

Chapter 2: Economic Development Strategy

Strategic Aim

To promote a strong, resilient, competitive, sustainable, low carbon, digital, inclusive and diverse economic base supported by enterprise, innovation and skills to enable people to live, create, study, visit, invest and work in Birr. Also to support the capitalisation of the high quality tourism attractions in Birr Town.

2.1 Context

Project Ireland 2040, The National Planning Framework sets out that the development of a strong economy supported by enterprise, innovation and skills as a National Strategic Outcome, which will depend on creating places that foster enterprise and innovation and attract investment and talent. The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) encourages an asset based development

It is noted that Birr is designated a 'Self Sustaining Growth Town' in Table 2.5; Settlement Hierarchy of the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-27, due to its function as;

'A sub-county market town that has significant employment and service functions relative to its regional and local catchment, has good regional transport links and has the capacity for continued commensurate growth to become more self-sustaining. It supports the regional driver role of Tullamore, and acts as an important local driver providing a range of functions for its resident population and its surrounding catchment including housing, employment, services, retail and leisure opportunities. The town should grow at a sustainable level appropriate to its position in the settlement hierarchy.'

An established measure of the employment 'health' of a settlement is a measure called the 'Jobs to Resident Workers Ratio'. This is the relationship between the number of people in the labour force and the number of jobs in any defined area. Birr has a healthy Jobs: Resident Workers Ratio of 0.965¹.

Significant employment sectors in Birr and Crinkill include manufacturing, commerce and trade, and professional services.

Industry	Birr Census 2016 % share	Offaly Census 2016 % share	State Census 2016 % share
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	1.6%	7.3%	4.4%
Building and Construction	3.9%	6.1%	5.1%
Manufacturing industries	18%	16.9%	11.5%

¹ A ratio of 0.7 or more indicates a strong economic function as set out in Figure 1 of Appendix A of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region.

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Commerce and trade	22.8%	19.7%	23.9%
Transport and communications	4.4%	4.9%	8.6%
Public administration	4.5%	6.1%	5.3%
Professional services	20.2%	22.5%	23.5%
Other	24.5%	16.4%	17.8%

Figure 2.1 Industries in Birr (CSO, 2016)

Principle Economic Status	Birr Census 2016	Offaly Census 2016	State Census 2016
	% share	% share	% share
At work	46.5%	50.3%	53.4%
Looking for first regular job	1.1%	0.9%	0.8%
Unemployed having lost or given up previous job	12.1%	8.6%	7.1%
Student	8.5%	10.7%	11.4%
Looking after home/family	9.2%	9.9%	8.1%
Retired	16.4%	14.3%	14.5%
Unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability	5.6%	5.0%	4.2%
Other	0.3%	0.3%	0.4%

Figure 2.2 Principle Economic Status (CSO, 2016)

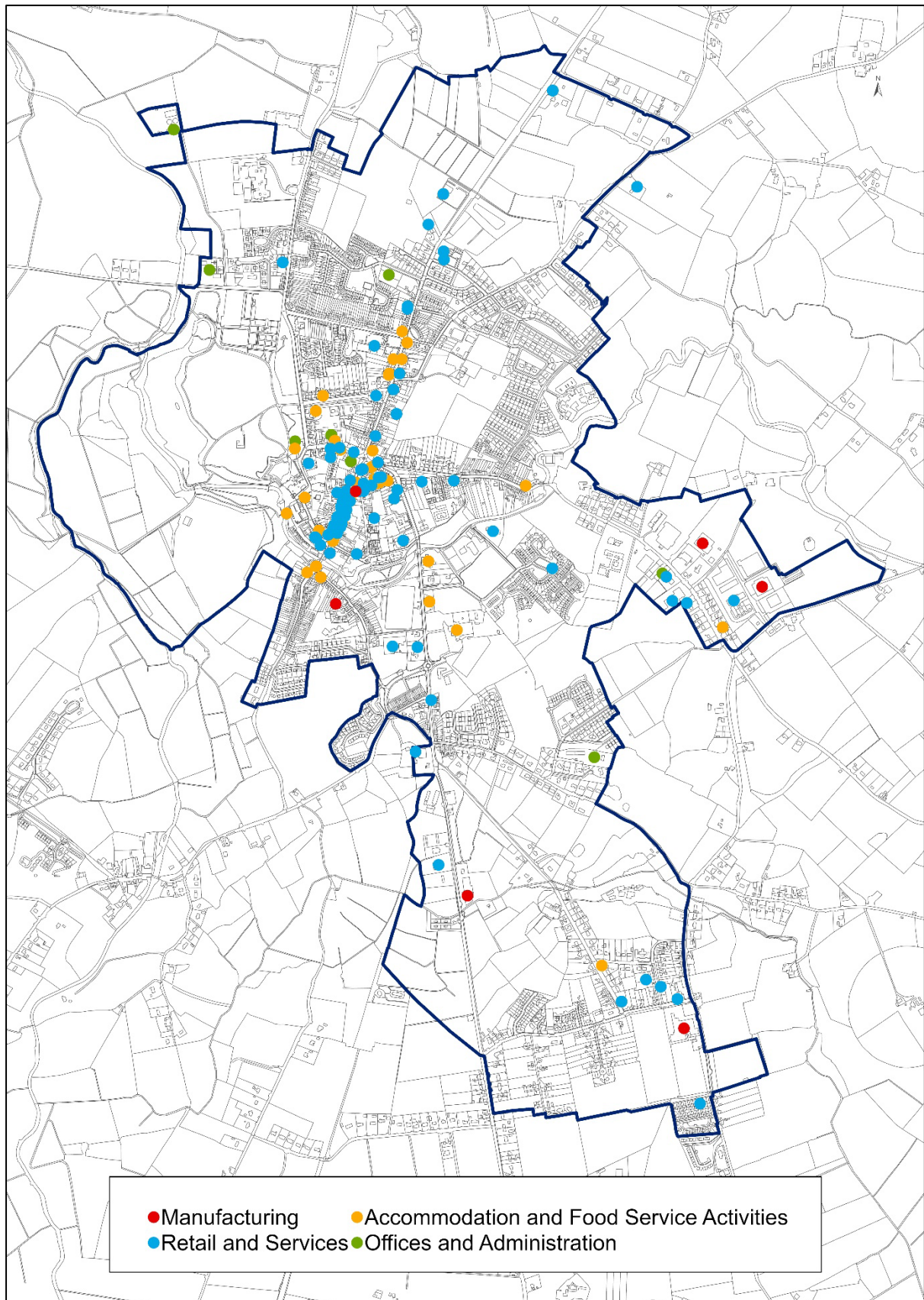


Figure 2.3 Location of Commercial Properties in Birr

One of the key enablers in attracting potential investment and employment to Birr is the availability of appropriately zoned lands. This Plan takes an asset based approach in establishing an overall economic growth strategy for Birr, identifying and building on a combination of economic, natural and built assets and opportunities, guiding enterprise and employment development to appropriate locations with the necessary infrastructure in place.

Based on the priorities of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 (published 2022), this Local Area Plan intends for the future economic development of Birr to be future focused and centred around the following priorities;

- Transition to a zero carbon town; and
- The continued development through smart specialisation in existing areas of regional strength; tourism, manufacturing, scientific research and data analytics.

2.2 Tourism

Tourism can play a key role as an economic driver for Birr with the town offering a range of attractions to both overseas and domestic visitors. The town is located in a central location within ‘Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands’ while also being situated in close proximity to a number of nationally and regionally important tourist attractions such as Lough Boora Discovery Park, River Shannon, Slieve Bloom Mountains and Clonmacnoise.



Figure 2.4 Regional Tourist Attractions in the vicinity of Birr

2.2.1 Birr Castle, Gardens and Science Centre

Birr Castle is an impressive castle located within Birr Town. It's award winning 50 hectares of gardens hosts rare trees and flowers, wildlife and walking routes along its rivers, lake and waterfalls and a playground that boasts the largest treehouse in Ireland.

Birr Castle is also home to a science gallery and museum and an astrophysics observing facility known I-LOFAR (Irish Low Frequency Array) the Irish addition to a European-wide network of state-of-the-art telescopes used to observe the universe in unprecedented detail at low radio frequencies. It allows Irish astrophysical research to be integrated into one of the most sophisticated telescopes on the planet. This facility allows Irish researchers and students access to a facility involved in some of the most ground-breaking and advanced research projects in modern astronomy, including projects in big-bang cosmology, deep extragalactic surveys, cosmic magnetism, cosmic rays, solar physics and space weather. In this regard, the Council recognises Birr as a Technology Hub. It's location in the Midlands draws on the rich astronomical heritage of Birr Castle Gardens and Science Centre, going back to 1845, with the Great Leviathan Telescope.

The Offaly Tourism Statement of Strategy 2017-2022 includes Birr Castle, Gardens and Science Centre as one of the 'Big Six' visitor attractions in the county, which are integral to encouraging visitors to increase their dwell time in Offaly.

2.2.2 Birr Shannon Gateway Town

The Shannon Tourism Masterplan 2020 identifies Birr as a Gateway Town with the potential to act as a portal to the region providing;

- significant visitor services such as accommodation, food and drink;
- ancillary experiences of cultural heritage, evening entertainment;
- critical access to public transport to major centres and opportunities to provide transport links to smaller settlements closer to the core Shannon masterplan area;

This Plan recognises that there are significant opportunities for Birr to leverage and develop its own tourism product that not only supports the Shannon tourism destination but also encourages visitors to the region to stop and stay in Birr.

2.2.3 Greenways

Greenways are trails built to be used by cyclists, pedestrians and other non-motorised transport. They are generally traffic-free routes. With no traffic, the routes are generally safer and can be enjoyed by most members of society. In order to further develop Birr's role as a regional visitor destination, this Plan supports the establishment of a network of greenways in the vicinity of the town. A network of greenways, which could follow old railways lines, the Camcor River and Killaun Bog could connect the town with and support some other tourism attractions in the region, including the River Shannon, Clonmacnoise, Lough Boora Discovery Park, the Grand Canal Greenway, Portumna and Roscrea. This is addressed further in Chapter 6 Biodiversity and Landscape.

2.2.4 Birr Town Trails

There are a number of walking routes around Birr which connect the town's built, natural and heritage assets. The Birr Town Trail provides two walking routes through the town to visitors. Route 1 explores Birr Town through Emmett Square, O'Connell Street, Church Street, St Brendan's Old Churchyard, Birr Castle Demesne, Oxmanstown Mall and Emmet Street and covers a distance of 1.2km. Route 2

measured at 1.1km starts at Emmet Square, passing John’s Mall, Birr Civic Offices and Roman Catholic Church, Camcor River, Market Street before passing through the Main Street back to Emmet Square.

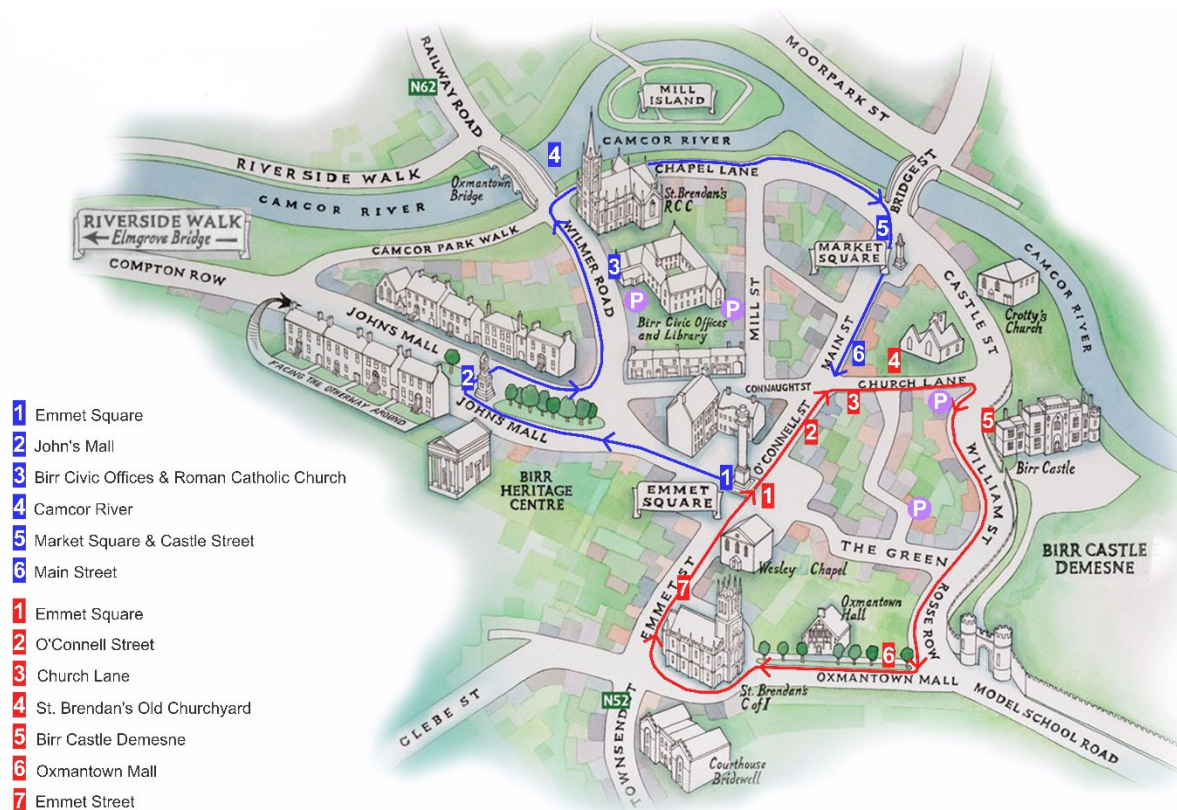


Figure 2.5 Birr Town Walking Trails

2.2.5 Festivals

The Council recognises the important role that festivals play in developing brilliant visitor experiences that encourage people to visit areas outside of traditional tourism hotspots and outside of peak times. Birr is home to a host of annual festivals;

- **Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival**, held every August bank holiday weekend, is one of the oldest town festivals in the country. It celebrates the community, the heritage tradition, the visual arts, the built environment and the hospitality of the town.
- **Offline Film Festival** is a contemporary celebration of the pioneering adventure into photography associated with Mary, Countess of Rosse, wife of the Astronomer Earl.
- **Hullabaloo!** celebrates the creative and imaginative intelligence of children and young people whose lives were deemed worthy of protection in the Law of the Innocents proclaimed near Birr more than 1300 years ago.
- **Scripts** is a testimony to the long traditions of Drama, Publishing and Printing in which Birr has excelled for more than two centuries.
- **Birr Festival of Music & Voice** represents the pursuit of excellence in the making of music in castle, townhouse, farmhouse and cottage that has characterised Birr and its neighbourhood over centuries.
- **Irish Hot Air Ballooning Championships** have been held in Birr Castle Demesne in recent years and sees the skies above the town filled with dozens of hot air balloons.



Figure 2.6 Irish Hot Air Ballooning Championships, Birr

2.2.6 Night Time/After Dark Economy

In line with the Birr Interpretative Strategy 2021, this Plan recognises the opportunity to build a post-5pm tourism economy in the town embracing food, activity, recreation, and entertainment such as theatre, music, outdoor performances, night time tours and events. In so doing, the Council will facilitate increased bed nights supply in accordance with the 2025 targets set out in 'Tourism: An Industry Strategy for Growth to 2025' by The Irish Tourism Industry Federation.

2.2.7 Living History and Storytelling

Whilst Birr's Georgian architecture is well known, it also has an interesting early Christian monastic site and a medieval story to tell. St. Brendan founded the early Christian Monastic Site later known as St. Brendan's Monastery in Birr. This Monastery has both national and international significance and highlights the importance of Birr in the early Christian period in Irish history.

This Plan supports the Birr Interpretative Strategy 2021 identification of overarching themes, primary stories and supporting narratives of Birr that will add to the richness and depth of future visitor experience and in turn growing its tourism offering and revenue. The town has the potential to sustain new specialist guided tours such as Birr By Night, Early Christian/Monastic Heritage Tours, Women's Tour of Birr, Birr's Military History, Science Tour, Architectural Tour Through the Ages, Cultural and

Arts Tour, The Children's Tour, Environmental and Ecological Tour and Birr's Ghost Tour. A key recommendation from Birr Interpretative Strategy 2021 in this regard is the need to upskill/train/network specific guiding and visitor interfacing staff in order to follow good international practice but also to create a valuable selling tool for the town's tourism product.

In particular, it is recognised that the creation of physical spaces and different communication mediums known as 'visitor touch points' at different locations around the town can support the telling of these stories and reveal to the visitor unexpected, long hidden or overlooked aspects of the town's past.

2.2.8 Signage

In order to effectively communicate the history and heritage of Birr to visitors and to create a distinct destination image for the town, this Plan supports the;

- erection of bespoke signage for tourism attractions throughout the town, including interpretative panels and directional signage along designated tourist trails.
- development of an Orientation Signage and Street Interpretation Programme.

2.2.9 Tourism Hub

The Birr Interpretative Strategy 2021 recommends that a dedicated tourist information office/point be developed in Birr Town Centre in the form of an easily accessible/pedestrianised plaza-like space which could house a progressive, multi-functioning and commercialised tourist office to provide a gravitational centre for visitors to the town. Any tourism office/point could be staffed year-round by local people on a voluntary basis following the model of the existing tourism office in Tullamore. It could aspire to house small micro tourist / recreational businesses such as walking tours, bike hire and genealogy services.

2.2.10 Food Tourism

The Midland Regional Food and Drink Strategy 2021-2024 refers to the food and drink sector having the potential to strengthen the attractiveness of the Midlands as a destination to visit by developing a sense of local pride in the region's produce. This local pride can help support the commercial viability of local food and drink enterprises such that visitors to the region encounter a vibrant and proud food culture. This Plan supports the development of evocative food and drink experiences that will boost tourism and accelerate job creation and enterprise development in Birr building on the success of the vibrant Farmers Market held weekly in Marion Square and the range of high quality cafes, restaurants and artisan food stores in the town.

2.3 Enterprise

The Plan supports major employers in the town such as Grant Engineering in Crinkill, large convenience retailers; Tesco and Lidl, a number of service stations throughout the town, Arrabawn Co-Op, in addition to the County Arms Hotel and Dooley's Hotel through its policies supporting the ongoing development of suitable employment on these lands and zoning sufficient land to allow potential expansions. Significant lands have also been zoned for Enterprise and Employment at Townparks and on the Roscrea Road in order to support the future enterprise and employment function of the town.

Lands at the Tullamore Road into Birr Town have been identified as having the potential to facilitate opportunities for a Business and Technology Park to accommodate technology based industry and advanced manufacturing, compatible office space and research and development based employment within high quality, highly accessible, campus style settings. The Council places an emphasis on attracting high end, high quality, value added businesses and corporate headquarters in these area in addition to promoting high quality sustainable design and aesthetic quality to enhance its corporate image and identity.

2.3.1 Healthy Place-making

Place-making and quality of life is increasingly recognised as a key factor in attracting investment, skills and talent, enabling enterprise development². Birr's public realm has improved significantly in quality over the past decade due to the implementation of the Public Realm Plan in 2009 with high profile interventions such as at Emmet Square and the Birr Castle, Gardens and Science Centre combining with smaller-scale improvements, such as street signs and heritage frontages, which have contributed to making the town an attractive place to live, work, visit and invest.

The success of these improvements have been recognised with Birr winning the Chambers Ireland Excellence in Local Government award for Enhancing the Urban Environment in 2018, by way of its public realm projects winning the Tidy Town Silver in 2019 and being chosen as a 'Destination Town' under the Government's 'Destination Towns' initiative launched in 2019 by the National Tourism Development Authority. The purpose of the 'Destination Ireland' funding, as issued through Fáilte Ireland, is to boost the attractiveness and tourism appeal of the town. The funding will assist in measures to sustain and improve the quality of the tourist experience in the town, a benefit of which is to increase visitor numbers and also to protect and increase direct employment in tourism related businesses in the town and wider area.

This Plan recognises that Birr needs to develop its own distinct impactful and memorable destination image that develops its potential as a destination for residents, visitors and investors and which defines the unique attributes, assets, themes and stories of Birr. This requires co-ordination of approach in relation to sign types and styles, street furniture, street tourism information and use of innovative technology related not only to tourist information but also the history and heritage of Birr. Providing a range of job opportunities in town centres can also support wider social inclusion programmes and enhance the attractiveness of town centres as places for people to live.³

2.3.2 Birr Courthouse

The Birr Courthouse, built in 1830, but currently lying vacant, has significant potential to be refurbished and repurposed as a multi-purpose community space, a digital / connected hub, as well as for arts and culture purposes.

² As set out in The Programme for Government – Our Shared Future 2021-2025.

³ Section 6.2 Town Economy from Town Centre First – A Policy Approach for Irish Towns (2020).

2.3.3 Industry and Manufacturing

Industry and manufacturing remain core contributors to the local economy. It is therefore important to retain existing established industrial and manufacturing based development and also to expand further industrial activities appropriate to the town.

This Plan consolidates and supports the town's significant industrial employment base at Syngefield Industrial Estate which is home to established industries such as Romaquip machinery manufacturing, Kennedy Motors, Larkin Tool Hire, Nanoclean Ltd, Milne Foods Ltd, LCC Eurotex, Rudds Fine Foods, Irish Recycling Products, in addition to industrial lands on the Roscrea Road such as EJ Ireland Manhole Covers, Applied Concepts Blasting Technologies and Oliver Douglas and Sons Builders Providers and Fuel Depot.

This Plan allows for expansion of these sectors by zoning lands to the north east of Syngefield and southwards on the Roscrea Road.

2.3.4 Small and Medium Enterprise (SME)

The development of small and medium scale projects with longer-term employment potential are essential to the future development of Birr. Emphasis is placed on recognised best practice approaches to stimulating SME activity including incubation units, clustering of similar such enterprises and networking. Small and medium enterprises may include manufacturing, food and beverage production, services, repairs, agriculturally related enterprises and logistics.

Incubation units, workshops and business starter units provide small and medium businesses with a base to develop and grow production, research and development and enterprise activities. Offaly County Council will continue to work pro-actively with national, regional and local development bodies and agencies including the Local Enterprise Office and the Offaly Local Community Development Committee to support such start-up enterprises.

The Council through its zoning of land in the LAP for compatible land uses and implementation of Development Management Standards from the Offaly County Development Plan is facilitating and supporting the creation of favourable business ecosystems for innovation and entrepreneurship in which new players can emerge and thus support the development of new industrial value chains and emerging industries. This Plan recognises the potential to further strengthen collaboration and clustering activities between foreign and Irish owned enterprises, and between enterprises, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), and the research base.

2.3.5 Smart Specialisation

Smart Specialisation is one of the key economic principles adopted in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region.

Smart specialisation is an innovation policy concept that aims to boost enterprise innovation, contributing to growth and prosperity by helping areas to focus on their strengths. The approach involves assessing economic, higher education and other innovation assets to identify and select a limited number of priority areas for knowledge-based investments, focusing on an area's strengths and comparative advantages. This Plan with its policies and objectives adheres to broad, high level, current priorities for national enterprise-focussed RD&I investment as set out in the National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027:

- Enhancing the R&D capacity of SMEs
- Driving industry-academic collaboration and clustering to support an internationally competitive enterprise base
- Encouraging new technology adoption in Irish businesses
- Funding state-of-the-art research infrastructure including for the benefit of enterprise
- International connectedness in the area of enterprise research and innovation
- Supporting excellence in strategically important research areas.

Programmes for the delivery of these priorities include the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund, the SFI Research Centres Programme, Enterprise Ireland/IDA Ireland Technology Centres and Gateways, Knowledge Transfer Ireland and various RD&I funding supports from Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and Science Foundation Ireland.

2.3.6 I-LOFAR

I-LOFAR at Birr Castle allows exciting, world class scientific research and Ireland's world leading capability in big data and data analytics. Skills in software and big data that researchers will acquire from participation in I-LOFAR are in high demand in business and will open diverse and high quality career opportunities for them. The harnessing of big data and data analytics opportunities afforded by the presence of I-LOFAR and Stream Creative Suite, which provides hot desk facilities, office space, IT training facilities, industry focused events and research projects in science, technology, research, engineering, arts and mathematics affords Birr the potential to develop as a 'Technology Hub'. This 'Hub' can specialise in areas relating to research, development, education and innovation in Science, Technology, Research, Engineering, Arts and Maths (Stream) fostering best practice learning and cross sectoral collaboration, including film & image processing.

2.3.7 Smart Cities Technologies

Encouraging the greater adoption of digital technologies and broadband usage by enterprises of all sizes and from all sectors is a critical component of the Offaly Digital Strategy 2019-2022. This Plan will facilitate the necessary growth in Birr's Information Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure by;

- Supporting the upgrade of communications infrastructure and growing digitisation of ICT assets in the town;
- Facilitating broadband, Smart Technology and IoT (Internet of Things) services to enable deployment of integrated systems in appropriate locations in the town; and
- Enabling as many public spaces and buildings as possible with High Speed Broadband and public WiFi to enhance towns and villages and public realm spaces and enterprise development.

The Council recognises that Smart Cities Technologies, which integrate multiple technologies and IoT solutions, offer the potential to reduce the town's carbon footprint through emerging technologies such as green/cool roofs, smart grids/smart meters, waste robotics and the development of a digital infrastructure supporting the roll out and convenient use of electric vehicle charging points. In addition, the use of smart city technologies can lead to tech-inspired innovation and entrepreneurship that in turn will attract businesses and jobs, create efficiencies allowing services and infrastructure to be managed more sustainably and efficiently. The Council supports the establishment of a Smart Services 'Internet of Things' pilot in Birr during the lifetime of this Plan in this regard.

2.3.8 Remote Working, Co-working and Business Workspaces

2.3.8.1 Co-working Hubs

Offaly Local Enterprise Office (LEO) in partnership with Offaly Innovation and Design Centre, Offaly County Council and I-LOFAR has established a state of the art remote working hub in the town; BIRR Stream Creative Suite at the Birr Technology Park. The Council recognises that managed co-working hubs provide much more than a physical centre for start-ups and expanding enterprises, allowing important interaction between early stage entrepreneurs, remote workers, more experienced business owners and Local Enterprise staff. Increased investment in remote working hubs that are in locations that suit commuters and are close to childcare facilities will also potentially attract people to live in towns. ⁴

2.3.8.2 Live-Work Units

Traditionally office based activities have tended to have a high density of employment and whilst the impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic on the density of employees per office space is not yet clear, it is anticipated that employers will require lower densities and in some cases, offer a blended solution of office and remote working. The potential increase in working from home/e-working as a result of COVID-19 provides new opportunities for people who would like to live in Birr and also to increase the vibrancy of the town centre through the concept of a live-work unit.

A live-work unit can be defined as a single commercial unit designed to accommodate a residential element e.g. commercial ground floor with living accommodation over. Live-work units are used for business/enterprise to provide for uses such as office, medical and related consultations, data processing, software development, media associated uses, publishing and film production, artists and crafts studios, home-based economic activity and creative industries.

While this Plan supports the concept of home working, it is important that such activity is not injurious to the amenities of a predominantly residential area and therefore employment use in a dwelling should be restricted to the occupier(s) of the dwelling and such use should be subordinate to the main use of the dwelling as a residence.

⁴ Section 2.2 Digital Transformation and New Ways of Working and Living; Town Centre First – A Policy Approach for Irish Towns (2020)

2.4 Economic Development Policies

It is the policy of the Council to:

Tourism

EDP-01 Support Birr's role as a Tourism Destination Town having particular regard to its built heritage including Birr Castle, Gardens and Science Centre, its accessibility and proximity to key tourism attractions including natural amenities, and recreational opportunities including the Slieve Bloom Mountains, Clonmacnoise, Lough Boora Discovery Park and Banagher marina on the River Shannon.

EDP-02 Support the development of arts and cultural activities, new visitor accommodation and the establishment of a network of greenways in the vicinity of Birr to support the tourism industry in the town.

EDP-03 Support the development of the transformational public realm projects that will enhance the aesthetics of the town's built and natural character and improve the overall ambience and visitor experience of the town.

EDP-04 Support the emerging purple economy (night-time / after dark economy) of Birr and to increase the number of visitor overnight stays in the town.

EDP-05 Protect the distinctive Georgian and Historic character of the town in order to provide a sound basis for the development of tourism.

EDP-06 Support training initiatives for visitor services personnel related to the 'storytelling' of Birr's history and heritage.

EDP-07 Support the provision of a suite of Vista Viewers at potential resting and contemplation places based on the Town and Fan Trail in key locations as shown in Figure 2.5.

EDP-08 Support the development of a viewing platform around St. Brendan's Church.

EDP-09: Support the provision of recommendations set out in the Offaly Tourism Statement of Strategy 2017-2022 as it relates to Birr and subsequent editions.

EDP-10 Support the promotion of the Military History of Birr and Crinkill through the consideration of appropriate proposals for tourism related projects.

EDP-11 Support the Birr Scientific and Heritage Foundation in the initiative to have Birr's Great Leviathan Telescope designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in collaboration with the Dunsink and Armagh Observatories.

Enterprise

EDP-12 Support and promote the development of economic and enterprise development and activity in a manner which contributes to the transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable county.

EDP-13 Support the development and expansion of enterprise and employment within Birr, and to co-operate with all stakeholders, land owners and relevant agencies to attract investment.

EDP-14 Promote Birr as a competitive and attractive location for economic development emphasising Foreign Direct Investment.

EDP-15 Support IDA Ireland in the attraction of high value added manufacturing sectors and internationally traded sectors to Birr.

EDP-16 Promote the provision of incubation/start up units suitable for small businesses and start-up companies in general on appropriately zoned land.

EDP-17 Support and protect the development of agriculture within the Green Belt designation in Figure 6.13 Chapter 6 from encroachment by urban development uses.

EDP-18 Support the development of a 'Business and Technology Park' in the northern part of the town.

EDP-19 Ensure that sufficient industrial land is available when required, and to encourage and facilitate the expansion of existing industry, manufacturing and warehousing where it conforms with the proper planning and development of the areas involved.

EDP-20 Support the development of evocative food and drink experiences that will boost tourism and accelerate job creation and enterprise development in Birr.

EDP-21 Promote and facilitate the development of light industry, manufacturing, warehousing and logistics on appropriate zoned lands. Developments must achieve a high standard of layout and design including landscaping and screening and the delivery of a high quality working environment.

EDP-22 Improve the cluster-specific business environment by putting in place a favourable business ecosystem for innovation and entrepreneurship that supports the development of new industrial value chains and emerging industries.

Smart Specialisation

EDP-23 Support the development of Stream Creative Suite in Birr and its association with Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest, University of Limerick, Tipperary Institute, Irish Manufacturing Research, Mullingar and regional Business Innovation Hubs to create a

formal network of linked e-Hubs to leverage economies of scale in research, advanced manufacturing, collaboration, training and funding applications.

EDP-24 Support leveraging opportunities in big data and data analytics from Irish Low Frequency Array (I-LOFAR), which is the Birr-based Irish station in a European wide network of state of the art radio telescopes used to observe the universe at low frequencies, and in this regard facilitate the development of Birr as a technology hub.

EDP-25 Support smart specialisation partnerships in the town and wider region.

Smart Cities Technologies

EDP-26 Encourage new buildings to provide for installations of shared telco infrastructure (ducting) to future proof services.

EDP-27 Support the utilisation of digital technology to promote tourism, heritage, cultural and community services in the town.

EDP-28 Support the surveying of underground duct infrastructure in the town and digitise it to enhance awareness and use by Telecoms Industry.

Remote Working, Co-working and Business Workspaces

EDP-29 Support;

- (a) improved access to digital services and skills to support and grow economic and social activity for citizens, business, community and visitors;
- (b) improved access and use of Birr Library as a Community Hub with access to digital technology equipment, in line with 'Our Public Libraries 2022 - Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities'.
- (c) the provision of remote working hubs and co-working spaces within Birr in the interests of mitigating long commuting times;
- (d) the provision of live-work units as part of mixed-use developments in appropriate locations; and
- (e) home-working and other innovative forms of blended / location-less working which reduce the need to travel but are subordinate to the main residential use of the dwelling and do not result in a dis-amenity in an area.

Climate Action

EDP-30 Promote transformative projects with the support of Government funding streams for low-carbon focused projects.

2.5 Economic Development Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

General Economic Development

EDO-01 Ensure that an appropriate quantum of land is zoned for employment generating uses in Birr.

Tourism

EDO-02 Support the re-development of Birr Courthouse as a high quality multi-purpose space for creative artists in the visual, performing and digital arts.

EDO-03 Develop an integrated network of greenways, heritage/tourist trails and looped walks where appropriate (including taking into account the findings of the Appropriate Assessment), within the town centre and along the Camcor River and Killaun Bog.

EDO-04 Facilitate the erection of bespoke signage for tourism attractions throughout the town, including interpretative panels and directional signage along designated tourist trails.

EDO-05 Develop an Orientation Signage and Street Interpretation Programme that creates a distinct destination image for Birr that develops its potential as a destination for residents, visitors and investors.

EDO-06 Promote festivals and sporting events to increase the tourism, cultural and lifestyle profile of the town.

EDO-07 Develop a tourism information office in the town.

Smart Cities Technologies

EDO-08 Facilitate development of high speed broadband and digital infrastructure including roll-out of the National Broadband Plan.

EDO-09 Identify and seek funding at both National and EU level to support the provision of public access to high speed broadband and digital technology.

Remote Working, Co-working and Business Workspaces

EDO-10 Establish a Smart Services 'Internet of Things' pilot in Birr during the lifetime of this Plan.