

Chapter 3 Context and Challenges

Introduction

This Chapter examines the key indicators of change occurring within Tullamore by examining past experiences and trends consequently predicting future development needs for the town and environs. Subsequently, it highlights the key challenges facing Tullamore over the plan period (2010-2016).

3.1 Demographic Context

3.1.1 Population Growth

For the ten year period from 1996-2006, the Tullamore urban area and its surrounding rural areas have experienced an upward trend in population growth.

As illustrated in Table 3.1, Tullamore experienced a significant population increase during the 2002-2006 inter censal period. According to the 2006 Census results published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the population of Tullamore Town area was 10,270 in 2002. Including the environs area, it is estimated by the CSO that the total population was 11,098 in 2002. Between 2002 and 2006, the population of the urban areas increased by 6.1% or 630 persons, and significantly the population of the environs area increased by 144.8% or 1,199 persons from 2002. This represents an overall increase of 16.5% since 2002 and is over double the national population growth figure of 8.2% for the 2002-2006 period.

The unprecedented population growth can be attributed to strong net in-migration and a higher rate of household formation particularly within the environs area.

Table 3.1: Population of Tullamore Town and Environs 1991-2006

Year	Tullamore Urban	% Change	Tullamore Environs	% Change	Total	% Change
2006	10,900	06-02 6.13%	2,027	02-06 144.8%	12,927	02-06 16.48%
2002	10,270	02-96 11.38%	828	02-96 1.22%	11,098	02-96 10.55%
1996	9,221	96-91 6.9%	818	91-96 1.24%	10,039	91-96 6.46%
1991	8,622	---	808	---	9,430	---

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

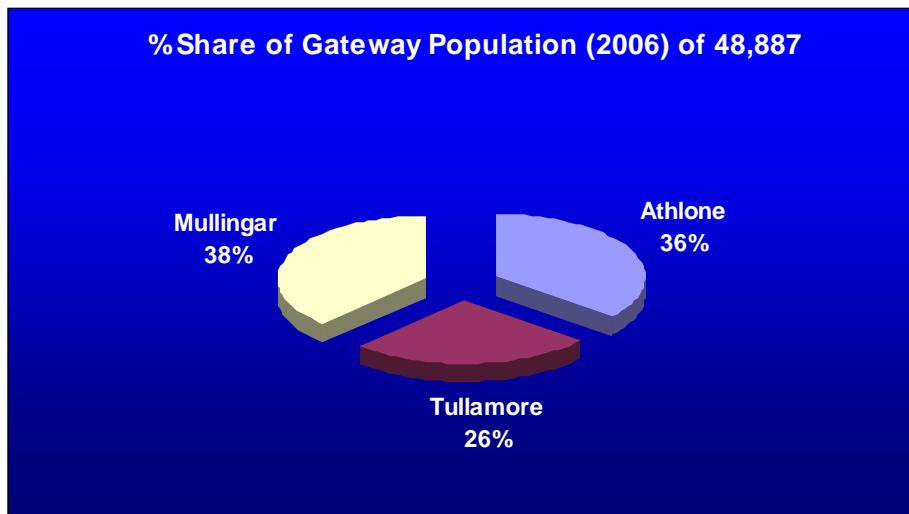
3.1.2 Population Projections

Tullamore's growing population provides a foundation on which a thriving economy can continue to be built into the future. The degree to which change in-migration can influence this growth makes population projection difficult, as migration is the most unpredictable constituent of population change. However, as the NSS has designated Tullamore as part of the **Midlands Linked Gateway** (Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar), it is envisaged that a substantial increase in population of Tullamore should be accommodated within its landuse and planning framework. The MRPGs target that the Linked Gateway towns must combine to achieve a population of c.100,000 to attract development at a National and International level and to provide a level of employment and services to rival and compete with other regions. The Midlands Linked Gateway is prescribed to account for an estimated 55,000-60,000 additional growth targeted for the region during the period 2004-2020.

Tullamore as part of the Linked Gateway, is prescribed to grow to a population of 30,000 by the year 2020 with Athlone and Mullingar prescribed to take the balance of 100,000 persons.

Tullamore's position as County Offaly's primary urban centre within an extensive rural hinterland means that it can cater for the employment and services requirements of a population much greater than what it currently accommodates.

Figure 3.1: Population of Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar 2006



Source: Census of population 2006 for Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar

3.2 Planning Challenges

Arising from the provisions of the population statistics and projections for Tullamore coupled with the provisions of the MRPGs in relation to the role of Tullamore within the Midland Region and Midlands Linked Gateway, the following are key challenges facing Tullamore over the plan period (2010-2016) and beyond:

- Delivering a successful linked **Gateway** in the Midlands Region in conjunction with other key stakeholders (in particular Westmeath Local Authorities).
- Arising from the MRPGs targets, how to ensure that the growth of Tullamore meets its population target as part of the Midlands Linked Gateway of 30,000 by 2020 in order that it can be a driver of balanced development within the county and the region.
- Provision of necessary infrastructure and services to underpin anticipated growth within Tullamore.
- Providing that new developments areas of Tullamore enjoy the provision of local employment, community and commercial services and recreational amenities for the newly expanded population.
- Ensuring that Tullamore evolves and develops in a sustainable and attractive manner which respects its potential for growth as well as its existing character.
- Encouraging the development of Tullamore in a sequential manner providing for the sequential expansion of the town from central areas into the environs areas in a coherent manner with the aim of facilitating the complete integration between the town and environs areas.

- Facilitating the provision of improved amenities within the town, securing and encouraging the appropriate re-development, renewal and improvement of areas within the town and to encourage high quality design in new development making Tullamore Town Centre an attractive place to visit.
- The continued protection of the environment at all levels, including air and water quality.