community and Enterprise assessed the Commission's research reports, START reports and the draft Territorial Just Transition Plan. A submission on the draft TJTP was made on behalf of Offaly County Council as part of the consultation process. The submission included proposals around priority projects in the county that would meet the objectives of the Just Transition criteria. Council management attended online workshops hosted by DECC and EMRA on the draft. A presentation summarising the submission and the anticipated process of finalising the Territorial Plan was made to the elected members at the February Meeting of Offaly County Council. A report on the findings of the public consultation process, and submissions made, were published by DECC and are available on gov.ie. On July 27<sup>th</sup>, the Cabinet agreed a further draft of the Territorial Just Transition Plan for the Midlands, which was then forwarded to the European Commission. The territory to benefit from the Plan was identified as the counties of Offaly, Longford, Laois, Westmeath, Roscommon and parts of Galway, Kildare and Tipperary. The Cabinet also announced that it would match the EU's contribution of €84.5m towards the Just Transition Fund. The East and Midlands Regional Assembly continues to engage with the European Commission on finalisation of the Plan and the development of an associated Operational Programme for the Just Transition Fund.

Other engagements and events;

- May 23<sup>rd</sup> - the Management Team of Bord na Móna met with the elected members of Offaly County Council at Mount Lucas to respond to a discussion paper prepared by the Corporate Policy Group in consultation with all members.
- June 9<sup>th</sup> – European Economic and Social Committee Just Transition Conference – Tullamore
- EU Just Transition Platform for Coal Regions in Transition held conferences online in spring and autumn (see [ec.europa.eu](https://ec.europa.eu))
- The Final Report of the Just Transition Commissioner, Kieran Mulvey, dated December 2021 was published and is available on [gov.ie](https://gov.ie)
- Offaly County Council continued implementation of its projects funded under the Irish Just Transition Fund 2020.

## ROADS 2022

In 2022 the Roads and Transport Department of Offaly County Council have continued to build on delivering new sustainable infrastructure to promote modal shift across our entire County to Walking, Cycling and Zero Emission Vehicle. There has been and will continue to be targeted investment towards our existing infrastructure in order to maintain, upgrade and expand our existing road networks in order to facilitate growth across our entire County.

Our 2022 Roads program included for the following works which are currently at design, procurement, construction or completion stage.

- Annual 2022 Roads Program
- Active Travel Schemes
- NTA Pathfinder proposal
- Zero Emission Vehicle Infrastructure
- Grand Canal Greenway Construction
- Edenderry Inner Relief Road Stage 1
- Edenderry Inner Relief Road Stage 2
- Birr Distributor Roads (North and South)
- Peat Road Pilot Studies(Do Nothing Scenario-€800k/Do Something Scenario 2023 - €1.3 million)
- PLEEP-Public Lighting Energy Efficiency Project

The 2022 grant allocations from Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), the Department of Transport (DOT), National Transport Authority (NTA) and The Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) are set out below, the figures for 2021 are shown alongside for comparison purposes.

### Road And Infrastructure Grants Received In 2022

Initial Grant Allocations	2021 (€)	2022 (€)
<b>Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII)</b>		
<b>National Primary</b>		
Motorway MMarC Lighting	9,117	9,117
<b>National Secondary Improvement</b>		
Major Scheme N52 Tullamore to Kilbeggan Link	1,000,000	0
Minor Works N62 Crancreagh (Cloghan to Derrinlough)	250,000	150,000

Pavement Scheme N62 Corr Hill	n/a	460,000
Pavement Scheme N52 Ballynacard East & West	450,000	n/a
Pavement Scheme HD28 Pavement Renewals	0	TBC (Q2/Q3)*
HD15 & HD17 Minor Works N52, N62 & N80	0	125,000 **
HD15 & HD17 Minor Works Fencing Retrofit (N52/N62/N80)	0	100,000
Local Authority Support (Improvement)	164,000	160,000
<b>National Secondary Maintenance</b>		
Ordinary Maintenance	129,194	129,194
Route Lighting	86,744	75,900
Winter Maintenance	190,000	190,000
Local Authority Support (Maintenance)	30,700	30,700
Local Authority Support (Winter Maintenance)	10,000	10,000
Greenways	0*** (DOT 2021)	€1,323,000***
<b>TII Total</b>	<b>€2,319,755</b>	<b>€2,762,911</b>
<b>Department of Transport</b>		
<b>Regional &amp; Local Roads Grants</b>		
Restoration Improvement	5,707,500	6,190,500
Restoration Maintenance	955,000	955,000
Supplementary Restoration Maintenance	682,000	750,500
Discretionary Grant	1,813,500	1,776,500
Bridge Rehabilitation	344,950	366,975
Safety Improvement Works	300,000	297,700
Specific Improvement Grants	900,000	2,275,000.00
Speed Limits	12,000	16500
Former National Roads	300,000	250000
Active Travel	50,893	-
Climate Adaptation	95,404	320763
Training Grant	47,500	47500
Community Involvement Scheme	735,500	368500
Pilot Scheme testing on roads over peat	40,000	800000



PSCI Survey Support	16,000	16000
Drainage Works	446,993	446993
<b>DOT Total</b>	€12,447,240	€14,878,431
<b>National Transport Authority</b>		
<b>Active Travel</b>		
Transport / Mobility Plans: Tullamore	250,000	146,000****
Tullamore Cycle Network Phase 1	500,000	116,000****
Footpath Improvements Package A: Birr & Crinkill	289,000	377,894****
Footpath Improvements Package B: Clara	470,000	192,525****
Edenderry - Hare's Lane	175,000	75,000****
Footpath Improvements Design Package: Banagher & Cloghan	40,000	38,000****
Tullamore - Spollenstown Road	420,000	116,000****
Countywide Pedestrian Crossings	250,000	246,000****
Portarlington Active Travel Scheme	180,000	173,455****
Safe to Schools Programme - Support Infrastructure: Frederick Street, Clara	70,000	-
Low Cost Urban Junction (tightening) Schemes: Edenderry & Birr	145,000	115,000****
Light Segregation Cycling Scheme: Edenderry	75,000	69,034****
Tullamore Urban Greenway Project	575,000	371,000****
EDENDERRY - R402-1 Junction Upgrade	n/a	240,000
TULLAMORE - Collins Lane Junction - Advance Scheme	n/a	200,000
BIRR - Riverside Walk Upgrade/Link	n/a	285,000
RHODE - Pedestrian Crossings & Footpath	n/a	185,000
MUCKLAGH - Brocca Rd - Junction/Path	n/a	200,000
SHINRONE - Cloughjordan Road	n/a	140,000
BALLYCUMBER - Upgrade Footpath Links	n/a	125,000
Offaly County Council Active Travel Office - Staff Costs	n/a	271,000
<b>NTA Active Travel Total</b>	€3,439,000	€3,681,908
Bus Stops in Tullamore & Edenderry	€140,655	€63,374****
<b>NTA Total</b>	€3,579,655	€3,745,282

Offaly County Council (OCC) has allocated €2,077,130 from own resources. In summary therefore, the 2022 initial Roads Budget is as follows:

2022 Initial Roads Budget	
Transport Infrastructure Ireland - National Roads allocation together with Greenways allocation	€2,762,911
Department of Transport	€14,878,431
National Transport Authority	€3,745,282
Offaly County Council (Own Resources)	€2,077,130
Total	€23,463,754

Offaly County Council also allocates €949,500 for Public Lighting and a central management charge (support services) of €3,161,858.

### **Grand Canal Greenway:**

In collaboration with our partner stakeholders in the TII and Waterways Ireland work on delivering the remaining sections of the Grand Canal Greenway are ongoing. It is envisaged that this critical infrastructural corridor will be completed in its entirety in 2023. Currently works are ongoing on the Pullough to Henseys Bridge section of the Greenway and is due for completion in November.

### **Electric Vehicle Charging Points (DC/Fast Charging):**

The Roads Department of Offaly County Council have been working in partnership with Eir/Easy Go in order to delivery 11 new DC charging points across our County. The proposed scheme is classified as a public private collaboration designed to provide DC charging points across critical nodes on our Roads Infrastructure while also serving our rural communities in order to promote our migration as a County towards Zero Emission transport options.

Offaly County Council have further secured funding from our partners in the Department of Transport's Zero Emission Vehicle Ireland (ZEV) for the installation of two fast charging points at Áras An Chontae and the Machinery Yard in Tullamore as part of a pilot scheme in 2022. An overall investment facilitated by and in some cases delivered by Offaly County Council of approximately €650,000 has provided a foundation for our County to commence the migration towards Zero Emission vehicles.

Birr Distributor Road:

Contracts have been signed between Offaly County Council and Tobin Consulting Engineers for the provision of Technical Consultancy services for the Design and Construction of the

Birr Distributor Road. Design works have now commenced with a view to construction commencing in Q1 of 2024 subject to approvals and funding.

The objective of the proposed Road Scheme is to create a road link between the Tullamore Road (N52) at Woodlands and the Birr to Banagher Road at Cappaneale (R439). This critical link will:

- relieve congestion in Birr Town by providing an alternative to the existing routes through the town.
- provide better access to the national road network for major local industry,
- open up zoned development lands,
- provide improved access to St Brendan's Secondary School,
- allow the tourism potential offered by Birr Castle and the town's historic and unique Georgian town centre to be realized.

### **Edenderry Inner Relief Road:**

Stage 1 of the Edenderry Inner Relief Road was delivered by the Edenderry Municipal District Office in 2022. Stage 2 is currently scheduled to commence construction in early 2023.

### **Birr South Eastern Distributor Road:**

An application for funding to commence Design works on the Birr South Eastern Distributor Road in 2023 has been submitted to the Department of Transport for their consideration.

### **Peat Road Pilot Scheme:**

Tender documentation has been submitted and approved by the Department of Transport for a full reconstruction of 600m of the R400 in Edenderry. There were significant Road Failures on our Roads constructed over Peat subgrades due to the elongated dry spell over the summer. The Department have approved reassignment of the €800k allocation for Peat Roads to address immediate Health and Safety risks across the County. Due to the scope and severity of the failures the Department also allocated additional funding to be targeted to the worst areas to a maximum additional spend of €1.2million. The Peat Road Pilot scheme for the R400 will be tendered in early 2023.

### **Climate Change Adaptation And Energy Efficiency**

Climate Change & Energy awareness continue to be key areas where we show leadership in both promoting public awareness and in changing mind sets towards energy management. Offaly

County Council continues to work in conjunction with the Midland Energy Agency in an effort to achieve the objectives as set out in the 2030 and 2050 targets. The Roads section continues to implement the goals and actions identified in the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy in 2022.

### Areas Of Activity In 2022

Areas of Activity	Objectives Delivered in 2021
Road Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2022 Roads Programme ensuring all TII and DOT grant allocations were used efficiently and economically;</li> <li>• Applied for additional funding where available such as Climate Adaptation and Resilience Works, Active Travel, Outdoor Infrastructure;</li> <li>• Maintained and improved the Road Network making the optimal use of available resources;</li> <li>• Ensured best practice techniques and methodologies are used in road maintenance operations and upgrades;</li> <li>• Continued our programme of upgrading Public Lighting to LED in the interest of energy efficiency;</li> <li>• Continued our bridge rehabilitation programme, develop plans and seek funding for further schemes;</li> <li>• Progressed the Community Involvement Scheme, Local Improvement Scheme and CLAR funded by DOT and DRCD.</li> </ul>
Road Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Road Safety awareness in association with the RSA and Gardai;</li> <li>• Road Safety Initiatives in Offaly;</li> <li>• Road Safety Improvement programme, developed plans and sought funding for further schemes;</li> <li>• Winter Service duties in accordance with Offaly County Councils Winter Service Plan;</li> <li>• Responded to extreme weather events in accordance with Offaly County Councils Severe Weather Plan;</li> </ul>
Zero Emission Vehicle Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Roads Department will have delivered approximately 13 new DC fast Charging EV points across the entire County by the end of 2022. The delivery of this strategically important infrastructure has been realised by direct delivery by Offaly County Council and a public private participation in collaboration with EIR/Easy Go.</li> </ul>

<p>Roads Connectivity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offaly as an important transport link in the midlands progressing the following projects by engagement with TII, DOT and relevant stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- N52 Tullamore to Kilbeggan Link route selection, Public consultation;</li> <li>- N62 Crancreagh peat replacement Minor Works</li> <li>- Edenderry Town Inner Relief Road stage 1 is now open to traffic. Edenderry Town Inner Relief Road Stage 2 tender documentation completed in 2022 with a view towards construction in 2023;</li> <li>- Birr Distributor Road R439 Banagher Road to N52 Tullamore Road specific road improvement scheme;</li> <li>- Birr South Eastern Distributor Road;</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Roads Sustainable Transport Systems</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NTA Active Travel Measures to improve walking and cycling infrastructure in the County;</li> <li>• NTA Safer Route to school Programme;</li> <li>• Pedestrian &amp; cyclist accommodation on our road network;</li> <li>• Development of the Offaly Greenway off road pedestrian &amp; cyclist routes;</li> <li>• Climate Change Adaptation measures to address the impact of climate change on the road network;</li> <li>• New Wheelchair Accessible Bus Stops Tullamore &amp; Edenderry on behalf of the NTA.</li> </ul>
<p>Machinery Yard</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operated and maintained the fleet in a safe and efficient manner;</li> <li>• Implemented the fleet replacement plan and review fleet energy efficiency;</li> <li>• Produced a Decarbonisation Strategy for the Machinery Yard which include a Draft plan towards the introduction of Zero Emission Vehicles into our Corporate Fleet</li> </ul>

All works in 2022 have been assessed with a view to assisting in reducing our Carbon Emission footprint where possible. This reduction can sometimes be achieved by changing the way in which we do our works or the materials which we use to deliver our schemes. The following is a list of changes in 2022 which will be strengthened and build upon in 2023 and onwards;

- Construction of Sustainable, Safe, Green Infrastructure to promote Modal Shift towards Walking and Cycling via our Greenway funding/Active Travel Funding.
- Roll out of Zero Emission Vehicle Fast Charging points across the County.
- Decarbonisation of the Corporate Fleet
- Trial use of Zero Emission Road Marking Materials

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- Utilisation of new Technologies such as the 2 new Velocity Patching Units to decrease our Carbon Footprint when repairing Road Failures.
  - PLEEP-Public Lighting Energy Efficiency Project

## **Road Safety 2022**

As part of the 2022 Roads program Offaly County Council in collaboration with all our stakeholder partners have commenced the review and updating of our counties Road Safety Plan. The works relating to it are ongoing.

## **Key Actions For 2023**

The Roads and Transportation Department of Offaly County Council aim to build upon the many positive outcomes from 2022. It is anticipated that the roads budget for 2023 will be similar to 2022 for both National and Non National Roads. Offaly County Council will continue to engage with the TII, DOT and NTA to secure significant investment for our National, Regional and Local Roads including urban walking and cycling improvements and rural linkages.

A number of schemes that the Road Section wish to progress in 2023 to various stages of approval and funding include:

- Edenderry Inner Relief Road Phase 2;
- R400 Peat Roads Pilot Project;
- N62 Cloghan to Kennedys Cross peat replacement and road improvement TII Minor Works Scheme;
- Birr Distributor Road – R439 Banagher Road to N52 Tullamore Road specific road improvement Scheme, complete the scheme design and formulate Tender Documentation.
- Birr South Eastern Distributor Road – submission to the Department for funding has been completed and it is hoped to appoint Technical Consultancy Services for this scheme in 2023.
- R444 Ballinahown to Clonmacnoise to Shannonbridge specific road improvement scheme secure future funding;
- Progress the Grand Canal Greenway to completion;
- Continue to work with the NTA to deliver Active Travel and Safer Route to Schools schemes in Offaly;
- Safety schemes on National and Non National Road Network;
- Public Lighting upgrades to LEDs through the Public Lighting Energy Efficiency Project;
- Pedestrian Crossings upgrade works including lights to LEDs;

- Engage with DOT following the pilot scheme for peat on bog roads to inform applications for strategic grants and identify additional funding sources for county road maintenance;
- Winter service and severe weather response in accordance with the 2022 - 2023 plans;
- Continue to promote investment and to deliver targeted Electric Vehicle Infrastructure delivery across our Local Authority owned sites;
- Change the methodologies, materials and approaches used to deliver the roads program with a view to Carbon reduction;
- Progress the community involvement scheme, local improvement scheme and Clár funded by DOT and DRCD;

## Health And Safety 2022

Health and Safety objectives were set out at the beginning of the year with the management team after reviewing 2021 both from a local and national level.

The key objectives were:

1. To continue to enhance the safe working environment for all employees of Offaly County Council and members of the public;
2. To ensure that communication between all levels of staff within the organisation relating to health and safety are improved;
3. To continue to work closely with external groups such as the Health and Safety Authority and consider any improvements which are suggested;

Every day staff in Offaly County Council are reminded of the risks they face and how to eliminate or reduce this risk. Nationally, during 2022, 20 fatalities have occurred as of the 24th of October 2022.

Industry	Number of Fatalities in 2021	Number of Fatalities in 2022
Agriculture	10	10
Fishing and aquaculture	0	0
Forestry & logging	1	0
Mining and quarrying	0	0
Manufacturing	5	0
Water supply	2	1
Construction	10	5
Repair of motor vehicles	2	1
Transportation and storage	6	0

Public Administration (Others Arts, Entertainment & Recreation, Education)	2	3
Total	38	20 <i>H.S.A website updated 24<sup>th</sup> of Oct 2022</i>

2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
38	54	47	39	48	48	55	55	47	48	54	48	43	57	67

One of the main targets for 2022 was to enhance communication with staff on accidents/incidents and good practices from other Local Authorities and private companies. This was achieved through monthly safety discussions and through re-fresher health and safety training. Training during 2022 was completed in house and on line or in certain circumstances outdoors. This will continue in 2023.

All work needs to be treated safely and a suitable Safe system of Work agreed and communicated to all staff prior to commencing the works. Another key focus for 2022 has been a focus on transport safety and vehicle management in light of the number of serious incident across the country in 2022.

There was an overall reduction in Offaly County Councils accident ratio in 2022 (as of the 1st of November 2022) when compared to the same period in 2021.

Senior management continued to provide leadership in order to raise the profile of safety within Offaly County Council. A key focus in 2022 involved safety discussion with all staff and additional line manager meetings with staff. An internal seminar was carried out in Quarter 1-2 2022 with all line managers setting out the targets and the key health and safety points for 2022.

The management team and senior management group carried out a number of inspections during the year, this will remain a key focus for 2022 along with tracking the number of inspections carried out by each department and directors attending key quarterly health and safety meetings in their departments.

An internal health and safety inspection by the management team are scheduled for the last quarter of 2022 and the key findings will be closed out by the relevant departments. Offaly County Council are involved in Construction Safety week also during 2022.



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A health and safety review will be completed in full in early 2023 and this will be used to set out the targets and areas for improvements in 2023.

## **Climate, Environment and Water Services**

### **Climate Change**

Offaly County Council have commenced preparatory work associated with the statutory Local Authority Climate Action Plan as set out in legislation by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021. This will be a 5 year plan which will set a roadmap for the organization taking decisive action to reduce our emissions to 51% while increasing energy efficiency to 50% by 2030 and reaching net zero by 2050. The Climate Action Plan will follow statutory plan making processes involving Stage 1 Initiation i.e. stakeholder engagement and building the evidence base, Stage 2 Draft Plan i.e. publication, public consultation and collating submissions and finally Stage 3 Completion i.e. addressing submissions, adoption of the draft plan and final publication. It is envisaged that the draft plan will go before the elected members for adoption in late 2023.

Offaly County Council continue to implement our Climate Change Adaptation Strategy adopted in 2019. The purpose of the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy is to ensure a proper comprehension of the key risks and vulnerabilities of climate change, ensuring that climate adaptation considerations are mainstreamed into all plans and policies and integrated into all operations and functions of Offaly County Council. Significant progress is being made across a range of our 88 actions contained within the CCAS and reported upon annually.

In accordance with the strategy, a Climate Change Adaptation Steering Group with representatives from across key functions of Offaly County Council was set up in 2020 to ensure the successful implementation of the actions of the Offaly Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and to report on progress. The Group continues to meet monthly to manage and oversee the effective mainstreaming of adaptation measures into all plans, programmes, strategies and policies of Offaly County Council.

Specific training was made available for members of the Climate Action Team in 2022 and Climate Action Training was provided on-line to all indoor staff. Climate Action Leadership Training was provided to the Management Team, Senior Management Group and elected representatives at an interactive scheduled session. Scheduled interactive training sessions will also be provided for outdoor staff.

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A number of projects are being progressed under the banner of Climate Change, from drainage, flood relief, EV infrastructure, PV panels, building retrofits to biodiversity and paperless offices. These projects are being carried out by a number of different sections throughout the organisation.

## **Water Services**

### **Irish Water Service Level Agreement (SLA)**

The Council is continuing to deliver Water Services in accordance with the SLA with Irish Water and the Annual Service Plan for 2022. Water Services are 100% funded by Irish Water who are now the Statutory Authority for water services and all major decisions around funding of services are approved by Irish Water.

The delivery of Water Services under the SLA, although challenging, is an opportunity to retain a level of water services activity within Local Government and to influence water services investment and policy in the future.

Local Authority remains the Water Services Authority in connection with Group Schemes, Small Private Supplies (SPS) and domestic wastewater treatment systems (septic tanks).

### **Drinking Water Supply**

The most recent EPA Drinking Water Report has been published and shows that the compliance rate in Offaly calculated for 2020 (based on compliance data sent to IW and the EPA) is:

- Microbiological = 98.21%
- Chemical = 100%
- Indicator = 100%
- Overall Compliance = 99.40%

Watermain Rehabilitation Works completed in Newtown and on the Clara Road, Tullamore and currently in Portarlinton, Clara, Ferbane & Pollagh. To commence work shortly in Fahy, Rhode.

Leak detection and pressure management have reduced the consumption of water in Public Water Schemes (PWS) in Offaly since the beginning of 2020. Leak repair, Find and fix works are ongoing in Edenderry, Tullamore, Ferbane, Banagher, Ballybeg (Dromakeenan) and Clonbullogue.

There has been a saving of approx. 5,000m<sup>3</sup>/day since January 2018 in Offaly where average consumption in January 2018 was 24,839 m<sup>3</sup>/day compared to 19,500m<sup>3</sup>/day in 2022.

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IW are currently preparing the design for a replacement reservoir at Clonbullogue and considering a replacement reservoir at Walsh Island.

## **Wastewater**

There are 14 Wastewater Treatment Plants in Offaly with Discharge Licences serving agglomerations with populations greater than 500. Meeting the stringent limit values on these licences is challenging. Full secondary treatment is now provided in all public sewerage schemes in Offaly with a significant improvement in quality standards compliance being achieved as a result.

Consulting Engineers have been engaged for Birr, Shinrone, Cloghan & Daingean. They will examine the existing plants and come up with proposals to treat storm water via holding tanks or reed beds. Also, a Design Team has been engaged to upgrade the design of the Banagher WWTP.

Significant improvement works have been carried out at the various Plants throughout the County, especially with regard to Health and Safety. Also, Aeration Tanks & Clarifiers were cleaned leading to a better final effluent quality and also a reduction in the running costs of the Plants.

Tullamore Drainage Area Plan has been completed and the first project to be delivered from the Plan, is the upgrade of the twin siphons at the Grand Canal combined with the upgrading of 1.2km of sewers in the centre of the town.

Phase 1 of the Tullamore southern interceptor has been designed and now we await a start date from IW.

Edenderry WWTP: IW have appointed Aecom consultant engineers to design an upgrade of the plant to ensure capacity into the future.

Rhode WWTP is included for funding under the Small Town & Villages Programme, this work should commence 2023.

## **Water Services Capital Schemes**

A major upgrade of the Tullamore and Birr Water Supplies approaching completion. Aecom/Jennings O'Donovan appointed Murphy Processing Engineering to Design and Build the project. The contract which involves the major upgrade of the Ardan, Clonaslee and Birr Water Treatment Processes, commenced in November 2018 and is currently virtually complete.

Under Irish Water's Disinfection programme, works are virtually complete at Toberdaly WTP, Edenderry WTP, Clonbullogue WTP, Walsh Island WTP and Coolderry WTP.

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Construction works are being carried out on Geashill and Holmshill WTPs. Initial surveys are being carried out at Daingean WTP and Kilcormac WTP.

It is envisaged that greater emphasis will be placed on completing low cost small scale projects through the Capital Programmes and Capital Maintenance Programme which will facilitate the upkeep and improvement of existing schemes and the replacement of end-of-life assets. This approach will be beneficial to our County given the large number of small schemes.

In 2023, we will continue to engage with IW on prioritising infra-structural improvements in Offaly. There is a rigorous health & safety inspection and management regime in place across all water services infrastructure and this is driving an ongoing programme of Significant Health and Safety Improvement Works. There is also a significant investment in plant replacement and process optimisation through the Capital Works Programme and a countywide Disinfection Programme.

## **Rural Water Programme**

### **Subsidies**

- Annual Group Water Scheme Subsidy payments totalling €1,018,504 have been made to 16 no. Group Water Schemes which supply a combined total of 4,436 no. domestic customers. Annual subsidies amounted to €411,105.00 and advance subsidies totalled €607,369. The GWS Subsidies help to support group water scheme to operate to their full potential and deliver potable water to their customers.

### **Rural Water Programme (RWP) 2019 - 2022 Capital Works:**

Circular L1/19 was received from the Department on 8th February, 2019 inviting Local Authorities to bid on a priority scheme & project basis, for grant assistance under the Multi-Annual Rural Water Programme 2019- 2022.

The objective for this funding is to provide enhanced funding certainty for priority investment needs to support the implementation of proper planning and sustainable development in rural areas. It is to assist in meeting the requirements of the Drinking Water Directive in relation to rural water supplies and to support the delivery of measures identified in the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018 – 2022 to meet the needs of the Water Framework Directive.

The total allocation to the successful projects under the programme is €1,839,625.00 for 19 projects. Two extra projects have been added to the programme during it's lifetime. Fifteen of these projects are completed and the other six are at various stages of progress with all projects expected to be completed in 2022.

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The circular to roll out the MARWP 2022-24 is due in quarter 4 of 2022.

### **Domestic Water and Domestic Waste Water Grant Schemes:**

Under Measure 8 of the Multi-Annual Rural Water Programme 2019-2022 a revised Private Water Supply (Well Grants) and Domestic Waste Water Treatment grant scheme was announced by the Dept of Housing, Planning and Local Government in June 2020. Applicants that have been approved under the terms of the previous scheme are entitled to re-apply under the terms of the new scheme, if they wish, and their existing approval will still apply.

**Well Grants:** The application process and the level of grant payable have been revised. The main revision of the scheme is that the applicant must provide three quotes for the proposed works and that the percentage of the approved cost of works that can be claimed by the applicant has been increased from 75% or a max of €2,031.58 to 85% or €5,000.00, whichever is the lesser. There are also new grants available for Well Rehabilitation of 85% of costs up to €3,000.00 and Water Treatment Systems grant of 100% up to €1,000.00.

**Domestic Waste Water Treatment grants:** This grant may be available to householders where they have been identified by the Local Authority under various river basin and catchment area plans and they must meet specific criteria (an applicant cannot self declare for these grants). The percentage of the approved cost of works that can be claimed by the applicant has been increased from 75% to 85% or €5,000.00, whichever is the lesser.

- So far, in 2022, under the Domestic Water Grant scheme we have paid 27 grants to a total of €71,296.00 and under the DW/WTS Grant Scheme we have paid one grant of €2,797.78.

## **Environment**

### **Waste Management**

#### **Derryclure Landfill**

The aftercare costs of the landfill continue to be a financial burden on the Council. To reduce costs, Environment carried out feasibility studies of alternative on site technologies for the treatment of leachate and gas, this study determined the current system of treating the leachate off site and flaring of the landfill gas were the most cost effective treatment methods. However, looking to the future a full review of the activities at the landfill needs to take place in order to consider costs and opportunities associated with changes overtime, treatment methodologies available, degrading gas quality and quantity, wear and tear on installed systems etc.

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## Recycling Facilities

There are currently 37 bring banks in the County for glass, aluminium & steel cans recycling on both private and public sites and we continue to pay for the recycling of the glass by the service provider, Glassco Ltd., as per the tender agreement of €17.90 per tonne. Offaly receives an income from Glassco of €130 per tonne for the aluminium cans and €55 per tonne for the steel cans. For 2022 (Jan – Jun), we received an income of €3,000 and paid Glassco €14,873 for the same period. Offaly CoCo receives an income for textiles from Coppertale at €305/tonne and for 2022 Jan- June, an income of €3827 was received.

## Civic Amenity Sites

The contract to operate and manage 3 Civic Amenity Sites at Birr, Derryclure and Edenderry was awarded to Oxigen in May 2022 for an initial period of 2 years. These sites accept a wide range of materials for recycling and complement our existing Bring Bank facilities. Charges apply for all waste brought to these facilities, with the exception of electrical items, glass, packaging and batteries. The gate fees of these facilities are retained by the contractor under the terms of the current service agreement

## Eastern Midlands Regional Waste Management Plan 2015-2022

The Waste Management Planning regional structure was changed to three regions in line with the 2012 Government Policy document "A Resource Opportunity-Waste Management Policy in Ireland". Offaly is in the Eastern/Midlands Region. The current Eastern Midlands Regional Waste Management Plan 2015-2022 was launched on the 14th May 2015. Offaly County Council staff work with our Regional colleagues to implement the policies of the plan. A new Waste Management Plan is being drafted for the entire Country, called the National Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy – NWMP, consultation will begin once the final draft of the plan is available.

## Waste Enforcement

We continue to investigate all illegal waste activities and instigate legal proceedings appropriate. Inspections and audits of the operations of the 57 Waste Collection Permit holders and the 18 Waste Facility Permit Holders in the functional area are ongoing.

To the start of October, Environment Section received 720 complaints since the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2022.

Complaint Category	Number
Air Pollution (Dust/odour/emissions)	15

Litter pollution (fly tipping/casual litter/litter on property)	478
Waste (dumping/burning/unauthorised sites)	82
Noise (community/commercial/industrial)	26
Control of Horses	12
Control of Dogs	89
Water Quality	18

### Litter picks

In 2022 to date, Offaly County Council has supported the collection and disposal of 229 no. litter picks by members of the public. These collections in total weighed 22 tonnes.

### Anti-Dumping Initiative

An application was made to the DECC for funding under the Anti-Dumping Initiative to clean up some very littered areas and to provide funding for CCTV at bottle banks, Offaly County Council was approved for €79,000. In the event that the Department make similar funding available for 2023, Offaly County Council will seek comparable funding.

### Anti-Litter Anti-Graffiti Grant

Offaly County Council will receive an allocation of €16,000 for 2022 from DECC. Projects must be co funded by OCC at a ratio DECC 70:OCC 30. Therefore OCC must contribute in the region of €7000 towards the projects. The claim and projects for this grant must be submitted by 4th November.

### Green Schools Awareness Programme

Offaly County Council continues to support the Green Schools Programme by frequent visits to the schools, facilitating free workshops to the schools, arranging the annual teacher training seminar as well as making a financial contribution to the schools for their environmental projects. The annual Green Schools Seminar for 2022 was held on 10 October jointly with Westmeath, Laois and Kildare CoCo.

### Protection of Natural Waters Water Framework Directive

#### Water Quality

Environment have commenced implementing the objectives of Water Framework Directive as set out in the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2022-2027. Roles undertaken in this work area include the co-ordination of sampling for the EPA's national monitoring program in Co. Offaly, the enforcement of Section 4 licences for discharges to surface waters and the investigation of complaints relating to a range of water linked issues. Inspections are also undertaken across

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various sectors including domestic septic tank inspections, agricultural inspection and catchment assessments where waterbodies are not achieving Good Status.

The Council are committed to advancing water quality in the county, recognising the links between water quality and the Councils goals throughout Co. Offaly, from Enterprise to Tourism. We are committed to working closely with the Local Authority Waters Program Office (LAWPro), towards shared national goals.

The requirements of the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle, River Basin Management Plan that was adopted this year places a greater onus on OCC to meet regulatory requirements as set out in the Plan. This will require a greater input from Environment staff to meet our commitments under the Water Framework Directive and River Basin management Plan 2022-2027.

### **Catchment Flood Risk Assessment And Management Studies (CFRAM)**

On 3 May 2018, Minister of State with special responsibility for the Office of Public Works (OPW) and Flood Relief, Kevin Moran T.D. published 29 Flood Risk Management Plans to address flood risk in Ireland. The CFRAM Programme studied the flood risk for 300 areas or communities in Ireland and concluded that it is possible to provide protection through flood relief schemes to approximately 95% of properties at risk within the assessed areas.

Under the Flood Risk Management Plans, , OCC has progressed the flood relief scheme at Rahan in conjunction with the OPW. It is estimated that the cost of the works will now be in the region of €400,000. Prior to issuing Part 8 planning application, approval of funding from OPW is currently in progress.

Offaly County Council are also discussing a number of schemes under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works with the Area Engineers.

### **Burial Grounds**

Kilcoursey Cemetery extension construction works were substantially completed in 2022, with landscaping due to be carried out in Q4/22 to Q1/23. The works include extension to roadway, burial plots, footpaths and fencing. The total extension of the lawn cemetery will cover of 2.246ac. (0.909 ha.), and, in total, the development will provide 1028 no. new graves spaces. It is estimated that the extension will provide capacity for at least 50 years. The works will be carried out in phases and 138 no. graves will be provided in Phase 1 along with a new entrance from the Horseleap Rd., provision of carparking spaces in the extension, resurfacing of the current carparking space on the Kilbeggan Rd and landscaping. Subsequent phases will comprise construction of footpaths and headstone foundations as the need arises.



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We have carried out the initial survey for the extension to St. Mary's Cemetery in Edenderry and are preparing to apply for Part VIII planning permission. It is planned to commence work on the extension in early 2023. In 2023, further investigations will be carried out on the provision of more burial ground space in Daingean, Banagher, Clonbullogue and Clonmacnoise; resources will need to be allocated annually in the coming years to fund the necessary works.

In 2021, we provided grant funding of €31,090.00 for sixteen different cemetery caretaking committees and projects in Council owned cemeteries around the county, and we have helped set four new committees in 2022. Applications for grant funding for 2022 are now being sought from the local committees.

## **County Veterinary Service**

### **Food Safety**

We continued with a shared service agreement with Westmeath County Council to provide the County Veterinary Service in Westmeath, including Temporary Veterinary Inspectors in abattoirs and support with Control of Dogs and Control of Horses.

### **Control of Dogs - Offaly.**

Number of Dog Licences sold in 2021:	3297
Number of Dog Licences sold to 30/09/22:	2467

In 2021 we cared for 250 dogs in our Dog Shelter. We successfully rehomed 18 directly from the Dog Shelter, 39 were reclaimed by their owners and 189 were rehomed by our dog welfare charity partners and the remainder spent Christmas in the Dog Shelter. So far in 2022 we have minded 209 dogs; we rehomed 40 directly from the dog shelter and 116 through our animal welfare charity partners, and 38 were reclaimed by their owners.

We have begun to notice an increase of 15% to 20% in surrenders and strays since May 2022 and this trend is being repeated across the sector. These increases are putting extra pressure on our dog shelter both for space and cost as dogs have to remain with us for longer than previously, and require more care and attention, while we wait for them to be rehomed.

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## Control of Horses

Under the Control of Horses Act 1996, all local authorities are responsible for the control of horses in their area including the collection of stray horses on public land. The numbers have been reducing in recent years from a high of 164 horses in 2014 to only 3 this year to date.

### Year No. of Horses Seized

Year	No of horses seized
2014	164
2015	101
2016	67
2017	60
2018	16
2019	5
2020	2
2021	4
2022 (y-t-d)	3