



Athlone Town

Development Plan 2014 - 2020

Volume 1 Written Statement

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Chapter 1 *Introduction 1*



1 INTRODUCTION

This Plan sets out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the administrative area and immediate environs of Athlone Town for the period 2014 to 2020, together with the provision of policies and objectives for the future development of the town and environs. The Plan will provide for and manage the physical, economic and social development of the town in a sustainable manner, in the interests of the overall common good, whilst protecting and enhancing the cultural and environmental assets of Athlone. The Plan also provides an opportunity to reaffirm and realise the role of Athlone as a driver of growth at local, regional and national level, commensurate with the status of the town as a “Linked Gateway”.

1.1 AREA TO WHICH THE PLAN RELATES

Athlone Town Plan extends beyond the boundaries of Athlone Town Council’s functional area and into the administrative area of Westmeath County Council. In the interests of the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, Athlone Town Council and Westmeath County Council, collectively referred to as the Councils, have come together to make a joint Plan for Athlone Town Council area and environs, in accordance with Section 9 (3) (a) of the Planning & Development Acts 2000 as amended.

The Plan area covers approximately 1,612 hectares. This Plan covers the Electoral Districts of Athlone East Rural, Athlone East Urban, Athlone West Urban and parts of Tubritt and Moydrum. Part of the environs of Athlone is located within the jurisdiction of Roscommon County Council. This area does not form part of this Plan but is subject to the Monksland / Bellanamullia Local Area Plan adopted by Roscommon County Council in 2010. The Councils liaised with Roscommon County Council when preparing this Plan, to discuss transboundary issues and to ensure the compatibility of adjoining land uses and are committed to full cooperation and

co-ordination with Roscommon County Council, with regard to the preparation, implementation, monitoring and review of this Plan. Specific objectives for Monksland / Bellanamullia Area Plan which are prescribed in that Local Area Plan propose significant economic development and population growth which need to be supported by necessary infrastructural services. In order to ensure that there is an integrated planning framework to guide the development of the Gateway, there is a requirement to secure greater co-ordination of planning objectives for Athlone between Planning Authorities in Counties Westmeath and Roscommon.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

This Plan builds on the strategies, policies and objectives of both the Athlone Town Plan 2008-2014 and the Athlone Environs Plan 2008-2014, which was previously contained within the Westmeath County Development Plan 2008-2014. The review process and preparation of the Plan has had regard to recent development trends and national, regional and local policy developments, in particular the need to support economic recovery and development. The Plan has given due prominence to the issue of flooding, given the history of flood events in the town. In addition, issues of climate change, housing, community services, pedestrian and cycle connectivity, town centre regeneration and an increasing awareness of the importance of safeguarding the towns’ natural amenities form the basis of the Plan.

In summary, the Plan will provide:

- A Spatial framework to support economic recovery and growth founded on an Economic Regeneration Strategy for Athlone
- A sustainable spatial development strategy to guide the location of development
- A framework for future investment in physical, social and community infrastructure

- A process for the preservation, protection and enhancement of the town's natural and built heritage and social assets.
- A mechanism for the creation of safe and socially inclusive sustainable communities with a renewed emphasis on improving the quality of life for all.

The Plan itself cannot directly provide jobs per se, rather it seeks to create the policy context by which economic recovery and job creation can be facilitated in a sustainable manner.

The Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020 builds on the policy and aspirations of the previous plans and advances policy and objectives in new areas of importance such as climate change and flood risk, quality of life, education, sustainable communities and issues identified during the phases of public consultation.

1.3 ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE ATHLONE TOWN AND ENVIRONS DEVELOPMENT PLANS 2008-2014

The 2008-2014 Athlone Town and Environs Development Plans were drafted at a time of economic prosperity and growth. However, the preparation of the current Plan coincides with the global economic recession and as such, levels of economic activity and population growth envisaged for the Plan period have not been realised. The economic downturn has also created several challenges affecting the implementation of the 2008-2014 Plans namely:

- Increased economic uncertainty and subsequent falling levels of investment.
- Unemployment.
- Reduced retail activity.
- Increased rates of commercial vacancy.

Notwithstanding the foregoing challenges, the 2008-2014 Plans set a framework for the sustainable physical, economic, environmental development of Athlone town and its environs including policies in relation to its environmental, social and cultural assets.

The Plans continued the practice of preparing Framework Plans for distinct neighbourhood areas in Athlone, which were the subject of significant development or likely to undergo comprehensive development, to ensure more integrated development forms and coordinated delivery. In this regard, a Local Area Plan was adopted for Lissywollen South in 2008, which provides for a number of distinctive character areas set within a unifying urban and landscape structure. The Cornamagh Local Area Plan 2009 also provided for sustainable residential communities served by social, community and recreation infrastructure. In addition, a Local Area Plan was adopted for Creggan in 2010, to the east of Athlone to guide the sustainable economic development of the area up to 2025. The Creggan Local Area Plan provided for the establishment of a Strategic Gateway Zone (SGZ) to facilitate flagship enterprise including international trading.

The Plans also prescribed a clear framework which guided and facilitated public investment in physical infrastructure in Athlone, intended to underpin continued economic and social development e.g. N6/M6 upgrade and the Athlone Main Drainage Scheme.

The Plans gave prominence to the importance of urban design and quality public realm in the town centre. In this regard Urban Design Framework Plans were prepared for Irishtown (2009) and Loughanaskin (2007). In addition, a Building Heights Policy Document was also adopted to provide for tall buildings in designated areas in the town.

A key consideration of the previous Plans was the importance of protecting the town's environmental assets, in particular the River Shannon and its Callow and Lough Ree, together with architectural heritage, archaeology, eskers, boglands, groundwater and urban trees. In this regard, Athlone Town Council adopted a Waterfront Strategy to provide a strategic approach to dealing with the River Shannon in terms of waterfront management, amenity and tourism provision

and increased accessibility and movement along the River. In 2012, the Council also prepared the Athlone Canal Study, which provided for the regeneration of the canal area, and in particular opportunities for increased movement along the canal for both pedestrians and cyclists.

Central to the existing Plans was the ethos of integrating land-use and transportation as a basis for achieving more sustainable development patterns. This philosophy is embedded in the Government's Smarter Travel Policy. The Plan has promoted and facilitated the development of a network of walking and cycling routes within Athlone. Aligned to the furtherance of Smarter Travel, the existing Plan has influenced transport management within the town centre, by advocating modal shift to sustainable modes of transport and facilitating the installation of cycling and walking infrastructure.

Finally, the Plans gave prominence to the critical role of the town centre, as highlighted in the Retail Strategy, in relation to the economic, social and cultural life of Athlone and emphasised the importance of achieving development patterns, which reinforced and supported this role. In this regard, the Council introduced reduced car parking requirements in the town centre area for new small-scale developments, thus promoting the regeneration of the town core. The €200m Athlone Town Centre mixed use scheme was completed in 2007.

1.4 PHYSICAL CONTEXT

The town has a largely waterlogged hinterland of glacial and later deposits resting on bedrock of carboniferous limestone. The broad and slow-moving River Shannon dissects Athlone and is flanked by an extensive floodplain or Callows which emerge to dominate the landscape to the north and south of the town, with numerous peat bogs to the east and west. The flat landscape is punctuated by esker ridges of sand and gravel which run east west across the countryside.

1.5 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ATHLONE

The name Athlone (in Irish Áth Luain) literally means 'The ford of Lúain'. The town was regarded as the principal crossing point on the Shannon connecting the provinces of Connacht and Leinster. The town itself developed as an Anglo-Norman settlement around a castle built for King John in 1210. From the mid-thirteenth century Athlone was a walled town and comprised of numerous defensive structures such as castles, medieval bridges and a motte and bailey.

The most important events in the history of the town were the two sieges which took place in 1690 and 1691. In the aftermath of the second siege a military barracks was constructed in the town. In the seventeenth century earthen ramparts were constructed on the west side of the town, and bastions were added to the walls of the east town. In the mid eighteenth century, a complex of artillery batteries were built to the west of the town.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the town of Athlone was greatly enhanced by a scheme of works to improve navigation on the River Shannon. In the 1750s, a canal was cut on the west side to by-pass the river callows, making through traffic possible for the first time. By 1851 the first of two rival railway firms had reached Athlone in their race to the west. This improved infrastructure resulted in a period of commercial growth and increased industrial activity in Athlone, much of which was focused on the riverfront.

1.6 EVOLUTION OF THE TOWN

The River Shannon is the dominant factor in dictating the settlement form of Athlone, with both sides of the river demonstrating compact settlement patterns. This medieval urban grain remains largely intact, with narrow streets radiating from the historical focal points of the town, and enclosed vistas adding a great deal of character and a distinctive sense of place to the town. The historic core

of Athlone remains one of the best examples of such street patterns and settlement formation in the country.

Much of the western bank of the town centre is dominated by large scale historic developments such as Custume Barracks, the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul as well as Athlone Castle. The large land take of Custume Barracks erodes much of the fine urban grain of this part of the town, and acts as a transition between the medieval street form and more dispersed settlement forms further west from the Shannon.

In recent years, new residential development has primarily been concentrated to the east of the town in areas such as Coosan, Cornamaddy and Clonbrusk. The distribution of industrial development within the town has occurred in designated Industrial Parks namely IDA Business Park, Garrycastle, Blyry Business Park and the Athlone Business Park. Athlone has strong socio-economic linkages with Longford and Roscommon and its environs including Monskland.

1.7 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

Under the Habitats and Birds Directive and the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive, both a Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental Report (SEA) and an Appropriate Assessment (AA) have been carried out for the entire Development Plan, including the written statement, maps and objectives, including appendices. The Plan had regard to both assessments with resultant changes being made to the content of the Plan throughout the plan making process. In addition, the Plan has also been informed by a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment contained in Appendix 4.

1.8 LINKED GATEWAY TOWN OF ATHLONE

Westmeath hosts the Linked Gateway towns of Athlone and Mullingar. The preferred development scenario for the Athlone Tullamore Mullingar Linked Gateway Towns as

prescribed in the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022 is through the accelerated population and economic growth of these centres in accordance with an agreed planning framework. The Guidelines set a target population to be met for both the county and each Gateway Town. In the case of Athlone, it is 26,203 up to 2022.

The Midland Gateway, the fifth largest Gateway in terms of population, is unique among the Gateways designated by the National Spatial Strategy in 2002, in that it comprises the three linked towns of Athlone, Mullingar and Tullamore, from the neighbouring counties of Westmeath and Offaly. All three towns have developed around the traditional east-west transport axis that traverses the Irish Midlands.

The three towns that form the Midland Gateway have different natural functional areas (hinterlands). Athlone has a wide catchment area which extends westward into Roscommon and East Galway and the planning framework for the town needs to take account of this phenomenon.

Athlone is marginally the largest of the Midland Gateways towns, with a population of 20,153. The town features an extensive industrial base, which supports a number of pharmaceutical, medical devices and information technology companies (both manufacturing and service support related). The town also plays host to the Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT), an important third level education institution for the Midland Gateway with more than 4,800 enrolled students and which offers programmes in business, humanities, engineering and science. In addition the Midlands Innovation and Research Centre which is based at AIT, is a hub for research and innovation and enterprise development in the Midland Region. Also present within Athlone is Georgia Tech Ireland, which operates an applied research centre based in the IDA campus since 2006 and a joint initiative between Georgia Tech (USA) and the Irish State.

All three towns, individually, have proven to be successful at attracting both Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and indigenous companies to establish operations within their functional areas. Examples of the types of companies which Athlone has been successful in attracting include Ericsson (ICT), Covidien KCI and Alkermes (formerly Elan pharmaceuticals).

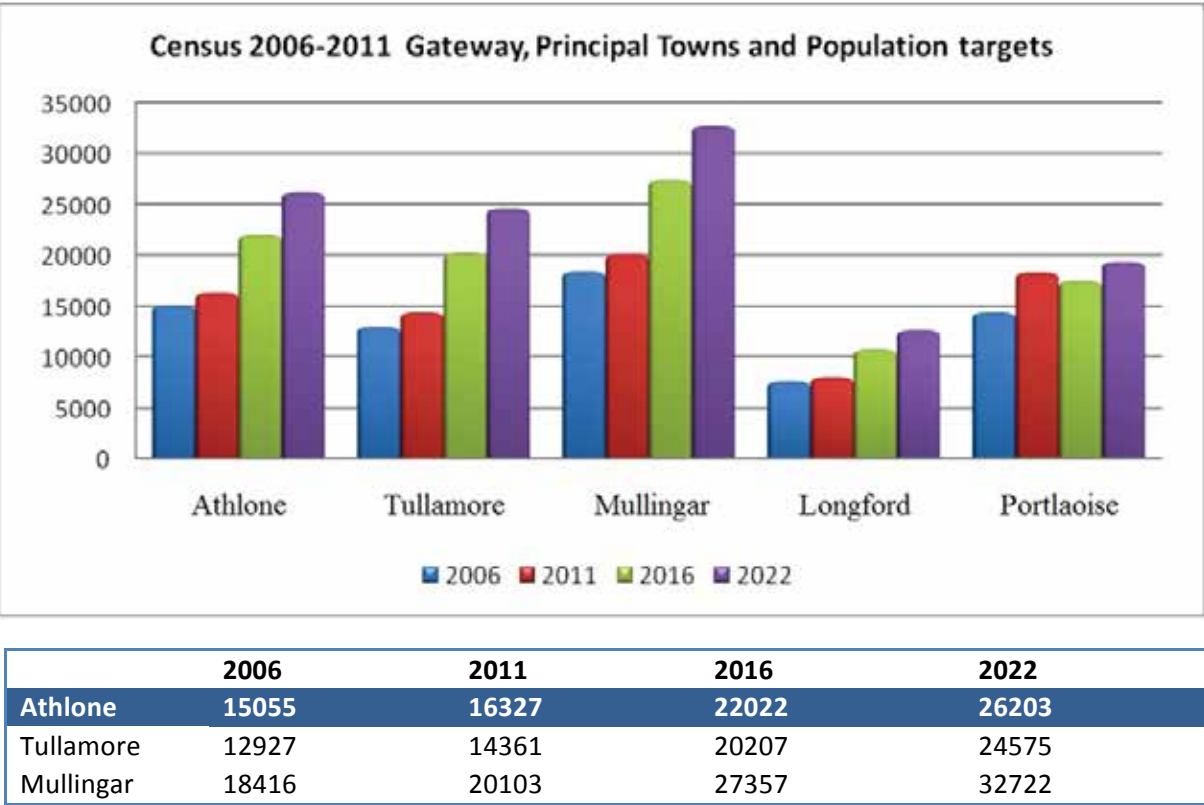
The Gateways Hubs Development Summary Report 2012 noted the following which are of direct relevance to Athlone:

- The Midland Gateway population has grown by 9.01% between 2006 and 2011, which is ahead of the Gateway average of 8.44%.
- Third level research and development funding in the Athlone Gateway (€722 per enrolled student) is below the Gateway average (€2,405 per enrolled

student) in 2010. This has however increased 63.05% since 2006.

While growth was experienced in Athlone, significant progress is required to achieve 2016 targets and the levels of population target growth set in the Midland Regional Authority Planning Guidelines up to 2022, as outlined in Fig 1.1 above. Achievement of this level of growth will depend upon continued expansion and consolidation of the industrial base with specialisation in pharmaceutical and information technology services and expansion of the research and innovation hub at Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT). Third level research and development funding for the Athlone Gateway, which is significantly below the Gateway average, requires to be supplemented to support further innovation and job creation. Future levels of economic development and employment will also be greatly influenced by the continued development of and Government commitment to the Linked Gateway concept

Fig 1.1 Population Growth 2006-2011 in the Gateway Towns



Source: Midland Regional Planning Authority

1.9 FORMAT OF THE PLAN

In accordance with Section 10(1) of the Planning & Development Acts 2000 as amended, the Development Plan sets out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of Athlone town and its environs. The Plan is set out as follows:

Volume 1 Written Statement

This constitutes the main body of the document outlining the vision, Core Strategy and objectives of the Plan. Reference is made in the Plan to Local Area Plans and Framework Plans. Should any conflict arise between the aforementioned Plans and the Development Plan, the Development Plan shall take precedence.

Volume 2 Book of Maps

The written statement is accompanied by a set of maps which give visual representation to the policies and objectives in the Plan. Should any conflict arise between the written statement and the Maps, the written statement shall prevail. Should any conflict arise between the print and electronic version, the print version shall take precedence.

Volume 3 SEA Environmental Report

The SEA Environmental Report is contained in Volume 3. This report identifies, evaluates and describes the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the Plan and identifies appropriate mitigation measures which will be undertaken.

Volume 4 Natura Impact Report

The Natura Impact Report is contained in Volume 4. This Report contains the evaluation of the potential impacts of the Plan on the conservation objectives of Natura 2000 sites, and the development, where necessary, of mitigation or avoidance measures to preclude negative effects.

Volume 5 Record of Protected Structures

Volume 5 contains the Record of Protected Structures. The structures are considered worthy of protection due to their special

interest from an architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical perspective.

Volume 6 SEA Statement

Volume 6 contains the SEA Statement which summarises how environmental considerations were factored into the Plan, and the reasons for choosing the Plan as adopted in light of other reasonable alternatives considered.

Volume 7 AA Conclusion Statement

Volume 7 contains the AA Conclusion Statement which summarises how the findings of the AA were factored into the Plan and the reasons for choosing the Plan as adopted, in light of other reasonable alternatives considered as part of the AA process.

1.10 MONITORING, REVIEW & IMPLEMENTATION

The Councils are obliged to monitor and review the operation and implementation of the Plan. The Councils will seek to implement the aims, policies and objectives of the Plan in a proactive manner. They will engage with all relevant stakeholders, both statutory and non-statutory agencies and organisations in seeking to achieve the objectives of the Plan. In accordance with the SEA Environmental Report, it is the intention of the Councils to establish a monitoring programme based on the indicators selected to track progress towards achieving strategic environmental objectives and reaching targets, enabling positive and negative impacts on the environment to be measured. It is the Councils policy that the monitoring regime should also embrace that part of the urban core within Co. Roscommon. The Monitoring Report shall be included in the review of the Implementation of the Development Plan, under Section 15 of the Planning & Development Acts 2000 as amended.

Chapter 2 *Core Strategy*



2 CORE STRATEGY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Core Strategy is intended to set out high level policy to direct the future development of Athlone Town and its environs, taking account of adopted Regional and National policy, in order to strive towards coordinated sustainable development.

The Core Strategy was introduced as a requirement of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 as amended and is required to demonstrate consistency of the Athlone Town Plan with the National Spatial Strategy, Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines, and other National Policy, particularly regarding the settlement hierarchy, infrastructural investment and requirements for housing land.

The Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midland Region as adopted by the Midlands Regional Authority in July 2010 set out specific targets for population growth and future housing land requirements for the Linked Gateway Town of Athlone. These targets now set the framework for planning policy at local level. Estimates of residential land zoning required to accommodate population growth envisaged for the Linked Gateway Town of Athlone have been calculated on the basis of these targets. The Guidelines provide for the establishment of a Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) for employment generating uses to the east of Athlone (given the presence of AIT), between Athlone and Tullamore with linkages to Mullingar and the principal towns via high capacity road links, enhanced public transport options and world-class communications networks.

Athlone is marginally the largest of the Midland Gateways towns, with a population of 20,153. The town possesses an extensive industrial base and is an important administrative centre with significant employment in public services, including the Department of Education and the Department of Defence. In addition to its hinterland in Co.

Westmeath, Athlone has strong socio-economic linkages with Longford and Roscommon and its environs including Monksland. As a commercial centre it has a sphere of influence, which also impacts upon the West Region. The environs of Athlone in Co. Roscommon (Monksland) fall within the remit of the Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) for the West Regional Authority.

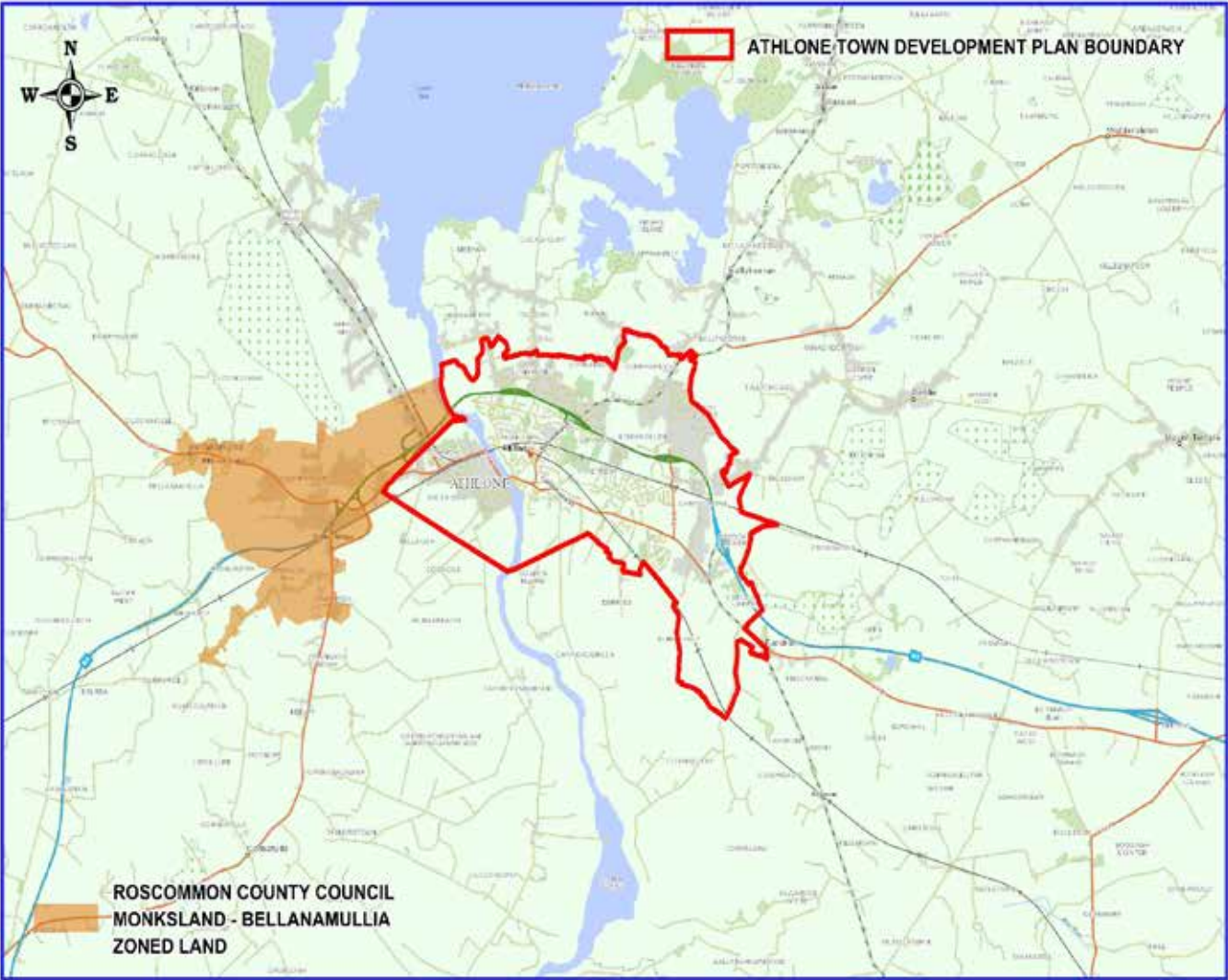
The Core Strategy has been drafted for the duration of the Plan and population targets and lands use zoning objectives relate to that period. The Core Strategy should be read in conjunction with the Core Strategy Map and Table contained in this chapter. The Core Strategy Map also identifies major employment areas and development nodes which are zoned in the Monksland Bellanamullia Local Area Plan 2010-2016, which fall within the sphere of the influence of the town, in addition to those in Co. Westmeath.

The Local Planning Framework for Athlone is also to be considered in the context of the Monksland Bellanamullia Local Area Plan 2010-2016, which covers the Athlone West Area located in County Roscommon. This Local Area Plan shows, in a population change table, that the population of this area increased from 4035 in 2002 to 5013 in 2006 representing a 23.7% increase. Core Strategy population allocations from the Draft Roscommon County Development Plan 2014-2020 set a population increase for the area of 538 persons and a housing allocation of 215 units. The Local Area Plan strongly supports continued employment expansion in the area of medical and pharmaceutical businesses, financial services, logistics, tourism and the strengthening of links with third level institutions. Financial support for enterprise development will be sought through the Western Investment Fund (WIF). The Plan has reserved an area of approximately 130Ha for business enterprise and industrial uses in the Monksland/ Bellanamullia area.

Key objectives for the town’s western environs within Co. Roscommon relating to economic development and population growth adjacent to the linked Gateway require greater co-ordination with those for Athlone town. In order to ensure the coordinated development of the Midland Gateway it remains a strategic objective of Westmeath County Council and Athlone Town Council to secure the preparation and adoption of a unitary Plan to be prepared in collaboration with Roscommon County Council.

This process will provide the framework for meaningful collaboration in relation to the scale of population growth for the Gateway consistent with regional targets, economic development and employment creation, transportation and land use including the preparation of LUTS, Housing Strategy, retailing, flood risk appraisal and management, recreational, tourism and heritage protection.

Map 2.1 Context Map indicating location of the Athlone Town Plan relative to the Monksland Bellanamullia Plan



2.2 VISION FOR ATHLONE

The Core Strategy will set out a vision for Athlone town and environs and strategic aims to deliver this vision. The writing of this Town Development Plan coincides with a time of economic uncertainty, following a prolonged period of sustained economic growth and population increase. The adverse impacts of the current economic downturn on issues pertaining to spatial planning, dictates that the vision for Athlone should focus on the need for sustainable economic regeneration and recovery. This process can be greatly assisted by building on the town's inherent strengths and should provide for a more focused approach to planning for sustainable growth.

The vision for Athlone is as follows:

“To provide for the development of Athlone as a driver of sustainable economic growth, commensurate with the Linked Gateway status of the town, whilst balancing the need to safeguard the town's inherent environmental assets with the creation of appropriate development opportunities. To develop Athlone as a vibrant and dynamic town in which to live, work, do business and visit, offering high quality employment, educational, sporting and tourism facilities, together with sustainable communities.”

2.3 STRATEGIC AIMS

The strategic aims for achieving this vision and which underpin the policies and objectives of the Plan, are set out hereunder for each of the sectors and subject areas. These aims are addressed in detail in relevant chapters within the Plan.

This Athlone Town Development Plan seeks to encourage the focus of new development on:

- (i) Prioritising sustainable development of the Gateway

- (ii) Promoting the town as a premier destination for foreign direct investment and retailing.
- (iii) Continuing to respect the primacy of the town centre including prioritising the improvement and enhancement of the public realm
- (iv) Supporting continued public capital investment in enabling infrastructure and achieving economies of scale for services and infrastructure in the town
- (v) Facilitating, supporting and protecting national public investment in infrastructure (such as transport, water services, housing, environment and community services) to achieve the sustainable development of Athlone in accordance with an agreed planning framework.
- (vi) Promoting sustainable economic development and employment creation, within defined economic clusters in established Business Parks such as Garrycastle, Blyry, Athlone Business Park and the Strategic Gateway Zone.
- (vii) Supporting and promoting the sustainable development of Athlone as an international tourist destination through the continued advancement of the “Destination Athlone” initiative.
- (viii) Protecting the town's natural assets by preserving the quality of the River Shannon and its callows, landscape, parks, open spaces and the architectural, archaeological and cultural heritage of Athlone
- (ix) Promoting social inclusion and the creation of sustainable communities
- (x) Supporting the development and expansion of Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT)

- (xi) Securing the preparation of a unitary Plan for Athlone in collaboration with Roscommon County Council in order to ensure the co-ordinated development of the Gateway.

2.4 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE & TRENDS

According to the 2011 census, there were 20,153 people living in Athlone, with 15,558 living within the legally defined town boundary and the remaining 4,595 comprised of people living in the town environs including parts of the town within the jurisdiction of Roscommon County Council. Athlone comprises of 18.1% of the county's population. The town and its environs have increased in population by 14.9% since the previous census in 2006. In actual terms, there was an increase of 1,211 people within the legal Athlone town boundary and 1,398 in the town environs. Most notably the largest increase in population occurred in the electoral district (ED) of Moydrum (Part Urban), which grew by 38% between 2006 and 2011.

Fig. 2.1 indicates the demographic profile of Athlone. According to the 2011 census, the largest component of the population comprises people in the 20-24 and 25-29 age cohorts, equating to 10.3% and 11.1% of the towns' population. This compares to 6.5% and 7.9% for the corresponding age group for the state. This may be indicative of the student population and number of young professionals working in the town. Dependency groups within the town are also increasing in numbers. Athlone has a smaller proportion of children in the 10-14 age cohort compared to the state average.

2.5 ATHLONE GATEWAY ROLE

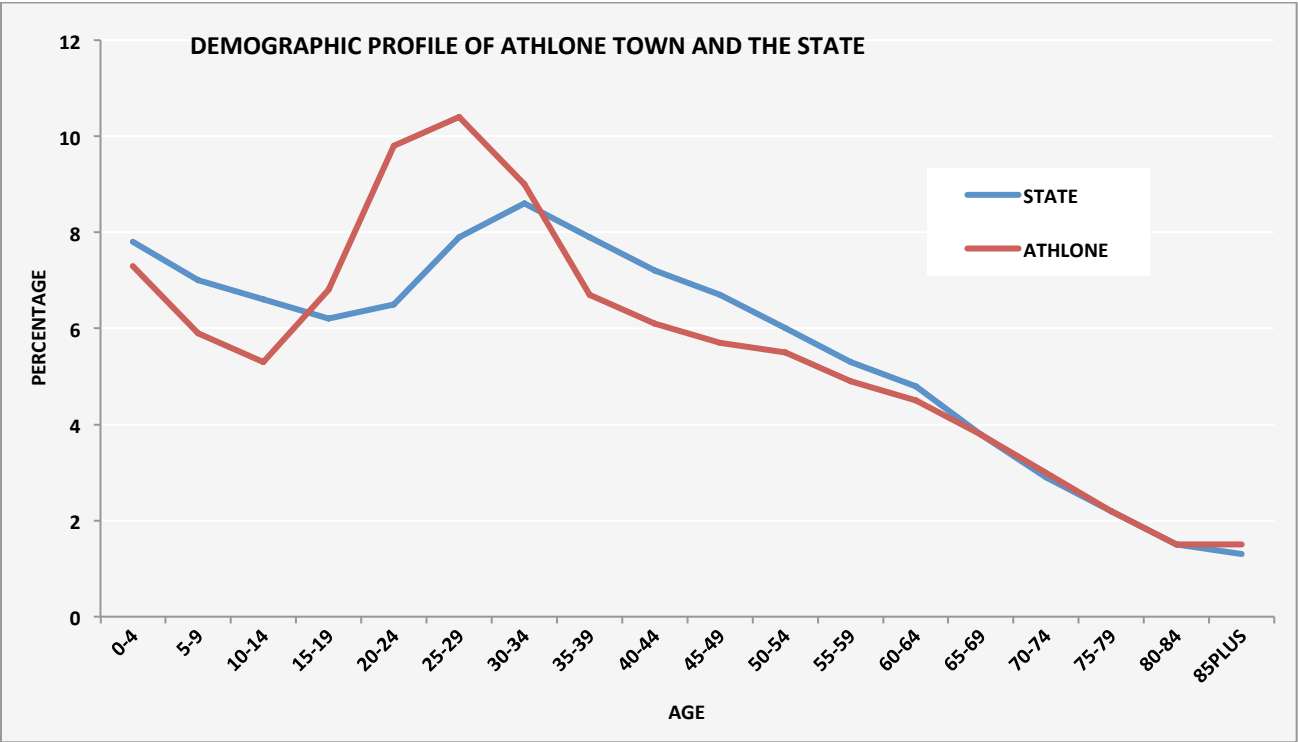
The strategy for Athlone seeks to develop a distinctive role for the Athlone Gateway in the context of the overall collaborative development of the Midlands Gateway, and the building of critical mass and the promotion of the town as a premier destination for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). This will involve harnessing the

potential of the sectors identified in the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022, as key drivers of employment growth and economic activity.

In the context of future economic development for the town, the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022 emphasise the importance of development a complementary role for Athlone within the Linked Gateway, working in tandem rather than in competition with Mullingar and Tullamore. In the case of Athlone, the following sectors have been identified for continued expansion and development: ICT, pharmaceuticals and related activities, education, international trading, shared services (multi-lingual) and R&D. In addition, this will involve the promotion and expansion of the knowledge-based enterprise and innovation economy, capitalising on strong linkages between industry, AIT and existing research institutions. The strategy also seeks to expand Athlone's role as a regional centre for retailing and thus enhance the range of functions and services, retail offer and facilities in the town, in order to support economic activity and maintenance of a suitable workforce including continuing to develop Athlone as a national centre for sport and recreation. Additionally, the development of Athlone as an international tourist destination centred upon the River Shannon, Lough Ree and major tourist attractions such as Athlone Castle is a key objective of economic policy for the town and its hinterland.

The strong employment base evident in the town is confirmed in the POWSCAR Data 2011, which analyses commuting to work patterns in the Midland Region. Of the three Gateway Towns, Athlone exhibits the most sustainable travel to work pattern with 70% commuting to work from within the town and its environs. Conversely, there are relatively low levels of commuting from Athlone to the other Gateway Towns.

Fig. 2.1 Demographic profile of Athlone Town relative to the state



Source: CSO 2011

2.6 SPATIAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK IN THE TOWN

The Plan provides for the continued implementation of the spatial planning framework established under the 2008-2014 Development Plan. In this regard, the following Local Area Plans (LAPs) have been adopted by the Planning Authorities to guide the future spatial development of the town.

Cornamagh Local Area Plan (LAP)

The Cornamagh LAP establishes the framework within which the provision of housing, services, transport links, employment and supporting infrastructure and development are appropriately coordinated to create a sustainable urban extension Athlone. There are 25ha of land zoned for residential use in the Cornamagh LAP which is available for development.

Lissywollen South Local Area Plan (LAP)

This Plan provides for the creation of five distinctive areas of residential and mixed uses. It provides a mix of housing and household types, new community uses and facilities, local services and working opportunities. There are 18 ha of land zoned for residential development in the Lissywollen South LAP which is available for development.

Creggan Local Area Plan (LAP)

The Creggan LAP provides for the development of a world class enterprise, innovation and trading hub, underpinned by a vibrant urban structure, excellent infrastructure and high quality environment. The Plan focuses upon a number of distinctive Character Areas set within an extensive open space network.

Curragh Lissywollen Local Area Plan (LAP)

The Curragh-Lissywollen LAP sets out a framework which provides for mixed use and residential development within a network of passive and active open spaces. This Local Area Plan was subsumed into the Athlone Town Plan 2008-2014.

Cornamaddy Local Area Plan (LAP)

This Local Area Plan consists of a number of residential development cells set within a landscaped framework of linear parks and open spaces. It also provides for a neighbourhood centre to serve the area. This LAP was subsumed into the Athlone Town Plan 2008-2014.

2.7 FLOOD RISK ISSUE

The Plan gives due prominence to the issue of Flood Risk, which is a key determinant in the settlement pattern of the town.

2.8 HOUSING REQUIREMENT

According to the 2011 census, there are 7,616 permanent dwellings in the legally defined town of Athlone with an occupancy of 80%. The average occupancy rate in the town is 2.45 persons per dwelling. The census also revealed that 17% of the permanent housing stock in the town comprised apartments.

The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government Survey of Unfinished Housing Developments 2012, identified nine Unfinished Housing schemes in the town, three of which comprised of apartment schemes. It is an objective of this plan to prepare Site Resolution Plans (SRP’s) for these unfinished housing schemes, in conjunction with relevant stakeholders.

Prediction of future housing demand and associated housing land requirements is based upon the Housing Strategy and population targets which have been set for Athlone in the Regional Planning Guideline’s up to 2022. Average occupancy for the purposes of estimated future housing demand is 2.4 persons per dwelling. Average density

applied to this estimate is 35 dwellings per hectare. It is estimated that 3,310 housing units will be required up to 2020 to meet projected population targets set in the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022 for the Gateway Towns. The achievement of this target is constrained by limitations in the environmental carrying capacity associated with the waste water treatment infrastructure.

2.9 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & EMPLOYMENT

There is an established tradition of manufacturing, pharmaceutical, research and development, medical devices and telecommunications software industries and retailing in the town. The Public Sector is also a major source of employment in the town and Athlone is also an important administrative centre for national and regional services.

2.9.1 Employment Policy

Employment policy should seek to ensure that the potential of the town is maximised in terms of sustainable economic development and employment generation. Employment growth will be driven by the promotion of enterprise in export led projects, which will act as a catalyst for economic expansion and employment across the remainder of the town. Athlone’s natural and locational advantages should be utilised and marketed to secure further Foreign Direct Investment and growth of the indigenous and tourism sectors. This shall be facilitated by the designation of an Innovation and Technology Zone at the IDA Park in Garrycastle.

The Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022, which emphasise the importance of building critical mass of population, services and infrastructure point to particular potential of employment creation in the following sectors:

- ☐ ICT
- ☐ Pharmaceuticals and related activities
- ☐ Education

- ☐ International Trading
- ☐ Shared Services (multi-lingual)
- ☐ R&D

Particular sectors with growth potential include life sciences, R&D in partnership with AIT, tourism & hospitality and indigenous industry expansion.

The Councils will work in support of the IDA, Enterprise Ireland and Teagasc, in relation to their role in the promotion of job creation and maintenance. The Councils will in conjunction with other agencies and Government Departments actively support initiatives in this area in accordance with Smarter Travel Policy.

The establishment of a Strategic Gateway Zone (SGZ) with particular emphasis on international trade and enterprise is provided for in the Creggan Local Area Plan with potential for major employment creation. This initiative will complement ongoing employment creation measures with respect to existing Business Parks and Industrial Estates in the town.

Commerce and trade, including the retail sector also contribute significantly to employment and economic activity in Athlone. Other policies in the realm of transportation, development management and urban design will seek to reinforce this strategic aim. The role of Town Centres as a hub for commerce and trade is recognised as an important facet of the economic development of the town. The Councils will promote the continued economic development of Athlone Town Centre, and to underpin its economic viability through appropriate policies which facilitate regeneration, consolidation and expansion of existing enterprises. One of the aims of the plan is for the town to become the primary destination for retailing in the Midlands.

The Councils will engage with development agencies including the IDA in relation to the establishment of a Strategic Development Zone for (SDZ) for employment generating

uses to the east of Athlone, as prescribed in the RPG's. The site for the proposed SDZ has not yet been identified and will be subject to ecological appraisal with regards to Natura 2000 sites in the area i.e. Crosswood Bog and Carn Bog.

2.9.2 Employment Infrastructure

The provision of infrastructure which facilitates employment creation and enterprise investment is critical for the future development of Athlone. The town benefits from a number of high quality Business and Industrial Parks. Major investment in water, wastewater and transportation infrastructure has been made in the town to further development and job growth.

2.10 INFRASTRUCTURAL CAPACITY

2.10.1 Water Supply and Waste Water Treatment Infrastructure

The River Shannon provides the water supply to the town. Qualitative and quantitative issues, the competing demands of nature conservation, water quality and capital resource requirements are factors impacting upon this finite resource and require careful management. The Core Strategy is intended to guide at a strategic level this management process. The development of the town's wastewater and surface water drainage system is essential to facilitate the continued growth of Athlone. This infrastructure is critical to securing the policies and objectives of the Plan. It is noted from Athlone Water Services that there is a proposal to upgrade the system to 40,000 population equivalent (p.e), which is required in order to meet projected demands over the Plan period.

2.10.2 Roads

Athlone is served by a number of strategic national routes namely M6, N55, N61 and N62. The plan includes an objective to provide the Loughandonning Link Road, as an alternative route from the Creggan Lands to Golden Island, and thereby relieve traffic congestion in the town centre.

2.10.3 Rail

Athlone is positioned on the Galway/Dublin/Westport rail line and provides commuter, intercity and inter regional services. The reinstatement of the disused rail link between Athlone and Mullingar is deemed to be of strategic importance in the promotion of public transport interconnectivity at a county, regional and national level. However the Councils recognise that this is a long term objective and in the interim, it is the Council's policy to provide a cycleway within this disused rail line linking Mullingar, Moate and Athlone, which forms part of the National Cycle Network between Dublin and Galway.

Measures to promote sustainable transport alternatives, including the development of a cycling network within the town, as provided for in the Green Routes Strategy for Athlone are being implemented by the Council.

Strategic transport corridors in Athlone for road and rail are shown in the Core Strategy Map.

2.10.4 Bus

Athlone is a major national hub for public bus services. The town is served by bus routes from Dublin, Galway, Westport, Sligo, Belfast, Tuam, Dundalk, Roscrea and Waterford. Athlone town also has two local bus services providing looped routes, serving the east of the town, including AIT.

2.10.5 Access to Broadband

The Metropolitan Area Network (MAN) in Athlone represents a coverage area of 21km with the latest fibre optic technology enabling telecommunications companies to provide affordable 'always-on' high-speed access to the internet and a range of telephony and data communications services. In addition to the MAN, the town is served by other broadband services, including mobile 3G broadband from the main carriers, DSL Broadband from up to six providers and wireless broadband from three providers.

2.10.6 Electricity

Athlone contains a substantial electricity infrastructure network comprising the 110/38kV Athlone station and the Busfield 38/20kV station, both of which have been recently redeveloped resulting in a doubling of capacity. Further upgrades are planned to the town electricity supply during the Plan period.

2.10.7 Gas

The Dublin Galway gas pipeline traverses the south of Athlone and serves the IDA Business Park in Garrycastle.

2.11 RETAIL

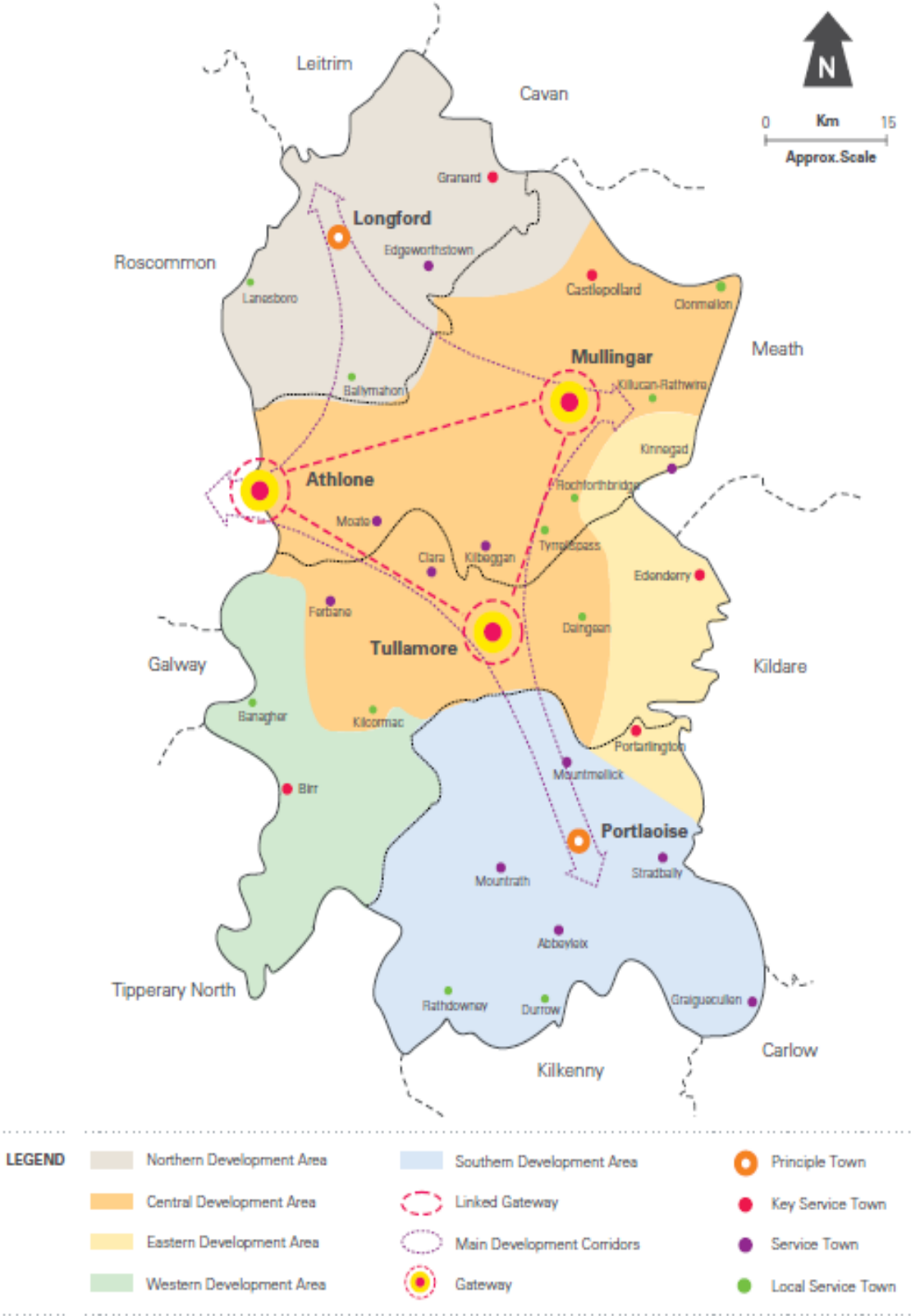
Athlone hosts a considerable retail profile. The town is served by two Shopping Centres. There is also a strong retail warehousing sector, together with local and neighbourhood shopping facilities. A strategic aim of the Plan is to continue to support the consolidation and expansion of retailing in the town centre. Aligned to this, is the objective to prioritise the improvement and enhancement of the public realm, as a support to a vibrant retail sector.

2.12 POLICY CONTEXT

2.12.1 National Spatial Strategy 2002 (NSS)

The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) is a twenty year planning framework designed to achieve a better balance of social, economic and physical development and population growth between the regions. To this end it proposes the clear integration of Athlone, Mullingar and Tullamore into a 'seamless linked gateway. There is a need to focus on the implementation of the linked gateway, to deliver the level of critical mass needed to create more self-sustaining patterns of development where people both live and work within the region avoiding long distance commuting to Dublin. In addition, it states that key rural assets must be protected and the local potential of rural areas developed.

Map 2.2 Settlement Hierarchy, Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022



2.12.2 Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines 2010 to 2022 (RPG's)

The Guidelines promote the accelerated development of Athlone, along with the Linked Gateway towns of Tullamore and Mullingar, and thus act as a key driver of growth in the region. It is envisaged that Athlone and Mullingar will be the focus of the bulk of the Midlands Regions target population up to 2022. This concentration is essential in order to generate the critical mass necessary to sustain the services and infrastructure required to enable the “Linked Gateway” to perform and compete in a national context.

The Regional Planning Guideline’s Development Area policies affecting the Athlone Town Development Plan entail policy protection to ensure that sufficient and appropriate development is channelled and concentrated towards the linked gateway.

2.12.3 Section 28 Guidelines

There is now a broad range of Guidelines set out below issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 as amended. There are many converging themes within this suite of Guidelines, which have been taken into account in informing policy in this Core Strategy including the following:

- ❑ Implementation of SEA Directive (2001/42/EC): Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment. Planning Guidelines 2004
- ❑ Sustainable Rural Housing 2005, Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG)
- ❑ Development Plans Planning Guidelines 2007 (DEHLG)
- ❑ Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (Cities, Towns and Villages) Planning Guidelines 2007 (DEHLG)

- ❑ The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Planning Guidelines 2009 (DEHLG)
- ❑ Spatial Planning and National Roads Planning Guidelines 2012, Department of the Environment Community and Local Government (DECLG)
- ❑ Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2012 (DECLG)

2.13 SHANNON RIVER BASIN MANAGEMENT PLAN (RBMP)

The Shannon Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management Study (CFRAMS) is one of seven such river basin district studies being carried out to meet the requirements of the EU Floods Directive (Directive 2007/60/EC). The Plan will define the levels of existing and future flood risk in the Shannon River Basin District area (RBD) and set out how this will be managed both now and into the future. The interaction of the Core Strategy and the Water Services Investment Programme (WSIP), particularly in the preparation of the Water Services Strategic Plan, shall be critical to the proper integration of the spatial and River Basin Management Plan planning processes.

2.14 HABITATS DIRECTIVE

Issues with regard to Article 10 of the Habitats Directive, which is concerned with the network of habitats and areas outside of but supporting the Natura 2000 Network, can only be dealt with on a case by case basis. Reference has been made elsewhere in the Plan to Article 10 of the Habitats Directive and a policy statement in this regard included.

2.15 POPULATION ESTIMATES AND PROJECTIONS TO MEET REGIONAL PLANNING GUIDELINES (RPG) TARGETS

The population target for Athlone derived from the RPGs for 2020 is 24,809 representing an increase for the period 2011-2020 of 8,482 persons. The RPG population target up to 2022 for Athlone is 26,203. The table below applies the methodology prescribed in the Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022 to equate population targets to housing land requirements for Athlone.

Table 2.1 Population Target & Housing Land Requirement

	2011 census	Population 2020*	Population Increase 2011-2020	Zoning Requirement (ha) 2011-2020 (+50%)
Population Target	16,327	24,809	8,482	151

*Based on RPG Target Population & RPG Density Assumptions

Table. 2.2 Land Use Zoning for Athlone 2014-2020

Land Use	Ha
Commercial	49.5
Enterprise & Employment	115.5
Agricultural	4.7
Innovation Technology	41.4
Mixed Use	74.6
Open Space	164.3
Existing Residential	287.4
Proposed Residential	129.2
Retail Warehousing	10.9
Sporting Recreational	48.5
Strategic Gateway Zone	112.9
Comm, Educational, Institutional	85.4
Agricultural	4.7
Total Amount of Zoned Land	1,129Ha

Table 2.2 provides details of areas in hectares which have been reserved in the Zoning Objectives Map for different categories of use in Athlone. In total an area of 129.2ha of residential zoned land, in addition to a small

area of Mixed Use is available for residential development, to a scale consistent with RPG targets. This includes lands located within the various Local Area Plans within the town, referred to above. At an average density of 35 units per hectare the target population increase would imply an increase in households of 3,310 units over the Plan period.

2.16 PREFERRED DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The preferred development strategy has been informed by National policy, the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) and has taken account of environmental sensitivities of the county. The Strategy is based upon strengthening the town centre, facilitating job creation and regeneration, support its rural hinterland and careful management of the town’s environment and natural assets. The focus is as follows:

- ☐ Promoting and facilitating the development of critical mass, employment, enterprise and economic activity in Athlone, commensurate with its status as a Linked Gateway Town
- ☐ Advancing the development of the Strategic Gateway Zone
- ☐ Supporting and incentivising economic development and regeneration of brownfield and under-utilised areas in the town centre
- ☐ Enhancing competitiveness and stimulating economic recovery and job creation across all sectors of the town’s economy.
- ☐ Protecting the town’s key environmental assets, in particular the River Shannon and its callows by implementing an environmental protection policy which recognises the various environmentally sensitive zones and Natura 2000 sites within the town
- ☐ Providing for the continued expansion and development of the town as an

international tourist destination in association with the “Destination Athlone” initiative.

- Ensuring that all new significant development is carried out in accordance with the agreed development framework in tandem with the provision of appropriate supporting infrastructure
- Pursuing the development of identified opportunity sites in the town
- Ensuring that vacancy and dereliction are minimised, particularly in the town centre area
- Continuing to develop Athlone as a national centre for sport and recreation
- Promoting the town as a premier destination for Foreign Direct Investment and Retailing.

2.17 CORE STRATEGY POLICIES

Core Strategy Goal: The Councils shall ensure that the future spatial development of Athlone is directed by means of a plan-led approach.

CORE STRATEGY POLICIES

It is a policy of the Councils:	
P-CS1	To ensure that the future spatial development of Athlone is in accordance with higher level Plans including National and Regional Spatial Policy, together with national policy guidance issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 as amended, the River Basin Management Plans, Surface Water Regulations and the Habitats Directive.
P-CS2	To take account of in the assessment of development proposals, transport corridors, environmental carrying capacity, availability and/or capacity to provide waste water services,

	education and other socio-economic objectives.
P-CS3	To promote and facilitate sustainable economic development and employment creation in the town, commensurate with Athlone’s status as a Linked Gateway Town.
P-CS4	To seek the delivery of physical and community infrastructure in conjunction with high quality residential developments to create quality living environments.
P-CS5	To guide the future development of Athlone in accordance with the spatial framework established in Local Area Plans in the town.
P-CS6	To take in account, in the assessment of development proposals, Article 6(3)(4) and Article 10 of the Habitats Directive, the Surface Water Regulations 2009 and the relevant measures of the Shannon River Basin Management Plan 2009-2015.
P-CS7	To ensure a sequential approach to development and promote residential development, prioritisation of infill sites / developments and the occupation of residential units in the town core, in order to promote the achievement of critical mass and protect and enhance town centre function.
P-CS8	To promote the integration of land use and transportation policy and to prioritise provision for cycling and walking travel modes and the strengthening of public transport.
P-CS9	To restrict development in areas at risk of flooding in accordance with the Planning System, Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DECLG/OPW 2009) and the Shannon Catchment Flood Risk Assessment Management Study (CFRAMS)

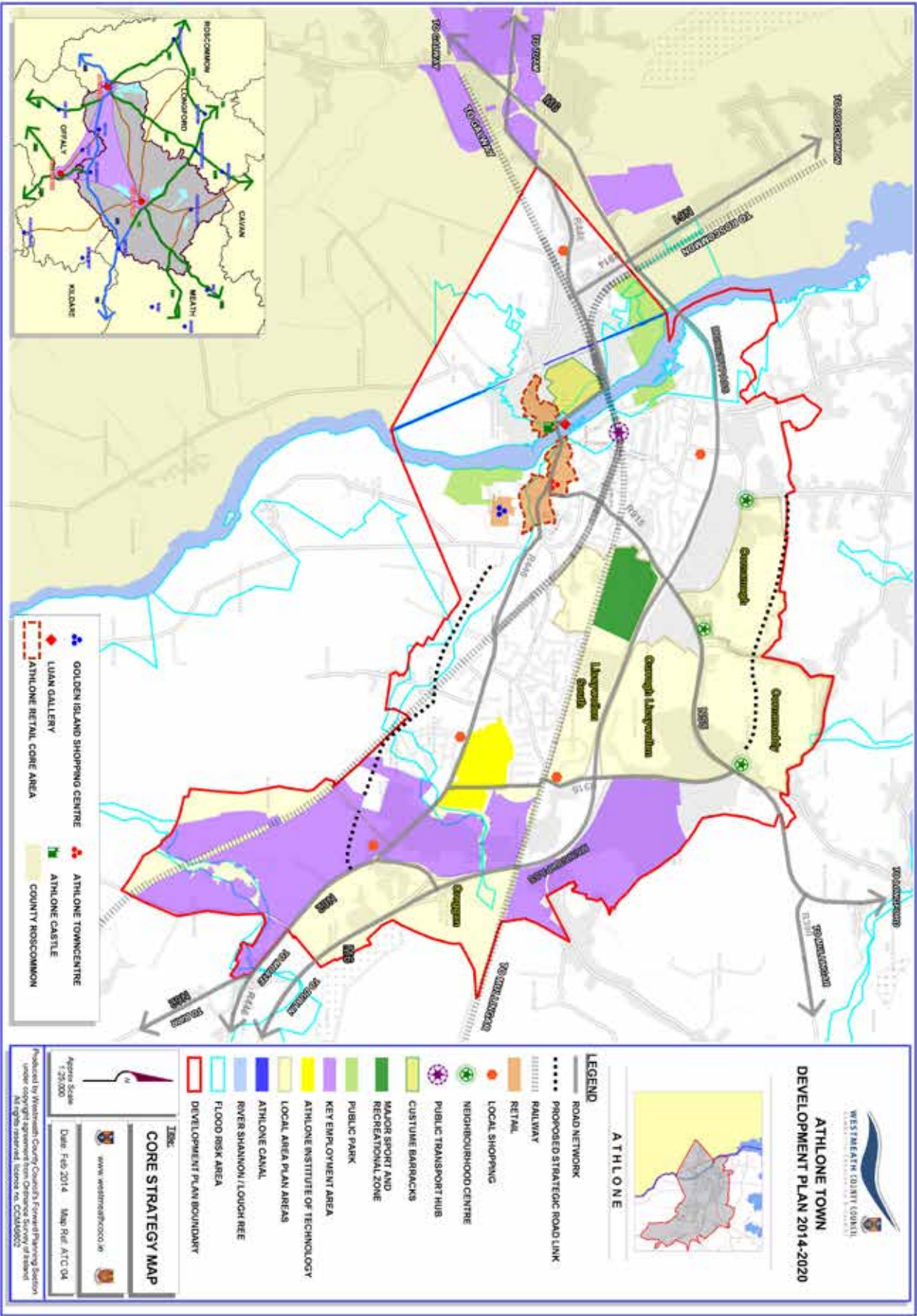
P-CS10	To protect and conserve buildings, sites, public open spaces and features of special architectural, historic, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest and to protect features of natural heritage, including the River Shannon, canal, watercourses and habitats.
P-CS11	To promote the appropriate use and re-use of town centre backland and under-utilised sites and to promote the regeneration of areas in need of renewal.
P-CS12	To facilitate the sustainable development of Athlone as part of the Midland Linked Gateway to meet economic, social and demographic growth requirements in accordance with the provisions of the National Spatial Strategy and the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022.

O-CS3	To advance the development of the Strategic Development Zone, in collaboration with Westmeath County Council, subject to strategic environmental assessment, flood risk assessment and Appropriate Assessment processes.
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It is the objective of the Councils:

O-CS1	To secure the preparation of a unitary Plan for Athlone in collaboration with Roscommon County Council, in order to provide for the co-ordinated development of the Gateway town, recognising its importance as a key driver of growth in the region. The Unitary Plan for Athlone shall be subject to SEA, AA and Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) processes.
O-CS2	To monitor plans and development trends in the Roscommon environs of Athlone, in the interests of securing co-ordinated development of the Gateway, consistent with an agreed planning framework for Athlone. The Monitoring Report shall be included in the Review of the implementation of the Development Plan, under Section 15 of the Planning & Development Act 2000 as amended.

Map 2.3 Athlone Core Strategy Map



Chapter 3 *Housing*



3 HOUSING

AIM:

To facilitate the provision of high quality residential development in sustainable communities and provide an appropriate mix of house sizes, types and tenures in order to meet the different household needs of the people of Athlone.

3.1 BACKGROUND

The Councils have statutory obligations to ensure that sufficient land is zoned for all types of housing to meet the projected housing requirements of the town over the Plan period. The Core Strategy in Chapter 2 of this Plan outlined the framework for residential development in the town, the population projections and the amount of land required for residential purposes over the period 2014–2020. The Council’s Housing Strategy (Appendix 1) correlates with the Core Strategy and assesses the requirement for social and affordable housing.

3.2 POLICY CONTEXT

3.2.1 National Spatial Strategy (NSS)

This Strategy emphasises the importance of closely aligning where people live, and where they work, to sustain a better quality of life. The Strategy sets out criteria to determine the suitability of housing in an urban area (see Fig. 3.1). This evaluation criterion will be used when considering any new residential development within Athlone.

3.2.2 Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022 (MRPG)

The Guidelines have provided the population targets, distribution and future housing and development land requirements for Athlone, which has informed both the Core Strategy and Housing Strategy.

3.2.3 Smarter Travel – A Sustainable Transport Future – A new Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2015

The central ethos of this policy is the need to reduce travel demand and to improve the alignment of spatial and transport planning.

Table 3.1 Criteria to determine suitability of housing in an urban area

Housing Location in Urban Areas		Evaluation Considerations
Asset Test		Are there existing community resources, such as schools etc, with spare capacity?
Carrying Capacity Test		Is the environmental setting capable of absorbing development in terms of drainage etc?
Transport Test		Is there potential for reinforcing usage of public transport, walking and cycling?
Economic Test		Is there potential to ensure integration between the location of housing and employment?
Character Test		Will the proposal reinforce a sense of place and character?
Integration Test		Will the proposal aid an integrated approach to catering for the housing needs of all sections of society?

Source: National Spatial Strategy 2002

3.2.4 Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government Guidelines

There has been a significant amount of guidelines issued by the DEHLG in relation to housing. These Guidelines inform policy and development management on sustainable residential development in urban and rural areas on layout, density and design and include the following:

- Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (Cities, Towns & Villages) (2009)
- Urban Design Manual A Best Practice (2009)
- Government Policy on Architecture 2009-2015 (2009)
- Delivering Homes Sustaining Communities (2007)
- Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities Design Guidelines (2007)
- Sustainable Urban Housing Standards for New Apartments (2007) and
- Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines (2005)

3.2.5 Housing Strategy 2014-2020

The Housing Strategy makes the following recommendations which will inform housing policy:

- Future housing allocation shall be allocated in accordance with the Core Strategy settlement hierarchy.
- All new housing shall be built in accordance with a 'house for life' and support independent living.
- Identify sites for elderly sheltered accommodation.
- Require a higher percentage of new housing developments to cater for 'start up units' i.e. 2 bedroom accommodation.

- Reduce affordability requirement to 15% in new housing schemes.
- Bring all Unfinished Housing Development (UHD) to an acceptable standard of completion.
- Prepare Site Resolution Plans for UHD identified in the DECLG Survey.
- Consider alternative purchase options for UHD for Athlone including the Voluntary Sector in those locations closest to public transport and central locations for sheltered accommodation.
- Promote co-operation and a co-ordinated approach for the resolution of UHD between all stakeholders.
- Continue to implement the Council's Traveller Accommodation Programme.
- Identify underutilised or derelict land and housing units in the town centre of Athlone, close to public transport links appropriate for residential use.
- A detailed survey should be carried out within the town to identify the type of units that are vacant and their location to enable supply to be matched with demand.
- Improve energy efficiency in all new residential development.

3.3 POPULATION, HOUSING REQUIREMENTS & LAND AVAILABILITY

According to the census 2011, the population of Athlone Town, i.e. the legal defined town boundary is 15,558 and the number of existing households in the town is 7,616. This Plan makes provision for sufficient zoned land for residential use to meet anticipated population targets up to 2020.

Table 3.2 Regional Population Target and Housing Allocation for Westmeath 2011-2020 based on an average household size of 2.4.

	2011 census	2020	Population Increase 2011-2020
Population target	16,327	24,809	8,482
Housing Allocation	7,616 households		3,310* additional housing units required

3.4 HOUSING POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is the policy of the Councils:

P-H1	To provide sufficient land to meet anticipated demand and to facilitate and implement the Housing Strategy and its policies.
P-H2	To secure the provision of social and affordable housing, to meet the needs of all households and disadvantaged sectors in Athlone, including the elderly, first time buyers, single person households on modest incomes, people with disabilities and special needs etc.
P-H3	To ensure, in accordance with Part V of the Planning & Development Acts 2000 as amended, that 15% of the land zoned for residential use, or for a mixture of residential and other uses, be made available for the provision of social and affordable housing.
P-H4	To support the right of every individual to own their own property, and to ensure a suitable range of tenure types, and engage with the private rented sector to meet the needs of a more mobile population.
P-H5	To ensure the provision of a suitable range of house types and sizes to facilitate the demographic

profile of the town.

P-H6	To have regard to the provisions of the ‘Guidelines on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas’ and the accompanying ‘Urban Design Manual’ in assessing applications for housing development.
P-H7	To require diversity in the form, size and type of dwelling within residential schemes.

It is the objective of the Councils:

O-H1	To continue to monitor, the extent and type of residential development in the town to ensure sufficient housing type and land is zoned to meet housing demand.
O-H2	To continue to provide for the accommodation needs of single parent families, single homeless persons, people with disabilities, the elderly, etc. through the Council’s housing programme as resources permit.
O-H3	To continue as a provider of accommodation including rental accommodation for households whose financial circumstances dictate that they cannot provide for their own housing needs.
O-H4	To co-operate with Voluntary Housing Associations and other providers of social and specialist needs housing.
O-H5	To promote the preparation of Site Resolution Plans for all Unfinished Housing Estates identified by the DECLG in accordance with the format set out in the Guidance Document for Resolving Unfinished Housing Developments.

3.5 SPECIFIC HOUSING REQUIREMENTS

The Housing Strategy identified a decline in the average household size and an increase in the elderly, dependent and single parent household population. The census records indicate that 2,329 people in Athlone town have a disability. Of this number, 61% were aged between 45 and 65 and over. The demand for two bedroom accommodation is high among the elderly and people with disabilities, as they require additional rooms for carers. The greatest requested need among people on the Councils waiting list is for 2 bedroom accommodation.

It is the policy of the Councils:	
P-FH1	To ensure a mix and range of housing types and in particular two bedroom accommodation, to meet the diverse needs of residents of the town.
P-FH2	To ensure all new residential schemes are designed so that units are easily adaptable in the future to accommodate housing for life.
P-FH3	To ensure that a suitable variety and mix of dwelling types and sizes is provided in developments to meet different needs, having regard to demographic and social profile of the town’s population.
P-FH4	To support independent living for people with disabilities and the elderly and where possible housing is integrated within proposed or existing residential developments and located close to existing community facilities.
P-FH5	To facilitate the provision of purpose built dwellings for those with special needs, including provision for the needs of the elderly, persons with physical disabilities in conjunction with other voluntary bodies and the private sector.

P-FH6	To provide for and facilitate the provision of accommodation to meet the needs of the elderly and to encourage the provision of a range of housing options for elderly persons in central, convenient and easily accessible locations in the town and to integrate such housing with mainstream housing where possible.
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It is the objective of the Councils:	
O-H6	To identify sites in Athlone for elderly accommodation close to public transport and community facilities.

3.6 SUSTAINABLE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable neighbourhoods are areas where an efficient use of land, high quality urban design and effective integration in the provision of physical and social infrastructure combine to create places people want to live in. This Plan seeks to promote high quality design and construction standards that result in a visually and functionally pleasing environment. A high quality living environment is vital to economic and social development and to the building of sustainable communities. The challenge is to design residential environments that impact positively on quality of life and comprise attractive safe areas with a mix of house types, sizes and design. Good permeability with pedestrian and cycle links to surrounding neighbourhoods, community facilities and open spaces and recreation areas are required for sustainable neighbourhoods.

The following criteria for new housing developments will be considered in the assessment of proposals:

- The capacity of the infrastructure to cater for future population;

- The adequacy of community facilities;
- Appropriate density, high standards of design and appropriate mix of housing
- Adequate privacy for individual houses, apartments and the protection of existing residential amenity;
- The safety and permeability of proposed layouts
- Appropriate provision is made for amenity and public open space as integral part of new development proposals.
- Design principles outlined in the Urban Design Manual published by the DEHLG, together with Urban Design and the Development Management Standards, set out in this Plan should be referenced for the development of residential areas in the town.

Local Area Plans, which have been prepared for specific areas of Athlone and its environs, will provide the spatial framework for the development of sustainable residential communities in the town.

3.7 SUSTAINABLE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is the policy of the Councils:

P-SR1	To support the principle of sequential development in assessing all new residential development proposals, whereby areas closer to the centre of the town, including under utilised and brownfield sites, will be chosen for development in the first instance to promote a sustainable pattern of development.
P-SR2	To encourage and promote the development of underutilised infill and backland development in the town subject to development management criteria being met.
P-SR3	To ensure all new residential development complies with the evaluation criteria for determining

	the suitability of housing in an urban area, as set out in the National Spatial Strategy.
P-SR4	To promote residential accommodation in the town centre as part of mixed use development.
P-SR5	To resist the loss of existing housing stock in the town centre.
P-SR6	To ensure that new Greenfield residential estate development should be in accordance with the spatial framework established in the relevant Local Area Plan for the subject area.
P-SR7	To promote energy efficiency both during the construction phase and during the lifetime of residential development by sensitive design and layout taking into account topography, orientation and surrounding features of a site.
P-SR8	To promote social inclusion by encouraging the provision of community facilities and in particular child care facilities in new and established residential areas.
P-SR9	To provide that accommodation which is purpose built for elderly should be located close to services such as Church, medical services, public house and shop and should be linked to services by a footpath lit by public lighting.

It is the objective of the Councils:

O-SR1	To promote connectivity and linkages between open spaces and existing residential developments in the town.
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3.8 RESIDENTIAL DENSITY

The DEHLG Guidelines on ‘Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas’ (2009) outline sustainable approaches to the development of urban areas. The Guidelines promote increased densities in appropriate locations where there is necessary infrastructure, compliance with open and private space, undue impact on amenities and is in keeping with the character of the area. Densities and detailed residential layouts are prescribed in many of the Local Area Plans in the town. In particular, the Cornamagh Local Area Plan makes provision for lower and medium density housing. Outside the Local Area Plans in the town, the following densities will apply.

Table 3.3 Density for New Residential Development

Location for new Residential Development	General Density Parameters
Town Centre & Brownfield Sites	Site Specific 35 per ha
At strategic locations including public transport nodes	35 units per ha
Inner suburban/Infill	Site Specific
Outer Suburban/Greenfield	30-35 per ha
Outer edge of Urban/Rural Transition	20-35 per ha

3.9 RESIDENTIAL DENSITY POLICIES

It is the policy of the Councils:	
P-RD1	To require that new residential schemes in the town centre are to a high quality design and include provision for environmental, economic, social and community functions, combined with improvements in the public realm,

	required in tandem to increase the attractiveness of the town centre as a residential location.
P-RD2	To promote higher residential density development in the town centre, and on brownfield and infill sites subject to Development Management Standards and the Evaluation Considerations in the NSS being met and existing residential amenity not being compromised.
P-RD2	To resist residential development on institutional lands unless indicated by a Local Area Plan for the area. These lands are a valued resource and very often provide valuable open space and amenity provision in the towns.
P-RD3	To apply the residential standards set out in the DEHLG’s guidelines Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (2009) as appropriate.

3.10 RESIDENTIAL LAYOUT AND DESIGN

The Councils primary aim in relation to residential development is to deliver high quality sustainable living environments which are attractive, safe and vibrant and meet the needs of the residents and the community. The companion design manual to the DEHLG’s Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (2009) sets out 12 criteria that can be applied to the design and layout of new residential development at a variety of scales of development and in various settings. These principles will be applied to new residential schemes in the town.

In the past suburban sprawl and the road hierarchy has characterised housing estate layouts, with roads designed first and the houses fitted around them. This has led to the under utilisation of zoned lands, in particular urban lands, the over reliance on the car, with

traffic calming being introduced after the development is occupied and little or no connectivity within or between sites. A good development creates a ‘sense of place’ and community belonging to the residents. This is created by providing a mixture of house types and tenure, an individual design, the use of a variety of materials for the context of the site and area and connectivity of the site to others places. The concept of place making includes issues relating to the making of edges, buildings turning corners, landmark buildings in the form of community buildings, supervised play area, public walkways and the safety and security of an area for residents and other users.

3.11 RESIDENTIAL LAYOUT AND DESIGN POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is the policy of the Councils:	
P-RLD1	To achieve attractive and sustainable development and create high standards of design, layout, and landscaping, for new housing development.
P-RLD2	To determine the layout of new development before or at the same time as the road layout with connections to social infrastructure identified.
P-RLD3	To require that appropriate provision is made for amenity and public open space as an integral part of new residential or extensions to existing developments.
P-RLD4	All new housing schemes shall be designed to reduce energy demand and shall comply with the Building Regulations energy performance standards.
P-RLD5	To ensure that all residential properties are designed with flexible and adaptable layouts to suit the home owner with regard to Lifetime Homes.

P-RLD6	To resist new residential developments that would create gated communities. Gated communities do not support a well connected and linked urban environment and are socially exclusive.
P-RLD7	To ensure that all new urban development especially in and around the town centre is of a high design and layout quality and supports the achievement of successful urban spaces and sustainable communities.

It is the objective of the Councils:	
O-RLD1	To ensure all Local Authority social and affordable housing schemes shall meet energy performance standards.
O-RLD2	To produce a supplementary planning guidance note on an integrated approach to the design, layout and landscaping of new Residential Development.

3.12 PUBLIC AND PRIVATE OPEN SPACE

Open space is one of the key elements in defining the quality of the residential environment. The provision of open space to serve new residential developments should be on a hierarchical basis varying in size from large regional parks to small children’s play areas and passive recreation spaces close to peoples’ homes.

Quality will take precedence over quantity in open space provision and details of the proposed landscaping, hard and soft, of these spaces should be provided with planning applications. If, in higher density schemes a lower quantity is accepted, then there must be a reciprocal increase in quality.

In order to facilitate community interaction and create a sense of place, public open spaces must be designed and treated as important nodes that perform a specific function in the creation of sustainable communities, regardless of scale or type. They should be overlooked with if feasible a south facing aspect. The Councils will not consider incidental spaces left over after site layout has been designed, as open space. The requirements for provision of private, semi private and communal open spaces for houses and apartments are outlined in the Development Management Standards Chapter.

3.13 PUBLIC AND PRIVATE OPEN SPACE POLICIES

It is the policy of the Councils:	
P-POS1	To ensure that the provision of public and private open space for new residential development is of a high standard, overlooked and integral to the overall development. Narrow tracts of land or 'left over areas' will not be included within open space provision.
P-POS2	To require a detailed landscaping plan with all new housing developments by a suitably qualified professional. The landscaping design shall include a survey of the existing natural features on the site and indicate those to be retained.
P-POS3	To reserve the right to accept contributions from developers in lieu of provision of open space in appropriate circumstances where it would achieve a better distribution of open space and assist in the provision of amenities for the area.

3.14 APARTMENTS

Within Athlone, the provision of apartment schemes may be considered at appropriate locations and where a significant demand for smaller units of accommodation is evident. Generally apartments, or retail/commercial developments with apartments above, shall be located in the town centre. Apartments may also be appropriate close to public transport nodes or as a limited proportion of a general residential scheme. Regard shall be had to the Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for Apartments, Guidelines for Planning Authorities, September 2007 in the overall design and layout of apartment developments. Reference shall also be made to development standards in relation to room sizes, communal and private open space outlined in Section 12.9.13 of the Plan.

3.15 APARTMENT POLICIES

It is the policy of the Councils:	
P-APT1	To require the establishment of management companies for apartment developments as part of a grant of planning permission.
P-APT2	To ensure that all apartments provide adequate facilities for the storage, separation and collection of waste (organic, recyclable and landfill waste) and ensure the ongoing operation of these facilities. (Refer to Development Management Chapter of the Plan)

3.16 GRANNY FLAT/FAMILY FLAT

A granny/family flat comprises the provision of an independent living unit by the extension or subdivision of an existing house to provide temporary accommodation, generally, for an elderly family member. The Councils will favourably consider proposals for the extension

or subdivision of existing houses to provide an independent family annex provided that the proposal does not detract from the character of the host structure and area or negatively impact on neighbouring residential amenity, including the provision of private open space.

A grant of permission will normally be conditioned that the independent unit be returned to a single residential unit on cessation of use as a family annex and shall not be sold, leased or otherwise disposed of to a third party.

3.17 GRANNY FLAT/FAMILY FLAT POLICIES

It is the policy of the Councils:	
P-GF1	To ensure that granny/family flats are: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Integral to the existing dwelling house, capable of being reintegrated to the main house.- Subordinate in size to the main dwelling house.

3.18 VACANT HOUSING AND UNFINISHED HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

The 2011 census recorded 15.8% of the 7,616 houses in Athlone town were vacant on census night, which would account for 1,210 dwellings. This level of vacancy (which may include unfinished housing in estates, apartment schemes including student accommodation) is potentially a resource which could meet the needs of people in need of housing accommodation. The location and type of the vacant units within the town needs to be identified and monitored, to plan and manage the supply of housing to match need.

Furthermore vacant houses in unfinished estates detract from the character of an area and may encourage anti-social behaviour. For those dwellings which remain unused for housing purposes, a flexible approach for the reuse of the buildings needs to be considered.

Potential uses such as community facilities educational, craft or commercial uses could be considered subject to development management standards being met.

The DECLG Survey of Unfinished Housing Developments in 2012 identified nine Unfinished Housing Developments in the town, three of which comprised of apartment schemes.

3.19 VACANT HOUSING & UNFINISHED HOUSING DEVELOPMENT POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is the policy of the Councils:	
P-VUH1	To promote the preparation of Site Resolution Plans (SRPs) for all Unfinished Housing Developments in the town in cooperation with all the relevant stakeholders, in accordance with the DECLG Guidance Manual for Resolving Unfinished Housing Developments 2011.
P-VUH2	To ensure that all SRPs have regard to the Core Strategy and the Housing Strategy and comply with the policies and objectives as set out in this Plan.

It is the objective of the Councils:	
O-VUH1	To establish a database on the number of vacant residential units in the town to inform policy making and to monitor throughout the Plan period.
O-VUH2	To ensure, through the planning enforcement process, collection of bonds and development contributions, that housing developments are completed to a standard that is in accordance with the Council’s Taking in Charge Policy for Private housing Developments.

3.20 TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION

The 2011 Census recorded 283 Travellers present in Athlone on census night. The Council recognises the distinct culture and lifestyle of the Travelling Community and it will endeavour to provide suitable accommodation for travellers who are indigenous to the area. The Traveller Accommodation Programme 2014 – 2018 outlines the Councils proposals to meet the accommodation needs of traveller families in the county as a whole, including Athlone and sets out a strategy to achieve these proposals. The Councils will consult with the Travelling Community, their representative organisations and local communities in relation to the siting, planning and design of traveller accommodation such as halting sites or group housing schemes, in order to promote social inclusion.

3.21 TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION POLICY & OBJECTIVES

It is the policy of the Councils:	
P-TA1	To provide a good living environment for travelling people to recommended standards of accommodation, sanitary facilities, education and employment opportunities.

It is the objective the Councils:	
O-TA1	To secure the implementation of the County Council’s Traveller Accommodation Programme 2014-2018 and any subsequent update, during the Plan duration.
O-TA2	To consider the construction of bedrooms to the permanent bays in Blackberry Lane Halting Site, Athlone.

3.22 STUDENT ACCOMMODATION

All applications for student accommodation shall be based on a needs assessment and the onus is on the applicant, with the third level

institutes support, to demonstrate the quantitative need for accommodation at the location proposed.

The Councils will support applications for purpose built student accommodation. Student Accommodation shall be located on campus or at locations in proximity to Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) and accessible to public transport corridors and neighbourhood services.

Whilst supporting the continued development of AIT, the Council is also conscious of the impact transitory student accommodation may make on established residential communities.

3.23 STUDENT ACCOMMODATION POLICIES

It is the policy of the Councils:	
P-SA1	To support the provision of high quality, professionally managed and purpose built third level student accommodation on campus or in appropriate locations close to the main AIT campus or adjacent to high quality public transport corridors and cycle routes, in a manner which respects the residential amenity of the surrounding area.
P-SA2	The Council will explore in co-operation with stakeholders, through the Site Resolution Plan (SRP) process the possibility of using Unfinished Housing Developments for Student Accommodation subject to site suitability and accessibility.

3.24 RURAL HOUSING

The rural environs of Athlone have been subject to significant development pressure in recent years. There has been a 38% increase in the population of Moydrum since 2006. It is Council policy to restrict undesirable urban generated

housing within the rural hinterland of Athlone. Provision will be made for farmers, members of farm families and people that have spent substantial parts of their lives as part of the established rural community building who are building their first home.

Proposals shall in all instances, except for reasons of traffic safety, design or other environmental consideration, be clustered with the existing family home or if farm buildings are isolated from the family dwelling, consideration can be given to grouping with farm structures.

Wastewater treatment facilities in the rural environs of the town shall be located, constructed and maintained in accordance with the EPA Code of Practice 2009, to ensure minimal impacts on water quality and particularly groundwater quality. The Council therefore will seek to direct rural housing to areas where acceptable wastewater treatment and disposal facilities can be provided and avoid sites that are prone to extreme high water tables, flooding, or are subject to impeded drainage or where ground water is at risk of contamination.

Dwellings and structures in the countryside need to be sited and designed to impact minimally on their setting and add to the landscape rather than detract from it. The utilisation of existing features, natural and manmade, can assist in integrating new development into its established setting. New residential development in the town rural environs shall adhere to standards outlined in Chapter 12 Development Management standards and supplementary planning guidance contained in the Westmeath Rural Design Guidelines (2005).

Where a number of houses are proposed in an area, (e.g. a number from the same family) it is preferable that these would be clustered, well set back from the public road and served by a single entrance rather than set out in a line along a roadside.

3.25 RURAL HOUSING POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:

- P-RH1
- To permit residential development in areas outside of the development boundaries of the settlement hierarchy subject to the following circumstances:

 - (1) Persons who are actively engaged in agriculture, horticulture, forestry, bloodstock and peat industry,
 - (2) Members of farm families seeking to build on the family farm,
 - (3) Landowners and members of landowners’ families (landowner for this purpose being defined as persons who owned the land in question since the year 2000),
 - (4) Persons employed locally whose employment would provide a service to the local community,
 - (5) Persons who have personal, family or economic ties within the area, including returning emigrants.
 - (6) Persons who wish to return to farming and who buy or inherit a substantial farm-holding which is kept intact as an established farm unit, will be considered by the Council to be farmers and will be open to consideration for a rural house, as farmers. Where there is already a house on the holding, refurbishment or replacement of this house is the preferred option.

P-RH2	To ensure all proposed on-site wastewater treatment systems shall comply with the EPA document Code of Practice for Wastewater Treatment and disposal Systems serving Single Houses (2009) and any revision thereof.
P-RH3	To ensure that waste water treatment systems are installed by competent persons with regular monitoring and testing carried out on the treatment system, in accordance with the planning permission and in accordance with Circular SP5-03.
P-RH4	To have regard to the Westmeath Rural Design Guidelines and the DEHLG Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines in the assessment or rural residential proposals.
P-RH5	To promote the clustering of houses particularly on the same landholding or for the same family and promote shared accesses to minimise hedgerow removal.
P-RH6	To resist urban generated and speculative residential development in the immediate environs of Athlone Town, in particular on the approach roads into the town.
P-RH7	To resist new accesses for single houses onto regional roads, where the 80km per hour limit applies to safeguard the carrying capacity and safety of these roads.

It is an objective of the Councils:	
O-RH1	To have regard to the DEHLG Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines, and any subsequent amendment in the assessment of applications for rural housing.

O-RH2	To resist development proposals which would involve the clustering of septic tanks in areas of identified ground water vulnerability.
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3.26 AREAS OF HIGH AMENITY

Lough Ree High Amenity Area extends into the north-western portion of the Plan area. High Amenity Areas are designated due to their amenity value and recreational potential. The Council will prohibit housing developments which are obviously urban-generated or speculative ventures in designated Areas of High Amenity.

3.27 HIGH AMENITY AREAS POLICIES

It is a policy of the Councils:	
P-AHA1	To restrict residential development not related to farming or forestry practices in defined water catchments areas of Lough Ree, with the exception of the erection of a house for a member of an existing residential farm family who will inherit the farm, or another member of the family, provided that not more than two dwellings (existing and proposed) be permitted on any farm holding within the Lough Ree water catchment and only where this relates to the first dwelling for the applicant and no alternative site is available outside the water catchment. Where there is a conflict with P-AHA2, this policy shall take precedence.
P-AHA2	To restrict development not related to farming practices and tourism in the Lough Ree High Amenity Area, with the exception of housing for the immediate family (son/daughter) of established residents living on the landholding,

who demonstrate a housing need and have long-term intrinsic links with the area. The entire landholding will be demonstrated to have been in the resident's ownership since 2000. No more than three additional dwellings to be permitted on any such holding and provided there is no alternative site on the holding outside the Area of High Amenity.

3.28.1 Planning Applications for Significant Extensions

Where an application is made for a significant extension to a house, or other use, without the benefit of mains drainage in the rural area, it will be a requirement to include in the application an assessment of the existing waste water treatment system.

3.28 REFURBISHMENT AND EXTENSIONS OF EXISTING STRUCTURES

The Councils will facilitate the reuse and refurbishment of vacant traditional farm houses and their outbuildings in the countryside. When assessing proposals to convert, re-use and/or adapt traditional buildings in rural areas, it is a requirement that:

- The external walls, roof and openings are substantially intact.
- The design, scale and materials used in the refurbishment and extension are in keeping and sympathetic with the existing structure.
- The size of any house extension takes account of the siting and size of the existing dwelling and the character of the original structures is respected.
- The design of the proposal does not erode the siting and design qualities of the building and its setting which makes it attractive in the first instance.
- Mature landscape features are retained and enhanced with landscape proposals.

Chapter 4 *Economic Development*



4 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

AIM:

To promote and facilitate the development of critical mass, employment and sustainable economic activity in Athlone commensurate with the status of the town as a Linked Gateway Town. This is to be achieved by developing a business environment that is attractive to both indigenous and inward investment and supports the establishment of an innovation based economy and growth of the international trading sector.

4.1 NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

4.1.1 The National Recovery Plan 2011-2014

This Plan builds on and is consistent with the preceding National Economic Recovery Plan 'Building Ireland's Smart Economy- A Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal' published in December 2008. Within these plans key action areas have been identified to bring about national economic recovery. These are namely:

- ☐ Securing the enterprise economy and restoring competitiveness.
- ☐ Building the Ideas Economy.
- ☐ Enhancing the environment and securing energy supplies.
- ☐ Investing in critical infrastructure.
- ☐ Providing efficient and effective public services and smart regulation.

4.1.2 IDA Horizon 2020 Strategy (2010)

Horizon 2020 is IDA Ireland's strategic blueprint for attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into Ireland. FDI is deemed to be critical in ensuring Ireland's economic recovery. Significantly, it outlines a series of impactful short term goals, including an ambitious target for job creation.

- ☐ 105,000 new jobs
- ☐ 640 investments
- ☐ 50% of investments will be located outside Dublin and Cork
- ☐ 20% of Greenfield investments originating from high-growth emerging markets by 2014

- ☐ Annual spend in excess of €1.7bn in research, development and innovation by 2014

The importance of securing FDI is critical to the rejuvenation of the local economy in Athlone. Given the availability of a skilled workforce and an established base of international companies in the town, Athlone is well placed to entice overseas investment. The preferred location for FDI is within the designated Innovation and Technology Park at Garrycastle.

4.2 REGIONAL PLANNING CONTEXT

4.2.1 Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022

The Guidelines outline five strategic requirements to drive the regions economy and enhance its overall business environment.

These key strategic issues are as follows:

- ☐ Creating a strong regional identity.
- ☐ Building the critical mass of the Linked Gateway and Principal Towns.
- ☐ Establishing a Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) east of Athlone.
- ☐ Promoting the rural economy.
- ☐ Increasing regional productivity and enhancing competitiveness.

The Guidelines require that priority should be given to targeting the development of activities which capitalise on existing and emerging strengths in the linked gateway town of Athlone, in addition to promoting the development of all sectors within the town. In this regard, it specifies the development of the following sectors in Athlone:

- ☐ ICT-related activities
- ☐ Pharmaceuticals and related activities
- ☐ Education
- ☐ International Trading
- ☐ Shared Services (multi-lingual)
- ☐ Research and Development

4.3 STRATEGIC COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES OF ATHLONE

In terms of potential for employment and enterprise generation, Athlone has a number of key strengths which may be summarised as follows:

- Strategic location along the M6, with excellent inter-urban links to the capital and international airport
- Gateway Status.
- Highly Skilled Workforce
- The presence of Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) and its capacity for future expansion, including its established role in developing Athlone as a competitive world class knowledge based Gateway
- Advanced infrastructure network, in terms of both road and rail connections
- Existing base of leading international companies at the forefront of their field in areas such as pharmaceutical, R&D, medical devices and life sciences and telecommunication software
- Established administrative centre for national and regional services
- Excellent broadband and telecommunications infrastructure
- Availability of water and wastewater infrastructure
- The River Shannon and a high quality natural environment

4.4 ECONOMIC PROFILE OF ATHLONE

There is an established tradition of manufacturing, pharmaceutical, research and development, medical devices and telecommunications software industries and retailing in the town. Athlone has traditionally performed strongly in attracting multinational companies such as Ericsson and Georgia Tech which provide a significant employment base for the town.

The town is also a regional centre for a number of state and semi-state organisations which contribute substantially to the business life of the town. The State Examinations Commission, Revenue Commissioners, SOLAS, Midlands Region, Bus Éireann, Iarnród Éireann, IDA Ireland, and Enterprise Ireland all have bases in the town. Custume Barracks on the West bank of the Shannon currently employs 1,400 people. The AIT is also a big employer in the town.



IDA Business Park, Garrycastle

Fig. 4.1 Leading Companies in Athlone



Source: Community & Enterprise Section, Westmeath County Council

4.5 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Enhancing the level of critical mass in the Midlands region by combining the complementary strengths of Athlone, Mullingar and Tullamore as a Gateway at the heart of the region is essential to boosting the region's overall economic strength. The role of Athlone is therefore critical in achieving and sustaining regional growth. This strategy seeks to ensure that the potential of Athlone is maximised in terms of economic development and employment generation. It seeks to promote and facilitate the growth and expansion of existing enterprises, attracting new indigenous and multi-national companies and extending the industrial base in the town. These measures will enable the Linked Gateway of Athlone to become a key driver of economic growth in the Midland region, thus acting as a catalyst for economic expansion across the county and within the town's catchment area.

The Strategy centres on the following strategic principles:

- ☐ To promote and facilitate the development of critical mass, employment, enterprise and economic activity in Athlone.
- ☐ To facilitate sustainable economic development and regeneration.
- ☐ To provide for the establishment of an innovation based economy with links to AIT.
- ☐ To support the establishment and growth of the international trading sector in the town.
- ☐ To enhance competitiveness and stimulate economic recovery and job creation across all sectors of the economy.
- ☐ To improve the international competitiveness of businesses in Athlone and enhance their capacity to

attract inward investment from both foreign and indigenous sources.

- ☐ To promote and expand the knowledge-based enterprise and innovation economy, capitalising on strong linkages between industry, AIT and existing research institutions.
- ☐ To provide for the continued expansion of established enterprise clusters in the town and the enhancement of linkages between these enterprise hubs and national enterprise development agencies such as Enterprise Ireland and the IDA.
- ☐ To support the role of retailing in Athlone in recognition of its key role in the provision of employment and economic activity and its contribution to the social dimension of the town.
- ☐ To attract, support and enhance rapidly growing industry sectors such as ICT, life sciences, pharmaceutical, medical technologies and R&D
- ☐ To support the establishment and expansion of indigenous industry and micro-enterprise in the town.
- ☐ To develop and maximise the tourism potential of Athlone as a 'pillar of economic growth'.
- ☐ To encourage the development of the town as a conference venue.
- ☐ To enhance the range of functions and services, retail offer and facilities in the town, in order to support economic activity, retention of an appropriate workforce and to reinforce sustainable travel patterns.

The Gateway town of Athlone will be promoted as an anchor of regional enterprise. Critical mass is a core objective to create more self-sustaining patterns of development.

It is a priority of the Plan to encourage and make provision for increased employment activity, including ensuring that sufficient land is zoned at optimum locations, the provision of necessary infrastructure, and to encourage measures to promote critical mass to allow for future economic development.

4.6 LOCATION OF ENTERPRISE / EMPLOYMENT LANDS IN ATHLONE

The Councils zoning strategy for the town identifies locations for particular types of employment land uses such as large-scale enterprise development, industrial development, retail and small to medium enterprises. The Plan seeks to identify a range of optimum locations which can present opportunities for the location of specific / specialised enterprise and employment uses within the town. The Plan also encourages the re-use and re-development of brownfield lands i.e. those lands formerly used for other uses. There are 115 ha of land zoned for enterprise and employment use in Athlone, together with 112ha of land within the Strategic Gateway Zone and 41ha in the Innovation Technology Zone.

4.6.1 Innovation Technology Zone

The aim is to strengthen the industrial base in the town. Emphasis shall be placed on attracting both foreign owned and indigenous companies into Athlone, with particular emphasis given to encouraging higher value-added knowledge based industries and international traded activities. There is a need to support innovation in the town, in order to translate ideas into high value products and services and to align education provision with industry needs. Innovation is also essential in order to enhance entrepreneurship and develop the existing economic sectors within the town. In this regard, a new enterprise and employment land use zoning type has been introduced in Athlone, known as “Innovation and Technology”, which will channel high value high tech knowledge, R&D and SMART industries into the IDA Innovation and Technology Park in Garrycastle. The focus in this area shall be on creating knowledge-

based enterprise clusters. The delivery of such knowledge based quarters is achievable, owing to the presence of AIT and the opportunities and networks derived from same. The linkage between the AIT campus and Garrycastle Business Park is critical for the spin-off and synergy required to fulfil the vision to develop a centre of excellence for education, research, enterprise and innovation at this location. It is considered that there is potential to develop some lands as ‘technology transfer’ incubators similar to current AIT operated facilities which could be expanded into the IDA campus.

4.6.2 Strategic Gateway Zone (SGZ)

The Creggan Local Area Plan 2010-2025 provides for the development of a Strategic Gateway Zone (SGZ) on the eastern side of the town. The vision presented for the area encompasses a vibrant, high quality and sustainable centre of activity that creates a positive and lasting image of Athlone to the visitor, investor and resident alike. This zoning provides for a range of specialist but complementary uses such as flagship enterprise, exhibition, and integrated large-scale projects within the international trading sector, conference facilities and other business services. The extent of lands zoned in the SGZ is 112ha.

4.6.3 Athlone and Blyry Business Parks

The Athlone and Blyry Business Parks accommodate a large proportion of the indigenous industries in the town.

4.6.4 Lissywollen South

The Lissywollen South Local Area Plan provides for a business quarter which extends to 5.9ha in area. It is envisaged that this business quarter could accommodate a mix of enterprise and business uses including medium and large offices.

4.7 STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT ZONE ATHLONE (SDZ)

The proposal for an SDZ to the east of Athlone will on delivery also add to the economic profile and employment opportunities in the

town. Given the current economic climate and the projected outlook up to 2020, it will be a major challenge to ensure that the full implementation of a Strategic Development Zone would occur during the lifetime of this Pan. It is more probable that this process would take a much longer time frame to be fully realised, and therefore will also be relevant to the 2020-2026 Development Plan. Notwithstanding, the Council is committed to securing the implementation of this objective in conjunction with relevant state, semi-state and development agencies. In keeping with the Midlands Regional Planning policy 2010-2022, it is an objective of this Plan to progress the development of an SDZ east of Athlone. It is also important to note that the Linked Gateway Town of Athlone hosts the necessary attributes to support the development of an SDZ, namely strategic transport infrastructure, third level Education Institute, skilled workforce, established industrial base and a comprehensive planning framework.

The nature of the SDZ shall be such that it shall generate employment, foster innovation, engender research and development opportunities and strengthen linkages both inter-regionally and intra-regionally.

4.8 HOME WORKING

Home working can make a positive contribution towards reducing car travel. While the Plan supports the concept of home working, it is important that it does not result in disamenity in a residential area. In addition to home working, this Plan supports the concept of a live-work unit which can be defined as a single unit within a building that is both a place to live and a place of business or commerce. The development of live-work units can lead to a more sustainable land use pattern, by providing for a mix of uses, ensuring a balance between day and night time activity and reducing commuting, and is specifically provided for in the Lissywollen South Local Area Plan.

4.9 TOURISM

It is recognised that tourism development can make an important contribution to the economy of the town. The highly attractive nature of Athlone’s natural and physical environment, its setting on the River Shannon and at the foot of Lough Ree, combined with the richness of its cultural and architectural heritage and archaeology add to its’ attractiveness as a tourist location. The Councils acknowledge the role of Athlone as a tourism destination of national and international standing and will therefore encourage the development of tourism facilities and services in the town. (Chapter 9 provides additional policies in relation to tourism).



4.10 GENERAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:	
P-EC1	To accelerate the sustainable development of the linked gateway town of Athlone, in a structured and cohesive way, recognising its importance as a key driver of economic growth for the region.
P-EC2	To facilitate development agencies such as IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland to promote development of foreign-owned and indigenous sector higher value-added, knowledge based industrial and internationally traded activities.
P-EC3	To foster and support industry and enterprise in Athlone, in particular indigenous businesses.

P-EC4	To ensure the availability of lands for employment uses, allied to defined development needs and to develop same in conjunction with the relevant Development Agencies.
P-EC5	To promote innovative economic sectors and encourage clustering which positively exploits synergies between interconnected companies and / or which forge synergies with AIT and other Research Institutes.
P-EC6	To facilitate and encourage the development of the alternative energy sector and to recognise its potential in the creation of enterprise and employment opportunities including the building of research capacity.
P-EC7	To continue to support and facilitate the development of start-up enterprise units for local indigenous enterprises in Athlone.
P-EC8	To facilitate innovative work practices such as ‘live-work’ units where they do not negatively impact on residential amenity.
P-EC9	To provide for childcare facilities in appropriate locations and in consultation with Westmeath Childcare Committee thereby promoting labour market participation among parents and supporting parents in accessing employment, training and education.
P-EC10	To continue to improve access to major areas of employment through sustainable transport modes.
P-EC11	To actively encourage the redevelopment of brownfield sites and re-use of disused buildings for enterprise and employment creation, subject to meeting Development Management Criteria prescribed in Chapter 12 of the Plan.
P-EC12	To encourage and facilitate at appropriate locations, small indigenous industries in recognition

	of their increasing importance in providing local employment and helping to stimulate economic activity.
P-EC13	To promote, protect, improve, encourage and facilitate the development of tourism in Athlone as an important contributor to job creation in the town.
P-EC14	To support the establishment and growth of the international trading sector in the town.
P-EC15	To support and facilitate continued public sector employment in the town.

It is an objective of the Councils:

O-EC1	To identify and progress the establishment of a Strategic Development Zone, to the east of Athlone, subject to environmental constraints and Habitats assessment, particularly in relation to Crosswood Bog and Carn Park Bog.
O-EC2	To support the implementation of the Creggan Local Area Plan and Strategic Gateway Zone.
O-EC3	To continue to pursue funding initiatives to secure development in Athlone.
O-EC4	To develop and implement a Regional Brand and Brand Strategy for the Linked Gateway, in partnership with the Gateway Implementation Forum.
O-EC5	To support the work of the Local Enterprise Office, once established under the Local Government Reform Initiative.
O-EC6	To provide for an extension to Blyry Business Park.
O-EC7	To promote a programme of environmental enhancements at all existing industrial estates and enterprise zones within the Town.
O-EC8	To require workplaces and educational facilities to produce Mobility Management and Transportation Plans.

4.11 PREVENTION OF MAJOR ACCIDENTS

The EU Directive on the Control of Major Accidents Hazards (Seveso) seeks to reduce the risk and to limit the consequences of accidents involving dangerous substances that present a major accident hazard. The Directive requires Planning Authorities to have regard to the potential effects of relevant development of the risks or consequences of a major accident for public health and safety, and the need to maintain an appropriate safe distance of such establishments from residential areas, areas of public use, and areas of particular natural sensitivity.

Article 12 of the Directive (2003/105/EC) provides that appropriate consultation procedures must be put in place to ensure that before decisions are taken, technical advice is available to Planning Authorities in respect of relevant establishments. The Health and Safety Authority (or the National Authority for Occupational Health and Safety, NAOSH) provides such advice where appropriate in respect of planning applications within a certain distance of the perimeter of these sites. Such technical advice will be taken into account in the consideration of applications for planning permission.

At present, there are no Seveso sites within the functional area of Westmeath County Council or Athlone Town Council. The Elan site was previously listed as a Seveso site in 2009 and 2010. However, Alkermes (formerly Elan) was not listed in the HSA website as a Notified Seveso Establishment in 2011.

4.12 PREVENTION OF MAJOR ACCIDENTS POLICY

It is a policy of the Councils:

P-MA1

To comply with the Seveso II Directive in reducing the risk and limiting the potential consequences of major industrial accidents in relation to spatial planning policy and development management as necessary.

4.13 RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

AIM:

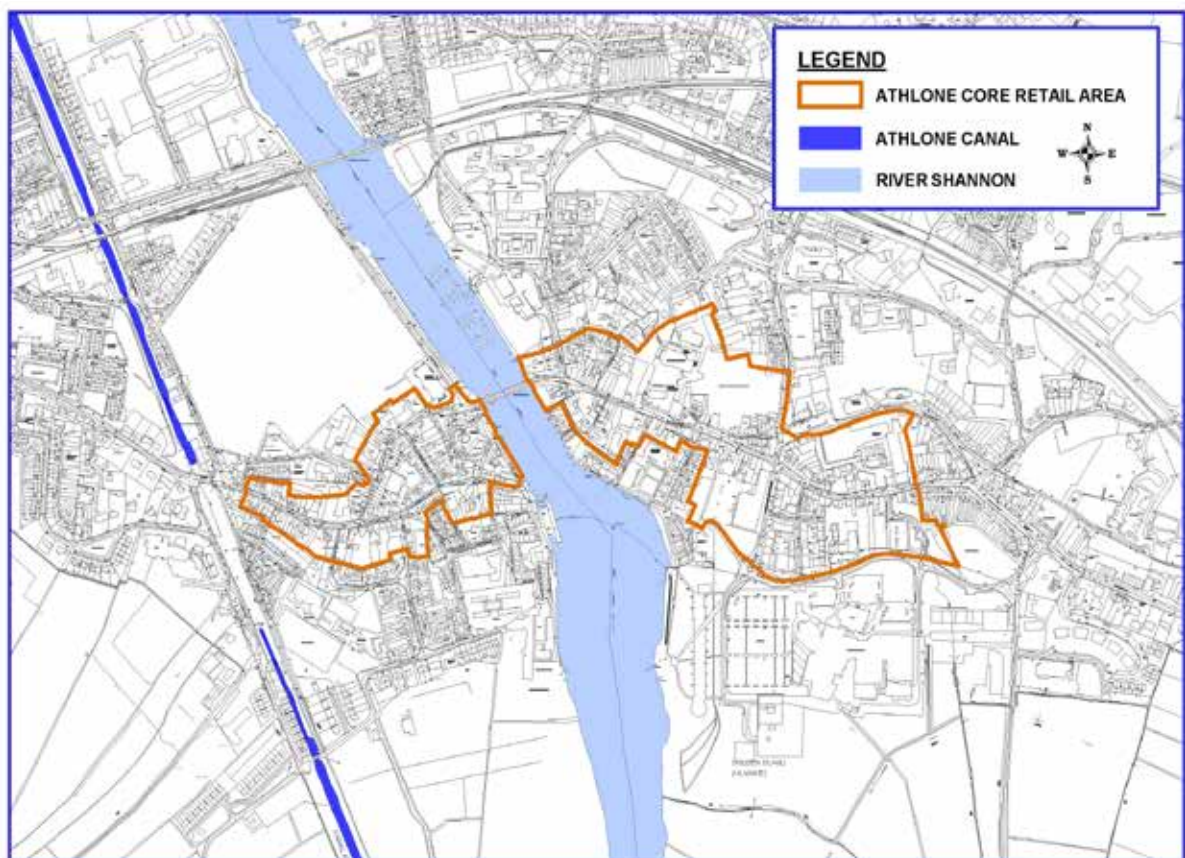
To continue to sustain and improve the retail profile and competitiveness of Athlone, through the support, consolidation and environmental enhancement of the town centre and by improving the quality and choice of retail developments on offer.

4.13.1 Background

Athlone acts as the primary retail centre in the west of the county and is a key focus for future retail development in the form of convenience and comparison floor space. The town centre benefits significantly in terms of its wide attraction and appeal to shoppers. Its catchment extends well beyond the county boundary to include parts of adjoining Counties Roscommon, Offaly, Galway and Longford.

Athlone hosts a considerable retail profile. The traditional core shopping streets in the town centre comprise the Retail Core. These are on both sides of the River Shannon and to the east broadly comprise Church Street, Dublin Gate Street and Sean Costello Street. On the west side of the town the Retail Core generally comprises Connaught Street, Pearse Street, Main Street and St. Peters Square. It is Council policy to encourage retail development, including new forms of shopping which encourages the regeneration of the existing Town Centre. Proposals which would undermine the vitality and viability of the Retail Core of Athlone and which contravene retail policy will not normally be permitted.

The town is served by Golden Island Shopping Centre to the south which has a gross retail floor space of approximately 16,000 sq m and contains more than 40 shops, including a choice of national, international and multiple retailers. The Athlone Town Centre shopping hub constructed in 2007 provides 25,000 sq m of retailing. In addition, the town is also served by Arcadia Retail Park and a number of retail warehousing units along the Dublin Road.



Map 4.1 Retail Core Athlone

4.13.2 Policy Context
Retail Planning - Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2012 (DECLG)

The Guidelines have five key policy objectives:

- Ensuring that retail development is planned.
- Promoting a sequential approach to development.
- Securing competitiveness in the retail sector by actively enabling good quality development proposals in suitable locations.
- Facilitating a shift towards increased access to retailing by public transport, cycling and walking in accordance with Smarter Travel.
- Delivering quality urban design outcomes.

The Guidelines also provide national level policy guidance in relation to retailing, objectives for retail policy, specific retail formats and issue advice in relation to the location of new retail development.

4.13.3 Plan-Led Approach to Retail Development

The Guidelines represent a plan-led approach to retail development at a national level, which is intended to inform County Retail Strategies to guide development at a local level. This plan-led approach is to be underpinned and delivered through the co-operation by Planning Authorities in the preparation of Joint or Multi-Authority Retail Strategies for certain areas. In this regard, the Guidelines require the preparation of a Joint Retail Strategy for the Midland Gateway with Counties Roscommon, Offaly and Westmeath. It shall be a policy of this Plan to prepare a Joint Retail Strategy for the Linked Gateway Towns.

Retail development shall be carried out in accordance with the principles set out in the Retail Planning – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DECLG 2012). Policies for retailing are currently set out in the Retail Strategy for County Westmeath 2007-2012. The strategy and policy prescribed in this Retail Strategy shall remain in force pending the adoption of a Joint Retail Strategy for the Midlands Gateway Towns.

4.13.4 Sequential Approach

Development proposals not according with the fundamental objective to support the vitality and viability of town centre sites, must demonstrate compliance with the sequential approach before they can be approved. The order of priority for the sequential approach is to locate retail development in the town centre, and only to allow retail development in edge-of-centre or out-of-centre locations where all other options have been exhausted. Applications for such development must demonstrate suitability, availability and viability, in order to meet the requirements of the sequential approach. Retail impact assessment and transport impact assessments may be required for significant retail development, which due to their scale and/or location may impact on the vitality and viability of town centres.

4.13.5 Facilitating a Shift towards Increased Access to Retailing by Public Transport, Cycling and Walking

Consideration must be given to the siting of retail developments, in terms of how they are connected by footpaths and cycle facilities to surrounding areas, thus encouraging alternatives to using the car, particularly for smaller purchases. Moreover, by encouraging appropriate retail development in locations with good public transport facilities such as the Athlone Retail Core, increased usage of public transport can be encouraged.

4.14 RETAIL DESIGN QUALITY

The Retail Planning Guidelines (2012) are accompanied by the Retail Design Manual – A Good Practical Guide (2012) which provides Planning Authorities, developers and

designers with guidance on the practical issues of relating design principles to retail development at a variety of scales and in various settings. The provision of evidence-based, quality principles within the Retail Design Manual seeks to ensure that future planning for the retail sector is focused on the creation of vibrant, quality places.

The Councils will seek to promote quality design in all retail developments owing to their particular importance arising from the visually dominant role which retail plays in a town or village streetscape. Design quality in retail development can make an important contribution to the vitality and viability of town and village centres. The Development Management Standards Chapter provides general guidance on retail development, whilst individual Local Areas Plans in the town prescribe details in relation to neighbourhood shopping facilities. Retail developments shall be assessed on their application of the ten urban design principles outlined in the Retail Design Manual:

1. **Design Quality:** Quality design contributing to making places that are attractive, inclusive, durable and adaptable places to live, work, shop and visit.
2. **Site + Location:** Healthy city and town centres contributing to the proper planning and sustainable development of their locations.
3. **Context + Character:** Regard for the character and the physical, social and economic contexts of the site and its location.
4. **Vitality + Viability:** Vitality and viability in city and town centres that are attractive and competitive places to live, work, shop and visit.
5. **Access + Connectivity:** Town centres that are accessible and well-connected, easy to get to and convenient to move about in.

6. **Density + Mixed Use:** Higher density and mixed use development creating compact urban areas and the efficient use of land.
7. **Public Realm:** Well-designed and well-used open spaces contributing to a high quality public realm in the location.
8. **Built Form:** Built form, scale and mass contributing to a high standard of urban design and quality in the built environment.
9. **Environmental Responsibility:** Environmentally responsible use of energy resources to lower fuel consumption and carbon emissions.
10. **Sustainable Construction:** Construction materials and technologies that have regard for the environmental impacts of their production, transportation, use and disposal.

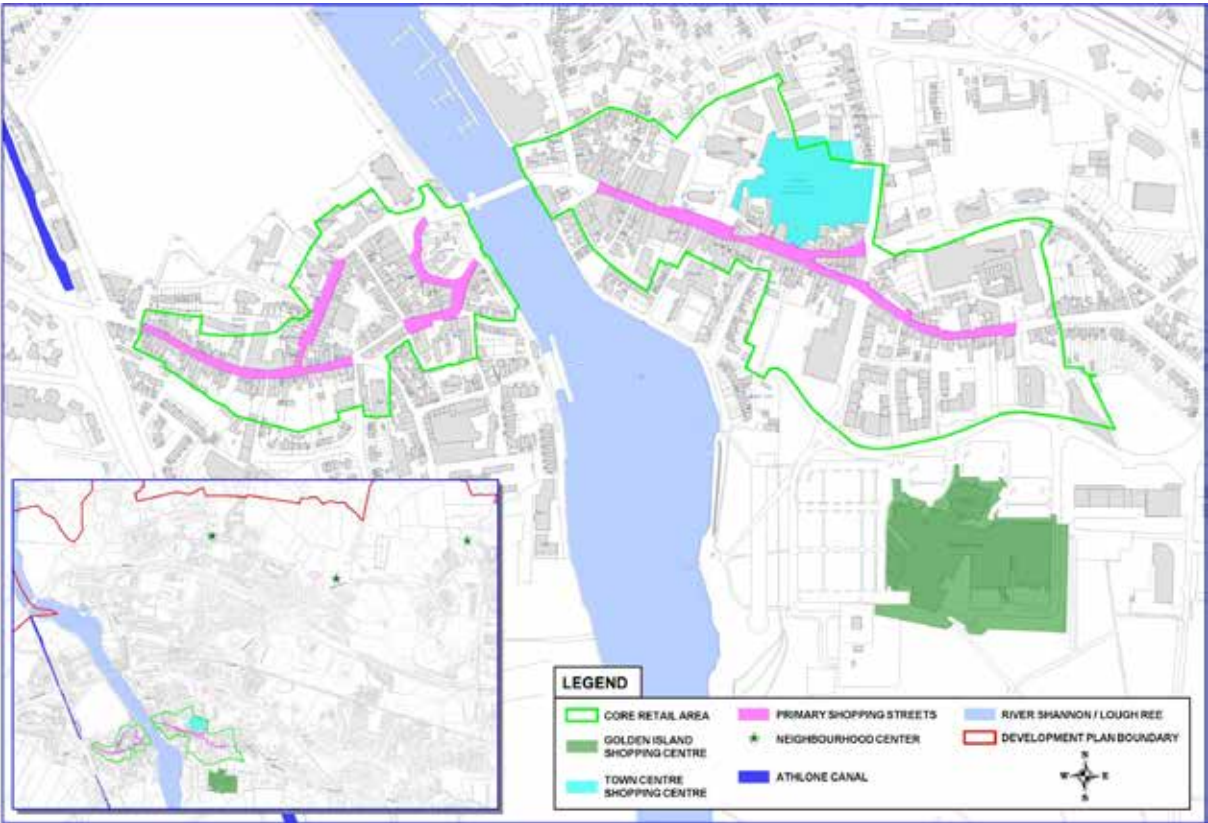
4.15 RETAIL WAREHOUSING

In terms of retail warehouse development, the town is well served with retail warehousing developments at Arcadia and

along the Dublin Road. Both locations have capacity for further development. Applications for new retail warehouse developments shall be supported by evidence of need for the development based on predicted demand and taking account of locational criteria and existing permissions. The subdivision of retail warehouse premises into smaller units shall not be permitted, as they may undermine existing retail provision in the retail core and thereby adversely impact upon the vitality and viability of the town centre. The Retail Planning Guidelines indicates that individual retail warehouses should not be less than 700m² gross floor area (with no permission to subdivide), but yet no more than 6,000m² in size. It is also important that all retail warehousing is restricted solely to the sale of bulky goods.

4.16 NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES

Neighbourhood Centres provide a greater distribution of retail availability which can be more readily accessed by foot or cycle. In this regard, appropriately scaled neighbourhood retailing facilities promote Smarter Travel objectives.



Map 4.2. Map indicating the distribution of Retail Activity in the Town

The essence of Neighbourhood Centres is that they serve quite localised catchment areas in a way which is convenient to the population served. The distribution of such facilities cannot be too widespread however, as this would negate the benefits of a local focus of provision and development could be unviable. Thus, there needs to be a reasonable quantum of scale to provide a good local range and provide a viable focus of shopping and service outlets. In Athlone, neighbourhood centres are provided for in Cornamaddy, Lissywollen South and Cornamagh.

4.17 LOCAL SHOPS & PETROL FILLING STATIONS

Local shops play an important role in providing for daily top up shopping. They are also often easily accessible to the elderly and people with disabilities. The development of such local shops should be encouraged in residential areas in the suburbs of the town. Such developments should be easily accessible to all sections of society.

Local shops attached to petrol filling stations are a growing sector of the retail market. Such facilities do play an important role, particularly in serving some more isolated rural communities. However, care should be given to the development of such facilities on the edge of town centres as they may have a negative impact on established convenience outlets within the town centre. As stated in the Retail Planning Guidelines the net sales area of such units shall not exceed 100 square metres.

4.18 MARKETS

Markets are a popular form of traditional retailing which meet local shopping needs. The Councils will normally grant planning permission for new off-street, covered or street markets, or individual market stalls in or close to the town centre subject to the following conditions being met:

- There should be no adverse effect on residential amenity, conservation areas, or the general environment.

- The existing road network should have sufficient capacity to take any additional traffic generated by the proposal.
- The proposal should include adequate arrangements for customers’/traders’ parking, servicing, storage, disposal and recycling of refuse and storage of stalls.

Farmers Markets are an increasingly popular retail element of towns and villages, providing an outlet for locally sourced and grown produce; it is the Councils policy to support the provision of Farmers Markets in the town subject to compliance with the conditions outlined above.

4.19 GENERAL RETAILING POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:	
P-RET1	To protect and strengthen the retail primacy of Athlone within the region.
P-RET2	To promote retail development as a fundamental element and catalyst for the promotion and enhancement of broader town centre functions. New development proposals shall respect the retail function of the core shopping area, contribute positively to the public realm and display high quality urban design and place-making attributes.
P-RET3	To prioritise the reuse of vacant and derelict buildings in the town centre for uses including retail development.
P-RET4	To sustain the vitality and viability of the major shopping areas and to encourage measures to improve their attractiveness.
P-RET5	To support the vitality and viability of existing designated retail centres and facilitate a competitive and healthy environment for the retailing industry into the future by ensuring that future growth in retail floor space is in keeping with the Retail hierarchy, as prescribed in the Retail Strategy.

P-RET6	To adhere to the provisions of the Sequential Approach in the consideration of retail applications located outside of core retail area, as identified in Map 4.1
P-RET7	To promote and facilitate the development of local markets devoted to the sale of local agricultural and craft produce and support their role as visitor attractions.
P-RET8	To prohibit the development of large retail centres located adjacent or close to existing, new or planned national roads/motorways or on national roads outside the speed limit zones of the town.
P-RET 9	To provide for an adequate and appropriate scale of retail and other services within the existing and proposed neighbourhood centres in the town.
P-RET10	To ensure that best quality of design is achieved for all proposed retail developments and that design respects and enhances the specific characteristics of the town.
P-RET11	To restrict the subdivision of retail warehouse premises into smaller units, as they may undermine existing retail provision in the retail core and thereby adversely impact upon the vitality and viability of the town centre.
P-RET12	To pursue all avenues of funding to secure resources for the continued enhancement, renewal and regeneration of the public realm of the town centre.
P-RET13	To discourage non retail and excessive lower grade retail uses, such as, take-aways and betting offices in the core retail area and other principal streets in the town centre, in the interests of maintaining and sustaining the retail attraction of the town centre.

It is an objective of the Councils:	
O-RET1	To prepare and implement a Joint Retail Strategy for the Linked Gateway Towns of Athlone, Mullingar and Tullamore, in conjunction with Offaly and Roscommon County Councils in accordance with the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012.
O-RET2	To develop a GIS based system for retailing in Athlone in order to monitor patterns of use and ensure the vitality and variety is maintained.
O-RET3	To promote higher order and comparison goods retail activity in the town centre and resist the loss of retail units, to non-retail use, at pedestrian level, particularly in the primary shopping streets in Athlone which are defined as follows: Connaught Street, O'Connell Street, High Street, Main Street, Castle Street, Pearse Street, Church Street, Mardyke Street, and Irishtown Upper.
O-RET4	To align new retail development with existing and proposed public transport infrastructure and services and encourage access by foot and bicycle to reduce the dominance of the private car.
O-RET5	To provide off street car-parking and to manage on street car-parking, to further improve the town centre.
O-RET6	To encourage the retention of traditional shop fronts and pub fronts, and where relevant interiors, of character and good design quality.
O-RET7	To promote the development of street furniture and public art in the town centre, in order to ameliorate the retail environment.

Chapter 5 *Town Centre & Urban Design*



5 TOWN CENTRE AND URBAN DESIGN

AIM:

To make Athlone town centre a more attractive destination where people will want to live, work, visit, shop and socialise with a diversity of uses and activities during the day and evening in a safe and inclusive environment.

5.1 BACKGROUND

For the purposes of this Town Centre Strategy, the area referred to as the town centre includes the lands to the south of the railway line, lands to the east of the disused canal, the east and west banks of the River Shannon, and the area north of Castlemaine Street. The town centre area reflects the historic and commercial core of Athlone.

A core principle of the development of the town centre strategy is to achieve a sustainable high quality urban environment through accepted design principles in new development and to promote the enhancement of the existing streets and public spaces within the town.

5.2 POLICY CONTEXT

5.2.1 Athlone Integrated Area Plan 1998

This Plan analysed the make up of the town and consulted widely with the community and various stakeholders to select and prioritise areas within the town centre and its environs for development and renewal under the provisions of the 1998 Urban Renewal scheme. Many of the aims and objectives of the Plan have been implemented.

5.3.2 Athlone Town Walls and Defences Conservation Plan 2005

This document was produced as an action of the Westmeath Heritage Plan in 2005. The Plan sets out the policies for the conservation of the Town walls and defences and also puts forward strategies to raise awareness of these important monuments.

5.2.3 Loughananaskin Master Plan 2007

This is an adopted Masterplan for an area to the east and west of Grace Park Road on the north eastern boundary of the town centre. The Masterplan promotes the use of the area for mixed and residential uses and integrates the area with the town centre.

5.2.4 Irishtown Urban Design Framework 2009

This Framework Plan examines the future development potential of a 0.34 hectare site to the south of Sean Costello Street, to the north of John Broderick Street and to the east of TP O'Connor Street.

5.2.5 Athlone Waterfront Study 2011

This study focuses on both sides of the River Shannon, stretching from the points of the Shannon past the N6 Athlone by-pass bridge on the western side and from the Town Park past the N6 Athlone by-pass bridge, on the eastern side. The study has identified the following:

- ☐ Key areas for protection and conservation.
- ☐ Character areas which display distinct enclaves along the river leading to enhancement provisions and increased linkages.
- ☐ Opportunities to improve accessibility and movement along the River Shannon.

5.2.6 Athlone Visual Amenity Study

This Study includes proposals for the upgrading of the streets and facades in the town from St. Mary's Square to Custume Place.

5.2.7 Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government Guidelines:

- Best Practice Urban Design Manual Part 1 & 2 (May 2009)
- Retail Planning Guidelines 2012 and Retail Design Manual 2012

These Guidelines recommend that Planning Authorities promote high standards of design in their planning policies, and in the implementation of these policies through the Development Management process.

5.3 PROGRESS IN THE TOWN CENTRE SINCE ATHLONE TOWN PLAN 2008-2014

A substantial number of the objectives outlined in the previous Plan for the town have been fulfilled and include the following:

- Town Centre retail development completed.
- St. Mary's Hall has been upgraded and contains a Community Hall and Artists Studios
- A Waterfront Study has been completed for the River Shannon
- Building Heights policy adopted.
- Athlone Canal Study was completed

In addition to the above the following developments and initiatives have taken place within the Town centre:

- New Art Gallery built on the River Shannon
- Renovation of Athlone Castle completed
- A programme of events and festivals including the Triathlon Festival and RTE Drama festival.
- Revised parking policy within the town centre.



5.4 THE TOWN CENTRE AND URBAN DESIGN

Urban Design is defined as “places for people”. Places where people have a sense of belonging and where they feel comfortable and safe walking to employment, services, public transport or other destinations; and in

so doing meet their neighbours and the wider community.

The Councils aim to achieve the following in relation to Urban Design in the town:

- To promote quality of the public realm: public spaces and routes that are attractive, safe, uncluttered and work effectively for all in society, including people with disabilities and elderly people.
- To promote ease of movement: accessibility and local permeability; by making places that connect with each other and are easy to move through, putting people before traffic and integrating land uses and transport.
- To promote legibility through development that provides recognisable routes, intersections and landmarks to help people find their way around.
- To promote adaptability through development that can respond to changing social, technological and economic conditions.
- To promote diversity and choice through a mix of compatible developments and uses that work together to create viable places that respond to local needs.
- To promote continuity and enclosure; the continuity of street frontages and the enclosure of space by development which clearly defines private and public areas.
- To promote character in townscape and landscape by responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development, land use, culture and built form.



5.5 URBAN DESIGN POLICIES

It is a policy of the Councils:	
P-UD1	To adopt a design-led strategy in assessing the impact of development on the town centre, in accordance with Guidelines issued to Planning Authorities by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government.
P-UD2	To require new development to positively contribute to a network of streets and spaces, in terms of positive additions to the streetscape, or by creating links through sites where opportunity exists.
P-UD3	To require applications for significant development in the town centre to be accompanied by Design Statements, including how the proposal contributes to the achievement of urban design principles as specified in the Development Management Standards.
P-UD4	To prepare an Urban Design Framework Plan for Bellaugh.

5.6 PHYSICAL CONTEXT OF THE TOWN CENTRE

Athlone’s historical growth and success as a town is in many ways attributed to its close ties to the River Shannon. While the river may no longer be as important for trade and travel, it is still one of the town’s most important landscape and recreational assets. The historical context and setting of the town on the river has defined its character, street pattern and sense of distinctiveness.

5.6.1 Zone of Archaeological Potential

The zone of Archaeological Potential for the town extends from Castlemaine Street across the river to the disused canal. Athlone’s town centre by virtue of its location on the River Shannon was firmly established by the thirteenth century and any archaeology remains including the town wall and

battlements, would provide information on the medieval history of the town. Any development within the town would need to have regard to the archaeology policies contained within Chapter 11 of this Plan.

5.6.2 Town Centre Architectural Conservation Areas

The Councils have designated a total of nine Architectural Conservation Areas (ACA’s) within Athlone, including:

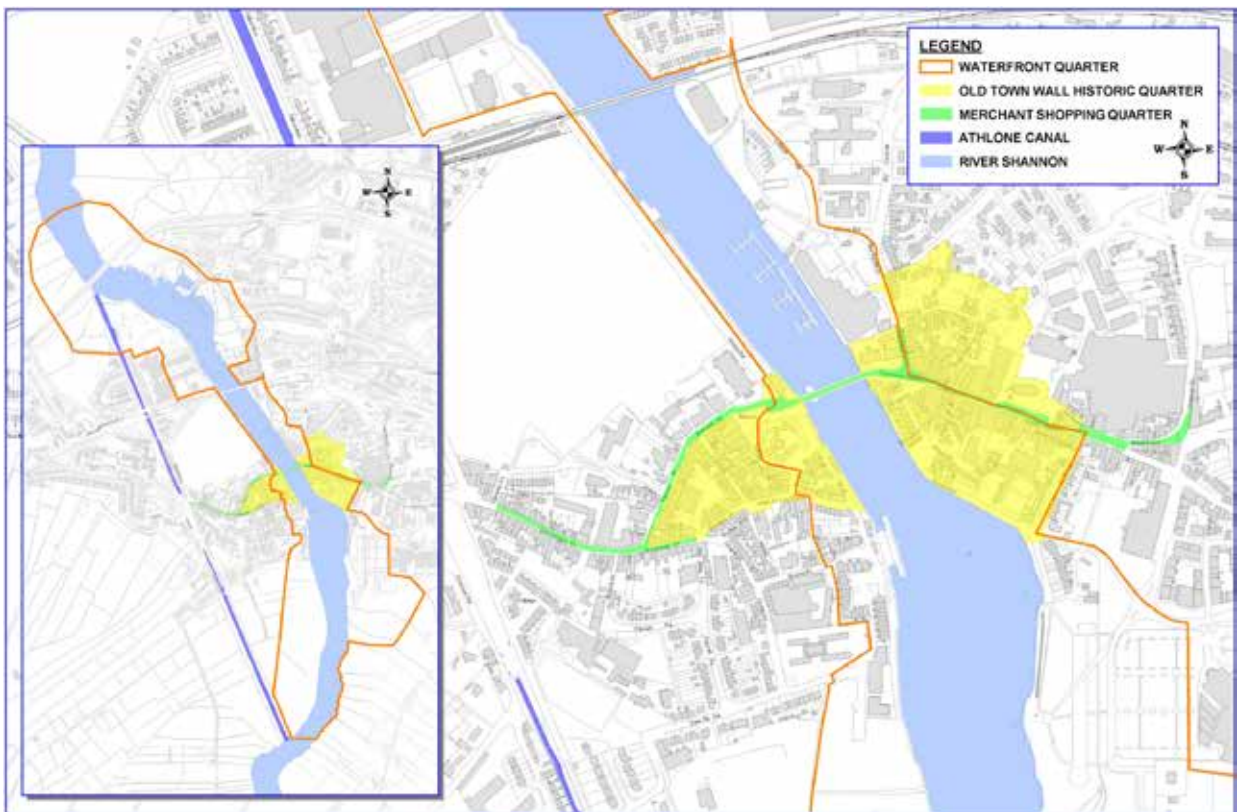
- 1. Town Centre
- 2. St. Mary’s Place
- 3. St. Brigid’s Terrace
- 4. Garden Vale
- 5. Goldsmith Terrace
- 6. St. Columba’s Terrace
- 7. Riverside Place 1
- 8. Riverside Place 2
- 9. Coosan Point Road

Where appropriate, the Councils will designate new Architectural Conservation Areas and extend existing areas where it is considered such areas are of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

5.6.3 Building Heights Guidelines

The Council has undertaken a review of building heights policy in Athlone and have identified sites within the town centre which could be considered for tall buildings i.e. a building of over 3 to 4 storeys depending on the local context. These sites are as follows:

- Site 1** Existing garage and adjoining lands adjacent to the Railway Station/Bus Station.
- Site 2** Site currently occupied by Dunnes Stores with frontage onto John Broderick Street and Dublin Gate Street.
- Site 3** Ranelagh site on the west bank.



Map 5.1. Character Area Map of Athlone

5.7 CHARACTER AREAS

The town centre has different Character Areas and for the purposes of this Plan the areas have each been given a specific character and identity.

5.7.1 Old Town Wall Historic Quarter

Given the town’s origin as a defensive town and its uniqueness of being contained within a town wall, it is considered appropriate to identify this area. This area unites both sides of the river, including the Castle, on the west bank and Bastion Street, and extends from Northgate Street to Dublin Street and includes St. Mary’s Church and part of Devenish Street on the eastern side of the river.

This area is characterised by its compact form and narrow medieval lanes and there is evidence of the town wall within this area. The inclusion of both sides of the river within this quarter places an emphasis on uniting both sides of the river. The uses within this quarter include the Castle, St. Mary’s Church, the Franciscan Church, Custume Barracks and the Batteries.

The west bank in particular has developed a cultural area within the town walls and includes several theatres, restaurants and cafés. These particular uses have evolved as a result of the narrow terraced frontages and plot layouts of the buildings and the growth of tourism and commercial activity. The existing market place by the Castle and Cathedral would be an appropriate location for a tourist market.

5.7.2 Merchant/ Shopping Quarter

This area is centred around the axis extending from Irishtown, through Dublin Gate Street/ Church Street/ Pearse Street and Connaught Street. The built form is characterised by narrow building frontages and deep plot widths. Vacancy levels are high along the main shopping street and there is a need to make improvements to the main shopping street through environmental improvements, reuse of derelict and empty units and incentives to refurbish shopfronts.

5.7.3 Waterfront Quarter/ Quay area

This area has been identified in the Waterfront Study and includes both sides of the Shannon. The Study promotes a new pedestrian bridge over the Shannon to link the west bank with the east bank. The Study has identified the existing walkways and proposed new walkways along the east and west banks of the river.

5.8 CHARACTER AREA POLICIES & OBJECTIVE

It is a policy of the Councils:	
P-CA1	To protect and enhance the existing streetscape and in particular the historic quarter of the town.
P-CA2	To restrict the development of tall and higher buildings to identified sites within the town centre.
P-CA3	To promote high quality urban design which responds positively to the town’s historic character and architectural heritage.
P-CA4	To encourage tourism related retail and commercial uses to increase the attractiveness of the town centre for visitors.
P-CA5	To promote development along the river in accordance with the Athlone Waterfront Study 2011 for tourism and amenity related uses.
P-CA6	To preserve and enhance the historic built form and retain the existing traditional shopfronts within the town centre.

It is an objective of the Councils:

O-CA1	To examine the potential to construct a new bridge across the River Shannon linking the east and west areas of the town for pedestrians and cyclists, subject to the requirements of the Habitats Directive, Water Framework Directive, EIA Directive and other relevant EU Directives. Due regard shall also be given to environmental sensitivities highlighted in the SEA.
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5.9 VARIETY AND MIX OF USES

A balance and mix of uses needs to be provided in the town centre to maintain its character and vibrancy. An appropriate range of shops needs to be present, including not only national and international retailers but local and independent retailers to provide choice, variety, distinctiveness and local identity. Mixed use developments within the town centre are required to attain sustainable development objectives, thereby creating opportunities to live, work, shop etc, within urban environments and reduce the propensity to travel by car.

5.9.1 Residential

Given the historic built form of the town there are a significant number of residential properties which date back to the nineteenth century such as Fry Place and Ballymahon Road. There are however a number of modern apartment blocks along the western side of the Shannon, in Connaught Street and in the recent shopping centre development which gives the town a good variety of tenure and type of residential accommodation. It is important to retain this strong residential base within the town centre.

5.9.2 Commercial and Retail

The main commercial streets in the town extend from Castlemaine Street to Connaught Street. The areas to the west and east of the Shannon have different commercial profiles. The west bank has become the preferred location for restaurants and the east bank accommodates the retail and office uses.

The west bank area with its winding streets and proximity to the Quays tends to attract tourists stopping off for food or to visit the Castle. The east side contains the convenience and comparison shops. It is considered a greater synergy should be aimed at both sides facilitating each other and to encourage people to linger for longer in the town centre.

5.9.3 Community Uses

The town centre is unique in that it contains a significant number of community facilities within its boundary including the hospital, several schools, a youth café and community hall, theatres, boat club, numerous churches and open spaces. The community uses within the town centre generate activities in the evenings and weekends in the town centre when the majority of retail uses have closed.

5.9.4 Employment

Employment within the town centre comprise in the main of retail, commercial, public sector, service and tourist type industries.

5.9.5 Public Space

There are three large areas of green public open space within walking distance of the town centre and on the periphery of the town, which includes Burgess Park to the south, Wansboro Park to the north and The Batteries to the north west of the town centre. There are several urban spaces within the town including the civic square to the front of the Council offices, Custume Place and St. Mary’s Place. The River however provides a significant amenity area for the town centre.

5.9.6 Vacancy within the Town Centre:

This Strategy seeks to reverse recent trends such as vacancy in the town centre and support a vibrant retail core with a mix of complementary uses.

5.10 DEVELOPMENT USES POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:

P-DU1	To encourage a mixture of uses in new developments within the town centre. The following mechanism will be applied: (a) No less than two separate planning uses will normally be allowed (i.e. retail/residential or retail/offices etc.). (b) Where more than two separate uses are proposed, no one singular use will prevail in terms of >50% of the total gross floorspace.
P-DU2	To limit the development of retail facilities outside of the town centre to serve local needs.
P-DU3	To resist proposals for the change of use from a retail use to a non retail use such as take aways and betting offices in the town centre core area, where such a proposal would individually or cumulatively undermine the vibrancy of the town centre and result in the loss of active retail frontages at pedestrian level.
P-DU4	To promote the use of upper floors of town centre properties for residential use and the provision of residential accommodation in all town centre redevelopments on mixed use town centre zonings.
P-DU5	To encourage culture and entertainment uses within the town centre and other uses that support the evening economy.
P-DU6	To protect the residential amenity from the undue encroachment of commercial uses in the town centre.

It is an objective of the Councils:

O-DU1	To prepare a Town Centre Management Strategy in consultation with all relevant stakeholders within the town centre.
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O-DU2	To monitor change of uses and ensure the vitality and variety is maintained.
O-DU3	To undertake a health check of the town centre, identifying occupancy levels, variety of uses and the vitality of the town centre.
O-DU4	To introduce reduced car parking requirements for town centre areas in an effort to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Promote town centre development- Reduce Vehicular traffic- Promote pedestrian and cycle movement- Increase public transport use
O-DU5	To prepare and implement a Public Realm Strategy for the town centre area.

5.11 ACCESS AND CONNECTIVITY IN THE TOWN

The Government’s transport policy is seeking to reduce the need to travel, to encourage the use of public transport, walking and cycling and reduce reliance on the private car, to facilitate multipurpose journeys and to ensure that everyone has access to a range of facilities. Successful town centres depend on good access with a safe pedestrian environment to encourage greater pedestrian use of the streets which has economic benefit for commercial properties.

5.12 ACCESS & CONNECTIVITY POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:	
P-AC1	To create an environment in the town centre in which vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians can safely co-exist and share public space.
P-AC2	To minimise vehicular traffic volumes in the town centre through traffic management measures.

It is an objective of the Councils:	
O-AC1	To implement environmental improvements from Irishtown to Custume Place and St. Peter’s Square and to improve the urban environment and enhance pedestrian mobility.

5.13 MAKING THE TOWN CENTRE A DISTINCTIVE PLACE

A quality built environment provides the basis for an attractive and distinctive town. The built environment includes the buildings that frame the streets and urban spaces. The urban spaces with the town include the streets, parks, trees, squares pedestrian and cycle ways, waterfront, natural features and landmarks within the town. The quality of these urban spaces is important for those that visit and live in the town centre.

5.14 PLACE-MAKING POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is a Policy of the Councils:	
P-PM1	To require all new development to draw on the intrinsic qualities of Athlone’s urban environment and add to the local distinctiveness and sense of place that forms the basis of the town’s unique character and attractive urban form.
P-PM2	To ensure high quality open spaces are provided and maintained to create vibrant civic spaces for a wide range of active and passive activities.
P-PM3	To ensure new development respects the existing streetscape and that taller buildings will only be permitted on identified sites, in compliance with the Building Heights Policy for the town, and subject to meeting the criteria set out in the Development Management standards.
P-PM4	To utilise the provisions of the Derelict Sites Act 1990 to encourage the refurbishment of derelict properties.

It is an objective of the Councils:

O-PM1	To carry out a Townscape appraisal of the Town.
O-PM2	To identify further trees within the town worthy of a Tree Protection Order.

5.15 KEY SITES AS ECONOMIC DRIVERS WITHIN THE TOWN CENTRE

There are sufficient lands zoned for business and commercial opportunities within the town and its environs. The Integrated Area Plan 1998 identified a number of key sites for regeneration.

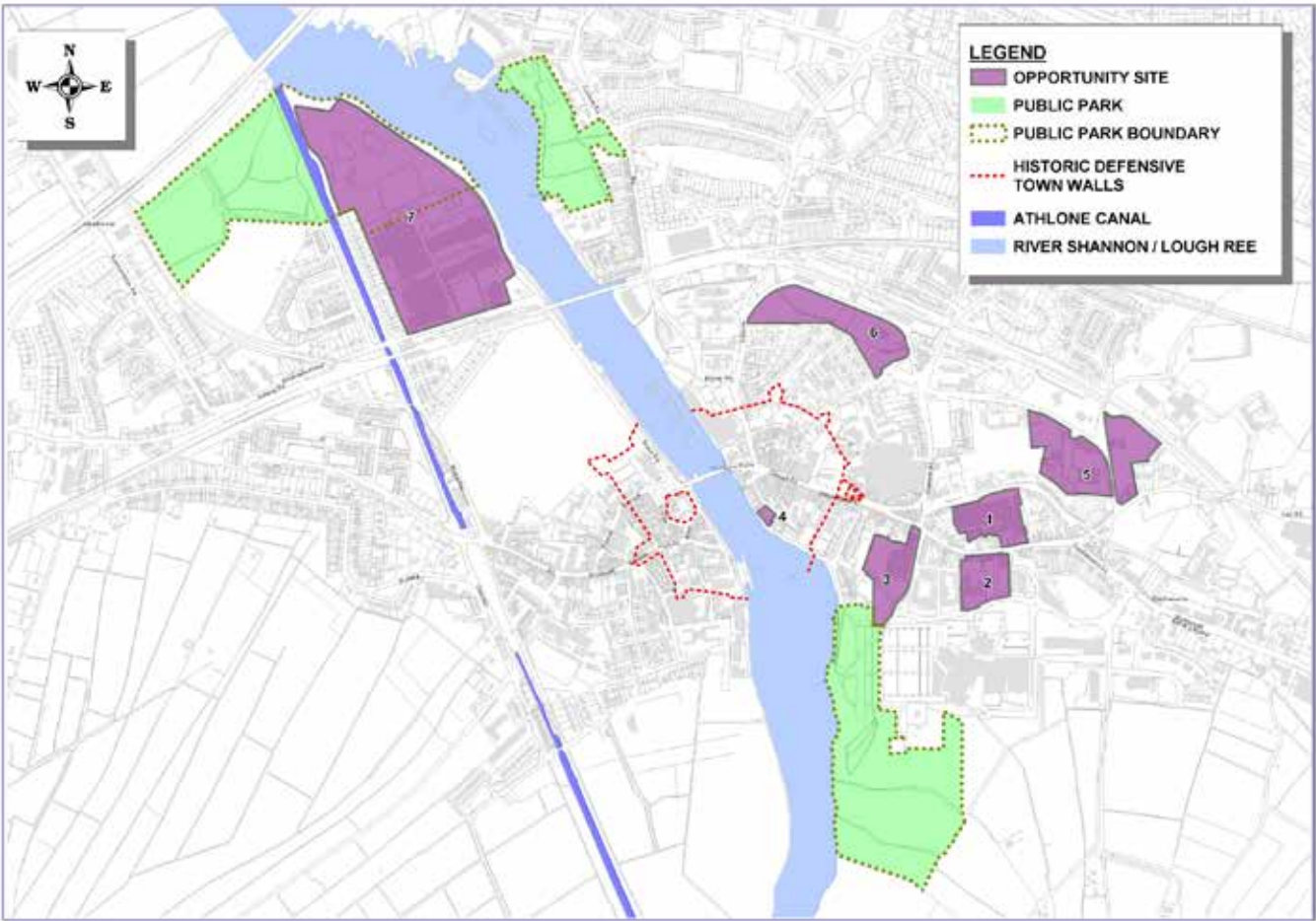
A number of these areas have been brought forward through previous Town Plans and include:

- ☐ The Radisson Hotel site.
- ☐ Inis Oir development
- ☐ The Town Centre Shopping site
- ☐ Civic Centre
- ☐ The Upgrade of St. Mary's Hall and associated community uses.
- ☐ Redevelopment along Connaught Street.
- ☐ Residential development along the west bank.

5.16 KEY SITES POLICY

It is a policy of the Councils:

P-TC1	To promote the commercial development of Connaught Street with an emphasis on tourist activity.
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Map 5.2. Opportunities Sites in Athlone

5.17 OPPORTUNITY SITES

Seven specific opportunity sites have been identified in this strategy for comprehensive redevelopment or refurbishment of existing brownfield lands over the lifetime of the Plan to play a key role in the town centre's rejuvenation and revitalisation.

Proposals involving new town centre development will be encouraged to make effective and efficient use of land, improve the range and diversity of uses and activities and drive economic development within the town centre. An appropriate mix of land uses is sought in each opportunity site so that they integrate with the existing character and function of the town centre and enhance the town’s identity and sustainability.

When considering a specific proposal or application on an opportunity site, the focus will be on the effects of a scheme as well as the site’s location. Considerations such as the degree of integration (either existing or proposed) and the current/future level of accessibility will be key determinants.

Key considerations will include:

- ❑ The nature of the scheme and the extent to which it is complementary to existing retailing/other main town centre uses in the centre.
- ❑ The quality of linkages within the site and connectivity to adjoining streets.
- ❑ The way in which the development will operate as an integral part of the town centre, e.g. links with new or existing public transport routes and whether it will enhance the role of the town centre.

5.18 OPPORTUNITY SITES POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:	
P-OC1	To encourage the development of infill and under-utilised sites in the town centre area, where the commercial or residential function of the town will be strengthened.
P-OC2	To retain buildings and streetscapes of character in the town and that all new development will be required to enhance streetscapes and retain features of interest and vernacular detailing.

It is an objective of the Councils:	
O-OC1	To prepare detailed development briefs for the opportunity sites identified in the Plan.
O-OC2	To investigate designating further areas of the town and individual sites particularly on the west side of the river, to facilitate and encourage development for the purposes of regeneration.

The Opportunity sites identified are:

1. Texas Site.
2. Irishtown Site.
3. Dunnes Stores Site.
4. The Strand.
5. St. Mel’s Loughanaskin.
6. Existing Bus Garage and adjoining lands.
7. Ranelegh Site.

5.19 SPECIFIC OPPORTUNITY SITES

1. TEXAS SITE

This site is located within the edge of the retail core and has an area of 1.339 ha and is an underutilised site occupied by a vacant retail store with car parking. The site lies within the zone of archaeological potential and town centre conservation area.



Map 5.3 Texas Site

Objective for the Site:

To refurbish or redevelop this site to enhance the town centre’s appearance and contribute to the creation of an attractive frontage onto St. Mary’s Place and secure the vitality and viability of the town centre and enhance retail choice. The redevelopment of this site would enhance the town centre’s image and conservation area and improve the public domain at this location.

Uses:

The site is zoned for commercial use.

Built Form:

This site as currently developed does not reflect the tight urban grain of the adjoining properties. Future redevelopment of the site could reduce the massing currently on site and improve accessibility and permeability from John Broderick Street to the main retail core.

2. IRISHTOWN SITE



Map 5.4 Irishtown Site

This site is located to the south of the Texas site and comprises approximately 1ha. A Framework Plan was adopted for this site in 2009. The site lies within the zone of archaeological potential and part of the site lies within the town centre conservation area.

Objective for the Site:

Remove extensive car parking area and improve permeability and connectivity between the main retail core and enhance the street frontage onto John Broderick Street. Provide for a new civic space at Payne’s Lane and open up the view of St. Mary’s Church.

Uses:

The site is zoned for mixed use, including residential/commercial and retail uses.

Built Form:

The site is relatively flat and lends itself to be potentially developed as a perimeter infill development. Building heights would be determined by the surrounding area and subject to impact on residential amenity. The Framework Plan contains detail on the appropriate heights for the site.

3. DUNNES STORES SITE



Map 5.5 Dunnes Stores Site

This site is occupied by Dunnes Stores and has an area of 1.46 ha with a frontage to John Broderick Street and Dublin Gate Street. The site lies within the zone of archaeological potential with the northern part of the site lying within the town centre conservation area.

Objective for the Site:

Enhance the town centre’s land use efficiency and sustainability. A tall building could define this corner within the main retail core and provide a bookend at both junctions. A new building or buildings on this site would have the potential to provide active frontages onto John Broderick Street and provide connectivity to Burgess Park and the town centre.

Uses:

The site is zoned for mixed use.

Built Form:

The land falls from north to south and has an irregular shape. The urban grain of the site is not reflective of the medieval plots elsewhere in the town centre and is much courser. Frontages along the perimeter would be important on this corner site. The scale and appearance of any new development within this site should be of a high quality and respect the local distinctiveness of the town centre and that of nearby older buildings, particularly those within the designated conservation area.

4. THE STRAND



Map 5.6 The Strand

This site is currently in use as a car park area and has an area of 0.08 ha and fronts onto the Shannon. The site lies within the zone of archaeological potential and abuts the town centre conservation area. The site provides a view of the river from the town centre. There are a number of trees on the site. The site lies within the 100 and 1000 year projected flood zone.

Objective for the site:

This site was identified in the Waterfront study as being appropriate for a high quality square to accommodate small to medium events along the waterfront. A building at this location would complement a proposed new bridge over the river to enhance the town centre’s land use efficiency and provide for a much needed urban outdoor public space within the town centre fronting the river capable of supporting events.

Uses:

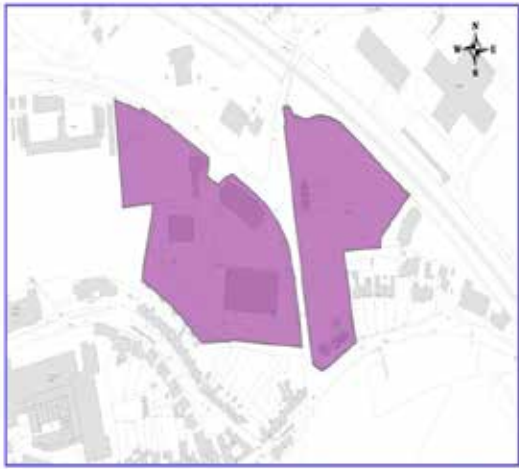
The site has no zoning.

Built Form:

The land is flat and is highly visible from the river. Only water-compatible development, such as docks and marinas, dockside activities that require a waterside location, amenity open space, outdoor sports and recreation, would be considered appropriate in this zone. Development proposals will need to be accompanied by a Site Specific Flood Risk Assessment. The scale of any development on

this site would need to have regard to the residential properties.

5. ST. MEL’S LOUGHANASKIN



Map 5.7 Loughanaskin

This area is located to the north east of the town centre core and is currently an underused site which has been identified for regeneration. Loughanaskin Masterplan was adopted for the area in 2007. The site is 3.15 ha and is divided into two parts separated by Grace Park Road. The site lies outside the zone of archaeological potential and the western part of the site abuts the town centre conservation area.

Objective for the site:

To optimise the potential of a town centre site, to facilitate a mixed residential scheme which will support the commercial core of the town, reinforce neighbourhood identity and enhance the physical character and provide a focus for the area.

Uses:

The site is zoned residential, commercial, educational and open space.

Built Form:

The existing buildings on the site do not reflect the built form of the surrounding area which comprise enclosed blocks fronting the road. The Masterplan for the area proposes a high density mix of uses on the site in perimeter blocks fronting Grace Park Road.

6. EXISTING BUS GARAGE AND ADJOINING LANDS



Map 5.8 Existing bus garage and adjoining CIE Lands

This site is currently occupied by the CIE bus depot and vacant under-utilised adjoining lands on the edge of the town centre next to the railway and bus station. The site is approximately 2.5 ha and the land levels fall from north to south. St. Brigid’s conservation area lies to the south of the site and the railway station is a Protected Structure. A drain runs through the site. The site has been identified for a new road project.

Objective for the site:

To facilitate the development of employment uses, and maximise connectivity and permeability from the train/ bus station to the town. The objective would include the relocation of the bus garage to an out of town centre location. Part of this site was identified in the Athlone Integrated Area Plan 1998 for residential and commercial uses and to accommodate a new road. The site was identified in the building heights policy as a suitable site for a tall building subject to residential amenity, views and setting of the conservation area to the south and railway building being protected.

Uses:

The site is zoned commercial.

Built Form:

Redevelopment of this site should support improved accessibility and links within the town centre, particularly to and between the railway station and the existing retail core. The layout of any proposals should therefore seek to improve pedestrian and cyclist legibility and permeability through the provision of new high quality, convenient, safe and well lit pedestrian connections and cycle routes.

7. RANELEGH SITE



Map. 5.9 Ranelagh Site

This site lies outside the defined town centre but is an important edge of centre site with an area of 11.6ha which flanks the west bank of the river and the north eastern side of the canal. The southern part of the site is currently occupied by Athlone Extrusions and the northern part of the site is a public open space area with playing pitches. There are several trees on the site worthy of a Tree Protection Order. Lough Ree SAC and NHA are to the north of the site. The site was the former Batteries to the Castle and there is a recorded monument on the site. The site lies outside the zone of archaeological potential and within the 100 and 1000 year projected flood zone.

Objective for the site:

This site was identified in the Waterfront Study as being an appropriate site for a new recreational zone including a riverside park and community garden which could be accompanied by a new ecology centre adjoining a new mixed use area. The site was

also identified as being appropriate for a tall landmark building in the building heights policy subject to Building Heights assessment criteria being met. Having regard to the risk of flooding on this site, it has been reserved in the Plan for low vulnerability uses including open space and enterprise and employment, reflecting established uses. Any further development or intensification of use proposed on these lands shall be subject to a Site Specific Flood Risk Assessment, prepared in accordance with the Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines 2009.

Uses:

The site is zoned open space and enterprise and employment.

Built Form:

With the exception of the houses to the west of the site there is no established urban form at this site. The scale of any development on this site would need to have regard to the residential properties. The current road and public transport services are limited to the site. Pedestrian accessibility to the railway station would be improved if a pedestrian footbridge was provided along the existing bridge.

5.20 SITE FOR FARMER’S MARKET IN THE TOWN CENTRE

During the public consultation process a suitable site for a farmer’s/tourist market was considered an issue. Several sites are considered suitable for a farmer’s market or weekly tourist market areas within the town which include St. Mary’s Place, the Civic Square, Market Place and Burgess Park.

It is a policy of the Councils:

P-FM1

To support the operation of events and markets within the town centre core.

Chapter 6 *Transportation & Movement*



6 TRANSPORTATION & MOVEMENT

AIM

To achieve a sustainable, efficient and integrated transport system, high quality connectivity and ease of movement within Athlone, by enhancing the existing strategic transportation infrastructure, and by the achievement of modal change in favour of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport.

6.1 BACKGROUND

There have been considerable traffic management improvements and upgrade of the road network in Athlone in recent years including:

- R916 Moydrum Road.
- N55 Cornamaddy Roundabout.
- Traffic Lights Magazine Road/Talbot Street.
- Cycle routes.
- Traffic Lights at the N6 Interchanges.
- Upgrading of Athlone Relief Road.
- Crescent Junction.

The Councils shall seek to achieve a more balanced and sustainable pattern of movement both within and through the town and shall endeavour to facilitate the provision of a greater choice of transport modes. The Councils recognise that accessibility and mobility for all sections of the community is vital for the future development of the town and therefore the development of an integrated transport policy is of the utmost importance.

6.2 NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

6.2.1 Smarter Travel – A Sustainable Transport Future - A new Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020

Smarter Travel is the new transport policy for Ireland that sets out how the vision of a sustainable travel and transport system can be achieved. The policy recognises the vital importance of continued investment in transport to ensure an efficient economy and

continued social development. The five key goals of this policy are as follows:

- (i) to reduce overall travel demand,
- (ii) to maximise the efficiency of the transport network,
- (iii) to reduce reliance on fossil fuels,
- (iv) to reduce transport emissions, and
- (v) to improve accessibility to transport.

6.2.2 National Cycle Policy Framework 2009-2020

The National Cycle Policy Framework 2009-2020, which is derived from Smarter Travel sets out a national policy for cycling, in order to create a stronger cycling culture, a more friendly environment for cycling and improved quality of life. The vision is that all cities, towns and rural areas will be bicycle friendly. The policy document sets a target of 10% of all trips by bicycle by 2020 and places emphasis on promoting and integrating cycle networks.

6.2.3 Spatial Planning & National Roads – Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2012

These Guidelines set out planning policy considerations relating to development affecting National Primary and Secondary roads, including motorways and associated junctions, outside the 50-60 kmph speed limit zones for towns. The Guidelines seek to achieve and maintain a safe and efficient network of National roads in the broader context of sustainable development strategies, thereby facilitating continued economic growth, while encouraging a shift towards more sustainable travel and transport in accordance with the Smarter Travel policy document. In Athlone, this in particular refers to the M6/N6 bypass, N55, N61 and the N62.

6.2.4 Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets, Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport (DMURS) 2013

The DMURS aims to end the practice of designing streets as traffic corridors, and instead focus on the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users. The manual sets out design guidance and

standards for constructing new and reconfiguring existing urban roads and streets in Ireland, incorporating good planning and design practice and focus on the public realm. It also outlines practical design measures to encourage more sustainable travel patterns in urban areas.

6.2.5 Electric Transport Programme 2008

The “Electric Transport Programme 2008”, seeks to assist Ireland in meeting EU targets on carbon emissions. The target seeks that 10% of the National Road Transport fleet be electrically powered by 2020. The provision of appropriate battery charging infrastructure in car parks and other suitable locations is a means by which the Councils can assist in achieving this objective.

6.3 REGIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

6.3.1 Draft Coordinated Sustainable Transport Plan for the Midland Region 2012-2022 (CSTP)

The CSTP will guide and inform local policy in the progression of sustainable transport, including prioritisation and direction of key transport related investment decisions within the region and in the Linked-Gateway and principal towns. It will identify opportunities for the promotion of sustainable travel within the region and will set out indicators by which trends in travel behaviour and patterns can be assessed to assess progress over time. The CSTP will provide a guidance framework that Local Authorities in the region can reference in the preparation of Sustainable Transport Plans and the development and assessment of transport projects for guidance in the promotion of transport sustainability.

6.4 LOCAL POLICY CONTEXT

6.4.1 Green Routes Strategy Athlone

The Town Council adopted a Green Routes Strategy for Athlone in 2011. The aim of the strategy is to encourage alternative forms of transport within the town and environs, such as walking and cycling, rather than the private car, thereby reducing congestion within the town centre and promoting healthier

lifestyles. The goals which form the basis of the strategy are as follows:

- To promote safe and sustainable alternative modes of travel to the private car within the towns and its environs and reduce reliance on the private car.
- To reduce congestion in the Town Centre.
- To reduce pressure on the environment thereby improving health and increasing tourism in the town and its environs.

The delivery of these goals will require the Councils to work with partners in the private and voluntary sectors together with other sections of the Public Sector. Central to the strategy is the development of a Strategic Cycle Network within Athlone. It is intended that this network will connect the main residential areas to the Town Centre and the main areas of employment including Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT). The aim is to build upon and extend existing cycle lanes in the town. In areas where the provision of cycle lanes is not feasible, traffic calming measures shall be introduced to enable cyclists, pedestrians and motorists to co-exist safely.

6.5 INTEGRATION OF LAND USE PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION

The sustainable integration of land use and transportation is a fundamental principle of the Smarter Travel policy document, which shall inform policies and objectives in this Plan. Land use planning and the provision of transport infrastructure and services will be better integrated if development proposals make provision for good public transport connections and safe routes for walking and cycling to access such connections and local amenities. Land Use and Transportation Strategies (LUTS) also play a vital role in supporting better coordination and integration of development planning. This is particularly pertinent in the context of promoting increased connectivity and permeability within the gateway towns. The Council is committed to preparing a LUTS for

Athlone and to the continued incorporation of the traffic model in conjunction with Roscommon County Council. The Plan shall in addition provide policy and a coordinated consistent approach to development affecting the M6/N6 strategic corridor.

A Strategic Transport Assessment was carried out as part of the Creggan Local Area Plan. This assessment took account of all of the potential development that is included in the current Plan. Therefore, the transportation requirements identified in this assessment have been carried forward into this Plan.

The most direct method of tackling traffic congestion is by providing alternative transport choices to encourage a modal shift to public transport and non car modes, while also focussing local transport policy on developing improved public transport services and other sustainable modes. By providing a compact and sustainable pattern of development, including the provision of a range of residential accommodation types and sizes, in close proximity to places of employment where feasible, the demand for travel will be reduced and the need for private vehicular transport will also reduce.

6.6 TRANSPORT POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:

P-TR1	To support the sustainability principles set out in national and regional policy documents and guidelines, thus ensuring the integration of land use planning and zoning with transportation.
P-TR2	To promote the sustainable development of walking, cycling, public transport and other sustainable forms of transport in Athlone, as an alternative to the private car, by facilitating and promoting the development of necessary infrastructure and by promoting initiatives contained within “Smarter Travel, A Sustainable Transport Future 2009-2020”

P-TR 3	To actively seek to utilise the provisions of Sections 48 and 49 of the Planning & Development Acts 2000 as amended, to secure financial contributions towards the capital costs of providing and/or upgrading of strategic public transport infrastructure services, which benefit development.
P-TR4	To support the implementation of the Coordinated Sustainable Transport Plan for the Midland Region 2012-2022, once finalised.
P-TR5	To implement the Green Routes Strategy for Athlone.

It is an objective of the Councils:

O-TR1	To develop and implement a LUTS for Athlone, in conjunction with Roscommon County Council.
O-TR2	To identify car parks and other suitable locations for the provision of appropriate battery charging infrastructure for electrically powered cars / vehicles as a means by which the Council can assist in achieving a reduction in carbon emissions within Athlone.

6.7 PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The Councils acknowledge the importance of the provision of a high quality public transport service, and will facilitate transport service providers where possible in the expansion of services and improvements in the quality of services on offer. In this regard, the Councils are in full support of upgrading and facilitating the improvement of the national and local bus network and services. Given its central location, Athlone is a natural transportation hub with the availability of frequent bus and rail schedules. Furthermore, CIE are committed to expanding Athlone Station as a central public transportation hub.

6.7.1 Rail

The gateway town of Athlone is positioned on the Galway/Dublin/Westport rail line. Trains operate on each route several times daily. The reinstatement of the rail link between Athlone

and Mullingar would serve to further strengthen public transport interconnectivity by connecting the Galway/Mayo rail line with the Sligo rail line and potentially provide an additional line option for the Galway-Dublin service. This would also facilitate greater accessibility to Athlone and connectivity within the county and also on a national level providing improved cross linkages, with services to the two main stations in the capital and enabling increases on the Galway Dublin rail line. The Councils are committed to supporting and facilitating the re-opening of the Athlone to Mullingar rail line.

Iarnród Éireann in their strategic policy document “Rail Vision 2030: The Future of Rail Transport in Ireland” provide for the maintenance and renewal of the existing rail infrastructure is safeguarded, to avoid the asset being “run down” over time. Investment in track to give journey time improvements of up to 30 minutes is prescribed on key intercity routes such as the Dublin to Galway route, resulting in a journey time of 1 hour 45 minutes for this route. In the longer-term, electrification of key routes including the Dublin to Galway line is promoted. It is also envisaged that capacity will be increased through double-tracking the line from Portarlinton to Athlone.

6.7.2 Light Rail

In the longer term, Athlone’s growth may become sufficient to support a light rail system and development should not be carried out which would prejudice the implementation of such a light rail system, particularly along the main spine of the town: between Battery Ridge and the AIT; or along Regional Roads R446 or R915.

6.7.3 Bus

The bus is seen as a key player in offering an alternative to the private car. The development of a quality bus system as an alternative to private car use is an essential element of an integrated and balanced land use transport system. Athlone is a hub for public bus services. The town is served by bus routes from Dublin, Galway, Westport, Tuam,

Sligo, Belfast, Dundalk, Roscrea and Waterford. Athlone town also has two local bus services providing looped routes, serving the east of the town, including AIT. It is important that these services are retained and supplemented, to maintain access to public services for all citizens.

The provision of Quality Bus Corridors (QBC) is in keeping with the principles of Smarter Travel by encouraging a modal shift to public transport. The aim is to make taking the bus more attractive, thereby taking private vehicles off the roads and accordingly improving overall air quality. The Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022 support the provision of QBC’s, as part of the delivery of a seamless and fully integrated public transport service.

6.8 TAXI & HACKNEY SERVICES

Accessible taxi and hackney services are also an important element in transport provision, providing a demand-responsive 24 hour door-to-door service. Accessible taxis are often the only means of public transport available for those using wheelchairs or with mobility impairments. According to the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, the number of licensed public service vehicles in Athlone as of September 2012, was 98. Of these, there were 87 taxis, 8 hackneys and 3 limousines.

The Councils shall assist taxi movements, where appropriate and practicable, within traffic management schemes and encourage measures to reduce the environmental impact of taxis. Taxi priority will not be afforded where this is likely to be detrimental to the movement or safety of pedestrians and cyclists.

6.9 PARK AND RIDE FACILITIES

The purpose of a Park and Ride facility is to encourage car commuters to transfer to public transport, thereby reducing congestion and promoting public transport. Given the volume of workers in the county who commute daily to Galway and Tullamore and other major centres, the Plan shall seek to provide for Park and Ride facilities. This is in

line with the NTA’s Draft Transport Strategy which supports exploring the potential for bus based Park and Ride sites close to high quality road corridors and provide such facilities where appropriate and feasible.

6.10 RIVER/CANAL TRANSPORT

The River Shannon is fully navigable in Athlone and a number of private companies currently operate boat trips between the Shannon and Lough Ree. The Waterfront Strategy for Athlone provides for increased transportation and movement along the River Shannon. In addition, the Mid Shannon and Lough Ree Amenity Study include objectives to promote waterbuses on the Shannon. The Councils will support initiatives to optimise travel on the Shannon. With regard to the canal in Athlone, consultants were engaged to conduct a planning study on the canal, which includes identifying proposals for increased movement on the canal. In the short-term, it is unlikely that the canal will again be made navigable, nonetheless there is considerable potential to increase pedestrian and cycle movement along its extent.

6.11 PUBLIC TRANSPORT POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is the policy of the Councils:	
P-PT1	To promote and facilitate the establishment of an integrated transportation hub for public transport services at Athlone Station.
P-PT2	To facilitate the development of public transport throughout the Town, linking with transport initiatives in the rural hinterland, particularly where services can benefit the maximum number of people.
P-PT3	To promote the use of and facilitate improvements to existing public transport services and to support initiatives designed to improve bus/coach-rail interchange facilities.
P-PT4	To support the continued integration of national, regional and

	local bus and rail services to ensure the delivery of a seamless and fully integrated public transport service.
P-PT5	To safeguard existing rail infrastructure from inappropriate development and support the improvement of rail transport infrastructure, including the provision of increased frequency of services on the Dublin Galway Line.
P-PT6	To actively promote the re-opening of the Mullingar to Athlone rail line, thereby increasing connectivity between these gateway towns.
P-PT7	To support public transport improvements by reserving corridors for any such improvements free of development, including provision of setbacks along public transport corridors.
P-PT8	To encourage and facilitate the development of a sustainable river-based transport system on the River Shannon, including the development of ferry and waterbus services.

It is an objective of the Councils:	
O-PT1	To provide for improved bus services both within Athlone and between Athlone and Mullingar and Athlone and Tullamore.
O-PT2	To provide for new transport routes by public and private operators throughout Athlone and its environs.
O-PT3	To support the operation of existing bus services and to facilitate the provision of improved facilities for bus users in Athlone, including the provision of set down and parking areas for coaches and bus shelters for passengers.
O-PT4	To support the electrification of railway line between Dublin and Galway and the double tracking of the line between Athlone and Portarlinton.

O-PT5	To provide bus priority measures, including QBC's on existing and planned road infrastructure, where appropriate, in collaboration with the National Transport Authority, Bus Éireann and the NRA.
O-PT6	To facilitate the relocation of the existing Bus Éireann Bus Maintenance Garage to a suitable suburban location.
O-PT7	To provide public transport interchange facilities, including facilities for taxis on the public transport network.
O-PT8	To provide for Park and Ride facilities at appropriate locations in Athlone.
O-PT9	To support the expansion of town bus services.
O-PT10	To encourage and facilitate the development of a Mid-Shannon Waterbus from Athlone to Portumna.
O-PT11	To investigate the feasibility of a seasonal float trip operation between Athlone and Shannonbridge/Clonmacnoise.
O-PT12	To provide pedestrian and cycle linkages across the River Shannon and canal.

6.12 WALKING & CYCLING

Walking and cycling are the most sustainable modes of transport and are key components to movement and accessibility in urban and inter-urban areas. Benefits accruing from same for both the environment and population, include reducing air and noise pollution and traffic congestion as well as contributing to healthy more active lifestyles.

If walking and cycling are to be successfully promoted as realistic alternatives to the private car, we need to ensure that they are, as far as possible, a safe and pleasant experience.

Pedestrian and cycle facilities will be most successful where they form a coherent network, place an emphasis on safety, directly

serve the main areas where people wish to travel, provide priority over vehicular traffic at junctions, are free from obstructions and have adequate public lighting. In addition, support facilities such as secure parking and changing/showering facilities at places of employment are a key determinant in encouraging people to cycle.

The promotion of walking and cycling will be focused not just on measures for travel to work/school purposes, but will also focus on the development of routes for leisure and tourism purposes, and integration with existing public transport facilities.

Athlone is an elongated town and with the exception of a few areas notably around Retreat, the overall topography supports cycling and pedestrian activity. The Councils have engaged extensively in developing an integrated cycle/walking network under the Smarter Travel Programme to ensure viable alternatives to car use. Investment in cycle infrastructure will continue as resources allow during the Plan duration.

6.12.1 NATIONAL CYCLE NETWORK

It is the Council's intention, pending its reinstatement as a railway, to develop a greenway incorporating a public pedestrian / cycle route along the entirety of the disused Mullingar-Athlone railway, within the rail corridor. It is anticipated that this initiative will appeal to both locals and tourists alike by creating an alternative off-road link across the county. The proposed Greenway will complement existing cycle pathways and infrastructure in the county and will form part of the National Cycle Network.

Ireland's first National Cycling Policy Framework was adopted in 2009, the stated vision of which is to "create a strong cycling culture in Ireland". The development of a national network of both rural and urban cycle routes is a specific objective of the National Cycling Policy Framework. The policy framework identifies the need to deliver high quality cycle routes on a nationwide basis so as to encourage cycling for transport, leisure,

recreation and tourism. The delivery of interurban routes, in the form of a National Cycle Network (NCN) would be in addition to the recognised need for the provision of safe cycling routes within urban settlements and the delivery of safe routes to schools.

The NRA was tasked by the Minister of Transport and Sport to undertake a Scoping Study for a National Cycle Network, which was published in August 2010. An advisory group under the auspices of the National Trails Advisory Committee and with members such as Bord Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland and Coillte was set up.

The study identified thirteen potential route corridors between urban centres of a population of 10,000, which total 2,000km in length. The advisory group agreed that the next steps for the National Cycle Network project should be to carry out detailed “Route Feasibility and Delivery” studies on a selected corridor. (e.g. Dublin to Athlone as part of the Dublin to Galway corridor) and to carry out a feasibility study and route selection report. In this regard, the vision for the Dublin to Galway Greenway is “To develop a world class traffic free trail from Dublin to Galway, which is of a scale and singularity that will allow Ireland to tap in to the growing tourism market for cycling which has been identified”. It is proposed that the National Cycle Network will extend between Mullingar and Athlone along the entirety of the disused Mullingar Athlone railway.

Fig. 6.1. Population aged 5 year and over by means of travel to Work, School or College in Athlone Administrative Area.

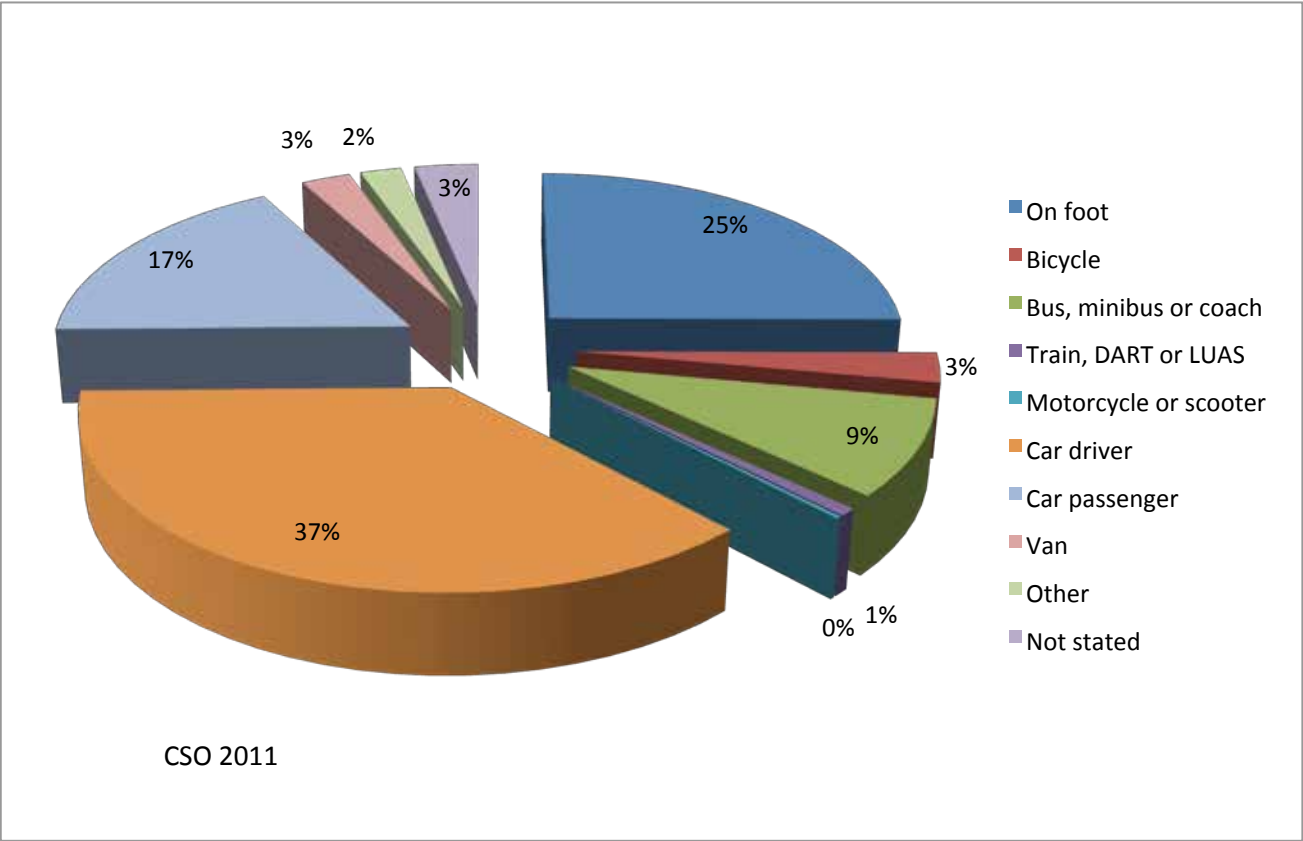


Fig. 6.1 illustrates the mode of transport used by residents within Athlone Town boundary when travelling to work, school or college. The majority of residents (54%) travel by car, with 25% on foot and only 3% cycle. The census records also indicate that 55% stated that their journey time to work, school or College took less than 15 minutes. The Council seeks to influence people’s travel behaviour towards more sustainable options. In this connection, it will seek to develop both pedestrian and cycle links within Athlone town and environs, in order to encourage modal shift and reduce car dependency. This approach is in keeping with the principles of Smarter Travel, which seek to promote walking and cycling as a viable mode of transport, particularly for short journeys.

6.13 PARK AND STRIDE

The purpose of a “Park and Stride” facility is to encourage car users to transfer to a healthy and ecologically sound mode of transport, i.e. walking for the final element of their journey.

6.14 WALKING & CYCLING POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is the policy of the Councils:

P-WC1	To encourage and facilitate safe walking and cycling routes in Athlone, as a viable alternative to the private car, in accordance with initiatives contained within “Smarter Travel, A Sustainable Transport Future 2009-2020”
P-WC2	To develop walking and cycling strategies within Athlone and between the Linked Gateway towns of Athlone and Mullingar and Athlone and Tullamore.
P-WC3	To improve the streetscape environment for pedestrians, cyclists, and people with special mobility needs, by providing facilities to enhance safety and convenience.
P-WC4	To provide for sustainable transport movement at the earliest design stage of development

	proposals to ensure accessibility by all modes of transport and all sections of society.
P-WC5	To implement proposals for pedestrian and cycle routes along the River Shannon as prescribed in the Athlone Waterfront Strategy.
P-WC6	To support and facilitate the development through Athlone of the National Cycle Network between Dublin and Galway, including the construction of a new pedestrian and cycle Bridge across the River Shannon, subject to the requirements of the Habitats Directive, Water Framework Directive and environmental sensitivities identified in the SEA being addressed.
P-WC7	To support and facilitate the provision of a cycleway and walkway in Athlone within the corridor of the disused Mullingar to Athlone railway line, pending the re-opening of this line as a railway, subject to environmental sensitivities identified in the SEA being addressed.

It is an objective of the Councils:

O-WC1	To further the development of an integrated cycle network in Athlone.
O-WC2	To provide for signal controlled pedestrian facilities at all crossing points with an audible signal and dished kerbs with tactile paving to assist visually and mobility-impaired persons in crossing roads.
O-WC3	To provide a cycleway and walkway in the town within the corridor of the Mullingar to Athlone disused railway, pending its reopening as a railway line, together with a pedestrian and cycleway link to the Roscommon County Boundary, including all related signage, way-marking

	and all associated site works and connections. Development of the cycleway and walkway shall be carried out in a manner such that landscape impacts are minimised and the project will be subject to Appropriate Assessment and the requirements of the Water Framework, Floods and EIA Directives.		and Lissywollen South/Retreat, to overcome barriers to access and movement created by the N6 and rail lines.
O-WC4	To provide for and maintain the provision of covered secure cycle parking facilities in public car parks, on-street cycle facilities and at public transport nodes.	O-WC12	To provide for safer routes to Schools within the town centre.
O-WC5	To investigate the potential for providing a number of “park and stride” sites in Athlone, which would provide convenient pedestrian access to the town centre, thereby reducing the distance of car journeys and congestion in Athlone town centre.	O-WC13	To encourage and facilitate the provision of walking and cycling links both along and across the canal in Athlone.
O-WC6	To promote the provision of covered shelters for cycles in development schemes.	O-WC14	To provide a network of on-road and greenway pedestrian and cycle routes within the town.
O-WC7	To provide a pedestrian bridge across the River Shannon south of the existing Town Bridge.	O-WC15	To provide a new pedestrian and cycleway bridge across the River Shannon, in conjunction with the development of the Dublin-Galway National Cycle Network, subject to habitat protection requirements and environmental sensitivities identified in the SEA being addressed.
O-WC8	To upgrade the streetscape to include modifications to footpaths to achieve traffic calming and a safer environment for pedestrians and cyclists in the town centre.	O-WC16	To provide a walking/cycling route from the Athlone Mullingar railway line in Athlone, to the River Shannon, via a new bridge over the Shannon to the west bank and onwards to the Roscommon County boundary, with the potential to connect to Athlone Castle and southwards around the town. This route shall be subject to the requirements of the Habitat, Water Framework and SEA Directives.
O-WC9	To encourage and facilitate the provision of a walkway/cycle route along the course of the AI River to the south of the town, to the River Shannon, thus providing an alternative off-road link to the town centre for pedestrians and cyclists.	O-WC17	To provide a network of pedestrian and cycle routes within the town in conjunction with the development of the Dublin Galway National Cycle Network, subject to habitat protection requirements and environmental sensitivities identified in the SEA being addressed.
O-WC10	To provide a pedestrian boardwalk along the West Bank of the River Shannon from the Luan Gallery to the Canal.		
O-WC11	To provide north-south pedestrian and cycle linkages between Curragh-Lissywollen		

6.15 NATIONAL ROADS

Athlone occupies a strategic location on the national route network given that the M6, N6, N55, N61 and N62 traverse the town and its environs. The Councils recognise the importance of Athlone’s strategic road infrastructure in providing intra and inter county movement of goods and services. The Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022 support the continued provision and enhancement of roads linking the Gateway Towns, and in particular the prioritisation of investment in the National Secondary road network. The improvement of the National road network, including more direct travelling routes between cities and gateways creates a demand for development management policies at important interchanges and along the national routes to safeguard investment in the network and protect capacity and safety.

Considerable investment has been made in upgrading the N6 Relief Road and its associated interchanges in recent years. The Councils will seek to ensure that the capacity on National roads is utilised appropriately to enable such roads to continue to perform their intended function into the future by:

- Protecting undeveloped lands adjoining National roads and junction development to cater for potential capacity enhancements.
- Ensuring that capacity enhancements and or traffic management measures will be put in place to facilitate new development and
- Improving the operational efficiency of the regional and local roads and transportation infrastructure e.g. where appropriate, promoting new regional and local road networks and alternative modes.

6.15.1 The National Roads Traffic Management Study 2011

The study states that the N6 strategic bypass in Athlone functions well in providing for inter-urban connections. Nevertheless, it is recommended that future growth in Athlone will need to be focused on a pattern of sustainable

development, based on the sequential growth of the town centre and surrounding built up area. It is further stated that uncoordinated piecemeal development at or adjacent to National Roads should be avoided.

6.16 NATIONAL ROAD POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is the policy of the Councils:	
P-NR1	To safeguard the strategic role of the N6 Bypass and associated junctions in catering for the safe and efficient movement of inter-urban and inter-regional traffic.
P-NR2	To restrict access to National roads, in order to protect the substantial investment in the National road network, to improve carrying capacity and safety and to prevent the premature obsolescence of the network.
P-NR3	To support and provide for improvements to the National road network, including reserving corridors for proposed routes, free of development, so as not to compromise future road schemes.
P-NR4	To prevent the undermining of the strategic transport function of national roads, including junctions, by providing an adequate local transport infrastructure, as advocated in the DEHLG/DoT/DTO publication “Traffic Management Guidelines”.
P-NR5	To prevent the provision of large retail centres located adjacent or close to existing, new or planned national roads/motorways, in accordance with the provisions of the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012 and the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines 2005.
P-NR6	To prevent the creation of additional access points from new developments or the generation of increased traffic from existing accesses to National roads, to which speed limits greater than 60kmph apply.

It is an objective of the Councils:	
O-NR1	To require all applications for significant development proposals to be accompanied by a Traffic and Transport Assessment (TTA) and Road Safety Audit (RSA) to be carried out by suitably competent persons, in accordance with the NRA's Traffic and Transport Assessment Guidelines.
O-NR2	To reinforce linkages between Athlone and the Northern Development Area/ Border Region/ Northern Ireland by strengthening the N55 route.
O-NR3	To upgrade the N62 route, thereby increasing connectivity between the M6 and M8.

6.17 URBAN ROADS & TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

The Town Council is responsible for the construction and maintenance of 60km of urban/local roads within the Town Council area and Westmeath County Council is responsible for the construction and maintenance of the regional road network. The Councils recognise the important role a safe and efficient road system can play in the economic, social and cultural development of the Town and its contribution to regional and national prosperity.

New urban roads should be designed to have an ‘urban character’ with appropriate walking and cycling linkages located within a landscaped setting. The Councils shall seek to provide new distributor roads to permit new development to take place where the need for such roads is identified in Action Area Plans, to provide links serving the transport nodes and in the promotion of economic activity.

The Councils shall seek the reduction of through-traffic entering Athlone town centre and encourage measures to restrain the use of motor vehicles, especially commuting by car, for the benefit of local traffic, public

transport, pedestrians and cyclists. The Councils will endeavour to reduce the adverse effects of heavy goods vehicles within the Town. Where new roads have been provided and designed for their use, the Councils will discourage HGV’s from travelling unnecessarily through the town centre and other urban areas.

6.17.1 Loughandonning Link Road

The Loughandonning Link Road is a key local road link that will provide strategic access to the town centre from the Creggan Local Area Plan lands to the east of Athlone. The Link Road will provide relief in terms of traffic volumes to the Dublin Road (R446) and in particular should relieve the Dublin Road of all heavy goods vehicle traffic that is serving the town centre. It will extend along the southern edge of the Plan area and is to be accessed through Golden Island. The road will be designed as a main through route with attendant tree line set within a landscaped framework. Access will be provided from the Dublin Road to the Loughandonning Link Road via a number of existing and proposed connections.

6.17.2 New Development Areas

The Creggan Local Area Plan (LAP) provides for the development of a significant land bank to the east of Athlone, including the development of a Strategic Gateway Zone with an international trading profile. Such development has been identified as a major generator of traffic affecting both the National road network (M6 and N6 bypass) and local roads. The Plan was subject to a Strategic Transport and Traffic Assessment, which recommended a number of upgrades to the local road network and provision of public transport services, including bus services, together with pedestrian and cycle infrastructure to serve the area.

6.18 CAR PARKING

The management of parking in Athlone is important to its efficient economic development. Providing for additional long stay parking in towns encourages further use

of private cars and makes public transport a less attractive or viable option. Access to the town centre is essential for the successful operation of business. Where journey lengths require use of motorised transport and public transport in the form of local bus services or commuter rail services are not available, provision must be made for use of private vehicles, and this includes parking facilities.

There is a balance to be achieved between facilitating necessary parking in the short term, and the overall objective, of having improved public transport as a viable alternative and thus discouraging use of private cars. That can only be achieved in the medium term.

It is accepted that journeys to the town centre are often multifunctional and that shared use is made of public parking facilities to an extent not experienced in out of centre locations. In this regard, it is Council policy that a reduced car parking requirement will operate in Athlone town centre, in order to encourage the establishment and the expansion of businesses in the town, and thereby strengthen the town’s economic viability. The Councils aim is to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of parking spaces to support town centre activity and that these spaces are effectively managed.

The Councils approach to parking is therefore framed by the following aims:

- To improve and enhance parking facilities in the town, in order to relieve and prevent traffic congestion and generally enhance the amenity of the area.
- To pursue a policy of access for those with limited mobility in terms of parking provision.
- To promote off street parking as opposed to on street parking.
- To manage public car parking spaces to achieve more frequent and greater turnover.

6.19 MOBILITY MANAGEMENT PLANS

Mobility planning by business and institutions that have high numbers of employees is a way of promoting sustainable means of access, reducing traffic congestion in urban areas and making more efficient use of land by reducing the need for car parking. The Councils consider Mobility Management to be a suitable mechanism by which new development can support the objectives of sustainable development and the achievement of reduced car dependency.

Mobility Management Plans will be required to accompany planning applications for significant new development or trip intensive developments.

Mobility Management Plans must address:

- The need to provide adequate, affordable and sustainable means of access for employees, visitors and others (e.g. students).
- The need to promote and support alternative means of transport to the private car, i.e. public transport, cycling, walking.
- The need to minimise the impact of traffic and parking generated by the business or institution in the surrounding areas.
- The need to manage on-site parking (if any is to be provided).

6.20 GENERAL ROADS & TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is the policy of the Councils:	
P-TM1	To improve the standards and safety of public roads and to protect the investment of public resources in the provision, improvement and maintenance of the public road network.
P-TM2	To increase the safety of children at schools by assessing safe routes to schools for school children and by the installation of traffic management measures at school premises.

P-TM3	To promote road safety measures throughout the town centre, including traffic calming, road signage and parking.	O-TM4	To manage on-street and off-street car-parking to accommodate longer term parking in less convenient and under-utilised off street and out of centre car parks.
P-TM4	To manage the provision of on street parking and to promote the provision of off-street car parks at edge of- town centre locations and to reduce on street parking in the town centre.	O-TM5	To favour purpose built off-street car parks including multi-storey car-parks, in preference to on-street parking.
P-TM5	To ensure that environmental improvements, traffic calming and parking are provided in a way that will respect and enhance the town centre.	O-TM6	To seek the provision of off-street car parking in new residential development.
P-TM6	To restrict new accesses onto regional roads, where the 80km per hour speed limit applies, in order to protect the carrying capacity and safety of such roads.	O- TM7	To optimise the use of the existing parking stock, by increasing turnover, by increasing occupancy at under-utilised locations and to direct traffic to locations where spare capacity is available.
P-TM7	To secure vibrant streets that are permeable and well connected with appropriate pedestrian and cycle infrastructure.	O-TM8	To seek the provision and improvement of parking arrangements for people with disabilities.
P-TM8	To provide traffic calming throughout the town centre to create an environment in which vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians can safely co-exist.	O-TM9	To require Mobility Management Plans to be submitted with applications for trip intensive developments.
P-TM9	To apply the principles of the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (2013) in relation to the design and upgrade of streets in the town.	O-TM10	To ensure that a high standard of design, layout and landscaping accompanies any proposal for surface car parking.
It is an objective of the Councils:		O-TM11	To develop and implement a HGV Management Strategy for the town.
O-TM1	To seek the reduction of through-traffic entering Athlone Town Centre.	O-TM12	To improve existing streets in terms of pedestrian and cycle facilities, landscape and urban quality.
O-TM2	To carry out specific road improvement/maintenance works as outlined in Table 6.1, subject to environmental and habitats protection requirements.	O-TM13	To provide a new north-south avenue from the Dublin Road with appropriate pedestrian and cycleway infrastructure connecting the Chadwick site with the new Loughandonning Link Road.
O-TM3	To progressively improve all urban roads and footpaths and maintain these to the highest possible standards, having regard to the availability of finance and amenity and townscape requirements.	O-TM14	To improve existing junctions between the R446 and the L5414/L40215 and the R446 and the L40212.
		O-TM15	To realign the L5414/L40215 and increase the capacity thereof.

O-TM16	To overcome the barriers to movement associated with existing railway lines and the River AI, by establishing new pedestrian and cycle connections.
O-TM17	To require that any new/existing mammal mitigation measures installed during road construction /upgrades shall be managed and repairs carried out where necessary.

Table 6.1 Schedule of Road Improvement Schemes in Athlone

Objective No:	Road No.	Description
O-TM18	R916 Garrycastle Realignment	Realignment of the R916 (700m) and construction of new road bridge over the Mullingar rail line.
O-TM19	Rail Link Road	Completion of new road between Coosan Road and Crescent Junction
O-TM20	Cornamaddy - Coosan Link	Provision of Cornamaddy - Coosan Link
O-TM21	R446	Roscommon Road/ Baylough Road junction improvement
O-TM22	R446	Junction improvement at R446 / Athlone Business Park / Garrycastle Business Park Junctions
O-TM23		Provide Loughandonning Link Road from Creggan to Golden Island, including associated links to the town centre.
O-TM24	R446/N62	R446 road widening to 4 lanes and improvement to urban standard, including junctions as required by the development of the Creggan Area, over a length of 1.4km from the Creggan roundabout to the N62 junction at Fardrum
O-TM25	R446/ N62	Creggan roundabout capacity enhancement

Chapter 7 *Water, Drainage & Environmental Services*



7. WATER, DRAINAGE & ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

AIM:

To provide, improve and extend water, wastewater, surface water and flood alleviation services throughout Athlone and its environs, and achieve improved environmental protection, including providing for adaptation to climate change.

7.1 TRANSFER TO IRISH WATER

In accordance with the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 (No. 50 of 2013), a range of statutory water services functions transferred from Local Authorities to Irish Water from 1st January 2014.

The Water Services (No.2) Act 2013 provides that strategic planning and investment in water services infrastructure will be provided for by the preparation by Irish Water of a Water Services Strategic Plan allied to rolling Capital Investment Plans.

The Act provides that such Plans will be shaped by a number of wider policy requirements including spatial planning, particularly the National Spatial Strategy, Regional Planning Guidelines and the Local Authority Development Plans.

For the purposes of policies and objectives cited in this Plan in relation to Water and Wastewater, reference to the Local Authority or Westmeath County Council, shall be interpreted as applying to Irish Water.

7.2 LEGISLATIVE/POLICY CONTEXT

The Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020 has been prepared taking account of the following policy documents and legislation.

Water

- EU Water Framework Directive 2000
- Water Services Act 2007
- Drinking Water Regulations 2007
- Water Services Investment Programme 2010-2013

Wastewater

- EU Wastewater Treatment Directive
- Wastewater Discharge (Authorisation) Regulations 2007

Flooding

- EU Floods Directive 2007
- Planning System & Flood Risk Management Guidelines
- Shannon CFRAM

Climate Change

- National Climate Change Strategy 2007-2012

7.3 WATER SUPPLY

Water supply represents no foreseeable constraint to the continued growth of Athlone as the supply for the Town is sourced from the River Shannon. Currently the water treatment plant in Athlone abstracts approximately 500m³/hr, or 3 million gallons per day (MGD) which is distributed to the four main reservoirs at Annagh, Ardnaglug, Battery Heights and Coosan. Current demand is approximately 2MGD. The 2008 upgrade to the Athlone Treatment Plant was an interim upgrade pending construction of a new water treatment plant at Killinure, which would abstract up to a maximum 40.9MLD (or 9 MGD) to serve the South Westmeath Water Supply Scheme, which includes Athlone and its environs and a large area of South Westmeath.

The Councils have received funding under the ERDF for watermains rehabilitation /replacement in Athlone Town, totalling €5million, which will reduce unaccounted for water in the Town and improve the security of supply to consumers. The Councils have already replaced approximately 5km of main in Coosan, at a cost of €1million.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has prepared a handbook on the "Implementation of Regulations for Water Services Authorities for Public Water Supplies". This handbook explains the duty of

Water Service Authorities to supply wholesome and clean water defined by standards together with monitoring requirements which must be met by the Councils.

7.3.1 Water Supply Projects

The Water Services Investment Programme (WSIP) 2010 - 2012 has been extended to 2013, and is now cited as the WSIP 2010 - 2013. The main goal of this programme is to ensure that the timing and scale of water services investment facilitates economic and other development, compliance with statutory requirements for drinking water and wastewater treatment and the achievement of environmental sustainability objectives. The South Westmeath Water Supply Scheme is included in the Water Services Investment Programme 2010-2013. The Council has obtained a Water Abstraction Order for 40.9MLD but the scheme has not advanced to detailed design owing to the current economic situation.

It is an objective of both the Council and the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022 that the South-Westmeath Water Supply Scheme is progressed.

7.3.2 Conservation of Water Supply

Conservation is an essential element in the Council's Water Management Strategy even where adequate supplies exist, to ensure optimal use of natural resources. Conservation measures include not only the monitoring of usage of water and early detection of leaks but also an awareness programme for consumers.

The Water Conservation Unit of the Council works to reduce the current level of water loss on the 1200 km of distribution mains throughout the county. This programme will continue over the duration of the Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020.

7.4 WATER POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is the policy of the Councils:	
P-WT1	To provide water, sufficient in quantity and quality to serve the needs of the existing and future population and to promote the sustainable management of the Towns water supply.
P-WT2	To facilitate the implementation of the relevant provisions of Water Pollution legislation.
P-WT3	To prepare Water Services Strategic Plan(s) in compliance with the Water Services Act 2007.
P-WT4	To ensure that all drinking water supplies comply with the European Union Drinking Water Directive 98/83/EC as given effect in Irish law by the European Communities (Drinking Water) (No. 2) Regulations 2007, as may be amended.
P-WT5	To seek to comply with Directive 2006/7/EC on bathing water as implemented by the Bathing Water Quality Regulations 2008 (S.I. No. 79 of 2008) and in particular to ensure bathing waters achieve "sufficient or better status by 2015" and increase the number of bathing waters classified as 'good' or 'excellent'.
P-WT6	To ensure that in the case of all developments where public mains are available or likely to be available, the development will be required to connect into them.
P-WT7	To ensure that all drinking water supplies conform with the relevant recommendations set out in The Provision and Quality of Drinking Water in Ireland: A Report for the Years 2007-2008 (EPA Office of Environment Enforcement, 2009).
P-WT8	To promote water conservation measures within Athlone by requiring, where appropriate, the installation of water meters in all

new residential units and commercial development and in units where planning permission is required for an extension.

It is an objective of the Councils:

O-WT1	To implement the Water Services Investment Programme 2010 - 2013 and all subsequent Water Services Investment Programmes.
O-WT2	To continue the implementation of the Water Conservation Programme, including the commitment to water conservation and leakage reduction within Athlone and its environs and promote awareness of water conservation measures and techniques.
O-WT3	To prepare a Water Conservation Strategy for Athlone Town.
O-WT4	To apply water pricing in accordance with water pricing policies as adopted.
O-WT5	To implement the South Westmeath Water Supply Scheme.

7.5 WATER QUALITY AND GROUNDWATER PROTECTION

The EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) sets out a new approach to the protection and enhancement of the country’s water resources. The fundamental objective of the WFD is to maintain the high quality status of waters where it exists, preventing any deterioration in the existing status of waters and achieving at least “good status” in relation to all waters by 2015. The WFD is complemented by Directive (2006/118/EC) on the protection of groundwater against pollution and deterioration and Directive (2008/105/EC) on environmental quality standards in the field of water policy. For the purposes of the WFD, Athlone and its environs are located within the Shannon River Basin District Region.

River Basin Management Plans (RBMP’s) examine all of the issues impacting on water quality and bringing it to good quality status. Delivering the plans is a major challenge for Local Authorities both in financial terms and also in monitoring and negotiations to bring about the necessary improvements. The core objectives of the RBMP’s are as follows:

- Achieve protected areas objectives.
- Prevent deterioration.
- Restore good status.
- Reduce chemical pollution.

Ground waters are of importance as a water source for potable water for private wells, group schemes and Local Authority supplies and for use in a range of commercial activities. Groundwater directly and indirectly contributes to, and sustains a variety of important ecosystems, the most important of which in Westmeath include turloughs and fens, in particular rich fens and flushes and marl lakes. In many rivers, more than 50% of the annual flow is derived from groundwater and more significantly, in low flow periods in summer, more than 90% is groundwater. If groundwater becomes contaminated, surface water quality can also be affected and so the protection of groundwater resources is an important aspect of sustaining surface water quality. Groundwater directly and indirectly contributes to, and sustains a variety of important ecosystems such as the Shannon Callows.

The Councils ensure that groundwater is protected by ensuring compliance with the following:

- The appropriate control of development in areas of high groundwater vulnerability, having regard to the Groundwater Vulnerability Maps.
- Implementation of the Programme of Measures as required in the Shannon River Basin Management Plan.
- Licensing of discharges of effluent to groundwater, having particular regard to the requirements of the EC

Environmental Objectives (Groundwater) Regulations, 2010 (S.I. No. 9 of 2010).

- Implementation of the EC (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations, 2010 (S.I. No. 610 of 2010), the so-called "Gap Regulations", which give effect to several EU Directives including in relation to protection of waters against pollution from agricultural sources ("the Nitrates Directive"), dangerous substances in water, and protection of groundwater.

It is essential that ground water resources and abstraction points are recognised and such sources are protected and safeguarded in the interest of the common good and public health. In this regard, developments shall be strictly controlled where such development would compromise ground water quality.

7.6 GROUNDWATER POLICIES & OBJECTIVE

It is the policy of the Councils:

P-GW1	To ensure, through the implementation of the Shannon International River Basin Management Plan and its associated Programme of Measures and any other associated legislation, the protection and improvement of all drinking water, surface water and ground waters.
P-GW2	To implement the EC (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations, 2010 (S.I. No. 610 of 2010)
P-GW3	To ensure that the licensing of discharges of effluent to groundwater, is in accordance with the requirements of the EC Environmental Objectives (Groundwater) Regulations, 2010 (S.I. No. 9 of 2010)
P-GW4	To protect groundwater resources and associated habitats and species, including the Shannon Callows in accordance with the

requirements of the Groundwater Directive (2006/118/EC) and the Habitats Directive.

P-GW5	To protect and safeguard Protected Areas on the Water Framework Directive Register of Protected Areas.
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It is an objective of the Councils:

O-GW1	To promote public awareness of water quality issues and the measures required to protect both surface water and groundwater bodies.
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7.7 WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT

The development of the town’s wastewater and surface water drainage system is essential to facilitate the continued growth of Athlone. The Athlone Wastewater Treatment Plant, which is located in the townlands of Loughandonning and Ankers Bower, has capacity of 30,000 population equivalent (pe).

The Water Services Investment Programme 2010 – 2013 (WSIP) provides for the Athlone Sewerage Improvement Scheme. The scheme is required to address pollution issues and to meet statutory environmental or public health requirements and the requirements of the Shannon River Management Plan.

The Councils will have regard to all relevant waste water legislation particularly the Waste Water Discharge (Authorisation) Regulations 2007. The Councils shall secure the taking of adequate measures by land users in the treatment and disposal of effluent to prevent the pollution of rivers and watercourses generally and to safeguard human health and animal, fish and plant life.

7.7.1 EPA Code of Practice 2009 - Code of Practice Wastewater treatment and Disposal Systems serving single houses (p.e. ≤ 10) (CoP)

The purpose of this CoP is to provide guidance on the provision of wastewater treatment and disposal systems for new single houses with a

population equivalent (p.e.) of less than or equal to 10 and contains the following:

- An assessment methodology to determine site suitability for on-site wastewater treatment systems and to identify minimum environmental protection requirements.
- A methodology to select suitable wastewater treatment systems for sites in un-sewered rural areas.
- Information on the design and installation of septic tank systems, filter systems and packaged treatment systems.
- Information on tertiary treatment systems.
- Maintenance requirements.

It shall be a policy of the Councils to require that individual septic tank drainage systems be provided in accordance with the standards set out in the aforesaid Code of Practice.

7.8 WASTEWATER POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is the policy of the Councils:

P-WST1	To develop and expand existing wastewater infrastructure for the town, in order to facilitate the supply of serviced land and the continued growth of the town in a sustainable manner.
P-WST2	To ensure that public wastewater collection and treatment infrastructure fully complies with the requirements of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Regulations 2001 and 2004 and promote, as appropriate, specific provisions for the implementation of the relevant recommendations set out in the recent Focus on Urban Waste Water Discharges in Ireland Report (EPA, 2012).
P-WST3	To prevent zoned land being developed unless sufficient waste water treatment capacity is available to conform to the objectives of the relevant River Basin Management Plan.

P-WST4	To require that wastewater treatment and disposal systems for new single houses in unserviced areas are implemented in accordance with the 2009 EPA Code of Practice - Code of Practice Wastewater treatment and Disposal Systems serving single houses (p.e. ≤ 10)
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It is an objective of the Councils:

O-WST1	To implement wastewater projects in accordance with the Water Services Investment Programme 2010 - 2013 and all subsequent Water Services Investment Programmes.
O-WST2	To ensure that all new developments shall be provided with separate foul and surface water networks. In redevelopments, combined systems shall be separated where feasible.
O-WST3	To promote the changeover from septic tanks to mains connections in Athlone.

7.9 FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT

Flooding is a natural phenomenon of the hydrological cycle. In Athlone, the most common causes are seasonal flooding of the River Shannon, flooding from the AI River, and the inadequacy of existing stormwater pipe networks to cope with extreme rainfall events. The frequency, pattern and severity of flooding are expected to increase as a result of climate change. Accordingly, it is more important than ever to take account of flood risk in spatial planning.

Flooding cannot be completely eliminated, but its impacts can be minimised with proactive and careful management of catchments and identified flood risk areas and by ensuring that any development does not individually or cumulatively give rise to new flood risk. In order to minimise the impact of an increased future flood risk, there are various steps that Local Authorities can take.

These include flood protection works, stormwater attenuation and more significantly, avoidance of development in floodplains subject to flooding except in very limited circumstances.

7.9.1 Flooding in Athlone

There is a history of flood events associated with the River Shannon. The Shannon flood event in November 2009, is the most recent flood event affecting Athlone town. A paper by Cunnane & Cawley delivered at the Irish National Hydrology Conference in Athlone on 16th November 2010, identified the November 2009 flood event as representing the historic maximum flood levels in the River Shannon for the area between Lough Allen and Lough Derg. On 25th November 2009, the level on the River Shannon peaked at Athlone providing the highest level on record. The estimated return period was in excess of 150 years.

The AI River rises east of Athlone in the townland of Upper Moydrum in raised bog to the northeast of the town. The channel is approximately 6km long. The source is fed by the bog. The river flows south eastward through the lands of Creggan Lower and Garrycastle and then eastward, prior to discharging into the Shannon downstream of Athlone in the townland of Golden Island. The AI River is a very important watercourse as it provides the habitat and breeding ground for brown trout and Lamprey eel. According to OPW records, there are two recorded recurring flood events associated with the AI River, one at Loughandonning and one at Derries.

A number of studies have been commissioned by the Councils with regard to the management of the AI River as follows:

- “Westmeath County Council AI River Improvement Preliminary Report” by PH McCarthy & Partners, July 2002.
- “Westmeath County Council Golden Island Action Area Report on Development Constraints” by PH McCarthy & Partners, July 2002.

- Westmeath County Council Athlone Main Drainage – Stage 3 AI River Improvements Scheme Report” by Jennings O’Donovan & Partners & J.B. Barry & Partners Ltd.

These reports highlight the need to incorporate the use of SUDS (Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems) into any approach to managing the AI River and recommend diversion of part of the river channel. The preferred approach for mitigating against the risk of flooding from AI River is the creation of an overflow supply channel.

Surface Water Network Projects at AI River, Roslevin Lawns and Retreat Road were identified under the Athlone Sewerage Improvement Scheme to alleviate surface water run-off and potential flooding.

7.10 SHANNON CATCHMENT FLOOD RISK ASSESSMENT & MANAGEMENT STUDY (CFRAM)

The EU Floods Directive (2007/60/EC) was introduced in 2007 and sets out how member states must have a plan for the management of flood risk. This Directive required Member States to undertake a national preliminary flood risk assessment at river catchment level to identify areas where significant flood risk exists or might be considered likely to occur. Member States are also required to prepare catchment-based Flood Risk Management Plans (FRMPs), by 2015 that will set out flood risk management objectives, actions and measures.

The Shannon Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management Study (CFRAMS) is one of seven such River Basin District (RBD) studies being carried out to meet the requirements of the EU Floods Directive (Directive 2007/60/EC). The Plan will define the levels of existing and future flood risk in the Shannon River Basin District area (RBD) and set out how this will be managed both now and into the future. The study will focus on areas known to have experienced flooding in the past and areas that may be subject to flooding in the future either due to

development pressures or climate change. The study was commissioned in 2011 and is due for completion in 2015 with the publication of the Flood Risk Management Plans (FRMP).

7.11 PLANNING SYSTEM AND FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR PLANNING AUTHORITIES 2009

The Office of Public Works as the State's lead agency in flooding has been tasked with delivering an integrated multifaceted programme aimed at mitigating future flood risk and impact. *The 'Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Guidelines for Planning Authorities'* were published in 2009. The Guidelines aim to ensure a rigorous assessment of flood risk at all levels to provide a consistency of approach throughout Ireland. Development at all levels will be required to comply with the recommendations of these Guidelines. In achieving the aims and objectives of the Guidelines, the Councils must:

- Ensure that flood vulnerable development is not permitted in areas of flood risk, particularly floodplains and areas subject to flooding, except where there are no suitable alternative sites available in areas at lower risk that are consistent with the objectives of proper planning and sustainable development.
- Adopt a sequential approach to spatial planning which aims to avoid flood risk, where possible, substitute less vulnerable uses where avoidance is not possible, and mitigate and manage the risk where avoidance and substitution are not possible.
- A precautionary approach should also be applied to flood risk management to reflect uncertainties in flooding datasets and risk assessment techniques and the ability to predict the future climate and the performance of existing flood defences.

7.11.1 Sequential Approach

The Guidelines prescribe the use of a sequential approach to flooding to ensure that new development is directed towards land that is at a low risk of flooding. The sequential approach makes use of flood risk assessment and of prior identification of flood zones for river flooding. It is also essential that the risk potentially arising from other sources of flooding should also be taken into account in all areas and stages of the planning process. In summary, the planning implications for each of the flood zones are as follows:

Zone A – High Probability of Flooding:

Most types of development are considered inappropriate for this zone and development in this zone is to be avoided in all but exceptional circumstances, such as in the case of essential infrastructure that cannot be located elsewhere.

Zone B – Moderate Probability of Flooding:

Highly vulnerable development will be considered inappropriate for this zone unless the requirements of the justification test, as set out in, *The Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009)* are met. Highly vulnerable developments are those such as care homes, hospitals, dwellings, Garda Stations, etc.

Zone C – Low Probability of Flooding:

Development in this zone is appropriate from a flood risk perspective but would need to meet the normal range of other proper planning and sustainable development considerations.

The Councils will ensure that only developments consistent with the overall policy and technical approaches of these Guidelines will be approved and permission may be refused where flood issues have not been, or cannot be, addressed successfully and where the presence of unacceptable residual flood risks to the development, its occupants or users and adjoining property remain.

In general, development in flood plains will be severely restricted. Areas adjacent to maintainable channels should be reserved for maintenance. The Councils are mindful of the potential for increased incidences of flooding due to climate change and will seek to incorporate this into strategic land use decisions.

7.12 STRATEGIC FLOOD RISK ASSESSMENT (SFRA)

A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment has been undertaken to identify the broad nature of flood risk in the county, including flood risk management objectives and development management standards, which have been subsequently incorporated into the Plan. The SFRA has been drafted using the Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment Map Set produced by the OPW in July 2011 and records of the Shannon 2009 flood event.

7.13 SURFACE WATER

Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) are effective technologies which aim to reduce flood risk, improve water quality and enhance biodiversity and amenity. The objective of SUDS in new developments is to replicate, as closely as possible, the surface water drainage regime of the predevelopment ‘greenfield’ situation. The surface water runoff rate from the developed site must be limited to the ‘greenfield’ runoff rate to reduce the risk of flooding. It is the Councils policy that all large-scale developments incorporate Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems as part of development proposals.

7.14 FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT & SURFACE WATER POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is the policy of the Councils:	
P-FL1	To comply with the requirements of the “Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities” (DECLG/ OPW, 2009) through the use of the sequential approach and application

	of the Justification Tests for Development Management.
P-FL2	To ensure that a site specific flood risk assessment is carried out for any development proposal on lands at risk of flooding, including Pluvial Flooding in accordance with the “Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Guidelines for Planning Authorities” (DECLG/OPW, 2009).
P-FL3	To consult with the Office of Public Works in relation to proposed developments in the vicinity of drainage channels and rivers for which the OPW are responsible, and to retain a strip of 10 metres on either side of such channels where required, to facilitate access thereto.
P-FL4	To implement the recommendations of the Shannon CFRAM study, when published.
P-FL5	To ensure new development does not significantly increase flood risk elsewhere, including that which may arise from surface water run off.
P-FL6	To protect and enhance the county’s floodplains and wetlands as vital green infrastructure which provides space for storage and conveyance of floodwater, enabling flood risk to be more effectively managed and reducing the need to provide flood defences in the future.
P-FL7	To seek to alleviate flood risk in areas currently liable to flooding.

It is an objective of the Councils:	
O-FL1	To improve and extend the surface water disposal infrastructure to serve the planned levels of growth, during the lifetime of this Plan, in order to facilitate development.
O-FL2	To incorporate and promote the use of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems within development

	proposals and infrastructural projects.
O-FL3	To carry out improvements to surface water drainage on the AI River, subject to habitats protection requirements.
O-FL4	To promote rain water harvesting in all developments and in particular for larger developments, as an alternative to attenuation.
O-FL5	To provide for the control of surface and storm waters arising from new development within Athlone.
O-FL6	To remediate and enforce against unauthorised discharges to the surface water drainage system.
O-FL7	To ensure in newly developing neighbourhoods that all surface and storm water discharges shall be attenuated and sustainable urban drainage systems utilised. Attenuation schemes may be combined with the provision of public amenity areas through the provision of water features, wildlife refuges and other desirable elements.

7.15 ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Protection and enhancement of the physical environment is of primary importance to Athlone. The Council seeks to ensure the provision of the highest standards of waste management facilities and collection and to prevent and control water, air and noise pollution.

7.16 WASTE MANAGEMENT

The Management of waste in Athlone is governed by the Waste Management Plan for the Midlands Region 2005-2014. This Plan sets out a framework for the management of waste within the Midlands Region and follows the waste management hierarchy which promotes in order of priority the prevention, recycling and safe disposal of waste in accordance with the requirements of the

Waste Management (Framework Directive) Regulations 2011.

The Councils will continue to promote waste prevention and minimisation initiatives to target all aspects of waste in Athlone focusing on both commercial and domestic waste producers. It is considered that raising the awareness of citizens and businesses with regard to their responsibility as generators is essential.

7.16.1 Waste Disposal

The Councils have provided bring banks for the collection of glass and aluminium cans at North Gate Street, Fair Green car park, College Street car park, Coosan Church, Blyry, and Dunnes Stores car park. In addition, the Civic Amenity Centre at Golden Island provides for a wide range of household recycling materials. In 2011, 840 tonnes of domestic waste was deposited at the Athlone Civic Amenity Centre.

Waste handling facilities will only be permitted if they are sensitively sited in relation to local communities and businesses and adhere to good siting principles as set out in the Waste Management Plan for the Midlands Region. Where large-scale development takes place land should be set aside for the duration of the construction period to facilitate the sorting and storing of waste inert material. Such land shall be sensitively sited in relation to local communities and businesses. The Councils will permit the use of appropriate inert and non-hazardous wastes such as construction and demolition waste for landscaping activities.

The Councils will encourage the provision of recycling systems of an appropriate scale in all new developments and will investigate how best to achieve expansion to the network of public recycling facilities in the existing built-up area. Any residual waste material to be removed from the site must be carefully managed to ensure that any environmental damage is avoided and be transported and accommodated by authorised operators.

The Councils will require Waste Management Plans to be prepared for Construction and Demolition Projects of a particular scale in accordance with Best Practice Guidelines issued by the Department of Environment Heritage and Local Government, July 2006.

7.17 LITTER MANAGEMENT

With regard to litter control, the Councils adhere to the Athlone Litter Management Plan 2013-2018. It is the main objective of this plan to prevent and minimise litter in the town including incidence of illegal dumping. This is to be achieved through education and awareness, community involvement, litter prevention and control and enforcement. It is clear that the presence of litter detracts from the beauty of Athlone both for residents and tourists alike. While the Councils play a very important role in terms of both prevention and reduction of litter in the town, this can only be achieved by the co-operation of local communities, the Athlone Tidy Towns Group, the business community and the public in general.

7.18 WASTE & LITTER MANAGEMENT POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is the policy of the Councils:

P-WM1	To implement the recommendations of the Midlands Waste Management Plan 2005-2014 and any subsequent plan made thereafter.
P-WM2	To seek to ensure that Athlone is served by adequate recycling facilities in the form of kerbside collection, civic site and bring bank-recycling facilities.
P-WM3	To encourage waste prevention, minimisation, reuse, recycling and recovery as methods of managing waste.

It is an objective of the Councils:

O-WM1	To promote and encourage the education and awareness on all issues associated with waste
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	management, at household, industry and community level.
O-WM2	To promote and facilitate communities to become involved in environmental awareness activities and community-based recycling initiatives or environmental management initiatives that will lead to local sustainable waste management practices.
O-WM3	To encourage and support the provision of a separate collection of waste in accordance with the requirements of the Waste Management (Food Waste) Regulations 2009, the Waste Framework Directive Regulations, 2011 and other relevant legislation.
O-WM4	To eliminate all unauthorised fly tipping and to regulate and control the disposal of all builders spoil and rubble.
O-WM5	To provide for additional recycling, including composting facilities both within Athlone town and within newly developing neighbourhoods subject to Framework Plans.

7.19 NOISE, AIR & LIGHT POLLUTION

The importance of a clean environment for the economic and social life of Athlone is recognised. In this regard, continuous effective monitoring and enforcement in relation to pollution control measures is imperative and will continue over the period of this Development Plan.

7.19.1 Noise

Noise pollution has become an increasingly important issue as it affects quality of life and also has health impacts. Environmental Noise Regulations 2006 give effect to EU Directive 2002/49/EC relating to the assessment and management of environmental noise. The Council will seek to negotiate reductions in noise and/or vibration at site boundaries or

within adjacent sensitive areas, especially residential areas, by measures such as layout, design and/or attenuation mechanisms. The cost of such measures shall be borne by the developer.

The Councils will require the submission of noise impact assessments where it is proposed to introduce noise creating uses in proximity to noise sensitive uses, such as residential areas, and if permission is being granted may impose conditions mitigating impact. Similarly, where noise sensitive uses are proposed within proximity to a noise source, such as national roads, rail lines, etc., proposals shall include noise and/or vibration attenuation measures in any planning application, for example where development proposals are brought forward within the zone of influence of existing national roads or of planned new national roads.

In accordance with the requirements of the EU Directive on Assessments and Management of Environmental Noise, it is an objective to prepare Noise Maps for major roads, rail lines, etc and to prepare Action Plans to seek to reduce noise levels based on the data maps. The Council has prepared a Noise Action 2013-2018 which is aimed at the strategic long term management of environmental noise from transport systems i.e. traffic noise.

7.19.2 Air

The biggest threat facing air quality in Athlone is emissions from road traffic. Air pollution can affect the health and well-being of sensitive population groups and eco-systems. The most sensitive areas in relation to air quality are built-up urban areas and major transport developments. The Councils support the Polluter Pays Principle and will have regard to the EU Framework Directive on Air Quality Assessment relating to air quality standards. Regard shall also be made to the EPA document “Air Quality in Ireland”. There has been a ban on the marketing, sale and distribution of bituminous fuel (or ‘smoky coal ban’) in Athlone since 2011.

7.19.3 Light

The Councils will give a higher priority to the potential problems of light pollution relating to new development and the intensification or alteration of existing development. The limitation of light pollution is important in the interests of nature conservation, residential amenity and energy efficiency.

7.20 NOISE, AIR & LIGHT POLICIES & OBJECTIVE

It is the policy of the Councils:	
P-NAL1	To promote the implementation of Noise Directive 2002/49/EC and associated Environmental Noise Regulations 2006.
P-NAL2	To seek to preserve and maintain air and noise quality in accordance with best practice and relevant legislation.
P-NAL3	To promote the preservation of best ambient air quality compatible with sustainable development.
P-NAL4	To seek the control of lighting of development in particular sensitive locations.

It is an objective of the Councils:	
O-NAL1	To prepare Noise Maps in accordance with the EU directive on Assessment and Management of Environmental Noise and implement Action Plans.
O-NAL2	To implement the provisions of Westmeath Noise Action Plan 2013-2018.

7.21 CLIMATE CHANGE

The Councils recognise that climate change is a global threat with local consequences. Whilst uncertainties surround the magnitude and extent of climate change impacts, the Councils are committed insofar as they can to addressing climate change in a proactive manner through the careful consideration of growth and development. The National Climate Change Strategy 2007-2012 sets out how Ireland will meet its commitments to

reduce greenhouse gas emissions in accordance with the Kyoto.

The Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 introduced a mandatory objective that Development Plans promote sustainable settlement and transport strategies in urban and rural areas including the promotion of measures to reduce anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions and address the necessity of adaptation to climate change.

The Plan seeks to protect, mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change by:

- Protecting people, vulnerable infrastructure and the environment from the impacts of climate change
- Consolidation of our existing urban areas and integration of land-use and transportation.
- Ensuring new development is appropriately located, in particular outside areas at risk of flooding
- Providing objectives for the sustainable development of renewable energy sources
- Ensuring new developments are designed to take account of the predicted impacts of climate change
- Promoting the protection of the Town’s green infrastructure which provides many benefits as it regulates temperature, reduces storm flows and provides clean water and air.

These measures will allow for a reduction in the amount of fossil fuels used which is one of the main contributors to greenhouse gases in Ireland.

7.22 CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY & OBJECTIVES

It is the policy of the Councils:

P-CC1	To support the implementation of the National Climate Change Strategy and to facilitate measures which seek to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases.
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It is an objective of the Councils:

O-CC1	To adopt sustainable planning strategies through the integration of land use and transportation as a means of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
O-CC2	To encourage improved energy efficiency of the existing building stock and to promote energy efficiency and conservation in the design and development of all new buildings, including Local Authority dwellings.
O-CC3	To promote and encourage new developments to mitigate against, and adapt to, where possible the impacts of climate change through the location, layout and design of development.
O-CC4	To closely monitor flood events in Athlone and implement the Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines 2009.
O-CC5	To raise awareness of climate change and its potential impacts among businesses, local communities and the public.
O-CC6	To prepare a report on climate change adaptation measures in the plan, within two years of adoption of the plan.

Chapter 8 *Energy & Communications*



8 ENERGY & COMMUNICATIONS

AIM:

To ensure the provision of sufficient energy supplies and thus facilitate the sustainable economic development of Athlone, together with supporting and providing for the development of indigenous energy resources, with an emphasis on renewable energy supplies. To seek the development of high capacity Information Communications Technology Infrastructure, broadband connectivity and digital broadcasting in the interests of economic progress and the proper planning of Athlone.

8.1 CONTEXT

The Athlone Town Plan seeks to encourage and facilitate the development of energy generation and infrastructure facilities. Alongside energy production, the plan will address issues of demand and how to encourage domestic and industry wide energy saving measures on a project and strategic level.

Plan policies have been drafted having regard to the following policies and strategic documents:

- Delivering a Sustainable Energy Future for Ireland – The Energy Policy Framework 2007-2020
- Ireland National Climate Change Strategy 2007-2012
- National Energy Efficiency Action Plan 2009-2020
- Westmeath County Council Energy Efficiency Action Plan 2011

8.2 GENERAL ENERGY POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is the policy of the Councils:	
P-EN1	To support local initiatives for limiting emissions of greenhouse gases through energy efficiency and the development of renewable energy sources which make use of the natural resources in an environmentally acceptable manner.
P-EN2	To support the National Climate Change Strategy and, in general, to facilitate locally applied measures, which seek to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases.
P-EN3	To support and facilitate the provision of improved energy supplies to the town in order to support economic and social development.
P-EN4	To support the sustainable development of the infrastructure required to support the Midland Region in the delivery of renewable energy, particularly in the context of the existing energy infrastructure in the region and the need to make a transition from peat to renewable energy.

It is an objective of the Councils:	
O-EN1	To ensure that energy conservation measures and the use of sustainable energy sources are used in Council activities and in the provision of services, and to encourage developers to adopt a similar approach.
O-EN2	To require proposals for new developments which will be significant energy users to submit energy statements.
O-EN3	To preserve significant landscape views in the town area from the visual intrusion of large-scale energy infrastructure.

8.3 ALTERNATIVE ENERGY

The Councils seek to achieve a reasonable balance between an overall positive attitude to renewable energy and enabling alternative energy resources to be harnessed and applied in a manner that is consistent with proper planning and sustainable development. It is Council policy to prepare a Local Authority Renewable Energy Strategy for the county. Reference shall be made to the “Methodology for Local Authority Renewable Energy Strategies (SEAI, 2013)” in this regard.

Given the environmental sensitivities in Athlone, the River Shannon, and existing natural heritage designations, it is considered that the town and its environs are unsuitable for the development of commercial or industrial scale wind-farms. Notwithstanding, the Councils will encourage the development of appropriately scaled single turbines, in particular within industrial parks, provided that they do not negatively impact upon the environmental quality, landscape, wildlife and habitats or residential amenity of the area.

The Councils will encourage home owners in appropriate locations to install micro wind energy units and small scale domestic turbines, in accordance with the Planning Exemptions scheduled in the Planning & Development Regulations 2007. The Planning and Development Regulations 2008 provide exemptions subject to certain conditions, for wind turbines, meteorological masts, combined heat and power plants, solar panels and biomass boiler units for industrial, commercial and public buildings.

The Councils strongly support all national and international incentives for limiting emissions of greenhouse gases and encourages the development of renewable energy resources. The national target commits 40% of electricity from renewable resources by 2020 under the Government’s publication Building Ireland’s Smart Economy – A Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal (2008).

8.3.1 Solar Energy

Solar applications are usually small scale and can supply electricity or energy. Solar energy provides a suitable source of energy for buildings. The Councils will encourage solar energy in commercial and residential developments, subject to design and other considerations.

8.3.2 Bio-energy

Bio-energy is energy derived from biomass. There are many bio energy fuel sources and technologies, and several conversion alternatives i.e. dry resources such as wood and wood residues, dry agricultural residues such as straw, and wet resources can be processed through anaerobic digestion, producing a methane-rich gas for combustion.

Given that bio energy initiatives contribute to the achievement of aims set out in the National Climate Change Strategy Plan 2007–2012, the Councils will seek to promote and facilitate the development of bioenergy technologies, subject to environmental, habitats and landscape protection.

8.4 BUILDING SUSTAINABILITY

Energy use in buildings alone account for some 50% of EU carbon emissions. Therefore, in order to reach legally binding emission reduction targets and achieve more sustainable forms of development, planning, design and construction processes for buildings must be made more sustainable by:

- ☐ Promoting the highest standards of resource and energy efficiency in new developments, to reduce carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions arising from construction and use.
- ☐ Requiring land-use patterns that reduce the need and the propensity to travel by car.
- ☐ Promoting small scale renewable energy projects.
- ☐ Adapting development which would otherwise have a major negative impact on CO₂ emissions.

These aims have been incorporated into various sections of this plan and this section deals with building construction and energy use.

The alternative energy systems to be considered will include:

- (a) decentralised energy supply systems, based on renewable energy
- (b) combined heat and power systems
- (c) district or block heating or cooling, if available, or
- d) heat pumps.

The introduction of the Building Energy Rating (BER) certification process, allows for dwellings to be assessed on their energy performance. The provision of this label system allows individuals to make informed decisions regarding the energy efficiency of a building.

8.4.1 Building Design

Reducing energy demand in buildings would contribute to a reduction in CO₂ and would in addition reduce fuel poverty. The cost of all forms of energy is increasing and the burden that this creates will lie more heavily on the less well off. Requiring that new buildings have better energy performance and less energy demand is socially inclusive and will economically benefit occupiers and users over the lifetime of the building.

8.4.2 Flexible Building Design (Building for Life) (Homes for Life)

All buildings, particularly buildings for residential use should be designed to be able to respond to occupiers and users changing demands and lifestyles by providing flexible internal layouts and allowing for cost-effective alterations. Buildings should be designed to be adaptable to respond to an occupiers needs, providing an opportunity to stay in one home should an individuals or families circumstances change.

Such flexibility in design provides an opportunity for people to stay living within the community they are part of without having to move to a new house to meet their

changing design requirements. This has obvious benefits in establishing sustainable communities and fostering a sense of community spirit. The Councils will promote the provision of adaptable buildings in all development.

Under the requirements of SI 666 of 2006 European Communities (Energy Performance and Buildings) Regulations, the developers of buildings greater than 1000sq m or residential schemes above 30 units, must consider, during the design stage, the economic, environmental and technical feasibility of installing alternative renewable energy systems such as decentralised energy supply systems, combined heat and power systems, district heating, block heating, heat pumps, biomass boilers and solar energy.

8.5 RENEWABLE ENERGY POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is the policy of the Councils:	
P-REN1	To encourage the development of small-scale wind energy development and single turbines particularly within industrial parks provided they do not negatively impact upon environmental quality, landscape, wildlife and habitats or residential amenity.
P-REN2	To ensure the siting and development of wind turbines is carried out in accordance with the requirements of the DEHLG Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2006, or as amended.
P-REN3	To promote, encourage and facilitate the provision of micro-renewable energy.
P-REN4	To promote renewable forms of energy where it is consistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.
P-REN5	To favour the use of renewable energy as a contribution to the energy demand of all new buildings.

P-REN6	To improve the efficiency of existing building stock and require energy efficiency and conservation in the design and development of all new buildings in Athlone.
P-REN7	To encourage development proposals that maximise energy efficiency through siting, layout, design or which incorporate best practice in energy technologies, conservation and implementation of smart technology.
P-REN8	To ensure that all Local Authority social and affordable housing schemes meet the minimum low energy performance standards.
P-REN9	To ensure that all building design should be adaptable and meet the needs for life time use.
P-REN10	To encourage use of passive solar design principles for residential and commercial buildings.

It is an objective of the Councils:

O-REN1	To produce a supplementary planning guidance note on energy efficiency and the use of renewable energies in buildings, including advice on rain water harvesting.
O-REN2	To ensure that the Councils both in their operations and building stock use best practice in the context of energy efficiency.
O-REN3	To require the use of energy saving measures in all new developments including retrofit developments.
O-REN4	To promote energy efficiency and conservation to Building Regulations standards in the design and development of all new buildings and in residential schemes in particular and require designers to demonstrate that they have taken maximising energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy into account in their planning application.
O-REN5	To require details of the requirements for alternative renewable energy systems, for

	buildings greater than 1000sq m or residential schemes above 30 units, under SI 666 of 2006 European Communities (Energy Performance and Buildings) to be submitted at application stage for consideration. These should take the form of an Energy Statement or Feasibility Study carried out by qualified and accredited experts.
O-REN6	To consider local and migrating bat and bird populations in the assessment of applications for Small-Scale Wind Turbines.

8.6 NON-RENEWABLE ENERGY

8.6.1 Natural Gas

The Dublin Galway gas pipeline traverses the south of Athlone and serves the IDA Business Park in Garrycastle.

8.6.2 Electricity

The development of secure and reliable electricity transmission infrastructure is a key factor for supporting economic development and attracting investment in Athlone. There have been several upgrades and enhancements of the ESB network in the town in recent years. The Athlone 110/38kVstation has been substantially rebuilt, thus doubling the capacity of the station. In addition, the capacity of the Busfield 38/20kV station has doubled in the last 5 years from 10MVA up to 20 MVA.

Planning permission has been granted for a new 2 x15 MVA 39/110kV substation in the IDA Industrial Estate in Garrycastle, which will replace the old Cartontroy Siemens station. In terms of future upgrades, it is proposed to upgrade the 38kV networks in the east side of Athlone and convert the Ferbane 10kV outlet from Cartontroy station from 10kV to 20Kv, thus doubling electrical capacity.

The Councils support the major investment underway in the high voltage electricity transmission system under EirGrid’s Grid 25 Programme. The Grid 25 Projects of relevance

to Westmeath include the Gridlink in the South and East.

The Councils will continue to support the infrastructural renewal and development of electricity and gas networks. A balanced progressive approach will be adopted to minimise the impact on the environment while providing for the town’s energy needs. The sustainable provision of energy networks is therefore encouraged provided that it can be demonstrated that:

- The development is required in order to facilitate the provision or retention of significant economic or social infrastructure.
- The route proposed has been identified with due consideration for social, economic, environmental and cultural impacts.
- Where impacts are inevitable mitigation features have been included.
- Where it can be shown the proposed development is consistent with international best practice.

8.7 ELECTRICITY/GAS POLICIES

It is the policy of the Councils:	
P-ELE1	To provide for an electricity transmission network to the Linked Gateway of Athlone that will provide for the medium to long-term future needs of the town, subject to environmental and habitats requirements.
P-ELE2	To support and promote the improvement and extension of gas infrastructure to serve Athlone.
P-ELE3	To co-operate and liaise with statutory and other energy providers in relation to power generation in order to ensure adequate power capacity for the existing and future needs of the town.
P-ELE4	To support the implementation of EirGrid’s Grid 25 Investment Programme.

8.8 COMMUNICATIONS & ICT INFRASTRUCTURE

Telecommunications investment is essential for furthering the social and economic development of Athlone. The provision of an efficient broadband service is critical in the development of a knowledge based economy. Major advancements have taken place within the telecommunications sector over the last two decades in the town, in particular the development of the Metropolitan Area Network (MAN) for broadband communication in Athlone.

8.8.1 Broadband

The (MAN) in Athlone covers 21.7km. It has enabled telecommunications companies to provide affordable ‘always-on’ high-speed access to the Internet and a range of telephony and data communications services which are vital tools for industry, business and government to be efficient and competitive. The MAN facilitates new entrants, new services and more competition for broadband users in the area. There are currently six telecoms/ISPs providing services on the Athlone MAN.

The MAN Infrastructure has been built using the latest fibre optic technology. It has been designed in interconnected fibre rings, reducing the risk of service interruption common to other networks. The Athlone MAN Infrastructure is owned by Westmeath County Council and managed on its behalf by Enet. It is a vendor-independent open access service, ensuring increased competition on a world class robust resilient communications network.

In addition to the MAN, the town is served by other broadband services, including mobile 3G broadband from the main carriers, DSL Broadband from up to six providers and wireless broadband from 3 providers.

According to the 2011 census, 60% of households in Athlone Town Council administrative area had a broadband connection; however, the town still lags behind the state in terms of broadband provision (65%).

8.9 TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Intensive digitisation offers a competitive advantage in attracting economic development and investment. It also offers more flexible working arrangements, enabling people to work and communicate locally and internationally from their homes. The Councils acknowledge the importance of the telecommunications sector, in particular the development of broadband telecommunications, in terms of capitalising on investment opportunities.

The town is served by a number of telecommunications structures, which occupy prominent locations on the urban landscape. It is considered that the existing telecommunications infrastructure is suitable to cater for the needs of the town during the lifetime of the plan. With advances in technology and in particular satellite technology the need for telecommunication structures will diminish and this may provide an opportunity for removal and/or lowering of existing structures.

The Planning Authority will have regard to the Guidelines issued by the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government, 'Planning Guidelines for Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures' (1996) and Circular Letter PL 07/12. The assessment of individual proposals will be governed by the guidelines and the controls scheduled in the Development Management Standards chapter of this plan.

8.10 ICT POLICIES & OBJECTIVE

It is the policy of the Councils:

P-ICT1	To support the delivery of high capacity Information Communications Technology Infrastructure, broadband connectivity and digital broadcasting in order to ensure economic competitiveness and enabling more flexible work practices e.g. teleworking.
P-ICT2	To support the co-ordinated and focused development and extension of broadband infrastructure throughout Athlone.

P-ICT3	To achieve a balance between facilitating the provision of telecommunications infrastructure in the interests of social and economic progress, and sustaining residential amenity and environmental quality.
P-ICT4	To ensure that the location of telecommunications structures should minimise and / or mitigate any adverse impacts on communities, public rights of way and the built or natural environment.
P-ICT5	To encourage co-location of antennae on existing support structures and to require documentary evidence as to the non availability of this option in proposals for new structures. The shared use of existing structures will be required where the numbers of masts located in any single area is considered to be excessive.
P-ICT6	To facilitate the provision of telecommunications infrastructure in Athlone in accordance with the requirements of the "Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures – Guidelines for Planning Authorities" July 1996 and Circular Letter PL 07/12.
P-ICT7	To protect areas of significant landscape, habitats and species importance from the visual and physical intrusion of large-scale telecommunications infrastructure.
P-ICT8	To review all telecommunication structures in the Town, in the light of advances in telecommunications and satellite technology.
P-ICT9	To maintain a register of approved telecommunications structures in Athlone, in cooperation with operators.

It is an objective of the Councils:

O-ICT1	To seek to provide public WiFi zones in Athlone.
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Chapter 9 *Arts, Cultures & Tourism*



9 ARTS, CULTURE & TOURISM

AIM:

To promote the arts, literary, cultural and natural heritage of Athlone, and build upon the town's local distinctiveness, thus harnessing the marketability and potential of this vibrant Gateway town as an international tourist destination.

9.1 POLICY CONTEXT

9.1.1 New Horizons for Irish Tourism – Survival, Recovery and Growth: A Strategy for Renewing Irish Tourism, 2009-2013 (Report of the Tourism Renewal Group Mid-Term Review August 2013)

The National Tourism Development Strategy, published by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport provides a set of actions to support the further development of tourism in Ireland and its regions.

9.1.2 Lakelands & Waterways Strategic Plan 2010-2015

This Plan commissioned by both Fáilte Ireland and Waterways Ireland seeks to differentiate the Midlands from other parts of Ireland by establishing an identity and a brand for the area based on its unique selling proposition – namely the Lakelands and Waterways. The Plan seeks to attract sightseers and culture seekers to the Lakelands and Waterways region including the Mid Shannon and Lough Ree. The key focus for the development of this market will be creating products based on literary heritage, activity hubs, walking and cycling routes and further development of the waterways infrastructure.

9.1.3 Mid Shannon & Lough Ree Development Study 2010

This Plan has been prepared on an integrated, inter-agency basis and represents a sustainable approach to the development, management and promotion of recreation and tourism in the Mid Shannon and Lough Ree area. It includes a list of programmes and actions to be

undertaken to improve the local tourism economy. In the context of Athlone, the following actions are suggested:

- Mid-Shannon Waterbus from Athlone to Portumna
- Investigate the feasibility of a seasonal float trip operation between Athlone and Shannonbridge
- Canoe Trail
- Development of walking/cycling trails from heritage towns and activity hubs
- A programme leading towards the designation of Lough Ree as a special landscape
- A programme of coordinated management measures to ensure public safety and the protection of the wildlife of Lough Ree from inappropriate waterway use

9.1.4 Waterfront Strategy Athlone 2011

Athlone Town Council published the Athlone Waterfront Strategy in April 2011. The strategy focuses on both sides of the River Shannon, stretching from the points of the Shannon past the N6 Athlone by-pass bridge on the western side and from the Town Park past the N6 Athlone by-pass bridge, on the eastern side. The aim of the plan is to provide a strategic approach to dealing with this area incorporating waterfront management, amenity provision, and environmental awareness.

The Athlone Waterfront Strategy identifies opportunities for tourist related developments associated with the river and the need for additional berthage and mooring facilities.

9.1.5 Athlone Canal Study

Athlone Town Council published the Athlone Canal Study in 2012. The study aims to establish principles for the regeneration of the canal area and the integration of its use as a public amenity in conjunction with the River Shannon. It also identifies opportunities to improve accessibility and movement along the canal line for pedestrians and cyclists and the formulation

of an integrated walking and cycling network with linkage to the town centre and River Shannon. Recommendations in relation to natural heritage and nature conservation practices for the area are also addressed in the study. In addition, opportunities for both tourism related development and water based recreational activities are identified.



View of Athlone Canal

9.1.6 Westmeath Arts Plan 2010-2016

This plan sets out policy for supporting, promoting and developing the Arts in the county. One of the strategic aims of the Plan is to explore and research mechanisms for supporting the development of the Luan Gallery and the Dean Crowe Theatre.

9.2 ARTS & CULTURE

Arts and cultural facilities contribute towards the intellectual, artistic and social quality of life of people in a town. They can also encourage people, tourism, businesses and jobs to an area, thus helping to create a sense of place, reinforcing local distinctiveness and contributing to the regeneration of the urban environment.

In the physical environment, the arts can be expressed in the design of buildings and urban spaces and where possible, with community involvement. The creation and enhancement of public spaces, pedestrian routes and buildings can incorporate art into all aspects of their design and development.

9.2.1 Local Context

Arts, cultural and entertainment facilities are wide ranging in Athlone, including Athlone Castle, Arts Centre, Artists Studios, theatres, museum, cinema, library etc. The town hosts many popular cultural events and festivals, including seasonal performances by Athlone Little Theatre, Passionfruit Athlone Musical Society, Athlone Choral Society and the Athlone Town Pipe Band. In addition, local and travelling productions, concerts and small-scale exhibitions are hosted in the Dean Crowe Theatre and Arts Centre.

The town has also shown its capacity to host significant national and international events, including the European Triathlon Championships, the RTE Drama Festival and the National Community Games. Triathlon has grown in popularity since the first event was held in 2006, which attracted 640 competitors. It now attracts over 2,500 competitors and is one of Ireland's biggest Triathlons. It generated in excess of €12 million for the local economy in 2010.

9.2.2 Athlone Art and Heritage Ltd

Athlone Art and Heritage Ltd is an initiative of Athlone Town Council set up to manage a number of Art and Heritage sites, facilities and amenities in Athlone. These include Abbey Road Artists' Studios, Luan Art Gallery, Athlone Castle and the proposed John McCormack Museum.

9.2.3 Athlone Castle

Athlone Castle is a major tourist attraction in the town, housing the Tourist Office and visitor's centre. Major renovation works to the Castle were completed in 2012. The facilities have been re-developed to bring the standards of interpretation and display in line with the visitor expectations of the twenty-first century. The Keep of the Castle is used to tell the dramatic story of the famous Siege of Athlone, while the other buildings house a modern interpretative centre focusing on Athlone, the Castle and the periods both before and after the siege.

9.2.4 Luan Gallery

The Luan Gallery is a purpose built modern facility incorporating an old building, sympathetically restored, with a modern glass section over a boardwalk area. It will cater primarily but not exclusively for the visual arts, with an emphasis on meeting local audience needs in terms of art exhibitions and engagement. It will also target national/international projects.



9.3 ARTS & CULTURE POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:

P-AC1	To continue to encourage the provision of new, or improved arts, cultural and entertainment facilities, particularly in the parts of the Town where there is a deficiency in such provision.
P-AC2	To actively foster and promote the arts in order to preserve and develop the unique history and heritage of Athlone.
P-AC3	To ensure that arts, culture and entertainment facilities are accessible to all in both physical and economic terms.
P-AC4	To support the provision of workshop spaces for artists in suitable buildings.
P-AC5	To encourage the development of concert and exhibition facilities along the Shannon Waterfront.
P-AC6	To promote the provision of the visual arts in the town.

P-AC7	To work toward the provision and integration of Public Art throughout the town, including supporting initiatives undertaken by Voluntary Groups and other agencies.
P-AC8	To support events and festivals which promote Arts and Cultural endeavours of the town.
P-AC9	To recognise the central role of drama in Athlone's cultural tradition and promote theatres, galleries and workshops/studios at suitable locations in the town.
P-AC10	To promote and develop Athlone as a centre of artistic and cultural excellence.
P-AC11	To promote and develop Athlone Castle as a flagship international tourist attraction.
P-AC12	To continue to expand the profile of arts in Athlone, through appropriate branding and hosting of associated events.

It is an objective of the Councils:

O-AC1	To ensure that all arts, culture and entertainment facilities are designed to meet the needs of people with auditory, visual or other disabilities and people with restricted mobility.
O-AC2	To continue to encourage and develop locally based art activities and facilities in accordance with the Westmeath Arts Plan 2010-2016.
O-AC3	To encourage developers of retail, business and other schemes to provide Public Art as part of new development proposals.
O-AC4	To promote the development of the Left Bank as a culture quarter and actively promote the development of specialist shops, including Arts and Crafts.

O-AC5	To encourage and support the role of Athlone as a Festival town.
O-AC6	To explore and research mechanisms for supporting the development of the Athlone Gallery and the Dean Crowe Theatre.
O-AC7	To develop an appropriate museum dedicated to Count John Mc Cormack, including the provision of a statue in the Civic Square.

9.4 LIBRARIES & OTHER CULTURAL SERVICES

The Councils seek to enrich the lives and sense of identity, increase social and cultural opportunities and preserve the inheritance of every person in the town, for present and future generations by maintaining and developing Library, Arts and Archives Services at the Aiden Heavey Library in the Civic Centre.

9.5 LIBRARY AND CULTURAL SERVICES POLICY & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:	
P-LIB 1	To support the development of the library service and promote its use as a centre of culture, recreation and information for the people of Athlone.

It is an Objective of the Councils:	
O-LIB1	To ensure that Athlone Library will continue to provide a valuable resource for the residents of the town, by providing access to a broad range of information, culture and arts and facilitate the improvement of literacy and other skills.
O-LIB2	To encourage Athlone Library to act as the collective memory of the community and of Athlone by

	collecting and making available local studies materials of all types.
O-LIB3	To encourage Athlone Library to act as a focal point of the community for social and cultural events.

9.6 TOURISM

The Councils regard tourism as a key economic driver for Athlone and the wider region. The town of Athlone has significant visitor attractions, both locally and nationally recognised. The historic urban fabric of the town, including the Castle and the medieval street pattern, are the main attractions within the core area and the important retailing role of the town adds to the profile. The town’s setting on the River Shannon and proximity to Lough Ree and its Inner Lakes add to its’ attractiveness as a tourist location, and has ensured a consistent influx of water enthusiasts including those who participate in sailing, cruising, wind surfing and canoeing. The town also hosts a number of annual festivals and cultural events.



The Councils can contribute to the tourism potential of Athlone through a variety of different synergistic measures including improved accessibility throughout the town, environmental regeneration of specific areas, the provision of recreation and amenity areas, facilitation of the development of visitor attractions and protection of the natural and built heritage and enhancement of public spaces.

The strategic emphasis will continue to be on increasing the numbers of visitors to Athlone; but it will be the development of further quality and sustainable tourism products that will

ultimately provide the long-term returns. The development of Athlone as a premier tourism destination, with a diverse and innovative range of tourism products; in a way that is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable can only be achieved in co-operation and collaboration with relevant agencies including Fáilte Ireland and Waterways Ireland.

In this regard, Waterways Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) have collaborated and prepared a Tourism Development Plan entitled “Lakelands Destination Athlone”. The Plan contains many projects and objectives and includes strategic directions to be undertaken in the areas of infrastructure, research and information, marketing and PR, product development, finance and investment, community sector and education for those working in the tourism industry. The partnership group involved aims to drive and develop Athlone as a premier short break/holiday destination.

9.6.1 Cultural Tourism

Athlone’s character, quality landscape and rich culture are vital assets that help the town compete as a tourism destination and a location of choice. The culture tourism sector is set to grow during the timeframe of the plan.

The challenge is to unlock the tourism potential associated with the towns historical, archaeology, landscape, built heritage, literary, musical heritage and its festivals. The town is in a strong position to build on its unique cultural heritage, which is a key factor in developing Athlone as a cultural tourist destination.

Athlone has a rich cultural heritage with links to many historical figures and events. The Shannon Crossing, The Táin Trail and the various monastic and religious sites, and Count John McCormack’s birthplace; are just some of the many places with cultural association within the town. The Councils will protect the context of such places and support appropriate

development of places with cultural association through its Arts programme.



9.6.2 Water-Based Tourism

The River Shannon is an important resource and represents the link between the town and the network of Midland lakes. Development along the river naturally seeks to exploit this resource either by design reference to the river or through development in the form of marinas or jetties. Such facilities will not be permitted where the proposal would detract from the visual amenity and environmental quality and stability of the area or if it would compromise access to the riverside.

In new development, the Councils will require a high standard of design, with consideration given to a proposals potential impact on its surroundings in terms of design impact, scale and intensity. All ancillary landscaping will seek to blend in, and any signage should be appropriately designed. Development proposals shall retain existing linkages and provide new links to the riverside and other recognised amenities as opportunities present.

The Councils will seek to facilitate increased access to the River Shannon and Athlone Canal and to work in conjunction with the relevant statutory bodies to promote the sustainable development thereof. Development along the Shannon shall be carried out taking account of the recommendations made in the Athlone Waterfront Strategy 2011.



9.7 TOURISM POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:

P-TRM1	To promote the linked gateway town of Athlone as an urban tourism destination in its own right and as an access point to a collection of wider county tourist attractions.
P-TRM2	To promote Athlone as a national and international tourist destination in co-operation with other agencies, such as Fáilte Ireland and Waterways Ireland.
P-TRM3	To continue to encourage and promote the sustainable development of a range of quality tourism facilities, attractions and accommodation within the town.
P-TRM4	To resist development that would detract from the town's unique natural and built environment.
P-TRM5	To support the growth of cultural tourism in the town and its potential for niche tourism

	products by facilitating the development of cultural events, infrastructure and activities.
P-TRM6	To promote Athlone's cultural, literary, historical, archaeological and architectural heritage as tourism generating opportunities.
P-TRM7	To promote festivals and sporting events to increase the cultural and lifestyle profile of Athlone, and where appropriate to promote the development of new venues to host such events.
P-TRM8	To facilitate increased access points to Athlone's lakes including walkways along the lakes, subject to the requirements of the Habitats and EIA Directive.
P-TRM9	To facilitate the sustainable development of eco-tourist projects at appropriate locations in the town and its environs, whilst protecting areas of ecological value and ensuring that any development is in compliance with the requirements of the Habitats Directive.
P-TRM10	To reserve where feasible, land adjacent to river banks and lakes for public access and to facilitate the creation of linear parks to accommodate walking/cycling routes.
P-TRM11	To develop and manage the tourism of the River Shannon and Lough Ree, in a sustainable manner, so as to upgrade facilities, promote diversity, reduce seasonality and improve access, whilst retaining the natural character of the area, and taking into consideration issues of capacity and environmental sensitivity.

P-TRM12	To support the development of cruise line tourism in Athlone and acknowledge the significant contribution and diversity it could add to the local and regional tourist economy.
P-TRM13	To encourage the development of Athlone as a national conference destination.

It is an objective of the Councils:	
O-TRM1	To support and implement the actions contained in the Athlone Waterfront Strategy 2011.
O-TRM2	To support the implementation of the Lakelands Destination Athlone Tourism Development Plan.
O-TRM3	To support and implement actions contained in the Athlone Canal Study 2012.
O-TRM4	To promote and facilitate the development of sustainable adventure tourism projects within the town and its environs.
O-TRM5	To explore the provision of sustainable medium and long distance walking routes, focusing on the River Shannon and Lough Ree, in co-operation with Roscommon County Council, subject to environmental constraints being addressed and the requirements of the Habitats Directive being met.
O-TRM6	To support the provision of a water-bus on the River Shannon from Athlone to Portumna.
O-TRM7	To investigate the feasibility of providing a seasonal float trip operation between Athlone and Shannonbridge.
O-TRM8	To support the development of

	a canoe trail between the River Shannon and Lough Ree.
O-TRM9	To promote the development of Heritage Trails/walks within the town and its environs.
O-TRM10	To develop and provide a programme of interpretative signage for important heritage features and principal tourism attractions in the town.
O-TRM11	To co-operate with and support Athlone Tidy Towns and other community organisations in enhancing the Town's appearance.
O-TRM12	To continue to support Triathlon and other festivals and events in the town.

9.8 TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE

Facilitating the development of infrastructure to meet the needs of visitors is fundamental to the effective delivery of a sustainable tourism sector. The provision of new tourist facilities will further strengthen the town's position as a gateway and a main tourist destination in the Midland Region. These would include facilities for conferencing, wellness, recreation, sport and outdoor activities and should be provided having regard to the existing settlement pattern of the county and touring routes used by visitors. This will enable new and enhanced facilities to be provided where they can be best accessed and used by international and domestic visitors using independent or public transport.



The Councils shall foster the development of all aspects of the tourist market by encouraging the provision of a wide range of types of accommodation for the tourist and home-based holidaymakers, by providing for the development of holiday home and hostel accommodation at suitable locations and by restricting development that would be likely to reduce the capacity of the resource, or have a detrimental impact on the local environment.

It is the policy of the Councils to seek to improve the overall appearance and level of facilities and services of the town and its environs through the Derelict Sites Acts, Community Employment Schemes and through effective development management and enforcement. The Councils will continue to work in partnership with other agencies to stimulate and coordinate projects in the tourism sector by identifying, influencing and bringing forward new products and initiatives.

9.9 TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:

P-TI1	To facilitate the development of high quality tourist accommodation such as hotels, hostels, B&Bs/Guesthouses, etc. at suitable locations in Athlone, subject to attaining a high standard of design, the provision of adequate infrastructure and compliance with development management standards.
P-TI2	To promote the development of Eco-tourism projects.
P-TI3	To improve the visual appearance of the town and its environs, protect their inherent character and maximise their tourism potential, by the continuance of environmental schemes, design control and the removal or encouragement of re-use of

derelict properties.

P-TI4	To encourage proposals for the reinstatement, conservation or adaptation of existing disused buildings such as former warehouse buildings for tourist purposes, subject to normal planning considerations relating to design, safe access and compliance with the Habitats Directive.
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It is an objective of the Councils:

O-TI1	To facilitate infrastructure for water related activities such as boating, canoeing, angling, and cruising and other sustainable water based activities, subject to the requirements of the EIA and Habitats Directive.
O-TI2	To develop and provide a programme of interpretative signage for important heritage features and main tourism attractions in the town in conjunction with relevant agencies including Fáilte Ireland and the NRA.
O-TI3	To investigate the potential of and opportunities for the funding of walking and cycling trails in the town; and for the development of linkages between existing trails such as the Táin Trail and others in adjoining counties.
O-TI4	To promote and develop walkways and cycle ways along the Shannon riverbank and canal, in co-operation with Waterways Ireland, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and other relevant agencies.
O-TI5	To ensure mooring posts, jetties and auxiliary facilities are appropriately located and are of good standard.

Chapter 10 *Social, Community, Education & Recreation*



10 SOCIAL, COMMUNITY, EDUCATION & RECREATION

AIM:

To support the development of inclusive sustainable communities in Athlone, that have a sense of place and belonging, with equal access to the facilities and services residents need, including housing, community and recreation, education, health and childcare and to ensure that such facilities are sufficient to meet the needs of the current and future population of the town, as they contribute to and support a high quality of life.

10.1 CONTEXT

A key objective of Athlone Town Development Plan is to strengthen community involvement and generate a shared vision and strategy for how the town should develop to achieve more sustainable patterns of development. The social and community requirements of the town's population are integral to the planning and sustainable development of Athlone. The Councils will seek to involve key groups including community and voluntary groups in the implementation of the Plan.

The Councils recognise that it has a role through its planning powers to promote social inclusion and to seek the provision of facilities for all members of society.

10.2 SOCIAL & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

10.2.1 Background

Although in many instances the Councils are not directly responsible for service provision, they have a very important role in ensuring the needs of the community and its disadvantaged groups are met, through supporting and influencing other authorities and agencies, and facilitating community provision by ensuring that appropriate and sufficient land is made available in association with commercial and residential development.

The DECLG Guidelines on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (2009) prescribe that sustainable neighbourhoods require a range of community facilities. The Councils will seek to ensure that new residential development proposals will provide the appropriate infrastructure, including social, community and recreation infrastructure, to meet the needs of future residents of the development. Such facilities focus on creating vibrant communities and thereby contribute to the quality of life of residents in the area.

10.2.2 Use of Community Facilities

It is important to seek the efficient use of new and existing community facilities so that the use of such resources may be maximised. The Councils will encourage flexibility in the provision of facilities, so that they may be adaptable to meet changing needs and that they may be multifunctional. Clustering of new community facilities with recreational and open space facilities will be encouraged where practicable, with the community facilities being located in local centres or combined with school facilities as appropriate. Developments incorporating the after-hours use of school facilities by community groups will be considered where practicable to allow the use of such resources to be maximised to the benefit of the wider community.

The Councils will resist the loss of such facilities to other uses where there is no proposal to otherwise meet the need. Planning permission for redevelopment of land or change of use from facilities for community related activities will not normally be granted if such development would result in the loss of an existing facility which cannot be replaced reasonably and conveniently in the area.

Community facilities within Athlone town range from schools, childcare provision, youth centres, religious meeting places, cemeteries, health facilities, library, playgrounds, sports and recreation areas, facilities for people with disabilities and elderly to recycling facilities,

walking routes and open spaces. It is important to provide these facilities and maintain existing buildings for such uses, as they contribute to the social fabric within the town. The Councils are committed to providing accessible community facilities to serve the needs and expectations of a growing and diverse population.

10.2.3 Revitalising Areas by Planning, investment and Development (RAPID)

The Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development (RAPID) programme is aimed at improving the quality of life and the opportunity available to residents of the most disadvantaged communities in Irish cities and towns. It aims, in a focused and practical way, to reduce the deprivation faced by residents of disadvantaged communities. It attempts to do this through targeting significant state resources at the needs of disadvantaged areas. In each local RAPID area, a local Plan has been developed which defines a series of issues, objectives and actions that are key to the RAPID programme locally.

There are now seven housing estates in the RAPID area of Athlone with the recent re-mapping of the RAPID areas country wide by Government. They are:

- Ashdale / Woodlands Grove
- Blackberry Lane
- Battery Heights
- Sarsfield Square
- St. Mel’s Terrace
- Monksland (Cedarwood Drive)
- Willowpark/Meadowbrook.

10.2.4 Religious Meeting Places

The Councils recognise the importance of providing for religious meeting places and places of worship for communities. These buildings can play an important social role and can have the potential to be adapted for use by other religious or community groups or as alternative community space.

The Councils have statutory responsibility to provide for burial facilities as part of its role as a provider of services. In most cases cemeteries are provided by local communities and are associated with Churches. The Councils will use appropriate measures to reserve lands for cemetery use as and when required.

10.3 COMMUNITY POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:	
P-CMT1	To support and facilitate the provision of a wide range of community facilities and premises to meet the needs and demands of new and existing communities, especially in areas in the town where there are perceived deficiencies.
P-CMT2	To ensure that community facilities are designed appropriately in terms of accessibility and ease of use by all.
P-CMT3	To ensure that applications for new residential developments make suitable provision for the social, community and recreational needs of the future residents of such schemes, unless it can be established that the needs of the new residential development can be adequately served by existing community facilities in the area.
P-CMT4	To ensure that new community facilities meet the needs of marginalised groups, older people, people with disabilities and young people in the town.
P-CMT5	To encourage shared use of community facilities, in new and existing premises and the clustering of such facilities with educational, recreational and open space facilities where

	practicable, so as to maximise the sustainable use of such infrastructure and promote community cohesion.
P-CMT6	To resist the redevelopment of land or change of use of facilities for community related activities, if such development would result in the loss of an existing facility which cannot be replaced reasonably and conveniently in the area, unless it can be demonstrated that the facility is no longer required to serve local needs, or alternatives are available.
P-CMT7	To facilitate the needs of the youth within the town, in terms of identifying suitable locations or buildings for youth centres and, where appropriate, by supporting voluntary organisations to secure such sites.
P-CMT8	To promote the use of long term vacant units for community facilities subject to building and site suitability.
P-CMT9	To consider religious, cultural and aesthetic traditions when considering applications for religious or cultural meeting places. The Council will encourage the reuse of redundant church buildings for community use and will resist the loss of such buildings from publicly accessible uses where they are of historical, architectural or social importance.
P-CMT10	To facilitate the provision of required burial grounds at appropriate locations in Athlone in consultation with local communities and Church bodies.

It is an objective of the Councils:	
O-CMT1	To ensure that community facilities and social services are located in appropriate locations or where easily accessible to communities and that they are designed appropriately for accessibility and ease of use by all.
O-CMT2	To resist the loss of existing community facilities.
O-CMT3	To support the provision of community facilities in the environs of Athlone in conjunction with the LEADER Programme.
O-CMT4	To provide for a youth centre in the Carton area to serve the needs of residents in the surrounding residential areas.
O-CMT5	To support the provision of facilities in Athlone in conjunction with the RAPID Programme.

10.4 SOCIAL INCLUSION

Social inclusion refers to the manner in which all members of the community are integrated in an equal manner into society. It seeks to reduce barriers to participation in areas such as education, recreation, employment and health. It incorporates the need to ensure that minority groups, people of different nationalities and cultural backgrounds, people with disabilities, the elderly, children and young people are recognised as valuable members of the community.

Athlone has a diverse population. According to the 2011 census, the nationality of residents living in the town area comprises of 77% Irish, 6% Polish, 4% EU, 1% UK, 1% Lithuanian and 8% rest of the world. The plan must reflect the needs of the diverse ethnic mix of the town’s population. 11% of the population of the town is aged 65 and over.

10.5 SOCIAL INCLUSION POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:

P-SI1	To consider cultural diversity and ethnic minorities in planning for the needs of communities and ensure community facilities and social services provided are accessible for all sectors of society, including people with disabilities, people with special needs, elderly, youth, marginalised and disadvantaged groups.
P-SI2	To promote equality of access to services and facilities and assist in the removal of barriers to full participation in society.

It is an objective of the Councils:

O-SI1	To prepare a Social Inclusion Strategy for Athlone town and environs.
O-SI2	To ensure that the recommended standards in Building for Everyone – A Universal Design Approach 2012 are applied in internal and external public environments.
O-SI3	To contribute to the creation of a more socially inclusive society by providing for appropriate community infrastructure and improving access to information and resources.
O-SI4	To work with the relevant voluntary organisations both locally and nationally including the Midlands Regional Drugs Task Force, the VEC Youth Plan, the Westmeath County Childcare Plan and the Leader Programme.

10.6 HEALTHCARE

Responsibility for the provision of health care facilities in Athlone lies with the Health Service Executive (HSE). The Council will engage with the (HSE) in planning for future health care needs of residents of the town.

There is a growing trend for the provision of local health care services in Primary Health Care Centres, where a range of health services, including GP's and related services are grouped together in one location.

The preference will be for these to be located in Neighbourhood Centres, where they can link in with other local services, including pharmacies, shops and services, in order to reduce the need to travel. The Councils will support such developments in appropriate locations, provided that they do not negatively impact upon residential amenity, and that they are in keeping with the character of the area and adequate car parking facilities can be provided.

The Councils will resist the loss of healthcare facilities where it is considered that they are required; recognising that the community served by those facilities extends beyond the town and its suburbs. Any redevelopment or change of sites used for health facilities should not result in inadequate provision or poor accessibility to health facilities by the residents of the town.

Athlone is served by St. Vincent's Hospital, which provides care for the elderly and outpatient services. A Primary Community and Continuing Health Centre at Clonbrusk, which extends to 4,230sq m in area and includes a pharmacy and 3 GP Suites is currently nearing completion.

10.7 HEALTHCARE POLICIES & OBJECTIVE

It is a policy of the Councils:

P-HC1	To resist the loss of health care facilities or health care facility sites, unless it can be demonstrated that the facility is no longer required to serve local needs, or unless proposals are made to otherwise meet that need.
P-HC2	To encourage the provision of new health care facilities which are well located in terms of their accessibility, serve a sufficient catchment population and are appropriately served by public transport and accessible on foot/cycle and are consistent with the size, scale and character of the area.
P-HC3	To consider proposals for Primary Healthcare facilities in association with the HSE's programme of delivery and distribution.
P-HC4	To ensure that proposals for the change of use of residential accommodation for use by doctors, dentists and other medical practitioners does not negatively impact on residential amenity and is in keeping with the character of the area.
P-HC5	To support existing healthcare facilities in their plans to develop and expand.

It is an objective of the Councils:

O-HC1	To ensure that the provision of in-community health services is consistent in size and scale with the character of the neighbourhood.
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10.8 CHILDCARE

The provision of childcare facilities, in various forms, is recognised as key social infrastructure, enabling people to participate more fully in society, particularly in accessing employment, education and social networks. According to Westmeath Childcare Committee, there are a total of 21 childcare services throughout Athlone offering full day care, after school and preschool care.

10.8.1 Siting of Childcare Facilities

Childcare facilities are required in residential areas but it is important that residential amenity is not adversely affected by the conversion of unsuitable dwellings or an over concentration of childcare facilities in one area. The Councils will require the provision of high quality, affordable childcare facilities at easily accessible locations, in association with housing and other developments. Such developments shall comply with the Westmeath County Childcare Strategy and the Childcare Facilities Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2001 (DECLG) or any amendments thereto. Consultation shall be required with the Westmeath County Childcare Committee regarding the appropriate provision of childcare places as part of the pre-planning process.

Appropriate locations for childcare facilities within Athlone are as follows:

- ☐ In appropriate locations in new housing areas with sufficient open space.
- ☐ Industrial estates and business parks where there are significant numbers working in an area.
- ☐ Large-scale retail developments.
- ☐ Neighbourhood centres.
- ☐ In the vicinity of schools.
- ☐ Adjacent to public transport routes and nodes.

10.8.2 Conversion of buildings for Childcare Use

Dual use of premises in the provision of childcare facilities shall meet the following criteria:

- (i) The ground floor of detached and semi detached houses may be suitable providing the upper floors remain as residential accommodation.
- (ii) The provision of soundproofing as appropriate.
- (iii) The provision of a play area in accordance with Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Childcare Facilities (June 2001)
- (iv) No adverse impact on residential amenity and traffic safety and flow.
- (v) The demand for childcare in the area is demonstrated.

10.9 CHILDCARE POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:	
P-CC1	To encourage and support the provision of sufficient childcare facilities to support new and existing communities in Athlone, in accordance with the Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Childcare Facilities (June 2001), or any revision thereof.
P-CC2	To encourage the establishment of high quality childcare facilities in suitable locations in Athlone, such as neighbourhood centres, areas of concentrated employment, in the vicinity of schools, adjacent to public transport corridors and /or pedestrian areas, and in larger new housing estates.
P-CC3	To work with Westmeath Childcare Committee in the implementation of childcare facilities in the town.

It is an objective of the Councils:	
O-CC1	To incorporate the findings of Westmeath Community Childcare Audit into Development Plan policy.
O-CC2	To encourage the provision of drop-in childcare facilities within large scale retail, leisure or tourism developments.

10.10 EDUCATION

The development of high quality educational facilities is vital in terms of both developing self-confident and vibrant communities in the town, together with preparing residents to participate fully in the life of Athlone. There is an excellent educational infrastructure in the town ranging from Primary to Third Level facilities. The Councils have a role in facilitating the provision of educational infrastructure through zoning lands for educational uses to meet the needs of new and existing communities in line with the pace of development. Where educational facilities are needed, the Councils will ensure that land is reserved for these purposes.

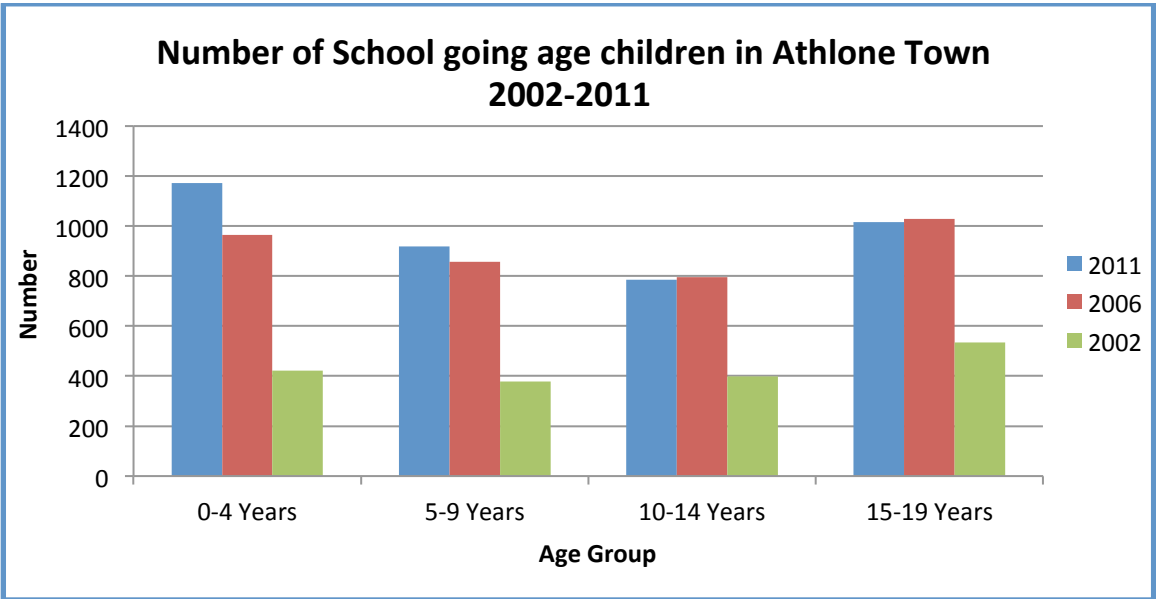


Fig. 10.1 Number of school going children in Athlone (CSO 2011)

10.10.1 Primary Education

There are six Primary Schools in the Athlone urban area which had an enrolment in 2012 of 1545. According to the 2011 census, 10% of the population of the town is of Primary School going age which would equate to 1,591 children. This number is likely to be much higher, when the demographic profile of the rural environs of the town is taken into consideration. It is considered that there is a deficit in primary school places in the town. This urban deficit is currently being provided for in rural schools in the rural hinterland namely Baylin National School, Coosan National School and Clonbonny National School.

According to the 2011 census, there were 1,172 children (0-4 year olds) recorded in Athlone. This represents a significant increase in this age cohort, relative to previous years and may in turn generate a need for additional school places. The Cornamagh Local Area Plan 2009 makes provision for a 16 classroom school on a 1.14 hectare site. There is also provision for a National School in the Cornamaddy Local Area Plan.

10.10.2 Secondary Education

There are five Post-Primary Schools in the town namely the Marist College, St. Aloysius College, Our Lady’s Bower, St. Joseph’s College and Athlone Community College. The 2012-2013 enrolment for these schools was 2,710.

10.10.3 Third Level Education

Third Level education is provided by Athlone Institute of Technology, Westmeath Vocational Educational Committee (V.E.C.), SOLAS and a number of private providers who deliver Certificate and Diploma courses in a range of different subjects.

10.10.4 Athlone Institute of Technology

There are currently 4,800 full-time students in Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) studying a broad range of courses offered by the institute's four schools i.e. Business, Engineering, Humanities and Science. AIT has benefitted from €100 million investment in the campus since 2000.

The Strategic Plan for the Institute, which sets out a vision to 2013, establishes a series of ambitious targets including increasing student numbers by 40 per cent; developing e-learning

platforms for students; generating research income of €10million per annum; and increasing collaboration across the tertiary education and industry sectors.

At the heart of AIT’s strategic vision is the ambition to play a key role in the Midlands, through driving innovation and fostering entrepreneurial activity. Research activity in Athlone is geared towards solving the needs of business. That applied focus is concentrated in three strategic areas: materials science, biomolecular sciences and computer networking. AIT provides the following R&D facilities:

- ❑ Software Research Institute
- ❑ Materials Research Institute
- ❑ Bioscience Research Institute
- ❑ Midlands Innovation and Research Centre (MIRC)
- ❑ Industrial Polymer Solutions and Design Centre

Given the importance of the AIT to the regional economy, the Council will continue to liaise with the Institute regarding future plans for expansion.

10.10.5 Siting of Educational Facilities

New schools should be located close to existing community facilities and services and have access to open space areas. They should be accessible by safe walking routes and sited in proximity to areas of residential development in Athlone. The clustering of schools with community facilities provides for a more economic use of resources. The Governments Smarter Travel Policy also advocates that every school and college in Ireland should have a School Travel Plan to encourage students to use alternatives to the private car.

The Government’s Guidelines on The Provision of Schools and the Planning System – A Code of Practice (2008) states that school provision should be an integral part of the evolution of compact sustainable urban development and the development of sustainable communities.

Accordingly, it is the Councils policy that new schools shall be located within the existing catchment in a manner that aids ease of access from surrounding areas and encourages sustainable mobility by walking, cycling and public transport.

It is the Councils policy that temporary structures will only be permitted for use as classrooms where projections indicate that there is a genuine temporary shortage of accommodation. Where projections indicate that the need will be for a period of more than five years, a more permanent solution must be sought. Alterations and extensions to existing establishments should conform to the Department of Education and Skills space standards and road safety design measures in the vicinity of schools.

10.11 EDUCATION POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:	
P-ED1	To reserve sites for educational use in those areas where the population has increased and there is a predicted demographic demand for further school places. Such sites shall cluster with existing community and open space facilities.
P-ED2	To resist the loss of sites in educational use, unless an appropriate alternative site is available, or it can be demonstrated that the educational facility is no longer required and there is no likelihood of the buildings or the site returning to educational use in the future. The preferred alternative use for the site would be an alternative community use.
P-ED3	To encourage the use of existing educational facilities and school playing fields for other community purposes when not in use.
P-ED4	To integrate the provision of school facilities with new residential

	development in accordance with the DEHLG Guidelines on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas 2009.
P-ED5	To support the development and expansion of educational institutions in the town including AIT.
P-ED6	To ensure that provision for education facilities is made with regard to access arrangements, road safety, high quality design and efficiency in the use of resources.
P-ED7	To promote the co-location of Primary & Post-Primary school sites subject to site suitability and access proposals.
P-ED8	To promote the development of facilities connected with outreach programmes between businesses and the third-level institutions (e.g. Research Facilities at AIT), thus promoting Athlone as a centre of excellence in research and development.
P-ED9	To support the upgrading, modernisation and expansion of the educational building stock in the town, so as to ensure that these institutions can accommodate anticipated population growth.

It is an objective of the Councils:	
O-ED1	To ensure that all new educational facilities are designed to facilitate social inclusion, incorporating access for people with disabilities, meeting Building Regulation space requirements and incorporating flexibility in design so that they may be suitable for alternative community uses, subject to the overriding need of providing good design for educational purposes.
O-ED2	To consult with the Department of Education and Skills in

	planning for education and in determining the need for education facilities in Athlone.
O-ED3	To implement traffic calming measures and reduced speed limits in the vicinity of schools.
O-ED4	To ensure that the infrastructural and expansion needs of AIT are provided for in a planned manner.
O-ED5	To require applications for school developments to be accompanied by a Sustainable Travel Plan indicating how pupils will access the school and provide for sustainable modes of travel to school and thus encourage alternatives to the private car.
O-ED6	To encourage clustering of school, community and open space facilities and to consider dual use of school and community facilities where appropriate.
O-ED7	To require applications for school extensions / temporary accommodation to identify a justification for such development at that location, having regard to the school catchment area and Smarter Travel policies.
O-ED8	To support and facilitate Research and Development Initiatives in AIT.

10.12 AMENITY, OPEN SPACE & RECREATION

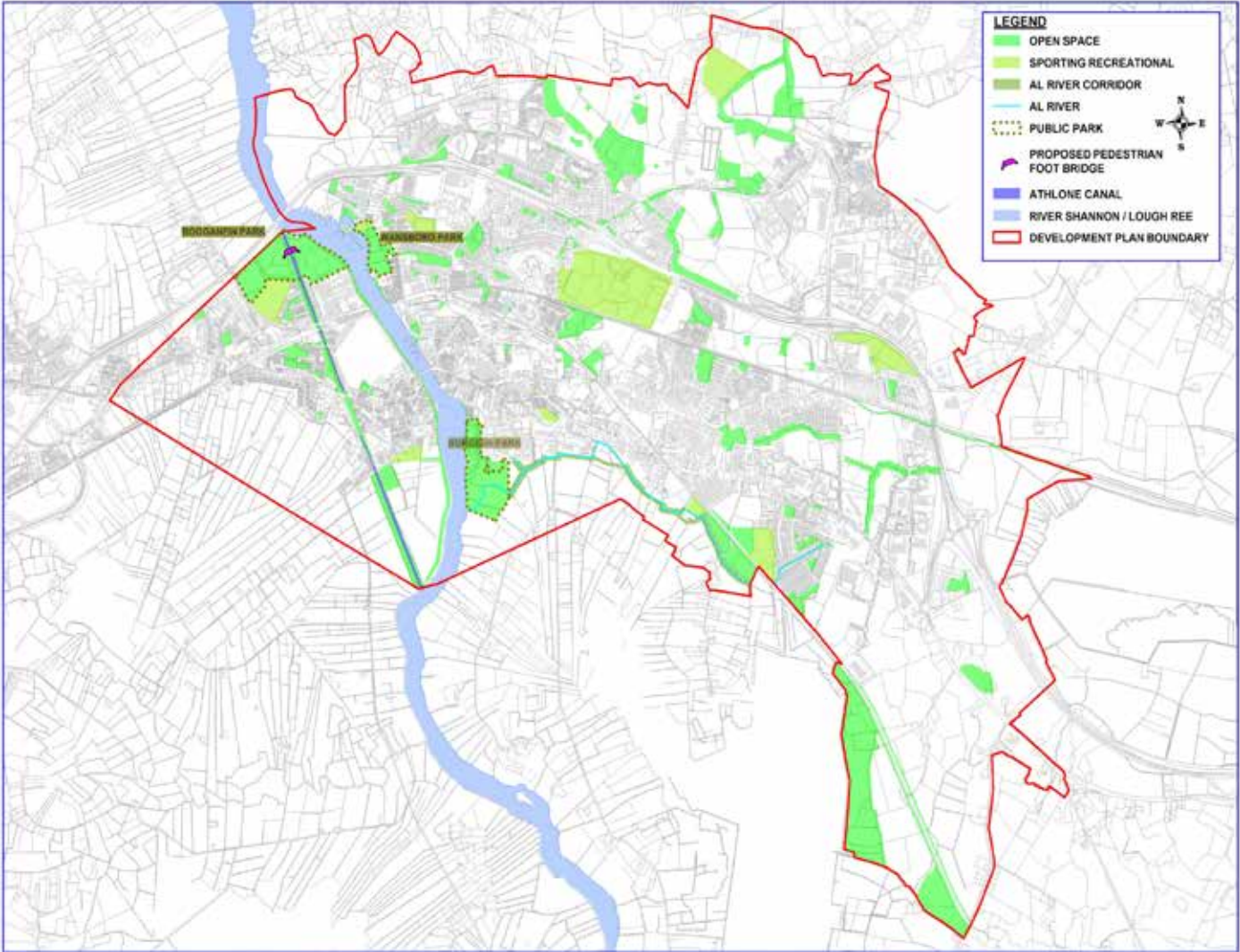
Athlone possesses a wide range of amenities and recreational facilities for the enjoyment of all members of the community and visitors alike, having regard to the natural resources and facilities it possesses and its environment of scenic value.

10.12.1 The value of open space and recreation

Open spaces are a vital part of the urban environment. Open space amenities create benefits for the enhancement of the quality of life of residential areas and also provide opportunities for recreational activities and vital green infrastructure that enables us to deal with floods or mitigate and adapt to climate change while providing wildlife habitats, sporting facilities or parks. Furthermore, open space fosters a sense of place.

10.12.2 Provision of Amenity, Open Space & Recreation in Athlone

The provision of open space, recreation and amenity facilities, which are accessible by all sectors and age groups of the town’s population, is a central element in the delivery of sustainable communities. The Councils consider that high quality open spaces, green linkages, such as walks, cycle ways and sports and recreational facilities should be provided in line with development and changing community needs. The Councils shall seek to promote connectivity between existing open spaces in the town centre, urban fringe and the rural hinterland through the development of safe pedestrian and cycle routes.



Map 10.1 Distribution of Open Spaces in Athlone

Map 10.1 outlines the hierarchy and distribution of open space amenities in Athlone. Existing provision in the town ranges from pockets of land within housing estates to playing grounds associated with AIT and the Regional Sports Centre to Wansboro and Burgess Park. Burgess Park is a formal park serving the town. In recent years, the Town Council has invested significantly in Burgess Park by providing a playground, tree planting scheme and general environmental enhancement. This plan provides for an extension to the park to the south to incorporate a walkway along the River Shannon, in accordance with the Athlone Waterfront Strategy.

The Plan also makes provision for a new public park and playing fields at Bogganafin which shall extend to an area of 14 hectares along both sides of the canal, thus providing an opportunity to promote the recreational potential of the canal. The park will also complement existing playing pitches on the site.

A riverside linear park is proposed along the Al River south of the railway line in the townland of Derries. It is envisaged that this park will provide opportunities for passive recreational use.

In addition, areas have been designated for parks and recreational open space within the Lissywollen South and Cornamagh Framework Plans. The provision of open space corridors along the Shannon is required to protect the amenity of the river and enhance accessibility to and use thereof.

There are a number of established walking routes within Athlone. The Town Council has also developed a number of cycling routes on newly constructed urban roads within the built up area. This emphasis on maximising pedestrian and cyclist permeability and connectivity will continue to be progressed during the lifetime of the plan. These routes allow urban dwellers to access and enjoy the

natural environmental assets Athlone possesses, namely the River Shannon and Lough Ree. Such routes can open up valuable amenity assets for local communities and visitors to enjoy and appreciate as well as providing opportunities for enhancement of quality of life and health. Many opportunities exist for creating new and improved linkages and facilities for walking and cycling so that the enjoyment of the wealth of natural heritage and amenity may be maximised and the potential to exploit these assets for the purposes of tourism may be realised.

10.13 AMENITY, OPEN SPACE & RECREATION POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:	
P-AOR1	To ensure that sufficient and appropriate open space, recreation and amenity facilities; both passive and active are provided to meet the changing needs of new and existing communities in the town.
P-AOR2	To seek to safeguard the town's natural amenity assets and facilitate the improvement of existing recreation facilities and open space, including town parks, riverside and canal walks, eskers, urban squares, walking and cycling routes, playing fields and playgrounds for the residents and visitors to the town.
P-AOR3	To employ a strategic approach to the delivery of open space, recreation and amenity facilities, thus ensuring that existing and future residents and visitors to the town are appropriately provided for and that such amenities are accessible by all members of society.
P-AOR4	To ensure new open space and recreational facilities are within walking distance of residential areas or close to public transport

	corridors. High standards of design, landscaping, functionality and usability, safety and security will apply to all open space areas.
P-AOR5	To restrict development in areas of proven flood risk and to have regard to their potential multi-functional benefits as open spaces, including their visual, wildlife, climate change and informal recreation functions.
P-AOR6	To provide for amenity and recreational development in accordance with the Athlone Waterfront Strategy 2011.
P-AOR7	To provide for and facilitate the expansion and development of Burgess Park, in accordance with the Athlone Waterfront Strategy 2011.
P-AOR8	To implement the findings of the Athlone Canal Study, to stimulate tourism and investment in the west side of Athlone, thus contributing to the regeneration of the area.
P-AOR9	To prohibit development that would significantly prejudice the form, character or setting of any recreational amenity, open space, walk or cycle way, or any other identifiable or scheduled amenity asset.
P-AOR10	To integrate and link open space amenities within the town and to the surrounding countryside.
P-AOR11	To seek to ensure the provision of sufficient and appropriate active and passive recreational facilities to meet the needs of the towns population and which are of a scale and quality to attract and retain a critical mass of population in the Gateway Town.
P-AOR12	To develop and facilitate the provision of public open spaces in accordance with standards prescribed in the Sustainable

Residential Development in Urban Areas –Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2009.

It is an objective of the Councils:

O-AOR1	To ensure that sufficient land is allocated for open space, recreational and amenity uses.
O-AOR2	To require, through development management, the provision of open space and amenity for new residential development in tandem with the phasing of development.
O-AOR3	To secure the provision of recreational and amenity facilities and improvement of existing facilities, in line with new development through approved development contribution schemes and through the development management process.
O-AOR4	To seek a greater variety of recreation and amenity facilities to reflect the demands of the increasingly diverse population in the town.
O-AOR5	To safeguard the ecological importance of open spaces and river corridors.
O-AOR6	To ensure sufficient land is allocated to provide a variety of open spaces on a hierarchical basis throughout the town in order to achieve a choice of open space, recreational and amenity facilities.
O-AOR7	To improve and develop safe public access to the river, canal and other features of amenity value.
O-AOR8	To have a coordinated approach to the provision of parks equipment, exercise areas, walks and spaces in the town, in conjunction with other agencies including the Westmeath Sports Partnership.
O-AOR9	To carry out amenity and environmental improvement schemes and any other works as

	appropriate and to improve open space, recreation and amenity facilities as resources allow subject to the protection of Natura 2000 sites.
O-AOR10	To ensure that the town’s flood plains, wetlands and water courses are retained for their biodiversity and flood protection values.
O-AOR11	To extend and further develop Burgess Park.
O-AOR12	To promote the development of a public park and playing fields at Bogganafin along both sides of the canal.

10.14 SPORTS, LEISURE AND PLAY

The Councils recognise the importance of play in the development of children. The Councils will support initiatives, which encourage play and raise awareness of the importance of play for the health, wellbeing and development of children. Open space and recreation facilities have many benefits that can contribute to people’s overall quality of life by providing exercise, play, a sense of freedom, somewhere to relax and a place to meet and enjoy the town’s environment. It is therefore vital to safeguard the natural assets in Athlone. The provision of safe footpaths and walkways encourage walking as a form of recreation. The town is well served by sporting facilities, with the Regional Sports Centre and AIT providing state of the art facilities including an indoor athletics stadium to international standards.

10.15 SPORTS, LEISURE & PLAY POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is policy of the Councils:	
P-SLP1	To maximise the range of public play opportunities available to children, particularly children who are marginalised or disadvantaged or who have a disability through the Council’s Play for Children Policy and

	Action Plan in accordance with the National Children’s Strategy.
P-SLP2	To promote, encourage and facilitate the increased participation in sports and physical activity by all age groups, including children, youth, parents, active age groups, schools and the community.
P-SLP3	To ensure the sufficient and appropriate provision for local sports and recreation and to seek more efficient usage of existing resources.

It is an objective of the Councils:	
O-SLP1	To implement the Council’s Play For Children Policy.
O-SLP2	To ensure that in public playgrounds or publicly funded playgrounds, surfaces and play equipment provided conform to the Irish standards for play equipment and surfacing.
O-SLP3	To consider, as part of provision, the quality of recreational environments that would promote play.
O-SLP4	To actively encourage and support the provision by private developers of additional recreational and amenity facilities across the town, including swimming pools, gyms, cinemas, play areas, playgrounds or other such amenities.
O-SLP5	To work with local sports groups and agencies in progressing and delivering quality and accessible facilities for sport, recreation and leisure, in conjunction with all key agencies involved.
O-SLP6	To support and assist in the effective marketing and promotion of the sporting and recreational opportunities that exist within the town.

10.16 ALLOTMENT PROVISION

The Planning and Development Acts 2000 as amended describe an allotment as ‘an area of land comprising not more than 1,000 square metres let or available for letting to and cultivation by one or more than one person who is a member of the local community and lives adjacent or near to the allotment, for the purpose of the production of vegetables or fruit mainly for consumption by the person or a member of his or her family.’ The Act also allows for a Local Authority to indicate in a Development Plan an intention to reserve land for use and cultivation as allotments and regulating, promoting, facilitating or controlling the provision of land for that use. There are no publicly owned allotments in Athlone.

Allotments are an important asset particularly within urban areas as they provide benefits to local communities and the environment. The Councils will facilitate the provision of allotments in Athlone, subject to site suitability and impacts on residential amenity.

10.17 ALLOTMENT POLICY & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:	
P-ALL1	To actively promote the reservation of land for the use and cultivation of allotments and facilitate the provision of land for that use.

It is an objective of the Councils:	
O-ALL1	To identify potential allotment sites in the town.
O-ALL2	To work with residents associations to establish allotment sites in large areas of under used open space lands.

10.18 PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY

The Planning & Development Acts 2000 as amended require that a Development Plan indicate the location on a map and preserve public rights of way which give access to seashore, mountain, lakeshore, riverbank or other place of natural beauty or recreational utility.

Rights of Way provide a valuable link to some of the town’s natural assets such as the River Shannon, Lough Ree, Crosswood Bog etc. There is currently public access to some of the amenities within the town, many of which are in the Council’s ownership. The residents of Athlone would benefit from having improved access to the towns natural amenities. Appendix 11 lists existing public rights of way in the town. This list is not exhaustive and it is intended this will be added to during the lifetime of the plan.

10.19 PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY POLICY & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:	
P-PROW1	To preserve and protect existing public rights of way for the common good and undertake to create new public rights of way, where it is considered desirable and possible.

It is an objective of the Councils:	
O-PROW1	To identify and map on an ongoing basis Public Rights of Way within Athlone Town and environs.
O-PROW2	To consider the feasibility of the provision of a walkway from Parnell Square, along the Left Bank to Broadmeadow.

Chapter 11 *Natural Heritage, Built Heritage & Archaeology*



11 NATURAL HERITAGE, BUILT HERITAGE & ARCHAEOLOGY

AIM:

To protect, conserve, manage and enhance the natural and built heritage of Athlone and its environs, including its biodiversity, geology and archaeology and achieve a balance between conservation and development for existing and future residents of and visitors to the town.

11.1 NATURAL HERITAGE

11.1.1 Policy Context

European and National legislation protects the most valuable natural heritage sites. The Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora) obliges member states to designate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) to protect and conserve habitats and species of importance in a European Union context. The EU Birds Directive (1979) offers protection to internationally important bird populations in Special Protection Areas (SPA). Collectively, SAC's and SPA's are known as Natura 2000 sites.

The National Heritage Plan 2002 sets out a clear and coherent strategy and framework for the protection and enhancement of Ireland's national heritage. The core objective of the plan is to protect the national heritage as well as promoting it as a resource to be enjoyed by all.

The National Biodiversity Plan - Actions for Biodiversity 2011-2016 issued by the DECLG recognises that conservation and enhancement of biodiversity is essential for sustainable development, and for maintaining the quality of human life. The National Biodiversity Plan sets out 102 actions under a series of strategic objectives. The preparation of a Local Biodiversity Plan is one of the actions.

The aim of the County Westmeath Heritage Plan 2010-2015 is to increase awareness so as to encourage community responsibility for the

conservation of the natural, built and cultural heritage of the county and promote enjoyment by all.

11.2 NATURAL HERITAGE IN ATHLONE

Athlone, whilst an urban settlement, supports a range of diverse and species rich habitats, including the River Shannon and its callows, canal, eskers, grasslands and hedgerows. The value of these habitats includes amenity and the provision of ecological corridors, allowing movement of wildlife through the area. The natural heritage and biodiversity of Athlone provides a valued physical, social and economic asset for those living and visiting the area and is integral to the image of the town. Heritage and landscape policy and objectives shall be co-ordinated across boundaries to ensure an integrated approach to features at a macro-scale that have the potential to significantly impact on regional character and identity, particularly in the context of the River Shannon and the built heritage and archaeology of Athlone.

The most valuable wildlife habitats around Athlone include the River Shannon Callows, characterised by botanically rich lowland wet grassland and are of international importance for wintering waterfowl. Of particular note is the ecosystem that supports the globally endangered cornflake. The Shannon Callows are designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA).

Lough Ree which is located to the north of the Plan area is designated as a SAC and SPA, as it comprises Annex I habitats; namely natural eutrophic lakes with alkaline fens, semi-natural dry grasslands, bog woodland and limestone pavements. It is also of special conservation interest in regard to the presence of whooper swan, wigeon, shoveler and coot.

Crosswood Bog, which adjoins the eastern boundary of the plan area is designated as a

Special Area of Conservation and is selected for its active raised bog and degraded raised bog, which is a rare habitat in the E.U.

Where developments would affect the integrity of a Natura 2000 site, they will only be permitted where there is no alternative solution and there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest for the development or land-use change. Where the site concerned hosts a priority natural habitat type and/or a priority species, development or land use change will not be permitted unless it is necessary for imperative reasons of human health or public safety or for benefits of primary importance for the environment. Where development is permitted, the Councils will consider the use of conditions or planning agreements to ensure the protection and enhancement of the site's nature conservation interest.

11.3 NATURAL HERITAGE AREAS

Natural Heritage Areas (NHA's) are heritage sites that were designated for the protection of flora, fauna, habitats and geological sites of national importance. Management of NHAs is guided by planning policy and the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000. In Athlone, the Shannon Callows, Lough Ree and Crosswood Bog are designated as proposed NHA's.

11.4 LOCAL SITES OF BIODIVERSITY VALUE AND NON DESIGNATED SITES

There are several important wildlife habitats in Athlone that do not meet the criteria for designations as an NHA but are important on a county or local basis and act as stepping stones in a wider ecological network. These include rivers and river banks, ponds, small woods and hedgerows which are essential for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species. Article 10 of the Habitats Directive states that Member States shall endeavour in their land use planning and development policies to encourage the management of

features of the landscape which are of major importance for wild flora and fauna.

11.5 NATURAL HERITAGE POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:	
P-NH1	To protect, manage and enhance the natural heritage, biodiversity, landscape and environment of Athlone, in recognition of its importance as a non-renewable resource, unique identifier and as a natural resource asset.
P-NH2	To protect and enhance the visual, recreational, environmental (flora/fauna/biodiversity) and amenity value of the River Shannon and Callows.
P-NH3	To provide for the protection, conservation and enhancement of wildlife habitats within the River Shannon Callows, Lough Ree and Crosswood Bog and to maintain the conservation value of these designated sites.
P-NH4	To ensure as far as possible that development does not adversely impact on wildlife habitats and species.
P-NH5	To support and cooperate with statutory authorities and other interested parties and community groups, in support of measures taken to manage designated nature conservation sites, in order to achieve their conservation objectives. Specific regard shall be had to Conservation Management Plans and their conservation objectives/management practices, where they exist.

P-NH6	To promote development for recreation and educational purposes, in areas of biodiversity value, that would not conflict with maintaining favourable conservation status and the meeting of conservation objectives for designated sites.
P-NH7	To promote increased understanding and awareness of the town’s natural heritage and local biodiversity.
P-NH8	To preserve and enhance the scenic amenity of the River Shannon and continue to protect the vistas available from designated views.
P-NH9	To protect and conserve wild bird species and their habitats, especially rare or vulnerable species and regularly occurring migratory species.
P-NH10	To require Appropriate Assessment (Habitats Directive Assessment) and where relevant environmental assessment such as EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment), or Ecological Appraisal for developments not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site, and which are likely to have significant effects on the integrity of the site individually or cumulatively.
P-NH11	To protect and conserve Natural Heritage Areas and proposed Natural Heritage Areas.
P-NH12	To consult with appropriate Prescribed Bodies and Government Agencies when assessing development proposals affecting designated sites of European importance.

P-NH13	To conserve the existing wide range of flora, fauna and wildlife habitats in Athlone, through the preservation of ecological corridors and ecological networks, i.e. habitats that link the areas of high nature conservation value.
P-NH14	To apply the precautionary principle in relation to development proposals in areas identified as being of local nature conservation interest by requiring a scientific/ecological risk assessment to ensure that the development will not impact on the integrity and habitat value of the site.
P-NH15	To conserve and protect all designated sites within and adjacent to the plan area including Natura 2000 sites, NHAs, local biodiversity areas and sites identified under the Bern and Bonn Conventions.
P-NH16	To safeguard Protected Areas on the Water Framework Directive Register of Protected Areas.
P-NH17	To promote the provision of green infrastructure in Athlone, in the form of linear parks, nature trails, wildlife corridors and urban woodlands.

It is an objective of the Councils:	
O-NH1	To ensure that existing biodiversity features such as watercourses, streams, hedgerows, trees, ecological corridors and linkages are incorporated appropriately into the design of new developments.

O-NH2	To prepare a Local Biodiversity Plan for Athlone in fulfilment of the requirements of the National Biodiversity Plan.
O-NH3	To prepare a habitat map of existing habitats along the River Shannon and Callows.
O-NH4	To identify and map sites of local nature conservation interest in the town.
O-NH5	To require the submission of a “Visual Impact Assessment” for proposed development with potential to impact adversely on significant landscape features within the plan area including the River Shannon.
O-NH6	To provide for a wildlife corridor along the existing railway lines in the town, to protect the ecological value of the existing trees and hedgerows located therein.
O-NH7	To protect existing views of the River Shannon from the L-8044, L-8006 and the L-5413.
O-NH8	To undertake a review of important vistas and panoramas within the town.

11.6 GEOLOGY

The Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI) has identified sites of geological importance within the county. Some of these sites may be designated as NHAs in due course because of their geological interest from a national perspective. There is one site of geological interest in the plan area, namely a Mushroom Rock in Loughandonning, which marks the former lake margins of Lough Ree. The Councils will protect this site, together with additional sites as they become designated during the lifetime of the plan, from inappropriate development.

11.7 GEOLOGY POLICIES

It is a policy of the Councils:	
P-GEO1	To consult with the Geological Survey of Ireland when undertaking, approving or authorising developments which are likely to impact on geological sites or involve significant ground excavations.
P-GEO2	To protect and enhance the geological and geomorphological heritage of existing geological sites in Athlone.
P-GEO3	To encourage and promote, where appropriate, public access to geological sites subject to the requirements of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive.

11.8 ESKERS

The relationship of the Shannon and the local esker system has contributed to and dictated Athlone’s position and its development, and resulted in defining the town’s character and distinctiveness. There are areas of undisturbed esker in the town that remain undeveloped, in part due to access constraints. The undisturbed eskers have facilitated flora growth and habitat creation that may not typically be found elsewhere in the town or county. The esker network in the town has amenity, heritage and cultural value.

In 2005, Athlone Town Council undertook an esker survey of the town, in conjunction with Westmeath County Council which identified the nature, extent and condition of eskers and the conservation value of each of those esker systems. Athlone Town contains seven segments of an overall extensive esker system that runs from the River Shannon to Mount Temple and Moate. These esker segments offer spectacular views over the town and provide important reservoirs for esker biodiversity.

Appendix 10 lists the esker systems worthy of protection in Athlone.

11.9 ESKER POLICY & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:

P-ESK1	To protect and conserve the landscape, natural heritage and geodiversity value of esker systems in Athlone.
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It is a objective of the Councils:

O-ESK1	To assess any proposals for development in proximity to esker sites with reference to the scientific amenity and landscape value and groundwater vulnerability of the esker landscape.
O-ESK2	To Increase pedestrian access to the eskers and opportunities to support local amenities and environmental education to maintain esker heritage.

11.10 TREES, WOODLANDS AND HEDGEROWS

Trees and hedgerows constitute an important natural and historic resource, given their contribution to landscape quality, their ecological importance as wildlife habitats and historical significance as townland and field boundaries. In urban settings, trees and groups of trees can contribute significantly to the local landscape/townscape and in the successful integration of new buildings into the landscape.

Athlone contains many large trees and groups of trees of considerable heritage value, which enhance the urban fabric of the town, e.g. mature tree stand along the waterfront in Burgess Park.

In July 2011, Athlone Tidy Towns (in partnership) with Athlone Town Council commissioned comprehensive tree surveys in the following areas:

- Ballymahon Road-Garden Vale
- Golden Mile
- John Broderick Street
- The Strand
- Wolfe Tone Terrace
- Burgess Park
- Grace Road
- No. 1 The Batteries
- Western Station.

A total of 405 trees were surveyed. The Beech Trees at the Batteries are believed to range in age from 180 years to 390 years. Appendix 9 of the plan lists trees and woodlands of special amenity value in the town.

A key consideration of the plan is the treatment of the southern edge of the town centre. Having regard to the open aspect and the low-lying nature of surrounding lands, the rear facades of the existing built form, namely Golden Island Shopping Centre and Ard na Rí apartment scheme, occupy a prominent position on the townscape. It is considered that a planting scheme and other environmental enhancements would ameliorate the vista from the southern approach on the River Shannon, and thus create a visually appealing approach to the town befitting of its status as a Gateway Town.



11.11 TREES, WOODLANDS, HEDGEROWS
POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:

P-TWH1	To protect, preserve and ensure the effective management of trees and groups of trees, considered to be of special amenity value included in Appendix 9 of the plan.
P-TWH2	To provide continuity of tree cover throughout the town, promoting the use of native species where possible, with varied species and age distribution.
P-TWH3	To promote the enhancement of the public realm and general amenity of the town through the continued maintenance and provision of trees in the urban environment.
P-TWH4	To preserve and enhance the amenity and biodiversity value of the town by preserving as far as possible trees, woodlands and hedgerows.

It is an objective of the Councils:

O-TWH1	To employ where appropriate, Tree Preservation Orders to protect important trees, groups of trees or woodlands of special amenity value.
O-TWH2	To promote the Native Woodland and Neighbour Wood schemes and other initiatives that aim to establish and enhance woodlands for recreational and wildlife benefits.
O-TWH3	To discourage the felling of healthy mature trees to facilitate development and to encourage tree surgery rather than tree felling where possible.

O-TWH4	To protect and preserve existing hedgerows in new developments particularly species rich roadside and townland boundary hedgerows and seek their replacement with new hedgerows with native species indigenous to the area, where their removal is necessary during the course of road works or other works.
O-TWH5	To adhere to the provisions of the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 in prohibiting hedge cutting during the bird nesting season from March 1st to August 31st.
O-TWH6	To protect existing trees and hedgerows along the approach roads into Athlone and to implement additional planting, to visually enhance the approaches into the town.
O-TWH7	To implement a tree planting programme within the town subject to resource availability.
O-TWH8	To develop a landscaped edge to the Loughandonning Link Road, and provide for tree planting set within a landscaped framework.
O-TWH9	To prepare and implement a landscape and visual enhancement scheme to enhance the southern edge of the town.

11.12 WETLANDS AND WATERCOURSES

Wetlands are associated with rivers and streams and include areas of marsh, fen, or water, and comprise habitats for unusual communities of species that can survive in aquatic and semi-aquatic conditions. Wetlands reduce the flow of pollutants to both surface water and ground water and can reduce the impacts of flooding. Increased drainage or

flooding can cause significant change in habitat value and species diversity. The Water Framework Directive provides for the protection of wetlands. These elements also function as ecological corridors that connect related habitats and designated sites which enable species to move from place to place.

Athlone is characterised by its crossing point on the River Shannon, an important waterway corridor for its amenity and habitat value. The AI River is a very important watercourse in the town as it provides the habitat and breeding ground for brown trout and Lamprey eel.

11.13 WETLANDS & WATERCOURSES POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:

P-WW1	To protect and enhance the natural heritage and landscape character of the River Shannon including the callows and maintain them free from inappropriate development and to provide public access where feasible, subject to the requirements of the EIA and Habitats Directive.
P-WW2	To maintain or enhance biodiversity richness by protecting rivers, stream corridors and valleys, by reserving riparian zones/ecological corridors, maintaining them free from inappropriate development, discouraging culverting or realignment, and promoting natural flood functions.
P-WW3	To ensure that Athlone’s watercourses are retained for their biodiversity and flood protection values and to conserve and enhance where possible, the wildlife habitats of the town’s watercourses and wetlands.
P-WW4	To consult, as appropriate, with the Fisheries Board in relation to any

	development that could potentially impact on aquatic ecosystems and associated riparian habitats.
P-WW5	To protect, where practicable existing streams and watercourses and wetlands located on land zoned for development and incorporate them within the overall design for the area, thereby contributing to and connecting into an overall green network for the town.

It is an objective of the Councils:

O-WW1	To provide for public access to waterways, where feasible and appropriate, in partnership with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Waterways Ireland and other relevant stakeholders, while maintaining them free from inappropriate development and subject to Ecological Impact Assessment and Appropriate Assessment Screening as appropriate.
O-WW2	To consult with Waterways Ireland and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the DECLG, Inland Waterways Association and local communities on development proposals that may affect inland waterways, rivers, lakes, canals or water courses.
O-WW3	To require that run off from proposed developments do not result in a deterioration of downstream watercourses or habitats.
O-WW4	To assess development proposals which involve lighting along water courses, rivers, streams and canal corridors, tree lines and urban woodland, in order to mitigate impacts of lighting on bats and other species.

O-WW5	To identify and map wetland sites of ecological value and protect them for their biodiversity.
O-WW6	To consult the Inland Fisheries Ireland and the National Parks and Wildlife Service on any development proposal concerning riparian areas and watercourses and to take account of the requirements for the protection of fisheries habitat during construction and development works at river sites.
O-WW7	To maintain good ecological status of wetlands and watercourses in support of the provisions of the Water Framework Directive.
O-WW8	To make provision for a wildlife corridor along the entirety of the AI River to maintain existing habitats and biodiversity.

11.14 INVASIVE SPECIES

Many non-native invasive species of flora and fauna have an impact on biodiversity and pose a threat to native vegetation and wildlife by destroying their habitats or introducing new diseases or parasites. Certified weed free material shall be used to prevent further spread of Invasive Species.

11.15 INVASIVE SPECIES POLICIES & OBJECTIVE

It is a policy of the Councils:	
P-IS1	To adhere to best practice guidance in relation to the control of invasive species in the plan area.
P-IS2	To support measures for the prevention and/or eradication of invasive species as appropriate, as opportunities and resources allow.

It is an objective of the Councils:	
O-IS1	To support and raise awareness towards measures for the prevention and eradication of invasive species and inform the public on prevention and management of invasive species.

11.16 BUILT HERITAGE

11.16.1 Policy Context

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) has published *Architectural Heritage Protection, Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2004)* and *A Government Policy on Architecture 2009–2015*, which contains policy and advice for the protection of architectural heritage, including protected structures and architectural conservation areas.

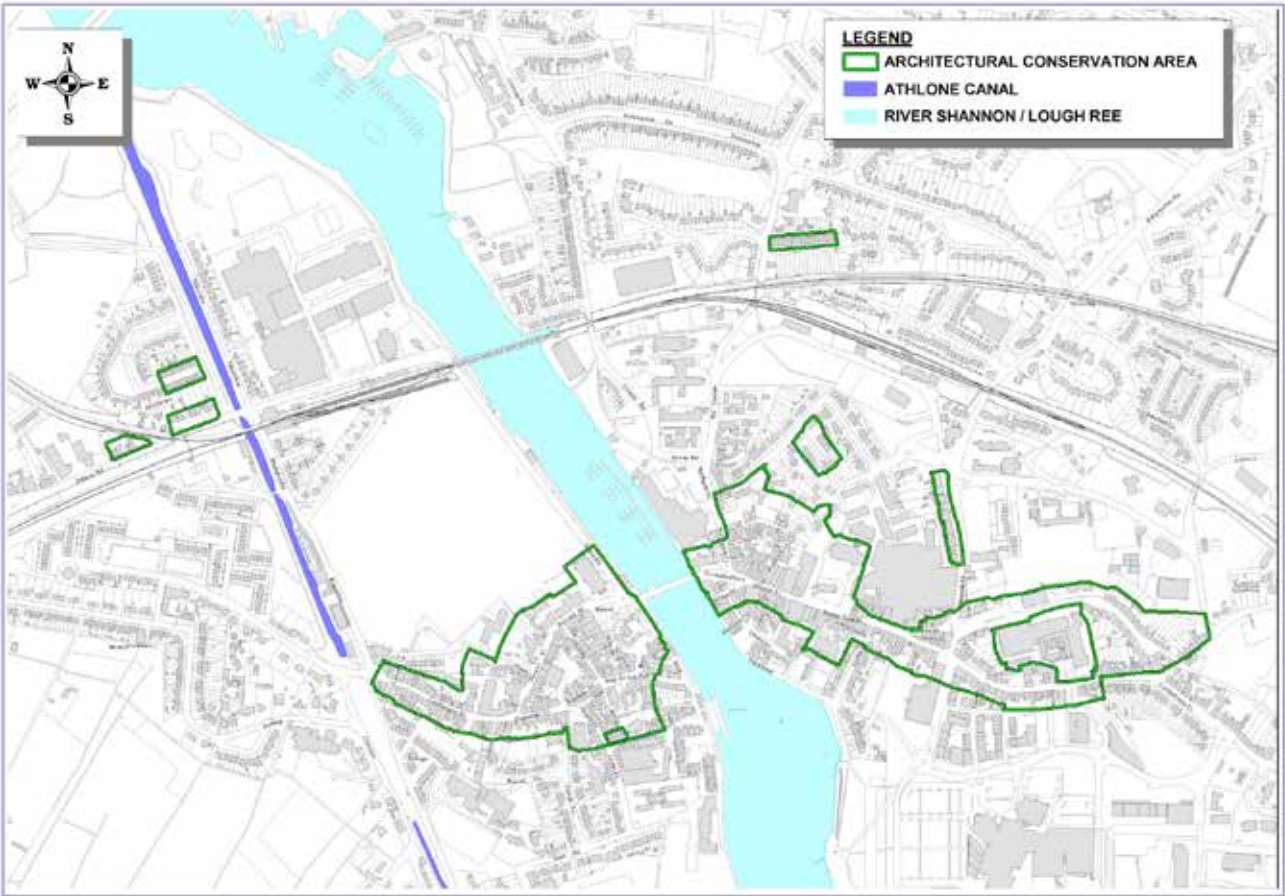
11.16.2 Context

Athlone has a wealth of buildings of architectural merit. Despite the significant growth of the town in recent years, the town centre has generally retained its compact form and essential architectural qualities.

11.17 PROTECTED STRUCTURES

The town has an abundance of structures of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest. Such features are contained in the Record of Protected Structures (RPS). Each Local Authority has a legal responsibility to include a Record of Protected Structures (RPS) in its Development Plan.

The Record of Protected Structures is contained in Volume 5 of this plan. In total there are 233 Protected Structures within the plan boundary.



Map. 11.1 Map of Architectural Conservation Areas, Athlone

11.18 ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION AREAS (ACAs)

An Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) is a place, area, group of structures or townscape that is of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest or value, or contributes to the appreciation of protected structures which may be included in a Development Plan where it is considered necessary to preserve its character. ACAs are chosen because they contain a group of historic buildings, have a distinctive street pattern or plot size which

gives the area a distinct character and contributes to the town or village where it is located. Any works that would have a material effect on the special character of an ACA require planning permission.

There are nine ACA's in Athlone:

1. The Town Centre
2. St. Mary's Place
3. St. Brigid's Terrace
4. Garden Vale
5. Goldsmith Terrace
6. St. Columba's Terrace
7. Riverside Place 1
8. Riverside Place 2
9. Coosan Point Road

1. The Town Centre:

This area extends from Connaught Street and includes most of the streets in the west bank area such as Fry Place and O'Connell Street, across the river including the road bridge to the eastern end of the town to Sean Costello Street. This conservation area retains the medieval form of the town and has a variety of styles and types of buildings ranging from the castle, domestic houses, civic buildings and churches, commercial premises and shop units.

2. St. Mary's Place:

St. Mary's Place area comprises a group of religious and community buildings including St. Mary's Church and a parochial house built in a Gothic style, two former schools fronting onto a square area and a unique group of single storey terrace of houses to the east of the square.

3. St. Brigid's terrace:

This is a group of 14 two storey terraced artisan dwellings in a group of 3 blocks built in the 1900's with spacious gardens, which are unusual in an urban setting. The terrace has an interesting streetscape and layout and the quality is derived from the sum of the terrace rather than individual architectural quality.

4. Garden Vale:

This area comprises a terrace of important nineteenth century properties predominantly in residential use of varying design on a prominent approach into the town centre along the Ballymahon Road.

5. Goldsmith Terrace

1-6 Goldsmith Terrace, Chapel Street, Athlone

Brief Description:

Goldsmith terrace consists of six two-bay two-storey brick houses which were built circa 1893. They are set back from the road and have small gardens with shared entrance gates and low boundary walls with decorative cast iron railings on top. The houses have projecting box bay windows at ground floor level and the entrance doors are slightly recessed. At first floor level

there is a yellow brick flush st ring course below which is a red and yellow alternating brick course. The stone used in the lintol to the paired segmental-headed box bay windows is repeated at the spring of the door openings. Here the flat arched lintol is in brick as they are at first floor level. All the windows and doors have been replaced but the original cast iron column seen in the ground floor window to number four indicates the line of the original mullion divide.

Assessment:

This is an attractive terrace of late nineteenth-century houses which displays decorative development such as two tone brick detailing, decorative stone lintol and spring course, box bay window design and the use of cast iron columns as feature items. This eye-catching but unassuming terrace of houses makes a valued and positive contribution to the streetscape of the west side of Athlone. John Count McCormack, world renowned tenor, lived in number 5, after which he went to Italy to further his voice training in 1905.

6. St. Columba's Terrace

1-50 St. Columba's Terrace, Athlone

Brief Description:

St Columba's terrace consists of two facing terraces of two-bay two-storey houses with 25 houses in each terrace, all which have street entry. The roofs are pitched with natural and some manmade replacement slates and the houses share chimneystacks. Externally the finish is primarily roughcast with some houses having smooth replacement render. Openings to windows and doors are square-headed. Many of the houses have been altered in recent times with extensions to the rear, replacement windows and doors and alterations to external wall finishes.

Assessment:

The form and intent of the original design and layout is intact and while the house have had minor alterations carried out in recent times

with replacement windows and doors etc these have not detracted hugely from the buildings and are reversible. The terraces are an integral and substantial example of late nineteenth century artisan dwellings. They present as a pleasing, simply designed and architecturally strong, large group of worker's houses which contribute to the streetscape on the west side of Athlone.

7. Riverside Place 1

Riverside Place, 1-6 Galway Road, Athlone

Brief Description:

Nos 1-6 Riverside Place are a group of three semi-detached three-bay single-story houses which were built circa 1880 as railway worker's houses by the Midland and Great Western Railway Company. The roofs are pitched and hipped with slate finish. The chimneys, one per house, are rendered. The houses are constructed of snecked limestone and the square headed openings have stone reveals. The houses are set back from the road with rendered boundary walls, one with original semi-circular stone capping.

Assessment:

While extensions and renovations including replacement windows and doors have been carried out to these houses, they still retain their charm and are an attractive and important group of houses built for railway workers by the local railway company. They were well built from snecked limestone which was the chosen masonry material of the railway companies during this period of construction.

8. Riverside Place 2

Riverside Place, 7-10 Galway Road, Athlone,

Brief Description:

Nos 7-10 Riverside Place are two semi-detached three-bay single-story houses which were built circa 1880 as railway worker's houses by the Midland and Great Western Railway Company.

The roofs are pitched and hipped with slate finish. The chimneys, one per house, are rendered. Constructed of snecked limestone the square headed openings have in the main rendered reveals. The houses are set back from the road with rendered boundary walls, two with original semi-circular stone capping.

Assessment:

While extensions and renovations including replacement windows and doors have been carried out to these houses they still retain their charm and are an attractive and important group of house built for railway workers by the local railway company. They were well built from snecked limestone which was the chosen masonry material of the railway companies during this period of construction.

9. Coosan Point Road

1-2 Coosan Point Road, Auburn Terrace, Athlone

Brief Description:

Auburn Terrace consist of a group of nineteen houses with the first of the terrace being a three-bay two-storey house with a single-bay single-storey porch to the front and the remainder of the terrace being two-bay two-storey houses and most with single-storey canted bay windows at ground floor level. The houses, reputedly designed by William A Tanner, were built for Athlone Woollen Mills personnel. The roofs are pitched and slated and the houses share brick chimneystacks. The walls are pebble dashed over smooth rendered plinths. The terrace is set back from the road with simple decorative steel railings delineating individual sites. Across the road from the terrace are the large gardens of the properties which is an unusual yet interesting layout of the site. The houses were built in 1903 and have been renovated in recent years, mainly with replacement windows and doors.

Assessment:

This is an attractive terrace of house and although recent alterations, including

replacement windows and doors, have resulted in the loss of original fabric it stills retains most of its character. The form of the original design and layout is intact and the terrace is an excellent example of early twentieth century quality housing. The setting of the terrace with the gardens across the road and the boundary treatment with the simple iron railing make this terrace quite unique. This is a pleasant well designed terrace of worker’s houses which contributes to the architecture in the north of Athlone.

Maps of some of the ACA’s are listed in Appendix 12 of the Plan. The identification of new ACAs and/or the modification of existing ACAs may be undertaken during the lifetime of the plan.

11.19 BUILT HERITAGE POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:

P-BH1	To have regard to the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government publication ‘Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities’ 2004 in the implementation of development objectives and the assessment of planning applications relating to protected structures, proposed protected structures or buildings within Architectural Conservation Areas.
P-BH2	To protect and conserve buildings, structures and sites contained in the Record of Protected Structures and to resist the demolition of such structures, except in exceptional circumstances where a need has been established.
P-BH3	To ensure that any development, modification, alteration, or extension affecting a Protected Structure and/or its setting is sensitively sited and designed, is

	compatible with its special character, and is appropriate in terms of the proposed scale, mass, height, density, layout, and materials so that the integrity of the structure and its curtilage is preserved.
P-BH4	To conserve and protect the town’s built environment and heritage in terms of streetscapes, individual buildings and features of historical, architectural, artistic, cultural, scientific, social and technical interest.
P-BH5	To consider designation of those areas that have particular environmental qualities that derive from their overall layout, design and unity of character as Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs) and that the character of such areas is preserved.
P-BH6	To ensure that any new development or alteration of a building within or adjoining an ACA positively enhances the character of the area and is appropriate in terms of the plot size, proposed design, including: scale, mass, height, proportions, density, layout, materials, plot ratio and building lines.
P-BH7	To resist the demolition of a structure that positively contributes to the character of an ACA, except in very exceptional circumstances. Where demolition is granted an assessment of the impact of the replacement building on the character of the ACA will be required.

It is an objective of the Councils:

O-BH1	To continue to administer a prioritised scheme of conservation grants for owners and occupiers of protected
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	structures, subject to Departmental funding allocation.
O-BH2	To require a Method Statement for the conservation of and any works to protected structures. Method Statements should make reference to the DECLGs Advice Series in how best to repair and maintain historic buildings.
O-BH3	To prepare statements of character for each of the identified Architectural Conservations Areas (ACAs) and guidance documents on the areas.
O-BH4	To examine the need to identify new ACAs and/or the modification of existing ACAs during the lifetime of the plan.

11.20 VERNACULAR BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES

In addition to protected structures, the town contains a wide variety of older vernacular buildings. Such buildings which may individually or as part of a group of buildings or street, contribute positively to the character of the area or townscape; which can be diminished by their loss. The Councils will seek to retain these buildings where feasible.

Alterations to individual buildings can have a significant and cumulative effect on streetscapes and landscapes. By the very nature of vernacular architectural heritage, it is normally the case that they are the most sustainable forms of construction, built with local materials in a style responding to local conditions, with a low energy use. Any changes to vernacular architecture need to be sympathetic to the special features and character of the building.

11.21 VERNACULAR BUILDINGS POLICIES

It is a policy of the Councils:	
P-VB1	To encourage the rehabilitation, renovation and reuse of existing older buildings where appropriate.
P-VB2	To retain where feasible, older buildings in the town which make a positive contribution to the character of the area or townscape and to encourage the rehabilitation, renovation and re-use of existing older buildings where appropriate.

11.22 INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE

Industrial heritage relates to the physical structures which remain today from the industrial era of the late eighteen century. There are many artefacts and structures remaining in Athlone connected to the industrialisation period; namely the railways, bridges and the Shannon and Canal navigation which all led to economic and social change in the town. The town also has an important built heritage association with its strategic military role including defence fortifications.

The Athlone Canal was built in the 1750’s and was originally constructed to provide for navigation of traffic on the Shannon through the town. The bridge prevented navigation through Athlone, and boats had to halt at harbours to the north and south of the town. To overcome this problem in 1757 work started to the west of the town on the short bypass canal. The canal was laid in a straight line to cut off the slight loop in the Shannon containing west Athlone. The canal provides an important aspect to the town’s history and has considerable recreational potential.

In 2012 Athlone Town Council commissioned a study of the canal which makes provision for the regeneration of the canal area, promotion

of its use as a public amenity and increased movement and accessibility along its extent.

11.23 INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:

P-IH1	To protect buildings, features and the setting of industrial heritage sites in the town.
P-IH2	To protect the heritage value of the canal, its bridges and ancillary features.

It is an objective of the Councils:

O-IH1	To promote an inventory, survey and record of the town and its industrial heritage during the lifetime of the Plan and raise awareness of same through the Heritage Plan.
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O-IH2	To ensure that development is appropriately managed in the vicinity of the Athlone Canal and does not cause significant adverse impacts on the built and natural heritage or the recreational potential of the canal.
O-IH3	To protect items of architectural heritage or industrial archaeological interest associated with the canal system.
O-IH4	To implement the recommendations of the Athlone Canal Study.
O-IH5	To promote increased public use of the canal lakes and rivers where feasible and appropriate.

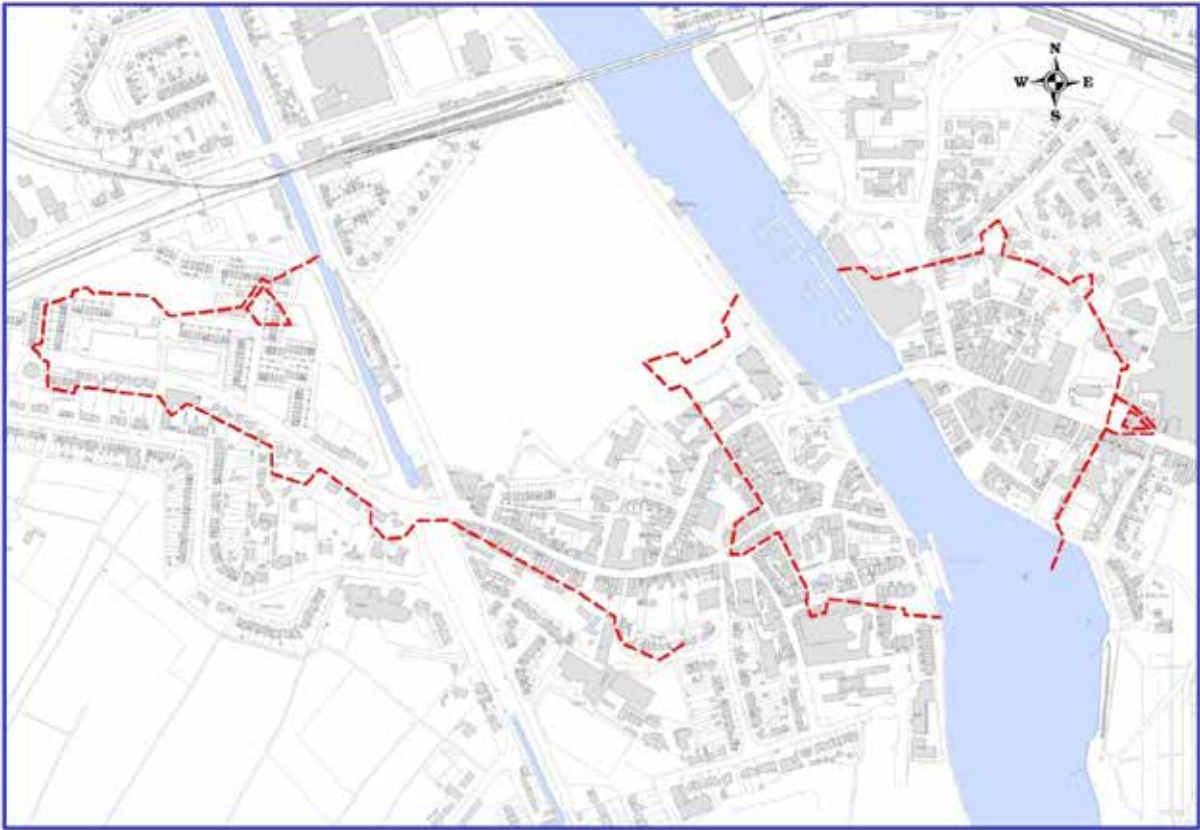


Fig. 11.2 Athlone Town Walls

11.24 ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE

11.24.1 Policy Context

The National Monuments Act 1930-2004 (as amended)

The archaeological heritage of Athlone is protected by the National Monuments Acts 1930-2004 and includes structures, constructions, groups of buildings, developed sites, all recorded monuments and their contexts. The excavation or removal of an archaeological site or feature can only be carried out under licence by the Department of Arts, Heritage & the Gaeltacht as outlined in the National Monuments legislation. National monuments are deemed to be of national importance and therefore worthy of State protection.

Athlone boasts a unique archaeological heritage that provides the town with resources of tremendous social, educational, recreational, and aesthetic value. Furthermore, in economic terms, it is of fundamental importance to the tourism industry, while also contributing to the towns distinctiveness and sense of identity.

While there are several interesting aspects to Athlone’s history including its administrative role and important religious role, the history of the town indicates a past rooted in conflict, primarily resulting from the strategic position of the town at an important river crossing.

A castle was constructed to guard bridges. Defences, in the form of stone walls, were built around the east side of the town, sealing it to the bank of the River. In the seventeenth century earthen ramparts were constructed around the west side of the town and bastions were added to the walls to the east side of the town. Defences in the form of batteries were added to the west of the town in the early nineteenth century in anticipation of Napoleonic invasion.

This military heritage is still very visible in the town today, dominating the town in the form of the Castle and upstanding remains of the Town Wall and evidenced in the street pattern and street names. As such it adds to Athlone’s distinctiveness as it has shaped the town. The Town Defences are now a recognised National Monument under the National Monuments Act 1930 – 2004 and it is important that this heritage is recognised in the Town Plan and protected, not simply for its significant tourism benefit but because of the distinctiveness it gives the town. In recognition of this important archaeological heritage, the Town Council supported by the Heritage Council produced ‘Athlone Town Walls and Defences Conservation Plan’ in 2005.

Archaeological monuments are protected under the National Monuments Acts 1930- 2004 and are listed in the Recorded Monuments and Places (RMP) which are listed in Appendix 5 of the plan. The Urban Archaeological Survey for County Westmeath conducted in 1985 identifies a ‘Zone of Archaeological Potential’ within the Town. The extent of the Zone of Archaeological Potential is indicated in Fig. 5.1.

11.25 ARCHAEOLOGY POLICIES & OBJECTIVES

It is a policy of the Councils:	
P-ARC1	To protect the archaeological heritage of the town in accordance with Departmental Guidelines.
P-ARC2	To strictly control development that may be detrimental to any feature or site of archaeological significance or that may seriously detract from the interpretation and setting of these sites.
P-ARC3	To protect and retain surviving medieval plots and street patterns in the town.

P-ARC4	To ensure that all sites of archaeological potential are protected from development that may injure any potentially important archaeological features or sites.
P-ARC5	To protect, preserve, conserve and restore, where appropriate, the upstanding remnants of the town's walls, embankments, gates, bastions and fortifications.
P-ARC6	To designate walking routes to archaeological sites as public rights of way where possible, subject to private landowners consent.
P-ARC7	To promote the use of the archaeological heritage of Athlone as an educational, cultural and tourism resource and to promote public access to and awareness of this rich archaeological heritage.
P-ARC8	To protect and preserve the archaeological value of underwater archaeology associated with the River Shannon.

It is an objective of the Councils:	
O-ARC1	To endeavour to ensure that all reports, excavation results and other information relating to archaeological heritage be made available for public viewing at libraries and create and maintain a database of same.
O-ARC2	To provide guidance to developers and landowners in relation to proposals for development that may potentially impact upon the archaeological heritage, drawing their attention to additional published government guidance

	available such as ‘Framework and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage, 1999’
O-ARC3	To require, where appropriate, that an archaeological assessment be carried out by a suitably qualified person prior to the commencement of any activity that may impact upon the archaeological heritage.
O-ARC4	To ensure that any development taking place either above or below ground which is within, adjacent to, or might affect sites and features of historical and archaeological interest shall respect the character of the archaeological site and its setting and shall be sited and designed with care for the character of the site and setting.
O-ARC5	To impose conditions on development that will affect sites of archaeological potential to ensure that appropriate measures are taken for the identification and mitigation of the archaeological impacts, including a licensed excavation and recording of remains prior to commencement of development where appropriate.
O-ARC6	To have regard to the provisions of the ‘Athlone Town Walls and Defences Conservation Plan’
O-ARC7	To prepare an inventory of the town's military heritage, structures, walls, fortifications, ramparts and bastions.

Chapter 12 *Development Management Standards*



12 DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT STANDARDS

INTRODUCTION

Development Management is one of the main implementation tools of the Town Development Plan and its Core Strategy. The carrying out of development in accordance with the standards set out in this chapter is therefore critical to the achievement of the objectives of the Town Development Plan. The purpose of this chapter is to ensure that new development is of a high quality and satisfactorily relates to the character, scale, layout, form of development in the area in question. Reference to other agencies and legislative requirements is also made and these and their latest revisions will be taken into consideration.

The Councils promote prudent use of natural resources, prompting sustainable construction and sustainable energy practices. The creation of attractive environments with a genuine sense of space and place is a prerequisite to achieving sustainability.

12.1 GENERAL GUIDELINES

12.1.1 Design Statement

The design of schemes should promote best practice in architectural design, consistent with the aims of the “Government Policy on Architecture 2009-2015” (DEHLG, 2009).

The Planning Authorities will require all planning applications for 20 houses or commercial / industrial developments over 1,000m² to include a ‘Design Statement’. A ‘Design Statement’ is a short document which enables the applicant to explain why a particular design solution is considered the most suitable for a particular site. The statement will usually consist of both text and graphics, but is not intended to duplicate planning application documents. It may be of special value in explaining why the context requires an exceptional – rather than a

conventional – design approach. The statement should address all relevant development Plan or Local Area Plan design policies and objectives, and relate them to the site. The design statement could outline a justification for the development as proposed and any alternative design options considered.

12.1.2 Visual Impact Assessments/ Photomontages

The Planning Authority will generally require Visual Impact Assessments (VIAs) to be completed to illustrate the visual impact of proposals likely to have an impact on protected views and other views of special amenity value. Failure to properly assess any major proposal in this regard will normally result in further information being requested. Visual Impact Assessment will be required for sites that lie within or towards views of:

- Landmark building viewing corridors;
- Landmark buildings within panoramic views;
- River or Lake Prospects;
- Areas of outstanding landscape or townscape value;

The impact of developments on important views and vistas can be accurately evaluated with computer generated views and photomontage models. This technique allows an accurate representation of the proposed development to be superimposed on its actual surroundings, thus enabling the scale, massing and heights of proposed developments to be assessed in relation to their context.

12.1.3 Building Height

There are a number of important/ prominent views and panoramas both within and on approach to Athlone, which require special consideration with regard to a tall building proposal. Impacts on these important views and panoramas could be negative or positive, however where it is considered that a proposal would have a significant impact on an important view or panorama a high level of detail would

have to be presented to justify the proposal, including computer generated images and 3D modelling of the views in question.

Other views and panoramas in addition to those listed above may be identified as being important in the course of assessing specific sites/proposals. The onus would be on anyone bringing forward such a proposal to identify and deal with any such issues in the course of the proposal.

12.1.4 Tall Building Precedent

Precedent exists for tall buildings to varying extents in Athlone; these act as natural reference points to those considering tall buildings in these towns. The Town Centre development in Athlone is an example of more recent high development which has been the subject of discussion regarding successfulness of height to width ratio and bulk and massing. Scope exists to provide tall buildings within this new skyline to achieve greater legibility in their context.

The Cathedrals and Church Spires represent the more established high precedent, utilising more traditional architectural methods, these shall remain the predominant features of the skyline. For the purposes of this plan, a tall building is a building of over three or four storeys, depending on context.

12.1.5 Use

Tall buildings are most successful where they contain a mix of uses. Uses that would ensure vitality and vibrancy at ground floor level are critical to the success of a tall building. Public use buildings such as a hotel or similar uses could be appropriate for a tall building.

Tall buildings 3-4 storeys are generally considered to be inappropriate for residential use in Athlone. However scope exists for the development of high quality residential accommodation in appropriate locations such as on the riverfront in Athlone. There is also potential for mixed-use buildings to

accommodate an element of high quality residential units over commercial uses to ensure efficient use of town centre lands.

The quality of residential elements of tall buildings is of critical importance to their success. The internal and external design, access to a high standard of services and amenities including open space/recreational facilities, help make residential units attractive and conducive to owner and family occupation which is in turn essential to the medium and long term success of any such proposal. The area in Athlone, within which tall buildings will be considered is outlined in Section 5.6.3 of the plan.

12.1.6 Assessment of site

Sites where tall buildings may be proposed will be assessed using the following criteria:

- a) Does the site lend itself to a tall building arising from its **natural topography**?
- b) Given other constraints is the site of a **size** such that it can accommodate a tall building?
- c) Is the **urban grain** of the site and grain and **use of its surrounding** area compatible with the development of a tall building?
- d) Does the site avoid known or potential **archaeology** of significance?
- e) Where there is known **archaeology** within the proposed site can a tall building offer enhanced access and interpretation of site's past?
- f) Does the site have an established **building line** that can be enhanced by a tall building?
- g) Would a tall building on the site enhance an existing or help in defining **streetscape**?
- h) Do the existing **street width(s)** and number of streets the site fronts onto lend themselves to a tall building from an urban design and traffic safety perspective?
- i) Is there an **existing built form**, which can be enhanced by a tall building?
- j) Does the site avoid and/or offer potential to protect and enhance **ACA's**, and/or **protected structures** including close and distant views to and from?

- k) Where the site contains structures of **architectural and street/townscape merit** can they be enhanced by the development of a tall building?
- l) Does the site present opportunities which could be enhanced by the development of a tall building such as **external public spaces**?
- m) In the case of a tall building for a major employment generator on a green field site outside of the policy boundary is the site of sufficient size to facilitate a high level of **landscaping** to form the setting of such a significant structure?
- n) Is the site adjacent to existing or proposed significant **public open space**?
- o) Is the site adjacent to a **waterway**?
- p) Are there important **views, panoramas and glimpses** (close and distant views) that would be impacted upon by a tall building on the site?
- q) Does the site offer potential to **cluster** taller buildings?
- r) Does the site offer potential for **stepping** from or to, existing or potential taller buildings?
- s) Does the site present opportunities to enhance daytime and night time **skylines/roofscapes**? (assessed particularly from the identified view and panoramas)
- t) Has the site proximity and the potential to offer good permeability from both within and to its wider setting to **public transport** infrastructure?
- u) Has the site or adjacent land been designated as a **European site** as defined in the Planning and Development Acts 2000 as amended or contain other assets of Natural Heritage Value?

12.1.7 Assessment of a Proposal for a Tall Building.

Proposals for tall buildings will be assessed using the following criteria:

- a) Is the proposal of high **architectural quality** when assessed under the following headings?
 - Height to width ratio.
 - Scale.

- Form
- Relationship with established building line if any, potential for establishment of building line where there is none.
- Massing and bulk from both main and other views in isolation and in context.
- Plot ratio.
- Proportion.
- Affect on long, medium and short views into and out of the town, including but not confined to those views identified, by day and night. Are views weak or overpowering? Does it respect the scale and rhythm of its neighbours?
- Lighting.
- Design of top and base of the building.
- Silhouette.
- Quality of proposed materials, how do they relate to materials in the surrounding area? Are there interesting comparisons or contrasts? How will proposed colours work?
- Is the architecture appropriate to the use; is the design trying to be too grand or too modest?
- Sustainability of construction and use? (due to the high profile and local impact, high buildings will be expected to exceed current policies and regulation with regard to energy use and full life cycle energy cost of construction and operation).
- Does the design contribute to the heterogeneity of design in the town whilst respecting existing built forms and materials?
- Is the proposed landscaping of a sufficiently high quantity and quality to provide an appropriate setting for a tall building?
- b) Have car **parking** proposals and accommodation thereof within the proposed site been resolved successfully in the design whilst meeting development plan standards?
- c) Has surface **car parking been landscaped and** treated to a high standard?
- d) Has the short and long term commercial **viability** of the proposal been considered? Have adaptability and other safeguards

against future obsolescence been designed in?

- e) Does the proposed development contribute positively to **public space** (internal and/or external) and to the public domain? is it clear that this public space will provide a positive benefit; will it have a genuine use?
- f) Has the **vitality** of the proposed development been maximised, street level activity etc.?
- g) Has provision been made through uses and/or spaces created, for **social engagement**?
- h) Will the proposal contribute to **sense of place** and avoid the creation of anywhere places?
- i) Has the potential for the creation of **micro-climates** been considered and mitigated in the design?
- j) Does the design including positioning and orientation of residential blocks, deal with issues of **daylight and sunlight** for both future users and any adjoining existing users? The recommendations of 'Site Layout Planning for Daylight and Sunlight: A Guide to Good Practice', (B.R.E. 1991) or B.S. 8026 'Lighting for Buildings, Part 2 1992: Code of Practice for Day lighting' should be followed in this regard.
- k) Has any potential **overshadowing** of adjacent property been dealt with satisfactorily?
- l) Have opportunities for increased permeability **and legibility** of the street/townscape been availed of successfully?
- m) Have issues such as **access and means of escape** dealt with under other codes been considered so that they will not impact on proposed design?
- n) Does the proposal meet or exceed **current design standards** for internal and external spaces?
- o) Have real **alternative development strategies** been considered and the tall building remains the optimum method to achieve the development goals? For residential proposals alternatives may

include urban blocks, apartments built around garden squares.

- p) Has provision been made in the design for **antennae, plant rooms, satellite dishes**, accommodation of window cleaning equipment/maintenance etc?

12.2 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Certain developments may require the submission of an Environmental Impact Statement at application stage, if the development is likely to have a significant effect on the environment. The full list of projects and threshold limits for EIA development are set out in Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 as amended. Regard shall also be had to the Guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessment issued by the DECLG March 2013.

12.3 APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

Appropriate Assessment is a process of the assessment of the likely significant effects of every plan or project on the Natura 2000 network. The Natura 2000 network consists of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and candidate SACs and Special Protection Areas (SPA) and candidate SPAs both within the county and within a 15km radius of same.

An Appropriate Assessment of proposed development is required in cases where it cannot be discounted that the proposed development would have a significant effect on a European site. It is the responsibility of the Planning Authorities to screen proposed developments to determine whether an Appropriate Assessment is required. Where the Authority determines that an Appropriate Assessment is required, the applicant will normally be required to submit a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) with the planning application. Where the applicant considers that the proposed development is likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site, it is

open to him/her to submit a NIS with the planning application. The screening, scoping and carrying out of an Appropriate Assessment shall be undertaken in accordance with the Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities 2009.

12.4 ACCESS FOR ALL

The Councils recognise the need for equality of access for everybody to all aspects of the built and external environment as a fundamental prerequisite of equal opportunities and the development of an inclusive society. Standards established in Part M of the Building Regulations (S.I. No. 179 of 2000) seek to ensure that buildings are accessible and usable by everyone, including the aged, people with disabilities and people with children. The Technical Guidance Document in relation to Part M provides guidance on access requirements for public buildings and for residential dwellings.

The Councils will have regard to the National Disability Authority's Building For Everyone Planning Guidance (2012) and will seek to encourage the implementation of best practice standards with regard to access in relation to both indoor and outdoor environments.

An important element in achieving sustainability in the design of residential units is the ability of the design to accommodate reduced mobility as residents may acquire some level of mobility impairment through accident, or as an inevitable consequence of old age. In assessing planning applications in relation to protected structures, regard shall be had to the protected status of the structure and the need to protect its special character.

12.5 GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Proposals should seek, as is reasonably possible, to address best practice sustainable solutions with emphasis on the following:

- Sustainable Site Design
- Sustainable Buildings
- Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems

12.5.1 Sustainable Site Design

- The proposal should address how existing natural features of the site will inform sustainable urban design by exploring the potential for the integration of existing natural features of merit such as watercourses, mature planting and topography. Such an approach ensures that the landscape character of the area is maintained whilst also assisting biodiversity maintenance and more natural forms of surface water drainage.
- Effectively, the layout of the proposed development will be informed by the inherent natural characteristics of the site. Connectivity between proposed open spaces and adjoining existing open space or natural features should also be considered in the site design.
- Proposals in relation to larger sites should be cognisant of any ecologically sensitive areas where it may be appropriate to retain or integrate into a landscape plan. In such cases the ecological attributes of the site and the impact of any development should be considered prior to any final design. Consultation with the Councils is recommended in such instances, with all landscaping proposals complying with standards on landscaping.

12.5.2 Sustainable Buildings

- The Councils welcome development proposals that incorporate building designs which utilise sustainable energy technologies and innovative design solutions such as solar panels. All development proposals should be accompanied by a Sustainable Construction Management Plan and Water Conservation Plan documenting the sustainable construction elements and technologies in their proposals.

- In landscaping proposals involving apartment schemes, industrial parks, large commercial developments or utility buildings, rainwater harvesting systems shall be provided. These features are particularly favourable owing to their effectiveness in conserving water.
- Rainwater harvesting systems offer sustainable, environmental and infrastructurally inexpensive alternatives to purified water for non-potable uses, whilst alleviating demands on water treatment systems.
- Green roofs can store stormwater and slow down the rate of run-off thus easing pressure on urban drainage systems. Green roofs can also reduce the amount of energy lost from a building and can sequester and store more carbon. Improved air quality, higher biodiversity and use as an area of amenity are also additional benefits accrued from green roofs.
- In order to achieve the benefits outlined above, the following specification is recommended:
 - Substrate depth 6-10 cm.
 - Planting; minimum requirement of extensive green roof planting supplemented with semi-intensive or intensive type planting.

Table 12.1 Type of Green Roof

Type of Green Roof	Vegetation Type
Intensive	Wide variety of plants, shrubs, trees & grasses.
Semi-intensive	Restricted to shrubs, perennials & grasses.
Extensive	Restricted to mosses, sedums & grasses.

- Larger development proposals should also consider the incorporation of district heating and Combined Heat and Power (CHP) schemes.
- Development proposals should seek to employ the optimum use of sustainable

building design criteria in order to reduce energy consumption. Such design criteria should include:

- Passive solar principles relating to the orientation, location and sizing of windows and use of energy efficient glazing units and frames.
- The use of green building materials: low embodied energy and recycled materials.
- Appropriate use of thermal mass and insulation.
- Appropriate renewable technologies.
- The use of natural ventilation or mechanical ventilation with heat recovery.
- Building envelope air tightness.

12.5.3 Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems

All proposals should incorporate the principles of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) in accordance with the requirements and standards of the Council.

12.6 BUILDING ENERGY PERFORMANCE

The recent Building Regulations (Part L Amendment) and the European Communities (Energy Performance of Buildings) (Amendment) Regulations 2008 further support the employment of the sustainable building design criteria outlined above by requiring all new buildings to become more energy efficient. These regulations contain a range of provisions aimed at improving energy performance in residential and non-residential buildings, both new and existing. The regulations are augmented by the introduction of the Building Energy Rating Certification process, which facilitates the assessment of the building on the basis of their energy performance.

The Councils are committed to developing sustainable building requirements resulting in energy efficient, low environmental impact buildings. In this regard all buildings, particularly any new proposals considered by the Councils, should seek to attain high BER levels. The incorporation of good, sustainable building designs will be considered a positive factor for

the Councils in considering new development proposals.

12.7 NOISE MANAGEMENT

The generation of noise in the community can have undesirable effects on residential areas and the community at large. Noise emissions from specific activities are controlled by the Environmental Protection Agency through Integrated Pollution Prevention Control licensing and Waste licensing (refer to the Guidance Notes for Noise in relation to Scheduled Activities 2006 (EPA). The Environmental Noise Directive (END) (2002/49/EC) relates to noise from industries, road, rail and air traffic and requires authorities to assess and manage noise from these sources. The Directive mainly addresses noise emitted by a range of transport sources (road, rail, and air traffic), although the definition of 'environmental noise' includes noise from industrial sites.

Where planning applications are submitted in close proximity to major roads (both proposed and existing) and would result in a breach of the NRA's design goal for sensitive receptors exposed to road traffic noise, the developer shall identify and propose noise mitigation measures within the zone of influence. In this regard the developer should refer to the Environment Noise Regulations 2006 and noise maps developed by the Council. The cost of implementing mitigation measures shall be borne by the developer.

12.8 FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING APPLICATIONS

OPW channels' are maintainable channels. The OPW requests that a 10 metre strip be retained from the top of the bank on both sides of these channels to allow for maintenance. This strip should not be paved or landscaped in a manner that would prevent access by maintenance plant.

'Drainage District Channels' are maintainable channels under the Drainage Districts and are maintainable by the Local Authority. Similar facilities for maintenance as required by the OPW may be appropriate at the discretion of the Local Authority.

12.8.1 Development Assessment Criteria where a potential Flood Risk Exists

The Councils are committed to avert, insofar as possible, the threat of flooding in new developments, to minimise the impact of structures and earthworks on flood plains and river flow, and to reduce the rate and quantity of surface water run-off from all new developments.

Applicants are required to conduct a Flood Impact Assessment in accordance with The Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009) in all applications where a potential flood risk exists. It shall be a requirement that development proposals are framed such as to address in an authoritative manner the following issues with regard to flood protection:

- The requirement that a Flood Impact Assessment be submitted with all significant development proposals (areas exceeding 0.2ha) identifying potential loss of floodplain storage and mitigation proposals to minimise flood risk and impact.
- To require a certificate from a 'suitably qualified competent person' stating that the proposed development will not contribute to flooding, with planning applications for smaller scale development proposals as considered appropriate.
- To require applicants to submit, prior to commencement, details of sediment and water pollution control measures, for the agreement of the Local Authority.
- Where proposed developments are adjacent to watercourses of a significant conveyance capacity, any proposed

structures (including hard landscaping), shall be set back from the edge of the watercourse to allow access for channel clearing/ maintenance and to protect their biodiversity value.

- All development proposals, especially those in floodplains and areas liable to flooding, shall, in so far as is reasonably practicable, incorporate sustainable design/ construction measures to reduce the rate and quantity of runoff; for example:
 - Hard surface areas (car parks, etc.), should be constructed in permeable or semi-permeable materials.
 - On-site storm water ponds to store and/or attenuate additional runoff from the development should be provided.
 - Soak-aways or french drains should be provided to increase infiltration and minimise additional runoff.
- All new flood prevention or channel maintenance development shall be designed and constructed to meet the following minimum flood design standards:
- For urban areas or where developments (existing, proposed or anticipated) are involved the 100 year flood, a term used to describe the probability of a flood event expected to occur once in 100 years, is used as an assessment criterion in relation to proposed developments and flood risk management.
- The Councils will take account of the guidelines established in “The Planning System and Flood Risk Management”, (Department of Environment, Community and Local Government publication, 2009) in assessing any development proposals in flood risk areas, with particular regard to the sequential approach. The sequential approach involves:
 - Assessing areas for risk of flooding;
 - Avoiding development in areas at risk of flooding;
 - If this is not possible, consider substituting a land-use that is less vulnerable to flooding;

- Only when both avoidance and substitution cannot take place should consideration be given to mitigation and management of risks.
- The Council will consult with the OPW in relation to flood risk affected proposals

12.9 RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

12.9.1 Existing Residential Development Conversion of Existing Houses to Apartment Accommodation

In general there is a presumption in favour of retaining houses suited for family accommodation in their original undivided form.

Subdivision of houses into a number of smaller units will only be acceptable in areas which are characterised by large houses on relatively extensive sites, which are well served by public transport and where subdivision into a number of units would not result in a dramatic alteration to the character of the area.

In all instances the standard of development provided should satisfy the following criteria:

- The minimum size of the unit is 75 m² or more,
- The internal space and design standards are acceptable.
- Apartments are self-contained.
- Sound insulation is installed to alleviate the problems of noise both between the new residential units and between them and neighbouring dwellings.
- Adequate, safe and secure access to all dwellings is provided.
- Those intended for families are provided on the ground floor or have direct access to a garden.
- Adequate parking is provided and the parking is not provided at the expense of garden or courtyard areas necessary for amenity purposes.

- Car parking in the surrounding grounds is dealt with sensitively; extensive parking areas to the front of the building line will be resisted.

12.9.2 Extensions and alterations to Dwellings

Extensions to existing dwellings will be assessed in terms of the degree of impact on existing adjacent residential amenity and the design approach adopted.

Impact on residential amenity can result from over-shadowing, loss of light and loss of outlook or from loss of privacy resulting from over-looking. Extensions will not be permitted where they result in an unacceptable impact to adjacent residential amenity.

In terms of design, care should be taken to ensure that the design satisfies the following criteria:

- Follows the pattern of the existing building as much as possible.
- Is constructed with similar finishes and with similar window arrangements to the existing building so that they integrate better with it.
- Elevation detailing should match that of the host structure.
- In the case of an extension to the side of a house, be set back at least 150mm from the front wall of the existing house to give a more satisfactory appearance.
- In some circumstances a gap of not less than 1m to be retained between the extension and the neighbouring dwelling so as to prevent dwellings which were intended to be detached from becoming a terrace.
- Have a pitched roof, particularly when visible from the public road or when the building is two or three storeys high. The traditional ridged roof is likely to cause fewer problems in the future rather than flat ones.
- Dormer extensions should not obscure the main features of the existing roof, i.e. should not break the ridge or eaves lines of the roof. Box dormers should be avoided.
- Front dormers should normally be set back at least three-tile courses from the eaves line and should be clad in a material matching the existing roof.
- Proposed side extensions shall retain side access to the rear of the property where possible.

12.9.3 New Residential Development in an Urban Area - Infill Residential Development

Potential sites may range from small gap infill, unused or derelict land and backland areas, up to larger residual sites or sites assembled from a multiplicity of ownerships. In residential areas where the character is established by its density or architectural form, a balance has to be struck between the reasonable protection of the amenities and privacy of adjoining dwellings, the protection of the established character and the need to provide residential infill. The design approach should be based on recognition of the need to protect the amenities of directly adjoining neighbours and the general character of the area and its amenities, i.e. views, architectural quality, civic design. However, subject to reasonable conformity with these, developments on infill sites, particularly those in excess of 0.5ha, should be capable of proposing their own density and character. Local Authority intervention may be needed to facilitate this type of development, in particular with regard to the provision of access to backlands.

12.9.4 Density

The Planning Authority will have regard to the principles as outlined in the DECLG publication 'Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas – Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (2009) and the accompanying Urban Design Manual (2009) and Smarter Travel Policy. Within these policies and guidelines a range of residential densities are prescribed dependent

on location, context, scale and availability of public transport. Recommended densities in Athlone range from 35-50 units per hectare, depending on location. In the town centre, densities of up to 50 units per hectare will generally apply. In outer suburban locations, a density of 35-50 units is applicable.

Higher densities may be considered in respect of all sites in urban areas, but particularly those developments in excess of 0.5ha. When considering proposals for housing developments the Councils will give first priority to design quality and to securing a good environment for residents, having regard both to the individual characteristics of the site and the character of the surrounding area. Subject to this, development should make the best use of land and new dwellings should be constructed at an appropriate density. In some special circumstances, e.g. in areas of environmental or architectural merit, the appropriate density may need to be lower.

12.9.5 Site Coverage

In order to prevent adverse effects of over-development in inner urban locations site coverage of between 70% and 80% would be appropriate. However, some flexibility will be applied in the interests of achieving a more sustainable use of inner urban/town centre land, when design is of exceptional merit.

12.9.6 Plot Ratio

Plot ratio is defined as the gross floor area of buildings on a site divided by the gross site area and is used to depict the intensity of use on the site and is determined as follows:

Plot Ratio =

$$\frac{\text{Gross floor area of the building(s)}}{\text{Site area}}$$

In calculating the area of site adjoining road widths are excluded. The following range of indicative plot ratios is recommended:

Table 12.2: Indicative Plot Ratios

Area Location	Indicative Plot Ratio
Town Centre/Brownfield	1.0 – 2.0
Inner Suburban	0.5 – 1.0
Outer Suburban Close Proximity to Public Transport	0.35 – 0.5
Outer Suburban Remote from Public Transport	0.25 – 0.35

12.9.7 Design

Development proposals shall exhibit a high quality of architectural design and layout in order to achieve a high quality living environment. All housing developments will be assessed in both quantitative and qualitative terms as to whether they demonstrate the key elements of a good urban design and meet prescribed standards.

12.9.8 Privacy and Enclosure

- (i) In order to achieve adequate privacy and open areas between houses in new residential development the normal minimum rear garden space shall be not less than 11m in depth. This should be measured to the rearmost wall of the house and should not extend less than the full width of the house. As it is appreciated that this standard may not be readily complied with in all occasions, discretion may be employed where a side garden of equal or greater dimensions can be substituted for rear garden space and where the building design provides for the achievement of privacy. Consideration may be given to further reduction if the site is infill, is less than 10m deep and design is of a high standard.
- (ii) Where a front boundary wall or fencing is provided, the design and materials shall be such as to provide a pleasing design feature to the overall housing layout.

- (iii) Rear boundary walls or fences shall be constructed to a height of not more than 2m. Permanent screening of a similar height should also be provided between the gardens of adjoining houses for a minimum distance of 2.5m behind the rear of the house.

12.9.9 Over-looking

In general there should be a distance of 22m between opposing rear first floor windows. Innovative dwelling types, such as single aspect houses which have their main sleeping and living areas on one side, and circulation and bathrooms on the other, may be closer. Where developments are proposed in existing residential areas a distance of 35m or greater is required in the case of overlooking living room windows and balconies. Any window proposed at ground floor level shall not be less than 1m from the boundary it faces.

12.9.10 Overshadowing

This may be a problem with significantly high buildings or when new buildings are located close to adjoining structures. Daylight and shadow projection diagrams should be submitted for such proposals. The recommendations of 'Site Layout Planning for Daylight and Sunlight: A Guide to Good Practice', (B.R.E. 1991) or B.S. 8026 'Lighting for Buildings, Part 2 1992: Code of Practice for Day lighting' should be followed in this regard.

12.9.11 Private Open Space for Houses

To ensure that conventional dwellings have adequate private space the following standards, as set down in DECLG publication 'Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas – Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (2009) and the accompanying Urban Design Manual (2009), will apply:

- In general, development should have regard to the general character of the area in which they are located.
- For 3/4/5 bedroom houses, a minimum of 60-75 m² should be provided as private open space.

- 1 to 2 bedroom houses, a minimum of 48m² should be provided as private open space.
- A garden of 25 m² should be considered the minimum for inner urban infill dwellings.

Where appropriate a condition may be applied to permissions requiring that no additional development whatsoever take place within the curtilage of each house save with a prior grant of permission, notwithstanding the exempted development provisions of the Local Government (Planning and Development) Regulations 2001 as amended.

Innovative layouts may contain a combination of private and semi-private spaces in courtyard layouts. It may be considered appropriate to accept the sum of the area of both spaces as satisfying the private open space requirement for these dwellings.

All houses (terraced, semi-detached, detached) should have an area of private open space behind the building line.

Table 12.3: Private Open Spaces for Houses

Accommodation size	Min. private open area
1-2 bedrooms	48m ²
3-4-5 bedrooms	60-75m ²

12.9.12 Public Open Space

Open space in housing estate areas shall normally be based on a standard of 15% minimum of gross site area. The open space provision should be on a hierarchical system distributed throughout the housing area, ranging from small children's play areas, located in sight of their homes to larger areas where recreation and games can be facilitated.

Regard should be given to DECLG publication 'Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas – Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (2009) and the accompanying Urban Design Manual (2009), in the development and layout of public open space areas.

12.9.13 Internal Standards for Apartments

The Planning Authority will have regard to standards scheduled in the ‘Social Housing: Design Guidelines’, (DECLG, 1999) and the ‘Design Standards for New Apartments’ (DECLG, 2007), in the assessment of the quality and adequacy of residential layout.

The recommended minimum floor areas and standards for apartments are as follows:

Table 12.4: Minimum Overall Apartment Floor Areas

Apartment Type	Floor Area
One bedroom	45 m ²
Two bedroom	73 m ²
Three bedrooms	90 m ²

Table 12.5: Minimum Aggregate Floor Areas For Living/Dining/Kitchen Rooms, And Minimum Widths For The Main Living/Dining Rooms For Apartments

Apartment type	Width of living/dining room	Aggregate floor area of living / dining / kitchen area*
One bedroom	3.3 m	23 m ²
Two bed	3.6 m	30 m ²
Three bedrooms	3.8 m	34 m ²

Table 12.6: Minimum Bedroom Floor Areas/Widths For Apartments

Type	Minimum width	Minimum floor area
Single bedroom	2.1 m	7.1 m ²
Double bedroom	2.8 m	11.4 m ²
Twin bedroom	2.8 m	13 m ²

* Note: Minimum floor areas exclude built-in storage presses.

Table 12.7: Minimum Aggregate Bedroom Floor Areas for Apartments

Apartment Type	Floor Area
One bedroom	11.4 m ²
Two bedroom	11.4 + 13 m ² = 24.4 m ²
Three bedrooms	11.4 + 13 + 7.1 m ² = 31.5 m ²

Table 12.8: Minimum Storage Space Requirements

Apartment Type	Floor Area
One bedroom	3 m ²
Two bedroom	6 m ²
Three bedrooms	9 m ²

12.9.14 Private Open Space for Apartments

The provision of some private open area increases amenity of apartment living thereby making them more sustainable. For this reason, the provision of some private gardens, suitably landscaped, should be included in new apartment developments. Courtyards and terraces/patios, particularly in the inner urban areas should be considered in the design of new apartment development, where it is not practicable to provide a private garden.

To ensure that apartments and flats have adequate private space the following standards, as set down in the DECLG publication ‘Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas – Guidelines for Planning Authorities’ 2009 and the accompanying Urban Design Manual, and the; DECLG Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for Apartments (2007) will apply:

Inner Urban/Town Centres:

- 1 bedroom apartment: minimum of 10m² of private open space
- 2-3 bedroom apartment: minimum of 15-20m² of private open space

Shortfall in provision may be made up in the form of communal space.

Outer suburban areas:

- 1 bedroom apartment: minimum of 20m² of private open space
- 2-3 bedroom apartment: minimum of 30-40m² of private open space

In outer suburban areas private space may be in the form of communal gardens or courtyards.

12.9.15 Landscaping

Trees and shrubs help blend new houses and buildings into the landscape and enhance the amenity, aesthetic quality and wildlife value of a development. Where possible, existing trees and fences/ hedgerows should be preserved and incorporated into the design. Detailed proposals providing for a mix of both hard and soft landscaped areas should form part of the development application. In the interests of sustainable development, existing trees or hedgerows should be retained. Additional planting should be selected from native species. Applicants may refer to Council Publications in this regard.

12.9.16 Phasing of Large Scale Residential Development Schemes

- In large developments the Planning Authority will seek phasing programmes. The phasing can be by: number of units over a certain time period, or on completion of a particular area of a development, which is regarded as a discreet entity.
Commencement of any next phase will not be permitted until all services and infrastructures are completed to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority.
- The Planning Authority may condition that no houses in a development shall be occupied until services to each house has been completed and are operational.

12.9.17 Taking In Charge

In any applications to have a development taken in charge, the Councils will have regard to its policy document 'Taking in charge policy for Private Housing Developments.' Generally, individual phases of development will not be

taken in charge, only the entire completed development will be considered.

12.9.18 Residential Car-parking

Cars and car-parking have both positive and negative impacts on the environment. A balance needs to be achieved between the provision of car-parking and convenient vehicular access, and the design of pleasant living and social streets. The integration and provision of car-parking needs to be carefully considered when designing new residential layouts.

The most successful housing developments in the long term will most likely employ a range of parking solutions, thus catering for people needs throughout the life cycle, as well as changing market conditions. Depending on the density range, these parking solutions will be primarily communal on-street and supplemented with grouped parking, peripheral grouped parking; and smaller numbers of undercroft, on-curtilage, rear access and small private parking courtyards.

Car parking for detached and semi-detached housing should be within the house site. Car parking for apartments and terraced housing should be in informal groups overlooked by housing units. The visual impact of large areas of car parking should be reduced by the judicious use of screen planting, low walls and the use of textured or coloured paving for parking bays.

In town centre residential estates, the on-site car parking requirement may be reduced in light of availability of public transport and urban design requirements.

12.9.19 Road Design and Layout in Residential Schemes.

The Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines (2011) set out planning policy considerations relating to development affecting national roads outside the 60 kph speed limit zones for cities, towns and villages,

including motorways, National Primary and National Secondary roads.

These Guidelines replace the document, “Policy and Planning Framework for Roads”, published by the Department in 1985, supplement other policy guidance in other Ministerial guidelines and replace the NRA Policy Statement on Development Management and National Roads published in May 2006.

Significant development proposals affecting National roads must be accompanied by traffic and transport assessments (TTA) and/or road safety audits and refer to the National Road Authority’s (NRA) *Design Manual for Roads and Bridge* and to the *Traffic Management Guidelines* prepared by the then Department of Transport and the Department of the Environment and Local Government together with the Dublin Transportation Authority.

Development proposals which may necessitate changes to road and/or junction layout in order to address capacity and road safety concerns arising from significant additional trips/travel generated by the proposed development should be accompanied by a Traffic and Transport Assessment (TTA). Applicants of such developments are referred to the *Traffic Management Guidelines* and the *Traffic and Transport Assessment (TTA) Guidelines* (2007) published by the NRA.

12.10 NEW RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT IN A RURAL AREA

It is the Councils intention to enable and enhance new development in the countryside to be absorbed in a sustainable way. Development shall reflect the vernacular aspects in design and treatment to ensure a respect for the local and traditional context, with minimal intrusion on the landscape and utilising appropriate design, scale and materials and use of planting and landscaping.

Westmeath County Council has produced a supplementary design guideline, the ‘Westmeath Rural Design Guidelines’ to inform rural development, the Councils will have regard to these guidelines in the assessment or rural residential proposals.

12.10.1 Plot Size

The scale of the building should be appropriate to its setting. Larger houses and their resultant form, whilst they may be visible should be contained in the landscape, avoiding obtrusiveness. Generally a site of 0.2 hectares is required for new residential development. However, a small, typical, half-acre site is unsuitable in a country setting for a very large house. The size of the site is an important factor, in its ability to integrate the development into the landscape and consequently a larger site area and setback shall be provided.

12.10.2 Building Line

The set back of buildings from the public road will depend on site size, adjacent building line, and topography of the site. In the absence of existing houses or a specific character, new developments will be required to be set back to building lines as follows, subject to requirements of good design and layouts:

Table 12.9: Building Line Setback

Road Capacity	Distance from centre line of roadway (minimum)
Regional Route	37m
Local Roads	20m but local factors will be taken into consideration.

12.10.3 Orientation

This will be influenced by the direction of the sun and make maximum use of existing landscape screening, regard should be had to the Westmeath Rural Design Guidelines.

12.10.4 Boundary Treatment

Hedgerows should be retained and reinforced. Only in exceptional circumstances shall hedgerows be removed. In all cases, the replacement of removed hedges with similar of native species will be required. Native hedgerow species are recommended for planting and plants of local provenance are always preferable.

Trees provide an attractive element to any garden or home and help to blend new housing into the countryside. Native trees are ecologically more valuable than non-native species.

Planting clumps of trees is preferable to single trees, and biodiversity value can be further enhanced by connecting new planting with hedgerows, woodland edges and rivers and ponds.

12.10.5 Traffic Safety and Sight Visibility

It in the interests of traffic safety, it is an objective to ensure that appropriate sight distances, as set out below, are provided from vehicular entrances on the road network.

The prescribed sight distances are as follows;

- Local Roads: 90m
- Regional Roads 150m
- National Roads: 230m

As set out by the NRA Design Manual for Roads and Bridges sight distances shall be measured from a point 2.4m from the road edge at the proposed access to a point at the near edge of the approaching carriageway. The standard for local roads can be reduced on secondary or tertiary roads at the discretion of the Planning Authority.

12.10.6 Entrances

A new entrance should combine the requirement for continuity in the type of natural boundary with carefully considered linking of hedges to gates.

The new entrance shall be located within a 12m x 2.4m parking strip which shall adjoin the metalled edge of the public road. Hedgerow disturbance should be limited to that required to provide the parking strip and required sightlines only.

The entrance gate shall be located within the parking strip and recessed 4 metres behind the roadside boundary. The entrance gate shall be joined to the fence line which shall be splayed at angles of 45 degrees.

Table 12.10: New Rural Entrances Should Not Be Located Within The Following Distances Of Junctions

Road Class	Adjacent	Opposite
Local Roads	50m	25m
Regional Roads	100m	30m
National roads	150m	50m

12.10.7 Drainage Requirements

Where public services in the form of water supply and sewerage mains are available (or likely to be provided), the developer will be required to connect to them. The standards for single private wastewater treatment are set out in the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) 'Code of Practice on Wastewater Treatment and Disposal Systems serving Single Houses (October 2009), or any revisions thereof. This Code of Practice establishes an overall framework of best practice in relation to the development of wastewater treatment and disposal systems, in unsewered rural areas, for protection of our environment and specifically water quality. It provides guidance on the design, operation and maintenance of on-site wastewater treatment systems for single houses (p.e. less than or equal to 10). The Code of Practice provides for the certification of the treatment system by a person, suitably qualified, and with professional indemnity insurance.

12.10.8 Water

Each dwelling shall be provided with a viable and secure water supply. Where public water supply is available, connection shall be made to the mains to serve the new development.

12.11 INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

12.11.1 Development Considerations

Industrial and commercial developments on greenfield sites will be required to satisfy minimum requirements for design regarding location, layout, finishes, access, tree planting and landscaping, boundary treatment, water supply, fire fighting, drainage, and effluent disposal.

In addition, sufficient space shall be reserved within the curtilage of the sites for parking of all employees and visitors cars, and for the loading and unloading of vehicles. Parking shall be integrated in the overall design layout, and expanses of parking shall be broken by planting and landscaping.

It is intended that such developments should leave approximately one-third of the site free from buildings and that adequate rear access to business premises be made. The Councils shall require that adequately screened onsite storage be provided for raw materials, waste products and finished goods.

The Councils will require that the design of structures be of a good standard and where relevant be compatible with the design of adjacent structures in terms of building line, heights, roof design, proportions, window design, materials etc., and will consider the preparation of a Design Guide for Industrial Estates during the plan period.

The Councils does not generally favour the splitting of occupancy on serviced sites and will consider the designation of sites for smaller cluster units as necessary.

The Councils will require full details of the nature and extent of processes involved in industrial activities together with the means of dealing effectively with effluents, noise, solid waste and gas emissions if relevant.

The Councils will, in dealing with applications for industrial development, take account of relevant provisions of the Regulations on Environmental Impact Assessment (SI 349/89) and where relevant, the Environmental Protection Agency Act 1992 as amended, in relation to integrated pollution control licensing.

12.11.2 Facilitation of Enterprise and Employment Development

The Councils are prepared to use their powers of site assembly where appropriate to facilitate desirable development for enterprise and employment.

12.11.3 Industrial & Business Parks Site Coverage

It is an objective of the Planning Authority to seek to achieve the following standards with regard to new development in Industrial and Business Parks:

- It is desirable that an adequate proportion of sites be left without covered structures for parking, loading, air circulation, refuse storage etc. In Industrial Estates, a maximum site coverage of 60% shall generally apply.
- A maximum plot ratio of 1 will be imposed. Plot ratio is defined as the gross floor area of buildings on a site divided by the gross site area. Provision of rear access to business premises may also be required.
- Where a proposed development is located within convenient walking distance of a high quality public transport network, the above requirement may be varied so as to achieve a scale of development and density of employment appropriate to the proximity of the site to a high quality public transport network

Business parks shall be laid out in an open parkland setting with a high level of landscaping and provision shall be made for pedestrian and cycle paths. The following design issues should be taken into consideration:

- Individual buildings should exhibit a high quality contemporary design and finish.
- Car parking shall be provided in a discreet, landscaped and well-screened environment with a view to minimising its visual impact, particularly when viewed from approach roads.
- Proposals shall incorporate Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) and other measures that address adaptation to climate change including the creation of integrated wetlands, the construction of green/living roofs whereby opportunities for existing solar energy and wind energy are taken.
- In order to ensure an attractive open parkland setting, the building line on all principal road frontages shall generally not be less than 15 metres from the road. There shall be a minimum planted strip of a width of 5 metres on all principal road frontages.

12.12 MIXED USE DEVELOPMENTS

In considering mixed use developments within the areas identified as appropriate in the town, the following mechanism for securing mixed-use developments in appropriate locations will be applied:

- (a) No less than two separate planning uses will normally be allowed (i.e. retail/residential or retail/offices etc.).
- (b) Where more than two separate uses are proposed, no one singular use will prevail in terms of >50% of the total gross floorspace.

Without such a mechanism it is recognised that one predominant use may prevail on such designated lands. Mixed use developments in town centres are appropriate in attaining sustainable development objectives, creating

opportunities to live, work, shop etc. within urban environments.

12.13 EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES

Generally speaking, the minimum size for a new primary school is 8 classrooms. In rapidly developing areas this minimum may be as high as 16 classrooms, depending on the school catchment population and anticipated need.

Sites required for schools shall comply with the requirements of 'The Provision of Schools and the Planning System: A Code of Practice for Planning Authorities, the Department of Education and Science, and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government' (2012). Technical Guidance Document TGD-027 (or any such updated document) on the identification and suitability assessment of sites for post primary schools shall be complied with in respect of post primary schools while Technical Guidance Document TGD-025 (or any such updated document) shall be complied with in respect of primary schools. School buildings shall exhibit a high quality contemporary design, finish and materials.

12.14 CHILDCARE

Childcare facilities should comply with the provisions of 'Childcare Facilities: Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2001.' Childcare facilities are a key element in the provision of sustainable communities, and the following locations are considered appropriate locations for childcare facilities:

- (i) In communities/larger new housing estates.
- (ii) The vicinity of concentrations of work places, such as industrial estates, business parks and any other locations where there are significant numbers working.
- (iii) In the vicinity of schools.
- (iv) Neighbourhood and town centres.
- (v) Adjacent to public transport corridors, park-and-ride facilities, pedestrian routes and dedicated cycle ways.

In relation to new housing areas a standard of one childcare facility providing for a minimum of 20 childcare places per approximately 75 dwellings shall be provided, unless otherwise recommended by the County Childcare Committee.

12.15 NURSING HOMES

In general, these facilities should be located close to a range of facilities in towns and villages where the residents can more easily access local services.

In determining planning applications for change of use of a residential dwelling or other building to nursing/elderly care home, the following factors should be considered:

- Compliance with the standards as set out in the Health Act 2007 and in the Care and Welfare of Residents in Designated Centres for Older People) Amendment Regulations 2010 (or any such other relevant standards and legislation that may be enacted).
- The impact on the amenities of adjoining properties.
- Suitable private open space.
- Proximity to local services and facilities.
- The size and scale of the facility proposed – the scale must be appropriate to the area.

Comprehensive landscaping plans must be prepared by a fully qualified landscape architect and shall be submitted at application stage. In general in Nursing Homes developments a maximum site coverage of 60% shall apply.

12.16 RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

The Retail Planning Guidelines (2012) require that the location, scale, nature and function of future retail development comply with the retail policies and objectives set out in Chapter 4 and with the key principles of the sequential approach as set out in the Guidelines. The Councils will generally require a Retail Impact Assessment (RIA) to be carried out for large-scale retail proposals or where the Planning Authority considers the development may

impact on the vitality and viability of the town centre.

The RIA shall comply with the criteria set out in the Retail Planning Guidelines (DECLG, 2012).

It is a requirement of the Councils that proposals for major retail centres such as shopping centres and retail outlets are accompanied by specific measures to address the following issues:

- The ability of the proposal to be adequately serviced in relation to car parking, public transport and pedestrian and cyclist access and facilities.
- The creation and enclosure of, good pedestrian space at an appropriate scale.
- A good mix of uses to increase activity and passive security, particularly in the evening time.
- The provision within the overall design of the centre, of public facilities such as childcare facilities, toilets, advice centres, public telephones, etc.
- The provision and design of street furniture including public art, telephones, seats, litter bins, etc.
- The design and layout of buildings, including materials, should discourage graffiti and other forms of vandalism.
- Service areas should be out of sight of surrounding residential and pedestrian areas.
- Tree planting and landscaping must form part of the overall design of the centre, plans of which must be prepared by a fully qualified landscape architect.
- Infill development should reflect the architectural character of its surroundings in terms of height, massing, materials and design.
- Shopping centres must conform to the highest urban design standards. The design must ensure that the proposed centre will be integrated with and be complementary to the streetscape where it will be located in accordance with a detailed urban design framework.

12.16.1 Retail Design

The designers of prospective retail developments are encouraged to carry out an appraisal of the distinctive character of the area adjoining the site and to consider how the design and layout of the proposed development responds to, and preferably enriches that character. In instances where an appraisal finds that the adjacent area is characterised by poor design, the design approach to the proposed development shall be based on the ten urban design principles as outlined in Chapter 3.

12.16.2 Pre-Application Consultation

The Councils will encourage the use of pre-application consultations with developers and their design teams, particularly in instances of major development proposals or where design issues are particularly important, e.g. within heritage towns or conservation areas, or which affect Protected Structures or Architectural Conservation Areas.

12.16.3 Use of Design Statements

A design statement addressing why a particular design solution is considered the most suitable for a particular site, especially in the context of larger or more complex forms of retail development, is required from developers or designers in supporting their planning application for large scale developments. In such circumstances, the following issues shall be addressed.

- How the proposed development contributes to the coherence and legibility of the urban structure of its location.
- The ability of the proposal to be adequately serviced in relation to car parking, public transport and pedestrian and cyclist access and facilities.
- The creation and enclosure of high quality pedestrian space at an appropriate scale.
- Contribute to the promotion of greater vitality and viability in town centres and provide a diversity of choice and quality in their retail offer and facilities.

- How proposed developments in larger urban centres combine shopping with complimentary uses that stay open later or contain residential elements in order to increase the evening activity and security of the centre.
- The provision and design of street furniture including public art, seats, litter bins, etc.

12.16.4 Shopfronts

Traditional shop front designs and nameplates over shop windows should be preserved. The Councils will require that new shop fronts designs be in keeping with the existing character and traditional form of the streetscape.

New shopfront design shall respect the scale and proportioning of the streetscape by maintaining the existing scale of development along the street and respecting the appropriate plot width. Large expanses of undivided glass will generally not be permitted. Elevation modelling and vertical proportioning should break up long runs of horizontal facades. The uses of fascias, pilasters and stall risers are means to achieve this.

12.16.5 Petrol Filling Stations

Regard shall be had to the Retail Planning Guidelines, (DECLG, 2012) and the County Retail Strategy when accessing applications.

Proposals for petrol stations shall comply with the requirements of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges National Roads Authority (2000) along with the Dangerous Substances Regulations SI 311 (1979). Discharge licences to sewer shall be in accordance with the Water Pollution Acts 1979 and 1990.

12.16.6 Automatic Teller Machines

The provision of automatic teller machines will be strictly monitored having regard to the need to protect the character of the relevant building and to allow the normal function of the footpath. The Councils would seek to minimise the impact of these machines by not allowing

canopies and encouraging the provision of lobby facilities.

12.16.7 Take-aways

Due to amenity considerations, take-away establishments should generally be confined to core retail areas or areas of mixed commercial development. Such uses are generally not suited to mid-terrace locations or other locations where neighbouring properties or upper floors unconnected with the business are in residential use. Proposals for such uses near to residential areas will be given very careful consideration. In order to maintain an appropriate mix of uses and protect night-time amenities in particular areas, it is the objective of the Councils to prevent an excessive concentration of takeaways and to ensure that the intensity of any proposed takeaway is in keeping with both the scale of the building and the pattern of development in the area. The provision of such facilities will be strictly controlled.

12.16.8 Betting Offices

The Councils shall seek to avoid a concentration of betting offices in the core retail centres of towns. In controlling the provision of betting offices, the Councils shall have regard to the following, where appropriate:

- The need to safeguard the vitality and viability of the defined retail core and to maintain a suitable mix of retail uses
- The number/frequency of such facilities in the area
- The effect on the amenities in the area arising from noise, hours of operation and litter.

12.16.9 Amusement Arcades / Casinos

In considering proposals for amusement arcades and casinos, the Councils will have regard to the likely impact on the amenity of neighbouring activities. There will be a presumption against locating them or expanding existing arcades in primary frontages or smaller settlements in order to maintain the vitality and character of shopping areas.

Amusement centres and casinos will not be permitted close to residential areas, schools, churches and other community buildings or associated lands due to the potential for noise and general disturbance. The provision of such facilities will be strictly controlled, having regard to the following, where appropriate:

- The likely impact on the residential amenity of the area arising from noise, litter and hours of operation;
- The number/frequency of such facilities in the area;
- The existing number of similar, non-traditional retail service outlets in core retail areas such as internet cafés, call centres, amusement arcades and takeaways;

12.16.10 Market/Casual Trading

Farmers' or local country markets are an increasingly popular retail element of towns and villages, providing an effective means of selling locally sourced produce and opportunities and expanding the rural economy base. The Councils will seek to protect the economic and social benefits such markets offer on account of their ability to sustain and reinforce rural areas and support their role as visitor attractions. In considering planning applications for such facilities, the Councils will have regard to the following:

- The impact the market would have on town centre vitality and viability and retail policy provisions.
- The likely impact on residential amenity, conservation areas, the general environment or existing shops.
- The capacity of the existing road structure to take any additional traffic generated by the proposal and parking requirements.
- Arrangements for customers'/traders' parking, servicing, storage, disposal and recycling of refuse and storage of stalls.
- Provisions of the Casual Trading Act of 1995 and specifically any Bye-Laws made by Westmeath County Council under Section 6 of the Act.

12.17 FACILITIES AND AMENITIES ANCILLARY TO TOURISM AND RECREATIONAL ATTRACTIONS

Certain facilities and amenities, and associated services, are often required to support the enjoyment of tourism and recreational attractions particularly in areas of high amenity value. Facilities of this type would often include car parks, viewing points, and may include toilets and cafes. Facilities will be permitted, where it can be demonstrated that they involve as appropriate:

- A simple form and function and unobtrusive siting and design so as not to interfere with the visual setting of sensitive visual attractions.
- The particular facilities are justified by reference to anticipated demand
- There should be adequate capacity in the local public road network to accommodate vehicular and non vehicular traffic generated by the tourist and recreational attractions. This would involve where possible off road car parking sufficient for anticipated demand and strategically located to avoid traffic hazard and nuisance.
- Adequate signage and interpretation panels, to inform and enhance the visitor experience and assist in proper site management.

It is important that both the facilities themselves and downstream environmental impacts, are non-obtrusive with respect to the intrinsic character of place and setting that is essential to the amenity value of the attraction; and with respect to local biodiversity, and historic and archaeological potential that is associated with the environment.

12.17.1 Sustainable Forms of Niche Tourism and Recreation

The Councils will promote sustainable forms of niche tourism and recreation in the town and its environs. These include theme holidays and

group based activities that take advantage of local and natural resources in a way that enhances the appreciation of place, minimises disturbance to the local environment, and improves the prospects for tourism in the long term. Land uses can be associated with particular farms or forests, or special natural features. As a general preference, facilities should be in existing structures, or in buildings of character requiring renovation or in traditional farm houses. Where new buildings are permitted outside of this framework, they should be modest in scale, sensitively located and designed having regard to existing buildings, topography and landscape. In addition, they should be adequately serviced and suitably managed.

12.18 AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Agriculture will continue to be an important land use activity in the outer area of the Town and agricultural development in the form of new agricultural structures and extensions to existing buildings is likely to take place. In considering applications for agricultural development the Planning Authority will apply the same criteria as it would in any other planning applications and will be bound by the consideration of the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. The Planning Authority will exercise strict control over the discharge of effluent from agricultural buildings in order to protect water bodies, water supplies and existing biodiversity.

12.18.1 Agricultural Buildings and Structures

- (i) The design, scale, siting and layout of agricultural buildings should respect and where possible, enhance the rural environment.
- (ii) Buildings should generally be located a minimum of 100 metres from the nearest dwelling other than the applicants dwelling.
- (iii) Applicants shall demonstrate their ability to store and dispose of agriculture waste.
- (iv) In visually sensitive areas the Councils will seek to group together and site buildings in

an appropriate manner, and require the use of harmonious external materials to minimise obtrusion on the landscape. The use of dark coloured cladding, notably dark browns, greys, greens and reds are most suitable for farm buildings, and roof areas should be darker than walls.

12.18.2 Reuse of Existing Buildings

Planning permission may be granted for the re-use of redundant farm buildings for small-scale rural enterprise, provided the Councils are satisfied about the following matters:

- That the building was previously in agricultural use for a reasonable period of time.
- That it is no longer required for agricultural purposes.
- That the use can be largely contained within the existing building.

12.18.3 Agricultural Related Industry

- (i) Agricultural-related development may not be permitted within the agricultural zone where it conflicts with the amenity or viable use of farm holdings.
- (ii) Other considerations include traffic safety, pollution and waste control, and the satisfactory treatment of effluents, smells and noise, the size and form of building and the extent to which they can be integrated into the landscape.

12.18.4 Forestry

Given the need to restructure agricultural practises the Council will assist the development of forestry, particularly deciduous forestry, as an alternative agricultural land use, while also protecting residential amenities of rural dwellers by the establishment of an appropriate area free from afforestation.

Forest developments should follow current best practice and the Forest Service's "Forestry and the Landscape Guidelines" (July 2000) where landscape objectives should focus on compatibility with and enhancement of existing local landscape character. Landscape Design

Plans should be prepared where sensitive high amenity areas are concerned.

Afforestation projects should be designed and implemented in a manner likely to enhance existing local amenities.

Forest owners should prepare and maintain a forest fire defence strategy, including provision and maintenance of adequate prescribed firebreaks, water supply reservoirs and forest access. Fire Plans should be prepared for each forest and reviewed annually.

The Councils will not favour the development of forestry in locations which would adversely impact upon Protected/Listed Views or would adversely impact upon recorded monuments. Some forestry developments are subject to EIS, regard should be had to the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended)

12.19 ENVIRONMENT & HERITAGE

12.19.1 Protected Structures

Good design and conservation go hand in hand. They both recognise that the historic environment is a precious asset that shall be conserved for future generations. Good conservation ensures that important buildings and spaces continue to have contemporary relevance and vitality.

12.19.2 Development Involving Extensions or Alterations to a Protected Structure

The Councils will not normally permit development, which would adversely affect the character or setting of a Protected Structure. Development proposals will normally only be considered appropriate where all the following criteria are met:

- (a.) The detailed design respects the Protected Structure in terms of scale, height, massing and alignment.
- (b.) The works proposed make use of traditional or sympathetic structural

materials and techniques which respect those found on the structure.

- (c.) The nature of the use proposed respects the character and setting of the structure.
- (d.) Development proposals involving protected structures shall be prepared by a Conservation Architect.

12.19.3 Recording and Designation of a Protected Structure

The Councils will endeavour to keep an up-to-date and accurate list of Protected Structures, in the form of a Record of Protected Structures, and to inform owners/occupiers of the structure's status and their responsibilities.

12.19.4 Architectural Conservation Areas (ACA's) and Townscape

The Councils will require development proposals for new buildings, alterations, extensions and changes of use in, or which affect the setting of an Architectural Conservation Area to demonstrate that following criteria are met:

- (a.) The development preserves or enhances the character and appearance of the area.
- (b.) The development is in sympathy with the characteristic built form of the area.
- (c.) The scale, form, materials and detailing of the development respects the characteristics of adjoining buildings in the area.
- (d.) Important views within, into and out of the area are protected.
- (e.) Trees and other landscape features contributing to the character or appearance of the area are protected.
- (f.) The development conforms to the guidance set out in Architectural Conservation Area development briefs.

12.20 Archaeology

- (i) Within the designated Zone of Archaeological Potential in Athlone and in sites on or abutting monuments identified by the Sites and Monuments Record, the

Councils will refer applications for proposed developments to National Monuments Service of DAHG, to ascertain their requirements.

- (ii) Where a proposed development would result in significant ground disturbance within a Zone of Archaeological Potential a preliminary archaeological investigation by a licensed Archaeologist will be required to form part of any planning application.
- (iii) Where a proposed development would result in significant ground disturbance leading to potentially significant archaeological implications in a Zone of Archaeological Potential or in sites on or abutting Monuments identified by the Sites and Monuments Record, a comprehensive archaeological report from a licensed Archaeologist will be required to be submitted to the Council and to National Monuments Service of DAHG, for their assessment, prior to the commencement of any development on site, or where considered appropriate prior to the decision by the Council on a planning application.
- (iv) In all cases where a development would result in ground disturbance within a Zone of Archaeological Potential and in sites on or abutting Monuments identified in the Sites and Monuments Record, it will be a requirement of a permission that a licensed Archaeologist be retained on site to monitor all site works, and in appropriate circumstances the preservation of all or part of any archaeological material so discovered will be required.
- (v) It will be a requirement that development shall cease immediately upon the finding of any elements or artefacts of archaeological interest, and the Planning Authority and National Monuments Service of DAHG, are informed to facilitate recording and protection of such elements.

12.21 TRANSPORT

12.21.1 Mobility Management Plans

Mobility management aims to mitigate congestion in urban areas by providing for the transportation needs of people and goods in an ordered and planned manner. In doing this, the environmental and economic impacts of travel may be greatly reduced. Regard shall be had to the NRA Traffic and Transport Assessment Guidelines 2007, when preparing Mobility Management Plans.

Mobility Management Plans are required where significant developments are proposed. The Councils will require that consideration is given by prospective developers to limiting traffic generation as far as possible. Significant developments are those which are likely to result in more than 25 employees in a facility or a housing estate development. The developer should include in any significant proposal measures to reduce dependency on private car use for journey to work such as:

- Facilities to encourage car sharing/pooling;
- Promotion of public transport / cycling /walking; and
- Provision of physical infrastructure to support cycling/walking i.e. footpaths /cycling paths and bicycle storage areas, showers, changing areas etc.

12.21.2 Car Parking Standards

It will generally be required that developments that are residential, commercial, enterprise and employment or otherwise, shall comply with the parking standards detailed in Table 12.11. The Councils shall seek to control the provision of parking in town centres and has a policy to encourage alternatives to car commuting. Within the designated town centre location a lower standard of car parking provision shall apply.

12.21.3 Access for the Persons with Disabilities/Mobility Impaired

Car parking shall be provided for persons with disabilities and mobility-impaired in all car parking developments.

The minimum criteria for such parking provisions are detailed in “Building for Everyone - Planning and Policy”, published by the National Disability Authority in 2009. Special car parking bays for people with disabilities shall be provided as close as possible to the entrance of premises to be served. Each designated parking bay shall be clearly marked with the relevant standard international symbol.

Table 12.11: Car parking standards

Land Use	Unit	Plan Area	Designated Centre Area	Town
		Min. Space / Unit	Min. Space/ Unit	
Residential 2+ bedrooms	Dwelling 2+ Bedrooms	1	0	
Residential 1 bedroom	Dwelling 1 bedroom	1	0	
Visitor Parking for Residential	1 visitor space for every three dwellings	1	0	
Shopping	100m ² gross floor area	6	3	
Retail Warehousing	100m ² gross floor area	3	3	
Cash & Carry	100m ² gross floor area	2	2	
Manufacturing	100m ² gross floor area	2	1	
Warehousing	100m ² gross floor area	1.5	1.5	
Office	100m ² gross floor area	3	1.5	
Bank/Financial Institutions	100m ² gross floor area	5	0	
Library	100m ² gross floor area	3	1.5	
Bar, function room, ballroom	100m ² gross floor area	6	0	
Restaurant	100m ² gross floor area	6	0	
Take-aways	Unit	5	0	
Hotel/Guest House	Bedroom	1	0.5	
Hospital	Bed	0.33	0.10	
Nursing Home	Bed	0.33	0.10	
Clinics and Group Medical Practises	Consulting room	1	1	
Sports Hall/Club	100m ² gross floor area	2.00	0	
Cinema, theatre, Stadium auditorium	Seat	1.0	0	

The Town Centre Parking Standards will apply in the following designated areas:

- The area west of the river centred on Conaught Street, O'Connell Street, High Street, Main Street, Castle Street, Pearse

Street, and east of the river centred on Church Street, Mardyke Street, and Irishtown Upper; and extending northwards as far as St. Kieran's Terrace and Grace Park Road and the Railway Line and southwards as far as Inis Oir.



Map 12.1: Athlone Car Parking Boundary.

For small scale development listed below within the area described above, no parking requirement will apply, in the interests of encouraging town centre development and the consolidation of existing business:

- Extensions up to 100% of the net floor area of an existing business premises up to a maximum of 150m²
- New small business, the net floor area of which is below 150m²

This change in policy will have the effect of reducing the cost of starting or expanding a business in Athlone Town Centre and will support the viability and vitality of the town centre area.

Table 12.12 Required Dimensions:

Car Parking Bay	5m x 2.5m (end-on) 6m x 2.5m (parallel to kerb)
Loading Bay	15m x 3m (HGV) 6m x 3m (Small Van)
Circulation Aisle	6m in width

12.21.4 Cycle Parking Standards

The Planning Authority requires the provision of a minimum level of secure cycle parking facilities in association with new development and a change of use. This is consistent with the objectives and policies of the Department of Transport’s National Cycle Policy (2009). Where the provision of cycle parking facilities are intended for use by the staff of that particular development, stands should be covered and located within the curtilage of the development to ensure security and supervision.

Table 12.13: Cycle Parking Standards (Source: National Cycle Manual, June 2011)

Location	Minimum number of bicycle parking spaces
Housing developments	2 private secure bicycle spaces per 100 sq.m (note –design should not require bicycle access via living area) 1 visitor bicycle space per two housing units
Offices	10% of employee numbers, (subject to minimum of 10 bicycle places or one bike space for every car space, whichever is the greater)
Schools	10% of pupil registration numbers, minimum 10 places Consider separate teacher / employee parking
Other developments	1 bike space for every car space
Shops	1 space per 100 sq m
Public Transport pick-up points (Rail, tram, taxi Ranks & QBCs)	2.5% of number of daily boarders at that point / station, subject to minimum of 10 bicycle places

12.21.5 Motorcycle Parking Standards

Provision for motorcycle parking will be required to accommodate this user and also to encourage modes of transport other than the car.

At a minimum, one secure motorcycle parking space shall be required for every 20 car parking spaces. These should be in well lit places, with limited gradients. The motorcycle parking bays should be a minimum of 2.5m by 1.5m. This may be required to be greater for bays parallel to the kerb to allow for manoeuvrability.

12.22 DEVELOPMENT ADJACENT/OVER OR NEAR RAILWAY

12.22.1 General

All potential works by third parties on and adjacent to the railway are required to meet the terms of the Railway Safety Act, 2005 (particularly Sections under Part 3 and Part 11)

All potential risks to the railway must be assessed early in the design stage and developed throughout the life of the proposed development works including the construction

of the railway shall be clearly identified and the mitigation or elimination of such risks shall be agreed by Iarnród Éireann.

Where potential works may, or will have an impact on the railway, Iarnród Éireann has a formal technical and safety approval process for each stage of the project life of Third Party works.

12.22.2 Development adjacent the Railway

- During the planning, design, construction, maintenance and the permanent completed state of a development adjacent the railway due consideration shall be given to the impact on the railway and such impacts shall be adequately addressed to the satisfaction of Iarnród Éireann and may possibly require the consent of the Railway Safety Commission.
- Secure boundary treatment must be provided during the construction and in the permanent condition of the development works.

- (c) No development shall take place within 2m of the new boundary fence or wall to allow for maintenance.
- (d) No materials, plant, equipment, temporary works or site office be placed or operated in such a manner which would obscure or interfere with the sighting distances or visibility of railway signals.
- (e) Railway mounds, ditches and drains are to be preserved except where written consent of Iarnród Éireann has been sought and received.
- (f) Lights from the proposed development either during construction phase or when the development is completed shall not cause glare or in any way impair the vision of train drivers or personnel operating track machines.

12.22.3 Residential, Commercial & Institutional Development adjacent the Railway.

- (a) To ensure the security of the railway boundaries preventing trespass and vandalism, the railway boundary to proposed developed lands shall be a minimum 2.4m high, welded steel palisade fencing or similar as approved by the Planning Authority/ Iarnród Éireann.

The existing boundary line with required provision for new fencing shall be maintained unless the boundary is less than 3m from the nearest rail of the track and then the new boundary line shall be a minimum of 3m from the nearest rail.

- (b) In all cases where residential development is proposed the boundary shall consist of a 2.4m high reinforced solid concrete or concrete block wall capped with copings to be erected by the Developer on the Developer's side

of the wall of the existing railway boundary line. The wall shall be of adequate strength, stability and durability. Boundary wall proposals shall be submitted for approval to Iarnród Éireann and shall demonstrate the adequacy of fulfilling the required functions in a Planning Application.

- (c) Any temporary and permanent works, including basements that come within the track support zone or railway structure zone shall be submitted to Iarnród Éireann for approval and included in a Planning Application.
- (d) The design of new structures adjacent to the railway should ensure that there is no flashback of sunlight from reflective surfaces, which would impair the vision of train drivers or other railway personnel.
- (e) No liquid, either surface water or effluent, shall be discharged onto railway property. The surface water run off from new buildings and paved areas is not to be discharged into any existing streams or water courses leading to a railway.
- (f) Iarnród Éireann requirements in relation to existing railway bridges, new bridges, utility crossings and level crossings shall be complied with in development proposals which concern these items of infrastructure.

12.23 GENERAL ADVERTISING

12.23.1 Canopies

The erection of plastic or fabric canopies or the 'Dutch' type will be discouraged. Such canopies disrupt the view along the street and obscure both shopfront detail and neighbouring advertising and are generally not acceptable. Where shading of a window display is required the use of traditional rectangular sun blinds/awnings of the retractable type may be permitted.

12.23.2 Roller Shutters

The installation of security shutters can visually detract from and deaden the shopping street at night, thereby detracting from the public realm/environment of the town. It is the policy of the Councils to discourage the use of such shutters and to ensure the removal of unauthorised shutters. The erection of a roller shutter and its associated housing, requires planning permission. Where security shutters are considered to be essential – for example, because of the type of business transacted or goods stored and where the location so indicates, the Councils may permit them provided that they are characterised by the following:

- Internal roller shutters located behind a display window.
- Steel security display shutters may be acceptable for security reasons in exceptional cases only.

12.23.3 Hoardings & Billboards

In general the Councils will not look sympathetically on applications for large-scale advertising hoardings and billboards. Excessive outdoor advertising will be strictly controlled. Such advertising will not be permitted in the following locations:

- Close to a listed building, a public open space or an important view.
- In predominantly residential areas, especially on prominent gable walls.
- Where a proliferation of such signage already exists.
- On street elevations.
- Where they may cause a road hazard
Where it is considered there may be a detrimental visual impact

Where such advertising could perform a role in screening off derelict or obsolete areas thus improving the overall visual amenities of these areas favourable, consideration may be given to applications for temporary permission for signage which performs this function. Such

proposals should not interfere with the desirability of the ultimate re-development of such areas.

12.23.4 Local Advertising

The importance of local advertising in the economy of Athlone is recognised. Such advertising can play an important role in enabling the identification of a particular trade or service outlet or tourist facility. Local advertising structures can be segregated into two specific categories:

- On-premises local advertising.
- Remote local advertising.

The special needs of hotels and guest-houses or services for directional signs is catered for by licensing fingerpost signs.

12.23.5 On-Premises Local Advertising

- (i) Applications for this type of local advertising will be assessed on merit having regard to the following points:
 - Signs on free-standing hoardings are undesirable.
 - Size and scale of signs shall not be in conflict with those on existing structures in the vicinity.
 - Projecting signs should generally be at fascia level.
 - Structures will not be allowed above the eaves or parapet level of the building.
 - Signs should not interfere with windows or other features of the façade, they should not project above the skyline or outside the general bulk of the building.
 - Signs shall not obscure architectural features such as cornices or window openings.
 - Advertising signs erected parallel to a road or street are preferable to those projecting at angles thereto.
 - Signs which compete with road signs or otherwise cause traffic hazard shall not be permitted.

- Advertising signs are undesirable in residential areas.
- Flashing reflectorised or glitter-type signs will not be permitted.
- Solid block or painted lettering will be preferred to hollow plastic or neon type signs.
- Traditional sign writing will be encouraged.
- Advertising signs of good quality and design which enhance and complement the streetscape will be encouraged.
- A plethora of advertising signs which cause visual clutter on buildings or streetscape will be discouraged.
- Is sympathetic in design and colouring both to the building on which they will be displayed and their surroundings.
- Shopfront advertising should be designed as an integral part of the shop front.

(ii) The Planning Authority will require commercial interests and especially multiple outlets groups to adjust the use and scale of their corporate image-advertising logo to respect the scale and design of adjacent properties and streetscapes.

(iii) Modern approaches to advertising such as internal window signs will be considered.

12.23.6 Advertising on Bus Shelters

Large, internally-illuminated advertising panels on bus shelters can detract from the visual appearance of Protected Structures in Architectural Conservation Areas and will not generally be permitted in these areas. In considering applications for bus shelters, the Planning Authority will have regard to the particular circumstances of each case, such as location, scale and type of advertising proposed and the effect on the amenities of the area and the streetscape and the requirements to provide shelter for waiting bus passengers.

12.23.7 Fingerpost Signs

The erection of finger post signs will require a licence from the Planning Authority and should comply with the following:

- Directional signs for major tourist attractions and community facilities will be considered. Product advertising will not be permitted.
- Signs must be of a standard size and colour and where permitted shall be provided by the licensee but will be erected by the Council.

12.23.8 For Hotels, Guesthouses And Industrial/Commercial Premises

- Each sign shall be a finger-post sign of standard dimensions (i.e. 950mm x 288mm) with white lettering on a brown background with a white trim.
- The sign shall be erected on an existing road-sign pole where this is available, or otherwise on a pole of the same type specially erected.
- Signs shall not be permitted beyond a distance of 10km from the premises.
- A maximum of two signs may be permitted in respect of any establishment on a local road which connects to more than one regional route.
- Signs will not be permitted on national roads.
- In addition to the initial sign, further signs will be permitted at intersections along the route of the county road as necessary.
- A sign shall be permitted only at a junction between a county or private road and another national/regional road, or at an entrance leading off a county or private road.
- Signs shall not be permitted at a junction between two national routes or two regional routes or between a national route and a regional route where the maximum speed limit applies. A maximum number of six signs shall be permitted on a single pole at any junction.

- Where appropriate, a sign may be permitted subject to a condition that if there is a further application in respect of a sign for another facility at the same junction, the Planning Authority may require the first sign to be removed and replaced by a joint sign advertising both facilities. This requirement is subject to the overall limitation of six signs as defined in the previous paragraph.

The basic planning control principle in this regard is to reduce visual environmental clutter and to meet the needs of basic necessities thus improving the overall quality of the physical environment and legibility of the county.

12.23.9 Signage on National Routes

Regard shall be had to the *Spatial Planning & National Roads – Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2012*, in relation to the issue of signage on national roads. On national roads, the erection of signage must be tightly regulated for road safety and environmental reasons. The proliferation of roadside signage should be avoided, especially outside the 50-60 kmph speed limit areas, in a manner that would reduce the effectiveness of essential signage such as directional and other authorised road traffic signs, create visual clutter and distractions for road users and/or reduce visibility at junctions, interchanges and bends. In particular, the practice of random parking of large truck trailers on lands visible from the public road as a form of advertising hoarding is unauthorised development and is prohibited. Enforcement mechanisms will be employed in relation to the road safety, planning and environmental impacts of such practices. Signage in relation to major tourist and leisure features and facilities must be carried out in accordance with the *NRA's Policy on the Provision of Tourist & Leisure Signage on National Roads (March 2011)* and *NRA National Roads Guidelines 2011*.

12.24 ENERGY

Wind Energy development proposals will be considered in designated industrial, enterprise and research areas within the plan boundary. Such proposals shall have regard to the *Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2006 (DECLG)* and the provisions of the Habitats Directive.

12.25 TELECOMMUNICATIONS

An efficient telecommunications system is important in the development of the economy. However, in considering locational requirements, the Planning Authority will take the Department of the Environment and Local Government's "Planning Guidelines for Telecommunications Antennae and Supports Structures" (1996) into account. The Councils will take necessary steps to ensure the protection of public health and the preservation of residential and visual amenity and to strike a fair balance between the rights of individual citizens and the general good.

- Co-location agreements are desirable for the granting of planning permission. Where new facilities are proposed applicants will be required to satisfy the Council that they have made a reasonable effort to share facilities or to locate facilities in clusters.
- As part of the planning application, operators should furnish a statement of compliance with the International Radiation Protection Association (IRPA) Guidelines (Health Physics, vol. 54, no.1, Jan 1988) or the equivalent European Pre-standard 50166-2, which has been conditioned by the licensing arrangements with the Department of Transport, Energy and Communications, and to furnish that an installation of the type applied for complies with the above Guidelines.

12.26 IMPLEMENTATION OF PLANNING PERMISSION

12.26.1 Development Contribution Scheme

The Councils will when granting a permission under Section 34 of the Planning & Development Act 2000 as amended include condition(s) requiring the payment of contributions in respect of public infrastructure and facilities benefiting development in its area and that is provided, or that is intended will be provided, by or on behalf of the Local Authority, in accordance with a Development Contribution Scheme made under Section 48 of said Act.

12.26.2 Supplementary Development Contribution Schemes

The Planning Authority will wherever appropriate, require by condition, payment of a contribution in respect of any public infrastructure service or project, in accordance with a Supplementary Development Contribution Scheme made under Section 49 of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 as amended.

12.26.3 Special Contribution

Where appropriate the Planning Authority will in addition to the terms of a Scheme, require the payment of a special contribution in respect of a particular development where specific exceptional costs not covered by a Scheme are incurred by the Local Authority in respect of public infrastructure and facilities which benefit the proposed development, in accordance with a Development Contribution Scheme under Section 48 (2) (c) of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 as amended.

Chapter 13 *Land Use Zoning*



13 LAND USE ZONING

INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets out the general land use and zoning policies and objectives of the plan. It provides an explanation of the land use categories and the zoning objectives that apply to them. The primary purpose of land use zoning in the context of the Development Plan is to promote the orderly development of Athlone by eliminating potential conflicts between incompatible land uses and to establish an efficient basis for investment in public infrastructure and facilities. The objective of zoning is to specify which types of land use the Councils consider appropriate for different areas or 'zones', and it therefore indicates the planning control objectives of the Councils. The Councils are obliged under the Planning & Development Acts 2000 as amended to include in its Development Plan objectives for the 'zoning of land for the use solely or primarily of particular areas for particular purposes'.

Zoning policy must have regard to the other strategic policies underlying the plan. These include the principles of sustainable development, consolidation of the town centre, the integration of land use and transportation planning and the maintenance of a high quality of life within Athlone. In this regard, the overall zoning strategy for the town is based on the following principles:

- Sufficient land should be zoned at appropriate locations throughout the town to accommodate the expected growth in population, to meet the needs of growing communities and to facilitate economic growth within the lifetime of the plan.
- Land use and transportation, should be considered in tandem with the objective of minimising the need to travel, and favouring other modes of travel over the private car.

- Flexibility should be provided for, subject to the ability to mitigate the effects of a use on existing or proposed neighbouring uses.
- Lands will be reserved for uses which are not market driven, such as open space or community facilities to ensure that these necessary uses can be provided.
- A rational pattern of land use must be secured, and a framework put in place within which the objectives and strategies contained in this plan can be realised.
- The efficient use of infrastructure and services provided should be ensured, by maximising the use of nearby lands and consolidating the town centre, which will in turn enhance the vitality and viability of Athlone.
- Amenity, including residential amenity must be protected, by promoting particular uses in appropriate locations, which will reduce conflict between uses.
- A framework for development management must be provided.
- Where new development areas are to be developed, these should be carried out comprehensively and to a reasonable state of completion, before other development areas are commenced.

In the event of a conflict between the zoning objectives in this Town Plan and zoning objectives within Local Area Plans in the town, the Town Development Plan shall take precedence.

Table 2.2 in Chapter 2 provides details of areas in hectares which have been reserved in the Zoning Objectives Map for different categories of use in Athlone. Since the Athlone Town Plan 2008-2014, 45 hectares of land has been dezoned in Athlone. A large proportion of this land was removed as it was subject to flood risk.

13.1 LAND USE ZONING CATEGORIES

The following sections set out the objectives and requirements of the Planning Authority for the main categories of land use. In total there are eleven land-use zoning categories as follows:

- 1. Residential
- 2. Mixed Use
- 3. Enterprise & Employment
- 4. Commercial
- 5. Retail Warehousing
- 6. Sporting/Recreational
- 7. Open Space
- 8. Community, Educational & Institutional
- 9. Agricultural
- 10. Innovation & Technology
- 11. Strategic Gateway Zone

13.2 LAND USE ZONING OBJECTIVES

13.2.1 Residential

O-LZ1 To provide for residential development, associated services and to protect and improve residential amenity.

The priority of the Councils is to improve the quality of existing residential areas and to protect their amenities and to strengthen the provision of local community services and amenity. In both new and established residential areas, a range of uses will be permitted in principle, in addition to housing, which has the potential to strengthen communities and encourage the enjoyment of residential amenity. Such uses may include local shops, crèches, schools, nursing homes, open space and recreation facilities. These may be permitted provided they are appropriate in scale and do not unduly interfere with the predominant residential land use.

13.2.2 Mixed Use

O-LZ3 To provide for, protect and strengthen the vitality and viability of town centres, through consolidating development, encouraging a mix of uses and maximising the use of land, to ensure the efficient use of infrastructure and services.

Mixed use reflects the mixture of uses which have always co-existed in town centres and which gives them the vitality, variety and intensity of uses which makes them attractive and important places for community interaction. A mixed use zoning provision can also help to ensure the economic efficiency through which public infrastructure and services can be provided. It can attract a critical mass to a central area around which service provision can be focused.

It is a policy of this Development Plan, to sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of town centres and where appropriate to consolidate urban areas. This will be achieved by encouraging a mix of compatible uses within town centres and maximising the use of land to ensure the efficient use of infrastructure and services, through mobilising brownfield and under-utilised land for development where appropriate. Any such development will have regard to the Councils adopted Retail Strategy and policies in relation to the built heritage and building height and density. Development incorporating residential units above ground floor ‘active’ street frontages such as commercial/retail units, will be encouraged where appropriate, to facilitate activity on the street both during and after office hours.

13.2.3 Enterprise & Employment

O-LZ4 To provide for enterprise, employment and related uses including industrial and service uses such as Class 3 offices, which due to their scale or nature cannot be located within the town centre.

It is the policy of the Councils to ensure that there is adequate land available to facilitate opportunities for employment creation and the Councils will accommodate enterprise and employment uses that are incapable of being situated in a town centre location, provided that such development does not detract from the town centre’s commercial function. Warehousing, manufacturing, energy and recycling, technological and office based enterprise and ancillary services should be provided in high quality environments, incorporating a range of amenities.

The uses in this zone are likely to generate a considerable amount of traffic by both employees and service traffic. Sites should therefore have good vehicular and public transport access. The implementation of Mobility Management Plans will provide an important means of managing accessibility to these sites.

Since the development in this zone will provide significant employment, it may be appropriate to locate this zoning in close proximity to residential areas, depending on the nature of the employment use and whether or not the use would be likely detract from residential amenity. Childcare facilities may also be permitted, subject to appropriate design and location.

13.2.4 Commercial

O-LZ5 To provide for commercial development which does not need to be located in the town centre or retail warehousing zone.

This zoning provides for expansion of existing commercial uses and for new uses.

13.2.5 Retail Warehousing

O-LZ6 To provide for retail warehousing in appropriate locations on edge of town centre sites, which do not detract from the town centre’s retailing function.

Retail warehousing is defined as large stores specialising in the sale of bulky household goods such as carpets, furniture, electrical goods and bulky DIY items, which generally, cannot be located in the town centre due to their requirements for space and parking facilities. Retail warehousing will be permitted in principle, depending on its scale and nature, provided that such development does not detract from the town centre’s retailing function and provided that it is in accordance with Councils Retail Strategy and policy.

13.2.6 Sporting/Recreational

O-LZ7 To provide for, protect and improve the provision, attractiveness, accessibility and amenity value of sporting and recreational facilities.

Only development that is incidental to, or contributes to the enjoyment of recreation or leisure will be permitted within this zone, and development that enhances the amenity value of such areas will be encouraged. The development of such uses will have regard to the requirements in the area and needs of changing communities, as well as the quality of landscaping, usability and accessibility of areas and facilities. The Councils will encourage the provision for a variety of sporting and recreation activities as required.

13.2.7 Open Space

O-LZ8 To provide for, protect and improve the provision, attractiveness, accessibility and amenity value of public open space and amenity areas.

To provide for, protect and improve the provision, attractiveness and accessibility of public open space and amenity areas intended for use for recreational or amenity purposes. Only development that is incidental to, or contributes to the enjoyment of open space, amenity or recreational facilities will be permitted within this zone.

13.2.8 Community, Educational, Institutional

O-LZ9 To provide for, protect and improve educational and institutional facilities such as churches, schools, libraries, museums, health-centres, fire stations, graveyards, arts and entertainment facilities. To preserve the open character of institutional lands and the setting of heritage buildings contained within institutional lands.

It is the policy of the Councils to protect and improve existing social, health, educational and arts/cultural/entertainment facilities and institutions and to safeguard their continued use and future provision. Such provision will be important in maintaining viable and stable communities and it will be necessary to provide for these uses in line with the pace of development, as they are required. Childcare facilities within institutions (or within this zoning category) may be permitted subject to appropriate design and location. Provision of such facilities may also arise through use of specific objectives and phasing arrangements under Local Area Plans.

13.2.9 Agricultural

O-LZ10 To protect agricultural land from development that would restrict its use, and to provide for the development of existing established uses.

To ensure that premature urban development on unserviced or unsuitable agricultural land does not take place.

13.2.10 Innovation & Technology

To provide for high value high tech knowledge, R&D and SMART industries in a high quality built and landscaped environment.

This zoning is aimed at providing a location for high end, high quality, value added businesses and corporate headquarters. The focus in this area shall be on creating knowledge-based enterprise clusters. The delivery of such knowledge based quarters is achievable, owing to the presence of AIT and the opportunities and networks derived from same. An emphasis on exemplar sustainable design and aesthetic quality will be promoted to enhance corporate image and identity.

13.2.11 Strategic Gateway Zone

The Strategic Gateway Designation provides for a range of specialist but complementary uses which are permissible within this area. Such uses include flagship enterprise, trade, exhibition, conference facilities and related leisure, cultural, residential and community uses including schools.

The vision presented for this area encompasses a vibrant, high quality and sustainable centre of enterprise and employment that creates a positive and lasting image of Athlone to the visitor, investor and resident alike. The land use zoning matrix in the Creggan Local Area Plan contains a matrix with regard to what development is permissible within the Strategic Gateway Zone.

13.2.12 Non-conforming uses

It is not intended, that existing uses within the zones outlined in this plan, which appear to be inconsistent with the primary use zoning objective should be curtailed. All such cases, where legally established by continued use for the same purpose prior to 1st October 1964, or by a planning permission, shall not be subject to legal proceedings under the Acts in respect of the continued use. There will be a presumption against intensification of such premises or use of land, but each case shall be considered on its own merits.

Type of Development	Residential	Community/Educational/Institutional	Mixed Use	Enterprise & Employment	Commercial	Sporting / Recreational	Open Space/Amenity	Innovation & Technology	Retail Warehousing
Abattoir	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Advertising structures	X	O	O	O	O	O	X	X	O
Agri-business	X	X	O	O	O	X	X	O	X
Agricultural building	X	X	X	X	X	O	O	X	X
Agri-tourism	X	X	O	O	O	O	O	X	X
Amusement arcade	X	X	O	X	O	X	X	X	X
Betting office	X	X	O	X	O	X	X	X	X
Car Sales/repairs	X	X	O	O	O	X	X	X	P
Caravan park; Residential	O	O	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Casual-trading	X	X	P	X	O	X	O	X	O
Cemetery	X	O	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Church	O	P	O	O	O	O	X	X	X
Cinema	X	O	P	O	O	X	X	X	X
Commercial car-park	X	O	P	P	P	O	X	X	P
Community Hall (recreation & functional)	O	O	P	O	P	O	O	X	P
Crèche/Nursery	P	P	O	O	O	O	X	P	P
Cultural use	P	P	P	O	O	O	P	X	O
Dance Hall/Discotheque	X	X	P	X	O	O	X	X	O
Doctor/Dentist	P	P	P	X	O	X	X	X	X
Dwelling	P	O	P	X	O	X	X	X	X
Education	P	P	O	O	O	O	X	O	O

Type of Development	Residential	Educational/ Institutional/ Community	Mixed Use	Enterprise & Employment	Commercial	Sporting / Recreational	Open Space/ Amenity	Innovation & Technology	Retail Warehousing
Energy Production	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	O
Extractive industry	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Funeral home	X	O	O	O	O	X	X	X	O
Garden centre	X	X	O	O	O	X	X	X	P
Golf course	X	X	X	X	X	P	O	X	X
Guest house	O	O	O	X	O	X	X	X	X
Halting Site	O	O	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Health centre	O	O	P	O	O	O	X	X	O
Manufacturing Industry	X	X	O	P	O	X	X	P	X
Hospital	X	P	O	O	O	X	X	O	O
Hotel	O	X	P	O	O	X	X	X	O
Light industry	O	O	O	O	O	X	X	P	X
Multi-storey car park	X	O	P	P	P	O	X	O	P
Offices <100m ²	O	O	P	O	O	X	X	O	X
Offices 100m ² - 1000m ²	X	O	P	O	O	X	X	P	X
Offices >1000m ²	X	X	P	O	O	X	X	P	X
Off licence	O	X	P	X	O	X	X	X	X
Open space	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Park & Ride	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	O	O
Petrol station	X	X	O	O	O	X	X	X	P
Public house	O	X	P	X	O	O	X	X	X
Recycling Facilities	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	X	O
Residential institution	O	O	O	X	O	X	X	X	X
Restaurant/Cafe	O	O	P	O	P	O	X	O	P
Retail warehouse	X	X	O	O	O	X	X	X	P

Type of Development	Residential	Educational/Institutional/Community	Mixed Use	Enterprise & Employment	Commercial	Sporting / Recreational	Open Space/Amenity	Innovation & Technology	Retail Warehousing
Retirement home	P	P	O	X	O	X	X	X	X
Shops - local	P	O	P	O	O	X	X	X	X
Shops - neighbourhood	O	X	P	X	O	X	X	X	X
Shops - major	X	X	P	X	O	X	X	X	X
Workshop	O	X	O	P	O	X	X	X	X
Sports facility	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	X
Take-away/Fast food	X	X	O	X	O	X	X	X	X
Telecom structures	O	O	O	P	P	O	O	X	O
Tourism-recreational complex	O	O	O	X	O	O	X	X	O
Training Centre	O	P	P	P	O	O	X	P	O
Transport Depot	X	X	X	O	O	X	X	X	X
Urban-Nature Reserve	O	O	X	X	X	O	P	X	O
Veterinary surgery	X	X	O	X	O	X	X	X	O
Warehouse	X	X	X	P	O	X	X	X	P
Wholesale outlet	X	X	O	X	O	X	X	X	P
Research & Development	X	P	O	P	O	O	O	P	X

Appendices



Executive Summary

This Housing Strategy provides a comprehensive review of the demographics, demand for social and affordable housing and planning provision of housing within the County including Athlone Town Council based on the 2011 census and current trends within the county.

Current Trends

In the previous strategy it was highlighted that there was a need for future housing to meet the increase in the population of the County, and for housing supply to catch up with that demand. However the county is experiencing a significant slowdown in residential development in line with regional and national trends. This situation is in the main attributed to a number of factors, chief of which being the economic collapse and credit unavailability.

The current population trends indicate a decline in migration into the County, an above average young population in the 0-20 year old category and an increase in the older population similar to national trends. The ‘early nesters’ and ‘first time buyers’ age category has shown a decline since the previous census.

Population Targets

The population projections and targets, settlement strategy and housing allocations are in accordance with the Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022. The regional population target for the lifetime of this strategy is 106,370, an increase of 20,206 from the 2011 census figures. The housing allocation is for an additional 8,419 housing units from 2011 and a housing land requirement of 372 hectares with the majority of the housing land requirement being in the towns of Mullingar and Athlone.

Core Strategy and Settlement Hierarchy

The Core Strategy for the Development Plan 2014-2020, emphasises the importance of continuing to manage zoned land in a sustainable manner, to rebalance the growth in the County and apportion a greater amount

of growth to the Gateway towns of Mullingar and Athlone.

Home Ownership

There are currently 3,369 persons on Westmeath and Athlone Town Council’s housing waiting list, with 83% citing financial reasons. As house prices have declined within the County there is no demand for affordable housing at present. The Council has procured 479 units under the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) since its introduction in 2005/2006. The highest housing need is for two bedroom accommodation with the greatest need being in Mullingar and Athlone followed by Kinnegad, Killucan-Rathwire and Moate.

Affordability

House prices have fallen significantly both nationally and within the County. Given the reduction in house prices, most of the lowest of household incomes could afford a residential unit by 2015, but 18% of the population would still experience affordability problems. Based on the decline in house prices and affordability problems being reduced, this strategy recommends intervention be reduced to 15% in new housing schemes.

Empty Housing and Unfinished Housing Developments (UHD)

The percentage of vacant units within the County has declined since the 2006 Census from 15% to 13%. In Westmeath 45 estates and apartment (36 in the County and 9 in Athlone Town Council) were identified as being unfinished developments. Of these, 18 are broadly completed with plans for the remaining in progress. Under the initial categorisation by the DECLG, four housing developments in the County were assigned Category 4 status. This level of vacancy has a bearing on the housing allocation targets as set out in this Strategy.

1 Introduction

This Housing Strategy forms part of the Review of the County Development Plan and Athlone Town Plan 2014-2020 and supersedes the Housing Strategy in the County Development Plan 2008-2014 and Variations No.3 of the Athlone Town Plan and No.9 of the Westmeath County Development Plan 2008-2014.

Variations Nos. 3 and 9 were adopted in January 2011 following advice from the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government in Circular AHS1 2009, which advised Local Authorities who have not recently done so to undertake a review of their housing strategy, to take account of the altered circumstances with regard to the significant changes in the housing market and experience to date with the affordable housing schemes.

The review of the then Housing Strategy in Variation No.9 of the County Development Plan 2008-2014 and Variation No.3 of the Athlone Town Plan 2008-2014 highlighted the following issues:

- Housing demand and supply within the County had been affected by the changes in the market.
- Decline in house completions.
- Less demand for affordable housing and a greater need for social housing.
- 26.4% of the population would experience housing affordability problems.
- Intervention was reduced from 20% to 15%.
- The Council would provide any shortfall in housing by way of direct provision or through the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS).
- 15% of the housing stock was vacant.
- Support would be given to the aging population in the county through sheltered housing provision and ‘independent living’.
- The need to reassess the level of zoned land against demand.

The strategy has regard to the Core Strategy, population targets and settlement hierarchy

as set out by the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) 2010-2022, to the current economic climate and the reduction in house completions.

2 Westmeath County Council Corporate Plan 2010-2014

A strategic objective of the Plan is to ensure that the County’s physical and social infrastructure is sufficiently developed to support economic development, and quality of life into the future.

The Plan with regard to housing provision aims to:

- Ensure that the property assets of the Council are managed in a manner which maximises their present and future potential,
- Continue to maintain a Housing Advice Centre,
- Update and implement the County Social Inclusion Strategy,
- Implement the Housing Strategy, and
- Ensure through the Development Management process that there is a suitable range of housing stock for all our citizens.

3 Statutory Context

The preparation of a Housing Strategy is a requirement under the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended. The Act requires each Planning Authority to prepare a Housing Strategy which is to be integrated into the County Development Plan. The Act specifies a Housing Strategy shall take into account the following:

- (a) the existing need and the likely future need for housing,
- (b) the need to ensure that housing is available for persons who have different levels of income,
- (c) the need to ensure that a mixture of house types and sizes is developed to reasonably match the requirements of the different categories of households, as may be determined by the Planning Authority, and including the special

- requirements of elderly persons and persons with disabilities,
- d) the need to counteract undue segregation in housing between different social backgrounds,
- e) reserve a percentage of land zoned for residential or a mixture of residential uses, for social and affordable housing not being more than 20%,
- f) Ensure that sufficient land and suitable land is zoned for residential use or a mixture of residential and other uses to meet the requirements of the housing strategy, and
- g) Part V of the Planning & Development Acts 2000 – 2010 as amended applies to all applications for residential development on sites in excess of 0.1ha or 4 units on residential/mixed use on zoned land (where residential is a part).

4 National and Regional Policy Context

This Housing Strategy had regard to the following national and regional policies:

4.1 National Spatial Strategy (NSS) 2002-2020

The NSS is a twenty year planning framework designed to deliver more balanced social, economic and physical development between the regions. The NSS outlines that Local Authorities are required to ensure that sufficient land is zoned for housing over the period of their development plans and highlights that housing strategies should consider:

- realistic targets for the location of housing within existing built up areas of villages, towns and cities
- policies to support the achievement of such targets, including interventions designed to ensure the availability of under-utilised or derelict land in urban areas through the use of the various Local Authority powers.
- Evaluation of progress to inform review of future strategies. Housing strategies

are the prime vehicle for better integration at local level and in particular for assessing the range of housing needs.

- matching housing needs with supply and identifying necessary measures such as aids to affordability where local circumstances require this.
- meeting particular housing needs such as those of smaller households, vulnerable sections of society and the Travelling Community.

Local Authorities, under the provisions of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended, are obliged to undertake detailed estimates of housing demand for all sectors, private, social and affordable housing through the preparation of housing strategies as part of the Development Plan process. In addition, it will be critical to provide for an adequate supply of land in line with assessments of housing land needs, through the Development Plan system.

4.2 Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022

These Guidelines have identified the settlement hierarchy for the Midlands Region and the County up to 2022. The strategic vision for the Midland region is to enhance the critical mass of the region by combining the strengths of the linked gateway of Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar, as envisaged in the National Spatial Strategy. The Guidelines provide guidance for each County within the region on population targets and distribution which in turn informs the Housing Strategy. The RPGs represent an upper limit during the 2010-2022 period for housing and housing land requirement and this is outlined below for the period up to 2020.

Regional Population Target and Housing Allocation for Westmeath 2011-2020			
Census	2011	2016	2020
Population target	86,164	99,863	106,370
Housing Units	36,659	5,708 additional units	2,711 additional units

The Housing Strategy is based on the regional population targets and housing allocation. This ensures that the Strategy is based on robust long term targets applicable to all Local Authorities in the region.

The Regional Guidelines have set population targets for the county to grow up to 2016 which then would slow down between 2016 and 2022 for the lifetime of the Regional Guidelines. The population target for the County is projected at 106,370 up to 2020, and a housing allocation of 8419 from 2011-2020. This allocation will be distributed throughout the county with the majority of the allocation going to the two Gateway towns of Mullingar and Athlone. This will be assessed further in this Strategy.

4.3 National Climate Change Strategy 2007-2012

This Strategy includes energy efficiency measures aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions from residential development. Emissions from the residential sector accounted for just over 10% of total emissions in 2005, based on direct energy consumption for space and water heating.

4.4 Housing Policy Framework – Building Sustainable Communities 2005

This document was aimed at building sustainable communities where people want to live and work now and in the future. The policy statement sets out a range of actions geared at building sustainable communities and effectively delivering housing programmes.

4.5 Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities February 2007

These guidelines provided greater detail on the action required to ensure the goals in the Housing Policy Framework document are to be achieved.

4.6 Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas 2009

These guidelines emphasise the role of development plans and local area plans in

setting out policies and standards for residential development.

4.7 Smarter Travel- A Sustainable Transport Future – A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020

This policy document sets out the Government’s policy objectives with respect to promoting a significant modal shift from private transport to public transport and sustainable transport modes over the period up to 2020. The key goals for achieving sustainability in transport are as follows:

- (i) reduce overall travel demand
- (ii) maximize the efficiency of the transport network
- (iii) reduce reliance on fossil fuels
- (iv) reduce transport emissions
- (v) improve accessibility to public transport.

Key to the need to reduce travel demand is the need to improve the alignment of spatial and transport planning.

4.8 Housing Policy Statement (June 2011)

The overall strategic objective in this document is to enable all households’ have access to good quality housing, appropriate to household circumstances and in their particular community of choice.

4.9 National Housing Strategy for People with Disability 2011-2016

This Strategy was introduced to establish a framework for the delivery of housing for people with a disability through mainstream housing policy, underpinned by the following vision:

“To facilitate access, for people with disabilities, to the appropriate range of housing and related support services, delivered in an integrated and sustainable manner, this promotes equality of opportunity, individual choice and independent living”.

The 2011 census indicates there is 13% of persons with a disability as a percentage of the population, which increases to 72% in the 85 years and older category. The Housing

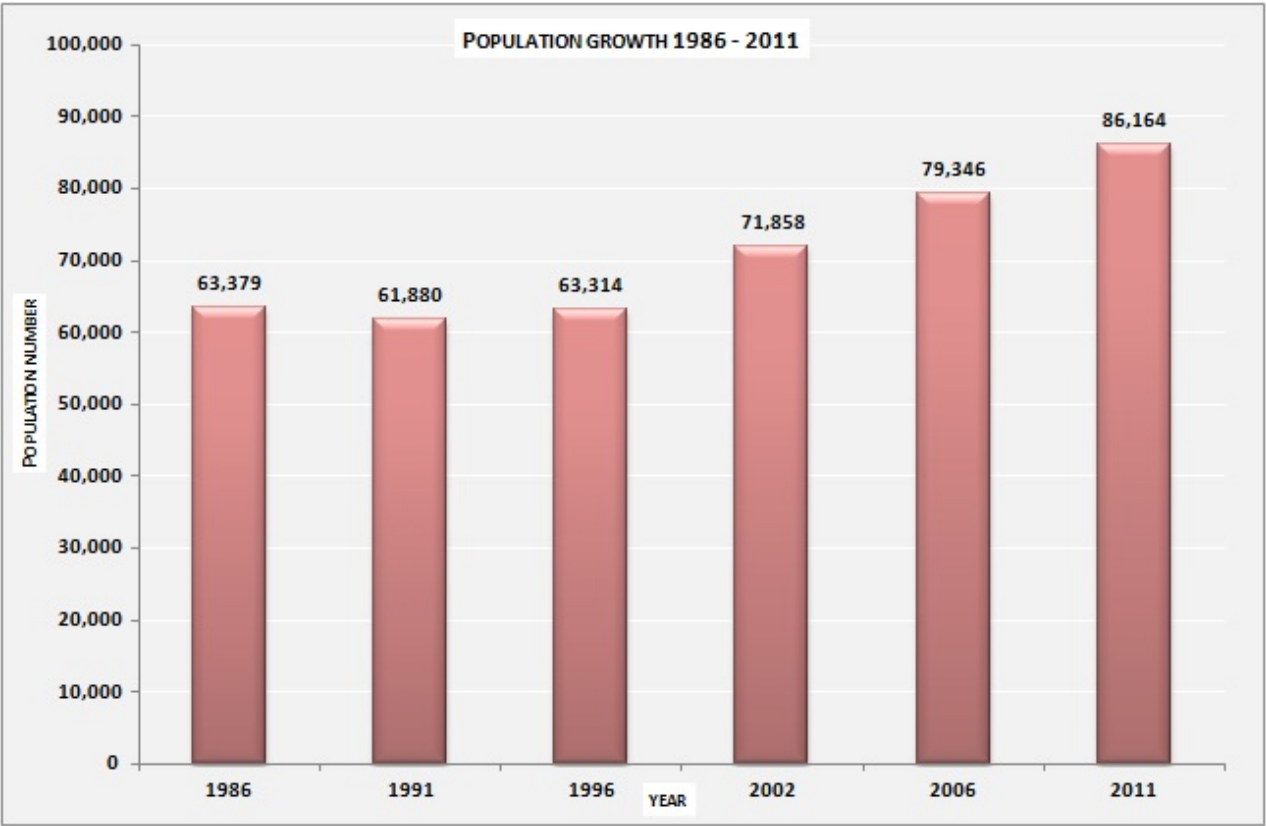
Strategy will address this increase and the need to provide for ‘housing for life’ for the elderly population of the county.

5 Population, Demographic Profile and Household Trends

5.1 Population Trends

The population of Westmeath has been increasing since 1991 and in the recent census in 2011 the county had a population of 86,164. Population is affected by several factors, namely natural increase; with births exceeding deaths, and migration.

Chart 1: Population growth in the County 1986-2011



Source: CSO 2011

The increase in population since 1991 within the county is as a result of net increased migration and a steady rise in births and decrease in deaths. A significant growth in the county’s population is attributed to net increase migration as indicated in Table 1 below. As can be seen from Table 1 the level of net migration has dropped significantly

since the 2006 census but the population has continued to rise as a result of the steady natural increase in births. The decline in immigration if it continues, will have an impact on the population size, and ultimately the demand for new housing within the county.

Table 1: Components of population change in Westmeath:

Annual Rates*	2002	2006	2011
Births	15.5	16.2	17.9
Deaths	9	7.4	6.4
Migration	14.5	15.9	5

Source: CSO 2011

* Average annual rates per 1,000 of average population.

Although the population of the County is showing a steady increase and has had a higher percentage increase to that of the state over the same period (see Chart 2 below), it did not grow at the same rate as

other Midland counties with Laois and Longford increasing their population by 20% from 2002-2011 as indicated in Chart 3 below. The population trends for the County would suggest it will grow at a much slower rate than it has done in the previous decade.

Chart 2: Percentage population change since previous census in the State and county

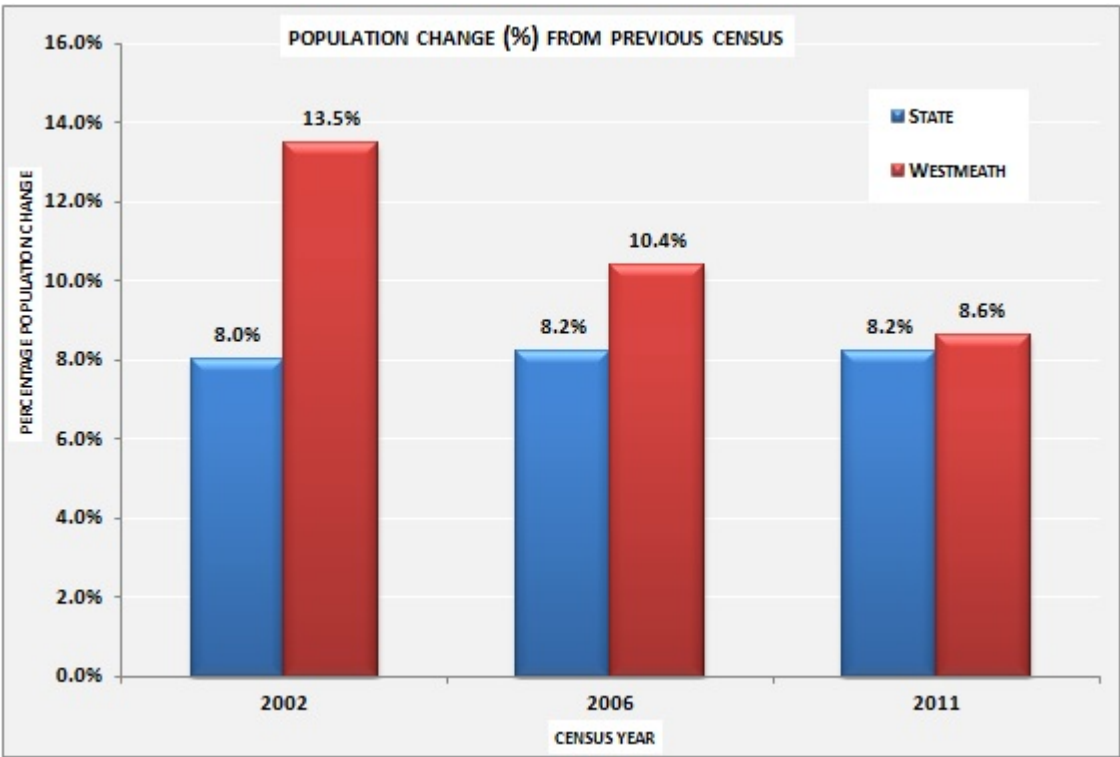
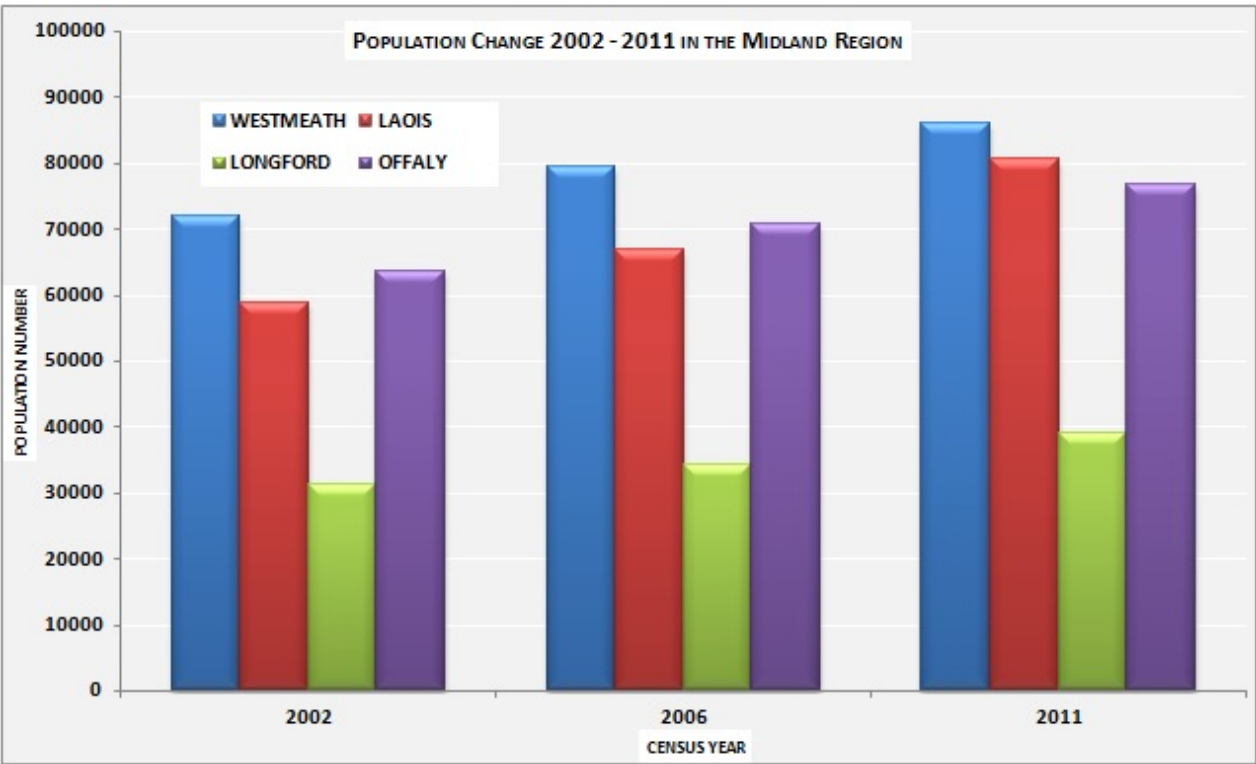


Chart 3: Population change in the Midland Region 2002-2011



Source: CSO 2011

5.2 Demographic Profile and Trends

To enable the Strategy assess the future needs of the County, it is necessary to profile the characteristics of the population in terms of age, gender, home ownership, location of population and ethnic group. The following section will initially compare the demographic profile and trends of the County with the national profile.

5.3 Age

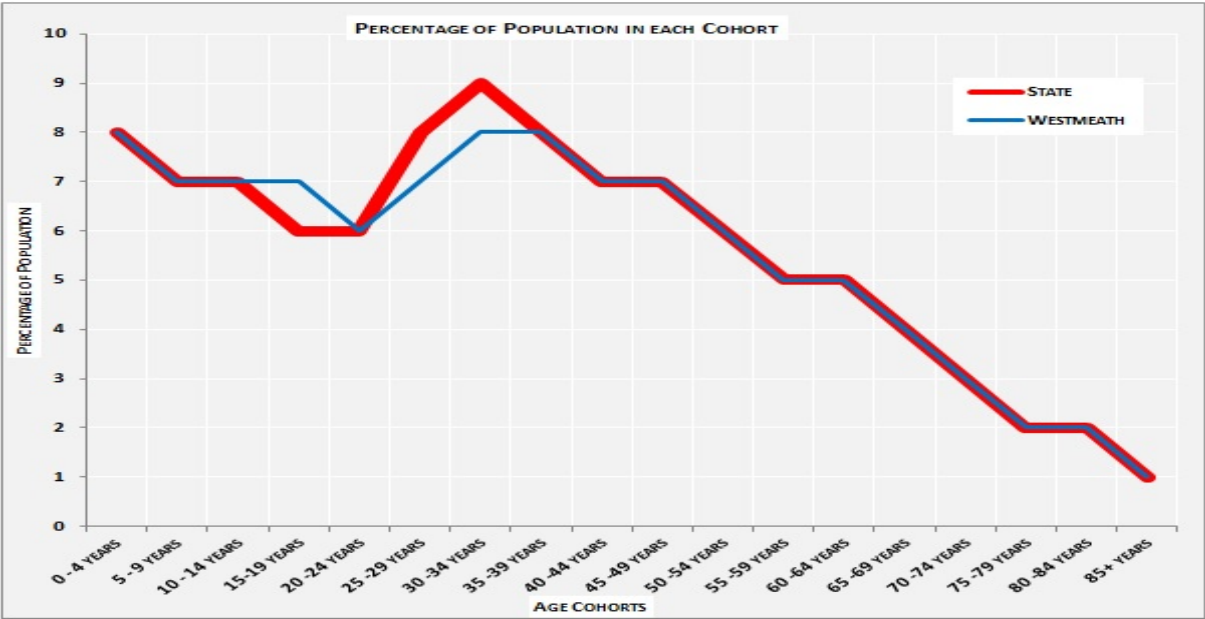
The 2011 census indicates that Westmeath has a similar demographic profile and pattern to that of the state; that of a young and aging population with two exceptions. The County has a higher percentage of 0-20 year olds and lower percentage in the 25-44 year old cohort compared to the state. This has implications for the type of housing required for the County.

As can be seen from Chart 4 below the County has shown an increase in each category since the previous census with the exception of the 20-24 year category which has declined. The 25-29 year old age group only showed an

increase of 120 people from the previous census. The decline in population in the early 1990's could be attributed to the small increase in these two age groups, but could also be as a result of emigration, with this age group seeking employment elsewhere. The decline in these two age categories would have implications for the housing demand within the county for the lifetime of this Strategy.

The 25-44 year old age group is normally associated with being the group which would require new housing; known as the 'early nesters' leaving home for the first time, and the age group which may need larger housing as they start a family etc. As this group is below the national average the demand for new housing from this age group may not be to the same extent as experienced nationally. However the increase in the 0-20 year cohort would suggest there will be a continued demand for housing into the future as this group ages and presuming a significant proportion remain in the county.

Chart 4: Percentage of population in each age group

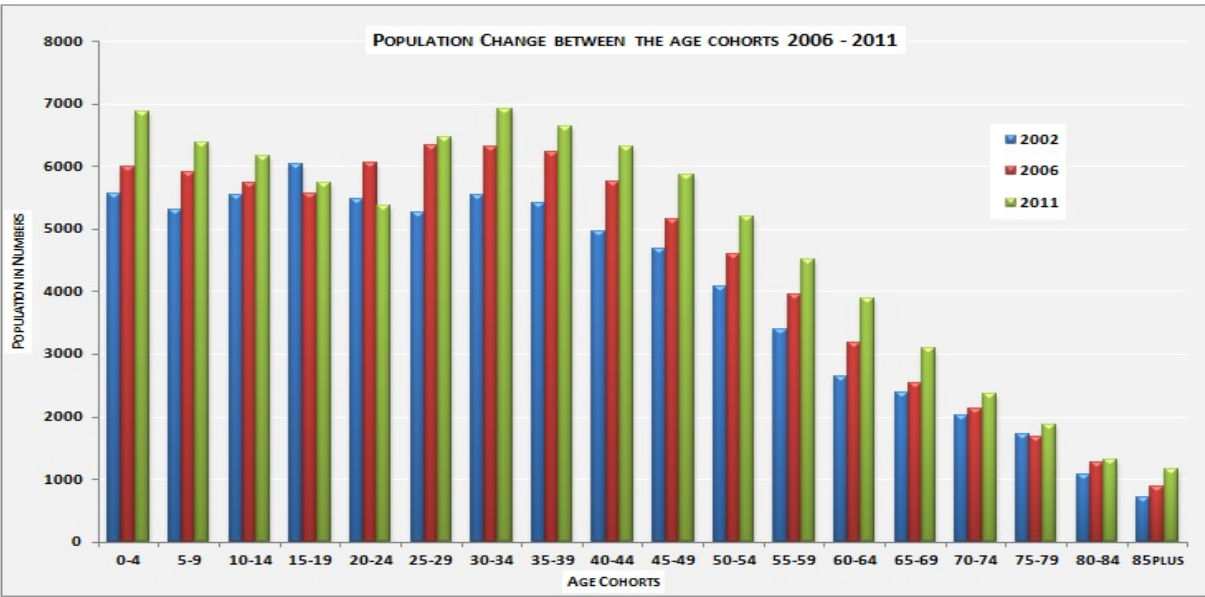


Source: CSO 2011

The high percentage of young people (0-20 cohort) would suggest the county has experienced a high birth rate since the last census and has a high percentage of young

family households. The number of people within each household will have a bearing on the housing demand and will be assessed below within the strategy.

Chart 5: Population numbers for each group (Source: CSO 2011)



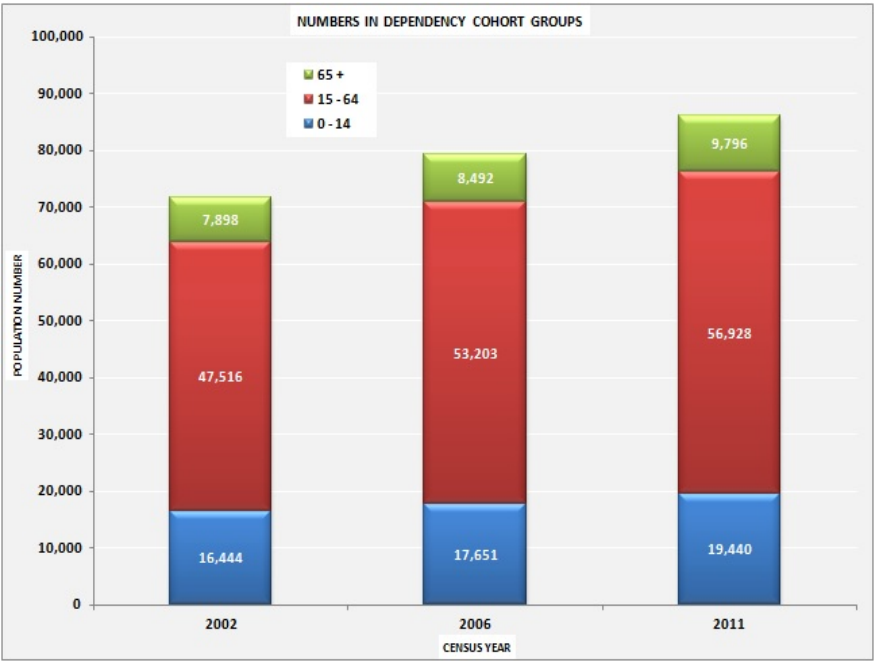
Charts 5 and 6 indicate that dependency groups with the county are growing, i.e the younger and older groups have shown an increase over the last decade. This has been balanced in the past by the increase in the 15-64 year old age group which would support a

young and aging population. However the recent trends as seen above indicates there may be a rise in the 20-24 group emigrating from the county in search of employment, with a consequent fall in numbers from that section of the population. Ballymorin DED in

Westmeath is one of the top 5 DEDs in the state with a high percentage of under 10 year

olds with 29% of the population of the DED under 10 years of age.

Chart 6: Dependency groups within County’s population (Source: CSO.ie 2011)



5.4 Gender

The county has a similar gender and age profile to the State. The population within the county however comprises a higher number of males in the 0-14 year old category and a

higher number of females in the 30-34 year old and 75 years plus category to that of the State. The current population profile of the county indicates a population which has a high dependency ratio with a relatively high young and old population.

Chart 7: Comparison between the State and County by Age and Gender (Source: CSO.ie 2011)

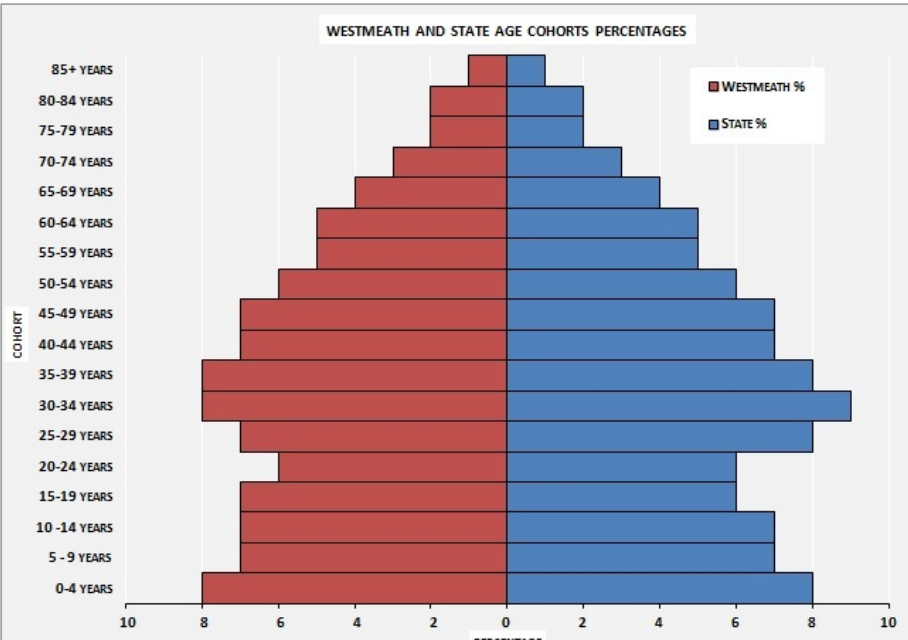
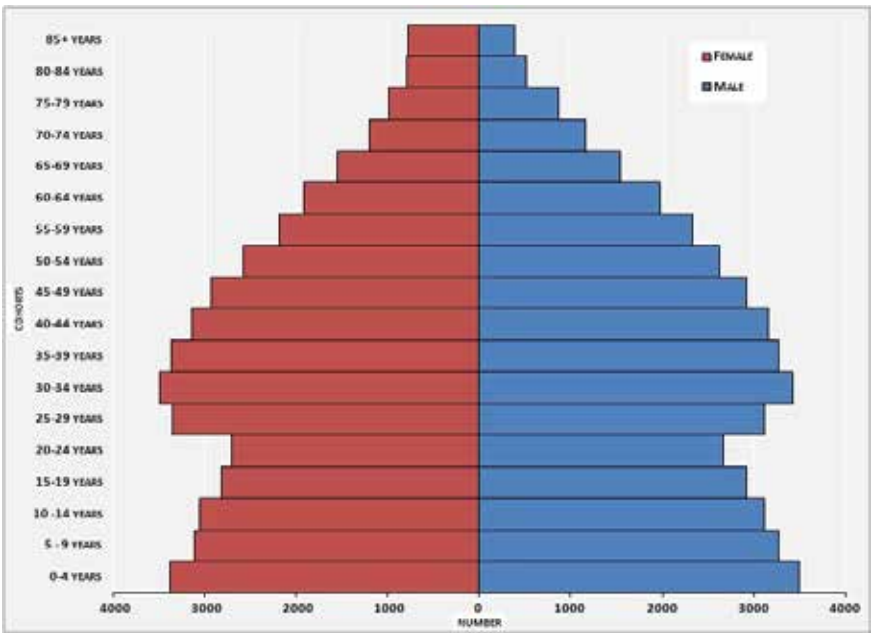


Chart 8: Breakdown of Male and Female in the County 2011 (Source: CSO 2011)



5.5 Average Age of Mother

The average age of mothers giving birth in the state is increasing and is currently 31.4 years according to the recent census figures. The County has experienced a ‘baby boom’ in the last decade which could be attributed to the higher than state average number of females in the 30-34 year old cohort. The trend of a younger population within the County could continue to grow given the above average age of females within the 30-34 year cohort.

5.6 Population increase by Area in the County

There is a need to establish where the population is increasing within the County to identify those areas most in need of future housing. The recent figures from the 2011 census indicate the greatest increase in population has tended to be in the higher tier settlements areas. However caution needs to be expressed as this data is based on DED data which does not correspond entirely to

settlement areas. The population increase within the County since the previous census has tended to be concentrated along the eastern boundary of the county and those areas close to Dublin.

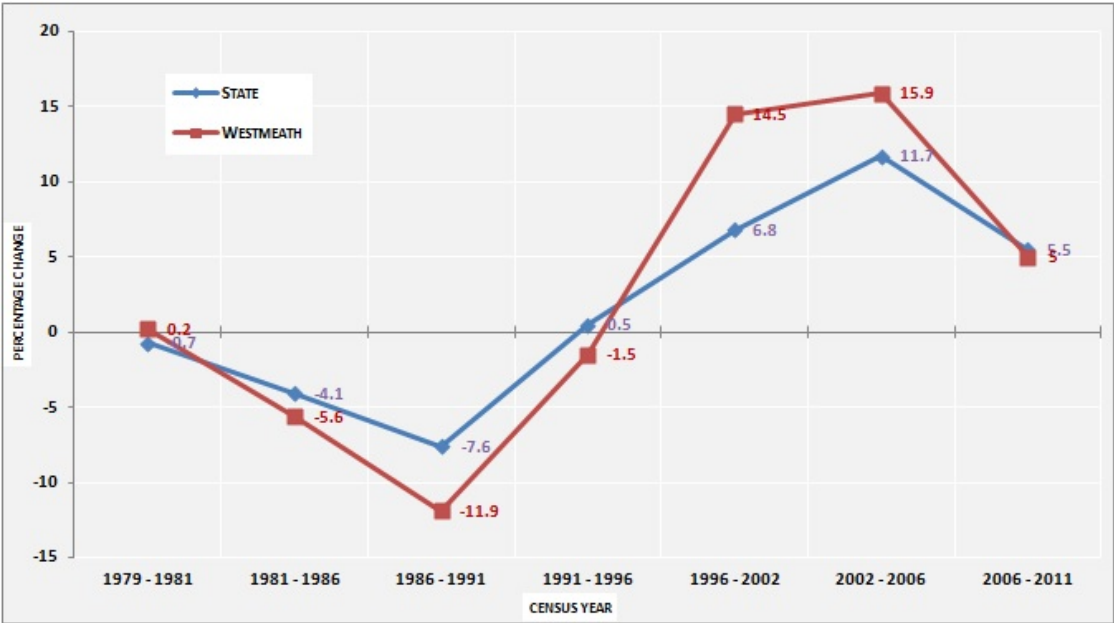
5.7 Net Migration

The population within the County has continued to rise since the previous census. As outlined above this attributed to the increase in births over deaths, and less so to immigration since the 2006 census. Although the County’s birth rate has continued to rise since 2002 the immigration levels have dropped significantly since 2006 from 15.9% to 5%. Based on the components of change on the population of the County since 2002 the level of net immigration has fallen significantly which would impact on the County’s population targets being met, as specified in the RPGs.

Table 2: Westmeath’s Components of Population Change 2006-2011

	Number	Natural Increase Number	Estimated Number. of net migration
Persons	6815	4745	2073
Males	2848	2432	532
Females	3767	2313	1541

Chart 9: Net Migration in the County compared to the State



Source CSO 2011: Preliminary results net migration

5.8 Ethnic Make-up of the County

The ethnic makeup of the County in the 2011 census indicates the county is predominantly

white Irish (84%) (See Table 3 below). There was an 11.9% net change of non Irish nationals in the county compared to 13.2% for Leinster since the 2006 census.

Table 3: Ethnic Make up of the County in 2011

Usually resident population by ethnic or cultural background	
White Irish	72,210
White Irish Traveller	853
Other White	7,396
Black or Black Irish	1,218
Asian or Asian Irish	1,546
Other	731
Not stated	1,300
Total	85,254

Source: CSO.ie 2011

The net migration the County experienced in 2006 would appear to have been either returning immigrants or from within the state rather than other countries. This would suggest the demand in the past was not as a result of people from other countries deciding to live in the County, but either returning immigrants or people from within the state choosing to live in the County either because

of employment or cheaper housing compared to Dublin. These latter type of migrants may choose to return to their original county of birth if house prices continue to fall throughout the state.

5.10 Household Size

The average household size within a county determines the demand for houses. The

trend both nationally and within the County is of a declining household size. In 1996 the average household size in Westmeath was 3.2 and the recent census suggests that the household size is continuing to decline but at a much slower pace than considered in the

previous strategy. The household size in 2011 for Westmeath was 2.8 (previous housing strategy suggested 2.3 in 2011) which are higher than the state average and higher than that stated in the RPGs of 2.4.

Table 4: Average Household size in the county compared to the State

	2002	2006	2011	2020
State	2.95	2.81	2.7	2.4*
Westmeath	2.98	2.85	2.8	

Source: CSO

*In line with RPGs the household size is predicted to fall to 2.4

Over a 20 year period the average household size dropped in Westmeath by 0.8 per year. The household size however only dropped by 0.05 in the last 5 years. Based on a similar decline the average household size for the next 6 years would be expected to fall to 2.75 and would be higher than 2.4 as specified in the RPGs which would mean fewer household formations than projected.

The trend in the reduction in household size is influenced by a number of factors including a general increase in divorce/separation, lone

parents, people living longer, growing trend of young adults living alone and having children at a later age. The overall implications of decreasing household size is that more houses will be needed for the same number of people.

In the 2006 census the higher percentage of households within the county were the 2, 3 and 4 person households with the higher person households being in the rural area of the county.

Table 5: Average occupancy rates per household in Westmeath in 2006

	1 person	2 persons	3 persons	4 persons	5 persons	6 persons	7 persons	8+ persons
Westmeath	7,128	17,502	16,839	19,916	13,695	6,588	2,121	1,080
Percentage	8.3	20.6	20.	23.4	16.2	7.7	2.5	1.27

(Source: www.cso.ie)

5.11 Conclusion

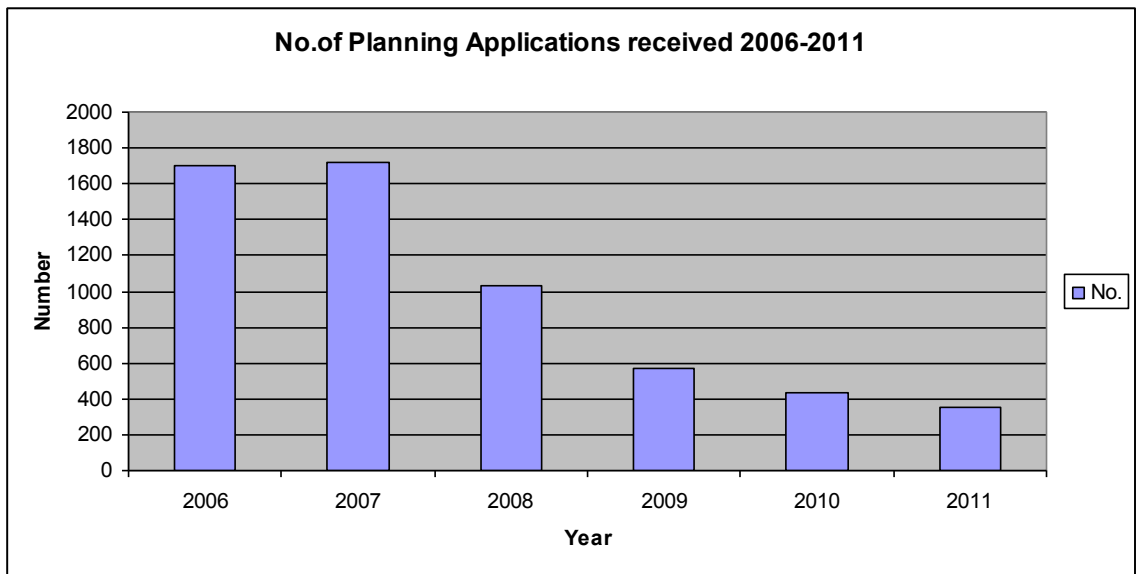
The population trend for the County suggests a population that will continue to rise but not to the extent that it has in the past, with reduced net immigration, and with an emphasis on continued higher than average household sizes. The County has a similar aging population profile to that of the State which will have implications for housing being designed for the lifetime of an occupant and may also result in the older population wishing to downsize and therefore a greater demand for one/two bedroom housing and

care assisted or sheltered housing in the future.

6 Housing Supply in the County

There has been a decline in the level of residential construction since 2008, with a decline in the number of planning applications received by the Council and houses completed since the previous Strategy.

Chart 10: No. of Planning Applications in the County from 2006-2011



Source: [www. Department of Environment](http://www.doe.ie)

A further breakdown of the planning applications received indicate the number of residential type applications have been reducing and in particular the multiple type units.

Table 6 Breakdown of Residential Planning Applications received

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012 (3rd Qtr)
All residential dwellings	393	208	165	113	31
Single dwellings	339	208	165	108	31
Multiple dwellings	54	0	0	5	0

Source: Dept of Environment 2012 3rd Quarter

Table 7: New houses completed by Type

Year	Individual house	Scheme House*	Apartments	Total
2008	452	460	234	1146
2009	289	144	73	506
2010	207	90	37	334
2011	149	54	9	212
2012(1 st 4 mths)	41	14	0	55

Source: Dept of Environment, Community & Local Government

Based on connections to ESB network and represents no. of homes completed not work in progress.

* 2 or more houses

The above figures are an indicator of the level of supply of housing that is likely to be provided in the next six years, based on the type and number of planning applications received by the Council for housing development and ultimately provide for the future housing demand. The future housing demand for the county will be discussed in Section 7 which assesses future population targets.

6.1 Existing Housing Stock

With the level of construction contracting within the county for residential properties, it is necessary to assess the existing stock, level of vacancy and existing and future population trends to consider whether the supply can meet the predicted demand. The 2011 census figures would suggest that there is 13.5% of the existing house stock vacant, compared to the State average of 14.5%.

Table 8: Existing Housing stock in the county

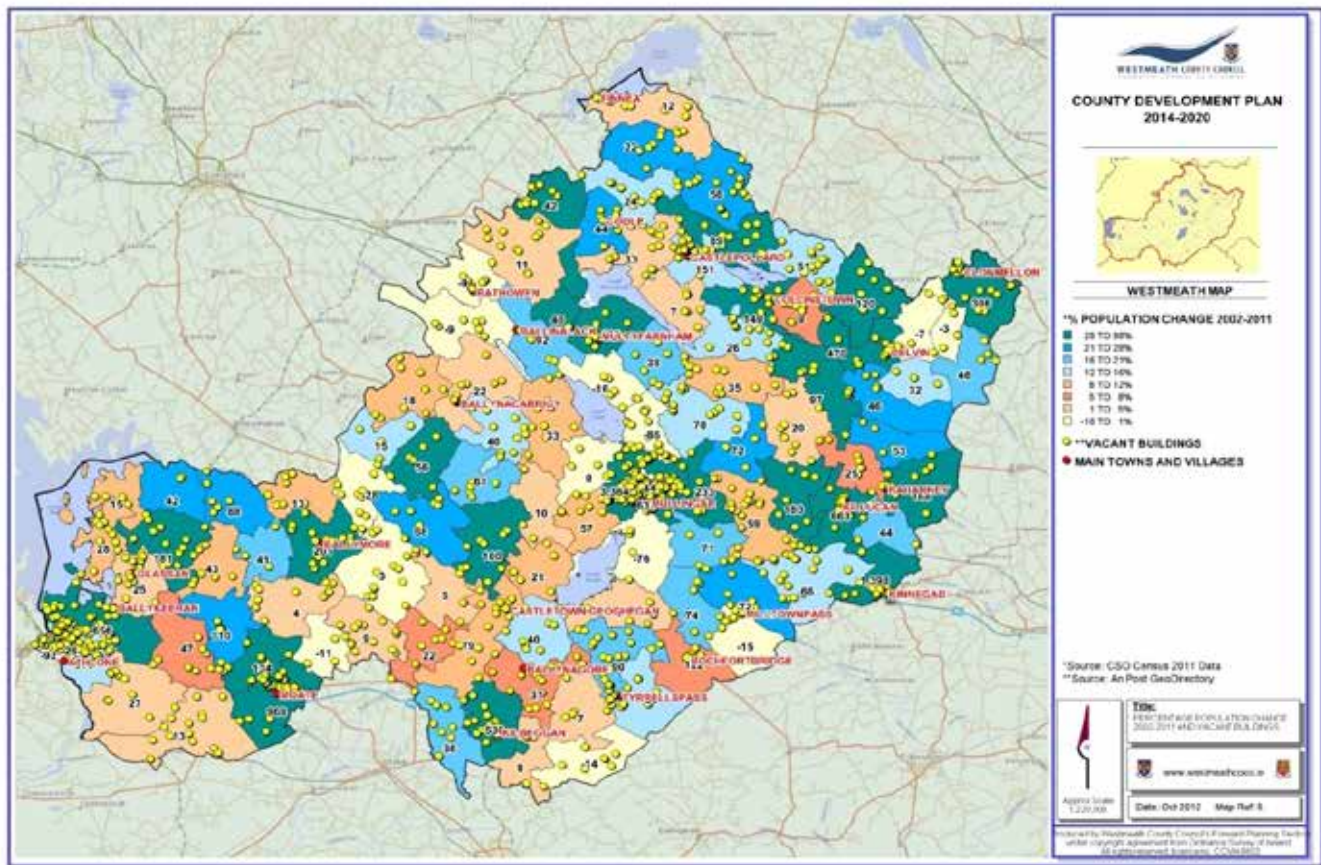
	2006	2011
Housing Stock (Number)	32,817	36,835
Vacant dwellings (Number)	5015 15.3%	4921 13.5%
Vacancy Rate		

Source: CSO 2011

Based on an existing housing stock of 36,659 and a household size of 2.8 (current household size) there is the potential to accommodate a population of 102,645 which exceeds the current population of the county by 16,481. The number of vacant units recorded in the census could accommodate a population of 11,810 with a household size of 2.4. The census figure however does not indicate the location of the vacant houses or why they are vacant.

The map below indicates the vacant buildings in the County (yellow dots) in 2012 based on the Geo Directory count. There is a high housing vacancy rate in the rural areas within the county.

Map 1: Population change by DED and Number of vacant properties from Geo Directory



The map above gives a more up to date picture of the location of vacant properties in the county taken from the Geo directory which a much lower number of vacancies.

The increase in housing units has always been proportionally greater than the increase in population allowing for the increased need to allow for falling household size. It is a recommendation of this strategy that a detailed survey is carried out within the county to identify the profile of units that are vacant, their location and why they are vacant to enable supply to be matched with need.

6.2 Unfinished Housing Developments (UHD) within the County

Council Policy would include facilitating Voluntary organisations in identified settlement areas identified in the RPGs in the

purchase of suitable social and affordable housing in these developments for individuals to rent or purchase.

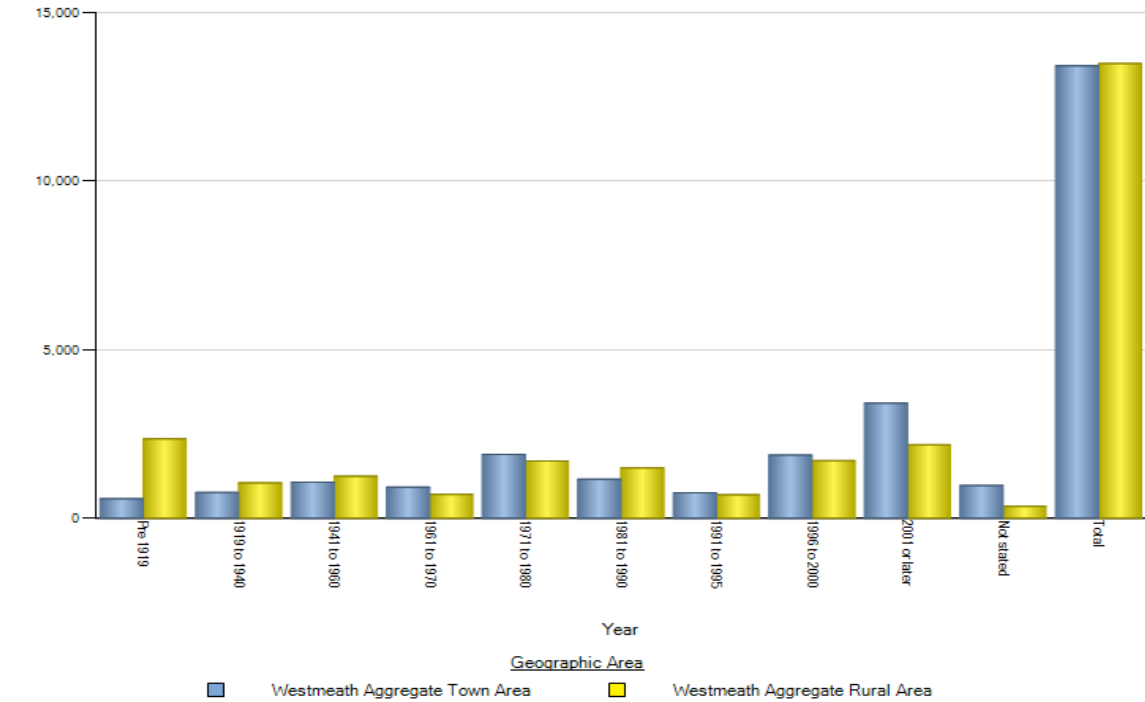
There are a total of 45 identified unfinished housing developments within Westmeath, 36 in the County and 9 in Athlone.

Of the 45 estates, 18 are broadly completed with progressing plans for the remaining in progress.

6.3 Age of stock

The age of dwellings provides an insight into their condition which has implications for energy sustainability and the general condition of the housing stock across all tenures. A substantial amount of the housing stock in the county has been built after 1990 according to the 2006 census.

Chart 11: Age of Housing Stock within the County:



Source: CSO 2011

6.4 Conclusion

The level of housing stock currently within the county including vacant units could accommodate a population of 102,645 (based on current household size of 2.8) which would meet the population targets as outlined in the following section for 2018. There is therefore an excess of housing supply within the county. However further analysis would need to be carried out to assess where the excess is located, the type of units which are vacant and their suitability to adequately match supply with demand.

7 Midland Regional Planning Guidelines (MRPGS) Targets

The population targets for the county have been set out in the MRPGs and are dealt with in detail in the Core Strategy. The RPGs have identified the population targets for the Midlands region up to 2022. The targets are based on a regional level and to individual counties within the region of which Westmeath is one. The target figures would see the population of the county increase by 13,699 by 2016 which is an increase of 15.8% on the current population and will determine the demand for future housing.

Table 9: Midland Regional Planning Guidelines Population Targets

RPGs targets	2006 (CSO)	2011 (current population)	2016	2022
Westmeath	79,346	86,164	99,863	109,623
Laois	67,059	80,559	75,931	79,314
Longford	34,391	39,000	39,392	41,392
Offaly	70,868	76,687	82,114	86,771
Region	251,664	282410	297,300	317,100

The RPGs set a population target for the county of 99,863 by 2016 and 109,623 for 2022. If taking the intervening years as deciles from 2006 (recorded population of 79,346) up to 2016 then the annual increase in population would be 2052 persons per annum. Using this rate of growth the 2011 population target for the county based on the RPGs targets would be 89,606. The actual figure is 3.8% lower than the target set for 2011.

Table 10: Westmeath's annual population targets up to 2022 as identified in RPGs

	RPGs figure	Actual	+2740 per annum up to 2016	+1627 per annum from 2016
2006	79,346	79,346		
2011	89,606	86,164		
2012			89,904	
2013			91,644	
2014			94,384	
2015			97,124	
2016	99,863		99,863	
2017				101,490
2018				103,117
2019				104,744
2020				106,371
2021	109,623			107,998
2022				109,623

The recent figures from the Regional Authority apportions the increase in the population for the county to Mullingar and Athlone as outlined in Table 11 below.

Table 11: Midland Regional Planning Guidelines Population projection for the county

WESTMEATH Population - Actual and projected, 2006-2022																
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Athlone	15055	15309	15564	15818	16073	16327	17466	18605	19744	20883	22022	22719	23416	24112	24809	25506
Mullingar	18416	18753	19091	19428	19765	20103	21554	23005	24455	25906	27357	28251	29145	30039	30934	31828
County	45875	46647	47419	48190	48962	49734	49884	50034	50184	50334	50484	50520	50555	50591	50627	50662

Source : Reproduced from MRPGs based on CSO figures for 2006 and 2011

Table 12: Household Numbers based on Population targets

	Population	Average Household size	Household Numbers	Change
2014	94,383	2.4	39,326	
2015	97,123	2.4	40,468	1142
2016	99,863	2.4	41,609	1141
2017	101,490	2.4	42,287	678
2018	103,116	2.4	42,965	678
2019	104,742	2.4	43,642	677
2020	106,370	2.4	44,321	679
Total				4995

Based on a population target of 106,370 by 2020 as set out in the RPGs the housing requirement for the county based on a household size of 2.4 would be 8,419 units from 2011. Table 13 below has outlined the

number of housing units required for the whole county and Mullingar and Athlone based on the targets set out in the RPGs and the land required to provide the housing.

Table 13: Housing Units required up to 2020 based on Midland Regional Guidelines

	Population increase 2011-2020
County Population	20,206
County Housing Units required ¹	8419
Mullingar	10,831
Housing Units required ¹	4513
Athlone	8482
Housing Units required ¹	3534
County balance	893
Housing Units required ¹	372

¹ Housing Units have been derived using difference between projected population for 2016 and 2011 and 2016 and 2020 and dividing by household size 2.4.

Based on the above population projections the level of zoning to meet future housing demand would be 372 hectares (allowing for 50% headroom) up to 2020. This level of land is significantly less than that currently zoned for housing in the Housing Land Availability 2012 returns.

7.1 Conclusion

The population projections as identified in the RPGs are an upper limit for the County and based on the current census figures for the County it is unlikely the targets will be met.

8 Housing Demand

8.1 Introduction

The existing and future population of the county will determine the demand for housing. As outlined in the above sections various factors influence population such as family size, the age and composition of the population, migration, death rate etc. However the demand for new housing is also influenced by the economy, availability of credit, house prices, land availability, income and interest rates.

8.2 Housing Demand from Population Projections

The population projections for the county as outlined in the RPGs are projected to grow from 94,383 in 2014 to 106,370 in 2020. Household formations based on these projections are shown in Table 14 below. The additional houses required for the next 6 years from 2014 would total 4,995 units.

Table 14: Household Projections for Westmeath 2014-2020

	Population	Average Household size	Household Numbers	Additional Households
2014	94,383	2.4	39,326	
2015	97,123	2.4	40,468	1142
2016	99,863	2.4	41,609	1141
2017	101,490	2.4	42,287	678
2018	103,116	2.4	42,965	678
2019	104,742	2.4	43,642	677
2020	106,370	2.4	44,321	679

8.3 Type of Housing Demand

In 2011 the county had 72% of its housing owner occupation which was slightly higher than that of the State of 70%.

8.4 Profile of Council Housing Need

The Council delivers housing accommodation under the Social Housing Investment Programme (SHIP), through the provision of a construction programme, turnkey developments, Rental Accommodation Scheme and leasing arrangements.

Table 14 (Housing Waiting list 2006, 2010 and 2012 for WCC and ATC) sets out the assessed overall social housing need within the county at the time of the previous Housing Strategy, the variation and the current review.

The combined housing need applications for Westmeath and Athlone Town Council indicate the largest single category of need for both periods arises from financial/ inability to pay for alternative accommodation at 71%, 76% and 80% for the respective years.

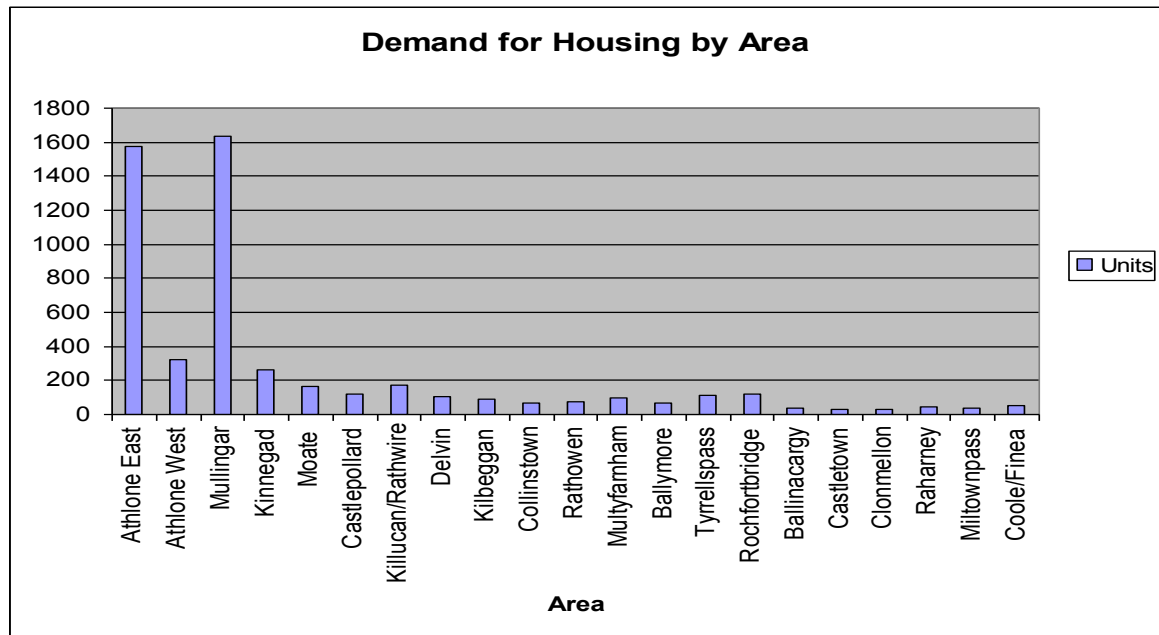
Table: 15 Comparison and breakdown of households by category of need within Westmeath and Athlone town Councils 2006, 2010 and 2012.

Category of Need	No. of Households 2006	No. of Households 2010	No. of Households 2012
People with Disabilities/special needs	14	20	22
Elderly	93	86	89
Leaving institutional care	7	27	12
Financial	1,374	2,529	2,856
Homeless	4	37	63
Medical or compassionate	135	243	225
Overcrowded	101	104	99
Sharing	81	165	118
Travellers	34	43	51
Unfit	79	77	43
Total	1,922	3,331	3,578

Source: WCC Housing section 2012 (4-7-12)

The number on the Council’s waiting list is continuously changing, however Chart 12 below indicates the greatest demand for accommodation is in the larger towns within the county’s settlement hierarchy; namely Mullingar and Athlone. In the event of new developments occurring in these larger towns the intervention level should be greater than for the smaller settlements.

Chart 12 Housing Demand in the County by Area July 2012



Source: WCC Housing Section

The greatest request need among those on the Council’s waiting list is for 2 bedroom accommodation at 62% of the overall house type need.

8.5 Housing Stock

The total Council current housing stock is 1753 properties. The Council do not envisage given the current economic situation building substantial numbers of housing units in the immediate future. The private rented sector has a role to play in meeting the needs of the county. The Council has 527 properties in the Rental Accommodation Scheme since its introduction in 2005/2006 and may continue to provide housing for those on the Council’s waiting list through this scheme. Affordable housing schemes are no longer in operation as the demand for such accommodation has decreased.

8.6 Assessment of Housing Need

Under Section 9 of the Housing Act 1988, it is a requirement of the Local Authority to carry out every three years an assessment of need for the provision of adequate housing for those persons who are:-

- ☐ Homeless
- ☐ Travellers

- ☐ Living in accommodation that is unfit for human habitation or is materially unsuitable for their adequate housing.
- ☐ Living in overcrowded accommodation
- ☐ Sharing accommodation with another person or persons who, in the opinion of the Housing Authority, have a reasonable requirement for separate accommodation
- ☐ Young persons leaving institutional care or without family accommodation in need of accommodation for medical or compassionate reason
- ☐ Elderly
- ☐ Disabled Persons and
- ☐ In the opinion of the Housing Authority, not reasonably able to meet the cost of accommodation, which they are occupying, or to obtain suitable alternative accommodation.

8.7 Conclusion

It is recognised that there will continue to be a need for social housing irrespective of the level of overall housing output. Westmeath and Athlone Town Council will therefore endeavour to meet the needs of households through a range of social housing options, including the house building programme, as set out in the Council’s Corporate Plan,

Housing Action Plan and other special programmes. The Council is committed to promoting and facilitating the use of the full range of these social housing options. The challenge is to ensure delivery of this programme and achievement of the maximum amount of social and affordable housing, thereby providing quicker and more affordable access to housing for people in need.

9 Housing Affordability

9.1 Introduction

The aim of this section of the Housing Strategy is to analyze the affordability of housing in County Westmeath over the period 2014-2020. This will enable the identification of the numbers of households who will be eligible for social and affordable housing. The economic downturn will have a major affect on affordability in particular raising the unemployment level and driving down house prices. The calculation of housing affordability is based on Section 93 of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 as amended, which defines an eligible person for affordable housing as someone:

“who is in need of accommodation and whose income would not be adequate to meet the payments on a mortgage for the purchase of a house to meet his or her accommodation needs because the payments calculated over the course of a year would exceed 35 per cent of that persons annual income net of income tax and pay related social insurance”

The approach used is to analyse data on income distribution. It is assumed that the Westmeath distribution of household income is the same as the national profile. There are grounds for assuming that Westmeath would

have a smaller number of high earners than nationally but this is not taken into account. It would not distort the estimates because the affordability problem arises at the lower end of the income scale. The level of income in each cohort is adjusted by the ratio of Westmeath to national disposable income. This distribution of income is then related to the cost of houses and an affordability problem is defined as having to spend more than 35% of income on housing costs. The affordability estimate is dependent on interest rates, the loan to value ratio and the price of houses.

9.2 Level of Disposable Income in County Westmeath

The CSO publication *County Incomes and Regional GDP 2009* (published in January 2012) provides data on disposable income per person. The survey indicated that in 2009 County Westmeath had below average disposable income per person compared to the rest of the Country; representing 93% of the state average, which is however higher than that of the Midland region (91% of the state average).

Table 16: Disposable Income per person

Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Westmeath	17221	17673	18578	18925	20123	21090	19865
Midland Region	17402	17110	18186	18666	19867	20767	19345
State	17865	18581	19746	20540	21960	23239	21356
Midland Region as % of State Average	69%	92%	92%	91%	90%	89%	91%
Westmeath as % of State Average	96%	95%	94%	92%	92%	91%	93%

9.3 Household Income

The *EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC)* is an annual survey conducted by the CSO to obtain information on the income and living conditions of different types of households. It also collects information on poverty and social exclusion. A representative random sample of households throughout the country was derived to provide the required information. The data outlines national gross and net weekly disposable incomes arranged in income categories (deciles). In the absence of any

other appropriate data, the most recent *SILC* (2010) will be used to estimate the distribution of disposable household income in County Westmeath.

For the purpose of the Strategy, an income deflator of 0.93 (based on the fact that disposable income per person in County Westmeath is 93% of the state average) has been used to determine the likely disposable income within the County. This is shown in Table 17 which illustrates the percentage of Westmeath households in each income category (deciles).

Table 17: Estimated Distribution of Household Disposable Incomes in County Westmeath

Income Range	National Gross Household Weekly Disposable Income (EU - SILC Survey 2010)	% of Households in each category	National Net Weekly Household Disposable Income (EU - SILC Survey 2010)	National Average Annual Disposable Household Income	County Deflator	Average Annual Disposable Income Westmeath
Column	1	2	3	4	5	6
	€	%	€	€		€
1st Decile	<254.79	10	171.24	8904.48	0.93	8281.17
2nd Decile	<336.35	10	283.39	14736.28	0.93	13704.74
3rd Decile	<468.15	10	398.63	20728.76	0.93	19277.75
4th Decile	<583.87	10	502.65	26137.80	0.93	24308.15
5th Decile	<720.52	10	607.02	31565.04	0.93	29355.49
6th Decile	<895.40	10	719.56	37417.12	0.93	34797.92
7th Decile	<1142.51	10	872.53	45371.56	0.93	42195.55
8th Decile	<1464.28	10	1058.1	55021.20	0.93	51169.72
9th Decile	<2100.47	10	1329.25	69121.00	0.93	64282.53
10th Decile	>2100.47	10	2369.53	123215.56	0.93	114590.47

(Source: Council analysis)

Explanation of columns

1. National Gross Weekly Disposable Income derived from the most recent EU-SILC Survey 2010.
2. Income deciles have been constructed in a manner whereby households are equally categorised into deciles. Therefore 10% of all households fall into each decile.
3. National Net Weekly Disposable Income derived from the most recent EU-SILC Survey 2010.
4. National Average Annual Disposable Income is calculated by multiplying the National Net Weekly Disposable deciles * 52 weeks.
5. County Deflator derived from information received from the CSO publication "County Incomes and Regional GDP" 2009.

9.4 Household Income Analysis

Against the current backdrop of economic uncertainty and rising unemployment it is very difficult to project future changes in wage growth. However an attempt must be

made for the purposes of this calculation. The following assumptions are made; wages remained static in 2010, grew by 0.4% in 2011 and 2012, by 3.2% 2013 – 2015 and 4.2% thereafter to 2020.

Table 18: Revised personal disposable income

		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Wage forecast	Growth	0%	0.4%	0.4%	3.20%	3.20%	3.20%

Sources: IBEC Report Q1 2011ESRI document Recovery Scenarios for Ireland May 2009 (Using World Recovery Scenario)

As wage growth is closely related to Household Income, it is possible to use these

percentages to estimate the distribution of household income for these years.

Table 19: Projected Disposable Household Income Distribution for Westmeath 2010 – 2016

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
% Change in income	-	0.40%	0.40%	3.20%	3.20%	3.20%	4.20%
1st Decile	8281.17	8314.29	8347.55	8614.67	8890.34	9174.83	9560.18
2nd Decile	13704.74	13759.56	13814.60	14256.66	14712.88	15183.69	15821.41
3rd Decile	19277.75	19354.86	19432.28	20054.11	20695.85	21358.11	22255.11
4th Decile	24308.15	24405.38	24503.00	25287.10	26096.29	26931.37	28062.41
5th Decile	29355.49	29472.91	29590.80	30537.71	31514.92	32523.39	33889.31
6th Decile	34797.92	34937.11	35076.86	36199.32	37357.70	38553.14	40172.31
7th Decile	42195.55	42364.33	42533.79	43894.87	45299.51	46749.09	48712.51
8th Decile	51169.72	51374.40	51579.90	53230.45	54933.83	56691.71	59072.71
9th Decile	64282.53	64539.66	64797.82	66871.35	69011.23	71219.59	74210.81
10th Decile	114590.47	115048.83	115509.03	119205.32	123019.89	126956.52	132288.71

9.5 House Prices

Of the properties registered on the Property Services Regulatory Authority the average house price for the County from January – November 2012 was €115,747 for 323 properties.

9.6 Interest Rates

It is evident that there are inextricable linkages between income levels and house prices, and interest rate variables. Current interest rates (set by the European Central Bank (ECB) are at an all-time low at 0.75% due to the huge problems being faced by the European economy. Interest rates in Ireland are determined externally by the ECB and will therefore reflect the situation in the Euro Area rather than domestic conditions.

Interest rates charged by Irish financial institutions are historically 2-3% higher than the prevailing ECB Interest rate. The gap between the official ECB interest rate and the rate charged by Irish financial institutions has widened in the face of increased banking losses and higher capital funding costs in the short term. In terms of mortgage interest rates there are a number of products available. The three main interest rate products are variable rates, fixed rate and split rate. Should ECB interest rates rise, the lender can pass on in part or full that increase to the client if they hold a variable mortgage. Fixed interest rates are rates fixed for a set time and are commonly available over one, two, three, four, five and ten year periods. A split rate is where a portion of your mortgage is both fixed and variable.

For the purposes of accessing affordability a stress interest rate of 6% was decided to be appropriate as it is likely that interest rates will rise over the course of a 25 year mortgage and potential buyers will take this into account.

9.7 Affordability Thresholds

In determining the number of households that would be eligible for assistance with their accommodation needs under the various Local Authority housing programmes (including the Affordable and Social Housing Schemes), a number of factors must be taken into consideration:

1. The level of new housing supply expected onto the market over the period of the Development Plan within each price band.
2. The maximum house price band which a household in each income decile could afford using up to 35% of their net income (threshold for eligibility under Part V of the Local Government (Planning & Development) Act 2000-2010 as amended).

In relation to housing supply, it is assumed that the level of housing to be supplied or sold over the lifetime of the Development Plan is equal to the level of demand. Table 20 therefore represents the additional units to be supplied in County Westmeath up to 2020 based on projected household formations.

Table 20: Additional Units from 2014

	Population	Avg Size	No.of Households	Change
2014	94,383	2.4	39,326	
2015	97,123	2.4	40,468	1142
2016	99,863	2.4	41,609	1141
2017	101,490	2.4	42,287	678
2018	103,116	2.4	42,965	678
2019	104,742	2.4	43,642	677
2020	106,370	2.4	44,321	679

Note: The stated population is for the beginning of the relevant year

In order to ascertain the maximum house price that a household could afford if allocating up to 35% of their net income on repayments the following variables are included:

- Total mortgage loan to value ratio of 90%

- Mortgage interest rate of 6%
- Term of Loan 25 years

Table 21 below indicates the derived maximum house price a household could afford based on 35% of their net income.

Table 20: Household affordability

House Price each decile can afford assuming mortgage to value ratio of 90%				
	2012	2013	2014	2015
1st Decile	41987	43330	44717	46148
2nd Decile	69485	71709	74003	76371
3rd Decile	97741	100869	104097	107428
4th Decile	123246	127190	131260	135460
5th Decile	148837	153600	158515	163587
6th Decile	176431	182076	187903	193916
7th Decile	213938	220784	227849	235140
8th Decile	259438	267740	276308	285150
9th Decile	325922	336352	347115	358223
10th Decile	580991	599583	618769	638570

1. Maximum house prices are based upon criteria set out in section 93(1) of the 2000 Act, and assuming a 6% APR, 25 year mortgage and a 90% Loan-to-Value (LTV) ratio.
2. Approximate Affordable House Prices have been calculated on the Annuity Formula (Appendix A of the Model Housing Strategy and Step-by-Step guide by DoEHLG).

9.8 Social & Affordable Need Calculation

The lowest decile of household income can afford a residential unit in 2015. However, some of the second decile can purchase. This still leaves 92 households in this decile short of being able to purchase.

The rest of deciles are able to purchase a residential unit.

The percentage with an affordability problem is then calculated:

(114 + 92)/1141 which gives a percentage with an affordability problem of 18%.

As wage increases are projected to be in line with house prices this is the estimated percentage with an affordability problem for the course of the plan.

9.9 Implications

With an unemployment rate of the order of around 20% it is clear that the affordability problem almost totally relates to those who are unemployed.

Therefore the Council will prioritize social housing provision through the various options open to the Local Authority.

The Planning and Development Acts 2000-2010 as amended provide that a housing strategy shall take into account the need to ensure that housing is available for persons who have different levels of income. It should also include an estimate of the amount of affordable housing required in the area of the development plan during the period of the development plan. The Council for the immediate future is not going to provide affordable housing as there is no demand. A flexible approach will be required in relation to Part V with developers, particularly with

regard to affordable homes in developments. A maximum quota of 15% in new developments for social and affordable housing will apply.

10 Conclusion

The Planning & Development Acts 2000-2010 (as amended) provide that when submitting a planning application the applicant shall specify how they propose to comply with a condition imposed under Section 96(2) of the Act. This form of distribution is in accordance with the Planning & Development Acts 2000-2002 which allows planning authorities the flexibility, where they deem it appropriate in the context of the housing strategy, to seek the development of particular sites with a higher or lower proportion of social or affordable housing having regard to the housing needs of the area and the objective of promoting social inclusion. In compliance with Section 94(4) of the Planning and Development Acts, 2000-2010 as amended, this Housing Strategy provides as a general policy that 15% of the land zoned for residential use, or for a mixture of residential and other uses, be reserved for purposes of Section (4) (a) (i) and (ii).

The Council shall also take into account its Housing Services Plan and Housing Action Plan prepared in accordance with the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 in making agreements. Furthermore approval from the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government is required before committing to the purchase of social units under the Part V mechanism.

The legislation provides for the following methods of compliance:

- ☐ The transfer of completed housing units on the application site
- ☐ The transfer of fully or partially serviced sites on the application site
- ☐ The transfer of a portion of land on the application site

- ☐ The transfer of completed housing units at another location
- ☐ The transfer of serviced sites at another location
- ☐ The transfer of land at another location
- ☐ The payment of a financial contribution

The method of compliance agreed with the applicant may also provide for a combination of any of the above.

When completed housing units are transferred to the local authority the Council will seek to:

- Ensure that social segregation is minimised
- ☐ Ensure complete and efficient development of building sites
- ☐ Facilitate the implementation of policy in regard to social and affordable housing

The local authority recognises that local circumstances, such as house types, housing requirements in the area, existing and planned distribution of housing, density issues, etc. may require to be taken into account in assessing the arrangements for compliance with Part V of the Act.

When the local authorities agree to accept or stipulate the payment of contributions towards meeting social and affordable housing need in lieu of the transfer of land, the funds so acquired shall be treated in accordance with Section 96 of the Act which provides that they shall be kept in a separate account and shall be applied as capital for the authorities' functions under Part V of the Act or for their functions as housing authorities.

In particular it should be noted that some housing, including dwellings for elderly persons or other classes of people who have special needs may be deserving of special consideration and the local authorities will consider the development of policies to take account of this.

11 Recommendations

- ☐ Future housing provision shall be in accordance with the Core Strategy settlement hierarchy and in particular in Athlone and Mullingar.
- ☐ An aging population means an increase in demand for flexible and adaptable housing solutions for older people.
- ☐ All new housing shall be built in accordance with a 'house for life' and support independent living including special needs.
- ☐ Continue to implement the Council's Traveller Accommodation Programme.
- ☐ Identify sites in Mullingar and Athlone for elderly sheltered accommodation.
- ☐ Require the provision of two bedroom houses in new residential schemes.
- ☐ Implement Part V requirement of 15% in all new housing schemes.
- ☐ Carry out a detailed survey within the county to identify the profile of vacant units, their location and why they are vacant to enable supply to be matched with need and demand.

According to the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2011, each Development Plan must include objectives for:

- The zoning of land for the use solely or primarily of particular areas for particular purposes (whether residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, recreational, as open space or otherwise, or a mixture of those uses), where and to such extent as the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, in the opinion of the Planning Authority, requires the uses to be indicated.
- The provision or facilitation of the provision of infrastructure including:
 - (i) Transport, energy and communication facilities.
 - (ii) Water supplies, and waste water services (regard having been had to the water services strategic plan for the area made in accordance with the Water Services Act 2007).
 - (iii) Waste recovery and disposal facilities (regard having been had to the waste management plan for the area made in accordance with the Waste Management Act 1996).
 - (iv) Any ancillary facilities or services.
- The conservation and protection of the environment including, in particular, the archaeological and natural heritage and the conservation and protection of European sites and any other sites which may be prescribed for the purposes of this paragraph.
- The encouragement, pursuant to Article 10 of the Habitats Directive, of the management of features of the landscape, such as traditional field boundaries, important for the ecological coherence of the Natura 2000 network and essential for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species.
- The promotion of compliance with environmental standards and objectives established:
 - (i) For bodies of surface water, by the European Communities (Surface Waters) Regulations 2009.
 - (ii) For groundwater, by the European Communities (Groundwater) Regulations 2010; which standards and objectives are included in river basin management plans (within the meaning of Regulation 13 of the European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations 2003).
- The integration of the planning and sustainable development of the area with the social, community and cultural requirements of the area and its population.
- The preservation of the character of the landscape where, and to the extent that, in the opinion of the planning authority, the proper planning and sustainable development of the area requires it, including the preservation of views and prospects and the amenities of places and features of natural beauty or interest.
- The protection of structures, or parts of structures, which are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest.
- The preservation of the character of architectural conservation areas.
- The development and renewal of areas in need of regeneration.
- The provision of accommodation for travellers, and the use of particular areas for that purpose.

- The preservation, improvement and extension of amenities and recreational amenities.
- The control, having regard to the provisions of the Major Accidents Directive and any
- regulations, under any enactment, giving effect to that Directive, of:
 - (i) siting of new establishments,
 - (ii) modification of existing establishments, and
 - (iii) development in the vicinity of such establishments,

for the purposes of reducing the risk, or limiting the consequences, of a major accident.
- The provision, or facilitation of the provision, of services for the community including, in particular, schools, crèches and other education and childcare facilities.
- The protection of the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Gaeltacht including the promotion of Irish as the community language, where there is a Gaeltacht area in the area of the Development Plan.
- The promotion of sustainable settlement and transportation strategies in urban and rural areas including the promotion of measures to:
 - (i) reduce energy demand in response to the likelihood of increases in energy and other costs due to long-term decline in non-renewable resources,
 - (ii) reduce anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, and
 - (iii) address the necessity of adaptation to climate change; in particular, having regard to location, layout and design of new development.
- The preservation of public rights of way which give access to seashore, mountain, lakeshore, riverbank or other place of natural beauty or recreational utility, which public rights of way shall be identified both by marking them on at least one of the maps forming part of the development plan and by indicating their location on a list appended to the development plan.
- Landscape, in accordance with relevant policies or objectives for the time being of the Government or any Minister of the Government relating to providing a framework for identification, assessment, protection, management and planning of landscapes and developed having regard to the European Landscape Convention done at Florence on 20 October 2000.

In preparing the Draft Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020, regard has been taken of international, national, regional and local documents outlined below and other documents referred to throughout the Plan. The Draft Plan's overall aims and strategic direction, including a settlement strategy of consolidated development, maximising efficient use of land, and integrating land-use and transportation, was conceived from consideration of these documents. This is not intended to read as an exhaustive list of relevant policy documents.

International Context

Strategic Environment Assessment Directive (2001/42/EC)

The EU Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (2001/42/EC), otherwise referred to as the SEA Directive, requires all Member States to systematically evaluate the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing a plan or programme prior to its adoption. SEA is a valuable tool that influences decision-making at each stage in the development plan process; to improve the environmental sustainability of the plan and to raise awareness of the potential environmental consequences of its implementation so that these consequences may be mitigated or avoided altogether. The preparation of an SEA is mandatory for the County Development Plan. An SEA Environmental Report has been prepared and has informed the preparation of this Draft Plan. The SEA Environmental is contained in Volume 3 of this Plan.

Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC)

The Council Directive 92/43/EEC provides legal protection for habitats and species of European importance. Articles 3 to 9 provide the legislative means to protect habitats and species of Community interest through the establishment and conservation of an EU-wide network of sites known as Natura 2000. These are Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) designated under the Habitats Directive and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated under the Conservation of Wild Birds Directive (79/409/ECC). Articles 6(3) and

6(4) of the Habitats Directive set out the decision-making tests for plans and projects likely to affect Natura 2000 sites. Article 6(3) establishes the requirement for Appropriate Assessment (AA):

“Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the [Natura 2000] site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. In light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public.”

This requirement is implemented in the Republic of Ireland by the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (SI 477/2011) and the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2011. The DoEHLG published Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland – Guidance for Planning Authorities in December 2009 (revised in February 2010).

Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC)

The purpose of the Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) is to establish a framework for the preservation and, where necessary, the improvement of water quality of inland surface waters, transitional and coastal waters and groundwater. The prime and overriding objective of the Water Framework Directive is for all surface waters, artificial and groundwaters to achieve good water status by 2015. The WFD has been transposed into Irish Law by National Regulation S.I. 722 of 2003.

The Directive contains a very large number of tasks in a variety of areas, including scientific/technical, information management, economic and administrative, which must be addressed by each Member State. The Water Framework Directive requires the preparation of a management plan for all waters in an area called a River Basin District. Parts of Westmeath are located in the Shannon River Basin District and the remainder in the Eastern River Basin District. The River Basin Management Plans describe in detail the status of all waters and protected areas. A programme of measures will be put in place to provide the works necessary to bring water bodies to good quality status. These measures have informed the preparation of this Plan.

Floods Directive (2007/60/EC)

The European Directive 2007/60/EC on the assessment and management of flood risks, aims to reduce and manage the risks that floods pose to human health, the environment, cultural heritage and economic activity. The Directive applies to inland waters as well as coastal waters across the EU. The Directive requires Member States to carry out a Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment by 2011, in order to identify river basins and coastal areas at risk of flooding. Flood Risk Maps are required to be drawn up for such zones by 2013. Flood Risk Management Plans focused on prevention, protection and preparedness must be established by 2015.

National Context

National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020

The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) is a twenty-year planning framework designed to achieve a better balance of social, economic and physical development and population growth between the regions. To this end it proposes the clear integration of Athlone, Mullingar and Tullamore into a 'seamless linked gateway'. This strategy provides that the principal towns that comprise the 'Midlands Gateway' will not develop in competition to one another but rather alternative to the urban centres of Dublin, Cork, Galway and Waterford.

The principal messages within the NSS of particular relevance to the Midland Region can be summarised as follows:

- There is a need to boost critical mass to create more self-sustaining development in the region building on its central location, its proximity to Dublin and its quality of life and natural and cultural heritage attributes.
- There is a need to focus on the implementation of the linked gateway of Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar, to deliver the level of critical mass needed to create more self-sustaining patterns of development where people both live and work within the region avoiding long distance commuting to Dublin.
- The role of the linked gateway needs to be partnered by a focus on the development role of the principal towns in the region and these towns need to be supported in acting as engines of growth locally, but also well connected to the linked gateway to support it and benefit from it.

Implementing the National Spatial Strategy: 2010 Update and Outlook

Given the serious economic and environmental challenges now facing Ireland, a review of the implementation of the NSS was considered necessary. The 2010 Update and Outlook indicates a number of points for future action which are relevant to this plan. These include:

- Capital investment in physical infrastructure needs to be much more closely aligned with settlement policy, to integrate strategic planning and investment prioritisation so that infrastructure provision is efficiently targeted and co-ordinated.
- To support the Government's Smart Economy policy objectives for economic renewal.

- High quality, compact urban environments which can improve quality of life, reduce travel demand, optimise the use of infrastructure and reduce negative social and environmental costs.
- To reduce dependence on fossil fuels, greenhouse gas emissions and to protect and improve water quality, conserve and improve natural ecosystems and biodiversity.
- Harness the potential of rural areas including a more diversified rural economy and the potential of such areas to develop productive local economies and to deliver sustainable energy alternatives towards a less carbon intensive economy.

National Development Plan 2007-2013

The National Development Plan 2007-2013 entitled Transforming Ireland – A Better Quality of Life for All, sets out the roadmap to Ireland's future. The €184 billion Plan focuses on the principles of sustainable economic growth, greater social inclusion and balanced regional development. It builds on, and consolidates, the achievements of the previous Plan, and provides investment for economic infrastructure, social inclusion measures, social infrastructure, human capital and enterprise, science and innovation.

Sustainable Development: A Strategy for Ireland (1997)

The national strategy for sustainable development provides a framework for the achievement of sustainability at local level. Planning authorities are required to incorporate the principles of sustainability into their development plans and ensure that planning policies support its achievement. The strategy identifies key ways in which development plans can contribute to the achievement of sustainability including:

- Encouraging efficiency in the use of energy, transport and natural resources through the careful location of residential, commercial and industrial development and by controls on the shape, structure and size of settlements.

- Promoting the most effective use of already developed areas.
- Securing the protection and enhancement of the natural environment, including unique or outstanding features, landscapes and natural habitats.
- Accommodating new development needs in an environmentally sustainable manner.

The strategy identifies the need for integrated land-use and transportation policies in order to help minimise the potential growth in private transport demand and to increase the use and efficiency of public transport.

A Framework for Sustainable Development for Ireland (Draft for Public Consultation, December 2011)

The objectives of the draft Framework are to identify and prioritise policy areas and mechanisms where a sustainable development approach will add value and enable continuous improvement of quality of life for current and future generations and set out clear measures, responsibilities and timelines in an implementation plan. The draft Framework draws on the model established by the EU Sustainable Development Strategy and concentrates on gaps where limited progress has been made and which still present formidable challenges.

Smarter Travel – A Sustainable Transport Future: A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020.

This policy recognises the vital importance of continued investment in transport, to ensure an efficient economy and continued social development, but it also sets out the necessary steps to ensure that people choose more sustainable transport modes such as walking, cycling and public transport. The document outlines 49 actions that form the basis of achieving a more sustainable transport future and are categorised as follows:

- Actions to reduce distances travelled by car
- Actions to ensure alternatives are available

- Actions to improve the efficiency of motorised transport
- Actions to ensure institutional arrangements are in place to deliver the policy

Ireland National Climate Change Strategy 2007-2012

The National Climate Change Strategy aims to reduce energy consumption and ensure Ireland reaches its target under the Kyoto Protocol to limit greenhouse gas emissions to 13% above 1990 levels by 2012. This is to be achieved through legally binding limits on the production of gases and the strategy includes a programme of actions for achieving those limits. The main focus is on reducing transport emissions, encouraging renewable energy sources, changes in agricultural practices and changes in waste disposal policies and plans. The strategy recognises that decisions by Local Authorities on the location, design and construction of domestic and commercial developments and of related economic and social activity, can have a significant effect on greenhouse gas emissions.

National Energy Efficiency Action Plan 2009-2020

This major Government Policy document sets out the Governments plans and actions to achieve its target of 20% energy efficiency savings across the economy by 2020, through energy efficiency measures. A strategy is outlined to reduce the country's dependency on imported fossil fuels, improve energy efficiency across a number of sectors and ensure a sustainable energy future. The Government's energy policy framework Delivering a Sustainable Future for Ireland – The Energy Policy Framework for 2007-2020 is designed to steer Ireland towards a new and sustainable energy future, one that helps increase security of supply, makes energy more affordable, improves national competitiveness and reduces our green house gas emissions. The public sector is to take a leadership role in this regard and achieve an overall energy efficiency improvement of 33%.

National Renewable Energy Action Plan

The EU Renewables Directive 2009/28/EC promotes the use of energy from renewable sources. It establishes the basis for the achievement of the EU's 20% renewable energy target by 2020. Under the terms of the Directive, each Member State was set an individual binding renewable energy target, which will contribute to the achievement of the overall EU goal. Ireland was set a 16% target. The National Renewable Energy Action Plan sets out the Government's strategic approach and concrete measures to deliver this target which includes:

- 40% of electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2020
- 10% electric vehicles by 2020
- 12% of renewable heat by 2020

The Government is also looking beyond 2020 in terms of the significant opportunities to develop Ireland's abundant offshore renewable energy resources, including offshore wind, wave and tidal energy.

Government Policy on Architecture 2009-2015 (2009)

The Government Policy on Architecture 2009-2015 recognises the place of architecture in society as an expression of cultural, aesthetic, and social values, both past and present, and the challenges and expectations of the future in shaping a sustainable quality environment. The publication comes at a time of increased public interest in these issues and its recommendations include the implementation of 45 actions by a number of government departments, including the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and the Department of Education and Science, the Office of Public Works, the Heritage Council, the Arts Council, local authorities and other agencies.

The implementation programme of the Policy will be carried out on the basis of prioritisation of the actions. Recognising that such priorities will be subject to further inbuilt processes and reviews, the timeframe for

delivery of individual actions should be seen in the context of the overall timeframe of the Policy, while recognising that many actions will have a lifetime that extends beyond 2015.

Regional Planning Context
Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022

The Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) sets out a long-term strategic planning framework which aims to direct the future growth of the Midland Region over the medium to long term and works to implement national policy as set out in the National Spatial Strategy (NSS). This aim is to be achieved through integrating spatial policy, investment decisions, and environmental priorities at a national level and translating these to the region, taking account of demographic change and economic trends.

A key aspect of the RPGs is to build upon and enhance the competitiveness and attractiveness of the region within a spatial planning hierarchy. This will be achieved by focussing on:

- Building up the “critical mass” of the region in terms of its economic strength, employment, education and population.
- Developing an Economic Development Strategy.
- Developing and strengthening the identity of the region.
- Providing better transport and communications connections within the region and between the region and other regions.
- Ensuring both rural and urban areas play their full roles in driving the development of the region in a balanced and sustainable way.

The guidelines promote the accelerated development of the Linked Gateway towns of Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar, and thus act as a key driver of growth in the region. It is envisaged that these Gateway Towns will be the focus of the bulk of the Midlands Regions target population up to 2022. This concentration is essential in order to generate the critical mass necessary to sustain the services and infrastructure required to enable

the “Linked Gateway” to perform and compete in a national context. It is an objective of the RPG’s to target the development of activities which capitalise upon the existing and emerging strengths in each of the linked gateway towns.

Targeted investment in transport and infrastructure is key to the creation of a competitive sustainable region with an improved quality of life for all. The guidelines promote the reinstatement of the rail link between Athlone and Mullingar to further strengthen public transport interconnectivity in the Midland Region by connecting the Galway/Mayo rail line with the Sligo rail line and provide an additional line option for the Galway-Dublin service. The development of the sections of the National Cycle Network between Athlone and Mullingar and provision of an electricity transmission network to the linked gateway towns is also provided for in the guidelines.

Midlands Waste Management Plan 2005-2014

The aim of the Plan is to set out a framework for the sustainable management of waste within five Local Authority areas including Westmeath. It covers all non-hazardous waste arising in the region. The Plan also has regard to the management of hazardous waste in accordance with the National Hazardous Waste Management Plan, prepared by the EPA. An integrated approach to waste management is prescribed in the document based on the following principles:

- Reducing dependence on landfill
- Reducing waste growth
- Greatly increasing recycling
- Introducing waste to energy with energy recovery

Ministerial Guidelines

Planning Authorities are required by the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2011 to have regard to Ministerial Guidelines issued by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG). The Planning and Development Act 2000-2011 strengthens this by requiring planning authorities to include a statement in

Development Plans which demonstrates how the planning authority has implemented the policies and objectives of the Minister contained in the guidelines when considering their application to the area or part of the area of the Development Plan. The guidelines include the following:

- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland
- Architectural Heritage Protection
- Architectural Heritage Protection for Places of Worship
- Best Practice Urban Design Manuals
- Childcare Facilities Guidelines
- Design Standards for New Apartments
- Development Management Guidelines
- Development Plans Guidelines
- Landscape and Landscape Assessment
- Provision of Schools and the Planning System
- Quarries and Ancillary Activities
- Retail Planning Guidelines
- Spatial Planning and National Roads
- Strategic Environmental Assessment
- Sustainable Rural Housing Development Guidelines
- Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas
- Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures
- The Planning System and Flood Risk Management
- Wind Energy Development
- Drainage & Reclamation of Wetlands (Draft)

Section 28(1B) of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2011 requires that a statement be appended to the Development Plan which demonstrates how the Planning Authority has implemented the policies and objectives contained in the Ministerial guidelines when considering their application to the Development Plan area. Section 28(1B) also requires that the statement should demonstrate, if applicable, that the Planning Authority has formed the opinion that it is not possible, because of the nature and characteristics of the Development Plan area or a part thereof, to implement certain

policies and objectives of the Minister contained in the guidelines when considering the application of the those policies in the Development Plan area and must give reasons for the forming of this opinion and why the policies and objectives of the Minister have not been implemented. The statement as required under Section 29(1B) is included as Appendix 16 of the Draft Development Plan.

Strategic Flood Risk Assessment

**For the Westmeath County Development Plan 2014-2020 &
Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020**

Section 1 Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

This is the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) for the Draft Westmeath County Council 2014-2020 and the Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020. The purpose of this report is to inform the draft Plans, particularly their policies and objectives, as well as their Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA).

This SFRA sets out how flood risk relates to the planning processes. It presents and analyses available flood related data at appropriate scales to identify flood risk management priorities for the County.

1.2 Flood Risk, Context and its Relevance as an Issue to the County and Athlone Development Plans

1.2.1 Flood Risk

Flooding is an environmental phenomenon which, as well as causing economic and social impacts, could in certain circumstances pose a risk to human health. Parts of County Westmeath are vulnerable to flooding as mapped in Volume 2 and as identified by the Office of Public Works in the Draft Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment, published in 2011. This vulnerability can be exacerbated by changes in the occurrence of severe rainfall events and associated flooding of the county’s rivers. Local conditions such as low lying lands and slow surface water drainage increase the risk of flooding. This risk can be increased by human actions including clearing of natural vegetation to make way for agriculture, drainage of bog and wetland areas, the development of settlements in the flood plains of rivers and on low-lying or eroding coastlines, as well as by changing weather patterns. Inadequately planned infrastructural developments, culverting, forestry operations and urban development in the floodplan can also give rise to flooding hazards.

1.2.2 Context

Flood risk must be seen in the context of both the long history of settlement in the county and in the context of existing and emerging policy and practice in relation to planning, development and flooding. The location and layout of settlements has

generally evolved to avoid flood-prone areas. The direct impact of new urban development is generally not as significant a problem now as it was in the past, because of the implementation of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS). However, vigilance is still needed at the planning and zoning stage to avoid flood risk, for example in less well understood urban fringe areas – hence the need for Flood Risk Appraisal of all new plans at all levels – including County Development Plan level.

1.3 Policy Framework

1.3.1 EU Flood Directive

European Directive 2007/60/EC on the assessment and management of flood risk aims to reduce and manage the risks that floods pose to human health, the environment, cultural heritage and economic activity. The directive applies to inland waters as well as all coastal waters across the whole territory of the E.U. The Directive requires Member States to carry out a preliminary assessment by 2011 in order to identify the river basins and associated coastal areas at risk of flooding. For such zones, flood risk maps are required to be drawn up by 2013. Flood risk management plans focused on prevention, protection and preparedness must be established by 2015.

Compliance with the Directive is to be co-ordinated with actions under the Water Framework Directive. Flood risk management plans and river basin management plans are also to be co-ordinated.

1.3.2 DOEHLG Flood Risk Management Guidelines

1.3.2.1 Introduction

In September 2008, the DOEHLG published draft guidelines on flood risk management for public consultation. These were called The Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Consultation Draft Guidelines for Planning Authorities. These were aimed at ensuring a more consistent, rigorous and systematic approach which will fully incorporate flood risk assessment and management into the planning system. Local authorities were required to have regard to the draft Guidelines' recommended flood risk identification, assessment and management processes when preparing or varying development plans and local area plans and in consideration of applications for planning permission.

After the draft stage, the actual Guidelines were published on 30th November 2009.

1.3.2.2 Principles of Flood Risk Management

The key principles of flood risk management set out in the flood guidelines are to:

- Avoid development that will be at risk of flooding or that will increase the flooding risk elsewhere, where possible:
- Substitute less vulnerable uses, where avoidance is not possible; and
- Mitigate and manage the risk, where avoidance and substitution are not possible.

The Flood Guidelines follow the principle that development should not be permitted in flood risk areas, particularly floodplains, except where there are no alternative and appropriate sites available in lower risk areas that are consistent with the objectives of proper planning and sustainable development.

Development in areas which have the highest flood risk should be avoided and/or only considered in exceptional circumstances (through a prescribed Justification Test) if adequate land or sites are not available in areas which have lower flood risk. Most types of development would be considered inappropriate in areas which have the highest flood risk. Only water-compatible development such as docks and marinas, dockside activities that require a waterside location, amenity open space, outdoor sports and recreation and essential transport infrastructure that cannot be located elsewhere would be considered appropriate in these areas.

1.4 Role of the OPW in Regional Flood Risk Assessment and Management

The Office of Public Works is the lead agency for flood risk management in Ireland. The co-ordination and implementation of Government policy on the management of flood risk in Ireland is part of its responsibility. It is the primary agency responsible for ensuring Ireland's compliance with the EU Floods Directive and particularly for the preparation of a preliminary assessment by 2011, flood risk mapping by 2013 and flood risk management plans by 2015. It is the principal agency involved in the preparation of flood Risk Assessment and Management Studies (FRAMs).

Section 2 Strategic Flood Risk Appraisal

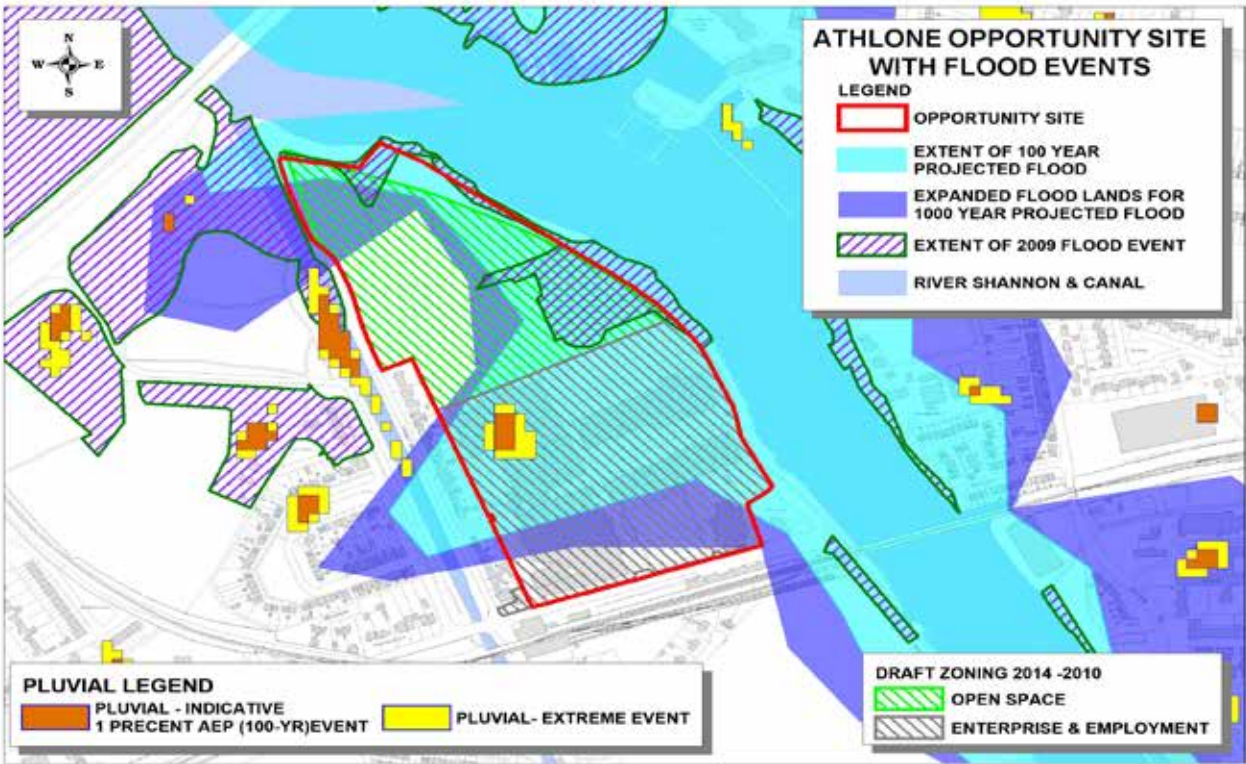
This section provides a description of the spatial distribution of flood risk at appropriate scales for the draft Plan, based on available information. The assessment is generally prepared at the County scale. However, a more detailed flood risk map has been prepared for Athlone, given the flooding history in this area.

It should be noted that some of this data is historically derived, not prescriptive in relation to flood return periods and not yet predictive or inclusive for climate change analysis.

Full detail regarding the spatial distribution of fluvial flood risk as published by the OPW as the Draft Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (August 2011) is outlined in Volume 2. The draft Assessment also includes areas at risk due to pluvial flooding, which are not reproduced in the Draft County or Athlone Town Development Plan as they do not take into account local drainage structures such as culverts through embankments or other local drainage. However, any issues regarding pluvial (and any other type of flooding) must be resolved in accordance with Departmental Guidance through a Site Specific Flood Risk Assessment at the development management stage.

ADDENDUM TO STRATEGIC FLOOD RISK ASSESSMENT

Following the preparation of material amendments to the Plan, the following Addendum to the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment was prepared and shall be considered in conjunction with the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment.



This site is located along the western bank of the River Shannon. A significant portion of the site has been identified as subject to risk of pluvial flooding as it is encompassed with the consolidated flood risk envelope for Athlone Town. This flood risk envelope comprised maps of:

- a) The 100 Year projected flood
 - b) Expanded flood lands for 1000 year projected flood
 - c) Extent of the mapped 2009 flood event
- Maps a) and b) are derived from the Draft Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment from the OPW. Map c) is based on an actual measured flood event in November 2009.

Based on analysis undertaken, by Cawley and Cunnane to the Irish National Hydrology Conference 02, this 2009 flood event was the maximum recorded flood event on the River Shannon and has been classified as representing a "return period significantly greater than 100 years",

The mapped 2009 flood event impacts only on the portion of site zoned as Open Space. This proposed zoning represents low vulnerability to flood risk and therefore satisfies the sequential approach.

The area of the site zoned for Enterprise and Employment development is outside the mapped 2009 flood event which would substantiate local information which suggests the site level has been raised in recent years. The proposed zoning of the site associated with any minor flood risk would satisfy a Justification Test. Any development would be subject to a site specific flood risk assessment at development control stage. Therefore no change in zoning is recommended.

Site Code	Townland	Classification
WM029-010	Ranelagh	Battery
WM029-011	Athlone South	Fortifications Site
WM029-016	Athlone	House Site
WM029-021	Loughandonning	Holy Well
WM029-022	Retreat	Enclosure
WM029-023	Collegeland	Graveyard
WM029-024	Blyry Upper	Enclosure
WM029-025	Garrycastle	Castle
WM029-026	Garrycastle	Earthwork Site
WM029-027	Creggan Lower	Earthwork
WM029-028	Creggan Upper	Castle
WM029-033	Clonbonny	Earthwork

NATIONAL MONUMENTS IN STATE CARE IN ATHLONE		
RECORD OF MONUMENTS AND PLACES REF.	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION
WM-029-042	Athlone	Castle

Site Code	Site Name
000575	Ferbane Bog
000581	Moyclare Bog
000610	Lough Croan Turlough
002337	Crosswood Bog
000576	Fin Lough (Offaly)
000580	Mongan Bog
000611	Lough Funshinagh
001625	Castlesampson Esker
002336	Carn Park Bog
002339	Ballynamona Bog and Corkip Lough
001776	Pilgrim’s Road Esker
000440	Lough Ree
000216	River Shannon Callows

Special Areas of Conservation

Site Code	Site Name
000440	Lough Ree
000216	River Shannon Callows
002337	Crosswood Bog

Special Protection Areas

Site Code	Site Name
004064	Lough Ree SPA
004096	Middle Shannon Callows SPA

Proposed Natural Heritage Areas

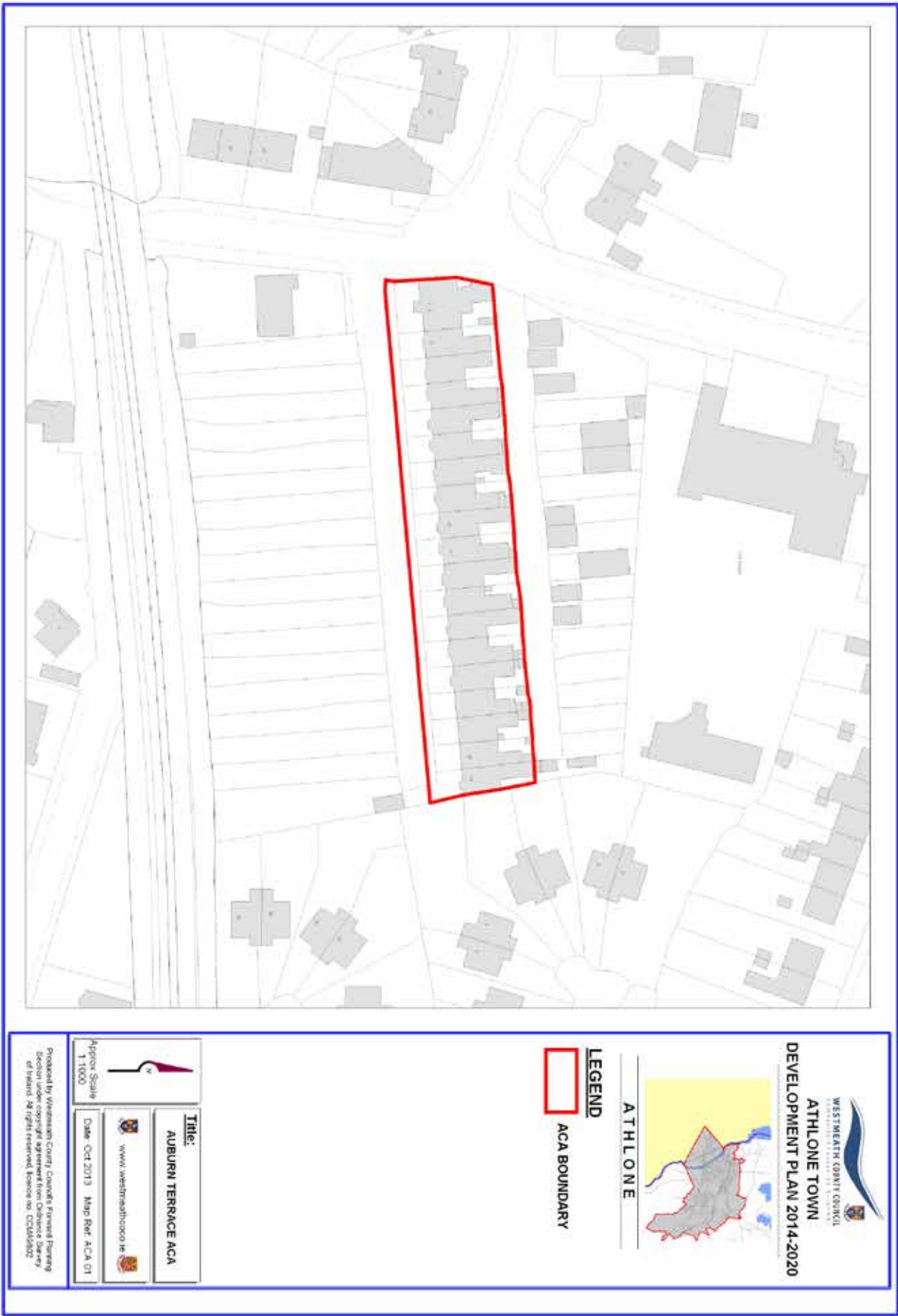
Site Code	Site Name
000440	Lough Ree SAC
000216	River Shannon Callows SAC
000678	Crosswood Bog SAC

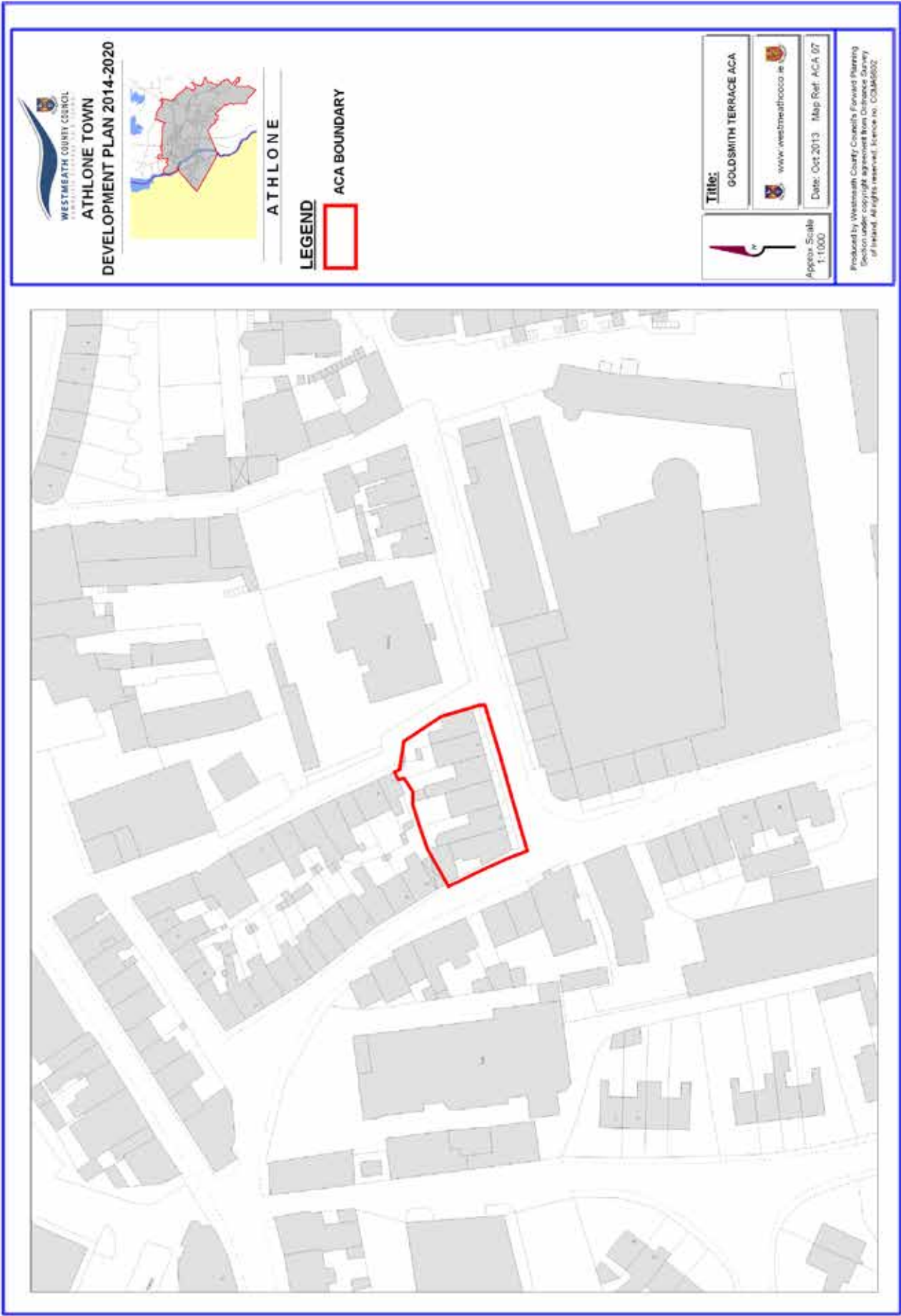
REF	ITEM
1.	Stand of trees to front of Athlone Civic Centre.
2.	Stand of trees at Burgess Park.
3.	Trees at Wolf Tone Terrace and The Strand car park.
4.	Trees west of Fairgreen carpark along Garden Vale.
5.	Extensive stand of trees on private lands west of Ballymahon Road and south Sli An Aifrinn (New Court).
6.	Trees along perimeter of The Moorings, Ballymahon Road.
7.	Trees fronting Coolevin Park
8.	Mature beech tree at One Mile Road Arcadia (east of roundabout).
9.	Trees along perimeter of green space at Beechpark West.
10.	Trees on Wansboro Field, Abbey Road.
11.	Trees along Grace Road – Promenade (north & south of bridge).
12.	Stand of trees at The Golden Mile & Western Station.
13.	Avenue of Beech trees No. 1 Battery.
14.	Stand of trees Connaught Gardens.
15.	Matures trees on grounds of Shamrock Lodge Hotel.
16.	Stand of trees close to junction of Retreat Road with Retreat Avenue.
17.	Stand of trees adjacent to oil depot Old Dublin Road (Brideswell).
18.	Two mature trees at either side of Auburn on Old Dublin Road.
19.	Mature tree on site of Veterinary Surgery Old Dublin Road.
20.	Mature trees to rear of Abbey Grove houses
21.	Matures trees at Abbey House, Abbey Road
22.	The North-south axis of mature trees along the avenue leading to and surrounding Lissywollen House
23.	Area of several mature oak trees along the western boundary of Macken's farmlands
24.	Trees to south of National Secondary Route N55 at Curragh, Athlone*
25.	Trees to north of National Primary Route N6 at Glynn, Fardrum, Athlone*

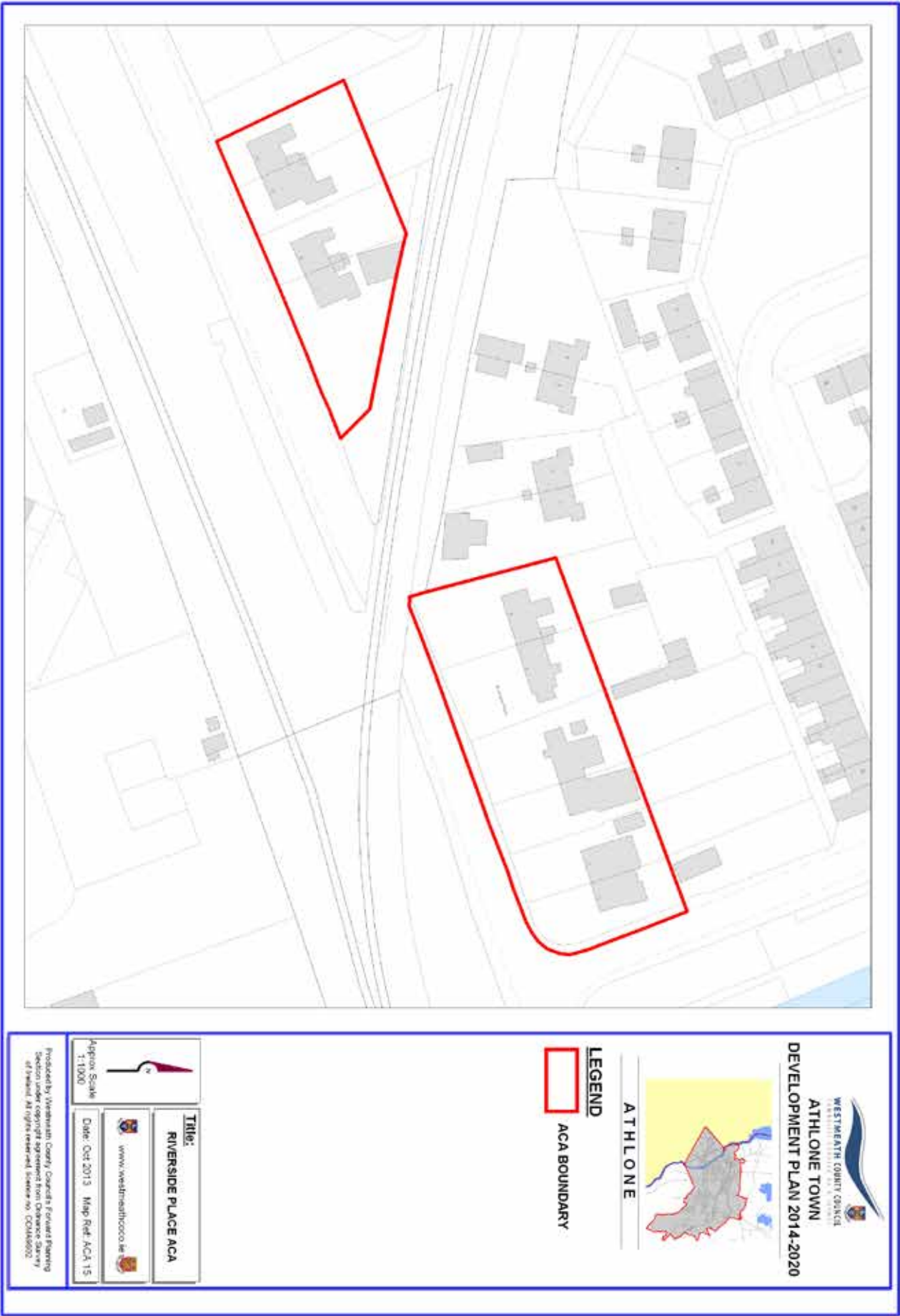
*Trees subject to Tree Preservation Order

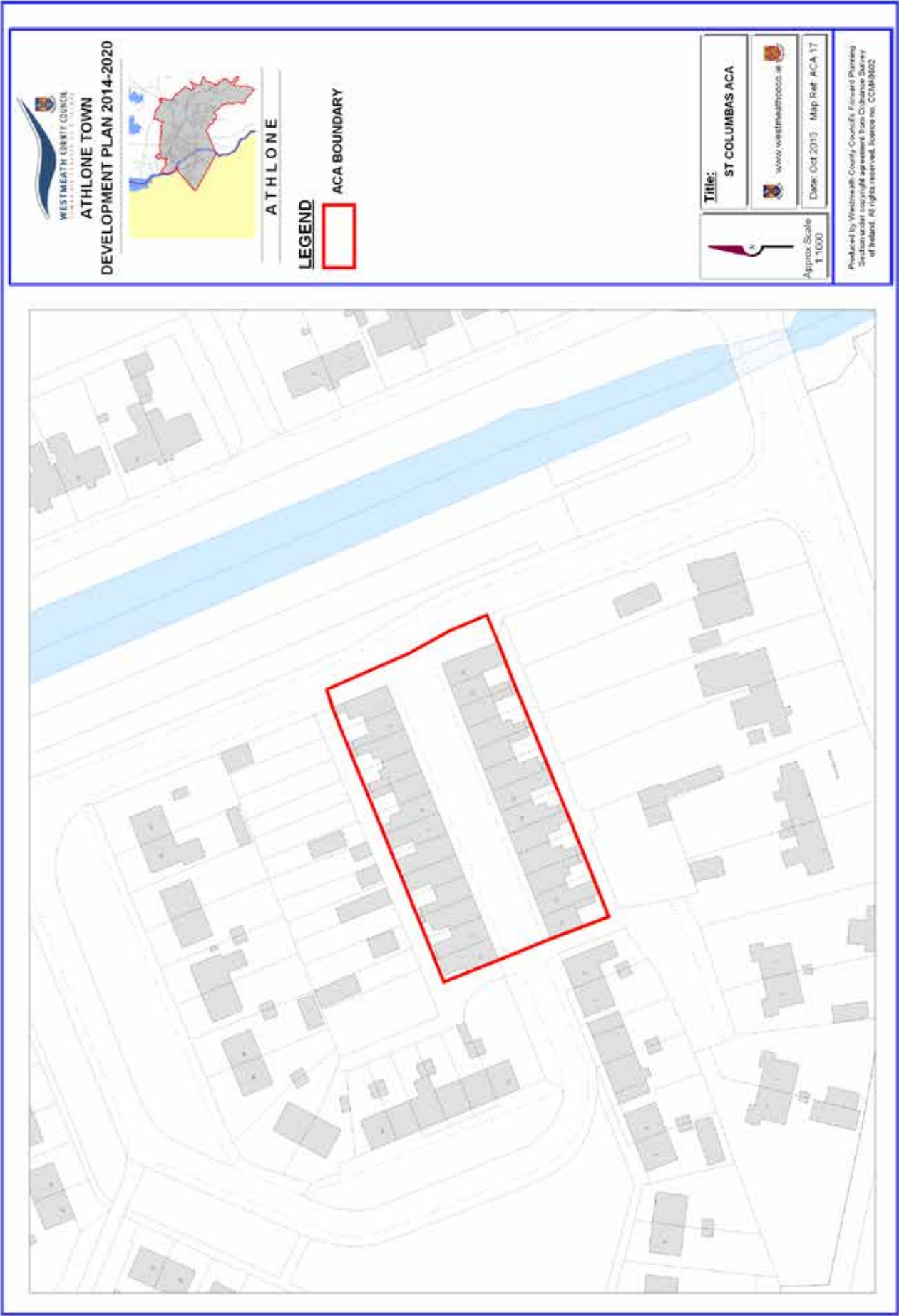
Site Code	Site Name
34a	Cornamaddy Low hill
35a	River Shannon Part of SAC
35b	River Shannon Part of SAC
35c	Beside Fire Station Dry grassland and scrub
35d	St. Mary's Place Dry grassland and scrub
35e	Aghacocora Dry Calcareous Grassland, Scrub, semi natural woodland
35f	Kilnafadoge Low hills
35g	Kilnafadoge Low Hills

REF. NO.	PUBLIC RIGHT OF WAY
1.	East bank along the river Shannon from Burgess Park to Custume Place.
2.	Northgate Street to Westbank of the river Shannon to Abbey House and Wansboro Park.
3.	Westbank to the canal, Talbot Avenue and the Quays.
4.	Lane leading to Dunnes Stores, Montree branch.
5.	Entrance onto the N55 east of Beech Park.
6.	Lane to rear of Beechpark West and Ardnaree leading into Arcadia (L-4002).
7.	Love Lane (L-40101).
8.	Link from Church St. (R466) to town centre leading to St. Francis Terrace (L-8053) east of the civic centre.
9.	Laneway north of L-40061 (Ashgrove) leading to R916.









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