

Chapter 9 Employment, Economy, Enterprise & Tourism

9.0 Aim

The following are the main aims of this chapter:

- To build on Birr's current economic strengths, recognise its challenges and strive to improve same, therefore ensuring that its people will have access to a range of quality employment opportunities in the town's catchment area, **"bringing people and jobs closer together"**:
- To promote Birr as a **"Tourism Centre"** for the **"Western Area"** of the Midlands and to continue to support/facilitate the development and diversification of tourism in an environmental and sustainable manner.

These aims are of high importance to Birr's success as a **"Key Service Town"** and will allow for a greater quality of life for the inhabitants of **South-West Offaly**.

9.1 Context

9.1.1 The National Economy

The **NDP 2007-2013** sets out the economic and social investment priorities necessary to realise the vision of a better quality of life for all. In excess of €54.6 billion will be invested nationally over this period to address **economic infrastructure deficits**, which are vital for the Country's future economic growth, regional development and environmental sustainability. A further €20 billion is to be invested in **Enterprise, Science and Innovation**.

At **county and regional level**, development of the Midlands Gateway as the economic driver of the region is set to be the largest beneficiary of national funding. However, Birr and neighbouring towns and villages, are also broadly included as priority areas for investment which may address the following areas: infrastructure, enterprise and employment, agriculture and food, tourism, culture & sport and social inclusion, as resources permit.

9.1.2 Employment Creation Agencies

The Councils acknowledge and support the role of **employment/investment promotion agencies and tourism agencies** which include: IDA, Enterprise Ireland, FÁS, Shannon Development, Fáilte Ireland and the County Enterprise Board. The County Development Board (CDB) plays an important role as agency co-ordinator for Birr.

With particular regard to Birr, **Shannon Development** is a government owned regional development company dedicated to promoting and developing the Shannon Region of Ireland. It has a regional office in Birr, which carries out a range of functions to facilitate and encourage new start-up enterprises and local businesses enterprises, including businesses incubator units.

9.1.3 Related Plans

The Councils' economic strategy is consistent with the principles of the National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020, the Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines (2004), Offaly County Development Board's – "Bringing the Future into Focus 2002-2012, A Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development" and Offaly County Enterprise Board's Action Plan under **"Towards 2016"**.

9.1.4 National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020

The NSS states the following in relation to Birr:

"With its built heritage and links to the Mid West Region, Birr has the potential to become a significant tourism centre and also one which further develops small enterprises in a high quality environment. The development of Birr as an e-commerce centre of excellence, builds upon the new Shannon Development Technological Centre on Brendan Street".

9.1.5 Midlands Planning Guidelines 2004

The MRPG's state the following in relation to Birr:

"The town of Birr with its substantial built heritage and strong links to the mid west region, particularly Roscrea, is an obvious growth centre. As a heritage town, Birr has much to offer in terms of architecture, history, amenity and leisure. The recent development of Birr Technology Centre has provided substantial support and an important location for knowledge-based industries in the software, multi-media and e-commerce sectors. A thriving entertainment and arts sector is also present in the town".

9.1.6 Offaly County Development Plan 2009-2015

9.1.6.1 "West and South" of the County

"The economy of South and West Offaly has traditionally been and continues to be heavily reliant on the primary sectors. This part of the county's proximity to the 3 Linked Midland Gateway towns (Tullamore and Athlone) can be harnessed to stimulate population and economic growth in West and South Offaly. It is acknowledged that Birr and Ferbane towns have particular roles in the services (including business and commerce) sector of West and South Offaly. It is also envisaged that tourism and tourist related activity will continue to be an important factor in sustaining the economy and provision of employment within this portion of the county. The Mid-Shannon Area Tax Incentive Scheme will assist in encouraging the development of tourism within those areas of Offaly designated under the scheme".

9.1.6.2 Tourism

The Offaly County Development Plan 2009-2015 recognises that Birr is critical to establishing strong economic links with other tourist areas in the County and the Midland Region in its entirety. Birr, with its built heritage and links to the Mid West-Region, has the potential to become a significant tourism centre and one which further develops small enterprises in a high quality environment.

9.1.6.3 Fáilte Ireland

Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority, was established under the National Tourism Development Authority Act, 2003 to guide and promote tourism as a leading indigenous component of the Irish economy. The organisation provides strategic and practical support to develop and sustain Ireland as a high - quality and competitive tourist destination. In this context, their mission is broadly:

"To increase the contribution of tourism to the economy by facilitating the development of a competitive and profitable tourism."

Fáilte Ireland works in strategic partnership with tourism interests to support the industry in its efforts to be more competitive and more profitable and to help individual enterprises to enhance their performance.

9.1.7 A Tourism Strategy for County Offaly

A Tourism Strategy for County Offaly was published in 2006 on behalf of the Board of the Offaly LEADER+ Company, with co-operation from the Inter Agency Group of Offaly County Development Board. The Councils recognise the importance of the Strategy and will seek to facilitate appropriate tourism development in line with the Strategy's recommendations. 8 tourist products were identified for the County as part of the Strategy. They are as follows: Slieve Blooms, Waterways, Birr/Birr Castle Demesne, Monastic Heritage, Tullamore, The Peatlands, Offaly Sports and Leisure and Offaly Lifestyle and Culture.

9.1.8 Mid Shannon Incentive Scheme

A pilot tax-incentive scheme for tourism development in the Mid-Shannon area was introduced in 2007 by the Department of Finance. The aim of the proposed Scheme is to incentivise the sustainable development of tourism in the centre of Ireland with a particular reference to the Mid-Shannon Corridor. The scheme includes Birr, and will support the development of new tourism infrastructure or the refurbishment of existing tourism infrastructure along the mid-Shannon corridor.

The nature of the tourism buildings and infrastructure, which will qualify under the Scheme, is set out in guidelines issued by the Minister for Arts Sport and Tourism in consultation with the Minister for Finance. The Councils will seek to build on this opportunity to further develop and enhance the tourism economy in the Birr area.

9.1.9 West Offaly Tourism Initiative

West Offaly Tourism Initiative involves Offaly County Council leading a co-operative and collaborative process involving statutory and non-statutory bodies and interests in order to plan for and develop the tourism potential of the West of the County. To date, a master plan for tourism development in the area has been produced, and the Councils will continue to work with relevant and interested parties to implement specific projects to develop tourism in line with this masterplan.

9.1.10 Economic Profile

9.1.10.1 Principal Economic Status

Table 9.1 provides the principal economic status for persons aged 15+ years in Birr over the period 2002-2006. In this short period of time, persons "at work" increased by over 2% and unemployment marginally decreased to 6.32%. For 2006, the % share of population categorised as "student", "looking after home/family", "retired" and "other" was similar to the County % share of population. The % share of population categorised as "unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability" was at 7.1%, when compared to the county share of 4.4%.

Table 9.1: Principal Economic Status (Persons 15+)

Principal Economic Status	Birr town and environs		County Offaly
	2002 % Share	2006 % Share	2006 % Share
At work	49.08%	51.42%	56.90%
Looking for first regular job	0.74%	1.48%	0.90%
Unemployed having lost or given up previous job	6.45%	6.32%	4.40%
Student	8.38%	7.42%	8.70%
Looking after Home/Family	14.83%	14.40%	13.50%
Retired	14.58%	11.53%	10.90%
Unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability	4.19%	7.10%	4.40%
Other	1.72%	0.30%	0.30%
Total	100%	100%	100.00%

Source: Central Statistics Office, Census Reports 2008

Table 9.2 indicates the persons on the Live Register recorded for the Birr Local Office taken at annual intervals. Between the years 2002-2007 there have not been any consistent trends in persons claiming employment assistance or employment benefit, with rates increasing and decreasing on an annual basis. In 2008, the world "banking crisis" coupled with Ireland's slowing construction activities, caused a dramatic increase in the Live Register both in Birr and in

County Offaly. These statistics indicate a slowing economy which is likely to impact on the future development of Birr, and indeed County Offaly, in the short to medium term.

Table 9.2: Persons on Live Register

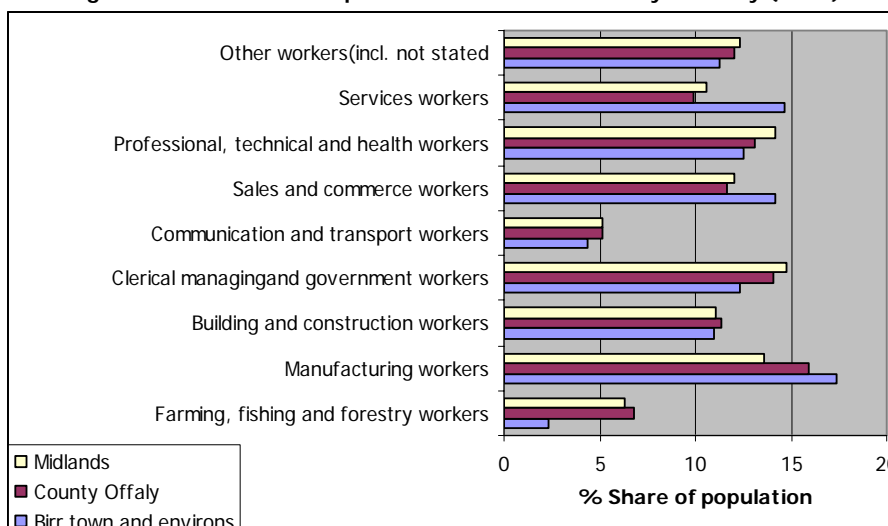
Annual Change (By Month)	Birr Local Office	Annual % Change	County Offaly	Annual % Change	Birr Local Office, Annual % Share of County Offaly
Oct-08	1261	33.72%	4862	48.14%	25.94%
Dec-07	943	8.27%	3282	18.57%	28.73%
Dec-06	871	-1.25%	2768	-0.11%	31.47%
Dec-05	882	5.63%	2771	8.12%	31.83%
Dec-04	835	-7.02%	2563	-9.75%	32.58%
Dec-03	898	9.25%	2840	7.58%	31.62%
Dec-02	822	-	2640	-	31.14%

Source: Central Statistics Office Census Reports 2002 & 2006

9.1.10.2 Labour Force/Employment

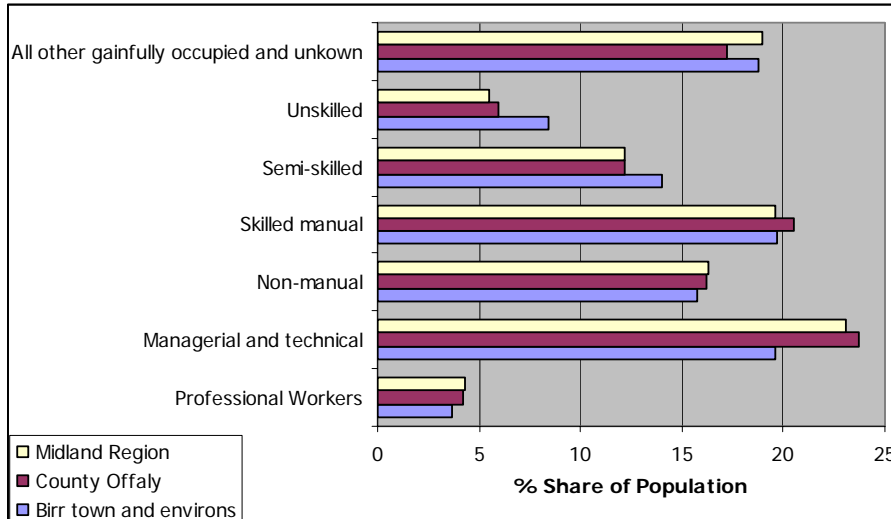
Figure 9.1 displays the % shares of persons at work by industry in Birr, County Offaly and the Midlands. Some of the key points emerging from this table relate to the services, sales and commerce sectors, building and construction and manufacturing sectors. Birr has a high % share of population working in the services, sales and commerce sectors when compared to County Offaly and the Midlands. Birr, County Offaly and the Midlands, have similar % shares of persons employed in the building and construction sector, between 10-11%. Birr recorded a higher % share of persons working in the manufacturing sector and it is important to maintain this level of employment in this area. It would be expected that the % share of persons employed in the professional, technical and health sectors will increase in the future, given Birr’s vision to become an important location for knowledge-based industries in the software, multi-media and e-commerce sectors. Figure 9.2 highlights persons classified by socio-economic group. This table illustrates a skilled workforce similar to County Offaly and the Midlands. As already stated, given Birr’s vision of higher order employment opportunities, while sustaining existing employment industries, it would be expected that the % share of people employed in professional, managerial and technical areas would increase.

Figure 9.1: % Share of Population - Persons at Work by Industry (2006)



Source: Central Statistics Office, Census Report 2006

Figure 9.2: % Share of Population - Persons Classified by Socio-Economic Group (2006)

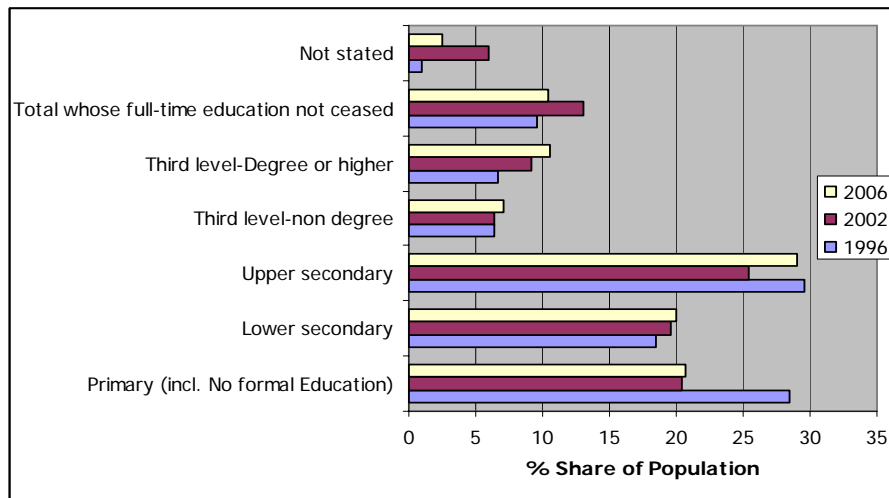


Source: Central Statistics Office, Census Report 2006

9.1.10.3 Educated Workforce Native to Birr

Figure 9.3 illustrates the % share of persons in Birr, aged 15+ years, classified by highest level of education for the years of 1996-2006. Results are positive indicating that the level of education is rising, particularly at third level-non degree and third level-degree or higher.

Figure 9.3: % Share of Birr Population Aged 15+ Years – Classified by Highest Level of Education



Source: Central Statistics Office, Census Reports 1996, 2002, 2006

Figures 9.4 and 9.5 display private households in permanent housing units in Birr, classified by personal computer and access to the internet, for the period 2002-2006. Results indicate a strong increase in computer ownership and internet access over a short-period of time. Overall, these results support Birr’s vision as an important location for knowledge-based industries in the software, multi-media and e-commerce sectors.

For the period 2002-2006 - Private Households in Permanent Housing Units in Birr, Classified by:

Figure 9.4: Personal Computer

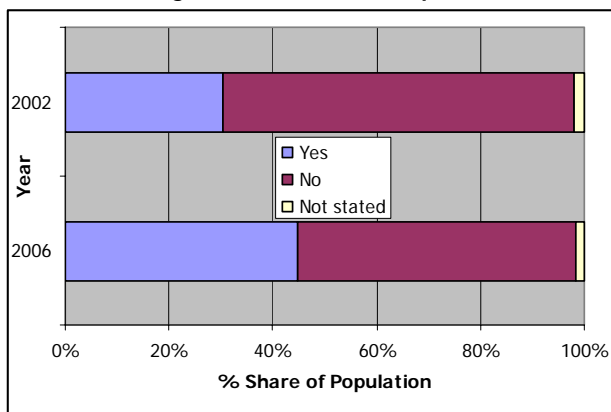
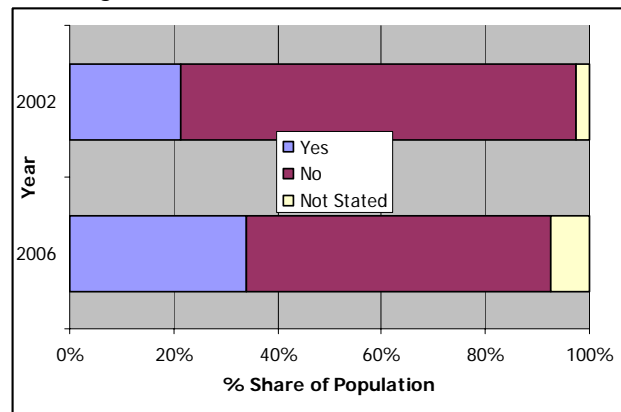


Figure 9.5: Access to the Internet



Source: Central Statistics Office, Census Reports 2002 & 2006

9.2 Strategy

The following main principles (in conjunction with Chapter 3) establish the overall economic strategy for the purposes of this plan, having regard to its existing and potential economic strengths in the West-Midlands.

9.2.1 Birr – Attractive Place to Do Business

As highlighted in Chapters 1 and 8, Birr is strategically located in the west-midlands of Ireland. The town has good access routes and economic ties to Ireland's large economic cities of Dublin, Limerick and Galway, the Midlands Gateways of Tullamore-Athlone-Mullingar, and Roscrea town. As illustrated in Chapters 3, 8 and 10, Birr has adequate infrastructure provision to support future economic development, with future upgrades already planned for, along with a sustainable vision for future town development.

Birr is in close proximity to four third level colleges, Athlone Institute of Technology, Tipperary Institute, University of Limerick and Limerick Institute of Technology. In recent times, Birr has built a strong image of knowledge-based industries in the software, multi-media and e-commerce sectors. These sectors are strongly supported by other sectors. For example, Birr has a strong services base catering to the surrounding agricultural hinterland and a good niche retail market supported by its strategic location for tourism.

The high quality of lifestyle on offer in Birr, in terms of, built and natural environment, history, culture, amenity and leisure, is a key driver to its attraction to workers, businesses and tourists' alike.

In accordance with the MRPGs' population **target** levels for Birr, coupled with the need to provide a strong employment base and an alternative to long distance commuting, provisions have been made to provide for an increase in employment activity (refer to Chapter 3: Development Strategy and Chapter 6: Local Area Strategies).

9.2.2 Factors Influencing Future Economic Development

Availability of Zoned Land

The Councils have adequate levels of zoned land available in particular at identified locations throughout Birr town and environs, which provides for the future economic growth of Birr as a **"Key Service Town"** in a plan-led and sustainable manner (refer to Chapter 3).

Availability of Infrastructure

Investment in infrastructure is paramount for the facilitation of future economic development activity within Birr. Chapter 10: Infrastructure and Environment, highlights the infrastructural requirements for Birr in the form of policies and objectives. This includes adequate provision/upgrading of the following in particular:

Transportation
Road - Increasing accessibility to airports/ ports/other regions. Increasing accessibility and movement for all modes of transport in and around the town.
Water Services
Water Supply, Wastewater Treatment Infrastructure.
Energy Management
Sustainable use of Energy and Electricity Infrastructure.
Telecommunications
Broadband, Mobile Phone/Telephone Infrastructure.
Waste Management

▪ Councils – Role as Facilitator

The Councils in partnership with the County Development Board provide a **co-ordinating** role for all development agencies and are **facilitators** for local employment initiatives. The Planning Authority will continue to assist in pre-planning advice and implement a positive approach towards employment generating development.

9.2.3 Settlement Hierarchy - Type/Scale of Enterprise and Employment

The Councils' strategy for sustainable employment is compatible with the County settlement hierarchy. Future development must have regard to Birr's settlement location within the overall settlement hierarchy and its capacity to facilitate the scale of such development proposed.

9.2.3.1 Large-scale development

Optimum locations for **large-scale development** proposals are considered in accordance with Birr's location within the identified tiers of the settlement hierarchy. In general, large-scale **multi-national companies** display a preference for locations within or within proximity to large urban areas that can provide a labour force, skills, infrastructure, services, accessibility and business and social networks. In contrast, established **Irish-owned companies** are distributed more widely.

The Councils are supportive in encouraging and making provisions for increased employment and enterprise activity, including ensuring that sufficient land is zoned at optimum locations (refer to Chapter 3 and Chapter 6), the provision of necessary infrastructure, where possible and measures in encouraging and sustaining critical mass levels to allow their future economic development.

9.2.3.2 Small-Medium Enterprises (SME's)

The term small enterprise refers to an individual business/enterprise which **employs less than 10 persons** and the term medium enterprise refers to those which employ up to 50 persons. The Councils acknowledge that the development of small-scale projects with long-term employment potential are important to the future development of Birr as stated in the NSS and MRPGs. Offaly County Enterprise Board (CEB) is actively involved in promoting and encouraging the development of SME's throughout the County. The Council further encourages such development within Birr.

The Councils continue to take a proactive and flexible approach on a case-by-case basis in the identification and location of employment activity in Birr as displayed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 6.

9.2.3.3 Employment Opportunity Sites – Tullamore Road and Roscrea Road

Lands have been zoned to the north of the town on the Tullamore Road for a high quality business/science/technology park i.e. in the style of 'campus' development. These lands represent an aspiration towards a significant scale of higher order employment-generating activity i.e. recognising Birr's role as a driver for south-west Offaly in providing employment opportunities for its present and future inhabitants. Any development must contain high quality buildings

along the N52 coupled with open space/edge zoning and quality landscaping/green spaces throughout the site. The resulting park would be approximately 14ha (35 acres) in size.

Lands to the South of the town on the Roscrea Road have been zoned for residential, commercial, open space/sports/recreation/amenity and business/employment. This last element of approximately 19ha (47 acres) is seen as an ideal location for quality business/employment to locate, in line with Birr's role within the County.

Development proposals relating to the south eastern corner of this site shall be required to incorporate Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS – refer to Chapter 10, Section 10.2.2.4), and include provisions for this portion of the site to also serve as an amenity area, where appropriate.

9.2.4 Tourism

9.2.4.1 Birr – Tourism Centre for West Midlands

Birr is located within the Shannon (Mid-West) Tourism Region, which is one of the most popular destinations, attracting approximately 25% of total tourists to the country. The town has been identified by Shannon Tourism as one of the core areas with significant potential for tourism development within the region. Tourism has potential to bring economic benefits to a town, and it can also benefit residents through the improvement of the town's environment resulting from ancillary developments and applied conservation measures.

Birr is an established tourism centre for the Western Area of the Midlands. Much of the tourism activity generally focuses on day trips to Birr Castle and its Demesne by tour operators. The town has significant potential to act as a central base in close proximity to other important tourist destinations including Slieve Bloom Mountains, Clonmacnoise, Shannon Harbour, Leap Castle and Kinnitty Castle.

9.2.4.2 Built Heritage - "Georgian Heritage Town"

Birr's attractive built history is a key element to the town's success as a tourism destination. The 2 and 3-storey pastel Georgian buildings line the town centre streets.

Birr Castle and Demesne and Historic Science Centre are national attractions. Historic Birr developed around the Castle estate of the Parsons family. The Castle received over 80,000 visitors in 2007, including 30,000 visitors at the Game and Country Fair (www.discoverireland.ie/offaly).

As stated in Chapters 4, 7 and 12, the Councils will continue to protect the character of structures and buildings of interest in Birr taking account of their importance to Birr's tourism industry. As stated in Chapter 8, the Councils will also continue to improve the public realm and connectivity of the town, which will add to Birr's attraction as a place to visit. The development of pedestrian and cycling linkages around the town will provide visitors with a safe, comfortable and accessible environment to move around.

9.2.4.3 Lifestyle and Culture - "The Birr Experience"

Tourism polls would suggest that it is Ireland's timeless traditional side that continues to hold the key to the country's draw as a tourist destination. No more is this apparent than in Birr, with its **"Warm Welcome"** and **"Traditional Heritage"**. The town has good accommodation, eating and drinking options along with interesting shops and annual festivals, including Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival.

The Councils will continue to facilitate the staging of these events where appropriate and will seek to build on Birr's successful experience in hosting such events. In addition, the Councils will continue to promote, facilitate and support festivals and events, particularly because of the contribution that such events bring to the town.

9.2.4.4 Sport and Leisure

As stated in Chapter 11, Birr is a sporting town with strong traditions. There is wide variety of sporting and leisure facilities in Birr, which continue to be beneficial to promoting tourism in the area. There is also particular potential for promoting the viewing of traditional sporting activities in Birr, such as hurling, to foreign visitors.

As stated in Chapter 5, the Councils will continue to improve the hierarchy of open space in Birr and subsequently the town's parks and sporting fields.

9.2.4.5 Arts and Culture

The Arts encompass many forms including the visual arts, music, literature, performance, drama and architecture. The Council's Arts Office continues to provide funding and a developmental information and advisory service. An Arts Plan has been prepared for the county and provides a framework from which the arts service can develop over the next five years (refer to Chapter 11). The Councils recognise the valuable contribution of Birr Theatre and Arts Centre to the cultural life of Birr and the county.

9.2.4.6 Conferencing Facilities

The Councils recognise that conference business is, and has, significant potential to continue to contribute to tourism revenue in the town. The Councils will encourage building on the opportunities that this established tourism attraction can offer.

9.2.4.7 Signposting of Tourism Facilities

As stated in Chapters 5 and 8, there is proliferation of signposting in the town. In the case of tourism facilities and tourist attractions, standardised directional signs may be allowed, by licence, on the roadside margin. Such signs shall be sized and colour coded in accordance with the NRA's publication, "Policy on the Provision of Tourist and Leisure Signage on National Roads Signs", 2007.

9.3 Policy

Employment and Workforce

BTEP 09-01 It is the Councils' policy to facilitate the development of Birr as an e-commerce centre of excellence.

BTEP 09-02 It is the Councils' policy to seek to **promote and diversify** the local economy as prescribed under the National Spatial Strategy, Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines and in accordance with the County's agreed settlement hierarchy which provides for balanced development.

BTEP 09-03 It is the Councils' policy to **co-operate with potential employers and local, regional and national enterprise authorities**, most notably IDA, Enterprise Ireland, Offaly County Enterprise Board, Shannon Development and FÁS in the attraction of investment into Birr, including both overseas investment and local investment and the provision of employment/enterprise.

BTEP 09-04 It is the Councils' policy to support **employment creation** including where it can mitigate against long distance commuting.

BTEP 09-05 It is the Councils' policy to encourage and facilitate existing and/or future **decentralisation** to Birr.

BTEP 09-06 It is the Councils' policy to actively encourage, facilitate and provide for the location and development of **knowledge-intensive** and **technology based specialisation companies** in Birr, as appropriate and in accordance with development/environmental standards.

BTEP 09-07 It is the Councils' policy to **facilitate** and work pro-actively with other interest groups (both public and private sector) in the **location of industry, business and enterprise** in particular by:

Zoning of lands within an adequate range of locations for both industry and business/employment uses which can facilitate the provision of large-scale and small-scale development, as appropriate. This includes the identification and possible reservation of lands at suitable locations which will accommodate, where appropriate - business/commercial activity, industry, enterprise, retail etc. having regard to proper planning and sustainable development. The Councils will protect zoned lands from inappropriate development that would undermine future economic activity or the unsustainable development of such areas.

BTEP 09-08 It is the Councils' policy to ensure that sufficient industrial land is available when required, and to encourage and facilitate the expansion of existing industry where it conforms with the proper planning and development of the areas involved.

BTEP 09-09 It is the Councils' policy to **actively encourage the redevelopment of brownfield sites and the reuse of disused buildings** for enterprise and employment creation, in particular disused sites, when such a development is in compliance with the **land-use zoning matrix**.

BTEP 09-10 It is the Councils' policy to **co-operate with and facilitate** Government agencies, and other bodies where feasible, in **encouraging home-based employment**.

BTEP 09-11 It is the Councils' policy to encourage the provision of **incubator units** at a scale appropriate to Birr's location in the County Settlement Hierarchy.

BTEP 09-12 It is the Councils' policy to **encourage and establish links** between Birr and higher educational institutes e.g. Athlone Institute of Technology, Tipperary Institute, University of Limerick and Limerick Institute of Technology and other higher educational institutes as appropriate, which will improve the skills base/education of inhabitants within Birr.

BTEP 09-13 It is the Councils' policy to facilitate the continued development of the Birr Technology Centre on Brendan Street in conjunction with Shannon Development.

BTEP 09-14 It is the Councils' policy to examine the feasibility of establishing a business and technology park for service employment on Council owned lands at Syngefield and to promote and facilitate the development at this location.

BTEP 09-15 It is the Councils' policy to facilitate the provision of new broadband telecommunications infrastructure in Birr, which offers significant future employment opportunities.

Tourism

BTEP 09-16 It is the Councils' policy to promote and facilitate the development of Birr as a Tourism Centre for the West-Midlands.

BTEP 09-17 It is the Councils' policy to promote and foster a growing sense of innovation and entrepreneurship in the tourism sector in Birr.

BTEP 09-18 It is the Councils' policy to continue to support and encourage increased coordination, cohesion and linkages between agencies involved in tourism development e.g. Fáilte Ireland (East and Midlands Region), Shannon Development, Waterways Ireland and Offaly County Council and Birr Town Council.

BTEP 09-19 It is the Councils' policy to continue to improve pedestrian and cycling linkages around the town and environs, which will provide visitors with a safe, comfortable and accessible environment to move around.

BTEP 09-20 It is the Councils' policy to promote and facilitate conferencing facilities in Birr and to support future tourism opportunities, which may offer the opportunity to build on this existing attraction to the town, based on its location and attractive built heritage.

BTEP 09-21 It is the Councils' policy to encourage tourism related employment and tourism related developments in Birr town and environs where the scale and size of the proposed development is appropriate and in keeping with the character of the area and respects the intrinsic character of Birr.

BTEP 09-22 It is the Councils' policy to protect the distinctive Georgian and Historic character of the town in order to provide a sound basis for the development of tourism.

BTEP 09-23 It is the Councils' policy to facilitate and encourage the provision of a range of accommodation and ancillary tourist services.

BTEP 09-24 It is the Councils' policy to promote Birr as a tourist destination, especially for over-night stopping tourists.

BTEP 09-25 It is the Councils' policy to support the continued development of the Theatre, Arts and Cultural Centre at Oxmantown Hall and other cultural and tourist events such as the Birr Vintage Week and the National Country Fair.

BTEP 09-26 It is the Councils' policy to investigate and support best-practice environmental management including energy efficiency, waste management and procurement and recycling in tourism enterprises/accommodation providers throughout Birr.

BTEP 09-27 It is the Councils' policy to support the development of agriculture where it is compatible with the sustainable development of Birr and commensurate with sustaining the farming community.

BTEP 09-28 It is the Councils' policy to encourage the development of alternative rural based small-scale enterprises. The Councils will consider the use, nature and scale of developments when assessing such applications. In addition, the Councils will also consider the requirement to locate such developments in rural areas of Birr.

BTEP 09-29 It is the Councils' policy to consider favourably proposals for on-farm based diversification, which is complementary to the agricultural operation on the farm and is operated as part of the farm holding.

BTEP 09-30 It is the Councils' policy to facilitate and encourage the reuse of redundant farm buildings of vernacular importance for appropriate agri-tourism enterprises, subject to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

BTEP 09-31 It is the Councils' policy to liaise and co-operate with statutory, local development, sectoral and community/voluntary agencies and groups to develop economic, social and cultural benefits for the rural community and its service base.

9.4 Objectives¹

Employment and Workforce

BTEO 09-01 To promote the Birr Technology Park, in co-operation with Shannon Development.

BTEO 09-02 To reserve a site for a technology complex on the banks of river at Mountsally to complement the Birr Technological Centre on Brendan Street.

Tourism

BTEO 09-03 To implement the Tourism Strategy for Offaly published in 2006 (McIver Consulting) relevant to Birr.

BTEO 09-04 To establish an appropriate signage policy and investigate funding opportunities for integrated directional and interpretive signage with a timeframe for implementation in Birr.

BTEO 09-05 To prepare a Tourism Development and Management Plan in association with Shannon Development, the Midlands East Tourism Authority and adjoining Local Authorities for key tourist sites in the county, including Birr. This plan should include the built and natural features which have an established tourist draw and will set out requirements in relation to tourism facilities and accommodation of visitors.

BTEO 09-06 To preserve and protect the town's Architectural, Industrial and Scientific heritage as a basis for expansion of tourism.

BTEO 09-07 To protect architectural heritage and streetscapes including railings and street furniture.

BTEO 09-08 To implement a programme for the provision of new street name signage and ornamental sign posting to appropriate heritage design.

BTEO 09-09 To promote Birr as a Heritage Town in co-operation with Bord Fáilte, Shannon Development and local tourism organisations.

BTEO 09-10 To co-operate with community organisations in enhancing the town's appearance.

BTEO 09-11 To promote use of the arts centre at Oxmantown Hall.

BTEO 09-12 To facilitate the continued development of Birr Historic Science Centre.

¹ The order of listing of objectives is not intended to indicate priorities. Subject to the availability of resources, it is the Councils' aim to monitor and accomplish the objectives listed in this section within the period of the plan.