



Chief Executive Report April 2023

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April Highlights

Minister Heather Humphreys TD visits County Longford

The Minister for Rural and Community Development Heather Humphreys TD visited Longford on 19 April to officially open The Yard Hub, Abbeyshrule. She also launched Newtownforbes Bog Walk and Ardagh Remote Working Hub.



Granard leads the way with Ireland's inaugural Booktown Festival

A nationwide first, Granard was treated to fascinating discussions, insights and intellect at the Granard Booktown Festival in late April.



The launch of new piano for the people in Longford Centre

Cathaoirleach of Longford County Council Cllr Turlough McGovern unveiled a new piano for the people in Longford Centre. Anyone who wishes to play is encouraged to ask security for the key to the instrument during business hours.



Longford County Council scoops Health and Safety Excellence Award for Public Sector

Longford's latest success in the Health and Safety arena was celebrated at the Health and Safety Excellence Awards on Wednesday 29 March.



Library, Arts, Heritage and Archives

The sad passing of Fergus Kennedy RIP

It is with great sadness that we remember Arts Officer Fergus Kennedy who passed away suddenly but peacefully on Friday, 31 March 2023. Originally from Borrisokane, County Tipperary, Fergus graduated with a law degree from University College Galway and later earned a postgraduate degree in International Law from Strasbourg University.



After working for a time in Galway FM as a journalist, researcher and arts correspondent, Fergus became one of the first Arts Officers appointed in Ireland when he took up the post in Longford-Leitrim County Councils in 1995. He set about supporting artists and community groups to develop their cultural and artistic capacity. Fergus was heavily involved in the setting up of many quality arts events including the very successful Lough Ree Environmental Summer School and the Longford Music Club. Fergus had a particular interest in literature

and writing. He set up an award-winning virtual writers' website in 2002. This was ahead of its time and became the template for other writing websites nationally.

Fergus will be remembered fondly by his colleagues and the Longford arts community that he championed throughout his career. We offer our heartfelt condolences to Fergus' family, his son Michael and his mother Sinead, sisters Karina and Orla, brother Damien and extended family. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam.

Piano for the People launch

A new community piano has been introduced in Longford Shopping Centre. The brightly coloured 'Piano for the People' was officially unveiled by Longford County Council Cathaoirleach Cllr Turlough McGovern on Monday, 27 March. Its introduction was just in time for International Piano Day celebrations on Wednesday, 29 March.



Library, Arts, Heritage and Archives

The piano, which was sourced and funded through Longford County Council Arts Office, is kindly supported and hosted by Longford Shopping Centre. Local artist Phil Atkinson was commissioned to design and render a colourful and joyful mural on the instrument.

The piano is located on the ground floor in Longford Shopping Centre, easily accessible to all. It is available to be played by members of the public during Centre opening hours. One of the first performances held to mark the piano's arrival was a concert by Fintan Farrelly and members of the Longford County Choir and a selection of young pianists.

Longford Lights

A total of 11,800 patrons passed through the front gates of Connolly Barracks to view a charming display of 450 handmade lanterns that transformed this town centre location. The five-month long project was a partnership between Longford Arts Services and artistic director Tom Meskeel who said, "I don't think it could have gone better. The end result was an amazing tribute to everyone involved. There was such a huge team that made it happen". The event involved nearly 200 local citizens and local artists. It has become the largest and most successful arts event ever held in County Longford. Plans are now underway to develop the festival for 2024, for what is fast becoming Longford's signature festival.

The project was funded through the Arts Council of Ireland's Project Award Grant and Longford County Council.



Library, Arts, Heritage and Archives



Spring into Storytime

April is Spring into Storytime month, a national festival of storytelling for younger children. There was a storytelling session held in each of the six libraries, with children from the local early learning centres and primary schools invited to take part. It was a great success. There was also a demand for some online sessions which were recorded by the Longford Library employees.

Age Friendly Programme

Longford Age Friendly team and Older Person Council Chair Kitty Hughes participated in a walkability study in Moate on Wednesday, 22 March, invited by Westmeath Age Friendly Programme. The study and its outcome will inform the Moate Town Centre Plan and the County Development Plan.

There was representation from many

age groups, including those with additional mobility needs. The tour also included Westmeath County Council stakeholders and elected representatives.

Longford Age Friendly Programme will undertake walkability studies in 2023 in Longford, Ballymahon, and Edgeworthstown as part of the new Age Friendly Strategy.

Longford Handy Helps

A new Longford Handy Helps' collection of useful gadgets and devices which can be borrowed from Ballymahon, Edgeworthstown and Longford Libraries with an adult Longford Libraries card.

This is a collaboration between Longford Libraries and the Health Service Executive senior occupational therapists working in the community.

It is a try before you buy initiative with participating local pharmacies

Library, Arts, Heritage and Archives



Sinead Burke in discussion with Rick O'Shea at Granard Booktown Festival.

and aims to help people to live more independently in their own homes.

Bealtaine Festival

The Bealtaine festival is an action packed schedule and one of the highlights includes the Longford Age Friendly Programme. As part of this, a partnership with the Irish Hospice Foundation will deliver the Putting Your House in Order programme in three libraries on 26 April, 2 May and 9 June.

Seachtain na Gaeilge

For Seachtain na Gaeilge, many events took place in all six libraries. This included a screening of the Oscar nominated film *An Cailín Ciúin* in Ballymahon Library on Wednesday, 15 March to an audience of 80 people.

For people interested in the Irish language there is also a weekly Ciorcal Comhrá in Longford Library each Tuesday between 1-2pm. All are welcome to attend.

Youth Library Group Conference

After a four-year break, an in-person Youth Library Conference will be held in Edgeworthstown Library on Wednesday, 3 May.

This conference celebrates library success stories from around the country. Speakers will come from Galway, Kildare, Kilkenny, Leitrim, Louth, Meath and school libraries.

The format of the conference is a round table approach to encourage more networking, delve into the projects in more detail and to offer support to library staff that would be interested in starting a similar project.

Dormant Account Funding 2023

Longford Libraries has applied for funding under the Dormant Account Funding 2023 to develop a new sensory toy and equipment collection. This collection will be selected by library employees in consultation with local community groups and a play therapist.

Creative Ireland

Creative Ireland's Community Open Call was hugely successful with over 70 applications for funding from County Longford. The variety and ambition of

Library, Arts, Heritage and Archives

the projects was very encouraging.

The programme for Cruinniú na nÓg is under way and planned for Saturday, 10 June.

Longford Age Friendly Programme has made an application to Older Persons Creativity in Older Age Scheme 2023 for funding to deliver music performances in all Longford nursing homes in 2023.

There is also an application submitted for the Climate Action Spark Fund and the Traveller Wellbeing through Creativity initiative.

Decade of Centenaries Programme

Two school projects were launched as part of Civil War commemorations. Senior pupils at primary level are asked to design a postage stamp with the theme of reconciliation.

A Transition Year intergenerational project entitled 'The Changing Life of a Teenager since Independence' is underway in five schools.

The winners will be announced at the ecumenical prayer service on Wednesday, 24 May at 2pm in the Garden of Remembrance.

Launch of book on Mills

Mills, Millers and Milling in County Longford, a book by the late Dr Seamus Mímnagh, was launched on Monday, 3 April.

The book was funded by the Heritage

Office and the launch was performed by Professor Richard Vincent Comerford, formerly of Maynooth University.

Albert Reynolds Collection

The Archives Officer is currently preparing to receive a collection donated by the family of the late Albert Reynolds. It includes documents and a variety of other items.

Heritage Office

The Heritage Office has secured funding for eight community projects and a further €213,362 under three separate funds:

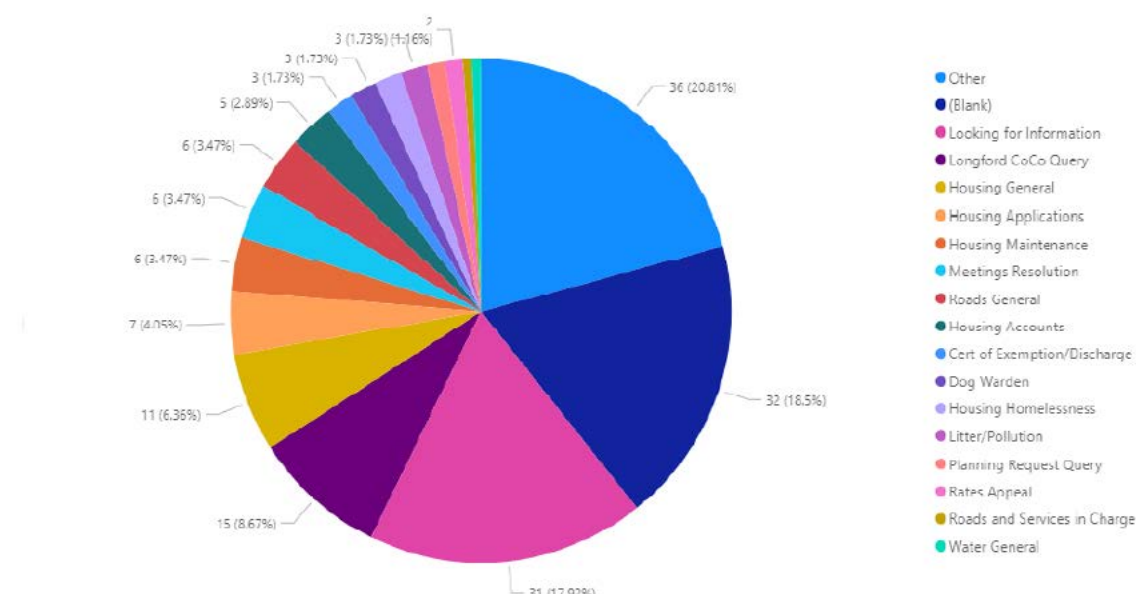
- Built Heritage Investment Scheme
- Historic Structures Fund, and the
- Community Monuments Fund.

The Heritage Office also applied for funding under the biodiversity grants from the National Parks and Wildlife Service for five additional projects including:

- Monitoring the Quagga Mussel (a nine-county joint project)
- Barn owl survey
- Conservation of the swifts
- the Longford Hedgerow Project and
- Plant a pot for pollinators

The outcome of this grant should be released shortly.

Corporate Services



Customer Services

The Customer Services Desk responded to 1,750 calls in March and April.

There were 171 emails to the dedicated customer services email address, as well as many other in-person customers.

The graph above demonstrates which section the 167 cases generated over the two months were directed to.

Check the Register

In March and April, 223 applications were processed from checktheregister.ie. These include both new registrations and updates to existing electors.

Those already registered to vote, need to add their date of birth, personal public service number and Eircode. This helps to ensure the accuracy of the Electoral Register.

In addition, everyone aged 16 and 17 years can now pre-register online

and will be automatically added to the Register when they turn 18 years. The easiest way to add or update your details is to go to checktheregister.ie

Encouraging registrations

As part of an ongoing promotional campaign, presentations were given to two groups of students in Mercy Secondary School, Ballymahon, on 19 April to explain and demonstrate how to use the checktheregister.ie website.



Corporate Services

Official Languages Act

Work continues on meeting our obligations under Section 10A of the Official Languages Act (Amendment) 2021. From March to April 2023, there were 269 advertisements placed in various media, with 114, or 37.9%, of these adverts placed in Irish or bilingually. This surpasses the 20% target for such adverts.

Bottles for Climate Action

In support of Longford County Council's Climate Action Charter Programme and to encourage the organisation's promotion of climate change awareness and drive towards being more environmentally friendly, Corporate Services have introduced a reusable water bottle, and these have been distributed to all employees of Longford County Council. This aims to help reduce the use of plastic bottles in the organisation.



Freedom of Information

Freedom of Information (FOI) and Access to Information on the Environment (AIE) requests, as well as Office of the Ombudsman complaints received are detailed below:

	March	April	YTD
FOI requests	4	7	19
AIE requests	3	1	8
Ombudsman complaints	0	0	1

Data Protection

The Data Protection Officer attended national and regional data protection officer meetings. Clean and Clear Desk training was rolled out to employees and a Data Protection Impact Assessment guidance was also circulated.

Also in March and April:

- Two data breaches were closed
- Three Data Subject Access Requests were received with this work ongoing
- Eighteen data protection queries were received and closed
- One data protection impact assessment reviewed

Elected Members Supports & Meetings Administration

Meetings held in March/April 2023:

7 March	Corporate Policy	Hybrid Group
8 March	Longford County Council	Hybrid Council

Corporate Services

22 March	Longford Municipal District & In Committee Meetings	Hybrid
23 March	Ballymahon MD & In Committee Meetings	In Person
24 March	Granard MD & In Committee Meetings	In Person
11 April	Corporate Policy Group	Hybrid
12 April	Longford County Council	Hybrid
17 April	Strategic Infrastructure Strategic Policy Committee	MS Teams
17 April	Climate Action & Planning Strategic Policy Committee	MS Teams
18 April	Governance Strategic Policy Committee	MS Teams
27 April	Longford County Council - In Committee	Hybrid
28 April	Longford County Council - In Committee	Hybrid

Highlights included:

- LAMA Spring Seminar 2-4 March 2023
- AILG Module 2 Training, 25 March 2023
- Civic Recognition for Ballymore

Ladies GFA, 2020 Leinster Junior Championship Winning team, on 24 March 2023

- Adopted Capital Budget 2023-2025 (April 2023 LCC Meeting)
- Adopted Draft Revised Development Contribution Scheme (April 2023 LCC Meeting)
- Adopted Draft Annual Report 2022 (April 2023 LCC Meeting)



Communications

Media Queries responded to: 13

Publicity Campaigns commenced: 4

Key work items included:

- Support with coordination of visit of Minister Heather Humphreys for opening of The Yard Hub, Abbeyshrule, Newtownforbes Bog Walk and Ardagh Remote Working Hub and other amenities
- A Customer Communications Toolkit presentation has been prepared and is now live on Metacompliance
- Supporting preparation for publications: Responsible Dog Ownership leaflet and Road Safety Plan

Corporate Services

- Supported work on the preparation of the Annual Report to elected members at the April County Council meeting
- Newly approved Brand Standards are being applied initially by Communications team members to test how user friendly they are, before roll out to all employees

Longfordcoco.ie Improvements

We are working through the National Disability Authority monitoring report on Longfordcoco.ie. Accessibility will be improved once these identified issues are addressed.

Communications Training

Further Advanced Media Training for key identified employees of the Council took place. This and further Smartphone video training will take place again in May to help employees using media outlets and social media platforms in their work.

Social Media

	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram
Posts	116	97	75
Stories			77
Reach*			2.6k
Impressions**		24.6k	
New Followers	146	11	68

*Reach: The number of people who had your page's post enter their screen.

**Impressions: The number of times your page's post entered a person's screen

The Social Media team shared updates on dog rehoming, Pride of Place applications, CLÁR funding, the International Womens Day flipped gender meeting and much more of the work of the Council.

Corporate Services

Health and Safety

Health & Safety Excellence Awards

Longford County Council is delighted to announce that it has won the Health and Safety Excellence Awards for the Public Sector Category. This award is a very positive recognition of all the hard work that all Longford County Council employees have put into the Safety Management System. The ceremony took place on Wednesday, March 29 at The Crowne Plaza Hotel, Dublin.

Health & Safety Inspections

Ten safety inspections were completed by Health and Safety and management.

Internal Audit

Health and Safety Internal Audits were completed in Housing and the Safety Management System.

An audit schedule is in place for other sections.

Health and Safety Training

Health and Safety briefings were held with Environment, Roads and Library Services. These were in relation to the section risk assessments and relevant Standard Operating Procedures.

World Memorial Day

A national day of action to mark Workers' Memorial Day took place on 28 April. The Council is holding a risk assessment training session with employees to mark the day.

Safety Monitoring Consultative Committee Meetings

Safety Monitoring Consultative Committee meetings were held with all directorates in March.

These meetings are chaired by the relevant Director of Services. They give an opportunity for Council Safety Representatives to raise concerns regarding health and safety issues.



Local Enterprise Office

Local Enterprise Week 2023

Local Enterprise Week took place, with 540 people taking part in local events.

A training and information day included information sessions on local apprenticeships. There were also many local employment opportunities advertised at the event with local companies in attendance to meet with prospective employees.

Many events locally also focused on training, with the ever-popular Start Your Own Business course on offer, as well as digital marketing and more.

National Enterprise Awards County Longford Final 2023

Midland Language Centre were the overall winners at the National Enterprise Awards County Longford Final 2023.

The company specialises in providing homestay programmes for international students coming to Ireland. Midland Language Centre will represent County Longford in the National Enterprise Awards final on 1 June 2023.



International Women's Day

International Women's Day took place during Local Enterprise Week on Wednesday, 8 March. This year's theme was 'Embrace Equity'.



To mark the day, the Local Enterprise Offices of Longford, Leitrim and Westmeath jointly-hosted a Tri-County Women in Business Network event in the Mullingar Park Hotel.



With over 100 attendees, the event showcased female entrepreneurs from a spectrum of business sectors and stages of their business journey from each participating county. The MC was Longford's Pat Murphy, who is Chairperson of the Tri County Women in Business Network.

Local Enterprise Office



Pat also facilitated a very successful networking session. Longford businesswoman Edel O'Hanlon of The Well Being Clinic was one of the guest speakers at the event.

Student Enterprise Programme County Longford Final 2023

Student Enterprise Programme County Longford Final 2023 took place in March, with 250 students from eight County Longford secondary schools taking part.



In the Junior category, Bronwyn McGarry, Michael Murtagh, Holly McIntyre and Gavin Murphy from Moyne Community School will represent Longford at the national finals with their business, Big Move 2 Big School.

They produced a booklet on the transition to secondary school for new first years students.

In the Intermediate category, Caitlin Morris, also from Moyne Community School, will represent Longford with her business, Clip Clop Designs. This business produces bespoke ecorative horseshoe gifts.



Senior category winners also going on to the national finals are Erin Flynn and Rachel Higgins from Ardscoil Phadraig, Granard with their business, An Crú Capaill. This business similarly re-uses old horseshoes to make beautiful products, including candle holders.



All winners will represent County Longford at this year's Student Enterprise Programme national finals on Friday, 5 May.

Water

Find and Fix Programme

The Find and Fix team are currently operating in the Lanesborough and Killashee areas. Good progress is being made with regards to water leakage identification and repair.

As part of the leakage reduction programme, the Find and Fix team are busy installing network improvement infrastructure. This includes additional bulk water meters, flow loggers and sluice valves to aid water conservation.

Leakage Progress in 2022

The national leakage target for 2022 was to reduce leakage by 28.5 mega litres per day (MLD). This was successfully achieved as there was a leakage reduction from 647 MLD to 617 MLD, based on 12-month rolling average data. In percentage terms, the national leakage level is now at 37%, reduced from a high of 46% in 2018.

The target for Longford County Council in 2022 was to achieve a 0.3 MLD leakage reduction by September 2022. This target was achieved, with leakage levels showing a reduction of 0.54 MLD by September 2022.

Leakage Target for 2023

The proposed leakage target for Longford in 2023 is a leakage reduction of 0.35 MLD. This will now be based on a 12-month rolling average period from 2023 onwards.

A budget of approximately €6.6 million

has been allocated to assist in achieving the leakage target in Longford, in addition to improving the overall below ground assets.

In relation to mains replacement, approximately 18.2 kilometres (km) is due to progress to construction in 2023. Of this, 9.7km is design only.

Progress against the national and local authority level leakage targets will be provided on a quarterly basis. It will be provided via the National Leakage Report issued by the Uisce Éireann National Leakage Team.

There will be ongoing meetings to discuss progress and identify areas for improvement between each Local Authority Water Services, Uisce Éireann and the Leakage Reduction Programme Regional Contractor.



Fire Services

Fintan McDonald RIP

Longford Fire Brigade lost a dear friend and colleague in Fire Fighter Fintan McDonald who passed away on Thursday, 27 April having battled a serious illness.

The death of Fintan at such a young age is a huge loss to his family, his community, the Longford Fire Service and Longford County Council.



As a retained Fire Fighter, Fintan served the local community in Ballymahon and the surrounding areas of Longford and Westmeath with professionalism, skill and good humour for the past eight years.

Fintan will be remembered fondly by all those who worked with him, as well as the many people and communities that he served.

We offer our sincerest condolences to Fintan's wife Edel, son Fintan Junior, his extended family and friends.

Health and Safety

No injuries to report.

Training

The 2023 drill programme has commenced in all five fire stations.

A recruit for Lanesborough has completed his three-week recruit induction course in Hacketstown, Carlow.

Two recruits have completed an initial breathing apparatus course in Tullamore.

All stations have completed one day abrasive wheels and compartment fire behaviour training course.

Operations

Total callouts: 29 in March and 27 in April.

All stations remained fully operational.

Capital Funding has been sought and approved for a new road traffic collision jeep for County Longford.

Major Emergency Management

Two people completed training in information management.

Regional steering and working group meetings took place.

Fire Prevention

Three fire safety certificates were processed.

Fire Services

Fire Prevention Contd.

One court licence application was processed.

One dangerous substance licence application was received.

Recruitment

Interviews have been held for fire fighter vacancies in Granard and Longford Town.

Equipment

Irish Engineering has completed statutory inspection testing for our equipment.

Regeneration

Minister Humphreys opens Regeneration projects

The Minister for Rural and Community Development Heather Humphreys TD visited Longford on 19 April to officially open Newtownforbes Bog Walk, Ardagh Remote Working Hub and The Yard Hub, Abbeyshrule.

Newtownforbes Bog Walk



Newtownforbes Bog Walk was opened by Minister Humphreys and includes a 2.9 kilometre trail. This trail links into existing footpaths in the village of Newtownforbes, creating a looped walk.

It brings the user from the GAA grounds, through pasture and forestry, with a stream running alongside a section of the trail. There is also a smaller looped section with a fairy trail in forestry for the children.

The Minister was joined by Scoil Mhuire National School Newtownforbes school children, who helped her unveil the plaque.

Thanks is extended to local landowners who facilitated this development, as well as the local community who had the vision for this project. This project is the first phase of a larger vision for opening up the biodiversity and heritage of the area to the wider community.

Ardagh Remote Working Hub

Ardagh Remote Working Hub was also opened. This project involved refurbishment and upgrade works to part of the Ardagh Community Centre.

Minister Humphreys unveiled a plaque on the front of the building, before touring the building and viewing the work carried out by the community with support from Longford County Council. The work of the local community and the role of such remote working hubs in rural life was acknowledged by the Minister.

Ardagh Remote Working Hub includes a dedicated office space and six hot desks, with 1GB fibre broadband. It is an ideal location for local people wishing to live and work locally.



Regeneration

The Yard Hub, Abbeyshrule

The Yard Hub in Abbeyshrule provides a remote working and enterprise facility.

The project included the renovation of several derelict buildings along the Royal Canal.

It is now a state of the art facility with space for workshops, remote working, training, and toilet and shower facilities for Royal Canal users.

This project was driven by the local community with support from Longford County Council, including in securing substantial funding and project delivery.

The project also delivered a new purpose-built home for the Abbeyshrule Canoe Club.

Minister Humphreys praised the project as a huge boost for local people and businesses, as well as adding to the village's tourism offering.



L-R: Director of The Yard Hub, Phillip Butler; Longford Westmeath TD Deputy Joe Flaherty; Cllr Mick Cahill; Director of The Yard Hub James Byrne; Director of The Yard Hub Irene McGoe; Chief Executive of Longford County Council Mr Paddy Mahon; Minister for Rural and Community Development Heather Humphreys TD; Cathaoirleach, Longford County Council Cllr Turlough McGovern; Director of The Yard Hub Cepta Duffy; Cathaoirleach Ballymahon Municipal District Cllr Paul Ross; Director of The Yard Hub Edward Egan and Senator Micheal Carrigy.

Planning

Planning Applications

The Center Parcs extension application has been appealed to An Bord Pleanála.

County Development Plan

Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027 policies and strategies are being implemented. The plan consists of four volumes and is available on Longfordcoco.ie and can be purchased from the Council Planning Office.

Longford Town Local Area Plan

A scoping and screening report on the Strategic Environmental Assessment is complete and is subject of consultation with the environmental bodies.

Preparation of the Draft Plan is ongoing. A Longford Town Transport Study is progressing in advance of the production of the Town Plan.

Longford Town Local Transport Plan

A scoping and screening report on the Strategic Environmental Assessment is complete. It has been subject of consultation with environmental bodies.

Preparation of the Draft Plan is ongoing. Feedback from relevant bodies will be included in the Draft Plan before the formal consultation can begin.

Active Travel

Part 8 has been approved for the pedestrian Camlin bridge.

Residential Zoned Land Tax

A draft map under the Residential Zoned Land Tax legislation has been published. Submissions were invited and reviewed regarding inclusion or exclusion on the map and possible re-zoning. The final map is to be published on 1 December.

Lough Ree Biosphere Reserve

Consultants have been appointed to prepare the application to UNESCO for Biosphere Reserve status for Lough Ree. The project is due to be launched in May and the public consultation period will begin in June.

Regeneration

The Planning section provides required support for the Regeneration team in Longford County Council. Part 8 planning has been secured for the Longford dog track and proposed skate park. A design and build eTender was advertised and a resulting panel has been assessed.

The next stage is to appoint contractors for these works. It is expected to be completed in late 2023. There is an August 2024 deadline to drawdown funds.

Compulsory Purchase Orders

Some vacant and semi-derelict properties have been identified for potential CPO in 2023.

CONNECTED

People • Place • Opportunity

Management Report for March 2023 prepared in accordance with Sec 136 (2) of the Local Government Act 2001, as inserted by Section 51 the Local Government Reform Act 2014. The report outlines key aspects of our service delivery and performance in April 2023 in securing the objectives set out in the Council's Corporate Plan.

Signed: 
Paddy Mahon
Chief Executive

