

Chapter 5: Residential

Strategic Aim:

Deliver high quality housing in terms of design, mix, tenure, sequence and density to reasonably match the requirements of the different categories of households, which shall be constructed on the principles of universal design, life-long adaptability and energy efficiency, and developed in a manner which promotes compact growth and healthy place-making, and is in line with the Core Strategy in the County Development Plan.

5.1 Context

The Census in 2016 recorded a total of 2044¹ households in Birr. The existing housing stock is generally located to the north and east of Birr town with the majority of housing stock in Crinkill located to the north and south-west of the village.

In 2016, 30% of households in Birr were one-person households. This is higher than the state average of 24% for this household composition category. In 2016, 89% of the population of Birr lived in houses/bungalows, whilst 8% of the population of Birr lived in flats/apartments.

Unfinished housing developments as a legacy issue required a particular focus in the previous Town Plan. This issue has been resolved in Birr, thanks to the successful collaboration and co-operation from a number of stakeholders.

This LAP seeks to develop Birr in a manner that is consistent with its status as a 'Self-sustaining Growth Town' within the settlement hierarchy outlined in the County Development Plan (CDP). This LAP has had regard to the Town Centre First – A Policy Approach for Irish Towns (TCF Policy), a policy document that aims to create town centres that function as viable, vibrant and attractive locations for people to live, work and visit, while also functioning as the service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community. The Council also supports the Housing for All - A New Housing Plan for Ireland, 2021 (HFAP) with regard to the four pathways outlined below to achieving overarching objectives:

¹ The total number of households in the Birr Urban Electoral District (not including Crinkill).



Four Pathways
to *Housing for All*

Figure 5.1 Four Pathways for Housing for All
(Source: Housing for All: A New Housing Plan for Ireland 2021)

The Council has considered the current and future needs of the local community of Birr in making this Plan, with regard to quality public realm, sustainable mobility infrastructure and green spaces that facilitate vibrant, connected local communities and economies, as well as ensuring the delivery of the residential units allocated to Birr under the Core Strategy of the CDP.

5.2 Compliance with Core Strategy

Based on the Core Strategy for the county contained in the County Development Plan 2021-2027, 14.4 hectares of lands are zoned for 'New Residential' use to sustain the anticipated population growth and housing supply target for Birr (including Crinkill), which is 441 residential units with a population growth of 1,263 persons above the 2016 Census population of 5,052. Monitoring the number of units permitted and constructed enables alignment with necessary physical, social and community infrastructure.

5.3 Achieving Compact Growth

Securing compact and sustainable growth is a key aim of the Council - this means favouring more compact forms of development that focus on reusing 'brownfield' land, building up infill sites and reusing or redeveloping existing sites and buildings within Birr Town. The compact growth strategy as outlined in the NPF emphasises locating new development and investment in areas with existing physical and services infrastructure. Birr is well placed to support new development that will consolidate its footprint and contribute to the viability of services, shops and public transport. Increasing housing supply within the built-up footprint of Birr will enable more people to be closer to employment, recreational and sustainable transport opportunities.

As per the TCF Policy, the Council recognises the importance of having vibrant, accessible and lived-in town centres that are home to young and old, which are not seen as a second-best option to more peripheral locations. The vision for Birr is that growth planned for the town over the life of the Plan occurs in a sustainable and sequential manner, characterised by a compact, consolidated and permeable pattern of development linked by sustainable modes of transport including a robust network of pedestrian and cycle routes. The Council will encourage the appropriate redevelopment of brownfield and infill sites for residential and mixed uses within the existing built-up footprint of Birr Town in addition to making better use of under-utilised land and buildings including vacant, derelict and under-occupied buildings.

5.3.1 A Tiered Approach to Land Zoning

Appendix 3 of the National Planning Framework (NPF) requires the plan to adopt a Tiered Approach to Land Zoning. On foot of this, a Planning and Infrastructural Assessment (PIA) was prepared to assess the suitability of lands in Birr for future development. This assessment (Chapter 10) provides an assessment of potential sites for future development on the basis of serviceability/infrastructural/planning grounds. The PIA assists in the designation of lands as either Tier 1 lands (lands that are already serviced) or Tier 2 lands (lands that are serviceable within the life of the plan) and identifies the likely development services required to support new development. An indicative timeframe for delivery of critical infrastructure is also provided.

5.4 Residential Design

Residential schemes in Birr should provide for both a mix of dwelling size and dwelling type to cater for a diverse range of housing needs. The overall design and layout of residential development should be of high-quality and comply with the urban design principles contained in the Urban Design Principles set out in the Urban Design Manual – A Best Practice Guide (2009) along with the provisions of the relevant Section 28 Ministerial guidelines. It is a priority of the Council to ensure resilience is built into the housing stock in Birr through: Reuse, energy efficiency, lifetime adaptability, universal design, sustainable accessibility, and integration to ensure vibrant sustainable communities.

Housing should be of high-quality in terms of scale, design, mix, tenure, sequence and density, and should be located in optimum locations aligned with adequate social and physical infrastructure.

5.5 Special Needs Housing

There are a number of groups with specific design and planning needs including older people, people with disabilities and members of the travelling community. This Plan places emphasis on universal design in order to provide for those with specific housing needs. The mix and design of new housing for special needs housing in Birr will be influenced by a range of factors including:

- Consideration of the nature of the existing housing stock and existing social mix in the area;
- Desirability of providing for mixed, integrated and inclusive communities;
- The need to provide a range of new housing types, suitable and adaptable for all needs.

Offaly County Council is aware of the special needs of the Travelling Community in the Birr Area. It is the Council's aim to provide a good living environment for the Travelling Community including recommended standards of accommodation, sanitary facilities and pre-school education facilities.

5.6 Becoming an Age-Friendly Town



The Age-Friendly Strategy for Offaly 2018-2021 sets out a vision where the inclusion of older people is promoted, valued and actively encouraged in all areas of life. The strategy seeks to support older people to live independently with confidence, security and dignity in their homes for as long as possible and to encourage this age group to maintain, improve and manage their health and wellbeing. This Plan will seek to ensure, where possible, that homes in new residential developments are universally designed to the relevant standards. The Council will encourage age-friendly homes within new residential developments in Birr. These homes shall be designed having regard to the *Age-Friendly Ireland - Ten Universal Design Features, 2021*, and the best-practice guidance outlined in the *Building for Everyone – A Universal Design Approach*, by the Centre of Excellence in Universal Design in order to ensure that homes built are suitable for use across the life course for people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. Age Friendly Homes incorporate key features such as level access and connection to the outdoors. The homes are integrated into the neighbourhood and are capable of incorporating assistive technology to support ageing in place. Developing age-friendly homes helps to future proof housing for an ageing population.

As the population of Birr town is likely to continue to age, further dedicated services will be required for older people in order to contribute to an age friendly society. It is the Council's aim to make outdoor spaces and buildings in Birr attractive, accessible, inclusive and safe for older people, creating a walkable community with age-friendly spaces. It is a goal of the Age-Friendly Strategy for Offaly to provide opportunities for older people to stay socially connected and to play an active part in social networks. The Council will support an increase in the provision of smaller homes in developments, ensuring that older people can remain within the communities they have lived within.

The Council will support the provision of dedicated elderly services including assisted living, supported living, nursing homes and day care centres where the applicant can demonstrate there is an evidence-based need for these services. New development should be located on sites with good access to a broad range of services for older people. The Council will have regard to the principles as outlined in the *Housing Options for Our Ageing Population Policy Statement*. These principles are intended to inform strategic thinking and practical planning in developing housing options and supports for older

people. The Council will support development of good quality, well-connected, residential developments that incorporate a choice of housing tenures and types that will actively support ageing in place.

This will allow older people to choose housing that is appropriate to their needs, which will help them to enjoy more active, healthy and socially connected lives to age confidently and comfortably within their community.

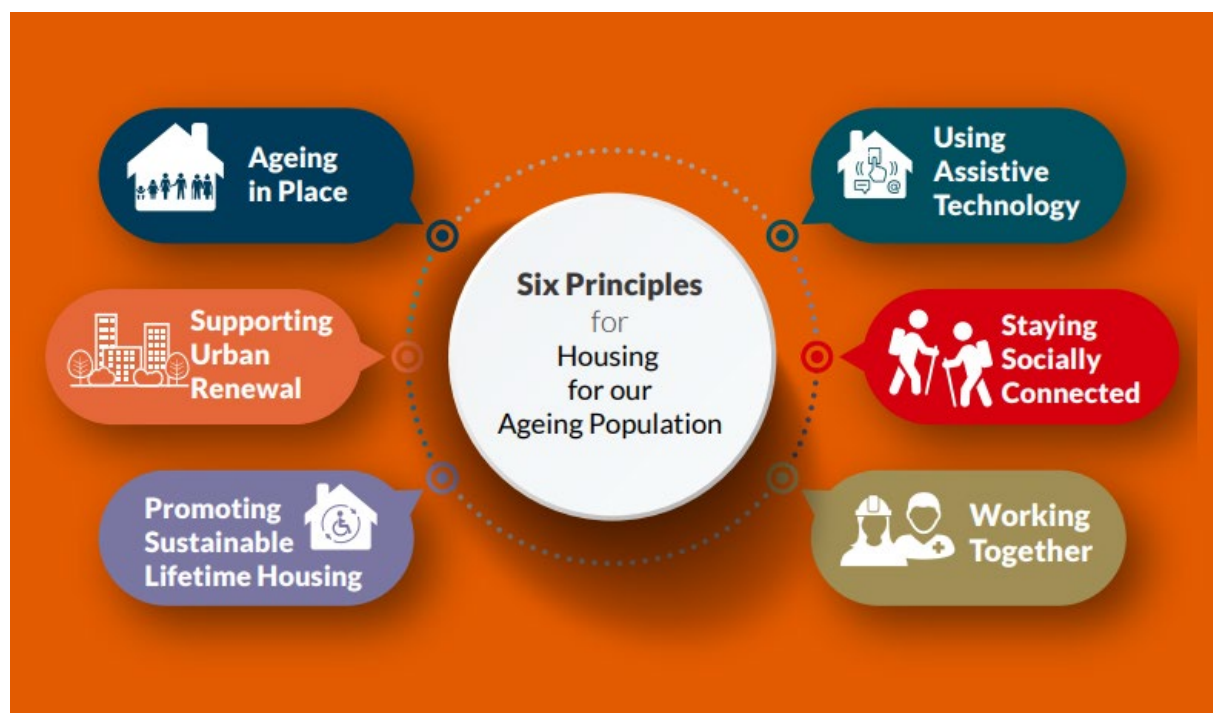


Figure 5.2 Six Principles | Housing for an Ageing Population
(Source: Housing Options for Our Ageing Population Policy Statement 2019)

All new housing in Birr should be reasonably accessible for older people and, in so far as possible, the design should provide for flexibility in use, accessibility and adaptability. The aim is to ensure that dwellings can meet both the immediate and changing needs of the occupant over the course of their lifetime including needs associated with moderate mobility difficulties and the normal frailty associated with the ageing process. This will enable older people, who wish to remain independent in their own home, to do so without the need for costly and disruptive remodelling of the dwelling. The Council recognises that to facilitate social interaction and to provide appropriate support for older people in Birr, housing shall be located close to amenities and services to enhance their general independence.

5.7 Vacancy, Dereliction, Re-Use and Land Activation

A survey of vacant homes in Birr Town was carried out by the Council's Housing Department in February 2022. The survey identified 78 no. vacant homes within the Birr Town boundary. It is the Council's aim to reduce the number of vacant homes in Birr.

Measures to support the change of use from vacant commercial units to residential use in Birr, where appropriate, will be supported by the Council under the Derelict Sites Act 1990 (as amended) or the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 (as amended).

The Council will also encourage the use of upper floors of existing retail/office units within the Town Centre as residential accommodation.

The planning authority will have regard to the *'Residential Zoned Land Tax – Guidelines for Planning Authorities, June 2022'* in identifying suitably zoned and serviced lands with the aim of bringing forward housing development.

5.8 Residential Policies

It is Council policy to:

RP-01 Encourage the compact growth of Birr Town and undertake a town centre first approach to ensure that development proceeds sustainably and at an appropriate scale, density and sequence and in line with the County Core Strategy Table.

RP-02 Remain within the allocated housing requirements set out in the County Core Strategy for Birr and Crinkill when facilitating residential development. In this regard, development shall not be permitted where it conflicts with the County Core Strategy.

RP-03 Encourage the appropriate redevelopment of brownfield and infill sites for residential and mixed uses within the existing built-up footprint of Birr Town.

RP-04 Require that an appropriate mix of housing type, tenure, density and size is provided in all new residential areas and in appropriate brownfield/infill areas to meet the needs of the population of Birr, including the provision of special needs housing, which includes housing for older people, people with disabilities, social housing, affordable housing and accommodation for the travelling community.

RP-05 Promote healthy place-making, increase the liveability factor of Birr, encourage the most efficient use of land, and ensure a mixture of residential unit types that are designed and constructed on the principles of universal design, life-long adaptability and energy efficiency.

RP-06 Encourage the reuse of upper floors above commercial premises in Birr for residential accommodation.

RP-07 Secure the provision of social infrastructure, community and recreational facilities in tandem with residential development.

RP-08 That Birr, a Self-Sustaining Growth Town, continues to grow at a sustainable level and at a commensurate scale in accordance with the Core Strategy Table in an effort to become more self-sustaining.

RP-09 Reinforce the attractive rural character of Crinkill, which exists at present, by permitting appropriate and sensitively designed new development.

RP-10 Promote an age-friendly town, which seeks universal accessibility and age-friendly homes in accordance with the *Age-Friendly Ireland - Ten Universal Design Features, 2021*, and the best-practice guidance outlined in the *Building for Everyone – A Universal Design Approach*, by the Centre of Excellence in Universal Design.

5.9 Residential Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

RO-01 In line with the requirements of the National Planning Framework, ensure that at least 30% of all new housing development is delivered within the existing built-up footprint of Birr Town.

RO-02 Encourage and be proactive in the habitation of vacant homes in accordance with the Council's Vacant Homes Action Plan 2018.