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**SUSTAIN, NURTURE, GROW.**

LAOIS ARTS PLAN | 2014–2017



# SUSTAIN, NURTURE, GROW.

LAOIS ARTS PLAN

2014–2017





COMHAIRLE CHONTAE LAOIS  
LAOIS ARTS PLAN 2014–2017

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Laois County Council wishes to acknowledge the support of all who  
assisted with the development of this Arts Plan.

Special Thanks To:  
Arts Consultant to the Arts Plan – Clíodhna Shaffrey  
Photography – Michael Scully, Alf Harvey, Caitríona Maher, Eoin Ó  
Conaill, Siobhán Coffey and Ciara Drennan  
The Cathaoirleach and Members of Laois County Council  
Housing Social and Cultural Strategic Policy Committee  
Manager and Staff of Laois County Council  
The Staff of the Arts Office, Laois School of Music and  
Music Generation Laois  
The Arts Council Staff  
The Manager of the Dunamaise Arts Centre – Michelle de Forge and  
board members  
The arts organisations and individuals in the county who participated in  
and attended meetings during the consultation process.

Design by: Caitríona Maher  
Printed by: Jetprint, Tullamore, Co. Offaly

Typeset in Arial and Bebas Neue  
Printed on 120 gsm uncoated



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Culleton, Muireann Ní Chonaill and Bridie Keenan*

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# CATHAOIRLEACH STATEMENT

As Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council I welcome The Laois Arts Plan, 2014–2017.

In these challenging times the arts prove increasingly relevant to the civic life of the county – to artists, communities, people and audiences – where culture and the arts are now being greatly acknowledged, as amongst our most significant of assets. We have come, as a society, to increasingly appreciate the valuable contributions the arts make to the vitality of contemporary society and, we have increasing confidence, as a local authority, to value the arts equally for their intrinsic qualities.

We have valuable new artistic initiatives created in our county since the implementation of the last Arts Plan.

The Laois Arthouse in Stradbally is a very important beacon to artists and has hosted exciting programmes and events since it opened in 2011. It is also an important point of contact for the general public to engage with artists in workshops, exhibitions, performances and through residencies. The other major new cultural initiative in our county is the Music Generation Laois. This is an example of partnership working at its best as Laois County Council work closely with the Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board, Laois Partnership, Music Generation Laois and others to enrich the musical lives of our young people.

As is clear the Arts Office has demonstrated the value of planning for the arts. It will be interesting to see what developments will emerge in the next few years in our county. I am confident that the ongoing development of the arts will continue.

– Mary Sweeney, Cathaoirleach, Laois County Council

# FORWARD

The Arts Plan 2014–2017 sets out our policy for supporting and developing the Arts in County Laois for the next three years. Laois County Council has a positive approach to the ongoing cultural development of the County through an integrated and responsive contemporary arts programme. The Arts Plan shows the significant progress that Laois have made over the years and the positive effect this has had on the economic, social and cultural development of the county. The Arts Plan outlines initiatives to foster and consolidate key partnerships

with stakeholders in an effort to sustain and maintain the high standards we have achieved to date.

I wish to thank all those who have contributed to the Arts Plan particularly our Arts Officer, Muireann Ní Chonaill and the staff in the Arts Department. I also wish to acknowledge the support of the Council and the Arts Council over the years. I look forward to the implementation of the Arts Plan and the continued success and further development of the Arts in County Laois.

– Peter Carey, County Manager.



# PART

*Mosaic Workshop at the Laois Arthouse,  
Stradbally, Co. Laois*

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# CONTEXT

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Laois Arts Plan, 2014–2017, is the fourth Arts Plan to be implemented by Laois County Council. It is devised and written during economically challenging times, within a national and global recession, and with much uncertainty around the future. With the hope, (but without certainty) that things may start to improve, at least incrementally, over this time-span, this Arts Plan represents a positive consolidation and nurturing of programmes and strategies, many already established by the Arts Office in its 2006–2011 Arts Plan. Within this current Arts Plan there is also scope for embracing new ideas for partnerships, and in further developing the work we do with artists, people and creative communities.

We consider it important to sustain and build on these programmes, even in these challenging times, as the arts prove increasingly relevant to the civic life of the county (to artists, communities, people and audiences) where culture and the arts are now being greatly acknowledged, as amongst our most significant of assets.

We have come, as a society, to increasingly appreciate the valuable contributions the arts make to the vitality of

contemporary society and, we have increasing confidence, as a local authority, to value the arts equally for their intrinsic qualities – in the way, for example, an artwork might move us intellectually, emotionally and spiritually.

Further, the growing significance of culture and tourism for the local economy and an emphasis on culture in the quality of people's everyday lives, are themes embraced by Laois County Council as evident in consecutive Laois County Development Board Strategies. "Realising Our Potential" is the vision statement for Laois County Council's current County Development Strategy (2012–2018), and the arts have a significant role to play in this.

Recent initiatives, such as, the completion of the Laois Arthouse Studios and Library, Stradbally and our success in being awarded the Music Generation Programme in 2012, Ireland's new National Music Education Programme, initiated by Music Network and funded by U2 and the Ireland Fund – clearly demonstrates our on-going commitment to strengthening and sustaining contemporary arts development in diverse and inclusive ways in County Laois.

# STATUTORY

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Laois County Council has been at the forefront of local arts development and Laois was one of the first local authorities to appoint an Arts Officer in 1989. As a consequence of the first Arts Act in 1973, and subsequently, the Arts Act of 2003, local authorities have been given a legal mandate to plan for the arts. The statutory requirement is for local authorities to develop Arts Plans and to allocate grants to the development of the arts – the adoption of which is a reserved right of the elected members. This formally positions the arts as an important part of local authority services and recognises the unique leadership role of local authorities in the development of the arts.

Furthermore, the Local Government Act of 2001 empowers local authorities to support cultural activities in their administrative areas.

*“At the forefront of local arts development.”*





# DEFINITION OF THE ARTS

The 2003 Arts Act defines the arts as relating,

***“ To any creative or interpretative expression (whether traditional or contemporary) in whatever form, and includes in particular, visual arts, theatre, music, dance, opera, film, circus and architecture, and includes any medium when used for these purposes.”***



# GEOGRAPHY AND DEMOGRAPHY

Laois is an inland midland county, and part of the Midlands Region, covering an area of 171,990 hectares. It was planted in the 1500's, known for a time as Queen's County, and has a pattern of settled small towns and good agricultural land. Its chief town and administrative centre is Portlaoise (making up 21.2% of the total county population). Other urban centres include, Portarlinton and Mountmellick (also with growing populations). Agriculture is a major activity with over 70% of the land used for farming and a relatively high proportion of County Laois' workforce still involved in agricultural and related activities, such as the excavation and protection of boglands in the county, carried out by Bórd na Móna, since the 1940's. While employment in manufacturing has declined, the services industries, such as, Education, Transport, Retail, Wholesale, Health, and the Prison Service, has seen steady increases, until 2006, with 56% of the population employed in these areas. Areas of recent growth include agri-tourism and agri-food,

where indigenous start-up small-scale artisan producers have emerged, many of whom have developed alternative farm enterprises. With the downturn in the economy, the unemployment rate in the County has risen dramatically.

Laois has a number of distinctively attractive small towns and villages; many are of a high architectural standard.

There are notable heritage attractions, such as, Emo Court and the Rock of Dunamase. Laois' landscape includes considerable stretches of raised bog, and the Slieve Bloom Mountains in the Northwest, which are partially covered by coniferous forest and Killeslin Plateau in the South East and Cullahill Mountain in the south. The Grand Canal passes through the north east of the County and links to the wider Barrow Navigation system. All of these landscapes, places and watercourses offer potential by way of natural and cultural heritage, the arts, tourism, leisure and recreational pursuits.

Laois is on a major transport route, with the M7 and M8

connecting Dublin to Limerick and Cork and, the County is served well by excellent rail and bus services. As a consequence, over the Celtic Tiger years, close proximity to Dublin city (70km) and a good transport service made Laois an attractive place for in-migration and many foreign nationals.

The population of the county is currently 80,559 and according to the 2011 census – this is 20% higher than it was in the 2006 census, – representing the highest percentage population growth in the country. A forecast for population growth, in general, suggests that the population for each urban settlement in Laois will grow. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) and Department of Education and Science projections indicate that birth rates will remain relatively high for the foreseeable future at least, resulting in a growing percentage of those in the standard school-going age cohorts of 0–18.

In the county there are 74 education centres, including 67 national schools (with 9,221 pupils), 12 post primary schools

and 3 centres for further education. There are no conventional third level education centres, notwithstanding the good efforts of the Laois Third level initiative. While Carlow Institute of Technology, Athlone Institute of Technology and Tipperary Rural Business Development Institution are all within relatively easy commuting distance, the absence of any such facility in the county is regarded as a serious drawback. Laois has a low third level education participation rate of only 24.3%.

The picture emerging for Laois is one of an overwhelmingly rural county, where the aggregate urban population is increasing and where a growth in population will see increasing numbers of young people living in the county. Its proximity to Dublin has made it attractive for people to live here.

**Laois Landscape**  
(Map Courtesy of Laois Planning Department)





# CONTEXT WITHIN COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND THE ARTS COUNCIL'S STRATEGY

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Laois County Development Plans (2006–2012) and (2012–2018) recognises the role of arts and culture in maintaining and improving the quality of people's everyday life. Within its overall aim, is the desire to achieve goals, which are designed first and fore mostly to improve the quality of everyday working, living and social life of the current and future population of County Laois. In order to achieve this it is necessary to develop and improve the social, physical, economic and cultural aspects without compromising the environmental health of the County. In Laois County Development Plan, (2012–2018), the growing significance of culture and tourism for the local economy is also made evident, with 'the recognition of the 'Dunamaise Arts Centre offering much potential in this regard' and 'the appointment of an Arts Officer and Tourism Officer to further develop this niche market'.

Furthermore, The Library Service is recognised for its increasingly important educational, community, information and outreach role in the County, and also as an important venue for cultural activities.

The Arts Council in its Strategic Plan, 2011–2013 sees its partnership with local authorities across the country as key – *"as access and participation are central to our mission, our partnership with local authorities across the country is key. Our strategic focus in 2011–2013 will include engagement with local authorities in relation to arts provision within their areas so as to maximise coherence of planning and provision."*

The partnership will be based on a dialogue that respects the local remit and distinctive concerns of local authorities and the national remit and arts development concerns of the Arts Council.

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*St. Colman's National School at the Laois County Art Exhibition at the Laois Arthouse, viewing 'Emo Court' by Ray Murphy*

# CONSULTATION

The Laois Arts Plan, 2014–2017 has been considered with reference to the above context – the demographics; geography and recent social and cultural history that are of relevance to our thinking; along with local and national strategic Arts Plans and County Development Plans; previous arts strategies and statutory obligations for arts planning. The Arts Plan is also informed through consultation with our local arts sector. Public meetings were held. Individuals and groups were consulted. Three public meetings were held over the Summer of 2012 and the public were encouraged to attend. See list of consultation groups and meetings in Appendix.



*President Michael D. Higgins at the Laois Arthouse*





*The Laois Arthouse, Stradbally, Co. Laois*



*Abbeyleix Library, Abbeyleix, Co. Laois*



*Mountmellick Library, Mountmellick, Co. Laois*



*Dunamais Arts Centre, Portlaoise, Co. Laois*



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# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

A SET OF PRINCIPLES GUIDES OUR WORK AND IS AT THE CORE OF ALL OF OUR DECISIONS

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*John Davidson, Laois School of Music  
at St. Colmans, National School, Stradbally*

## Service and Partnership

We aim to provide a quality arts service and institutional care through a multifarious approach that can sustain and nurture the development of the arts, under key strategic priorities, and in partnership with others.

## Communication

We aim to establish excellent communication services and utilise information technologies through digital and social media networks to support our role as a pivotal network and to highlight awareness between different constituencies of artists, organisations and public.

## Artistic Quality

We encourage and support standards of high artistic quality and endeavour, across the various arts programmes we initiate and support.

## Inclusiveness and Diversity

We support wide access to the arts and the involvement of people, through diverse arts programmes and initiatives that respects a diversity of artists and creative practices, audiences and participants.

## Participation

We support a range of programmes that encourage and support participation in the arts, creating opportunities especially for young people, older people and for various communities of interest to engage with the arts.

## Long-term Commitments

We are committed to nurturing programmes in the development of the arts over the long-term.

## Dunamaise Arts Centre

We will work in close partnership through membership of the Board and by continuing a strong relationship with officials. This will ensure that our aims and ambitions and those of the Dunamaise Arts Centre are efficiently, effectively and cohesively delivered.

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# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Local Arts Plans set a framework for a pro-active response to a distinct context and the dynamic of societal, cultural and artistic nuances of a particular county and place. Key pillars of our arts programme include; music development, visual arts, the Laois Arthouse Stradbally, the Dunamais Arts Centre and a focus on young people and the arts. This strategy seeks consolidation and development of these areas – where we aim to improve our efficiencies, while remaining open to ideas that might emerge through partnerships, and networking with artists and communities.

The ambitions for our work are realistically conceived under the following Strategic Priorities:

**The Arts Service and Creative Partnerships**

Investment in an Arts Service and consolidation of a partnership approach in the implementation of the Arts Plan.

**Young People and the Arts**

Investment in various programmes that focus on young people and the place of the arts in education and youth culture.

**Venues, Spaces and Facilities**

Investment in the Dunamais Arts Centre, Portlaoise as Laois' principal multi-disciplinary arts facility and in facilities for visual artists at the Laois Arthouse, Stradbally and the Studio/ Apartment Artist facility in Mountrath.

**Artists**

Investment in artists, across all disciplines, through bursaries and commissions, a resident artists' scheme and by maximising use of the Per Cent for Art Scheme.

**The Per Cent for Art Scheme**

Maximising use of the scheme and instigating a vision for an exciting programmatic approach to commissioning art and artistic practices which encourage interaction between artists, communities, contexts and people.

**Creative Communities**

Investment in directly run programmes, and in those run in partnership with the Dunamais Arts Centre, that support and respond to the diversity of creative communities through support for arts festivals, clubs, amateur arts, hobbyists, and grassroots arts initiatives.

# STRATEGIC PROGRAMMES

*“Working in such close co-operation with other cultural partners ensures greater potential and outcomes.”*

– Muireann Ní Chonaill  
Laois Arts Officer

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# 1

## THE ARTS SERVICE AND CREATIVE PARTNERSHIPS



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*Muireann Ní Chonaill, Arts Officer, Michelle de Forge, Manager of the Dunamaise Arts centre and Ann Mulrooney, CEO Visual Carlow, at the opening preview of 'Shine' by Vera McEvoy at the Laois Arthouse, Stradbally*



## POLICY

To provide and develop a quality arts service for the county, positioning the Arts Office as an important conduit for arts development through partnerships and more dynamic communication strategies

The Arts Plan is built around Six Strategic Priorities. At the fulcrum is the Arts Service, which will drive the implementation of the Arts Plan and its evaluation for future learning. As such, our role is multifarious – as developer, producer, networker, facilitator, communicator, funder, advisor, advocate, supporter and evaluator.

The Arts Office, currently consists of five staff – Muireann Ní Chonaill, Arts Officer; Bridie Keenan, Assistant Arts Officer; Nuala Kelly, Laois School of Music Co-ordinator; Rosa Flannery, Music Generation Laois Co-ordinator; and Maureen Culliton, Clerical Officer. It is our aim to ensure that we can sustain our capacity to deliver the strategy, in terms of, finance, human resources and expertise, (including engaging external expertise, as appropriate to our work).

A partnership approach is key to the implementation of the Arts Plan, as we work with others (locally, regionally, and nationally) towards achieving strategic priorities. Our main partner is The Arts Council and we also work closely with various departments within the local authority, such as the county development board, housing and the library service. Over the course of this Arts Plan we will strengthen our working relationship with the Dunamase Arts Centre, and continue to work with many other partners, including Laois School of Music, Music Generation Laois, artists, schools, the Laois and Offaly Education and Training Boards (E.T.B), the Department of Environment and Local Government, National Roads Authority, youth groups, the Midland's Network, Bealtaine, Culture Night, and various community and voluntary groups throughout the county.

Laois Music Education Partnership (MEP), which is led by Laois County Council Arts Office, and supported by Laois and Offaly E.T.B and Laois Partnership Company epitomises the shared approach to resources and local expertise which Laois Arts Office will utilise as a guiding principal going forward in the 2014–2017 Arts Plan. The partnership approach adopted by Laois MEP enabled the group to successfully gain access to new funding opportunities at a time when such resources are extremely difficult to obtain. Laois MEP, under the leadership of Laois County Council, was successfully awarded Music Generation funding in December 2011.

Our aspiration is to provide a strong and efficient arts service and we aim to re-position our principle functions from one of producer to one of co-ordination, a shift to networker, collaborator, facilitator and communicator, improving our role *vis a vis* advice and guidance to those with creative ideas. We understand that these are economically difficult times, but they also present opportunities for greater resourcefulness, collaboration and imaginative working practices. We will work hard to investigate others sources of funding and potential sponsorship partnerships – that will help to sustain and strengthen contemporary arts development in County Laois.

## ACTIONS

- To oversee the implementation of the Arts Plan, 2014–2017 and to advocate for sustained support for the arts in County Laois over the course of this Arts Plan.

- To establish excellent communication services and information in relation to our arts programmes, funding streams and documentation of artistic projects and programmes.

- To create links to local and national arts agencies, organisations and resources, local authorities, and third level institutions, to enable us to act more effectively as a pivotal partner and networker between different constituencies of artists, organisations, public and information.

- To invest in staff training in areas, such as, IT and marketing and in professional practice related to contemporary arts, so as to enable us

to continually learn and develop our capabilities.

- To invest in a more dynamic web-site that is a central source of our communication which can act as a form of information exchange, documentation, advice and links.

- To investigate potential corporate sponsorship, other funding sources, inclusive of support-in-kind, for the delivery of specific programmes in our Arts Plan.

- To commission an evaluation of the Arts Plan and to define a performance indicator for each programme of work.

- To review and evaluate our work in progress, through invited feedback from artists, local authority, partners, communities, etc, on an annual basis.

# 2

## YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE ARTS

***“Youth Theatre is a place to have fun, meet friends and learn about theatre. It is the best two hours of my week.”***

***– Saoirse Anton  
Youth Theatre Member***

***Portlaoise Youth Theatre, scene from  
‘The Musicians’ by Patrick Marber***



## POLICY

To provide and develop a quality youth arts programme that supports opportunities and experiences for learning, creativity and developing skills in a range of art forms

Establishing long-term opportunities for young people to develop their creativity, particularly in the areas of music and youth theatre, has been a major part of our work over the years. A critical part of developing these programmes has been in response to the wider community needs in relation to art forms, such as music, within the region. The commitment by partners and the role of artists and practitioners involved in their delivery has been fundamental to the success of these programmes.

These programmes include the Laois School of Music, established in 2001 by Laois County Council with support from the Laois Vocational Educational Committee (now Laois and Offaly ETB); a county-wide network of youth theatres; an artists-in-schools scheme for primary schools, an annual community summer art workshop programme for children; and, in 2011, we were awarded the Music Generation Programme – Ireland's new National Music Education Programme, initiated by Music Network and funded by U2, the Ireland Funds and local resources. This enables young people to have access to music education in their own locality and learn to play a musical instrument. Programmes under Music Generation include Stampede Drumming, Uilleann Pipes, Harp, Brass, Choral/Singing, Orchestral, School of Rock and Pop, the Music Box (a programme for children with Special Needs). 900 children currently attend weekly lessons.

Many of these programmes are highly ambitious and involve considerable structural organisation and management. The Laois School of Music, for example, has 340 people attending classes and there are Junior and Senior ensembles, Flute,

Flute Choir, Piano, Violin, Viola, Cello, Saxophone, Guitar, Clarinet, Drums, KinderMusic, Music Box, Voice, Junior and Leaving Certificate Music. There are 70 members attending Youth Theatres, and thousands of children have participated in the community summer art workshops and artists-in-schools programmes over the years.

Over the course of this Arts Plan we aim to consolidate our successful work in these areas and with our strategic partners – the Arts Council, Laois and Offaly ETB, schools, the Dunamais Arts Centre, etc, deliver high quality artistic programmes for young people and children, nurturing their creativity. In some cases, this will include a re-evaluation of how programmes are structured and managed.

The Portlaoise Youth Theatre group has located to the Dunamais Arts Centre, Portarlinton Youth Theatre comes under the After-Schools Project and Stradbally Youth Theatre meets in a local hall. Whilst they are all separate groups, many programmes are run simultaneously such as performances and training.

- To facilitate a review of Laois School of Music and consolidate its programmes over the next years to include for group tuition, as well as individual tuition.

- To investigate the possibility of a corporate sponsor for the School of Music and the Laois Youth Orchestra.

- To seek curatorial advice in commissioning and staging an ambitious new music and interdisciplinary work that can include performances by the Youth Orchestra and other musicians from Laois (as well as elsewhere), sourcing funding from the Per Cent for Art scheme. (See under Strategic Priority 5)

- To continue running Portlaoise, Portarlinton and Stradbally Youth Theatre, to continue membership of NAYD and avail of their expertise and support in the development of the youth theatres.

- To seek curatorial advice in commissioning and staging new writing for the youth theatre, sourcing funding through the Per Cent for Art scheme. (See under Strategic Priority 5)

- The Arts Office will encourage youth arts Groups to take advantage of the professional facilities at the Dunamais Arts Centre, which offers opportunities and experiences for learning. We also encourage young people to attend performances. In addition, participants will have an opportunity to achieve the highest possible production standards as well as to increase their skill set in a range of art forms.

- To evaluate the artists-in-schools scheme.

- To facilitate and oversee with our Music Generation Laois Manager, the implementation of the programme county wide.

- To continue to support the annual community summer art workshops given by local artists in a range of disciplines, including music, visual arts, creative writing, sculpture, poetry and dance.

- To provide training and support when possible to those delivering arts programmes.

- To increase the use of the Laois Arthouse for youth programmes.

# 3

## VENUES, SPACES AND FACILITIES

*“Dunamaise is an arts space for the entire community of Laois. Captive audiences engage with artist’s creativity and the energy between the two entertains, enlightens and inspires performers and viewers alike. This encourages a deeper appreciation and value of all art forms and keeps the arts at the core of our community.”*

– Michelle de Forge  
Manager, Dunamaise Arts Centre

*Druid Theatre Company ‘Conversations on a Homecoming’ by Tom Murphy, at the Dunamaise Arts Centre, Portlaoise*



## POLICY

To consolidate, facilitate, nurture and define our work with key venues and spaces, such as, the Dunamaise Arts Centre, the Laois Arthouse, Stradbally Artists' Studios and Gallery and Mountrath Apartment and Studio

Dunamaise Arts Centre, which opened in 1999, is a multi-disciplinary arts centre, and the primary performance space in the county. It also has workshop spaces, digital cinema facilities and an exhibition space. It has played a highly significant role in expanding audiences for the arts locally and regionally, delivering a varied artistic programme of a very high calibre. The Arts Centre has been firmly established as an essential and all-important part of the National Arts Infrastructure. It is held in the highest esteem among artists, critics, audiences, funders and the general community. The Mission of the Centre is "to provide the people of Laois and surrounding counties with access to the best in contemporary arts practice in both performing and visual arts".

It receives an annual programming grant from the Arts Council and operational funding from the Local Authority. During 2012, the Centre undertook two strategic and professional reviews entitled Renew, Re-Invent and Re-Engage at a time of Management change. One dealt with Corporate Governance and the second dealt with Operations & Management. The recommendations which emanated from the two reports will be implemented by the Board, Management and Staff of the Dunamaise Arts Centre over the period of this Arts Plan, with support from the Arts Office, Laois County Council. This includes formalising a Service Level Agreement between both organisations.

Under a new Arts Council initiative, a greater co-ordination in developing the arts locally is sought between Local Authorities

and their multi-disciplinary arts venues. This proposes exciting opportunities for us to invigorate arts programmes that might be jointly proposed and developed and to strengthen our support to the mutual benefit of developing the arts within County Laois. With the recently appointed Director of the Dunamaise Arts Centre, Michelle de Forge, we will give significant scope to define a new path for the consolidation of an imaginative vision for co-ordinating our work. We will formalise a Service Level Agreement between both organisations.

The Laois Arthouse Studios and Library, Stradbally opened in May 2011. The development has been assisted with significant funding from the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport, under Access 11 scheme. The facilities are equipped and built to a high standard and include a community library, four artists' studios and living accommodation, a small-scale exhibition gallery, an equipped music rehearsal space, a kiln, and a garden space (with a commissioned Percent for Art wall mounted artwork by James Hayes). In the process of setting up the artists' studios there was wide consultation and links were formed with the Arts Council, NCAD and the Crafts Council of Ireland and other artists' studios in Ireland and abroad. The Laois Arthouse – studios and gallery is managed directly by the Arts Office.

### Residency Scheme at the Laois Arthouse

Since opening in 2011, one of the artists' studios is awarded under the Resident Artists scheme offering a significant

opportunity to a recent graduate in fine art. This was funded through the Percent for Art scheme and was run in partnership with NCAD. The scheme provided a studio and accommodation for one year, and a fee of €10,000. The artist was selected on the basis of his/her practice and a proposal around community engagement. A change of focus was initiated in 2014, continuing to utilise the scheme, shorter residencies of around three months duration, are offered to professional artists. The gallery programme is currently curated through open submission and by invitation. There are an average of 6 exhibitions held annually in the Laois Arthouse.

### Mountrath Apartment and Studio

The Arts Office acquired the management of an apartment attached to the Library in Mountrath. The facility offers a studio and apartment to an artist. Previous recipients were John Davidson, Aisling Walsh and the current recipient is Pat Byrne.

### Mountmellick and Abbeyleix Library and Art Galleries

The Galleries are part of the innovative new libraries recently opened. The Galleries offer exciting opportunities for artists to bring their work to new audiences.

### Mountmellick Arts Centre

The Mountmellick Arts Centre facilities include a main auditorium with a seating capacity of 450 and a Balcony

Theatre with a seating capacity of 134. Other facilities include dressing rooms and meeting rooms.

The Laois County Council recently purchased the Shaws Department Store on Lower Main Street. It is planned to situate the new Portlaoise Library in this prime location.

- To consolidate and define our work in relation to the Dunamaise Arts Centre, within the context of the aforementioned Arts Council pilot initiative and the Service Level Agreement between both organisations. This will strengthen our existing partnership, the work that we do and secure a strong relationship into the future. This will be implemented jointly by the Arts Office, Laois County Council and the Dunamaise Arts Centre over the period of this Arts Plan.

- To initiate a curatorial programme which will include the engagement of external curators.

- We will support both the Dunamaise Arts Centre and the Laois Arthouse in their programmes and audience building initiatives.

- We will develop a curatorial approach to visual arts

## ACTIONS

programmes and exhibitions, through collaboration with the Dunamaise Arts Centre and the Laois Arthouse. This will offer greater focus on visual arts development and engagement of audiences through programming exhibitions, mediation, discursive events and other platforms for the visual arts.

- To continue to financially support the Dunamaise Arts Centre as a significant arts venue and resource in the county, and to jointly pursue potential sponsorship partners and other relevant funding streams to ensure increasing available resources.

- To develop a policy for best practice management and running of the Laois Arthouse, Stradbally.

- To consider within this policy links to national and international artists' studio programmes.

- To broaden the range of artists availing of the residency programme at the Laois Arthouse offering more scope for different approaches to residencies and greater diversity.

- To continue to source funding from the Per Cent for Art scheme for the Residence Artist's Scheme.

- To programme artists and curators talks, a mentorship programme for artists, and a lecture series based on aspects of contemporary art, consolidating our work in the visual arts at the Laois Arthouse.

# 4 ARTISTS



***“My residency at the Laois Arthouse has proven to be invaluable to me by offering me the space to create my work. Working with the community through the artists-in-schools scheme and workshops facilitated by the Laois Arts Office was the perfect antidote to the solitary nature of what I do. The professionalism of the full time artist is a precarious one and any support from the Laois Arts Office, be it studio space or bursary is absolutely vital to continue our artistic endeavours.”***

***– Gemma Guihan  
Resident Artist at the Laois Arthouse***

***Closing of the Laois County Art Exhibition at  
the Laois Arthouse***



**POLICY** To create opportunities in an environment that recognises the importance of artists, artistic ambition and the creative development of individual artists, artist collectives and groups

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Artists are central to our work and we cannot develop the arts without investing in the artist. We have over the years supported artists in a number of different ways – from providing opportunities to create work through commissions, bursaries (formally a patronage scheme), curated programmes and through the Per Cent for Art scheme (see also under Strategic Priority no. 5); investing in facilities and resources that provide studio spaces, or performance and exhibition opportunities.

The Laois Arthouse Studios and Apartments and the Mountrath Studio & Apartment is at the core of our artists support. We also support artists by engaging them to creatively facilitate a range of programmes from youth theatre, artists-in-schools and community art workshops. Venues in Laois which can facilitate this work are encouraged to accommodate and support this activity. The Midland Network was established in 2006 with our neighbouring counties of Offaly, Westmeath and Longford County Council's to provide an inter-county forum that acts as a networking programme for artists to share and publish information, profile their work and exchange knowledge through the Midland Arts Magazine and Master Classes.

We are aware of the major contributions artists make to society. The impact of their creative work is often visible beyond the work itself, creating opportunities for people to

gather; impacting on the energies and atmosphere of place; their work adding other dimensions to the way we understand, experience or think about the world and things around us. Often artists receive very small funding compared to the time and commitment they make to their work. Many artists report that they are increasingly being asked to undertake work for lower fees or for free. We are aware from recent surveys and campaigns that artists are suffering and 'are experiencing a collapse in income as a result of the recession and various government cuts – with the knock-on effect of the lack of part-time teaching jobs; cuts in local authority and Arts Council budgets.'

We wish to continue to support artists, emerging and established, working across art form disciplines and who practice in both contemporary and more traditional forms, through our various programmes. We are keen to support artists who show ambition for their practice and whose work is of a high artistic quality. We are also keen to nurture and develop local artists who show commitment to their practice. Over the course of this Arts Plan we will continue to financially support artists and will encourage greater networking opportunities for peer exchange, learning and mentorship.

**ACTIONS**



- To create opportunities in an environment that recognises the importance of artists, artistic ambition and the creative development of individual artists, artist collectives and groups.

- To support good quality documentation of all artistic programmes, through photography, video, YouTube videos, critical writing and maximise use of our website and publications to promote these.

- To consolidate programmes at the Laois Arthouse so as to establish a mentorship programme for artists.

- To continue to support the Midland's Network in partnership with the Midland's local authorities

and to enable it to continue to develop as an effective forum for exchange supporting artists in the region.

- To continue to publish the Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine – a collaborative publication of a quality artistic regional arts overview.

- To continue to support Master Classes and to review this programme to suit mentoring, peer exchange, as well as, considering proposals from artists and art groups in the region.

- To encourage a supportive environment for artists and creative development in venues throughout the county.

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*“The commissioning of my artwork ‘Growth’ at the Laois Arthouse allowed me to create an artwork that I had been contemplating for some years. Without these Per Cent for Art commissions artists such as myself would not have any opportunities to pursue creating medium and large scale artworks and have a specific site ready to receive them.”*

— James Hayes  
Sculptor



## POLICY

To maximise the use of the Per Cent for Art Scheme across all art forms and to develop a vision for a programmatic approach to commissioning

The Per Cent for Art Scheme supports the commissioning of artworks, events and projects, permanent or temporary, in any art form or discipline, through funds generated from local authority capital expenditure programmes. The scheme is capped at €65,000, but it is feasible for local authorities to pool funds from different capital schemes and to initiate larger budgets for programmatic approaches to commissioning artworks. The guidelines for the scheme, published by the Department of Arts in 2004, encourages high standards of commissioning, seeking a vision for artists' briefs in supporting artists to create new work in consideration of specific contexts. It also supports mediation, documentation and discursive and other events around the commission.

Laois County Council has utilised this scheme over the years, commissioning many artworks. Currently the scheme supports the Artists Residency programme at the Laois Arthouse, which is designed to engage specific communities in a participatory way with an emerging artist. Over the course of this Arts Plan, we aim to develop a vision for a programmatic approach to commissioning that will enable us to use this scheme in partnership with Music Generation Laois, Laois School of Music, Laois Youth Theatre, venues and establish a new international symposium programme. This latter programme will build on previous successful curated programmes such as, Finding Portlaoise, 2008, UNIT, 2009, Emo Court, 2006 and sculpture symposium held in the 1990's.

## ACTIONS

- To continue to maximise use of the Per Cent for Art Scheme across all art forms.

- To continue to use specialist artistic expertise and advice in different art forms when developing artistic briefs and to sit on selection panels.

- To work with curators in developing concepts and implementing programmes with artists in all disciplines and suitable venues.

- To host an international symposium for sculptors in association with Mc Keon Stone, Stradbally.

- To ensure selection panels have a majority of representation from artistic specialists – artists and curators of the relevant art discipline.

- To oversee the commissioning process with fair

contracts and fees, and high quality documentation and mediation of artworks.

- To agree a vision for instigating a programmatic approach to commissioning art under the Per Cent or Art scheme. This will enable us to devise exciting, relevant and curated approaches in a variety of contexts and with a range of communities, including the Youth Theatre, Music Generation Laois/ Youth Orchestra, Laois School of Music, the Residency Programme and a new programme –SITUATIONS (working title).

- To develop SITUATIONS – a curatorial programme, locating specific places or situations in the county and inviting artists to create new work within these contexts. The emphasis will be on process, experimentation, presentation to public audiences and documentation.





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# 6

## CREATIVE COMMUNITIES

*"It is a great privilege to explore the meaning of creativity in everyday life with others. I love to facilitate the awakening of dormant potential within."*

– Vera McEvoy,  
Artist

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*Finding Portlaoise, Artists  
Symposium, 2008*



## POLICY

To support and encourage the diverse range of creative communities and grassroots arts activity including festivals, clubs, amateur arts and hobbyists

There are many local arts and creative groups based in Laois, such as, photographic societies, book clubs, reading groups, amateur drama and musical societies, choral groups, knitting clubs, film societies, etc., who gain much from coming together to share and participate in creativity. There are also festivals and community arts events that are an important cultural element, animating towns and places and actively engaging wider audiences and specific communities. In general, many of the amateur groups receive some funding through the Arts Act Grants.

The Arts Office co-ordinates a number of festivals and events including the Leaves Literary Festival, the Bealtaine Festival for Older People – which showcases the talents and creativity of both first-time and professional older artists, Culture Night – a free night of arts entertainment, in galleries, theatres, public spaces, National Drawing Day and others.

We also have supported artists who have participated in the

Electric Picnic – a major annual arts and music festival that takes place in Stradbally.

The Dunamais Arts Centre provides a professional gallery and theatre facility to present a diverse range of creative community and grassroots arts activity in all art forms.

The libraries are also an important facility and provide spaces and rooms for gatherings for various arts activities and also exhibition spaces for artists, such as those at Stradbally, Abbeyleix and Mountmellick libraries.

Over the years we have supported artists working with particular communities in socially engaged projects and in a number of arts-in-health initiatives. Over the course of this Arts Plan we will continue our work with this important sector to encourage and support quality arts programming and events in all venues across the county.

## ACTIONS

- To support and encourage the diverse range of creative communities and grassroots arts activity including festivals, clubs, amateur arts and hobbyists.
- To continue to support this sector through the Arts Act Grants.
- To continue to promote and support the establishment of festivals and community events to develop arts activities throughout the county.
- To work in partnership with book clubs and reading groups on programming and producing

the annual literature festival, Leaves.

•To encourage photographic societies and other hobbyist groups to put forward proposals for master classes and mentoring or peer exchange programmes.

• To advise on the quality of presentation and promotion of cultural events locally and nationally.

• To collaborate with the Dunamais Arts Centre as a key venue for presentation of community arts activity in all art forms.

# PEOPLE AND PLACES

## Arts Office Staff

Muireann Ní Chonaill, Arts Officer, Bridie Keenan  
Assistant Arts Officer, Maureen Culliton, Clerical Officer,  
Nuala Kelly, Laois School of Music Co-ordinator, Rosa  
Flannery, Music Generation Laois Co-ordinator.

## Arts and Culture Subcommittee (SPC)

John King, John Bonham, James Deegan, Paul  
Mitchell, Padraig Fleming, Rotimi Adebari, Michael  
Lalor, T.C., Fintan Phelan, Chamber of Commerce Rep,  
Kathleen Gorman, Brendan O’ Brien.

## 52 Consultation Groups and Meetings

Arts Plan Meetings held:  
Dunamaise Arts Centre on Tuesday 21st of August  
2012.  
The Laois Arthouse, Stradbally on Wednesday 22nd  
and Thursday 23rd of August 2012.

## Exhibition Spaces

Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise  
Dunamaise Arts Centre  
The Laois Arthouse, Stradbally  
The Gallery, Abbeyleix  
Mountmellick Library and Gallery  
The Parish Centre, Portlaoise  
Mountmellick Arts Centre  
The Huguenot Gallery, Portarlinton

Sheppards Contemporary Gallery  
Dove House, Abbeyleix  
Heritage House, Abbeyleix  
Mountmellick Development Association,  
Oak House, Portarlinton

## Workshop Spaces, Drama and Dance

The Laois Arthouse, Stradbally  
Dunamaise Arts Centre  
County Libraries  
The MDA Mountmellick  
The Parochial Hall, Railway Street, Portlaoise  
The Methodist Church, Portlaoise  
St. Mary’s Hall, Dublin Road, Portlaoise  
The Macra Hall, Portlaoise  
Parish Hall, Ballinakill  
Community Hall, Timahoe  
Community Hall, Killeen  
Community Hall, Arles  
Community Hall, Rathineska  
Scout Den, Portarlinton  
Community Hall, Portarlinton  
Community Parish Hall, Mountrath  
St Josephs Hall, Stradbally  
St Patricks Hall, Stradbally  
Community Hall, Ballylinan  
Community Hall, Clonaghadoo

## Venues, concerts, plays, readings

Dunamaise Arts Centre

The Laois Arthouse, Stradbally  
Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise  
County Libraries  
Mountmellick Art Centre  
Emo Court, Emo, Co. Laois  
Stradbally Hall, Stradbally  
Roundwood House, Mountrath  
Heritage House, Abbeyleix, Co. Laois  
St Peter and Pauls’ Church,  
Church of Ireland, Portlaoise  
Church of Ireland, Coolbanagher, Emo, Co Laois  
Macra na Feirme Hall, Mountmellick  
Macra na Feirme Hall, Abbeyleix  
Macra na Feirme Hall, Spink  
Heywood Community College, Ballinakill  
Preston House, Abbeyleix

## Groups

Abbeyleix Art Group  
Abbeyleix Drama Group  
Abbeyleix Parish Choir  
Acorn Outreach  
Arles Art Group  
Ballyfin Arts Group  
Ballyfin Drama Group  
Ballypickas Drama Group  
Ballyroan Art Group  
Birchgrove Afterschools Programme  
Burren Arts Group  
Capers Group  
Chatterbox Drama Group

Clonaghadoo Art Group  
Clonaslee Art Group  
Daublers Art Group  
Druid Art Group  
Durrow Development Forum  
Durrow Photographic Society  
Emo Arts Group  
Errill Dramatic Society  
Half Door Club Ireland  
Happy Hearts Art Group  
Irish Wheelchair Association  
Jesters  
Killenard Musical Drama Society  
Killeshin Pipe Band  
Laois School of Music  
Laois Craft Group  
Laois Comhaltas Groups  
Laois Drama Association  
Laois Federation ICA  
Laois ICA Choir  
Laois Writers Group  
Laois Youth Theatres  
MDA Mountmellick  
Mountmellick Drama Group  
Mountmellick Film Society  
Mountmellick Pantomine Group  
Mountmellick Photographic Society  
Music Generation Laois  
National Association for Parent Support  
National Learning Network  
O’Moore Folk Club

O’Moore Place Music and Drama Group  
Ossory Laois and Leinster Group  
Passion Play Group  
Portarlinton Art Group  
Portarlinton Arts, Heritage Culture  
Portarlinton Drama Group  
Portarlinton Youth Club  
Portarlinton Writers Group  
Portlaoise 50+ Active Age Group  
Portlaoise Arts Group  
Portlaoise Girls Choir  
Portlaoise Gospel Choir  
Portlaoise Literature Studies Group  
Portlaoise Musical Society  
Portlaoise Pantomime Group  
Portlaoise Singers  
Pre-school and Childcare Groups  
Raheen Panto Group  
Rathdowney Busy Bodies Theatre Group  
Rathdowney Pantomine Group  
Rehab Care  
Rory O’Moore Pipe Band  
School of Ballet Aideen O’ Hagan  
Sheppards Contemporary Gallery  
Slieve Bloom Story Telling Festival  
South East Laois Arts Network  
St Brigids After School Club  
St Fintans Band Mountrath  
St Josephs Accordion Band  
St Josephs Mountmellick Embroidery  
St Peters Pipe Band Mountmellick

St. Vincents Hospital Day Care Centre  
Sunflower Integrated Art Group  
The Heath Art Group  
The Link Artists Group  
The Open Door Drama Group  
The Portarlinton Singers  
Vicarstown Craft Group  
White Horse Art Group  
White Lady Drama Group  
Youth Work Ireland Laois  
65 Kitchen Choir



# LAOIS ARTS OFFICE MILESTONES

## {1988—1999}

Arts Office Staff has grown from one staff (**1988**) to five staff (**2014**)

**1988** First Arts Officer appointed (Vincent Ó Shea)

**1991** Second Arts Officer appointed (Muireann Ní Chonaill)

**1993** Established the Laois Youth Theatre

**1993** Mary Ó Donnell appointed as Writer-in-Residence, published first Laois Anthology

**1994** Laois Sculpture Symposium in association with Mc Keon's Stone, Stradbally, resulting in six permanent limestone sculptures

**1994–2003** Bealtaine Festival of Literature

**1996** Patrick Galvin appointed as Writer-in-Residence, published the Laois Anthology, "A Sense of Place"

**1996** Devised first County Arts Plan in Ireland

**1996–1998** Headed up European programme entitled PACTE, with partners in Germany, Finland and Northern Ireland

**1999** Key role in securing funding and establishing the Dunamaise Arts Centre in Portlaoise

**1999** Rita Kelly appointed as Writer-in-Residence, published the Laois Anthology,

## {1999—2007}

"From Here to the Horizon"

**1999** Engaged Noirin Ní Riain as the first singer to be employed in County Council Arts Residency

**2001–2003** Devised the Second Arts Plan for the County

**2001** Established the Laois School of Music

**2001** Engaged Nuala Hayes as the first Storytelling and Collecting Residency in a County Council

**2005** Jean O' Brien appointed as Writer-in-Residence, published Laois Anthology, "From Maigry to Slieve Bloom"

**2005** Artists Symposium, Emo Court

**2006–2011** Devised the Third Arts Plan for the County

**2006** Laois School of Music Town Twinning trip to Colouneix-Chamiers, France as part of the 10th Anniversary celebrations of Town Twinning

**2006** RTE National Symphony Orchestra Residency in Laois

**2006** Laois School of Music winners of the Chambers Ireland Award – Excellence in Local Government Award (Arts, Culture & Recreation)

**2007** Brent Parker, Composer-in-Residence appointed to Laois School of Music –

## {2007—2011}

work premiered in June and subsequently performed by LSM Youth Orchestra at the Electric Picnic, Stradbally

**2007** LSM & the Dunamaise Arts Centre winners of the Allianz Business2Arts Dublin Airport Authority €4000 Arts Award

**2007–To Present** Inaugural Bealtaine Festival celebrating creativity as we age

**2007** Artists Symposium, "Unit" in Portlaoise Town

**2007** Commissioning of James Fintan Lalor Sculpture by Rory Breslin, in association with James Fintan Lalor Society

**2008** Caroline Barry appointed as Writer-in-Residence, published the Laois Anthology, "Gold"

**2008** Attained an apartment for artists to reside and work in Mountrath

**2009–To Present** Inaugural Leaves Festival of Literature

**2010** Ann Egan appointed as Writer-in-Residence, published the Laois Anthology, "Laois Echoes with Fionn MacCumhaill."

**2010–To Present** Inaugural Culture Night

**2011** Established the Laois Arthouse, Stradbally, Co Laois, four artist's studios, 2 apartments, gallery, rehearsal room, kiln, link with the National College of Art and

## {2011—2014}

Design on the graduate residency programme. Inaugural graduate recipient Vera McEvoy

**2011** Laois awarded the Music Generation Programme funding of €550,000 – Ireland's National Music Education Programme for children and young people

**2012** Cólín Rush graduate residency at the Laois Arthouse

**2013** Leonardo European Programme involving Laois School of Music and Music Generation Laois

**2013** 'From the Sod to the Sky' by Mike Finn, play commission, celebrating inaugural James Fintan Lalor School

**2013** Arts Council Theatre Artists-in-Residence funded programme. Mirari Productions, Kate Heffernan and Maisie Lee. Project entitled 'Home' collaborative project by Laois Arts Office and the Dunamaise Arts Centre

**2014** New residency programme in the Laois Arthouse, Padraig Robinson, Saidhbhin Gibson, Lorraine Walsh and Tara Connaghan

**2014** Devised new Laois Arts Plan for the county (2014–2017)

**The Arts Office has successfully managed to devise innovative programmes for artists, young people, children and adults, bringing literature, music and the visual arts to the fore in the county. Also, a number of Public Art Projects commissioning sculptures have taken place.**

# SUSTAIN, NURTURE, GROW.



Laois County Council  
2014





