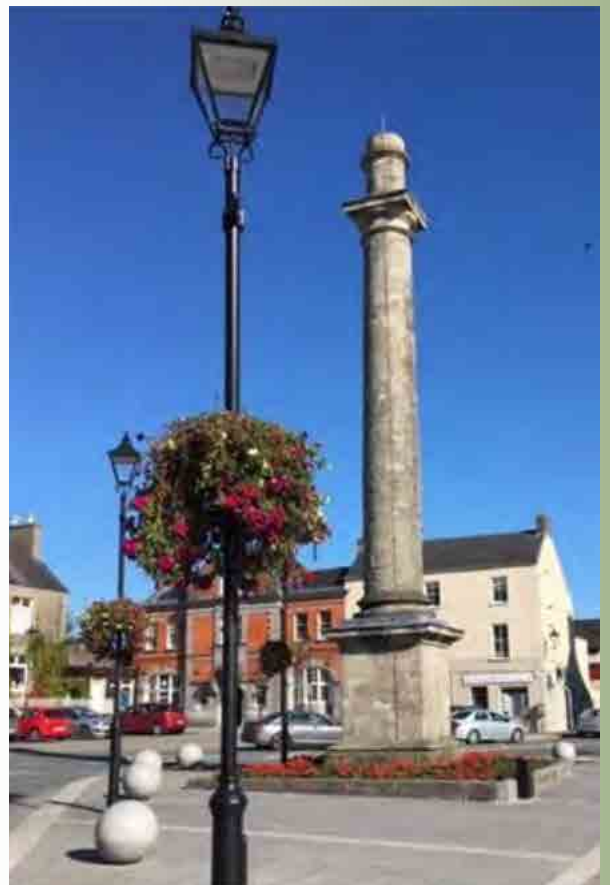




Birr Local Area Plan 2023 - 2029



Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí
Offaly County Council



In effect from 26th June 2023

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Context

1.1.1 Location of Birr

The town of Birr and village of Crinkill are located close to the border between County Offaly and County Tipperary, and are approximately 37 kilometres from the county town of Tullamore, 43 kilometres from Athlone, County Westmeath and 20 kilometres from Roscrea, County Tipperary. The N52 (Dundalk-Nenagh) and N62 (Athlone-Roscrea) National Secondary Routes run through the settlement and provide direct access to Tullamore and Athlone respectively. The Camcor River flows through the centre of Birr joining the Little Brosna River, a tributary of the River Shannon, which flows along the western boundary of the town. The highly scenic Slieve Bloom Mountains and Clonmacnoise monastic site are located in proximity to the east and north of Birr, respectively.

The village of Crinkill lies some 2.2 kilometres south of the centre of Birr (Emmet Square). Crinkill village is a relatively new settlement and the town map of 1822 indicates the general layout being in place at that time. More recent development has been mainly linear in form along Barrack Street, Military Road and School Street. Crinkill has a distinct character and separate identity to Birr. This is viewed as a positive element in the promotion and development of the area and it is the Council's intention that this situation shall be maintained and reinforced. To this end, Crinkill shall be planned and managed as a village complementing but separate from Birr Town.

1.1.2 Historical Development

Birr town is an early monastic site situated on the River Camcor. The first recorded indication for a settlement in Birr dates to the 6th century AD when a monastery was founded by Brendan the Elder. The present Birr Castle Demesne, started its evolution as an Anglo-Norman structure built in 1170 and has been significantly amended and extended since then. Birr experienced significant growth from the mid-18th century onwards. Emmet Square (1747) represented the earliest phase of Georgian Birr with later phases including Oxmanstown Mall (c. 1816), Wilmer Road (c. 1817) and John's Mall (c. 1833). A monumental column, formerly known as the Cumberland Column, is an important historic landmark that adorns Emmet Square at the centre of the town. Erected in 1747 as a Pillar of Victory to commemorate the military successes of the Duke of Cumberland, it is the oldest monumental column constructed in Ireland. Birr Barracks was built in Crinkill between 1809 – 1812 followed by Birr Courthouse (c. 1830). Birr Workhouse opened in 1842. In the early 1840's, the Third Earl of Rosse designed and built a great telescope on the grounds of Birr Castle Demesne. This telescope remained the largest in the world for over 70 years. Birr also gained fame as the venue for the first ever All-Ireland Hurling Final between Tipperary and Galway held in 1888.

Birr was designated a 'Georgian Heritage Town' by Bord Fáilte (now Fáilte Ireland), in 1994. The history of Birr town and its environs, is still represented today in its buildings and structures that have been preserved and protected under previous development plans. The protection of this proud history, through the protection of the character of these buildings, is important to the culture of the people of Birr and the related tourism industry.

1.1.3 Socio-Economic Profile

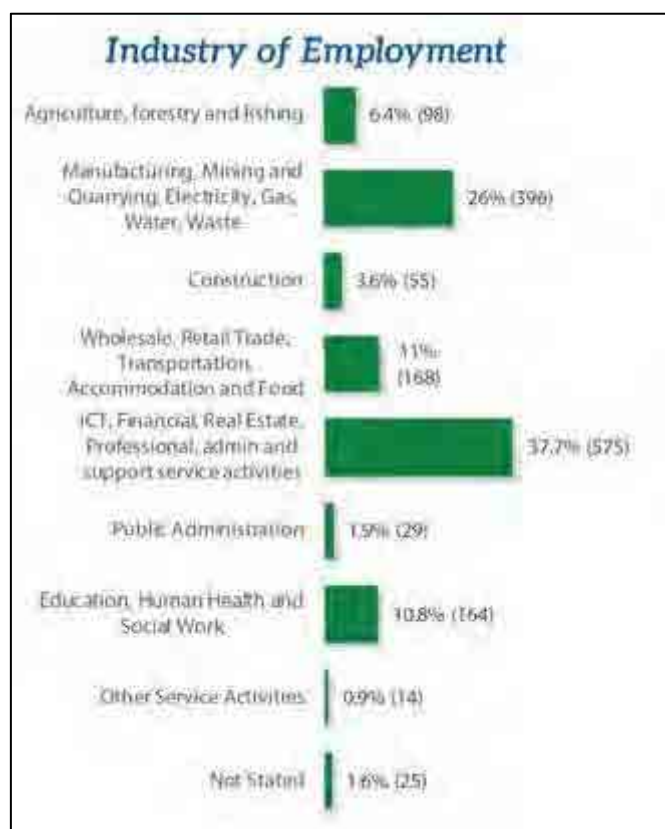
Birr and Crinkill together has a population of 5052 (2016 Census). It has experienced growth throughout recent census periods.

	2006	2011	2016
Population	4053	5000	5052
% Increase	-	23.3%	1.0%

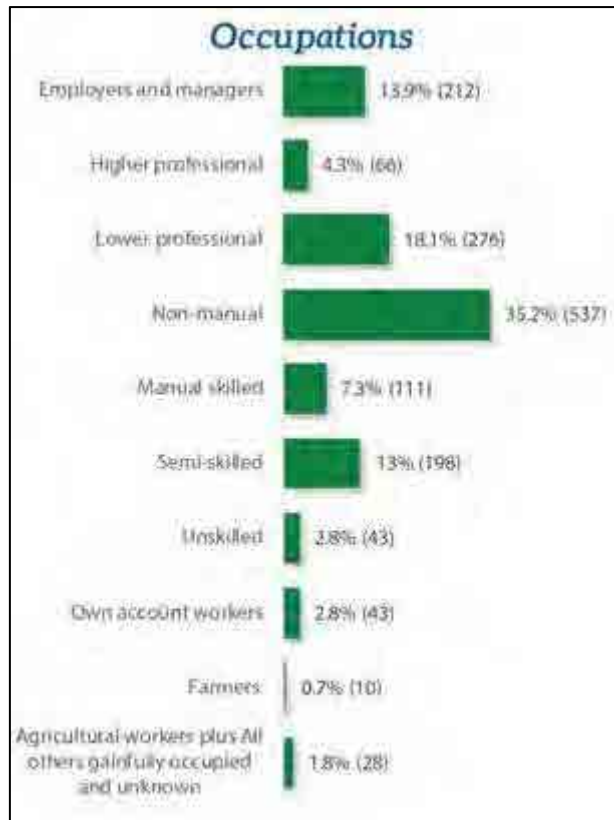
(Note there has been changes to the Census boundary between census periods)

The following images represent statistics derived from the 2016 Census. The total jobs in Birr in 2016 was 1,524, which represented 7.7% of total jobs (19,782) in County Offaly. Birr, with 1,524 local jobs and 1,579 resident workers, results in a high 'jobs to resident worker' ratio of 0.965, which represents a strong economic function.

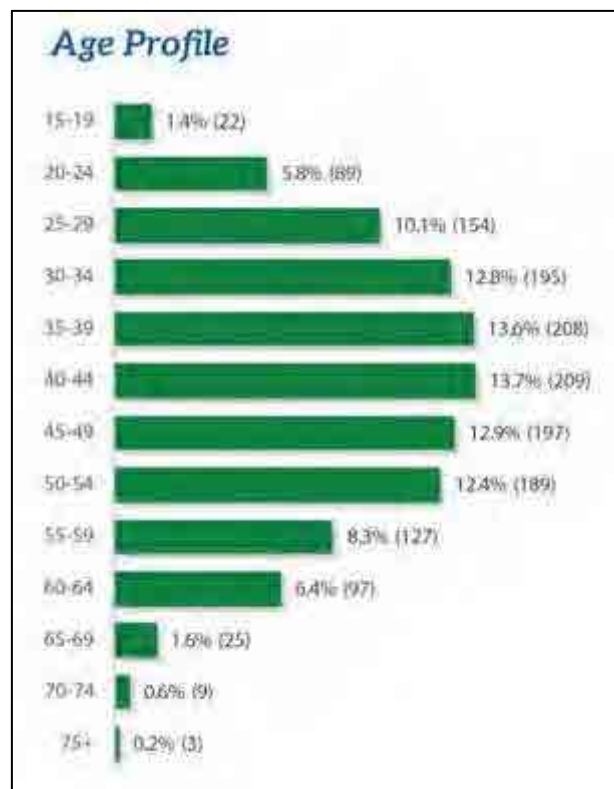
Birr serves as an important employment centre for the county, and in particular has a strong ICT, Financial, Real Estate, Professional, Administration and support service activities sector representing 37.7% of Birr's Employment. Further analysis of the employment sectors of Birr and Crinkill are provided in section 2.1 of Chapter 2 Economic Development Strategy.



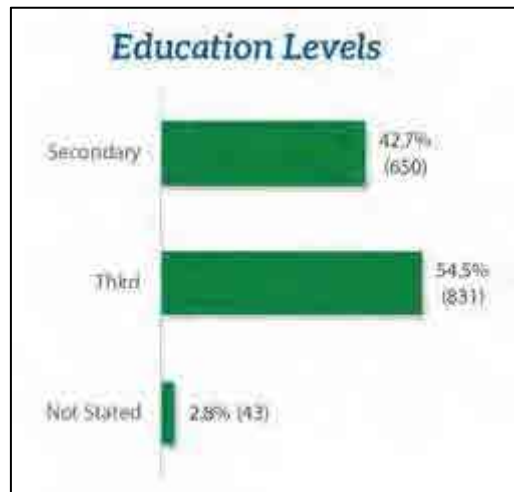
The graph below shows the breakdown of occupations across all sectors of industry in Birr as a percentage of the total workforce. 'Non-manual' (35.2%) represents the largest cohort, followed by 'lower professional' at 18.1%.



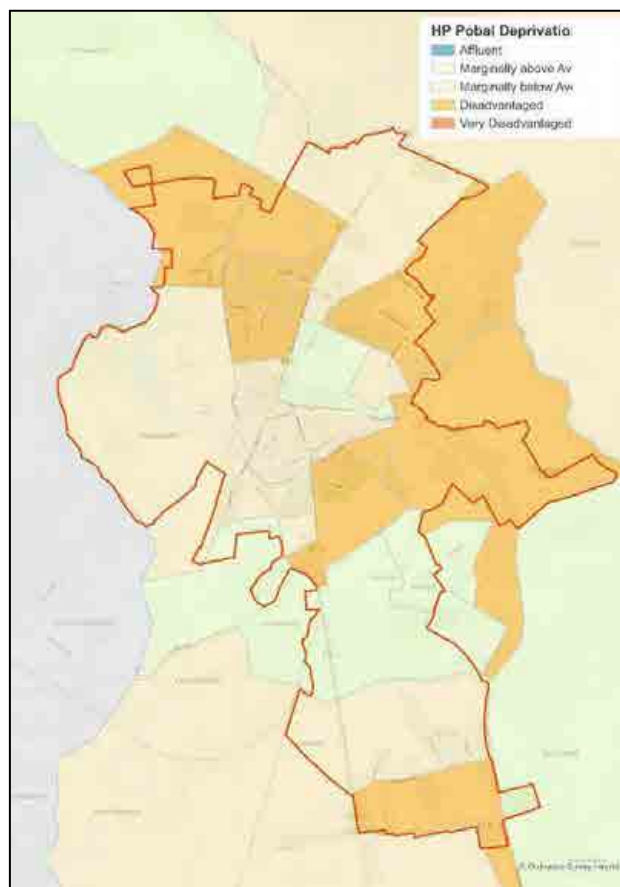
The age profile of Birr is set out below, which demonstrates that the 35-44 age group accounts for 27.3% of the population. 42.4% of the population is aged 45 or older, which is higher than the national figure of 37.2%.



In terms of educational attainment for those aged 15 years or older, the majority have third level education at 54.5%.



As set out below, a range of deprivation / affluence designations fall within the development boundary of Birr, ranging from marginally above average to disadvantaged.



1.1.4 Plan Preparation

This Birr Local Area Plan (LAP) 2023-2029 has been prepared in accordance with the requirements and provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

Under the provisions of the Local Government Reform Act 2014, Birr Town Council was abolished and its functions, including those relating to planning and development were fully subsumed into Offaly County Council. Accordingly, this LAP has been prepared to replace the Birr Town and Environs Development Plan 2010 – 2016 (as extended) as the key strategic planning document, which will guide the overall development of the town in the period to 2029.

The Local Area Plan has been prepared in accordance with the requirements and provisions of Sections 18-20 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the 'Act'). Section 19(1) (b) of the Act requires a local area plan to be made in respect of an area, which:

- Is designated as a town in the most recent census of population, other than a town designated as a suburb or environs in that census;
- Has a population in excess of 5,000; and
- Is situated within the functional area of a planning authority, which is a County Council.

Census 2016 recorded a population of 5,052 persons for Birr and Crinkill. A Local Area Plan is therefore a mandatory requirement.

This LAP sets out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of Birr in the context of Project Ireland 2040, the National Planning Framework, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region and the Offaly County Development Plan (CDP). It is informed by Ministerial Guidelines issued pursuant to Section 28 of the Act together with EU requirements regarding Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA).

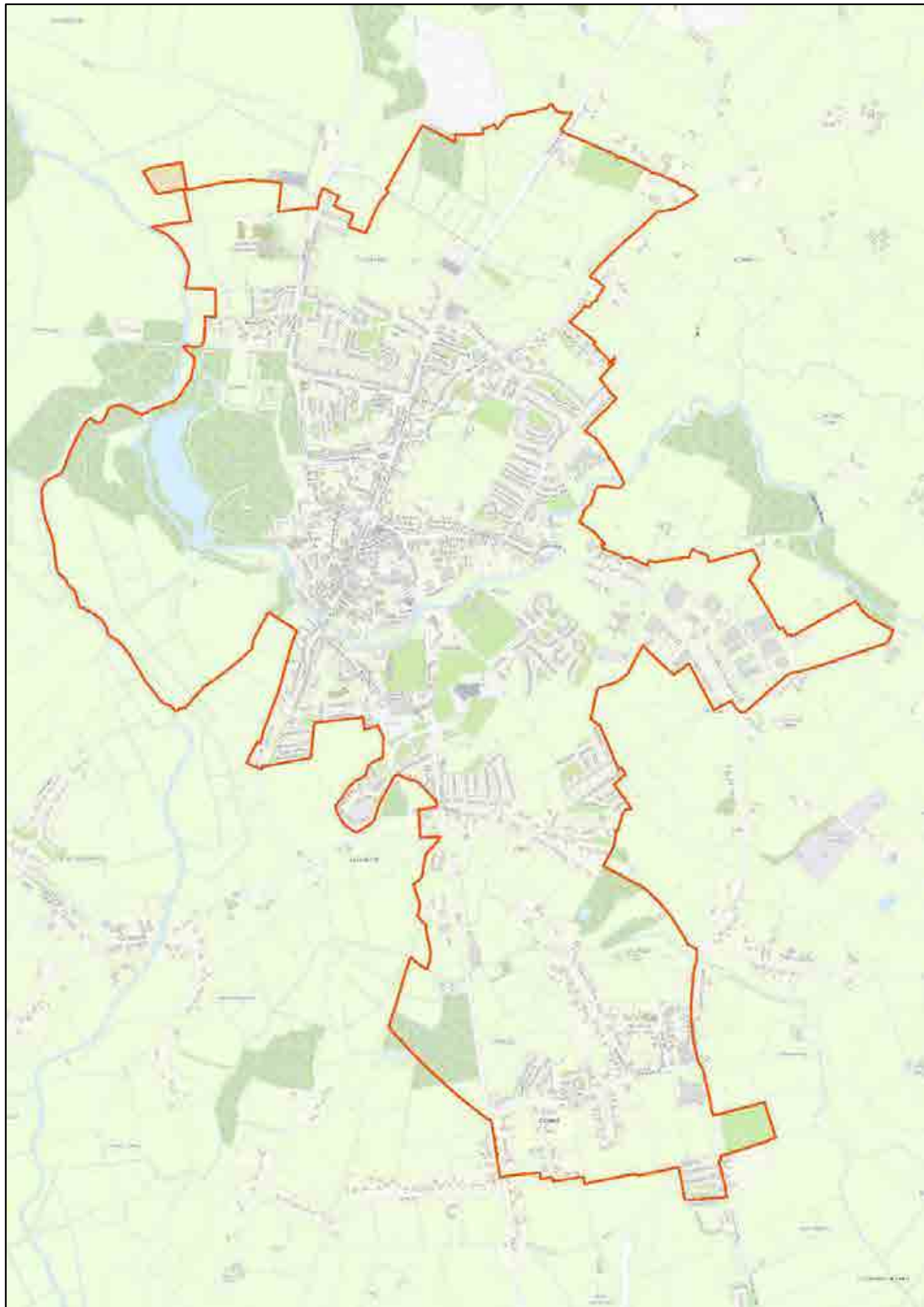


Figure 1.1 Birr Local Area Plan boundary

1.1.5 Life of the Plan

The Birr LAP shall remain in effect for a period of 6 years from when it was made or until such time as the LAP may be extended, revoked or replaced by a new LAP.

1.1.6 The Plan Making Process

The strategic vision for Birr has been informed through public consultation with residents and stakeholders.

The Council engaged in an extensive pre-draft public consultation programme as part of the preliminary work stage of the plan preparation process. A Public Consultation Issues Paper set out a summary with background information on a range of key issues to be addressed in the preparation of the LAP. It also framed a number of key questions on each issue to prompt community discussion and help develop and shape their comments and observations. The Public Consultation Issues Paper was placed on display at Council offices, Birr library, and on the Birr LAP webpage. Notification of the Public Consultation Issues Paper and of a public consultation-drop in session in Birr Civic Offices was provided in locally circulating newspapers, to PPN groups, Oireachtas members, elected members, and Strategic Policy Committee members. Written submissions were invited from public sector agencies and non-governmental agencies. A workshop was held with Birr Municipal District elected members for their input into the draft Birr Local Area Plan. Public consultation also takes place on the draft Birr LAP and proposed material alterations.

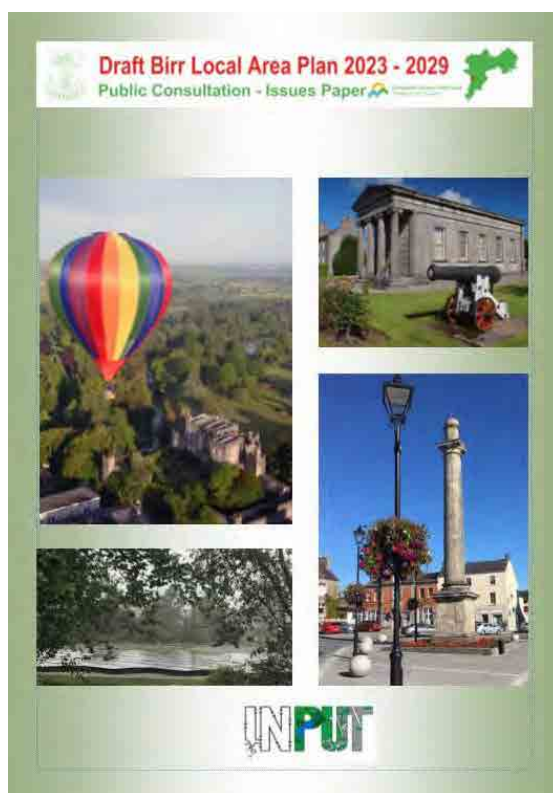


Figure 1.2 Cover Page of Public Consultation Issues Paper

The early engagement of the community and relevant stakeholders in identifying issues, a vision and a strategy for Birr Town improved the plan preparation process by providing, at the right stage, the understanding of community needs and aspirations and important aspects of local knowledge.

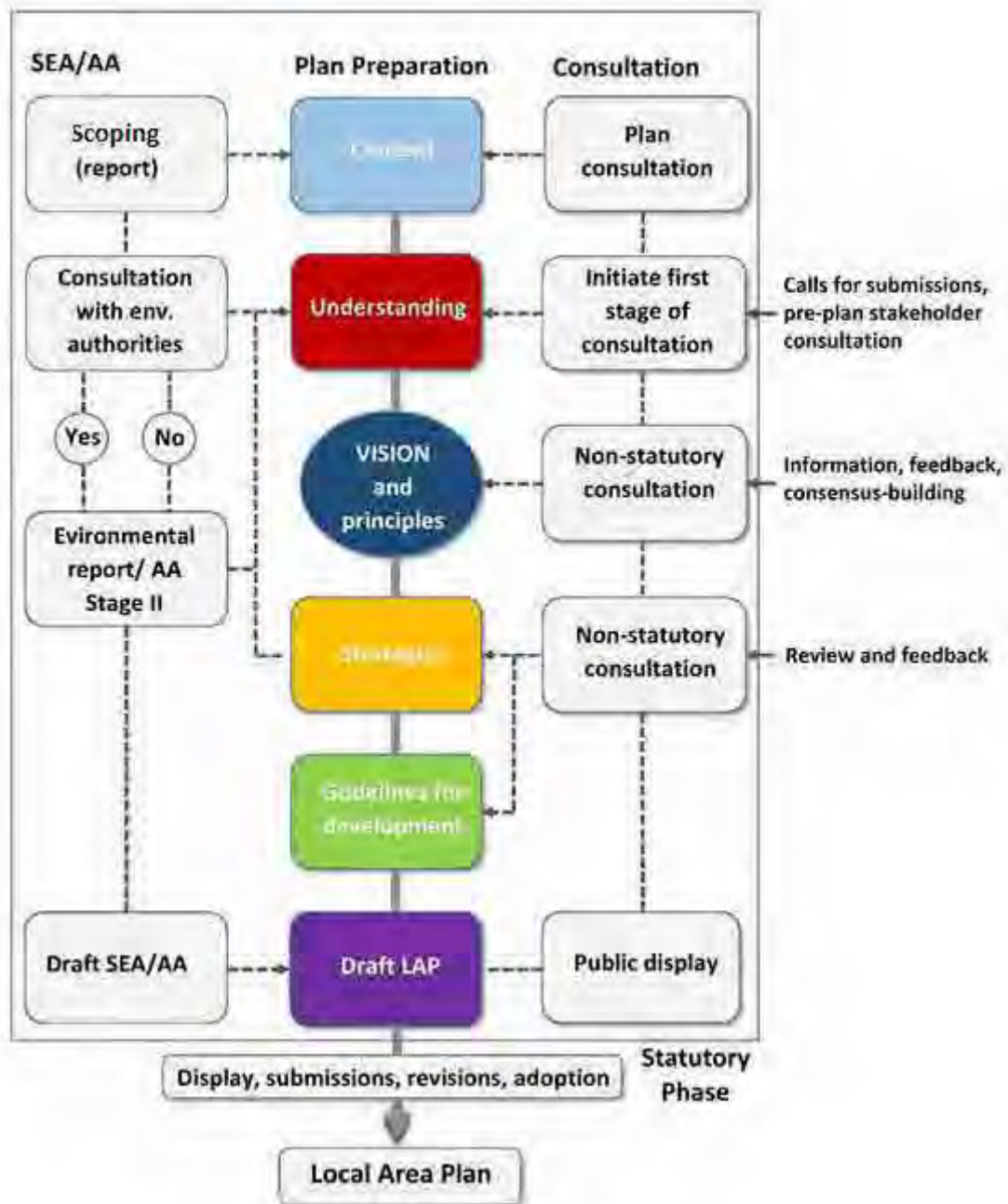


Figure 1.3 Plan Preparation Process

The public consultation process supplemented Offaly County Council’s research and analysis with a more extensive understanding of the main issues of concern affecting the residents and stakeholders in Birr. The consultation exercises helped to establish an overarching common vision for the future development of Birr.

1.2 Structure and Content of Birr Local Area Plan

The LAP consists of a written statement setting out the vision for the town and the policies and specific objectives to guide future development along with a zoning and objectives maps, opportunity sites development briefs and visual representations of the development framework of the town. It also consists of separate Environmental Reports prepared in accordance with EU Directives ensuring that environmental considerations are fully integrated into the plan making process.

The written statement shall take precedence over the map should any discrepancy arise. In the full interpretation of all objectives for Birr, it is essential that both the CDP and the LAP are read together. Where conflicting objectives arise between the CDP and the LAP, the objectives of the relevant CDP shall take precedence.

It should be noted that the general development management standards and general policies and objectives in the CDP applicable to settlements can be applied to the LAP boundary area, while additional policies and objectives that are specific to Birr are included in this LAP.

1.2.1 Accompanying Strategies

This Local Area Plan is accompanied by a number of separate assessments / strategies. They have been undertaken in parallel with the preparation of the Plan. An iterative process has been followed whereby each revision of the Plan has been informed by the assessments. They constitute;

- *Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Report and Natura Impact Report (NIR)*

AA is a focused and detailed impact assessment of the implications of a plan or project on European Sites designated for habitats or species. AA is required by the EU Habitats Directive as transposed into Irish law through the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). Screening for AA determined that the implementation of this Local Area Plan was likely to have a significant effect on European Sites. Accordingly, a NIR was compiled. The findings of the AA are included in the NIR that accompanies the Plan. That report provides a clear understanding of the likely consequences of the Plan on European Sites. All AA recommendations have been integrated into the Plan. The emerging conclusion of the AA is that the Plan will not affect the integrity of the European Sites, alone or in combination with other plans or projects.¹

- *Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)*

SEA is the formal, systematic evaluation of the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing a plan or programme before a decision is made to adopt it, in this case the Local Area Plan. SEA is required by the EU SEA Directive as transposed into Irish law through the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (S.I. No. 436 of 2004) as amended. The findings of the SEA are included in the SEA Environmental Report that accompanies the Plan. That report provides a clear understanding of the likely environmental consequences of

¹ Except as provided for in Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, viz. There must be:
(a) no alternative solution available, (b) imperative reasons of overriding public interest for the Plan to proceed; and (c) adequate compensatory measures in place.

decisions regarding the adoption and implementation of the Plan. All SEA recommendations have been integrated into the Plan.

- *Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)*

SFRA is an assessment of flood risk and includes mapped boundaries for Flood Risk Zones, taking into account factors including Catchment Flood Risk Management Plan data, site walkovers and flood risk indicators. SFRA is required under 'The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (Department of Environment and Office of Public Works, 2009) and associated Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government Circular PL2/2014. All SFRA recommendations have been integrated into the Plan.

1.3 Strategic Hierarchy

The content of this LAP aligns with international, European, national, regional and county policy and legislation, in addition to Ministerial Guidelines / policy Directives.

1.3.1 Sustainability Development Goals

Since 2015, Ireland has been a signatory for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as outlined in Figure 1.4 below. These goals provide a comprehensive framework for policy development to the year 2030, which collectively outline a roadmap to end poverty, combat climate change and ensure peaceful, just and equal societies for future generations. The 17 SDGs are integrated – that is, they recognise that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. Achieving the SDGs requires the partnership of governments, private sector, civil society and citizens alike to make sure we leave a better planet for future generations.



Figure 1.4 United Nations Sustainability Development Goals

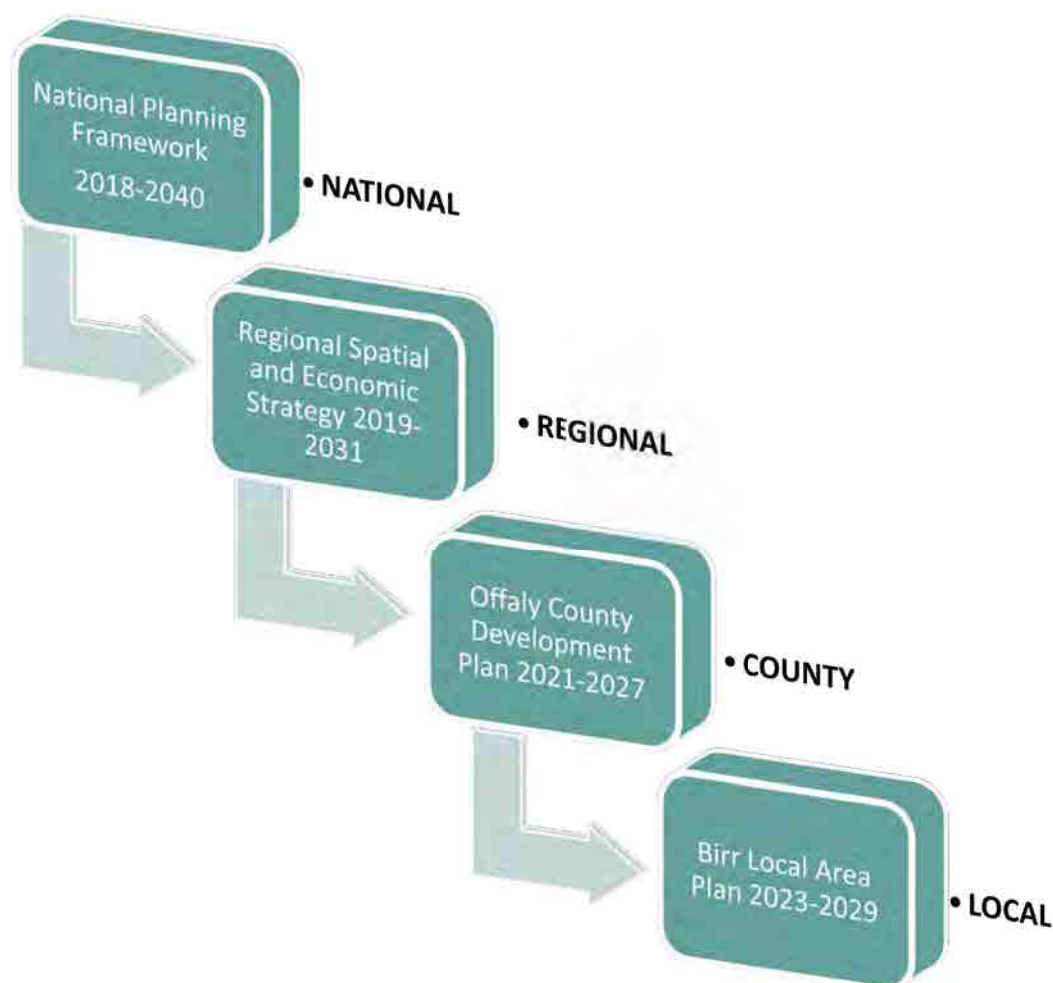


Figure 1.5 Hierarchy of Strategic Plans

1.3.2 Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework

The National Planning Framework (NPF) was adopted as part of Project Ireland 2040 in February 2018. The NPF sets out a high-level strategic plan for shaping the future growth of Ireland and provides 10 National Strategic Outcomes for realising the vision of the plan. The NPF sits at the highest tier of planning in Ireland, and all regional, county and local planning policy should be consistent with the principles contained within it. Whilst Birr is not referred to directly in the NPF, it is noted that the NPF recognises the important role towns like Birr fulfil as local drivers for their surrounding areas through accommodating local housing and employment growth and that the natural and built heritage of a town, can add distinctiveness to its 'sense of place' which is becoming an important factor in attracting foreign direct investment and individual talent to Ireland.

1.3.3 Eastern and Midland Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2031

The Eastern and Midland Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2031 is a strategic plan and investment framework to shape the future development of the region to 2031 and beyond. The aim of the strategy is to create a sustainable and competitive region that supports the health and well-being of its people and places, with access to quality housing, travel and employment opportunities for everyone. The three key principles of the RSES are focused on: Healthy Place-making, Climate Action and Economic Opportunity. Each of these principles are supported by 16 Regional Strategic

Outcomes (RSO's) that promote compact growth and urban regeneration, integrated sustainable transport options, a promotion of enhanced green infrastructure and protection of local biodiversity and heritage. Birr Town is mentioned within the Retail hierarchy, classified as a 'Level 3 Town and/or District Centres & Sub-County Town Centres (Key Service Centre)'. The town is also recognised for its Architectural Heritage and for being a historic planned town and designated Irish Heritage Town.



Figure 1.6 Birr within the Eastern and Midland Region

1.3.4 Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027

The Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 is a land use plan and overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the county over a 6-year period. The Plan is informed by Project Ireland 2040 and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland

Region. Within the Core Strategy, Birr including Crinkill is listed as a ‘Self-Sustaining Growth Town’, with the following function over the lifetime of the Plan;

“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.”

This LAP is working towards an anticipated population growth of 1263 persons in line with the provisions of the Core Strategy objectives of the County Development Plan. Under the Core Strategy for the county contained in Chapter 2 of the County Development Plan, Birr, including Crinkill Village, is allocated a requirement for 13.9ha for new residential development over the lifetime of the Plan. The 13.9ha of ‘New Residential’ zoned land has been identified within the existing built-up footprint of Birr and Crinkill, with Birr town as the primary focus of the overall settlement. The development strategy of this plan is based around the projected population growth.

1.4 Other Relevant Plans and Studies

In addition to national, regional and county strategic plans listed above, this Local Area Plan has been prepared having regard to other documents listed below.

The following Birr specific non-statutory plans and studies were taken into account in the preparation of this LAP;

Birr Local Transport Plan (LTP)

The purpose of the LTP is to place the integration of land use and transport planning at the centre of the plan-making process for Birr. The LTP examined the existing and proposed transport infrastructure and service provision across all modes of transport including sustainable means such as active modes (walking and cycling) in the town. It provides an understanding of the existing constraints and modal share and it also identifies the interventions required within the Plan area and in the wider context, to effectively accommodate the anticipated increase in demand and ensure the optimal transportation interventions can be planned in order to drive a shift towards sustainable movement.

Birr Public Realm Study

The Council adopted the Birr Public Realm Plan in April 2009. The purpose of the study was to identify areas where improvements can be made in all elements of the public realm and to ensure a coordinated approach to any improvements. The addendum to the Public Realm Plan for Birr was written in 2021 to reflect changes in the town since the original plan was launched in 2009. The addendum, which has been informed through consultation with local stakeholder groups, will be used alongside the original plan to further inform planning policy and investment decisions for Birr.

Rectory Lands Masterplan

A concept masterplan is currently under preparation by consultants for the Rectory Lands in Birr (referred to in section 3.3.2 of this LAP as an Opportunity Site). The subject underutilised lands are

located in close proximity to Birr town centre and their development is anticipated to play a major role in the future regeneration of Birr. The concept masterplan is expected to address compact growth, sustainable mobility, permeability, healthy place-making, low carbon output, mix of uses and have regard to relevant section 28 Ministerial Guidelines.

Birr Interpretive Strategy, A Unique Heritage Vision, 2021, Offaly County Council and Fáilte Ireland

This document is a community-led Interpretation Strategy for Birr town. It includes a suite of key storylines and actions to convey the story of Birr.

The LAP was also prepared taking account of the following documents at a county, regional and national level.

County level:

- Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027
- Offaly Digital Strategy 2020-2022
- Irish Water Treatment Capacity Register and 10-year Water Supply Capacity Register, 2022
- Seeing the Beyond, Birr Festivals Planning for a Shared Future, Birr Festival Development Strategy, 2020 by Birr 20:20 Vision CLG
- Birr Creative Court; A Scoping Report on the Potential of Birr Courthouse, 2019 by Birr 20:20 Vision CLG
- Offaly Heritage Plan 2023-2027

Forthcoming documents:

- Offaly Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2027
- Local Economic and Community Plan 2022-2027
- Offaly Streetscape Project 2023 Tullamore and Birr
- Offaly Tourism Strategy 2022 – 2026
- Age Friendly Strategy for County Offaly 2022-2027
- Offaly Digital Strategy 2023-2025

Regional level:

- Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 Midlands, Government of Ireland; An initiative of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, 2022
- Midland Regional Food and Drink Strategy 2021-2024, by Midlands Ireland

Forthcoming document:

- Regional Tourism Strategy for Ireland's Hidden Heartlands 2022-2026 by Fáilte Ireland

National level:

- Documents and Section 28 Guidelines as listed in Chapter 1 of Offaly CDP
- Town Centre First, A Policy Approach for Irish Towns, DRCD, 2022
- Housing for All – A New Housing Plan for Ireland, DHLGH, 2021
- Housing Options for Our Aging Population – Government Policy Statement, 2019
- Age Friendly Principles and Guidelines for the Planning Authority, Age Friendly Ireland, June 2021
- Nature-based Solutions to the Management of Rainwater and Surface Water Runoff in Urban Areas; Water Sensitive Urban Design Best Practice Interim Guidance Document, DHLGH, 2022
- Local Area Plans - Guidelines for Planning Authorities, DECLG, 2013
- Manual for Local Area Plans, DECLG, 2013
- Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets, update 2020.
- Building for Everyone; A Universal Design Approach, Booklet 9 Planning and Policy, by the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design
- National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027
- Ten Universal Design Features to include in a Lifetime Adaptable and Age Friendly Home, by Age Friendly Ireland, 2021
- Climate Action and the Local Authority Development Plan (OPR Case Study Paper CSP05), 2022
- The Need for UN SDGs, Baseline Data and Vacancy Targets in Local Area Plans (LAPs) for Historic Town Centres, A Report by the CTCHC Programme, The Heritage Council, 2022.
- National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland, Dept. of Transport, 2022
- National Sustainable Mobility Policy, Dept. of Transport, 2022
- Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2025

Forthcoming documents:

- Places for People – National Policy on Architecture (stated in Town Centre First Policy)
- A National Strategy for People with a Disability (stated in Town Centre First Policy)
- National health check model (stated in Town Centre First Policy)
- Climate Action Plan 2022, Securing Our Future, Government of Ireland, 2022

1.5 Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR)

The Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018 provided for the establishment of an Independent Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR). Under the provisions of the Act, the OPR has assumed the Minister's evaluation and assessment function of all statutory land use plans including local area plans. The OPR provides statutory observations on all draft statutory plans to ensure consistency with relevant national and regional policies. All observations received from the OPR have been taken into consideration.

1.6 Strategic Vision and Aims for Birr

This LAP is intended to guide the future growth of Birr in a sustainable manner, in a way that reflects the inherent character of the area and identifies the potential of utilising its existing assets as the base for improving the quality of life and resilience of both the present and future residents of the town.

The following strategic aims in conjunction with each other will assist in delivering the strategic vision for Birr.

Strategic Aim 1: Economic Development

To successfully fulfil Birr's role as a self-sustaining growth town by embracing the transition to a low carbon and climate resilient model of development while seeking to utilise and invest in the town's existing economic, social and environmental assets to generate sustainable economic development and job creation, thereby enhancing its status as the main business, service, social, cultural, tourism and recreational hub for everyone in south Offaly and ensuring it is an attractive place to live, work and visit.

Strategic Aim 2: Town Centre and Regeneration

To sensitively and sustainably enhance the historic town centre through the provision of healthy place-making. To facilitate a competitive and healthy retail environment and to support the future vitality, diversity and viability of Birr town centre and Crinkill village. Reinforce Birr town centre as the heart of the town, by avoiding undesirable and inefficient sprawl, achieving critical mass and consolidating new development within the built-up footprint of the town, through targeting a significant proportion of future development on infill/brownfield/under-utilised sites, and extending out sequentially subject to available infrastructure. These aims will improve the attractiveness and functionality of Birr Town as a place in which to live, work and visit while also functioning as the business, service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community.

Strategic Aim 3: Built Heritage

To protect, conserve and manage Birr's buildings, areas, structures, sites and features of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest, by promoting the understanding, enhancement and appropriate development of these assets in order to instigate a heritage-led regeneration of the town.

Strategic Aim 4: Residential

Deliver high quality housing in terms of design, scale, 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.

Strategic Aim 5: Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure

Protect and enhance Birr Town and Crinkill village's natural assets of clean water, biodiversity, landscape, green infrastructure, natural heritage and agricultural land, while maintaining ecosystem services and improving resilience to climate change.

Strategic Aim 6: Community

Promote Birr as a town where people can live and work, with access to a range of community facilities and events that are vital for social inclusion and quality of life for all.

Strategic Aim 7: Climate Action

Enhance climate adaptation and mitigation, and accelerate a transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy in Birr.

Strategic Aim 8: Critical Infrastructure

Facilitate the timely provision of infrastructure and utilities that will support sustainable socioeconomic growth and protect the quality of the environment of the town in a low carbon manner.

Strategic Aim 9: Planning and Infrastructural Assessment

To phase new development to ensure that it occurs in a sequential and efficient manner and in tandem with the delivery of supporting physical and social infrastructure.

Strategic Aim 10: Land Use Zoning Objectives

To adhere to the land use zoning objectives contained in this Plan in the interests of orderly development and eliminating potential conflicts between incompatible land uses.

Strategic Aim 11: Implementation and Monitoring

To implement in conjunction with key stakeholders, the objectives of this Local Area Plan, with a particular focus on the key strategic objectives, and to monitor same.

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.

Birr Local Are Plan 2023-2029
Chapter 2 Economic Development Strategy

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)

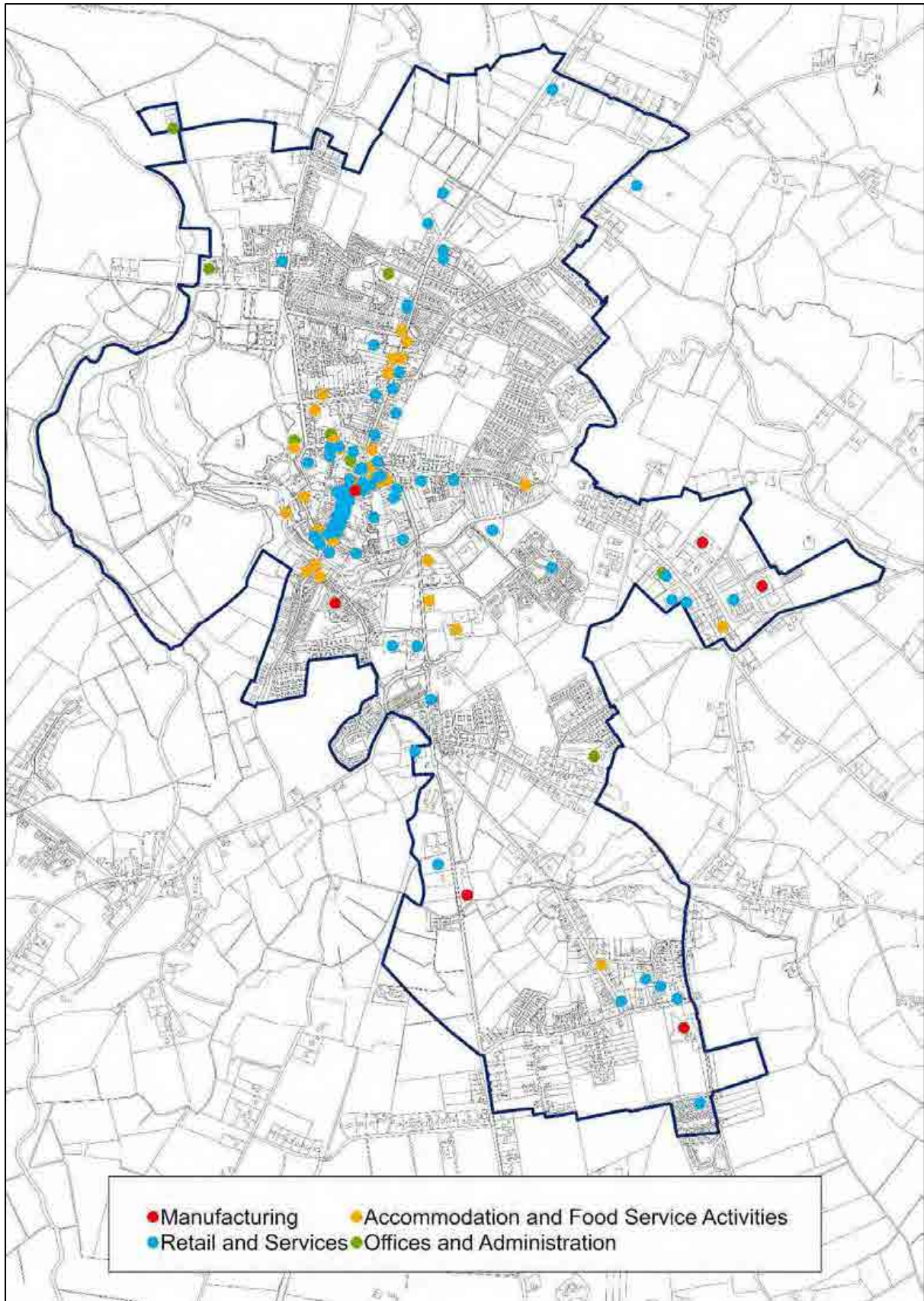


Figure 2.3 Location of Commercial Properties in Birr

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.

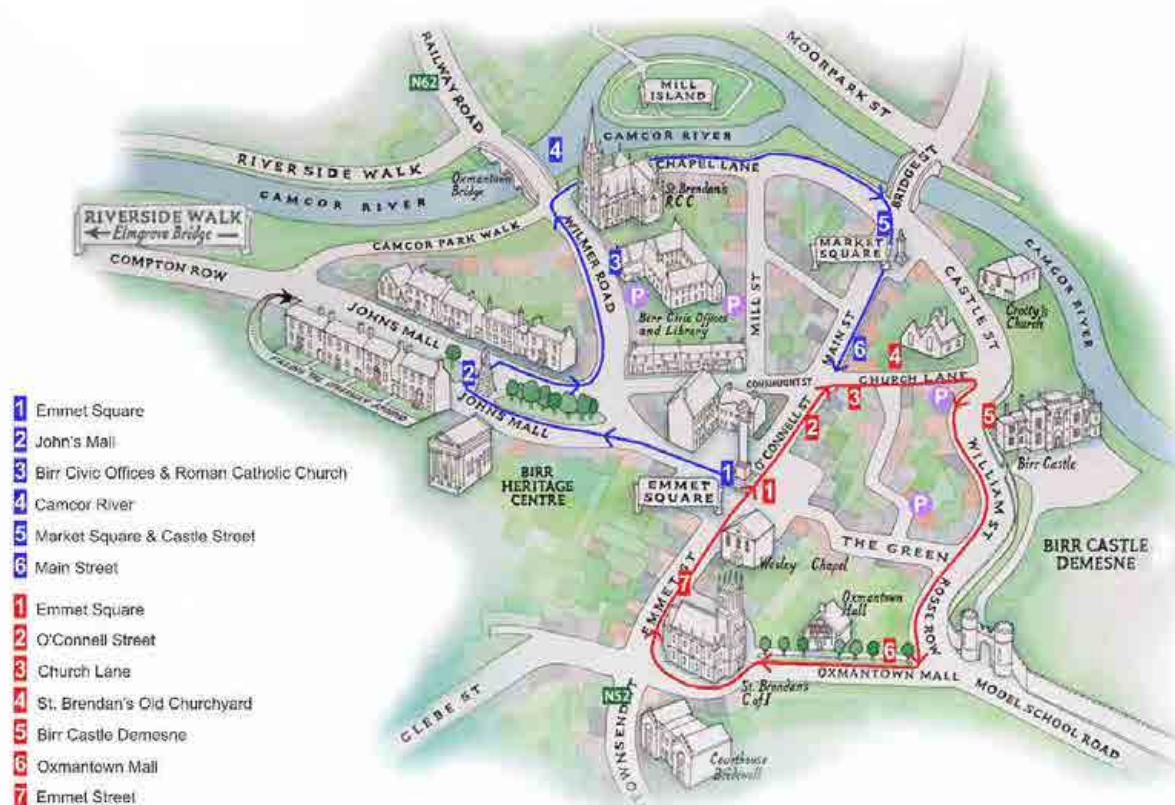


Figure 2.5 Birr Town Walking Trails

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

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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.

Chapter 3: Town Centre and Regeneration

Strategic Aim:

To sensitively and sustainably enhance the historic town centre through the provision of healthy place-making. To facilitate a competitive and healthy retail environment and to support the future vitality, diversity and viability of Birr town centre and Crinkill village. Reinforce Birr town centre as the heart of the town, by avoiding undesirable and inefficient sprawl, achieving critical mass and consolidating new development within the built-up footprint of the town, through targeting a significant proportion of future development on infill/brownfield/under-utilised sites, and extending out sequentially subject to available infrastructure. These aims will improve the attractiveness and functionality of Birr Town as a place in which to live, work and visit while also functioning as the business, service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community.

3.1 Context

The town's influential Georgian heritage has given Birr a strong urban form within its central core. The urban core has clearly defined urban spaces such as Emmet Square and John's Place as well as the tight urban grain prevalent along the two main axes Main Street/Emmet Street and John's Mall. All the major routes converge at Emmet Square making it the central focal point of the town. Beyond the compact central core, however, the urban form of Birr 'dissipates' into lower density development typically associated with the 20th century. The result is less clearly defined open spaces and in certain areas, a lack of distinctive character or identity, with a lack of pedestrian circulation.

The protection and enhancement of the historical core of Birr town is a priority of the Council. This will be facilitated by all available means including environmental improvements, the promotion and facilitation of the appropriate reuse/renewal of derelict, vacant and underutilised buildings in the town centre. The Council will also endeavour to achieve permeability and connectivity in the town centre for cyclists and pedestrians. The architectural character of the existing built fabric in the commercial area will be protected and enhanced where possible.



Figure 3.1 View of O'Connell Street from Emmet Square, Birr

3.1.1 SCOT Analysis of Birr Town Centre

Strengths	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A Self-Sustaining Growth Town - Healthy niche retail along Main Street - A tourism destination town - Diverse recreation opportunities and facilities - Compact and walkable scale - Excellent architecture both historic and contemporary - Hospitality - Central national location - Fishing - Strong character and sense of place, attractive streetscape - Festivals and entertainment - Arts and Cultural experiences including Library and Birr Theatre and Arts Centre - Birr Castle, Gardens and Science Centre - Farmers Market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Connection from Castle Street to Main Street - St. Brendan's ruins - River access - Role of Birr as a base for tourism - Restoration of significant buildings – old workhouse, distillery, Birr Courthouse, mill, etc. - Cattlemart and Rectory lands redevelopment - Bypass - Co-ordinated wayfinding system (directional signage) - Support healthy ecosystems and local biodiversity - Plant more trees - Improve walking and cycling permeability and public transport provision - Source sustainable materials for use and re-use in the public realm - Public realm works in accordance with Birr Public Realm Plan (2009 and addendum of 2021) - Get people back living in the town centre
Challenges	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Large amount of cars and traffic along Main Street - Shortage of public transportation - Wayfinding system not clear, difficult to navigate - Derelict and vacant buildings - Pedestrian and cyclist facilities - Continued management of street clutter including advertising signage - Inappropriate shop signage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Traffic congestion

3.2 Regeneration

3.2.1 Healthy Place-Making

The Healthy Place-Making Strategy outlined under the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) aims to improve both physical and social infrastructure to create places that are healthy and attractive to live, work, visit and invest. Healthy Place-making is one of three principles outlined in the Offaly County Development Plan that will support the County Strategic Outcomes. Healthy Place-making encompasses compact growth, liveable settlements, regeneration, attractive places, sustainable settlement patterns, permeability, appropriate redevelopment of Opportunity Sites and universal and lifetime adaptable design etc. The Council will support and encourage the principle of healthy place-making in Birr Town.

The Town Centre First Approach notes that a Town Centre should function as the ‘business, service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community’. This LAP has had regard to the Town

Centre First – A Policy Approach for Irish Towns (TCF Policy), 2022. As per the TCF Policy, the Council recognises the importance of having vibrant, accessible and lived-in town centres that are home to both young and old. It is the Council’s aim to embed an age-friendly approach to the design of the public realm. 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 grafting of a new ‘green twist’ upon plans for enhancing public spaces / realm in the town is encouraged.



Figure 3.2 Healthy Place-making Strategy (Source: Figure 9.2 of EMRA RSES)

3.2.2 Vacancy and Dereliction

In addition to promoting compact growth and sustainable transport modes, the Council will encourage the regeneration and the appropriate redevelopment of brownfield and infill sites for residential and mixed uses within the existing built-up footprint of the historic town of Birr. The Council will support making better use of under-utilised land and buildings in Birr including vacant, derelict and under-occupied buildings. Continued enhancement and improvement of Birr will not only improve how the

town functions on a day-to-day basis but will have longer term socio-economic, cultural and environmental benefits for residents, businesses and visitors.

The Council will aim to support the reduction of vacancy in properties identified below by 20% during the life of the Plan, subject to resources and funding.

3.2.3 Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SuDS)

There are many amenity benefits that are intrinsic to SuDS – good SuDS design often provides amenity benefits while delivering water quantity, water quality and biodiversity benefits. In turn, it helps regenerate a town by contributing to healthy place-making and thereby improving quality of life. The table below demonstrates how SuDS can add such amenity value to a town.

Table 3.1 Amenity Benefit of SuDS

SuDS Amenity Benefit	Examples
Air quality Improvements	SuDS using blue and green areas, including grass and trees, provide significant air quality improvement, by for example, removing fine particulates from urban streets.
Air and building temperature regulation	Green and blue infrastructure buffer and moderates extreme temperatures caused by climate change.
Biodiversity and ecology	Green and blue SuDS help to support flora and fauna.
Carbon emission reduction	Plants and soils take in and store Co2 and other greenhouse gases, so where SuDS use plants this potential can be exploited.
Community cohesion	By increasing opportunities for human interaction and creating more enjoyable environments, people are more likely to feel they belong to the community and take a greater pride in their neighbourhood. This is especially the case if the community has been involved in the SuDS design and process and in some cases the maintenance process.
Increase inward investment	SuDS contributes to the creation of attractive places which in turn improve a town’s attraction as a place in which to invest, live, work and visit.
Health and wellbeing	Blue and green infrastructure can play a role in maintaining mental and physical health by providing places for recreation and relaxation.
Noise reduction	SuDS and associated trees and grassed areas can provide noise-absorbent barriers and surfaces. Green roofs provide sound insulation for buildings.
Security of water supply	Direct collection of rainwater to use for domestic and other purposes saves water, and potentially provides essential irrigation resources and long-term viability for amenity trees, vegetation and crops.
Recreation	SuDS can deliver a wide range of green and blue spaces that can be used for walking, cycling, informal play, organized sports and games etc.

Developments and public realm works require climate adaptive and resilient urban design and accordingly ‘Nature-based Solutions to the Management of Rainwater and Surface Water Runoff in Urban Areas – Best Practice Interim Guidance Document, 2022’ (and any subsequent editions) should be considered at design / retrofitting stage in terms of SuDS. These Guidelines seek to mimic the

natural water balance of rural areas through water sensitive urban design which can be achieved through the replacement of impermeable surfacing with nature-based planted areas that are designed to absorb, retain, store and treat urban runoff prior to discharge back into the environment. This will reduce pollution and reduce flood risk as well as improving biodiversity and a greener more pleasant urban environment.

The natural slowing and filtration of runoff from our roofs, streets and public realm can be assisted by the creation of a variety of initiatives such as green building surfaces, green roofs, raingardens, swales, permeable surfaces, bioswales, natural water collection and storage ponds.

SuD is also addressed in Chapter 6 Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure, Chapter 8 Climate Action and Chapter 9 Critical Infrastructure.

3.2.4 Birr Public Realm Plan

The Council launched the Birr Public Realm Plan in April 2009. The purpose of the study was to identify areas where improvements can be made in all elements of the public realm and to ensure a coordinated approach to any improvements.

Some key points arising from the analysis and of the study include:

- Key character areas are well defined.
- Mill Street and Wilmer Road have weaker defined character.
- The river is detached from the town.
- Birr Castle, Gardens and Science Centre is a permanent fixture to the west.
- Key views are the townscape and castle.
- Landmarks are evenly spread through the town.
- Scattered neighbourhood spaces.

Some key points arising from the concept of the study include:

- Elevate and enhance Emmet Square as the heart of Birr.
- Sustain mixed-uses on Emmet and Connaught Streets to ensure the town centre remains lively through different times of the day and week.
- Create strong connections with Birr town and castle via Church road using St. Brendan's Old Churchyard as a node in between.
- Establish key gateways.
- Integrate the town with the Camcor River.
- Extend the river pathway network to the Old Distillery and beyond.
- Improve the quality of small neighbourhood spaces.

Significant progress has been made on enhancing the town of Birr since production of its public realm plan in 2009. Emmet Square now features an attractive pedestrian space for people and events, with defined parking and traffic routes. Visitor numbers to Birr Castle, Gardens and Science Centre have risen dramatically through much investment there. Many of the town's fine buildings have undergone improvements and restoration, enabling them to contribute far more positively to the public realm of Birr. Other successful projects delivered have included the William Street car park, frontage improvements and the addition of high quality street name signage around the town delivered by the Chamber of Commerce.

The addendum to the Public Realm Plan for Birr was written in 2021 to reflect changes in the town since the original plan was launched in 2009. The addendum, which has been informed through consultation with local stakeholder groups, will be used alongside the original plan to further inform planning policy and investment decisions for Birr.

As a planned heritage town with abundant existing assets, the Council and its partners have demonstrated their ability to use public realm enhancements to improve Birr as a place to live, work and visit. A total of 26 projects were proposed in the Public Realm Plan for Birr, a number are substantially complete, while several more have been very well advanced.

Four new projects (relating to Moorfield, Rectory Lands, Regional Greenways and a Castle Entrance) have also been introduced, reflective of opportunities and priorities that have emerged since 2009. It is the intention of the Council that each project be delivered individually based on their importance, complexity and availability of funding.¹



Figure 3.3 Proposal to make Market Square a far more pedestrian friendly space, with potential for outdoor seating (Source: Birr Public Realm Addendum 2021)

3.2.5 Town Enhancement Projects

The council will encourage and assist in the enhancement and regeneration of areas and structures in Birr in order to improve the quality of place and urban resilience of the town. In planning for the creation of healthy and attractive places, there is a need to prioritise and promote walking and cycling in town centres in the design of streets and public spaces. In recognition of this, a new pedestrian bridge was built over the Camcor River, in Birr between November 2016 and April 2017. The bridge was built to eliminate the hazardous situation whereby pedestrians were required to walk alongside traffic at the intersection of Main Street and Moorpark Street.

¹ Refer to the Birr Public Realm Plan 2009 and associated addendum.



Figure 3.4 Birr Pedestrian Footbridge, River Camcor, Birr

The Council recognises the importance of improving the appearance of streetscapes in order to provide communities with attractive, coherent, and legible spaces. A number of improvement works have been carried out in Birr and Crinkill such as the public realm works in Crinkill Village in 2019 (Town and Village Renewal Scheme funded), and most recently, improvement works carried out to Green Street in Birr - 'The Green' (Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2019, Fáilte Ireland Destination Town Funding and Birr Municipal District). The works carried out at The Green have enhanced the area linking Emmet Square to Birr Castle, Gardens and Science Centre thus improving the overall tourism product in Birr and people's experience of visiting the town. An additional pedestrian entrance to the Birr Castle, Gardens and Science Centre at the head of Green Street has approval. Historic plans from 1808 show that a gate once existed in this location prior to the construction of the present walls. Any such proposal would require the utmost care and attention to the historic integrity of the castle and its walls.

In 2021, the Office of Public Works transferred ownership of Birr Courthouse to Offaly County Council. The Courthouse had last held a court in 2013 and was not used in the intervening years. In 2021, circa €200,000 was allocated towards works for the conservation of Birr's nineteenth century Courthouse to prevent rain ingress continuing and to improve windows and doors to the front. This was in addition to a contribution from the Historic Structures Fund and Offaly County Council. The Plans proposed by Birr 20:20 Vision CLG (referred to as Birr 20:20 hereon) are to re-use it as a multi-purpose community space, a digital/connected hub, as well as for arts and culture purposes. Offaly County Council commissioned a conservation master plan for the Courthouse. This was supported under the Offaly Heritage Plan 2017-2021 Heritage Council funding with a contribution from Creative Ireland funding. Offaly County Council are examining all options for funding support to continue the works at Birr Courthouse and are working with Birr 20:20 group in the process. It is estimated that close to €2,000,000 is needed to bring the Courthouse to a usable condition.

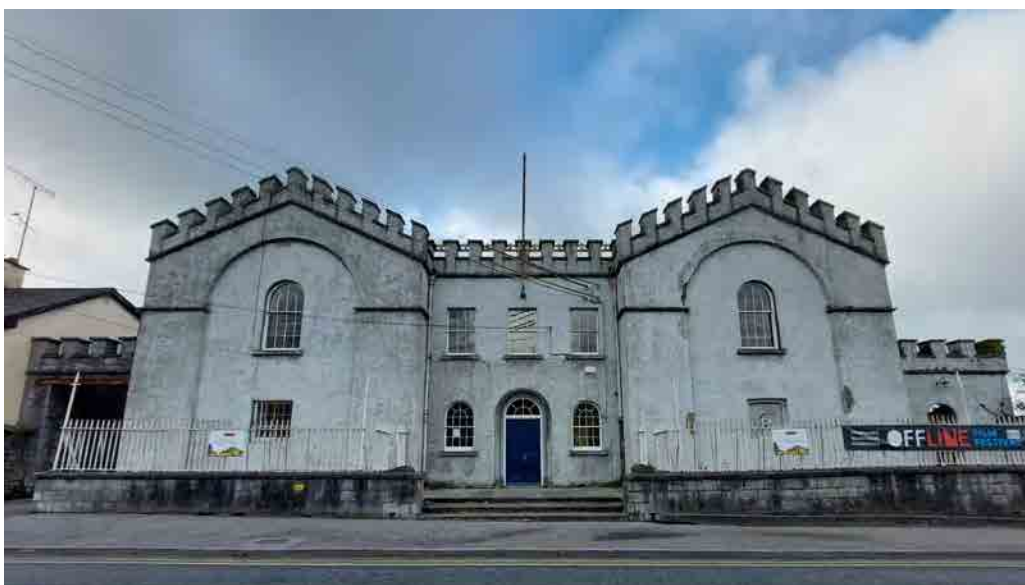


Figure 3.5 Birr Courthouse, Townsend Street, Birr

The Council also supports the conservation of Birr’s streetscape furniture. In recent years, conservation projects have included the Crimea Canon Gun at John’s Hall, the weighbridge at The Green and the water fountain on Castle Street.

Continued enhancement and improvement of Birr will not only improve how the town functions on a day-to-day basis but will have longer-term socio-economic, cultural and environmental benefits for residents, businesses and visitors.

3.2.6 Streetscape

Offaly Streetscape Project 2022 is currently under completion by consultants and is part-funded by the Heritage Council under the County Heritage Plan funding stream. It concerns a number of streetscapes in Birr and Tullamore. In terms of Birr, the streets include Market Square and Castle Street. The survey will determine occupancy / use with consideration of possible uses of vacant floors, provide guidance on appropriate repair of elements of the façade and provide graphic illustrations of existing and possible future uses / facades.

3.3 Opportunity Sites

Two key opportunity sites located on the periphery of the town centre are ‘The Mart’ and ‘Rectory Lands’ (refer to Figure 3.6). These sites have been identified as opportunity sites because of their prominence and underutilisation. In addition to promoting local economic growth, it is considered that their redevelopment would contribute greatly to the renewal, enhancement, regeneration and compact growth of Birr Town. These sites also provide the greatest potential for development and consolidation.

Opportunity Site	Land Use Zoning	Site Area (Ha)
Site 1 - Mart Site	Town Centre / Mixed-Use	1.23
Site 2 - Rectory Lands	Town Centre / Mixed-Use	5.72

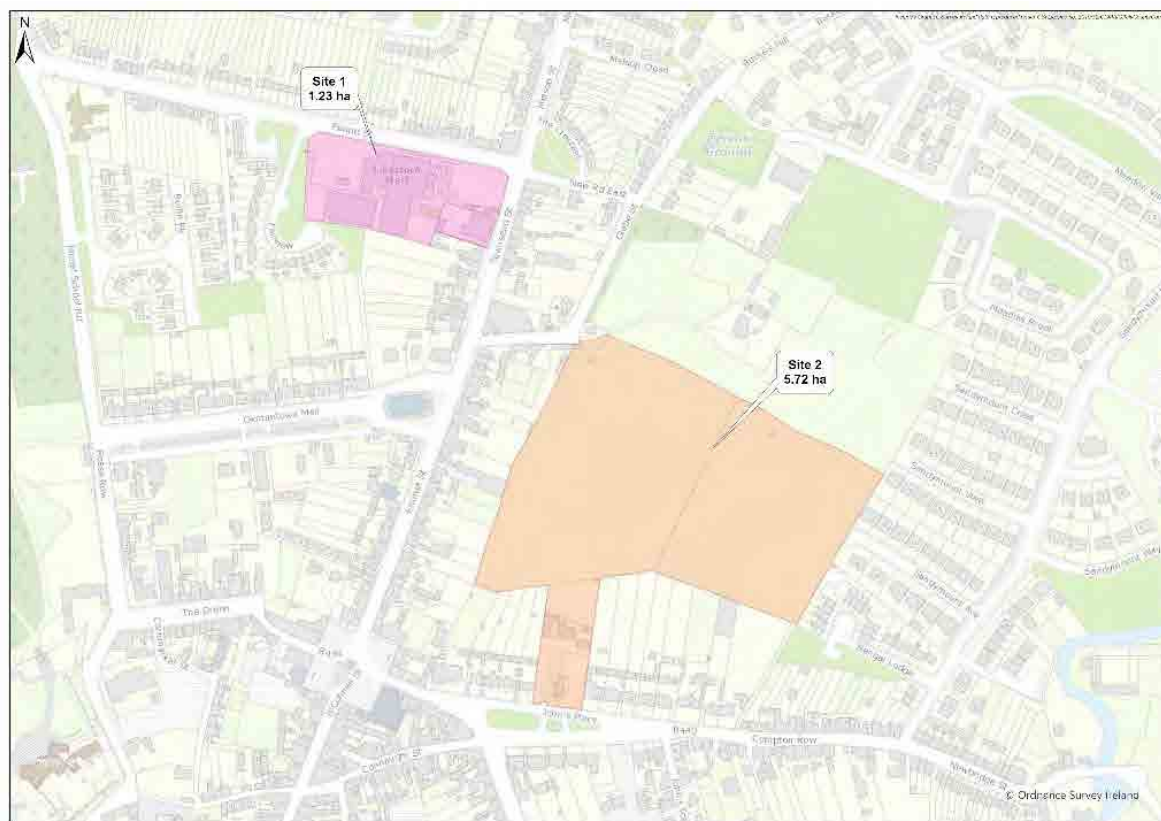


Figure 3.6 Birr Opportunity Sites

These two sites are potentially connected to the built form of the town centre through Emmet/Townsend Street. Both of these sites offer the potential for high quality designed developments that will knit into the urban grain of the town centre. Emmet/Townsend Street already have established streetscapes catering for a range of compatible town centre land uses and is naturally a continuation of urban grain of the town centre.

The inclusion of Emmet/Townsend Street in the ‘town centre’ makes Emmet Square a more central focal point, allows for the objectives of the Birr Public Realm Plan 2009 and associated addendum to be implemented i.e. pedestrian friendly town centre, reduces the need to travel within the town centre and allows for the two identified key opportunity sites to develop in tandem into the town centre, in accordance with the sequential approach.

To help realise the full potential for the development of Birr’s opportunity sites, any application put forward should consider the Development Plan policies, objectives and standards and shall include an Urban Design Statement and Masterplan taking cognisance of the development principles outlined in the Offaly County Development Plan.

3.3.1 Opportunity Site 1 – ‘Mart Site’



Figure 3.7 Mart Site, Pound Street, Birr

Development of the 1.23 ha ‘Mart Site’ will act as a landmark building on entry to the town centre. Located at a vehicular junction, it will become a natural cut off point/end to the town centre in a northern direction. The impact on the town centre must be carefully assessed. The residential amenities and the protection of the heritage character of the town must be respected.

Potential of the Site

- The ‘Mart Site’ offers opportunities to accommodate a mixed-use development incorporating an appropriate mix of commercial, recreational, cultural, amenity and residential uses.
- The site includes the handball alley and Birr Courthouse. Additional access and permeability to this site should be considered.
- Development proposals should be of a use, scale, form and design that accords with the role, function and size of Birr town.
- A diversity of uses for both day and evening is encouraged.
- The site will require high levels of accessibility.

Development proposed on this site must have a strong ‘mixed-use’ emphasis and be of sufficiently high stature, quality, design and overall benefit to the town to justify the once-off opportunity presented by the site. The surrounding residential amenities and the protection of the heritage character of the town must be respected.

3.3.2 Opportunity Site no. 2 – ‘Rectory Lands’



Figure 3.8 Rectory Lands, Birr

The 5.72ha ‘Rectory Lands’ are of key importance to future development of the town centre. The lands are located to the rear of Emmet/Townsend Street, in close proximity to Emmet Square and adjoining residential housing developments to the east and north.

The key to any development on this site is that it knits into and further extends the built form/urban grain of Emmet/Townsend Street and hence the town centre. It is also seen as an opportunity to integrate housing developments to the north of the town centre into the urban fabric of the area. Movement and access through the site from Emmet/Townsend Street and adjoining housing estates is of key importance to its future development. Public spaces, access points and routes must be fronted and overlooked by development. Potential exists for mixed-use development in the backlands of Emmet/Townsend Street overlooking any new development on the Rectory Lands and incorporating improved public access from Emmet/Townsend Street onto the site. Potential also exists for the development of the backlands of existing residential developments at John’s Mall, but this may prove more difficult due to the need to protect the character of buildings of significant importance on these site plots.

The Rectory Lands are considered to constitute a strategic site within the town. The Concept Masterplan will illustrate an overarching design concept for the lands which will be based on an appraisal of the area and its surrounding contextual environment. It is intended to set out the broad parameters for the development of the site and is designed to assist all parties involved in the planning process including the Council, design teams and residents.

Potential of the Site

The 'Rectory Lands' offers opportunities to accommodate uses, design, form and layout in accordance with the Concept Masterplan which is currently under preparation by consultants and which is due to be finalised in 2023. The Concept Masterplan and future development of the site needs to address the following principles:

- Understanding natural and heritage assets of the site and its context to guide their protection and integration with the scheme as appropriate;
- Ensuring appropriate permeability within, to and from the site, with an emphasis on town centre foot and cycle links;
- Demonstrating a compact urban form, good urban design and healthy place-making;
- Be of high quality in terms of building form, layout, materials and public realm;
- Be consistent with Ministerial Guidelines for example Sustainable Development in Urban Area Guidelines, Sustainable Urban Housing Design Standards for New Apartments and Urban Development and Building Heights;
- Providing for low carbon output;
- Planning the development capacity, urban and landscape form of the site in reference to the above two;
- Examining the potential mix of uses appropriate to the site;
- Establishing design guidance / coding to help ensure the development complements the unique character of Birr;
- Guiding phased implementation of the scheme; and
- Informing future policy.

3.4 Residential Areas and the Town Centre

The Council will seek to maintain a strong residential base in the town centre area, and to prohibit undue encroachment of commercial uses into established residential areas and streets such as Oxmantown Mall and John's Mall. This is in order to protect the residential amenities of existing properties, to retain residential character and to foster and protect architectural integrity of the streets and individual buildings.

The Council will encourage the appropriate re-use of rear gardens where adjoining landowners can co-operate to create new streets and/or cohesive developments.

The Council will encourage the use of upper floors of existing retail/office units within the Town Centre as residential accommodation in order to contribute to the daytime and night time activity of the Town Centre, and improve the liveability factor of the town.

3.5 Retailing

Birr is designated a 'Self-Sustaining Growth Town' in the Offaly County Development Plan. Appropriate levels of convenience and comparison floor space will be encouraged and supported in Birr, where it is required to serve the existing and projected population catchment, subject to consideration of the impact on the core retail area and existing retail developments. There will generally be a presumption against the development of retail parks accommodating retail warehousing in Birr. Where retail

warehousing is proposed, careful consideration shall be given to the level of existing provision, the levels of vacancy, pressure to entertain or accommodate inappropriate uses at existing sites and the justification for additional retail warehouses. Any retail application received by the Council will be assessed under the remits of the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012 or subsequent editions.

3.5.1 Sequential Approach

The Council recognises that new retail development is best located within the existing core retail areas of Birr and Crinkill respectively.

It is necessary to retain the vitality and viability of Birr town centre and Crinkill village, therefore, a sequential approach (from the centre–outwards) will be applied in the location of retail developments. The Council consider that the size and scale of retailing provision should follow the established size of Birr town and Crinkill village and be located within the settlement i.e. concentration of retailing within the town centre, where possible.

3.5.2 Core Retail Area

The Core Retail Area of Birr Town is defined in the Offaly County Development Plan. The Core Retail Areas of Birr Town and Crinkill Village contain the primary retail streets where the main concentration of retail activity takes place (see Figures 3.9 and 3.10 below). These areas are the preferred areas for retail development. This Plan anticipates that new retail provision will be achieved through a combination of appropriate regeneration and renewal of sites within Birr Town and Crinkill Village.

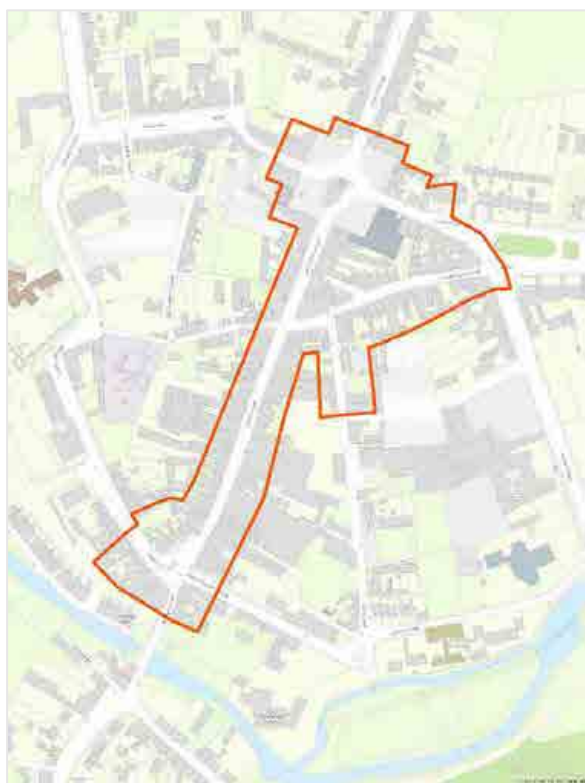


Figure 3.9 Birr Core Retail Area



Figure 3.10 Crinkill Core Retail Area

3.5.3 Shopfronts

Birr has many examples of well-designed shopfronts contributing positively to enhance the streetscape. Shopfronts provide colour and add variation to main streets, older shopfronts can contain clues of the history of commerce and the development of the town. New shopfronts may reflect a more traditional design or be more contemporary in approach but they should have regard to the features of the building that they front, particularly when they occur in protected structures. The design and material used for shopfronts should be of high quality materials and the colour scheme should integrate successfully with that of existing buildings in the vicinity.

The Council encourages the design of shopfront and signs in accordance with the Advice Leaflet 'Guide to Shopfronts and Signs' by Offaly County Council. The leaflet addresses, fascias, signs, lighting, windows, entrances, elements of traditional shopfronts, and principles of good design.



Figure 3.11 Cover of A Guide to Shopfronts and Signs by Offaly County Council

3.6 Purple Flag Accreditation

There is an opportunity for Birr town to obtain ‘Purple Flag’ accreditation by raising the standard and broadening the appeal of the town centre between the hours of 5pm and 5am. Areas that are awarded the ‘Purple Flag’ are recognised for providing a vibrant and diverse mix of dining, entertainment and culture while promoting the safety and wellbeing of visitors and local residents. The Council recognises the importance of achieving ‘Purple Flag’ accreditation for Birr Town. Obtaining a ‘Purple Flag’ for Birr town will play a valuable role in raising the standard and broadening the appeal of Birr town’s night-time economy.

3.7 Town Centre & Regeneration Policies

It is Council Policy to:

TCP-01 Protect and promote the vitality and viability of Birr and Crinkill's Core Retail Area, and to ensure that it remains the primary location for retail development, through the application of a sequential approach to development.

TCP-02 Support and promote the function of Birr town centre as the business, service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community and ensuring that it is vibrant, accessible and lived-in in accordance with the Town Centre First - A Policy Approach for Irish Towns 2022.

TCP-03 Facilitate the redevelopment of Opportunity Sites for a mixture of uses that will contribute to the vibrancy, diversity, vitality, attractiveness, safety, liveability and compact growth of Birr Town Centre. In conjunction with this, proposed developments must demonstrate how they will interact within its context and the wider urban area and shall be in accordance with section 3.3 of this Local Area Plan and section 7.2.4 of the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027.

TCP-04 Encourage and facilitate the reuse and regeneration of derelict, vacant, backland and underutilised lands and buildings in the town centre for retail, residential and other mixed uses through legislative measures and / or by supporting the progression and delivery of projects funded by the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund and other appropriate funds.

TCP-05 Support and encourage the principle of healthy place-making in Birr Town.

TCP-06 Ensure that growth planned for Birr 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.

TCP-07 Embed an age-friendly approach to the design of the public realm.

TCP-08 Further improve the streetscape and public realm in Birr town centre by undergrounding existing cables and improving pavements and street furniture in particular.

TCP-09 Support and promote the implementation of measures proposed in the Offaly Streetscape Project 2023 as it relates to Market Square and Castle Street in Birr.

TCP-10 Ensure that traditional shop fronts are retained and restored, and that new shopfront design contributes positively to and enhances the streetscape and that the design of shopfront and signs are in accordance with the Advice Leaflet 'Guide to Shopfronts and Signs' by Offaly County Council.

TCP-11 Provide loading bays of adequate capacity where they are needed most in order to ensure that traffic flows are not restricted.

TCP-12 Support and promote the development of the Rectory Lands, which are the subject of an emerging Rectory Lands Concept Masterplan.

TCP-13 Support the implementation of the key projects of the Birr Public Realm Plan 2009 (and associated addendum 2021).

TCP-14 Secure the relocation of the cattle mart, and facilitate the redevelopment of the existing mart site.

TCP-15 Support the development of sustainable low-carbon climate resilient communities and encourage a climate adaptation and mitigation approach to developments which will enable regeneration.

TCP-16 Incorporate Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) and other nature-based solutions in accordance with the 'Nature-based Solutions to the Management of Rainwater and Surface Water Runoff in Urban Areas – Best Practice Interim Guidance Document, 2022' and any subsequent editions.

TCP-17 Prohibit the proliferation of any individual use within the town centre which would by way of increased presence and use, detract from the amenities of the area and work against the policy of encouraging appropriate development to contribute positively to the vitality and viability of the town centre.

TCP-18 Seek a survey of existing numbers of bats, swifts and swift/nests for planning applications for renovations, redevelopment or demolition of old buildings in Birr Town and Crinkill Village centres. Where bats and/or swifts are shown to be present, specific mitigation measures during and after construction shall be proposed.

3.8 Town Centre & Regeneration Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

TCO-01 Assess retail development outside the Core Retail Areas of Birr and Crinkill in accordance with town centre first principles, the Offaly County Development Plan and Chapter 4 'Retailing and Development Management' of the Retail Planning Guidelines (DECLG, 2012).

TCO-02 Reduce the extent of vacant properties in Birr by 20% during the Plan period, subject to resources and funding.

Chapter 4: Built Heritage

Strategic Aim:

To protect, conserve and manage Birr's buildings, areas, structures, sites and features of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest, by promoting the understanding, enhancement and appropriate development of these assets in order to instigate a heritage-led regeneration of the town.

4.1 Introduction

Birr's built and natural heritage are key and distinctive assets that can be used positively to promote a positive image of the town and attract visitors. The built heritage is a unique resource and represents an irreplaceable expression of the richness and diversity of the town's past.

As stated in the Offaly County Development Plan, our *'built heritage assets are a non-renewable resource that contributes to our understanding of the past. It is important that our components of our built heritage such as our historic planned towns, heritage towns, protected structures, Geashill Architectural Conservation Area, sites and monuments, country houses and demesnes, industrial architecture, vernacular structures and monastic sites are valued and protected for future generations.'*

Accordingly, this Plan will seek to manage and conserve Birr's heritage assets for the benefit of present and future generations. This plan also seeks to promote Birr's heritage assets as generators of economic development and urban regeneration while adhering to the relevant statutory obligations.



Figure 4.1 The Early Medieval Church ruins of St. Brendan, Church Street
(Source: Stephen Callaghan)

4.2 Architectural Heritage

4.2.1 Record of Protected Structures

The Council intends to protect all structures within the County Offaly Record of Protected Structures (RPS) that are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest. The County Offaly RPS accompanies the Offaly County Development Plan.



Figure 4.2 Cumberland Column, Emmet Square

4.2.2 Architectural Conservation

Birr is a designated 'Georgian Heritage Town' because of its unique and largely intact architectural character and setting. Birr town's built environment is characterised by a compact historic core, but also by wide streets, defined squares and tree lined walks. It contains many fine buildings and terraces dating from the 18th and 19th Centuries. It is essential that any renewal or new development should respect and compliment this character. The overall aim of the Council will be based on conserving and maintaining the character and attractiveness of Birr by carefully managing development, in particular, in the town centre and within Crinkill village.

4.2.3 Vernacular Structures

There are some structures within this plan area that are of moderate scale and are important for a number of local reasons e.g. local history or building techniques etc. Individually, or as part of a group of buildings or street, such structures may contribute positively to the character of the area or townscape, which can be diminished by their loss. It is an aim of the Council to encourage the protection, appreciation and appropriate revitalisation / reuse rather than demolition of the vernacular heritage of Birr including their setting and features.

4.2.4 Birr Workhouse

In 2008, a study was commissioned by Offaly County Council supported by the Heritage Council to investigate the current condition and use of workhouses in Ireland generally and Birr Workhouse specifically. The study provided an assessment of how workhouses may be adapted for future uses. The Birr Workhouse experienced fire damage during the last plan period resulting in the building falling further into disrepair. The workhouse has potential to be restored for multiple uses. Any future proposal for the Birr Workhouse shall involve consultation and engagement with Offaly County Council and shall consider all sources of funding to safeguard the structure.

4.3 Archaeological Conservation

It is the Council's aim to protect Birr's archaeological heritage from damage. It is also an aim of the Council to secure the preservation of all archaeological monuments included in the Record of Monuments and Places, together with any other sites and their settings discovered since the publication of the Record.

4.3.1 Zones of Archaeological Potential in Birr

Zones of Archaeological Potential in Birr town are identified in Figure 4.3, including an Urban Archaeology Zone. However, it is accepted that many other sites may remain beneath the surface and possibly may become uncovered following development/excavation work (refer to www.archaeology.ie).

4.3.2 Urban Archaeology

In 1986, an Urban Archaeology Study of Birr town was undertaken by the Department of the Environment which has led to an Urban Archaeology Zone being delineated (refer to Figure 4.4) Elsewhere, however, deposits are likely to survive and there is a strong likelihood of recovering house foundations, refuse pits, industrial area, and workshops of 16th and 17th century date.

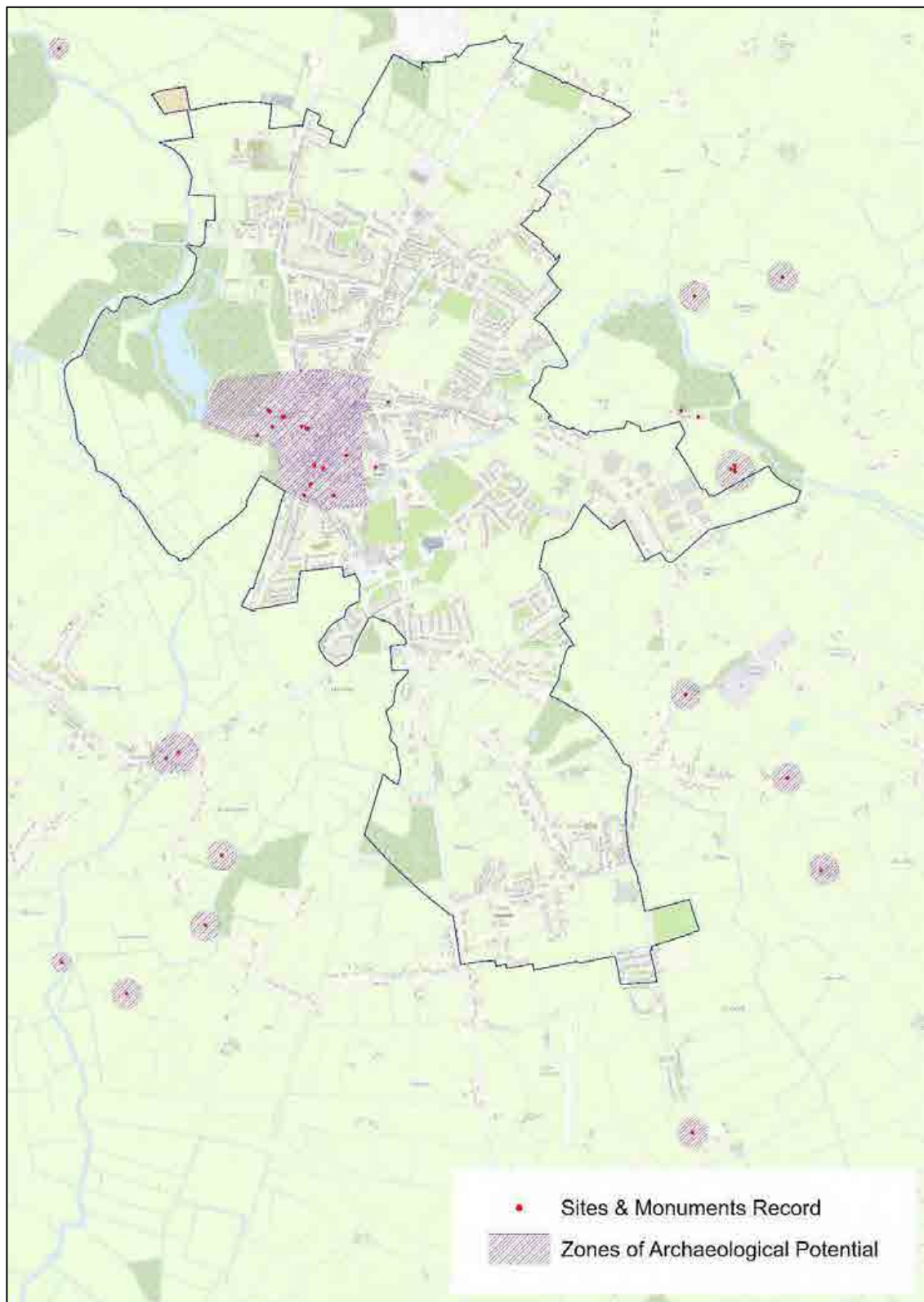


Figure 4.3 Zones of Archaeological Potential

4.3.3 Birr's Burial Grounds

A total of nine burial grounds can be found within a short distance of Birr town. These burial grounds include St. Brendan's Old Graveyard, Bully's Acre, Birr Military Cemetery, Clonoghill Cemetery, Workhouse Cemetery, Quakers Burial Ground, Presbyterian Burial Ground (Crotty's Church), and Burial Grounds to the north of St. Brendan's Catholic Church (Parish Priests' and Nuns' burial grounds). The Council aims to protect the historical burial grounds within Birr town and encourage their maintenance in accordance with conservation principles.

4.3.4 Built & Archaeological Heritage Climate Change

Predicted changes to the Irish climate will have implications for built and archaeological heritage. Wetter winters and drier summers along with increasingly powerful storms have potential to give rise to structural damage of Birr's built and archaeological heritage. The Council will consider the Built & Archaeological Heritage, Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan (2019) prepared under the National Adaptation Framework in this regard. The Council recognises the importance of climate proofing structures and work has been carried out on St. Brendan's Medieval Church and Birr Courthouse in recent years to plan for works to make them more robust.

4.3.5 Consultation with Relevant Bodies

In the interest of conserving Birr's buildings, structures and sites of special interest, the Council will ensure that all planning applications for development, refurbishment, and restoration works etc. are referred on receipt to the relevant statutory bodies. The Council will take cognisance of the advice and recommendations of the statutory bodies, both in respect of whether or not to grant planning permission, and in respect of the conditions to which permission, if granted, should be subject. Wherever practicable, the Council will encourage the provision of public access to sites identified in the Record of Monuments and Places.

4.4 Built Heritage Policies

It is Council Policy to:

BHP-01 Encourage the rehabilitation, renovation, climate-proofing and re-use of existing protected structures, where appropriate, over the demolition of same and new-build on-site.

BHP-02 Encourage the rehabilitation, renovation, climate-proofing and re-use of existing vernacular structures that are not listed on the Record of Protected Structures, over the demolition of same and new-build on-site.

BHP-03 Protect and enhance the urban form of Birr including the character of streetscapes, vistas and squares for example, Market Square, Emmet Street and Square, Oxmantown Mall, Townsend Street, The Green, John's Place, Compton Row, Newbridge Street, Connaught Street, O'Connell Street, Main Street, Castle Street, St. Brendan Street and Crinkill village core.

BHP-04 Protect all structures in Birr that are listed in the County Offaly Record of Protected Structures that are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest in Birr.

BHP-05 Encourage contemporary development within Birr where the applicant can successfully demonstrate that any proposal will not negatively detract from the special character of the existing built environment.

BHP-06 Ensure that full consideration is given to the protection of archaeological heritage when undertaking, approving or authorising development in order to avoid unnecessary conflict between development and the protection of archaeological heritage.

BHP-07 Have regard to the Zones of Archaeological Potential as shaded on Figures 4.3 and 4.4, and to ensure that planning applications are referred to the appropriate prescribed bodies.

BHP-08 Protect the historical burial grounds within Birr town and encourage their maintenance in accordance with conservation principles.

4.5 Built Heritage Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

BHO-01 Secure, where feasible and appropriate, the protection of the character of the existing original carriage archways/access-ways to the rear of existing properties.

BHO-02 Secure, where feasible, the protection of the character of structures of interest, which are part of the town's milling and distilling heritage.

BHO-03 Examine the feasibility of designating Architectural Conservation Areas in Birr over the plan period.

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).



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.

Chapter 6: Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure

Strategic Aim:

Protect and enhance Birr Town and Crinkill village's natural assets of clean water, biodiversity, landscape, green infrastructure, natural heritage and agricultural land, while maintaining ecosystem services and improving resilience to climate change.

6.1 Introduction

The character of Birr Town and Crinkill can be described as a combination of urban and rural landscapes with a gentle topography apart from undulating areas at Burke's Hill, Seefin and Hillside. The historic core of the town centre is sensitively built into the surrounding landscape.

The natural landscape of the Birr Castle Demesne in the western part of the town comprises a mixture of woodland, arboretums, ponds and lakes, and formal gardens before transitioning to private gardens within the town centre and larger public open spaces in established residential areas such as Castle Court, Ashbrook Drive, Chesterfield Close, Avondale, Woodlands Park, Seefin and Woodlane.

The Camcor River, a tributary river of the Little Brosna, originates in the Slieve Bloom Mountains and flows east to west in the town. The areas around the Camcor River provide an important green infrastructure corridor, with the two largest spaces being the Mill Island Park and Camcor Park, which are situated in central Birr adjacent to the north bank of the Camcor. These spaces are composed mainly of undulating mown grassland with groups of deciduous trees, connected by a network of paths and seating areas. In addition, the banks of the river offer unobtrusive soft grassy surface walking trails from Elmgrove Bridge to Syngefield Bridge to the east of the town.

The most significant open space areas to the south of the town centre are in the ownership of Birr GAA and Birr Rugby Club as well as the private grounds of the County Arms Hotel and public open space areas serving established residential areas at Droombane, Seefin and Woodlane.

To the east of the town, the patterns of development changes into suburban and low density rural development with a large industrial estate at Syngefield Retail Park with the majority of open space in the form of pasture and deciduous woodland.

The village of Crinkill is separated from the town of Birr in the Plan Area by undulating agriculture land, the Fionaun River and a deciduous woodland area. The most significant open space areas in Crinkill are in the ownership of Crinkill GAA as well as public open space areas serving established developments at Cemetery Road, Hawthorne Drive and Grove Street.

Birr and Crinkill has an abundant stock of natural capital that in turn provide a wide range of ecosystem services to residents. In line with Regional Policy Objective (RPO) 3.4 of the Eastern and Midland Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, the Council promotes an ecosystem services approach in the preparation of this Local Area Plan. The four main types of ecosystem services are provisioning, regulating, habitat and cultural, each of which are defined in Table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1 Definition of Each Type of Ecosystem Service

Type of Ecosystem Services	Definition
Provisioning services	Products obtained from ecosystems such as food, fresh water, wood, fibre, genetic resources and medicines.
Regulating services	Benefits obtained from the regulation of ecosystem processes such as climate regulation, natural hazard regulation, water purification, waste management, pollination and pest control.
Habitat services	Provision of habitats for migratory species and to maintain the viability of gene-pools.
Cultural services	Non-material benefits that people obtain from ecosystems such as spiritual enrichment, intellectual development, recreation and aesthetic values.

6.2 National and European Designations

Whilst there are a number of designated sites near Birr Town, there currently are no Natura 2000 sites, Special Protection Areas or Special Areas of Conservation within the Plan Area. There are currently two proposed Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs), within the Plan Area, which are Leister bat nursery roosts on domestic dwellings (see Figure 6.1 below). The ecological interest that underlies the proposed NHAs is taken into account in decisions on planning applications. The designation of sites within Birr and subsequent protection afforded to them does not always preclude development from occurring. However, the Council’s role is to ensure that development, when considered appropriate, is carried out in a manner that does not impede or disturb the biodiversity of the proposed/designated site.

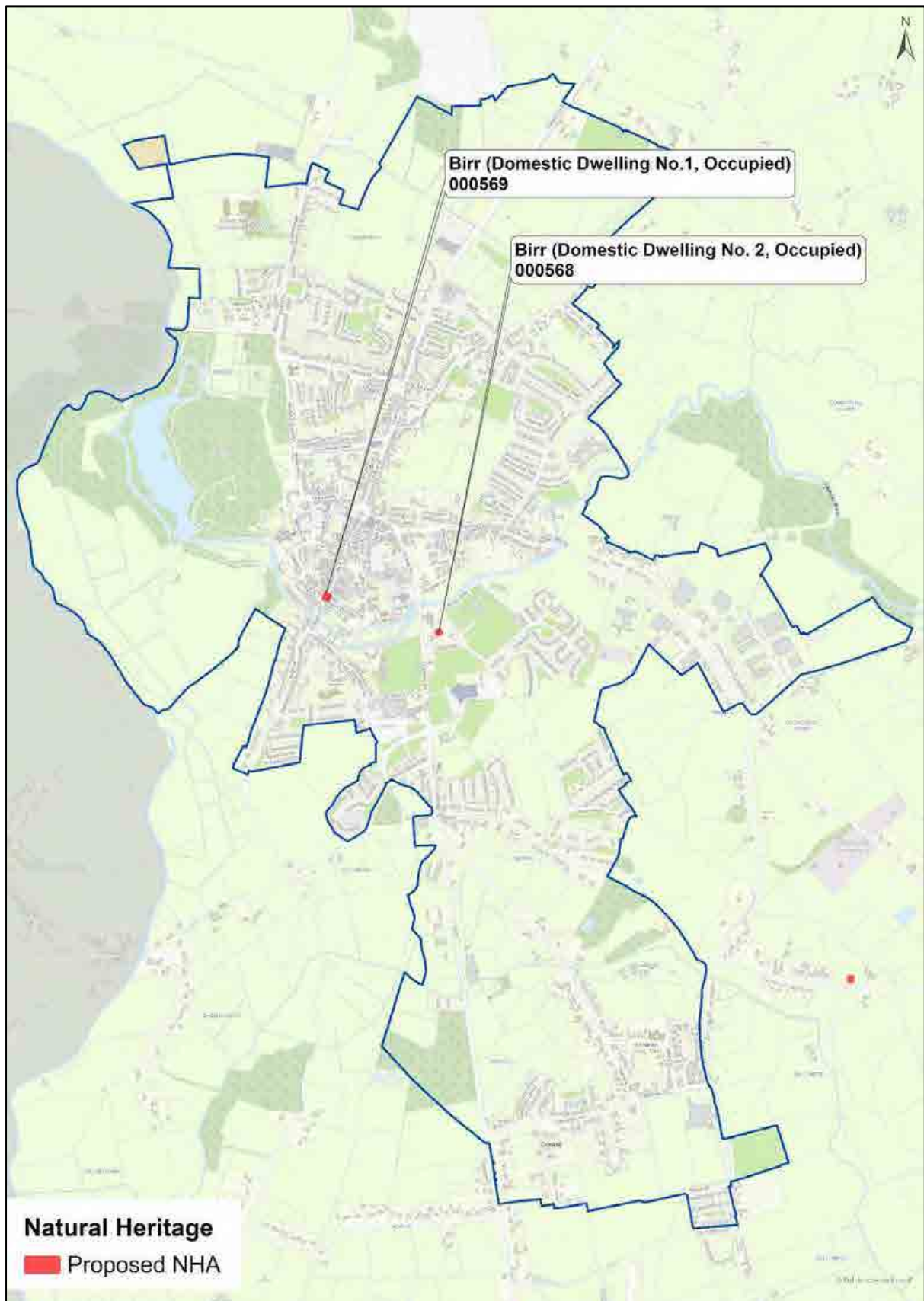


Figure 6.1 Proposed Natural Heritage Areas in Birr

6.3 Crinkill Mushroom Stone

The Crinkill Mushroom Stone is classed as a County Geological Site (CGS) identified for protection under the Irish Geological Heritage (IGH) Programme 2016. Mushroom stones are solitary sentinels of limestone, occasionally shaped like mushrooms from prolonged exposure to lapping waves at the edge of postglacial lakes, which have since vanished or retreated. This Plan recognises that this stone is an important geomorphological and archaeological feature, providing information about past landscapes and landscape change while ancient lichen communities continue to live on this stone also.

6.4 Landscape Sensitivity

The Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 contains a Landscape Classification for the County that classifies the different landscapes of the County in relation to their different characteristics and values and their degree of sensitivity to various kinds of development.

Much of Birr is classified as 'Low Sensitivity'. This class largely encompasses the Plan area's main urban and farming areas. These areas comprise natural enclosing features (e.g. topography, vegetation) which have the capacity to absorb a range of new development. These areas can effectively absorb appropriately designed and located development.

A number of worked-out esker systems within the town are classified as 'Medium Sensitivity'. These areas are generally 'open' in character with intrinsic quality and moderate capacity to absorb new development.

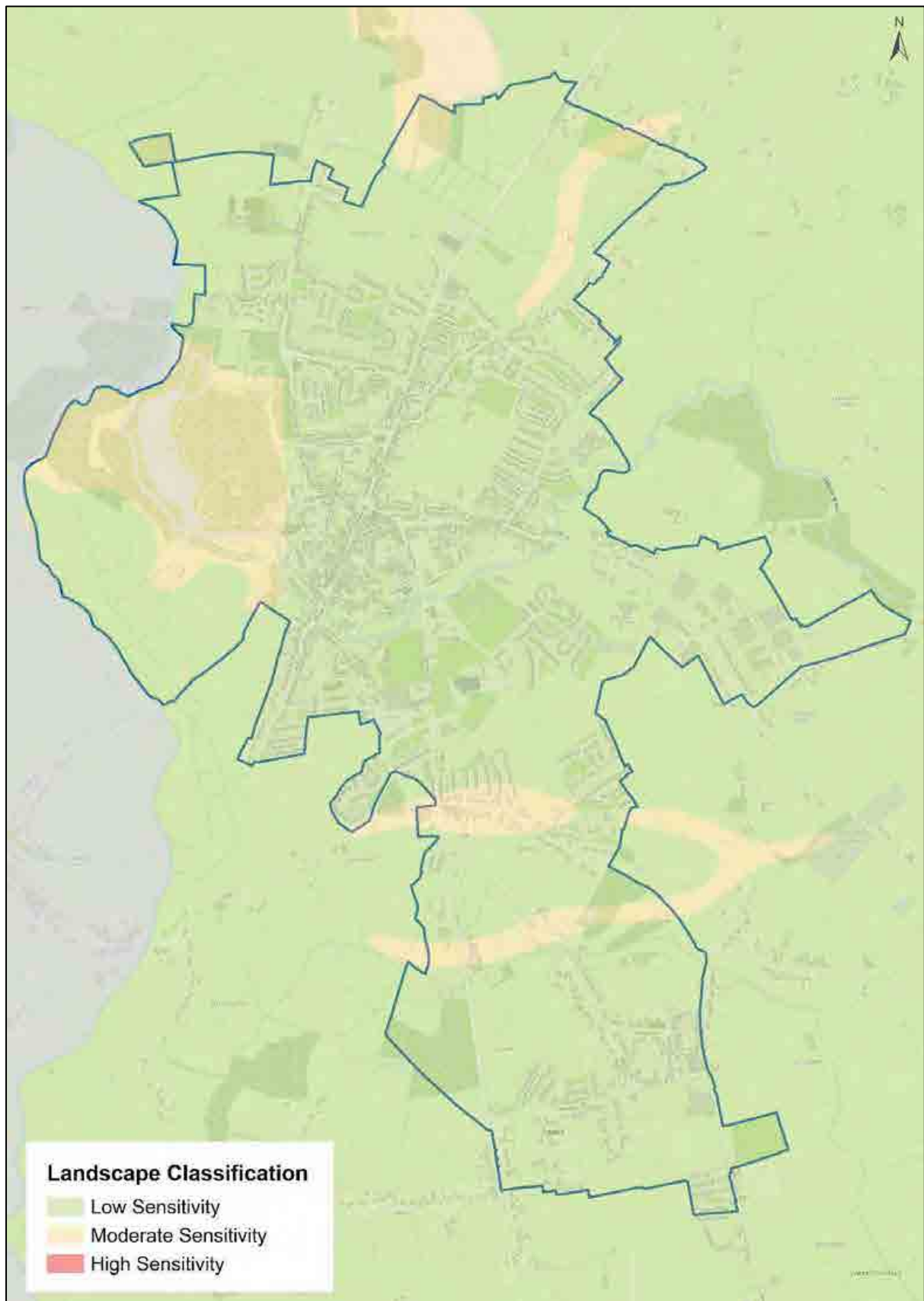


Figure 6.2 Landscape Classification

6.5 Green Infrastructure

The term Green Infrastructure (GI) can be broadly defined as integrated and interconnected networks of green space and water capable of delivering ecosystem services and quality of life benefits to people. It includes features such as parks, gardens, green roofs, green walls, rivers, lakes, canals, peatland, wetland landscapes, uplands, greenways, blueways, woodlands and farmlands in our countryside and settlements. This Local Area Plan takes a proactive approach towards planning and managing the GI network of Birr and Crinkill by seeking to maximise the benefits of the multi-functionality that GI provides. In protecting and enhancing the green infrastructure network of the town, important amenity and recreational spaces can be provided for communities, thereby contributing to the health and quality of life of residents and allowing for increased climate resilience within the town in the years ahead.

Article 10 of the Habitats Directive recognises the importance of ecological networks as corridors and stepping-stones for wildlife, including for migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of species of flora and fauna. The Directive requires that ecological connectivity and areas of ecological value outside the Natura 2000 network of designated ecological sites are maintained and it recognises the need for the management of these areas through land use planning and development policies. Ecological networks are important in connecting areas of local biodiversity with each other and with nearby designated sites to prevent islands of habitat from being disconnected entities. Ecological networks are composed of linear features, such as treelines, hedgerows, waterways, which provide corridors or stepping-stones for wildlife species moving within their normal range. They are particularly important for mammals, especially for bats and small birds.

6.5.1 Existing Green Infrastructure Network

As can be observed from Figure 6.3 below which maps the town's GI Network, Birr benefits from a significant level of GI assets that creates an attractive setting for residents and visitors alike. The primary GI assets in the town are the extensive grounds of the Birr Castle Demesne to the west of the town, the Camcor River and associated linear parks, and large tracts of agricultural land serving as a Green Belt between the town of Birr and the village of Crinkill. These primary assets are supported by a wide range of playing pitches, public open spaces, agricultural grassland, woodlands and grassy strips between footpaths and road surfaces, all of which perform different GI functions.

Table 6.2 Typologies of Green Infrastructure in Birr and Crinkill

Category	Examples in Plan Area
Agricultural land/Green Belts	Land managed for agriculture, including grazing lands and crop production fields, to the south of the Plan Area at Clonoghill, Crinkill, Roscrea Road and Military Road allow for food production, act as ecological corridors and stepping-stones while also acting as an important green belt to preserve the separate identity of Crinkill village from Birr Town.
Green areas for water management	Lands designated Constrained Land Use to protect urban areas from flood damage and help adapt to changing climate patterns. These areas are also suitable for important walkways for local residents.
Blue Areas	The Little Brosna River, Camcor River and the lake at Birr Castle Demesne comprise the town's most significant water bodies providing many benefits; supporting tourism, forming part of storm surge and flood management providing recreation and exercise space and biodiversity.
Parks, gardens and public open space	Birr Castle Demesne, Camcor Linear Park, Mill Island Park, Syngesfield Demesne, playing pitches, public open spaces within residential and business park developments, woodlands, and shrub lands efficiently bring biodiversity into the town and provide recreation space for residents improving quality of life.

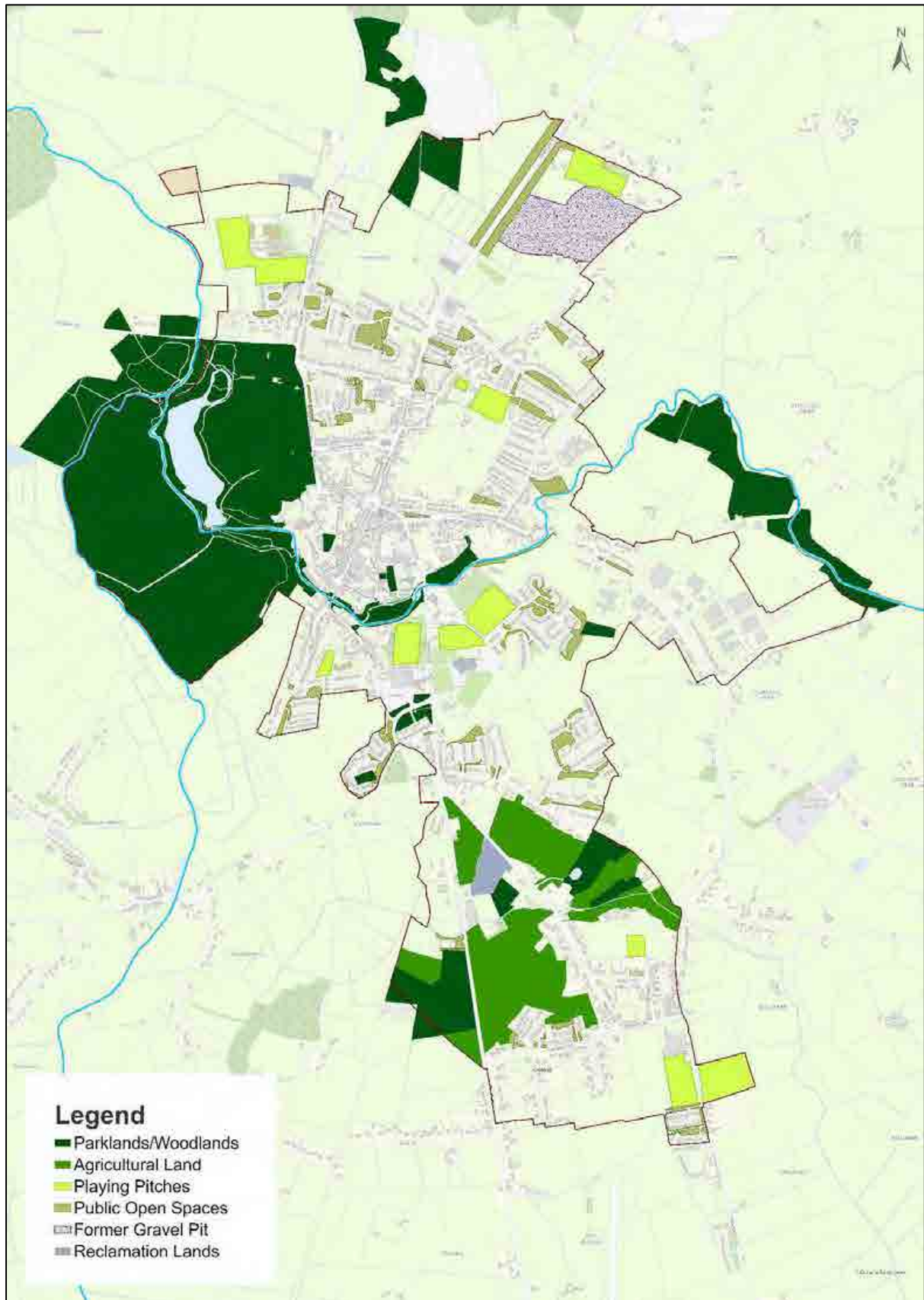


Figure 6.3 Existing Green Infrastructure in Birr and Crinkill

6.5.2 Birr Castle Demesne

The Birr Castle Demesne, in addition to being home to significant tracts of woodland and wild flower meadows in an extensive 18th and 19th century parklands setting, contains award-winning gardens, which are home to the world's tallest box hedges and have a worldwide plant collection of rare flower and plant species, including over 40 champion trees. Champion trees are individual trees that are exceptional examples of their species because of their enormous size, great age or historical significance.



Figure 6.4 Grounds of Birr Castle Demesne

6.5.3 Little Brosna River and Camcor River

The Little Brosna River, which rises in County Tipperary near Moneygall, forms the western boundary of the Plan area. The Camcor River, the primary tributary of the Little Brosna River, rises on the western slopes of the Slieve Bloom Mountains and flows to the west until it meets the Little Brosna River within the Birr Castle Demesne at the River Walk. The banks of both the Little Brosna River and the Camcor River are important ecological networks that provide habitats for flora and fauna and facilitate linkages to the surrounding countryside.



Figure 6.5 Significant water bodies in Birr

Table 6.3 Examples of flora and fauna at the Little Brosna River and Camcor River

Birds and Bats	Blackbird	Flowers and Insects	Brimstone
	Blue Tit		Butterbur
	Bullfinch		Cow parsley
	Daubenton's Bat		Cowslip
	Dipper		Cuckoo Flower
	Grey Heron		Fairy Foxglove
	Grey Wagtail		Holly Blue
	Mistle Thrush		Lesser Celandine
	Rook		Red-tailed Bumblebee
	Song Trush		Small Tortoiseshell
	Swift		Yellow or Flag Iris
	Treecreeper		



Figure 6.6 Cuckoo Flower

In addition, the Croneen trout, a rare breed of brown trout, is unique to the Birr area, travelling in shoals from Lough Derg to the Little Brosna and Camcor Rivers in May/June every year before spawning in November and returning to Lough Derg in November.

This Plan recognises the importance of protecting and enhancing water quality and the multitude of benefits to the local community in Birr that good water quality supports.

Existing linear public parks in Birr follow the meandering course of the Camcor River running through the town with a river walk stretching from Mill Island to Elmgrove Bridge. There exists an opportunity to extend the town's river walk with an eco-friendly walkway or nature trail along the Camcor River running from Elmgrove Bridge to Springfield Bridge. An eco-friendly walkway or nature trail has the potential to:

- Greatly contribute to the town's green infrastructure providing vital amenity and recreational space for the local community, while also contributing to the health and quality of life of residents and visitors to the town; and
- Support the tourism and economic development of Birr, in conjunction with existing tourism assets such as Birr Castle and the town's cultural heritage.

The planting of appropriate and suitable native trees along riverbanks is important as they provide shade and shelter for fish, help stabilise riverbanks, and help regulate floods while their leaves provide food for aquatic creatures.

River restoration is required in a number of places on the Camcor River to reduce riverbank and instream erosion and increase overall channel instability but also to reduce flood risk. River restoration

works during the plan period could take the following forms; river bank or instream habitat rehabilitation (improving existing impacted conditions), restoring riparian areas (bringing the physical and ecological conditions of the river bank back to what it once was), reintroducing instream habitat (adding specific instream habitat formerly lost) and reconnecting fragmented habitat.

6.5.4 Public Parks

The existing public park network in Birr follows the meandering course of local rivers and streams running through the town. This Plan supports the extension of the Camcor Linear Park and Mill Island Park with the overall aim of creating a park network throughout the town and environs with high accessibility to the public. The Council will continue to improve the quality of this park as resources permit and will investigate the feasibility in conjunction with the appropriate prescribed bodies of establishing a Wetlands Park on Little Brosna Flood Plain.



Figure 6.7 Mill Island Park

6.5.5 Pocket Parks, Community Gardens and Allotments

Pocket parks, community gardens and allotments utilise small spaces efficiently to bring biodiversity into urban areas, provide high-quality recreation spaces for residents and improving quality of life for all. The Council considers that there exists potential for the provision of pocket parks, community gardens and allotments in the Plan Area at the following locations;

1. To the east of the Tullamore Road at Woodlands;
2. To the south of the River Camcor at Syngfield;
3. To the west of the Main Street; and
4. Adjacent to Mill Street and Birr Civic Offices at Wilmer Road.
5. To the north east of Moorpark Street



Figure 6.8 Potential locations for pocket parks, gardens and allotments

6.5.6 Pollination Zones/Biodiversity Zones

The Council supports pollinator friendly planting and wildlife strips or Biodiversity Zones to enhance biodiversity at approaches to the town, roundabouts, peripheral open space areas in residential areas, and areas connected to woodlands/farmlands/riparian zones throughout the plan area in accordance with the recommendations of the All Ireland Pollinator Plan. In this regard, the Plan promotes the use of pesticide-free and pollinator friendly fertilisers and other treatments used by the Council on public land and will seek to progress the reduction, and ultimate cessation, of use of such pesticides and treatments. A number of potential locations for pollination zones/biodiversity zones are identified in Figure 6.14 below.

6.5.7 Killaun Bog

Killaun Bog, located to the north east of the town, leased long term to St. Brendan's Community School, Birr, with its newly replaced boardwalk produced from recycled plastic by local company, Irish Recycled Products, offers significant potential for rewilding and recolonisation as a new wilderness area, with significant benefits for educational, amenity and recreational purposes for visitors.

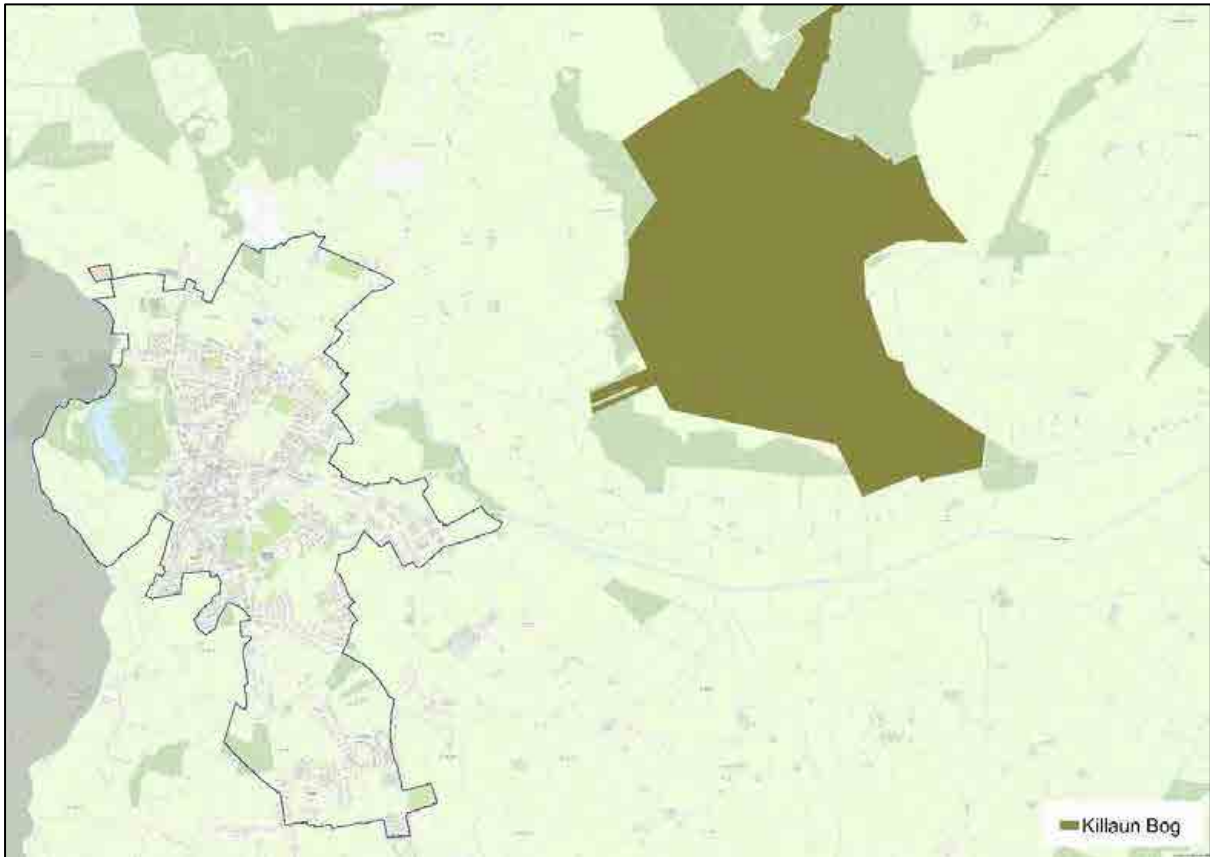


Figure 6.9 Location of Killaun Bog

There is also potential for a future linkage between Killaun Bog and a River Camcor Walk in the townlands of Syngefield and Clonoghil Upper through the Rath Road on the east and west of the bog.



Figure 6.10 Killaun Bog Boardwalk

6.6 Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS)

The impact of extreme rainfall events is increasing with climate change and this is significantly increasing both the level of pollution from urban runoff and the flood risk arising from the greater volume of that runoff from the largely impermeable urban area.

A fundamental part of SuDS is the provision of adequate levels of treatment of surface water prior to discharging to a watercourse. SuDS aims to address both quality and quantity of runoff whereby both the rate and volume of discharge are reduced.

Whilst Irish Water maps for Birr show that the town is mainly served by combined foul-surface water networks, this Plan encourages new developments to consider nature-based solutions to the management of rainwater and surface water runoff to reduce pollution and reduce flood risk as well as to improve biodiversity and provide a greener more pleasant urban environment. Developers are advised to consult with the Nature-based Solutions to the Management of Rainwater and Surface Water Runoff in Urban Areas – Water Sensitive Urban Design Best Practice Interim Guidance Document (DHLGH, 2021) which seeks to mimic the natural water balance of rural areas through water sensitive urban design. This can be achieved through the replacement of impermeable surfacing with nature-based planted areas that are designed to absorb, retain, store and treat urban runoff prior to discharge back into the environment.

SuDS proposals for Birr town could include the:

- Replacement of impervious surfacing in car parks with pervious pavements;
- Incorporation of rain gardens into traffic calming measures or upstream/in place of existing gullies. Rain gardens allow runoff to pond temporarily on the surface before filtering through vegetation and underlying soils;
- Replacement of gullies with tree pits;
- Use of swales and linear wetlands to slow the flow of water and where infiltration characteristics of the soil are favourable, reduce the quantity of surface water runoff. They are ideal for use alongside car parks and roadways;
- Provision of planted channels which can provide conveyance routes and intercept flows and which can be incorporated into the landscape design to form boundaries;
- Provision of storage areas within public open spaces. These can include landscaped depressions, ponds and wetlands; and
- Provision of green roofs on bus shelters, bicycle shelters and on roof space on all large commercial, industrial, institutional and large apartment blocks.

Whilst there is scope for limited attenuation capacity within the SuDS measures listed above, there are better opportunities to provide storage areas within public open spaces in the form of landscaped depressions, ponds and wetlands where possible. Where space constraints apply, underground modular attenuation structures should be considered.

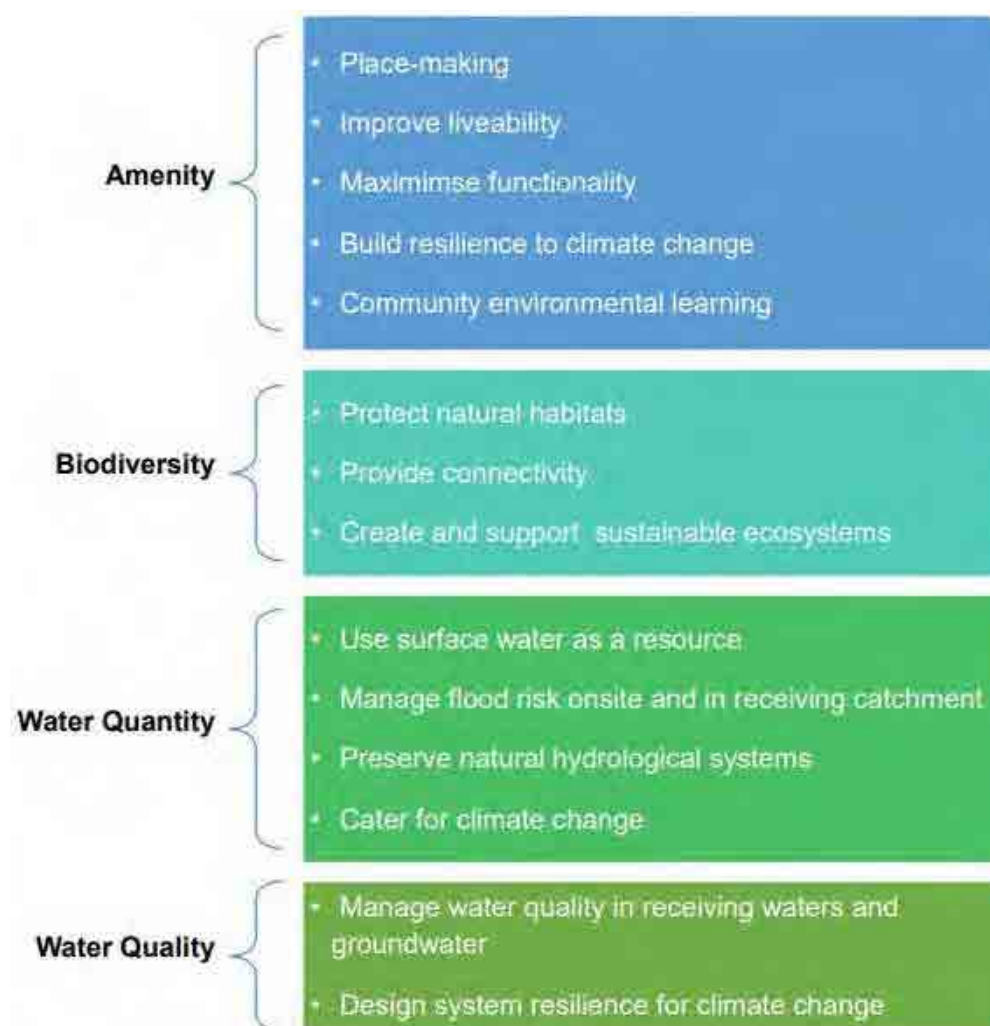


Figure 6.11 Purpose of SuDs

(Source: Nature-based Solutions to the Management of Rainwater & Surface Water Runoff in Urban Areas, DHLGH, 2021)

SuD is also addressed in Chapter 3 Town Centre and Regeneration, Chapter 8 Climate Action and Chapter 9 Critical Infrastructure.

6.7 Constructed Wetlands and Community Ponds

There is considerable potential to develop wetlands near the rivers that flow through the Plan Area to provide extra water storage in the countryside, habitat for wildlife and help reduce flood risk. Wetlands have been shown to be effective at removing pollutants from water and can double up as nature reserves as they attract a range of wildlife species. In addition, constructed wetlands can be used in the treatment of polluted water which otherwise may contaminate a local watercourse. They can be used where water treatment has not been fully effective, for a variety of reasons, (e.g., where tertiary treatment is not available) and can ‘polish’ the water by removing contaminants. Small ponds can also be crucial habitats for a range of wildlife from dragonflies and water hens to frogs and newts. These in turn, support other species of wildlife such as grey heron, otters and bats. Figure 6.14 below shows a number of specific areas where wetlands could potentially be developed during the life of this Plan.

6.8 Building Green

This Plan recognises the ability of green walls, green roofs, green terraces and facades to lower temperatures in urban areas, absorb carbon from the atmosphere, as well as make buildings more habitable through noise reduction, air filtration and creating attractive places.

A green roof or terrace is one that is planted with different types of vegetation, which can include grasses, flora, herbs and vegetables. Green roofs can be incorporated into new developments and installed on older buildings in order to secure a variety of benefits. They can contribute to climate change resilience, helping to improve air quality and temperature while also retaining and filtering storm water to alleviate pressure on drainage infrastructure. Depending on the mix of plants used green roofs can also help contribute to local biodiversity, as well as provide new public and private amenity spaces and increase property values. Green walls, also known as plant walls, living walls or vertical gardens, are vertical structures that have different types of plants or other greenery attached to them.

The Dublin City Green and Blue Guide 2021 is an effective guide on the technical specifications and design considerations for such structures in this regard.

6.9 Burial Grounds and Gardens of Remembrance

This Plan recognises that burial grounds while providing culturally sensitive space for burial and remembrance also have significant value as recreational spaces similar to parks for nature conservation and the promotion of biodiversity. Grass cutting management and planting programmes will be considered for each site to provide access to the burial grounds while also allowing for the flowering of plants in certain areas.



Figure 6.12 Military Cemetery at Crinkill

Grounds such as (1) the Garden of Tranquillity, (2) the Workhouse Cemetery, (3) the Military Cemetery at Crinkill, (4) Bully's Acre, (5) Quakers Burial Ground and (6) St. Brendan's Graveyard are considered a type of green infrastructure in Birr. The locations of these cemeteries and gardens of remembrance are shown below in Figure 6.13.

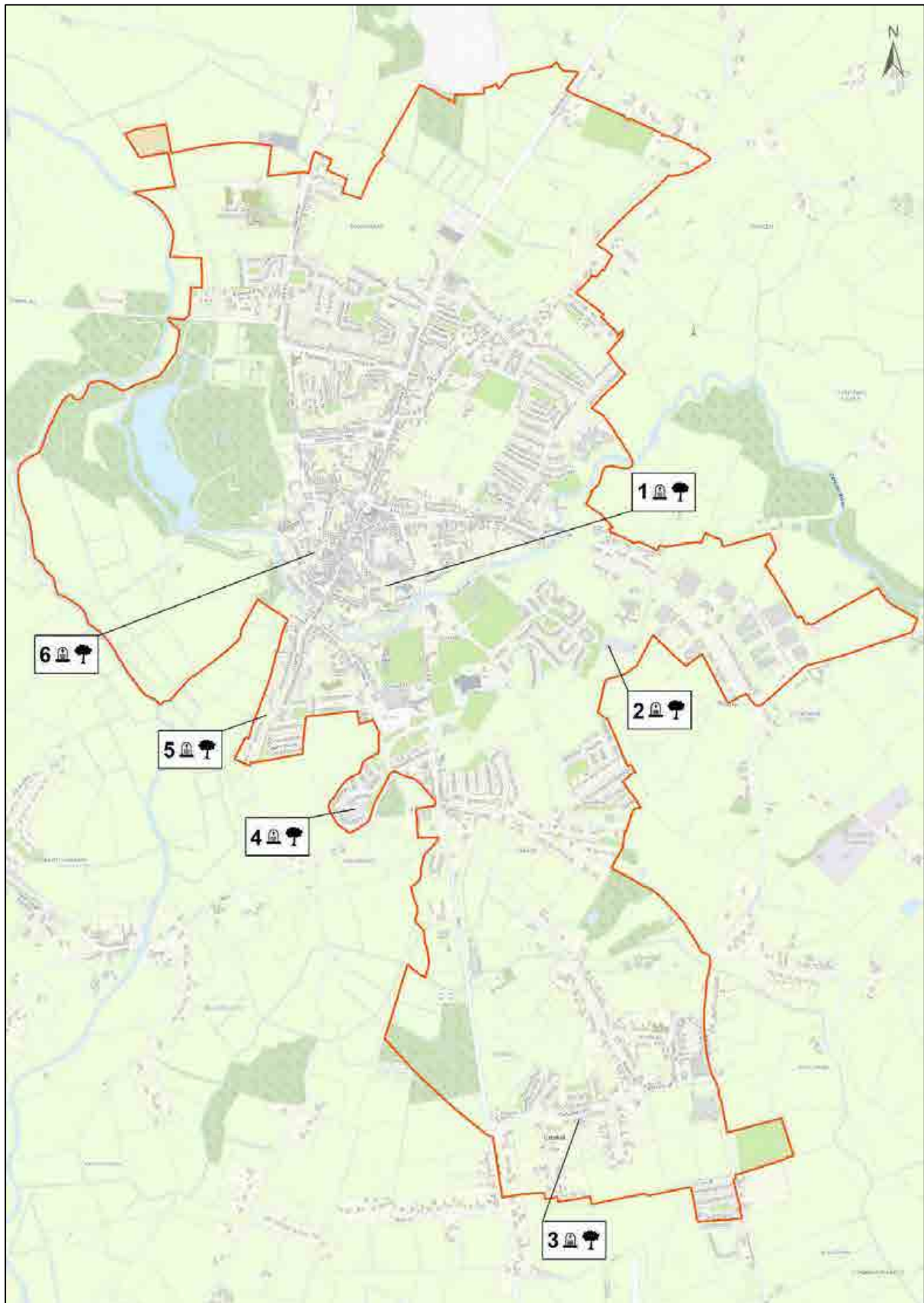


Figure 6.13 Location of existing cemeteries and gardens of remembrance within Plan Area

6.10 Control of Invasive Species

Invasive species such as Himalayan Balsam are a particular problem along rivers leading to a loss of biodiversity and even destabilised riverbanks through increased erosion. The Council will seek to continue the implementation of non-native invasive species control within Birr including along the Camcor River and the Little Brosna and to co-ordinate control measures with other stakeholders, wherever possible, to ensure a collaborative approach in relation to removal and monitoring.

6.11 Potential Green Infrastructure Projects

There is an opportunity to enhance the green links and ecological connectivity between open spaces throughout Birr. This Plan seeks to establish a coherent, integrated and evolving green infrastructure network which extends from Killaun Bog, through the town along the Camcor River all the way to Birr Castle Demesne, in addition to numerous ecological corridors providing habitats for wildlife, air and water filtration, surface water management, recreational and tourism opportunities and 'greener' neighbourhoods. Figure 6.14 below shows the potential GI projects that could be developed in the town in the Plan Period.

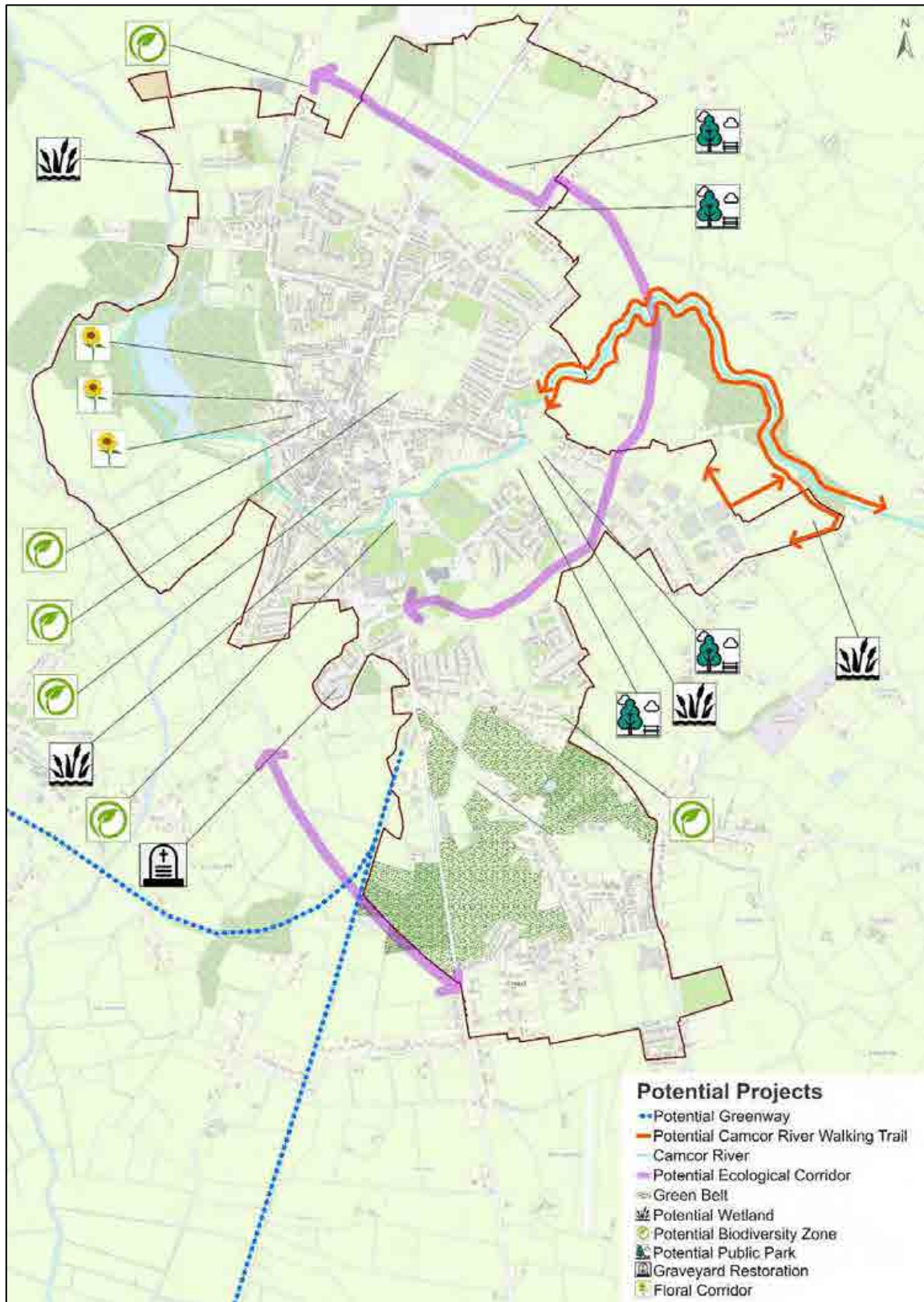


Figure 6.14 Potential Green Infrastructure projects.

6.12 Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure Policies

It is Council policy to:

Overarching

BGIP-01 Protect, conserve and enhance Birr's biodiversity and natural heritage that includes wildlife (flora and fauna), habitats and landscapes of importance to wildlife, especially along the Camcor and Little Brosna Rivers and the Birr Castle Demesne, which in-turn can contribute to climate action.

BGIP-02 Prohibit any development that would be harmful to or that would result in a significant deterioration of habitats and/or disturbance of protected species within Birr and to support/co-operate with statutory authorities and others in support of measures taken to manage proposed or designated sites in order to achieve their conservation objectives.

BGIP-03 Support the role that biodiversity and green infrastructure plays in the Plan Area in relation to ecosystem services along with climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Native Hedgerow and Tree Species

BGIP-04 Promote the protection and preservation of existing hedgerows and to encourage planting of native hedgerow and tree species.

BGIP-05 Support the development of a Floral Corridor concept that involves designing and constructing, through the coordinated planting of trees, flowers, and shrubs, a physical linkage of scale between the Castle grounds and the centre of the town taking into account local traffic safety.

Camcor River and the Little Brosna River

BGIP-06 Support the following restoration and conservation works to protect and enhance water quality of the Camcor River and the Little Brosna River and the biodiversity value of riverbanks during the Plan Period;

- Planting of trees and riparian plants;
- Riparian management work;
- Techniques to manage rainwater or soiled water ingress to rivers;
- River restoration works;
- Fish passage – e.g. modification of weirs;
- Invasive species control;
- Silt trapping;
- Nature-based Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) – e.g. natural flood retention measures (NFRM), bio-swales, raingardens, water butts;
- Pond creation and biodiversity habitats;
- Constructed wetlands;
- Wild flower meadows; and
- Rare species conservation initiatives.

Crinkill Mushroom Stone

BGIP-07 Protect from inappropriate development, the Crinkill Mushroom Rocks, a county geological site, which is identified by the Irish Geological Heritage Programme for Protection in County Offaly.

6.13 Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

Networks

BGIO-01 Further develop an integrated and coherent Green Infrastructure network for the Plan Area by requiring the retention of substantial networks of green space in urban, urban fringe and adjacent countryside areas to serve the needs of communities now and in the future including the need to adapt to and mitigate climate change.

BGIO-02 Integrate existing green infrastructure as shown in Figure 6.3 and potential GI projects as shown in Figure 6.14 as an essential component of all new developments and to discourage development that would fragment, damage or prejudice the integrity of the green infrastructure network.

BGIO-03 Promote a network of pedestrian and cycle paths to enhance accessibility to the green infrastructure network, while ensuring that the design and operation of the routes responds to the ecological protection needs of each site, including the undertaking of Appropriate Assessment where relevant.

Camcor River Eco-Friendly Walkway or Nature Trail

BGIO-04 Provide an eco-friendly walkway or nature trail along the Camcor River running from Elmgrove Bridge to Springfield Bridge.

Wetland Amenity Area

BGIO-05 In conjunction with the appropriate prescribed bodies, to investigate the feasibility of providing a Wetland Amenity Area at Syngefield and on the Little Brosna Flood Plain taking into account the environmental sensitivities of the site and Inland Fisheries Guidance document, Planning for Watercourses in the Urban Environment.

Syngefield Demesne Conservation Masterplan

BGIO-06 Support the preparation of a Conservation Management Plan for the Syngefield Demesne, Woodlands and the section of the Camcor River that passes the Demesne.

Cultural and Heritage Assets

BGIO-07 Provide attractive and safe routes linking parks, open spaces and other related features such as cultural sites and heritage assets as an integral part of Green Infrastructure provision, where appropriate and feasible including taking into account the findings of Appropriate Assessment.

Green Belts

BGIO-08 Protect the Green Belt Public Open Space Areas as shown on Figure 6.14 to preserve the separate identity of Crinkill village.

Pocket Parks, Community Gardens and Allotments

BGIO-09 Provide opportunities for Birr residents to engage in food production through allotments, community gardens and the provision of food foraging areas in new parks and Green Infrastructure proposals where appropriate.

BGIO-10 Support the provision of pocket parks, community gardens and allotments as outlined in Figure 6.8.

Biodiversity Zones/Pollination Zones, Mini-Woodlands and Wildlife Strips

BGIO-11 Continue to promote and support re-wilding and pollinator initiatives within the Plan Area in support of the National Pollinator Plan and ensure that the management of the Council's open spaces and parks is pollinator-friendly, provides more opportunities for biodiversity, and is carried out without the use of pesticides where possible.

BGIO-12 Develop linked corridors of small urban 'Miyawaki' native mini woodlands, a minimum of 100 m² in size, to capture carbon and encourage biodiversity in suitable existing built-up areas, in low grade public open space areas and other areas of zoned lands where deemed suitable and appropriate.

BGIO-13 Encourage the provision of Biodiversity Zones/Pollination Zones in the locations outlined in Figure 6.14.

Pedestrian Linkages/Permeability and Accessibility

BGIO-14 Further develop and extend the following network of pedestrian route ways in Birr and Crinkill to allow greater linkages between the Green Infrastructure assets in the area in the locations outlined in Figure 6.14.

Control of Invasive Species

BGIO-15 Continue the control programs of invasive species with all relevant stakeholders and landowners to control the key invasive species.

Chapter 7: Community

Strategic Aim:

Promote Birr as a town where people can live and work, with access to a range of community facilities and events that are vital for social inclusion and quality of life for all.

7.1 Introduction

Encouraging vibrant communities in Birr must start with offering residents a quality of life that opens new and different opportunities. Building communities should not retain focus on building homes only but build for the wider needs of the whole community and strive to develop communities that are well balanced, integrated, sustainable and well connected. Community services, facilities and amenities are needed at an early stage within the life of new communities to keep people engaged and invested. Equally important are the less visible types of support that make people feel at home in an area and create a sense of local identity and belonging, like volunteers, local committees or community development workers who by their passion and mobilization encourage involvement in shared community activities.



Figure 7.1 Birr Theatre & Arts Centre, Oxmantown Mall, Birr

7.2 Strategy

This plan seeks to assist and facilitate the improvement of existing social, community and cultural facilities, as appropriate within Birr and make adequate provisions for the development of new facilities. The Council provides a number of roles in ensuring adequate provision of social, community and cultural facilities as appropriate.

Suitably located sites will be reserved in existing and newly built-up areas where deficiencies exist. The provision of social facilities including recreational facilities for the youth of the town is essential, and the Councils wish to see the expansion of these types of facilities in Birr.

This strategy, for the purposes of this plan, identifies the needs of the community of Birr in broad terms. However, a collaborative approach by all stakeholders i.e. state, local authority, community groups and the private sector on the identification and provision of community facilities is required on an on-going basis to ensure that appropriate facilities are provided, when necessary. The Council plays an integral role in facilitating and supporting these identified needs.

7.3 Social Infrastructure

7.3.1 Assessment of the Existing Situation and Future Demand

Assessing the existing situation included:

- Establishing a social and demographic profile of the community who live in Birr (Chapter 1)
- Identifying existing community infrastructure features under a number of predefined themes including 'Education & Training', 'Childcare Facilities', 'Health Facilities', 'Sports and Recreational Facilities', 'Playgrounds & Open Spaces', 'Community & Resource Centres, 'Places of Worship', 'Arts and Culture', and 'Libraries'.

Below outlines an assessment of the existing infrastructure provision relative to the existing/planned population and best practice provision.

7.3.1.1 Education & Training

The Athlone Campus of the Technological University of the Shannon (TUS): Midlands Midwest is located in proximity to Birr Town (circa 40km) and the Thurles campus is located approximately 53km from Birr Town.

There are currently five primary schools and one secondary school within the areas of Birr and Crinkill. With regard to capacity, the Department of Education has confirmed that there is sufficient capacity within the Primary and Post-Primary schools of Birr and Crinkill to facilitate future population projections within the Plan period. In the context of extending the capacity of existing schools if required within the Plan period, the Department notes that it is important to consider the current refugee situation within Ireland and the potential need for extra education provision that increasing numbers of refugees may bring in the short to medium term. It may be possible to add some of this level of accommodation onto existing schools. However, this would be dependent on the size and suitability of the existing sites and school agreements.

The Birr Outdoor Education Centre (OEC) is a non-profit making body affiliated to the Department of Education and Science under the auspices of Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board. Birr OEC offers environmental education courses, adventure sports and team building activities to groups of people from the ages of 8 to 80 years. Courses provided are also part of the curriculum for Junior, Transition Year and Leaving Certificate classes.

Birr Further Education and Training Centre (FET) Centre offers part time unaccredited and accredited courses at QQI Levels 1 to 6 at Townsend Street.

The I-LOFAR Education Centre was officially opened in Birr in May 2019. The Education Centre was funded by the Department of Rural and Community Affairs in conjunction with Offaly County Council, Trinity College Dublin and Birr Scientific & Heritage Foundation Ireland. The I-LOFAR Education Centre

compliments the existing Science Visitor Centre at Birr Castle, which tells the story of past Irish achievements in science. The I-LOFAR Education Centre provides an inspirational location for education workshops, and community-based science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) projects. The I-LOFAR Education Centre provides a home for STEM Education in Offaly.

To support and develop I-LOFAR in Birr, there is a related project called stream BIRR (which stands for Science, Technology, Research, Engineering, Arts and Maths), where research and education connects with businesses, to create jobs. Stream BIRR provides researchers and businesses with hot desks, office space and training in data analytics and related topics. The stream BIRR project is an initiative of Offaly Innovation & Design Centre CLG, and has received funding from Enterprise Ireland and Offaly County Council.

Established in 2010, the Irish Heritage School located at John's Hall is Ireland's leading provider of accredited, site-based heritage research and training. The ethos of the school is to provide an opportunity for students and enthusiasts of the natural, cultural and built heritage, to learn in an outdoor classroom within an established research framework led by a team of highly qualified and experienced heritage experts.

The Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Offaly provides outreach services to businesses in Birr. These include: business clinics, mentoring and enterprise related training and networking events.

7.3.1.2 Childcare

Childcare facilities are well distributed spatially within the Birr Plan area with 5 facilities, predominantly located close to or within existing residential developments. All future proposed childcare facilities shall be provided in accordance with the Childcare Facilities: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DEHLG) 2001 or subsequent editions.

7.3.1.3 Healthcare Facilities

Healthcare facilities in Birr include GPs, health centres, dentists, care and other related facilities. Healthcare facilities are dispersed throughout the town, although there is some clustering within the HSE grounds off St. John's Terrace.

Birr Community Health and Nursing Unit is located at Sandymount, Birr. Facilities cater for a 90 bed-nursing unit providing respite, rehabilitation, palliative and continuing care for older people. There is also a health care/day care centre for non-residents.

The HSE is proposing to construct a primary care centre in Birr subject to obtaining planning permission. The Council will continue to work with healthcare service providers and key stakeholders, including the HSE and private bodies to strengthen healthcare services in Birr.

7.3.1.4 Sport & Recreation

Birr has a colourful image throughout the country as a successful sporting town, and has a number of sports and recreational facilities. Established in 1909, Birr GAA Club is located at St Brendan's Park. It is one of the main grounds for Offaly's Gaelic football and hurling teams. The grounds have capacity to hold 8,800.

Birr town and environs is served well by sports clubs with facilities for athletics, Gaelic Games, rugby, soccer, boxing, handball, tennis, gymnastics, swimming and gyms. Birr town also has a number of playgrounds and outdoor play areas. The public swimming pool and gymnasium is located at Townparks. The Council recognises the importance of this facility and will encourage and facilitate its continued development and enhancement.



Figure 7.2 Tree House at Birr Castle Playground
(Source: Birr Castle Website)

The Ormand Flying Club located at Birr Airfield, is a club passionate about making aviation fun and accessible to all. The Club specialises in training for the Private Pilot Licence (PPL) and are a registered training facility with the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA).

Birr Equestrian Centre has been catering for riders and horse enthusiasts for over forty-five years. The centre is open 7 days a week and they offer riding lessons; cross country treks and tuition; hourly, half day and full day trekking in the Slieve Bloom Mountains; trekking holidays in conjunction with local accommodation providers and also seasonal pony camps. Other activities also provided at the equestrian centre include Archery and Laser Shooting.

Birr Outdoor Education Centre offers a wide variety of activities and adventure sports including canoeing, kayaking, gorge walking, raft building, orienteering, abseiling, rock climbing, archery, team building games, obstacle course, indoor rock climbing, ropes course and hillwalking. Also, included is hostel accommodation for environmental studies and adventure sports.

7.3.1.5 Libraries

Birr Convent was built between 1846 and 1856 and is considered as one of the gems of Birr's architectural heritage. Part of it now accommodates Birr Civic Offices and Library.

The core library areas are located on two floors of the original Pugin chapel, and this accommodates the adult library. The Children's library is situated on the ground floor with designated spaces for children's activities. Computers are provided on each floor. In addition to the traditional services, the library provides assistive technology facilities, online services including access to over 150 years of Birr's newspapers. It also holds the only facsimile of the Gospel Book of Macregol of Birr (The Book of Birr) and other items of local interest.

7.3.1.6 Arts and Culture

Offaly County Council has adopted and published the County Offaly Arts Strategy for the period 2018-2022. The vision statement of the Plan notes the importance of the arts being *'embedded and integrated into the way of life of the people of County Offaly; accessible to and experienced by all citizens, as well as attracting visitors to the county.'* Birr hosts a number of arts and cultural facilities and events.

Birr Theatre and Arts Centre is a dedicated purpose built theatre, which dates from 1888. Having fallen into disrepair during the eighties and nineties, Birr Stage Guild set about restoring and refurbishing this Victorian theatre building to its original glory with seating capacity for 220 with both public funds and local fundraising. The first performance in the renovated Theatre and Arts Centre was in July 2000. The Centre provides a base for year-round development of the Arts in Birr, its environs and the wider region. The programme of events held in the centre includes theatre, music, film, dance, comedy etc. The centre is involved with a number of festivals, supported by the Birr Festivals Collective, (Birr Festival of Music & Voice, Hullabaloo! Offaly's Children's Arts Festival, OFFline Film Festival, Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival, Scripts Ireland's Playwriting Festival). The Council acknowledges the valuable contribution of the Birr Theatre and Arts Centre for the people of Birr, its inhabitants and those people in surrounding areas through its continued support.

The consortium of the Birr Festivals Collective was formed in 2020 with the coming together of Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival, Birr Festival of Music, OFFline Film Festival, Hullabaloo! Offaly's Children's Arts Festival and Scripts Ireland's Playwriting Festival to reflect, to imagine and to create possibilities for the future of Birr's festivals. Birr 20:20 sought to reflect, reshape and plan for the future of festivals in Birr and accordingly in 2020 commissioned a Birr festival development strategy titled 'Seeing the Beyond: Birr Festivals Planning for a Shared Future'.

Offaly County Council Arts Office has developed an Arts Infrastructure Strategy, with a focus on a coordinated approach to Place-Making through Arts Infrastructure. Of relevance to the Council are the potential synergies that can be co-ordinated between the primary infrastructural hubs throughout the county and how these can work together for the making of Creative and Cultural Places for artists and audiences across the county. Birr Theatre and Arts Centre therefore have an important role within this strategic approach, which will at once demonstrate how they can work collaboratively with other arts infrastructure, while identifying and growing their own unique selling proposition. The Arts Infrastructure Strategy will explore the potential to enhance, add value and provide multiple benefits through connectivity and complimentary programming, across the county and in collaboration with existing and new arts infrastructure.

Established in 2016, Birr Festival of Music is an annual four-day classical music festival in Birr. It represents the pursuit of excellence in the making of music in the castle, townhouse, farmhouse and cottage that has characterised Birr and its neighbourhood over centuries. The programme includes a vibrant range of events; concerts (indoors and outdoors), workshops, street performances, pop-up and online events featuring singers and musicians of national and international acclaim.

Hullabaloo! Offaly's Children's Arts Festival is coordinated by the Offaly County Council Arts Office and Birr Theatre & Arts Centre for the county of Offaly. It celebrates the creative and imaginative intelligence of children and young people. Festival workshops and family performances take place in Birr, Clara and Edenderry and Offaly Libraries during the Festival dates. The festival includes quality

workshops and performances that see children engaged in arts activity and showcase theatre for young audiences and develop their arts interest.

OFFline Film Festival is a five-day event that is run annually in a quirky array of venues around Birr town. It is a contemporary celebration of pioneering adventure into photography associated with Mary, Countess of Rosse, wife of the Astronomer Earl. The festival also includes workshops on different aspects of filmmaking given by industry professionals. LEO Offaly also provides mentoring for the winners of the OFFline Film Festival Animation Residency, and in the last couple of years has funded a Film Industry Day as part of the OFFline Film Festival. This is to encourage development of Creative Industries in Offaly.

The Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival is one of the oldest town festivals in the country. It features professional national and international artists bringing visual arts, theatre, music, street theatre, pop up performers, workshops, exhibitions and lots more, together with a variety of community events.

Scripts Ireland's Playwriting Festival was established in 2013 and is an annual four-day festival held in Birr. It is a testimony to the long traditions of drama, publishing and printing in which Birr has excelled for more than two centuries. The festival is dedicated to new Irish plays—the writing of them, the development and nurturing of them. The playwriting festival features a host of exciting events for lovers of theatre - those who want to create, perform and watch live in beautiful surroundings.

In addition, there is the regular Annual Hot Air Balloon Event organised in Birr Castle Demesne.

In 2021 Birr Courthouse was transferred into the County Council's ownership from the Office of Public Works. A conservation plan was drawn up and under the 2021 Historic Towns Initiative and Historic Structures Fund, emergency repair conservation works have been carried out on Birr's nineteenth century Courthouse with a view to re-use it as a multi-purpose community space, a digital/connected hub, as well as for arts and culture purposes. Offaly County Council and community group Birr 20:20 are working together on this ambitious project.

7.3.1.7 Community & Resource Centres

Birr encompasses a number of Community and resource centres such as the Marian Hall located at William Street. The Marian Hall, established in 1954, caters for the Birr Community and currently hosts weekly Bingo nights as well as being used for activities such as dance and drama classes. The Alzheimer Society of Ireland provides dementia specific, person centred care to meet the needs of the person with dementia at the Old Day Care Centre at John's Terrace, Birr. The centre offers a wide range of activities including reminiscence therapy, music sessions, gentle exercises, arts and crafts and personal care. St Brendan's Hall on Emmet Street is run by the Church of Ireland Vestry and is available for community rental. John's Hall is owned by Birr Castle Estate and leased to Offaly County Council and is available for public meetings / rental as a lecture hall.

7.3.1.8 Places of Worship

A total of four faith facilities are located in Birr comprising St. Brendan's Roman Catholic Church, St. Brendan's Church of Ireland, The Methodist Church on Emmet Street and Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses. Most facilities are located within the town centre.

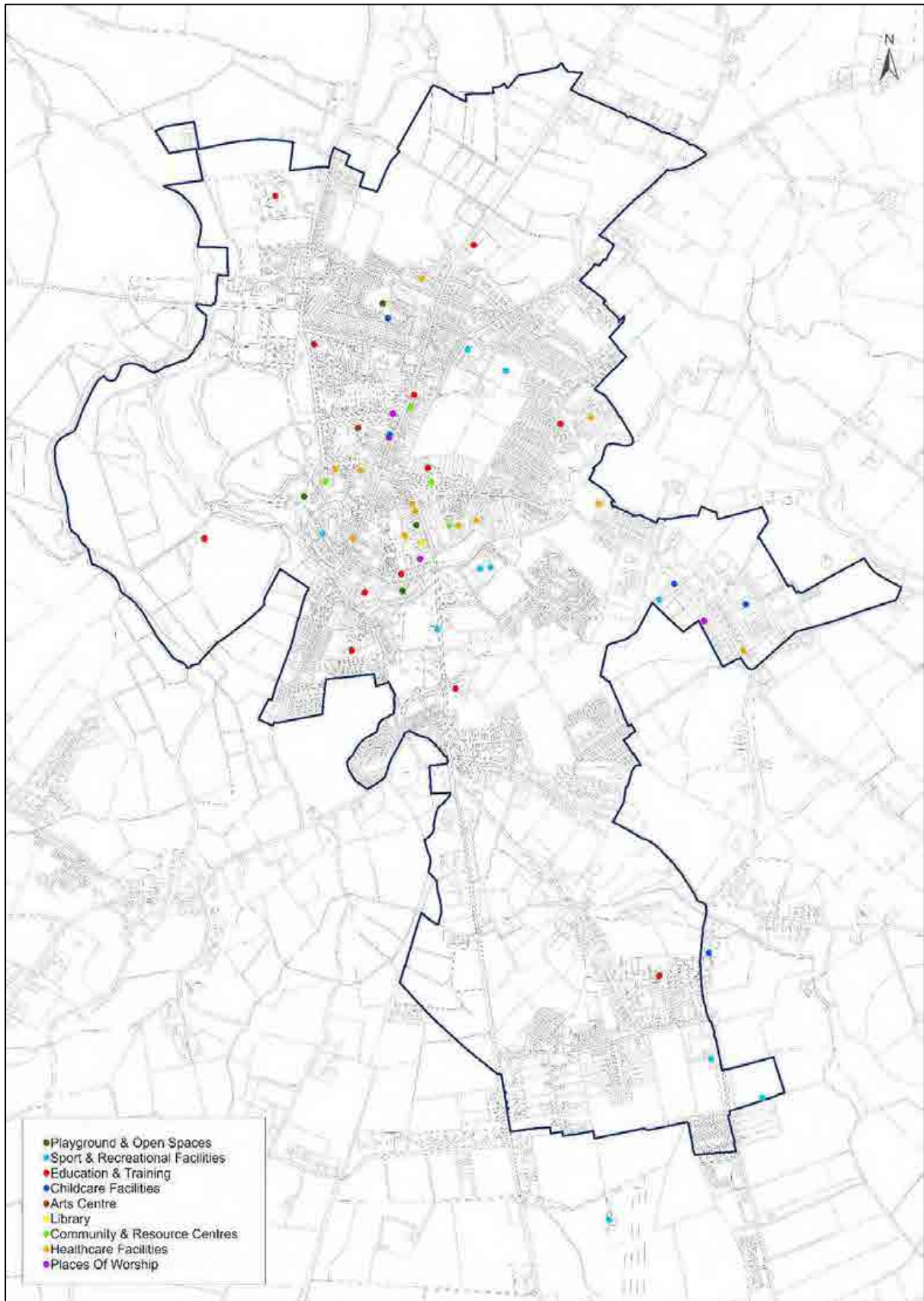


Figure 7.3 Existing Social Infrastructure

Table 7.1 provides a breakdown of the requirements for social infrastructure under relevant themes that are required to provide for the future needs and demands of the projected population.

Table 7.1 Assessment of Future Demand & Requirements

Theme	Land Use	Potential Location	What is required	Delivery Mechanism
Education & Training				
Primary & Post-Primary School Extension	Educational	Dependent on the size and suitability of the existing sites and school agreements.	To consider the current refugee situation within Ireland and the potential need for extra education provision that increasing numbers of refugees may bring in the short to medium term. It may be possible to add some of this level of accommodation onto existing schools.	Department of Education
Primary & Post-Primary School New school	Educational	-	No requirement for new Primary or Post-primary schools within Plan Period	-
New Training Facilities	Educational	-	While no further training facilities are required over the period of the plan appropriate applications would be considered.	Developer / Offaly County Council / Other
Childcare				
20 childcare spaces required per 75 new residential units	Childcare	Adjacent to / within new residential developments over 75 residential units	Additional childcare spaces required per 75 new residential units	Private developer-led alongside new development
Health				
Primary Care Centre	Health	Subject to planning permission.	A new Primary Care Centre	Developer / Offaly County Council / HSE / Other
Community & Resource				
No critical infrastructure required	Community	-	While no further Community Facilities are required over the period of the plan, appropriate applications would be considered.	Developer / Offaly County Council / Other
Arts & Culture				
No critical infrastructure required	Community	-	While no further Arts & Culture Facilities are required over the period of the plan, appropriate applications would be considered. The Council is committed to the on-going works being carried out to the Birr Courthouse facility	Developer / Offaly County Council / Birr 20:20 / Other
Places of Worship				
No critical infrastructure required	Faith	-	While no further Places of Worship are required over the period of the plan, appropriate applications would be considered.	Developer / Other
Sports				
No critical infrastructure required	Sports	-	Provision of an athletics facility on appropriately zoned lands may be required.	Developer / Other
Equipped/Designated Play Space				
Equipped/Designated play spaces	Community	Within new residential developments	Designated play spaces will be encouraged within new residential developments	Developer / Offaly County Council / Other

7.4 Best Practice Measures in the Provision of Community Services and Infrastructure

In addition to the above specific community and social infrastructure requirements, the Council recommends the following principles in the provision of social infrastructure consistent with best practice and the sustainable and effective use of resources:

Co-Location

Co-location and clustering of complementary community services, thus facilitating coordination, climate action, convenience and access for service users.

Multi-purpose and Multi-function

Facilities and spaces should offer flexible and diverse space and uses over a range of times to maximise efficiency, utilisation and adaptability of physical assets.

Place-making and Community Identity

Promotion and encouragement of community facilities that create a sense of place and that have a civic quality, and level of amenity that can foster community ownership, and offer a focus to support community engagement in Birr.

Age-Friendly Town

The creation of an age friendly town means that key destinations within the town should all be easily accessible by foot, particularly within the commercial core. Social and community facilities should be within walking distance of the town centre, key services and public transportation, while also being integrated into a universally accessible and age friendly public realm.

Partnership

Encourage delivery of infrastructure services and facilities through partnerships between different bodies for maximum efficiency and co-ordination.

7.5 Community Policies

It is Council Policy to:

CP-01 Facilitate and secure the provision of social infrastructure to support existing and new communities within the plan area, in a manner which provides flexibility to respond to varied and changing community needs.

CP-02 Support and facilitate improvements to existing primary and post-primary schools if necessary to facilitate increased population including the influx of refugees in the short-medium term.

CP-03 Support and co-operate with promoters or operators of public and private health care facilities by facilitating appropriate health care facilities in suitable locations in Birr.

CP-04 Support and facilitate the provision of children's play facilities in Birr within existing and proposed green spaces, for children of all ages while also having regard to those with special needs.

CP-05 Support community-led and cultural projects, which enhance the social and economic well-being of residents of the town and improve the quality of the environment of the town.

CP-06 Support an extended festival season in Birr.

7.6 Community Objectives

It is an objective of this Council to:

CO-01 Require the provision of appropriately located and purpose-built early learning and childcare facilities to meet the pro-rata childcare needs of new housing developments during the plan period.

Chapter 8: Climate Action

Strategic Aim:

Enhance climate adaptation and mitigation, and accelerate a transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy in Birr.

8.1 Introduction

Climate Action is covered in Chapter 3 of Volume 1 of the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 and is also embedded through cross cutting themes of other chapters of the Plan.

The key focus of Objective 10(2)(n) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, is to promote sustainable settlement and transportation strategies in urban and rural areas, in particular in relation to the location, layout and design of development. This objective also requires that these strategies should include measures to reduce energy demand, to reduce anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions and to address the need to adapt to climate change. These strategies and measures, formulated in the development plan, will equate to a significant element of the local authority's overall climate action response, and will, over time, result in meaningful change to the current trajectory of Ireland's contribution to and ability to deal with the effects of climate change.

In the context of planning for the mobilisation of mitigation and adaptation efforts at local level in Birr and Crinkill, this Plan recognises the multi-faceted impact of the climate challenge and the need for the integration and co-ordination of relevant 'climate proofed' policies and investment decisions for the delivery of key projects and infrastructure at appropriate locations. While it is acknowledged that wider sectors are directly outside the scope of this Local Area Plan, this Plan integrates national policies on climate action by incorporating a series of measures by promoting compact growth, sustainable mobility and other adaptation/mitigation measures. Such measures strive to adhere to the provisions of the Climate Action and Low Carbon (Amendment) Act 2021 which sets binding targets for greenhouse gas emissions reduction and for the delivery of renewable electricity.

The Plan through its policies, objectives and decarbonisation actions and projects supports the National Climate Objective from the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 which states; *"The State shall, so as to reduce the extent of further global warming, pursue and achieve, by no later than the end of the year 2050, the transition to a climate resilient, biodiversity rich, environmentally sustainable and climate neutral economy (in this Act referred to as the 'national climate objective')"* (Government of Ireland, 2015).

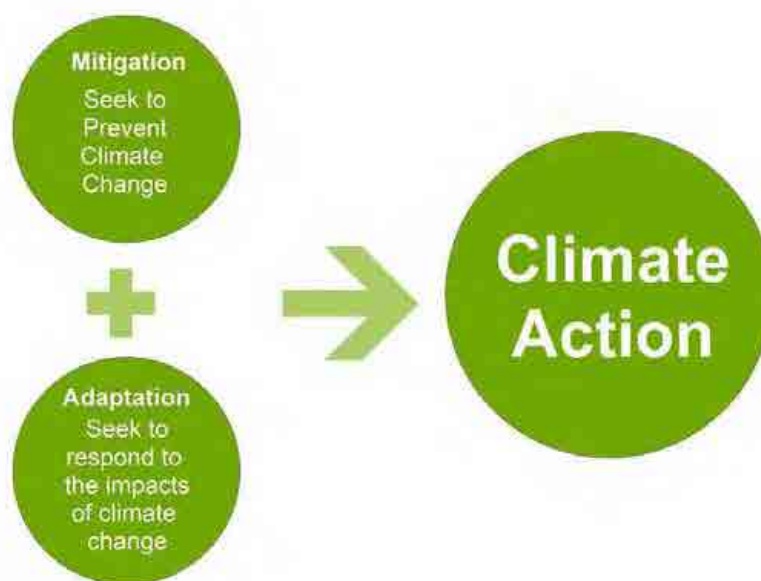


Figure 8.1 Climate Mitigation and Climate Adaptation

8.2 Integration of land use planning and sustainable mobility

The National Climate Action Plan 2021 states that transport accounts for almost 20% of Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions and that road transport is responsible for 96% of those GHG emissions. It is therefore clear that changing the way in which we move around to more sustainable modes including walking, cycling and public transport has significant potential to help us tackle climate change by reducing emissions from transport.

This Plan aims to:

- Integrate land use and transportation in order to reduce travel demand;
- Reduce Birr's local carbon footprint caused by transport emissions by prioritising sustainable mobility routes and connectivity and permeability to key destinations within the town;
- Support the growth of Electric Vehicles, E-Bikes, Fuel Cell Vehicles and Autonomous Vehicles, through a roll-out of additional electric charging points and refuelling infrastructure in collaboration with relevant agencies; and
- Make more provision for secure cycle parking facilities.

A Local Transport Plan for Birr was made in conjunction with this LAP in the interests of integrating transportation and spatial land use planning. This is further addressed in Chapter 9 Critical Infrastructure and Appendix 1.

8.3 Compact Growth and Regeneration

It is generally accepted that promoting compact settlement patterns can lead to shorter trips to employment, education, shops, social contacts and activities, creating more possibilities for active and sustainable travel and indeed low carbon district heating. The National Planning Framework requires a shift in settlement patterns to provide a more compact form of growth changing the prevailing pattern of dispersed development and the resultant inefficient and carbon heavy commuting patterns. The policies, objectives and land use decisions contained in this Local Area Plan support the '10 minute' settlement concept¹. In essence, this concept centres on the premise that people should be able to meet most of their needs within a short walking or cycling distance of their homes.

This Plan seeks to achieve more compact and sustainable growth through consolidating a greater share of future development; new homes, businesses and amenities, within Birr and Crinkill's existing built-up footprint.

This approach to zoning combined with tailored policies and objectives relating to compact growth, sequential development and regeneration of the existing urban area, allows for people to live close to employment, recreational opportunities and other services, reducing dependence on car based transport, the extent of greenfield land consumption and costly and inefficient infrastructure provision.

This Plan through specific measures in Chapter 3 and local actions in Table 8.1 Decarbonisation Actions and Projects below encourages infill development, regeneration of brownfield/underutilised sites, the reuse of existing vacant/derelict buildings and remote working/co-working hubs, which support the achievement of a compact and consolidated pattern of development for Birr and Crinkill.

The Irish Heritage School renovation and reuse of St. Johns Hall, the old Town Council Offices and ancillary buildings, all previously vacant, as educational and community buildings are examples of finding new uses for existing buildings in this regard. The school now provides teaching in the fields of environmental science, landscape studies and biodiversity and conservation and cultural heritage programmes in the newly renovated old Town Council buildings whilst the main John's Hall building itself is now used as a lecturing and exhibition space, with significant scope to develop this iconic building as a tourism space in future years.

¹ As advocated on page 187 of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly 2019-2031.



Figure 8.2 Irish Heritage School (Old Town Council Office) and St. Johns Hall

8.4 Nature-based Solutions

8.4.1 Green Infrastructure

Birr and Crinkill's extensive green infrastructure, as detailed in Chapter 6 of this Local Area Plan, are vital tools at a local level, in adapting to climate change in the following ways;

- acting as carbon pools or sinks which absorb emissions;
- creating a more diverse habitat, which has a positive impact on biodiversity and related ecosystem services such as pollination and natural pest control;
- managing high temperatures, particularly in urban areas, through trees providing evaporative cooling and shading; and
- providing a flood prevention and storage capacity function by green areas and wetlands reducing and slowing down peak flows, thereby helping to alleviate flooding. In addition, these areas reduce the rate and volume of water entering the drains by intercepting it, providing temporary and permanent storage areas, and allowing water to infiltrate into the ground rather than being directed to drains.

8.4.2 Flood Risk Management

The Council recognises that climate change will have significant impacts on flooding, flood risk and flood risk management. This Local Area Plan, informed by a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) and which complies with OPW Guidance on climate change avoids zoning land for development at inappropriate locations through designating these flood prone lands (see Figure 8.3 below) as 'Constrained Land Use'.

Flood Risk Assessments shall apply the precautionary approach recommended in the Guidelines and shall be informed by the advice on the expected impacts of climate change and the allowances to be provided for future flood risk management provided in the OPW's (2019) Flood Risk Management Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan.

New developments will be required to ensure that access is preserved for the maintenance of the Drainage District. Applications for development on land identified as benefiting land may be prone to flooding, and as such site-specific flood risk assessments may be required in these areas.

Development Management Standard 106 from Chapter 13 Development Management Standards of the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 shall apply to proposals located on lands designated Constrained Land Use in the Local Plan Area.

All flood zones are subject to FRA of flood hazards from other sources, which should assess all potential sources of flooding that may affect the site – from rivers, streams, surface water run-off, sewers, groundwater, reservoirs, canals and other artificial sources or any combination of these.

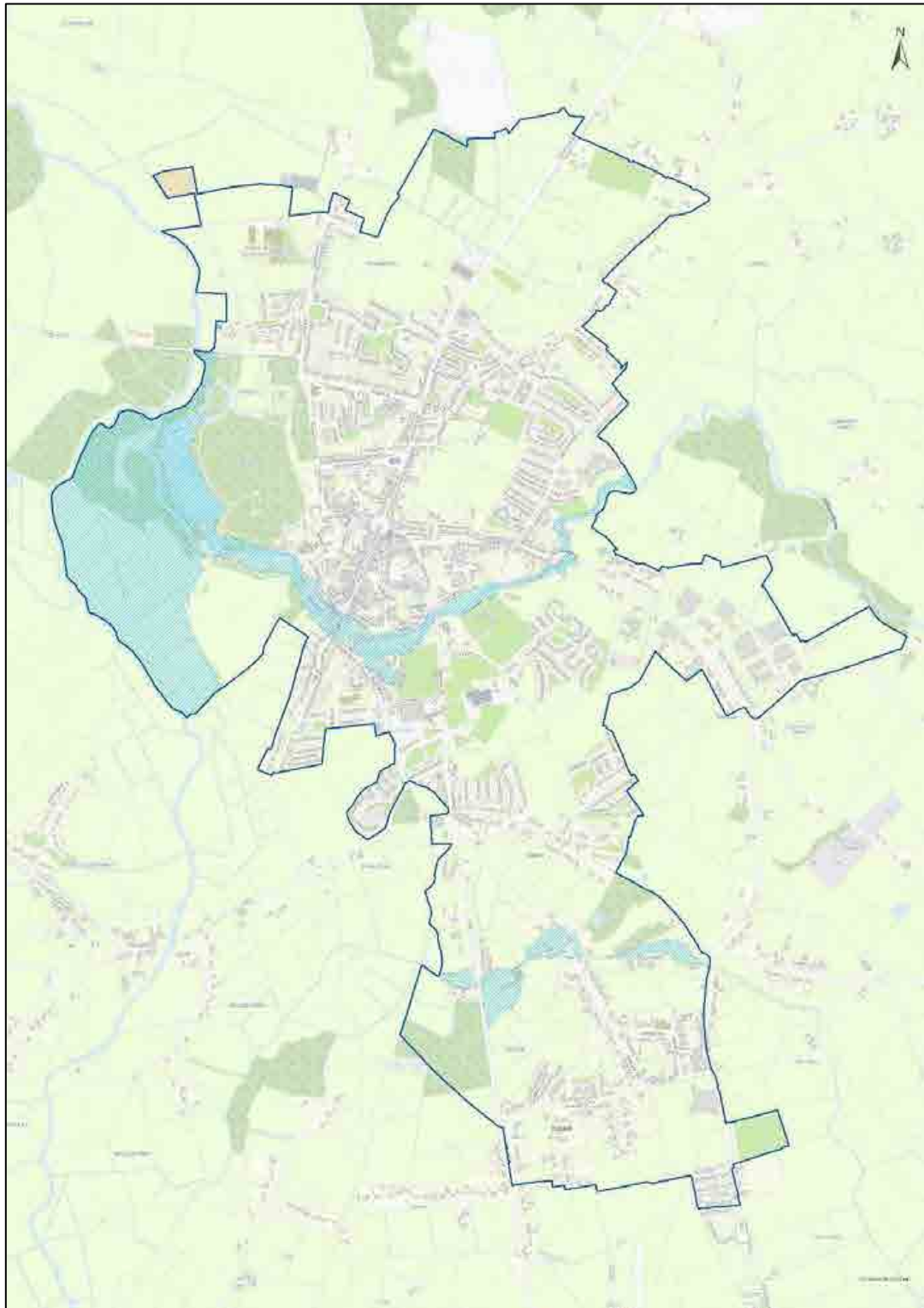


Figure 8.3 Birr Flood Map

8.4.3 Sustainable Drainage Systems and Constructed Wetlands

Chapter 3 Town Centre and Regeneration, Chapter 6 Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure and Chapter 9 Critical Infrastructure outline the importance of Sustainable Drainage Systems and wetlands as Green Infrastructure but both have a substantial role to play in reducing flood risk. Both systems

reduce the rate and volume of water entering drains by intercepting it, providing temporary and permanent storage areas, and allowing water to infiltrate into the ground rather than being directed to drains, which improves water quality and contributes to local amenities. This Plan supports the provision of the positive role that both Sustainable Drainage Systems and Constructed Wetlands make in climate mitigation and adaptation and includes in Figure 6.13 in Chapter 6 of the Plan potential locations that both systems could be provided in Birr and Crinkill in the life of the Plan.

8.5 Energy Efficiency

8.5.1 Energy Storage

The Council recognises the importance of energy storage in allowing for the storage of electrical energy from renewables for later use, and helping to balance grid load thereby guaranteeing reliable supply for users. There are a number of energy storage systems that provide this function, including pumped hydroelectric energy storage (PHES) and thermal storage in addition to newer technologies such as liquid storage.

8.5.2 Energy Efficiency – Homes and Public Buildings

Improving the energy efficiency of our homes and public buildings is a critical climate priority and a major focus of the funding provided in the National Development Plan 2018-2031. This will deliver wider benefits than just a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. An energy efficient home is a home that is warmer, more comfortable and much cheaper to heat. This leads to improved health outcomes, higher disposable incomes and reduced poverty, as well as the creation of new employment.

In line with the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027, this Local Area Plan;

- recognises that the design, construction and operation of new buildings, have a significant role to play in reducing energy demand and increasing energy efficiency into the future;
- promotes energy efficient design through careful site selection, building shape/design, structural materials (that have low to zero embodied energy and CO2 emissions) and orientation so as to maximise solar gain;
- recognises the potential of green roofs and green walls to greatly reduce the amount of energy needed to keep the temperature of a building comfortable all year round by insulating against extensive heat loss in the winter and heat absorption in the summer;
- promotes the retrofitting of existing buildings to reduce energy demands and promotes the principles of Energy Efficient Design (EED) to minimise the energy consumption of buildings through their lifecycle. The Council is continually upgrading its social housing units in the town to bring dwellings to a minimum BER level of B2 and also supports the sensitive proposals to improve the thermal performance of or insert renewable energy technologies into historic buildings subject to the works not causing damage to the structure, requiring the removal of historic fabric such as original windows, doors and floors, or have a detrimental visual impact;
- supports the use of smart city technologies in Birr to assist in energy reduction through integrating public lighting infrastructure with EV charging points and also providing real time

data on street lighting energy usage, atmospheric pressure, CO2 emissions and average noise pollution levels.

8.5.3 Low Carbon District Heating

District Heating is a method of delivering thermal energy in the form of hot water through a network of highly insulated pipelines. District heating systems have the ability to distribute heat from many different sources, including heat sources that are typically seen as a by-product and usually go to waste, like the waste heat from electricity production, industry and data centres. This Plan recognises the potential of District Heating Systems, where technically feasible and cost effective, to provide heating and hot water to houses and businesses at appropriate locations, where feasible, to assist in meeting renewable heat targets and reduce Irelands GHG emissions, reducing our dependency on fossil fuels and our carbon emissions as well as providing better air quality. Heat mapping can be considered to support development, which would deliver energy efficiency and the recovery of energy that would otherwise be wasted.

8.5.4 Public Lighting

Public lighting is widely accepted to be a significant user of energy and generator of CO2 emissions. As part of the 2020 Public Sector Energy Efficiency Target Reduction of 33%, the Council supports the upgrading and retrofitting of non LED Local Authority lighting in Birr to high efficiency LED lanterns to contribute to meeting statutory energy efficiency targets, significantly reduce emissions and achieving cost savings with energy and maintenance efficiencies.

8.6 Circular Economy

In a circular economy, resources are kept in use for as long as possible, the maximum value is extracted from them, and at the end of their life cycle they are recovered to regenerate new products and materials. These processes involve sharing, reusing and reinventing materials, and using fewer material resources to sustain our communities, homes and economy. This Local Area Plan fully supports a transition to a circular economy, and embraces the opportunities that it can bring to Birr. A local company, Irish Recycled Products, is noteworthy in this regard, as it produces eco-friendly outdoor furniture and gardening products from recycled plastic.

8.7 Climate Action, Business and Community

Decarbonising the economy will open up new employment and enterprise opportunities. This will mean new jobs, new skills, new investment opportunities and a chance to create a more productive and resilient economy. Grant Engineering Ltd, who have been significant employers in the town for generations, are a fine example of a local business who uncovered opportunities in responding to climate change, developing in recent years products such as hybrid heating pumps and biofuel compatible oil boilers which offer significant potential to reduce carbon emissions with existing and new building stock.

There are several impressive initiatives in the town that directly / indirectly can contribute to climate action that are community based from food production, waste management, wild planting to micro-

hydro energy production. These need to be supported and provided with an opportunity to cross-fertilise with the more traditional and mainstream aspects of Birr community development. This new type of ‘conversation’ and relationship building will be vital on the ground as Birr progresses.

8.8 Decarbonisation Actions and Projects

Table 8.1 below lists actions and specific local projects that that can be progressed in Birr and Crinkill in the lifetime of this Local Area Plan to help achieve a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy.

Table 8.1: Decarbonisation Actions and Projects

Aim	Actions	Potential Projects
Promote Compact Growth	Reduce urban sprawl, encourage higher densities, reuse buildings.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Specific projects which may arise from development of Opportunity Sites as identified in Section 3.3 of the Plan relating to Opportunity Sites. 2. Provision of community and enterprise space for meetings, digital hub, creative spaces, exhibition spaces and study spaces in specific objectives in Chapter 3 of this Plan. 3. Re-use of Birr Courthouse.
	Integrate transportation and landuse planning.	
	Reduce the need to travel and move towards self-sustaining rather than commuter driven activity.	
	Support car free developments in suitable locations.	
	Provide mixed-use developments and support the close location of jobs / shops / services / education and homes to minimise the need for the most common travel patterns.	
	Promote the repair and reuse of existing buildings including underutilised upper floors in Birr town centre and Crinkill village centre.	
	Reduce vacancy and dereliction.	
	Strengthen public transport linkages and encourage their use.	

Sustainability Mobility	Development of pedestrian routes, cycleways, permeability, connectivity to facilities and amenities and public transport provision.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify and provide suitable sites for secure and appropriately located bicycle parking in Birr and Crinkill. 2. Improve cycling infrastructure including dedicated cycle lanes and footpath connections in Birr and Crinkill as outlined in specific objectives of this Plan. 3. Provision of an Eco-Friendly Walkway or Nature Trail along Camcor River from Elmgrove Bridge to Springfield Bridge. 4. Continue to improve the existing walkway along Camcor River from Mill Island to Elmgrove Bridge. 5. Implement recommendations of Birr Local Transport Plan.
	Electric vehicle recharging infrastructure.	Provision of EV recharging points throughout Birr Town.
Transition to a Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Society	Create or enhance delivery of carbon sinks, for example, wetlands, bogs, forestry, mini woodlands/stepping stone forests, permanent grassland in conjunction with other climate mitigation actions.	Provision of wetland and swales at locations shown on Figure 6.13 of this Plan.
	Flood risk management, avoid development on flood plains and only facilitate the appropriate management and sustainable use of flood risk areas, and support the delivery of the Birr Flood Relief Scheme and the enhancement of flood resilience of buildings.	
	Renewable and low carbon energy, Circular Bio-Economy.	Ongoing programme of upgrading public lighting to LEDs.

	Promote linkages and synergies between new developments and renewable energy resources, for instance by sourcing energy on-site renewably or from low carbon fuel sources.	
	Green Technology and Jobs.	
	Green Infrastructure, for example, green walls, green roofs, parks, waterways, wetlands, greenways, peatways, woodlands, plant drought-resistant plants / trees in public amenity areas to provide shade.	Progression of Green Infrastructure as outlined in specific objectives in this Plan.
	Promote nature-based sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDs).	
	Energy efficient building design.	Continue providing energy efficiency upgrades amongst social housing in Birr under the Midlands and National Retrofit Scheme.
	Support efforts to maximise water conservation and support grey-water recycling schemes.	
	Abatement of Greenhouse gas emissions in the agricultural sector.	
	Implementation of Offaly Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024 and future editions.	Applicable projects as outlined in Chapter 5 of the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy: Adaptation Goals, Objectives and Actions.
	Climate proof major projects.	
	Sustainable food production.	

8.9 Climate Action as a Cross-Cutting Theme

Climate Action is a cross cutting theme and one of the main components of this Plan with every chapter of the Plan contributing to the overall effort to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change. The summary table below provides a brief overview of the principal ways that each relevant chapter in the Plan contributes to climate adaptation and mitigation and how in broad terms, it supports the overall strategic aim and policies from this chapter.

Table 8.2 Contribution of Chapters to Climate Adaptation and Mitigation

<p>Chapter 1 – Introduction and Context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Climate is a core consideration in international, European, national, regional and county policy and legislation in addition to Ministerial Guidelines/policy Directives, which this Plan has taken account of in its preparation.
<p>Chapter 2 – Economic Development Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports and promotes 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 settlement. Promotes transformative projects with the support of Government funding streams for low-carbon focused projects.
<p>Chapter 3 – Town Centre and Regeneration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports the development of sustainable low-carbon climate resilient communities and encourages a climate adaptation and mitigation approach to developments, which enable regeneration. Promotes the concept of compact growth through the reuse / renewal of vacant, derelict or underutilised buildings in the Town Centre.
<p>Chapter 4 – Built Heritage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourages the rehabilitation, renovation, climate-proofing and re-use of existing historic structures, where appropriate, over the demolition of same and new-build on-site. Encourages the rehabilitation, renovation, climate-proofing and re-use of existing vernacular structures that are not listed on the Record of Protected Structures, over the demolition of same and new-build on-site.
<p>Chapter 5 - Residential</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures 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. Encourages the compact growth of Birr Town and Crinkle village and the appropriate redevelopment of brownfield and infill sites for residential and mixed uses within the existing built-up footprint of Birr Town and Crinkle village. Promotes growth 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, enabling more people to be closer to employment, recreational and sustainable transport opportunities. Ensures 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.
<p>Chapter 6 – Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes multiple policies and objectives that promotes the protection and enhancement of the green infrastructure network of the town, thereby providing important amenity and recreational spaces for communities but also economically viable and effective tools to combat the impacts of climate change. Benefits of Green Infrastructure measures as outlined in this chapter include flood prevention, CO2 storage, filtration of pollutants, providing connectivity for migrating species and lowering building energy demands.
<p>Chapter 7 - Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The promotion of best practice measures to ensure that social and community facilities should be within walking distance of the town centre, housing and public transportation, which will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions by allowing people to travel to these

facilities by sustainable transport modes, and also by making provision for the sharing of the facilities.
Chapter 9 – Critical Infrastructure
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Policies are included which improve accessibility and movement within Birr, reduce dependency on private car transport, increase permeability in the town, and encourage the use of energy efficient forms of transport through the promotion of walking, cycling, public transport and electric vehicles.• Requires that all developments provide appropriate Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) and other nature-based solutions and that flood risk in Birr is managed in conjunction with the Office of Public Works and in accordance with the requirements of the Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009) and circular PL02/2014 (August 2014).
Chapter 10 – Infrastructural and Planning Assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In accordance with National Policy Objective 72a of Project Ireland 2040: The National Planning Framework, the Planning Authority has taken a standardised, tiered approach to differentiate between; i) zoned land that is serviced and ii) zoned land that is serviceable within the life of the plan to ensure co-ordination between land use zoning, infrastructure and services. This assessment supports the National Planning Framework and its National Strategic Outcomes and Priorities of the National Development Plan.
Chapter 11 – Land Use Zoning Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seeks adherence to the land use zoning objectives in the interests of orderly development by integrating land use and transportation.
Chapter 12 – Implementation and Monitoring
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Requires new development to be phased to ensure that it occurs in a sequential and efficient manner and in tandem with the delivery of supporting physical and social infrastructure ensuring development proceeds in a sustainable and co-ordinated manner ensuring sustainable use of natural resources.

8.10 Climate Action Policies

It is Council policy to:

Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation

CAP-01 Support the transition of Birr to a competitive, low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050, by way of reducing greenhouse gases, increasing renewable energy, and improving energy efficiency.

CAP-02 Promote and encourage positive community and/or co-operative led climate action initiatives and projects in Birr that seek to reduce carbon emissions, improve energy efficiency, enhance green infrastructure and encourage awareness on climate change issues.

CAP-03 Encourage innovation and facilitate the development of pilot schemes in Birr that support climate change mitigation and adaptation measures.

CAP-04 Support the implementation of the Offaly County Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and promote Birr as a key driver of the transition to a low carbon economy within the south-west of the county.

CAP-05 Support the National Climate Objective from the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 which states; *“The State shall, so as to reduce the extent of further global warming, pursue and achieve, by no later than the end of the year 2050, the transition to a climate resilient, biodiversity rich, environmentally sustainable and climate neutral economy (in this Act referred to as the ‘national climate objective’)”* (Government of Ireland, 2015).

Compact Growth

CAP-06 Support the effective and efficient use of land in Birr, prioritising compact growth through the development of brownfield/infill land in the built-up footprint of the town in preference to greenfield land.

Green Infrastructure

CAP-07 Maintain existing green infrastructure in Birr and encourage and facilitate, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, the development of green infrastructure that recognises the synergies that can be achieved with regard to the following:

- Provision of open space amenities;
- Sustainable management of water;
- Protection and management of biodiversity;
- Protection of cultural heritage; and
- Protection of protected landscape sensitivities.

CAP-08 Require, where the presence of invasive species is identified at the site of proposed development in Birr, to detail how it is proposed to be managed and controlled.

Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems

CAP-09 Incorporate Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems and other nature-based surface water drainage solutions as part of all proposed developments.

Energy Efficiency

CAP-10 Encourage development proposals that are low carbon, well adapted to the impacts of climate change, include mitigation measures and, maximise energy efficiency through renewable energy sources, water conservation, siting, layout and design.

CAP-11 Promote the use of district heating systems as a decarbonising technology for the built environment powered by renewable fuel sources and/or waste heat in new residential and commercial developments where such development does not have a negative impact on the surrounding environment, landscape, biodiversity or local amenities.

CAP-12 Promote the use of efficient energy storage systems and infrastructure that support energy efficiency and reusable energy system optimisation, subject to compliance with proper planning and environmental considerations.

Electric Vehicles, Fuel Cell Vehicles and Autonomous Vehicles

CAP-13 Support the growth of Electric Vehicles, E-Bikes, Fuel Cell Vehicles and Autonomous Vehicles through a roll-out of additional electric charging points and refuelling infrastructure in collaboration with relevant agencies and in accordance with the siting criteria set out in the National Policy Framework Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport in Ireland 2017-2030, and the Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2025 (and any subsequent editions).

Smart City Technologies

CAP-14 Support the use of smart city technologies in Birr and Crinkill to assist in energy reduction through integrating public lighting infrastructure with EV charging points and also providing real time data on street lighting energy usage, atmospheric pressure, CO2 emissions and average noise pollution levels.

Decarbonisation Projects

CAP-15 Support the implementation and provision of the decarbonisation projects listed in Table 8.1 in Birr and Crinkill during the lifetime of this Plan.

8.11 Climate Action Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

CAO-01 Consider a variation of the development plan within a reasonable period of time, or to include such other mechanism, as may be appropriate, to ensure that the development plan will be consistent with the approach to climate action recommended in the revised Local Area Plan Guidelines when adopted or any other relevant guidelines.

Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation

CAO-02 Source E.U. and national funding for projects that support Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation.

CAO-03 Provide LED lighting in all new lighting and retrofit of existing lighting throughout the town.

CAO-04 Identify appropriate locations in conjunction with key stakeholders for the provision of battery charging infrastructure for electric vehicles in Birr.

CAO-05 Co-operate with the Office of Public Works (OPW) in the delivery of the Birr Flood Relief Scheme that may be brought forward in the lifetime of this Plan.

CAO-06 Seek to improve and promote looped walks along the Camcor River in conjunction with all stakeholders recognising them as important health and recreation infrastructure within the town.

CAO-07 Ensure that all development within Birr allows for connectivity (pedestrian, cyclist and vehicular) to adjacent lands in accordance with the National Transport Authority's Permeability Best Practice Guide (2015), or any updated version of same.

CAO-08 Provide the network of walking and cycling infrastructure in the Plan area as detailed in Figure 6.14 Potential Green Infrastructure Projects, subject to funding and resources.

Chapter 9: Critical Infrastructure

Strategic Aim:

To facilitate the timely provision of infrastructure and utilities that will support sustainable socioeconomic growth and protect the quality of the environment of the town in a low carbon manner.

9.1 Introduction

The sustainable, consolidated and coherent growth of Birr is dependent on the satisfactory provision of critical infrastructure associated with:

- Movement and Connectivity;
- Water, Wastewater, Flooding and Drainage;
- Energy and communications; and
- Waste and Recycling.

9.2 Movement and Connectivity

Birr is a compact town, with most residential properties located within a short distance of services. However, the use of the private car is still the predominant form of transport for trips and therefore supporting and facilitating a modal shift to sustainable transport options must be a priority over the next Plan period. The Plan, in accordance with national guidelines, will also require that at design stage, employment, education, residential and mixed-use developments consider pedestrian movement and the provision of cycleways and associated facilities.

The Sustainable Transport Strategy chapter (Chapter 8) in the County Development Plan 2021-2027 examines county level data on modal split and identifies the need to reduce the reliance on the private car by promoting and facilitating more sustainable modes of transport and supporting the integration of land-use and transportation that would reduce the need to travel. The Council seeks to promote sustainable mobility including walking, cycling and public transport, in order to create a sustainable low carbon settlement pattern. The benefits of sustainable mobility are set out below in Figure 9.1. It is also important that Birr maintains good transportation linkages to surrounding urban and rural areas, which is a contributing factor to its sustainable growth.

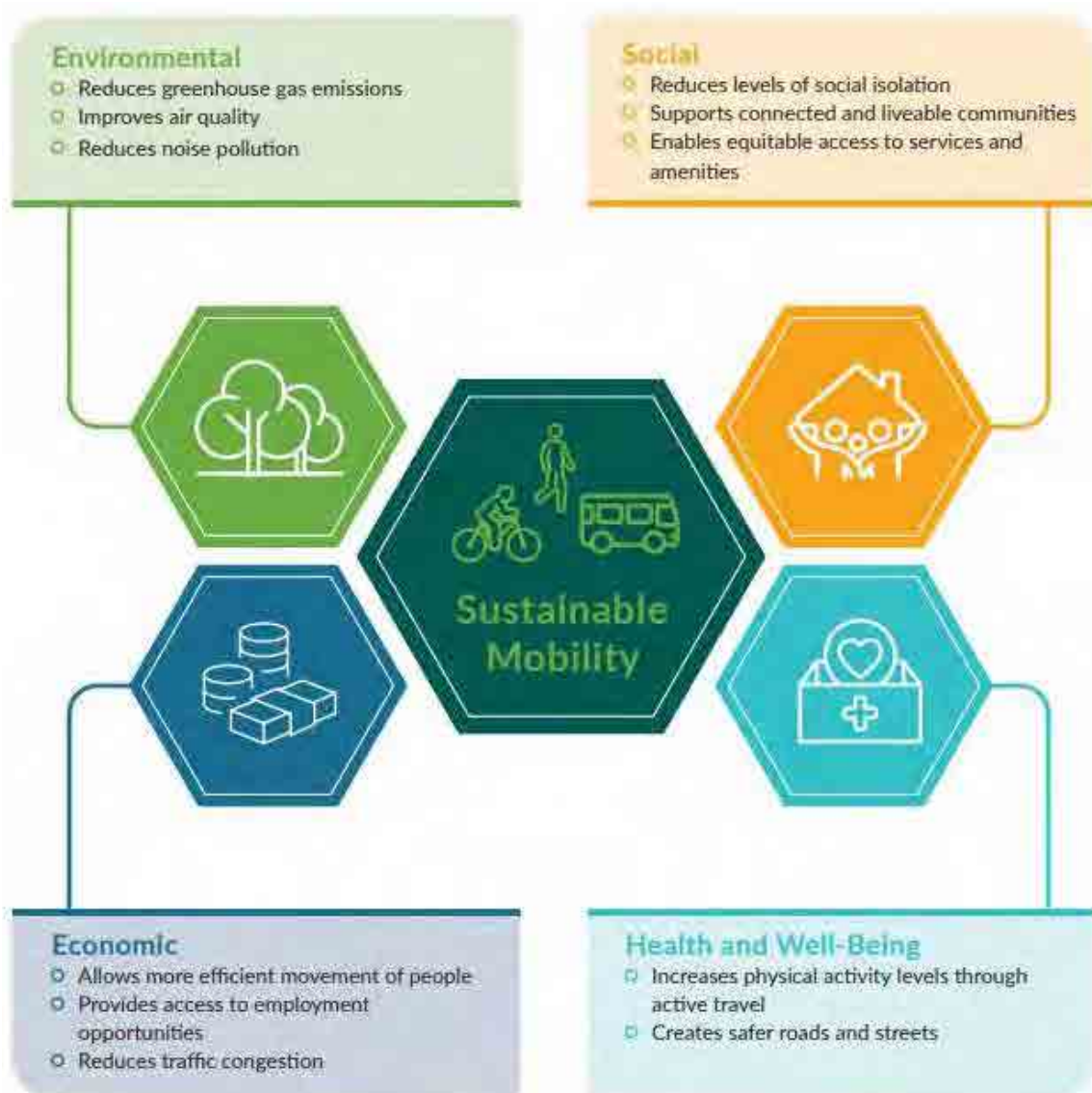


Figure 9.1 Benefits of Sustainable Mobility (Source: National Sustainable Mobility Policy, 2022)

The approach to achieve a more sustainable transport sector is based on the Avoid-Shift-Improve principle and implementing measures to:

- **Avoid:** Reduce the frequency and distance of trips.
- **Shift:** Move towards more environmentally friendly modes of transport, such as walking, cycling or using public transport.
- **Improve:** Promoting efficient fuel and vehicle technologies.

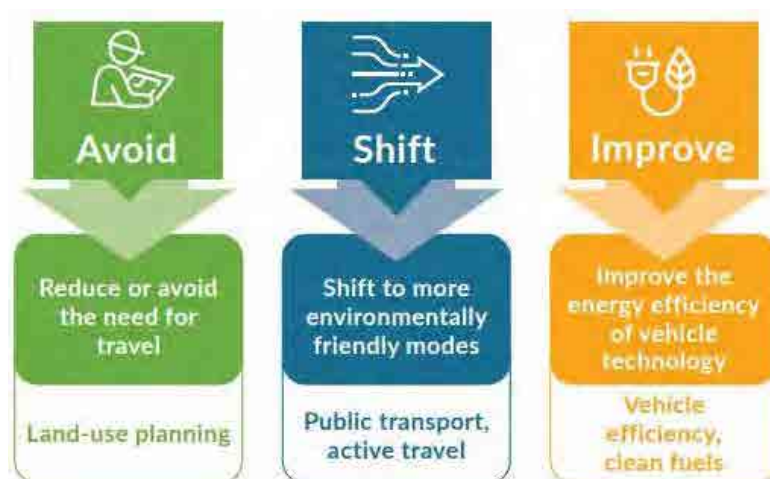


Figure 9.2 Avoid-Shift-Improve Principle (Source: National Sustainable Mobility Policy, 2022)

9.2.1 Local Transport Plan

As part of the preparation of the Local Area Plan, a Local Transport Plan (LTP) was undertaken, which forms part of this Local Area Plan (Appendix 1) and which has assisted in placing sustainable transport considerations to the forefront of land use planning decisions in the formulation of the Local Area Plan.

The LTP examined the existing and proposed transport infrastructure and service provision across all modes of transport, including active modes (walking and cycling) in the town. The assessment provides an insight into the existing transport patterns and constraints in Birr and also identifies the interventions that are required to effectively accommodate the anticipated increase in demand due to planned population growth, ensure the optimal transportation interventions can be planned, and drive a shift towards sustainable movement.

The outputs of the LTP include a series of proposed measures to improve the transport network of the town and have informed the contents and policy objectives of this Chapter. These proposals also include measures designed to ensure the integration of areas designated for new residential development in the town, with particular reference to developing active and sustainable modes of travel. The LTP sets out modal share ambitions which are also presented in Table 9.1 below.

9.2.2 Mode Share

The Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS) advocates the internationally recognised 'pedestrian first' Hierarchy of Roads Users model to encourage more sustainable travel patterns and safer streets. This model recognises that by prioritising design for pedestrians first, the number of short journeys taken by car can be reduced and public transport made more accessible. DMURS recognises that the need for more walkable communities is also an issue of social equity as it is the poorest and most vulnerable in society, including children, older people and people with disabilities for whom car travel is less of an option.

Section 8.4 of the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 addresses modal share within the county. Appendix 1 of the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 titled Transport Modal Shift provides a list of all references to modal shift in Volumes 1 and 2 of the County Development Plan.

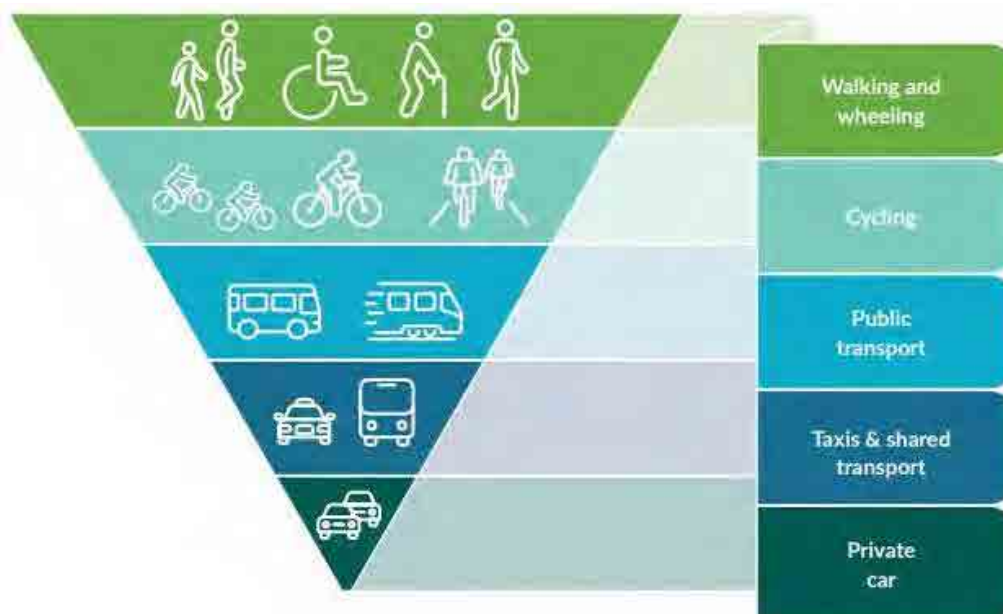


Figure 9.3 Hierarchy of Road Users model (Source: National Sustainable Mobility Policy, 2022)

Table 9.1 Birr Modal Share Baseline and Ambitions for Work and Education

Mode Share for Work Trips	2016 Baseline	Minimum Ambition 2029	% Change
Car	70%	65%	-5%
Public Transport	1.3%	3%	+1.7%
Walking	15.8%	20%	+4.2%
Cycling	3.1%	5%	+1.9%

Mode Share for Education Trips	2016 Baseline	Minimum Ambition 2029	% Change
Car	51.8%	45%	-6.8%
Public Transport	7.9%	9%	+1.1%

Walking	32%	37%	+5%
Cycling	1.6%	5%	+3.4%

The Council will work closely with other relevant agencies and stakeholders, including the NTA to develop schemes and secure funding to support modal shift ambitions as above.

Critical infrastructure necessary to improve the modal share in favour of sustainable modes of transport is further discussed under separate headings below, with identified improvement measures supported by critical infrastructure objectives set out in this Plan.

9.2.3 Walking and Cycling

The Council will endeavour to upgrade and make further provision for safer routes for walkers and cyclists in Birr, forming an integrated, safe, convenient, direct and comfortable network of routes.

Footpaths are provided throughout the town and the Council will seek the consolidation and incremental expansion of the existing footpath network in tandem with new development proposals.

It is the Council's intention to achieve a high level of permeability for walking and cycling in Birr town centre subject to funding received under the Active Travel Programme, through new build and retrofitting, to create accessible, attractive, vibrant and safer routes.

The Council proposes to provide a Riverside Walk of 910m for pedestrians and cyclists linking residential areas to schools, church, shops, library, swimming pool, gym and sports field, which has received NTA funding, as shown below.

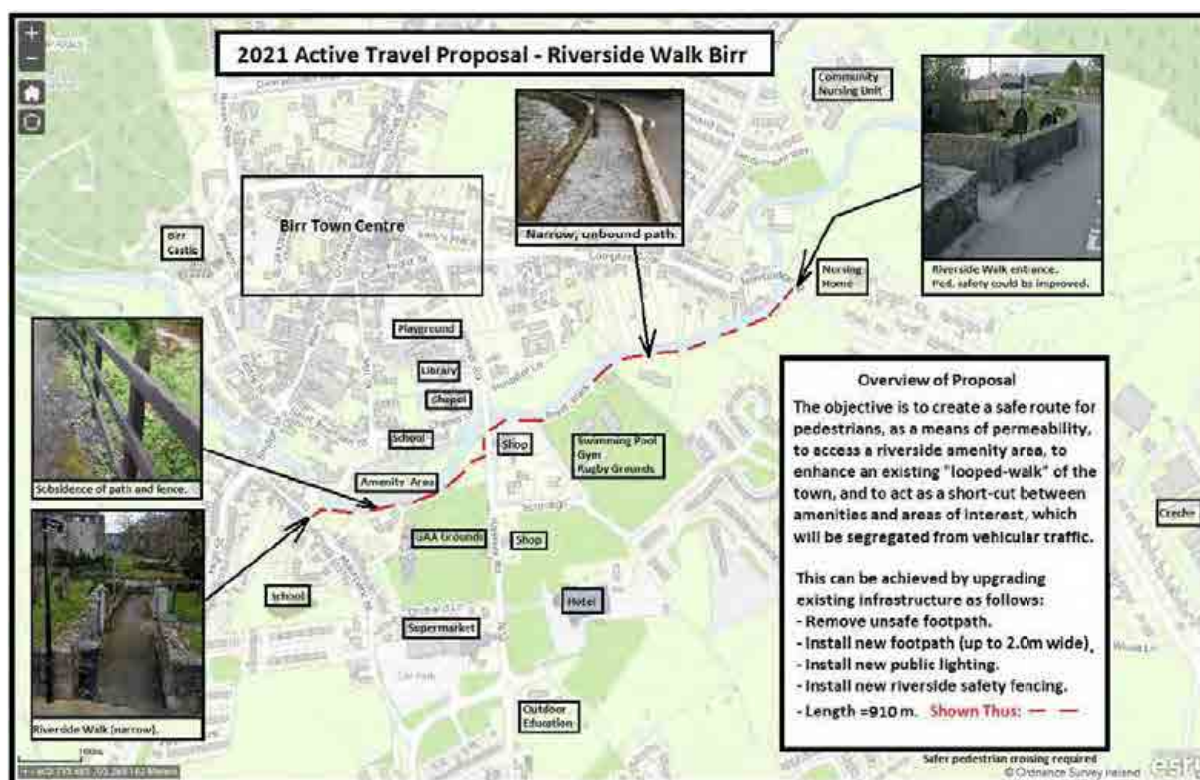


Figure 9.4 Riverside Walk Birr

Section 2.2.3 Greenways, section 2.2.4 Birr Town Trails (both in Chapter 2 Economic Development Strategy of this Plan) and the existing and potential Green Infrastructure Networks (in Chapter 6 Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure of this Plan) address additional walking / cycling provision in Birr.

There is limited cycle infrastructure in the town. There are some dedicated cycle lanes within the town and additional cycle lanes may be incorporated into new developments and on existing roads, where feasible.

AECOM, as part of the Cycle Design Office, on behalf of NTA, are currently developing a National Cycle Network map. This will include an overall map for County Offaly and town maps for Tullamore, Edenderry and Birr-Crinkill, detailing the existing and proposed cycle infrastructure.

9.2.4 Public Transport

Local Link bus services support rural communities in providing for social and economic connectivity between Birr and other settlements in the County as well as from within its own rural hinterland. The Council will continue to support and encourage operators to extend local services, where feasible.

Table 9.2 Local Link Bus Timetable - Birr

Bus Number	Route Area	Day
7098	Coolderry – Shinrone - Birr	Tuesday
911	Kinnitty – Clareen - Birr	Friday
823	Birr to Portlaoise	Monday to Sunday

9.2.5 Roads

The Council acknowledges the strategic function, capacity and safety of the national roads network traversing through Birr, which comprises of the N52 and N62 National Secondary Routes and strives to maintain them to a high level to ensure quality of service, safety, accessibility and connectivity to transport users.

Relief / distributor roads that could be considered in the future are identified by indicative lines in the Zoning Objectives Map and would be subject to future feasibility studies and environmental assessment.

9.2.6 Car Parking

Car parking, while a necessary feature of any town centre, should not be allowed to dominate the public realm or compromise the experience of pedestrians. Public car parking in the town consists of on-street car parking and off-street car parking at Marian Hall car park, Emmet Square car park and Mill Street car park. The Council aims to achieve a balanced approach to effectively manage parking to support the local economy and give priority to sustainable travel modes in order to reduce reliance on the private car. In accordance with the Age Friendly Strategy, the Council intends to provide suitable areas in Birr Town for age-friendly parking bays.

9.3 Water, Wastewater, Flooding and Drainage

The availability of high-quality infrastructure is critical to securing investment, creating sustainable and attractive places, ensuring health and wellbeing and safeguarding the environment. The Council will work with national, regional and local utility providers to safeguard the protection of existing infrastructure assets in the town and seek up-grades and enhancement, where necessary, to facilitate the sustainable growth of the town.

9.3.1 Water Supply

Birr's water supply is taken from the Camcor River and abstraction points are at Kinnitty and Springfield Bridge, Birr. The Irish Water 10-Year Water Supply Capacity Register (March 2022) notes that there is sufficient water supply capacity available up to 2031. Within Birr some sites are currently served by a

private well. All new developments must connect to the public supply scheme where it is feasible to do so.

Where there are public water supply constraints, the availability of water will be on a first come, first served basis with priority given to domestic customers. Non-domestic developments will be asked by Irish Water to review their proposals to reduce water requirements.

9.3.2 Wastewater Treatment

The current wastewater treatment system serving Birr is located at Townspark, Birr. The Irish Water 10-Year Waste Water Treatment Capacity Register (March 2022) notes that there is capacity available within the Birr Wastewater Treatment Plant (WwTP) up to 2031, and currently has capacity for an additional 989 persons. As per the Core Strategy outlined in the County Development Plan, the population of Birr Town is projected to increase by 1,263 people.

Currently after heavy rain, the incoming flow to the WwTP overflows to the river. The proposed wetlands will prevent this occurring and will pump the effluent to the Plant when a storm subsides. Also, this wetland will prevent the Plant from washing out. It will not increase the capacity of the Plant. There are no current proposals to expand the WwTP. In the event of no remaining headroom, any proposed development would require developer investment. Where there are deficiencies in the capacity of Birr's wastewater treatment plant to cater for all of the proposed population, the sites that come forward first for development may be served by Irish Water based on their first come first served approach, whilst later sites might require a developer-led approach to finance the infrastructure.

9.3.3 Flooding

The following flood events have been highlighted on the OPW website (www.floodinfo.ie) for Birr. Information received from www.floodinfo.ie will continue to inform the plan making and decision-making process on an on-going basis.

As represented on older Ordnance Survey Ireland Mapping, lands to the west of Birr town were highlighted as liable to flooding from the Little Brosna River. Where possible and feasible, riparian strips of land within close proximity to the Camcor River and Little Brosna River are zoned open space and kept development-free, for not only flood risk issues, but also for recreational and natural heritage issues. A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment accompanies this LAP. The Council intends to co-operate with the Office of Public Works (OPW) in the delivery of the Birr Flood Relief Scheme that may be brought forward in the lifetime of this Plan.

9.3.4 Drainage

The Council is responsible for the management and disposal of surface water run-off within the public realm. All new development will be required to be adequately serviced with surface water drainage infrastructure and to ensure new development will not cause surface water flood risk or safety risks to the public. New development proposals should ensure that surface water run-off does not increase above existing levels.

The Council seeks to ensure the sustainable management of surface water discharge through the use of sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDs). New developments in Birr must consider, as part of the initial design concept, whether SuDs and rainwater harvesting can be incorporated, particularly on large-scale developments. Insofar as practicable, development should seek to reduce the amount of impermeable hard surface areas.

New developments should also consider Nature-based Solutions to the Management of Rainwater and Surface Water Runoff in Urban Areas – Best Practice Interim Guidance Document, 2022 and any subsequent editions. Climate change, and the need to adapt our urban areas to a changed climate in terms of rainfall patterns is the unifying concept in terms of the scope of this guidance document. The document identifies the need for a significant change in the way we plan, design, build and maintain our urban areas through the replacement of impermeable surfacing with nature-based planted areas designed to absorb, retain, store and treat urban runoff prior to discharge back to the environment.

SuD is also referred to in Chapter 3 Town Centre and Regeneration, Chapter 6 Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure and Chapter 8 Climate Action.

9.4 Energy and Communications

Enhanced development of secure and reliable electricity transmission infrastructure is recognised as being a key factor for supporting economic development and attracting investment to any area. At present there is more than adequate electricity infrastructure supplying Birr.

The Bord Gáis gas network does not currently extend to Birr town. The Council will encourage the extension of the gas network to Birr, if considered feasible.

9.4.1 Broadband

Broadband is readily available in Birr. A number of telecoms providers have network infrastructure serving the area and provide various types of connectivity from fixed line to wireless and mobile broadband.

9.5 Waste and Recycling

Birr Recycling Centre is located in the Syngefield Industrial Estate, Kinnitty Road, Birr. There is currently a bring bank available for public use at Tesco Car Park, Roscrea Road, Birr.

The Council will support the circular economy principles, prioritising prevention, reuse, recycling and recovery over the disposal of waste. The Council will encourage the provision of recycling infrastructure where it is considered necessary and will assess requirements for recycling facilities on a case-by-case basis as part of the development management process.

9.6 Critical Infrastructure Policies

It is Council Policy to:

Movement and Connectivity

CIP-01 Promote enhanced connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists within Birr in order to improve access to the town centre, local schools, residential areas, recreational facilities, public transport services and other amenities.

CIP-02 Improve accessibility and movement within Birr, reduce dependency on private car transport, increase permeability in the town, and encourage the use of energy efficient forms of transport through the promotion of walking, cycling and public transport.

CIP-03 Make provisions for the use of electric vehicles through a significant increase in the provision of clearly and exclusively designated electric car charging points on public and private land in partnership with ESB and other relevant stakeholders and landowners.

CIP-04 Maintain and protect to a high level the safety, strategic transport function, capacity, accessibility, connectivity, level of service and efficiency of the N52 and N62 National Secondary Routes and associated junctions in Birr Town in accordance with Strategic Planning and National Roads Guidelines 2012 or any subsequent edition.

CIP-05 Ensure that new cycling and walking infrastructure, including the provision of new cycling hubs / parks, shall be provided subject to environmental constraints, including those related to habitats and potential impacts such as disturbance from lighting; this will include minimising river crossings, avoiding sensitive habitats, not increasing barriers to flood waters and sustainable design and construction techniques.

Water Supply

CIP-06 Ensure that adequate and appropriate water services infrastructure is provided in accordance with the requirements of Irish Water and as part of new development proposals.

Surface water, Drainage and Flooding

CIP-07 Maintain and enhance the existing surface water drainage systems in Birr and to protect surface and ground water quality in accordance with the Water Framework Directive.

CIP-08 Require that all development proposals demonstrate that appropriate Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) and other nature-based solutions are examined and provided.

CIP-09 Manage flood risk in Birr in conjunction with the Office of Public Works and in accordance with the requirements of the Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009) and circular PL02/2014 (August 2014).

Energy

CIP-10 Promote and facilitate the development and renewal of energy and communications networks in Birr, while protecting the amenities of the town.

CIP-11 Seek the undergrounding of all electricity, telephone and television cables within the town.

Recycling

CIP-12 Adequately maintain recycling facilities and to secure the provision of additional facilities, as required, including in conjunction with development.

9.7 Critical Infrastructure Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

Movement and Connectivity

CIO-01 Increase modal share for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport, and decrease dependency on private cars subject to the Council securing funding under the NTA Active Travel Investment Programme and other applicable funding streams to develop and deliver schemes to help achieve this objective.

CIO-02 Make provision for cycle lanes in accordance with the Birr Urban Cycle Network Map by NTA when published, subject to resources and funding.

CIO-03 Identify suitable areas in Birr Town for age-friendly parking bays, in accordance with the Age Friendly Strategy for Offaly 2018-2021, and any future editions.

CIO-04 Support the delivery of the infrastructure proposed in the Local Transport Plan (LTP) subject to funding being made available.

CIO-05 To investigate the feasibility of constructing a Birr Relief Road and construction of Birr By-pass and Distributor Road Network (Birr LUTS), taking into account environmental sensitivities as identified in the SEA Environmental Report and the policies and objectives of the County Development Plan relating to sustainable mobility. Where feasibility is established, the Council will seek to pursue and / or facilitate the relevant project, subject to other provisions in the County Development Plan, including section 8.6.4 Corridor and Route Selection Process.

CIO-06 To reallocate roadspace within Birr to walking, cycling and public transport. This may take the form of removing traffic from streets, removing lanes of traffic, narrowing carriageways, traffic management measures, or removing on-street parking to provide cycle tracks or widened footpaths.

CIO-07 Ensure access to the lands to the north of the town that are zoned 'Enterprise and Employment' and 'Business or Technology Park' are accessed from a local road and not from a national road at a point where the speed limit exceeds 60kph and regard shall be had to the Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2012 (and any subsequent edition).

CIO-08 Reserve land for an access link to the Birr Northern Distributor road from zoned residential land to the south, in consultation with and in agreement with TII.

Wastewater

CIO-09 Support and work in cooperation with Irish Water to upgrade Birr Wastewater Treatment Plan.

Flooding

CIO-10 To support and work in co-operation with the OPW in the implementation of the Birr Flood Relief Scheme.

CIO-11 Provide a new Wetland Area adjacent to the Crinkill Pumping Station within the Council landholding to provide necessary storm water attenuation.

Chapter 10: Planning and Infrastructural Assessment

Strategic Aim:

To phase new development to ensure that it occurs in a sequential and efficient manner and in tandem with the delivery of supporting physical and social infrastructure.

10.1 Introduction

Appendix 3 of Project Ireland 2040; National Planning Framework (NPF) sets out a methodology for a two-tiered approach for zoning of land which is informed by an Infrastructural Assessment, which states that *'The potential for delivery of the required services and/or capacity to support new development must be identified and specific details provided by the Planning Authority at the time of publication of both the draft and final development or local area plan'*.

The NPF places an emphasis on the need for compact, smart and sustainable growth and requires 30% of all new housing to be within existing urban footprints (outside of the five cities), thus reducing the amount of greenfield land required to meet future housing requirements.

The NPF defines Tier 1 and 2 lands as follows;

'Tier 1: Serviced Zoned Land, comprising lands that are able to connect to existing development services for which there is service capacity available and can therefore accommodate new development; and

Tier 2: Serviceable Zoned Land, comprising lands that are not currently sufficiently serviced to support new development but have the potential to become fully serviced within the life of the plan.'

The NPF requires that where lands are identified as Tier 2 lands, the potential for delivery of the required services and/or capacity to support new development must be identified and specific details provided by the Planning Authority at the time of publication of the draft and final local area plan.

Table 10.2: titled 'Site Appraisals' evaluates the suitability of sites for zoning based on the principles of compact growth and sustainable mobility along with consideration of the availability of infrastructure and services and the physical suitability of the site. This Planning and Infrastructural Assessment (PIA) ensures that informed decisions are made as to whether or not to zone land or sites in this LAP for residential development and that the County Development Plan Core Strategy is supported.

10.2 Methodology

A review of potential sites within a defined study area is illustrated in Figure 10.1 below. A range of potential sites were identified which were further examined in terms of their suitability for development and zoning. Prior to this review a number of sites for assessment were omitted because they have extant permissions. Smaller infill sites within the town centre (under 1 ha in area) were also omitted from this PIA as their development would be in keeping with Offaly County Development Plan

and National Planning Framework policy and their development would have little bearing on existing services and infrastructure.

Advice was provided by relevant departments of Offaly County Council and external bodies in relation to;

- Any infrastructure deficits that would impede the development of lands;
- The current status of any plans/programmes in place to address these infrastructure deficits;
- The anticipated timeframe for the delivery of these projects.

As the NPF acknowledges that infrastructure and service availability is not the only criteria in determining the suitability of a site for development, it was decided to merge infrastructure and service availability with support for the principles of compact growth and sustainable mobility and the physical suitability of the subject site for development. A traffic light matrix has been developed in Table 10.2 titled 'Site Appraisals' in this regard that weighs adherence to the following criteria;

- Whether the zoning of the site for development promotes compact growth;
- Whether the zoning of the site for development promotes sustainable mobility;
- The availability of infrastructure and services on the site or in the vicinity of the site; and
- The physical suitability of the site for development, i.e. the contours and shape of the site, the accessibility of the site.

A green colour indicates strong adherence to the above criteria, an amber colour indicates medium adherence while a red colour indicates low adherence.

Whilst the Birr waste water treatment plant (WWTP) has limited capacity and IW have no proposals to expand the plant, having regard to the willingness of IW to facilitate the provision of necessary infrastructure through developer-led investment and the generally good service infrastructure (see Figure 10.3 below) in Birr and Crinkill, it is considered that the Local Plan Area in its entirety can be considered Tier 1 Lands in accordance with Appendix 3 of the NPF.

17 potential sites were identified within the study area, which are mapped in Figure 10.1 and described in Table 10.1 'List of Sites Assessed' below.

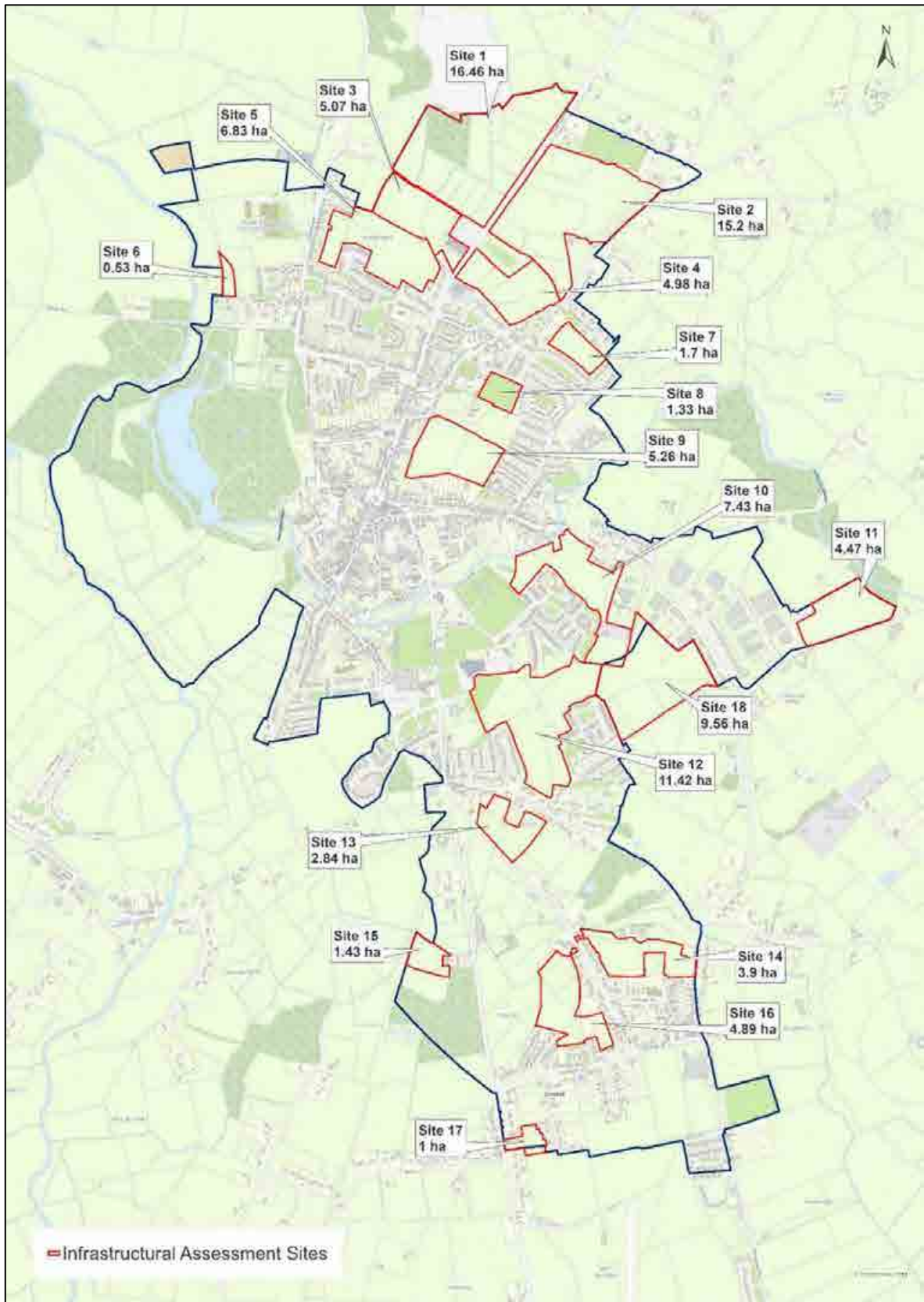


Figure 10.1 Location of sites assessed as part of this Planning and Infrastructural Assessment

Table 10.1 List of Sites Assessed

Site No.	Site Name	Site Area	Site Description
1	Woodfield or Tullynisk Td	16.46 ha.	<p>Poor quality agricultural land characterised by rough grazing land, mix of hedgerow and vegetation along with extensive woodland area to north west of site. Most of the land is predominantly flat apart from the north west corner, which is elevated. Large drains dissect the landholding in a number of locations.</p> <p>Land faces onto N62 (Tullamore Road) and service road to Aldi. A row of mature trees runs along the boundary of the landholding with the N62.</p>
2	Woodlands Td	15.2 ha.	<p>Landholding comprises a worked-out sandpit. Significant recolonisation and regrowth of vegetation has taken place. Apart from an extremely steep bank along the eastern boundary, the site is predominantly flat with some deposits of materials stockpiled. A row of mature trees runs along the boundary of the landholding with the N62.</p>
3	Townparks	5.07 ha.	<p>Grazing agricultural land that falls from its highest point at the north west towards the southeast. Hedgerows along field boundaries. Located north west of Aldi.</p>
4	Burkes Hill	4.98 ha.	<p>Landholding stretches from N62 Tullamore Road to Burke's Hill. Gradients are relatively flat on the western N62 side before becoming undulating/hilly to the southeast.</p>
5	Townparks	6.83 ha.	<p>Grazing agricultural land. Gradients fall from west to east. The landholding borders housing in Cappaneale and Macauley Drive. Field boundaries comprise hedgerows.</p>
6	Cappaneale	0.53 ha.	<p>Triangular shaped and flat parcel of land, located to the north (rear) of houses/mobile homes and is accessed from a road to the east of houses/mobile homes.</p>
7	Burke's Hill	1.7 ha.	<p>Infill site, undulating in nature at a higher elevation than adjacent housing developments; Meadow Court and Meadow Ville.</p>
8	Burke's Hill	1.33 ha.	<p>Currently or last used as a soccer pitch. Generally flat although falls to the east. Bordered by stonewall and mature trees to the south, and Eircom Telecoms building to the east. Meadow Ville and Meadow Brook housing developments are located to the north of the land.</p>
9	Rectory Lands	5.26 ha.	<p>Grazing agricultural land predominantly flat although falling to the southeast. Land to the north is very elevated. Field boundaries comprise mature hedgerow and mature trees. Groups of mature trees are along the southern boundary in particular. Extensive and intact stonewalls are along the eastern and southern boundaries. The subject lands lie adjacent to the Sandymount housing development to the</p>

			east, the town centre and Emmet St. to the west and Johns Place to the south.
10	Syngefield	7.43 ha.	Grazing agricultural land. Land is very undulating with highest point to centre of field and levels fall towards the Camcor River. Land is bounded by housing estate to south and low density houses to the north.
11	Clonoghill Upper	4.47 ha.	Grazing agricultural land. Land is very undulating/hilly. Highest point is crest of hill along northern boundary to the site. Syngefield Industrial Estate is located to the west, the remains of Clonoghill Castle to the north and the Camcor River to the east. An extensive stonewall runs along the field boundary with the R440.
12	Seefin and Scurragh	11.42 ha.	Predominantly grazing agricultural land but part of the lands are being developed for housing currently. The western part of the land is relatively flat before gradients rise to the middle and eastern part of the land. The highest point is the crest of the hill along the centre of the site in a north-south axis.
13	Seefin	2.84 ha.	Grazing agricultural land. Land is very prominent rising in gradient to the north, which is very elevated. The field boundaries and driveway are tree-lined with mature hedgerow.
14	Beechpark, Crinkill	3.9 ha.	Grazing agricultural land. Undulating in nature. Landholding truncated by school car park. Field boundaries to south and east are stonewalls. Field borders low-density housing to the west (Military Road) along with low-density housing and Crinkill National School to the south (School Road).
15	Roscrea rd.	1.43 ha.	Grazing agricultural land. Land is predominantly flat and is located to the west of houses/mobile homes. Field boundaries comprise mature hedgerow and trees.
16	Crinkill	4.89 ha.	Grazing agricultural land. Land is very undulating and hilly. Most prominent elevated part of the field is to the south. Field boundaries comprise mature hedgerow and trees. Land located north of Cemetery Road and Hawthorne Drive.
17	Leinster Villas	1 ha.	Grazing agricultural land. Land is relatively flat and located to the rear of low-density linear housing.
18	Clonoghill Upper	9.55 ha.	Grazing agricultural land. Undulating in nature and located to the south west of low-density linear housing in Syngefield and to the north east of a residential development in Woodlane.

10.3 Infrastructural Overview

10.3.1 Roads and Transportation

10.3.1.1 Responsibility for Delivery

Offaly County Council is responsible for the delivery of road infrastructure. Site access arrangements and some road improvement works will generally be developer-led.

10.3.1.2 Necessary Infrastructure

A number of sites require road improvement works as facilities are not in place. Improvement and upgrade works are identified in the Birr Local Transport Plan (LTP) generally for roads, cycle lanes and footpaths. In general, most facilities such as footpaths etc. are in place at the majority of the sites in the town centre but no cycle lanes are in place in other sections of the town.

The construction of a Northern relief road from the Banagher Road to the Tullamore Road to the north of the town and the South Central Distributor Road will improve the capacity of Birr Town Centre which is currently heavily congested in addition to opening up backlands for development.

10.3.2 Environment and Water Services

10.3.2.1 Responsibility for Delivery

The provision of public water and sewerage services is the responsibility of Irish Water, the national water services authority. Local authorities act as agents for Irish Water, providing services for the utility under service level agreements.

10.3.2.2 Necessary Infrastructure

Where new network provision or network reinforcements such as upgrades or extensions are required, these shall be developer driven unless there are committed Irish Water projects in place to progress such works. New connections to Irish Water networks are subject to their Connections Charging Policy.

Irish Water has no proposals to expand the Birr WWTP. In the event of no remaining headroom, any proposed development would require developer investment. Irish Water intends to provide a wetland adjacent to the Birr WWTP to ensure that during heavy rain, the incoming flow does not overflow to the Little Brosna River and to provide extra wastewater treatment.

The pumping station in Crinkill requires upgrade. The provision of a wetland adjacent to the pumping station within the Council landholding would provide important storm water attenuation.

In relation to Water Supply, the Birr / Kinnitty Water Supply Zone has capacity.

10.3.3 Drainage/SuDS

10.3.3.1 Responsibility for Delivery

Any drainage works on site will generally be developer-led.

10.3.3.2 Necessary Infrastructure

The public sewer network is required to be extended in the Townparks/Tullamore Road area to the north of the town.

A number of potential wetland/swales will be required at a number of locations in the town (see Section 6.13 Potential Green Infrastructure Projects in Chapter 6 Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure) to provide additional storage to reduce flood risk and improve water quality.

10.4 Site Assessment

All sites have been appraised based on infrastructural requirements and planning assessment criteria. Table 10.2 provides the site appraisal process and the weighting of infrastructure and planning criteria along with land use zoning recommendations.

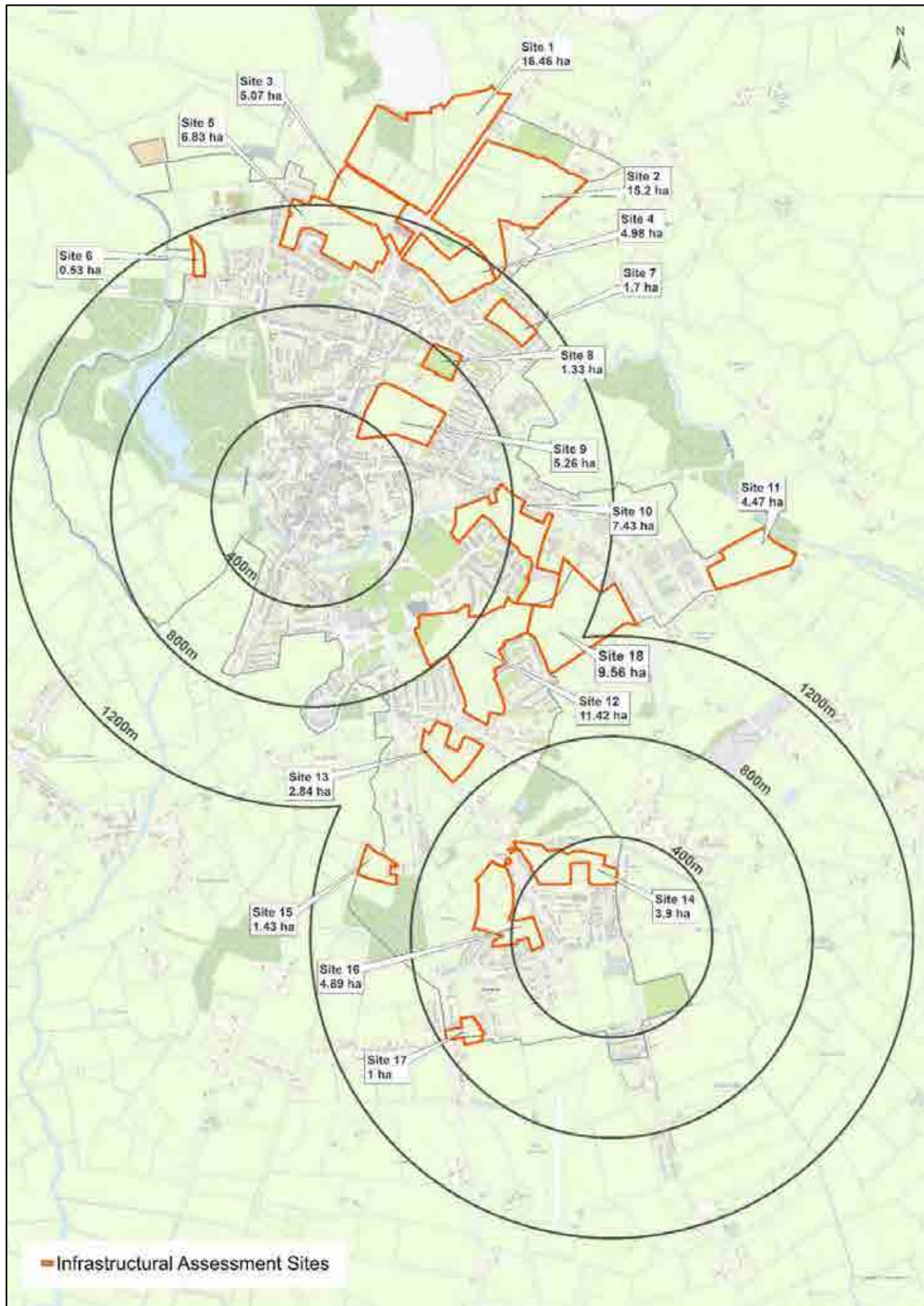


Figure 10.2 Distance of sites from Birr Town Centre and Crinkill Village Centre

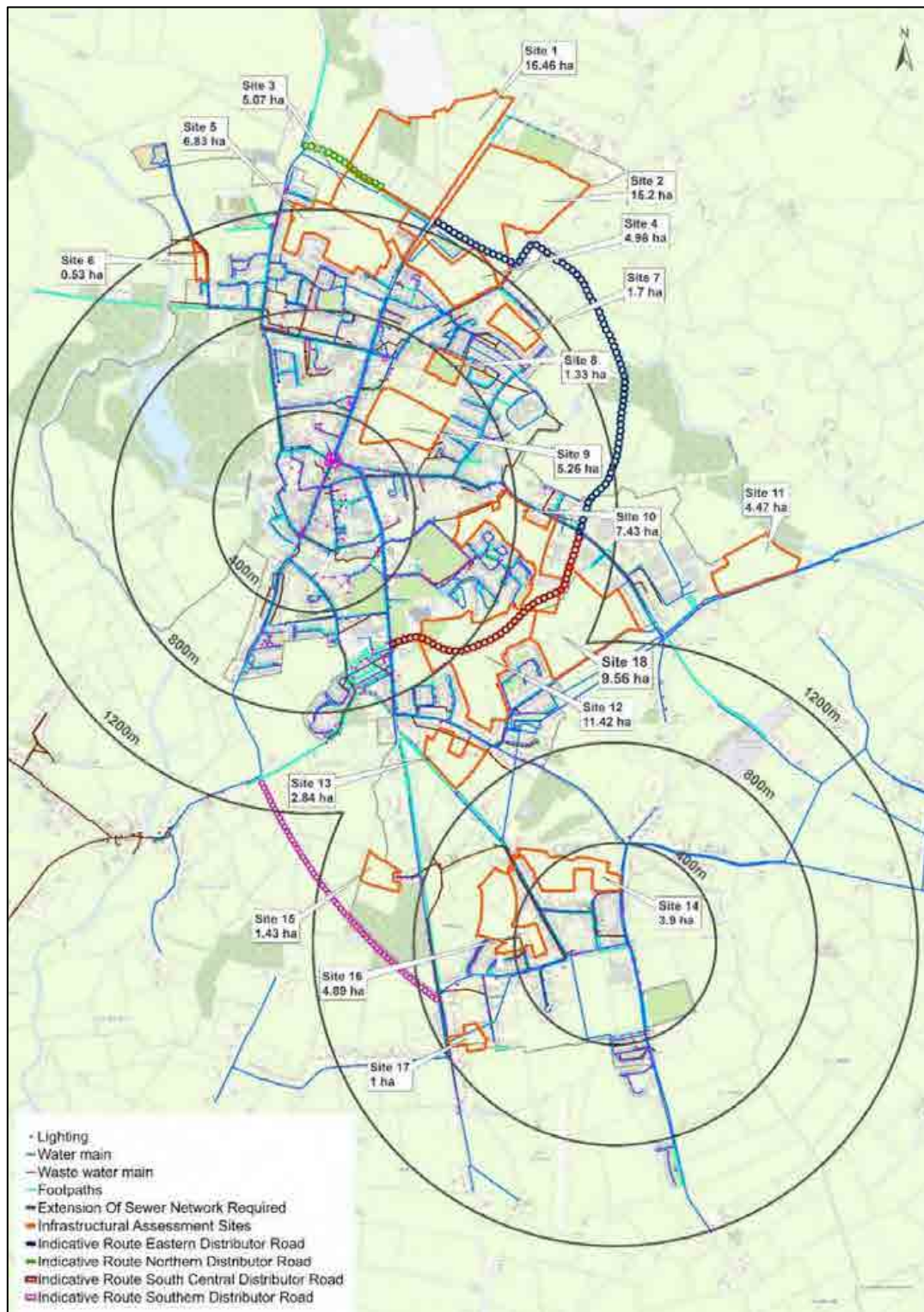


Figure 10.3 Distance of sites from Birr Town Centre and Crinkill Village Centre overlain with existing infrastructural services

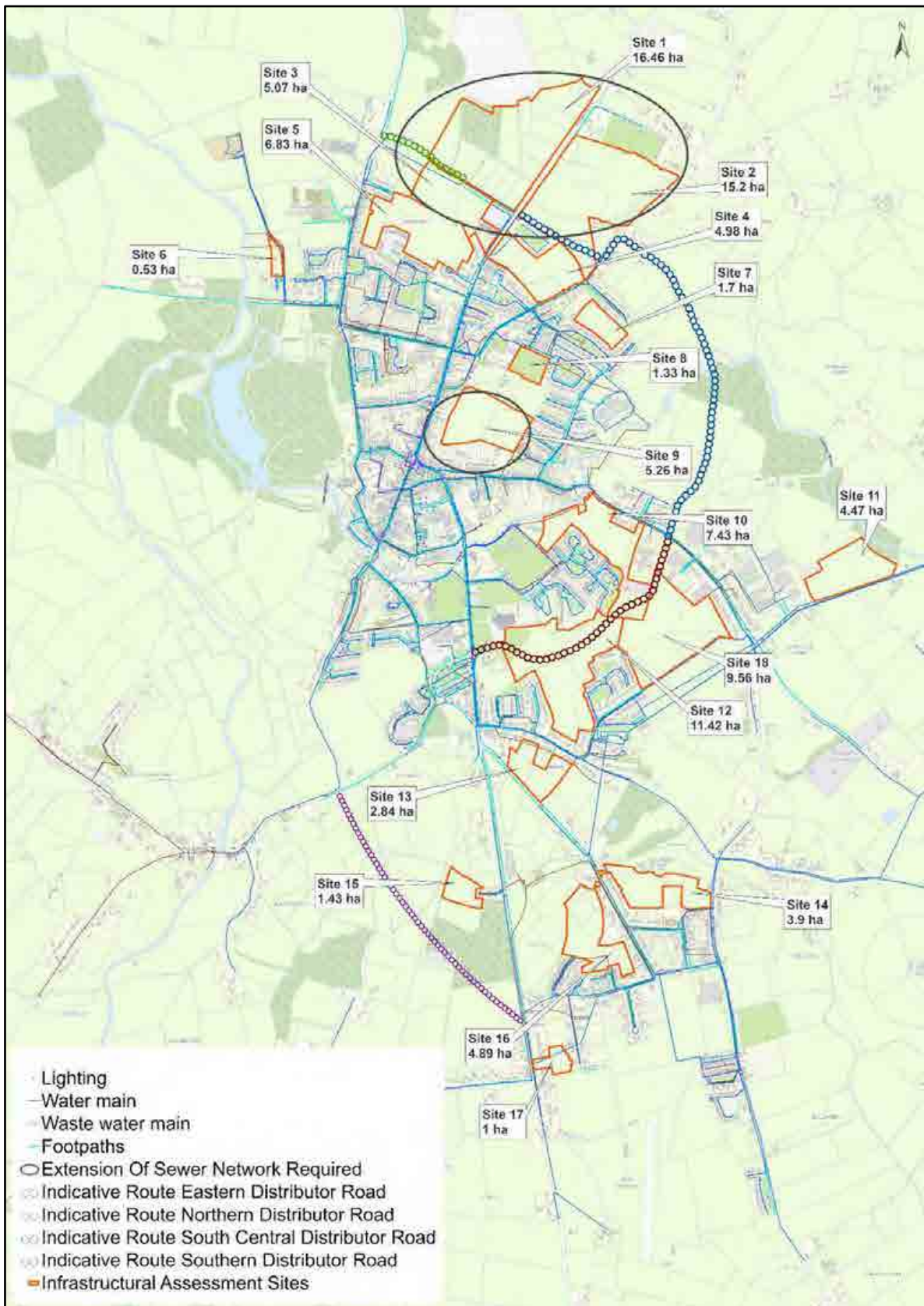


Figure 10.4 Location of Necessary Infrastructure in Birr

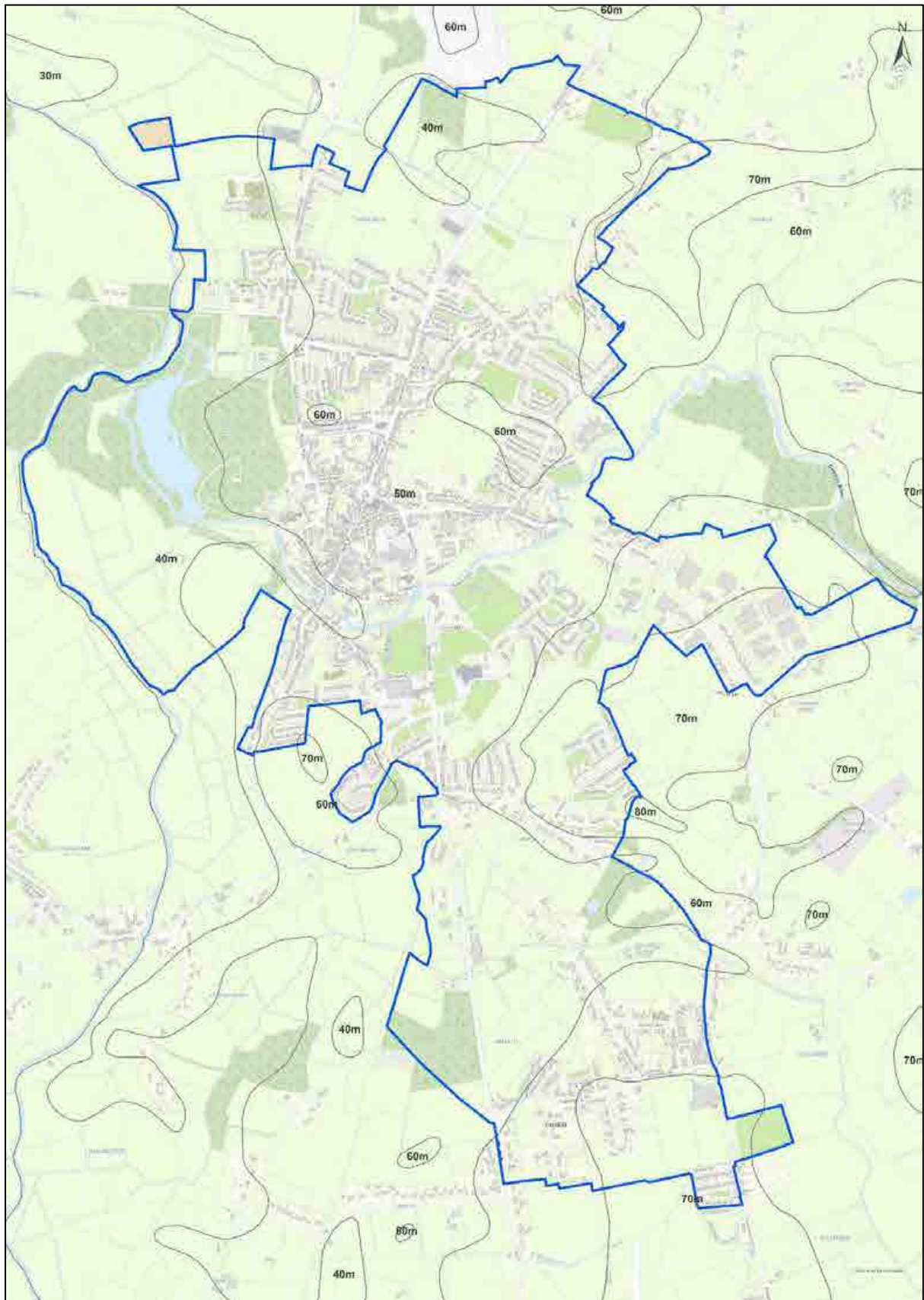


Figure 10.5 Topography of Birr

Table 10.2 Site Appraisals

Site No.	Criteria	Recommendation	Justification
1	Promotes compact growth	Zone combination of 'Business or Technology Park', 'Enterprise & Employment' and 'Open Space, Amenity and Recreation'	There are other lands more suitable for residential development that support compact growth but this site has potential to accommodate a campus style Business or Technology Park along with complimentary Enterprise and Employment uses. Whilst the landholding is on the edge of town, there is potential to incorporate cycling, walking and green infrastructure provision into any development on site.
	Promotes sustainable mobility		
	Availability of infrastructure & services		
	Physical suitability		
2	Promotes compact growth	Zone combination of 'Business or Technology Park', 'Enterprise & Employment' and 'Open Space, Amenity and Recreation'	There are other lands more suitable for residential development that support compact growth but this site has potential to accommodate a campus style Business or Technology Park along with complimentary Enterprise and Employment uses. Whilst the landholding is on the edge of town, there is potential to incorporate cycling, walking and green infrastructure provision into any development on site.
	Promotes sustainable mobility		
	Availability of infrastructure & services		
	Physical suitability		
3	Promotes compact growth & sustainable mobility	Zone a combination of 'Community Services/Facilities' and 'Enterprise & Employment'.	There are other lands more suitable for residential development that support compact growth but this site has potential to accommodate a campus style Business or Technology Park along with complimentary Enterprise and Employment uses. Whilst the landholding is on the edge of town, there is potential to incorporate cycling, walking and
	Promotes sustainable mobility		
	Availability of infrastructure & services		
	Physical suitability		

Site No.	Criteria	Recommendation	Justification
			green infrastructure provision into any development on site.
4	Promotes compact growth	Zone 'Enterprise & Employment' and 'Strategic Residential Reserve'.	Land bordering the Tullamore Road has the potential to avail of the sizeable land bank and good road access to accommodate 'Enterprise and Employment' uses. The land fronting onto Burke's Hill, albeit undulating and hilly has potential to be developed in time but for now there are other sites more suitable for residential development that support compact growth.
	Promotes sustainable mobility		
	Availability of infrastructure & services		
	Physical suitability		
5	Promotes compact growth	Zone a combination of New Residential and Strategic Residential Reserve.	The 'New Residential' zoning in this location provides a counter balance for the town relative to other areas where 'New Residential' zoning is proposed. Any development would have to provide for future potential access to 'Strategic Residential Reserve' lands to west and east. Lands proposed to be zoned 'Strategic Residential Reserve' have the potential to be developed in time but there are other lands more suitable for residential development that support compact growth in the Plan Area.
	Promotes sustainable mobility		
	Availability of infrastructure & services		
	Physical suitability		
6	Promotes compact growth	Zone 'New Residential'	Lands adjoin a social housing development and may provide an important site to build more social housing units in the lifetime of the Plan.
	Promotes sustainable mobility		
	Availability of infrastructure & services		
	Physical suitability		

Site No.	Criteria	Recommendation	Justification
7	Promotes compact growth & sustainable mobility	Zone 'Strategic Residential Reserve'	Land albeit elevated/hilly has potential to be developed in time having regard to access issues.
	Promotes sustainable mobility		
	Availability of infrastructure & Services		
	Physical suitability		
8	Promotes compact growth & sustainable mobility	Zone 'Strategic Residential Reserve'	This infill site has the potential to be accessed through Meadow Vale and Burke's Hill and is a logical extension of the adjacent 'New Residential' zoned areas in time.
	Promotes sustainable mobility		
	Availability of infrastructure & Services		
	Physical suitability		
9	Promotes compact growth & sustainable mobility	Zone a combination of 'Town Centre/Mixed Use' and 'New Residential'.	This infill site is located close to the town centre and has significant potential for connectivity and permeability linkages through the site and with adjacent areas.
	Promotes sustainable mobility		
	Availability of infrastructure & Services		
	Physical suitability		
10	Promotes compact growth	Combination of 'New Residential', 'Strategic Residential Reserve' and 'Open Space,	Land albeit hilly/undulating is located within 800 metres of the town centre and has potential to link in effectively with the town's Green Infrastructure network.
	Promotes sustainable mobility		

Site No.	Criteria	Recommendation	Justification
	Availability of infrastructure & Services	Amenity and Recreation’.	
	Physical suitability		
11	Promotes compact growth	Combination of ‘Industrial and Warehousing’ and ‘Open Space, Amenity and Recreation’.	Whilst the landholding is on the edge of town, there is potential to incorporate cycling, walking and green infrastructure provision into any development on site and to link up with the Camcor River Walking Trail.
	Promotes sustainable mobility		
	Availability of infrastructure & services		
	Physical suitability		
12	Promotes compact growth	Combination of ‘New Residential’ and ‘Open Space, Amenity and Recreation’ and ‘Strategic Residential Reserve.’	Whilst located on elevated lands, significant residential development has occurred to the north and south of the subject site. The development would offer potential for an important section of the South Central Distributor Road. The subject lands to the south of the landholding are considered suitable for a ‘Strategic Residential Reserve’ zoning as while not suitable for residential development in the current plan period it may be suitable for development in future LAPs.
	Promotes sustainable mobility		
	Availability of infrastructure & services		
	Physical suitability		
13	Promotes compact growth	‘Strategic Residential Reserve’	Land albeit elevated/hilly has potential to be developed in time having regard to access issues.
	Promotes sustainable mobility		
	Availability of infrastructure & services		
	Physical suitability		

Site No.	Criteria	Recommendation	Justification
14	Promotes compact growth	Combination of 'New Residential' and 'Strategic Residential Reserve'.	Land albeit elevated/hilly has potential to be developed in time having regard to access issues.
	Promotes sustainable mobility		
	Availability of infrastructure & services		
	Physical suitability		
15	Promotes compact growth	'New Residential'	Lands adjoin a social housing development and may provide an important site to build more social housing units in the lifetime of the Plan.
	Promotes sustainable mobility		
	Availability of infrastructure & Services		
	Physical suitability		
16	Promotes compact growth	'Strategic Residential Reserve'	Land albeit elevated/hilly has potential to be developed in time having regard to access issues.
	Promotes sustainable mobility		
	Availability of Infrastructure & Services		
	Physical suitability		
17	Promotes compact growth	'Strategic Residential Reserve'	There are other lands more suitable for residential development that support compact growth in the Plan Area. Limited potential to incorporate cycling, walking and green infrastructure provision into any development on site.
	Promotes sustainable mobility		
	Availability of infrastructure & Services		

Site No.	Criteria	Recommendation	Justification
	Physical suitability		
18	Promotes compact growth	Do not zone	There are other lands more suitable for residential development that support compact growth in the Plan Area. Limited potential to incorporate cycling, walking and green infrastructure provision into any development on site.
	Promotes sustainable mobility		
	Availability of infrastructure & Services		
	Physical suitability		

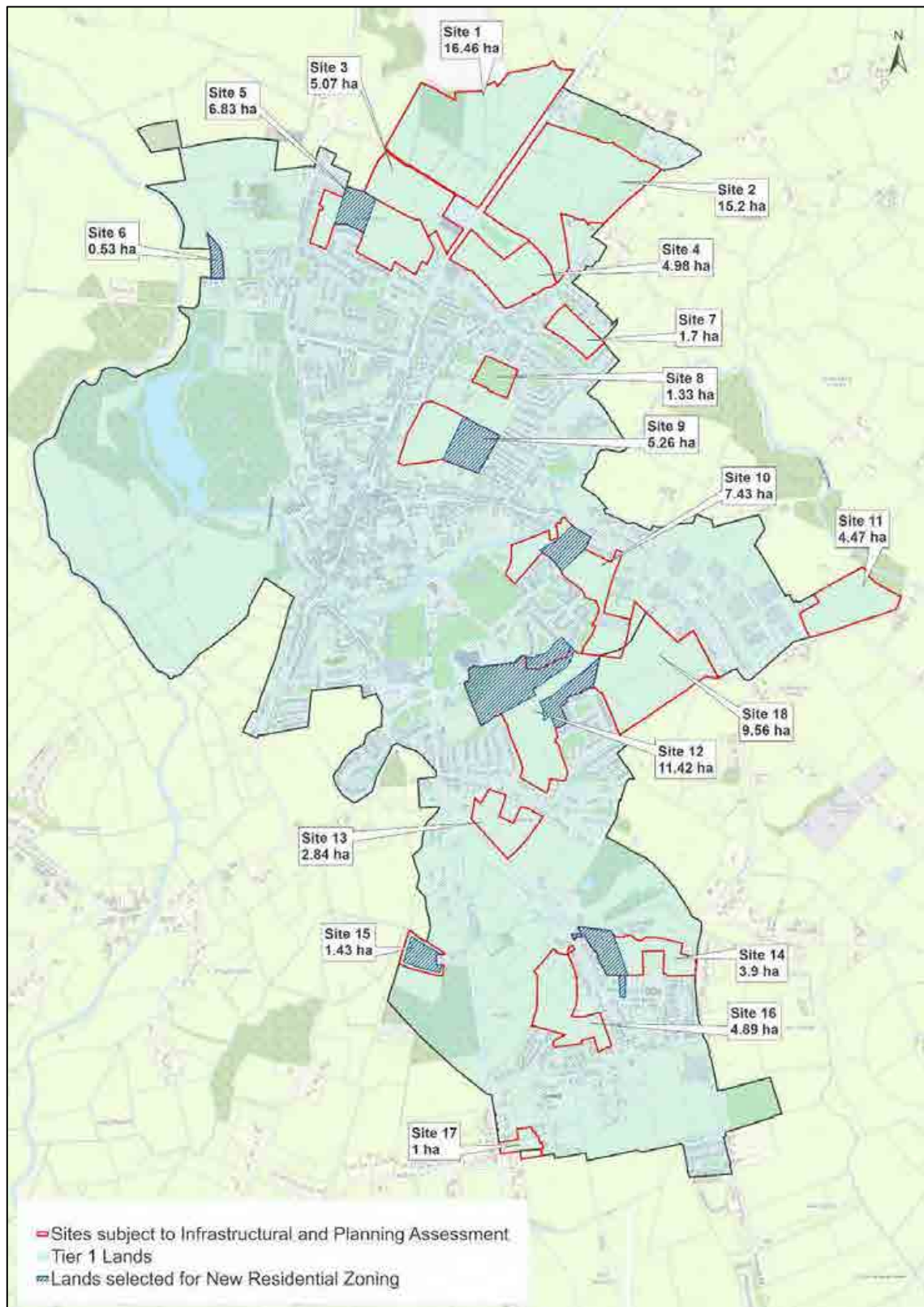


Figure 10.6 Lands categorised Tier 1 and zoned New Residential

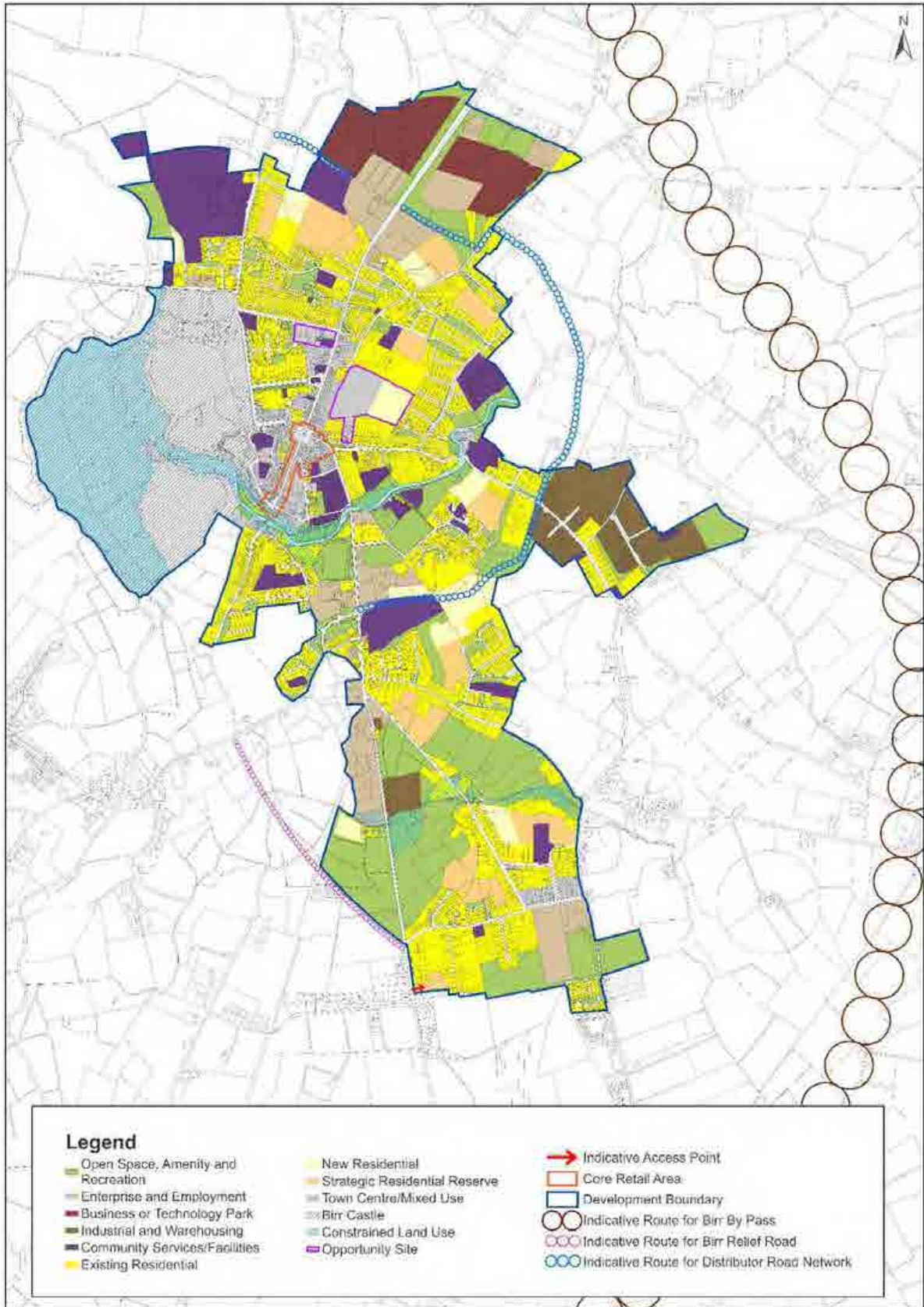


Figure 10.7 Zoning Objectives Map for Plan Area

10.5 Findings and Implications

The PIA has informed the overall development strategy and the policies and objectives of the Birr Local Area Plan, specifically the zoning proposals for lands zoned new residential. Seven sites identified are recommended for 'New Residential' zonings in the LAP having regard to their serviceability and physical suitability for development, and their adherence to the principles of compact growth and sustainable mobility.

10.6 Infrastructure Delivery Schedule

The Plan seeks to ensure that the required infrastructural and site-servicing requirements for these lands, as outlined in the PIA, are delivered prior to or in tandem with development of these sites, where appropriate and reasonable. The lifetime of the Local Area Plan is six years. The infrastructure delivery schedule is staged in the following phases in order to achieve the timely delivery of infrastructure.

Table 10.3 Infrastructure Delivery Stages

Short term	Year 1 and Year 2
Medium term	Year 3 and 4
Long term	Year 5 +
On-going	Throughout the plan lifetime and beyond

This schedule should be regarded as a 'living' programme. It will be reviewed at regular intervals to assess how the implementation is progressing, which is influenced by the availability of resources, funding, economic climate and engagement by providers.

Table 10.4 Required Infrastructure

Required Infrastructure	Delivery Schedule	Estimated Cost	Funding Source
Roads and Transportation			
Northern Distributor Road	Short Term	€2 million	Department of Transport Specific Improvement Grant
Eastern Distributor Road	Long Term	€10 million	Department of Transport Strategic Improvement Grant

South Central Distributor Road	Medium Term	€4 million	Department of Transport Specific Improvement Grant and Development Contribution
South West Distributor Road	Long Term	€6.25 million	Department of Transport Strategic Improvement Grant
Environment and Water Services			
New Wetland adjacent to Birr WWTP	Short Term	Responsibility of Irish Water	Irish Water
New Wetland adjacent to the Crinkill Pumping Station	Short Term	€60,000	Irish Water
Drainage/SuDS			
Extension of public sewer network in Townparks/Tullamore Road area of Birr	Long Term	€200,000	Responsibility of Irish Water
Provision of wetland/swales at locations outlined in Figure 6.13 Potential Green Infrastructure Projects	On going	€120,000	Responsibility of Irish Water

Chapter 11: Land Use Zoning Objectives

Strategic Aim:

To adhere to the land use zoning objectives contained in this Plan in the interests of orderly development and eliminating potential conflicts between incompatible land uses.

11.1 Introduction

Effective zoning promotes orderly development by integrating land use and transportation, providing a high quality of life, eliminating potential conflicts between incompatible land uses and establishing an efficient basis for investment in public infrastructure and facilities. Each land use zoning objective in this chapter is accompanied by a justification for same and the context for the type of development, which would be acceptable.

There are a wide range of land uses identified under each of the Land Use Zoning Objectives. Proposals for development will need to demonstrate compliance with the various written provisions of the Plan, as relevant, including those relating to environmental protection and management. Environmental considerations, such as those related to elevated levels of flood risk or European site ecological designations, may limit the types of uses that may be possible at certain sites. Prospective applicants are encouraged to engage with the Planning Authority at the earliest opportunity to seek guidance as to the appropriateness of emerging proposals.

11.2 Zoning Principles

In accordance with the overall strategy of the plan, the town's zoning strategy is based on five important principles in particular:

- Sufficient lands should be zoned at appropriate locations, in accordance with the population targets as set out in the Core Strategy to facilitate the envisaged land-use requirements during the lifetime of this plan.
- Encourage sustainable development and the redevelopment of brownfield sites by targeting at least 30% of all new homes that are proposed for settlements in this Plan within their existing built-up footprints in accordance with the National Planning Framework (NPF).
- Ensure alignment of zoning with availability of services, investment in infrastructure and the provision of employment, together with supporting amenities and services.
- Land use zoning objectives are set out in order to assist individuals assessing the most appropriate locations for new development. Not all needs can be anticipated and therefore some flexibility is required, having regard to all other principles, policies and objectives.

- Land is only zoned if it is serviced and/or serviceable within the life of this Plan based on Appendix 3 of the National Planning Framework.

Land Use Zoning - General

It is an objective of the Council to:

LUZO-01: Ensure that development progresses in accordance with the land use zoning objectives as set out in Section 11.4 and the Land Use Matrix contained in Table 11.1.

11.3 Zoning Matrix

The land use zoning matrix (Table 11.1) details the most common forms of development land uses in accordance with the zoning objectives and classifies under the three below categories as to whether a proposed use is generally 'permitted in principle', 'open for consideration' or 'not normally permitted'.

1. 'Permitted in Principle' – The subject use is **generally acceptable** subject to the normal planning process, compliance with the relevant policies and objectives, standards and requirements as set out in the County Development Plan and Local Area Plan, and in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. (Note: A proposal, which is indicated as being 'Permitted in Principle' within the zoning matrix **does not imply** 'automatic approval' as each proposal for development is considered on its individual merits).

2. 'Open for Consideration' – The subject use **may be permitted** where the Local Authority is satisfied that it is in compliance with the zoning objective and other relevant policies and objectives, standards and requirements as set out in the County Development Plan and Local Area Plan and will not conflict with the permitted, existing or adjoining land uses, in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

3. 'Not Normally Permitted' – The subject use is generally incompatible with the written zoning objective and will **not be favourably considered** by the Local Authority, except in exceptional circumstances and in such instances, the development may represent a material contravention to the plan.

11.4 Land Use Zoning Objectives

11.4.1 Town Centre / Mixed Use

The purpose of this zoning is to maintain the vitality and viability of the existing town centre by developing and consolidating it with an appropriate mix of commercial, recreational, cultural, amenity and residential uses. Development proposals should be of a use, scale, form and design that accords with the role, function and size of the town. A diversity of uses for both day and evening is encouraged. These areas require high levels of accessibility, including pedestrian, cyclist and public transport (where feasible). Retail provision will be in accordance with Chapter 3 Town Centre and Regeneration.

Land Use Zoning Objective – Town Centre / Mixed Use

It is an objective of the Council to:

LUZO-02: Provide for, protect and strengthen the vitality and viability of the town centre, through consolidating development, encouraging a mix of uses and maximising the use of land, to ensure the efficient use of infrastructure and services.

11.4.2 Existing Residential

This zoning allows for the conservation and enhancement of the quality and character of existing residential areas, to protect residential amenities and to allow for small scale infill development, which is appropriate to the character and pattern of development in the area. Existing residential zoned land may also provide for small scale home based employment uses where the primary residential use will be maintained.

Land Use Zoning Objective – Existing Residential

It is an objective of the Council to:

LUZO-03 Protect and enhance the amenity and character of developed residential communities.

11.4.3 New Residential

This zoning shall be taken to primarily include the use of land for new residential units. It may also provide for a range of other uses particularly those that have the potential to foster the development of new residential communities, for example, schools, childcare facilities, open spaces etc. The development of new residential areas shall allow for and ensure multi-modal connectivity to existing

development and facilities and to adjacent lands, which are zoned for development or, which may be zoned for development in the future.

Land Use Zoning Objective – New Residential

It is an objective of the Council to:

LUZO-04 Provide for new residential development and other services incidental to residential development.

11.4.4. Strategic Residential Reserve

This categorisation includes lands, which are not currently and not proposed to be sufficiently serviced to support development within the lifetime of this Plan. These lands are not developable within this plan period. The inclusion of Strategic Residential Reserve lands in this Plan will not in any way infer a prior commitment on the part of Offaly County Council regarding their future zoning in subsequent local area plans. Such a decision will be considered within the framework of national and regional population targets applicable at that time, infrastructural services and the proper planning and sustainable development, including environmental assessment requirements and compliance with the Flood Risk Management Guidelines.

Land Use Zoning Objective – Strategic Residential Reserve

It is an objective of the Council to:

LUZO-05 Provide lands for development at some time in the future but it will not be considered for development purposes during the current plan period.

11.4.5 Enterprise and Employment

This zoning promotes the development of employment uses that reinforce the enterprise and employment function of the subject area as a whole and require high environmental and design standards. Appropriate uses in this zoning include, for example research and development, light industry, retail warehousing, car showrooms, offices, employment and enterprise related uses within a high quality campus/park type development.

Both standalone retail and retail as an ancillary part of a business enterprise are open to consideration within this zoning objective subject to appropriateness in applying the sequential test as detailed in Chapter 4 of the Guidelines for Planning Authorities, Retail Planning, Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2012, and in accordance with proper planning and sustainable

development. Uses specifically excluded from this zoning include waste management activities and heavy industrial uses.

Land Use Zoning Objective – Enterprise and Employment

It is an objective of the Council to:

LUZO-06 Provide for enterprise and employment development.

11.4.6 Industrial and Warehousing

The purpose of this zoning is to facilitate opportunities for industrial and warehousing uses, activities and processes, which would in general give rise to land use conflict if located within other zonings. Appropriate uses in this zoning include for example, light and heavy industry, large scale warehousing, logistics, telecommunications infrastructure, energy and recycling and ancillary office space. It excludes retail warehousing. Significant landscaping is required to be incorporated into design proposals.

Land Use Zoning Objective – Industrial and Warehousing

It is an objective of the Council to:

LUZO-07 Provide for industrial and warehousing development in suitable and accessible locations.

11.4.7 Business/Technology Park

This zoning facilitates opportunities for technology based industry and advanced manufacturing, compatible office space and research and development based employment within high quality, highly accessible, campus style settings. The zoning accommodates locations for high end, high quality, value added businesses and corporate headquarters. An emphasis on high quality sustainable design and aesthetic quality will be promoted to enhance corporate image and identity.

Land Use Zoning Objective – Business/Technology Park

It is an objective of the Council to:

LUZO-08 Provide for technology based light industry, research and development and compatible offices in a high quality built and landscaped environment.

11.4.8 Community Services/Facilities

The purpose of this zoning is to protect, provide and allow expansion of a wide range of different community facilities, civic facilities and social services ranging from education and health facilities to places of worships, community centres and childcare facilities. Ancillary facilities such as dedicated open space or sports facilities will normally be facilitated within this zoning objective.

Land Use Zoning Objective – Community Services/Facilities

It is an objective of the Council to:

LUZO-09 Provide necessary community, social, health, public administration and educational services and facilities.

11.4.9 Open Space, Amenity and Recreation

The use of land as ‘Open Space’ shall be taken to include the use of land for; parks, public woodland, pedestrian routes and greenways, riparian zones, housing estate open spaces, development incidental to the enjoyment of open space (including playgrounds, outdoor recreation centres and sports centres, civic/market square, town greens, landscaped areas, shelters, sanitary conveniences, play equipment, dressing rooms and similar facilities). It also provides for the use of such land or such facilities for games, educational and recreational purposes. High standards of accessibility are essential.

Land Use Zoning Objective – Open Space, Amenity and Recreation

It is an objective of the Council to:

LUZO-10 Protect and improve the provision, attractiveness, accessibility and amenity value of public open space, amenity and recreation.

11.5 Uses not listed in the Indicative Zoning Matrix

Land uses, which are not listed in the indicative land use zoning matrix will be considered on a case-by-case basis having regard to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area and compliance with the relevant policies and objectives (including land use zoning objectives), standards and requirements as set out in this Plan and the County Development Plan, guidelines issued in accordance with Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) and guidance issued by other government bodies/ departments.

11.5.1 Established Use/Non-Conforming Uses

Where an established use does not conform with the designated land use zoning objective of the area as set out in the Plan, improvement works may be permitted where it is considered by the Planning Authority that the proposed development would not be injurious to the amenities of the area and would be consistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. It is not intended that existing uses, which appear to be inconsistent with the land use zoning objective should be curtailed.

Land Use Zoning Objective – Established/Non-Conforming uses

It is an objective of the Council to:

LUZO-11 Generally support reasonable extensions and improvements to premises that accommodate established/non-conforming uses, where it is considered by the Planning Authority that the proposed development would not be injurious to the amenities of the area and would be consistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

11.5.2 Ancillary Uses

Planning applications for developments, which are ancillary to the principle use, i.e. they rely on the permitted principal use for their existence and rationale, will be considered on their merits irrespective of what category the ancillary development is listed under in the zoning matrix of this Plan.

Land Use Zoning Objective – Ancillary Uses

It is an objective of the Council to:

LUZO-12 Ensure that developments ancillary to the parent use of a site are considered on their merits irrespective of what category the ancillary development is listed under in the zoning matrix of this Plan.

11.6 Designations

Constrained Land Uses

Flood risk areas are represented by a 'Constrained Land Use' designation. This designation generally limits new development, but will facilitate existing development uses within these areas that may require small scale development such as small extensions. Development proposals within these areas shall be accompanied by a site specific flood risk assessment, carried out in accordance with The Planning System and Flood Risk Assessment Guidelines and Circular PL 2/2014 (or as updated), which shall assess the risks of flooding associated with the proposed development.

Proposals shall only be considered favourably where it is demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority that they would not have adverse impacts or impede access to a watercourse, floodplain or flood protection and management facilities, or increase the risk of flooding to other locations and be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. The nature and design of structural and non-structural flood risk management measures required for development in such areas will also be required to be demonstrated, to ensure that flood hazard and risk will not be increased. Measures proposed shall follow best practice in the management of health and safety for users and residents of the development.

Land Use Zoning Objective – Constrained Land Uses

It is an objective of the Council to:

LUZO-13 Facilitate the appropriate management and sustainable use of flood risk areas designated as 'Constrained Land Use' in the zoning map in accordance with the provisions of the Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009), as amended, in consultation with the OPW.

11.7 Material Contravention

The Council has a statutory obligation to take such steps as may be necessary to secure the objectives of its Plan. In appropriate circumstances, the Council may permit a material contravention of the Plan where a proposed development contravenes materially an objective of the Plan but, which following detailed assessment is considered appropriate by the Council's Executive. The granting of a permission, which materially contravenes the Plan is a reserved function of the Council's Executive, exercisable following a public consultation process and consideration of a report prepared by the Chief Executive.

Table 11.1 Land Use Zoning Matrix

	Town Centre / Mixed Use	Residential - Existing	Residential - New	Residential – Strategic Reserve	Enterprise and Employment	Industrial and Warehousing	Business / Technology Park	Community Services/Facilities	Open Space / Amenity / Recreation
Abattoir	X	X	X	X	X	O	X	X	X
Advertisement Structures	√	X	X	X	√	√	√	X	X
Agri. Business	O	X	X	X	O	O	X	X	X
Agricultural Structures	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Amusement Arcade	O	X	X	X	O	X	X	X	X
Apartments	√	√	O	X	O	X	X	X	X
Aerodrome/ Airfield	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
B&B/ Guesthouse	√	√	√	X	O	X	X	X	X
Bank/ Financial Institution	√	X	X	X	O	X	O	X	X
Batching Plant (asphalt/ concrete)	X	X	X	X	X	√	X	X	X
Betting Office	√	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Boarding Kennels	X	X	X	X	X	O	X	X	X
Bring Banks/ Civic Amenity	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	O	X
Caravan Park / Campervan Park / Camp Site/ Glamping (Tourism)	O	O	O	X	O	X	X	X	X
Car Parking	√	O	O	X	√	√	√	O	X
Cash and Carry Wholesale Outlet	O	X	X	X	√	O	X	X	X
Cemetery	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	O	X
Chemist/ Pharmacy	√	O	O	X	O	X	X	O	X
Childcare Facilities – Crèche, Nursery and Playschool	√	√	√	X	√	O	√	√	X
Cinema/ Theatre	√	X	X	X	√	X	X	X	X
Community Facility (hall, centre or recreational use)	O	O	O	X	O	X	X	√	X
Composting Facility	X	X	X	X	X	O	X	X	X
Conference Centre	√	X	X	X	O	X	√	X	X
Craft Industry	√	O	O	X	O	√	O	O	X
Dance Hall/ Disco/ Night Club	O	X	X	X	O	X	X	X	X
Data Centre	X	X	X	X	O	O	O	X	X
Dentist/ Doctor Surgery	√	O	O	X	O	X	X	O	X
Dog Grooming	√	O	O	X	√	X	X	X	X
Drive Through Restaurant	O	X	X	X	O	X	O	X	X
Education/ Enterprise Centre	O	O	O	X	√	O	O	√	X
Extractive Industry	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

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Chapter 11 Land Use Zoning Objectives

	Town Centre / Mixed Use	Residential - Existing	Residential - New	Residential – Strategic Reserve	Enterprise and Employment	Industrial and Warehousing	Business / Technology Park	Community Services/Facilities	Open Space / Amenity / Recreation
Function Room	O	X	X	X	O	X	X	X	X
Funeral Home	O	X	X	X	√	X	X	O	X
Fuel Depot	X	X	X	O	O	√	X	X	X
Garden Centre	O	X	X	X	√	O	X	X	X
Golf Course/ Pitch and Putt	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	√	√
Go-Kart Track	X	X	X	X	O	O	X	X	X
Hairdressing Salon, Beauticians and Nail Bars	√	O	O	X	O	X	X	X	X
Heavy Vehicle Depot	X	X	X	X	O	√	X	X	X
Helicopter Pad	X	X	X	X	O	O	O	X	X
Home Based Economic Activities	√	O	O	X	O	X	X	X	X
Hospital	O	X	X	X	O	X	O	√	X
Hostel	O	O	O	X	O	X	X	X	X
Hotel	√	X	X	X	O	X	O	X	X
Industry – Heavy	X	X	X	X	X	√	X	X	X
Industry – Light	X	X	X	X	O	√	O	X	X
Landfill	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Launderette/ Dry Cleaners	√	O	O	X	O	X	X	X	X
Leisure Centre/ Gym	√	O	O	X	O	X	O	O	O
Library	√	O	O	X	O	X	O	√	X
Licensed Premises (Public House)	√	O	O	X	O	X	X	X	X
Mart/ Co-operative	O	X	X	X	O	O	X	X	X
Materials Recovery Facility/ Composting/ Waste Transfer Station/Waste Recycling Centre	X	X	X	X	X	√	X	X	X
Motor Sales/ Service	O	X	X	X	√	√	X	X	X
Municipal Waste Incinerator	X	X	X	X	X	√	X	X	X
Nursing Home/ Retirement Village	√	O	√	X	X	X	X	O	X
Office	√	O	O	X	√	√	√	O	X
Open Space (Public)	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√
Plant/ Tool Hire	O	X	X	X	O	√	X	X	X
Playground	√	√	√	X	O	X	O	√	√
Playing Pitches/ Sports Club	O	√	√	X	X	X	X	√	√
Primary Care Centre, Health Centre and Clinics	√	O	O	X	O	X	X	O	X

Birr Local Area Plan 2023-2029
Chapter 11 Land Use Zoning Objectives

	Town Centre / Mixed Use	Residential - Existing	Residential - New	Residential – Strategic Reserve	Enterprise and Employment	Industrial and Warehousing	Business / Technology Park	Community Services/Facilities	Open Space / Amenity / Recreation
Research and Development	O	X	X	X	O	O	V	X	X
Residential Care	O	O	O	X	O	X	X	O	X
Residential – Multiple (two or more units)	V	V	V	X	X	X	X	X	X
Residential – Single	V	V	V	X	X	X	X	X	X
Restaurant/ Café	V	X	X	X	O	O	O	O	X
Retail Warehousing	O	X	X	X	V	X	X	X	X
Science and Technology Enterprise	O	X	X	X	O	O	V	X	X
School/ Third Level Education	O	O	V	X	O	X	O	V	X
Scrap Yard	X	X	X	X	X	O	X	X	X
Self-Catering	V	V	V	X	X	X	X	X	X
Service Station	O	X	X	X	O	O	X	X	X
Shop (200m ² or less)	V	V	V	X	V	O	O	X	X
Shop (above 200m ²)	V	X	X	X	O	X	X	X	X
Take Away	O	X	X	X	O	X	X	X	X
Training Centre	O	X	X	X	V	O	V	O	X
Traveller Accommodation	O	O	O	X	X	X	X	X	X
Utility Structures	O	O	O	X	O	O	O	O	X
Veterinary Surgery	O	O	O	X	V	O	X	X	X
Warehousing	X	X	X	X	O	V	X	X	X
Water-based Recreational Activities	O	X	X	X	O	X	X	O	O
Waste to Energy Facilities	X	X	X	X	O	O	O	O	X
Workshops	X	X	X	X	O	V	X	O	X

Note that new Permitted in Principle /Open for Consideration uses under ‘Enterprise and Employment’ Zoning in Flood Zone A or B shall be limited to less-vulnerable and/or water compatible uses (as per the Flood Risk Management Guidelines). This requirement will take primacy over any related provision relating to the land use zoning matrix.

Chapter 12: Implementation and Monitoring

Strategic Aim:

To implement in conjunction with key stakeholders, the objectives of this Local Area Plan, with a particular focus on the key strategic objectives, and to monitor same.

12.1 Implementation Strategy

This Local Area Plan sets out a clear and strategic vision for the development of Birr Town (including Crinkill Village) in the period to 2029. This vision is in accordance with the role identified for Birr at both county and regional levels and seeks to make the town a more attractive place to live, work and visit while also functioning as the business, service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community. In order for the vision to be realised it is critical that the projected population growth is accompanied by the delivery of the necessary site servicing and social infrastructure requirements. The identification of critical infrastructure that needs to be delivered in tandem with the planned development of the town forms the basis of the following assessments:

- Planning and Infrastructural Assessment (PIA) – Chapter 10
- Birr Local Transport Plan (LTP) – Appendix 1

These assessments provide a strong evidence base, which has informed key policy objectives and provisions of this Plan including the Infrastructure Delivery Schedule for new residential development lands and for the development of Birr's Opportunity Sites, as outlined in Section 10.6. These assessments ensure that new developments are considered in a sustainable and co-ordinated manner, and will ensure the maximum integration of new residential neighbourhoods into the existing community.

The Council is fully committed to securing and monitoring the implementation of the strategies, policies and objectives of this Plan. The Council will continue to occupy a leadership role to progress and secure the Plan policies and objectives to achieve the sustainable development of Birr Town. The successful implementation of a significant number of the policies and objectives of this Local Area Plan will necessitate on-going collaboration and a sense of good-will across a range of agencies and stakeholders. The implementation of this Plan will depend also on the economic climate, political support, Council funding and the availability of funding from other sources. It is considered that the implementation of the plan would be best focused on anticipated/proposed key, strategic and practical outcomes of the plan.

12.2 Stakeholders

This Local Area Plan outlines specific policies and objectives of Offaly County Council with regard to Birr Town (including Crinkill Village). The overarching policies and objectives of Offaly County Development Plan also apply, specifically the Development Management Standards outlined in the

County Development Plan. As far as practicable, every effort has been made to formulate objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable and realistic.

The Planning Department of the Council is the main section responsible for monitoring and implementing the Plan, mainly through the development management function. However, it is important to note that this Plan coordinates the work and objectives of other key departments within Offaly County Council, such as Local Economic Office (LEO), Environment and Water Services, Roads, Housing, Tourism, Regeneration, Local Community Development and the Municipal District. The local authority will need to utilise its wide range of statutory powers and responsibilities to achieve the objectives of the Plan. In some cases, the body responsible for the implementation of certain Plan objectives may be external, such as Irish Water, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Waterways Ireland, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, and the Environmental Protection Agency.

The Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018 established the legal basis for the Office of the Planning Regulator and outlines its role and functions, which include the assessment of all local authority forward planning programmes. It operates an independent monitoring role, advising Government on implementation of local authority statutory planning processes.

12.3 Funding

The Council will endeavour to attract state and other investment programmes to support the implementation of the objectives of the Plan including required infrastructure. Some sources of funding that will help in achieving the delivery of objectives within the Plan include;

- Public Private Partnerships
- Rural Regeneration and Development Fund
- Town and Village Renewal Funding
- Active Travel Funding
- Climate Action Fund
- Disruptive Technologies Fund
- EU LIFE Programme funding
- Development Contributions
- Private – The developer of lands can privately finance the delivery of infrastructure
- Irish Water Capital Investment Plan funding, Smarter Travel funding by the National Transport Authority, Transport Infrastructure Ireland funding, and Government Department funding

Appendix 1: Local Transport Plan



Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí
Offaly County Council

Birr Local Transport Plan



Report by: Birr Municipal District

In effect from: 26th June 2023

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1.0 Baseline Assessment of Plan Area and the Surrounding Area

1.1 Policy Context

This section outlines the policy context at a National, Regional and local level used to inform and influence development of the Birr Local Transport Plan, an accompanying document to the Birr Local Area Plan (LAP). The Birr Local Transport Plan is the outcome of performing an Area Based Transport Assessment (ABTA). The ABTA process has been developed by the National Transport Authority (NTA). The NTA recommend an ABTA as the preferred form of technical assessment, which can be used to appraise and guide the formulation of transport policies within a LAP and, more generally, the integration of land use and transport planning in the form of the LAP's accompanying Local Transport Plan.

1.1.1 National Planning Framework

Project Ireland 2040 – National Planning Framework (NPF) is a strategic, long term planning framework detailing planning policy for the period to 2040. The NPF identifies ten National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) to guide public and private development and investment over the Framework Period.

Birr is located within the Eastern and Midland Region. National Policy Objective 1b of the NPF states that the Eastern and Midland Region will have an additional 490,000 – 540,000 people by 2040, i.e. a total population of circa 2.85 million.

Transport forms an integral part of a number of the National Strategic Outcomes detailed in the NPF, notably the following are particularly relevant to the Birr ABTA;

NSO 1: Compact Growth

NSO 2: Enhanced Regional Accessibility

NSO 4: Sustainable Mobility

NSO 7: Enhanced Amenity & Heritage

1.1.2 National Development Plan 2021 – 2030

The National Development Plan (NDP) 2021 – 2030 outlines strategic investment priorities to ensure the successful implementation of the National Planning Framework for the period up to 2030.

The NDP details indicative spends across the ten NSOs identified in the National Planning Framework. Spending packages include €35bn for Transport across various NSOs including NSO 2 and NSO 4 across the ten year lifespan of the plan.

1.1.3 Climate Action Plan 2021

The CAP sets out targets, measures and actions for a range of sectors to facilitate the level of decarbonisation required to achieve 2030 targets for carbon emissions and create a pathway towards achieving net zero emissions by 2050. Notably, the action plan aims to promote sustainable growth that is less transport intensive through efficient planning, remote and home-working and modal shift towards walking, cycling and public transport.

1.1.4 Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy 2019-2031

The Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region 2019-2031 sets out a framework to direct future growth of the region during the timeframe of the strategy. The RSES also helps implement the strategic planning framework guidelines set out in the National Planning Framework.

Specifically the RSES identifies Birr as a Level 3 retail town whilst also noting it as having a Strategic Natural, Cultural and Green Infrastructure Asset in the Region (Birr Castle) as well as it being a Historic Georgian planned town and a designated heritage town.

1.1.5 Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027

Chapter 2 (Core Strategy, Settlement Strategy and Housing Strategy) of the County Development Plan (CDP) designates Birr (including Crinkill) as a “Self Sustaining Growth Town” with “significant employment and service functions relative to its regional and local catchment” and “good regional transport links and has the capacity for continued commensurate growth to become more self-sustaining”.

Settlement Strategy Policies SSP-08 and SSP-09 detail the growth objectives for Birr;

SSP-08; It is Council policy 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.

SSP-09; It is Council policy to reinforce the attractive rural character of Crinkill, which exists at present, by permitting appropriate and sensitively designed new development.

Chapter 8 (Sustainable Transport Strategy) of the CDP details the Transport and Movement policy for County Offaly. The following objectives are of particular relevance to the Birr LTP.

SMAO-02; It is an objective of the Council to prepare a Local Transport Plan in accordance with ‘Area Based Transport Assessment Guidance’ by TII and NTA, for the Key Town of Tullamore in conjunction with the National Transport Authority and in tandem with the Local Area Plan, and to prepare Transport Plans for other towns that are subject to Local Area Plans, namely Birr, Edenderry and Portarlinton subject to the provision of funding and agreement with statutory agencies.

SMAO-11; To investigate the feasibility of constructing a Birr Relief Road and construction of Birr Bypass and Distributor Road Network (Birr LUTS), taking into account environmental sensitivities as identified in the SEA Environmental Report and the policies and objectives of the County Development Plan relating to sustainable mobility. To investigate the feasibility of carrying out Birr-Riverstown road improvements taking into account environmental sensitivities as identified in the SEA Environmental Report and the policies and objectives of the County Development Plan relating to sustainable mobility.

SMAO-16; It is an objective of the Council to examine the feasibility of providing future relief / distributor roads adjacent to / within the following towns and villages, taking into account environmental sensitivities as identified in the SEA Environmental Report and the policies and objectives of the County Development Plan relating to sustainable mobility. Where feasibility is established, the Council will seek to pursue and / or facilitate the relevant project, subject to other provisions in the Plan, including section 8.6.4 Corridor and Route Selection Process. Where lines are shown on the maps in Volume 2, they are indicative only. • Tullamore • Birr • Clara • Ferbane • Portarlinton • Cloghan • Killeigh • Geashill • Cloneygowan • Edenderry • Kilcormac

1.1.7 Public Realm Plan for Birr – 2021 Addendum

The Public Realm Plan for Birr – 2021 Addendum, along with the original 2009 Public Realm Plan were drafted to inform planning policy and investment decisions for Birr whilst aiming to ensure these contribute more positively to the public realm of Birr. The original Public Realm Plan identified 27 proposals and an accompanying action plan.

1.1.8 Walking and Cycling Strategy for Birr Town – December 2012

The Walking and Cycling Strategy for Birr Town, published in December 2012 aimed to develop a Walking and Cycling Strategy for Birr Town under the guidance of the “Smarter Travel” 2009 National Transport policy.

1.1.9 National Transport Authority – Area Based Transport Assessments

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has issued guidance which recommends that Local Transport Plans should be based around an approach known as Area-Based Transport Assessments (ABTA).

1.2 Baseline Assessment

This section outlines details of the current transport and settlement patterns in Birr, including transport infrastructure, services and an analysis of transport demands.

1.2.1 Study Area

The existing infrastructure map included as Appendix A with this report outlines the extent of the study area included in the Birr Local Transport Plan.

1.2.2 Population Data

The total population of Birr was 5,741 at the time of the most recent available census data (2016 National Census). This total comprises of 4,370 in the urban area, with a further 1,371 located in the rural surrounds.

1.2.3 Employment Distribution

An analysis of the small area data available from the 2016 census shows concentrations of jobs (Small Areas with greater than 100 jobs) located in the northwest, centre, northeast and east of Birr and the village of Crinkill.

1.2.4 Education

The location of primary, secondary and third level training centres located within the study area is included in the existing infrastructure map included as Appendix A with this report.

Four primary schools are located within the town of Birr with another located in the Village of Crinkill. A single secondary school serving the town and the rural surroundings is located on the northern edge of the town. Two further education facilities, are also located within the town. The table below lists

education facilities located within Birr. The locations of each are indicated on the map included at Appendix A.

Primary Education	Secondary Education	Further Education
St. Brendans Primary School	St. Brendans Community School	LOETB Birr Further Education and Training Centre
Mercy Primary School		
Oxmantown National School		Irish Heritage School
Gaelscoil na laochra		
Crinkill National School		

1.2.5 Existing Public Transport

Birr has a limited public transport offering, focused on regional connectivity and provided by public and private bus operators. These bus services, operating from bus stops in Emmet Square, are limited in frequency but provide connections to a number of hinterlands and major towns as well as Dublin, Galway and Limerick.

The 72 route operated by Bus Eireann connects Birr with Limerick and Athlone and offers stops at nearby towns including Roscrea, Cloghan and Ferbane.

Kearns Transport operate daily return services to Dublin and weekly services to Galway and Maynooth during 3rd level college terms.

Local link operate weekly return services connecting Birr with surrounding towns and villages including Shinrone, Ferbane, Coolderry, Ballycumber, Clareen and Kinnitty.

1.2.6 Existing Walking Network

Birr features an extensive existing walking network constrained by a number of natural barriers. These are the N52 National Secondary route which traverses north-south through the town and the Camcor River which crosses the town from East to West. There are currently three controlled crossings located on the N52, at Emmet Square, Wilmer Road and Railway Road. River crossings are located at Newbridge Street, Railway Road and Bridge Street.

1.2.7 Existing Cycling Infrastructure

Birr town is served by a limited number of sporadic cycle paths. These existing routes are predominantly focused on serving schools namely in the area from St. Brendans Community School to the town centre via the Oxmantown National School and from Coach Road to St. Brendans Boys School. Other existing cycle paths are located on the N52 at Woodlands and the Military Road in Crinkill. There are limited existing cycle parking facilities located in Emmet Square.

1.2.8 Existing Road Network and Parking Provisions

Two National Secondary Routes, the N52 and N62 converge northeast of Birr and travel south through the town centre and diverges again in the South of the town at Drumbane. The R440 heading East and R439 heading north both originate in Birr. All four routes N52, N62, R439 and R440 all converge on Emmet Square in the centre of Birr.

A number of public and private car parks are in operation within Birr. Offaly County Council operate two car parks within the town, a free car park at Wilmer Road and a paid car park at the Marion Hall. Additionally, there are private car parks located at Supervalu adjacent to the public car park on Wilmer

Road, Tesco at Drumbane, The County Arms Hotel on Railway Road and Lidl on the N52 at Woodlands. A pay and display system operates on streets in the town centre from Monday to Saturday, 9am to 5pm.

2.0 Establishing Context for the LTP

2.1 Overview

The Birr LTP is required to demonstrate how measures to improve transport provision within the town (and for trips made to and from the town by visitors) will align with the wider objectives and principles within National and Regional policy and the County Development Plan. In turn the Local Transport Plan will inform the Local Area Plan. Below objectives for the LTP are outlined as well as expected future demands for travel to, from and within Birr.

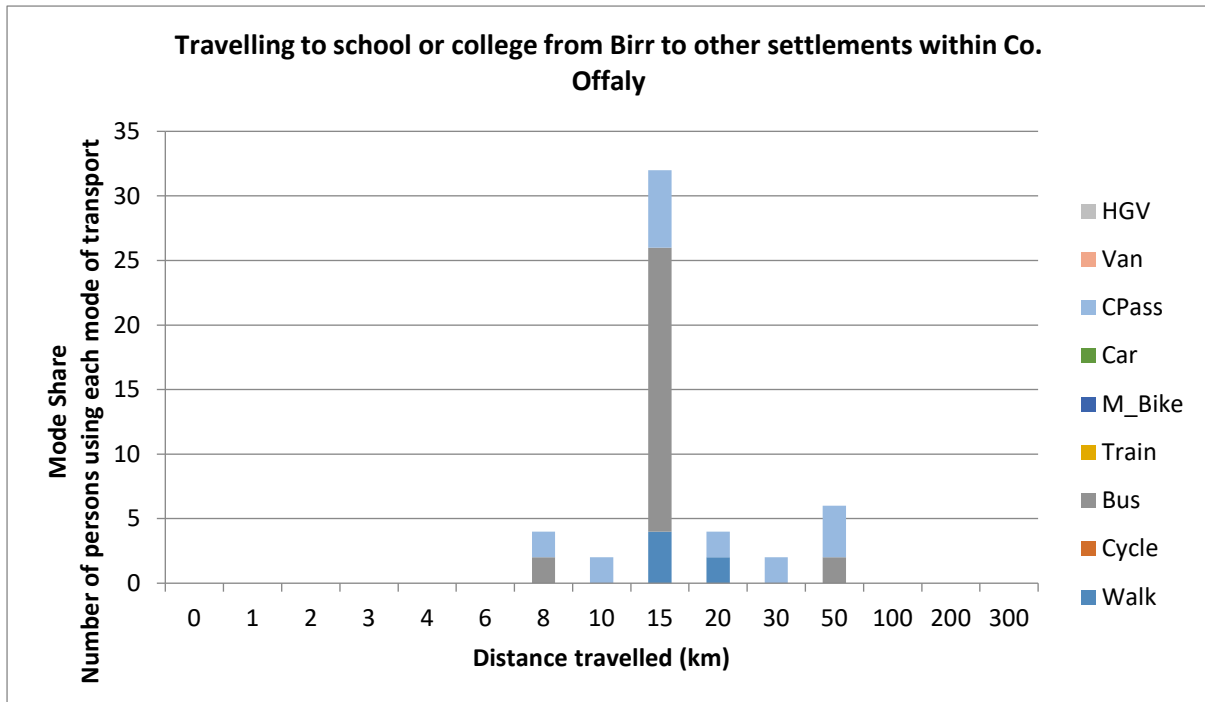
2.2 LTP Objectives

Having reviewed the policy constraints and objectives identified in Section 1.1 above and factoring in the existing baseline outlined in section 1.2, the following are proposed as the objectives of the Birr Local Transport Plan;

- Support and implement transport measures which improve provision for, and accessibility to, sustainable transport modes for residents of Birr and inward visitors;
- Support and enhance existing and new walking infrastructure provision within Birr and encourage active travel choices;
- Seek to improve provision for cycling within Birr, both for residents and for those travelling to and from surrounding areas;
- Maintain and enhance facilities and infrastructure for road-based public transport;
- Seek to support and expand road-based public transport services; and
- Maintain and enhance Birr's status as a designated Historic Georgian Town.

2.3 Current and Future Travel Demand

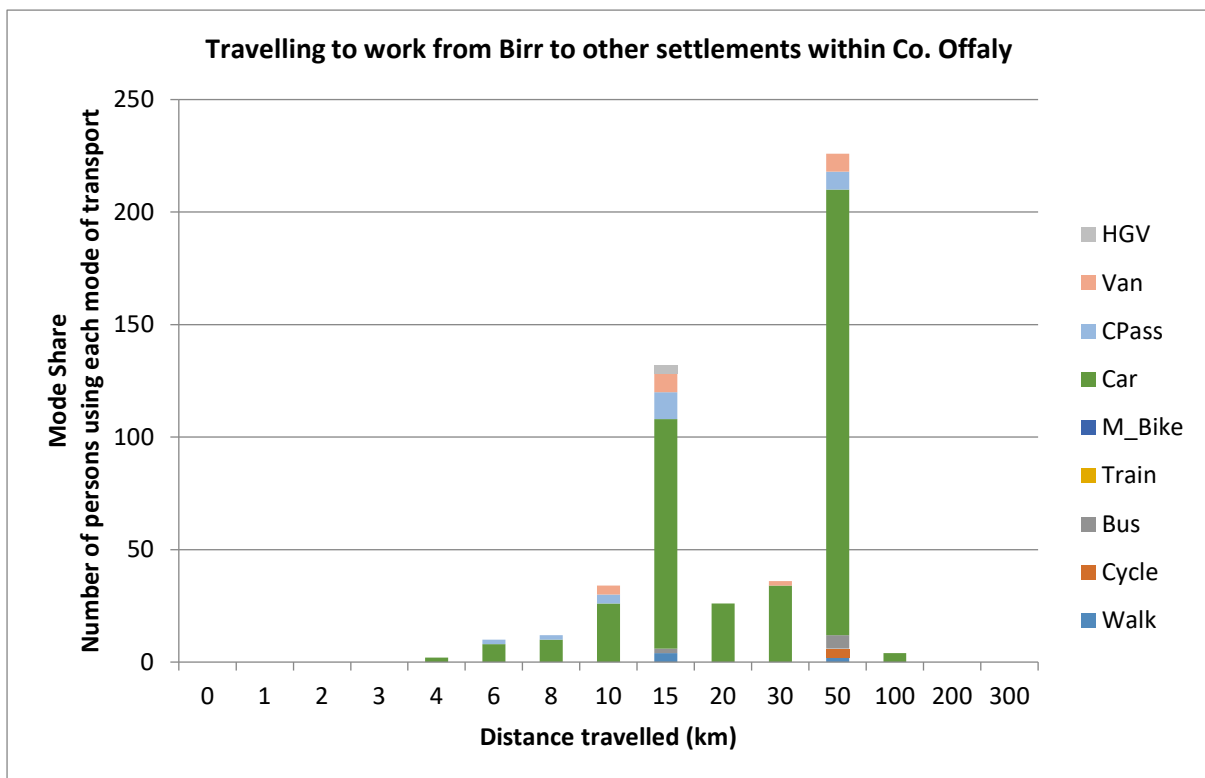
The graphs below show the modal share for trips generated at various distances travelled from and within Birr for work and education purposes. The graphs are based on data derived from Census 2016, and provide a baseline to inform objectives in this Plan, which seek to improve the modal share away from private car and in favour of walking, cycling and public transport.



For journeys to school / college from Birr to another settlement within County Offaly, the above graph indicates the following:

76% are 15km or less;

52% of journeys are by bus and 36% by car passenger.



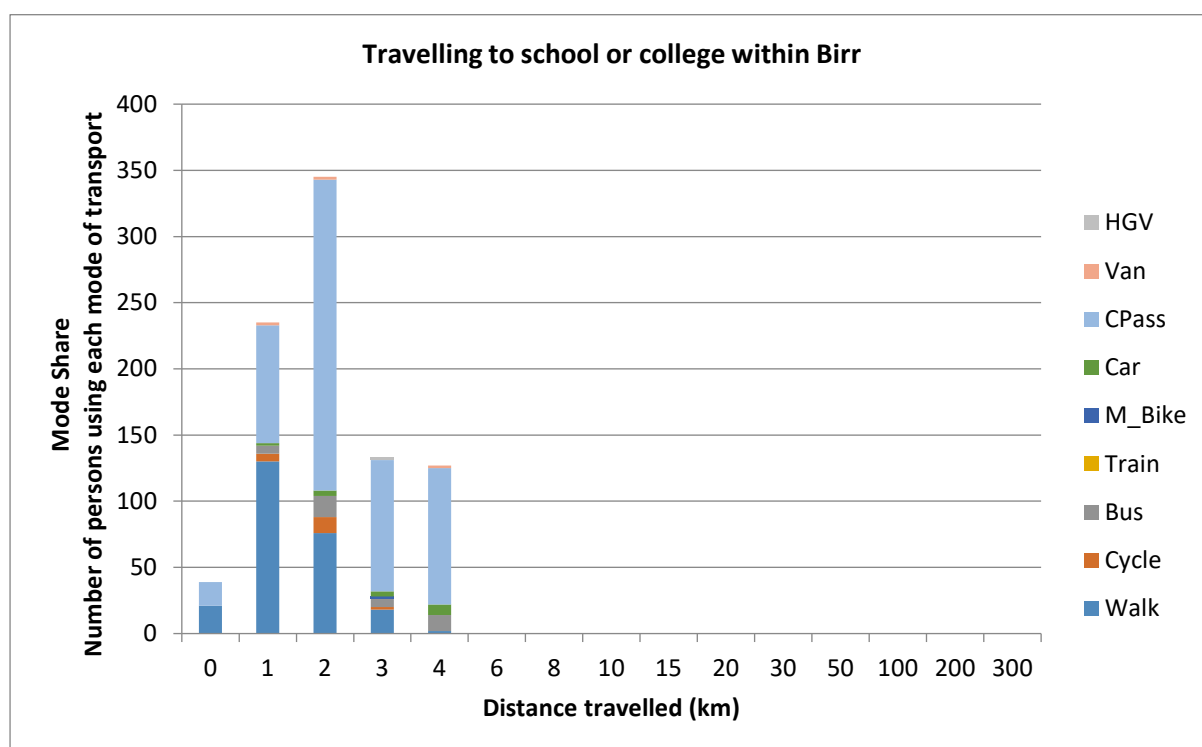
For journeys to work from Birr to another settlement within County Offaly, the above graph indicates the following:

99% are 50km or less;

39% are 15km or less;

85% of journeys are made by car, 5% by car passenger, 4% by van and 1% by bus.

In terms of work-related journeys to other settlements within the county, the statistics support a review of local bus services from Birr to other settlements within the County in terms of connections and frequency.



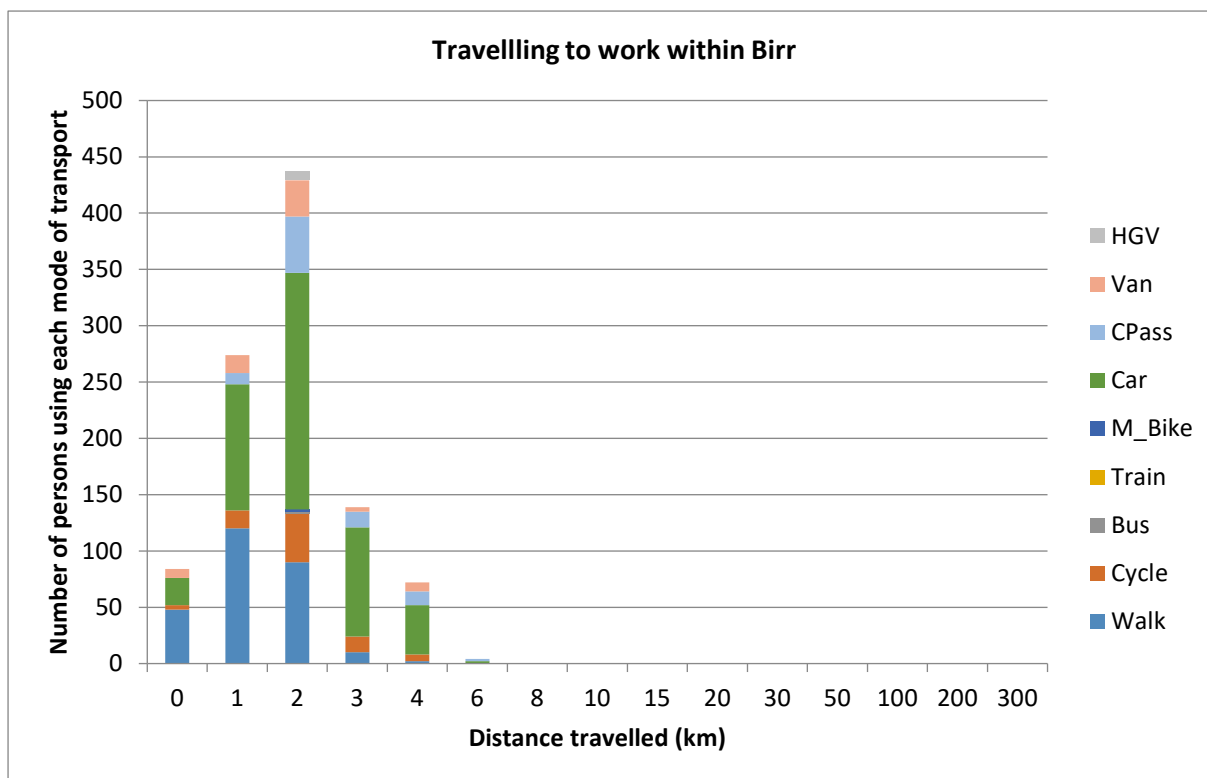
For journeys to school / college where the trip starts and ends in Birr, the above graph indicates the following:

100% of journeys are 4km or less;

61% of journeys are from car passengers, 27% by walking, 4% by bus and 2% by cycling.

In terms of schools trips within the town, while the statistics do show a relatively positive modal share in favour of walking, travel by private car still dominates modal share. As such, the data supports provision of / improvements to walking and cycling infrastructure and permeability within the town.

The statistics also support a review of local bus services within the town in terms of connections and frequency.



For journeys to work where the trip starts and ends in Birr, the above graph indicates the following:

99% of journeys are 4km or less;

48% of journeys are from car, 8% by car passengers, 6% by van (63% total of former 3 modes), 26% by walking, 8% by cycling, and less than 1% by bus.

In terms of work trips within the town, while the statistics do show a relatively positive modal share in favour of walking, travel by private car still dominates modal share. As such, the data supports provision of / improvements to walking and cycling infrastructure and permeability within the town.

In light of the significant shortfall of bus users, the statistics also support a review of local bus services within the town in terms of connections and frequency.

The below Tables summarize the baseline modal splits and outlines future ambitions.

Mode Share for Work Trips	2016 Baseline	2029 Minimum Ambitions
Car (or other vehicle)	70%	65%
Public Transport	1.3%	3%
Walking	15.8%	20%
Cycling	3.1%	5%

Mode Share for Education Trips	2016 Baseline	2029 Minimum Ambitions
Car	51.8%	45%
Public Transport	7.9%	9%
Walking	32%	37%
Cycling	1.6%	5%

3.0 Option Development and Assessment

3.1 Methodology

A long list of potential options is outlined below. These options were developed following site visits, desktop studies and taking into account the information in the preceding chapters. Potential options are presented below as Walking Options (WO), Cycling Options (CO), Road Infrastructure Options (RO), and Public Transport Infrastructure Options (PO).

3.2 Walking Infrastructure

WO1 Improved footpath linking Burke's Hill and Glebe Street to Emmet Street

Feasibility: High

Reasoning: Good Cross section width available to construct footpaths, will aid in improving link between residential area and core of town. Located away from national route through town.

WO2 Improved footpath linking St. Brendans Community School to Pound Street

Feasibility: Medium

Reasoning: Good Cross section width available to construct footpaths. Large volume of residential parking may cause accommodation issues. Would aid in link between educational facilities and residential areas.

WO3 Improved Footpath Linking Green Street and Castle Street to Market Square

Feasibility: Medium

Reasoning: Existing footpaths of poor crossing section for most of route. Width available for widening. Pinch point in the area of Spinners at the corner of Castle Street. Would improve link between Birr Castle and Retail area of town.

WO4 Improved Footpath linking Syngfield, Newbridge Street and Johns Place/Mall to Emmet Square

Feasibility: Low

Reasoning: High Feasibility for delivering section located in Syngfield. Average to Good cross section available to improve footpaths. Large volume of residential parking on Newbridge Street may cause accommodation issues and reduces feasibility. Would improve link between area of significant employment (Syngfield) and town centre.

WO5 New Pedestrian Link between Meadowville/Burke's Hill Estates and Sandymount

Feasibility: High

Reasoning: Laneway has previously been taken in charge, infrastructure is partially in place. Would link large residential area with community nursing unit and provide alternative route to the town centre.

WO6 New Pedestrian Link between Rectory lands and Sandymount Avenue

Feasibility: High

Reasoning: Land is in ownership of Offaly County Council. Would provide link between residential area (Sandymount) and any future development of the Rectory lands.

WO7 New Pedestrian Link between Rectory lands and Johns Mall

Feasibility: High

Reasoning: Land is in ownership of Offaly County Council. Would provide link between any future development of the Rectory lands and the town centre.

WO8 New Pedestrian Link between Rectory lands and Johns Place**Feasibility: High**

Reasoning: Land is in ownership of Offaly County Council. Would provide link between any future development of the "Rectory" lands and residential area (Johns Place/Newbridge Street).

WO9 Improved footpath between Drumbane/Seffin and Moorpark Street Street via Coach Road**Feasibility: Medium**

Reasoning: Good Cross section width available to construct improved footpaths. Would provide alternative route away from national route. May be better suited to continued use as cycle link.

WO10 Improved walking route from Syngefield to Hillside via Wood Lane**Feasibility: High**

Reasoning: High feasibility subject to land acquisition. Would create offline link between residential area of Wood Lane/Seffin and area of significant employment (Syngefield).

WO11 New and Improved footpath linking Seffin and Hillside to Whiteford Cross**Feasibility: Medium**

Reasoning: Good Cross section width available to construct footpaths. Would create part of walking loop linking Seffin with Crinkill Village and the town centre.

WO12 New footpath linking Syngefield to Whiteford Cross**Feasibility: Medium**

Reasoning: Good Cross section width available to construct footpaths. Would create part of walking route linking Crinkill village to area of significant employment (Syngefield).

WO13 New and Improved footpath linking Barrack Street and School Street to Whiteford Cross**Feasibility: Medium**

Reasoning: Good Cross section width available to construct footpaths. Would create part of walking route linking Crinkill village to area of significant employment (Syngefield).

WO14 Improvement for Pedestrian users at Newbridge Street Bridge**Feasibility: Medium**

Reasoning: May require intervention with vehicular traffic across bridge to achieve sufficient width to construct suitable footpath. Would improve pedestrian safety on existing walking route between Syngefield and town centre.

WO15 Improvement for Pedestrian users at Whiteford Bridge**Feasibility: High**

Reasoning: May require intervention with vehicular traffic across bridge to achieve sufficient width to construct suitable footpath. Would improve pedestrian safety on existing walking route between Syngefield and Crinkill Village.

WO16 New Pedestrian Crossing at Railway Road

Feasibility: High

Reasoning: Would provide link between existing sections of Riverside walk located either side of N52.

WO17 Addition of Pedestrian Crossing to Traffic Lights at Townsend Street/ Pound Street (Mart) Junction

Feasibility: High

Reasoning: Would provide pedestrian links between Pound Street and Burke's Hill area of town. Infrastructure partially in place.

3.3 Cycling Infrastructure

CO1 Cycle Lane linking Woodlands, Townsend Street and Emmet Street to Emmet Square

Feasibility: Low

Reasoning: Would be located on/adjacent to National road through town. Volume of traffic would in likelihood discourage use.

CO2 Cycle Lane linking St. Brendans Community School and Oxmantown National School to Emmet Square

Feasibility: High

Reasoning: High feasibility if terminated in Green Street. Infrastructure already in place. Would require installation of bicycle parking facilities at suitable location on Green Street to act as terminus.

CO3 Cycle Lane linking Burke's Hill, Glebe Street and Emmet Street to Emmet Square.

Feasibility: Low

Reasoning: Section connecting Glebe Street and Burke's Hill areas has a high feasibility rating due to adequate cross section being available. Remainder of link would be located on/adjacent to the N52 national route with limited cross section availability and high traffic volumes.

CO4 Cycle Lane linking Syngfield, Newbridge Street and Johns Place/Mall to Emmet Square

Feasibility: Medium

Reasoning: Section connecting Syngfield and Newbridge Street Bridge has a high feasibility rating due to adequate cross section being available. Remainder of link would be through area with limited cross section availability and high volumes of residential parking.

CO5 Cycle Lane linking Hillside, Seffin, Drumbane, Railway Road and Wilmer Road to Emmet Square

Feasibility: Low

Reasoning: Majority of route would be constructed on/adjacent to the N52/N62 national route with limited cross section availability and high traffic volumes.

CO6 Cycle Lane linking Drumbane, Moorpark Street and Castle Street to Market Square

Feasibility: Medium

Reasoning: Good cross section availability for part of route with limited cycling infrastructure already in place. Would encounter pinch point on Moorpark Street close to junction with High Street and Bridge Street.

CO7 Cycle Lane Linking Scurragh to St. Brendans Boys School via Convent National School

Feasibility: High

Reasoning:

CO8 Cycle Lane linking Hollypark, High Street and Bridge Street to Market Square

Feasibility: Low

Reasoning: Majority of route located off vehicular routes with infrastructure partially in place along Riverside walk. Would need to be located and constructed close to riverbank and require adequate environmental assessment. Pedestrian crossing at Railway Road (WO16) would be required to fully implement the scheme.

CO9 Cycle Lane linking Green Street and Castle Street to Market Square

Feasibility: Low

Reasoning: Limited cross section availability and pinch point at Spinners corner limits feasibility of constructing route.

CO10 Cycle Lane linking New Road and Pound Street to the Oxmantown National School

Feasibility: Medium

Reasoning: Very good cross section available to construct cycle infrastructure. May require loss of some residential parking facilities.

CO11 Cycle Lane linking Crinkill National School and Military Road to Drumbane/Seffin

Feasibility: Low

Reasoning: Limited cross section available in areas close to Crinkill National School.

3.4 Roads Infrastructure

RO1 Construction of Northern Distributor Road between N52 and R439 Banagher Road

Feasibility: High

Reasoning: Currently at detailed design phase. When constructed, it will include both pedestrian and cycling infrastructure.

RO2 Construction of South Eastern Distributor Road between N52/Tesco Roundabout and R440 Syngefield

Feasibility: Medium

Reasoning: Long term objective identified in Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027. If constructed it would include both pedestrian and cycling infrastructure and provide enhanced link between residential and employment zones.

RO3 Construction of North Eastern Distributor Road between N52/Tesco Roundabout and R440 Syngefield

Feasibility: Medium

Reasoning: Long term objective identified in Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027. If constructed it would include both pedestrian and cycling infrastructure and provide enhanced link between residential and employment zones.

RO4 Construction of Southern Relief Road between N52/Roscrea Road and N62/Riverstown

Feasibility: Medium

Reasoning: Long term objective identified in Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027. If constructed it would include both pedestrian and cycling infrastructure and provide enhanced link between residential zones.

RO5 Improvement to Junction at Johns Mall/Wilmer Road

Feasibility: High

Reasoning: Proposed to provide enhanced pedestrian facilities and aid link between town centre and Johns Mall, Sandymount, Newbridge Street and Syngefield.

RO6 Improvement to Junction at Syngefield

Feasibility: High

Reasoning: Proposed to provide enhanced pedestrian facilities and aid link between town centre and Syngefield, Whiteford and an enhanced link to Clonoghill Cemetery.

RO7 Improvement to Junction at Pound Street/Model School Road

Feasibility: High

Reasoning: Provide enhanced pedestrian and cycling facilities at junction to enhance link between residential areas and St. Brendans Community School and Oxmantown National School.

RO8 Improvement to Junction at Pound Street/Townsend Road

Feasibility: High

Reasoning: Infrastructure partially in place. Alterations to existing footpath layout may be required. Cross section available to complete works.

3.5 Public Transport Infrastructure

PO1 Enhancement of Existing Bus Stop at Emmet Square

Feasibility: Low

Reasoning: Limited capacity to accommodate bus coaches at present. Limited cross section available to construct bus stop to relevant accessibility standards or install bus shelters. Any proposal to construct bus shelters at current location may compromise historic area of town.

PO2 Relocation of Bus Stop to a suitable location south of Emmet Square

Feasibility: High

Reasoning: Significant cross section available to construct bus stop to relevant accessibility standards or install bus shelters. Parking available at Wilmer Road Car Park.

PO3 New Bus Stop at Woodlands Park/Villas

Feasibility: Low

Reasoning: Limited Cross Section available to construct bus stop to relevant accessibility standards or install bus shelters.

PO4 New Bus Stop at Crinkill (Roscrea Road)

Feasibility: Low

Reasoning: Limited Cross Section available to construct bus stop to relevant accessibility standards or install bus shelters.

4.0 Plan Finalization

4.1 Methodology

From the long list of potential options included in Section 3.0 above, a further refinement of proposals was conducted including eliminating options of low feasibility and combining elements of separate options to achieve a viable proposal. Final proposals are presented below as Combined Walking and Cycling Proposals (WCP), Walking Proposals (WP), Cycling Proposals (CP), Road Infrastructure Proposals (RP), and Public Transport Infrastructure Proposals (PP). A map detailing the final proposals is included at Appendix B of this report. Additionally, for clarity a map detailing cycling proposals only has been included at Appendix C of this report. A Delivery timeframe (short: 1-2 years, medium: 2-5 years or long term: 5-10 years) is also attached to each proposal. (

4.2 Combined Walking/Cycling Infrastructure Proposals

WCP1 Construction of walking and cycling route as part of the proposed Distributor road route, from R439 Banagher Road to the N52/N62 “Tesco Roundabout”. Section of route from R439 to N52 at Woodlands currently at detailed design phase.

Feasibility: Medium to High

Delivery Timeframe: Short (R439 to N52) to Long (Remainder of proposed route)

Reasoning: Will create alternative walking and cycling loop around the town and link education facilities, and employment centres to residential areas. Also provides enhanced links between further proposals detailed below.

WCP2 Construction of Southern Link Road between N52/Roscrea Road and N62/Riverstown

Feasibility: High

Delivery Timeframe: Long

Reasoning: Long term objective identified in Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027. If constructed would include both pedestrian and cycling infrastructure and provide enhanced link between residential zones.

WCP3 Walking and cycling route linking Burke’s Hill and Glebe Street to Johns Mall via the “Rectory” Lands.

Feasibility: High

Delivery Timeframe: Medium

Reasoning: Good cross section available on Glebe Street and Burke’s Hill area. Utilising link through the “Rectory” lands removes section on highly trafficked N52 at Emmet Street.

WCP4 Walking and cycling route linking Sandymount and Bengal Lodge to Johns Mall/Johns Place via the “Rectory” Lands.

Feasibility: High

Delivery Timeframe: Medium

Reasoning: Further utilises available Local Authority lands to link residential areas to the town centre.

WCP5 Linking Meadow Ville/ Meadow Brook to Sandymount via Love Lane

Feasibility: High

Delivery Timeframe: Short

Reasoning: Limited infrastructure required to complete link would enhance links between residential areas and area of significant employment (Syngefield).

4.3 Walking Infrastructure Proposals

WP1 Enhance Pedestrian links to create pedestrian friendly streets where possible within historic area of town

Feasibility: Medium

Delivery Timeframe: Medium

Reasoning: To better provide pedestrian links within the historic area of Birr whilst meeting the objective of protecting and enhancing Birr's status as a designated Historic Georgian Town.

WP2 Improved walking route from Syngefield to Hillside via Wood Lane

Feasibility: High

Delivery Timeframe: Medium

Reasoning: High feasibility subject to land acquisition. Would create offline link between residential area of Wood Lane/Seffin and area of significant employment (Syngefield).

WP3 New and Improved footpath linking Barrack Street and School Street to Whiteford Cross

Feasibility: Medium

Delivery Timeframe: Medium

Reasoning: Good Cross section width available to construct footpaths. Would create part of walking route linking Crinkill village to area of significant employment (Syngefield).

WP4 New and Improved footpath linking Seffin and Hillside to Whiteford Cross

Feasibility: Medium

Delivery Timeframe: Medium

Reasoning: Good Cross section width available to construct footpaths. Would create part of walking loop linking Seffin with Crinkill Village and the town centre.

WP5 New and footpath linking Syngefield to Whiteford Cross

Feasibility: Medium

Delivery Timeframe: Medium

Reasoning: Good Cross section width available to construct footpaths. Would create part of walking route linking Crinkill village to area of significant employment (Syngefield).

WP6 New and Improved footpath linking Barrack Street and School Street to Whiteford Cross

Feasibility: Medium

Delivery Timeframe: Medium

Reasoning: Good Cross section width available to construct footpaths. Would create part of walking route linking Crinkill village to area of significant employment (Syngefield).

WP7 Improvement for Pedestrian users at Newbridge Street Bridge

Feasibility: Medium

Delivery Timeframe: Medium

Reasoning: May require intervention with vehicular traffic across bridge to achieve sufficient width to construct suitable footpath. Would improve pedestrian safety on existing walking route between Syngefield and town centre.

WP8 Improvement for Pedestrian users at Whiteford Bridge

Feasibility: High

Delivery Timeframe: Medium

Reasoning: May require intervention with vehicular traffic across bridge to achieve sufficient width to construct suitable footpath. Would improve pedestrian safety on existing walking route between Syngefield and Crinkill Village.

WP9 New Pedestrian Crossing at Railway Road

Feasibility: High

Delivery Timeframe: Short

Reasoning: Would provide link between existing sections of Riverside walk located either side of N52.

WP10 Addition of Pedestrian Crossing to Traffic Lights at Townsend Street/ Pound Street (Mart) Junction

Feasibility: High

Delivery Timeframe: Short

Reasoning: Would provide pedestrian links between Pound Street and Burke's Hill area of town. Infrastructure partially in place.

WP11 Improved pedestrian link between Crinkill and Riverstown via Rock Lane.

Feasibility: High

Delivery Timeframe: Medium

Reasoning: Would provide improved pedestrian links between the Villages of Crinkill and Riverstown, partially offline from the N52 and N62 National Secondary routes.

4.4 Cycling Infrastructure Proposals

CP1 Cycle Lane linking St. Brendans Community School and Oxmantown National School to Emmet Square

Feasibility: High

Delivery Timeframe: Short

Reasoning: High feasibility if terminated in Green Street, some infrastructure already in place. Would require installation of bicycle parking facilities at suitable location on Green Street to act as terminus. Likely to increase cycle mode share to schools on route if existing infrastructure further enhanced.

CP2 Cycle Lane linking Syngefield, Newbridge Street and Scurragh to Moorpark Street via Riverside walk.

Feasibility: High

Delivery Timeframe: Medium

Reasoning: Feasibility increases by diverting off road network at Newbridge Street Bridge, utilizing existing riverside walk to Moorpark Street. Route via Riverside walks adds in links to Scurragh and increases links from Residential areas to St. Brendans and Mercy Primary Schools.

4.5 Roads Infrastructure Proposals

RP1 Construction of Northern Distributor Road between N52 and R439 Banagher Road

Feasibility: High

Delivery Timeframe: Short

Reasoning: Currently at detailed design phase. When constructed, will include both pedestrian and cycling infrastructure.

RP2 Construction of South Eastern Distributor Road between N52/Tesco Roundabout and R440 Syngefield

Feasibility: Medium

Delivery Timeframe: Medium

Reasoning: Long term objective identified in Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027. If constructed would include both pedestrian and cycling infrastructure and provide enhanced link between residential and employment zones.

RP3 Construction of North Eastern Distributor Road between R440 Syngefield and N52 at Woodfield

Feasibility: Medium

Delivery Timeframe: Long

Reasoning: Long term objective identified in Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027. If constructed would include both pedestrian and cycling infrastructure and provide enhanced link between residential and employment zones.

RP4 Construction of Southern Relief Road between N52/Roscrea Road and N62/Riverstown

Feasibility: Medium

Delivery Timeframe: Long

Reasoning: Long term objective identified in Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027. If constructed would include both pedestrian and cycling infrastructure and provide enhanced link between residential zones.

RP5 Improvement to Junction at Johns Mall/Wilmer Road

Feasibility: High

Delivery Timeframe: Short

Reasoning: Proposed to provide enhanced pedestrian facilities and aid link between town centre and Johns Mall, Sandymount, Newbridge Street and Syngefield.

RP6 Improvement to Junction at Syngefield

Feasibility: High

Delivery Timeframe: Short

Reasoning: Proposed to provide enhanced pedestrian facilities and aid link between town centre and Syngefield, Whiteford and an enhanced link to Clongohill Cemetery.

RP7 Improvement to Junction at Pound Street/Model School Road.

Feasibility: High

Delivery Timeframe: Short

Reasoning: Provide enhanced pedestrian and cycling facilities at junction to enhance link between residential areas and St. Brendans Community School and Oxmantown National School.

4.6 Public Transport Infrastructure Proposals

PP1 Relocation of Central Bus Stop – to investigate, in consultation with the NTA, options for the provision of a high quality, fully accessible bus stop / interchange serving Birr Town Centre, including its potential relocation from Emmet Square.

Feasibility: High

Delivery Timeframe: Medium

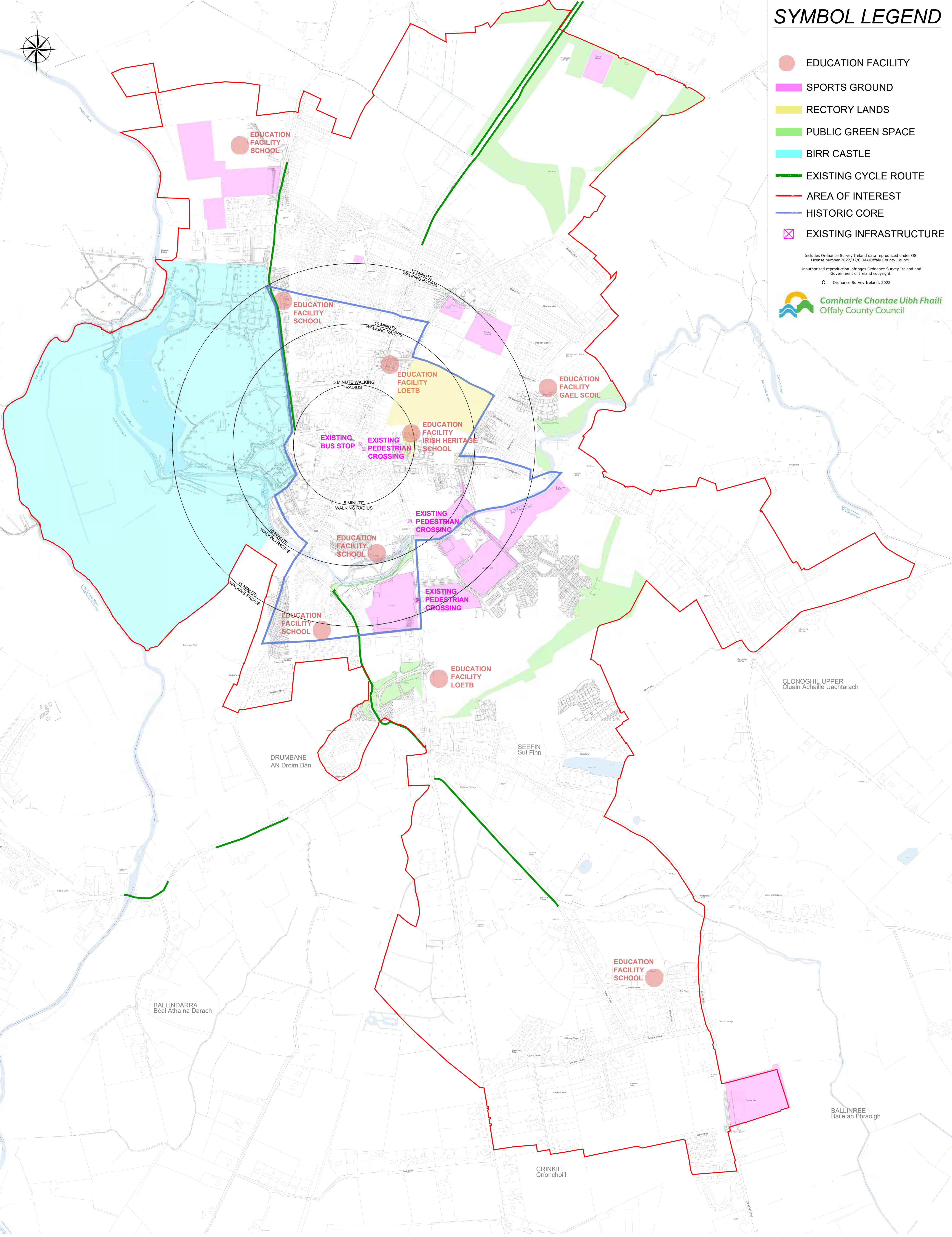
Reasoning: Significant cross section available to construct bus stop to relevant accessibility standards or install bus shelters. Car parking available at Wilmer Road Car Park.

Appendix A – Existing Infrastructure Map

SYMBOL LEGEND

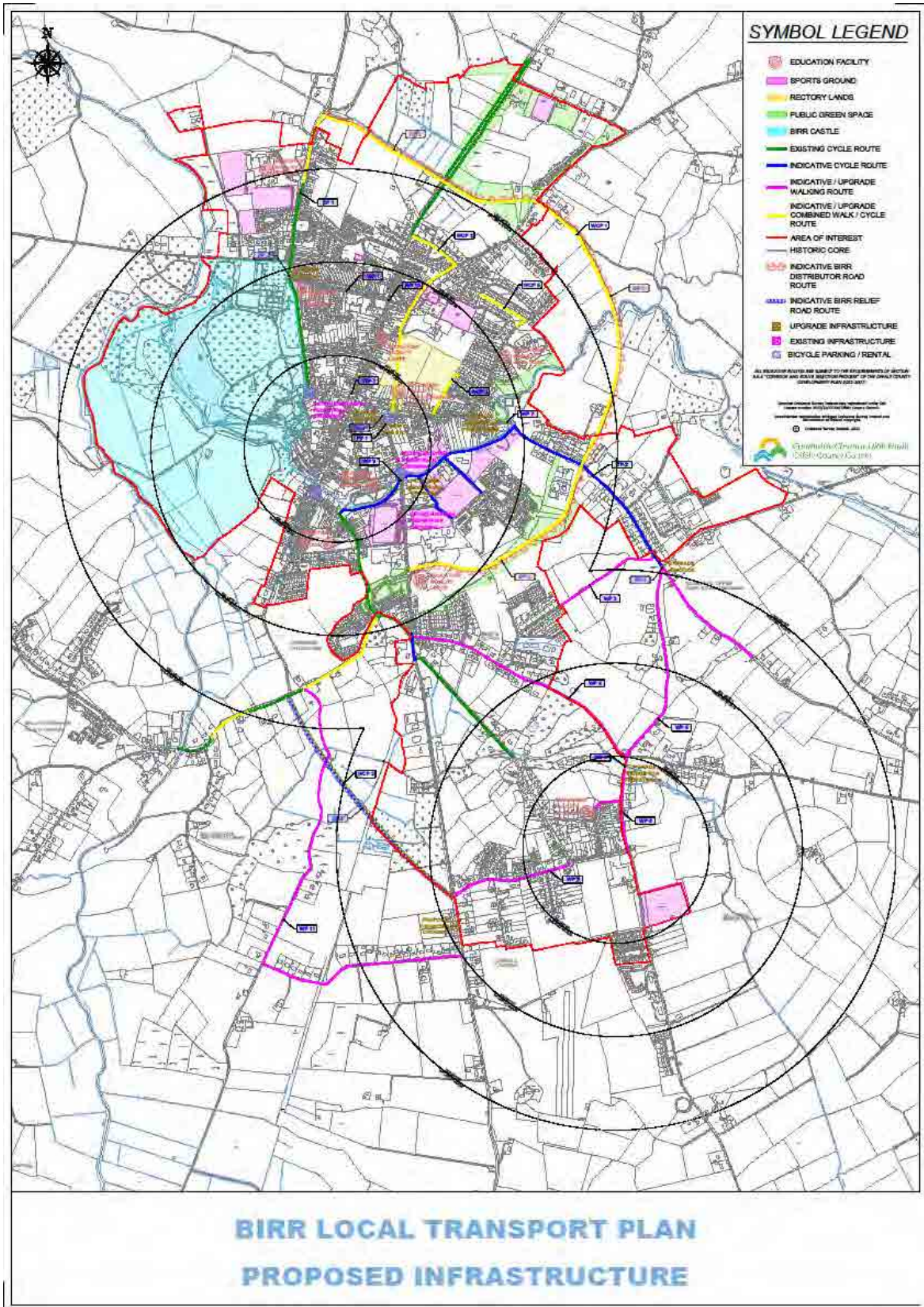
- EDUCATION FACILITY
- SPORTS GROUND
- RECTORY LANDS
- PUBLIC GREEN SPACE
- BIRR CASTLE
- EXISTING CYCLE ROUTE
- AREA OF INTEREST
- HISTORIC CORE
- EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE

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BIRR LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE

Appendix B – Proposed Infrastructure Map



Appendix C –Cycle Network Map

