



Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí
Offaly County Council

BUDGET 2024

SUPPLEMENTARY DIRECTORATE REPORTS



OFFALY COUNTY COUNCIL

DIRECTOR OF SERVICES REPORTS

THOMAS MAWE – A/HEAD OF FINANCE & DIRECTOR OF SERVICES FOR:

Corporate Services, Human Resources, Internal Audit, Information Systems,
Health & Safety 3-12

SHARON KENNEDY – DIRECTOR OF SERVICES FOR:

Housing & Sustainable Communities, Community, Culture, Heritage,
Libraries & Emergency Services 13-57

ANN DILLON – DIRECTOR OF SERVICES FOR:

Land Use, Planning & Economic Development 58-91

TOM SHANAHAN - DIRECTOR OF SERVICES FOR:

Climate Action, Environment & Rural Water, Transportation, NWCPO 92-111

CORPORATE SERVICES

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, and field work continues for the 2024 Local elections.

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 2023

Service Indicators

Corporate Services coordinated the Council's 2022 Service Indicators return to the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC)

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. The Annual Service Plan 2023 was prepared in quarter 1 and reflected the 2023 Budget. Monthly progress on the 2023 Annual Service Plan formed part of the Chief Executive's monthly report to the Council. Performance against prescribed service indicators was published in September 2023 in NOAC's 'Local Authority Performance Indicator Report 2022'.

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.

Internal Audit

The Internal Audit Unit have completed the majority of the agreed Internal Audit Plan for 2023 (with the aim of having all audits completed by year-end). 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. All Internal Audit documents were maintained including Internal Audit Manual Procedure, Internal Audit Charter, and the Audit Committee Charter . The Internal Audit Unit provided administrative support to the Audit Committee in the fulfilling of its duties in 2023, 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 completed on updating the Council's website.

Swimming Pools

Corporate Services administer funding for swimming pools, all of which has been processed for 2023.

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 2024

Where resources provide Corporate Services will:

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

- Maintain the Register of Electors and complete the running of Local Elections in June 2024.
- Support Swimming Pool Committees.
- Implementation of priority actions from our Access Plan in compliance with the Disability Act 2005.
- Coordinate 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, including the Official Languages Act
- 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. 450 full-time staff. Almost 90% of the budget allocation for the HR department is non-discretionary 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 2023 with 38 competitions held during the year, which involved the processing of over 700 applications. Funding provided by the members for staff training

in the 2023 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 23 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 2022 of 5.28%.

Key Priorities 2024

- 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

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 450 users.

In 2023 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 continue to the roll out of Blended working by upgrading staff laptops that enables staff to use a single device, which has operational, cyber security and environmental benefits.
- 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.
- Complete the upgrade of Financial Management System and Library Management System.
- Complete the upgrade of Audio-Visual equipment throughout the organisation including major upgrade to AV system in the council chamber.
- Continue to work with Government in relation to the National Broadband Plan and implementation of Offaly's Digital Strategy.
- 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.
- ICT Infrastructure 2022-2026- Our new ICT server infrastructure has been installed and configured to support the organisation for the next 5 years.
- Online Planning Applications process went live in Offaly at the end of June 2023
- Launch of new website offaly.ie in June 2023

In 2024, the work programme for the IS Department will include work on the following projects:

- Complete the 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.
- Complete the upgrade MS Office products on all devices from MS Office 2016 to MS Office 365.

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- Upgrade MS Teams to Teams Calling for all Offaly staff.
 - 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.
 - Complete the full roll out of MyCoCo.ie.
 - 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.
 - A new Planning Enforcements System was procured and is currently being adopted by Planning staff.

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.

In 2023 the main projects were:

- Further rollout of Free Public WiFi in Offaly to include additional community centres and public spaces.

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- 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.
 - 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.
 - Collaboration with Education and Learning Providers to support Digital Education and Training opportunities.

Key Actions for 2024

- Offaly Digital Strategy - Work to continue 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.

The Broadband / Digital Officer for Offaly can be contacted at broadband@offalycoco.ie

HEALTH AND SAFETY 2023

Health and Safety objectives were set out at the beginning of the year with the management team after reviewing 2022 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 2023, 26 fatalities have occurred as of the 10th of October 2023.

Industry	Number of Fatalities in 2022	Number of Fatalities in 2023
Agriculture	10	11
Fishing and aquaculture	0	0
Forestry & logging	0	0
Mining and quarrying	0	0
Manufacturing	0	1
Water supply	1	2
Construction	5	6
Repair of motor vehicles	1	0
Transportation and storage	0	2
Public Administration (Others Arts, Entertainment & Recreation, Education)	0	4
Total	20	26 <i>H.S.A website updated 10th of Oct 2023</i>

2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
26	38	54	47	39	48	48	55	55	47	48	54	48	43	57	67

One of the main targets for 2023 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 2023 was completed in house and on line or in certain circumstances outdoors. This will continue in 2024.

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 2023 has been a focus on transport safety and vehicle management in light of the number of serious incident across the country previously.

There was an overall reduction in Offaly County Councils accident ratio in 2022 (as of the 1st of November 2023) when compared to the same period in 2022.

Senior management continued to provide leadership in order to raise the profile of safety within Offaly County Council. A key focus in 2023 involved safety discussion with all staff and additional line manager meetings with staff.

The management team and senior management group carried out a number of inspections during the year, this will remain a key focus for 2024 along with tracking the number of inspections carried out by each department and directors attending key quarterly health and safety meetings in their departments.

Housing - 2024

Overview

Offaly County Council continues to progress the actions provided for in *Housing for All – A new Housing Plan for Ireland* and the delivery of social housing units as detailed in *Offaly's Housing Delivery Action Plan 2022-2026*.

The Government's Housing Plan *Housing for All – A new Housing Plan for Ireland* 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.

Activities to the end of Quarter 3 - 2023

Social Housing 2023

There were 543 households in Offaly on the social housing list at the end of September 2023. A further 639 households were in receipt of Housing Assistance Payments and 244 supported in various leasing arrangements.

To the end of September 2023, 111 individuals and families were allocated to Local Authority and Approved Housing Bodies tenancies across the county.

Construction Programme

Housing for All – A new Housing Plan for Ireland, provides for an overall build (via direct Local Authority, Approved Housing Bodies, 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

There are 124 social houses at the various stages of the construction programme. They will be ready for allocation to qualified applicants on Offaly County Council's Social Housing Support List by the end of 2023 and throughout 2024. These developments are in Tullamore, Banagher, Belmont, Birr, Daingean, Edenderry and Portarlinton. The units are a mix of Local Authority direct builds, Turnkey

developments and Approved Housing Body developments. An additional 205 houses have either commenced construction and will be available in 2024 or are at the various stages of departmental approval process. These developments will provide homes in Ballycumber, Birr, Clara, Daingean, Edenderry, Tullamore and Portarlington.

An Expression of Interest for Turnkey developments was held during summer 2023 and consultations with the developers and the Department are on-going and it is hoped that this approach will realise additional housing units.

An Expression of Interest for lands was also held during summer 2023 and consultations with the developers are on-going.

Part V Programme

Housing continue to engage with developers to agree Part V units. *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 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.

Tenant in Situ Supports

The 'Winter Emergency Period' under the Residential Tenancies (Deferment of Termination Dates of Certain Tenancies) Act 2022 ceased in April 2023. Deferred tenancy terminations could take effect over a staggered period from 1st May 2023. The various pathways for households on a valid Notice of Termination were outlined on the Council's website at <https://www.offaly.ie/c/housing/> on the Notice of Termination Information link.

The HAP Placefinder working with a number of households sought to source alternative HAP supported tenancies.

Where appropriate Housing progressed the acquisition of a number of housing units in accordance with the Tenant in Situ Acquisition Programme. At the end of September eleven (11) acquisitions were finalised and householders had become Local Authority tenants; and, a further twenty (20) properties were at sale agreed; and nine (9) properties were at inspection / bid stage.

The Cost Rental Tenant-in-Situ Scheme, introduced by the Government, was made available to tenants of private rented property who have been served a Notice of Termination due to Landlord selling the property and are at risk of homelessness but who are not eligible for social housing supports. Offaly County Council is the first point of contact in the area for this scheme, but it is managed by the Housing Agency. Under the scheme the Housing Agency can purchase a property and rent it to the tenant. The Council will undertake an initial assessment of the tenant's circumstances and refer details to the Housing Agency for consideration, where the tenant is at risk of homelessness and the Cost Rental Tenant-in-Situ Scheme may apply. Five (5) applications, to the end of October, were forwarded to the Housing Agency under the scheme.

Returning Vacant Stock to Productive Use (Pre-lets)

Pre-let and void works have been completed on 33 council owned properties to the end of September 2023. 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 when funding has been granted to a property on a previous occasion it will not be granted a second time. There is an increased reliance on the LA's own resources for this activity. Construction inflation and availability of contractors has had a major impact on the cost and turnaround time of pre-let works in 2023.

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 2023 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. The programme continues to be over subscribed. The Council continues to work with the Occupational Therapist to ensure that the funding received is maximised in 2023.

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. Similar to the private home owners scheme the demand for works on Local Authority units continues to exceed the funding available to the programme. The Local Authority contribution is 10% for these grants and provision needs to be made for this programme in the future.

The availability of contractors and construction inflation continues to impact on the delivery across many of these housing programmes.

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 2,526 requests for repairs and maintenance by local authority tenants in the first three quarters of 2023. 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 2023 was €628,511.

2023 saw an increased planned maintenance budget to €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.

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 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.

The Energy Efficiency Retrofit Programme (EERP) runs to 2030 and represents significant upscaling from 'shallow' to 'deeper retrofit' on what has been completed by Local Authorities to date. Funding covers the installation of a Heat Pump and insulation, windows and doors only. Insulation, windows and doors are only permitted if calculations show that the Heat Pump requires fabric upgrades. The average spend on a single house must be €34,000 (increased from €33,000 in 2022) and accordingly the Council need to consider a blend of houses to achieve the approved average spend in order to maximise department funds. To date 78 homes have been retrofitted, works are ongoing on 19 local authority homes and tenders are being sought for works on a further 19 homes.

Local Authority Home Loan (LAHL)

The Local Authority Home Loan, commenced in 2022 saw some modifications introduced in 2023. The LAHL is a Government backed mortgage for first time buyers and fresh start applicants and can be used to purchase a new or second-hand property or for self-build. The Loan can provide up to 90% of the market value of the property, to a maximum value of €275,000. The maximum loan amount is determined by where the property is located – in Offaly the maximum LAHL available is €247,500. The loan is a normal Capital and Interest-bearing mortgage which is repaid by standing order on a monthly basis. The maximum loan term is 30 years, up to the age of 70 and must be repaid by an annuity of principal and interest combined.

26 LAHL applications have been received to date – 3 have received approval in principle, 15 declined, and a further 8 applications are under consideration.

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. Thirty eight (38) applications were received to the end of September 2023, of which eleven (11) have been approved in principle, eight (8) were deemed not qualified in accordance with the Scheme and a further nineteen (19) are being assessed.

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 Offaly County Council tenancies in 2023 and it is proposed to hold a rent review of all leasing, RAS and HAP tenants in 2024.

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 2023.

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 29 single adults and 17 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 in the Midlands region. 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 are being finalised and it is hoped that the facility will be opened in Q4, 2023 or Q1, 2024. The facility will provide professional supports for up to 17 individuals from the Midlands Region of Offaly, Westmeath, Laois and Longford.

Throughout 2023, 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.

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.

The 4 Group Housing Units at Croghan Road, Birr received departmental Stage 3 approval on 27th July 2023. Following the tendering process four (4) tenders were received. The Stage 4 approval application was forwarded to the Department on 27th October and it is anticipated that works on site will commence in Q1, 2024. In addition a number of traveller specific acquisitions have been concluded in 2023.

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 seek to re-establish Resident Associations in Local Authority estates. The Housing Section, partnering with the Library, Arts, IT and Heritage services made significant progress to develop programmes to improve their estates and to build their capacity to work together.

Games on the green were provided in six (6) Local Authority estates during the summer months and up to 80 children participated. Working with our IT Section Housing developed a suitable version of the VEX robotics programmes and delivered summer workshops in each of the three Municipal Districts. It was very well received and in excess of 50 children participated in the robotics programme.

The Estate Management Fund for 2023, 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 continued to 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 and Municipal District).

The Council continued to refer a number of anti-social behaviour cases to the County Solicitor in 2023 and these were successfully addressed by the Courts.

Housing Disability Steering Group

Offaly County Council chair the Offaly Housing Disability Steering Group. Chaired by the Housing Director of Services, the membership of the Steering Group is comprised of representatives from the Housing Section, Offaly County Council, HSE, Disability Sector, AHB and the Housing Agency. The Council adopted its *Housing Strategy for People with a Disability 2022 – 2027* in December 2021. The

National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022 – 2027 was published on 14 January 2022. The National Strategy is a joint publication of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage; the Department of Health; and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. It sets out how the Government will put in place the frameworks to ensure that the housing and support needs of disabled people are comprehensively addressed. The Housing Agency is launching the *National Implementation Plan* for the Strategy in summer 2023.

The overarching vision of each of the Strategies is to facilitate disabled people to live independently and be included in their communities.

Strategic Policy Committee 2023

The Housing Strategic Policy Committee met on three occasions to date in 2023 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; Differential Rent Scheme; Local Authority Home Loan; and the Tenant Purchase Scheme. The SPC also received a report on Offaly's Response to Ukraine Refugee Crisis.

Priorities for 2024

- 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.
- Administer and oversee the Housing Disability Steering Group meetings and working with the various agencies progress the actions provided in the *National Housing Strategy for Disability People 2022 – 2027 Implementation Plan*.
- Progress the Retrofit Programme in line with departmental guidelines.
- Continue to review and seek to implement best practice in the delivery and coordination of supports for those presenting as homeless.

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- 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.
 - Offaly County Council will seek to recruit those staff identified for the delivery of the Housing for All programme.
 - 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.

Community & Culture 2024

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	Fiona	Fitzpatrick	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:

- 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).

During the period 2016-2023 (to date) in excess of €8.8 million LEADER project funding has been approved for investment in over 316 innovative community and private enterprise projects throughout the county. Claimed expenditure in excess of €6.3 million has been paid to project promoters to date.

DRCD extended the programme deadline for project approvals to the 31st Dec 2023. Additionally, the completion deadline for completion of all projects is extended to the 31st March 2024.

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 2023 is €927,791. An additional €100,842 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.

SICAP Programme 2024 – 2028: Procurement process has been completed and evaluation is ongoing at present.

Community Recognition Fund 2023:

This Fund of €669,691 for capital projects was launched by DRCD on 24 January 2023 specifically targeted at projects that are located in communities, towns and villages that are hosting Ukrainian refugees in significant numbers. All 28 applications were assessed by the LCDC subcommittee and projects were approved for submission to the Department by the LCDC at its meeting on 9th March 2023.

Final approval for 26 successful projects amounting to €636,206 was received from DRCD on 22nd May 2023. Funding Agreements have been agreed between OCC and the successful applicants. All projects must be completed by 18 October 2024. Seven of the projects have been fully completed, and 7 partly completed in 2023. Twelve of the successful projects decided to wait until 2024 before commencing works.

Community Support Fund 2022/23:

Offaly was approved for a Fund totalling €283,843 which was managed by Offaly LCDC. A total of 188 applications received grant approval under the following categories:

€144,791 Current non-pay running costs such as energy costs

€136,064 Capital repairs and improvements to facilities / purchase of equipment/ LED Lighting upgrades

€2,988 Women's Sheds Non-pay Running Costs

A subcommittee of the LCDC assessed the submissions and their recommendations were approval by the full LCDC at their meeting on 9th March 2023. On the 21st June 2023 Departmental approval was

given for the awards to the 188 community groups in Offaly under the Community Support Fund 2022/23.

Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP)

A review of the LECP 2016-21 was completed in 2021. During 2022 the Department issued Guidelines and held online informational webinars to assist the completion of the LECP. The Advisory Steering Group (ASG) assists 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
Ann Dillon	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
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. The LEO Office has prepared an Offaly Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan, which will inform the new LECP.

Offaly LCDC held a detailed consultation process during the period from May to August 2023. A Socio Economic Statement and Profile, along with the Offaly Economic Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2027 were provided on the www.offaly.ie website. In person meetings were held in the 3 MD's, an online questionnaire was provided, and submissions were welcomed via email or by post.

PPN groups and key organisations were contacted and invited to make a submission to the Plan. The new LECP sets out the objectives and actions which are needed to promote and support the economic and local community development of County Offaly. The new LECP will be finalised and adopted in early 2024.

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 worked hard and achieved so much on their chosen topic 'Disability'. The work completed included:

- Working groups were established by the Executive members to progress the topic.
- Disability Awareness Week was held in June. Comhairle members got involved by partnering with Offaly PPN and Offaly libraries. A bookmark was designed to promote awareness. Members organised Book stands to display Books with themes of Disability and engaged with the public on the topic.
- To promote Disability Awareness in Primary & Secondary Schools across the County, Comhairle members collaborated with ODEN to design interactive workshops covering all aspects of disabilities. The first Workshop was held in Birr and was a success.
- Collaborating with Offaly County Council IS Department, a podcast was recorded to promote awareness on living with disabilities and hidden disabilities. There are plans to record future podcasts on a variety of topics and issues of interest to the Young People of Offaly.

Other achievements in 2023 include:

Other achievements in 2023 include:

- In March, five members presented to the Secretariat for the Assistance of Regions in Transition (START) in the Offaly County Council Chamber as the Youth Voice – Being heard on Just Transition.

An Interactive conversation followed with Comhairle members on their family connections with the peatlands and opinions were put forward on Just Transition and prospects for the future.

- In Croke Park in April the National Showcase event was attended by members who displayed their work and met members from other Comhairlí. A Comhairle na nÓg representative was interviewed on Midlands 103 regarding the event and the work of Offaly Comhairle.
- Throughout the year the members have put in a significant amount work into this year's chosen topic – 'Disability'. Members liaised with Offaly County Council IS Department, Offaly Libraries, Offaly PPN and ODEN (Offaly Disability Equality Network) among others.
- The Podcast promoting awareness on living with disabilities and the proposed interactive workshops to be delivered in schools across the county to educate and increase awareness and understanding of disability in all forms are fantastic initiatives. I believe there are plans to record more podcasts on topics important and relevant to the young people in Offaly. I look forward to tuning into these.
- Members of Offaly Comhairle na nÓg have engaged with the HSE in relation to the funding of projects and organisations which aim to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 15-24 years. The most promising projects will be funded for 3 years.
- Offaly Comhairle na nÓg was represented among the delegates this month that attended the Ireland National Rural Youth Assembly in Dublin Castle to discuss the challenges and opportunities for young people participating in civic society in rural Ireland and to make recommendations for consideration by rural policy makers across Government.

The Offaly Comhairle na nÓg Youth Consultation Day 2023 took place on 17th October and was well attended. The CNN availed of the opportunity to showcase their work and network with one another, discuss their chosen topics and voice their opinions.

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 2023 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 (replaced by Cllr Sandra Feehan Smollen Sept 2023)	Offaly County Council
Sectoral Representatives (1)	Thomas Woulfe	Agriculture/Farming
PPN Representation (3)	Ana-Maria Cumpanici & Rachel Kenny Madeline Corboy VACANT	Youth & Environment Social Inclusion Voluntary / Community

The SPC met four times in 2023: 2 March; 26th May; 22 September and 8th December.

Issues and policies discussed by the SPC during 2023 included: SPC Induction training; Disability Participation and Awareness; LECP Plan; Offaly Age Friendly Strategy; Offaly Arts Strategy 2024-2029; Offaly Local Development Strategy; and Offaly Library Strategy.

Offaly Community Response Forum:

Following the military invasion of Ukraine on 24th February 2022 the Offaly Community Response Forum (CRF), was established and has met regularly since 16th March 2022.

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	
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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. 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 total numbers of Ukrainians in Offaly has gradually increased:

12 June 2022	419 PPS numbers were allocated in Offaly
26 October 2022	708
29 th November 2022	837
10 th May 2023	1,214
18th October 2023	1,501

Age Breakdown of Ukrainian arrivals in Offaly (November 2023)

35%	Under 20
47%	Between 20 and 49
18%	Over 50

Offaly Age Friendly Alliance

Offaly Age Friendly Alliance was established on 27th 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

Throughout 2023, work was ongoing on the development of the second Age Friendly Strategy. In April Age Friendly Offaly held a Climate Action Workshop in Lough Boora in association with Climate Action Regional Offices (CARO). In June a Walkability Audit was carried out in Kilcormac. Three routes were covered by groups on the day, participants included a local elected member, the local area Engineer, Age Friendly Alliance member, OPC member, members of KDA and local residents. Work is ongoing to develop 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 and consults 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. Members of the Secretariat meet with OCC Community section management team quarterly.

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 and other opportunities. A plenary is held in Spring,



following on from the MD meetings and again in Autumn. The Autumn MD & Plenary meetings inform the work plan for the following year.



Groups are also assisted with queries including Revenue/Tax registration and Tax Clearance to draw down grants. We also collaborate with other sections and external organisations on areas of work In Spring & Autumn the PPN hosts Municipal

District meetings. We have a growing media presence via the website, 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 for the membership which now exceeds 645. There are a further 100 plus 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 Arklow in 5-6th.October 2023.

The PPN purchased a Property marking Machine in 2023. Training took place in Mucklagh, Ferbane and Clonbullogue. This PPN initiative is carried out in conjunction with the JPC, Gardai and Offaly Co. Co.

Tidy Towns Network

The Offaly Tidy Towns Network is in place since 2011 and is a collaborative project of the Community and Heritage sections of Offaly County Council. Tidy Towns Network meetings are held two to three times a year when advice, information and invaluable networking between members takes place.

The results of the 2023 Tidy Towns competition were announced on 6th October in Dublin. Twenty one Tidy Towns groups from Offaly entered the Tidy Towns competition in 2023 with Geashill again winning the title of Ireland's Tidiest Village. Other Offaly groups also made great progress and increased their overall scores. Other Offaly award winners were:

- Geashill County First & Gold Medal
- Birr Silver Medal
- Clonbullogue County Second & Bronze Medal
- Tullamore County Third & Gold Medal
- Kilcormac Endeavour Award

Pride of Place 2023

Judging for the three Offaly entries took place on 6th and 7th September 2023. The judges for the two days were Mr. John Briggs, former Chief Executive of Armagh Council, and Mr. Declan Nelson, former Chief Executive, Monaghan County Council. At the awards ceremony held on Friday 10th November 2023 in Armagh, Ballyboy Community Development

Community Group	POP Category	Municipal District	Judging Date
Ballyboy Community Development	Population 1,000- 1,500	Birr MD	Wed 6 th Sept 2023 AM
Tullamore Tidy Towns	Climate Action and Biodiversity	Tullamore MD	Wed 6 th Sept 2023 PM
Bracknagh Community Assoc.	Population 0 to 500	Edenderry MD	Thur 7 th Sept 2023 AM



Pride of Place judges with Ballyboy Community Development members at the Pride of Place judging event on 6th September 2023.



Ballyboy Community Development members outside Dan and Mollys pub. The judging was attended by Councillor John Leahy and Councillor Peter Ormond.



Pride of Place judges with Councillors Declan Harvey, Councillor Sean O'Brien and Tullamore Tidy Towns group members at the Pride of Place judging event on 6th September 2023.



The Pride of Place judges meet two Ukrainian volunteers who are active members of the Tullamore Tidy Towns group.



Pride of Place judges with Cathaoirleach Eddie Fitzpatrick and Councillor Noel Cribbin, Bracknagh Community Association members and Council staff at the Pride of Place judging event on 7th September 2023.



The Pride of Place judges listen to the presentation from Bracknagh Community Association in the Community Hall and meet local community groups and volunteers.

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 2023, Offaly Sports Partnership employed a staff of six: -

- 1) Eamonn Henry, Coordinator
- 2) Olivia Murphy, Administrator
- 3) Jean Brady, Sports Inclusion Development Officer supporting the participation of people with disabilities in sport and physical activity
- 4) Denise Coghill, Community Sports Development Officer coordinating the delivery of community based sport and physical activity programmes in the county
- 5) Liam O Reilly, ACE Coordinator supporting the participation of disadvantaged children in sport and physical activity through schools programmes and club / community links; and
- 6) Johnny Corboy, ASPIRE graduate - this is a Sport Ireland funded 11 month placement which enables recently qualified sport and physical activity graduates to gain relevant experience in sector based organisations such as Local Sports Partnerships and National Governing Bodies of Sport



Staff of Offaly Sports Partnership (l-r: Olivia Murphy, Dermot Egan, Denise Coghill, Jean Brady, Eamonn Henry, Liam O Reilly) pictured with Cllr Robert Mc Dermott, Chair Offaly Sports Partnership

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

Offaly Sports Partnership secured funding from a variety of sources (e.g. Sport Ireland; Health Services Executive; the Dormant Accounts Disbursement Fund, etc.) in 2023 to support the delivery of a range of sport and physical activity programmes across the county. Among the programmes delivered in 2023 were: -

- Adapted sport and physical activity programmes for children and young people with additional needs including in school and after school programmes, July provision days and 1:1 physical activity supports
- The establishment of our third community sports and physical activity hub in Mucklagh Community Centre
- HER Moves programme for 16 under active teenage girls
- HER Outdoors week in August - five activities were delivered as part of this week including three kayak programmes, a come dance programme and a come try boxercise programme for 100 women and girls
- Mass participation events such as spring athletics for 1,500 primary school pupils; Bike Week in May; Africa Day athletics in the Tullamore Harriers for 200 primary school pupils; and a "Fast Feet" programme in 26 primary 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, Daingean and Mucklagh Sports Hubs
- Remote speed endurance challenge for 4,430 children across 37 primary schools in Offaly
- Sport and physical activity summer camps for children and young people
- Women in sport week in March during which five activities were rolled out by the Sports Partnership catering for over 500 women and girls

30 clubs were also supported via our Club Development Grant Scheme; while a further six community sporting organisations were supported via the national Energy Support Scheme, administered on behalf of Sport Ireland by Offaly Sports Partnership.

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.

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 county-wide 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.

2023 - Key achievements

Arts Office Programmes - Youth Arts

In 2023, the Arts Office continued to implement the findings of the 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 be published in 2024.



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 2022-2023. In response to a call 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, four projects were selected and delivered in 2023. 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.

Hullabaloo! Offaly's Children's Arts Festival



Hullabaloo! 2023 hosted 101 Arts events for children this Midterm Break!

Hullabaloo! Offaly's Children's Arts Festival presented its biggest programme to date with an extravaganza of creativity, art making and fun experiences for all the family. Now, in its 17th year, Hullabaloo! Offaly's dedicated arts festival for children under 12, ran from Wednesday 1st November to Saturday 4th November in Birr, Clara, Edenderry and Tullamore.

Hullabaloo! is all about creativity, stimulating curiosity, originality and confidence with workshops and family performances with the best artist facilitators from all over Ireland and beyond. Children have fun and experience a medley of high-quality creative experiences, curated to meet

the developmental needs and interests of children of all ages.

The Arts Office worked in partnership with Birr Theatre and Arts Centre to deliver a programme of exciting live events countywide. This year we had even more reason to celebrate, with the opening of Esker Arts, we expanded our partnership and welcomed the new art centre to our team and were able to offer a full programme of events at Esker Arts, Tullamore as well as a great programme for Edenderry.

Mini Movies

The Arts Office, working with Young Irish Filmmakers, held a youth consultation process *Meeting of Young Minds* – as part of OFFline Festival. Established in 2012 *Mini Movies* is an initiative of Offaly County Council Arts Office, funded by The Arts Council, Offaly County Council Arts Office and the J.V.W. Trench Trust. The programme gives primary and secondary school children in Offaly first-hand experience of filmmaking, funding professional filmmakers to come into selected schools, supporting and mentoring students to make their own films, which have premiered at OFFLine Film Festival.

Mini Movies
Meeting Of Young Minds
 An Offaly County Council Arts Office
 Youth Voice Consultation in association with
 Young Irish Filmmakers



Young Irish Filmmakers Young Irish Film Makers is the national development and educational youth film making organisation dedicated to giving all young people, regardless of physical, social, educational, cultural disadvantage or background, an opportunity to access film training and digital technology skills to become skilled social and critical creators. In an exciting collaboration, Young Irish Filmmakers hosted a consultation with young people in Offaly at Offline Film Festival, examining the opportunities for the growth of the Mini Movies programme in Offaly. **Meeting Of Young Minds** took place in October, and the outcome of this review will inform the 2024 programme.

Filmoffaly

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

The FilmOffaly Award 2022 entitled, *Missing*, shot and completed on location in Offaly in March 2023. *Missing* was produced by Maggie Ryan, Escape Pod Media and written and directed by Maura Foley. The film held a local premiere in Birr during the OFFline Film Festival in October 2023. The film will then enter the film festival circuit.

FilmOffaly Review – The draft of the FilmOffaly Review undertaken by researchers, *Culture Works* was completed in 2023. The review examines the development of film production and the film sector in Offaly to date and offers recommendations for the potential growth of Film in Offaly going forward. The report focus is 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

The Arts Office once again co-ordinated Culture Night 2023 with a theme of 'one night for all' as venues and The Arts Office once again co-ordinated Culture Night 2023 with a theme of 'one night for all' as venues and public spaces across Offaly opened their doors to host a programme of FREE entertainment– an island-wide celebration of arts, heritage and culture. Celebrating its thirteenth year, Offaly Culture Night brought a packed programme of events that reflects the eclectic cultural exuberance within the county - a great night for all family and friends.

This year there was a thirty per cent increase in number of events from 2022, with an emphasis on diversity and inclusion with all communities encouraged to come and be part of a range of multi-disciplinary events. There was a rich range of cultural treats to choose from, across the perimeters of the County from Edenderry to Birr.



Events included a **pop-up portrait studio** hosted by commissioned artist



Tim Quinlan at Birr Technology Centre, and a medley of music, dance, recitals and spectacle took place at The Growery. **Clara Musical Society** hosted **'Musical All Sorts'** at Friends Meeting House. And in **Edenderry** there were choral delights with **Eden Chorale's** at Edenderry Library, as well a cultural community social event hosted by **Creative Places Edenderry** and the Voices of Edenderry Open Mic Night. Commissioned artist Veronica Nicholson held an exhibition at Edenderry Library showcasing the

work of a collaborative project with students of Oakland College. Kilcormac Development Association launched their project *Capturing Our Story*, with recordings that capture memories of life as it was lived in earlier days in the home, the workplace, the farm and the bog. This project was funded by Creative Ireland. **It was a special night for Esker Arts in Tullamore**, as this was their first Culture Night since opening earlier this year. The place was buzzing, and events for all included workshops, an Open Youth Busk hosted by **Music Generation Offaly**. A magnificent array of dance including a commissioned work by dancer Amy Donlan and a showcase of youth ballet at the start of the evening. Youth events featured strongly with the



young people from **The Acorn Project in Edenderry** taking centre stage with the premiere of their short film 'Stand Up' a short film set in Edenderry about boxing and making a choice.

And an exhibition of photographs *Through My Eyes*, a result of a year-long project with Offaly Down Syndrome Association and photographer James Crombie. The evening ending with a lively conversation between Paddy Slattery and John Connors on the event of the launch of Slattery's new book *Quiet Thoughts, But Out Loud*. Culture Night is supported the

Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the Creative Ireland Programme in partnership with Offaly County Council.

Bealtaine Roots & Shoots Programme

The Arts Office supported Birr Theatre & Arts Centre and Esker Arts in working with the **Bealtaine Roots & Shoots Programme** that took place in May 2023. Both venues hosted age-friendly Arts events including film curated for the audience, dance workshops, exhibition tours and a story-telling event the popular Midlands writer and story-teller Jean Farrell with an afternoon of Memories & Melodies. A highlight was "Timeless Tunes" taking place at Esker Arts, presented this dedicated afternoon of vocal delight in Ireland's newest Arts Centre, Esker Arts at the close of the festival month. Offaly County Council and HSE Tullamore Staff Choirs together with Le Chéile Singers, under the assured guidance of Musical Director Andrius Kozlovskis, presented "Timeless Tunes", a lively and eclectic mix of music from across the ages.



A specially curated programme of songs from a variety of genres, was performed in three-part harmony, with live musical accompaniment throughout by Ciaran Whelan, in the beautiful surroundings and acoustics of Esker Arts.

An afternoon of song, memory, fun and culture where the programme covered a broad range of classics from The Beatles, Bob Dylan and musicals such as Les Misérables and West Side Story to name but a handful of the eclectic programme performed.

The performance once again showcased the broad appeal across the community to attend events in the newly opened venue, with a full house in attendance.

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 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 2023 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.

Projects have included; Community socials, playwriting and screenwriting course ran with Eugene O'Brien, a visual Art project for and by people who identify as disabled began with Eleanor Farrelly, a Tea Dance as part of Bealtaine, drama workshops, music workshop started at The Youth Cafe with Tom Nolan, St. Patrick's Primary School completed their mural created with recycled bottle tops, memoir writing project with John Grogan



Creative Edenderry have also distributed various grants including Creative Grants to the local community and artist commissions awards

Arts Office Supports

Arts Act Grants

The Arts Acts Grants 2023 were assessed by an external panel. 21 projects were funded under the Arts Acts grant scheme to a total allocation of 20,190 Euro.

Festival Arts Grant

The county arts service disburses grants on an annual basis to a wide selection of arts and cultural festival taking place in Offaly. In 2023, Offaly County Council provided financial assistance, advice and promotional assistance to festivals including; Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival, OFFline Film Festival, Tullamore International Summer Organ Series, and Birr Festival of Music. The Arts Office also lead-out with other festivals such as Hullabaloo Children's Arts Festival in partnership with Birr Theatre and Arts Centre. The Festival Arts Grants were awarded to 9 festivals a total cost of 9,400 Euro.



Arts In Health

The Arts Office worked with Offaly Down Syndrome Association and renowned Offaly-based Photographer James Crombie, to deliver an Arts in Health Project throughout February. Funded under the Disability Participation Fund, the project funded 10 adults from the Down Syndrome Community to engage in a week-long workshop with James Crombie, learning the fundamentals of photography and exploring portrait photography as well as taking part in an outdoor field trip, at a nearby Alpaca Farm. The final part of the project took place in March, where an exhibition of the work will take place in Tullamore on World Down Syndrome Day.

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 2023



Animation Residency

Offaly County Council Arts Service, through the Creative Ireland programme, continued to support the Animation Film Residency through a period of reflection and review in 2023 with Offline launching the findings of their review at their festival in 2023.

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 2023. 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 2023 the arts office continued to provide assistance to professional artists from and living in Offaly through the Professional Artist Support Scheme with 20 applications being approved to a total cost of 11,740 Euro.

Birr Writers Residency

The continuation of the successful annual partnership with the St Brendan's House (Tin Jug Studio) in Birr saw writers awarded with the writers residency in 2023

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 by People Places Consulting: Caoimhín Corrigan and Siobhán O'Malley was ratified and published in 2023. The strategy explores 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.

Arts Office Strategy 2024-2028



2023 saw work on the development of a new strategy for the Arts in Offaly. The Arts Office Strategy *Inspire – Imagine – Involve* 2018-22 is due for revision and work on the new strategy has included the research, consultation and writing with a draft due for completion 2023. Following an open call and selection process the Arts Office commissioned arts consultant John O'Brien to assist with the planning, consultation and writing of the new Arts Strategy 2024-2028. The new strategy will align with the newly

adopted **Arts Infrastructure Strategy 2023-2028**. The development of the new strategy will be through a phased approach of research, consultation and writing throughout 2023. The consultant phase is near completion with a great take up from people attending four public meetings and a very positive response to a questionnaire send out from the Arts Office in Oct. The new Arts Strategy 2023-2028 will be aligned with the Arts Infrastructure Strategy 2023-2028.

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, Birr Festival of Music and, as co-producer with Offaly County Council of the Hullabaloo! Children's Arts Festival. Offaly County Council provided increased funding of €50,000.00 to Birr Theatre and Arts Centre in 2023.

Esker Arts Centre



The official opening of Esker Arts by President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins took place on Tuesday 6th June, on what was a historic day for both the arts centre and Offaly as a whole. President Higgins noted the “significant achievement of all involved” in the

realisation of the superb facility, noting that “I have no doubt that Esker Arts will play an important role in the provision of the cultural space that we so dearly need in Ireland as we continue our journey of building an inclusive, equitable, sustainable republic, one that places a high value on artists and cultural practitioners and the participation of the arts by all of its citizens.”

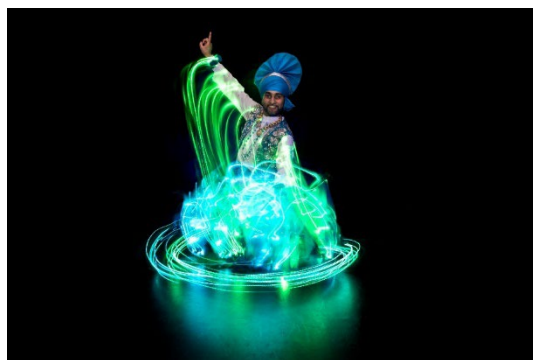


Esker Arts has since developed a vibrant and exciting programme of events in 2023 with great acknowledgement coming from the community in the numbers attending their innovative programme

Lough Boora Sculpture Park

In 2023, 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

Lough Boora Sculpture Park – Art In Landscape Project



The Arts Office in collaboration with Mayo County Council Arts Office and Visual Artists Ireland were successful in securing project funding under the Art Council's Invitation for Collaboration Scheme. OCC Art's Office is the lead partner on the project.

The project includes an artist commission in Offaly and Mayo, and a planned series of events taking place at Lough Boora Sculpture Park, Esker Arts and Tír Sáile (County Mayo) in April 2024. Curator Helen Pheby, who works as an associate director of programming for Yorkshire Sculpture Park, was appointed as Curator for the project. The artists commissioned to work in Offaly and Mayo are international artists Hardeep Sahota, collaborating with the photographer Tim Smith. As part of their research and community engagement the artists met with a number of artists, individuals and groups in September and more have been planned to take place in October 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 Edenderry, this will include developments that take place as part of the Creative Places Edenderry project.

Library Service Report

Offaly County Library Service continues to deliver on the objectives outlined in:

The Library is the Place: Information, Recreation, Inspiration

National Public Library Strategy 2023 - 2027

Creating Collaborative Communities, Offaly Libraries Development Plan 2022-2023

Offaly Libraries harness innovative technologies, including *My Open Library* services, and utilise our unique civic spaces to strengthen the role of libraries as gateways to and transmitters of cultural works, skills and experiences. Particular efforts are directed towards embedding Social Inclusion, Climate Adaptation and Accessibility in support of increasing user engagement. We continue to promote quality services on offer through monthly newsletters, interactive cultural programmes and via various social media platforms.

2023 Departmental Grant Awards to Offaly Libraries:

- **€8,000 CYPSC Funding:** Allowing for Sensory Offaly Programme and Parenting Support Programme, in partnership with Laois Libraries
- **€6,000 Healthy Ireland Funding:** Provision of Age Friendly Seating and a programme of Events for all age groups.
- **€5,500 Dormant Account Funding:** Sensory Room and accompanying equipment for Birr Library
- **€4,000 Integration Funding through CYPSC & DCEDIY:** Events for Children and their families living in International Protection Accommodation Services.
- **€1,250 Tusla Funding:** Book Supports for the Ukrainian Community

My Open Library services return to Offaly Libraries

- In 2022, €170,000 My Open Library funding was granted by DRCD for the upgrade of MOL technologies in Banagher, Ferbane, Tullamore and Kilcormac libraries. This project is 10% matched funded by Offaly County Council
- Banagher, Ferbane and Tullamore MOL services are now operational
- Installation of a new My Open Library solution is
- currently underway at Kilcormac Library
- Completion of all works due in 2024



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



**Reading & Literacy
Development**
Right to Read Festivals



**Learning and
Information Services**
eResources and
Age Friendly



**Community and
Culture Provision**
Healthy Ireland
and Sensory Offaly



Library Buildings Developments

- **Sensory Room, Birr Library** - Funding secured and procurement underway
- **Banagher Library** - refurbishments complete
- **Accessible Signage Upgrades** – completed at Tullamore, Ferbane and Banagher
- **Edenderry Library capital project** – work is ongoing on the development of a new library and arts space at 33-34 JKL Street, Edenderry. This project is supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development in partnership with Offaly County Council through the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund.

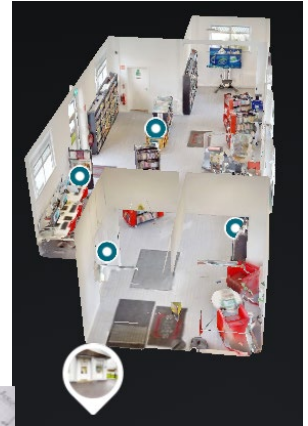


The project will consist of a new state of the art community library and arts space to include; adult, teen and children's libraries, multipurpose space and Artist's studios as well as ancillary support spaces such as library meeting rooms and a wet workshop. The project plans were advertised for Part 8 consultation in October 2023. All details of the proposal can be found at www.offaly.ie

New Services, Community Engagement, Social Inclusion Actions:

ICT & Digital Resources Developments

- **Virtual Tours** completed for each library branch, available to view online
- **New library website**, launched May 2023
- **Dedicated School Newsletter**, launched September 2023
- **Reading Eggs**, 250 licenses available free for the school year 2023 / 2024
- **MathSeeds**, 125 licenses available free for the school year 2023 / 2024
- **Moshi Emotional Wellbeing for Kids**, available free to all library members
- **LOTE Online for Kids** has over 1,350+ digital picture books in 45+ languages



Innovative Events and Curated Programmes at Offaly Libraries



Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme

Creative Ireland: Offaly Library Service works as part of the Offaly Culture and Creativity team, partnering with Heritage, Arts, Community, Biodiversity, LEO and culture administrative officer to deliver a diverse and innovative events programme across the county in line with the Offaly Culture & Creativity Strategy 2023-2027.

- **Offaly Libraries Comic Con** welcomed **1,300** visitors to Tullamore Library on Saturday 16th September 2023
- **Cruinniú na nÓg 2023: 28 free events** delivered to **254 children** all over the county
- **Sensory Offaly:** Sensory rooms on offer in two branches with an expansive range of Sensory Toys, Books and Assistive Technology available to borrow. **1,873 Sensory Space Users** to date in 2023.
- **Parenting Programme:** with **CYPSC funding**, Offaly Libraries are currently offering a varied programme of **Parenting Support Talks and Workshops** in **partnership with Laois Libraries** this Autumn 2023
- **Age Friendly Libraries & Positive Ageing Week:** a series of activities promoting lifelong learning for older persons in Offaly was well attended this September.
- **Healthy Ireland at your Library:** working with LGMA, Dept. of Health and local Healthy Ireland partners, Offaly Libraries delivers a varied programme of free events both online and in branch.
- **First 5 Little Library Initiative** – over **500+ bags** distributed in 2023



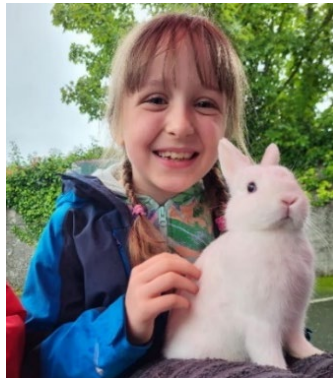
- **Right to Read:** Offaly Libraries continues to offer exciting events within the four national pillars:



Offaly Library Service – Community Response in support of Ukrainian and IPAS Communities

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.

- **€4,000 Integration Funding through CYPSC & DCEDIY** allowed Offaly Libraries to deliver events for children and their families living in International Protection Accommodation Services. **152 Children** and their families attended **8 events** in Banagher and Tullamore Libraries



- **€1,250 Tusla Funding: Book Supports for the Ukrainian Community** with new titles continuously added to our shelves and our online catalogues.
- Library digital services also have multi-lingual offerings, including Ukrainian, Russian and Arabic.



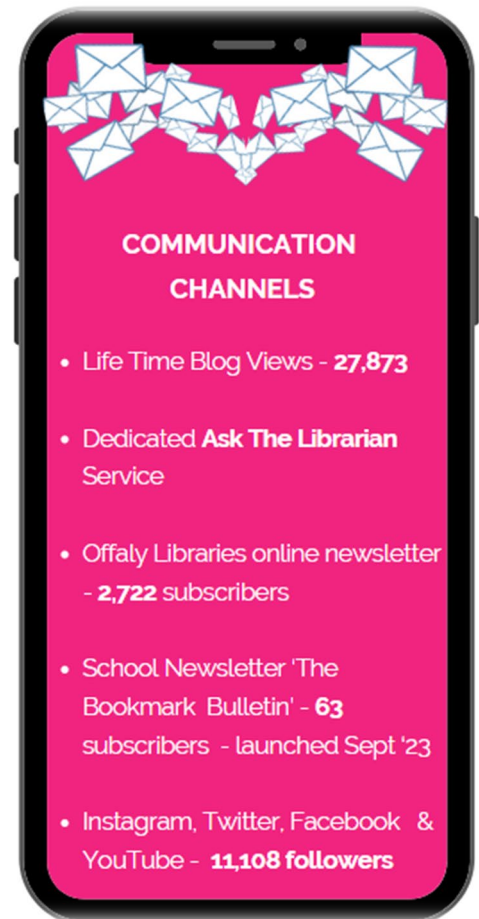
- A **library service leaflet in Ukrainian** with information on how to join and use the library has been circulated.



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

Priorities for 2024 include:

- Progression of the capital development of a new community library and arts space in Edenderry
- Introduce and adopt a new Library Development Plan for 2024 – 2028
- Launch My Open Library services at Kilcormac Library
- Increase promotion of library services especially through online channels including monthly newsletters, interactive cultural programmes & social media
- Showcase Offaly Libraries as the heart of reading and literacy development within our communities
- Contribute to local and national climate and environmental objectives by providing information and programmes for the community via libraries.
- 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
- Increase active membership by encouraging users back to libraries and increase engagement.
- Strengthen the partnership between Offaly Archives Service and Offaly Libraries
- Review, monitor and evaluate library service activities to the benefit of the community



Fire Service

Activities in 2023

Offaly County Council Fire & Rescue Service provided an effective and professional response to emergencies on a 24/7, 365day basis throughout 2023. 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 2023. The 2023 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 2023. 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.

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.

Equipment & Capital Expenditure

In addition, the Council's 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.

Funding was obtained in 2023 from the National Directorate for the provision of 2 new Jeeps.

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. Our new Training and Development Centre in Tullamore has advanced and construction will commence before the year end. The total cost which is €4 million will be funded by the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management.

The site which has been identified for a new Fire Station in Clara is located in Raheen. In 2023 the Fire Service continued to engage with the National Directorate of Fire and Emergency Management for funding which has now been secured. The process of appointing design consultants has now commenced.

January 2024 will also see the delivery of a new Fire Engine which will be located in Edenderry. This has been acquired through funding of €450,000 from the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management.

Civil Defence

Civil Defence provides an emergency response capability and supported the community and events throughout 2023. Civil Defence had a very busy operational year in 2023 covering many various Duties & Events within the county, running various local courses, and also assisting a neighbouring Civil Defence Unit within our Region.

Offaly Civil Defence also received funding from the dormant accounts fund for a new support vehicle. 2023 has brought a new change and direction to Offaly Civil Defence and with the continued support of all involved and the implementation of the 'Towards 2030 Civil Defence Policy' Offaly County Council will play its part in the future development of the organisation and continue to support the Principal Response Agencies in the years ahead.

Planning & Development - Development Management

Offaly County Council administers the planning function for the entire county. The number of planning applications within the county is in line with 2022 levels.

	Estimate to end 2023	Total 2022	Total 2014
Planning Applications	697 (517 to end September)	681	310

	Total received to end of September 2023	Total 2022
Extension of Duration Application & Assessments	14	15

Overview:

The Planning Department has experienced another demanding year. The new ePlanning system went live on 27 June 2023. This was in partnership with the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) who provide ongoing support. This new planning system is a one-stop online service for submitting planning applications and submissions/ representations. It allows the tracking of development applications by providing an alternative to the requirement to submit applications in hard copy. This facilitates an efficient, easy to use and environmentally friendly system.

Since its introduction, the percentage of online applications to paper applications is approximately 60% vs. 40% respectively. Therefore, the expectation is that there will be a continuous increase in the on-line planning applications, with an anticipated increase to 80% of online planning applications by Q3 2024.

The Planning Department continues to facilitate pre-planning meetings to give prospective applicants the opportunity to discuss their proposed planning application. Pre-application consultations are often conducted *via* phone or email, and face-to-face meetings are also available for larger or more complex proposals. Proposed developments, meeting the definition of Large-scale Residential Development, are required to engage in Pre-Planning consultation under Section 247 of the Planning and Development Act 2000.

The Planning Department's scanning project continues to allow for current and historical files to be viewed via the internet. This is important in terms of compliance with Access to Information on the Environment Regulations.

In addition to the above mentioned, the other main areas of focus for Development Management in 2023 were as follows:

a) Housing:

The Planning Department has received and processed a number of large-scale housing developments throughout the County in 2023 to date. Tullamore has experienced an increase in the number of housing developments, with a number of planning applications in excess of 50+ dwellings, submitted and assessed. The settlements of Birr, Edenderry Portarlinton, Clara and Clonbullogue have also seen an increase in the volume of housing proposals. In Portarlinton, planning permission 23/156 granted, by means of a material contravention, may provide 37 new dwellings. The number of rural one-off houses and small minor domestic extensions/additions planning applications has remained constant throughout 2023 to date.

b) Green Energy' Applications:

Similar to 2022, the Planning Department has experienced an upward trend in the volume of large-scale green energy-related developments and pre-planning meeting requests submitted during 2023. These include a number of large solar farm proposals, battery energy storage facilities and windfarm proposals. In particular, there has been a continued rise in the number of solar farm planning applications (totaling in excess of 392 hectares) lodged/assessed in 2023.

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 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, two LRD proposals have been granted by Offaly County

Council, another LRD is in the process of being accessed and one LRD is at pre planning consultation stage.

e) Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) Applications:

Development applications for projects such as large-scale wind farms, grid connections applications and substation proposals may be lodged to An Bord Pleanála. These applications require detailed referrals/reports to be issued to the Board.

f) 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, introduced under the Finance Act 2021, for which final maps will be prepared in Nov. 2023

g) Leave to Apply for Substitute Consent and Substitute Consent Applications

The Planning Department received 3 no. referrals by the end of Q3 2023 from An Bord Pleanála in relation to Leave to Apply for Substitute Consent applications for historical peat extraction. These referrals require significant technical input and staff resources 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 within the prescribed timeframe.

Enforcement & Compliance

Enforcement activity in the year 2023, in comparison to previous years, is outlined in the table below.

	To end September 2023	To end September	Total 2022
Warning Letters and (Enforcement Notices) issued	42 (10)	36 (9)	41 (10)

The investigation, regularisation and prosecution of complaints of unauthorised development is on-going and continues to be a challenge within the limited resources currently available. A number of complaints in relation to alleged unauthorised industrial peat extraction have been received through 2023 and these are extremely resource-intensive and legally complex.

Development Contribution Collection & Bonds

	To end September 2023	To end September	Total 2022
Warning Letters and (Enforcement Notices) issued	141 (75)	Nil	113 (1)
Referred for Legal proceedings	18	Nil	Nil

Forward Planning

a) County Development Plan 2021-2027

The Chief Executive's two-year progress report on the implementation of the objectives of the CDP, was circulated to the Members in October 2023 and will be discussed at the November Council Meeting 2023.

b) Local Area Plans (LAPs)

Birr LAP was adopted on 15 May 2023, and came into effect on 26 June 2023. Edenderry LAP was adopted on 17 July 2023 and came into effect on 28 August 2023. Portarlington Joint LAP 2024-2030 is currently being prepared and will be followed by the Tullamore LAP 2024/5-2030/1.

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 was placed on public display from 1 November 2022 until 1 January 2023. Nineteen submissions were received by 11 January 2023. Offaly County Council did not require to publish a Supplemental Map, which if it did would have required to be published by 1 May 2023. The purpose of a Supplemental Map was to display any additional land considered liable for the RZLT that had not been shown on the draft Map, after consideration of submissions.

Five appeals to An Bord Pleanála were received by 1 May 2023. All five of the Local Authority's decisions have been confirmed by the Board.

Two submissions sought zoning changes, and these were the subject of a Chief Executive's report in July 2023, in which the CE recommended not varying the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027. The administration of the tax will be undertaken by the Revenue Commissioners. The tax has been deferred to 2025 as per the National Budget 2024. However, publication of the final map is required by 1 December 2023. The first annual review of the mapping is then required on 1 February 2024. This is a very resource-intensive exercise, which will have implications for the delivery of the forward planning element of the section's work programme.

d) Land Value Sharing and Urban Development Zones

A bill to introduce proposals to ensure that communities get a greater share of increases in land value which arise from decisions made by the State to zone or designate land for development was published on 22 December 2021. It is currently being progressed as a separate piece of legislation to the new Planning and Development Bill. The General Scheme for the Land Value Sharing and Urban Development Zones Bill envisages that local authorities will be enabled to secure a proportion of the increase in the value of land that is either newly zoned for housing or for housing and a mix of other uses, or where any land zoned for housing or a mix that includes housing, is subject to an 'Urban Development Zone' or 'UDZ', designation. The contribution is to be used to deliver the necessary infrastructure to support the development of sustainable communities.

It is proposed that all or part of the contribution to be secured by condition of the planning permission may be facilitated by financial contributions, land transfer, and/or the undertaking of infrastructural works by the developer. Where applicable, this will replace current development levies.

Land Value Sharing will also apply to designated Urban Development Zones (UDZs), where significant potential for development including housing is identified. The proposed legislation will build on the existing Strategic Development Zone ('SDZ') concept. UDZs will involve a key decision-making role for the local authority and early engagement with the local community and landowners, through a planned approach that must include determination of a planning and delivery scheme.

Enhanced land assembly and acquisition powers are likely to be proposed, which may include obligations to transfer 'critical land' required for infrastructure within the UDZ, to the designated development agency on behalf of the State.

It is intended that the proposed land value sharing and urban development zone measures will operate in conjunction with the new Residential Zoned Land Tax.

e) Miscellaneous

- Forward Planning and Development Management will prepare submissions on draft consultation Guidelines and statutory returns relevant to Planning. The most recent submission made was on the draft consultation Sustainable and Compact Settlement Guidelines 2023.
- Forward Planning will continue to input into the Tullamore Regeneration Framework and the Tullamore Grand Canal Harbour masterplan.
- All Council Sections must implement County Development Plan objectives and Strategic Environmental Assessment objectives.
- Going forward, an annual Development Plan Monitoring Report (per the draft Development Plan Guidelines) will be required. This will be submitted to the elected members and placed on the council's website) – and will require input from throughout the council.

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. The planning section spent large parts of the spring & summer of 2022 providing information for the review. Staff from the OPR's office visited the council for two days in August 2022. The report is expected to issue in November 2023.

Greenways

Approx. €9,000,000 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 the council's walking & cycling strategy called *Connecting People Connecting Places*, September 2015. The Grand Canal Greenway, which is the 'spine' element of the strategy and of the *Midlands Cycling Destination – Offaly*,

Feasibility Study 2016 is expected to be complete (71 kms plus the 12km spur link to Kilbeggan) by Q3 2024.

Grand Canal Greenway –

The overall objective has been to extend a quality, family friendly cycling and walkway along the Grand Canal towpath from Dublin to Shannon Harbour. This includes 71kms in Offaly from Edenderry to Shannon Harbour. Furthermore, the 12km spur along the Kilbeggan Branch will hopefully ultimately link the Grand Canal Greenway to the Royal Canal Greenway / Dublin to Galway Greenway. The Council has, since 2018, worked in partnership with Waterways Ireland, South Dublin County Council and Kildare County Council to develop the overall greenway. Delivery of funding under the National & Regional Greenway Fund moved from the Department of Transport-to-Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in late 2021.

In summary, circa 50km of the Grand Canal (main line) Greenway is now in place with 12kms of this 'shared' with vehicles and of this, 5.5km is public road. Work was completed in 2023 to relocate 5.5km of the greenway route from the south bank of the Canal between Hennessey's Bridge and Pullough to the much quieter and partially off-road north bank.

A further circa. 12.5kms of Greenway (Kilbeggan Branch line) is in place between Ballycommon and Kilbeggan with 4.25km of this in Co. Westmeath.

Carbon Tax Fund 2021 – Feasibility Studies

Offaly County Council received funding for two feasibility studies under this 2020 fund. The study of the 'Monastic Greenway' from Shannon Harbour to Athlone via Shannonbridge and Clonmacnoise delivered a Scoping Document in 2023. 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 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 €1.1m 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 remains approx. 66% complete as of October 2023. An exemplar project to develop a link from Leabeg to the Discovery Park will commence over the winter period 2023/4.

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 (MCD-O). 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. In this regard, the principle of the EU Just Transition Strategic Trail Network for the Midlands is welcomed. Fáilte Ireland is the Intermediary Body for this €30m of the Just Transition Fund which was launched in 2023. This may deliver some or at least part of some of the routes of the MCD-O up to the end of 2026.

Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike (MTB) Trails

The trails network (approx. 60kms singletrack and 80kms overall) is complete. A hub building at Baunreagh, Co. Laois is progressing. Council staff continue to sit on a steering group with Coillte and Fáilte Ireland 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 the **Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) 2020**. The project encompasses:

- (i) the '*Route to the trails*' link from Kinnitty village – substantially complete, Oct. 2023.
- (ii) a 2km Novice Loop in Kinnitty Forest – complete and open, 2023.
- (iii) '*Rediscovering Castle Bernard's historic bridges and walking routes*' – complete.

Architecture & Conservation

The Conservation Architect's office provides a cross-departmental service throughout the County Council, particularly in areas of **Planning, Conservation and Public Realm**. The office 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 are 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: 16 projects received provisional grant funding ranging from repairs to rainwater goods and chimneys, to stained glass repair, consolidation of stone outbuilding, lime render and sash window repair. 5 applicants withdrew from the scheme and where possible the funding was reallocated among the 11 projects that were completed within the Department's timeframe.

Thatch Funding €15,450: 4 applicants received provisional approval for specific thatch funding. None of these projects proceeded despite consistent time working with the applicants. One thatcher retired, another did not carry out thatching projects in 2023, the third was still working on a project in Dublin, the fourth was unable to source suitable straw for thatching in time for the grant.

Historic Structures Fund €285,000: Four projects received funding from the Department and grant allocations involved Kinnitty Castle (repair of 22 windows) €37,500, Ballyboy Church (OCC building, structural repairs) €37,500, Birr Suspension Bridge Stream 2 project €200,000. A vernacular project in Rahan €10,000, did not proceed due to significant increase in the cost of the works.

Creative Ireland €15,000: As well as being part of the 5-person team managing the Creative Ireland annual programme, the Conservation Architect oversees conservation works to a Folly 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 trimming vegetation at Tubberday Folly as part of a Conservation Management Plan. The Vernacular Architecture projects **€5,000**, involved conservation of an 1870 Chaise Longue and Thatch repairs at Derrybeg.

Heritage Stewardship Fund €19,926: The Heritage Council are funding a Conservation Management Plan of Tubberdaly Folly, by Howley Hayes Cooney. The trimming of vegetation has assisted a more detailed survey of this significant structure.

Birr Destination Town €650,000: Working with Birr MD and Heritage Office and Fáilte Ireland funding, and the design team Howley Hayes Cooney for the new entrance to Birr Demesne/The Green link – project on site, to commence end 2023.

Masterplan Steering Groups: as required, subject to availability: Tullamore general, Tullamore Harbour, Banagher, Birr Rectory Lands, Edenderry Library etc.

County PR: Nationwide: 1-day filming 18 February 2023 with reporter and cameraman relating to completed folly projects at Acres Folly, Kinnitty Suspension Bridge and Gloster Arch. The programme also visited craftsmen in Offaly making God-in-the-Bottle. The show aired on 1st March 2023. Nationwide returned for a further 1-day filming 27 July 2023 at Gloster House with owners and guest speakers. This to air on 03 November 2023 for ¾ of a show. **Tracks and Trails** filmed at Kinnitty Castle on 15/08/23.

Heritage

The Heritage Office works with the Offaly Heritage Forum to deliver the Offaly Heritage Plan 2017-22. The **5th Offaly Heritage Plan** was adopted at the September 2022 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 **€37,500**. The Heritage office has one full time heritage officer: a full-time biodiversity officer and shared administration support. The Biodiversity Officer programme is an initiative of the Heritage Council and new posts are being rolled out nationwide in 2023.

Decade of Centenaries funding of €50,000 was received in 2023 and a comprehensive programme of publications, videos, blogs, and material hosted on the website has been developed in partnership with Offaly History.

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, Conservation Architect, Library Service, Community and Local Development and the Local Enterprise Offaly. In 2023

over **€200,000** 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.

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. Conservation works are being completed in 2023. The project was funded by the Irish Just Transition fund.

Community Monuments Fund c. €469,547 - Offaly received support for conservation works at four sites in Offaly in 2023, Seir Kieran Monastic Site, Killeigh chapter house, Kilbride (Ballycowan) and Monasteroris. A conservation management plan is being drawn up for Ballintemple church. In addition, research into the unique staircase at Emmel Castle has been undertaken.

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, Monasteroris.

Clonmacnoise – the OPW has appointed consultants for the Clonmacnoise Masterplan, and the Heritage Officer represents the Council on the working group, with the Senior Planner also representing the Council on the steering group.

Publications – In 2023 Offaly County Council has supported publications on *Kilcomin Graveyard* by Stephen Callaghan; *A Microcosmic Jungle, the Meadow at Birr Castle* by John Feehan; *The Camcor River* by John Feehan.

Biodiversity – Offaly County Council appointed a Biodiversity Officer in mid-March 2023. In the first six months, a large effort has been put into visiting sites, meeting communities, groups and individuals working to better biodiversity and heritage in county Offaly. This is seen as an important process ahead

of forming a biodiversity working group (a sub-group of the Heritage Forum) and drafting the County Biodiversity Action Plan in early 2024.

€120,000 of Local Biodiversity Action Funding (LBAF) allocated to OCC in 2023, with biodiversity projects delivered through this scheme. Projects include, surveys and monitoring of county flora and fauna, outreach and education, invasive species control and staff training.

The **Offaly Field Naturalist Club** programme returned to in-person events with a full programme of events spanning the year and locations across the county. Offaly's biodiversity was well represented through organised events during national celebrations such as Biodiversity, Heritage and Hedgerow Week.

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.

The **In Your Nature podcast** reached 100,000 downloads and continues to highlight the rich natural history of Offaly and the midlands.

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

Access to heritage -The very successful series of Wildflowers of Offaly and Story of the Bogs YouTube videos continued in 2023 along with support for the In Your nature podcast by BirdWatch Ireland.

Heritage Week - Nine days of events were held in August 2023 with over 40 events hosted predominantly by community groups. Bracknagh Heritage Group were finalists in the Living Heritage

national award and won the county award and Ballycumber Tidy Towns were finalists in the Wild Child award.

Legislation / Guidelines received in 2023 and / or expected in 2024

Legislation 2023

- Land Development Agency Act 2021 (Remaining Provisions) (Commencement) Order 2022
- Land Development Agency Act 2021 (Valuation of Relevant Public Land) Regulations 2023
- Planning and Development Act (Amendment) Regulations 2023
- Planning and Development (Section 179a) Regulations 2023
- Planning and Development (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2023
- Planning and Development Act 2000 (Exempted development) (no. 3) Regulations 2023
- Planning and Development (Street furniture fees) Regulations 2023
- Planning and Development and Foreshore (Amendment) Act 2022 (commencement) (no. 2) order 2023
- Planning and Development (Exempted Development) (No. 4) Regulations 2023
- Draft Planning and Development Bill 2022 published January 2023

Guidelines 2023

- Regulation of Commercial Institutional Investment in Housing, Guidelines for Planning Authorities
- Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments
- Guidance Note for Local Authorities – Temporary Waiver in respect of Development Contributions
- DMURS 2023
- Draft Sustainable and Compact Settlement Guidelines for Planning Authorities

Strategies/ Plans etc. 2023

- A roadmap for the first revision of the NPF

Circulars 2023

- Circular Letter: 'Housing 09/2023' and Planning 'PL 01/2023' Re Amendments to Planning Legislation relating to local authority Housing Development – Planning and Development, and Foreshore (Amendment) Act 2022

-
- Circular Letter: PGO 01/2023 Re: Land Development Agency Act 2021 – Part 9 Planning Condition – Delivery of Affordable Housing on Relevant Public Land and Part 7 Disposal of Relevant Public Land & First Refusal of LDA
 - Circular Letter: NRUP 01/2023 Re: Certain Amendments to Section 28 Ministerial Planning Guidelines related to Build-to-Rent Housing Developments
 - Circular Letter PL08/2023 re Temporary Time-Limited Waiver in respect of Development Contributions - Operational Guidance for Local Authorities

Expected in 2024:

- A National Strategy for People with a Disability (stated in Town Centre First Policy)
- Revised windfarm guidelines
- Sustainable rural housing guidelines update
- Guidelines on water framework directive
- Revised / amended childcare facilities guidelines
- The General Scheme for the Land Value Sharing and Urban Development Zones Act
- The Development of Residential Care Homes and Primary Care Centres
- Revised building height guidelines - in 2025 (according to page 86 of Housing for All)
- Revised Development Management Guidelines
- Guidance on achieving the most appropriate tenure mix within communities, including guidance on engagement with communities

Areas of Activity for 2024:

In addition to the normal activities of Development Management, Forward Planning, Conservation Architecture, Heritage, Biodiversity, and Enforcement, the following are the main major items of activity envisaged for 2024:

- Residential Zoned Land Tax (RZLT) first annual review of maps (Feb 2024)
- Portllington Local Area Plan 2024-2030
- Tullamore Local Area Plan 2024/5-2030/1
- Variations of County Development Plan relating to Birr and Tullamore zoning objectives map after adoption of respective LAPs
- Renewable Energy Acceleration Zones, regional level proposal
- Assisting on the progression of the *Strategic Trails Network for the Midlands* on Bord na Móna lands primarily

-
- The ongoing investigation, regularisation and prosecution of complaints of unauthorised development/s through enforcement
 - County Development Plan implementation and monitoring, SEA monitoring, and monitoring by Development Management of permitted residential development by maintaining a backdated and continuous record in accordance with objective CSO-01 of the CDP
 - Input into various and emerging tourism and amenity projects/initiatives, in particular the 10-year Plan for Derrycastle and the proposed Wilderness / Landscape Corridors as per objective BLO-28 of the County Development Plan 2021-2027
 - 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.
 - The processing of Leave to Apply for Substitute Consent and Substitute Consent referrals from the Board with respect to historical peat extraction.
 - Managing the electronic submission of planning applications through the roll out of the National e-planning Portal

Just Transition

The EU Just Transition Fund was formally launched by Eamon Ryan, Minister for the Environment, Climate, Communication and Transport, on 28 April 2023. The fund which totals €169m is made up of €84.5 from European funding with the Irish exchequer making up the balance. The territory to benefit from the fund has been identified as the counties of Offaly, Longford, Laois, Westmeath, Roscommon and parts of Galway, Kildare and Tipperary. The purpose of the fund is to assist with the transition to a climate-neutral economy, while securing the future of and livelihoods of workers and their communities, who are being most affected by this transition.

The **EU Just Transition Fund Programme 2021-2027**, sets out three priorities in relation to:

- a) Actions on economic diversification, enterprise and training / education
- b) Actions on peatland restoration / after-use and carbon capture
- c) Actions to enable the electrification of private vehicles, public bus routes and private bus operators.

Funding calls have been announced to date as follows. Applications are submitted as part of a competitive process. All eight counties in the Territory are eligible to apply.

-
- 1) Community Facilities EV Chargers (POBAL) – 28 July 2023 - €15m
 - 2) Bioeconomy Demonstration Initiative (DAFM) – 16 August 2023 - €20m
 - 3) Investment Grant Aid Scheme for Private & Community SMEs – (Failte Ireland) – 30 August 2023 - €17m
 - 4) Local Economic & Community Plan / Regional Enterprise Plan Schemes – (POBAL) –
 - 5) 13th October 2023 - €24m.

The projected date for the Community Grants Scheme under (4) above is December 2023 - €5m. In addition, a signed Partnership Agreement between Offaly County Council and Failte Ireland will allow the local authority to apply directly for funding for Tourism projects.

Offaly County Council was successful in securing 72 days of assistance from the Secretariat for Technical Assistance for Regions in Transition. The goal is to build sustainable communities and to enhance local capacity in County Offaly through Partnership Working. The partners involved in this process are Offaly County Council, the Technological University of the Shannon, the Laois / Offaly Education and Training Board and the Offaly Local Development Company. There is an identified need for the partners to work together to map opportunities and clear educational pathways which would assist in achieving higher educational attainment in the county but also to provide more defined routes into third level education and to provide courses that are relevant to both the emerging and changing economies on the Midlands.

Site visits, meetings and workshops have taken place in 2023 with a view to having a sustainable model to progress into the future.

Enterprise * Economic Development * Tourism



LEO Offaly manages the Enterprise, Economic Development and Tourism Functions within Offaly County Council. Currently, there are six members of staff in the Local Enterprise Office, 2 members of staff in Offaly Tourism and 1 Business Development Manager 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.

Through a wide range of activities and targeted work programmes, Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Offaly is working hard to deliver Offaly County Council's Mission Statement "To lead sustainable economic, social and community development in Offaly."



Core Activities:

- First Stop Shop for anyone thinking of setting up or growing a business
- Business Advice, Mentoring and Coaching
- Enterprise Training
- Networking Events and Seminars
- Finance, Grants and Loan Finance
- Promoting Entrepreneurship

Key Enterprise Highlights 2023:

Active Engagement with Offaly Enterprises to support them post-pandemic, post-BREXIT and through the 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. Our monthly electronic newsletter issues to 5,000+ subscribers.

Training, Seminars and Events

Throughout the year, LEO Offaly delivers a wide range of enterprise training and business events. In 2023, LEO Offaly continued to deliver many training programmes online while also arranging a number of in-person training and networking events. So far in 2023, almost 500 business people have participated in our enterprise training programmes and nearly 200 people have availed of one to one mentoring assignments.



Mount Briscoe Networking Event: How to Systemise

Your Business



County Arms Birr Networking Event: Nail Your Marketing

Message

Improved business efficiencies, innovation, export and sustainability



In 2023, LEO Offaly has been working closely with Enterprise Ireland to promote a range of targeted initiatives to help businesses become more efficient and productive. They include Green for Business, Lean for Business and Digital for Business. A new national media campaign and website has been launched www.allinadayswork.ie to increase awareness of the supports.

To complement this campaign, LEO Offaly has introduced a free mentoring session to Offaly businesses owners so that they can learn more about the initiatives and which supports would best suit them. The initiatives are either free or heavily subsidized and can be completed over a 2 to 5 day period.

Pilot to Support Businesses with International Ambition

In 2023, Enterprise Ireland launched a new Pilot Initiative for Manufacturing and Internationally Traded Service Businesses employing up to 50 people. Qualifying businesses, with an ambition to export, can apply and subject to criteria, be supported by either LEO Offaly or Enterprise Ireland. The initial support is towards the creation of an Internationalisation Plan. Following on from that, the business may be assigned to either LEO Offaly or Enterprise Ireland where they can apply for financial supports.

Entrepreneurship Promotion – Student Enterprise, Female Entrepreneurship

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 2023, for the Primary Level, there were 13 participating schools and 42 participating pupils. At Secondary Level, there were 10 participating schools and 613 participants.



Cru Capaill Limited:
Morgan Bennett and Niall Kelly
from Presentation Secondary
School, Killina. Merit Award
Winners in 2023 National
Student Enterprise Final.

Female Entrepreneurship – National Women’s Enterprise Day Midlands Region took place on Thursday, October 19, 2023, at the majestic Castle Durrow and gave women from Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath a chance to network, learn and be inspired by other women in business. Over 200 women attended the event at Castle Durrow.



Guest Speakers
Included:
Terry Prone
Darina Allen
Anna May McHugh

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

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.

LEO Offaly worked with local partners on the delivery of the second Offaly Job Fair, which took place in July.



Key Economic Objectives for 2023:

- Offaly Economic Development Strategy & Action Plan 2022-2027
- Grand Canal Dock Tullamore Masterplan
- New Industrial Sites
- Rhode Green Energy Park
- Develop and expand Co-Working Hubs

Economic Highlights 2023:

Offaly Economic Development Strategy & Action Plan 2022-2027

Plan completed and some implementation underway. Focus of the Plan is to develop national and international reputation in 6 distinct areas:

- Construction and Engineering (the Built Environment)
- Rural Green (including Energy Generation and Storage)
- MedTech and Wellbeing
- ICT Sector
- Food & Nutrition and the technologies that support them
- EcoTourism and the Creative Arts



Grand Canal Dock Tullamore –Masterplan nearing completion.

Industrial Sites –Exploring options for new Business Park in Tullamore

Ferbane - Industrial Site Sales and Building Development



Co-Working Hubs

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. The expansion of The Junction at 25J will commence in late 2023.

Rhode Green Energy Park: Infrastructural works in Park due to commence in late 2023 and be completed in 2024. Work underway on 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.

Positioning the county as **Offaly: The Green Energy County** continued in 2023 with the completion and launch of two noteworthy Feasibility Study Reports. The reports confirm Offaly's strategic location where an abundance of renewable energy generation, the national gas network and the electricity grid meet. The evidence-based studies confirm that Offaly is leading the way in green energy production and innovative green technologies. Offaly's central location provides an ideal base for companies to decarbonise, while serving national and international markets.

Data Centre Integration with Renewables

- Report Funded by Just Transition & North Offaly Development Fund
- Delivered by Siemens
- Confirms Rhode's suitability for large energy users to decarbonize
- Job and Economic Development Potential



Rhode Renewable Hydrogen Report

Report Funded by GNI, North Offaly Development Fund, SSE, Bord na Mona

- Delivered by RPS, UCD and NUIG
- Confirms Rhode's suitability for renewable hydrogen hub
- Job and Economic Development Potential



Land Use, Planning and Economic

Development Strategic Policy Committee (SPC)

LEO Offaly provides the Secretariat for this Committee. In 2023, 3 meetings were held and the SPC worked through its adopted work programme, covering topics such as:

- Offaly Development Contribution Scheme – Large Scale Energy Developments.
- Derelict Sites Policy and Procedure.
- Offaly Economic Strategy and Action Plan.
- Regeneration updates.
- Just Transition 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.

Subject to resources, LEO Offaly will in 2024

- 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



OFFALY SPACE TO INNOVATE, SPACE TO GROW

Offaly's central and strategic location provides an ideal base for companies to decarbonise, while serving national and international markets.

For further information or to discuss setting up or expanding your business in Offaly, please get in touch.

Call 057 9357480
or **Email** info@leo.offalycoco.ie

Tourism

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

Tourism Seminar

A successful tourism seminar was held on 3rd March in Tullamore. compered by Tina O'Dwyer, tourism expert from 'The Tourism Space', speakers included Paddy Matthews Head of Operations for Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, Julie McLoughlin, Visitor Experience Lead Lough Boora Discovery Park and tourism consultants CHL. Many members of the tourism and hospitality trade and associated stakeholders attended for an enjoyable and informative morning.



Familiarisation (FAM) Trips

FAM Trips provide an excellent opportunity for the sector to learn about each other's unique businesses, network and build important relationships.

Two FAM trips were held exclusively for Offaly Tourism members in 2023; 24th April & 16th October. The full day tours included businesses from throughout the county and even made time to stop and learn more about Ireland' s tidiest village, Geashill.



Marketing

The implementation of the Annual Marketing Plan includes public relations, advertising and social media but also a myriad of smaller marketing activities to reach various target audiences including; Blogs, ezines, competitions, maps and brochures.

Media Coverage

Public relations continued to be a focus for the team in 2023 with Offaly earning great exposure on print media, social media and TV.

The Ireland AM crew visited Birr in 2023, not once but twice!! Popular weatherman and social media influencer Deric O' h'Artagain kicked off Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival in August with a live broadcast early on a Friday morning! Deric returned to Birr in September for a special tourism feature on Offaly. Birr Castle Demense GM Grainne O'Malley and Offaly Tourism Marketing Chairperson Philip O'Brien gave informative interviews explaining the appeal of Offaly to visitors.



Offaly received much coverage in the media over the Summer period with full features in The Sunday World and www.thegloss.ie. Other noteworthy mentions included The Sunday Times, www.her.ie, www.joe.ie, The Irish Independent and The Irish Times.



SUNDAY WORLD Magazine+ Travel

SWITCH OFF'

Bringing a new twist to a range of ancient sites, Co Offaly is packed with opportunities, whether you fancy adventure or relaxation, writes **Edel Hughes**

BEING from Roscommon, the midlands is familiar territory. But while I frequently whizzed through Offaly, I'd rarely stopped off. With a wedding looming, my fiancé and I decided not to holiday abroad and instead, we spent a weekend in the Faithful County.

Our destination was beautiful Mount Briscoe, an adorable organic farm with glamping accommodation and an Airbnb. We stayed in a cosy converted trailer, which was decked out in cute cottagecore style.

Next up was Tullamore Distillery, home of the famous Tullamore DEW whiskey — named after Daniel Edmund Williams, who

the central spiral staircase evokes the inside of the barrels once stored there. The restaurant has a self-contained cof-

To get to the 234ft summit, you must hike through private land, and hikers are asked to be respectful and close any gates.

The Irish Hot Air Ballooning Championships



The Irish Hot Air Ballooning Championships returned to Offaly with much fanfare in September. With Offaly County Council tourism team co-sponsoring the event, bringing worldwide visitors to Tullamore for the weeklong festivities. The weather may have not been as hoped but the last day stole the show with a magnificent turnout in Lloyd Town Park as balloons scattered the sky above Tullamore to the delight of onlookers.

Rose of Tralee Tour

Offaly Tourism sponsored the 2023 Rose of Tralee Tour in August for a fun filled trip around the county. The Roses were greeted by a large enthusiastic crowd in O'Connor Square where they were treated to music and dance prior to a civic reception in the Library HQ. The Roses experienced many of our great sights and attractions which included Tullamore Dew Distillery Visitor Experience, Linda O'Brien Accessory Studio, Birr Castle Demesne, Clonmacnoise and the mighty River Shannon at Banagher and

Shannonbridge. It was an excellent opportunity to showcase Offaly to a national and international audience with exposure on national TV.



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 daily completion giveaway on the very popular Ray Foley Show. This ran in tandem with a campaign on iRadio the same period, targeting a younger demographic.

Digital Marketing

 Visit Offaly
Published by Sileen McCabe · August 5 ·
From the River Shannon to exploring the Slieve Bloom Mountains and plenty of castles and historic sites in between, Offaly packs a punch for a small county in the middle of Ireland! So if you're considering a visit to Offaly this summer (you definitely should!), find some great value day trip ideas at <https://www.visitoffaly.ie/budget-friendly-day-trips-in-/>
#VisitOffaly #Daycation #IrelandHiddenHeartlands #discoverireland #keepdiscovering #irelandshiddengem #budget... See more



... Offaly Tourism continued to grow its social media presence in 2023, with Facebook, Instagram and X (Twitter) accounts using the #visitoffaly. Working with a social media consultancy firm, our following and reach continues to grow year on year .



The total number of followers over the social media platforms is now in excess of 18,000; an increase of 47% in the last three years.

Print Advertising

Offaly specific adverts and editorial were organised for a number of publications in 2023;

Your Daily Adventure Guide; 'Your Ireland' Supplement, Celtic Media Group; Summer Breaks in Ireland, Nationalist Paper Group.



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 2023 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.

Events/Shows



Holiday World Show

Offaly Tourism exhibited once again in the Holiday World Show in January 2023. Ireland's largest tourism exhibition, with an attendance of approx. 7,000, this three-day show returned after a hiatus of three years. It was a great success with a captive audience and especially a great interest in the outdoors!

Tullamore Show

Offaly Tourism along with Local Enterprise Office Offaly showcased the best of Offaly tourism, artisan food and craft at the Tullamore Show in 2023, with great footfall to the Experience Offaly Pavilion.



Tourist Office

The tourist office in Tullamore continued to welcome visitors throughout 2023. Manned by a dedicated team of volunteers, the numbers visiting remaining steady.

Fáilte Ireland EU Just Transition Fund

September saw the launch of Fáilte Ireland EU Just Transition Fund which is available to eligible members of the tourism and hospitality sector. The tourism team will be assisting the trade in their applications. A new Tourism activator will join the team in December in order to strengthen our role in

building awareness and confidence in the potential of tourism in Offaly, elicit quality ideas and grant applications and to build strong networks among our tourism businesses.

Beyond 2023....

- New Offaly Tourism Strategy due to be implemented in 2024.
- Completion of the Fáilte Ireland's 'Destination Towns' project in Birr
- Works continuing on the Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trails and sections will open throughout 2024 once completed.
- Clonmacnoise Masterplan in progress, expected to be delivered in 2024
- Banagher Marina Master Plan launching in 2024, framing tourism development for Banagher into the future



Climate Action, Environment and Rural Water

Climate Action

In March 2023, Minister Eamonn Ryan TD directed each local authority to develop their individual LA Climate Action Plan (LA CAP) with a statutory timeline of 12 months to have these Plans adopted by Reserved Function. As set out in legislation by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, this will be a 5-year plan which sets a roadmap for the organization taking decisive action to reduce our emissions to 51% while increasing our energy efficiency to 50% by 2030. The development of Offaly's LA CAP followed statutory plan making processes with considerable engagement with elected members and relevant stakeholders along each step of the process. This will cumulate in a public consultation phase on the published draft LA CAP which expires on the 6th December 2023. The finalized draft LA CAP will be presented to elected members for adoption or adoption with amendments at their February 2024 monthly meeting in line with statutory timelines.

The LA CAP encompasses all forms of climate action including mitigation, adaptation and biodiversity enhancement and sets out actions which will encourage and support our local communities to strengthen their capacity and resilience to climate change through funding and other supports. The LA CAP is an ambitious plan and the actions contained within will require significant effort and investment.

Offaly County Council continue to implement and report upon our Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (CCAS) adopted in 2019. This may be the final year of reporting on our CCAS ahead of adoption and implementation of our LA CAP 2024-2029. Significant progress is being made across a range of our 88 actions contained within the CCAS, ensuring proper comprehension of key climate risks and vulnerabilities while ensuring adaptation considerations are mainstreamed.

Climate related training continued in 2023 with the commencement of a training program being rolled out to all outdoor staff. This program will continue through 2023 and into 2024. Figures for 2021 show Offaly County Council leading the national table for climate training with 92% of indoor staff receiving relevant training.

A number of projects will be progressed following on from the actions to be agreed within the Offaly Climate Action Plan, 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. Climate Action will place significant focus on building capability in Energy Action in 2024, to lead the delivery of energy related initiatives, and engage with funding streams to deliver on energy efficiency and reduction measures.

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.

In 2024, detailed assessment of alternative leachate treatment options will be undertaken, examining on-site treatment options from both technical and financial perspectives. In addition, a Closure, Restoration and Aftercare Management Plan (CRAMP) will be undertaken to provide up-to-date costings that deal with site decommissioning and known liabilities for the facility at closure.

Recycling Facilities

There are currently 39 bring banks in the County for glass, aluminium & steel cans recycling on both private and public sites and Offaly County Council pay for the recycling of the glass by the service provider, Glassco Ltd .. as per the tender agreement of €21.30 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 2023 (Jan - Jun), we received an income of €2,586 and paid Glassco €13,144 for the same period. Offaly County Council receives an income for textiles from Coppertale at €305/tonne and for 2023 Jan- June, an income of €3,602 was received.

Civic Amenity Sites

The contract to operate and manage 3 No. 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.

Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy – Ireland's National Waste Policy 2020-2025

Offaly County Council staff work with our Regional colleagues to implement the policies of the National Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy. This plan provides a framework to support the transition to a circular economy in Ireland. The plan includes specific targets, policies, and actions to enable the waste and resource sector to meet the circularity challenge and accelerate the transition to a circular economy

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 759 complaints since the 1st January 2023, an increase of 5% on the same period for 2022.

Complaint Category	Number
Air Pollution (Dust/odour/emissions)	19
Litter pollution (fly tipping/casual litter/litter on property)	538
Waste (dumping/burning/unauthorised sites)	79
Noise (community/commercial/industrial)	11
Control of Horses	20
Control of Dogs	61
Water Quality	31

Waste Conviction Register

Offaly has successfully taken legal action against 9 individuals for illegal dumping and environmental pollution and these cases were heard in Court since Jan 2023 with the support of legal representation. All cases were investigated by the litter team and taken to court for breach of the Litter Pollution Act, 1997 and/or Waste Management Act, 1996. Convictions in Court ranged from the imposition of fines to

prison sentences. The Environment Department maintains a Convictions Register which is updated regularly.

Litter Picks

In 2023 to date, Offaly County Council has supported the collection and disposal of 225 no. litter picks by members of the public. These collections in total weighed 21.4 tonnes.

Anti-Dumping Initiative

An application was made to DECC under the Anti Dumping Initiative 2023 for a grant to address issues of concern within County Offaly. Projects included clean ups of areas which were affected by substantial illegal dumping, provisions of more solar compaction litter bins (which brought the current number installed to 15 across the county) and an environmental campaign to increase awareness of the public on environmental topics. A successful submission has been made and a grant allocation of €72,500 was received.

Anti-Litter Anti-Graffiti Grant

Offaly County Council were allocated €16,600 from DECC for anti-litter and anti graffiti initiatives. Initiatives implemented included:

- the provision of litter supplies for communities,
- Composting for Schools Project,
- Awareness campaign
- Design of litter materials.

All individual projects were funded by Offaly County Council at a ratio of 30% with the balance being met by the Grant. The Certification Form and Claim Form were sent to the DECC on 25 October.

Green School Awareness Programme

Offaly County Council continues its support to all primary and secondary schools as part of this awareness programme. A teacher training seminar was held on 17 October with An Taisce to advise schools on their journey towards applying for their Green Flag. The Environment Section also supports schools financially by funding specific environmental projects. In the last school term, Offaly County Council participated in a ReLove Fashion programme with the Rediscovery Centre, aimed at second level schools to address sustainable fashion initiatives. This proved very successful with two schools participating in the national finals.

In 2023, Offaly County Council is piloting a Composting for Schools Programme with Munster Technological University and Clean Technology Cork. Four local schools are participating in this programme, paid for by the Environment Section €3,200. To date, the programme is very successful with positive feedback from the schools.

RURAL WATER PROGRAMME

Subsidies

Annual Group Water Scheme Subsidy payments totalling €1,072,067 have been made to 15 no. Group Water Schemes which supply a combined total of 4,311 no. domestic customers. Annual subsidies amounted to €441,292.00 and advance subsidies totalled €630,775.00. The GWS Subsidies help to support group water scheme to operate to their full potential and deliver potable water to their customers.

Multi Annual Rural Water Programme (MARWP) - 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 for Offaly for successful projects under the programme is €1,940,561.20 for 22 projects. Eighteen of these projects are completed and the other four are at various stages of progress with all projects expected to be completed in 2023.

The circular to roll out the next MARWP is due in quarter 4 of 2023.

Domestic Water and Domestic Wastewater 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 Wastewater 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 2023, under the Domestic Water Grant scheme we have paid 21 grants to a total of €58,100.00 and under the DWWTS Grant Scheme we have paid 4 grants of to a total of €19,956.76.

Burial Grounds

Part VIII approval has been granted for the extension of St. Mary's Cemetery, Edenderry. The tender documents are currently being drawn up for the extension with commencement on site expected to follow in early 2024. The extensions of Clonmacnoise, Cappincur and Cloncrane burial grounds will be further investigated in 2024. Resources will need to be allocated annually in the coming years to fund the necessary works.

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 2022:	2748
No. of Complaints dealt with in 2023 (y-t-d)	70

In 2023, so far, we cared for 256 dogs in our Dog Shelter. We successfully rehomed 40 directly from the Dog Shelter, 33 were reclaimed by their owners and 174 were rehomed by our dog welfare charity partners and the remainder continue to be minded in the Dog Shelter.

The increase which started in 2022 continues in 2023 and our y-t-d number show a 7.5% increase over the same period of 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.

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 in 2022, and we have seen a slight uptick in 2023 to 10 animals being seized. We have dealt with 21 Control of Horse complaints so far in 2023

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	3
2023 (y-t-d)	10

National Waste Collection Permit Office (Nwcpo)

The NWCPO

The National Waste Collection Permit Office (NWCPO) continues with its primary function of processing applications for waste collection permits since it was established in 2012 as a shared service, within the Environment Directorate in Offaly County Council. In addition, the NWCPO hosts the waste collection permit register, a national waste facilities register and a waste data reporting system for both. The data gathered by the NWCPO is used for enforcement purposes as well as local, regional and national reporting.

There are 1,982 waste collection permits on the NWCPO register and 257 applications pending. 306 permits were due for renewal in 2023 and of these 143 review applications were received up to the end of October. There were 103 new applications received in 2023. This number of applications was in line with projections and the 5-year waste collection permit cycle.

Kerbside Waste Collections

There are currently 51 waste collectors authorised for the collection of household kerbside waste. Amendments to the Waste Collection Permit Regulations in 2023 required the review of permits issued for the collection of commercial kerbside waste. Conditions on 59 permits were amended, introducing requirements on these waste collectors to *inter alia* weigh the commercial waste being collected, report back the weights to customers and put a customer charter in place.

ISO 9001 Certification

The office received certification for the ISO 9001 standard in November 2014. The office has successfully retained the certification this year.

Incentivised Charging Study

The NWCPO has finalised a tender process to engage an external consultant to undertake a study into incentivised charging for household and commercial kerbside waste collections. The NWCPO will have a coordination role in progressing the study while DECC will provide funding.

Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy

"A Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy" was launched on the 4th of September 2020. The policy specifically identified new roles for the NWCPO as well as introduced new policies that will impact on current operations and require measures to be taken. A business case for the enhancement of the office is being prepared for the PSROG.

Roads 2023

In 2023 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 2023 Roads program included for the following works which are currently at design, procurement, construction or completion stage.

- Annual 2023 Roads Program
- Active Travel Schemes
- Zero Emission Vehicle Infrastructure
- Introduction of Zero Emission vehicles into our corporate fleet
- Introduction of Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO)
- Grand Canal Greenway Construction
- Edenderry Inner Relief Road Stage 2
- Birr Distributor Roads (North and South)
- PLEEP-Public Lighting Energy Efficiency Project

The 2023 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 2022 are shown alongside for comparison purposes.

Transport Infrastructure Ireland & Department of Transport, Road Grants

Initial Grant Allocations	2022 (€)	2023 (€)
Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII)		
National Primary		
Motorway MMarC Lighting	9,117	9,117
National Secondary Improvement		
Major Scheme N52 Tullamore to Kilbeggan Link	0	0
Minor Works N62 Crancreagh (Cloghan to Derrinlough)	150,000	200,000
Pavement Scheme on the N62	460,000	4,000,000

Pavement Scheme HD28 Pavement Renewals	TBC (Q2/Q3)	TBC (Q2/Q3)
HD15 & HD17 Minor Works N52, N62 & N80	125,000	TBC (Q2/Q3)
HD15 & HD17 Minor Works Fencing Retrofit (N52/N62/N80)	100,000	TBC (Q2/Q3)
Local Authority Support (Improvement)	160,000	275,000
National Secondary Maintenance		
Ordinary Maintenance	129,194	129,194
Route Lighting	75,900	75,901
Winter Maintenance	190,000	170,000
Local Authority Support (Maintenance)	30,700	11,800
Local Authority Support (Winter Maintenance)	10,000	10,000
Greenways	€1,323,000	3,880,000
TII Total	€2,762,911	8,761,012
Department of Transport		
Regional & Local Roads Grants		
Restoration Improvement	6,190,500	6,542,000
Restoration Maintenance	955,000	955,000
Supplementary Restoration Maintenance	750,500	750,500
Discretionary Grant	1,776,500	1,783,500
Bridge Rehabilitation	366,975	376,500
Safety Improvement Works	297,700	300,000
Specific Improvement Grants	2,275,000	2,100,000
Speed Limits	16500	54,000
Cycle Signs	-	7,150
Former National Roads	250000	420,000
Strategic Regional and Local Roads	-	50,000
Climate Adaptation	320763	388,650
Training Grant	47500	47,500
Community Involvement Scheme	368500	301,500

Pilot Scheme testing on roads over peat	800000	1,000,000
PSCI Survey Support	16000	16,000
Drainage Works	446993	447,000
DOT Total	€14,878,431	€15,539,300
National Transport Authority		
Active Travel		
Transport / Mobility Plans: Tullamore	146,000	134,448
Tullamore Cycle Network Phase 1	116,000	358,231
Footpath Improvements Package A: Birr & Crinkill	377,894	100,563
Footpath Improvements Package B: Clara	192,525	298,882
Edenderry - Hare's Lane	75,000	Works complete
Footpath Improvements Design Package: Banagher & Cloghan	38,000	38,000
Tullamore - Spollenstown Road	116,000	191,104
Countywide Pedestrian Crossings	246,000	26,212
Portarlinton Active Travel Scheme	173,455	Works complete
Safe to Schools Programme - Support Infrastructure: Frederick Street, Clara	-	9,382
Low Cost Urban Junction (tightening) Schemes: Edenderry & Birr	115,000	110,449
Light Segregation Cycling Scheme: Edenderry	69,034	Works complete
Tullamore Urban Greenway Project	371,000	50,000
EDENDERRY - R402-1 Junction Upgrade	240,000	183,055
TULLAMORE - Collins Lane Junction - Advance Scheme	200,000	99,473
BIRR - Riverside Walk Upgrade/Link	285,000	147,500
RHODE - Pedestrian Crossings & Footpath	185,000	185,000
MUCKLAGH - Brocca Rd - Junction/Path	200,000	191,083
SHINRONE - Cloughjordan Road	140,000	140,000
BALLYCUMBER - Upgrade Footpath Links	125,000	125,000
Offaly County Council Active Travel Office - Staff Costs	271,000	271,000

Edenderry - SRTS (R1) Design & Cycle Links	-	75,000
Edenderry Active Travel elements	-	50,000
Arden View Tullamore Active Travel elements	-	75,000
Banagher SRTS (R1) Design Links	-	75,000
Kilcormac Village, Kinnity Road Active Travel elements	-	75,000
NTA Active Travel Total	€3,681,908	€3,009,382
Bus Stops in Tullamore & Edenderry	€63,374	
NTA Total	€3,745,282	€3,009,382

Funding Partner	2022 Initial Allocation	2023 Initial Allocation
Transport Infrastructure Ireland - National Roads allocation together with Greenways allocation	€2,762,911	€8,761,012
Department of Transport	€14,878,431	€15,539,300
National Transport Authority (incl. Bus Stops)	€3,745,282	€3,009,382
Offaly County Council (Own Resources Local Roads)	€2,077,130	€2,246,269
Total	€23,463,754	€29,555,963

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

TII Grand Canal Greenway:

As part of our 2023 TII allocation Offaly County Council's Road and Transportation team were allocated approximately €3,880,000 to deliver the final 16km of the Grand Canal Greenway. The remaining works were separated into 4 specific capital contracts all of which were procured and a contractor appointed in 2023. The works in their entirety will be completed in Q1 of 2024. As part of our works to provide connectivity to the Grand Canal Greenway we will commence the delivery of strategic links from specific towns and villages with the first scheme to be delivered in 2024.



TII Protection and Renewal:

As part of the protection and renewal program Offaly County Council were approved for additional funding for the delivery of 2 Emergency schemes on the N80 at Ballinarash and the N52 at Blueball. These schemes were in addition to the approximately 8.5km of pavement renewal works on the N62 delivered in Q2/Q3 of 2023.

Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Regional Strategy:

Offaly County Council's Road and Transportation acting on behalf of the lead authority which is Offaly County Council in collaboration with our colleagues in Westmeath, Longford, Laois and Roscommon commenced the procurement process for specialist Technical Consultancy services for the formation of a Regional Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy in 2023. The strategy will produce an implementation plan for the region. This implementation plan will be used to apply for funding and ensure regional delivery of Electric Vehicle Infrastructure which in turn will ensure any synergies that can be delivered with regards to positioning of infrastructure and delivery of this new service can be identified at the inception phase of the project.

Corporate Fleet migration towards Zero Emission and Low Emission fuels:

Offaly County Council's Road and Transportation Department commenced the migration of the Corporate Fleet toward both Zero Emission and Low Emission fuels in 2023. Our fleet now includes 5 electric vehicles which have replaced 5 diesel engine vehicles. We have also introduced Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil(HVO) as replacement for diesel across a number of vehicles as a trial in 2023. The success of this trial underpins our commitment to introduced HVO as our primary fuel in 2024 which will provide a 90% reduction in our carbon footprint.

The Machinery Yard purchased two velocity road patching units in 2023, with grant assistance from the Department of Transport. The velocity patching unit provides for significantly higher quality, safer operation and cost saving for pothole repairs than conventional units. In particular, they reduce our carbon footprint through reducing binder content of repairs and reducing the necessity to repeat repairs. With these savings we will reach more roads in a timely fashion.



Birr North Distributor Road:

Design works for the proposed new Birr North Distributor Road have progressed in 2023 with a detailed design now substantially completed and tender documentation due to be issued for approval to the Department of Transport. The Roads and Transportation Department aim to commence construction on this scheme in late Q2 early Q3 of 2024 subject to Department of Transport approval and funding.

Edenderry Inner Relief Road:

Works commenced in Q3 on Stage 2 of the Edenderry Inner Relief Road with a completion date projected for Q2 2024. Once completed this scheme will provide a strategically important piece of infrastructure that will assist in promoting our Town Centre Ethos and will help maximise the benefits of our ACTIVE Travel Investment programs going forward.

Birr South Eastern Distributor Road:

Procurement for the appointment of Technical Consultancy Services commence in 2023 with a view to having a specialist consultant appointed in Q1 2024.

Climate Change and Climate Adaptation works:

Offaly County Council's Road and Transportation Department works programs for 2023 were underpinned by assisting our organisations approach towards meeting our Climate Action commitments and showing leadership in this space. An example of works undertaken in 2023 are as follows;

- Active Travel Schemes
- Decarbonisation of the Corporate Fleet
- Zero Emission Vehicle Infrastructure
- PLEEP-Public Lighting Energy Efficiency Project
- Deployment of 2 new Velocity Patchers
- Completion of the Grand Canal Greenway

Road Safety 2023

As part of the 2023 Roads program Offaly County Council in collaboration with all our stakeholder partners have completed our counties Road Safety Plan. The works relating to it are ongoing.

Key Actions for 2024

The Roads and Transportation Department of Offaly County Council aim to build upon the many positive outcomes from 2023. It is anticipated that the roads budget for 2024 will be analogous 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:

- Completion of the Edenderry Inner Relief Road Phase 2;
- Sustainable upgrades and improvements on the R400;
- N62 Cloghan to Kennedys Cross peat replacement and road improvement TII Minor Works Scheme;
- Commence the construction of the Birr Distributor Road – R439 Banagher Road to N52 Tullamore Road;
- Appoint Technical Consultancy Services for the design of the Birr South Eastern Distributor Road;
- Progress the Grand Canal Greenway to completion;
- Deliver our first NTA pathfinder proposal from Edenderry Harbor to the Grand Canal Greenway;
- 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 which are to be delivered in 2024;
- 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;
- Commence the delivery of the Regional Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy;
- Change the methodologies, materials and approaches used to deliver the roads program with a view to Carbon reduction by the expansion of HVO across our corporate fleet;
- Progress the community involvement scheme, local improvement scheme and Clár funded by DOT and DRCD;

Projects in TMD

Tullamore Municipal District has benefited significantly from a number of National capital funding schemes across all core functions and specific regeneration schemes. This has been facilitated by the availability of match funding from Offaly County Council own resources, including the specific LPT allocations. The General Municipal Allocation allocated by the Tullamore elected members has been targeted at significant projects and facilitated significant developments such as the Lloyd Town park enhancements completed in 2023.

Tullamore Urban Regeneration Development Call 1 2018 Urban Greenway (URDF €1.7m)

The construction of the Urban Greenway through Tullamore will connect the Grand Canal Greenway at Convent View on the east to join the urban Greenway at Bury Quay to and Srah Road and Srah Bridge, on the west of Tullamore. The Works was tendered in September and the assessment of the tenders is currently ongoing.

Tullamore Urban Regeneration Development Call 2 2020 (URDF €2.3m)

The Project incorporates six individual projects building on the successful completion of the Tullamore Street Enhancement project funded under URDF 1.

- Project A: O'Connor Square to Church Street, Urban Garden, Civil Building / RW Hub TOBIN Consulting Engineers appointed for the planning design and construction management;
- Project B: High Street to Tanyard New Street Link TMD to tender for the Works;
- Project C: Meath Lane Civic Space TMD to tender for the Works;
- Project D: Tullamore Regeneration Framework, Brady Shipman Martin Architects preparing for Public Consultation of the draft Framework;
- Project E: Tullamore Grand Canal Harbour Masterplan, Grafton Architects preparing for Public Consultation of the draft Masterplan;
- Project F: Acres' Folly Enhancements, works on the Folly complete, TMD preparing the landscape drawings for tender.

Lloyd Town Park achieved the Green Flag for the 8th year running in 2023 from An Taisce acknowledging Ireland's best public parks and gardens. The new Bandstand in Lloyd Park is installed funded by the Outdoor Public Space Scheme, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media with TMD General Municipal Allocation. The new modular building for a caretakers office, storage unit and public toilets is complete in the workshop ready for delivery.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme: The Mucklagh TVR Scheme and the Mountbolus TVR phases 1 & 2 were completed in 2023.

Annual Roads Programme: Tullamore MD successfully delivered 14km of surface reconstruction over 22 schemes and 14km of surface dressing over 13 schemes in 2023; 1 Low Cost Safety Scheme; 4 Bridges, 3 Climate Adaptation & Resilience; 2 Community Involvement Schemes and 7 Local Improvement Schemes in 2023.

TMD continues to support **Active Travel** projects in the District: the Tullamore Area Based Transport Assessment and Cycle Network Phase 1 are in progress; the Collins Lane cyclists priority junction completed; a number of pedestrian crossings in the District upgraded; Spollenstown Road footpaths upgrade completed and the design for the pedestrian bridge is ongoing; Ballycumber footpath improvements is complete.

Community Engagement

- Team Tullamore: continued in 2023 with the partnership of Tullamore MD, Tullamore Tidy Towns, Waterways Ireland and the Tullamore Chamber of Commerce;
- IBAL Anti-Litter League: A solid result for Tullamore on its return to the League - Clean to European Norms in the An Taisce Report;
- Tullamore MD worked with and supported, Tidy Towns/Villages Committees and other organisations throughout the Municipal District. Tullamore collected the 8th Gold medal in a row at the 2023 Tidy Towns award;
- Tullamore MD maintained street cleaning services throughout the Municipal District area;
- The Estate Management Interagency Committee which was established under the aegis of the Offaly Joint Policing Committee to address issues in specific Local Authority Housing Estates and TMD participated on this committee and interagency approach to tackling issues;
- Estate Enhancement works were carried out in conjunction with the Housing section on Local Authority housing estates within the district;
- Offaly County Council supported the development of Tullamore Community Arts Centre opened in April 2023;

- Community Grants: Supporting in excess of 70 community and voluntary groups in the Municipal District by way of providing funding towards various community and estate enhancement initiatives.
- Christmas Lights: Tullamore MD continue to support Christmas Lights committees in the MD in 2023;
- Púca Spooka 2023 returned to Lloyd Town Park on the 28th and 29th October 2023 with ten thousand visitors to the Park and Tullamore over the two days;