

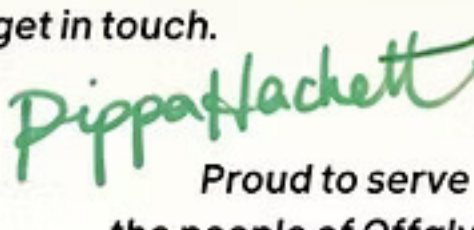
WHAT I STAND FOR

As the only Offaly representative in the Seanad and sitting at the Cabinet table, I have had the enormous privilege over the past four years of ensuring that our county is well represented at the heart of Government.

I have worked tirelessly since 2020 for the Faithful County. In everything I've achieved for Offaly and beyond, I am proud of always being consistent, reliable, and ready to stand up for our natural environment. Because without it, we have nothing.

These are undoubtedly busy times, and I've been working hard as a strong voice inside the party leading the charge in supporting environmental sustainability across communities and the economy - from farming and small businesses to schools and sports clubs.

In this newsletter, I will highlight some of the issues I have worked hardest on for the people of Offaly in recent times. Please read on and don't hesitate to get in touch.



Proud to serve the people of Offaly



CONTACT ME

A GREENER ECONOMY

Offaly's experience with Just Transition has been mixed so far, but I see many positives from recent funding:

I was pleased in recent months to announce an allocation €7.8 million to redevelop the visitor centre at Clonmacnoise. This is a very welcome first step, and now I am working with the local community to secure further funding, including money to renovate the Dalton Centre as an Enterprise Hub.

I worked hard to secure €3.6 million for new walking and cycling trails on Bord na Móna lands, including one linking up the Grand Canal Greenway and Mount Lucas, and another across West Offaly linking up Clonmacnoise, Ballinahown and Lough Boora. Like all Just Transition funding, it's vital to ensure that the primary beneficiaries will be local communities, and I will continue to advocate for this as these projects progress.



FARMING

As Minister for Land Use and Biodiversity, I have changed the face of land use in Offaly for the better. I've ensured there are options for every landowner - whether the County Council, local communities or farmers - to receive funding to plant the right trees in the right place.

I published the National Organic Strategy last month, building on the significant growth in the Irish organic sector. We've already seen a threefold increase in land and farmers in organics since 2020, with 5000 farmers (115 in Offaly) and 5% of the farmed land of Ireland under organic production. By 2030, we are aiming for 10% of Ireland's farmland to be organically farmed.

Schemes I've delivered are making a real difference.

RESEEDING PLANS

By sowing a multi-species sward or a red-clover silage sward you will be paid €300/ha AND you will save €€s on fertiliser costs.

PLANTING TREES

Plant a few corners of your farm up to 1ha (and include an extra 1ha if you have a waterway) and get up to €44,000 over 10 years tax free.

ORGANICS

A 40ha/100ac drystock farm will receive €61,000 in payment over 5 years, and will save €€s on input costs, as well as improving biodiversity, water quality and animal welfare.

SOLAR

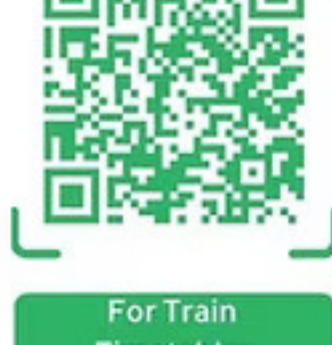
Be part of the Solar Revolution and future proof your farm. The TAMS 3 Grant offers financial assistance to cover up to 60% of the installation costs for roof top solar systems.



Farmers, I'm calling on you to take back control - farm with nature and build resilience into your farm.



For TFI Local Links in Offaly



For Train Timetables

BUSES & TRAINS IN OFFALY

Investment in rail and bus services and walking and cycling infrastructure has long been a priority of mine. We now have five new daily services along the Dublin to Galway rail route, with two additional daily journeys on Sundays. Whether you use Athlone, Clara, Tullamore or Portllington stations, these additional services give you more options and, in some cases, greater opportunity to reduce your car travel. While all progress is welcome, I am continuing to advocate for greater investment, including a later service, a return of catering services and, very importantly, a second platform for Clara.

Offaly TFI Local Link recently launched its latest new bus service, Route 850 which operates six daily return services, seven days a week creating a new connection from Athlone to Roscrea. The route will also offer enhanced connectivity to villages and areas such as Clonmacnoise, Shannonbridge, Belmont, Cloghan, Banagher, Birr, Crinkill and Shinrone.

Safe walking and cycling infrastructure is essential for Offaly's towns and villages. I worked hard to bring funding to Offaly for the 'Safe Routes to Schools' programme, which is delivering many kilometres of new and widened pavements and cycle lanes throughout our towns and villages. Proper walking and cycling paths are the future within our towns and villages, and I will continue to support funding for children to get to and from school safely.

I was delighted to receive recent confirmation that a footpath and traffic calming scheme has been proposed by Offaly County Council from the town of Kilcormac to the 'Faithful Fields' GAA complex. I will push for this project to be delivered as soon as possible.

WARMER HOMES SCHEME

The Warmer Home Scheme delivers FREE home energy upgrades to eligible homeowners and results in a significant improvement to your pocket and to your quality of life. Since 2020, 346 fully-funded property upgrades have taken place, in Offaly. Bernie Henry of Clara has this to say about her recent experience:

I am thrilled. I cannot believe the level and standard of work done, with minimum inconvenience.



Get in touch with me or SEAL to learn more

SPORT & RECREATION

We all know how important physical activity is for our health and wellbeing. The Paris Olympics shone a bright light on the incredible progress that has been made in the world of Irish Athletics, but none of that would be possible without the wonderful work that is made at grassroots level by so many volunteers.

In that spirit, I was delighted to work with the committee of Naomh Mhuire AC in Daingean in their endeavours to find a permanent home. Constructive engagement with Bord na Móna has delivered a long-term lease on grounds just outside Daingean and their recent success with the Sports Capital Grant means they will soon break ground. We all look forward to seeing the finished project and their ongoing success.

Edenderry needs a Swimming Pool again, and quickly, so that children can learn this vital life skill and adults can return to this safe and healthy form of low impact exercise.

I'm working closely with Offaly County Council and Minister Catherine Martin to ensure that a state of the art, accessible pool will be delivered for the town. I negotiated to secure the reallocation of €2 million from a legacy grant to the Council towards the development phase costs of a new pool. I will continue to advocate for further funding to complete this project.

OUR CHILDREN

It would be ideal to be able to bring nothing but good news to the people of Offaly, but while there have been many positive steps, there are also campaigns underway that as of yet, have not yielded satisfactory results.

There is a need to restore therapeutic services to three local schools, namely Offaly School of Special Education, Kolbe Special School, and St. Francis School. I have listened to the parents and have met with teachers in these schools. These services were previously in place, they worked, and I have called for their reinstatement. Children in rural Ireland should not continue to be at a loss of this vital service.

It is impossible to justify waiting lists for life changing conditions such as scoliosis and the gaps in service for children's disability and mental health services.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

I have been working on the Offaly Domestic Violence Support Services (ODVSS) Steering Committee and with Government colleagues to ensure that a Refuge is delivered for Offaly. Three 'safe houses' are now available for victims of domestic violence in Offaly.

In 2022, Offaly people participated in a Council-led survey on safety in public spaces. I continue to work to ensure that the recommendations, from CCTV schemes, to a more visible Garda presence and Domestic and Gender Based Violence training are implemented.

Where I stand on the issues that matter to you...

Too often, the Irish politician's solution to thorny questions has been to change the subject. Taking a position on a matter where there is no easy answer can be costly. My view has always been that constituents deserve to know where their public representatives stand, so I would like to briefly share my views on some topics that I know are important to the people of Offaly:

HOUSING

We have reached the point where the housing crisis is both a huge drag on the economy as a whole, and life-changing for certain people who are trapped in the crosshairs, unable to put down roots in our society and are consequently considering emigration.

The Housing Commission has said that the country needs an additional 250,000 units, and we need to do it fast. That's where modern methods of construction come in; increased off site construction, use of indigenous timber, and safer conditions for workers.

HEALTH

The legacy issues in health spending will not be easily addressed, nor will GP shortages or deficits in mental health services and hospital bed numbers. But there are green shoots and I am delighted to receive feedback from GPs that the International Medical Graduate Rural GP programme is already making a difference.

The Midlands Hospice development is an essential one for the region and must remain a priority now that a site is identified.

We need to see neurology outpatient services in the Midlands and easy access to women's healthcare, abortion services and vital menopause clinics.



Photo Credit: Tom O'Hanlon

COST OF LIVING

We are living in uncertain times, and recent years have shown that costs we can't avoid, from utility bills and groceries to childcare and rent, can be hard to budget for. Government has provided energy credits when they were needed most and long term I believe we must do everything we can to reduce energy costs by moving to cleaner energy, by retrofitting and insulating homes, and by building better quality housing. I also believe we need more supports targeting areas like childcare, family carers, GP only and General Medical Cards, and the working family payment.

IMMIGRATION

I would challenge anyone who perceives that 'Ireland is Full' to look around Offaly, from Clonmore over to Clonmacnoise and down to Coolderry, and to still tell me that we do not have room for more people.

There are issues with inadequate services, particularly when it comes to housing, GP care, school places and supports for special needs. These are long standing shortfalls that are not the fault of those seeking refuge here, and as is the case all around the world, the loudest, nativist voices usually have another agenda.

We need to look at the deficits in our community services and address those, while still having the State act in keeping with the very best of what it really means to be Irish - warm, open, compassionate, caring, and empathetic.

TURF

While I would always encourage everyone to be conscious of the environment in their day-to-day choices, I think Hough's Pub in Banagher has effectively settled the debate about burning turf in your own fireplace!

We need to continue to support people to make energy upgrades to their homes, where suitable, but there is no 'one size fits all' solution to the climate crisis and instead we must meet people where they are at.