



As we head into a New Year, I hope you and your family are safe and well.

I know things have been tough for many and that Covid continues to cause much hardship, but good things are happening too and I think it's really important to celebrate and honour that.

As your Green female Government Minister, I want to continue to support the communities of Laois and Offaly.

In these pages you will read about some of the work I have been doing over the last year. And if there is something I can help you with next year, please do get in touch.

Wishing you and yours all the best for the coming year.

Pippa

MAKING PROGRESS

- ✓ **Retrofitting: 345 social homes across Laois-Offaly**
- ✓ **Active Travel: More cycle lanes and better footpaths**
- ✓ **Peatland Restoration: 30,000 hectares of bog being restored**
- ✓ **All creating new job opportunities for the people of Laois-Offaly**

Celebrating the Towns and Villages of Laois and Offaly

Well done to the people of Ballycumber, Birr, Clonbullogue, Geashill and Tullamore in Offaly and Abbeyliex, Ballinakill, Ballacolla and Castletown in Laois. You made us so proud in 2021, with your wins in the Tidy Towns. And to Abbeyliex, Ballinakill and Tullamore on your recognition as Great Places to Live in Ireland.

I believe the values of community, co-operation and connection are at the core of a good worthwhile life, and my goodness those values are on show in our towns.

They are values the Green Party holds dear too. We know how important it is to work together to provide our children with a planet that is not damaged beyond repair. We want to leave them a legacy of clean air, clean water, warm homes and good jobs. That is why we are trying so hard to support communities to thrive and flourish.



Supporting Local Producers



We have so many wonderful local food producers and growers across Laois and Offaly. From meat to vegetables, milk to cheese, bread to flour and a variety of different drinks and juices. You can locally source everything you need to make a delicious meal. I encourage you to support those producers by spending in your community and shopping locally when you can.

Working with the Communities of Laois and Offaly



Out and about meeting farmers

'Connecting Communities with Peatlands' Pollagh, Co Offaly.

This initiative, funded by the Just Transition Fund, aims to provide community environmental groups and individuals with capacity-building training to help them to engage with their local peatland.

Land-Use, Community & Enterprise Webinar

In July I ran a webinar, bringing Coillte, the ESB and Bord na Mona together to explain the process of using public land. The potential of community groups to do more on state land is exciting.



Better Public Transport for Laois and Offaly

As a Green Party politician I know that public transport must be a viable option if we are to reduce car journeys and lower emissions. Connecting Ireland is the new plan for new bus routes and increased frequency on existing routes. New routes coming your way, with a min. of three return trips a day on each:

- Birr to Portlaoise via Kinnitty, Clonaslee and Mountmellick.
- Portlaoise to Mullingar via Portarlinton and Edenderry.
- Abbeyleix to Carlow via Ballinakill and The Swan.
- Athlone to Thurles via Shannonbridge, Banagher and Birr.
- Portlaoise to Mullingar via Portarlinton and Edenderry.



Getting the Best for Our Towns and Villages

Making progress in Abbeyleix

In October, I launched Laois's first NeighbourWood site which will see the transformation of an unmanaged 2.5 acres in Abbeyleix into a native woodland habitat, adjacent to five housing estates.

Following representations I made to Minister Foley, Scoil Mhuire, Abbeyleix was selected for inclusion in the 2022 Schools Energy Retrofit Pathfinder Programme. Works will provide a transformation to a modernised, sustainable low energy building for the future.

Earlier in the year I made representations to the EPA and Laois County Council regarding the volume of HGV traffic in the town. Nitrogen Dioxide monitoring took place and an origin-destination survey of these trucks got underway.

Revitalising Town Centres

This year, I hosted online meetings for the people of Portlaoise and Tullamore. At both meetings I heard from people who are passionate about their town centres and how we can make them attractive places to live and work.

I heard from the many people who came along about the need for public transport, planning inclusion into our public areas, encouraging people back into town centres to live and do business and conserving our built heritage.

Portlaoise aims to become Ireland's first low carbon town and received a €9m boost this year to help achieve that. Tullamore is getting ready for a tourism boom from the Grand Canal Greenway and was awarded €500,000 for Phase One of its cycle network earlier this year.



Food, Forests, and Biodiversity

As a Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine, I have responsibility for horticulture, organics, forestry, on farm biodiversity and land use.

Organics: As an organic farmer, I know the benefits of this type of production. It's in Ireland's best interest to switch to a greater percentage of organics and I've doubled the supports for organic farmers since becoming a Minister. It will give you, the consumer, a wider range of organic food to choose from.

Horticulture: I increased spending on horticulture from €6m to €9m in Budget 2021. We'll be spending a further €9m in 2022 to encourage people to make a livelihood from growing food and selling it locally. In August, I commissioned a major report on the Horticulture industry in Ireland to identify and analyse opportunities which are emerging for the sector here.

Forestry: We need to plant more trees, and we need to plant them in the right place. I've set up Project Woodland to do just that. I've met with foresters and farmers to listen to the difficulties they're having with the Department licensing system and we're working to solve that problem. I have also invested in schemes to include supports for planting on public land.

Biodiversity: I want to help farmers and communities to deliver biodiversity, both on farms and at a local level. The levels of on-farm innovation and creativity which I have seen in my time in this role are very reassuring. I secured an additional €5m for investment in new biodiversity initiatives by my Department next year.



Did you know Ireland imports 80,000 tonnes, or €45 million worth, of potatoes per annum?

So when you order a portion of fries at your local chipper, chances are they're not Irish.

I want to see more of our potatoes, fruit and vegetables produced here in Ireland to keep Irish growers in business.

I was delighted to officially open Ireland's first dedicated potato packer and distributor in September.



Meeting landowners and forestry experts

Taking a new approach to Flooding

We are vulnerable to flooding in Ireland with the frequency and intensity impacting on farms and communities. I visited the Shannon Callows this summer to meet farmers and Minister Patrick O'Donovan. I will continue to work with him to ensure we deliver solutions and communicate progress to those impacted.

My Green Party colleague, Minister Malcolm Noonan has launched the Draft River Basin Management Plan, while my fellow Senator, Róisín Garvey, has introduced a motion to the Seanad, recommending a multi-faceted response to flood management.



Visiting the Shannon Callows with Minister O'Donovan

Budget 2022: Better Healthcare for Women

Women's healthcare is a priority of mine.

I am delighted that Budget 2022 provides for new funding of €31m for women's health measures. This represents an unprecedented funding package for targeted initiatives to tackle health inequalities experienced by women.

We are introducing dedicated specialist menopause clinics across Ireland, and we are making contraception free to 17-25 year-olds.

Additional funding has been allocated to the National Maternity Strategy to ensure its timely implementation. An allocation of €10m of dedicated funding for the Women's Health Fund will transform the work of the Women's Health Taskforce, established in 2019, and aims to provide better supports for a range of health services for women.

I will continue to work with colleagues on progressing work on legislation for Safe Access Zones for those accessing abortion services.

I can support you:

I have assisted businesses in accessing information and business support grants and my team supports many Laois-Offaly constituents with a wide variety of situations; from large to small but always important to them. We are happy to assist you where we can, too.



Senator Pippa Hackett

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Animal Welfare Improvements

- 🐾 A ban on fur farming is in place.
- 🐾 Animal Welfare Organisation funding has doubled under this Government.
- 🐾 The first Animal Welfare Strategy 2021-2025 was published and a dedicated Animal Welfare Division is in place to drive the initiatives outlined in the Strategy.
- 🐾 The first ever annual equine census was introduced.
- 🐾 The Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council (FAWAC) has been re-launched.
- 🐾 A new Advisory Council on Companion Animal Welfare has been established.

Your Green Team in Laois-Offaly...

I have an excellent team on the ground, including Cllr. Mark Hackett on Offaly County Council, our Green Party Local Area Representative in Laois, John Holland, and my Parliamentary Assistant, Rosie Palmer.



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