

## Chapter 2 Survey & Analysis

### Introduction

This Chapter examines the key indicators of change occurring within Birr by examining past experiences and trends consequently predicting future development needs for the town and environs. Subsequently, it informs the challenges and strategic goals in Chapter 1 of this plan.

### 2.1 Demographic Context

#### 2.1.1 Population Growth

As illustrated in table 2.1, the early part of the 1990's saw the Birr population grow at relatively low-levels i.e. 2.5% during the timeframe 1991-1996. During the period of 1996-2002, growth levels rose to 6.1%. The greatest rise in population, over a 15 year period in Birr (1991-2006), occurred within the timeframe of 2002-2006. During this period of time, Birr increased its population from 4,091 to 5,053, a 14.6% increase.

**Table 2.1: Population of Birr town and environs 1991-2006**

Year	Birr Urban District	% Change	Birr Environs (excluding part of N. Tipp)	% Change	Total	% Change
2006	4091	06-02 14.0%	962	06-02 17.2%	5053	06-02 14.6%
2002	3590	02-96 7.0%	821	02-96 2.2%	4411	02-96 6.1%
1996	3355	96-91 2.3%	803	96-91 3.5%	4158	96-91 2.5%
1991	3280	---	776	---	4056	---

**Source: Central Statistics Office, Census Reports 2006, 2002, 1996 & Birr Town and Environs Development Plan 2004-2010**

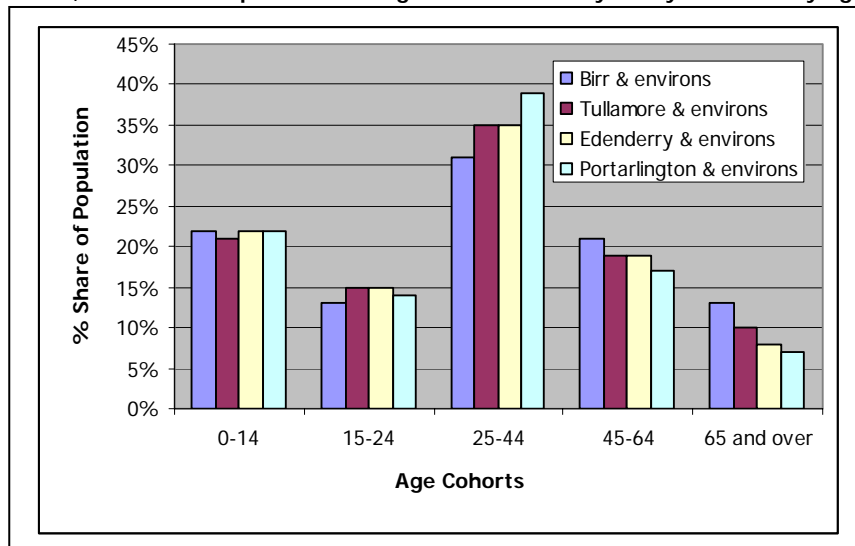
Birr's location means it is not as influenced by the "push" and "pull" factors on population movements when compared to other large towns which are closer to and therefore more under the influence of growth in the Greater Dublin Area. Population growth in Birr compares well to other similar large towns/comparison towns<sup>1</sup> in County Offaly. While other towns such as Tullamore, Edenderry and Portarlinton have seen very high levels of growth over a ten year period of 1996-2006, Birr has seen more sustainable levels of growth, therefore allowing social and physical infrastructure to keep pace with demands.

#### 2.1.2 Age Structure and Profile

Figure 2.1 compares Birr's age-structure and profile (% share of population) with similar large towns in County Offaly. Birr has a similar age-structure across each age-cohort when compared to each large town studied, although there are some significant differences when compared to Portarlinton. Birr has a similar 0-14 age-cohort in each comparison town. Within the 15-24 age-cohort, Birr has the lowest population base, although all of the towns display a low population base within this cohort. As noted in Paragraph 2.1, the towns closer to the Greater Dublin Area have seen high levels of population growth over the past 15 years (1991-2006). The significant growth within these settlements would appear to have been channelled into the 25-44 age-cohort. Although not as striking as the other comparison towns, Birr illustrates a substantial percentage share of population within the 25-44 cohort. Across the 45-64 and "65 and over" cohorts, Birr has a higher percentage share of population than the comparison towns. It is important to ensure that relevant services are provided for across these age-cohorts including employment opportunities, childcare facilities, retirement homes, public parks, etc.

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, large/comparison towns refers to Tullamore, Edenderry and Portarlinton.

Figure 2.1: Year 2006, % Share of Population of Large Towns in County Offaly Classified by Age-Cohorts



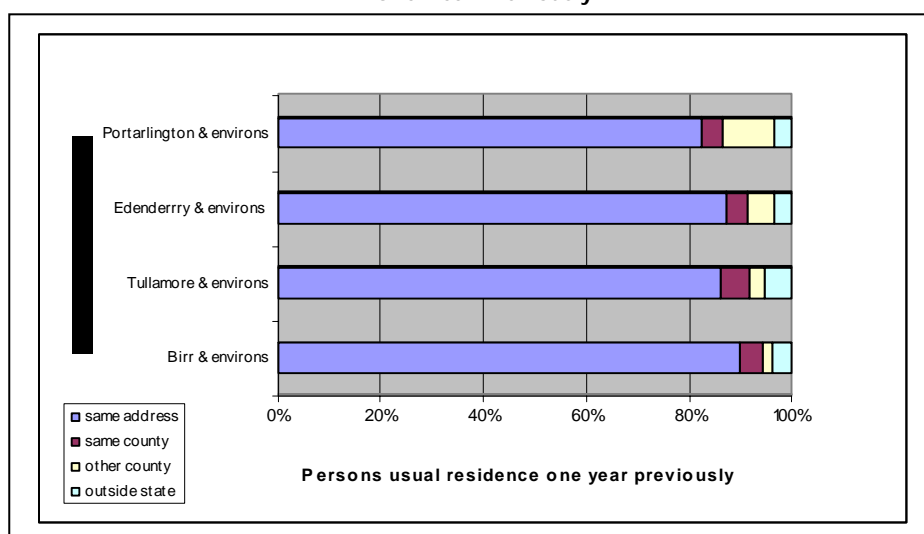
Source: Central Statistics Office 2006

### 2.1.3 Population Stability

Figure 2.2 highlights where usual residents of comparison towns (2006) were residing one year previously (2005). The figures are calculated as percentage share of population. Birr would appear to have a stable population base when compared to the comparison towns. The comparison towns have a greater increase in usual residents with a "Different Address" 1 year previously than Birr. The most significant change to population distribution for Birr is coming from the "Outside State" and "Same County" categories. For the comparison towns, the most significant change to population distribution, which differs from Birr, has come from the category "Other County", which would correspond to the influence of Greater Dublin Area on these settlements.

In order to support the role of Birr as a **"Key Service Town"** and **"Large Town"**, the settlement will need to perform well in attracting a share of population from its hinterland which also includes people from adjoining counties. The on-going provision of a **greater base of services and economic activity** are key to achieving this status.

Figure 2.2: Year 2006, % Share of Population of Large Towns in County Offaly Classified by Persons Usual Residence One-Year Previously



Source: Central Statistics Office 2006

### 2.1.4 Migration Flows

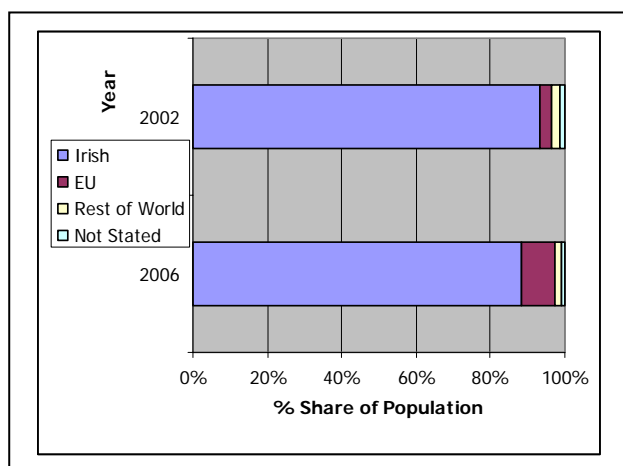
In-ward migration into comparison towns is a good indicator of a strong economic climate in each settlement. Figure 2.3 examines the percentage share of population in Birr by nationality between 2002 and 2006. There has been a 6% rise in

percentage share of population under the category of “EU” citizens, while the percentage share of population in the category of “Rest of the World” has remained the same at 2%. The percentage share of population in the category of “Irish” has decreased from 93% to 88%. Figure 2.4 compares the percentage share of population in each large town for the year 2006. In comparison, Tullamore and Edenderry has a greater, all be it moderate increase, in the percentage share of non-Irish population.

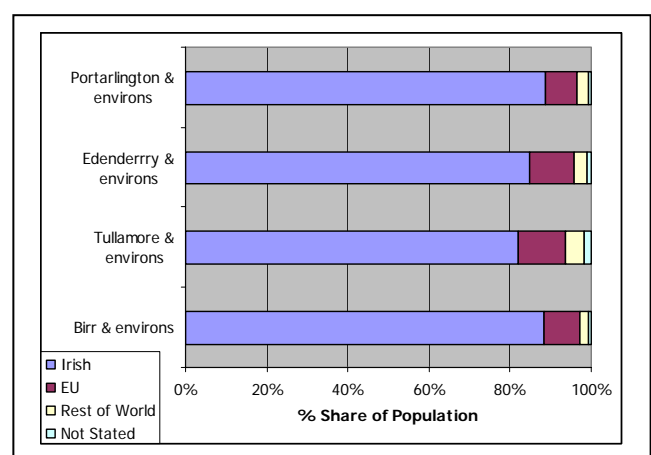
During challenging economic conditions there is a real possibility, especially in the short term, that the population may decline as a result of outward migration. It is an important aim of this plan to stabilise this element of the current population and to allow for a base for future population growth in the medium to long term. Therefore, this plan will continue to **shape Birr** as an **attractive urban environment to live, work and to visit**.

The plan will continue to encourage economic and employment opportunities for all its residents. Birr has a **proud history** and **strong sense of community** which will be **reinforced** if the residents can be encouraged to stay and continue to take a **sense of ownership** of and **belonging to the town**. The chapters on community, economy and local-area based strategies will underpin the need to sustain population growth, and subsequently the further development of the community within Birr.

**Figure 2.3: Persons Usually Resident (and present in their Usual Residence on Census Night) in Birr Classified by Each Nationality**



**Figure 2.4: Year 2006, Persons Usually Resident (and present in their Usual Residence on Census Night) in Large Town Classified by Nationality**



Source: Central Statistics Office, Census Reports 2006 & 2002

### 2.1.5 Other Planning Indicators

Other planning indicators on issues such as transport, accessibility and movement, economy, employment, enterprise, tourism and retail, housing, community, social and cultural development are analysed within their relevant chapters. Findings arising from these chapters are also fed into the challenges, goals and strategic objectives of this plan as set out in Chapter 1.

## 2.2 Population Projections

As already discussed in Chapter 1, the Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines (2004) have set population projections for the “**Western Development Area**” of the region and Birr’s role within same. This plan will support such projections for the town and environs.

### 2.2.1 MRPG’s Approach

The MRPGs (2004) estimate that the “**Western Development Area**” of the region will require a population growth of **3,500-5,500 persons** over the period **2004-2020**, with the “**bulk**” of this growth to be **channelled into Birr**.

For the purposes of this plan, “**bulk**” is defined as **65%** of the projected population growth. Therefore the following has been adopted:

- At the lower end of the target - 65% of 3,500 (**2,275**) of population is estimated to be channelled into Birr to **2020**.
- At the upper end of the target - 65% of 5,500 (**3,575**) of population is estimated to be channelled into Birr to **2020**.

Tables 2.2 and 2.3 highlight the targeted population growth at the “**lower end**” and “**upper end**” of MRPG’s figures. The MRPGs base year of 2004, for Birr, is estimated through the 2006 CSO Census figures by calculating even growth between the CSO years of 2002-2006. For the purposes of this projection, calculations are made on the basis of even patterns of population growth every year between the MRPG’s target years of 2002-2020. The Councils accept that annual population growth will vary from year to year depending on economic cycles, migration flows, fertility rates and mortality rates.

The **upper end** target estimates that the population of Birr will grow by **22%** between the years of **2010-2016**. It is important to note that the growth levels projected at the **upper end** are moderately above that of the past growth rate in population between 2002-2006 within Birr (Source: CSO 2006). For the life span of this plan, the Councils will ensure that adequate zoning of land is made at the **upper end** of this projection to year **2016** with an estimated population of approximately **7,400 persons**.

**Table 2.2: Population Targets set for this Plan in Accordance With MRPGS**

Intervals	Year	Lower End	Upper End
MRPG's Target Years, 2004-2020	2020	7007	8307
Birr Town & Environs Devt. Plan 2010-2016 Target Years	2016	6438.25	<b><u>7413.25</u></b>
Birr Town & Environs Devt. Plan 2010-2016 Target Years	2010	5585.125	6072.625
MRPG's Target Years, 2004-2020	2004	4732	4732

**Table 2.3: Population Targets set for this Plan in Accordance with MRPGs**

Intervals	Increase in Pop 2010-2016	Increase in Pop per each year 2010-2016
Upper End	1340.625(22.08%)	223.43
Lower End	853.125(15.27%)	142.18

It is important to note that the Councils have reduced the residential zoning from the previous development plan 2004-2010. While it is recognised that the quantum of undeveloped residentially zoned land remains greater than the anticipated need under the MRPG’s/ Offaly Housing Strategy, the Councils will ensure development will occur in a proper and sustainable manner through implementation of the following planning tools at Development Management stage:

1. Sequential approach.
2. Phasing of development areas.
3. Development of Local Area Strategies/ Land Parcels.
4. Protection of environment and heritage.