

Chapter 2 Context & Challenges

Aim

This chapter examines the key indicators of change which can set the past experiences of County Offaly, ongoing trends and consequent future development needs of the county in context. It acts as the rationale for the agreed strategies, policies and objectives of this County Development Plan as set out in the “Overall Strategy” (Chapter 3) which follows.

2.1 Demographic Context

2.1.1 Population

Table 2.1 shows population trends for Co. Offaly over the period from 1961 to 2006.

Table 2.1 Population changes in County Offaly 1961 – 2006

Census Year	Population	% Change
1961	51,533	- 1.92
1971	51,829	0.57
1981	58,312	12.51
1986	59,835	2.60
1991	58,494	-2.24
1996	59,117	1.07
2002	63,663	7.7
2006	70,868	11.3

Source: Central Statistics Office (CSO)

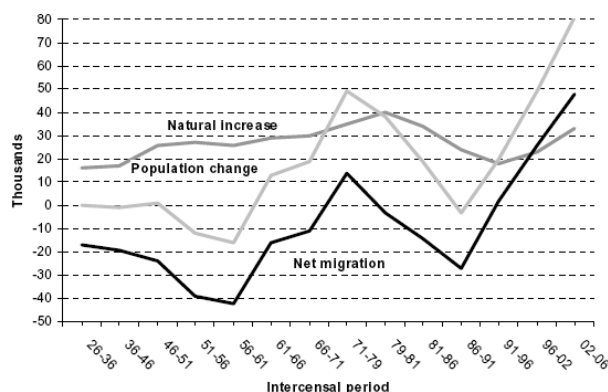
The County Development Plan 2003–2009 estimated a population of 69,622 in 2009 i.e. a 6.1% increase over 2002 levels. However, table 2.1 shows that the county had surpassed this figure by approximately 1,000 people by 2006 with 11% growth since 2002. This compared to 7.7% growth between 1996 and 2002 and 1.07% population growth between 1991 and 1996. The 2006 figure of 70,868 is the highest population figure for Co. Offaly since 1881 and reflects the national trend. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) estimates that the increase in population between 2002 and 2006 (7,205) comprised a natural increase of 2,026 persons and the balance of 5,179 was accounted for by net in-migration¹. (Source: www.beyond2020.cso.ie).

¹ This is in-migration into Offaly and comprises persons moving into Offaly from within Ireland in addition to from abroad.

Development trends indicate further population growth, although at a slower rate, over the medium term period from 2006.

Ireland’s population increased by 8.2% from 2002 to 2006, giving a total population of 4,239,848. This intercensal growth is the highest on record and has resulted from **both** natural increase and significant net inward migration. Figure 2.1 below, shows that at a national level, **migration** has been the dominant influence on the pattern of population change over the eighty-year period from 1926 to 2006.

Figure 2.1 Components of National population changes, 1926-2006



Source Central Statistics Office (CSO)

Government projections are for further strong national population growth over the period of this County Development Plan and beyond.

“Revised population forecasts, flowing from the results of the 2006 Census, could project a national population of up to 5.3 million people by 2021. Current CSO projections for 2021 suggest significant population increases for all areas with the highest areas of growth in the West (35%), followed by the Greater Dublin Area (34.3%) and the Midlands (31.6%)”.

Source: National Development Plan 2007-2013 p.26.

These projections have informed the strategy, policies and objectives of this plan. It is recognised, however, that having regard to figure 2.1, should in-migration into Ireland slow down over the period, population growth for Offaly may level off.

Offaly's population growth during the period 2002-2006 (11.3%) has been stronger than the national average (8.2%). This may be attributed to the county's proximity to the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), recent increased accessibility to Dublin (M6, M7, improved rail services etc.) and the differential in house prices between the GDA and County Offaly. Other midland counties have also experienced similar population growth, with Laois experiencing 14%, Longford 10.6% and Westmeath 10.5%.

Table 2.2 gives a breakdown of the increases in population directly associated with the Linked Gateway Town of Tullamore and the other large towns and their environs within the county. It shows:

- (i) The urban centres have performed strongly in terms of population growth over the period between 1996 and 2006.
- (ii) Edenderry and its environs has, between 1996 and 2006, had a faster rate of growth than both Tullamore, which is part of the Midland Linked Gateway and Birr, which was traditionally Offaly's second largest town.

Offaly Local Authorities' Housing Strategy (2007) has found that buoyant population growth has occurred in the period 1996-2006 in **Portarlington**, which, like Edenderry, is situated in the east of the county, under the influence of the Greater Dublin Area. The part of Portarlington within County Laois grew from 2,756 to 4,395 (59.5%) and the part within County Offaly from 1,245 to 1,609 (29.2%), a combined growth of over 2,000 persons over 4 years.

Population growth in **Clara** has been strong in the latter part of this period and has the potential to remain very strong towards 2010, and at a significantly higher rate than Tullamore. Clara's population growth during the period 2002-2006 was slightly lower than Tullamore's, as would be expected given Tullamore's role as part of the Midlands Linked Gateway. However, pressure for residential development over the period 2006-2007 has been greater in Clara than in Tullamore, possibly due to the higher relative availability/release of zoned land in Clara, coupled with the lower cost of housing.

Table 2.2 Population Change in Main Towns, 1996 – 2006

Population (Council area)	1996	2002	2006	% Change	
				2002- 2006	1996- 2006
Offaly County	59,117	63,663	70,868	11.3%	20%
Birr Town & environs	4,158	4,411	5,053	14.5%	21.5%
Tullamore Town & environs	10,039	11,098	12,927	16.48%	28.8%
Edenderry & environs	3,825	4,559	5,888	29.15%	53.9%
Portarlington (Co. Offaly)	1,158	1,245	1,609	29.2%	39%

Source: CSO 2002 & 2006 Census Reports

Map 2.1 indicates the areas (by District Electoral Division) of the county which have achieved more rapid population growth over the period 1996 to 2006. Population growth has been considerably stronger in the eastern part of the county (particularly around Edenderry, Portarlington, Daingean and Rhode) than in the remainder of the county over this period, largely due to this area's proximity to the Greater Dublin Area (GDA).

The area adjacent to the N52 and N80 between approximately Blueball / Tullamore and Tober has also seen significant rates of population increase. Parts of West and South Offaly have experienced less population growth with some negative figures being recorded. However, the areas adjacent to the towns of Banagher and Birr and the village of Shinrone have seen significant population increases, particularly since 2002, some in fact matching the county average.

Map 2.2 shows the population density at District Electoral Division level throughout the county.

2.1.2 Population trends by Electoral Area for County Offaly 2002 - 2006

Tables 2.3 to 2.6 below show both the percentage change in population and the actual change per District Electoral Division (DED) during the intercensal period 2002-2006. The Electoral areas for Co. Offaly were amended as per a recommendation of the Electoral Areas Committee Report (2008) and tables 2.3. to 2.6 reflect the DEDs as they stand within the electoral areas

following the change. The figures in red represent a fall in population, while the DEDs with an asterisk are designated within the 'Clár'² area. These DEDs have been subject to persistent population decline in comparison with population figures during the period 1926 to 2002. The 'Clár' programme is designed to stabilise population levels and support physical, economic and social infrastructure across a variety of measures.

2.1.3 Birr Electoral Area

Within the **Birr** Electoral Area, positive population growth was experienced in 21 of the 25 DEDs over the period 2002–2006. This compares to 16 of the 26* DEDs between 1996 and 2002. *(There were previously 26 DEDs within the Electoral Area). This indicates that population in much of the Birr Electoral Area is stabilising, albeit as a result of the recent strong national economy, a house building boom and a strong desire to reside in the countryside. Future census results will indicate more clearly if this stabilisation continues. Table 2.3 shows that in the town of Birr and the areas adjacent to the town of Banagher, the village of Shinrone and the sraids of Cadamstown and Lusmagh performed well with double digit percentage growth figures. Of the 13 DEDs within the 'Clár' programme (marked by an asterisk in the table), 2 experienced a fall in population.

DED Name	% Change 2002 - 2006	Actual Population Change
Aghancon*	4.7	17
Ballincor*	0.7	1
Barna*	-2.3	-4
Birr Rural	15.7	172
Birr Urban	14	501
Cangort*	13.8	22
Cullenwaine	2.3	15
Dromoyle	5.1	15
Dunkerrin*	-3.6	-13
Eglish*	3.1	5
Ettagh*	3.3	14
Gorteen*	0.4	1
Kilcolman	-6.8	-26
Killyon*	2.4	6
Kinnitty	3	15
Knockbarron	-1.9	-3
Letter	13.9	19
Lusmagh	10.2	47
Mounterin*	0	0
Mountheaton	0.8	6
Roscomroe*	2.1	3
Seirkieran	0.2	1
Shinrone	15.6	124
Templeharry*	3.9	6
Tulla*	11.1	11

* Represents DEDs within 'Clár' programme area – refer to Chapter 10, Rural Development.

Source: Central Statistics Office

2.1.4 Ferbane Electoral Area

11 of the 25 DEDs in the **Ferbane** Electoral Area experienced a fall in population from 2002 to 2006, and of these, 5 experienced falls in the order of 5% i.e. Broghal experienced (-5.9%), Gallen (-4.8%), Lumcloon (-6.8%), Rahan (-5.6%) and Shannonbridge (-5.9%). The remaining DEDs had smaller decreases. A challenge for the future is to address the falls experienced in the areas in and around the villages of Ballycumber, Rahan, Shannonbridge and Shannonharbour in particular. In this regard, the village plans for these settlements contained within this County Development Plan are envisaged to

Table 2.3 Population Change 2002 – 2006 in the Birr Electoral Area

² Refer Chapter 10, Rural Development

give positive focus to growth subject to the availability of services.

The DED of Kilcormac experienced a slight fall. The very slight fall in the Cloghan DED is likely to be significantly reversed in the next census (2010) due to a considerable number of new houses built in the village over the period 2005 to 2007 approximately. A number of DEDs experienced **growth** greater than 5% i.e. Banagher, Bawn, Derrycooley, Drumcullen, Killooly, Kiloughy, Lea and Moyclare. Of the 11 DEDs which experienced a fall, 2 are designated 'Clár' areas (marked by an asterisk in the table).

Table 2.4 Population Change 2002 – 2006 in the Ferbane Electoral Area

DED Name	% Change 2002-2006	Actual Population Change
Ballycumber	-2	-14
Banagher	9	161
Bawn	8.1	26
Broughal*	-5.9	-8
Cloghan	-0.2	-2
Clonmacnoise*	1.6	5
Derrinboy	1.6	4
Derryad*	-1.2	-3
Derrycooley	5.4	13
Doon	4.4	18
Drumcullen	19.8	55
Ferbane	4.3	48
Gallen	-4.8	-30
Hinds*	3.6	10
Huntston	-0.8	-3
Kilcormac	-0.6	-8
Killooly	5.5	13
Killoughy	10.2	58
Lea	5.9	19
Lumcloon	-6.8	-27
MoyClare	8	44
Rahan	-5.6	-41
Shannonbridge	-5.9	-21
Shannonharbour	-2.4	-8
Srah	3.7	26

* Represents DEDs within 'Clár' programme area – refer to Chapter 10, Rural Development.

Source: Central Statistics Office

2.1.5 Tullamore Electoral Area

Within the **Tullamore** electoral Area, no DED experienced a population fall over the period 2002 to 2006. The settlements of Tullamore and Clara, and the areas in and immediately adjacent to the villages of Mucklagh, Geashill and Killeigh experienced significant rises, while almost all of the other primarily rural DEDs, experienced growth of close to or over 10%.

Table 2.5 Population Change 2002 – 2006 in the Tullamore Electoral Area

DED Name	% Change 2002-2006	Actual Population Change
Ballycommon	14.9	69
Cappancur	1.4	18
Clara	11.2	361
Durrow	9.4	62
Gorteen	13.6	37
Kilcumreragh	9	41
Killeigh	5.7	65
Rathrobin	5.5	22
Screggan	21.5	237
Silverbrook	11	65
Tinamuck	11.2	22
Tinnycross	7.1	30
Tullamore Rural	119	1185
Tullamore Urban	6.1	630

Source: Central Statistics Office

2.1.6 Edenderry Electoral Area

Finally, within the **Edenderry** electoral Area, 3 of the 23 DEDs experienced a fall. 11 predominantly rural DEDs experienced increases of between 8% and 21%. Of the 3 'Clár' DEDs, Croghan experienced a slight (0.2%) fall.

Table 2.6 Population Change 2002 – 2006 in the Edenderry Electoral Area

DED Name	% Change 2002 -2006	Actual Population Change
Ballaghassaan	8.8	3
Ballyburly	12.5	143
Ballymacwilliam	20.7	97
Ballyshear	20.5	62
Bracknagh	11.1	94
Clonbullogue	9.1	59
Clonmore	21.4	74
Clonygowan	7.9	31
Croghan*	-0.2	-1
Daingean	25	292
Edenderry Rural	-2.1	-15
Edenderry Urban	33.2	1401
Esker	5.1	18
Geashill	19.6	237
Hammerlane	5.1	27
Kilclonfert*	6	18
Knockdrin*	11.3	16
Monasteroris	-7.8	-57
Mountbriscoe	0.5	1
O'Dempsey	12.5	14
Portarlinton North	24.7	404
Raheenakeeran	4.9	18
Rathfeston	47.1	122

* Represents DEDs within 'Clár' programme area – refer to Chapter 10, Rural Development.

Source: Central Statistics Office

2.1.7 Population Change – General Points

The general points to note from tables 2.3 to 2.6 are that much of the county has performed well in terms of population growth over the period 2002 to 2006, a general improvement from the previous intercensal period, and that the increases in most DEDs are, in general, considerably greater than the decrease experienced in the minority of DEDs. A notable exception is the Ferbane electoral area which experienced population decreases in a number of DEDs. The Council's Housing policy continues to provide a generally facilitatory approach to housing development (subject to location and siting considerations) within this area.

2.2 Social Indicators

2.2.1 Age Structure

Table 2.7 Population Breakdown by Age Group at County and National Level

Age Group	Co. Offaly		National	
	1996	2006	1996	2006
<15yrs.	25.4%	22.52%	23.7%	20.38%
15-64yrs.	62.73%	66.54%	64.88%	68.57%
>65yrs.	11.87%	10.95%	11.41%	11.03%

Source: Central Statistics Office

The figures indicated in table 2.7 show an increase in the age profile within both the county and the country. This will have implications for the provision of appropriate facilities for communities, within Offaly (for example more housing and facilities for the elderly) in the future.

Map 2.3 gives a visual representation of the number of people aged 65+ as a percentage of total population per DED in 2006, and indicates higher rates of persons in this age bracket to the west and south of the county.

A further factor to consider is that while the proportion of Offaly's population under 15 years of age has decreased over the period between 2002-2006, many of the county's urban centres have experienced significant levels of population growth, much of which is made up of young families. Such growth will necessitate increased provision of educational, childcare and community facilities in these areas.

2.2.2 Household Size

The national trend is one of falling household size, from an average of 4.48 persons per household in 1926 to 2.94 in 2002 (Source, Central Statistics Office). Further falls are predicted by the CSO and the Offaly Local Authorities Housing Strategy, in accordance with the NDP 2007-2013, assumes an average household size of 2.56 by 2015. Therefore, housing needs and demand are changing and will continue to change to reflect this and other socio-economic factors, with perhaps an increasing need for a greater mix of house types and sizes within housing developments.

Table 2.8 Private Households in Offaly Classified By Size

No. of People	1996	2002	2006	% Change	
				02- 06	96- 06
1	3,318 (19%)	3,973 (20%)	4,915 (21%)	24%	48%
2	3,836 (22%)	4,986 (25%)	6,398 (27%)	28%	67%
3	2,764 (16%)	3,477 (17%)	4,396 (18%)	26%	59%
4	3,066 (18%)	3,593 (18%)	4,083 (17%)	14%	33%
5	2,234 (13%)	2,313 (11%)	2,358 (10%)	1.95%	6%
6	1,241 (7%)	1,128 (6%)	1,150 (5%)	1.95%	-7%
7	604 (3%)	410 (2%)	289 (1%)	-30%	-52%
8	206 (1%)	154 (0.76%)	115 (0.48%)	-25%	-44%
9	112 (0.64%)	57 (0.28%)	40 (0.17%)	-30%	-64%
10+	84 (0.48%)	53 (0.26)	25 (0.11%)	-53%	-70%
Total	17,465	20,144	23,769	18%	36%

Source: Central Statistics Office

2.2.3 Other Social Indicators

Chapter 6, Employment, Economy and Enterprise contains information on educational attainment for the county and this information indicates that the level at which education has been completed for persons within the county has risen over the past decade. In particular, the total number of people who have completed a third level qualification has increased over the period 1996-2006.

Chapter 6 also contains information on labour force / employment figures and these inform the policy formulation for that sector.

Map 2.4 shows the Economic Dependency Ratio by DED for 2006.

The Offaly Local Anti Poverty Strategy for Offaly 2008-2013, adopted in October 2007 analysed poverty in Offaly across the five life-cycle areas identified in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016. The demographic and socio-economic profile of Offaly show it to be a dramatically changing environment with large population growth in the north and east of the county while parts of rural Offaly, particularly in the west and south, continue to decline in both population and economic terms. Crucially, poverty remains an issue across the county.

2.3 Trend in House Completions and Planning Permissions in County Offaly

From 2002-2006, an upward trend in house completions has been experienced at a county wide level. A levelling off is, at the time of preparation of this plan (2007-2008) underway with projected household formation in the Offaly Local Authorities for 2008 being 926, with a gradual increase to approximately 1,138 by 2015 (taken from Housing Strategy to 2015).

Table 2.9 House completions and planning permissions in Offaly 2002 - 2006

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
House Completions	853	1,308	1,516	1,202	1,594
Planning Permissions	1390	1486	1824	1462	1894

Source: Offaly County Council figures and Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government Housing Statistics Bulletins.

2.4 Distance to Work

Map 2.5 shows that workers in the eastern part of County Offaly travel considerably longer distances to their place of employment than those living in the remainder of the county. The rapid growth in population in the east of the county is largely commuter based and a challenge for the future will be to encourage employment generating development within Offaly to address this long distance commuting pattern.

2.5 Planning Challenges

The vision contained in Chapter 1, Introduction cannot be achieved without first considering the challenges facing the county. Arising from the foregoing analysis and the information contained in Chapter 1, the following are the key planning challenges for Offaly County Council over the plan period (2009 – 2015) and beyond.

- Protection of the environment at a county level, including air and water quality.
- Arising from the MRPGs targets, how to plan for a county population of c.93,000 by 2020 (c.85,000 by 2015) and how to ensure that the growth of Tullamore meets its population target as part of the Midlands Linked Gateway of 30,000 by 2020 (c.24,000 by 2015) in order that it can be a driver of balanced development within the county and the region.
- Delivering a successful linked **Gateway** in the Midlands Region in conjunction with other key stakeholders (in particular Westmeath Local Authorities and Tullamore Town Council).
- How to address and manage the pressures for further very rapid population growth of urban areas in the east of the county (adjacent to the Greater Dublin Area) which has the potential to ‘hinder’ the success of Offaly’s component of the Midlands Linked Gateway and to prevent a balance of development throughout the county.
- To ‘harness’ continued population growth to achieve the success of the Midlands Linked Gateway and to ensure the development of the settlements in south and west Offaly i.e. a ‘rebalancing’ of development pressure.
- Shifting the development focus in those areas which have experienced rapid population growth to the provision of local employment, community and commercial services and recreational amenities for this newly expanded population.

- Ensuring that Offaly's hierarchy of settlements evolve and develop in a sustainable and attractive manner which respects their potential for growth as well as their existing character.

- Encouraging moderate and appropriate population growth into the rural areas which have experienced persistent population decline and how to reinforce the network of small villages as population and service centres within the county.

These issues are examined in more detail in Chapter 3, Overall Strategy, which follows.