

Offaly- The green Energy County

Offaly has a long standing association with energy and power generation, arising from the inception of the Turf Development Board Ltd. in 1933, onto the establishment of Bord na Móna in 1946. The industrialised approach to developing the peatlands was significant in providing economic benefit for the midland communities, fostering vibrant communities. Offaly became a beneficiary of extensive peat-derived employment, from harvesting to the operation of various Power Stations. Three peat fires stations in Offaly with one just on the county boundary at Portarlinton had a capacity of approximately 350MW. These were replaced by more modern stations at Shannonbridge and Edenderry in the early 2000s, with a combined maximum output of approximately 250MW.

The increase in environmental awareness, the increasing appreciation of the biodiversity and the environmental impact of milling and burning peat on a commercial scale has signalled an inevitable shift towards cleaner fuels. To address these challenges, Offaly Co. Co. (OCC) is looking towards policies such as the Climate Adaptation Plan which present emerging opportunities arising from the transition to a low carbon economy and renewable energy .OCC has been a forward looking county with progressive wind policy, and consequently have accumulated significant expertise in the area of energy policy, energy planning and renewables. These dynamic capabilities provide a backdrop to facilitate and promote energy enterprise, with potential for collaborative initiatives.

Since the adoption of its first wind energy strategy in 2009, OCC has permitted a number of windfarms, with almost 100MW operational, approx. 250MW under construction or permitted and a further number at various stages of planning. Upwards of ten solar farms are either permitted or in planning with some of very large scale, over 100MW in capacity. Flywheel technology, biomass CHP and advanced pyrolysis & heat recovery have also been recently permitted. The recent 200MW battery storage facilities in Lumcloon & Shannonbridge represent leading European projects with €150m investment.

Arising from an acceleration of Bord na Móna's decarbonisation programme, the Midlands Regional Transition Team (MRTT) was formed, to meet this complex challenge. MRTT have worked to mitigate the impact and pursue new opportunities, taking the lead in liaising with the Just Transition Commissioner.

OCC has been proactive in seeking to identify collaborations that leverage the High Voltage energy infrastructure which crosses the county, with strong nodes due in large part to the 4 former or existing power station sites, strategic land banks and renewables capabilities. These advantages are reflected in OCC targeted strategies to promote and support the growth of the renewable sector, while also seeking to work with land/asset owners such as ESB and Bord na Móna to maximise public benefit from those assets in the post-peat context.

The pro-active approach to renewable energy in Offaly and the accelerated end-of-peat has provided Offaly with the opportunity to pivot, applying capabilities and energy infrastructure to foster new and emerging green energy and enterprise initiative. As the emerging 'Energy County', Offaly is facilitating

new opportunities through providing a favourable ecosystem for innovation and entrepreneurship. OCC is also working with other bodies to identify economic development opportunities in green technology.

OCC and partners are currently advancing Rhode Green Energy Park (RGEP), a leading energy enterprise prototype. Situated on the site of the former Rhode Power Station, it is ideally located to become a seedbed for enterprise and a regional focal point for the emerging energy sector through integrating renewable energy production with energy storage and transmission systems. RGEP is an innovative concept that may provide valuable insights to other former Power Station sites.

With RGEP, OCC and partners are currently advancing a leading-edge Hydrogen demonstration project. Hydrogen is one of the leading options for storing renewable energy, with rapidly emerging applications in transport and clean energy. This project is examining integration of energy from renewable electricity with the gas network, paving the way for Ireland's first green hydrogen hub.

Within the transition to a data-driven economy, OCC has recognised, through the draft County Development Plan 2021-2027 the potential for Data Centres in situating near renewable energy sources. The strong electricity grid, strategic land banks, proximity to gas transmission and proximity to Greater Dublin are key advantages for Offaly.

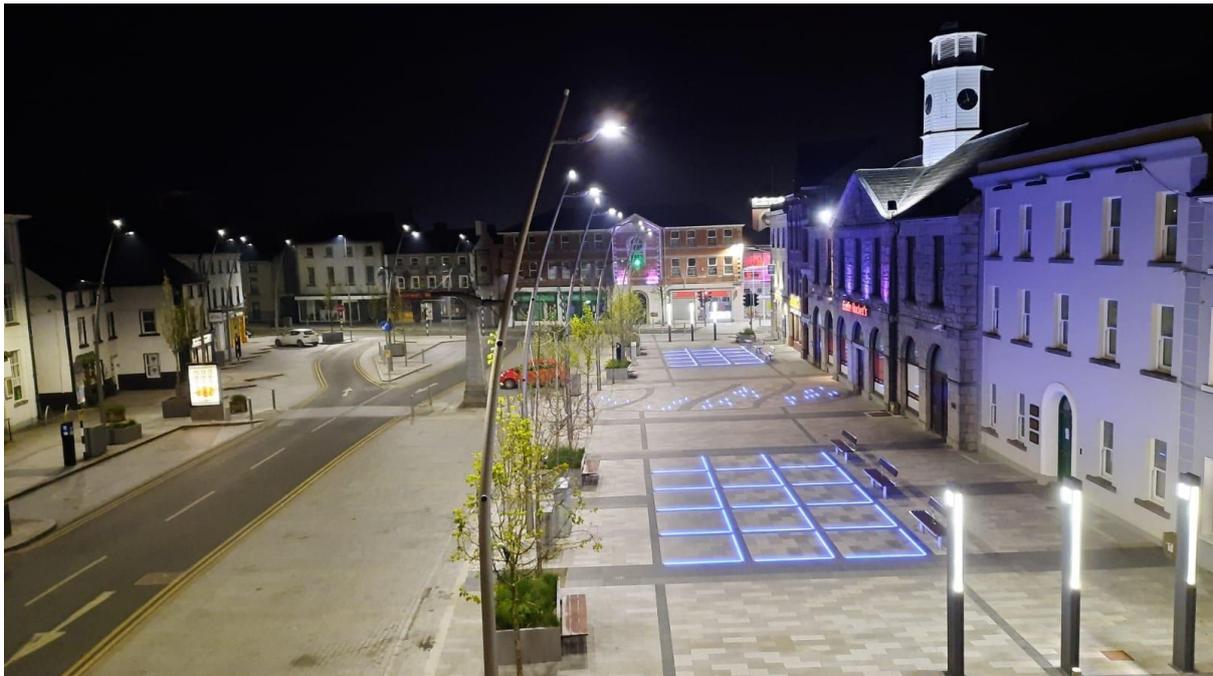
OCC has recognised the potential of new energy opportunities, and are actively supporting emerging enterprises. Through a policy of open engagement, Offaly is emerging as a leader in Green Energy, with an even a brighter future to come!



Tullamore Street Scape and Public Realm Project.

In 2020 Offaly County Council completed the Tullamore Street Scape and Public Realm project, which was part funded by the European Regional Development Fund and the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund. A major element of the project was the upgrade of street lighting to energy efficient LED lights which delivered a 40% saving on energy costs and better quality lighting. All overhead cables were undergrounded which along with the sleek column design has greatly improved the streetscape appearance.

A further lighting enhancement in the project was the provision of feature LED decorative lighting in the O'Connor Square pavement. The colours of this feature lighting can be altered on a sequence timer and set to honour particular events or occasions, eg green for Patricks Day. This feature lighting has created a wonderful night time ambience in O Connor Square.



Chairmans Tree of Hope

Caithearleach John Carroll on behalf of elected members of Offaly County Council recently launched a tree planting initiative open to community groups. Trees have been quietly offsetting carbon emissions for centuries, converting carbon dioxide into the oxygen we need for life. The initiative marks hope for communities coming out of the pandemic across 50 towns and villages. Planting will take place during the Autumn.



Tullamore Living River Project

The Tullamore Living River Project is an ambitious project, aiming to redress the low quality status of the Tullamore River, enhance the water quality and wildlife value of the river and provide an a natural amenity area within the Town. A constructed wetland with raised areas for access will be provided on a derelict site adjacent to the River within the Town, along with localised riverside enhancements in various locations within the Town.

The proposals will lead to some improvements in water quality, and will be used as a springboard to work in tandem with other catchment-wide measures. In parallel with water quality enhancements, the measures outlined here will help to provide wetland habitat for flora and fauna within the Tullamore River as it flows through the town, thus bolstering local aquatic and riparian biodiversity. The project will also help to fulfil Offaly's commitments in the Offaly Climate Adaptation Plan by providing carbon sequestration potential in the proposed wetland areas. The measures of the Tullamore Living River Project are designed to maximise the habitat value for riparian wildlife, and to enhance the area for biodiversity.

From a wider environmental perspective, wetland habitats sequester atmospheric carbon as they grow, and build up peat layers' year after year. The wetlands of Ireland are our rainforest equivalent, our species-rich habitats that also mop up carbon dioxide as well as providing invaluable habitats for wildlife. By creating wetland habitats such as this one, we can help to mitigate our county and national carbon emissions as well as assist with the recovery of wetland wildlife

