The new Loughrea Union workhouse was erected in 1840-1 on a 6.5-acre site half a mile to the south of Loughrea. Designed by the Poor Law Commissioners' architect George Wilkinson, the building was based on one of his standard plans to accommodate 800 inmates. Its construction cost £6,960 plus £1,740 for fittings etc. The workhouse was declared fit for the reception of paupers on 17th February 1842, and received its first admissions on 26th February.

After 1923, the former workhouse was designated as a County Home. The water supply and sewerage system were improved, the kitchen and laundry remodelled, and a dining room and recreation rooms added.

From the 1950s, an input of trained nurses under the direction of the Sisters of Mercy assisted the hospital, now known as St Brendan's, develop a service specialising in providing care services for the elderly. The Sisters of Mercy continued to oversee nursing services at St Brendan's until 2001.