

Portarlinton Joint Local Area Plan 2024 – 2030

Submission from the PBA Sustainable Energy Community

1. Housing and Communities

1.1 Where is new housing needed and what type?

1.1.1 Rental accommodation

There is a clear need for more rental units/ accommodation in the town. For the past 4 or more years, there has been no more than 3 rental properties available in the Portarlinton at any given time. This shortage makes it difficult for people who wish to remain in or to set up home in Portarlinton.

1.1.2 Housing Associations and maintaining common areas

It is important that Local Councils ensure that Housing Associations maintain common/ green areas related to properties for which they are responsible in Portarlinton.

1.1.3 Dereliction

The SEC requests the Councils to maintain pressure on property owners to renovate derelict shop fronts, houses and other premises by using a combination of façade enhancement schemes, vacant property grants and dereliction notices (better enforcement).

Each vacant or derelict site should have an action plan agreed with the County Council for remediation.

1.2 How can existing community facilities be maximised?

1.2.1 Funding for upgrades

Many of the existing community facilities (including the Community Centre, Library, Peoples' Park, Leisure Centre, Old Fire Station and Peoples' Park) all need funding for upgrades. For example, the Community Centre needs approx. €200,000 to be spent on insulation and other measures to become carbon neutral.

1.2.2 Leisure Centre pricing

The pricing structure for membership of the Leisure Centre needs to be reviewed (it is extremely expensive for people who can't pay up front amount).

1.2.3 Children's Playground

The Children's Playground needs to be maintained better.

1.2.4 River Walk

The River Walk needs to be extended to maximise the river as an amenity for the town.

1.3 How can social inclusion be promoted?

1.3.1 Mobility audit

A good starting point for social inclusion would be to carry out a Mobility Audit for the town. For example, it is difficult for people in wheelchairs or with other restricted mobility to use footpaths and entrances in the town and work is required to identify and address these issues.

1.3.2 Lack of transport

The lack of taxis or other forms of transport to carry disabled passengers is a major restriction on disabled or elderly folk in the town.

2. Economic Development

2.1 How can enterprise and employment be promoted and where?

Currently, Portarlinton has little to offer visitors to the town (e.g., there is a complete lack of restaurants or overnight accommodation in the town).

Similarly, the lack of a reliable taxi service presents an obstacle to people from going out in the town to support local hospitality businesses.

2.2 How can town centre vitality and vibrancy be enhanced?

2.2.1 Tidy Towns

The win by Abbeyleix in the 2023 Tidy Towns competition shows that towns in Laois can compete at national level. Increased funding for Portarlinton Tidy Towns would make a difference.

2.2.2 Market House and Market Square

The SEC notes the improvements made to Main Street and that the Market House is being renovate. The SEC is keen, however, to see the Portarlinton Regeneration Strategy 2030 implemented in full and the public realm on Main Street and Market Square be upgraded as per the strategy.

2.2.3 Cinema

The Savoy Cinema on Market Square needs to be renovated and repurposed as a space that attracts people into the town centre. A busy venue for arts and performance would go some way towards enhancing the vitality and vibrancy in the town centre.

2.2.4 Car parking

The SEC would be in favour of moving car parking from Lower Main St if capacity was increased nearby (e.g., Link Road).

The existing Car Park between Main St and Link Road needs improvement.

3. Urban Design and Regeneration

3.1 What is your desired vision for Portarlinton?

The SEC would like to see a pedestrian friendly Main St and Market Square enhanced by planting trees (including on Main Street).

The SEC would urge Laois County Council to implement the Portarlinton Regeneration Strategy 2030 to build on the improvements made to Main Street and the current renovation of the Market House, particularly by enhancing the public realm on Market Square.

The SEC would be in favour of transforming Portarlinton into a cycle friendly town as per the “**Port Cycle Vision Plan**” in Appendix 2.

3.2 How can the town centre be revitalised and regenerated?

3.2.1 Portarlington Regeneration Strategy 2030

As stated above, the town centred would be regenerated by implementing the Portarlington Regeneration Strategy 2030 in full and making the Main Street and Market Square more pedestrian friendly, with trees planted and the public realm enhanced.

3.2.2 Market Square as a public destination

A busy venue in the Savoy Cinema and seasonal events such as Christmas Fairs and farmers markets would also bring people into the town centre.

3.2.3 Enforcement

The SEC believes that regulations relating to dereliction and vacant premises, car parking and vandalism of public areas (e.g., public park) need to be enforced.

4. Movement and Active Travel

4.1 What are the key transport issues in Portarlington?

4.1.1 Traffic congestion

There is a need to reduce traffic and congestion in the town centre. A major element in reducing traffic is by increased use of walkways, cycle paths and permeability between estates etc. that allows pedestrian access.

The increased use of cycleways is particularly important for close on 1,000 pupils traveling from the Laois side to the Offaly side via the Barrow Bridge to attend Coláiste Íosagáin and those traveling in the other direction to attend the primary schools.

4.1.2 Dangerous junction at Kilnacourt

The SEC continues to be concerned with the dangerous roundabout at Kilnacourt and has requested that a safety audit is done and remedial action be taken to make it safer for pedestrians (particularly children walking to school up Canal Road) from Kilnacourt.

4.1.3 Ring Roads

The lack of progress on building a Ring Road means there is a high level of HGV traffic through the centre of the town into Market Square across the Barrow Bridge and up Patrick Street, which is too narrow to add cycleways.

4.1.4 Speeding

The lack of enforcement of speed limits and traffic calming measures in Portarlington makes the main roads unsafe for cyclists and pedestrians. This is a particular problem on main national roads coming into the town such as the Lea Road.

Please see the attached Appendix "Traffic Calming Proposals for primary approach roads into Portarlington" which was prepared by the SEC and submitted to Laois County Council previously.

4.1.5 Lack of taxis

The lack of taxis in the town means that elderly or disabled people are severely restricted in getting to the shops or church or doctors or shopping or entertainment.

4.2 How can walking and cycling be encouraged?

4.2.1 Bike hire

It would help to encourage cycling if there was a Bike hire or Velo service in the town (like Bolt) with bikes available for hire in key locations such as the Railway Station and Market Square.

4.2.2 Cycleways

Unless safe routes are created to key locations in the town, such as the primary and secondary schools, it will be difficult to persuade more people to travel on foot or bike.

Please see Appendix 2 “Port Cycle Vision Plan”, which was prepared by the SEC and submitted to Laois County Council previously.

For example, both Arlington FC and Portarlinton Rugby Club are out the Lea Road. As it’s a straight stretch leaving and coming into the town, cars and HGVs continuously exceed the speed limits making it unsafe for young players to travel out to the clubs by bicycle. The SEC has campaigned for cycle lanes to be installed out as far as the rugby club to enable people cycle out to the clubs.

Another obvious route for a pedestrian/ cycleway would be to connect from Ballymorris Manor on the Laois side to Riverside on the Offaly side with a bridge over the Barrow River close to the existing railway bridge/ embankment. This would provide a safe route for the 1,000 students traveling from the Laois side of the town to walk or cycle to Coláiste Íosagáin and for the primary school children traveling in the other direction.

Please see Appendix 3 “Portarlinton Greenway Proposal” which was prepared by the SEC and submitted to both county councils previously.

4.2.3 Illegal parking

The lack of enforcement of rules and laws relating to illegal parking (parking on footpaths, on cycle paths etc) hampers the use of footpaths and cycle ways. This is a particular problem at the primary schools when children are coming out and being collected by their parents who pull up and park on footpaths and cycleways.

4.3 How can the town be made more age-friendly?

4.3.1 Footpaths and road design

There is a need to review foot path & road design for with a mobility audit for prams, wheelchairs and elderly pedestrians.

4.3.2 Lack of benches

The complete lack of benches, for example on Station Road and Canal Road, means that there is opportunity for elderly people or children to take a rest when walking in the town.

4.3.3 Skate Park

A Skate Park for teenagers or additional spaces to hang out without having to pay, particularly on the Offaly side, would be a great addition to the town.

5. Infrastructure

5.1 What are the main infrastructural issues in Portarlinton?

5.1.1 Roads and cycleways

There is a need for ring roads to take traffic away from the town centre and cycleways to allow for safe active travel in the town.

5.1.2 Cabling

The undergrounding of the cables on the Main Street should be extended to other streets (e.g., French Church Street and Bracklone Street).

5.1.3 Water and Sewerage

The Water System and sewerage system needs to be upgraded (e.g., there is a regular loss of pressure issue in the Droughill area).

There is also a severe limescale problem in the town, which means that domestic appliances need to be replaced regularly.

5.2 How can waste reduction be encouraged?

5.2.1 Recycling centre

Waste reduction can be encouraged by lowering prices to use the recycling centre and by promoting and raising awareness of the recycling waste centre.

5.2.2 Use of sculpture bins

Use of sculpture bins (e.g., bottle/ can shaped).

5.2.3 Disposable coffee cups

The JLAP should look to minimise the use of disposable coffee cups etc.

6. Environment, climate change and biodiversity

6.1 What are the important environmental issues for Portarlinton?

6.1.1 Replacing use of fossil fuels

Most houses in Portarlinton are still heated by fossil fuels including turf and need to be retrofitted to reduce use of turf etc.

6.1.2 Irish native trees

Housing estates should plant native Irish trees.

6.1.3 Dereliction

There is an eyesore environmental disaster happening on Botley Lane (boarding on Botley Lane is worn/ damaged, dangerous rubbish behind hoarding).

6.1.4 Fly tipping

Fly tipping and dumping of domestic rubbish on Bog Road is a constant problem that needs to be addressed.

6.2 How can the LAP best address the challenges of climate change?

6.2.1 Alternative methods of heating/ powering homes

There is a need to support and promote alternative methods of heating/ power for homes in the town.

6.2.2 Increased use of active travel

The LAP can best address challenges of climate change by supporting alternative modes of transport, particularly active travel in and around the town with a new cycleway across the Barrow River from Riverside to Ballymorris Manor.

7. Heritage, amenity and Landscape

7.1 How can the LAP encourage heritage-led regeneration?

7.1.1 Environmental heritage

Currently, there is limited use of the Barrow River amenity with only a short riverside walk. A Blueway along the Barrow to Monasterevin would open access to the Barrow Way to St Mullins and can be extended the other way to Derryounce and onwards to the Grand Canal.

7.1.2 Historic buildings

It is suggested that plaques with QR Codes are erected on historic buildings in the town and historic photos of sites of significance around the town (e.g., photos of old Canal/ Canal Road next to Odlums, Blackhall Bridge, Market Sq.) are put up.

The renovation of the Market House should be complemented by regeneration of the Savoy Cinema and upgrading of the Parochial Hall.

It is suggested to move Love Port from Old Boys School to a new location in the Town Centre.

7.2 How can green spaces best be incorporated into new development?

7.2.1 Community gardens and town orchards

Increased use of community and pocket gardens and town orchards in the town centre.

7.2.2 Involve locals

Ask and involve local community/ residential groups and schools to take ownership of green spaces for landscaping and maintenance.

7.3 How can the town best capitalise upon its tourism potential?

There should be more connectivity between Kildare, Laois and Offaly by building a Blueway from Monasterevin along the Barrow/ Old Canal path and on to the Grand Canal Blueway via Derryounce. By connecting with the railway station, visitors can arrive by train and connect to the Blueway by bike via the town centre.

The access to Derryounce from the town should be enhanced.