



Offaly County Development Plan 2014-2020

Volume 1: Written Statement

Adopted 15th September 2014

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Introduction and Context

1. Introduction and Context

This plan is a land use plan and overall strategy for the development of County Offaly over the period 2014-2020.

There is an obligation on every Planning Authority to make a development plan every six years under the terms of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

2. Legal Context

The Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, requires a development plan to set out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of an area. The “sustainable” consideration means that the longer term effects of development and how it impacts on people and the environment in general, both locally and in the broader context, both currently and into the future, must be considered.

The Planning and Development Act requires the plan to contain mandatory development objectives in relation to a broad range of issues. These include the zoning of land, the provision of infrastructure and preservation of landscape character among others.

3. Contents of the Plan

This plan contains the following:

Volume 1 - Written Statement

This is divided into 8 chapters and sets out the vision, aims, goals and strategy for the county over the plan period in addition to the Council’s policies and objectives under various headings. It contains the written land use zoning categories which are read in conjunction with the land use zoning maps contained in Volume 2.

Volume 2 - Settlement Plans (includes Town plans, Village plans, and Sráid plans)

Plans are not included for Tullamore, Birr, Edenderry and Portarlington as these have Local Area Plans in force.

(Birr LAP also includes village plans for Crinkle and Riverstown)

Accompanying Strategies

The Plan is accompanied by a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), a Natura Impact Report (NIR), a Record of Protected Structures¹, a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) and a Wind Energy Strategy for the county.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a systematic process for evaluating the likely significant environmental effects of implementing the County Development Plan. This is a mandatory process under the terms of the Planning and Development (SEA) Regulations 2004, as amended and informs the Plan’s preparation.

Appropriate Assessment (AA)

An Appropriate Assessment of the County Development Plan has been undertaken in accordance with the requirements of Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive (directive 92/43/EEC). The initial iteration of the Plan was found to have the potential to result in impacts to the integrity of the Natura 2000 network if unmitigated. Accordingly, the inclusion of mitigation measures in the Plan will prioritise the avoidance of impacts and mitigate impacts where these cannot be avoided, thus resulting in this Plan excluding significant effects on the integrity of Natura 2000 sites.

Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)

An SFRA for the Offaly County Development Plan was undertaken with the purpose of setting out how flood risk is to be dealt with in County Offaly in addition to outlining what areas are at risk of flooding and what the extent of the risk is. The Plan has been informed by the SFRA in its preparation, particularly within Chapter 4 of Volume 1 and within the settlement plans of Volume 2, in accordance with the DOEHLG Flood Risk Management Guidelines (2009) and EU Flood Directive 2007/60/EC.

¹ The Town and Environs Development Plans for Tullamore and Birr contain the Record of Protected Structures for the relevant Town Council’s functional area.

4. Functional Area

This plan relates to the functional area of Offaly County Council, which is County Offaly. This plan sets out an overall vision, strategies, policies and objectives for the county as a whole and its successful implementation will have a positive impact on all areas within the county.

Statutory development plans are in place for Birr and Tullamore, and future development plans for these areas should have regard to and aim to be consistent with this County Development Plan. Local Area Plans are in place for the areas of Edenderry and Portarlinton (joint Local Area Plan with Laois County Council). These are adopted by way of a separate statutory process but must be consistent with the overall context, policies and objectives of the County Development Plan.

In the preparation of this plan, regard has been given to the development plans of adjoining planning authorities.

5. Policies and Objectives

These are specific actions or statements which Offaly County Council will endeavour to follow to ensure that policies are implemented, that goals and targets are attained and all development proposals are consistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of the county.

In the interests of clarity, any reference to a goal, aim, policy and objective in the text of this County Development Plan 2014-2020, associated town development plans and associated Local Area Plans shall be construed as an “objective” of this Plan for the purposes of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended and the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended.

6. County Profile

Location and Population

Offaly is situated in the Midlands of Ireland and shares boundaries with counties Westmeath, Meath, Kildare, Laois, Tipperary, Galway and Roscommon. As at Census 2011, the county's population was 76,687 persons, having increased from 70,868 in 2006. Much (approximately 40%) of this population is contained within larger towns such as Tullamore (County Town), Birr, Edenderry, Clara and Portarlinton. However the

county remains largely rural in nature, with approximately 60% of its population residing in rural areas comprising a well-developed network of smaller towns and villages of less than 1,500 population (approximately 30% of population) and the open countryside (approximately 30% of population).

Physical Features

Offaly's land extent is approximately 493,985 acres (199,981 hectares). It is primarily a county of flat and undulating lands. Approximately one fifth of the county comprises peatlands and the majority of the remainder of the land is in agricultural / forestry use. Peatlands have traditionally been a significant asset to Offaly in terms of an energy resource and a source of employment through extraction and power generation, but also as an amenity and educational resource. The international scientific importance of Clara Bog and the success of the Lough Boora Discovery Park are recognition of this amenity value.

Exceptions to Offaly's predominantly level topography are the Slieve Bloom Mountains, situated to the south west of the county and their attractive foothills. A comprehensive system of eskers also exists in Offaly, mainly concentrated in the northwest and centre of the county. The most comprehensive of these eskers is the Eiscir Riada which runs in a more or less continuous line from Shannonbridge to Clonmacnoise and onto Clara, Durrow and Rahugh, Co. Westmeath and dominates much of the landscape in the north west of the county. Other significant landscape features include the River Shannon which runs along the western county boundary and its Callows, the River Brosna, a tributary of the Shannon, the Grand Canal which traverses the county, important archaeological and historical landscapes such as Clonmacnoise and Durrow and Croghan Hill, an extinct volcano.

Offaly has a well-developed network of moderately scaled market towns and attractive villages.

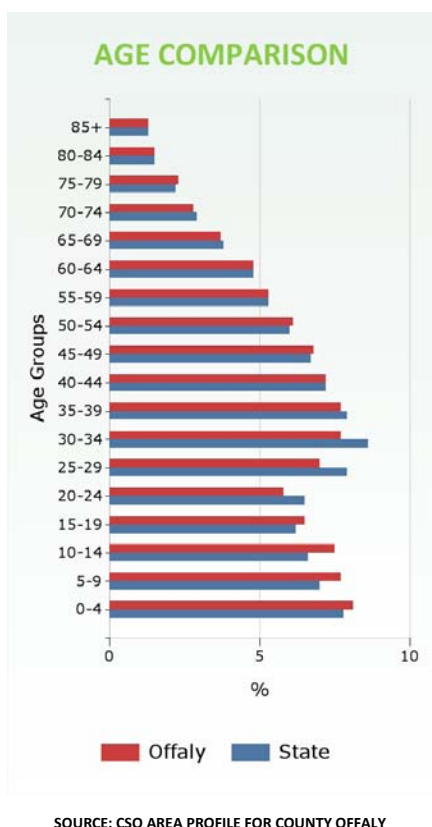
7. Challenges

Population

Offaly's population grew by 8.2% between 2006 and 2011 which is in line with the national growth rate for the same period. Figure 1.1 below indicates that there is a

larger proportion of younger people in County Offaly (0-19 age cohort) when compared with the State. Services for children and young people in this age cohort need to be adequately provided to ensure that needs are being met, particularly in the areas of healthcare, education and social and community facilities.

Figure 1.1. Age Comparison between Offaly and the State



Challenge: Ensure that the plan has adequately provided for, where it can, the social, community, healthcare and educational needs of younger people in Offaly.

Chapter 1 (Core Strategy and Settlement Strategy) sets out the population target for County Offaly, as allocated in the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines (MRPGs) over the plan period, as well as the associated housing land requirement. The targets allocated in Chapter 1 may be revised over the lifetime of this plan.

Challenge: Arising from the MRPGs targets, how to plan for a county population of c.90,445 by 2020 and how to ensure that the growth of Tullamore meets its population target as part of the Midlands Linked Gateway in order to ensure that the town can be a driver of balanced development within the county and the region.

Balanced Development

Since the previous plan was adopted, the nature and rate of development that has taken place in the county has significantly changed. The change and slowdown can largely be attributed to the economic downturn. In addition, as a result of previous development pressures, the issue of unfinished housing estates and the level of vacancy in towns and villages have become a priority for Offaly Local Authorities since the last plan was adopted.

The accompanying working paper to this plan on rural housing indicates that while the number of planning applications for houses in the countryside has reduced, there remains a sustained demand for this type of housing in Offaly.

There are a number of factors that have contributed to the changes in settlement policy in this plan compared to the last development plan. These factors include:

1. The pattern of settlement taking place in the County over the last decade;
2. continued demand for one off housing;
3. the existing housing stock available taking account of the vacancy rate across the county (in both urban and rural areas), and
4. The need to regenerate a number of towns and villages.

All of the above have contributed to the overall following challenge that this plan seeks to address:

Challenge: Ensuring that Offaly's hierarchy of settlements evolve and develop in a sustainable and attractive manner which respects their potential for growth as well as their existing character.

Employment and Enterprise

One of the major challenges is to ensure that enterprise and employment grows and develops in County Offaly over the lifetime of this plan. As already referred to, the economic downturn has had a significant impact on the growth and development of the county over the last plan period. While unemployment levels have grown (23.2% unemployment in County Offaly compared to the national average of 19%), there is sustained need to ensure that this plan facilitates employment growth and enterprise development where appropriate and possible.

Challenge: Enabling the facilitation of employment growth and enterprise development throughout the county in line with the settlement hierarchy set out in Chapter 1.

Energy

Chapter 3 'Energy Strategy' sets out the Council's position in relation to conservation and generation of energy. Offaly has a history of energy development in the County, mainly associated with the peatlands. As a non renewable source of energy, the peatlands may also present other opportunities related to employment creation including energy but also potentially tourism and recreation.

Challenge: To facilitate, promote and achieve a reasonable balance between responding to central Government policy on renewable energy and enabling energy resources within the Planning Authority's area to be harnessed in a way that is consistent with proper planning and sustainable development.

Environment

Protecting the environment of County Offaly together with enhancing it where appropriate remains a key challenge. In addition, there is an increasing amount of change to legislative provisions at both a European and a National level for the Council to comply with and implement.

Challenge: To achieve a balance between protecting and enhancing the environment.

8. Overall Vision

That all people in Offaly will enjoy equal opportunity and a good quality of life – that they will look forward to the future with confidence while cherishing the past.

The Council aims to follow the vision through in terms of its land use and planning implications through the implementation of this County Development Plan.

For the County Development Plan, this means having regard to:

- (i) How land use and planning decisions will impact on quality of life for the people of Offaly.**
- (ii) How such decisions will impact on Offaly as a location to live and work of choice, not necessity.**
- (iii) How such decisions will impact on the need to protect Offaly's natural and built assets.**

It is intended that this vision acts as a 'prompt' for all strategies, policies and objectives of this plan.

The policy framework and 'targets' mentioned above give rise to significant planning challenges for the Council over the plan period and beyond.

9. Environmental Considerations

Where relevant, projects and masterplans arising from this development plan must be fully compliant with the following:

- The requirements of the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), SEA Directive (2001/42/EC) and EIA Directive 2011/92/EU and associated legislation/regulations.
- The associated European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (SI No. 477 of 2011).
- European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004-2011.
- Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004-2011.

- The European Communities (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 1989-2011 (or any updated/superseding legislation).

Planning applications for proposed developments within the Plan Area that may give rise to likely significant effects on the environment may need to be accompanied by one or more of the following:

- An Environmental Impact Statement.
- An Ecological Impact Assessment Report.
- A Habitats Directive Appropriate Assessment Report or a Natura Impact Statement, as appropriate.
- Ensure that Natura Impact Statements and any other environmental or ecological impact assessments submitted in support of proposals for development are carried out according to best practice methodologies and contain all necessary baseline assessments.

Refer also to Chapter 7.

Chapter 1: Core Strategy, Settlement Strategy and Part V Housing Strategy

Core Strategy

1.0 Aim

To ensure that the development objectives of the Offaly County Development Plan are consistent with national and regional development objectives set out in the National Spatial Strategy and the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines.

1.1 Purpose of Core Strategy

The Core Strategy seeks to:

- Rationalise spatial land-use planning and population distribution in accordance with higher order plans.
- Align these with investment in infrastructure services and facilities.
- Enhance sustainability and ensure quality of life and protection of the environment.

The Core Strategy is central to the role of the Development Plan as a land use spatial plan. Its purpose is to set out a clear spatial framework for the growth of County Offaly over the plan period from 2014 to 2020. The Core Strategy must demonstrate consistency with higher order spatial plans at national and regional level and translate objectives to subsidiary plans such as town plans and local area plans.

The requirement for a Core Strategy is outlined in the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and provides for a quantitatively based approach to how much housing should be provided for over the lifetime of the plan. The location for new housing, aligned with projected population growth, is applied to a defined hierarchy of settlements.

The Core Strategy also considers the location of economic development, retail development and how transport and other infrastructure can be provided, maintained or enhanced in order to support the projected growth of the county's population. This enables all new development to take place in a

sustainable way and in line with the settlement hierarchy.

In promoting a strategy for growth, the Core Strategy “acknowledges” and reflects the wider agenda of protecting the environment and continuing to improve the quality of life for all residents, current and future in County Offaly.

The Core Strategy, in providing the scope for coordinating development and addressing future settlement patterns identifies:

- Strategic Objectives for the county, focusing on the key issues to be addressed over the lifetime of the Plan.
- Settlement Hierarchy - identifying the role of towns, villages and rural areas of County Offaly in accordance with objectives of the higher order spatial plans.
- The “likely” scale and distribution of population growth and associated housing demand.
- A delivery strategy for achieving the strategic objectives and addressing population growth and associated development.

1.2 Legislation and Policy Context

The provisions of the Core Strategy must adhere to a framework of legislation set out by Government and must take account of, and be consistent with, relevant national and regional planning policy. However, within this context there is the opportunity to tailor policies to reflect local circumstances and aspirations and to ensure that the challenges facing County Offaly are addressed in the most appropriate way.

Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)

Sets out the requirement to undertake and include a Core Strategy into the written statement of the development plan. Legislation in this regard is prescriptive as to what must be contained in the Core

Strategy and provides that the Core Strategy must demonstrate that the development objectives of the development plan are consistent with national and regional development objectives of the National Spatial Strategy and of the relevant regional planning guidelines.

National Spatial Policy

The NSS 2002-2020 provides a planning framework for delivering more balanced social, economic and physical development between regions in Ireland.

The National Spatial Strategy is uppermost in the hierarchy while the Core Strategy is a fundamental part of the Development Plan, this is shown in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1: Hierarchy of Spatial Planning Policy



Regional Spatial Policy

The Midland Regional Planning Guidelines (MRPGs) 2010-2022 set out a Settlement Strategy in Chapter 4 which focuses on:

- Population Targets,
- Settlement Strategy,
- Settlement Hierarchy,
- Developing Areas,
- Future housing and development land requirements.

Population Targets: The MRPGs set out future

population targets for the region for the periods 2016 and 2022. Each Planning Authority within the Midland Region is required to incorporate these population targets into a settlement strategy that is appropriate for their administrative area.

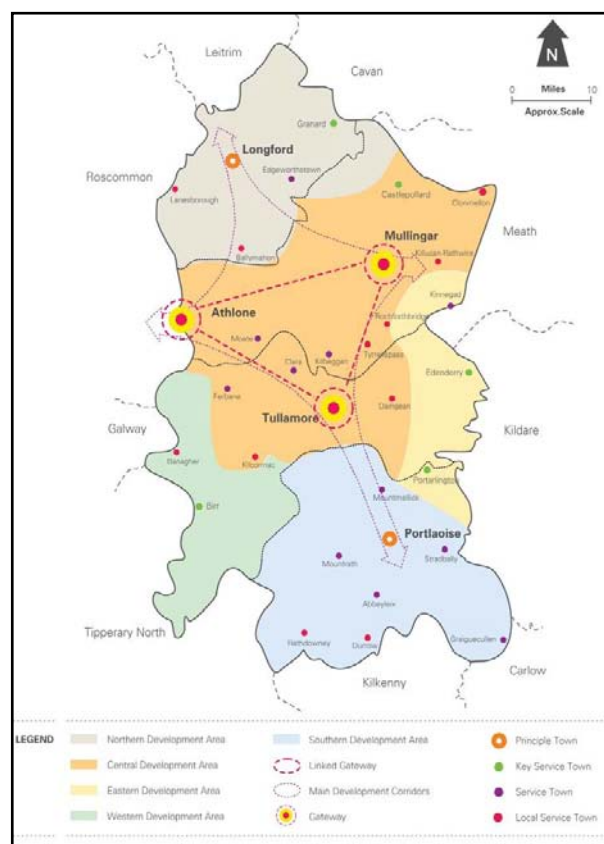
Regional Settlement Strategy: The Regional Settlement Strategy included in the MRPGs is based on the fundamental principle of 'Balanced Development of the Region' and on the provisions of the NSS which seeks to:

- Strengthen the critical mass of the Region's urban structure by prioritisation of major regional population and housing requirements around the Midlands Linked Gateway of Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar.
- Establish a policy framework for the five interrelated 'Development Areas' which would harness the unique development potential of each area including its urban and rural components.
- Sustain and revitalise rural areas by building towns and villages as 'local growth engines and service providers' and identifying opportunities in rural areas to deliver a more diverse economic base.

The settlement strategy promotes the growth of specific groups of settlements with defined strategic roles.

The MRPGs inform the critical component of the Core Strategy, the settlement hierarchy, which guides where new development should appropriately take place within the county in addition to the applicable population targets and associated housing land requirements.

Figure 1.2: Extract from the MRPGs, 2010-2022 showing the Midland Regional Settlement Strategy.



Source: Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022

Housing Land Requirement: Based on the future population targets, the MRPGs also set out an indicative housing and housing land requirement (HLR) up to 2016. This approach requires that the quantity of ‘designated’ housing land provided is closely related to the quantity required to accommodate the county’s anticipated population growth.

Planning (Ministerial) Guidelines

National planning guidelines or Ministerial guidelines issued under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) cover a wide range of topics, including Urban and Rural Housing, Retail, Roads, Flood Risk and others. The Planning Authority is obliged to consider policies and objectives contained in these guidelines when preparing and making Development Plans.

Other Legislation, Directives and Strategies

The Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) through its provisions require Planning Authorities to link with or into other legislation, directives and strategies in

order to provide for the inclusion of objectives in the development Plan as set out in the Act. Such provisions include:

- Waste Management legislation and policies.
- Habitats Directive.
- River Basin management plans.
- Smarter Travel.
- Climate Change.
- Water Framework Directive.
- Floods Directive.

1.3 Strategic Objectives of the Core Strategy

Strategic Objectives have been identified to ensure that the Core Strategy will direct the focus for appropriate development to appropriate locations in County Offaly over the lifetime of the Development Plan. The Strategic Objectives as identified in the Core Strategy permeate through the Development Plan and will be addressed and elaborated upon in other sections of the plan.

1. To strengthen the role of the Offaly Development Plan in implementing the objectives of higher order plans, where appropriate and ensure that the Offaly County Development Plan is consistent with the objectives and provisions of national and regional strategies, policy guidelines and national and regional population targets.
2. To develop a settlement strategy framework setting out a settlement hierarchy and providing an evidence base within which sustainable development, infrastructure, amenities and economic investment can be provided in a coherent and structured manner that maximises the use of resources in the county.
3. To provide for population growth in County Offaly in line with the population targets set out by the MRPGs and to allocate the population growth to settlement areas identified in the settlement hierarchy. This provides a framework within which sustainable infrastructure, amenities, economic investment and development can be provided in a manner that maximises the use of resources in the County, for current and future generations.
4. To provide for an appropriate quantity and location of zoned land so that this Plan accommodates the level of development anticipated over the plan period and support the priorities for growth as indicated in the settlement hierarchy of the Core Strategy whilst maintaining a level of development to secure the viability of rural communities.
5. To promote sustainable settlement and transportation strategies in order to focus and integrate development in the most sustainable locations in the county making best use of existing and planned transport infrastructure/networks available and making isolated locations more accessible by improving transport links, particularly public transport.
6. To ensure that future development will integrate with the existing and planned transport and services infrastructure such as road, rail, energy and water services infrastructure in order to utilise them in the most efficient way possible (as per priority investments outlined at national and regional level).
7. To ensure a high level of environmental protection ensuring the implementation of the policies and objectives of the plan through the observance of all legal requirements with regard to Strategic Environmental Assessment, Habitats Directive Assessment, Water Framework Directive and Floods Directive, as appropriate.
8. To promote sustainable economic development and direct economic activity into the most appropriate locations within County Offaly for employment generation and to capitalise on opportunities available in order to enhance the strategic competitiveness and attractiveness of the county.
9. To revitalise town centres maintaining a clear hierarchy of vibrant, diverse and distinct towns across the county as the focus for commercial, retail and leisure uses to meet the needs of the local population and ensuring the primacy of town centres as the first choice for the location of retail development.
10. To protect and conserve the high quality natural environment, built and cultural heritage of the county while ensuring that any future development is facilitated in a manner which complements, respects and protects natural, built and cultural heritage features.
11. To ensure that development promoted, supported or facilitated by the Development Plan provides for the adaptation to climate change and the promotion of renewable energy where possible including the increased risk of flooding.
12. To ensure that development over the lifetime of this plan is monitored and managed so as to achieve the overall objectives of the Core Strategy.

1.4 Core Strategy Approach

As part of the approach to achieve consistency with objectives included within higher order plans i.e. the MRPGs and the NSS, the Core Strategy addresses the following 3 main areas:

- Settlement Hierarchy,
- Population Targets,
- Future Housing land requirements (Core Strategy table).

The delivery approach outlined below will demonstrate how the Core Strategy will be delivered in the development plan and in particular in relation to ensuring that the development plan is consistent with the objectives of the higher order spatial plans.

The diagrammatic map (Map 1.2) brings all elements required by the Planning and Development Act together in an illustrative manner.

1.5 Settlement Hierarchy

The settlement hierarchy identifies a number of tiers of settlement within the county that are classified according to the following:

The settlement hierarchy provides the basis for the promotion of population growth, the allocation of housing land to meet the housing needs of that population and to focus on the delivery of infrastructure and services as maybe required for that population also.

- Strategic Location and potential,
- Function within the area that they are located,
- Function and relationship to other settlements, and;
- Size.

The settlement hierarchy for County Offaly has six tiers which identifies all settlements within the county as per their existing size and role and their envisaged size and role within the plan period. Please refer to Map 1.1 for location of settlements within the county and Table 1.1 for description of their defined strategic role. This hierarchy informs the settlement strategy by providing:

- i) Population growth projections for each of the

larger settlements and

- ii) Aggregate population figures for the Villages, Sráids and Open Countryside.

The hierarchical approach is consistent with the settlement hierarchy set out in the MRPGs.

The settlement hierarchy reflects the position of each settlement area type within the county in terms of existing and envisaged scale. The position of a settlement within the hierarchy coupled with the defined role of each tier provides an indication of the potential likely scale of population growth permissible over the period of the plan.

The general premise of the settlement strategy for County Offaly in ensuring consistency with the higher order spatial plans of the NSS and the MRPGs is to:

- To stimulate population growth in Tullamore in accordance with its identified role as part of the Midlands Linked Gateway so that it can form part of the driver of development for the region as envisaged in the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) and MRPGs (2010).
- To conserve, enhance and strengthen the town and village structure within the county.
- To inform decisions on the management of growth patterns in accordance with the county's settlement hierarchy.

Map 1.1: Settlement Hierarchy Map

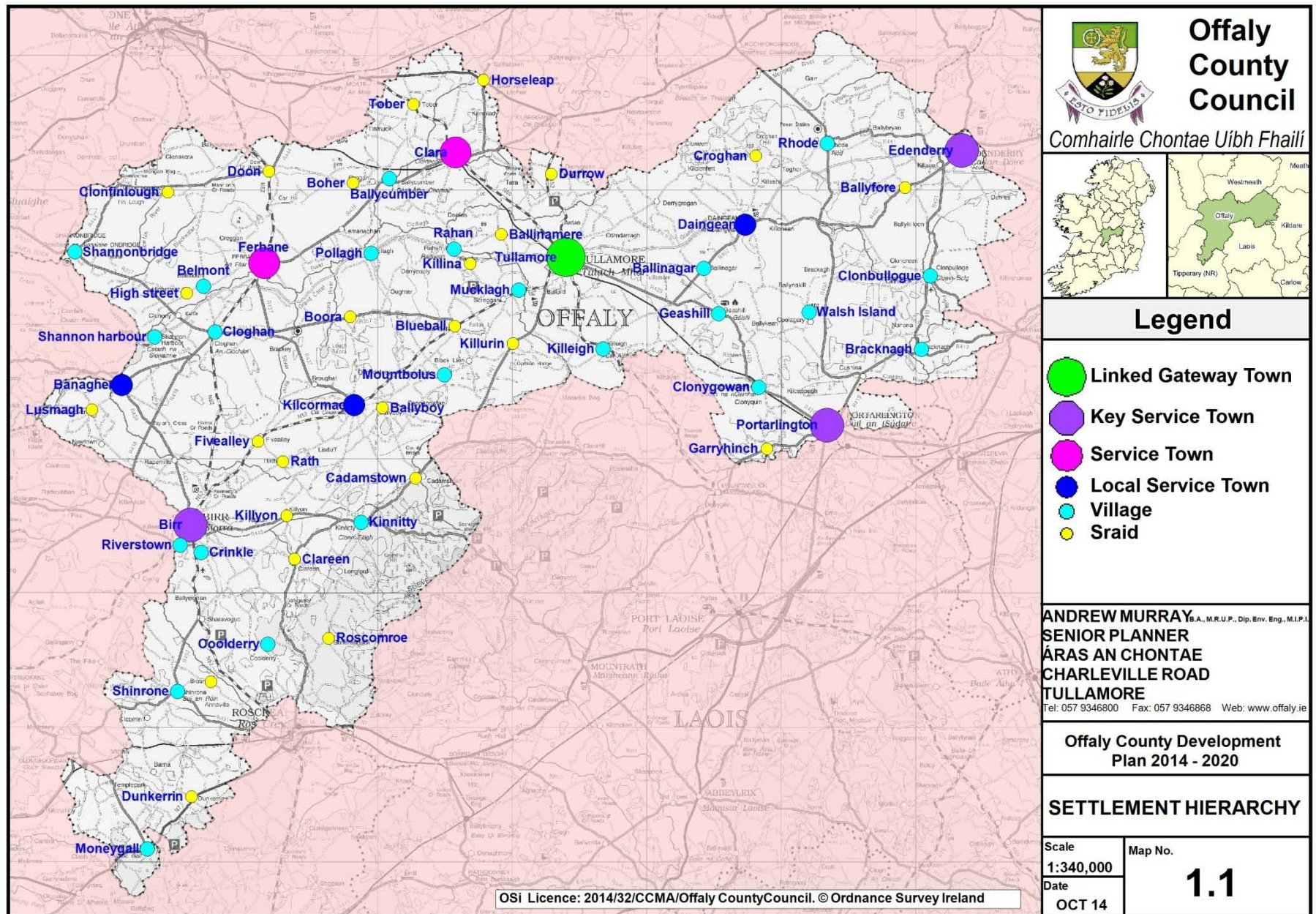


Table 1.1 Settlement Hierarchy (including extracts from the MRPGs)			
Tier	Role	Settlement	Defined Strategic Role as per MRPGs
Tier 1	Linked Gateway	Tullamore	Identified as a 'driver' for regional growth, the Linked Gateway is the focus for the bulk of target population for the period 2010-2022.
Tier 2	Key Service Towns	Birr, Edenderry, Portarlington	These towns are important drivers for local economies in areas that are more remote from main population centres. Well established economic, administrative and social functions are provided within these areas.
Tier 3	Service Towns	Clara, Ferbane	These towns perform important retail, residential, service and amenity functions for local and rural hinterlands. Many of these towns have experienced significant population growth over the last census period. Consolidation of growth is necessary and the provision of relevant physical and social infrastructure.
Tier 4	Local Service Towns	Banagher, Daingean, Kilcormac	These towns are more remote from the Linked Gateway and principal towns and perform important local level residential, retailing, social and leisure functions and provide appropriate local services to a wider rural hinterland.
Tier 5	Villages	Belmont, Ballinagar, Ballycumber, Bracknagh, Cloghan, Clonbullogue, Cloneygowan, Coolderry, Crinkle, Geashill, Killeigh, Kinnitty, Mucklagh, Moneygall, Mountbolus, Pollagh / Lemanaghan, Rahan, Rhode, Riverstown, Shannonbridge, Shannonharbour, Shinrone, Walsh Island.	Villages are smaller settlements, many of which are very attractive and rural in character. The level of services provided will vary between settlements and will depend on the surrounding rural hinterland. Residential development in these settlements should be of appropriate scale and density.
Tier 6	Sráids & Open Countryside	Ballinamere, Ballyboy, Ballyfore, Blueball, Boher, Boora (Leabeg), Brosna, Cadamstown, Clareen, Clonfinlough, Croghan, Doon, Dunkerrin, Durrow, Fivealley, Garryhinch, Horseleap, High Street, Killina, Killurin, Killyon, Lusmagh, Rath, Roscomroe, Tober.	<p>Sráids are very small, embryonic rural settlements. Sráids have a loose gathering of existing development mainly housing but with some services. New development should reflect this existing settlement pattern. Sráids have the potential to attract high quality individual housing or private site developments to attract population growth and offer an alternative to rural housing where appropriate.</p> <p>Open countryside comprises largely rural areas. The role of rural areas is to support the settlement strategy by ensuring that development in these areas does not compromise the integrity of defined urban and village roles by maintaining sustainable, rural level infrastructural demands.</p>

1.6 Population

The MRPGs specify the population targets for the Midland Region from which the Offaly County Development Plan is obliged to use for the development of a settlement strategy. These population targets inform the future housing land requirements for the needs of the growing population.

Table 1.2: Population Targets Table

	Census 2011	Plan Period 2014	Target MRPGs 2016	End Plan period 2020	Target MRPGs 2022
Offaly	76,687	81,273	84,330	90,445	93,502
Tullamore	14,361	17,144	19,004	22,714	24,575
County Balance	62,326	64,129	65,326	67,731	68,927

Source: Census 2011 (CSO)

The population target table above sets out the projected population figures for the plan period within the context of the population targets set by the MRPGs for the periods 2016 and 2022 in addition to the baseline factual population figure of Census 2011. This gives the target population parameters within which the Core Strategy will work. The Planning Authority is obliged to work within these maximum population targets for the lifetime of this plan. These population targets are fundamental to evaluating the housing land requirements for the plan period.

1.7 Future Housing Land Requirements

In accordance with the projected population targets as outlined above, housing need must be provided for this growing population over the lifetime of this plan. Housing land must be aligned with population targets in order to justify the quantum or extent of residential zoning required to facilitate the growing population.

This is shown in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3: Future Housing Land Requirements for Offaly.

	Population growth plan period 2014- 2020	No. of units ¹	Density (units) per ha ² .	Housing land (zoned) required (Ha) (allowing for 50% headroom)
Offaly	9,172	3163	-	238
Tullamore	5,570	1921	35	82
County Balance	3,602	1242	12	156

The average household size of 2.9 persons per household as per census 2011 was used to determine the number of housing units required over the lifetime of the plan. The MRPGs have pre-determined the density per hectare to be applied for both Tullamore and the county.

1.8 Core Strategy Table

The Core Strategy table combines the settlement hierarchy with the population targets and housing land allocation and shows where the envisaged population growth can be accommodated in compliance with the MRPGs. A density based on each settlement's place within the hierarchy is applied thereafter to obtain the housing land requirement for that settlement area.

The landuse zoning maps in Volume 2 of the plan illustrate the allocation, extent and location of residentially zoned land for each of the settlement areas. It should be noted that Sráids and the Open Countryside are not zoned settlement areas within the plan and so a population figure has been applied which is required to be monitored.

The delivery of residential development within and up to the end of the lifetime of this plan for all settlement areas identified in the settlement hierarchy will be required to be carefully monitored and managed to ensure compliance with the figures set out in the Core Strategy table. The monitoring approach is outlined below.

¹ Derived by average household size in Offaly as per census 2011 figures of 2.9 persons per household.

² As set out in MRPGs

Table 1.4: Core Strategy Table

Settlement		Population 2011	Population increase plan period	Housing land allocation to 2020 ³ (incl 50 % head room)
Tullamore Gateway	Linked	14,361	5,571	82
Birr		4,428	418	12
Edenderry		6,977	418	12
Portarlinton		1,678	174	5
Total Key Service Towns		13,083		
Clara		3,894	315	9
Ferbane		1,165	244	7
Total Service Towns		5,059		
Banagher		1,653	244	7
Daingean		1,037	174	5
Kilcormac		870	174	5
Total Local Service Towns		3,560		
Total Villages		8,639	720	21
Sráids & Rural open countryside		31,988	720	N/A unzoned land
Total		76,687	3,602	

³ This figure was reached for each settlement by apportioning the projected population growth by applying a growth rate and density based on each settlement's place on the hierarchy and an average household size of 2.9 people.

[illegible]

1.9 Delivering the Core Strategy

The quantum and location of residentially zoned land is a fundamental component of the Core Strategy, in that it focuses the projected population growth in a balanced way through all tiers of the settlement hierarchy. However, there are other aspects that will assist in the overall delivery of the Core Strategy for Offaly during the lifetime of this plan and includes the following:

- Settlement Strategy.
- Economic development.
- Energy.
- Retail and Town Centre Development.
- Protection of the environment and natural resources.
- Provision of necessary infrastructure.
- Midlands Gateway: Overall Approach by Offaly and Westmeath Local Authorities
- Monitoring and Management.

1.9.1 Settlement Strategy

The settlement strategy gives effect to the NSS and MRPGs at county level as it channels the scale and location of new residential and associated development required for the population growth projected over the lifetime of the plan. The settlement hierarchy greatly informs and enables a planned approach to the settlement strategy as it provides a clear understanding of the roles that settlements can play and their potential to develop over the plan period.

The settlement strategy demonstrates consistency with the NSS and the MRPGs by seeking to achieve balanced growth within the county. The incorporation of specific population targets and alignment between future population and housing land requirements will bring about an orderly and focused approach to the future development of County Offaly. The settlement strategy encourages more sustainable patterns of development with high quality design which prioritises the re-use of existing developed areas, development on greenfield sites in a sequential manner and the location of new development close to readily available infrastructure, services, facilities and good public transport routes. The settlement strategy encourages such principles in line with the provisions of both the Guidelines on Sustainable Residential development in Urban Areas and Smarter Travel – A new Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020.

The settlement strategy also identifies the rural areas as defined by the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines for the purposes of promoting sustainable rural settlement patterns i.e. applying rural housing need policy, as a key component of delivering balanced development across the county and in accordance with the population targets assigned to Rural areas (Sráids and Open Countryside) in the Core Strategy.

Part V Housing Supply is addressed as a component of the settlement strategy detailing information in relation to social housing provision, and the implementation of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) as informed by the National Housing Policy Statement, June 2011.

1.9.2 Economic Development

The period of this plan will be a time of planned economic recovery, and this will have consequences for the physical development of county Offaly. Within the lifetime of this plan, indigenous employment growth in Offaly will come from the vibrant start-up sector, many of which will be technology based. It will also come from more traditional areas such as Tourism, Agriculture and Food. The reuse of cutaway bog will present significant opportunities in the energy sector. In urban areas, professional services, retail and food services provide current employment and future growth potential. Further inward investment may be gained through pharmaceutical research, development and manufacturing, waste processing and energy production. The Public Sector, including health, education and central government is also a major employer in the county, as is the semi-state sector including the ESB, Bord na Móna and Coillte.

The Council, including the Local Enterprise Office, through this Development Plan, can play its part in recovery and growth by facilitating an environment conducive to investment and job creation and the Council will identify and act in those areas where it can be most influential in this regard. The quality of life for those living in an area is frequently cited as the most compelling consideration in influencing investment decisions and the County Development Plan with such wide ranging policies and objectives has a role in contributing positively to this.

1.9.3 Energy

The history of peat fired stations has left a valuable legacy for Offaly in the existing sites and transmission infrastructure that traverses the county and this existing distribution network can now be used for the sustainable development of new generation capacity. The main developments in the energy industry over the lifetime of this plan will be in generation, particularly the migration from non-renewables to renewables. Non-renewable sources such as Natural Gas will still have a role in maintaining the consistency of supply that is expected from consumers and there is potential for development of generating capacity in the county on brownfield sites previously used for peat-fired energy production. However, there is also an opportunity for Offaly to play its role in renewable energy, including wind energy on suitable sites in the county. Energy production from Biomass could add value to the agricultural economy, which could provide more employment in a rural county. It is anticipated that all of the above types of energy production will continue to play a central role in the economy of Offaly.

The development of Electrical Transmission network is the responsibility of Eirgrid and it has also published the “Grid 25 Implementation Programme 2011-2016” which is a practical, strategic overview of how Grid 25 will be implemented. Development of the grid will be facilitated where practical and necessary in the context of national transmission network planning in accordance with proper planning and sustainable development.

1.9.4 Retail and Town Centre Development

Retail development is promoted in the plan in Chapter 5 in accordance with and informed by the provisions of the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012. In accordance with the DoECLG Retail Planning Guidelines, a retail hierarchy consistent with the settlement hierarchy identifies the role of the main retail centres within the county.

The retail hierarchy reinforces the settlement hierarchy set out in the Core Strategy and takes the following approach which:

- Reinforces and extends the high order retail function of Tullamore as a linked Gateway, enabling it to effectively reduce retail expenditure exported from the county to other centres;
- Supports the roles identified for Birr, Edenderry and Portarlinton by encouraging retail floorspace provision commensurate with their anticipated growth; and
- Promotes balanced retail provision throughout the county of a scale appropriate to the size and function of the various settlements i.e. small towns and local shopping.

Offaly’s main urban centres are the preferred locations for retail development. To improve clarity for the purposes of applying the sequential approach to retail development, the core retail area of each urban centre has been delineated on the settlement map for each area in Volume 2. This allows a focused approach for retailing and town centre action initiatives as well as the proper application of the sequential approach to retail development. It also provides that out of centre development is only provided for in exceptional circumstances.

The sequential approach to retail development is promoted to provide for greater vitality in town centres. Retail development is also encouraged to make a positive impact on the built environment and the public realm, ensuring that new development is of the highest design quality, is located where smarter travel can be encouraged and is an appropriate level of development for its location.

The role of town centres outside of their retailing function is recognised as a challenge that needs to be addressed where possible within the lifetime of this plan. To remain competitive, attractive and sustainable, town centres need to be responsive to local needs and to strike a correct balance between choice, offer and environmental attributes that can be used to attract people. The town centre strategy aims to support the improvement of town centres in a number of ways including improvements to public realm and support for

resolution of traffic related issues. The Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets March 2013 set out principles, approaches and standards which will act as a framework for design projects relating to the built environment in town centres.

1.9.5 Protection of the Environment and Natural Resources

The protection of the environment and natural resources of County Offaly is of paramount importance in this plan and this is reflected in Strategic Objective Nos. 7 and 10. To regulate the sustainable development and management of County Offaly, a comprehensive and integrated environmental and planning approach is set out providing that the policies of the development plan are appraised against and informed by an environmental legislation framework. This framework appraises the demands for development with socio-economic considerations and the need to protect the environment and comprises the following:

- The **Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive (2001/42/EC)** considers the strategic options for the area of the Planning Authority, taking the potential impact of the objectives of the Development Plan on the environment into account.
- The **Birds and Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC)** considers the protection of the integrity of NATURA 2000 sites. Part XAB of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 implements Article 6.3 of the provisions of the Birds and Habitats Directive in relation to land use plans and requires an Appropriate Assessment to be conducted to establish whether the land use plans through their implementation or would be likely to adversely affect the integrity of NATURA 2000 sites.
- The **Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC)** considers the protection and enhancement of water quality, particular regard is given to securing objectives of the River Basin Management Plans to enable all rivers and coastal waters to achieve good ecological status.
- The **Floods Directive (2007/60/EC)** sets out how member states of the EU must plan for the management of flood risk including associated risk such their damaging effects on human health, the environment, infrastructure and property.

The Core Strategy and indeed the development plan represents a further iteration of environmental assessments to ensure insofar as practicable, that policies and strategies therein are consistent with the conservation and protection of the environment and natural resources.

1.9.6 Provision of Necessary Infrastructure

The provision of infrastructure will be undertaken where it is necessary, viable and economical in the context of the development of the settlement areas within the lifetime of the plan. The provision of water and wastewater services and infrastructure in particular will be linked to and determined by the projected growth in population as directed by the Core Strategy. It is important to note in the context of the lifetime of this plan i.e. 2014-2020 that Irish Water will be taking responsibility for the operational and capital delivery functions of local authorities in the water services area.

In relation to transport infrastructure provision the Government's Transport Policy – Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future - A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020 encourages a renewed focus on the achievement of more compact settlement patterns with urban and rural areas, focusing especially on the development of locations within urban areas that are served by public transport. This, coupled with modal shift towards more sustainable forms of transport such as public transport, walking and cycling, provides for the most optimal use of investment in infrastructure.

Offaly, with 40% of its population living in dispersed rural areas, represents a significant challenge to the provision of public transport as it drives the necessity for private car use. In addition, 63% of the population of County Offaly travel to school or work by car. The aim of government's Smarter Travel policy is to reduce this figure from a national average of 65% of all journeys in 2006 to 45% in 2020.

Consolidation of existing development and promotion of new development around existing urban centres and its link to sustainable transport is fully supported in this development plan. Policies and Objectives relating to Sustainable Transport and Accessibility are largely contained in Chapter 4 of the plan. However, the premise of sustainable development and transport filters

through the plan starting from the settlement hierarchy which focuses on maximising existing infrastructural use in settlement areas in line with the Core Strategy, through to Chapter 8 Development Management Standards which seek to promote landuse and transportation integration where possible and practicable.

1.9.7 Midlands Gateway: Overall Approach by Offaly and Westmeath Local Authorities

Building on the National Spatial Strategy and Regional Planning Guidelines, Offaly and Westmeath Local Authorities are working together to maximise the development potential of the Midlands Gateway triangle.

Offaly and Westmeath Local Authorities are working together to ensure that the linked Gateway will have the critical mass of population, services and infrastructure, the complementary strengths and attractions and the dynamic leadership to compete with other gateways in Ireland.

The Local Authorities agree that one of the key challenges that the Midlands region faces is generating self sustaining as opposed to commuter led growth and that creating more self sustaining growth drawing from the potential and capabilities of the region will be achieved through:

- Building up a strong critical mass of population within the linked gateway triangle at the heart of the region with an aim to reach a combined population of 85,000 in the period to 2020 and beyond through a prudent and structured approach to development of county wide land banks.
- Harnessing the potential of the Midland Region's third level knowledge and innovation infrastructure, including development of linkages with other regions third level facilities and to the enterprise sectors,
- Assisting the move towards a highly productive and diversified economic base with strong representation from the value added sectors including innovative property solutions such as a Strategic Development Zone.

- Improving the physical infrastructure of the towns in the Gateway triangle in preparation for their accelerated development including better roads and public transport links between the towns that will place the Gateway and the region at the heart of the physical territory of the state.
- Conserving the natural and cultural heritage of the region, its constituent counties and the gateway towns in particular including where appropriate, integration with necessary new development in order to offer a high quality of life and a distinctive basis for tourism based enterprise.
- Ensuring that the development of the Gateway is effectively linked to other parts of the counties and the region overall through enhanced local transport and the complementary development of other towns, villages and rural areas.

To energise the promotion and development of the Midlands Gateway, Offaly and Westmeath Local Authorities commissioned a Strategic Development Framework for the Midlands Gateway whose publication in November 2006 represented a major step forward in collaboration between the Local Authorities.

Looking to the findings and conclusions of the framework and what is required to implement those conclusions, Offaly and Westmeath Local Authorities agree on three key implementation priorities for the Midlands Gateway:

- 1: The development of the Midlands Gateway will be driven forward by the relevant Local Authorities in a strategic and co-ordinated manner that clearly demonstrates vision, leadership and a regional perspective in vigorously implementing the concept. Specifically, the Local Authorities are establishing mechanisms to deliver such co-ordination through, for example, a joint Gateway Co-ordination Office to work within and between the various local authority structures, local stakeholders such as the private sector as well as Government Departments and Agencies.
- 2: Collaborative action in implementing the gateway concept will embrace a co-ordinated approach amongst the Local Authorities to key gateway issues such as the preparation of urban design frameworks

for each of the gateway towns as well as a co-ordinated approach to Housing and Retail Strategies and combined efforts to secure funding for iconic gateway projects such as the early delivery of major improvements to the roads and public transport connectivity within the Gateway triangle.

- 3: A visionary and joined up approach to gateway development by the Offaly and Westmeath Local Authorities will be complemented by effective linkages with relevant private sector and community interests.

Structures in the Midlands are in a state of change (March 2014), with local government reform meaning that the relevant urban authorities, two of which had planning responsibilities, have been abolished as of May 2014. Offaly and Westmeath County Councils will seek continuity in the promotion of the Linked Gateway.

Therefore in overall terms the approach of the Offaly and Westmeath Local Authorities in implementing the gateway concept will ensure that;

- There is strong local driver for the Gateway concept and,
- There is agreement on the key complementary policies for the Gateway towns in matters such as housing, commercial development, transport connectivity and the treatment of intervening areas and,
- There is effective partnership between the policies of the Local Authorities and the community and private sector interests so as to maximise investment potential.

Central funding will continue to be sought by the Chief Executives of Offaly and Westmeath for specific measures to release blockages in the development of strategic sites within the Gateway towns, for urban regeneration and consolidation projects on key sites in the three towns and enhanced connectivity improvements between the towns.

1.9.8 Monitoring and Management

With the adoption of specific population targets for each county, the monitoring of the extent of residential development is required to ensure that development occurs in a coherent, reasoned and evidenced based manner.

The delivery of all residential development will be carefully monitored during the lifetime of this plan.

The Planning Authority will have regard to the following⁴, where relevant, in determining the suitability of residential applications on appropriately zoned lands:

- **The Core Strategy Table** - Population and housing unit requirements for the remainder of the plan period - the Planning Authority will also consider whether the number of resultant units shall contribute to cumulatively exceeding the required amount of housing units and population for the county as allocated in the MRPGs.
- **Land use zoning.**
- **Progression of the following:**
 - a) The completion of developments which are ongoing.
 - b) Unzoned lands with planning permission.
 - c) New residential development proposals.
 - d) Existing development on lands adjacent.
 - e) Current no. of unoccupied units within the plan boundary, where information is available

As has been experienced in the previous plan period, development pressures have not been spread evenly throughout the county and some settlements are likely to experience more pressures than others throughout the lifetime of the plan. The planning authority has a responsibility to ensure that residential development in each settlement is proportionate to that settlement's location in the Settlement Hierarchy and is consistent with the population levels outlined in the Core Strategy Table. Consequently, extant permissions within the subject settlement will be a material consideration when assessing planning applications for residential development in all settlements in County Offaly.

⁴ Notwithstanding other planning and environmental considerations which normally apply in the assessment of development proposals.

1.10 Core Strategy Policy

CSP-01 It is Council policy to implement the Core Strategy for Offaly, as part of the overall County Development Plan, in order to be consistent with, and in accordance with, policies at a national level and regional level, in particular population targets and distribution.

CSP-02 It is Council policy that development will not be permitted where it conflicts with the Core Strategy.

CSP-03 It is Council policy to prioritise development in accordance with the settlement hierarchy identified in the Core Strategy and in the MRPGs.

CSP-04 Notwithstanding the amount of land made available for residential purposes to 2020, it is Council policy not to exceed, through the facilitation of residential development, the allocated housing land requirements set out in the Core Strategy.

CSP-05 It is Council policy to monitor and manage residential development in Offaly, in line with national and regional development objectives, through the Core Strategy in this plan and also through the development management process. In this regard, it is Council policy to co-operate with the Midland Regional Authority as part of the monitoring and review approach.

CSP-06 It is Council policy to ensure that land is used in the most efficient way possible and appropriately according to the area (settlement) in which it is located and that in particular development in urban areas maximises opportunities to reuse previously developed land.

CSP-07 Impact Assessments

It is Council policy to ensure full compliance with the requirements of the EU *Habitats Directive* (92/43/EEC), *SEA Directive* (2001/42/EC) and *EIA Directive* 2011/92/EU and associated legislation/regulations, including the associated *European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011* (SI No. 477 of 2011), *European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004-2011*, *Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004-2011* and the *European Communities (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 1989-2011* (or any updated/superseding legislation). Planning applications for proposed developments within the plan area that may give rise to likely significant effects on the environment may need to be accompanied by one or more of the following: an Environmental Impact Statement, an Ecological Impact Assessment Report, a Habitats Directive Appropriate Assessment Report or a Natura Impact Statement, as appropriate.

CSP-08 Natural Heritage, Landscape and Environment

It is the policy of Offaly County Council, to support the conservation and enhancement of natural heritage and biodiversity, including the protection of the integrity of European sites, the protection of Natural Heritage Areas and proposed Natural Heritage Areas and the promotion of the development of a green/ecological network within the Plan Area, in order to support ecological functioning and connectivity, create opportunities in suitable locations for active and passive recreation and to structure and provide visual relief from the built environment. The protection of natural heritage and biodiversity, including European sites, will be implemented in accordance with relevant EU environmental directives and applicable national legislation, policies, plans and guidelines, including the following (and any updated/superseding documents):

- EU Directives, including the *Habitats Directive* (92/43/EEC), the *Birds Directive* (2009/147/EC codified version of Directive), the *Environmental Impact Assessment Directive* (85/337/EEC), the *Water Framework Directive* (2000/60/EC) and the *Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive* (2001/42/EC).

- National legislation, including the Wildlife Act 1976, the European Communities (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 1989 (SI No. 349 of 1989) (as amended), the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000, the European Union (Water Policy) Regulations 2003 (as amended), the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477 of 2011).
- Catchment and water resource management plans, including the Shannon and Eastern River Basin District Management Plan 2009-2015.
- Biodiversity plans and guidelines, including Actions for Biodiversity 2011-2016 and Ireland's National Biodiversity Plan.

1.11 Core Strategy Objectives

CSO-01 It is an objective of the Council to seek to direct development in such a manner as is appropriate to achieve the overall aims of the Core Strategy.

CSO-02 It is an objective of the Council to zone an adequate amount of appropriately located lands within the settlement areas to accommodate the projected population growth as set out in the Core Strategy.

CSO-03 It is an objective of the Council to monitor and manage the delivery of residential development throughout the county during the plan period through the development management process.

CSO-04 It is an objective of the Council that all developments shall be in accordance with the policies as set out in the County Development Plan 2014-2020.

Settlement Strategy

1.12 Settlement Strategy Aim

To provide for sustainable population growth and to manage development pressure within both the urban and rural environment in accordance with the Core Strategy whilst promoting quality of life in achieving a balance between social, economic and environmental factors.

1.13 Purpose

The purpose of the settlement strategy is to direct the provision of population and new homes in the most sustainable manner within the defined framework of the Core Strategy. The settlement strategy stems from a sound evidence base that communities can develop in such a manner that they will be supported by quality local infrastructure and services, reduce the need to travel where possible and to enable local areas to support their population generally.

With the identification of projected population growth for County Offaly within the lifetime of this plan and the identification of the relevant tiers of the settlement hierarchy, housing land has been determined and allocated to deliver new homes for the growing population in each of the settlement areas. This land can be viewed in the Land use zoning maps in volume 2 of this plan in terms of its location and extent. The settlement strategy seeks to elaborate further on the role of each tier of the settlement hierarchy in an approach to manage future growth appropriately within the context of balanced development. Guidance is given to direct housing provision both in urban and rural areas and Housing to be delivered under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

1.14 Strategy

The settlement strategy directs and encourages:

- more sustainable patterns of development of high quality design which prioritises the re-use of existing developed areas,
- development on greenfield sites in a sequential manner

- and the location of new development close to readily available infrastructure, services, facilities and good public transport routes.

Settlement Hierarchy and Planning Principles for Development

The settlement hierarchy as set out in the Core Strategy provides an indication of the potential scale of population growth permissible over the lifetime of the plan and plays a key role in the appropriate delivery of population targets. The settlement strategy recognises the settlement hierarchy and the role of all towns, villages and the open countryside in the achievement of balanced growth in the county.

The settlement strategy is consistent with the Midland Regional Settlement Strategy as outlined in the MRPGs.

Table 1.5 describes the individual tiers of the settlement hierarchy and in particular the role that Offaly's Towns and Villages play in the achievement of balanced growth and planning principles in which future development must take cognisance of.

Table 1.5 Settlement Hierarchy and Planning Principles for development.

<p><i>Tier 1: Linked Gateway Town</i></p> <p>Tullamore</p>	<p>Tullamore with its population at 14,361 (as per Census 2011) is the largest settlement in County Offaly and provides for the majority of employment and sustains a large portion of the population of the county. At a regional level, Tullamore forms part of the Midland Linked Gateway with Athlone and Mullingar which has been identified as being a 'driver' for the Midlands Region by the NSS and the MRPGs. This unified role allows the region to compete for development, for people, for jobs and for services at a National, European and International level.</p> <p>Tullamore therefore, has two important roles to play for both county and Region. The Council will continue to stimulate growth in Tullamore in acknowledgement of its strategic role. Tullamore has been allocated the largest projected population growth in the Core Strategy in order to build an appropriate critical mass to enable a range of services and facilities to serve County Offaly and the Midlands Region.</p>
<p><i>Tier 2 Key Service Towns</i></p> <p>Birr, Edenderry & Portarlinton</p>	<p>The role of the Key Service Towns is to act as important drivers for local economies as these towns have a well established economic, administrative and social function. The location in particular of Birr, Edenderry and Portarlinton strengthen the settlement pattern across the county and also provide support to their immediate surrounding hinterland (including Local Service Towns, Villages, Sráids and the Open Countryside) as well as being self-sustaining. It is anticipated that the Key Service Towns will reinforce their role as key centres within the settlement hierarchy through the provision of employment opportunities, business, industry, education, tourism and infrastructure.</p>
<p><i>Tier 3 Service Towns</i></p> <p>Clara, Ferbane</p>	<p>Service Towns perform important retail, residential, service and amenity functions for their local catchment and rural hinterland. The development of these towns is aimed at consolidating growth and matching appropriate development to relevant supporting physical and social infrastructure.</p>
<p><i>Tier 4 Local Service Towns</i></p> <p>Banagher, Daingean, Kilcormac</p>	<p>Local Service Towns perform important local level residential, retailing, social and leisure functions and provide appropriate local services to a wider rural hinterland. Local enterprise is encouraged within this settlement tier and the location of industry where appropriate may also be considered. The success of Local Service Towns can be achieved by adequate zoning of lands, servicing and a facilitatory approach towards appropriately scaled and designed urban development.</p>

<p>Tier 5 Villages</p> <p>Belmont, Ballinagar, Ballycumber, Bracknagh, Cloghan, Clonbullogue, Cloneygowan, Coolderry, Crinkle, Geashill, Killeigh, Kinnitty, Mucklagh, Moneygall, Mountbolus, Pollagh / Lemanaghan, Riverstown Shannonbridge, Shannonharbour, Shinrone, Rahan, Rhode, Walsh Island.</p>	<p>The Villages in County Offaly are very attractive and rural in character. Many are apportionally scaled with well designed residential, commercial and community developments in keeping with the character of the village. A priority for villages is to retain community and social facilities and to encourage service provision. The prevailing scale and density of villages provide a viable opportunity for serviced sites as an alternative to rural housing. It is acknowledged that some villages require significant improvements in physical infrastructure to facilitate existing residential and commercial development. Residential development in villages should at all times be of appropriate scale and density. Villages include statutory zoning for a range of uses. Development in Village areas must strike a balance in meeting the needs and demands of the village or its rural hinterland and be sensitive and responsive to the existing prevailing pattern, scale, density and design of the village.</p>
<p>Tier 6 Sráids & Open Countryside</p> <p>Ballinamere, Ballyboy, Ballyfore, Blueball, Boher, Boora (Leabeg), Brosna, Cadamstown, Clareen, Clonfinlough, Croghan, Doon, Dunkerrin, Durrow, Fivealley, Garryhinch, Horseleap, High Street, Killina, Killurin, Killyon, Lusmagh, Rath, Roscomroe, Tober</p> <p>Open Countryside</p>	<p>Sráids are very small, embryonic rural settlements. Sráids have a loose gathering of existing development mainly housing but with some services. Sráids evolved as a measure to be implemented in order to act as an alternative to piecemeal development activity; to provide alternatives to rural houses in the countryside and also to address rural de-population and decline in certain areas, in particular within the identified traditional rural settlement network.</p> <p>Given the Sráids' existing and envisaged scale and size, development envelopes are delineated and no formal zoning has been applied. Residential and other development which is appropriate in scale and character of the Sráid concerned, and subject to servicing, amenity and environmental limitations, including the potential for interaction with European Sites, will be encouraged within the development envelope. Sráids are considered as being a sustainable form of development in the longer term, and will create a greater sense of place and community in these areas. They will help stabilise and consolidate population levels, in an orderly and sustainable fashion, within those rural areas which have experienced a decline. They will also act as a planning tool to ensure that small settlements which come under pressure for development do not become over-developed.</p> <p>The open countryside encompasses all lands located outside of the identified settlements. This Council recognises the need to sustain rural communities through the provision of housing coupled with the countryside's agricultural function and other rural landuses such as forestry, tourism and rural enterprise and development. The Council continues to facilitate local growth which sustains rural communities within Offaly whilst managing development pressures and protecting the countryside's scenic amenities and environment.</p>

1.15 Approach to Future Population Growth

Future population growth and residential development will be managed in accordance with the individual population targets set out for all settlement in the Core Strategy.

The Council will implement a 'Plan-Monitor-Manage' approach in ensuring compliance with national and regional policy and the population targets set out in the Core Strategy.

The focus will be to:

- Stimulate population growth in Tullamore in accordance with its identified role as part of the Midlands Linked Gateway so that it can form part of the driver of development for the region and County Offaly.
- To conserve, enhance and strengthen the town and village structure in the County.
- To inform decisions on the management of growth patterns in accordance with the Settlement Hierarchy.

The Council strongly encourages the development of brownfield and other available sites within the existing built-up areas in line with the sequential approach to development. In order to ensure that the best use of land is made, a minimum overall density of 35 residential units per ha will be expected in Tullamore Town and Environs and 12 units per ha in other settlement areas within the county. This is directed by the MRPGs and is an important factor in ensuring alignment with the prescribed population targets.

The settlement strategy also provides for an allocation of Offaly's growing population to rural areas including Sráid rural settlement areas and the open countryside. This ensures that the needs of the rural communities are acknowledged and to encourage development needed to sustain and renew rural communities.

1.15.1 Sequential Approach

For zoned lands where development will be considered in the lifetime of this plan, a sequential and co-ordinated approach will be applied for their development in order to achieve consolidation of the built environment, avoid haphazard or ad hoc developments and to ensure the economic use of services and infrastructure. This is essential to underpin the sustainable delivery of population and housing requirements over the plan period. The sequential approach relates to development taking place from the centre out, avoiding 'leapfrogging' of more appropriate lands and consolidating existing developed areas.

1.15.2 New Residential Development

Offaly County Council will normally permit residential development on residential zoned lands which are proposed for development up to 2020 (refer to the land use zoning maps for location of residential zoned lands in Volume 2). The Core Strategy Table, extant permissions and development completed to date will all be considered when assessing new planning applications for residential development, as well as the potential for the development to result in adverse environmental effects including likely significant effects to European sites.

Residential Design and Layout

Residential development design and layout will be informed by guidance set out in guidelines entitled, "Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (cities, towns and villages)" and its companion document Urban Design Manual (DoEHLG 2009) that provide a framework for best practice in urban design and illustrate how design principles can be translated into practice to promote the creation of sustainable communities. The aim of these guidelines is to ensure that all new residential development achieve high standards of design and urban design, appropriate densities according to location, and the appropriate functioning of buildings and places for people.

There will be an expectation that any new housing within County Offaly will be of a high standard of design, will contribute to a strong sense of place, environmental sustainability and provide wide choice of housing sizes, types and tenures.

1.15.3 Efficient Use of Land

The Planning Authority promotes strongly that development in urban areas maximises opportunities to reuse previously developed land (brownfield sites and infill sites) and further, to use land in the most efficient way possible and appropriately according to the area (settlement) in which it is located e.g. appropriate development and use of land within a village setting would be entirely different to that of land within the linked gateway town of Tullamore for many reasons but principally relating to the context, setting and character of the area. Land within all settlement areas will be encouraged to be used as efficiently and appropriately as possible in accordance with indicative densities, plot ratios, site coverage etc for the creation of a more compact urban form.

1.15.4 Developments that are Ongoing

There are a number of sites in County Offaly where planning permission has been granted and works have commenced. Developments vary in their scale and the level of completion. The Government has made a commitment to report annually on progress being made to unfinished residential developments as part of their priority to tackle problems associated with them until progress is made and issues are seen to be under control.

The satisfactory completion of these developments is essential to ensuring the delivery of sustainable, vibrant, serviced residential areas which are attractive and safe places to live in. The Council will seek to ensure that priority is given, in the first instance, to the satisfactory completion of these developments in order to achieve the following:

- As a means of ensuring that the amenities of existing residents and residents adjoining, are improved.
- The appropriate consolidation of partially developed residential areas within settlements across the county.
- To avoid a partially finished residential development remaining incomplete and potentially giving rise to social issues.

The Planning Authority is working with developers and relevant agencies to reach appropriate and satisfactory solutions in line with national policy and guidance on

addressing developments that are ongoing.

1.15.5 Extension of Appropriate Period for Planning Applications

Existing planning permissions which are still valid within the lifetime of this plan, shall only be considered for Extension-of-Time in accordance with the provisions of the Act. The principles of the Core Strategy shall be considered for any application under Section 42 of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 (as amended).

1.15.6 Housing in the Open Countryside

The settlement strategy recognises the tradition of rural living and the requirements of people connected with the rural area and/or with an identified need to reside in the open countryside.

The policy in relation to housing within the open countryside in Offaly is informed by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government's (DEHLGs) 'Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines' (2005), which provides that Planning Authorities distinguish between areas under strong urban influence, stronger rural areas and structurally weaker areas. The rural housing policy is specifically aimed at restricting what the guidelines refer to as 'urban generated housing' whilst prescribing that 'rural generated housing' which will be facilitated by way of policy throughout the county. Map 1.3 below indicates the breakdown in rural area types in County Offaly.

The map displays the geographical distribution of three area types within Offaly County Council. The legend indicates the following categories:

- Strong Rural Areas:** Represented by green shading, covering a significant portion of the western and southern parts of the county.
- Strong Urban Influence:** Represented by blue shading, primarily concentrated around the Kullamore and Thurles urban areas, as well as a small area near Birr.
- Structurally Weak Areas:** Represented by yellow shading, scattered throughout the county, often in more isolated or less developed rural locations.

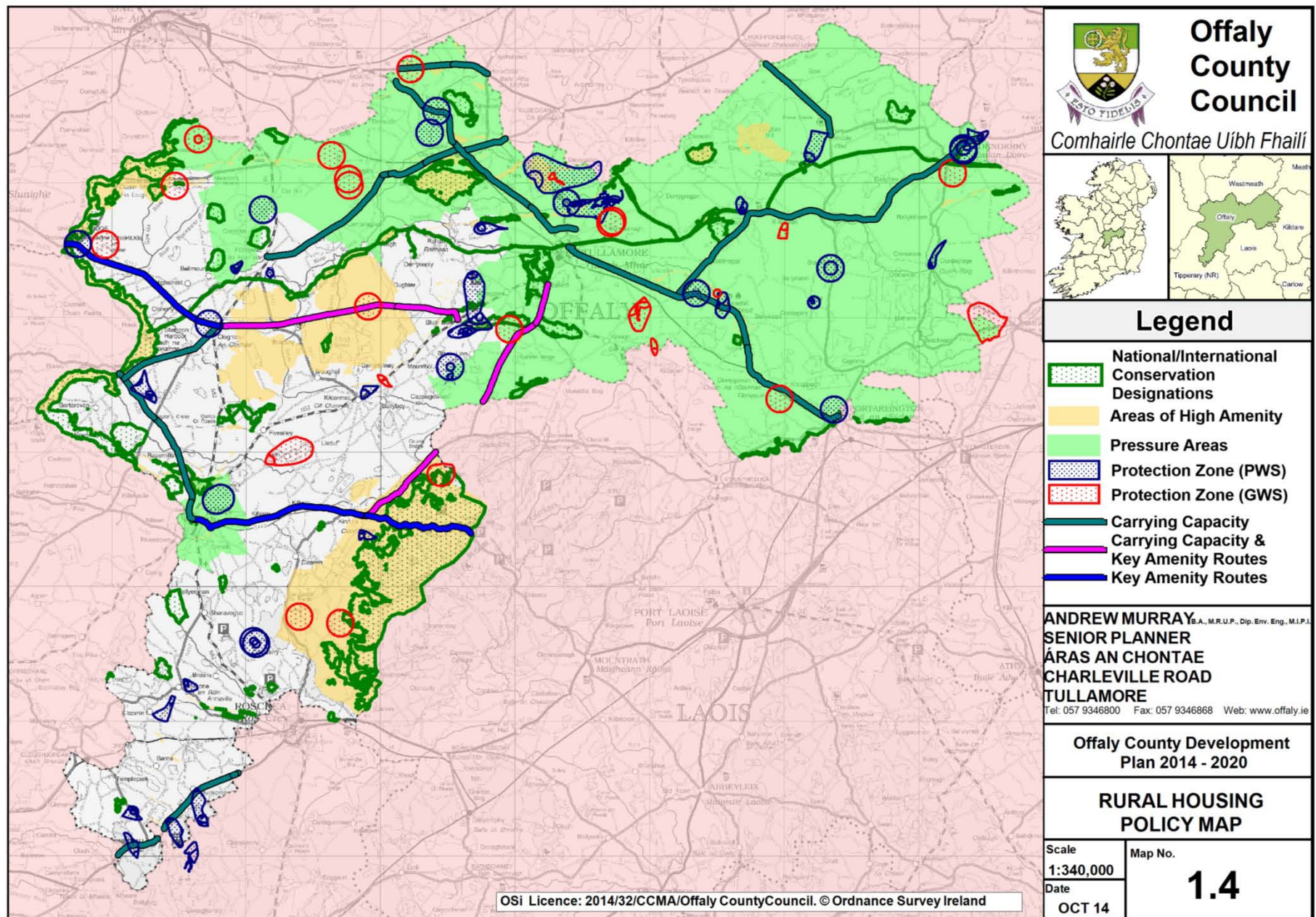
Geographical labels on the map include Kullamore, Thurles, Birr, Portlaoise, and various surrounding towns and regions like Kildare, Wicklow, and Dublin.

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Having regard to the need to protect County Offaly's natural resources, environment, landscape and infrastructure, areas of special control have been identified.

- Such areas warrant further consideration with respect to rural housing and so a more restrictive approach will be applied to rural housing in such areas.

Map 1.4 Rural Housing Policy Map (Refer to policies SSP-18, SSP-19 and SSP-20)



Ribbon Development and Rural Housing

Ribbon development will be assessed as a material consideration in all rural housing applications. Ribbon development requires a level of assessment for each rural housing application. A restrictive approach will be taken towards rural housing that contributes to or exacerbates ribbon development.

Ribbon development can be described as a line of buildings, served by individual accesses, extending along a road, without accompanying development of the land to the rear. Ribbon development does not necessarily have a continuous or uniform building line. Buildings sited back from a road, staggered or at angles to the road and with gaps between them can represent ribbon development or if they have a common frontage to the road and are visually linked when viewed from the road.

Rural housing will be assessed against the following criteria to determine if there is an issue with ribbon development:

- Number of houses located long the particular stretch of road
- What distance of road is fronted by existing rural housing.
- Number of access points to existing houses. This does not assume that intensifying the use of an existing access mitigates against ribbon development or overcomes the issue.
- Is the site a gap or infill site or is it considered to extend an existing ribbon of houses?
- Is there a design solution proposed to integrate building and mitigate against the visual impacts of ribbon development?

1.15.7 Smarter Travel – Providing for Sustainable Transport

Future population growth needs to be integrated with existing or the planned provision of transport infrastructure. Applications for residential developments should ensure that the principles of the Smarter Travel - A sustainable Transport Future – A new Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020 have been incorporated and provided for insofar as possible. To demonstrate the integration of the proposed residential landuse with transportation, the requirements of policy no. **SSP-07** must be addressed in planning applications to assist the Planning Authority in determining the sustainability of any such proposal.

1.16 Settlement Strategy Policies

Settlement Strategy

SSP-01 It is Council policy to ensure balanced growth and development across the county in accordance with the settlement hierarchy and to strategically prioritise the development of Tullamore as part of the Midlands Linked Gateway.

SSP-02 It is Council policy to monitor growth patterns and the pace of growth within individual settlements and ensure compliance with the population targets set out in the Core Strategy for all settlements in the settlement hierarchy.

SSP-03 It is Council policy that future residential development proposals shall be located in accordance with the provisions of the settlement hierarchy set out in the Core Strategy, and at a scale appropriate to the levels identified in the Core Strategy Table and the accompanying land use zoning maps.

Site identification should incorporate the following characteristics:

- Develop sequentially from the centre of existing settlements and maintain the existing pattern and character of settlements and;
- Make efficient use of existing and proposed infrastructure and;
- Integrate with the existing transport network to help reduce the overall need to travel and encourage the use of alternatives to the car.
- Respect environmental and landscape elements such as designated sites, watercourses, hedgerows, treelines and stone walls.

SSP-04 It is Council policy to encourage the provision of high quality residential design and layout in all settlement areas in accordance with the *Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas* and the accompanying *Urban Design Manual*, published by DoEHLG, 2009.

SSP-05 It is Council policy to encourage the provision of private serviced building sites, for example as part of housing developments within the county's settlements in order to strengthen the fabric of these settlements and to offer an element of choice. It is also Council policy to ensure that the size of such sites is adequate for appropriate levels of privacy and choice of house type and style.

SSP-06 It is Council policy to promote the integration of land use with transportation and to seek the most optimal location for new residential development with good accessibility to existing and planned transport infrastructure in accordance with the actions set out in Smarter Travel - A Sustainable Transport Future – A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020 (DoT 2009.)

SSP-07 It is Council policy to require applicants proposing large scale residential development i.e. over 50 residential units to provide a statement to assist the Planning Authority in assessing the sustainability of the proposal in the context of integrating land use with sustainable transport and avoiding deterioration of the natural environment. The statement must address the following:

- Assessment of proximity and access to existing public transport connections and safe routes for walking and cycling to access such connections and other local amenities.
- Integration of cycling and public transport.
- How the proposed development promotes new residential and mixed-use development to take place on brownfield/existing sites to consolidate urban growth and enable organic development of urban areas from the centre out.
- Ensures a general minimum housing density as advocated in the Core Strategy for urban areas of suitable size and population and higher densities where local circumstances warrant, particularly in high capacity public transport corridors.
- Addresses the specification of a maximum permitted level of car parking for commercial sites, which have suitable public transport facilities and are within walking/ cycling distance to amenities.

- The provision of a viable travel plans for larger developments.
- Incorporation of ways in which the development encourages a switch to more sustainable modes of travel.
- Provision of landscape treatment plan addressing protection and promotion of existing flora and fauna including hedgerows, native species, planting and appropriate leisure/ recreation amenity areas for the community.

Linked Gateway

SSP-08 It is Council policy to ensure that Tullamore can support the level of growth (socially and economically) to underpin its role as part of the 'Midland's Linked Gateway' and as a 'driver' of development in sustaining strong levels of economic growth and prosperity in the county and region as a whole.

Key Service Towns

SSP-09 It is Council policy to ensure that population growth of Key Service Towns, Birr, Edenderry and Portarlinton is appropriate in scale within their identified role in the settlement hierarchy and to apply appropriate management measures in ensuring that such growth and/or pace of growth is appropriate, sustainable and in compliance with the Core Strategy.

Service Towns

SSP-10 It is Council policy to ensure that population growth of the Service Towns Clara and Ferbane is appropriate in pace, scale and diversity of uses and services within its identified role in the settlement hierarchy. The Council will apply appropriate management measures as defined in this chapter and Chapter 8, in ensuring that such growth and/or pace of growth is appropriate and in compliance with the Core Strategy.

Local Service Towns

SSP-11 It is Council policy to conserve, enhance and strengthen the Local Service Towns within the county ensuring that the appropriate scale of growth is supported by sufficient physical and social infrastructure. Growth in these towns should be commensurate with their envisaged role.

Villages

SSP-12(a) It is Council policy to conserve, enhance, consolidate and strengthen villages within the county, in accordance with their existing size and character.

SSP-12(b) It is Council policy that expansion of villages will be in a planned and sustainable manner and in line with the population projections directed by the Core Strategy and the existing infrastructural capacity. Development may also be permitted where it will facilitate the provision of the necessary infrastructure provided that it is in accordance with policy, in particular concerning scale, siting, design and in accordance with the established character of the village.

SSP-12(c) It is Council policy to restrict single and/or multiple large scale developments which would lead to rapid completion of the village within the development boundary and in excess of the village's capacity to absorb development in terms of physical (i.e. water, wastewater, surface water, lighting, footpaths, access etc) and social infrastructure (i.e. schools, community facilities etc).

SSP-12(d) It is Council policy that there will be a presumption in favour of small developments of differing scale and character rather than larger, more homogenous urban scaled housing 'estates'. (For example 3 separately designed 10-house developments would generally be preferable to a single homogenous suburban style 30-house development). This approach would be more likely to create a sense of individualism and differing aspirations to each development. However, these smaller developments must not be solely "stand alone" developments. They must demonstrate how they fit in with and contribute to the overall development of the village (roadlines, services etc.) as indicated on the relevant plan. Where an individual landowner or a number of interests propose to combine and provide the necessary framework and infrastructure as an integral part of their proposals, and it is demonstrated that this is in line with the greater good of the area, and will not result in significant environmental effects, the Council would be prepared to examine such a proposal and consider it on its merit. Such a proposal may necessitate a 'master plan' for the landholding(s), clearly indicating potential development areas, obvious distinct character areas and vehicular, pedestrian, open space and services linkages to / through the remainder of the landholding or adjacent landholdings / developments.

SSP-12(e)	It is Council policy to ensure that development in villages will both reinforce existing village commercial centres and facilitate the expansion of or provision of new mixed-use and employment-generating development. Lands zoned as 'Local Employment/Services Lands' and in particular within the 'core' areas as indicated on the zoning plans will be considered favourably for such developments, subject to site suitability and normal planning requirements. This will bring variety and vitality to the settlements, providing a wider choice of services and will help to create a 'centre' with a greater sense of place.
SSP-12(f)	It is Council policy to require that applications for developments of 8 houses or more in Villages will be accompanied by a design statement, prepared by a suitably qualified professional. Such statements should indicate the reasons for choosing the design(s), the design cues from which ideas were taken and how it is considered that the design(s) chosen are compatible with their immediate environs. Regard should be had to the context and cues provided by the existing development and to the Council's policy to maintain attractive, appropriately scaled and well designed rural settlements.
SSP-12(g)	It is Council policy to ensure that developments have regard to and help to maintain and reinforce the form and character of the village concerned in terms of design, layout, finishing details, boundary make-up, landscaping etc. The resulting development shall be high in quality, appropriate in scale and designed in a style suitable for its location and context. In particular, roads which open up significant tracts of land relative to the existing size of the settlement should be assessed to ensure significant environmental effects to the environment are avoided and should be designed by suitably qualified professionals with strong Landscape Architecture and design input. Boundary treatments, footpaths and lighting should reflect the village's rural character.
SSP-12(h)	It is Council policy to ensure that developments, where possible, retain valuable man-made and natural heritage features within their boundaries or environs, and are designed in a manner which is sympathetic to the natural or heritage aspect concerned, (for example: attractive stands of trees, mature hedgerows, stone walls, protected structures, archaeological sites, street furniture, recorded monuments etc.).
SSP-12(i)	It is Council policy to promote the formation/consolidation of a central meeting place or similar open space within villages where practicable. It is also policy to facilitate by land identification, reservation of other means, the development of/extension of community facilities within villages.
SSP-12(j)	It is Council policy to monitor development activity within each village boundary to ensure that growth is completed in an orderly and sustainable manner.

Town/Village Brownfield Site

SSP-13 It is Council policy to encourage residential development within Town Centres and village cores which can take place on infill sites or brownfield sites.

Local Employment/Services Lands

SSP-14 It is Council policy that multiple housing developments i.e. two or more residential units, will not be considered on any land zoned as "Local Employment/Services Lands" in Villages. Proposals for single house development will still be considered on appropriate sites and multiple housing developments will be open for consideration but only within village cores areas as identified on the land use zoning maps.

Sráids

SSP-15(a) It is Council policy to promote the sustainable development of Sráids to assist in satisfying rural generated housing needs within a structured but low density settlement, as a viable **alternative** to the development of "one-off" houses in the open countryside, remote from services etc. It is also policy to promote Sráids as limited opportunities for housing for urban dwellers who would not satisfy "local need" criteria but who aspire to live in a rural environment.

SSP-15(b) It is Council policy not to permit developments which would lead to rapid completion of the Sráid development envelope i.e. in a period considerably short of the medium to long term time period envisaged, and in excess of the settlement's capacity to absorb development in terms of physical (i.e.

water, sewerage (if applicable), lighting, footpaths, access etc.) and social infrastructure (i.e. schools, community facilities etc.).

- SSP-15(c)** It is Council policy to facilitate the provision of appropriately scaled commercial development within the Sráids. This may include limited new mixed-use development, including employment generating development, childcare and other appropriate commercial development. This will bring variety and vitality to the settlement, providing a wider choice of services and assist in creating a 'centre' with a greater sense of place.
- SSP-15(d)** It is Council policy to monitor development activity and to encourage the sustainable, balanced development of the Sráids in an incremental and plan-led manner, with the emphasis on small scale developments over a medium to long term period, in keeping with the character of the settlement.
- SSP-15(e)** It is Council policy to provide an estimate of the possible / potential population capacity that each Sráid envelope may achieve in the medium to longer term.
- SSP-15(f)** It is Council policy to monitor development activity within each Sráid envelope to ensure that growth is completed in an orderly and sustainable manner and in keeping with the medium to long term timeframe envisaged. In particular, it is policy to ensure that the levels of housing development envisaged by the individual Sráid plans (which will be primarily single house development but with **limited** scope for small-scale multi-house developments) takes place in a balanced pattern throughout the Sráid over the plan period.
- SSP-15(g)** It is Council policy that there will be a general presumption against proposals of more than 4 units in any one application as such multi-house estate type developments would lead to "completion" of the Sráids at a faster rate than suggested, leading to premature overdevelopment. Larger scale development (i.e. >4 units) may be considered in exceptional circumstances but only if it can be demonstrated that: (a) it would add significantly to the area's sustainable development; (b) it is reflective of the character of the Sráid and envisaged growth rate; (c) it will be strictly phased by the developer. The Sráid plans contain a presumption in favour of the small scale and incremental development of Sráids and a presumption against urban scale and style housing schemes within these designated settlements.
- SSP-15(h)** It is Council policy that:
- (i) Most opportunities for residential development in Sráids will take the form of frontage / linear development and that sites will be a minimum of half an acre in size.
 - (ii) It shall further be the policy of the Council where in the limited cases that in-depth development is appropriate in a Sráid that houses shall be detached only and that densities shall not exceed a maximum of 3 to the acre. This maximum density shall be determined having regard to the area's character, density and to the residential amenity of proposed and existing development.
 - (iii) In circumstances where a street already exists or is appropriate and in the interests of protecting and enhancing the character of the Sráid, it may be appropriate to allow a street form.
- SSP-15(i)** It is Council policy to ensure that developments have regard to and help to maintain the form and character of the Sráid concerned. The resulting development shall be high in quality, appropriate in scale and designed in a style suitable for its location and context. In particular,
- a) Proposed new access roads through previously undeveloped lands should be designed to create a 'rural' rather than an 'urban' impression. Roads which open up significant tracts of land relative to the existing size of the settlement should be designed by a suitably qualified professional with strong Landscape Architecture and design input.
 - b) Boundary treatments, footpaths and lighting should reflect the rural character of the Sráid.
 - c) Where a Sráid (or part of) is characterised by interesting building layouts, plans and designs, these should be retained and complimented, rather than replacement with more 'standardised' development styles to ensure a varied character is maintained and to avoid typically suburban standardised developments.
- SSP-15(j)** It is Council policy to require that applications for developments of 2 houses or more within Sráids will be accompanied by a Design Statement, prepared by a suitably qualified professional. Such statements

should indicate the reasons for choosing the design(s), the design cues from which ideas were taken and how it is considered that the design(s) chosen is/are compatible with their immediate environs. Regard should be had to the context and cues provided by the existing development, and to the Council's policy to create attractive, appropriately scaled and well designed rural settlements.

SSP-15(k) It is Council policy to ensure that developments within Sráids, where possible, retain valuable man-made and natural heritage features within their boundaries or environs, and are designed in a manner which is sympathetic to the natural or heritage aspect concerned (for example; attractive stands of trees, mature hedgerows, stone walls, protected structures, recorded monuments etc.).

SSP-15(l) It is Council policy to promote the formation/consolidation of a central meeting place or similar open space within Sráids where practicable. It is also policy to facilitate by land identification, reservation of other means, the development of/extension of community facilities within Sráids.

SSP-16 It is Council policy to closely monitor growth and pressure for growth and to implement appropriate management measures in controlling development in Sráids.

Rural Housing in the Open Countryside

Rural Housing Design

SSP-17 It is Council policy to encourage and promote quality design, appropriate scale, form, informed siting, quality materials and finishes and to incorporate where possible and practicable, the best principles and mechanisms for sustainability and energy efficiency.

In addition, it is also Council policy to ensure that, notwithstanding compliance with the local need criteria, applicants comply with all other normal siting and design considerations including the following:

- The protection of features that contribute to local attractiveness including; landscape features, historic and archaeological landscapes, water bodies, ridges, skylines, topographical features, geological features and important views and prospects.
- The capacity of the area to absorb further development. In particular, the following factors will be examined; the extent of existing ribbon development in the area, the degree of existing haphazard or piecemeal development in the area and the degree of development on a single original landholding.
- The ability to provide safe vehicular access to the site.
- The ability of a site in an unserved area to accommodate an on-site waste water disposal system in accordance with the EPA Code of Practice for Wastewater Treatment Systems for Single Houses (2009), Source Protection Plans within the county, and any other relevant documents /legislation as may be introduced during the Plan period.
- The need to comply with the requirements of The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities published by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in November 2009.

Rural Housing Policy – Local Need

SSP-18 It is Council policy that within areas of the open countryside identified as a pressure area in Map 1.4: a positive presumption will be given towards a new single house for the permanent occupation of an applicant who falls within one or more of the 3 categories below and meets the necessary criteria.

Category 1: Local Rural Persons (a), (b) and (c)

The following 3 criteria arise in assessing applicants under this category:

The applicant must come within the definition of a 'Local Rural Person' **and** the proposed site must be situated within their 'Local Rural Area' **and** the applicant must have a 'Local Rural Housing Need'

- a) A 'Local Rural Person' (applicant) is a person who was born within the local rural area, **or** who is living or has lived in the local rural area for a minimum of **5 years** at any stage prior to making the planning application. It includes returning emigrants seeking a permanent home in their local rural area.

- b) The 'Local Rural Area' for the purpose of this policy is defined as the area generally within a **8km** radius of where the applicant was born, living or has lived. *The rural area excludes all urban settlements contained within Tiers 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the settlement hierarchy).*
- c) An applicant who satisfies a 'Local Rural Housing Need' is defined as a person who does not or has not ever owned a house in a rural area and has the need for a permanent dwelling for their own use.

Category 2: Persons Working Fulltime or Part-time in Rural Areas (a) or (b)

Such persons shall be defined as persons who by the nature of their work have a functional need to reside permanently in the rural area generally immediately adjacent to their place of work. Such circumstances will normally encompass persons involved in full-time farming, horticulture or forestry as well as similar part-time occupations where it can be demonstrated that it is the predominant occupation. Other cases will be dealt with on their own individual merits having regard to the intended spirit of the policy. In each case the applicant must not already own or have owned a house in the rural area.

Category 3: Exceptional Health Circumstances

Having regard to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government's 'Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines' (2005), special consideration shall be given in limited cases of exceptional health circumstances - supported by relevant documentation from a registered medical practitioner and a disability organisation proving that a person requires to live in a particular environment or close to family support, or requires a close family member to live in close proximity to that person.

Policy: Rural Housing Policy for Areas of Special Control

SSP – 19 Having regard to the need to protect County Offaly's natural resources, environment, landscape and infrastructure, it is Council policy to consider a single dwelling for the permanent occupation of an applicant in Areas of Special Control where **all** of the following can be demonstrated:

1. Applicant must meet the criteria of one or more of the 3 categories of Policy SSP - 18 (Rural Housing Policy) and,
2. Applicant has a functional need to reside in this particular rural area,
3. Adequate measures are proposed which will ensure protection of the drinking water source from any deleterious effects of the development (source protection zones).
4. No alternative site is available outside the areas of special control and,
5. Applicant does not already own or has owned a house in a rural area.

Areas of special control include (Refer to Map 1.4):

- **National/International Conservation Designations (SPA, SACs, NHAs).**
- **Areas of High Amenity.**
- **Source Protection Zones.**
- **Restricted Regional Roads (as per list set out in Chapter 4).**

'Functional need' is defined as a need to reside at this particular location in exceptional circumstances to be outlined by the applicant or for the purposes of employment.

Policy: For Rural Housing in areas not under Rural Housing Development Pressure or within Areas of Special Control:

SSP – 20 It is Council policy that within areas of the open countryside identified as being:

- NOT under Rural Housing Development Pressure (refer to Map 1.4), or
- NOT in an Area of Special Control (refer to Map 1.4 and SSP – 19),

There will be a presumption in favour of applications for single houses by persons from within or outside these rural areas who seek a permanent dwelling and will therefore contribute to the social and economic well being of the area. It is the policy of the Planning Authority to prohibit speculative development in these areas. Any application for a single permanent dwelling must be made in the name of the person for whom it is intended and a condition will be attached to any permission granted requiring them to occupy the house in the first instance.

Policy: Replacement of Habitable Houses in the Open Countryside

SSP-21 In the case of the proposed demolition of a habitable dwelling and its replacement with a new single dwelling, it is Council policy to favourably consider proposals subject to normal environmental, siting, design and layout considerations. In such circumstances, applicants will not be required to comply with local need criteria as set out in Rural Housing-Local Need Policy SSP - 18 and Rural Housing Policy for Areas of Special Control – SSP - 19.

Planning permission will be considered for a replacement dwelling when the building to be replaced is a dwelling house fulfilling the following criteria:

Existing dwelling house must:

- Exhibit all the essential characteristics of a dwelling house;
- Be in use, or have last been used, as a dwelling house. This use must not have been abandoned or changed from another use, without previous planning permission;
- Be occupied or be capable of occupation with minor renovation.

There may be instances where an existing dwelling, which fulfils the replacement criteria, should not be replaced for good planning reasons such as the dwelling or parts of the dwelling are of special, architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest.

The siting of a replacement dwelling should be within the same curtilage as the existing building, to take advantage of any natural features or mature planting and to reduce the visual impact of new larger dwellings. The siting and design of the total new development should not create a visual impact significantly greater than the existing building, in order that it is satisfactorily integrated into the landscape. The assurance of substantial landscaping, as a means to reduce the impact of a prominent and overly dominant dwelling in the longer term, will not be considered an acceptable design solution.

Policy: Reuse of Existing Structures as Dwellings in the Open Countryside

SSP – 22 It is Council policy to favourably consider all applications (i.e. 'Local Need' requirement will not apply) for the refurbishment and/or reuse of older building stock subject to the following criteria;

- The reuse will normally only be considered appropriate where the structure is an important element in the landscape or of local architectural merit or historic interest.
- The external walls and roof are substantially intact.
- The design of the proposal does not erode the siting and design qualities of the building which makes it attractive in the first instance.
- The size of any extension takes account of the siting and size of the existing building.
- The design, scale and materials used in the refurbishment and/or extension are in keeping and sympathetic with the existing structure.
- Mature landscape features are retained and enhanced, as appropriate.
- That normal planning considerations i.e. road safety, amenities, public health, design etc. shall take precedence over the 'principle' of encouraging such development.

Policy: Refurbishment of Derelict Dwellings in the Open Countryside

SSP-23 It is Council policy to encourage the sensitive refurbishment of existing derelict dwelling houses which have fallen derelict provided that the refurbishment provides for quality design, scale, form, material and finishes and does not detract negatively from the original character of the derelict of the dwelling.

The existing derelict dwelling house must:

- Exhibit all the essential characteristics of a dwelling house;
- Be in use, or have last been used, as a dwelling house.

Policy: Replacement of Derelict Dwellings in the Open Countryside

SSP-24 It is Council policy to consider the proposals for the replacement of derelict dwellings in the open countryside subject to normal planning considerations. In such circumstances, applicants will not be required to comply with local need criteria as set out in Rural Housing-Local Need Policy SSP - 18 and Rural Housing Policy for Areas of Special Control – SSP - 19. Planning permission will be considered for a replacement dwelling when the derelict

building to be replaced is a dwelling house which exhibits all the essential characteristics of a dwelling house.

There may be instances where an existing derelict dwelling, which fulfils the replacement criteria, should not be replaced for good planning reasons such as the dwelling or parts of the dwelling are of special, architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest, or the structure in question was inappropriately sited in the first instance; e.g. located in an area at flood risk or located in area which would result in public health or traffic hazard issues.

The siting of a replacement dwelling should be within the same curtilage as the existing building, to take advantage of any natural features or mature planting and to reduce the visual impact of new larger dwellings. The siting and design of the total new development should not create a visual impact significantly greater than the existing building, in order that it is satisfactorily integrated into the landscape. The assurance of substantial landscaping, as a means to reduce the impact of a prominent and overly dominant dwelling in the longer term, will not be considered an acceptable design solution.

1.17 Part V Housing Strategy

The Planning and Development Acts 2000 (as amended) require each Local Authority to adopt a Housing Strategy for their administrative area. Further, the Housing Acts 1966 – 2009 and the 2011 Housing Policy Statement serve as a framework for a sequence of legislative and policy initiatives in the short to medium term. Based on a number of fundamental principles and goals that will form the foundation of a substantial reform programme, the new framework of housing policy responds to current and emerging conditions in the housing sector, taking account of the dramatic cycle of rapid growth and sudden collapse in the residential property market. The centre piece of the approach is to chart a way forward for housing policy in Ireland by placing greater emphasis on: choice; equity across housing tenures; and delivering quality outcomes for the resources invested. A summary of the measures outlined include:

- More equitable treatment of housing tenure.
- Transfer of responsibility for long term recipients of rent supplement to local authority housing.
- New mechanisms for the delivery of permanent social housing.
- All affordable housing schemes stood down.
- Formal review of Part V.
- Housing Strategy for People with Disabilities.

Offaly County Council seeks to meet individual accommodation needs in a manner that facilitates and empowers personal choice and autonomy in a rapidly changing environment.

1.18 Future Part V Housing Development

The Core Strategy sets out the framework for future housing development in Offaly. Part V housing refers to social and affordable housing provided in accordance with Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and is provided for as an integral part of the housing allocations prescribed for each of the settlement areas. The Core Strategy provides that through its projected population growth and alignment

to appropriately zoned lands there are adequate lands zoned to provide for housing needs for Part V within the county over the plan period (2014-2020).

From a landuse and settlement structure perspective future housing development highlights three core challenges and priorities and these include the need to:

- Fully support and promote population growth and development of Tullamore as part of the Midlands Linked Gateway, in order for Tullamore and all of County Offaly to attract people, jobs and services to compete on a National and International stage.
- Conserve, enhance and strengthen the town and village structure within the county.
- Re-balance growth patterns in accordance with the Settlement Hierarchy.

Delivery of Part V housing must adhere to achieving these strategic priorities.

1.19 Part V Provision

As per the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), the options open to negotiate between the Council and a developer for a 'Part V' agreement for the provision of Part V housing includes the following:

1. Transfer of part of land subject of planning application.
2. Building and transfer on completion of houses on land subject of planning permission.
3. Transfer of fully or partially serviced sites on land subject to application for permission.
4. Transfer of the ownership of any other land within function area of Planning Authority.
5. Building and transfer on completion of houses on other land within functional area of Planning Authority.
6. Transfer of fully or partially serviced sites on other land within functional area of Planning Authority.
7. Payment of Money.
8. Rental accommodation agreement or leasing of houses agreement.
9. Combination of transfer of land subject to the conditions of planning application and any other option above.
10. Combination of two or more options.

A 'Part V' agreement may provide for a combination of any of the above. The preferred option of Offaly County Council is Option 7. However, each proposal will be considered and assessed based on individual merit, in line with Council policy as contained in 'Offaly County Council, Guidelines for the Implementation of Part V of Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)', adopted in 2003 and revised in 2009 and government policy.

Developers are advised to consult with the Housing Section of Offaly County Council at an early stage in order to obtain up-to-date information on options in light of changing circumstances and policy.

20% of all lands zoned for residential use, or a mixture of residential and other uses, shall be reserved for Social

Housing and all residential developments should ensure that a range of house sizes and types are provided in schemes.

1.20 Application for 'Part V' Exemption Certificate

In accordance with the Planning and Development Acts 2000 (as amended), an exemption from 'Part V' requirements may be sought from the Council in the case of small housing developments i.e. those of four or fewer houses, or on land of 0.1 hectares or less. This may be subject to conditions, where necessary.

1.21 Special Needs Accommodation

The Council continues to address particular identified needs through the provision of purpose built, adaptable dwellings, where feasible. This includes provisions for the needs of the elderly, persons with physical disabilities and persons with learning disabilities.

1.22 Traveller Accommodation Needs

Offaly County Council recognises the needs of the Travelling Community within the county. These are addressed and delivered within the context of an adopted Traveller Accommodation Programme 2014-2018, subject to funding. This Programme states that to meet the accommodation needs of the Travelling Community within the county, a range of accommodation options will be consider including: -

- Standard Local Authority Housing.
- Group Housing Schemes.
- Halting Sites – Permanent, Temporary, and Transient.
- Single House Purchase.
- House Purchase Loans.
- Voluntary Housing Scheme.

In accordance with the traveller accommodation options, the Council will continue to take a flexible approach to the location of accommodation for Travellers.

Offaly County Council will adhere to the provisions of the Traveller Accommodation Programme required to be undertaken in accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998.

1.23 Homelessness

The Council continues to provide an important role alongside voluntary groups and other agencies in the provision of emergency accommodation for the homeless and for those in need of crisis facilities. A new 6 bed facility was opened in Tullamore in 2012 operated in partnership by Midlands Simon, Tullamore Housing Association and Offaly County Council. A Homeless Implementation Plan agreed by the Midlands Regional Joint Homeless Consultative Forum and Offaly County Council in 2012 gives effect to an Action Plan adopted in 2010. Homeless Action Plans determine the configuration of homeless services and any need for re-configuration of existing services, provide a decision template for any proposals relating to homeless services and inform decisions in relation to funding allocations for homeless services. The Implementation Plan will guide service delivery and implementation of homeless services in Offaly over the period 2013 to 2016.

1.24 Part V Housing Strategy Policies

Reservation of Lands for the Provision of Social Housing

- HS-01** It is Council policy, as required under Section 95 of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 (as amended), that 20% of all land zoned for residential use and/or for a mixture of residential and other uses, (subject to preferred options as determined in Offaly County Council, Guidelines for the Implementation of Part V of Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) shall be reserved for the provision of housing for the purposes of Housing for persons referred to in Section 19 (2) (a) of the Housing Act 2009
- HS-02** It is Council policy to promote social inclusion by ensuring that social housing is of good quality design and layout, appropriately located with access to public transport services and community facilities where possible and is distributed throughout all residential developments and locations.
- HS-03** It is Council policy to allow for revisions should the Housing Strategy be reviewed or if Planning Legislation (notably 'Part V') is amended during the lifetime of plan.
- HS-04** It is Council policy to ensure the delivery of the Part V Housing Strategy by ensuring sufficient lands within the county are zoned in accordance with its settlement hierarchy.
- HS-05** It is Council policy that where considering development and/or acquisition of social and traveller specific housing the Council will have full regard to:
- The policies contained in the County Development Plan and any other relevant action plans.
 - The County's Settlement Strategy.
 - The policies contained in the Councils' Social Housing Investment Programme and Traveller Accommodation Programme.
 - The need for social integration.
 - The need to ensure the overall coherence of the development.

Social Housing

- HS-06** It is Council policy to provide social houses through a combination of mechanisms including, subject to funding, direct build, 'Part V', turnkey developments and the acquisition of second-hand housing in accordance within the County's settlement hierarchy to meet identified needs. Social housing units will be allocated on the basis of the Council's adopted Scheme of Letting Priorities 2011.
- HS-07** It is Council policy to appropriately manage the provision of social housing provided by the Council within the county.

House Types and Sizes

- HS-08** It is Council policy to ensure that an appropriate mix of house types and sizes are provided in each residential development. House designs and layout should reflect the requirements of different categories of households within the county – particularly those needs and requirements of elderly persons and persons with disabilities coupled with continuing trends in changing demographics (i.e. decreasing household size). This will be considered in relation to each settlement tier within the county's settlement hierarchy.

Homeless People

- HS-09** It is Council policy to actively promote integrated solutions to address the issue of homelessness within the county. The Council will continue to work in partnership with the statutory and voluntary agencies on the Midlands Regional Joint Homeless Consultative Forum and Offaly's Homeless Action Team to address the accommodation needs of homeless persons in a targeted and focussed manner, using an inter-agency approach. In particular, the

Council will support the ongoing provision of emergency accommodation in Tullamore in partnership with Midlands Simon.

Travellers

HS-10 It is Council policy to respect the distinctive culture of the Travelling Community and assist in the process of integration with the settled community.

HS-11 It is Council policy to provide a good and well-managed living environment for the Travelling Community including recommended standards of accommodation, sanitary facilities, and pre-school education facilities, where feasible and on sites approved by the relevant housing authority only.

1.25 Part V Housing Strategy Objectives⁵

HSO-01 It is an objective of the Council to secure the implementation of the Part V Housing Strategy of this plan including the proper implementation of its policies and objectives, in particular, through the reservation of 20% of all land zoned solely for residential use, or for a mixture of residential or other uses, to be made available for the provision of social housing referred to in Section 94(4)(a) of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 (as amended) subject to preferred options as determined in Offaly County Council, Guidelines for the Implementation of Part V of Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

House Types and Sizes

HSO-02 It is an objective of the Council to ensure that an appropriate mix of house types and sizes are provided in each residential development as part of 'Part V' proposals, where feasible.

Proposed Accommodation for the Travelling Community

HSO-03 It is an objective of the Council to provide adequate accommodation for Travellers in accordance with the Council's Traveller Accommodation Programme for County Offaly. Further it is an objective of the Council to take a flexible approach to the location of this accommodation for Travellers.

Purpose Built Dwellings

HSO-04 It is an objective of the Council to provide purpose built dwellings for those with special needs, including provisions for the needs of the elderly, persons with physical disabilities and persons with learning disabilities where feasible and in conjunction with other voluntary bodies and the private sector.

⁵ The order of listing of objectives is not intended to indicate priorities. Subject to the availability of resources, it is the Council's aim to monitor and accomplish the objectives listed in this section within the period of the plan.

Chapter 2: Economic and Enterprise Strategy

2.1 Aim

That Offaly County Council, within its capacity, will positively contribute towards the promotion of the maintenance and growth of employment across every sector in County Offaly so that the people of Offaly will have access to a range of quality employment opportunities enabling them to live and work in the county, if they so choose.

2.2 Context

The strategy is prepared in the context of the following documents:

- National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020,
- Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines (MRPGs) (2010),
- Putting People First
- National Recovery Plan 2011-2014
- Action Plan for Jobs 2013

This chapter sets out the employment and enterprise strategy and policies from a planning and economic development perspective for County Offaly over the plan period. The years preceding this development plan saw significant job losses in the County, particularly in the manufacturing and construction sectors.¹ This Development Plan prepares for recovery and return to growth in employment.

The document Putting People First outlines how Local government and the development plan have an enhanced role in the promotion of economic development and enterprise. Offaly County Council will embrace any new responsibilities it has in this regard and this dedicated strategy is part of that enhance role.

¹ Source CSO 2011: The number of people employed in Offaly in Manufacturing was 5,091 in 2006 and dropped to 3,661 in 2011 and Construction fell from 4,428 in 2006 to 1,620 in 2011.

The MRPGs include targeted population projections for the county and focus on employment in the Midlands Gateway, including Tullamore, promoting a strong rural economy and increased productivity and competitiveness in the region. Given that this Development Plan period 2014-2020 is intended to be one of economic recovery, provisions should be made to provide for and encourage an increase in employment activity in the county.

The Council acknowledges and supports the role of employment / investment promotion agencies within the county which include, IDA, Enterprise Ireland, FÁS/Solas, and the County Enterprise Board. The County Development Board (CDB) plays an important role as an agency co-ordinator for the county. The Council also administers the Local Enterprise Office (LEO) which will provide an important support to growing local businesses.

2.3 Strategy

Offaly County Council recognises that it has a role in coordinating and facilitating a competitive environment that maintains existing employment and supports employment growth. This Development Plan is part of this role. The Council will prepare and adapt to the changing landscape of employment agencies throughout the plan period and continue to co-operate with and support the relevant employment agencies that can do most to promote the economic growth of the county. The Council must take a multi-faceted and dynamic approach in its strategy to promote and encourage employment, recognising the challenges that are outside of its control while also being mindful that each section of the Council has both direct and indirect influence in employment creation on a daily basis.

Offaly County Council's Sphere of Influence in Employment

Ensuring Availability of Zoned Land

The Council has adequate levels of zoned land available at strategic locations throughout the county, which will provide for the future economic growth of the county in a plan-led and sustainable manner.

Maintenance and Investment in Infrastructure

Investment in infrastructure is paramount for the facilitation of future economic development activity within the county. This includes facilitating, providing and upgrading the following in particular;

Transportation: Road, Rail, Cycling, Walking - Increasing accessibility to airports/ ports/other regions (including other economic growth areas/residential areas).

Water Services: Water Supply, Wastewater Treatment Infrastructure. (Working with Irish Water and implementing Service Level Agreements)

Energy: Electricity, Gas Supply Infrastructure.

Telecommunications: Broadband, Mobile Phone/Telephone Infrastructure.

Waste Management.

Enhancing the Quality of Life of the People who live in Offaly

Making Offaly an attractive place to live will encourage potential investors to commit to the county as they know that employees will want to live and stay here. This wide ranging role includes ensuring the provision and maintenance of:

- Quality urban spaces and vibrant town and village centres,
- Public amenities including walkways, parks and playgrounds,
- Public services including libraries,
- Heritage sites.

The Arts Office in County Offaly works to support a vibrant and diverse culture of the creation and enjoyment of art, drama, literature and music in the county. The Council's Environment Section work with schools with environmental education initiatives and the Community and Enterprise section continuously coordinate and support community and sporting groups.

Facilitator and Promoter

Offaly County Council in partnership with the County Development Board and through the operation of its Local Enterprise Offices provides a **co-ordinating** role for all development agencies and is a **facilitator** for local employment initiatives. Offaly County Council will continue to **promote** the economic opportunities within the county. The Council will continue to produce and circulate promotional material that showcases the advantages of investing in the county and ensure that members of staff recognise their ambassadorial role in presenting the prospects of investing in Offaly.

Offaly County Council currently has a dedicated Economic Development Officer and operates the Local Enterprise Office and has provided direct financial assistance, employment programmes and initiatives that aim to support and promote employment in the county. The Council will continue in its efforts to foster and grow a culture of entrepreneurship throughout the lifetime of the plan.

However, the Council recognise that the biggest influence that it can have in the promotion and growth of the economy of County Offaly is contained within the policies and objectives of the other strategies included in this plan. The Council can have its biggest influence in attracting people to live and invest in County Offaly through taking action to ensure quality of life for the people living in the county, to ensure sustainable and efficient development throughout the county and creating and maintaining attractive towns, villages and open countryside. The reliable and efficient

provision of water, wastewater and roads infrastructure are critical considerations for potential investors and this plan includes policies and objectives accordingly.

The Council recognises that potential investors in County Offaly want to make sure that they can attract employees with relevant skills who will want to work and stay in the local area and that these decisions are influenced by such factors as the availability of recreational amenities, good transport links, local schools and attractive town centres.

The Council will strive to ensure that Offaly is an attractive place to live and to visit. By making Offaly a place where people want to be, employment opportunities will follow.

2.3.1 Sector-focused Approach

The Council recognise the value of existing employers in the County and will encourage and facilitate the maintenance of existing employment in the County. This will be achieved through facilitating a healthy environment for business networking and promotion and through the considered application of planning policies. The Council will also seek to promote new employment opportunities in traditional and emerging sectors.

Start-Ups

Through consultation with the employment agencies it is clear that many new employment creation opportunities are with start-up companies – particularly in the technology sector. These companies are not necessarily land-use intensive and Offaly County Council consider that there is sufficient floorspace and attractive premises within our town centres that can accommodate this type of business. Where the Council can be pro-active in encouraging such start ups is ensuring that our urban centres are healthy and vibrant and that that telecommunication infrastructure providers continue to invest in broadband throughout Offaly. Incubation units for new businesses are already a feature of our urban centres in County Offaly and the Council will work with the relevant employment agencies to ensure that appropriate business education and networking programmes are put in place to increase the support and opportunities for these new businesses in their early years and as they grow.

Foreign-Direct Investment

Opportunities to attract foreign direct investment will arise from time to time and the Council recognise the importance of ensuring that there are adequate available serviced lands throughout the county that would attract and maintain such investment. In Offaly there are a number of state-supported companies already and it is Council policy to recognise the importance of these companies and acknowledge that their presence and experience in the county is crucial in attracting similar large-scale employers in the future. In the settlements throughout Offaly there are serviced sites suitable for large-scale employers, there are turn-key, refit and greenfield sites available for prospective developers. Offaly County Council maintain a database of suitable sites and will engage with employment agencies and potential investors in order identify sites for particular investment.

Financial Services

The financial services sector is a growing employer in the County, and it presents a significant opportunity for growth in the plan period. The Council will facilitate this development and there will be an emphasis on this type of business setting up in appropriate sites, within existing town centres where possible.

Public Sector

The public sector, including health and education, is a big employer in County Offaly. The Council will seek to facilitate further government investment in the County and will work with the relevant departments as required.

Agriculture and Food

The agriculture sector is a significant source of economic activity throughout the county, it contributes to exports, provides the raw materials for the food processing industry and has potential for providing more added value in the artisan food sector. It is Council policy to capitalise on the potential for the growth in food processing in the county.

SME – Small to Medium Enterprises

According to the Department of Finance in 2013 small to medium enterprises make up nearly 99% of the businesses in Ireland and account for almost 70% of people employed in the State. Offaly also boasts an array of indigenous companies that have set up and successfully export high quality services and products. The SME sector is thriving in Offaly with a high quality

transport network and ease of distribution and access to markets. This business environment is fostered through a close working relationship with business through the Local Chambers of Commerce. This potential for growth in this sector includes existing industry in the County and new opportunities that will arise over the lifetime of this plan. The Council recognises the potential in this sector and will facilitate potential investors where feasible.

Digital and E-commerce

With expanded and improved communications infrastructure, over the lifetime of the plan opportunities will be created relating to web development, online education and other internet technologies. Existing and new businesses will also seek to reach a wider audience through online-retail and expanding their web-presence. Offaly County Council will facilitate and encourage the expansion of e-commerce businesses based in the County and particularly encourage a cluster of e-commerce development operating within the designated settlements, where opportunity arises.

2.3.2 Peatlands

The Council recognises the importance of cutaway bog as a major natural and archaeological resource and also its critical role in employment provision in the county. The development of the county's peat resources will be promoted and facilitated. The Council also recognises the potential for the utilisation of protected peatland areas for tourist, amenity, educational and research purposes. Bord na Móna is the largest single landowner in County Offaly and owns approximately 27,650ha of land within the county.

The term 'cutaway' is used to describe the land area left after the major portion of the original peat deposit has been removed or exploited for fuel. This cutaway now presents an opportunity for alternative uses.

Cutaway bogs have potential landuses that can enhance both the employment and tourism sectors of the county as well as providing a potential habitat as much of the area will return to wilderness and contribute to the green infrastructure network.

Peatlands offer the opportunity to contribute to the diversification of the rural economy through a number of measures including a number of employment uses.

They could potentially accommodate large scale energy production in the form of wind farms and bio energy fuel sources (Refer to the Energy Strategy). The Council will encourage the sustainable and appropriate use of the peatlands for employment generating uses when all other planning and environmental considerations are met. A number of the peatlands within the county are protected through European and national designations. The Council will seek to achieve a balance in developing such a valuable land resource whilst also protecting the heritage and environmental value of these areas where required.

2.3.3 Brownfield Sites

Dotted around the county's peatlands, at a remove from settlements, are a number of sites with 'antecedent' uses. Many of these relate to the County's energy production history and include former peat processing and power generation sites. They are owned mainly by semi-state companies such as the ESB and Bord na Móna. It is Council policy to favourably consider and promote the redevelopment of these sites for industrial or energy-related uses.

2.4 Strategic Policy

The following main principles establish the overall strategy for the purposes of the County Development Plan, having regard to the identification of potential economic strengths of the county in facilitating the development of the county's overall economy, enterprise and employment. Map 2.1 identifies the serviced lands with sites available for industrial, commercial and employment related uses throughout the county. It also identifies sites with 'antecedent uses' – these are sites that have had an industrial use in the past and that Offaly County Council will consider favourably for appropriate redevelopment for employment and industrial related uses.

2.4.1 Settlement Hierarchy – Type / Scale of Enterprise and Employment

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

The county's settlement hierarchy provides the framework for the allocation of areas of land zoned for

employment and enterprise including; industry, business and employment and other more non-prescriptive zoning objectives namely 'town centre / mixed use' and 'Local Employment/ Services lands'.

2.4.2 Large-Scale Development

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

The Council supports that priority be given to IDA (Ireland) and Enterprise Ireland to developing sectoral clusters within Tullamore as part of the future development of the Midlands linked Gateway.

The Council is supportive in encouraging and making provisions for increased employment and enterprise activity in the larger towns, including ensuring that sufficient land is zoned at optimum locations, the provision of necessary infrastructure where possible and measures in encouraging and sustaining critical mass levels within the county's urban settlements to allow their future economic development.

The Council will work with the providers of infrastructure, including the NRA, telecommunications providers and Irish Water, to ensure that they can respond adequately to the needs of existing industry and potential investors, contributing positively to a competitive economic environment in the county.

2.4.3 Small-Medium Enterprises (SME's)

The Council acknowledges that the development of small-scale projects with long-term employment potential are important in sustaining both urban and rural settlements in County Offaly. The Council will work closely with the relevant agencies to actively promote and encourage the development of SME's throughout the county. The Council further encourages such development within its towns and villages in particular.

However, the Council takes a proactive and flexible approach on a case-by-case basis in the identification and location of employment activity, where appropriate.

2.4.4 Home-Based Employment

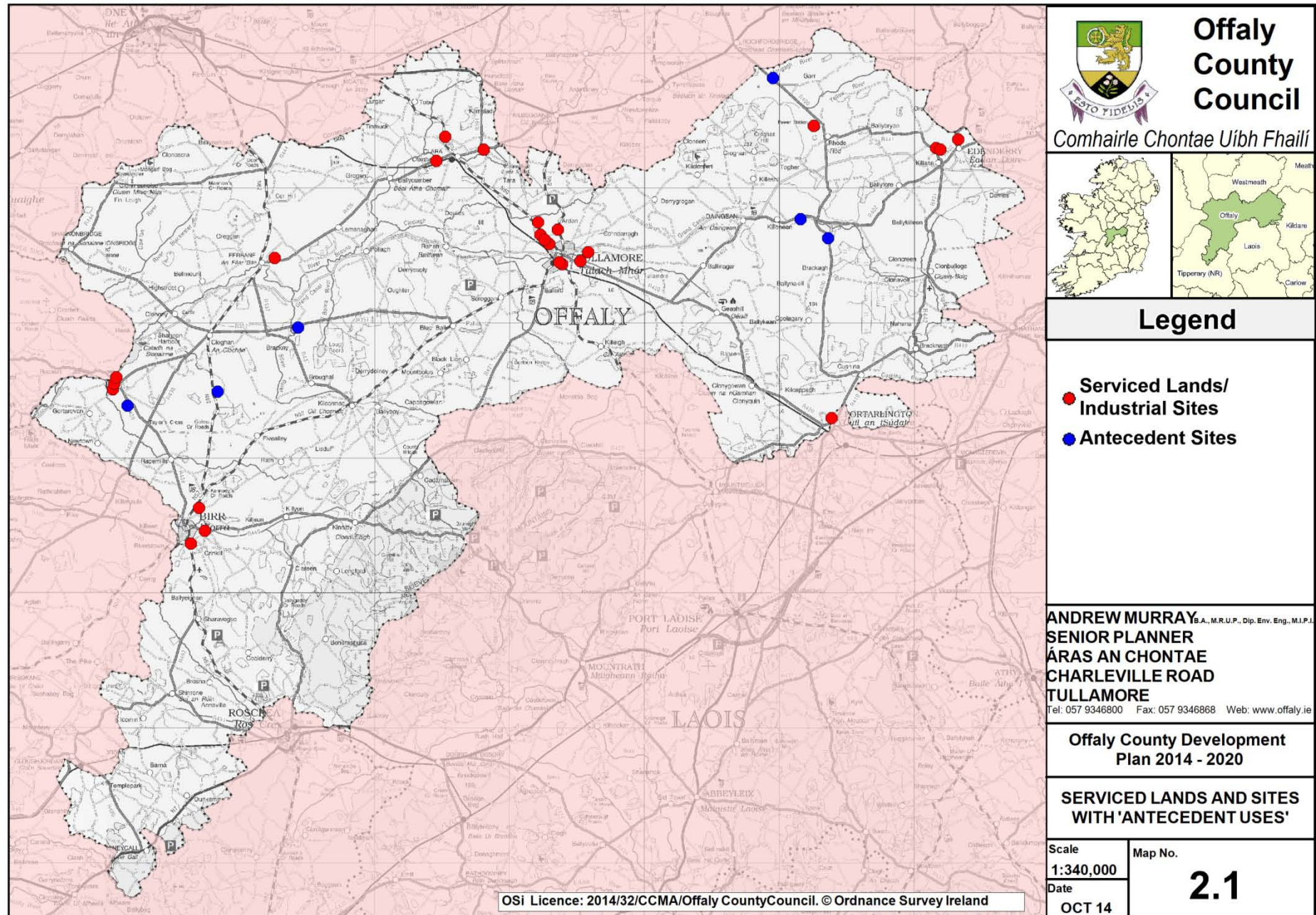
Home-based employment activity assists in dispersing economic activity and sustaining smaller, more rural settlements within the county. The economic benefits associated with the location of 'start-up businesses' within the home throughout the county is also recognised. The Council recognises that as businesses grow and activity intensifies to the level where additional employees, beyond the homeowner and immediate family, that they will need to relocate to more suitable premises within commercial areas of the County's settlements. It is important that this is communicated to prospective business owners at the outset.

2.4.5 Peatlands

There are approximately 32,400 hectares (80,000 acres) of peatlands within the county much of which are currently within the ownership of Bord na Móna. Given the significant size and location of areas of land involved, it is important to avoid piecemeal or uncoordinated use / development of this major resource. It is considered that some of the county's cutaway bogs may be suitable for the provision of industrial / business type development and/or facilitate the generation of energy, most notably, wind / biomass (refer to Energy Strategy).

2.4.6 Areas with Antecedent Uses

The Council acknowledges and is in favour of the re-development and/or expansion of these areas within the county. These include currently used and disused sites such as former ESB power station sites and Bord na Móna works.



2.5 Spatial Strategy

The strategy of economic development for Offaly should take into account the functional economic areas that are within the county. The Gateway of Tullamore and the large towns in the county, Birr, Edenderry and Portllington, command their own catchment areas and will be suitable for larger scale enterprises. Rural areas are not uniform, with agriculture in the east of the county being different to the west and south. Tourism too varies throughout the county, with Tullamore, Birr, the Slieve Blooms, River Shannon and Clonmacnoise in the west being the main draws for tourists. The East of the County has greater potential for energy development and has better transport links to Dublin and to the Ports/Airports.

2.5.1 Tullamore and Surrounding Area

Tullamore is identified as part of the Midlands Linked Gateway (economic driver of the region), and will account for a very significant portion of economic and employment growth. Tullamore and the Srah industrial estate has successfully hosted a number of medical manufacturing companies over many years. It is important that these companies are retained and that they act as a springboard for further opportunities. Given its role as the county town of Offaly, Tullamore has a role to play as the primary retail and services centre for the county. The MRPGs outline that priority to be given to targeting the development of activities which capitalize on existing and emerging strengths in each of the linked gateway towns. In relation to Tullamore the MRPGs identify Medical Devices/Medical Services, Other Medtec, Consumer Foods, Shared Services (multi-lingual) and Research and Development as potential areas for growth.

2.5.2 East of the County

The economy of east Offaly was traditionally dependent on agriculture and peat production, however given this area's proximity to the Greater Dublin Area, a trend of commuting emerged over previous development plan periods. The part of this region identified in the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines as part of the 'Eastern Development Area' within County Offaly experienced significant population growth since 1996.

It is considered that the reservation of substantial lands for industrial, business / commerce and other employment uses within this area is appropriate and will assist in generating local employment, reducing commuter patterns and contributing to the sustainable development of this area. The Council recognises the contribution that the beneficial after use of cutaway peatlands and those lands in Bord na Móna ownership could play in providing employment opportunities within this part of County Offaly.

2.5.3 'West and South' of the County

'West and South Offaly' is located within the 'Western Development Area' of the region as identified by the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines (MRPGs). The MRPGs identify this area as an area within which the existing urban centres need to be strengthened. The economy of west and south Offaly has traditionally been and continues to be heavily reliant on the primary sectors including agriculture and quarrying and also has a significant tourism asset in the River Shannon, Lough Boora Parklands, Clonmacnoise, Birr and the Slieve Blooms.

Birr and Ferbane towns have particular roles in service provision for their wider rural hinterlands.

The Council also acknowledges the important role in which the peatlands in ownership of Bord na Móna could play in providing employment and subsequently in increasing the future economic growth of this area within the county. The MRPGs also identify the potential for diversification of peat-based industries into alternative energy sources and for tourism and amenity installations.

2.6 Enterprise Policies

EntP-01	It is Council policy that future development in Offaly be largely distributed throughout the county's settlement hierarchy, having regard to each individual area's (a) identified role within the region, (b) existing size, (c) existing function (d) capacity for sustainable growth (i.e. growth without detriment to its surroundings, its built or natural assets and/or its character) and (e) available infrastructure capacity. However, there is a positive presumption in terms of employment creation and therefore it is Council policy to examine such proposals within other locations on a case-by-case basis.
EntP-02	It is Council policy to co-operate with local, regional and national enterprise authorities, most notably the IDA and Enterprise Ireland, in the attraction of investment into the county, including both overseas investment and local investment and the provision of employment / enterprise within Offaly.
EntP-03	It is Council policy to strengthen and channel development into Tullamore the primary driver for economic development within the county, a role identified as part of the Midlands Linked Gateway as set out in the National Spatial Strategy and the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines. The Council will explore and support opportunities for a coordinated approach to economic development across the three linked gateway settlements.
EntP-04	It is Council policy to support local employment creation where it can mitigate against long distance commuting.
EntP-05	It is Council policy to actively encourage, facilitate and provide for the location and development of knowledge-intensive and technology based specialisation companies within the county, as appropriate, in accordance with development / environmental standards.
EntP-06	It is Council policy to facilitate and work pro-actively with other interest groups (both public and private sector) in the location of industry, business and enterprise in particular by Zoning of lands within an adequate range of locations for both industry and business / employment uses which can facilitate the provision of large-scale and small-scale development, as appropriate. This includes the identification and possible reservation of lands at suitable locations which will accommodate, where appropriate – business / commercial activity, industry, enterprise, retail etc. having regard to proper planning and sustainable development. The Council will protect zoned lands from inappropriate development that would undermine future economic activity or the unsustainable development of such areas.
EntP-07	It is Council policy to actively encourage the redevelopment of brownfield sites for enterprise and employment creation throughout the county, in particular, sites with antecedent uses or disused sites which were formerly ESB plants and Bord na Móna works
EntP-08	It is Council policy to co-operate with and facilitate Government agencies, and other bodies where feasible, in encouraging home-based employment. This is in accordance with the National Spatial Strategy's policy of "Bringing people and jobs together" and includes the provision of small-scale individual enterprises. Proposals which involve the change of use and/or new development for purposes of home-based employment will be generally considered favourably where it can be clearly demonstrated that, a) the proposal is of an appropriate scale for its location; b) there are no adverse environmental, health and safety impacts and c) the proposal is without prejudice to residential amenity d) the proposal will not detract from the vitality and viability of Town or Village Centres.
EntP-09	It is Council policy to encourage the provision of incubator units at a scale appropriate to their location, in accordance with the county's settlement hierarchy and to ensure that an appropriate programme of

support is in place across the county that will both provide education and networking opportunities for new businesses.

EntP-10 It is Council policy to encourage and establish links between County Offaly and National University of Maynooth (NUIM) and Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) and other higher level colleges as appropriate, which will improve the skills base/education of inhabitants within County Offaly.

EntP-11 It is Council policy to prioritise, facilitate and promote the development of infrastructure that supports and attracts new employment-related investment in County Offaly.

2.7 Enterprise Objectives²

EntO-01 It is an objective of the Council to facilitate the development of the Midlands Linked Gateway, in accordance with national / regional policy. This will include measures to seek to reserve lands within Tullamore (part of the Midlands linked Gateway) which will make provisions for potential national and regionally significant activities and to attract specialist large-scale enterprise development within the county. The Planning Authority will therefore enhance, promote and protect Tullamore in the interests of providing for and facilitating the potential development of the gateway in accordance with national and regional policy.

EntO-02 It is an objective of the Council to co-operate with and seek to facilitate local community based development groups in developing industrial clusters as appropriate.

EntO-03 It is an objective of the Council to identify a range of optimum locations which can present opportunities for the location of specific / specialised enterprise and employment within the county.

EntO-04 It is an objective of the Council to encourage, in co-operation with Enterprise Ireland, the Offaly County Enterprise Board, and other local development bodies, the development of further small to medium scale indigenous industries and services. Further, to promote the establishment of a number of small incubator units, together with a county-wide support programme, within designated areas to accommodate new business start-ups.

EntO-05 It is an objective of the Council to identify, facilitate and promote the development of the county's peatlands where appropriate, in accordance with proper planning practice. Further, to seek the formulation of a coherent integrated land use plan for the sustainable and appropriate after-use of cutaway bogs in conjunction with adjoining local authorities. In seeking to achieve this objective, Offaly County Council will have regard to any national and regional policy, legislation or guidelines which may be published in the future, that will assist in further classifying the status of Offaly's peatlands".

EntO-06 It is an objective of the Council to continue to liaise and work alongside the enterprise agencies, ESB and Bord na Móna and the private sector, to develop enterprise space at various locations throughout the county, where feasible.

EntO-07 It is an objective of the Local Enterprise Office of the Council to create and adopt a local enterprise plan for County Offaly.

² The order of listing of objectives is not intended to indicate priorities. Subject to the availability of resources, it is the Council's aim to monitor and accomplish the objectives listed in this section within the period of the plan.

- EntO-08** It is an objective of Offaly County Council to support the development of Lough Boora Parklands as a National Peatlands Centre.
- EntO-09** It is an objective of the Council to facilitate the development of a digital/e-commerce hub in Offaly to serve the county in improving and promoting the use of the internet as a key educational and business driver.

2.8 Rural Strategy

Offaly is a rural county, with much of its population rural-based and close to traditional sources of employment such as agriculture and peat production. It is anticipated that both of these industries will face considerable change over the lifetime of this plan.

Construction, Quarrying, tourism-related services, transport, education, waste disposal and health are all significant areas of employment in the rural areas of County Offaly. The Council recognise, however, that rural based employment extends beyond these traditional rural sectors to include all aspects of the economy, improved communications technology mean that remote working is a reality for many professionals, and in addition the rise of niche retail and other internet based services may facilitate small-scale commercial opportunities in rural areas of the county.

The Council will continue to implement initiatives that are operated by its Community and Enterprise office to foster an entrepreneurial culture in the county generally.

2.8.1 Agriculture

Agriculture has always been and will continue to be a strong employer in the county and the Council recognises and values this fact. There are 3,462 farms in the County with an average size of 36.5ha. The vast majority of these farms are engaged in beef production (2,305). In 2010 just over half of the County's farmers, 54%, were engaged in agriculture full time while 1,713 are aged 55 or over.³

It is noted that there will be significant changes to livestock and tillage over the lifetime of this plan. There will be crossover with the Energy Strategy with the growth in the production of energy crops likely including willow over the lifetime of this plan. In the dairy industry the biggest anticipated driver of change is the ending of the milk quota system, this may give rise to a reorganisation of farmholdings. It is anticipated that a new Common Agricultural Policy will be developed and will be in operation within the lifetime of this plan, this could bring further changes to agricultural practices and bring new development pressures.

All of these changes may require changes to existing farmyards and the need for new buildings on Greenfield sites, the Council will take a positive approach to applications for agricultural developments generally, subject to the protection of groundwaters, residential amenities, designated habitats and the landscape.

2.8.2 Farm Diversification

In the Census of Farming 2010, 363 farms reported an alternative economic activity taking place on the farm, most of this could be considered as a direct spin off from the farming activity itself such as agricultural contracting and forestry, but there also farms reporting activity in farm tourism and recreation and in domestic crafts. Offaly County Council will favourably consider and promote projects that may be ancillary to farming activities but will contribute to the continued economic viability of the farm and will also contribute to the vibrancy of rural life generally.

2.8.3 Rural Based Industry

Rural areas in Offaly have traditionally sustained some small-scale employment based activities, such as car repair and light-industrial workshops. While it is the policy of Offaly County Council to direct industrial development towards serviced sites in urban areas, there is limited scope for small-scale industrial development appropriate to a rural area. For such proposals the applicant must demonstrate that the industry is appropriate in scale and will not injure amenities of the area or have a significant impact on traffic volumes on local roads.

2.8.4 Forestry

Offaly has a total forest area of just over 15,970ha. of commercial forestry with more providing biodiversity value. The Council will seek to accommodate afforestation throughout the county where it is deemed appropriate, both native broadleaf and coniferous species and in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the county. Much of the land is owned by Coillte, but individual landowners also feature in the ownership of commercial forestry in the county.

The Council is also cognisant of the fact that a proportion of the commercial forestry will reach maturity within the lifetime of this plan. The commercial felling of these lands will have a significant impact on the landscape, but the Council acknowledge that this was the purpose with which these lands were

³ CSO 2010 Census of Agriculture

originally planted. Felling Licences are administered by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine with an opportunity for limited input from the Council, relating to amenity. The extraction of the lumber should be carried out in a sensitive manner with minimal disruption to the area, damage to roadways should be monitored and be repaired at the expense of the operator.

2.8.5 Energy

The Council recognise that the energy sector, both renewables and non-renewables, is currently a significant employer in the county and has potential for considerable growth over the lifetime of this plan. The Council will encourage and facilitate the development of local or community based renewable projects in rural areas, (please refer to the Energy Strategy, Chapter 3 for more details).

Where opportunities in energy arise, in particular wind energy, the Council will seek to ensure that the county is well placed to secure both 'upstream' and 'downstream' jobs relating to a project of significant scale. 'Upstream' jobs relating to wind turbines will include manufacture of blades, shafts and components, securing such investment for Offaly would mean a greater benefit could be gained from any proposed project.

Bio Energy

Energy production from biomass can reduce greenhouse gas emissions, provide a secure native fuel source and provide some diversification out of traditional farm enterprises. The Council will support the development of the bio-energy, including bio-gas, industry in the county, including rural areas, where appropriate.

2.8.6 Sand and Gravel Extraction

The Council recognises the importance of sand and gravel extractions in the economic life of the county and its importance as a valuable source of employment in parts of the county. However, it is also recognised that exploitation of deposits can have a seriously damaging environmental impact on the scientific, recreational and amenity value of the County's natural landscape, in particular its esker network.

Offaly County Council acknowledges that a satisfactory balance is required between the needs of the building industry and the need to protect the environment. Under Section 261A of the Planning and Development

Act, 2000 as amended, between 2010 and 2013 the Planning Authority assessed 153 sites relating to quarrying activities within the county. The suitability of any extraction enterprise shall be assessed on the basis of the sensitivity of the local environment to such impacts, the scale of the development proposed and the capacity of the road network in the area to accommodate associated traffic.

It shall be the Council's policy to ensure that those extractions which would result in a reduction of the visual amenity of areas of high amenity (Map 7.17) or damage to areas of scientific importance or of geological, botanical, zoological and other natural significance including all designated European Sites (See Maps in Chapter 7) shall not be permitted.

It is Council policy that all such workings should be subjected to landscaping requirements and that worked out quarries should be rehabilitated to a use agreed with the Planning Authority which could include recreational, amenity and end-of-life uses. The use of these rehabilitated sites shall be limited to wastes such as soil, stone and subsoils and sites shall be authorised under the appropriate waste regulations.

The Planning Authority will have regard to the Department of the Environment's Guidelines for Planning Authorities for Quarries and Ancillary Activities 2004 when assessing applications relating to the extraction industry in the county. In this regard, bonds or levies will be required by the Council as a condition of any planning permission granted to ensure satisfactory reinstatement on completion of extraction. The Council will require the payment of a contribution towards the cost of road improvement and reinstatement works necessitated by permitted developments.

The Council recognises the unique importance of Offaly's esker landscape deriving from its scientific, botanical, archaeological and historical value. All proposals for sand and gravel extraction at eskers will be determined by reference to the need to conserve the environment, character and scientific value and the extent to which the proposed development would be damaging to these qualities. The Geological Survey of Ireland has completed Aggregate Potential Mapping providing an indication of where potential gravel extraction can take place in the county.

2.9 Rural Development Policy

RDP-01	It is Council policy to support the development of agriculture where it is compatible with the sustainable development of the county and commensurate with sustaining the farming community.
RDP-02	It is Council policy to encourage the development of alternative rural based small-scale enterprises. The Council will consider the use, nature and scale of developments when assessing such applications. In addition, the Council will also consider the requirement to locate such developments in rural areas.
RDP-03	<p>It is Council policy to favourably consider proposals for the expansion of existing industrial or new business enterprise in the countryside where the proposal is;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) an appropriate size and scale, b) does not negatively impact on the character and amenity of the surrounding area, and c) has regard to and complies with other guidelines/standards including traffic, noise and environmental considerations. <p>This policy will generally relate to enterprises which are rural resource based and which have the potential to strengthen rural areas.</p>
RDP-04	It is Council policy that the development of small rural enterprises and craft industries in rural areas will, in general be encouraged, subject to compliance with normal planning requirements.
RDP-05	It is Council policy to encourage the development of environmentally sustainable practices, particularly agriculture, to ensure that development does not impinge on the visual amenity of the countryside and that watercourses, wildlife habitats and areas of ecological importance are protected from the threat of pollution.
RDP-06	It is Council policy to consider favourably proposals for on-farm based diversification, which is complementary to the agricultural operation on the farm, the biodiversity supported by the farm and is operated as part of the farm holding.
RDP-07	<p>It is Council policy to support those who live and work in rural areas and who wish to remain on the land holding and accordingly the Council will favourably consider rural diversification intended to supplement farm income such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Specialist farming practices e.g. flower growing, equine facilities, poultry, mushroom growing, and specialised animal breeding. o Farm enterprises such as processing, co-ops, farm supply stores and agri-business. o The production of organic and specialty foods to meet the increase in demand for such products. o The conversion of redundant farm buildings of vernacular importance for appropriate owner-run enterprises, as a way of supporting a viable rural community, subject to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.
RDP-08	It is Council policy to support the development of renewable energy in rural areas, where it is considered appropriate i.e. where it is demonstrated that such development will not result in significant environmental effects. Such development will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.
RDP-09	It is Council policy to encourage and facilitate the development of local and community based renewable energy projects in the county, notwithstanding their suitability and additional considerations such as location, nature of use, compliance with relevant guidelines and scale, where it can be demonstrated that such proposals are feasible.

RDP-10	It is Council policy to encourage state and private afforestation, both native broadleaf and coniferous species, in appropriate locations, in co-operation with Coillte and the Forest Service and in line with national policy and Forest Service Guidelines.
RDP-11	It is Council policy to encourage expansion and employment in industries such as agriculture, horticulture, forestry, peatlands, food, crafts, tourism and energy.
RDP-12	It is Council policy to facilitate and encourage the reuse of redundant farm buildings of vernacular importance for appropriate agri-tourism enterprises, subject to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.
RDP-13	It is Council policy to liaise and co-operate with statutory, local development, sectoral and community / voluntary agencies and groups to develop economic, social and cultural benefits for the rural community and its service base.
RDP-14	It is Council policy to ensure those extractions (quarries / sand and gravel pits) which would result in a reduction of the visual amenity of areas of high amenity or damage to designated sites, habitat types or species shall not be permitted. It is Council policy that all such workings should be subjected to landscaping requirements and that worked out quarries should be rehabilitated to a use agreed with the Planning Authority which could include recreational, biodiversity, amenity or other end-of-life uses. The use of these rehabilitated sites shall be limited to wastes such as soil, stone and subsoils and sites shall be authorised under the appropriate waste regulations. Where the Council considers and accepts that in cases where inert material (i.e. soil, stones and subsoil etc.) cannot be recycled or otherwise sold, such materials may be considered for the phased restoration and landscaping of the site in line with standard planning conditions imposed.
RDP-15	It is Council policy to ensure that agricultural developments are designed and constructed in a manner that will ensure that watercourses and sources of potable water are protected from the threat of pollution in line with Water Quality Regulations and the requirements of the Water Framework Directive.
RDP-16	It is Council policy to continue to protect existing resource based industry from encroachment by residential development, for example mining, quarrying, gravel pits, peat extraction and intensive agriculture.
RDP-17	It is Council policy to support the development of the peatlands within the county for appropriate alternative uses, subject to environmental considerations and nature designations
RDP-18	It is Council policy to have a positive presumption to developments that seek to provide added value in the food sector, including processing and servicing, subject to the relevant environmental considerations. The Council support the development of the artisan food sector.

2.10 Rural Development Objectives⁴

RDO-01	It is an objective of the Council to support agricultural development and encourage the continuation of agriculture as a contributory means of maintaining population in the rural area and sustaining the rural economy.
RDO-02	It is an objective of the Council to identify and support, where feasible, Commercial Rural Enterprise Centres throughout the county.
RDO-03	It is an objective of the Council to support rural employment initiatives across the county, subject to the principles of proper planning and sustainable development.
RDO-04	It is an objective of the Council to ensure that all agricultural activities adhere to any legislation on water quality and biodiversity e.g. Phosphorus Regulations, Water Framework Directive, Nitrates Directive and Habitats Directive.

⁴ The order of listing of objectives is not intended to indicate priorities. Subject to the availability of resources, it is the Council's aim to monitor and accomplish the objectives listed in this section within the period of the plan.

2.11 Tourism

Tourism is recognised within Offaly as having potential to be an economic driver for Small and Medium Enterprises and communities. Putting People First identifies Tourism as an area where local authorities can have a genuine and positive impact.

Ireland is internationally recognized for landscape, culture and heritage, and people and Offaly fits well into this profile. The Council will seek to develop opportunities relating to the range of attractions that are consistent with this international identity in terms of tourism marketing. In this regard, there are many attractions encouraging people to visit and stay in Offaly, natural sites such as the River Shannon, Lough Boora Parklands and the Slieve Blooms, our Monastic heritage including sites in Clonmacnoise and Durrow, our historic towns and scenic villages throughout the county and our industrial past including the Grand Canal, Tullamore Dew Visitors Centre and Mills distributed across the County. The Tourism industry can contribute significantly to the socio-economic well being of people living in rural areas by generating diverse opportunities for employment and economic activity.

The Council recognise that the value of the contribution of visitors to Offaly goes beyond being purely monetary. Visitors help us to see everyday surroundings in a new light and to value our culture, arts and natural and built heritage. Visitors to the County have chosen to spend their free time and their disposable incomes here and the Members and staff of Offaly County Council are cognisant of our responsibility to ensure that they are rewarded with a quality experience and enjoyable time while here.

The Council recognises its role in ensuring a coordinated approach to tourism development and, by providing amenities and maintaining the quality of our built and natural environment throughout the county, will seek to both enhance the quality of life for those living here and the experience for visitors.

Over the lifetime of this plan Fáilte Ireland will assume the responsibility for Tourism promotion for the entire the county. Offaly County Council will seek to ensure that there is consistency in the approach to marketing the tourism attractions and providing facilities across

the county, including from agencies and semi-state bodies such as Bord na Móna, Waterways Ireland and Coillte. Offaly County Council has an important role to play in facilitating the promotion of tourism whilst protecting the county's valuable natural and built assets from inappropriate development

2.11.1 Slieve Blooms

The Slieve Bloom Mountains extend over approximately 36,000 hectares straddling the borders of counties of Offaly and Laois. This upland area of the county has a number of special environmental designations assigned to it. A balance must be maintained between conserving the environmental value of this area of the county and the economic potential that can be generated from such a resource. The Council acknowledges the value of this area as a resource for the county and will seek to encourage the further promotion of the Slieve Blooms in order to maximise its role within the tourism economy of Offaly.

The Slieve Bloom Mountains are also the focus for a number of walking routes in the county. The Council have been proactive in promoting established walkways in the Slieve Blooms in association with Laois County Council. Offaly County Council recognises the value of these walkways to the tourist economy in Offaly and will continue to promote and facilitate tourism development, where appropriate in this area.

2.11.2 Waterways

Offaly is now part of the national branding of the Lakelands and Inland Waterways. Waterways route based activity includes boating, walking, cycling; canoeing; angling; heritage trail; landscapes etc. The Waterways product in Offaly builds on the attractions of the Shannon and the Grand Canal.

Banagher is a well developed centre for cruising along the Shannon and the Grand Canal is also navigable, acting as a valuable tourism artery traversing the county. Offaly is very central to the route between Dublin and the River Shannon and also cross county from midlands to the Barrow system, Carlow, Waterford etc.

Towns and villages that attract tourist traffic from the Shannon include Banagher, Shannonbridge and

Shannonharbour. Clonmacnoise is a major destination served by the Shannon.

The towns of Tullamore, Daingean and Edenderry are served by the Grand Canal, which is also an attractive walking route and provides a corridor of tourism related activity throughout the county.

2.11.3 Towns and Villages

The towns and villages of the County are important attractions in themselves. The towns of Tullamore and Birr are recognised as being of particular importance in *A Tourism Strategy for County Offaly* (2006) and the Council recognises that both towns are critical to establishing strong economic links with other tourist areas in the county and the Midland Region in its entirety. Birr, with its built heritage and links to the Mid West-Region, has the potential to become a significant tourism centre and one which further develops small enterprises in a high quality environment.

The role of these towns, within the tourism context of the county, is to support and sustain a higher order of tourism services for the county. The Council will seek to strengthen the tourism roles of Tullamore and Birr.

2.11.4 Monastic Heritage

County Offaly boasts a rich Monastic past and the evidence of this occurs on a network of sites across the county.

In relation to Clonmacnoise, the Council recognises the heritage value attached to this site and encourages the continued promotion of the site as a tourist destination. A restrictive policy applies to the area surrounding the site in order to protect the amenity and heritage value attached to Clonmacnoise (Refer to Chapter 7, where the Clonmacnoise Heritage Zone is outlined).

The Monastic heritage is not limited to Clonmacnoise, however, as this site is just part of the story, Durrow is another prominent site and other sites include Rahan, Sier Kieran and Monasterosis.

2.11.5 Peatlands

The development of both Lough Boora Parklands and Clara Bog Visitor Centre has increased the access and educational value of the vast peatland network in the

county. The uninterrupted expanse and biodiversity of these areas are a significant attraction. It will be an objective of the plan to promote the existing facilities and their expansion and also that any development of wind energy on cutaway bog should provide increased access and education.

2.11.6 Sport and Leisure

Offaly is a sporting county and as well local and county level team sporting events occurring each week, has a wide diversity of recreational and sporting activities available to tourists including walking, cycling, golf, angling, and canoeing.

2.11.7 Conferencing Facilities

The Council recognises that conference business is an important generator of revenue in the larger towns of the county, particularly having regard to the central location of County Offaly.

2.11.8 Major Events / Festivals

A number of festivals and cultural events attract tourists to the county on an annual basis. The festival and event programme varies annually but some of the regular annual festivals include the Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival, the Slieve Bloom Storytelling Festival, and the Tullamore Agricultural Show. The Council will continue to facilitate the staging of these events where appropriate and will seek to build on the county's successful experience in hosting such events.

2.11.9 Arts & Culture

The Arts encompass many forms including the visual arts, music, literature, performance, drama and architecture. The Council's Arts Office continues to provide funding and a developmental information and advisory service. A vibrant arts scene will continue to make Offaly a more attractive place to visit.

2.11.10 Tourism Development

The Council is aware of the need and of its responsibility to protect the amenities of the county from insensitive or inappropriate development. The Council will control development, including tourist related development, in such a manner as to conserve and enhance the natural environment and therefore to foster the future growth of the tourist industry in the county.

Built development and other activities associated with tourism should be appropriate to the character of the

place in which they are situated, having particular regard to scale, design, nature as well as the land use and economic and social requirements of the surrounding area.

Visitor accommodation, interpretation centres and commercial / retail facilities serving the tourism sector should generally be located within established settlements, thereby fostering strong links to a whole range of other economic and commercial sectors and in turn should contribute to sustaining the host community.

2.11.11 Holiday Homes

Planning permission is required for holiday homes, including the conversion of an existing dwelling house to a commercial holiday home. It shall be the policy of the Council to encourage schemes of commercial holiday homes in serviced centres where piped water and waste water treatment are available and where there is reasonable access to shops and amenities.

Holiday homes will normally be encouraged in existing settlements where services are available. In addition, the Council will look favourably on the conversion of derelict houses and/or farm buildings to commercial holiday home usage where the design and scale is appropriate to the surrounding area, in particular the enhancement of vernacular architecture will be encouraged.

2.11.12 Signposting of Tourism Facilities

In the case of tourism facilities and tourist attractions, standardised directional signs may be allowed, by licence, on the roadside margin. Such signs shall be sized and colour coded in accordance with the NRA's publication, "Policy on the Provision of Tourist & Leisure Signage on National Roads Signs", (Revised March 2011).

It is an objective of the Council to develop a standardised strategy for signage of tourism related amenities in the county and implement it throughout Offaly.

2.11.13 Midland Region

The Council recognise that visitors to the midlands are not overtly aware of County boundaries and it does not impact on their visitor experience. Consequently it may arise that it is practical and sensible to work with adjoining counties in order to develop a strategy for attracting more visitors to the Region. This may be relevant on a practical level where walking or cycling routes traverse county boundaries or where visitor attractions are in close proximity to county boundaries but also on a macro level in the marketing and attracting tourists to the Midlands as a region. The Council recognise the value of developing midlandsireland.ie as a tool for marketing tourism in the region.

2.12 Tourism Policies

- TP-01** It is Council policy to promote and foster a growing sense of innovation and entrepreneurial activity in the tourism sector throughout County Offaly.
- TP-02** It is Council policy to continue to support and encourage increased co-ordination, cohesion and linkages between agencies involved in tourism development e.g. Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland and Offaly County Council.
- TP-03** It is Council policy to encourage clustering of products to increase linkages within and reduce leakage from the local economy e.g. linkages between providers of accommodation and local farmers / niche food producers, across County Offaly and the wider region.
- TP-04** It is Council policy to protect natural resources on which tourism is based through the enforcement of policies and relevant legislation in relation to protections of resources, architectural conservation areas, peatlands, water quality, species and populations of conservation concern and biodiversity, rural housing and holiday home development.
- TP-05** It is Council policy to further investigate the potential of and opportunities for the development of trails in County Offaly to include a mixture of walking, cycling and driving trails, for the provision of appropriate services along these trails, and for the development of linkages between these trails in Offaly and adjoining counties. The Council will only support such developments where it is demonstrated that no significant environmental effects will arise as a consequence of their construction or operation.
- TP-06** It is Council policy to liaise with strategic partners such as Bord na Móna, The National Parks and Wildlife Service and Coillte on the identification of land use strategies for appropriate areas of peatland and forestry within the county focusing on the tourism, environmental and heritage value of these areas.
- TP-07** It is Council policy to favourably consider tourism infrastructure development related to sport, recreation and information including boating, angling, walking and pony trekking routes, golf courses, adventure centres, and interpretive centres etc. subject to proper planning, environmental protection and sustainable development and policies of this plan.
- TP-08** It is Council policy to promote and facilitate conferencing facilities in the county and to support future tourism opportunities which may offer the opportunity to build on this existing attraction to the county, based on the county's location.
- TP-09** It is Council policy that where tourism related developments involve the interaction of a number of the above listed activities with accommodation facilities, such proposals should be facilitated (subject to proper planning) where integration and linkage between tourism facilities is promoted.
- TP-10** It is Council policy to encourage tourism related developments inside existing settlements where the scale and size of the proposed development is appropriate and in keeping with the character of the settlement.
- TP-11** It is Council policy that tourism related developments outside of settlements will be considered where there is proven sustainable need. The need to locate in a particular area must be balanced against the environmental impact of the development and the impact of the development and benefits to the local community.

- TP-12** It is Council policy to recognise the value of the Slieve Blooms as an area of natural beauty with considerable recreation value and potential for diverse opportunities for the tourism industry. The Council acknowledges the designation of the Slieve Blooms as a cSAC and SPA and will only support opportunities where it can be demonstrated that they will not result in significant effects to the conservation objectives of the Slieve Bloom European Sites.
- TP-13** It is Council policy to promote Durrow Abbey and Monastic Site as a tourist attraction in the county in conjunction with Fáilte Ireland, OPW and relevant stakeholders, with a view to appropriate development provision of signage, improved access, and associated infrastructure as appropriate and as resources allow.

2.13 Tourism Objectives⁵

- TO-01** It is an objective of the Council to implement a Tourism Strategy for Offaly.
- TO-02** It is an objective of the Council to establish a signage policy committee to design and investigate funding opportunities for integrated directional and interpretive signage with a timeframe for implementation in the county and guidance for the appearance and location of these.
- TO-03** It is an objective of the Council to prepare a Tourism Development and Management Plan in association with Fáilte Ireland and adjoining local authorities for key tourist sites in the county. This plan should include the built and natural features which have an established tourist draw and will set out requirements in relation to tourism facilities and accommodation of visitors.
- TO-04** It is an objective of the Council to co-operate with Fáilte Ireland, Bord na Móna, Waterways Ireland and other relevant bodies and agencies in promoting the waterways and lakelands of the county in respect of an overall tourism development and marketing strategy.
- TO-05** It is an objective of the Council to facilitate the development of a tourism resource using cutaway peatlands in conjunction with Bord na Móna and Fáilte Ireland, subject to environmental considerations and nature designations.
- TO-06** It is an objective of Offaly County Council to encourage the development of water-based recreation activities on flooded cutaway bog where the opportunity arises, including possibly in Noggus Boy Bog and in Garryhinch, subject to environmental considerations and nature designations.
- TO-07** It is an objective of Offaly County Council to seek to promote the provision of tourism amenity signs in accordance with national policy
- TO-08** It is the objective of the Council to work with the relevant stakeholders to examine the feasibility of developing the Kilbeggan to Ballycommon link of the Grand Canal, as a potential cycle and/or walking route and a navigational route.
- TO-09** It is an objective of the Council to support the development of a Mountain Bike Trail in the Slieve Bloom Mountains.

⁵ The order of listing of objectives is not intended to indicate priorities. Subject to the availability of resources, it is the Council's aim to monitor and accomplish the objectives listed in this section within the period of the plan.

- TO-10** It is an objective of the plan to promote the existing educational and amenity facilities at Clara Bog and Lough Boora and their expansion, subject to appropriate assessment and environment.
- TO-11** It is an objective of the Council to investigate the feasibility of an Energy Park with educational and amenity facilities, relating to any future development of renewable energy projects of significant scale that comes forward over the lifetime of this plan. Any development of renewable energy on cutaway bog will be required to provide increased opportunities for amenity access and education facilities.
- TO-12** It is an objective of the Council, to cooperate with the relevant stakeholders to facilitate, the development of water resource infrastructure with potential for water storage in the east of the county, water-based tourism and potential to facilitate the provision of a portion of Offaly's water requirements, in particular to facilitate economic development in the County, subject to the statutory environmental requirements.
- TO-13:** It is an objective of the Council to examine the feasibility of developing an overall recreational walking and cycling strategy, subject to available resources, and in conjunction with adjoining counties, and all relevant stakeholders, within the lifetime of this plan.

Chapter 3: Energy Strategy

3.1 Introduction

Offaly has a long history of energy production related predominantly to the commercial exploitation of peatlands. While Peat powered generation stations remain in operation in Offaly, the energy market is changing, moving to a greater reliance on various forms of renewable energy. In addition there must be a renewed emphasis on energy efficiency to reduce the influence of the markets for carbon based fuel on our economic prosperity.

As a net exporter of electricity, Offaly has a large stake in Irish energy policy. It is anticipated that over the lifetime of this plan, (2014-2020) there will be change in how we use and generate energy and the Council needs to be prepared for the opportunities that will arise from this change. The purpose of including this Energy Strategy in the County Development Plan is to acknowledge the importance of energy to the local economy and to ensure that the County is positioned in order to compete for future investment in generation capacity, while also insuring that any new development will be consistent with the interests of proper planning and sustainable development.

Energy can be subdivided into three main categories of use, Electricity, Heating and Transport. The Sustainable Transport and Accessibility section as part of the Environmental and Infrastructure Strategy promotes Smarter Travel policies and objectives, and the town and village plans in Volume 2 will encourage more sustainable transport patterns. This strategy will deal with the generation, distribution and use of electricity and heating.

The chapter is prepared in the context of the following documents:

- National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020,
- Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010,
- National Renewable Energy Action Plan for Ireland 2010,
- Ireland's second National Energy Efficiency Action Plan to 2020,
- Eirgrid's Programme for Investment: Grid 25,
- Strategy for Renewable Energy 2012-2020,
- Memorandum of Understanding between the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources of Ireland and the Department of Energy and Climate Change of the United Kingdom on cooperation in the energy sector,
- Wind Energy Development Guidelines, 2006,
- 'Government Policy Statement on the Strategic Importance of Transmission and Other Energy Infrastructure'.

3.2 Context

The Irish energy market is currently dominated by non-renewable energy, mainly imported forms of fuel, namely oil, gas and coal. Electricity production is particularly reliant on Natural Gas as a fuel, the majority of which is currently imported through two interconnectors via Scotland. Natural Gas contributed 62% of the electricity generated in Ireland in 2010, and all but 7% of the natural gas used in Ireland was imported. The Irish Government has recognised the risk that over reliance on imported fuels poses to energy security and has put regulations in place to maintain generation from fuel sourced in Ireland. Currently, with the depletion of the Kinsale gas field, the only significant indigenous source of non-renewable energy is peat, with three peat-fired power plants, providing 8% of the

electricity used in Ireland in 2010. Two of these stations are located in County Offaly, in Edenderry (120MW) and in Shannonbridge (137MW).

In the Renewable Energy Directive 2009/28/EC, Ireland has committed to attaining 16% of its gross final consumption of energy from renewable sources by the year 2020 to be achieved through around 40% of electricity consumed being from renewable sources, 12% of consumption in the heat sector and 10% consumption in the transport sector. Article 7 of the Directive, for the first time includes provision for co-operation between Member states in the generation of renewables which means that that energy generated in one country can now contribute to the renewable energy targets of another country.

Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Emissions

An important aspect of energy policy is recognising the impact that generation can have on the environment. According to the EPA, energy accounts for 21.5% of Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions. Offaly County Council will continue to support national targets for a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and implement policy that seeks to address climate change. Please refer to Chapter 4 Infrastructure and Environment for an objective to develop a climate change adaptation strategy.

3.3 Energy Efficiency and Conservation

Greater energy efficiency will tackle Ireland's exposure to climate change and energy security risks.

Ireland's second National Energy Efficiency Action Plan to 2020 launched on the 28 February 2013 reaffirmed Ireland's commitment to a 20% energy savings target in 2020 and a 33% reduction in public sector energy use.

The EU Directive on the Energy Performance of Buildings (EPBD), as transposed into Irish legislation in 2006, contains a range of provisions aimed at improving energy performance in residential and non-residential buildings both new build and existing. The incorporation of good design into developments is considered as being the key in achieving optimum energy performance of buildings.

This plan can influence energy efficiency by ensuring that the principles of efficiency and conservation are incorporated into all new development in the county and that the plan supports the retrofitting of our built environment in order to reduce both our energy bills and consumption.

3.4 Strategy for County Offaly

The electricity industry can be divided into three main strands:

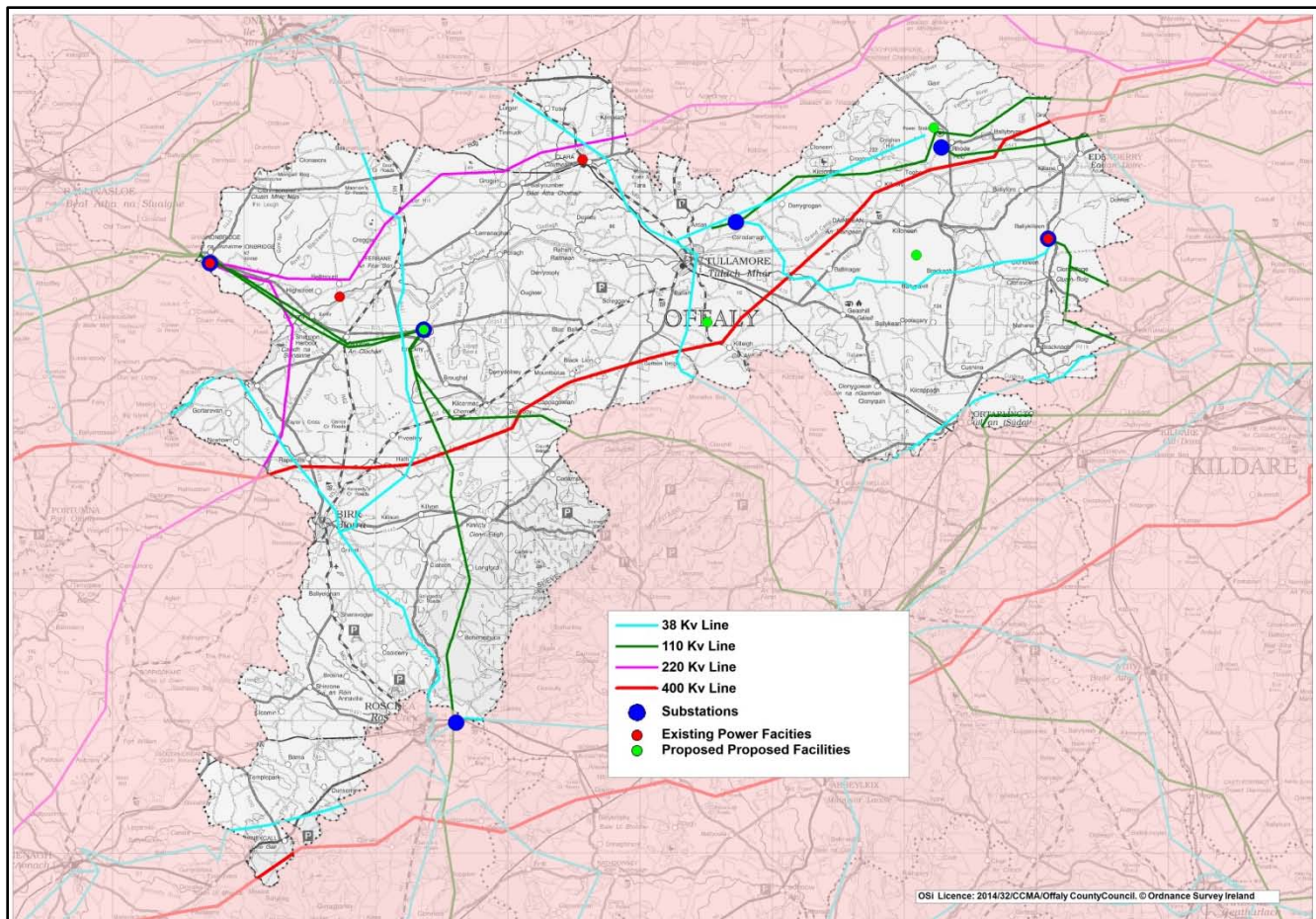
- Generation
- Distribution, and
- Supply

The Development Plan will have most influence in generation and distribution. The history of peat fired stations has left a valuable legacy for Offaly in the existing transmission infrastructure that traverses the County and we can now use this existing distribution network for the sustainable development of new generation capacity. Offaly County Council acknowledge that both renewable and non-renewable energy generation have the potential to be significant employers in the county.

3.4.1 Transmission Network

There is a strong electricity network traversing County Offaly, and there are six connection points to the 110kV network. The network is particularly strong around the sites of former power station sites, and the Power Station at Shannonbridge is connected to the 220kV network. The network can be seen in Map 3.1. Although 400kV lines traverse the county, it should be noted that there are currently no opportunities to connect to this line within the county. In accordance with their strategy, Eirgrid have a number of key transmission network development projects that are located in County Offaly:

- Cushaling – Thornsberry 110kV new circuit,
- Cushaling 110kV Station – Busbar Uprate,
- Thornsberry 110kV Station – Busbar Uprate,
- Shannonbridge 220/110kV Station – Uprate 2 x 110kV Circuit Breakers,
- 400kV line refurbishment.



Eirgrid is the organisation responsible for both the planning and operation of Ireland's national grid. ESB Networks are responsible for the development of new lines. Offaly County Council will work to ensure that plans to strengthen the grid around Tullamore are completed as quickly as possible.

Gate 3 the CER

Since December 2004 the Commissioner for Energy Regulation (CER) has implemented the 'Gate' or group processing approach to applications for connection to the transmission and distribution grid for large renewable electricity generators. So far there have been three rounds of applications. Gate 3 focused particularly on meeting Ireland's renewable energy targets by 2020. There is a relatively small number of Gate approvals in County Offaly, the CER have indicated that there is scope for applications outside of this grid connection process (CER/09/99), however it should be noted that the CER

have specifically excluded large-scale wind projects from connecting to the grid outside of the Gate process. Future Gates and approaches to grid connection of renewable and other generators will be determined by the CER in response to government policy, however there are no current plans for another round of Gate applications, consequently, new wind power produced in Offaly will have to look beyond the national grid for its market.

3.4.2 Non-Renewable Energy

Non-renewable energy will continue to play a role in the generation mix of electricity for the foreseeable future. Offaly will have a role to play in the generation of two types in particular, gas and peat.

Gas powered generation is a particularly valuable part of the energy mix. There are two permitted large-scale gas power stations in the county – in Lumcloon and north of Rhode in Derrygreenagh. Offaly County Council support the development of these stations over the lifetime of

the plan. Having regard to the short time required to fire up gas powered generators, Offaly County Council recognise that the gas generation is complimentary to development of renewable forms of energy.

The process of burning peat in Edenderry and Shannonbridge is likely to migrate to a co-fueling process over the lifetime of the plan. Offaly County Council supports the continued operation of power generation facilities at these sites.

Offaly already has two diesel powered Open Cycle Combustion Turbines, in Rhode with a capacity of 104MW and in Edenderry with a capacity of 111MW. These turbines are used for peaking capacity and for times of low wind output.

3.4.3 Renewable Energy

The sources of renewable energy in County Offaly have so far been limited to two hydroelectric turbines on the River Brosna, in Belmont and in Clara, and co-firing in the Edenderry Power Plant. A windfarm in Mountlucas is under construction (September 2014). It is anticipated that developments of renewable energy will be a significant feature over the lifetime of this plan.

Bio-energy

In Offaly there has already been planting of some bio-energy crops including Miscanthus, Oil Seed Rape and Willow. These have the potential to provide alternative markets for tillage farmers in the county. There may be significant opportunity as both Edenderry and Shannonbridge Power Plant move to co-fuelling operations. Bio-energy crops will most often be farmed using existing facilities and without recourse to the planning application system, but where an application for associated infrastructure is required, the planning authority will consider it favourably subject to environmental considerations.

Anaerobic Digesters

Anaerobic digestion has the potential to provide alternative sources of farm incomes. On-farm plants have become common-place in other European Countries such as Germany where the feed-in tariff is generous. Offaly County Council promotes the development of these

technologies within the county, subject to the usual siting and environmental considerations.

Solar Energy

Solar energy can provide a sustainable source of energy for buildings and reduces demand for electricity supply from the national grid. Solar energy is achieved by the manner in which glass and other materials and structures are utilised to capture and magnify the sun's energy. Three basic techniques are used today to harness solar energy and gain maximum benefit of solar energy in buildings:

- Passive Solar
- Solar Thermal
- Solar Photovoltaic (PV) Systems

The Council encourages such methods in the provision of renewable energy, subject to design and other considerations, over the plan period.

Ground Source Heating Systems

The Council will encourage the provision of ground source heat pumps, also known as geothermal heat pumps. These are used for space heating and cooling, as well as water heating for both residential and commercial developments. There are two types of geothermal energy: Deep is classified as being > 400m in depth and may be used for both thermal and electricity generation and Shallow geothermal (also known as ground source) energy can be harnessed by either 'closed' or 'open' loop systems and is most frequently used for providing heat.

Microgeneration and Autoproduction

A range of small- and micro-scale energy generation technologies – including wind, solar thermal, solar photovoltaic (p-v), geothermal and hydroelectric generators can be suitable for directly serving the electricity and heat needs of consumers on scales ranging from individual residences to small business or industrial premises. Some of these are already exempt, while others will require planning permission. Offaly County Council support the principle of these micro-generation technologies subject to the appropriate siting, design and protection of residential amenities.

3.4.4 Waste to Energy

Proposals for waste to energy development will be considered, on suitable sites, having regard to proper planning and sustainable development. Remote sites with 'antecedent' uses could be appropriate for these types of development. This type of development may be particularly suitable to combined heat and power developments. Subject to the assessment of the impacts on the environment and on the road network in the immediate area, such developments are generally subject to the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Licensing system, where environmental assessment will be the responsibility of the EPA.

3.5 Wind

Of the renewable forms of energy generation, wind is the most advanced with the highest penetration on the Irish energy grid. According to the Irish Wind Energy Association, Ireland's total installed wind capacity is now 2195.41MW, generated from 191 wind farms in the 26 counties, and it contributed nearly 20% of our electricity needs in 2012 (April 2013).

In recent years the technology of larger wind turbines has been developed to take advantage of lower wind speeds. These new turbines have taller hub heights and greater blade length to hub ratios. This technology makes the development of wind energy in Offaly, where wind speeds are generally a low 7m/s at 100m, possible. The turbines constructed in Mount Lucas have hub heights of 100m and blade tip heights of 156m. Offaly County Council consider that turbines of similar scale may be suitably sited on cutaway¹ and other unobtrusive sites around the county.

Site suitability is an important factor in determining the suitability of wind farms (turbines), having regard to possible adverse impacts associated with for example residential amenities, landscape, including views or prospects, wildlife, habitats, designated sites, protected structures or bird migration paths and compatibility with adjoining land uses.

¹ See Policies EP-03 & EP-04 and Objective EO-01

The Council is therefore required to achieve a reasonable balance between responding to overall positive Government policy on renewable energy and enabling the wind energy resources of the Planning Authority's area to be harnessed in a manner that is consistent with proper planning and sustainable development.

3.5.1 Wind Energy Strategy

The Wind Energy Strategy Map, at the rear of this chapter, shows the Strategy for Wind Energy development in the County, in particular showing areas where applications for Wind Energy developments will be open for consideration, subject to site specific considerations and layout.

In Areas Suitable for Wind Energy Development, as identified in Map 3.2,² the development of Wind Farms and smaller wind energy projects shall be open for consideration, where projects can demonstrate that they will not have likely significant effects on the conservation objectives of European Sites.

In all other areas Wind Energy Developments shall not normally be permitted – except as provided for under exemption provisions and as specifically described in Section 5.4 of the Wind Energy Strategy and Policy EP – 04.

It should be noted that turbines will not be permitted in the Slieve Blooms, on the county's esker system, the Shannon Callows or on Croghan Hill and wider areas as identified on the Wind Energy Strategy map. In areas outside of the identified areas for wind energy development, applications for wind energy development will not normally be permitted.

Cutaway Bog

The characteristics of cutaway bog appear to be particularly suitable for wind development. The individual sites on cutaway bogs are large and generally uninterrupted by hedgerows, streams, or other natural features. Many are already connected to each other via corridors i.e. bog railway routes, which will allow for transmission infrastructure and roadways to be built

² See Policies EP-03 & EP-04 and Objective EO-01

between sites, avoiding impacts on the public road in terms of traffic or visual impact.

The areas where peatlands occur have a low density road network and are traditionally sparsely populated, and while they have not completely avoided sporadic urban-generated one-off housing, they are the least densely populated areas of the county.

Appropriate buffers should be provided, which shall be a minimum of 2km from Town and Village Cores, European designated sites, including Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA), and national designations, Natural Heritage Areas (NHA). The EIA associated with any development should also assess the flight paths of any Annex 1 bird species present in order to minimise the potential for bird strikes.

Farmlands

Outside of the Cutaway there is potential for wind energy development on farmland at different areas of the county within the areas designated suitable for wind energy.³

This land, by its nature, is in fragmented ownership, and, these areas are more densely populated than cutaway. It is for this reason that these areas will be not suitable for the tallest turbines available and there will be more restrictions on the number and siting of turbines in these areas.

The areas are also more environmentally sensitive. By their nature they are comparatively undulating compared to the peatlands and this, together with the dispersed population, will further constrain the height of turbines.

Forestry

There is 15,970ha of land currently under commercial forestry in Offaly. This land is owned both by Coillte and by private landowners. While much of the lands, such as in the upland area of the Slieve Blooms, will not be suitable for development due to environmental constraints, however, there is a significant landholding on cutaway and lower lying areas⁴ owned by both Coillte and private landowners within the areas suitable for

wind energy development, that could prove suitable for wind energy development.

3.6 Heating

The heating of our homes, businesses and water is one of the most energy intensive activities that we carry out. The Census of 2011 found that oil and peat are the main sources of home heating in County Offaly, heating more than 20,000 homes in the County. Offaly County Council is positively disposed towards homes and businesses moving to more sustainable forms of heating.

Bord Gáis Networks have indicated that the development of the Lumcloon gas powered generator could present the possibility to serve more Offaly settlements with natural gas, Offaly County Council supports the expansion of the network.

The Council will encourage passive heating systems being incorporated into new builds; this is further outlined in the development standards contained within Chapter 8.

Combined Heat and Power

Combined heat and power (CHP) is a technology that uses the energy produced in the combustion of fuel to produce both useful heat energy and electricity. CHP can refer to gas-fired CHP or biomass CHP. CHP units may be developed by industries and commercial entities with a constant or predictable heat and electricity demand.

CHP units may also be installed for multiple unit residential developments and will provide a cheaper and more efficient heating system for residents and will also potentially provide an ancillary income to the developer, with the potential for a continuing income and a more sustainable business model.

District Heating Systems

It may arise that there is an opportunity to develop a district heating system for an urban area within the county that is related to the development of a large scale power plant. The Council would support such an application.

³See Policies EP-03 & EP-04 and Objective EO-01

⁴See Policies EP-03 & EP-04 and Objective EO-01

3.7 Energy Policies

EP-01	It is Council policy to support national and international initiatives for limiting emissions of greenhouse gases and to encourage the development of renewable energy sources.
EP-02	It is Council policy to facilitate the continual development of renewable energy sources having regard to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area concerned, the protection of amenities, landscape sensitivities, European Sites, biodiversity, natural heritage, and built heritage, and where such proposals comply with policy contained in the County Development Plan, in the interests of proper planning and sustainable development.
EP-03	<p>It is Council policy to encourage the development of wind energy in suitable locations, on cutaway bogs within the wind energy development areas open for consideration identified in Map 3.2, in an environmentally sustainable manner and in accordance with Government policy, having particular regard to the Wind Energy Strategy for the County and Section 3.5.1, which states that appropriate buffers should be provided, which shall be a minimum of 2km from Town and Village Cores, European designated sites, including Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA), and national designations, Natural Heritage Areas (NHA). Wind Energy developments on cutaway bogs should generally be developed from the centre out.</p> <p>The Area around Corracullin Bog, (Area 4 in Wind Energy Strategy), is omitted from the Wind Energy Development Area.</p>
EP-04	Cumulative effects of wind farm development can arise as the combined consequences of proposals for more than one wind energy development within an area or proposal(s) for new wind energy development(s) in an area with one or more existing or permitted developments. Offaly County Council will monitor cumulative impact assessments of wind energy proposals over the lifetime of the plan and cumulative impacts will be a material consideration in the assessment of any planning application for wind energy development.
EP-05	<p>It is Council policy that applications for wind energy development outside of the wind energy development areas open for consideration identified in Map 3.2 will not normally be permitted except when it can be demonstrated that the proposal falls into the following category:</p> <p>Category A: Single Turbines that are sited close to and specifically relate to the operations of an industrial/commercial premises or a school, hospital or other community-related premises. Supporting evidence must be provided detailing that the development will only facilitate and is only related to the operation of the business or community facility.</p> <p>Each proposal within this category will be open for consideration outside of the wind energy development areas and subject to site specific assessment in accordance with relevant guidance.</p>
EP-06	It is Council policy to promote energy conservation and efficiency measures and to facilitate innovative building design that promotes energy efficiency and use of renewable energy sources in accordance with national policy and guidelines.
EP-07	It is Council policy to promote, encourage and facilitate the provision of micro-renewable energy and auto-generation subject to the protection of residential amenities.

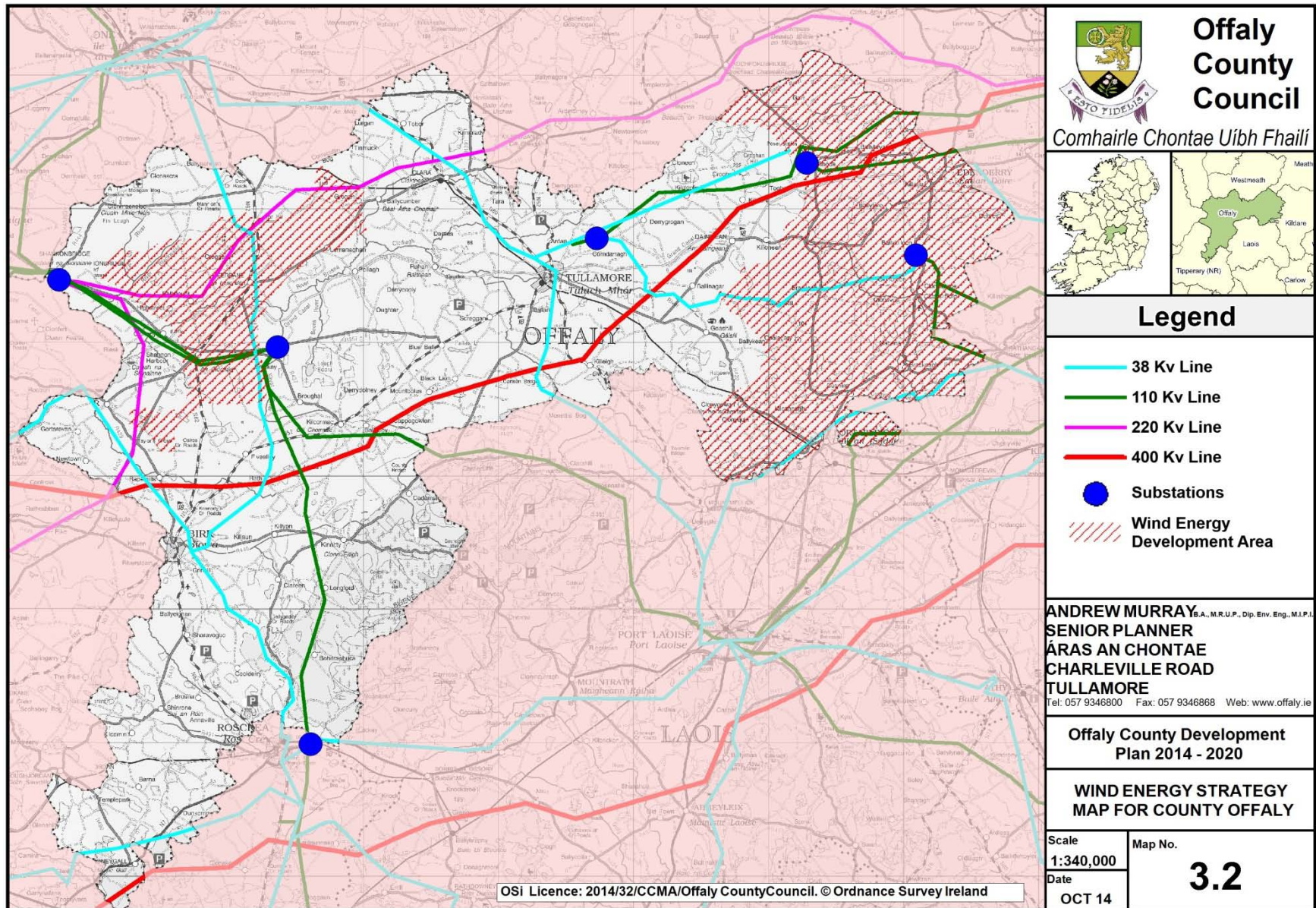
- EP-08** Having regard to the county's long tradition in power generation, it is Council policy to facilitate the continuance of power generation stations within the county, as appropriate including the consideration of co-fuelling and in line with National Policy Guidelines.
- EP-09** It is Council policy to require any applicant for energy generation facility to provide details of all transmission infrastructure associated with the development and to assess the impact of this infrastructure on both the environment and landscape as a material consideration of the planning decision.

3.8 Energy Objectives⁵

- EO-01** It is an objective of the Council to achieve a reasonable balance between responding to government policy on renewable energy and in enabling the wind energy resources of the county to be harnessed in an environmentally sustainable manner. This will be implemented having regard to the Council's Wind Energy Strategy as follows:
1. In Areas open for consideration for Wind Energy Development, as identified in Map 3.2,⁶ the development of Wind Farms and smaller wind energy projects shall be open for consideration.
 2. In all other areas Wind Energy Developments shall not normally be permitted – except as provided for under exemption provisions and as specifically described in Section 5.4 of the Wind Energy Strategy and Policy EP – 05.
- EO-02** It is an objective of the Council to facilitate the promotion and construction of energy efficient developments throughout the county.
- EO-03** It is an objective of the Council to support the further extension of the gas grid into County Offaly to serve existing and envisaged future residential development and commercial and industrial activity.
- EO-04** It is an objective of the Council to support and facilitate the generation of electrical power within the county and the provision of high-voltage electricity infrastructure to cater for natural growth, new and existing large customers. Further, it is an objective of the Council to ensure, insofar as is possible, that the necessary infrastructure is in place to support the existing and future economy in Offaly, to support economic development and to attract investment.
- EO-05** It is an objective of the Council to assist the Midland Energy Agency in delivering energy efficiency solutions, stimulating the increased uptake of renewable energy sources and the promotion of clean and sustainable transport.

⁵ The order of listing of objectives is not intended to indicate priorities. Subject to the availability of resources, it is the Council's aim to monitor and accomplish the objectives listed in this section within the period of the plan.

⁶ See Policies EP-03 & EP-04.



Chapter 4: Infrastructure and Environment Strategy

Sustainable Transport and Accessibility

4.1 Aim

Offaly County Council will endeavour to promote the use of sustainable modes of transport and the integration of land use planning with sustainable transport systems and will support the development of a safer, more efficient transport system within Offaly, with improvements to the road network, rail network, public transport, cycleways and pedestrian ways.

4.2 Policy and Legislative Context

The strategy is prepared in the context of the following documents:

- Smarter Travel. A Sustainable Transport Future. Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020
- National Cycle Policy Framework 2009-2020.
- Spatial Planning and National Roads, Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2012.
- Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets 2013.

4.3 Context

Offaly County Council recognises that the provision of sustainable, efficient and effective transport networks in the county is a major determinant of its level of competitiveness and its capacity to address some of its major social and environmental needs. The pursuit of sustainable transport and accessibility in Ireland and indeed County Offaly is underpinned by a national policy context that seeks to integrate landuse and transportation policy.

Smarter Travel – Sustainable Transport Future: A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020 is the national policy document that recognises the importance of investment in transport, to ensure continued economic growth and social development. It sets out objectives to increase walking, cycling and public transport use and reduce car demand, which stood at 65% of all journeys in 2006, to 45% in 2020. Five key goals have been identified in the smarter travel policy document which seek to:

1. Reduce overall travel demand.
2. Maximise the efficiency of the transport network.
3. Reduce reliance on fossil fuels.
4. Reduce transport emissions.
5. Improve accessibility to transport.

The smarter travel national policy sets out how the vision of sustainable travel and transport can be achieved in Ireland by 2020. This chapter sets out the strategy for Offaly for Sustainable Transport and Accessibility for the lifetime of the plan period.

4.4 Integrating Landuse and Transportation

A key issue for sustainable development is the relationship between transportation and land use. Transportation networks affect land use patterns in how people choose to locate their homes and businesses and equally landuse patterns direct transportation and provide the demand for transportation systems. Dispersal of land uses places an increase in demand for transportation because of greater travel distances, and this is unsustainable.

The integration of land use and transport is the most effective way of providing an efficient transportation system and is essential in the provision of a sustainable spatial framework for economic, social and cultural development. Ensuring that the places where people

live are either close to, or are connected by public transport to, their places of work or education and providing for higher density development along public transport corridors, allows people to use the most sustainable modes of transport, namely walking, cycling, and public transport and increases its financial and economic viability.

Integrating landuse and transportation represents a challenge for County Offaly to embrace given the predominantly rural nature of the county, dispersed settlement pattern and car ownership levels. The key challenge is to facilitate smarter ways of meeting needs and linking it to landuse. Within this context, high densities and mixed uses will be encouraged to locate within walking distance of public transport nodes and at accessible sites throughout the County, such as those within town centres. The provision of an integrated land use and transportation system, is a long term process, that is supported by a range of central government policies including the National Spatial Strategy and Regional Planning Guidelines and is guided by planning guidelines for Planning Authorities issued under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

The Council recognises the need to build on and further invest in transport infrastructure recognising that its provision is crucially important and needs to be linked with overall landuse to continue the promotion of growth in the county and in the midland region. The strategy for sustainable transport and accessibility as outlined below supports the integration of landuse and transportation where possible.

The Council, acting primarily as facilitator rather than direct provider of some sustainable transportation networks, will, nevertheless, have a significant role to play both in the development of an efficient transportation system and in planning for the future transport needs of the County. In pursuing the objective of encouraging modal shift the Council will co-operate closely with other relevant agencies and stakeholders, including the National Transport Authority.

4.5 Strategy for Sustainable Transport and Accessibility

The strategy for Sustainable Transport and Accessibility in County Offaly for the lifetime of this plan is to integrate spatial planning policies with key transport requirements and adhere to the most sustainable

principles of development. In this regard there is a direct link between this section of the plan and other sections of the plan such as the Core Strategy and Settlement Strategy set out in Chapter 1, Economic Strategy set out in Chapter 2 and the Retail and Town Centre Strategy set out in Chapter 5.

In the interest of consistency with national policy on smarter travel, the strategy for sustainable transport and accessibility, will address transport in order of sustainability focusing on the following areas:

1. Trip Generation/modal shift
2. Walking & Cycling
3. Public Transport i.e. rail and bus
4. Roads
5. Air Transport.

4.5.1 Trip Generation/Modal Shift

Smarter Travel policy acknowledges that achieving sustainable transport will require a suite of actions that will have supporting impacts in terms of travel demand and associated emissions. The suite of actions to reduce the distance travelled by private car encompasses a broad range of areas including:

- Focusing of population and employment growth in urban areas.
- Providing alternatives to the car are available i.e. public transport.
- Improving fuel efficiency, promoting energy efficient driving and alternative technologies.
- Strengthening institutional arrangements to deliver targets.

Reduction in trip generation is a particular challenge for County Offaly as car dependency stands at a rate of 63% according to the 2011 Census. This high rate of car dependency can be attributed to the predominantly rural nature of the settlement pattern of the County. However, the challenge for Offaly within the lifetime of this plan is to integrate landuse and transportation policy and give proper emphasis to the factors that have a positive role in promoting sustainable transport to reduce levels of car dependency such as:

- Promoting higher densities at appropriate locations.
- Mixing landuses.
- Designing for compact settlement forms and
- Concentrating appropriate development on transport corridors and linkages.

It is Council policy to encourage better integration of transport services in the County where possible with the aim of reducing car trips and to encourage and foster improved consultation and co-operation between both public and private providers of transport services operating in the County and in the Midland Region, including all providers of bus and rail services. In this regard, the Council shall be open to supporting, where practicable, initiatives to facilitate discourse and co-operation between transport service providers with a view to facilitating better integration of public transport services.

To deliver sustainable transport system and encourage modal shift away from car travel to more sustainable modes such as public transport, cycling and walking, to support the needs of residents and businesses in County Offaly, the Council will support proposals that:

- Support the full integration and alignment of transport plans with landuse plans and policies i.e. development plans, local area plans.
- Locate appropriate development in appropriate locations to make best use of transportation networks and to ensure that the carrying capacity of roads, operational efficiency, safety and significant investment is protected.
- Investment in public facilities such as schools, community/health centres and sports/amenity facilities takes account of the need to give priority to walking, cycling and public transport as a primary means of accessing these facilities.
- Improve choice by developing alternatives to the car.
- Promote regeneration and economic vitality by relieving traffic congestion and improving access to jobs and services, particularly for those most in need and for those without a car.
- Improve access to transport services and facilities in order to enable people with disabilities and people with mobility impairments to participate fully in public life.
- Improve pedestrian routes and the pedestrian environment.
- Improve and develop a walking and cycle network in County Offaly.
- Contribute to improvements to the extent and reliability of the public transport network.
- Improve and develop appropriate road and rail transport routes.
- Facilitate modes of transport that reduce carbon emissions e.g. by incorporating charging points for

electric vehicles, subject to their appropriate design and location.

- Would reduce the negative impacts of road traffic, for example, congestion, air pollution and road accident casualties.

4.5.2 Walking and Cycling:

Cycling and walking have the lowest environmental impact of all travel modes. The promotion of walking and cycling requires pedestrian and cycle facilities that form a coherent network, placing a strong emphasis on safety, serve the main areas where people wish to travel (including tourist and recreational areas of the County), are free from obstructions and are given priority over vehicular traffic where the modes converge. Offaly County Council promotes cycling and walking both as a means of transport and as a means of recreational activity particularly given the terrain in Offaly. The Council will therefore endeavour to make provisions for walkers and cyclists in both urban and rural areas of the County.

4.5.3 Public Transport

The provision of a high quality public transport network is paramount to achieving a high quality of life standard in the county and in providing a viable sustainable alternative transport mode. By encouraging employment and residential development to locate in existing development centres, it will be possible to take full advantage of existing and future investments in public transport. Due to the predominantly rural nature of County Offaly and its dispersed population, it is considered that small-scale public transport initiatives could be viable. The Council will co-operate and seek to find opportunities within the re-organisation of the Rural Transport Programme under the auspices of the National Transport Authority. The Council recognises the possibility of more integrated public transport services for the county particularly between the Midland Gateway towns and other regional towns such as Portlaoise and Longford.

Rail Infrastructure

County Offaly is centrally located along national interconnecting strategic rail corridors and as a result has an established rail infrastructure network. The 2030 Rail Network Strategy Review was published in 2011 and its purpose is to provide the Government with a basis for establishing a strategic policy framework for the future development of the rail passenger and rail freight sectors in Ireland.

The review informs of the strategic priorities and future investment strategy which would see three phases up to 2030 and all three phases would bring about improvements in rail services to County Offaly including:

- Reduced Journey times and increased frequency on Dublin to Galway Line in Phase 1 (2015-2020).
- Double Tracking from Portarlinton to Athlone in Phase 2 (2020-2025) and
- Electrification of Dublin to Galway line in Phase 3 (2025-2030).

Offaly County Council will co-operate with Iarnród Éireann and encourage the company to secure the upgrading of the existing rail linkages between Offaly and Athlone in particular as this represents a major opportunity to establish good physical links between Tullamore and Athlone. Within this is an opportunity for Tullamore station and adjoining lands to be developed as a transport (bus / rail) node. This would allow for the integration of local bus services, including a possible future town bus service with the rail network. Clara station could be developed similarly to increase service provision in the town. The Portarlinton Land Use and Transportation Study has identified the railway station as a key asset in the development of the town.

The provision of a rail link from Mullingar directly to Clara would have the effect of creating an integrated rail network linking Longford, Mullingar, Ballinasloe, and Athlone with Tullamore, Portarlinton, Kildare and Portlaoise.

The final link in the network could involve the provision of a new line from Enfield to Edenderry with a continuation to Portarlinton (possible junction at Garryhinch). This line, if provided, would be of great strategic importance in the context of the midlands. Many of the wayleaves between Portarlinton and Enfield are in the ownership of Bord na Móna.

Bus

Public bus services in Offaly are currently operated by Bus Éireann and private operators. Offaly County Council will facilitate the improvement and expansion of public bus services where they strengthen linkages to other areas of the county, the Midland Region and the rest of the country.

Rural Transport Programme

The Rural Transport Programme funded by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, provides transport services to people whose travel needs and

transportation are not met by existing bus or train services. The Programme aims to enhance and sustain nationwide accessibility, through community based participation, particularly for those at risk of social exclusion, as well as people with mobility, sensory and cognitive impairments. It plays a major role in combating rural isolation and acts as a catalyst in creating models of partnership, at all levels, where key sectors actively engage in transport provision, to ensure equality of access for all. Services funded under the Programme complement, rather than compete with, existing public transport services provided by CIE Companies or by private transport operators.

Offaly Local Development Company (OLDC) operates a rural transport service in West and South Offaly where there are currently 18 regular bus routes in operation in the area providing services and access to third level colleges, training centres for education and training opportunities, local towns, active age/network services in local centres and transport requirements for youth groups recreational and educational opportunities. Offaly Kildare (OK) Transport offers similar services for north Offaly and provides access to third level education facilities, bus connections, services to larger urban centres, activities and health and medical appointments.

Offaly County Council recognises the value that public transport can add to the quality of life of rural communities and will continue to support the Rural Transport Programme.

4.5.4 Roads

The Council recognises the importance of providing a safe and efficient road system in the county in order to facilitate the development of the local and national economy, to protect the safety of users of public roads and to safeguard public investment in their provision.

Transport patterns contribute to the changing lifestyle patterns in modern society. Car ownership in Offaly is high. The percentage of households in Offaly with access to a car stands at 86% compared to 82% nationally. Also, Offaly has a higher car ownership rate at one car per 2.6 persons compared to the national average of 1 car per 3.4 persons¹.

National Routes

As at 2013, County Offaly currently comprises over 2,100 kilometres of roads, which are categorised as follows:

¹ 2011 Census of population figures.

- Motorway (14.7 kilometres).
- National Secondary Roads (103 kilometres)
- Regional Roads (389 kilometres)
- County Roads (1640 kilometres)

Table 4.1 lists the Motorway and National Roads within County Offaly.

Table 4.1: Motorways and National Roads in Offaly

ROAD TYPE	DESCRIPTION
Motorway	M6 – Dublin to Galway. An 8.2 km section traverses North Offaly.
Motorway	M7 – Dublin to Limerick. A 6.5 km portion traverses through South Offaly.
National Secondary	N52 – Links Dundalk and Nenagh through Mullingar (including Mullingar By-Pass), Tullamore (including Tullamore Bypass) and links to Birr.
National Secondary	N80 – Links the N52 South of Tullamore to the N11 at Enniscorthy via Portlaoise
National Secondary	N62 – Links Athlone with the N8 south of Thurles. It passes through Birr.

Offaly is located on a “Central Spine” which was identified in the National Spatial Strategy as linking the east / west radial transport corridors by road through the midlands. Offaly is also where two national secondary routes interconnect i.e. the (N52) Dundalk - Nenagh and the (N80) Enniscorthy-Moate routes. These routes and their improvement make the county more accessible to ports such as Drogheda, Bellview and Rosslare. They are also fundamental in providing connections with other urban centres in the midlands. The M6 (Dublin to Galway) and the M7 (Dublin to Limerick) motorways assist substantially in improving the county’s accessibility and attracting inward investment.

The Midland Linked Gateway of Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar is characterised by a number of national and strategically road routes. These strategic national transport corridors play a key role in the economic competitiveness of the Midland Regional by providing access to the strategic international access points of Dublin Airport, Dublin Port, Rosslare and Bellview.

The Council is aware of the vital importance of Motorway and National Routes to the economic and social development both within County Offaly and throughout the country. The Council in particular recognises the crucial role of the National Secondary Routes in the county in contributing to economic development and of the special position of the N52, N62 and N80 as part of the Strategic Corridor links through the country. It further recognises the

importance of quick access from the major population centres to both the motorway routes of the M6 and M7.

Motorways

Offaly County Council will facilitate the development of the Motorway network in conjunction with the National Roads Authority (NRA) where necessary and in accordance with relevant Government policies. Part of both the M6 and M7 motorway routes traverse through County Offaly. It is the policy of this Council to assist and facilitate the achievement of road objectives, together with associated ancillary and infrastructural services that the NRA may be undertaking in future in the county.

National Secondary Routes

The Council will actively pursue the upgrading and improvement of the N52, N62 and the N80 including the provision of appropriate bypasses, where considered necessary.

Access to National Roads

In order that the effectiveness of past and future public investment in road improvements should not be diminished in whole or in part and to ensure the safety and free flow of traffic, future development requiring direct access onto National Secondary routes will be curtailed and assessed against the provisions of Guidance for Planning Authorities entitled Spatial Planning and National Roads issued by the DoECLG in January 2012 as outlined in table 4.2.

Table 4.2: NRA Access to National Roads Policy

Location	Policy
Lands adjoining National Roads to which speed limits greater than 60 km/ph apply:	To avoid the creation of additional access point from new development or the generation of increased traffic from existing access to national roads for all development types.
Transitional Zone i.e. sections of national roads on the approaches to or exit from urban centres that are subject to a speed limit of 60 km/ph before a lower 50 km/ph limit	To provide for a limited level of direct access to facilitate orderly urban development. Proposals must be subject to a road safety audit carried out in accordance with the NRAs requirements and a proliferation of entrances, which would lead to a diminution in the role of such transitional zones, must be avoided.
Lands adjoining National Roads within 50 km/ph speed limits:	Access will be considered by planning authorities in accordance with normal road safety, traffic management and urban design criteria for built up areas.

Source: National Roads and Spatial Planning, Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2012

Avoidance of Traffic Hazard

Where development is permitted, the Council will require that it can be accommodated without the creation of a specific traffic hazard and that sight distances, road widths and distances from junctions comply with the appropriate geometric design standards as adopted by Offaly County Council. Proposals should comply with the NRA Design Manual on Roads & Bridges (current edition) (NRA DMRB) and Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (2013).

Regional Routes

Regional roads comprise 389km of the county's total road network. In the case of Regional routes, especially those which carry higher volumes of traffic, the Council shall adopt a restrictive policy in relation to new development in the interests of preserving the traffic capacity of these routes and in order to avoid the creation of traffic hazards. These routes are of strategic importance to the county and to the region. Applications for rural housing requiring access onto restricted regional routes will be assessed against Policy **SSP-19** (Rural Housing Policy for Areas of Special Control) as set out in Chapter 1 (Core Strategy, Settlement Strategy and Part V Housing Strategy).

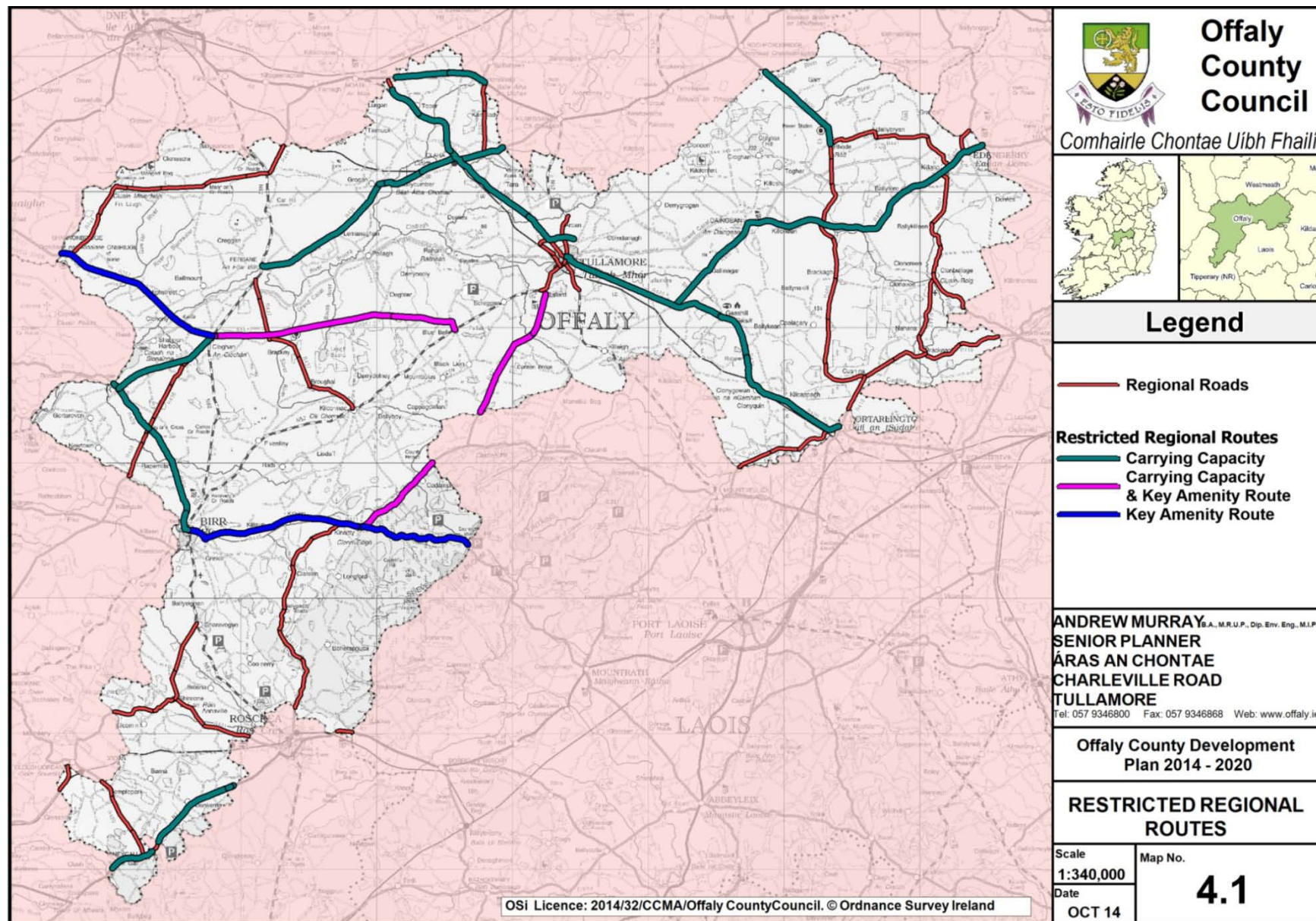
Four of the county's regional routes have been identified as key amenity routes which offer a very attractive "cross section" view of differing landscapes of the county. The enjoyment of such varying landscapes for the visitor, the person who regularly traverses the county or the local person can be lessened by insensitive levels of roadside development and indeed excessive levels of development.

Restricted Regional Routes are listed in Table 4.3 and illustrated on Map 4.1

Table 4.3 Restricted Regional Routes

Route	Location	Reason
R356	Cloghan to Banagher	Carrying Capacity
R357	Cloghan to Blueball	Carrying Capacity & Amenity
R400	Rhode to county boundary toward Rochfortbridge	Carrying Capacity
R402	Ballina Cross to Edenderry	Carrying Capacity
R420	Tober to Tullamore,	Carrying Capacity
R420	Tullamore to Portarlinton	Carrying Capacity
R421	Tullamore to Kinnitty,	Carrying Capacity & Amenity
R436	Ferbane to county boundary toward Kilbeggan	Carrying Capacity.
R439	Birr to Banagher	Carrying Capacity.
R445	Dunkerrin through Moneygall to county boundary	Carrying Capacity.
R446	Horseleap to the county boundary towards Moate.	Carrying Capacity
R440	Birr through Kinnitty to county boundary towards Mountrath	Amenity
R357	Cloghan to Shannonbridge	Amenity.

Map 4.1 Restricted Regional Routes



Local Roads

78% of County Offaly's roads are classified as 'local' roads. These roads are subsequently divided into Local Primary Roads, Local Secondary Roads and Local Tertiary Roads. The undulating nature of many of the roads can be attributed to the subsurface peat, which is prevalent in Offaly. Offaly County Council will enhance and improve this road network, in line with its programmes (refer to the objectives in this Chapter), as it is of major importance to both the economy of the county and to communities.

Urban Roads and Streets

There is an appreciation that urban roads and streets are much more than traffic corridors. They should be places where people want to live, and spend time. The key is to improve street design for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users, and to reduce the impact of vehicles on residential streets. A well designed network of streets, which are place-based in their scope and design, has the ability to promote active transportation. As a result, they encourage improved public health while shifting transportation towards sustainability, mitigating the impacts of climate change in the process.

The Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets as published jointly by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in March 2013 outlines practical design measures to encourage more sustainable travel patterns in urban areas. The Manual sets out design guidance and standards for constructing new and reconfiguring existing urban roads and streets, incorporating good planning and design practice.

The Council acknowledges the achievement of a better balance in how urban roads and streets are designed and used and will actively implement the principles, approaches and standards set out in the Manual in seeking to achieve best practice design outcomes with regard to street networks and individual streets.

Electric Cars

To assist Ireland in meeting EU targets on carbon emissions, the Electric Transport Program 2008 was launched by the government in an attempt to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The target for the program is to see 10% of the National Road Fleet electrically powered by 2020. The shift to electric vehicles requires the installation of charging points across the country and the provision for chargers in homes. Developing the infrastructure for alternatively

fuelled vehicles will be a vital step in encouraging consumers to make more environmentally friendly transport choices. The Council will promote and support the development of appropriate infrastructure to accommodate a change to electrically powered vehicles and to assist in achieving the 10% target for County Offaly.

Contribution towards the Cost of Road Construction / Improvements

The Council will require the payment of a contribution towards the cost of upgrading and or maintenance of a public road where the work is necessary to facilitate the proposed development.

Reservation of Land for Road Improvements/Bypasses

The Council will require the reservation of corridors of land free of development for the provision of road improvements or new roads including bypasses and relief routes serving towns and villages. Once the design, approval and funding for such works has been secured, the Council will endeavour to protect the route through the reservation of land free from development.

Transport Network and the Linked Midland Linked Gateway

The Midlands Linked Gateway transport network is characterised by a number of nationally strategic corridors including the M4, M6, and M7 national primary routes and the strategic linking corridors including the N52, N62, N55, N80 national secondary routes. Further, rail routes (Dublin-Galway / Mayo and Dublin-Sligo) that traverse the Midlands Region provide key external and internal linkages for the Gateway particularly to Dublin, Galway, Sligo, Portlaoise and Longford. Offaly County Council acknowledges its role in facilitating the upgrading of the transport network, particularly in relation to roads that link the principal Gateway towns.

The National Roads Authority (NRA) is currently committed to the following programme for Offaly:

- Tullamore / Kilbeggan (N52) – New Road.

In addition to this, the Council regards the upgrade and improvement of the N62, the N52 and the N80 as being important in the regional context, especially in promoting connectivity with the Midland Linked Gateway. In particular, the needs of the N62 having regard to its foundations on peat is acknowledged.

These road upgrades will have significant effects on the accessibility and competitiveness of the Gateway in terms of ease of access to adjacent regions and other gateways, access within the Midlands Linked Gateway and other large towns in the region, and on the overall development patterns in the midlands. Offaly County Council recognises the critical role it has to play in striving to create stronger, high quality transport linkages within the Midlands Gateway and in turn, will seek to ensure that transport linkages within Offaly are of a standard to ensure the successful delivery of people, employment and services to the Midlands Region. The Council will support the development of new transport linkages, to further strengthen connectivity and in particular, will liaise with the relevant bodies and agencies when seeking to establish such linkages.

Strategic Development Framework for the Midlands Gateway (2006)

This framework makes a number of recommendations in relation to the successful development of the Midlands Gateway and in relation to transport. The key messages are as follows:

- Investment in transport in order to increase interconnectivity within the region.
- Development of an integrated public transport system for the gateway.
- Completion of road improvements and upgrades as a matter of priority, specifically in relation to the N80, N52 and the N62 for Offaly.

This Council acknowledges the recommendations made in the Strategic Development Framework for the Midlands Gateway ('Indecon' report) and will endeavour to carry out these recommendations in order to strengthen the existing transport infrastructure within County Offaly and in turn contribute to a robust and efficient regional and national network.

The Strategic Development Framework for the Midlands Gateway states that one of the main characteristics that a gateway should aspire to achieving is to be within one hour of an airport either with international access or linking to one with such access, and also to have adequate, reliable, cost effective and efficient access to port facilities. Offaly County Council acknowledges that the establishment of an airport would significantly increase interconnectivity for the Midlands Gateway and will endeavour to facilitate such a development in the county.

4.5.5 Air Transport

The Smarter Travel national policy document recognises that aviation provides a key transport link for Ireland. Connectivity and access through international and regional airports are vital for our tourism industry in particular. It also acknowledges Government support for the development of a network of regional airports to assist balanced regional development.

Offaly County Council recognises the significance of the role that regional airports have in promoting balanced development and supports the location of an airport in the county or within the Midland Region.

4.6 Sustainable Transport and Accessibility Policies

Sustainable Transport and Accessibility

STAP-01 It is Council policy to support sustainable transport and accessibility in County Offaly and to be consistent with the goals of Smarter Travel – A sustainable Transport Future, A new transport policy for Ireland 2009-2020 which seeks to:

- Reduce overall travel demand.
- Maximise the efficiency of the transport network.
- Reduce reliance on fossil fuels.
- Reduce transport emissions.
- Improve accessibility to transport.

STAP-02 It is Council policy to support the Government's Electric Transport Programme 2008-2020 by facilitating the roll-out of battery charging infrastructure for electric vehicles where considered appropriate.

Landuse and Transportation Integration

STAP-03 It is Council policy to integrate landuse and transport to ensure a sustainable, coherent, efficient and cost effective approach to transport provision for development in County Offaly.

Trip Generation/Modal Shift

STAP-04 It is Council policy to promote more compact development forms that reduce overall demand for transport and transport infrastructure and support proposals that encourage modal shift towards sustainable travel modes.

STAP-05 It is Council policy to encourage better integration of transport services with the aim of reducing car trips and to encourage and foster improved consultation and co-operation between both public and private providers of transport services operating in the county and in the Midland Region, including all providers of bus and rail services.

Walking/Cycling:

STAP-06 It is Council policy to promote walking and cycling, subject to appropriate environmental assessments, including Habitats Directive Assessment, as an alternative mode of transport for travelling to work and for recreational purposes, to require the provision of cycle ways and walkways and associated facilities as part of new development and to support safer walking and cycling routes to schools under the Green Schools Initiative where feasible.

STAP-07 It is Council policy to facilitate and support a cycling route along the canal towpaths in County Offaly (from Edenderry to Shannon Harbour) for recreational purposes and to enhance tourism potential.

STAP-08 It is Council policy to support, subject to appropriate environmental assessments, including Habitats Directive Assessment, the continued development of cycle routes by identifying routes both within the county and at national and regional level. Particular emphasis will be placed on those that link existing cycle routes and tourist destinations. Cycle routes shall adhere to the principles contained within the national policy document Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future 2009-2020, and the National Cycle Policy Framework document or updated/amended guidance document where appropriate.

STAP-09 It is Council policy to support the pedestrianisation in town and village centres where appropriate.

STAP-10 It is Council policy to support the provision of secure cycle parking facilities in towns and at all public service destinations.

Public Transport

STAP-11 It is Council policy to co-operate with and encourage Iarnród Éireann to secure the upgrading of the existing rail linkages between Athlone, Tullamore and Portarlington.

STAP-12 (a) It is Council policy to promote and facilitate, in co-operation with the Department of Transport, Irish Rail and adjoining local authorities, the provision of a second line between Portarlington and Athlone. In conjunction with this there is an opportunity for;

- Tullamore station and adjoining lands to be developed as a transport (bus/rail node) with possible integration of local bus services to serve the town and catchment area
- Clara station and adjoining lands to be developed as a transport (bus/rail node) with possible integration of local bus services to serve the town and catchment area.

(b) It will be the policy of the Council to have regard to the Portarlington Land use and Transportation Study which has identified the railway station as a key asset in the development of the town.

STAP-13 It is Council policy to support and facilitate the operation of existing bus services and to facilitate the provisions of improved facilities for bus users in towns and villages including the provision of set down areas for coaches and bus shelters at all bus stops where feasible.

STAP-14 It is Council policy to support the rural transport programme in County Offaly which facilitates the provision and promotion of privately run transportation systems to provide accessibility in rural areas of the County.

Roads

STAP-15 It is Council policy to facilitate development of the road network in Offaly and the Midland Region in accordance with the National Development Plan and with Government policy. The Council will also support the relevant agencies and bodies involved in achieving such development including the National Roads Authority and the National Transport Authority.

STAP-16 It is Council policy to strictly control development, outside of identified settlements, which could generate significant additional traffic, thereby potentially compromising the capacity and efficiency of the national roads/restricted regional roads and associated interchanges and possibly lead to the premature and unacceptable reduction in the level of service available to road users. This policy will also apply to National roads which may be downgraded during the lifetime of this plan but which will still comprise high quality regionally important links.

STAP-17 It is Council policy to protect the safety, capacity and efficiency of national roads and associated junctions.

STAP-18 It is Council policy that development(s) requiring a new direct access or an intensification of an existing access onto National Secondary road, or onto a privately owned road leading onto National Secondary road where a speed limit greater than 50 km/ph applies will be restricted in accordance with the provisions of Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities, January 2012. Exceptional circumstances may be considered where the development is of National and Regional Strategic Importance and complies with the criteria set out in the Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines in this regard.

STAP-19 It is Council policy that proposals for rural dwellings which are seeking direct access onto a regional restricted route as identified in Table 4.3, will generally be permitted provided all of the criteria set out under the Rural Housing policy for Areas of Special Control as set out in Policy **SSP-19** is complied with.

STAP-20 It is Council policy to improve the road links between the national roads network and identified settlements within Offaly's Settlement Hierarchy in order to cater for anticipated additional traffic flows and to facilitate the economic development of these settlements.

STAP-21 It is Council policy to ensure that developments which have the potential to generate significant traffic movement as a result of the use proposed are subject to a Traffic Impact Assessment. The Council may also require the provision of Road Safety Audits in the case of major road works.

STAP-22 It is Council policy to comply with National Roads Authority Policy for the Provision of Service Areas on Motorways & High Quality Dual Carriageways, October 2007.

Air Transport

STAP-23 It is a Council policy to support the provision of an airport within the county to aid the development of the Gateway and the Midland Region.

Midland Linked Gateway

STAP-24 It is Council policy to encourage and facilitate transport investment within the county and the Midlands Region in particular the gateway towns, in order to create effective links and to reduce travel times between the main towns and to maximise the cohesion and critical mass of the region and improve intra and inter-regional connectivity. In this regard, it is also Council policy to co-operate with the adjoining local authorities to achieve these effective and improved links.

STAP-25 It is Council policy to maximise the use of fully accessible public transport that links the Midland Gateway towns internally and externally by co-ordinating built form, land use and transport planning. This will include facilitating high-quality bus and rail services that meet user needs.

General

STAP-26 It is Council policy to improve deficiencies in pavement surface, riding quality and general alignment to protect the heavy investment in existing facilities.

STAP-27 It is Council policy when designing or inputting into road schemes to recognize the importance of hedgerows and roadside boundaries for wildlife and bio-diversity. Retention of such features will be incorporated into design and where this is not possible, replacement planting with native species of indigenous provenance will be provided.

STAP-28 In considering applications for quarries, the Council will seek to ensure access to the highest possible category of the road network hierarchy.

4.7 Sustainable Transport and Accessibility Objectives²

STAO-01 It is an objective of the Council to carry out and implement:

- A walking and cycling strategy for County Offaly.
- The existing Birr and Edenderry Walking and Cycling Strategies.

STAO-02 It is an objective of the Council to facilitate the provision of transport infrastructure in County Offaly in line with national policy as outlined in the National Development Plan, Government policy and also in line with the Councils own programme of works.

STAO-03 It is an objective of the Council to facilitate the development of the national secondary road network in Offaly through the continued upgrading and improvement of the national secondary roads in the county, the N62, the N52 and the N80.

STAO-04 The Council recognises the importance of providing a safe and efficient road system in the county in order to facilitate the development of the local and national economy, to protect the safety of users of public roads and to safeguard public investment in their provision. In this regard it is an objective of the Council to

² The order of listing of objectives is not intended to indicate priorities. Subject to the availability of resources, it is the Council's aim to monitor and accomplish the objectives listed in this section within the period of the plan.

construct, upgrade and improve, where necessary, the national secondary roads in the county as outlined in Table 4.4. The Council will have regard to national and regional transport plans and the council's programme of works. The undertaking of any works will be subject to the availability of finance and resources.

Table 4.4 - National Secondary Route Roads Objectives:

Objective Reference	Scheme Description
STAO-05	N52: To construct a new road between Tullamore and Kilbeggan (Link Road).
STAO-06	To secure the provision of a Western Bypass/Relief Road to the west of Tullamore town linking the R420 to the north west of the town with the N52 to the south west of the town.
STAO-07	To co-operate with the NRA in providing a bypass for the following towns and villages, should the decision be made to do so and to protect from development any reservation bands / corridors so as to avoid compromising the construction of the road: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N52: Kilcormac • N80: Killeigh
STAO-08	N62: Upgrade, widen and reconstruction of N62 from Kennedy's Cross to the County boundary at Ballynahown.
STAO-09	N62: Construction of Birr Relief Road and construction of Birr By-pass and Distributor Road Network (Birr LUTS).
STAO-10	N62: Birr-Riverstown local widening and re-surfacing.

STAO-11: It is an objective of the Council to construct, upgrade and improve, where necessary, the regional roads in the county as outlined in Table 4.5. The Council will have regard to national and regional transport plans and the Council's programme of works. The undertaking of any works will be subject to the availability of finance and resources and will be subject to environmental assessments where necessary.

Table 4.5: Regional Roads Objectives:

Objective Reference	Scheme Description
STAO-12	R402: Construction of Edenderry By-Pass and Relief Roads
STAO-13	R420: Construction of By-Passes and Relief Roads for both Portarlinton and Clara
STAO-14	To secure the provision and undertake upgrades of regional roads in the county as listed in the following objectives: R357: Blueball to Cloghan and Cloghan to Shannonbridge.

	<p>R400: Rochfortbridge to Portarlington.</p> <p>R401/419/R442: Portarlington to Edenderry.</p> <p>R402: Ballina Cross to Daingean to Edenderry.</p> <p>R420: Tullamore to Portarlington.</p> <p>R421: Tullamore to Roscrea <i>via</i> Kinnitty.</p> <p>R436: Ferbane to Ballycumber, Ballycumber to Clara and Clara to Kilbeggan.</p> <p>R437: Kilcormac to Ferbane.</p> <p>R439: Birr to Banagher.</p> <p>R440: Birr to County Boundary via Kinnitty.</p> <p>R441: Rhode to Edenderry.</p> <p>R444: Clonmacnoise to Shannonbridge, to Doon, to County Boundary.</p> <p>R446: Moate to Horseleap (Old N6).</p> <p>R490: Moneygall to Cloughjordan.</p> <p>R491: Shinrone to Roscrea and Shinrone to Cloughjordan.</p> <p>R492: Sharavogue to Shinrone.</p>
STAO-15 (a)	R420: To provide a bypass for Cloneygowan and to protect from development any reservation bands / corridors so as to avoid compromising the construction of the road.
STAO-15 (b)	R420: To secure the provision of providing a bypass for Geashill and, should the decision be made to do so, protect from development any reservation bands / corridors so as to avoid compromising the construction of the road.
STAO-15 (c)	<p>R420: To co-operate with Laois County Council to provide the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Relief Road from the Tullamore Road to Botley Lane, Portarlington. 2. Long Term bypass to the south

STAO-16: It is an objective of the Council to provide effective linkages between the county and national roads.

STAO-17: It is an objective of the Council to facilitate the continued improvement and upgrading of all roads, should their status be re-graded, under the national roads programme and / or the Council's road programme.

STAO-18: It is an objective of the Council to improve and maintain regional and county roads.

STAO-19: It is an objective of the Council to safeguard all existing rail infrastructure and encourage the re-opening of rail stations, and to preserve disused stations / halts and track, appropriate to future strategic county public transport needs.

STAO-20: It is an objective of the Council to improve poor road alignment and junctions with a high accident rating as the opportunity presents itself or as development need requires. In general, the decision regarding which road section to improve first will be guided by the following considerations:

- The need to provide strategic links to National Road access
- The elimination of traffic hazards.
- The development of industry, agriculture, forestry, housing and commercial development wherever such development will be of substantial social or economic benefit to the county.
- The need to provide for essential communications at an acceptable social and economic cost.

STAO-21: It is an objective of the Council to improve and upgrade bridges in the county including the following:

- R400 (Rhode).
- R420 (Derrykillane, Cloneygowan).
- R420 (Cloneygowan Bridge).
- Pullough Bridge.
- N80 (Charlestown Bridge Clara).
- R421 (Clonfosse, Kinnitty).
- R401 (Kilcumber Edenderry).
- Rahan Bridge.

STAO-22: To reserve land for future relief roads adjacent to the following towns and villages:

- Tullamore
- Birr
- Clara
- Ferbane
- Portarlinton
- Cloghan
- Killeigh
- Geashill
- Cloneygowan
- Ballinagar
- Edenderry
- Kilcormac

STAO-23: It is an objective of the Council to support the location of an airport in the county and/or within the Midland Region.

Water Services

4.8 Aim

To continue to ensure the provision of necessary infrastructural services to support development in accordance with the county's settlement hierarchy without compromising the quality of our natural environment.

4.9 Context

The provision of infrastructure improves the quality of life for the existing and potential new population. It is a pre-requisite to facilitating new development within the county.

The **Water Services Act 2007** provides the legislative context, governing functions, standards, obligations and practice in relation to the planning, management and delivery of water supply and wastewater collection and treatment services.

The **Water Services (Amendment) Act 2012** is to ensure Ireland's compliance with a European Court of Justice ruling to fulfil its obligations under the Waste Directive (75/442/EEC) regarding domestic waste waters disposed of through septic tanks and other individual waste water treatment systems.

The Water Services Act 2013 & "Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides for the establishment of Irish Water as a subsidiary of Bord Gáis Éireann. Irish Water will be responsible for the installation of water meters for domestic households connected to a public water supply. The relevant legislation provides BGÉ and Irish Water/Uisce Éireann with the authority to install meters in all domestic properties and provides any of the necessary powers, available to a water services authority under the 2007 Act, that are necessary to meet this objective.

Irish Water was established as a public utility for the delivery of public water and wastewater services.

The statutory Responsibility for Water Services has transferred to Irish Water from the 1st of January 2014 under the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013, and all Local Authorities now operate water services under a Service Level Agreement with Irish Water. Both operational and capital expenditure in water services is 100% funded by Irish Water from this date, and accordingly Irish Water now approve and fund all water services infrastructure Development.

It is important to note in the context of the lifetime of this plan i.e. 2014-2020 that Irish Water will be taking responsibility for the operational and capital delivery functions of local authorities in the water services area.

Other legislative provisions with which the Council must comply with include;

- **Drinking Water Regulations 2007**
- **Waste Water Discharge Regulations 2007**

Offaly County Council's **Assessment of Needs** examines how and where the provision of public water services (water and wastewater) should be provided and/or improved, and in the most cost-efficient manner. Prioritisation of projects and the scheduling of construction works depends on Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government approval and the availability of resources.

The Council has a primary role in providing and/or facilitating the provision of adequate services at a local scale within its administrative area i.e. effluent treatment plants, water treatment facilities etc.

4.10 Strategy

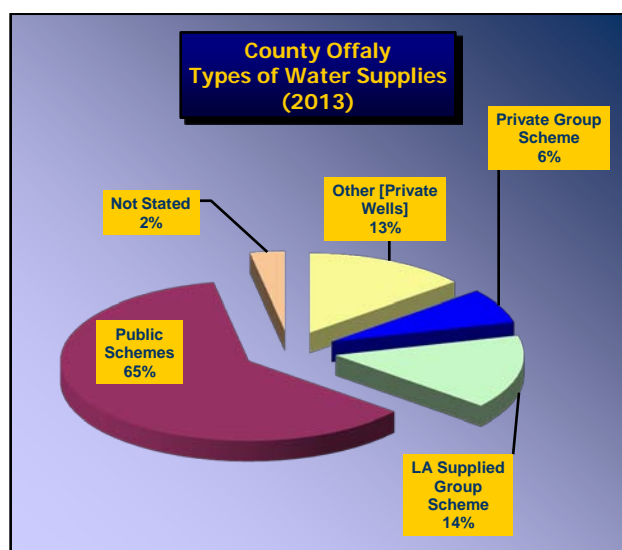
Under Section 33 of the Water Services No. 2 Act 2013, Irish Water shall prepare a Water Services Strategic Plan in a format prescribed by, and for the approval of the Minister for The Environment. Irish Water must consult with the each Local Authority, each Regional Authority, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Commission for Energy Regulation when making the Plan. The Plan, among other things will consider the existing and projected demand for water services. As far as is practicable, the Plan will be consistent with the National Spatial Strategy, Regional Planning Guidelines, and any river basin management Plans under regulation 13 of the European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations 2003 (S.I. No. 722 of 2003) for the time being in force.

The Water Services Strategic Plan shall be for a period of 25 years, and will be reviewed at 5 yearly intervals. Offaly County Council will liaise closely with Irish Water to ensure that improvements and upgrades to water services infrastructure is adequate to meet the planned development of the County in an environmentally sustainable manner and to ensure that existing schemes are operated and maintained adequately."

4.10.1 Water Supply

County Offaly's water supplies are derived from both public and private supplies. Approximately 65% of water supplies in Offaly are derived from ground water reserves which provide a very effective source of water supply. The Council provides a monitoring and regulatory approach in ensuring the protection of groundwater supplies. (Refer to Environment Section of this Chapter which includes policy and mapping regarding the protection of the county's major groundwater resources).

Figure 4.1: Types of Water Supplies in Offaly



Source: Central Statistics Office 2011.

4.10.2 Water Supply Schemes

Offaly County Council currently operates and maintains 23 Public Water Supply Schemes. As at June 2013, public water supplies provided a total supply of approximately 29,000m³ per day within County Offaly (i.e. groundwater supplies approximately 20,500m³ per day and river abstraction supplies approximately 8,500m³ per day). This serves approximately 49,786 persons within the county.

Table 4.6 provides a breakdown on the water supply schemes throughout the county as at June 2013 including Public Water Schemes, Public Group Water Schemes and Private Group Water Schemes.

The Council proposes to develop and extend water supply schemes to provide a potable water supply where necessary and economically viable. These supplies will be in full compliance with the drinking water regulations.

4.10.3 Private Water Sources

In respect of private water sources, the Council recognises the need for some developments to connect to a private water source. However, all new developments must connect to a public supply scheme or group scheme where such schemes are available.

Table 4.6: Water Schemes in Operation within Offaly (March 2014)

Scheme	Location
Public Water Scheme	Banagher, Birr, Clara, Clonbullogue, Coolderry, Daingean, Dungar, Dunkerrin, Edenderry, Geashill, Horseleap, Kilcormac, Kinnitty, Moneygall, MountBolos, Moyclare/Ferbane, Portarlinton, Rahan, Rhode, Shannonbridge, Shinrone/Brosna, Tullamore, Walsh Island.
Public Group Water Scheme	Ballindarra, Mile Tree, Endrim, Erryarmstrong, Kilnacarra, Rashina / Kilnagarnagh, Ballycommon / Kilclonfert, Townspark, Shandra Lane, Leamore / Leabeg, Bog Road.
Private Group Water Scheme	Aghancon, Ballinagar, Ballyboy, Ballyfore / Ballykilleen, Bloomhill, Boher, Bracknagh, Cadamstown, Clareen, Clondelara, Clonfinlough, Durrow, Killeigh/Cloneygowan, Meelaghans, Mountlucas, Tober, Rath.

Water Conservation

Stages 1 & 2 of the Council's Water Conservation project are complete and have established management structures and the basis for proper leakage control. Phase 3 of the project which commenced in 2010 and is ongoing, will involve infrastructural renewal and rehabilitation.

4.10.4 Public Wastewater Treatment

In accordance with the county's settlement hierarchy, wastewater treatment plants and the provision of public wastewater schemes are provided within the county's towns and villages as resources permit. Currently, (June 2013), the county's Sráids have no public wastewater schemes and are therefore serviced by individual septic tanks / effluent treatment systems.

Throughout the Plan Period 2014 - 2020

Future development is contingent on the provision of adequate wastewater treatment facilities which also includes individual treatment facilities, as deemed appropriate and in accordance with the Water Services Act 2012.

4.10.5 Public Wastewater Treatment Schemes

Table 4.7: Location of Public Wastewater Treatment Plants within Offaly as of June 2013.

Table 4.7: Location of Public Wastewater Treatment Plants within Offaly (June 2013)

Scheme	Location
Waste Water Treatment Plants	Ballinagar, Ballycumber, Banagher, Belmont, Birr, Bracknagh, Clara, Cloghan, Clonbullogue, Cloneygowan, Coolderry, Edenderry, Ferbane, Geashill, Daingean, Kilcormac, Killeigh, Kinnitty, Leamanaghan, Moneygall, Mountbolus, Mucklagh, Rahan, Shannonharbour, Rhode, Shannonbridge, Shinrone, Tullamore, Walsh Island.

4.10.6 Sludge Disposal

Offaly currently has three centres (located adjacent to existing wastewater treatment plants) for accepting domestic sludge namely: Edenderry, Ferbane and Tullamore. The Council's Sludge Management Plan recommends the establishment of a central sludge treatment facility for the county to be located in Tullamore. This plan will provide for the stabilisation of both municipal and domestic sludge and allow its beneficial reuse.

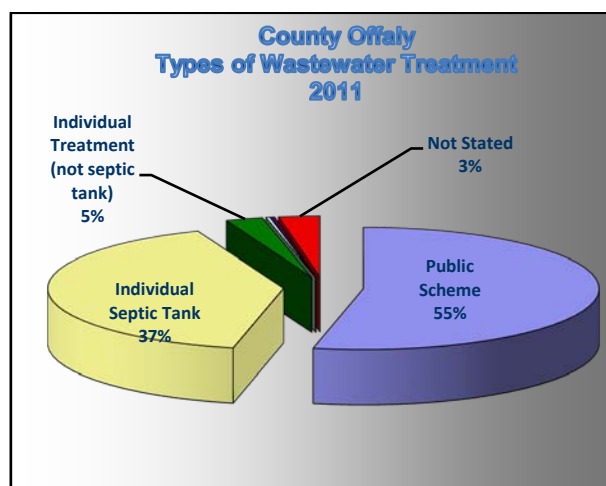
4.10.7 Surface Water Discharges

The Council continues to ensure the sustainable management of surface water discharges from all developments, through the utilisation of sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDs), in accordance with the provisions of SI NO. 272 of 2009 – European Communities Environmental Objectives (Surface Water) Regulations and international best practice.

4.10.8 Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems-SuDs

Please refer to the Environmental section of this Chapter for further details on SuDs.

Figure 4.2: Types of Wastewater Supplies in Offaly (June 2013)



Source CSO,2011.

4.11 Water Services Policies

Water Services General Policies

WSP-01 It is Council policy to ensure that the provision of water and wastewater treatment facilities is undertaken in accordance with EU policies and Directives, relevant National legislation and National / Regional policies.

WSP-02 It is Council policy to enable infrastructure and service delivery in the context of the National Development Plan, subject to available finance.

WSP-03 It is Council policy to provide and maintain adequate water supply, drainage and wastewater services in settlements as resources permit, giving priority to those centres where serious deficiencies are in evidence or where further development is anticipated. Further, it is Council policy that this is undertaken in a manner which protects and enhances the natural environment, whilst providing for economic, urban and rural development purposes.

WSP-04 It is Council policy to ensure that the capacity and efficiency of water supplies and wastewater facilities must be appropriate prior to the acceptance of a development proposal. The Council may, where it is deemed appropriate, require developers to provide water services mains with capacities in excess of those required by the development being served, if this is required in the interests of long term development of the area.

Water Supply Policies

WSP-05 It is Council policy to provide public water supply to towns, villages and rural areas in accordance with the Water Services Investment Programme 2010 - 2013 and the Rural Water Programme where feasible and where approved by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. All such supplies shall comply with Drinking Water Regulations 2007.

WSP-06 It is Council policy that the scale of provision of public water supply relates to scale of envisaged settlement size, in accordance with the county's settlement hierarchy. Therefore, large-scale availability and/or possibility of services available must not be a pre-cursor to large-scale growth in inappropriate locations.

WSP-07 It is Council policy to require developments to connect to public water supplies where adequate, or where proposals for upgrading works are put forward, as appropriate.

WSP-08 It is Council policy to monitor and regulate Group Water schemes in accordance with National policy and regulations.

WSP-09 It is Council policy to endeavour to facilitate developments which have requirements for water by allowing potential water resources of County Offaly to be utilised, where practicable and possible, subject to appropriate safeguards.

WSP-10 It is Council policy to endeavour to facilitate developments which may have exceptionally large requirements for water by allowing the potential water resources of the River Shannon to be utilised, where possible, subject to appropriate safeguards.

Water Conservation

WSP-11 It is Council policy to continue to facilitate, encourage and comply with best practice methods in water conservation throughout the county.

Wastewater Treatment Policies

WSP-12 It is Council policy to make provision for improved and additional wastewater services on a planned basis, related to present and future needs of housing, industry and commerce, in accordance with the county's settlement hierarchy and the Water Services Investment Programme 2010 - 2013 where feasible and where approved by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

WSP-13 It is Council policy that the scale of effluent treatment plants relates to the scale of envisaged settlement size, in accordance with the county's settlement hierarchy. Therefore, large-scale availability and/or possibility of services available must not be a pre-cursor to large-scale growth in inappropriate locations.

WSP-14 It is Council policy to control impacts of wastewater produced in the most environmental sustainable and cost-effective manner in accordance with Discharge Regulations Licenses and Certificates.

WSP-15 It is Council policy to require / implement appropriate buffer zones surrounding all effluent treatment plants.

WSP-16 It is Council policy to have regard to and conform with policies and objectives contained in the Council's Sludge Management Plan.

Surface Water Disposal Policies

WSP-17 It is Council policy to limit and manage the permitted stormwater run-off from all new developments. The maximum permitted surface water outflow from any new development is to be restricted to that of a Greenfield site before any development took place unless otherwise agreed by the Environment & Water Services Section of Offaly County Council. It is therefore Council Policy to require all proposed new developments within settlements as per the County's settlement hierarchy, to provide 'Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems' (SuDs) as part of their Development proposals.

4.12 Water Services Objectives³

Water Supplies

WSO-01 It is an objective of the Council to provide and/or facilitate the provision and/or upgrading of water supplies in accordance with the Water Services Investment Programme and Assessment of Needs, where appropriate, subject to adequate resources being available and the approval from the Department of the Environment Community and Local Government.

Wastewater Services

WSO-02 It is an objective of the Council to provide and/or facilitate the refurbishment and / or upgrading of wastewater treatment schemes, in accordance with the Water Services Investment Programme and Assessment of Needs, where appropriate and any other measures where an immediate need arises, subject to adequate resources being available and the approval of Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government.

Surface Water and Surface Water Disposal

WSO-03 It is an objective of the Council to promote and comply with all environmental standards and objectives established for bodies of surface water, by the European Communities (Surface Waters) Regulations 2009 and to meet the requirements of the Water Framework Directive and River Basin District Management Plans' Programme of Measures.

WSO-04 It is an objective of the Council to make provisions for the extension and improvement of surface water disposal infrastructure, in particular to facilitate identified settlements as per the county's settlement hierarchy.

Irish Water

WSO-05 It is an objective of the Council to facilitate and co-operate with Irish Water in delivering water services in County Offaly until the final transfer of responsibilities is complete.

³ The order of listing of objectives is not intended to indicate priorities. Subject to the availability of resources, it is the Council's aim to monitor and accomplish the objectives listed in this section within the period of the plan.

Communications Infrastructure

4.13 Aim

To identify the communications needs for the county and the manner in which the Council can facilitate the development of relevant and appropriate infrastructure.

4.14 Telecommunications

The provision of telecommunications services including its associated availability, price and quality within the county, is a measure which attracts industrial and commercial development whilst also enhancing social interaction and improving personal and household security. The Council acknowledges its increasing importance and its associated needs throughout the county.

However, the siting of antennae and support structures, whilst supporting and encouraging development, must not compromise environmental concerns or areas of particular visual amenity which merit protection. The Planning Authority will have regard to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government's *"Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures, Guidelines for Planning Authorities"* 1996 and Circular Letter PL07/12 (Telecommunication Antennae and Support Structures).

4.14.1 ICT and Broadband

The provision of modern information and Communications Technologies (ICT) is recognised by the Council as being important to the future development of the county. Such facilities can provide access to fast, reliable and cost effective communications and are critical for creating jobs and

improving quality of life in rural communities across the county.

The Council recognise the need for the provision of efficient telecommunications systems and will have regard to National policy by facilitating future development of new innovative and competitive telecommunications services.

The expansion of broadband facilities throughout the County will be necessary for the economic development of Offaly. Broadband infrastructure is identified as being one of the most important strategic tools currently available to facilitate economic development and an enhanced quality of life.

4.14.2 Metropolitan Area Network

The Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources are responsible for promoting investment in state of the art communications infrastructure and implementing initiatives such as the National Broadband Scheme, Rural Broadband Scheme and Metropolitan Area Network (MAN).

The MAN is a network of ducting and fibre optic cable laid within a metropolitan area which can be used by a variety of businesses and organisations. Birr, Edenderry, Banagher and Tullamore have developed MANs in their respective core areas. It is envisaged that a number of towns will be serviced by similar services over the period of the plan. Innovative solutions such as the use of the ESB network and wireless network are proposed.

The Council will co-operate with initiatives by the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources and public and private agencies, where appropriate in improving the provision of high-quality ICT and broadband throughout the county.

4.15 Communications Infrastructure Policies

Communications Infrastructure

CIP-01 The Council recognises the national and local importance of a high quality telecommunications service. It is Council policy to achieve a balance between facilitating the provision of telecommunications services in the interests of social and economic progress, sustaining residential amenities and environmental quality. The Local Authority will have regard to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Governments Guidelines on Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures and Circular Letter PL07/12 (Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures) in assessing development proposals.

CIP-02 It is Council policy to avoid an unnecessary proliferation of masts. It is Council policy to encourage owners and operators to facilitate the co-location of antennae on existing support structures and masts. In particular, it is Council policy to avoid a proliferation of communication masts, aerials etc. in upland areas of the Slieve Bloom Area in order to protect the amenity value and unspoilt character of such areas. The Council acknowledges that there is a need to facilitate land based communications masts, however such masts will not be permitted in areas above the 150-metre contour, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that it is not possible to locate antennae on the existing mast clusters at Wolftrap Mountain or Coolcreen.

CIP-03 The Council acknowledges the importance of telecommunications within rural areas of the county, however design, siting and visual impact are of paramount importance. It is Council policy to restrict the provision of overground masts and antennae within the following areas in particular:

- Designated areas of High Amenity.
- Areas adjoining or within the curtilage of protected structures.
- On or within the setting of archaeological sites, structures and zones.

4.16 Communications Infrastructure Objective

CIO-01 To recognise the importance of, facilitate and secure the provision of expanded and improved high-speed broadband facilities, including fibre and faster wireless networks, in urban and rural areas throughout County Offaly.

Environment

4.17 Aim

To achieve a balance between protecting and enhancing the environment.

4.18 Context

The Council recognises the need to preserve, enhance and protect the quality of the environment whilst also supporting economic development.

The challenges to be met in relation to the environment in Offaly will include strengthening the economy of the county, mainly through directing employment and services primarily to the Linked Gateway town of Tullamore and further into the surrounding supporting towns, villages and 'Sráids' of the county without detriment to the environment. In the open countryside, diversification of agriculture in County Offaly is a key element of sustaining the rural economy (Refer to Chapter 2, Economic Development Strategy). The Environmental impact of diversifying this sector of the economy must be factored into any decisions relating to the diversification of the rural economy.

The Council will ensure that environmental protection measures are taken to prevent environmental pollution, and that such measures are guided by the tenets of Sustainable Development, Local Agenda 21 and the 'Polluter Pays Principle'.

Four major environmental challenges were identified by the EPA in their state of the environment report, *Ireland's Environment 2012, an Assessment*:

- Valuing and Protecting our Natural Environment.
- Building a resource efficient low Carbon economy.
- Putting the environment at the centre of our decision making.
- Implementing environmental legislation.

Orderly and sustainable development should have regard to these challenges.

There are numerous pieces of legislation and governing documentation that relate to the environment which the Council abides by and has regard to. These include the following:

- Water Framework Directive 2000
- Waste Framework Directive, 2008
- Nitrates Directive 1991
- Water Services Act 2007
- Local Government (Water Pollution) Acts 1977 and 1990
- Waste Management Acts 1996-2007
- Litter Pollution Act, 1997
- Water Services Act, 2013

4.19 Strategy

4.19.1 Climate Change

In line with global trends, Ireland's climate is changing and the scientific consensus is that further changes are on the way. Incremental changes in climate are already evident in Ireland, including changes in our average temperature, rainfall intensity, and patterns, as well as subtle changes to our ecosystem.

Analysis of meteorological data for Ireland shows that the climate has changed here over the past 100 years. The clearest trend is evident in the temperature records - both high and low - but there is also a trend towards more intense and frequent rainfall.

Projected impacts of climate change in Ireland include:

- Increasing average temperatures;
- More extreme weather conditions including storms and rainfall events;
- An increased likelihood of river and coastal flooding;
- Water shortages, particularly in the east of the country;
- Changes in types and distribution of species; and
- The possible extinction of vulnerable species.

The *National Climate Change Adaptation Framework- Building Resilience to Climate Change*, issued by the DoECLG in December 2012, provides the backdrop to a strategic focus to ensure adaptation measures are taken across a number of different sectors and levels in

government to reduce Ireland's vulnerability to the negative effects of climate change.

Adaptation refers to the adjustment or preparation of natural or human systems to a new or changing environment, with the aim of moderating harm or exploiting beneficial opportunities.

The Government recognise the importance of planning and development measures in the overall strategic approach to adaptation to climate change. One such measure is the implementation of the provisions of the Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Flood Risk to inform the zoning of land for development. Planning Authorities are now required to integrate climate change adaptation and mitigation measures into the development plan. Local development planning is, in effect, the mechanism for the delivery of local climate adaptation action.

The *National Climate Change Adaptation Framework-Building Resilience to Climate Change*, sits within an International, European and National policy context. Much research, analysis, development of knowledge and capacity has provided a strong platform for the preparation of this National Climate Change Adaptation Framework.

This national policy framework for climate change adaptation draws together the work already being done by Government and the wider public sector on adaptation in Ireland, with the objective of:

- providing the policy context for a strategic national adaptation response to climate change;
- promoting dialogue and understanding of adaptation issues;
- identifying and promoting adaptation solutions and
- committing to actions to support the adaptation process.

Local authorities are required to take a proactive approach to climate change adaptation by integrating adaptation into the development of relevant policies, plans and programmes.

This Framework gives the mandate to local authorities to prepare, review and amend local development plans

to mainstream climate change adaptation as this is the most appropriate way to effect local adaptation planning.

It is acknowledged that further advances are required to improve the process of preparing statutory development plans with regard to the inclusion of practical measures to address both the drivers and side effects of climate change. These improvements will build upon the existing provisions of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 which require development plans to contain an additional mandatory objective for the promotion of sustainable settlement and transportation strategies in urban and rural areas, including the promotion of measures to reduce energy demand, man-made greenhouse gas emissions and address the necessity for adaptation to climate change, having regard to location, layout and design of new development.

The Council will endeavour to undertake and implement a Climate Change Adaptation Strategy in line with the guideline to be issued by the DoECLG for incorporation into the Development Plan.

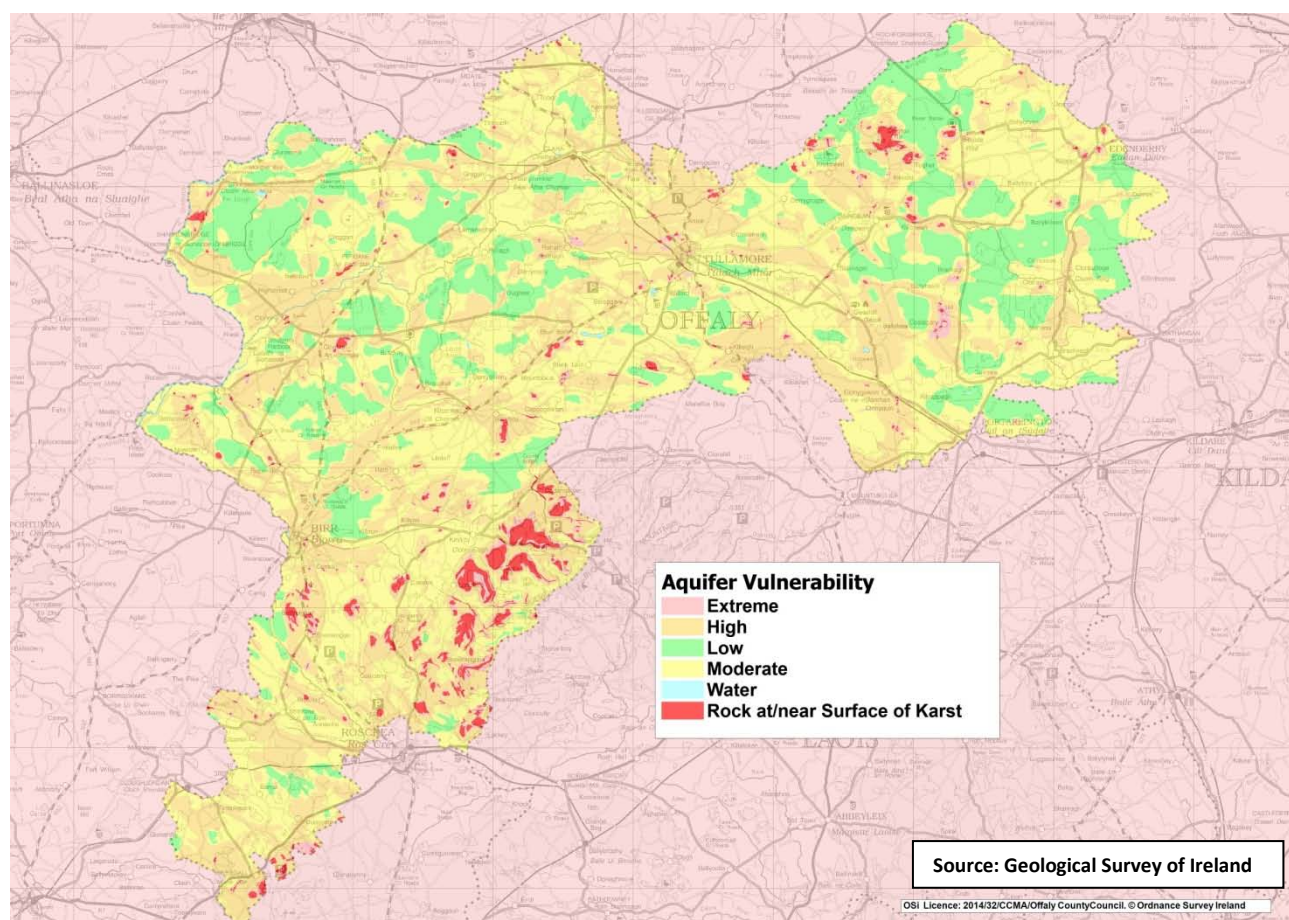
4.19.2 Water and Soils

Groundwater

Groundwater sources are important to the development of the county. The protection of these resources is of major concern to the Council.

Approximately 65% of water supplies in the county are derived from ground water reserves and they provide a very cost effective source of water supply. Consequently, particular attention must be paid to their protection.

Aquifer vulnerability refers to the ease with which pollutants of various kinds can enter underground water. Extreme aquifer vulnerability (which can be found in locations across the entire county with the largest area at the Slieve Bloom uplands and foothills in the south of the county) and high aquifer vulnerability (which is the most common vulnerability to be found in the county) are the two classifications of aquifers which are most sensitive to an imposed contaminant load. The majority of the county's ground waters are classified as being either of moderate or low vulnerability (refer to Map 4.2).

Map 4.2 Groundwater/Aquifer Vulnerability**Protection of Groundwater and Aquifers**

Groundwater is a resource that is under increasing risk from human activities. The main threat to groundwater is posed by:

1. Point contamination sources e.g. farmyard wastes (mainly silage effluent and soiled water); activities related to quarrying and extraction; septic tank effluent; leakages; spillages, the improper use of pesticides and leachate from waste disposal sites.
2. Diffuse sources e.g. spreading of fertilisers (organic and inorganic) and pesticides.

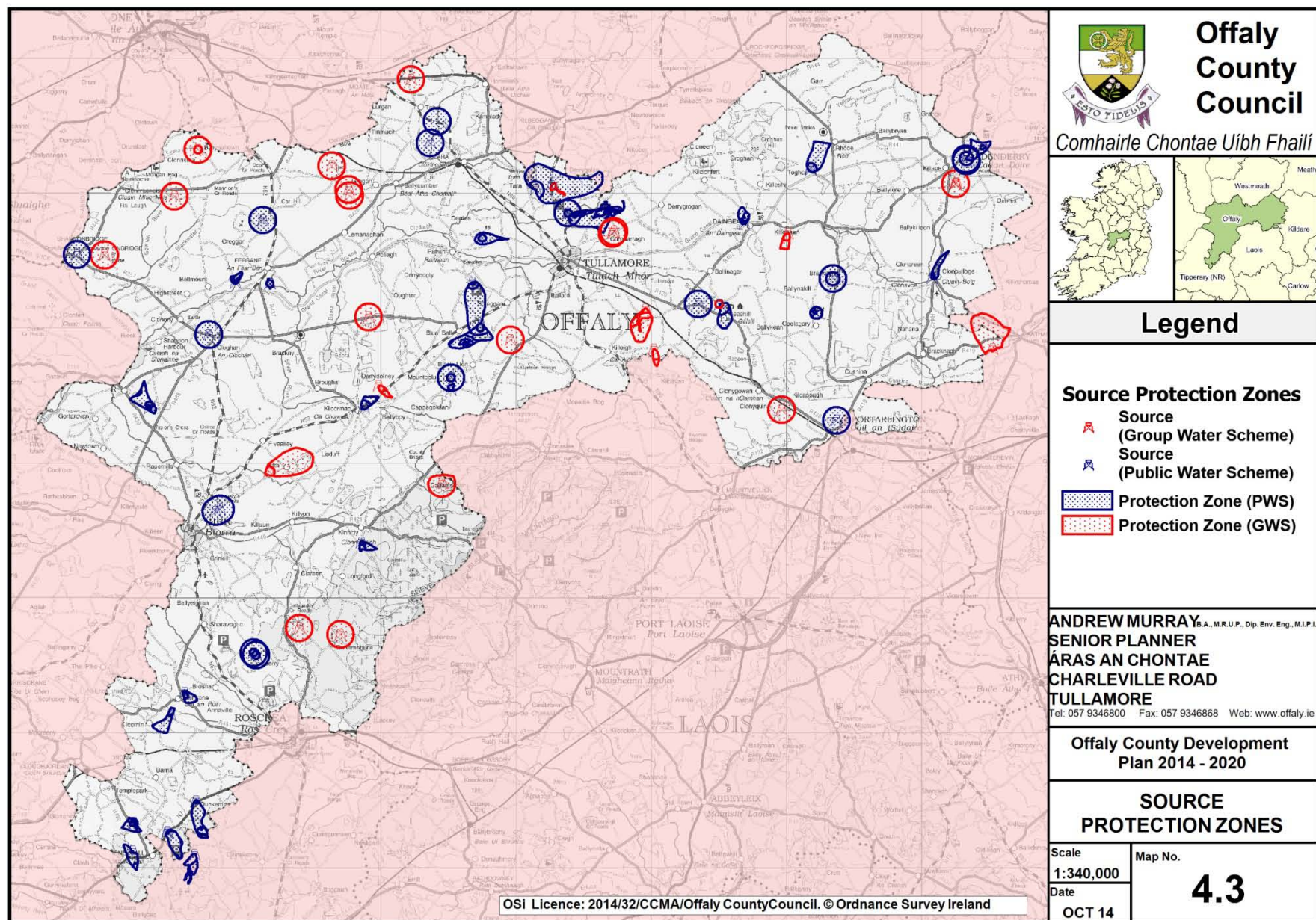
The Council has regard to national guidelines, policies and directives in relation to the protection of groundwater supplies. The Council has a monitoring and regulatory role in ensuring the protection of groundwater supplies. This includes identification of a Source Protection Plan for each of the major known

ground water sources within the county (refer to Map 4.3).

In relation to housing and commercial/industrial development the Council will take a precautionary approach to development in Source Protection Zones and development will not be permitted unless it can be shown over and above other considerations outlined in policy SSP-18 and SSP-19 in Chapter 1, that:

- 1) No reasonable alternative site is available.
- 2) Adequate measures are proposed which will ensure protection of the drinking water source from any deleterious effects of the development

Map 4.3: Source Protection Zones



Protection of Surface Water

The main threat to surface water quality is eutrophication, arising from excess nutrients in the water. The nutrients of concern are phosphorus and nitrogen, which come mainly from agricultural sources, municipal waste water treatment plants, individual septic tanks and effluent treatment systems. The County Council in conjunction with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are responsible for monitoring water quality in terms of both its physical and chemical status.

Under the Water Framework Directive and the River Basin District Management Plans, Offaly County Council has an obligation as the competent Authority to protect all high status sites (Q4-5, Q5) and catchments. All proposed developments which may impact on these sites or catchments will be subject to the most stringent requirements to prevent any release of pollutants.

Water Quality

Drinking water quality in Offaly is tested in accordance with the European Communities (Drinking Water) Regulations 2007 and national standards.

An extensive water-monitoring programme has been agreed with the EPA for all water bodies within the county. This includes seventy five sites, which are monitored under various parameters as part of an ongoing national monitoring programme.

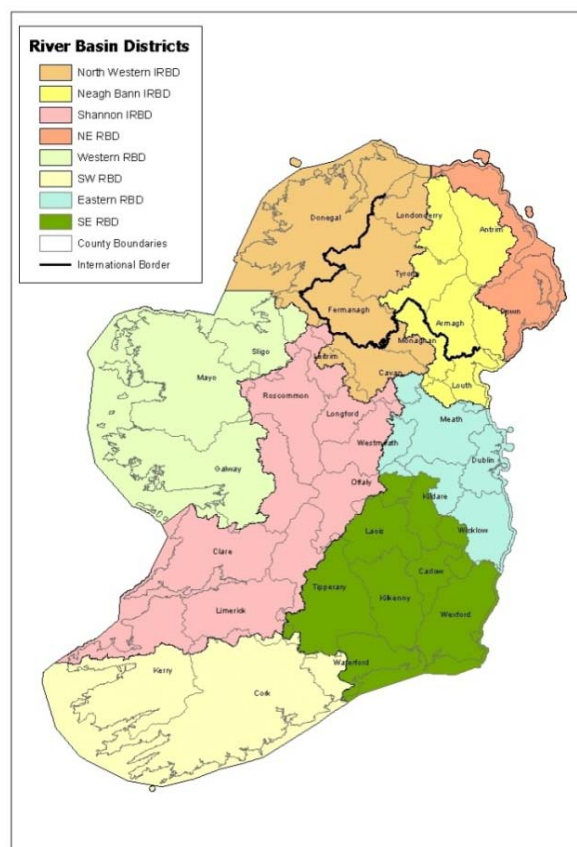
The Water Framework Directive (WFD) and the Protection of Rivers

There are three river basins districts applicable to County Offaly:

- 1: The Shannon catchment is located in the Shannon River Basin District and covers 73% of the county.
- 2: The Barrow catchment is located in the South Eastern River Basin District Authority and covers 20% of the county.
- 3: The Boyne catchment is located in the Eastern River Basin District Authority and covers 7% of the county.

Offaly County Council as an established Local Authority is charged with the role referred to as “competent authority” in the implementation of the WFD for the county. Under the WFD, the Council is required to ensure that all waters within the county meet good status prior to the deadline date of December 2015⁴. The Council will take cognisance of the various river basin district management plans and their associated programme of measures in order to protect and improve water quality. To this end the Council will implement the Programme of Measures for the three River Basin Districts (RBDs) relevant to County Offaly and any other water quality management plans prepared for the county or the Region.

Map 4.4 Ireland’s River Basin Districts



Source: www.wfdireland.ie

Nitrates Directive

The Nitrates Directive has, as its objective the prevention of the pollution of ground water and surface waters by nitrates from agricultural sources. Ireland’s National Action Programme under the Nitrates Directive was drawn up in 2005. New

⁴ Note: Good water status refers to good ecological and good chemical status. Good ground water status means good quantitative and chemical status.

regulations, entitled the Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters Regulations 2006 (S.I. No. 378 of 2006) (amended in 2010 and 2011) have put this action programme into law. The implementation of these regulations will ensure that the agricultural sector will meet its obligations under the Water Framework Directive. In particular, the Nitrates Directive sets out the required measures by the agriculture sector to meet targets contained in the WFD. It provides for the protection of all waters ensuring appropriate measures are taken in the use of organic and inorganic fertilisers.

The Council will seek the maximum protection of waters from nitrate and phosphorous pollution, and will seek compliance with bye-laws made under the Local Government (Water Pollution) (Amendment) Act 1990 in relation to agricultural activities in those parts of the county, which have been prescribed in the bye-laws.

Agriculture

Significant parts of the county, because of prevailing soil type, drainage characteristics and/or existing nutrient loading are sensitive to receiving slurry. Within these areas, the impact of further spreading of wastes will be assessed and such developments restricted, where necessary, as part of an overall soil protection policy. Land spreading shall also be prohibited where ground or surface water contamination is likely.

The density of intensive pig units shall be carefully controlled, in order to minimise their impact, to prevent soil and ground water contamination and to protect rural amenities. Developments involving intensive pig units shall be required to show compliance with the following requirements:

- The developer shall have all lands available and suitable for spreading in close proximity to the pig unit.
- Satisfactory arrangements for storage, management and spreading of slurries are provided.
- New units shall be well removed from existing settlements and development clusters.

Enforcement of Water Legislation

The Council's Environment Services Section monitors agricultural developments to ensure the adequacy of waste handling facilities and waste management controls.

Relevant discharges to sewers and water courses from agricultural, industrial and other activities are licensed by Offaly County Council under Sections 4 and 16 of the Water Pollution Act 1977.

Failure to meet the Council's standards in regard to storage, distribution and disposal of all waste are dealt with under the enforcement provisions of the **Water Pollution Acts 1977-1990**.

Energy

The Council shall have due regard to its obligation under European Communities (Energy End Use Efficiency and Energy Services) Regulations, 2009 to "*fulfil an exemplary role with regard to energy efficiency*". The Council shall aim to achieve a 33% energy reduction by 2020 in line with the Second National Energy Efficiency Action Plan for Ireland (refer also to Chapter 3 Energy Strategy).

4.19.3 Air and Air Quality

The quality of the air we breathe contributes to the quality of life we enjoy. Given Ireland's location on the western fringes of Europe, it benefits from the prevailing winds of the Atlantic Ocean and we currently enjoy good quality air as a result. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is responsible for monitoring air quality in Ireland and produces an annual report detailing the results.

The Council is the regulatory authority for the purposes of the Air Pollution Act 1997. Regulations made under this Act prescribe the procedures necessary for the operation of a licensing system for certain industrial uses.

The Council is committed to maintaining a high standard of air quality and will seek to continue to protect the quality of the air in the county through the enforcement of relevant legislation.

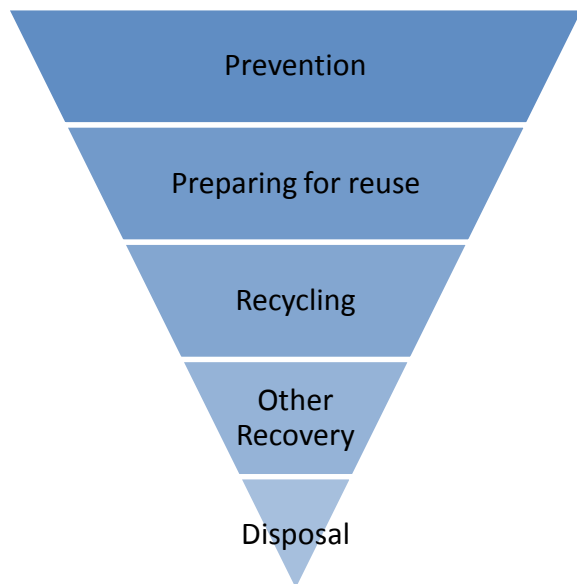
4.19.4 Waste and Waste Management

The Council will be implementing the Waste Management Plan for the Eastern and Midlands Region when formally adopted in 2015.

Following a statutory requirement to conduct an evaluation of the Midlands Region Waste Management Plan by December 2012, it was concluded that given the government policy document "A Resource Opportunity – Waste Management Policy in Ireland 2012" and the change in waste management

generation and practices over the last number of years that a new Waste Management Plan was required. The aforementioned policy document requires a change in the original waste management hierarchy, now placing more emphasis on *waste prevention* and *preparing for reuse*.

Figure 4.3: Waste Framework Directive, 2008:



The current Midlands Region, for the purposes of the Waste Management Plan, is to be discontinued and Offaly will form part of one of three proposed waste management regions; which comprises of Offaly and other midland counties (with the exception of North Tipperary) and eastern counties such as Dublin, Wicklow, Kildare, Meath and Louth. The Council will continue to implement relevant policy as part of an alternative waste management region.

Landfill

The underlying principle of the **EU Landfill Directive**, introduced in 1999, is to reduce our reliance on landfill as a means of waste disposal. The provision of appropriate waste management infrastructure is essential for the economic development of the county. The County Council operated a municipal waste landfill site at Derryclure, Tullamore until October 2012. The landfill ceased the acceptance of waste directly; however the Council still provides a waste and recycling service at this location. The Council will continue to examine measures that will cater for the appropriate management of waste in the county in line with the EU Landfill Directive, objectives outlined in the

current relevant Waste Management Plan and any Regional Strategy prepared thereafter.

4.19.5 Historic Landfill Sites

In accordance with Section 22(7)(h) of the Waste Management Act, the historic landfill sites have been identified for the purpose of identifying what, if any, remedial measures are required to be carried out at the sites. County Offaly has nine such sites located at:

- Birr (Clonbrone, Kilcormac, Scurragh).
- Edenderry (Cloncannon and site adjacent to Cloncannon).
- Tullamore (Ballydaly and Ballydrohid, Clara).
- Ferbane.

The Council will comply with legislation pertaining to the risk assessments for these sites and will undertake any subsequent remedial action, which is required to be taken.

Recycling

There are currently forty three 'bring centres' for recyclables available for public use throughout the county. These centres allow for the collection of bottles and cans and in some cases, textiles. There are three civic amenity sites in Offaly, in Tullamore, Birr and Edenderry, all accepting a wide range of materials from the public. The Council will continue to 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.

Enforcement of Waste Legislation

The Council is responsible for the enforcement of waste legislation relating to the domestic, commercial and industrial sectors and will continue to develop and maintain high compliance levels through the work of its Waste Enforcement Team.

The Council enforces legislation prohibiting the legal dumping of wastes and litter throughout the county and will continue to actively police this area.

Environmental Awareness

The Council plays an important role in the provision of environmental education within the community, schools and business sector. It is the policy of the Council to promote environmental responsibility and to make resources available to the public to this end. This is undertaken by the Environment Section via the promotion of the Green Schools Programme,

environmental initiatives and workshops and by the distribution of environmental grants and through establishing close links with the community.

National Waste Collection Permit Office

In 2012 the National Waste Collection Permitting Office (NWCPO) was established within Offaly County Council. All waste collection permits for the county are processed at the Council offices in Tullamore.

Major Accidents Directive

The EU Council Directive 96/82/EEC (known as the Seveso II Directive), as amended by Directive 2003/105/EC, provides for the prevention of major accidents that involve dangerous substances and the limitation of their consequences for individuals and the environment. It applies to establishments where dangerous substances are produced, used, handled or stored in large quantities. This EU directive seeks to ensure the safety of people and the environment in relation to major industrial accidents involving dangerous substances. .

The European Communities (Control of Major Accident Hazards Involving Dangerous Substances) Regulations (S.I. No. 74 of 2006) are the main regulations that give effect to this Directive in Irish law. The National Authority for Occupational Safety Health i.e. the Health and Safety Authority-HSA has been designated as the central Competent Authority for enforcement of these regulations in Ireland.

As of 2009, the company Isotron, which is located in the Srah Industrial Estate, is the only designated Seveso site in Tullamore. Should new Seveso sites be identified in Tullamore or for any new developments in the vicinity of such sites, Offaly County Council will consult with the Health and Safety Authority (HSA), as the designated authority for Seveso sites, Major Accidents Directive and Development and will seek advice on the proposed developments. The Council will continue to work in co-operation with the HSA when dealing with applications relating to Seveso sites and land use plans in vicinity of such sites.

Major Accidents Directive and Development

Where proposals are being considered for the following:

- New establishments at risk of causing major accidents,
- The expansion of existing establishments designated under the directive, and/or

- Other developments proposed near to existing establishments,

the Council will require that applicants demonstrate that the following are taken into account:

- Prevention of major accidents involving dangerous substances,
- Public health and safeguarding of public health, and
- Protection of the environment.

The Council will take these considerations into account when assessing development as listed above, as part of the development management process.

Construction and Demolition Regulations

The Council will have regard to the 'Best Practice Guidelines on the Preparation of Waste Management Plans for Construction and Demolition Waste Projects', (July 2006). These guidelines introduce the concept of integrated waste management planning for construction projects above certain thresholds.

Noise

Offaly County Council adopted the 2013-2018 Noise Action Plan in 2013, which is in accordance with Environmental Noise Regulations (SI 140 of 2006). These Regulations give effect to Environment Noise Directive (END) 2002/49/EC.

Environmental Noise is defined by END as 'unwanted or harmful outdoor sound created by human activities including noise emitted by means of transport, road traffic, rail traffic, air traffic and from sites of industry activity such as those concerning integrated pollution prevention and control'. Noise arising from domestic, neighbourhood and workplace activities are not considered in this plan.

The aim of the plan is to avoid, prevent and reduce, on a prioritised basis the harmful effects, including annoyance due to the long term exposure to environmental noise. It is the Council policy to consider development which reduce the harmful impacts of noise pollution within the vicinity of sensitive areas, especially residential properties.

Fire Service

Offaly County Council has adopted, as required under Section 26 of the Fire Services Act, a Fire and

Emergency Operations Plan. This plan sets out the arrangements in place to ensure that an efficient and adequate level of fire and rescue cover is available at all times.

It is an objective of the Council to ensure that communities are adequately serviced by a modern and effective Fire Service for the county and that the Section 26 plan is implemented in full. During the course of the County Development Plan a revised Section 26 Plan shall be adopted to facilitate the implementation of the “Keeping Communities Safe – A Framework for Fire Safety in Ireland”.

Flooding and Flood Risk

Flooding is a natural process that can happen at any time in a wide variety of locations. Flooding has significant impacts on human activities; it can threaten people’s lives, their property and the environment. Assets at risk can include housing, transport and public service infrastructure, commercial, industrial and agricultural enterprises. The health, social, economic and environmental impacts of flooding can be significant and have a wide community impact.

Flood Risk Management is set within a strong policy framework of the:

- EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) which aims at improving our water environment,
- EU Floods Directive [2007/60/EC]
- National Flood Policy.

The EU Directive on the assessment and management of flood risks [2007/60/EC], often referred to as the ‘Floods’ Directive, came into force late in 2007. It is a framework directive that requires Member States to follow a certain process, namely:

- Undertake a Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (PFRA), to identify areas of existing or foreseeable future potentially significant flood risk (referred to as ‘Areas for Further Assessment, or ‘AFA’s).
- Prepare flood hazard and risk maps for the AFAs by 22 December 2013, and,
- Prepare flood risk management plans by 22 December 2015, setting objectives for managing the flood risk within the AFAs and setting out a prioritised set of measures for achieving those objectives.

The ‘Floods’ Directive was transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Assessment and Management of flood risks) Regulations 2010 (SI

122/2010). These Regulations set out the responsibilities of the OPW and other public bodies in the implementation of the Directive, on consultation, and details the process for implementation of the measures set out in the flood risk management plans. The Office of Public Works (OPW) is the lead State body for the coordination and implementation of Government policy on the management of flood risk in Ireland. The OPW is the national authority for the implementation of the EU Directive on the Assessment and Management of Flood Risks [2007/60/EC].

CFRAM Programme

CFRAM is Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management. The CFRAM Programme is central to the medium to long-term strategy for the reduction and management of flood risk in Ireland. The OPW as lead agency for flood risk management in Ireland and as the national competent authority for the EU Floods Directive, works in close partnership with all Local Authorities in delivering the objectives of the CFRAM Programme.

Implementation of the requirements EU Floods Directive is being coordinated with the requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive and the current River Basin Management Plans.

The CFRAM Programme comprises three phases:

- The Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (PFRA): 2011,
- The CFRAM Studies and parallel activities: 2011-2015, and
- Implementation and Review: 2016 onwards.

The Programme provides for three main consultative stages:

- 2011 Preliminary Flood Risk Assessments,
- 2013 Flood Hazard Mapping, and
- 2015 Flood Risk Management Plans.

PFRA

The National Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (PFRA) is a requirement of the EU 'Floods' Directive. The objective of the PFRA is to identify areas where the risks associated with flooding might be significant (referred to as Areas for Further Assessment, or AFAs). This has been undertaken and the final designation list of areas of further assessment has been published since March 2012. The 'AFAs' are where more detailed assessment will be undertaken to more accurately assess the extent and degree of flood risk, and, where the significance of the risk is confirmed, to develop where possible measures to manage and reduce the risk. The more detailed assessment, which will focus on the AFAs, will be undertaken through Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Studies for release in 2015.

There are 8 AFAs identified in County Offaly including the following:

- Birr,
- Clara,
- Daingean,
- Edenderry & Environs,
- Pollagh, Rahan,
- Shannon Harbour,
- Shannonbridge - Power Station,
- Tullamore.

The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities

The DoEHLG in conjunction with the OPW published guidelines for Planning Authorities in November 2009 entitled '*The Planning System and Flood Risk Management*'. The guidelines introduce comprehensive mechanisms for the incorporation of flood risk identification, assessment and management into the planning process. Planning Authorities must implement these guidelines in ensuring that, where relevant, flood risk is a key consideration in preparing development plans and in the assessment of planning applications.

The core objectives of the guidelines are as follows:

- Avoid inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding;
- Avoid new developments increasing flood risk elsewhere, including that which may arise from surface water run-off;
- Ensure effective management of residual risks for development permitted in floodplains;
- Avoid unnecessary restriction of national, regional or local economic and social growth;
- Improve the understanding of flood risk among relevant stakeholders; and
- Ensure that the requirements of EU and national law in relation to the natural environment and nature conservation are complied with at all stages of flood risk management.

The guidelines require Planning Authorities to undertake a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and enable it to act as a guidance document to inform decision making on land use zoning and general flood risk issues where required and relevant. A stage 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment accompanies this plan.

The Flood Management Guidelines outline key principles of flood risk management which are to:

- Avoid development that will be at risk of flooding or that will increase the risk of flooding elsewhere, where possible,
- Substitute less vulnerable uses where avoidance is not possible and
- Mitigate and manage the risk, where avoidance and substitution are not possible.

The guidelines set out the principle that development should not be permitted in flood risk areas except

where there are no alternative and appropriate sites available in lower risk areas that are consistent with the objectives of proper planning and sustainable development i.e. applying the sequential approach and the justification test.

The Council will assess planning applications for development located in Flood Zones A and B in accordance with the provisions of these Guidelines. The Council will ensure that only developments consistent with the overall policy and technical approaches of these Guidelines will be approved and permission may be refused where flood issues have not been, or cannot be, addressed successfully and where the presence of unacceptable residual flood risks to the development, its occupants or users and adjoining property remains.

Sustainable Drainage Systems

Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDs) are a method of replicating the natural characteristics of rainfall runoff from any site. They provide hydraulic, water quality and environmental benefits. Some form of infiltration and/or retention/storage normally achieves this.

The overall objective is to minimise stormwater runoff. Therefore, the area of impermeable surfaces, for example pavement and tarmac, should be minimised by careful attention to site layouts and the specification of permeable surfacing, where practicable.

The objective of SuDs drainage designs is to collect and treat the minimised amount of runoff as close to source as possible. SuDs techniques comprise a flexible series of options, which allow the drainage designer to select those systems that best suit the circumstances of the site.

4.20 Environment Policies

Climate Change

EnvP-01 It is Council policy to reduce emissions to the air of greenhouse gases in order to contribute to a reduction and avoidance of human induced climate change. The Council supports and is committed to the National Climate Change Strategy and, in general to facilitating measures which seek to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. In this regard, the Council will support any initiatives taken to provide for more sustainable forms of energy use. Refer to Chapter 3, Energy Strategy for further relevant policies on energy.

Water Protection

EnvP-02 It is Council policy to comply with the provisions of the EU Water Framework Directive in order to fulfil obligations relating to water quality in the county and to implement the provisions of the River Basin Management Plans i.e. Eastern River Basin District, Shannon River Basin District and South East River Basin District. To this end, the Council will continue to co-operate with other statutory authorities / agencies and stakeholders in the preparation and implementation of existing water quality monitoring and management plans and also implementation of River Basin District Management Plans. In the assessment of development proposals due regard shall be given to the requirements of the plans.

EnvP-03 It is Council policy to protect groundwater sources in the form of Source Protection Zones. Proposals to develop within these zones will be required to demonstrate that adequate protection of groundwater quality will be put in place.

High Status Water Quality Sites

EnvP-04 All proposed development which may have an impact on a high status water quality site (as determined by the EPA) will require site specific assessment to determine localised pressures and demonstrate suitable mitigation measures in order to protect these sites where appropriate.

Energy

EnvP-05 It is Council policy to pursue procurement policies which shall take account of the lifetime energy cost of equipment and facilities. It shall be the policy of the Council to actively engage in energy use reduction programmes as laid out in the Energy Plan.

Air Quality

EnvP-06 It is Council policy to maintain good air quality in the county.

Environmental Awareness

EnvP-07 It is the policy of the Council to promote environmental responsibility and to make resources available to the public to this end.

Waste Management

EnvP-08 It is Council policy to ensure the provision of quality cost effective waste infrastructure and services, which reflect and meet the needs of the community and to ensure that the 'polluter pays principle' is observed in all waste management activities.

EnvP-09 It is Council policy to ensure that all permitted development shall be such that the requirements of Waste Management regulations shall be observed. Due regard shall also be given to the requirements of the current Waste Management Plan for the Region.

EnvP-10 It is Council policy to apply and enforce where appropriate, relevant EU and Irish environmental legislation. Permitted developments shall be required to comply with all such legislation.

EnvP-11 It is Council policy to co-operate with the Environmental Protection Agency in regard to licensing arrangements for Scheduled activities in County Offaly in accordance with the provisions of the Environmental Protection Agency Act 1992.

EnvP-12 It is Council policy to ensure that all waste disposal shall be undertaken in compliance with the requirements of the Environmental Protection Agency and relevant Waste Management Legislation.

EnvP-13 It is Council policy to require Waste Management Plans to be prepared for Construction and Demolition Projects of a particular scale in accordance with Best Practice Guidelines issued by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government in July 2006. It is Council policy to require developers of projects with significant potential for the generation of construction and demolition waste to prepare a Project Construction and Demolition Waste Management Plan where the project exceeds any of the following thresholds:

1. New residential developments of 10 houses or more.
2. New residential developments other than (1) above, including institutional, educational, health and other public facilities, with an aggregate floor area in excess of 1,250m².
3. Demolition/renovation/refurbishment projects generating in excess of 100m³ in volume of construction and demolition waste.
4. Civil engineering projects in excess of 500m³ of waste, excluding waste materials used for development works on the site.

Recycling

EnvP-14 It is Council policy that all proposed residential development applications of 100 units or greater will be assessed and if necessary required to provide a set of bring banks for recyclable material to the specifications and design required by Offaly County Council. A similar policy will also apply to commercial developments such as shopping centres where large volumes of people congregate. Such developments shall, where considered necessary, be required to provide a set of bring banks as part of their car park layout.

Major Accidents Directive

EnvP-15 It is Council policy that where proposals are being considered for the following:

- New establishments which may pose a risk of causing major accidents,
- The expansion and/or modification of existing establishments designated under the EU Council Directive 96/82/EEC (known as the Seveso II Directive) as amended by Directive 2003/105/EC, and
- Other developments proposed near to existing establishments, the Council will require that applicants demonstrate that the following considerations are taken into account:
 - Prevention of major accidents involving dangerous substances,
 - Public health and safeguarding of public health and
 - The protection of the environment.

Noise

EnvP-16 It is Council policy that potential development will be assessed for noise risk. Planning permission will not normally be granted for new developments or extensions of existing industrial, commercial, leisure, or other uses that produce significant and unacceptable levels of noise and/or vibration at site boundaries or within adjacent noise sensitive areas, especially residential areas. Reference shall also be made to the Offaly Noise Action Plan 2013-2018.

General

EnvP-17 It is Council policy to adhere to the mitigation measures, as outlined in the accompanying Environmental Report, and implement such measures, where appropriate.

Flooding and Flood Risk

EnvP-18 It is Council policy to have due regard to the CFRAM plans in assessing development proposals.

EnvP-19 It is Council policy to implement the Flood Risk Management Guidelines at both Plan and development management levels.

EnvP-20 It is Council policy to apply the Sequential Test and Approach within development sites located within Flood Zoned A and B to inform site layout by locating the most vulnerable elements of a development in the lowest risk areas. Flood Zone A & B shall be promoted for less vulnerable uses such as for recreation, amenity and environmental purposes thus providing for an effective means of flood risk management as well as providing connected green spaces with consequent social and environmental benefits.

EnvP-21 It is Council policy to require development proposals locating in Flood Zones A and B to be accompanied by a detailed explanation of how the Development Management Justification Test has been met where proposals for development may be vulnerable to flooding i.e. Box. 5.1: The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines, 2009.

EnvP-22 It is Council policy to require more detailed assessment frameworks (Site Specific Flood Risk Assessments) for planning applications where flooding is an issue, including the assessment of flooding from other sources at the site-specific level and offer mitigating options for the management of the risk, without increasing flood risk elsewhere.

EnvP-23 It is Council policy to preserve riparian zones along rivers free from development and of adequate width to permit access to rivers for maintenance.

Sustainable Drainage Systems

EnvP-24 It is policy of the Council that all planning applications whether for new development or redevelopment are required to make an assessment of the suitability of the proposed development for the incorporation of sustainable drainage systems and provide accordingly on site. All development sites will require the following:

- The drainage system to be designed to accommodate all storm events up to and including the 1% AEP (1 in 100 year) event, with an appropriate allowance for climate change
- A hierarchical approach should be applied to the SuDS used, in order of priority:
 - Preventative measures ensuring there are no unnecessary impermeable areas on-site
 - Source control measures such as rainwater harvesting and infiltration systems, provided the site conditions are appropriate
 - Site control measures, where prevention and source control measures alone cannot deal with all on-site drainage. Above ground site control attenuation systems, such as balancing ponds and swales, should be considered in preference to below ground attenuation, due to the water quality, biodiversity and amenity benefits they offer.
- A hierarchical approach should be applied to the disposal of surface water from the site referencing in order of priority:
 - Rainwater harvesting systems
 - An adequate soakaway or other adequate infiltration system
 - A watercourse
 - A surface water sewer
- Where prevention, source control/infiltration cannot deal with all on-site site drainage, for both Greenfield and Brownfield sites, the development runoff volumes and peak flow rates leaving the site should be attenuated to the Greenfield discharge conditions. (It is noted that on brownfield sites it is not always practicable to attenuate flows to Greenfield rates).
- Exceedance design measures to be applied to ensure that extreme events above the design standards of the system do not pose adverse impacts. A sequential approach should be applied to the site layout to specifically set aside appropriate location for SuDS.

- SuDS should be designed for the lifetime of the development, with suitable provisions for likely future permitted and minor development.

4.21 Environment Objectives⁵

Climate Change Adaptation

EnvO-01 It is an objective of the Council to incorporate a Climate Change Adaptation Strategy into the plan in accordance with the National Policy and Guidelines when issued and implemented.

Water Protection

EnvO-02 It is an objective of the Council to promote and comply with the Environmental standards and objectives established for:

- (i) Bodies of Surface water, by EC (Surface Water Regulations) 2009 and
- (ii) Groundwater, by the EC (Groundwater) Regulations 2010,

of which standards and objectives are included in the River Basin Management Plans.

EnvO-03 It is an objective of the Council to Protect and preserve the quality of surface water, ground water and drinking water in the county through the relevant legislative provisions.

EnvO-04 It is an objective of the Council to continue to work with the Environmental Protection Agency, and the relevant River Basin District Authorities in relation to implementing the River Basin District Management Plans for the 3 River Basin District Authorities pertaining to Offaly.

EnvO-05 It is an objective of the Council in conjunction with the Environmental Protection Agency to continue its programme of monitoring water quality in the county's waterbodies to ensure that the objectives under the Water Framework Directive 2000 are met.

EnvO-06 It is an objective of the Council to implement the relevant provisions of Water Pollution Legislation.

EnvO-07 It is an objective of the Council to protect the county's waters from pollution.

EnvO-08 It is an objective of the Council to issue and monitor, where appropriate, effluent licences for discharges to sewers and waterbodies.

High Status Water Quality Sites

EnvO-09 It is an objective of the Council to protect all high water quality sites in the county as determined by the EPA from any deleterious effect of development

Energy

EnvO-10 It is an objective of the Council, as a Public Body, to commit to fulfilling its exemplary role in energy efficiency, as required by the Energy Services Directive and the European Communities (Energy End-Use Efficiency and Energy Services) Regulations 2009. OCC will aim to achieve a 33% reduction in energy consumption by 2020; this is a Public Sector energy efficiency target, as outlined in the Second National Energy Efficiency Action Plan for Ireland (NEEAP).

Air Quality

EnvO-11 It is an objective of the Council that good air quality be maintained in the County.

⁵ The order of listing of objectives is not intended to indicate priorities. Subject to the availability of resources, it is the Council's aim to monitor and accomplish the objectives listed in this section within the period of the plan.

Environmental Awareness

EnvO-12 It is an objective of the Council to continue to develop environmental awareness initiatives in the areas of Waste, Water quality, Air quality and Energy designed to create increased public awareness of environmental responsibility.

Waste Management

EnvO-13 It is an objective of the Council to implement the provisions of the Waste Management Hierarchy and the current Waste Management Plan for the Region. As a result, developments in the county will be expected to take account of the provisions of the Waste Management Plan for the relevant Region and observe those elements of it that relate to waste prevention and minimisation, waste recycling facilities, and the capacity for source segregation.

EnvO-14 It is an objective of the Council to use statutory powers to prohibit the illegal deposit and disposal of waste materials, refuse and litter, and to authorise and regulate, waste disposal within the county in an environmentally sustainable manner.

EnvO-15 It is an objective of the Council that the environment shall be protected against harmful effects of inadequate waste management.

EnvO-16 It is an objective of the Council that the environment be protected against the harmful effects of litter

EnvO-17 It is an objective of the Council to implement the legislative provisions in relation to historic landfill sites in the county and to undertake risk assessments where required and any subsequent remedial measures where necessary.

EnvO-18 It is an objective of the Council to restore and protect the quality of the environment in the county.

Fire Service

EnvO-19 It is an objective of the Council to ensure that communities are adequately serviced by a modern and effective Fire Service for the county and that the Fire and Emergency Operations Plan (as required under Section 26 of the Fire Services Act) is implemented in full.

Flooding and Flood Risk

EnvO-20 It is an objective of the Council to reduce risk to life and property in the county from flooding by adhering to the Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2009

EnvO-21 It is an objective of the Council to ensure that all new development and as far as is practical all re-developments incorporate suitable sustainable urban drainage systems.

Chapter 5: Retail and Town Centre Strategy

5.1 Aim

To provide a clear framework for retail development in County Offaly in acknowledgment of its role in employment, economic activity and vitality in towns and villages and to promote and to support the vitality and viability of town and village centres promoting a high standard of urban design and encouraging a greater use of sustainable transport.

5.2 Context

Retailing plays an important role in the economy of Offaly and is a huge contributory factor in sustaining and improving the vitality of town centres. Trends in retailing have changed significantly in the past due mainly to changes in economic development and by changes in the industry itself. The retail sector has grown considerably in recent years with the emergence of new sectors such as discount stores. In addition, online shopping has become and is a steadily growing feature of the Irish retail market. Various retailers, trading a variety of convenience and comparison goods, are also increasingly availing of online services to reach a larger consumer market. In parallel with the prevailing trends, consideration of retailing within the planning process must be updated recognising that more needs to be achieved in relation to securing retail development in town centres.

The provisions of the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012 inform the retail development strategy for this plan. The retail development strategy must therefore be consistent with the approach of the guidelines.

The Retail Planning Guidelines 2012 advise Planning Authorities in relation to preparing development plans, assessing applications for retail developments and guiding retailers and developers in formulating development proposals and require the following matters to be informed by the Retail Development Strategy.

- Retail Hierarchy in line with Regional Planning Guidelines and Settlement hierarchy of Core Strategy.
- Outline the level and form of retailing activity appropriate to the various components of the hierarchy.
- Define by way of a map the boundaries of the core shopping areas or town centres and location of district centres.
- Broad assessment (sq.m) of requirement for additional retail floorspace.
- Set out strategic guidance on the location/scale of retail development.
- Identify sites to accommodate the needs of modern retail formats.
- Include objectives to support action initiatives to encourage the improvement of town centres.
- Identify development management criteria for assessment of retail development.

5.3 Retail Development Strategy

The Retail Planning Guidelines 2012 require that certain development plans and local area plans must be informed by joint or multi-authority retail strategies which should assess retail activity and demand needs that transcend planning authority boundaries. Consequently Offaly, Westmeath and Roscommon County Councils are required to undertake a joint retail strategy for the Midlands Region. The MRPGs 2010-2022 support the preparation of a joint retail strategy. It is an objective of this plan to prepare a joint retail strategy in conjunction with Westmeath and Roscommon County Councils. Such a strategy may be required to be incorporated into the development plan when finalised and agreed. Until such time as this is undertaken the retail development strategy for this plan will be informed by the provisions of the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012

as they offer direction on retailing matters to be addressed by development plans in locations beyond those cited for undertaking joint retail strategies.

5.3.1 Retail Hierarchy

The Retail Planning Guidelines 2012 prescribe that to ensure proper planning and sustainable development, retail development must follow the settlement hierarchy of the state as per the hierarchy identified by the NSS 2002-2020, Regional Planning Guidelines and Core Strategies of development plans. The retail development strategy will demonstrate consistency with the core strategy in setting out a retail hierarchy in line with the settlement hierarchy for County Offaly as set out in chapter 1 of this plan. The retail hierarchy provides for a ranking to be given by the planning authority to the range and quantity of retailing appropriate to a settlement as dictated by its role in the settlement hierarchy. Offaly's retail hierarchy comprises the following:

Table 5.1 Retail Hierarchy County Offaly

Tier	Classification	Location
1	Regional	Tullamore Linked Gateway
2	Sub-Regional	Birr, Edenderry, Portarlinton
3	Small Towns	Clara, Ferbane, Banagher, Daingean, Kilcormac
4	Local shopping	Villages & Sráids

The retail hierarchy reinforces the settlement hierarchy set out in the Core Strategy and takes the following approach which:

- Reinforces and extends the high order retail function of Tullamore as a linked Gateway, enabling it to effectively reduce retail expenditure exported from the county to other centres;
- Supports the roles identified for Birr, Edenderry and Portarlinton¹ by encouraging retail floorspace

¹ The majority of retail provision in Portarlinton is located in County Laois. However, Portarlinton has been included on

provision commensurate with their anticipated growth; and

- Promotes balanced retail provision throughout the county of a scale appropriate to the size and function of the various settlements.

To further the strengthening and consolidation of Tullamore, the county's main centres are the preferred locations for retail development. Retail development should be focused in the existing settlements of the county and the scale and size of such retail development should match that of its location.

The bulk of additional retail floorspace in the future will be directed to the main existing centres in the retail hierarchy, consistent with the provisions of the Core Strategy. Tullamore as a Linked Gateway town and as the county town will be the main focus of retail development activity. The role and function of established centres should be consolidated (at all levels in the retail hierarchy) by encouraging the improvement of retail facilities and supporting services appropriate to each of the existing centres. This will include:

- A positive approach to planning applications which reinforce retail roles and functions;
- Support 'in principle' for town and other centre improvement initiatives (including for example, public realm and business development initiatives); and
- Support for the resolution of traffic and transport-related issues which will require to be considered simultaneously.

Retail development should be focused in the existing settlements of the county and the scale and size of such retail development should match that of its location.

account of the large population catchment that it serves in County Offaly.

5.3.2 Level and Form of Retailing Activity

The Retail Planning Guidelines require Planning Authorities to outline the level and form of retailing activity appropriate to the various components of the retail hierarchy. The retail hierarchy encourages the provision of retail floorspace in the settlement areas of County Offaly at a level appropriate to the size and the defined function of its various settlements as outlined in the Core Strategy. This provides explicitly for the following level and form of retailing in the settlement areas:

Table 5.2: Level and Form of Retailing Activity in context of Retail Hierarchy

Tier	Location	Description
Tier 1	Tullamore	<p>Tullamore, as a Linked Gateway Town, will be the focus for all types of retail development. Its role, as a Linked Gateway Town, can be strengthened through securing major retail development for the town, which will in turn benefit the county area and the wider Midland region. Tullamore has the greatest capacity to accommodate a range of retail development types. Major comparison retail development should be directed to Tullamore town. The application of the sequential test will be fundamental to achieving appropriate retail development in the most appropriate locations within Tullamore. Major retail development in Tullamore will be considered where it can be demonstrated that proposed developments will have a positive impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ in further reducing levels of retail expenditure exported from the county; and ▪ in generating a significant improvement in Tullamore's regional appeal. <p>District Centres will be considered where they serve future population growth i.e. serving new or expanding outlying residential areas, to meet the convenience needs and lower order comparison needs of news residential communities. Such district centres should not serve as retail destinations or impact adversely in any respect on Tullamore town centre.</p> <p>Retail Warehousing development will be carefully considered given; 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.</p>
Tier 2	Birr, Edenderry, Portarlington	<p>As larger towns within the county appropriate levels of convenience floor space will be encouraged in Birr, Edenderry and Portarlington subject to consideration of the retail impact on existing retail developments and facilities. Convenience provision will be supported where it is required to serve the existing and projected population catchment. Comparison retailing can be provided for in these towns on a low level where it can be justified fully and in the context of existing vacancy rates of facilities that could support comparison retail development. There will generally be a presumption against further development of retail parks accommodating retail warehousing in these larger towns. Where, retail warehousing is proposed careful consideration will 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.</p>
Tier 3	Clara, Ferbane, Banagher, Daingean, Kilcormac	<p>Additional convenience and comparison floorspace will be encouraged where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is needed to support levels of population growth over and above that already identified, • Gaps are identified in local provision, and • There will not be a material and unacceptable adverse impact and viability of the existing town centre. <p>Comparison retail development will not be considered where it proposes to attract a larger catchment or impacts on the integrity of the retail hierarchy.</p> <p>There will generally be a presumption against the development of retail parks accommodating retail warehousing in these towns.</p>
Tier 4	Villages & Sráids	<p>Villages and Sráids will maintain the role in the provision of retail services to their local population catchments. New small scale retail developments will be supported where they meet the needs of the local population (including the rural catchments that they serve). There will be a clear presumption against edge-of-centre and out-of-centre locations in Village and Sráid areas.</p>

5.3.3 Define boundaries of the core shopping areas or town centres

Volume 2 of the plan provides for the settlement plans for all settlement areas within the county. The core retail area or town centre of each settlement area has been delineated to identify clearly the location of the retailing function of the settlement. Identifying and delineating core retail areas or town centres allows a focused approach for retailing and town centre action initiatives as well as the proper application of the sequential approach to retail development.

5.3.4 Broad assessment (sq.m) of requirement for additional retail floorspace

Making provision for additional retail floor space over the lifetime of this plan provides for:

- Highlighting the importance of retailing in core retail areas and town centres.
- Meeting the retail requirements of residents and others who use or visit town centres.
- Contributing to levels of activity and town centre viability and health.
- Supporting the general improvement of core retail areas and town centres.

The Retail Planning Guidelines 2012 require Planning Authorities to include a broad assessment (sq.m.) of the requirement for additional retail floorspace in areas that are covered by a joint or multi-authority retail strategy. County Offaly is required to undertake a multi-authority retail strategy in conjunction with Westmeath and Roscommon County Councils. This will examine the additional requirement to estimate detailed floor space. The Council will work with Westmeath and Roscommon County Councils to develop a multi-authority strategy and will endeavour to assess retail applications in the context of the detailed figures on retail floor space allocations for the county when the strategy is incorporated as part of the plan.

In the absence of the detailed figures on retail floor space the Retail Development Strategy of this plan

provides information on the general retail function appropriate to the settlement areas identified in the retail hierarchy.

The retail development strategy of the plan encourages the provision of retail floorspace in the county's centres at a level appropriate to the size and projected roles of its various settlements and this approach is consistent with national and regional policy. Additional retail floorspace should be provided therefore in accordance with the provisions of Table 5.2 which indicates the Level and Form of Retailing Activity appropriate to the various components of the retail hierarchy.

5.3.5 Strategic guidance on the location/scale of retail development & identify sites to accommodate the needs of modern retail formats

The location of new retail development and the identification of sites to accommodate the needs of modern retail formats will be informed by the principles of national policy i.e. Smarter travel - A sustainable Transport Future – A new Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020, DoT 2009, other national guidance such as Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2012, DoECLG and other guidelines to ensure that retail development is located in the most appropriate and sustainable location.

The priority for the location of retail development is towards town and village centres in line with the sequential approach to retail development. The delineation of core town and village centre areas in each of the settlement areas of the county as set out in Volume 2 of the plan set the framework from which the sequential approach can be applied.

Thereafter, key opportunity sites have been identified in various settlement areas (Volume 2). Such opportunity sites are considered suitable for re-development a range of different reasons but in the main are considered to contribute to the enhancement of the vitality and vibrancy of particular town or village centre and will provide for the future retailing or commercial needs of the area.

5.3.6 Encouraging the improvement of Town Centres

The decline in town centres in County Offaly is recognised as a challenge that needs to be addressed where possible within the lifetime of this plan. The role of town centres has been impacted by the following factors:

- Economic situation.
- Increased competition from out of town retail parks and large supermarkets.
- Changing trends and patterns in consumer purchasing i.e. on-line shopping.

To remain competitive, attractive and sustainable, town centres need to be responsive to local needs and to strike a correct balance between choice and offer environmental attributes that can be used to attract people. Owing to the range of functions outside of retailing that town centres provide for, a strategy for town centres within County Offaly is outlined in the next section (section 5.4). The town centre strategy aims to support the improvement of town centres in a number of implementable ways.

5.3.7 Identify development management criteria for assessment of retail development

The Council supports applications for retail development which:

- are in line with the role and function of the town in the settlement hierarchy of the development plan, and
- accord with the scale and type of retailing identified for that location in the development plan and relevant retail strategy.

Applications for retail development will be assessed against a range of criteria including the following:

- Sequential approach.
- Retail Impact Assessment.
- Traffic Impact Assessment.
- Specific Categories of retail development.
- Design.

5.3.8 Sequential Approach

Planning applications for retail development proposals must demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority that it complies with the policies and objectives of the development plan to support town centres and complies with criteria on location, suitability of use, size, scale and accessibility to ensure that the site chosen is the most suitable and the best available site for the type of retailing proposed. Proposals should demonstrate by supportive evidence what alternative sites were examined and why they were discounted.

Retailers should demonstrate a degree of flexibility in appraising potential sites and provide for:

- Adaptation of standard retail format to accommodate retail development on sites which are centrally located in the context of the sequential approach.
- Possibility of changing core business models and adopting flexible retail formats in order to blend in with the local character.
- Innovation in site and store layout.

Sequential approach will also be applied to material change of use of existing development where they are of a scale which could have a significant impact on the role and function of the town centre.

Table 5.3: Order of Priority - Sequential Approach.

Order of Priority	Location	Criteria
1	Town Centre	Preference for location of retail development in town centre locations, and only to allow retail development in edge-of-centre or out-of-centre locations where all other options have been exhausted.
2	Edge of Town Centre	Only where the applicant can demonstrate and the planning authority is satisfied that there are no sites or potential sites including vacant units within a town centre or within a designated district centre that are (a) suitable (b) available and (c) viable , can that edge-of-centre site be considered.
3	Out of Town Centre	Only in exceptional circumstances where the applicant can demonstrate and the planning authority is satisfied that there are no sites or potential sites either within the centre of a city, town or designated district centre or on the edge of the city/town/district centre that are (a) suitable (b) available and (c) viable , can that out-of-centre site be considered.

5.3.9 Retail Impact Assessment

A Retail Impact Assessment (RIA) will be required where a new retail development is considered to be particularly large in scale compared to the existing town centre or where there is a particular allocation of a specific type and/or quantum of retail floorspace to a particular settlement and a proposed development absorbs on one site the bulk of that potential retail floorspace. An RIA must examine and demonstrate compliance with the development plan and that there will not be a material and unacceptable adverse impact on the vitality and viability of any existing centre. The RIA must address criteria as set out in the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012.

5.3.10 Traffic and Transport Assessment

A Transport and Transport Assessment (TTA) must examine the transport impacts of a proposed development, incorporating any subsequent measures necessary to ensure roads and junctions and other transport infrastructure in the vicinity of the development are adequate to accommodate the proposed development without causing additional delays to existing and future road based traffic. In addition a TTA is important in demonstrating how to encourage a shift towards sustainable travel modes by those using the retail development in question. The TTA must also

address urban design impacts of the proposed public and private transport proposals. A TTA must form part of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) where a proposed development warrants an EIA.

A Traffic and Transport Assessment (TTA) will be required for retail developments over a threshold of 1,000sq.m. gross floorspace for retail/leisure developments.

5.3.11 Specific Categories of Retail Development

Table 5.4 provides a range of criteria for the assessment of the specific categories of retail development.

Table 5.4: Assessment of specific categories of retail development

Category	Assessment Criteria
Large Convenience Goods stores i.e. supermarkets, superstores and hypermarkets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should be located in town centres or on the edge of these centres and be of a size which accords with the general floorspace requirements set out in the development plan/retail strategy to support and add variety and vitality to existing shopping areas and also to facilitate access by public transport for shoppers. • The sequential approach should be used to find the most preferable sites. • Planning application drawings should clearly delineate the floorspace to be devoted for sale of comparison and convenience goods. • The balance between the convenience and comparison elements will be assessed as a critical element of the suitability of the development proposal. Where a significant element of the store is indicated to be for comparison goods the potential impact of that element of the store on existing comparison goods stores within the catchment must be included in the assessment of the application.
Retail Parks and Retail Warehouses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presumption against further development of out-of-town retail parks where they have already reached saturation point, there are existing levels of vacancy, there is potential for detrimental impact on town centres (including vacancy rates in town centres where retail parks exist on the periphery of the town) and where it is recognised that many bulky goods stores such as furniture retailers can and are accommodated in city and town centres • Types of goods to be sold from retail parks is tightly controlled and limited to truly bulky household goods or goods which are not portable by customers travelling by foot, cycle, or bus in accordance with the provisions of the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012. • Minimum size of retail park units shall be no less than 700 sq.m. in out of centre locations and shall not be subdivided. • Cap of 6,000 sq.m (gross) on large-scale single retail warehouse units
Factory Shops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should be restricted to the sale of products produced in the respective factory only. • Scale of the shop should be appropriate to location and raise no issues in relation to the vitality and viability of nearby centres.
Outlet Centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Applicants must demonstrate, and Planning Authority must ensure that the products sold will not be in competition with those currently on sale in typical town centre locations. ▪ Most appropriate location for outlet centres is likely to be where commercial synergy can be achieved between an outlet centre and an urban centre which would lead to economic benefits for the overall area. Outlet centres should not be permitted in more remote out-of-town locations. ▪ Applications for the development of outlet centres should be considered having regard to the retail hierarchy will be assessed in accordance with the sequential test.
Retailing in Small	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retail development should be provided for the local urban and rural populations that the

Towns and Villages	<p>town or village serves.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants must demonstrate a need for the retail development within such locations.
Local Retail Units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of local retail units must be justified for location within defined local centres.
Retailing in Sráids and Rural Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retailing in Sráids and rural areas should generally be directed to existing settlements and retailing in the open countryside should be resisted. • Retail development may be considered in Sráids and rural areas in circumstances where there is a justifiable need for one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A retail unit which is ancillary to activities arising from farm diversification; ▪ A retail unit designed to serve tourist or recreational facilities, and secondary to the main tourist use; ▪ A small scale retail unit attached to an existing or approved craft workshop retailing the product direct to the public; and/or ▪ A small scale retail unit designed to serve a dispersed rural community. ▪ Consolidation, extension and/or improvement of an existing retail development that is operational.
Casual Trading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Casual trading i.e. craft, Christmas and Farmer's markets and car boot sales, will be promoted in the retail centres of towns where it can create an ambiance which can contribute to the vitality and viability of such centres.
Retailing and Motor Fuel Stations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convenience shops part of the normal ancillary services provided within motor fuel stations should remain on a scale appropriate to the location. • The floorspace of the shop should not exceed 100 sq.m net; • Where permission is sought for a floorspace in excess of 100 sq.m., the sequential approach to retail development shall apply

5.3.12 Design

Retailing plays a vital role in attracting people to towns and villages and is a major component in the provision of high quality services and amenities to local populations and visitors. One of the key messages of the Retail Planning Guidelines is that a high level of design quality in retail development can make an important contribution to the visual aesthetic of an area, to the vitality and viability of town centres, and designs which are inappropriate for their contexts, or which fail to realise opportunities for improving the character and quality of their locations should not be accepted.

Quality urban design will be promoted and encouraged at all times by the Offaly County Council for retail developments. In this regard a Design Brief will be required to be submitted as part of all planning applications for retail development in County Offaly in order to assess the urban design aspects of the development.

The design brief should demonstrate how the design is guided and informed by good urban design practices as set out in the Retail Design Manual – A Good Practice guide (Companion document to the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012) and must describe and justify the rationale for the submitted design.

The scope and level of detail expected in the design brief will typically depend on the location, scale, site, nature and complexity of the development proposal. In any event the design brief should include and address the following:

- Description of the site and its context.
- Summary of development plan objectives and policies relevant to the site and the general area.
- Identification of planning constraints or considerations.
- Design considerations including:
 - Massing, scale, and density.
 - Building and architectural design.
 - Protection of existing architectural and heritage.
 - Character and form.
 - Vitality and viability.
 - Public realm enhancements.
 - Environmental responsibility and sustainability.

5.4 Town Centre Strategy

Town centres provide a broad range of services, facilities and activities. They serve as a focus for employment, the community and public transport. Attractive, well designed town centres boasting a diverse shopping choice, residential, arts and cultural uses, entertainment, amenities and good transport connections are engines for sustainable economic growth. They provide a focal point for business and social interactions. Vibrant town centres are drivers for business and for sustainable local communities. They create and retain jobs, attract new investment and generate income. They also create a feeling of civic pride, help to define the area and attract people from near and far. Shopping largely underpins the use and value of town centres and makes a major contribution to their vitality and viability. Accordingly, town centres should normally be the first choice for major new retail developments. However, owing to their multifunctional scope, town centres warrant a strategy that would provide for their promotion aside from their retailing function.

The settlement hierarchy defined in Chapter 1 identifies settlement areas within County Offaly. Very much at the heart of these settlement areas are town and village centres that perform many important functions for the population catchments that they serve. The Council recognise that town and village centres are not devoid from changing economic circumstances and that while they constantly adapt to respond to their customers needs and preferences, a level of scrutiny, promotion and assistance is required to secure their future direction. The Town Centre Strategy, outlined overleaf in section 5.4.1, provides for measures which will be encouraged for both town and villages centres in County Offaly.

5.4.1 Town Centre Strategy Approach

Retailing

The Council is committed to protecting the vitality and viability of existing town and village centres. The Council will seek to ensure adequate provision for retailing and related facilities or a quality urban design, within defined town and village centre areas in accordance with the retail development strategy and retail policies as set out in section 5.3.

Range of other appropriate uses

The diversity of uses makes an important contribution to the vitality and viability of town and village centres. The diversity of town and village centres is demonstrated by the range and mix of other appropriate uses aside from retailing provided within these centres. This, combined with their accessibility, means that they are often the most appropriate location for activities that attract many people.

The appropriate mix and level of uses will depend on the nature and size of the town or village centre and its functional role to the population catchment it serves, however there will be a presumption in favour of development that would make a positive contribution to ensuring that existing town and village centres continue to provide for the needs of their population catchments.

Town centres will be promoted as the principal locations for appropriate daytime and night time uses including general business, office, leisure, entertainment, cultural and service uses. Proposals for such development will be encouraged where they contribute to the diversity and vitality of each centre. Proposals which result or may result in a proliferation of any one kind of use that is considered to detract from the vitality and viability of the centre, will not be permitted.

Village centres will be promoted as the principle locations for uses outside of retail uses where it can be demonstrated that there is a justifiable need for a particular use in the area to serve the population of the area.

Residential development within town and village centres can contribute to its vitality. The Council promotes residential use above shops and other business premises, within town and village centres, provided that the primary retail core and commercial functions are not prejudiced and that they comply with normal planning and environmental considerations. The level of car parking provision which would be appropriate, for such residential development, will be considered in the circumstances of each particular case.

Vacancy Rates, Derelict Sites, Brownfield Sites and Potential Opportunity Sites

Vacancy Rates

Town centres are constantly evolving and vacant units provide opportunities for retailers to locate in such centres and add to the diversity of retailer representation. Vacant units are not necessarily a sign of stagnation or weakness; they are a function of the economic cycle within all retail centres. Vacancy rates of units within town centres can be used as an indicator of vitality. The Council promotes a targeted approach to addressing vacancy rates and to provide for the occupancy of centrally located units within town centres as a priority over out-of-centre locations. In this regard, vacancy rates will be a material consideration in the assessment of retail and other uses considered appropriate for location within town and village locations to promote their vitality and vibrancy and prevent leakage to outlying areas.

Derelict Sites

The Derelict Site Act 1990 requires that owners or occupiers on any land take all reasonable steps to ensure that the land and any structure within, does not become, or continue to be, a derelict site. A derelict site is any land which detracts, or is likely to detract, to a material degree, from the amenity, character or appearance of land in the neighbourhood of the land.

Offaly County Council maintains a Register of Derelict Sites for the county and continues to be proactive in identifying and seeking the improvement of such sites throughout Offaly. Any land registered in the Derelict Sites Register and located within an urban area as defined by legislations may be subject to a Derelict Sites Levy. It is considered that the continual implementation of the provisions of the Derelict Sites Act will assist in preventing and/or removing injury to amenity, which may potentially arise from derelict sites coupled with reducing level of urban and rural decay.

Brownfield Sites

The Council fully support and promote the use and re-use of brownfield sites within town and village centres throughout County Offaly for the development of appropriate development and uses that would:

- Contribute greatly to the renewal, enhancement and regeneration of the area concerned.
- Provide for urban consolidation on a sequential basis within the town or village centre without the need for expansion into outlying areas.

Potential Opportunity sites

Potential opportunity sites have been identified in plans of the settlement areas in Volume 2. Such sites are identified as potential opportunity sites as it is considered that their redevelopment would contribute greatly to the renewal, enhancement and regeneration of the town or village in which they are located. These sites also provide the greatest potential for development and consolidation within central core areas without the need for expansion of development or services into outlying areas. Potential opportunity sites have not been identified definitively and can be added to, to provide for logical site boundaries or the inclusion of other sites. To help realise the full potential for the development of these sites, any application put forward should include a **design statement** addressing the following issues:

- Site Characteristics
- Summary of development plan objectives or policies
- Identification of planning constraints
- Design considerations including:
 - Scale, form, height, urban grain, access and movement, assimilation.
 - Architectural heritage

Quality of the Environment

Urban Design

The Council emphasises the importance of urban design within town and village centres and will require all development proposals (not only retail development) to demonstrate the following:

- Make a positive contribution to townscape and be sensitive to the character of the area surrounding the site in terms of design, scale and use of materials.
- Minimise visual, functional and physical disruption and enhance or create interest, vitality and variety.
- Insensitive development which disrupts the scale and rhythm of townscape will be resisted.
- Building design will need to be architecturally sympathetic to the important townscape elements.

Design guidance as set out for retail development should be followed for all new developments in town and village centres and design briefs maybe requested by the Planning Authority where considered appropriate for re-development proposals providing for uses aside from retail on key sites in towns and villages.

Public Realm

The public realm (i.e. streetscapes, parks and greenspaces, riverfronts, public buildings and cycling and pedestrian facilities) provides the key element in the overall urban fabric of the County's settlements and is therefore an important contribution

to achieving an overall sense of place, increasing safety and enhancing visual amenity. A collaborative approach between central government (funding), the local authority, private sector and voluntary associations is required to successfully achieve the revitalisation and renewal of areas within the public realm. The Council acknowledges the important role that individual Tidy Towns associations and other voluntary associations contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of individual settlements throughout the county.

A high quality public realm can increase business confidence, foster civic pride and emphasise local identity. The Council will, where appropriate support proposals for:

- Enhancing the overall character and quality of public spaces;
- Environmental improvements, in particular to make the urban environment more welcoming,;
- De-cluttering of streets providing for the removal of unnecessary signage, excess railings, bollards, street furniture etc.;
- Measures to reduce on-street congestion and conflict between pedestrians and vehicles;
- Enhancement of open spaces;
- Making better use of vacant, derelict, underused or unused land;
- Conserving and enhancing historic buildings and townscape;
- Provision of an appropriate level of car parking; and
- Provision for cycle parking.

Shopfronts and Signage

There are many good examples of modern and traditional shopfronts in the towns and villages of County Offaly and also there is considerable scope for improvement in many towns. Well designed frontages, eye-catching displays and generous entrances are essential to ensuring that retail development makes a positive contribution to city and town centres as competitive destinations. Enhancing the visual aesthetics of buildings and their shop fronts and providing for appropriate signage is promoted by the Council. Offaly County Council seeks to improve the attractiveness of the streetscape and the quality of the shopping environment, by encouraging retention of the best of the existing shopfronts and by requiring a high standard of design and materials for installation of new shopfronts. Offaly County Council has published a Guide to Shopfronts and Signs as both an information and advice leaflet. Chapter 8 of this plan sets out the Development Standards applicable for shopfronts and signage and should be adhered to for all development proposals.

Unlocking the Potential of Town Centres

The Retail Planning Guidelines 2012 gives guidance on the re-use of existing town centre buildings and areas and regeneration to meet the needs of modern retail formats for assimilation into the existing urban fabric. It is acknowledged that certain locations will not be suitable for large scale development that would be beneficial to town centres because of physical constraints including car parking and servicing and that the space available in town centres is just not meeting the needs of the retailer's requirements. This represents a challenge to local authorities and highlights the need to identify and actively promote new schemes and initiatives that will unlock the potential of town centres. The identification of key opportunity sites and engaging stakeholders with regard to site assembly would act as mechanisms to unlock the potential of town centres. The Council is committed to actively progressing such initiatives.

In acknowledgment of the role of Tullamore as a Linked Gateway Town and as the primary tier of the retail hierarchy, the Council, in conjunction with Tullamore Municipal District, is committed to examining Tullamore town centre in the context of a comprehensive Town Centre Delivery Strategy the aim of which is to unlock the potential of Tullamore town centre.

The town centre delivery strategy would provide a detailed framework which enables for example:

- The co-ordination of individual projects,

- Promote the identification of development programmes,
- Examine and guide site assembly,
- Examine and address access and legibility issues,
- Give guidance on environmental improvements,
- Examine renewal opportunities.

Access and Legibility

In terms of access, legibility, car parking, permeability and general movement by all users within our towns and villages, it is widely acknowledged that a balance must be struck to provide for more sustainable approaches to the design and layout of our urban environments.

The Council will have regard to the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets as published in March 2013 by the DoECLG and the DTTS as it seeks to address street design within urban areas and outline practical design measures to encourage more sustainable travel patterns in urban areas. The Manual sets out design guidance and standards for constructing new and reconfiguring existing urban roads and streets in Ireland, incorporating good planning and design practice. The Manual recognises the importance of improving street design for pedestrians, cyclist and public transport users while at the same time recognising the reliance by people on and the role played by the car.

The provisions of this Manual are consistent with the provisions of the retail design manual as they endeavour to create and enhance urban spaces that are attractive, inclusive and adaptable places to live, work, shop and visit.

Town and Village Centre Approaches

The overall visual impression of some towns and villages needs to be improved particularly in relation to approaches into the town or village centre. Inappropriate or outdated uses, signage, high profile vacancies can have a visually negative first impression. The Council will seek to improve approaches to towns and villages around County Offaly. A very effective outcome to dealing with approach roads in the Birr area has proven very successful with the implementation of the provisions of an agreed strategy and the involvement of a number of bodies, groups and local interests.

5.5 Retail and Town Centre Policies

Retail

RTCP-01 It is Council policy to implement the retail hierarchy. The Council will seek to locate retail development in the designated settlements where the scale and size of retail development proposed matches the size and the defined function of the settlement as outlined in the Core Strategy.

RTCP-02 It is Council policy to promote Tullamore, part of the Midlands Linked Gateway, as the main retail centre in the County and to ensure that the retail quantity, quality and range is of a standard that contributes to the strengthening of the retail economy within Tullamore Town, the county and within the Midlands Gateway and Region as a whole.

RTCP-03 It is Council policy to support the vitality and viability of existing town and village centres and facilitate a competitive and healthy environment for the retailing sector into the future by ensuring that future growth in retail floorspace responds to the identified retail hierarchy and needs of the projected population of the settlement areas.

RTCP-04 It is Council policy to direct retail development to existing settlements and that retailing in rural areas should be commensurate with the needs of the local population.

RTCP-05 It is Council policy to apply the sequential approach in the consideration of the location of retail developments located outside of core retail areas.

RTCP-06 It is Council policy to ensure that higher order retail services and developments are located in higher order settlements, as set out in Offaly's Settlement Strategy. The Council will consider the scale, type and location of retail developments within the county when determining their suitability.

RTCP-07 It is Council policy to address leakage of retail expenditure from the county by providing the means to strengthen the range and quality availability of its retail offer.

RTCP-08 It is Council policy to resist the loss of retail units to non-retail use at pedestrian level, particularly in the primary shopping frontages of towns.

RTCP-09 It is Council policy to encourage and facilitate the re-use and regeneration of derelict land and buildings for retail uses with due cognisance to the sequential approach.

RTCP-10 It is Council policy to encourage retail development, including new forms of shopping which relates to the regeneration of existing town and village centres. Proposals, which would undermine the vitality and viability of retail core areas or town centres, as a whole will not be permitted.

RTCP-11 It is Council policy to encourage high quality design in retail development to support and promote the attractiveness and competitiveness of town and village centres as places to live, work, shop and visit.

RTCP-12 It is Council policy to require applicants of retail development include as part of the planning application, a design brief showing the rationale and evolution of the proposal and how the proposal will interact within its context and setting.

Town Centre

RTCP-13 It is Council policy to encourage the re-development of key opportunity sites identified in the settlement plan areas contained in Volume 2 for appropriate development that contributes positively to the character of the town and village centre.

RTCP-14 It is Council policy to require that any proposal brought forward on potential opportunity sites identified in the settlement plans in Volume 2 will include a design statement showing the rationale behind the proposal and how it will interact within its context and the wider urban area.

RTCP-15 It is Council policy to promote town and village centres in accordance with the Town Centre Strategy of the plan and to prohibit development that would detract in any way from their enhancement, viability or improvement.

RTCP-16 It is Council policy to promote and encourage the re-utilisation of suitable redundant or obsolete structures, ensuring that the improvement and screening of neglected sites and the renewal, repair and/or maintenance of structures is in line with the Council's powers under the Derelict Sites Act 1990.

RTCP-17 It is Council policy to seek to encourage the redevelopment of derelict or vacant buildings as an alternative to new build on new undeveloped sites. Vacancy rates will be a material consideration in the assessment of retail and other uses considered appropriate for location within town and village centres to promote their vitality and vibrancy and to prevent leakage to outlying areas.

RTCP-18 It is Council policy to apply the principles of the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets 2013, in relation to transport and movement issues within the town centre.

5.6 Retail and Town Centre Objectives²

RTCO-01 It is an objective of the Council to prepare and implement a joint retail strategy in conjunction with Westmeath and Roscommon County Councils.

RTCO-02 It is an objective of the Council to encourage the continued vitality and viability of town centres by:

- Identifying and promoting key town and village centre opportunity sites for development.
- Promoting the revitalisation of vacant and derelict properties/shop units.
- Promoting ongoing environmental improvements to the public realm.
- Prevent overdevelopment of particular non retail uses such as takeaways in core retail areas.
- Promoting activities including events, street markets and farmer's/country markets in appropriate town and village centres in the county.

RTCO-03 It is an objective of the Council, in conjunction with Tullamore Municipal District, to undertake a Comprehensive Town Centre Delivery Strategy which will examine unlocking the potential of Tullamore town centre.

² The order of listing of objectives is not intended to indicate priorities. Subject to the availability of resources, it is the Council's aim to monitor and accomplish the objectives listed in this section within the period of the plan.

Chapter 6: Community, Social and Cultural Development

6.1 Aim

To promote settlements and communities where people can live and work, with access to a range of community facilities which are a vital component in increasing social inclusion, contributing to the quality of life for all.

The chapter is prepared in the context of the following documents:

- Putting People First, 2012, Department of Environment.
- The Offaly Local Anti-Poverty Strategy 2008-2013.
- Childcare Facilities: Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2001.
- County Arts Plan 2012-2016.

6.2 Context

In general, the purpose of the County Development Plan in relation to community, social and cultural development is to include appropriate policies and objectives in plans which will relate to the allocation and reservation of land, development management standards and provision of specific social, community and cultural facilities within the county.

The term 'community services' potentially covers a very broad range of infrastructure and service provision to meet the needs of residents within the Planning Authority's area. The emphasis in the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended), is placed on childcare and educational facilities, including the services such as pre-schools, Naíonraí (Irish language playgroups), day-care services, crèches, Montessori schools, playgroups, childminding, after-school groups, primary, secondary and special needs schools. Other community

facilities include places of worship, burial grounds, hospital and health centres, facilities for the elderly and persons with disabilities, libraries and community halls.

'Putting People First', 2012, from the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, outlines Government Policy for reform and development across the local government system. This will impact on how the Council will deliver its community services role over the lifetime of the plan.

6.2.1 Putting People First (PPF)

The Council is committed to the recommendations of Putting People First as resources allow:

- County Development Boards will be replaced by a Local Community Development Committees (LCDC). LCDC's will be required to use a tailored approach to provide for engagement with agencies and other local stakeholders which are not members of the LCDC's.
- Formulation of a 6 year Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) encompassing all state funded and community development interventions.
- The capacity of local authorities will be utilised as fully as possible to work with or on behalf of other bodies.

The role of the Local Authority is likely to evolve over the plan period in light of the Putting People First policies. PPF builds on the recommendations of the Programme for Government Commitments, the Local Government Efficiency Review Group and the Report of the Local Development / local Government Alignment Steering Group.

6.3 Strategy

This County Development Plan seeks to assist and facilitate in the improvement of existing social, community and cultural facilities, as appropriate within the county and make adequate provisions for the development of new facilities. The Planning Authority provides a number of roles in ensuring adequate provision of social, community and cultural facilities as appropriate, as outlined in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Role of the Planning Authority in the Provision of Community / Social and Cultural Facilities:

Reservation of lands for community uses within settlements.
Facilitation and flexibility in the provision of increased community services within settlements as appropriate, including education, health, childcare etc.
Applying a collaborative approach in the assessment of planning applications submitted which are required to reflect the scale of their location and carrying capacity in terms of community infrastructure.
Encouraging the sustaining/appropriate expansion of settlements as per the county's settlement hierarchy.
Encouraging Sustainable Neighbourhoods through application of Sustainable Urban Housing Guidelines in Development Management.

This strategy, for the purposes of this plan, identifies the needs of communities 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.

6.4 Social Inclusion

Social inclusion refers to the way in which all persons in a community are integrated in an equal manner, reducing barriers to participation, for example, discrimination and/or physical barriers such as accessibility and inadequate transport facilities. In order to combat social exclusion, actions must be taken at both a national and a local level and be focused on the most disadvantaged areas.

6.4.1 Context

'The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 was reviewed in 2012, as part of the National Social Target for Poverty Reduction, October 2012. This document has given revised targets to reduce consistent poverty to 4 per cent by 2016 (interim target) and to 2 per cent or less by 2020, from the 2010 baseline rate of 6.2 per cent.

6.5 Community Facilities

The term 'community facility' covers a variety of amenities which are responsive to and meet the needs of individual communities. For the purposes of this plan, Table 6.2 below illustrates the individual sectors in broad terms, which are providers of community facilities.

Table 6.2 Community Facilities Providers

State
Local Authority
Community Groups
Private Interest Groups

6.6 Education

Central Government, through the Department of Education and Skills, is responsible for the delivery of educational facilities and services. The Planning Authority's role in education provision is in ensuring that adequate serviceable land is available in appropriate locations to meet current and envisaged future requirements beyond the plan period.

6.7 Other Education / Skills Training

A number of post second level courses are available within Offaly which provide additional education and

training, further equipping candidates for the workforce, for example OLDC courses, Offaly Outreach Education Project, Education Training Board, Adult Education Centre and Solas. The Council will encourage groups and providers to examine mechanisms to increase the availability of all existing community educational facilities and training resources to a wider section of the population.

6.8 Childcare

Increasing numbers of people in the workforce and changing lifestyles has increased the demand for childcare facilities within our communities. The Council continues to have regard to national guidelines notably 'Childcare Facilities: Guidelines for Planning Authorities' 2001. At a local level, the Offaly County Childcare Committee (inter-agency) has the following stated aims:

- To develop a co-ordinated strategy for childcare provision in the county.
- To increase the supply of childcare services and facilities.
- To support and develop local networks of providers.
- To update the baseline data provided in the National Childcare Census.
- To develop an information strategy concerning the provision of childcare in the county.
- To establish and maintain effective links with the appropriate structures i.e. County Development Board, Local Area Partnerships, Health Service Executive (HSE) etc.

The Planning Authority's role in relation to childcare facilities is in implementing national guidelines and local policies and in encouraging and supporting adequate measures which are consistent with the size and scale of development proposals. In addition, the Planning Authority has a role in accommodating both an increase in population levels as per the county's settlement hierarchy (Chapter 1, Core Strategy & Settlement Strategy) and facilitating individuals in the workforce at optimum locations i.e. within residential estates, town / village centre locations, places of employment).

6.9 Play Facilities for Children

The Council recognises the need to maximise opportunities for play facilities for children both within the natural and built environment. The Council has adopted a joint playground policy with OLDC, 'Joint Playground Policy 2009-2013' which is likely to be extended beyond 2014. It is based on a partnership approach between, OCC, OLDC and local communities, and has been successful in delivering a number of playground facilities, Multi-Use Games Areas, (MUGA) over the life time of the current plan.

Table 6.3 Play Facilities delivered under the current Joint Playground Policy

Location	Facility
Edenderry–Churchview Heights	MUGA
Rahan–College View	MUGA
Portarlinton–St.Joseph's Terrace	MUGA
Shinrone–The Green, Main St.	Children's playground
Shannonbridge–Main St.	Children's playground
Kilcormac–Town Park Frankford	Children's playground
Birr–Roscrea Rd.	Skate park
Edenderry–Granary Park	Children's playground
Moneygall–Elderberry Drive	Children's playground

6.10 Youth

The Council recognises the role of Comhairle Na nÓg, and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), in giving children and young people the opportunity to be involved in the development of local services and policies. It is recognised that a multi-agency approach is necessary in meeting the needs of the youth within the county. Such needs include recreational opportunities, including both formal and informal activities i.e. 'youth

cafes', sports facilities and casual areas where young people can integrate with each other etc.

6.11 Elderly

Offaly County Council recognises that the county has an ageing population. The Planning Authority supports the 'Offaly Age Friendly County Programme' as implemented by the Ageing Well Network.

The key priorities of the Programme are to implement the (World Health Organisation) WHO values and principles of Age Friendly Cities and Communities. The process will recognise the diversity of citizens as they age, encourage healthy active ageing, promote inclusion and participation, create safe accessible environments and ensure that the views and opinions of older people are valued and recognised in future policy and planning.

6.12 Sport / Recreation / Open Space

Offaly Sport Partnership's remit involves the achievement of sustained local increases in participation levels in sport, physical activity and active living in Offaly in line with the national participation objectives of the Irish Sports Council. The Planning Authority has a role in protecting existing sport / recreation and open space areas and ensuring that adequate land is zoned for development to accommodate sporting and recreational facilities, both active and passive.

Offaly Sports Partnership is an inter-agency group which is a sub structure of the County Development Board and is supported by the Irish Sports Council, with the aim to increase participation in sport and physical activity throughout county Offaly. Refer to Offaly Sports Partnership Strategic Plan 2011-2015 (<http://www.offalysports.ie>).

6.13 Health Services

The Health Services Executive (HSE) is the principal body responsible for the delivery of health and social services. The Planning Authority has a role in ensuring that health services are located within accessible areas. The Council acknowledges that residential care facilities and other health services distributed throughout settlements improve service accessibility and greater integration within the community.

6.14 Libraries

County Offaly's public library service provides an increasingly important community, information, cultural and outreach facility role within the county. Its county headquarters is situated in Tullamore and there are 8 branches in total throughout the county, namely: Tullamore, Birr, Edenderry, Clara, Banagher, Daingean, Ferbane and Kilcormac. The council will support the provision of library facilities across the county as resources allow.

6.15 Offaly Local Development Company - OLDC

Offaly Local Development Company (OLDC) is a partnership of agencies and groups representing the community, statutory and private sectors. It is funded by a number of Government departments and agencies to deliver a variety of programmes and supports to people, communities and businesses in County Offaly.

OLDC has a mix of in-house expertise and external funding to enable it to work with people, communities and businesses throughout County Offaly. The company was established in 2008 and is the result of an amalgamation of a number of organisations including, Offaly LEADER, Tullamore Wider Options, West Offaly Partnership and the Co. Offaly based section of OAK Partnership.

The Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP) aims to tackle poverty and social exclusion through partnership and constructive engagement between Government and its agencies and people in disadvantaged communities. It is managed by Pobal on behalf of the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government. Many of OLDC's initiatives form part of the Local and Community Development Programme.

The council will continue to support OLDC in achieving its objectives, in particular in identifying locations where resources are to be deployed.

6.16 Arts and Culture

The Arts and Culture is a vibrant element of social life in Offaly and provides positives across a wide range of areas

from tourism to cultural development. Offaly County Council has adopted and published a County Arts Plan for the period 2012-2016. This plan details eight strategic areas for Arts Development in the county:

- Economic Value.
- The creative community.
- Young people and the arts.
- The creative individual.
- Spaces and places.
- Festivals.
- Public Art.
- Film Offaly.

The Council acknowledges the importance of a cultural infrastructure to the county and that the completion of Tullamore Community Arts Centre in Tullamore and Grand Canal Corridor project will be a valuable contribution for the people of Tullamore, its inhabitants and those people in surrounding areas. The Council also acknowledges the contribution of Birr Theatre and Arts Centre and Public Access Arts in Edenderry and will support same.

The council acknowledges the significance of utilising the percent for art scheme as a means to create unique and meaningful artistic interventions within towns and communities such as Saints and Scholars on the Tullamore bypass or Grove Street TV project in Crinkle. We will also provide leadership, guidance and advice to other organisations in both the public and private sector to maximise the impact of their own artistic features/projects.

<http://www.offaly.ie/eng/Services/Arts and Culture/>

6.17 Places of Worship

The Council recognises the valuable contribution that places of worship have in a community context and will endeavour to accommodate and facilitate their provision and/or extension, where appropriate.

6.18 Burial Grounds

The Council has a responsibility for the provision of burial grounds including as necessary, the acquisition of lands and the undertaking of any necessary works on these

lands. The Council adopts a 5-Year Burial Ground Plan; The 2011 Offaly County Council Burial Grounds Policy gives greater responsibility and ownership of burial grounds to the local community, by encouraging local groups to develop manage and maintain new burial grounds by the provision of capital grants and technical guidance.

The Council has eighteen burial grounds under its control. The Planning Authority has a role in ensuring that adequate land is reserved to accommodate such a use in accordance with future needs within the county. A number of these burial grounds may need to be extended and/or new sites identified over the period of this plan (2014-2020).

6.19 Other Traditional Local Services

Other traditional local services such as small shops, post offices and licensed premises provide an important role for the communities of the smaller settlements in particular villages and sráids throughout the county.

The challenge to maintain local services in our towns and villages is recognised. The Council acknowledges the cooperation between Tullamore Municipal District and Tullamore Chamber in relation to town management and supports the extension of this model to the wider county.

6.20 New Residential Developments

All proposals for large scale residential developments must consider existing or future community facilities. Sustainable neighbourhoods require a range of community facilities as stated in the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government Guidelines on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (2009). The Planning Authority will seek to ensure that facilities for social and cultural use, such as resource centres, are available within the community. Such facilities play an important role in helping to create a vibrant community and thereby contribute to the quality of life of the residents in the area and are vital to their wellbeing.

This requirement will ensure that new residential areas in the county will have access to local community facilities. Refer to Chapter 8 Development Management Standards.

6.21 Voluntary Organisations

The Communities of the county have long been a huge volunteer base e.g.

- Youth clubs.
- Community Groups/Tidy Towns committees.
- Various sporting organisations.
- Charity Groups.

The role of the Community and Voluntary Forum is recognised and its impact on service provision for aspects of community. The value of these voluntary organisations cannot be underestimated in terms of its resource and service provision and overall benefits to the county. The Council will continue to support and facilitate voluntary organisations across the county.

6.22 Implementation

The successful implementation of the Council's Social/Community/Cultural policies is by way of a collaborative approach by Offaly County Council, other statutory bodies, private developers, the community and voluntary sector.

6.23 Community, Social and Cultural Development Policies

Community - General

- CSCP-01** It is Council policy to assist, where feasible, in social, community and cultural development within the county. It is Council policy to encourage and facilitate the provision and extension of community facilities to serve individual communities throughout the county.
- CSCP-02** It is Council policy to support and facilitate the Local Community Development Committees / Social Economic Committee in its key objectives of strengthening the community sector throughout the county and developing a long-term strategy of social investment at community level.
- CSCP-03** It is Council policy to identify and facilitate the development of suitable sites for community facilities within the county, particularly in newly developing areas. These sites should be easily accessible (walking and cycling) and promote the use of public transport.
- CSCP-04** It is Council policy that proposals for new developments will have regard to the Department of Environment Heritage and Local Government Guidelines on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (2009) in relation to Sustainable neighbourhoods to provide new facilities (including play facilities) for community use. Proposals should be in suitable locations and be compatible with adjoining developments. Such proposals will be subject to other policies of the Development Plan, in particular those concerning open space provision. Further, it is Council policy to encourage the provision of multi-functional buildings, which are adaptable to accommodating a range of community facilities, where appropriate. (This is particularly apparent in the case of new housing estates, whereby a crèche facility can be designed to be re-developed in subsequent years, if required, for an alternative community facility). Further, it is Council policy that the multi-use of public spaces will be encouraged.

Childcare

- CSCP-05** It is Council policy to encourage the provision of childcare facilities in residential areas, employment areas, retail centres and other areas as appropriate, when development proposals are put forward for consideration.
- CSCP-06** It is Council policy to encourage the provision of childcare facilities as an integral part of proposals for new residential developments. The Planning Authority will have regard to the DEHLG's Childcare Facilities Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2001 in relation to the provision of childcare facilities.
- CSCP-07** It is Council policy to assist the County Childcare Committee in identifying priority areas within the county for the provision of childcare facilities.

The Elderly

- CSCP-08** It is Council policy that residential homes for the elderly and nursing homes for the elderly are located within defined settlement boundaries and are appropriate in scale to the size and scale of the settlement. The provision of new residential homes and nursing homes within the rural countryside is considered only in such cases where it is clearly demonstrated that due to the nature of the services to be provided, a rural location is necessary and that no suitable alternative sites are available within a nearby settlement.

- CSCP-09** It is Council policy to support ‘the Offaly Age Friendly County Programme’ as implemented by the Ageing Well Network.

Open Space / Amenity Facilities

- CSCP-10** It is Council policy to preserve the landuse of existing public and private recreation areas, including sports clubs, built leisure facilities and open space areas. In exceptional circumstances, a change of use may be sought, but must demonstrate that alternative recreational provisions are provided in a suitable location. Further, it is Council policy to identify, where possible, sites for possible future extension adjacent, if appropriate, within settlement plans.
- CSCP-11** It is Council policy to encourage and facilitate the provision of community and recreational infrastructure as an integral component of proposed new residential schemes and in particular, the provision of playgrounds for children.

Education Facilities

- CSCP-12** It is Council policy to liaise with and to facilitate the Department of Education and Skill in the provision of education facilities, as appropriate. This includes the identification and reservation of sufficient land to meet the need for expansion of existing schools and/or provision of new schools in accordance with the county’s settlement hierarchy, requirements of individual settlements, their catchment area and the requirements of the relevant education authority, in accordance with ‘The Provision of Schools and the Planning System, A Code of Practice for Planning Authorities’, the Department of Education and Science, and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2008).
- CSCP-13** It is Council policy to consult with the Department of Education and Skills in the identification and facilitation of suitable sites, for new educational facilities.
- CSCP-14** It is Council policy to restrict new development adjacent to existing schools where such development may have potential to restrict the expansion of that school.
- CSCP-15** It is Council policy to encourage the multi-use of schools and facilities provided this does not conflict with the delivery of the education service.
- CSCP-16** It is Council policy to ensure that no significant residential developments proceed without an assessment of existing school capacity or the provision of new schools facilities in tandem with the development.

Libraries

- CSCP-17** It is Council policy to ensure that the county library service is strongly positioned to support: the knowledge society, social inclusion, e-Government, life-long learning initiatives, local studies and archive services, children’s services, services to rural communities, the housebound and homes for the elderly.
- CSCP-18** It is Council policy to support the refurbishment and upgrade of the Libraries at Banagher, Daingean, Edenderry Ferbane and Kilcormac, in accordance with the Offaly Local Authorities Library Development Plan.

CSCP-19 It is Council policy to implement the Offaly County Council, Library Development Plan 2010-2014 and any subsequent Library development plans.

Arts and Culture

CSCP-20 It is Council policy, having particular regard to Tullamore's Gateway status and projected population growth, to facilitate the development of a dedicated multipurpose arts centre in the town, as resources permit.

CSCP-21 It is Council policy to implement the Council's Arts Plan 2012- 2016 and the development of successive County Arts Plans.

CSCP-22 It is Council policy to maximise the per cent for art scheme for Offaly in relation to its major capital projects which provides opportunities for artists of all disciplines to create work to exist in the public realm. Public capital projects, for example: housing developments, roads, water and waste water treatment schemes, as well as hospitals, schools and libraries, have a percentage of the total capital costs allocated for the creation of a work of art. It is Council policy to reflect a commitment to, and recognition of, the diversities of the scheme in line with national guidelines.

Community Healthcare

CSCP-23 It is Council policy to promote the improvement of health services throughout the county, in particular to encourage the integration of health services and facilities with new and existing community facilities, where feasible.

CSCP-24 It is Council policy to look favourably upon the development of primary care centres in accessible locations which comprise / provide access to a range of healthcare services including general practitioners, nurses / midwives, health care assistants, home help assistants, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, social workers and administrative personnel, as appropriate. The provision of individual healthcare facilities will also be considered, as appropriate.

CSCP-25 It is Council policy to support the Health Service Executive and other statutory and voluntary agencies in the provision of appropriate healthcare facilities including the development of both the system of hospital care and the provision of community-based care primary facilities. It is Council policy to encourage the integration of appropriate healthcare facilities within new and existing communities.

Burial Grounds

CSCP-26 It is Council policy to protect the cultural heritage of historical burial grounds within the county and to encourage their management and maintenance in accordance with conservation principles.

CSCP-27 It is Council policy to implement the Offaly County Council Burial Grounds Policy 2011-2016 and any subsequent Burial Grounds policies.

CSCP-28 It is Council policy to consider handing Council graveyards back to communities to allow them to be cared for by the community, as appropriate.

Traditional Local Services

- CSCP-29** It is Council policy to consider to support and encourage traditional local services such as small shops, post offices, and licensed premises, acknowledging their important role in communities and smaller settlements, particularly villages and Sráids through the county.

6.24 Community, Social and Cultural Development Objectives¹**Education**

- CSCO-01** It is an objective of the Council that the provision of new education facilities are located within existing settlements and thereby out-of-town locations are considered only in exceptional circumstances.

- CSCO-02** It is an objective of the Council that the provision of extensions to existing education facilities is provided for by appropriate zoning of adjoining lands where feasible.

Open Spaces / Amenity

- CSCO-03** It is an objective of the Council to develop open spaces throughout the county which will encourage a range of recreational and amenity activities that will cater for both active and passive needs.

Sports and Recreation

- CSCO-04** It is an objective of the Council to support and facilitate local community groups / sporting organisations in the development of sport and recreational facilities, in particular through land-use zoning, where appropriate.

Burial Grounds

- CSCO-05** It is an objective of the Council to provide or assist in the provision of burial grounds and extensions to existing burial grounds, by 1) reservation of land at suitable locations and 2) provision of local authority burial grounds, where feasible. Regard will be afforded to the heritage value of cemeteries and access to and information on the history, ecology, archaeology and genealogy of the sites will be promoted.

Play Facilities

- CSCO-06** It is an objective of the Council to develop a partnership approach in funding and developing children's play opportunities throughout the county, in accordance with '*Ready Steady Play*,' A National Play Policy and Offaly County Council and OLDC, *Joint Playground Policy 2009-2013*' and any subsequent policies.

Library Facilities

- CSCO-07** It is an objective of the Council to support the refurbishment of Libraries at Banagher, Daingean, Ferbane and Kilcormac, in accordance with the Offaly County Library Development Plan, as resources allow.

- CSCO-08** It is an objective of the Council to examine making improvements to and/or seek to redevelop the library in Edenderry over the lifetime of this plan

Arts Facilities

- CSCO-09** It is an objective of the Council to facilitate the development of a dedicated multi-purpose Arts Centre at a suitable location within the town of Tullamore.

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

Chapter 7 Heritage and Landscape

7.1 Introduction

The list below includes a wide range of European and national legislative provisions for the protection of the landscape, habitats, species and ecosystems in existence that have international and national status.

The chapter is prepared in the context of the following documents:

- European Landscape Convention (Florence Convention), 2000.
- The Wildlife Act, 1976.
- The Wildlife (Amendment) Act, 2000.
- The European Union (Natural Habitats) Regulations, S.I. 94/1997 (which have been amended twice with S.I. 233/1998 & S.I. 378/2005).
- European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477 of 2011).
- Convention of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar sites).
- Natura 2000 sites legislation.
- The Heritage Act, 1995.
- National Monuments Act (1930-2004).

7.1.1 Appropriate Assessment

Plans and projects which have potential to negatively impact European Sites must be screened for Appropriate Assessment and full Appropriate Assessment must be carried out unless it can be established through screening that the plan or project in question will not have a significant effect on any European Sites.

The Council's role as competent authority in the context of European Sites is to ensure that development, when permitted, does not adversely affect the integrity of the site.

See Article 6(1) and 6(2) of the Habitats Directive for requirements relating to European Sites.

7.1.2 SEA

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is the process by which environmental considerations are required to be fully integrated into the preparation of Plans and Programmes and prior to their final adoption. The objectives of the SEA process are to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to promote sustainable development by contributing to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of specified Plans and Programmes.

The requirement for SEA derives from the SEA Directive (2001/42/EC). Eleven sectors are specified in the Directive and Competent Authorities (Planning Authority) must subject specific Plans and Programmes for these sectors to an environmental assessment where they are likely to have significant effects on the environment.

7.1.3 Landscape of Offaly

County Offaly largely comprises a flat landscape which is particularly typified by its extent of boglands. It also contains an esker landscape which encapsulates the geographical change that emerged following the ice age and merits protection given its unique importance in providing scientific, recreational and amenity value.

The Slieve Bloom Mountain uplands area, located in the southwest of the county, is the only substantial upland area within the county. Offaly's landscape is further marked by its ancient religious traditions and its monastic settlements. The Shannon River flows along the western boundary of the county and coupled with its callows area, its landscape is unique and of importance locally, nationally and internationally.

The important heritage areas/habitats in Offaly which will be addressed in this chapter are listed in Table 7.1.1.

Table 7.1.1 Heritage Areas/Habitats in Offaly

▪ Slieve Bloom Mountains
▪ Waterways, in particular the River Shannon (Shannon Callows & Little Brosna Callows) and the Grand Canal, River Barrow & Lakes
▪ Bogs (Raised and blanket bogs, Intact and cutaway)
▪ Eskers (in particular the Eiscir Riada)
▪ Farmland and associated hedgerows
▪ Woodlands

7.1.4 Heritage

Heritage is defined in the Heritage Act, 1995 as including monuments, archaeology, heritage objects, architecture, flora, fauna, wildlife habitats, landscapes, geology, heritage gardens and parks and inland waterways. Heritage is therefore all around us. It is reflected in the landscape in which we live and it is reflected in how we perceive the landscape. Aspects of our heritage help to define us and they contribute to the development of a strong sense of identity and pride. In addition, heritage is essential to our economy being one of our greatest selling points in the domestic and international tourism markets.

The conservation and enhancement of the built, natural and cultural heritage is a major function of the Plan. This chapter sets out policies and objectives to conserve, raise awareness and promote enjoyment of all aspects of the built, natural and cultural heritage of the county, under the following sections:

1. Natural Heritage
2. Green Infrastructure
3. Areas of High Amenity
4. Landscape and Amenity
5. Public Rights of Way
6. Built Heritage

7.2 Natural Heritage

7.2.1 Natural Heritage Aim

Offaly County Council will seek to conserve, protect and enhance Offaly's natural heritage where possible. The Council will aim to strike a reasonable balance between conservation and development objectives in the interests of the proper planning and sustainable development of the county.

The following principles will guide the Council's heritage policies and objectives:

- To avoid damage or loss of natural heritage.
- To mitigate the effects of harm where it cannot be avoided.
- To promote appropriate enhancement of natural heritage as an integral part of any development
- To promote a reasonable balance between conservation measures and development measures in the interests of promoting the orderly and sustainable development of Offaly.
- To promote bio-diversity.

Over 10% of the land area of Ireland is formally and legally designated as being of European importance for nature conservation¹. The designation includes Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) and proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs). Offaly has a wide diversity of natural and semi-natural habitats such as bogs, wetlands, lakes, river and upland habitats that support a wide range of wild plant and animal species. Many of these areas are coming under increasing pressure as development intensifies, and it is important that measures are put in place to respond to these pressures and that any development shall not have a detrimental effect on the natural environment.

County Offaly comprises a wide diversity of natural a semi-natural habitats as listed in Table 7.1.1 above.

The habitats listed support a variety of species and ecosystems that contribute to the unique biodiversity of Offaly. This unique biodiversity is protected under a number of measures at International, National and Local level. In its role as Planning Authority, Offaly County Council is one of the key agencies responsible for the protection of the natural environment. Section 10 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) requires that a Development Plan include

¹ Convention on Biological Diversity.

objectives relating to the conservation and protection of the environment, including, in particular, the natural heritage and the conservation of European Sites and any other sites, which may be prescribed. The designation of sites within County Offaly and subsequent protection afforded to them does not always preclude development from occurring. However, the Council's role is to ensure that development, where it is considered appropriate, it is carried out in a manner that does not impede or disturb the biodiversity of the subject site.

There are a number of designations which offer protection or require that particular areas of our natural heritage are managed. These include:

- Natural Heritage Areas
- Special Areas of Conservation
- Special Protection Areas
- Statutory Nature Reserves
- Ramsar Sites
- Wildfowl Sanctuary
- Biogenetic Reserves
- Species Protection /Protected Species

The process of designation is ongoing and other sites may be identified during the life of this plan.

7.2.2 European Sites

European Sites are a network of sites of the highest biodiversity importance in Europe designated under the EU Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) and the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). They comprise Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). Special Protection Areas (SPA) are established under the EU Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) for the protection and conservation of Annex I (rare and threatened bird species), regularly occurring migratory species and for bird habitats (particularly wetlands). Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) are established under the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) to provide for the protection and conservation of habitats and species listed in Annex I (habitats) and Annex II (species—not birds) of the Habitats Directive.

As per section 177R of the Planning and Development (Amendment Act) 2010, 'European Site' also includes candidate SAC and SPA sites.

The total land and freshwater area within the European Sites network in Ireland is some 11,644km². The designation of an area as a site in the European

Sites network does not mean the limitation of activities within the site and surrounding area if these are environmentally sustainable and do not adversely affect the integrity of the area or its habitats, or the objectives of species conservation.

Offaly has a particularly rich natural heritage and this is reflected in the number and importance of the European Sites in the county. There is a total area of 160km² of European Sites across the county.

7.2.3 Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs)

The Wildlife (Amendment) Act, 2000

Natural heritage areas are designated by the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) under the provisions of the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 in recognition of nationally important habitats, species and sites of geological interest. Natural heritage areas (NHAs) cover nationally important semi-natural and natural habitats, landforms or geomorphological features, wildlife plant and animal species or a diversity of these natural attributes. Within County Offaly there are thirty-six proposed NHAs and seven fully adopted NHAs². Refer to Tables 7.2.1 and 7.2.2 and also Map 7.1. Refer also to the following website: www.npws.ie.

Table 7.2.1 Natural Heritage Areas in County Offaly

Site Code	Site Name
000564	River Little Brosna Callows
000565	Clonydonnin Bog
000570	Black Castle Bog
000890	Cangort Bog
000921	Screggan Bog
002033	Daingean Bog
002355	Hawkswood Bog

² The designation of proposed NHAs is being phased over a number of years. 6 blanket bogs and the Callows of the River Little Brosna within Offaly have been given legal protection to date.

Table 7.2.2 Proposed Natural Heritage Areas in County Offaly

Proposed Natural Heritage Areas	
Site Code	Site Name
000010	Dovegrove Callows
000216	River Shannon Callows
000412	Slieve Bloom Mountains
000413	Annaghmore Lough Fen (Offaly)
000566	All Saints Bog and Esker
000567	Banagher (Domestic Dwelling)
000568	Birr (Domestic Dwelling)
000569	Birr (Domestic Dwelling)
000571	Charleville Wood
000572	Clara Bog
000574	Clonad Wood
000575	Ferbane Bog
000576	Fin Lough (Offaly)
000579	Kinnitty (Domestic Dwelling)
000580	Mongan Bog
000581	Moyclare Bog
000582	Raheenmore Bog
000583	Roscrea Bog
000585	Sharavogue Bog
000586	Woodfield Bog
000882	Ballintemple Bog
000885	Ballyduff Esker
000889	Camor Wood
000892	Clonfinlough Esker
000893	Clonllyn Glebe Bog
000894	Clorhane Wood
000897	Derrykeel Meadows
000900	Drumkeenan, Eagle Hill and Perry's Mill
000903	Golden Grove Woods
000906	Kilcormac Esker
000909	Lough Coura
000910	Lough Nanag Esker
000913	Mount St. Joseph's Wood
000916	Pallas Lough
000917	Raheen Lough
000919	Ridge Road, Sw of Rapemills
000920	Ross and Glens Eskers
000925	The Long Derries, Edenderry
000927	Woodville Woods
000936	Lough Nahinch (Tipperary)
001365	Lough Boora
001775	Murphy's Bridge Esker
001776	Pilgrim's Road Esker
001777	Ballyduff Wood
001830	Doon Esker Wood
002058	Bracken's Dwelling near Whiteford
002059	Cloghanbeg
002063	St Joseph's Mountheathon
002064	Drumakeenan National School
002065	Milltown, Shinrone
002104	Grand Canal

The ecological interest that underlies proposed NHAs is taken into account in decisions on planning applications.

7.2.4 Special Protection Areas (SPAs)

EU Birds Directive

Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are areas of European importance, designated under the EU Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) by reason of the bird species and populations that they support. A network of protected sites is required to protect wild birds at their breeding, feeding, roosting and wintering areas. The Birds Directive addresses the conservation of all wild birds throughout the European Union, including marine areas, and covers their protection, management, control and exploitation.

The Special Protection Areas (SPAs) listed in Table 7.2.3 below, have been selected because they support populations of birds of particular species that are rare or threatened in Europe and require particular measures, including the designation of protected areas, to conserve them. Within the county there are 6 SPAs³.

Table 7.2.3 Special Protection Areas in County Offaly

Site Code	Site Name
004017	Mongan Bog
004086	Little Brosna River Callows
004096	Middle Shannon Callows
004103	All Saints Bog
004137	Dovegrove Callows
004160	Slieve Bloom Mountains

All wild birds are protected under the EU Birds Directive. Table 7.2.4 lists particular birds, known to roost, nest, breed or winter within County Offaly, that are protected under the EU Birds Directive.

³ Notification regarding the designation of the Slieve Blooms as an SPA was received from the DoEHLG in November 2007.

Table 7.2.4 Occurrence in Offaly of birds protected under Annex I of the EU Birds Directive⁴

SPECIES	NOTES
Bewick's swan	Winter
Whopper Swan	Winter
Greenland White-fronted Goose	Winter
Golden Plover	
Hen Harrier	All year
Merlin	All year (possibly breeds)
Peregrine	All year
Corncrake	Breeding
Kingfisher	All year

Table 7.2.5 Special Areas of Conservation in County Offaly

Special Areas of Conservation	
Site Code	Site Name
000216	River Shannon Callows
000412	Slieve Bloom Mountains
000566	All Saints Bog and Esker
000571	Charleville Wood
000572	Clara Bog
000575	Ferbane Bog
000576	Fin Lough
000580	Mongan Bog
000581	Moyclare Bog
000582	Raheenmore Bog
000585	Sharavogue Bog
000919	Ridge Mill, SW of Rapemills
000925	The Long Derries, Edenderry
001776	Pilgrim's Road Esker
002147	Lisduff Fen
002162	River Barrow and River Nore
002236	Island Fen

7.2.5 EU Habitats Directive (Special Areas of Conservation)⁵

While (candidate) SACs are fully protected under the EU Habitats Directive, the term 'candidate' refers to the fact that the sites are currently under consideration by the European Commission. Table 7.2.5 lists the Candidate Special Areas of Conservation in County Offaly (refer to Map 7.2).

⁴ Source: William Woodrow Consulting

⁵ SACs in Offaly remain as candidate SACs (cSACs) September 2014

The Birds Directive requires that special measures be taken to conserve the habitats of listed species in order to ensure their survival and reproduction in their area of distribution. Only activities that do not have significant effects on birds are acceptable in SPAs. The Birds Directive also requires the avoidance of pollution or deterioration of habitats generally outside specifically protected sites (refer to Map 7.3).

Candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSACs) are areas of special importance to wildlife habitats and species. The EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) lists priority habitats and species that must be conserved.

7.2.6 Statutory Nature Reserves

There are four Statutory Nature Reserves in County Offaly as listed in Table 7.2.6 and shown on Map 7.4. Statutory Nature Reserves have been given a priority designation in association with the EU Habitats Directive. These Reserves provide the strictest means for the protection of wildlife sites in Ireland. The Reserves comprise of state-owned land, inland waters or foreshore areas which form the habitat of a species or community of flora or fauna of scientific interest or form part of an ecosystem of scientific interest, which would benefit from protection measures, established under the Wildlife Act, 1976 and the Wildlife (Amendment) Act, 2000. Nearly all damaging activities can be legally prevented in these areas.

Table 7.2.6 Statutory Nature Reserves in Offaly

Nature Reserve	Date	Area (HA)	Main Habitats
Slieve Bloom Mountains	1985	2,300	Blanket Bog
Clara Bog	1987	460	Raised Bog
Mongan Bog	1987	119	Raised Bog
Raheenmore Bog	1987	162	Raised Bog

7.2.7 Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Sites)

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands came into force for Ireland on 15 March 1985. Ireland presently has 45 sites designated as Wetlands of International Importance and 4 of these are located in County Offaly covering a total area of 2,979 hectares.

Protection derives from other designations of the sites as SPAs or Nature Reserves. It obliges the state to recognise and conserve any internationally important wetlands. Refer to Table 7.2.7 and Map 7.5

Table 7.2.7 Convention on Wetlands (RAMSAR) Sites in Offaly

Ramsar Site	Area Designated (Hectares)	Site Number
Clara Bog	460	415
Mongan Bog	127	416
Raheenmore Bog	162	417
Slieve Bloom Mountains	2,230	335

7.2.8 Wildfowl Sanctuary

There are 68 wildfowl sanctuaries in the state. These are wetland sites which are important for wildfowl. County Offaly shares one with County Tipperary, the Little Brosna Wildfowl Sanctuary. It straddles the Little Brosna River (county boundary) in the parish of Lusmagh. The Council recognises the importance of this site for wetland birds.

7.2.9 Biogenetic Reserves

Biogenetic Reserves are designated by the Council of Europe and are natural habitats which are especially valuable for nature conservation in Europe. There are currently fourteen Biogenetic Reserves in Ireland, four of which are in County Offaly. It is an objective of Offaly County Council to protect these habitats. Refer to table 7.2.8 and Map 7.6.

Table 7.2.8 Biogenetic Reserves in Offaly

Clara Bog
Mongan Bog
Slieve Bloom Mountains
Raheenmore Bog

7.2.10 Species Protection/Protected Species

Certain plant, animal and bird species are protected by law. This includes plant species listed in the Flora Protection Order, 1999 (or other such orders) and animals and birds listed in the Wildlife Act, 1976 and subsequent statutory instruments, those listed in Annex IV of the Habitats Directive, and those listed in Annex 1 of the Birds Directive. The planning process should seek to further protect and enhance those species (currently protected by law) and their habitats.

Table 7.2.9 lists the sites in County Offaly, which are designated for the protection of plants, species and habitats. These are designated under the provisions of the Wildlife Act 1976. (S.I. No. 338 of 1980). It should be noted that protected species are protected wherever they occur and not just within designated sites. The Flora Protection Order S.I. No. 94 of 1999 lists the species of flora, which are protected, and also protects the habitat or environment of protected flora, making it an offence to willfully alter or otherwise interfere with these areas.

The Council shall protect plant and animal species that are listed under Wildlife Act, 1976 (amended 2000). Some of the rarest flora species are protected under the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000. The current list of protected species is set out in the Flora (Protection) Order, (1999) which supersedes orders made in 1980 and 1987.

Under the Habitats Directive there is a requirement that certain species listed in Annex IV of the Habitats Directive are strictly protected. These species are not necessarily associated with areas subject to a specific designation.

Table 7.2.9 Sites designated for the protection of plant species and habitats.

1	Grand Canal at Tullamore (N. 340 250)
2	Grand Canal at Kilbeggan (N.35 35)
3	Shannonharbour near Bullock Island (N020 178)
4	Camus Callows, Clonmacnoise (N02 31)

Table 7.2.10 outlines a number of species that are known to occur in Offaly. A number of the species occur on sites that are already protected under international and national conservation legislation.

Table 7.2.10 Occurrence in Offaly of species protected under the Flora Protection Order (1999)

Species	Notes	Location	Grid Reference
Basil Thyme	Eskers; dry species-rich grasslands	The Long Derries, Edenderry	N6568 2933
		Roadside, Portarlinton Road, Edenderry	N6200 3096
		Rabbit Burrow, Church Hill, Blueball, Tullamore.	N2513 2251
Green-winged Orchid	Eskers; dry species-rich grasslands		
Red Hemp Nettle	Eskers; dry species-rich grasslands	Coneycarn Pit, Glaster, Birr.	N00247 10774
		Murphy's Bridge Esker, Tullamore.	N37476 30877
		Agall Quarry, Blueball, Tullamore.	N26977 23048
Opposite-Leaved pondweed	Mesotrophic lakes/water bodies	Shannon Harbour (drain between road and callows).	N030 180
		Tullamore River	N340 250
Meadow Barley	Waste ground, banks, field edges	Banagher (grazed meadow lying between the Shannon and the old railway line).	N01172 16232
		Minus Island, Banagher.	N02198 18515
Slender Cotton Grass	Peatlands	Sharavogue Bog	S052988

7.2.11 Biodiversity

EU Directives and Ireland's National Biodiversity Plan - Actions for Biodiversity 2011-2016 have reinforced the commitment to halt the loss of biodiversity. (Offaly County Council Bio-diversity Strategy 2012-2016):

"Biodiversity underpins the functioning of the ecosystems on which we depend for food and fresh water, health and recreation, and protection from natural disasters. Its loss also affects us culturally and spiritually. This may be more difficult to quantify, but is nonetheless integral to our wellbeing." - Ban Ki Moon, Secretary General United Nations.

Biodiversity - Context

Natural heritage, often referred to as biodiversity, is the variety of life, its physical or geological foundation and the landscapes which form our surroundings. Biodiversity includes everything from trees to weeds, from mammals to birds, from coast to countryside. Biodiversity creates natural benefits such as fertile soils, food and clean water. County Offaly has a rich

heritage of habitats of nature conservation value containing a wide range of plants and animals. Biodiversity can be threatened by development pressure, human activity and intervention. A sustainable approach to the management of natural heritage requires that human activity is managed in a manner which ensures that wildlife habitats and species are protected for the benefit of present and future generations.

National Biodiversity Plan 2011-2016.

In 2002, Ireland published its first National Biodiversity Plan which contained 91 actions. Actions for Biodiversity 2011-2016 builds upon the achievements since 2002. It focuses on actions that were not fully completed and addresses emerging issues.

It includes the following specific actions for Local Authorities:

- Each Local Authority to prepare a Local Biodiversity Plan or review existing plans.

- Each Local Authority to designate a suitably qualified officer.

The Council will have regard to the Strategies and Actions outlined in Ireland's National Biodiversity Plan 2011-2016 as resources allow.

Offaly Heritage Plan 2012-2016

The Offaly Heritage Plan 2012-2016 contains the following objective in relation to Biodiversity:

To be proactive in enhancing, protecting and raising awareness of Offaly's Natural Heritage. (Objective no. 5.)

Offaly County Council will seek to protect the County's Natural Heritage. There may be instances when development may be deemed appropriate in areas that are not designated for conservation protection but where the Planning Authority considers that significant biodiversity is present. In this instance, applicants will be requested to undertake an ecological report of the site.

Efforts should be made by the applicant to ensure that minimal disturbance is caused to the existing biodiversity pertaining to the site. Evidence of significant biodiversity may be detected because of the nature of the site e.g. waterway, esker, upland area, bog, woodland, presence of protected species etc. In such instances, the Planning Authority may recommend the following actions to be taken in order to protect and enhance the identified ecological features:

1. Retain existing habitats (e.g. trees, scrub, grassland, ponds) and incorporate into open space areas.
2. Leave rough grassland areas (with appropriate mowing regimes) as wildlife corridors, particularly adjacent to linear features such as roads and watercourses).
3. Retain existing boundary hedgerows between developments and private property. Fencing and man-made boundaries should be erected where necessary but not in the place of a hedgerow.

The National Biodiversity Centre www.biodiversityireland.ie staged a Bio –Blitz in 2012 of 4 important sites across the country, whereby, all species present of the site were recorded on a specified day. Lough Boora with 940 recorded species finished 2nd in this Bio-Blitz, 2012.

Lough Boora Parklands

The Lough Boora Parklands, which were Bord na Móna Cutover Peatlands, are an important biodiversity success story in Offaly, with potential for a number of such projects across the boglands of the county. See section 7.2.13 on Peatlands



Photo 7.1 Lough Boora Parklands

7.2.12 Nature Protection outside Protected Sites

The Planning Authority acknowledges that it is important to maintain and enhance the character and quality of the urban and rural environment in its entirety as wildlife heritage is not confined to statutory designated sites, but is found throughout the countryside and in built-up areas. Protecting areas in isolation from each other with little regard to conservation in the wider countryside is considered inappropriate. All development proposals should respect significant wildlife habitat areas and corridors so as to protect flora and fauna and to conserve and enhance their habitat. It is through the conservation of ecological infrastructure such as hedgerows and riparian corridors that we can develop a 'network of sites'. These allow for the migration and the exchange of species between conservation areas. The Council will encourage the management of features of the landscape which are of major importance for wild fauna and flora. Such features are those which, by virtue of their linear and continuous structure (such as rivers with their banks or the traditional systems for the marking of field boundaries) or their function as stepping stones (such as ponds or small woods), are essential for the migration, dispersal and genetic

exchange of wild species. The provision of Green Belts between built up urban areas can also play a significant role within this ecological network.

Offaly County Council will seek to conserve and protect features of natural interest such as woodlands, hedgerows, wetlands and unspoilt uplands. In addition, the Council will encourage the management (creation, restoration and enhancement) of features in the landscape, which are of importance for wild flora and fauna. Such features are those which, by virtue of their linear or continuous structures (such as rivers, hedgerows), are essential for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species (Habitats Directive Article 10). See Green Infrastructure Section 7.5.

7.2.13 Areas of Geological Interest

Geology is recognised as an intrinsic component of natural Heritage. The Irish Geological Heritage (IGH) Programme is selecting the very best national sites for NHA designation and also identifying sites of national or local geological heritage importance, which are classed as County Geological Sites (CGS). CGS have been adopted into the National Heritage Plan. Offaly County Council recognises the importance of geological heritage and will have regard to the DECLG's recommendations where planning applications are referred. Appendix Y, Offaly Geological Heritage Sites includes a schedule of CGS identified by the Irish Geological heritage programme for Protection in County Offaly.

It is a general objective to seek the preservation of important features of geological interest within the county identified in Appendix Y, Offaly Geological Heritage Sites. It is a particular objective to maintain the conservation value of those features or areas of geological interest that are listed in this chapter. Refer to Geology Publication, *Geology of Laois and Offaly*, (by John Feehan) for more on Geology of County Offaly.

7.2.14 Peatlands (boglands)

Peatlands cover over 1.34 million hectares of the country's total land area⁶. In the case of County Offaly approximately 42,000 hectares of its landscape is comprises Peatlands (refer to Map 7.7), with

approximately 6,000 hectares classified as being highly sensitive areas and approximately 36,000 hectares classified as being of moderately sensitive areas (refer also to Map. 7.15 Landscape Classification). It is important in the management of peatlands, to acknowledge the different types of peatlands in Offaly from, intact, cutover, active peatlands in production, and drained and rehabilitated cutaway peatlands. There is a fundamental need for the preparation of management strategies for peatlands as a whole. These should aim for a combination of land uses which are sympathetic to the landscape and compatible with the ecology of the bogs.

7.2.15 Eskers

Eskers (refer to Map 7.8) are glacial features which are composed of narrow ridges of sand and gravel and are located throughout the county. County Offaly's landscape contains a number of eskers, the most prominent being the Eiscir Riada. A restrictive approach to sand and gravel extraction from 'green field' sites will be encouraged by the council.

7.2.16 Uplands

County Offaly comprises a predominantly flat and undulating landscape. Map 7.9 illustrates the topography of the county and Map 7.10 highlights the county's two upland areas, namely Slieve Bloom Mountains, located in south west Offaly (area shown is above the 130m contour) and Croghan Hill located in northeast of the county (area shown is above the 100m contour). These upland areas are identified relative to the surrounding local landscape.

7.2.17 Waterways, Lakes and Wetlands

The County contains a number of important waterways, namely; River Shannon (& Callows), River Barrow, River Brosna, Little Brosna River, River Silver, River Figile, River Gageborough. The Grand Canal also traverses the county from Edenderry to Shannonharbour. A small number of lakes and wetland areas are located within the county, for example; Lough Boora Parklands (including Turraun Wetlands), Pallas Lake and Fin Lough. Map 7.11 highlights the principle waterways in Offaly.

7.2.18 Boundaries

Hedgerows, old stone walls and ditches are important visual elements and provide a corridor from which the county's landscape is viewed. Such features should be retained, where possible.

⁶ Source: Aalen, Whelan & Stout. 'Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape'.

7.2.19 Hedgerows

Offaly County Council recognises the heritage and amenity importance of the county's hedgerow resource. A Hedgerow Study has been carried out for the county (2005). Hedgerows provide a corridor role in the facilitation of the movement and distribution of wild flora and fauna through the landscape (habitat for insects, nesting sites for birds, assist mammals in their survival). In addition, hedgerows also provide a service to farms in terms of boundaries, have a scenic appearance and their root systems regulate water movement and improve the quality of water. In addition, hedgerows also have the following advantages:

- Preserve the rural character of an area
- Allow for instant screening of the site
- Screening allows for wider choice of dwelling style
- Preserves natural habitats

The unnecessary removal of hedgerows has the following disadvantages:

- Exposes a site
- Dwelling/ structure becomes more visible
- Suburbanises what was a rural area
- Creates an obvious ribbon of development
- Landscaping of the site would be required to replace what was lost
- Loss of biodiversity

There will be a presumption against the removal of mature hedgerows when there is a realistic alternative.

7.2.20 Trees and Woodlands

Woodland areas (both public and private) comprise circa 7% of the land area nationally. It is acknowledged that woodlands contribute to the landscape and scenic amenity of the county. Offaly contains approximately 9,000⁷ hectares of forests and woodlands (refer to Map 7.12). These include woodland areas within the Slieve Blooms, Lough Boora Parklands and within demesnes such as Charleville Demesne, Tullamore. Most landscapes within Offaly, most notably peatlands, agricultural lands and the county's main upland area – the Slieve Bloom Mountains, can absorb some afforestation provided it is sympathetically planned.

⁷ Source: Environmental Protection Agency, Corine Data 2000 (check this)

Coillte

The role of Coillte in forest management in county Offaly is significant. The Midlands Business Area Unit (BAU), Strategic Plan from Coillte, recognises the Recreational value of Coillte woodland in the midlands region. Refer to www.coillte.ie.

A number of recreational facilities have resulted from joint initiatives between Coillte and local communities.

Slieve Bloom Eco-Walks were developed in partnership with Fáilte Ireland and the Slieve Bloom Rural Development Group. This helped in the development and enhancement works to walks and trails such as Slieve Bloom Way.

Table 7.2.11. Coillte – Recreational Woodlands in Offaly

Durrow Abbey
Garryinch
Glasderry Woods
Glenafelly Forest Recreation Area
Glenregan Forest Recreation Area
Golden Grove
Knockbarron Wood

Offaly County Council intends to support the amenity, educational and scientific value of trees and woodlands. A number of woods have been listed in the proposed natural heritage areas and the candidate Special Areas of Conservation. In addition, the Council has made a number of specific Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) under the Planning & Development Acts 1963 to 1999, for the protection of Amenity Value Trees and details of these are contained in Table 7.2.12, and identified on Map 7.13.

Table 7.2.12 Tree Preservation Orders made by Offaly County Council

Reference Number	Location	Date of TPO
T.P.1	Clonmacnoise	6 th August 1970
T.P.2	Faddenmore, Belmont	29 th January 1976
T.P.2A	Tullybeg, Rahan	6 th November 1981
T.P.3	Castleroan, Dunkerrin	10 th June 1981
T.P.7A-7G	Monasterosis (Edenderry 7 separate TPOs)	29 th October 1982
T.P.9	Laywalk, Geashill	31 st January 1984
T.P.15	Kilcloncorkery, Rathangan	6 th August 1986

The Council considers that groups of trees listed in Table 7.2.13 are of significant value to the environment and will ensure such trees are protected where necessary.

Table 7.2.13 Trees and Groups of Trees that Contribute to Amenity

1	Trees West of Tullamore centering on Charleville Castle and the Golf Course.
2	Trees at Durrow Demesne
3	Trees at Tullybeg House, Rahan.
4	Trees at Cloneygowan Village
5	Trees at Garryhinch Church
6	Trees at the Green Clara
7	Trees at Kinnitty Village
8	Trees at Mount Lucas
9	Trees at Drumcooley Hill
10	Trees at Ballykillen Hill
11	Trees at Bellair
12	Trees at Belmont
13	Trees at Blacklion
14	Trees at Ballylin Wood, Ferbane, in the Business Park
15	Oakley Park, Clareen (on either side of Birr Road bordering and opposite to Coillte Forest)
16	Trees adjacent to Seir Kieran Monastic site, Clareen
17	Trees at Strawberry Hill (between Belmont and Cloghan)
18	Trees at Aughaboy, Ferbane

The Council encourages the enhancement of biodiversity in the county and recognises that the planting of native trees and shrubs can contribute to this enhancement. The Council will encourage the replanting and extension of the treescape within the county (in particular mixed forests and broadleaf forests) in order to ensure the preservation and enhancement of this attractive element of County Offaly's landscape. For a full list of native trees and shrubs, refer to Table 8.4 (Chapter 8, Development Management Standards).

7.2.21 Riparian (River) Buffer Zones

Riparian⁸ buffer zones are used to protect a particular watercourse from the impact of human activity or development in an area. The buffer zone if sufficiently large and managed will:

- Filter out pollutants and sediment from overland surface runoff
- Provide a refuge for animals with close affinity to rivers (e.g. otters, kingfishers, dragonflies)

⁸ A riparian buffer zone is a strip of vegetated land bordering a river or stream

- Create habitat necessary for fish and other aquatic life
- Provide amenity and recreation to local people and visitors to the area (fishing, scenic walks etc)
- Enhance flood alleviation

Where developments are proposed adjacent to waterways in urban areas generally and notwithstanding the consideration of setback distances to mitigate against flooding, the Planning Authority will generally seek a setback distance of between 30 metres to 50 metres from the waterway's edge. The Planning Authority may reduce or increase this setback depending on the size of the site and the nature of the development proposed.

7.2.22 After Use of Sand and Gravel Quarries

Offaly has a number of exhausted or worked out quarries and sand and gravel pits, where activity has ceased. It is now recognised that worked out quarries have potential as rich habitat and nesting sites. The council will examine the potential for these worked out quarries from a biodiversity and habitats view point. Refer to Chapter 2, Economic Development.

7.3 Natural Heritage Policies

NHP-01	It is Council policy to prohibit any development that would be harmful to or that would result in a significant deterioration of habitats and/or disturbance of species in a Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC), Natural Heritage Area (NHA) and Proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA), that are listed in tables 7.2.3, 7.2.5, 7.2.1 and 7.2.2 (and also future additions to these lists).
NHP-02	It is the policy of the Council to ensure an Appropriate Assessment in accordance with Article 6(3) and Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, and in accordance with the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland – Guidance for Planning Authorities, 2009 and relevant EPA and European Commission guidance documents, is carried out in respect of any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect on a European site(s), either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, in view of the site's conservation objectives.
NHP-03	It is Council policy to support and 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.
NHP-04	It is Council policy to ensure that development proposals are screened to determine whether they are likely to have a significant direct, indirect or cumulative effect on the integrity or conservation objectives of any European Site and, where significant effects are likely or uncertain, there will be a requirement for consultation with the relevant environmental authorities as part of any Habitats Directive Assessment that may be required.
NHP-05	It is Council policy to continue to promote education, knowledge and pride in the natural heritage and biodiversity of the county.
NHP-06	It is Council policy to promote increased public participation in biodiversity conservation by supporting and encouraging community-led initiatives.
NHP-07	It is Council policy to protect the landscape associated with the River Shannon, including the Callows and views of special interest, and also to encourage the development of Shannonbridge, Banagher and Shannonharbour as focal points. It will also be Council policy to investigate the possibility of providing a Linear Park based on the River Shannon from Banagher to Meelick, which takes account of the sensitive ecological nature of the Callows area.
NHP-08	It is Council policy to protect, conserve and enhance the county's biodiversity and natural heritage including wildlife (flora and fauna), habitats, landscapes and/or landscape features of importance to wildlife or which play a key role in the conservation and management of natural resources such as water.
NHP-09	It is Council policy to promote the protection and preservation of existing hedgerows and to encourage planting of native hedgerow species. It is also Council policy to encourage the replanting and extension of the treescape within the county (in particular mixed forests and broadleaf forests) in order to ensure the preservation and enhancement of this attractive element of County Offaly's landscape.
NHP-10	It is Council policy to promote areas for appropriate sustainable development, primarily for recreational or educational purposes, which would not conflict with the preservation of these sites in their natural state or impact on the overall conservation objectives of European Sites.

- NHP-11** It is Council policy to conserve, protect and enhance where possible wildlife habitats such as rivers, streams, canals, lakes, and associated wetlands including reed-beds and swamps, ponds, springs, bogs, fens, trees, woodlands and scrub, hedgerows and other boundary types such as stone walls and ditches which occur outside of designated areas providing a network of habitats and corridors essential for wildlife to flourish.
- NHP-12** It is Council policy to ensure that peatland areas, which are designated for protection under international and national legislation, are conserved and managed appropriately to conserve their ecological, archaeological, cultural and educational significance.
- NHP-13** It is Council policy to protect riparian corridors by reserving land along their banks for ecological corridors and maintain them free from inappropriate development, where appropriate clear span structures will be promoted where fisheries exist, and culverting and/or realignment of streams will be discouraged. The Council will consult with Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) in relation to riparian and instream works as appropriate.
- NHP-14** It is Council policy to protect and enhance the built and natural heritage and the recreational potential of the Grand Canal Corridor and to encourage and promote access to and understanding of the Grand Canal.
- NHP-15** It is Council policy to protect the identified Mushroom Stones listed in Table 7.8.1.
- NHP-16** It is Council policy to protect from inappropriate development the scheduled list of geological heritage sites identified in Appendix Y, Offaly Geological Heritage Sites.
- NHP-17** It is the policy to the Council to recognise the natural heritage value of disused quarries as rich habitat, and to provide appropriate protection to these renewing habitats.
- NHP-18** It is Council policy to encourage the retention, where possible, of hedgerows and other distinctive boundary treatments in rural areas. Where removal of a hedgerow, stone wall or other distinctive boundary treatment is unavoidable, provision of the same type of boundary will be required of similar length set back within the site. The hedgerow will be composed of a variety of native species of Irish provenance. This shall also relate to road improvements and realignments carried out by the Local Authorities or other agents on their behalf.
- NHP-19** It is Council policy to promote the preservation and enhancement of native and semi-natural woodlands, groups of trees and individual trees.
- NHP-20** It is Council policy to use native species wherever possible in the county including Offaly County Council's own landscaping work and on Council property.
- NHP-21** It is Council policy to discourage the felling of mature trees to facilitate development and to encourage tree surgery rather than felling where necessary.
- NHP-22** It is Council policy to encourage, pursuant to Article 10 of the Habitats Directive, the management of features of the landscape, such as traditional field boundaries, important for the ecological coherence of the Natura 2000 site(s) network and essential for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species.

NHP-23	It is Council policy to consider, in consultation with the National Parks & Wildlife Service, Westmeath County Council, the Geological Survey of Ireland and others, the potential designation of the north Offaly esker landscape as a UNESCO geo-park, to promote the unique geological heritage of the area.
NHP-24	It is Council policy to protect, conserve and enhance the county's biodiversity and natural heritage including wildlife (flora and fauna), habitats, landscapes and / or landscape features of importance to wildlife or which play a key role in the conservation and management of natural resources such as water.

7.4 Natural Heritage Objectives

NHO-01	It is an objective of the Council to ensure that any development proposal in the vicinity of, or affecting a designated site, complies with the provisions relating Appropriate Assessment and SEA requirements and the Council will consult with the appropriate statutory environmental authority in this regard.
NHO-02	It is an objective of the Council to conserve and protect the natural heritage of the county and to conserve and protect European and National designated sites within the county including Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSACs), Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs), Proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs), Ramsar Sites, Statutory Nature Reserves, Biogenetic Reserves and Wildfowl Sanctuaries.
NHO-03	It is an objective of the Council to protect, conserve and enhance the county's biodiversity and natural heritage and the principle of enhancement will be taken into account in the Development Management process. It is a particular objective to protect plants, animal species and habitats which have been identified by the Habitats Directive, Birds Directive, Wildlife Act and the Flora Protection Order.
NHO-04	It is an objective of the Council to co-operate with Bord na Móna and other relevant authorities to prepare a biodiversity management strategy for Offaly's peatlands.
NHO-05	It is an objective of the Council to undertake a comprehensive tree survey of the county and, where appropriate, propose measures for their protection.
NHO-06	It is an objective of the Council to renew or extend the Local Biodiversity Plan (Bio-Action Plan).
NHO-07	It is an objective of the Council to carry out and promote ecological studies in order to have improved baseline data and decision-making capacity.
NHO-08	It is an objective of the Council to seek the preservation of important features of geological interest within the county.
NHO-09	It is an objective of the Council to seek the preservation of important features of geological interest within the county, identified in Appendix Y, Offaly Geological Heritage Sites.
NHO-10	It is an objective of the Council to support the provision of bird-watching facilities at suitable locations in the county.
NHO-11	It is the objective of the Council to create a data base of habitats to inform habitat mapping for the county working with chief stakeholders including Bord na Móna, NPWS, Coillte, WWI and Farmers, community groups and NGOs, where appropriate.

NHO-12 It is the objective of the Council to work in partnership with relevant stakeholders towards achieving a national peatlands strategy and national peatlands park for Ireland.

7.5 Green Infrastructure

7.5.1 Introduction

The term Green Infrastructure (GI) can be broadly defined⁹ as strategically planned and interconnected networks of green space and water capable of delivering ecosystem services and quality of life benefits to people. The natural environment provides a variety of services to us for free and these bring many benefits to society and the economy.

Green Infrastructure can include parks, open spaces, rivers, farmland, playing fields, woodlands, allotments and private gardens which surround and intersperse our towns and villages. It should be designed and managed as a multifunctional resource capable of delivering a wide range of economic, environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities including:

- Attracting businesses and inward investment by creating an attractive environment;
- More places for people to access nature, outdoor recreation and for social interaction;
- Local food production - in allotments, gardens and through agriculture;
- Encouraging physical activity and improved health and well-being by providing quality green spaces for walking and cycling and other physical activity;
- Creating a sense of place and local distinctiveness;
- Space for nature and wildlife to flourish;
- Climate change adaptation - for example flood alleviation and cooling urban heat islands, and
- Environmental education

⁹ ...European Landscape Convention, 2000, defines Green Infrastructure as 'the use of ecosystems, green spaces, playing fields, woodlands road verges, allotments and private gardens. Green Infrastructure can contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation, natural disaster risk management, protection against flooding and erosion as well as biodiversity conservation.'

7.5.2 Planning for Green Infrastructure

Connectivity and multi-functionality are key concepts in Green Infrastructure Planning. Connected Green space provides greater benefits to both people and wildlife, than isolated patches and multi-functionality recognises that multiple benefits can be provided on the same site.

Planning for Green Infrastructure involves mapping existing GI resources, assessing future needs, and charting where improvements or enhancements can be made, and where GI can be provided in the future.

The Council acknowledges that Green Infrastructure planning involves a holistic approach and should be provided as an integral part of sustainable development, alongside other infrastructure such as utilities and transport networks, if this is to be achieved, the maximum benefit from our natural assets.

It is through the conservation of ecological infrastructure such as hedgerows and riparian corridors that we can develop a 'network of sites' as part of our green infrastructure. These allow for the migration and the exchange of species between conservation areas. To this end, and with a view to improving the ecological coherence of the Natura 2000 Sites network, the Council will encourage the management of features of the landscape which are of major importance for wild fauna and flora. In addition, the Council will identify sites of local biodiversity value through the on-going implementation of the County Heritage Plan.

7.5.3 Green Infrastructure Map

The green infrastructure map, (refer to Map 7.14) included with this section includes NHAs, SACs, SPAs designated areas, Areas of High Amenity in the county, woodlands and boglands connected by walking routes, eskers, riparian ways, protected routes, Bord an Móna rail links and the Grand Canal Line (refer to section 7.2) This map is at a strategic level and does not illustrate the entire local level green infrastructure such as open space provision, greens and parks, hedgerows, boundaries, coppices, country lanes and areas of low intensity agriculture and scrubland, which

are also an essential component of the county's Green Infrastructure.

7.5.4 Green Infrastructure Strategy

The principles of a Green Infrastructure approach to land use planning has been embedded as a cross cutting theme in the policies and objectives of this development plan.

The Council will consider the preparation of a Green Infrastructure Strategy, in accordance with international best practice and emerging national guidance, for the county subject to availability of resources.

7.6 Green Infrastructure Policies

GIP-01	It is Council policy to recognise the economic, social, environmental and physical value of Green Infrastructure.
GIP-02	It is Council policy to protect existing green infrastructure within the county and to provide additional green infrastructure, where possible.
GIP-03	It is Council policy to require that all land use plans protect, manage and provide where possible green infrastructure in an integrated and coherent manner to integrate Green Infrastructure into future developments and ensure developments are cohesive with Green Infrastructure corridors linking adjoining lands.
GIP-04	It is a policy of the Council to seek to prevent and promote measures to prevent the spread of invasive and alien species. When landscaping plans are included or requested as part of the planning assessment process they should indicate the specific measures to be taken to avoid and prevent the spread of invasive species.

7.7 Green Infrastructure Objectives¹⁰

GIO-01	It is an objective of the Council to develop and support the implementation of a Green Infrastructure Strategy, in accordance with international best practice and emerging national guidance, subject to the availability of resources.
GIO-02	It is an objective of the Council to identify sites of local biodiversity value in the over the lifetime of the plan.
GIO-03	It is an objective of the Council to encourage, pursuant to Article 10 of the Habitats Directive, the management of features of the landscape, such as traditional field boundaries, important for the ecological coherence of the Natura 2000 site network and essential for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species.
GIO-04	It is an objective of the Council to develop and support the implementation of Green Infrastructure Strategy for Offaly working with chief stakeholders including Bord na Móna, NPWS, Coillte, WWI and Farmers, community groups and NGOs, where appropriate.

¹⁰ The order of listing of objectives is not intended to indicate priorities. Subject to the availability of resources, it is the Council's aim to monitor and accomplish the objectives listed in this section within the period of the plan.

7.8 Areas of High Amenity

7.8.1 Introduction

Areas of High Amenity (AHA) are identified in this plan to protect and enhance areas of scenic and amenity value in the County Offaly which are worthy of special protection in order to preserve their uniqueness and amenity value. These designations are additional to statutory environmental designations National and European which may overlap these AHAs.

It shall be Council priority to protect and preserve the county's primary Areas of High Amenity (refer to Map 7.17) namely the Slieve Bloom Mountains, Clonmacnoise Heritage Zone, the River Shannon, Lough Boora Parklands, Grand Canal, Croghan Hill, Raheenmore Bog, Pallas Lake and Clara Bog and Eskers, Eiscir Riada, other eskers and Durrow High Cross, Abbey and surrounding area.

7.8.2 Slieve Bloom Mountains

The Slieve Bloom Mountain area is the only substantial upland area in County Offaly. Approximately one-third of the mountains, some 12,000 hectares, lies within County Offaly, the remainder is located in County Laois. The value of the Slieve Bloom Mountains derives from the contrast they offer to Offaly's otherwise flat landscape. The mountains afford the visitor a range of spectacular views, forests and riverside walks, picnic sites, historic and archaeological sites. The entire mountain area has been designated as an Environment Park and it is an over arching aim of the Council to realise fully the tourist, recreational and educational potential that the area has to offer.

The overall policy of the Council towards the mountains will be to co-operate with other bodies in encouraging development of the amenity and recreational potential of the area while at the same time, preserving the quality and character of the environment. The Council accepts that there is need to devise an overall strategy for the integrated development of the Slieve Bloom area and to secure an appropriate balance between competing land uses e.g. farming, forestry, recreation, conservation and residential. It is noted that Offaly County Council along with Laois County Council prepared a joint policy statement for the Slieve Bloom Mountain in May 1995.

7.8.3 Clonmacnoise

Clonmacnoise is one of Ireland's foremost national monuments and is of international importance as a spiritual, historic, archaeological and cultural centre. The unique atmosphere and attractiveness of Clonmacnoise derives not only from the monastic site itself but its relationship to the River Shannon and the callows together with the sense of enclosure provided by the eskers. The effect is heightened by the unfolding of the site as it is approached either from the river or any of the three approach roads. The Council is conscious of the fact that the interaction of all these elements contributes significantly to the impact of the area and that it is necessary to preserve and protect these fully in order to retain the unique and special character of Clonmacnoise. In addition to the monastic site, the area surrounding Clonmacnoise, including Mongan Bog, Fin Lough and Clonmacnoise Callows, are areas of international importance (refer to section 7.18 Built Heritage)

7.8.4 Waterways

Shannon River and Callows

The Council recognises the immense value of the River Shannon and Callows as a key habitat. The Council's policy will be to protect the landscape including the callows and views of special interest and also to encourage the development of Shannonbridge, Banagher and Shannon Harbour as focal points.

The Grand Canal

The Offaly section of the Grand Canal comprises of some sixty four kilometres from Edenderry to Shannon Harbour. It passes through the towns of Daingean and Tullamore. There is a disused Kilbeggan branch line, to Ballycommon which is now used as a recreational route. The canal traverses large tracts of boglands and is bordered by hedgerows dating back 200 years and fringes of wild vegetation along the bank.

The Grand Canal is a focus for a wide range of uses, especially for recreation and tourism purposes. The visual quality of the surrounding areas is intrinsic to maintain the attractiveness of the Grand Canal corridor. Hence, the corridor is especially sensitive to large development structures, insensitively designed sporadic housing and large-scale land uses such as extractive industries.

As the landscape around the Grand Canal Corridor is both flat and undulating, height restriction should apply to built development in the flatter areas to avoid long distance visual intrusion. The Heritage Council published a number of Waterway Corridor Studies pertaining to Offaly in 2002 and in 2004. Regard will be had to these studies.

The recreational value of the Grand Canal is recognised and it is intended to preserve its attractiveness by carefully controlling development in order to protect its amenity and tourism potential.

It is the Council's policy that developments, which require vehicular access from public roads that were formerly towpaths or from existing towpaths along the Grand Canal, are very strictly controlled (refer to Architectural and Archaeological section, and policy AAHP-15). The development of the canal in relation to walking, cycling, coarse fishing and cruising will however be encouraged. Offaly County Council will have regard to the Waterway Corridor Study 2002 in the development control process.

Also the potential for the Kilbeggan to Ballycommon link of the Grand Canal, as a cycling, walking and possibly navigational route is acknowledged.

Pallas Lake

The scenic and recreational value of Pallas Lake is recognised, as is the value of the unspoilt rural setting of this area. The Council intends to carefully control development in the area in order to preserve its attractiveness.

7.8.5 Boglands

Within County Offaly, the most significant and designated stretches of blanket bogs are to be found in the Slieve Bloom Mountains. Blanket bog hosts many scarce species associated with this relatively uniform habitat. In addition, there are many lowland raised bogs scattered throughout the county and are important as they support a number of scarce species. Offaly County Council recognises that the peatlands comprise the main topographical feature of the landscape in Offaly. The heritage value associated with the peatlands in County Offaly is acknowledged and the Council will continue to protect those areas of bogland, in line with existing designations.

Cutaway Bogs, or worked out bogs which were harvested since the 1940s by Bord na Mona; are found across the county; there are large tracts of cutaway bog in the Lough Boora area, Blackwater Bog and the bogs of the East of the county (Bog of Allen). There is potential to regenerate these bogs as is evidenced by the Lough Boora Parklands project.

Lough Boora Parklands

Lough Boora is made up of a number of smaller sites including three different wetland areas, two angling lakes and the Lough Boora Mesolithic Site. There are also areas of forestry, pasture, flower-rich natural grassland and wilderness areas. This area is shown in Map.7.11, (Wetlands). The area is rich in bio-diversity as evidenced by the bio-blitz survey carried out by National Biodiversity Data Centre in 2012.

7.8.6 Clara Bog and Eskers

Clara Bog is an internationally renowned bogland, which is a designated Nature Reserve. Moreover the esker system adjacent to the bog is recognised to be critically important to the functioning of the bog's soak system. The Council will, through its development management system seeks to protect and safeguard this area from development, which would damage or detract from its scientific environmental and ecological value.

The Clara Bog Visitor Centre located in Clara town, which opened in 2011, is an important educational and tourist attraction.

7.8.7 Eskers

The Council recognises the unique importance of Offaly's Esker Landscape deriving from its geological, zoological, botanical and scientific value. An Offaly Esker Study published in 2006 is a valuable source of information regarding the existing eskers in part of the county. There are twenty esker systems in Offaly containing 208 segments. Each esker system comprises a landform or series of landforms (esker segments) having a single process history, in a specific zone. The esker system covers over 4,000 acres in Offaly (Offaly Esker Study, 2006).

The Eiscir Riada which traverses the north-western corner of County Offaly in a more or less continuous line of Eiscir Riada from Shannonbridge to

Clonmacnoise and on to Clara, Durrow and Rahugh (County Westmeath), is worthy of conservation due to its geomorphologic, scientific, historical, recreational and amenity value and uniqueness.

7.8.8 Croghan Hill

The Council recognises the scenic quality and recreational value of the Croghan Hill area. Croghan Hill, Raheenmore Bog (which is a designated Nature Reserve under the Wildlife Act 2000 as amended) and Cannakill Deserted Medieval Village are the main elements of the Area of High Amenity. The Council, through its development control function will seek to preserve the scenic amenity and recreational potential of this area and to protect it from development that would damage or diminish its overall attractiveness and character. A comprehensive study of the Croghan Hill environment was published in 2011 by OCC in 2011, called 'Croghan, County Offaly' - a publication by John Feehan.

7.8.9 Mushroom Stones

County Offaly contains the best collection of Mushroom Stones in Ireland. These important geological features were shaped by the movement of water in postglacial lakes. Table 7.8.1 lists the Mushroom Stones in County Offaly.

Table 7.8.1 Mushroom Stones in County Offaly

<i>Location</i>
Crancreagh
Derrinlough
Drinagh
Endrim
Ballylin
Clonkeen
Clorhane 1, 2 and 3
Creevagh 1-7
Crinkill 1-3

7.8.10 Raheenmore Bog

Raheenmore Bog developed in a small basin in the catchment of two major river systems i.e. the Brosna and the Boyne. It is situated about 5km from Daingean. The bog has a well-developed hummock and hollow system. Raheenmore Bog is within the breeding territory of a pair of Merlin, a scarce species

in Ireland and one that is listed on Annex I of the EU Birds Directive. Other typical bogland birds that breed include Red Grouse and Snipe. Raheenmore Bog is a classical example of a midland raised bog and the deepest remaining in Ireland.

7.8.11 Durrow Abbey, Monastic Site and surrounding area

Durrow Abbey Demesne, situated between Tullamore and Kibeggan contains the remains of the monastery of Durrow founded by St. Columille in about 587. The Esker Riada and the Slí Mhór, which run approximately 600 metres north of the site, may have played an important role in the site's location. Durrow demesne is a fine example of an historic designed landscape in the natural style, which sought to respect and enhance natural features (Durrow Abbey Conservation Plan, Office of Public Works, 2005). The thirty one hectares of state owned lands which are the subject of the conservation plan, constitutes only a portion of the Historic Durrow Abbey Demesne. The broader demesne landscape, which is currently in private ownership, provides the setting and context for the landscape and archaeological features situated within the state owned lands. The conservation plan states that it is vital that the future management of the surrounding privately owned demesne landscape is complimentary to the conservation objectives for the monuments. The 'historic demesne boundary' as marked in the OPW's Conservation Plan represents the boundary of the Area of High Amenity.

7.9 Areas of High Amenity Policies

AHAP-01 It is Council policy to protect and preserve the county's primary areas of high amenity namely the Slieve Bloom Mountains, Clonmacnoise Heritage Zone, Durrow High Cross, Abbey and surrounding area, the River Shannon, Lough Boora Parklands, Grand Canal, Croghan Hill, Raheenmore Bog, Pallas Lake, Clara Bog and Eskers, Eiscir Riada and other eskers. These areas are indicated on Map 7.17.

Notwithstanding the location of certain settlements, or parts of, for which there are settlement plans (towns, villages, 'sráids'), within the Areas of High Amenity, it is not the intention of this policy to hinder appropriate sustainable levels of development (as set out in the plans and subject to proper planning).

Further, it is policy to facilitate the sustainable extension and expansion of existing visitor, tourist related or other rural enterprises within the Areas of High Amenity, where such development is appropriate and where it can be demonstrated that it gives 'added value' to the extending activity and to the immediate area which is the subject of the 'Area of High Amenity' designation.

AHAP-02 It is Council policy, in both cases above, to ensure that issues of scale, siting, design and overall compatibility (including particular regard to environmental sensitivities) with the site's location within an Area of High Amenity are of paramount importance when assessing any application for planning permission. The merits of each proposal will be examined on a case-by case basis.

7.10 Areas of High Amenity Objective¹¹

AHAO-01 It is an objective of the Council to protect and preserve the county's primary areas of high amenity namely the Slieve Bloom Mountains, Clonmacnoise Heritage Zone, Durrow High Cross, Abbey & surrounding area, the River Shannon, Lough Boora Parklands, Grand Canal, Croghan Hill, Raheenmore Bog, Pallas Lake, Clara Bog and Eskers, Eiscir Riada and other eskers.

¹¹ The order of listing of objectives is not intended to indicate priorities. Subject to the availability of resources, it is the Council's aim to monitor and accomplish the objectives listed in this section within the period of the plan.

7.11 Landscape Sensitivity in County

The sensitivity of a landscape is the measure of its ability to accommodate change or intervention without suffering unacceptable effects to its character and values. The sensitivity of the landscapes of County Offaly varies and is thereby classified within the following sensitivity classes: Low, Moderate and High Sensitivity.

Landscape considerations are an important factor in all land use policy for the county. This ensures that a positive view of development is undertaken whilst maintaining respect for the environment and the county's landscape, having regard to the principles of sustainability.

In general terms, the planning, design and management implications for development in accordance with the sensitivity class of its location are outlined in Tables 7.11.1 to 7.11.4. Map 7.15 illustrates the landscape classification areas for the county in broad terms. Map 7.9 gives a representation of the topography of the county.

Table 7.11.1 Landscape Sensitivity Classification in Offaly

Sensitivity Class [General Classification]	
<u>LOW SENSITIVITY AREAS</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This class largely encompasses the county'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 	
Acceptability of Development for consideration	A wide range of Development subject to appropriateness / conditions
Need for Landscaping and Appropriate Design	High
<u>MODERATE SENSITIVITY AREAS</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Areas which are generally 'open' in character with intrinsic quality and moderate capacity to absorb new development 	
Acceptability of Development for consideration	Some form of development subject to appropriateness / conditions
Need for Landscaping and Appropriate Design	Very High
<u>HIGH SENSITIVITY AREAS</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified features or areas of natural beauty or interest which have extremely low capacity to absorb new development Areas included within this class are designated Areas of High Amenity¹². 	
Acceptability of Development for consideration	Very limited development subject to appropriateness / conditions
Need for Landscaping and Appropriate Design	Essential

¹² Table 7.11.6 Lists Areas of High Amenity within the County. Refer also to section 7.2 Natural Heritage.

Table 7.11.2 Summary of Landscape Characteristics and Sensitivities as applicable to Low Sensitivity Areas

Low Sensitivity Areas
Rural and Agricultural Areas
Characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> County Offaly is largely a rural county which comprises of a predominantly flat and undulating agricultural landscape coupled with a peatland landscape. Field boundaries, particularly along roadside verges which are primarily composed of mature hedgerows typify the county's rural landscape.
Sensitivities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> These areas in general can absorb quite effectively, appropriately designed and located development in all categories (including: telecommunication masts and wind energy installations, afforestation and agricultural structures). Due to the rural nature of the area, development shall be screened by appropriate natural boundaries that are sympathetic to the landscape generally, where possible. New housing proposed should respect the Councils rural housing design guidelines, coupled with conformity with development standards.

Table 7.11.3 Summary of Landscape Characteristics and Sensitivities as applicable to Moderate Sensitivity Areas

Moderate Sensitivity Areas
Cutaway Bog
Characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cutaway bogs cover a large part of the landscape of Offaly and in their entirety, are approximately 42,000 hectares. There are a number of landuses for cutaway bog, which include wilderness, grassland, forestry and recreation. Some cutaway bog landscapes are more robust and may be considered for other uses.
Sensitivities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The development of Lough Boora (designated as high sensitivity) acts as a prototype in the creation of parkland character. However, some of these cutaway bogs may be appropriate for other sensitively designed and located developments including renewable energy (wind farms, biomass crops) and/or industrial use. The Council recognises the need for a land use plan for the future development and utilisation of large areas of cutaway bog within Offaly.

Table 7.11.4 Summary of Landscape Characteristics and Sensitivities as applicable to High Sensitivity Areas.

High Sensitivity Areas
<u>A) THE RIVER SHANNON AND CALLOWS</u>
Characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Offaly section of the River Shannon flows along the western boundary of the county and passes through Banagher, Shannonharbour and Shannonbridge. These lands are extremely liable to flood. There are local scenic views along the river and access to the local heritage sites such as Clonmacnoise and the Callows. The Shannon Callows are water meadows that are the breeding grounds for thousands of migrant wild birds. It is an important habitat within this river landscape. The Council recognises the immense value of the River Shannon as a major tourist resource and recreational asset.
Sensitivities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This area is extremely sensitive to all categories of development, given its scientific, ecological, recreational and scenic value. The protection of views of special interest and the landscape of this area is paramount. Development should not be of a nature which could damage the sensitive ecological habitats and the

archaeological aspects of the river corridor. Moreover, the attractive waterside edge is open and flat and is therefore highly sensitive to development. Further, development at the waters edge is often inappropriate, as it would be exposed to view and is generally prohibited in that part of the Shannon River Valley that carries a nature designation.

- New development which is considered necessary should be located within towns, villages and pockets of existing vegetation to assist screening and should also be clustered together to avoid ribbon development. This will maintain long distant views out into the open countryside.

B) THE GRAND CANAL CORRIDOR

Characteristics:

- The Grand Canal is a focus for a wide range of uses, in particular, for recreation and tourism purposes.
- The visual quality of the surrounding areas is intrinsic to maintaining the attractiveness of the Grand Canal corridor.

Sensitivities:

- Hence, the corridor particularly outside of settlements is especially sensitive to large development structures, insensitively designed sporadic housing and large-scale land uses such as extractive industries.
- Offaly County Council will have regard to the Waterway Corridor Study 2002 (and any relevant successive studies) in the development management process.

C) WETLANDS

Characteristics:

- The Lough Boora Parklands include Turraun Wetlands, Finnamore Lakes Area and Loch Clochán Wetlands. The areas which were previously cutaway bogs are now a nature reserve colonised by fen type vegetation, which boasts a rich diversity of flora and fauna. The Parklands are an open, expansive vista that is currently largely free of buildings and associated installations such as overhead wires.
- Pallas Lake. The scenic and recreational value of Pallas Lake is recognised, as is the value of the unspoilt rural setting of this area.
- Fin Lough. This fen which comprises approximately 100 hectares is a National Nature Reserve and is located within proximity to Clonmacnoise.

Sensitivities

- Wetlands are of importance for their habitat value and they provide a wildlife shelter.
- Recreation is also important. There is a sense of place and peacefulness in the newly created wetland area at Lough Boora Parklands and also at Fin Lough and Pallas Lake.
- Any development proposed which occurs within these areas, should demonstrate a necessity to be developed in this location, be very small scale and have minimum visual impacts. Hence, development in the surrounding areas should be controlled including insensitively designed agricultural buildings.

D) SLIEVE BLOOM UPLAND AREA

Characteristics:

- The Slieve Bloom Mountain area is the only substantial upland area in County Offaly, with approximately 12,000 hectares (i.e. one-third of the mountains) within County Offaly, the remainder being in County Laois.
- Their value is derived from the contrast they offer to the county's otherwise flat landscape. The mountains afford a range of spectacular views, forest and riverside walks, picnic sites, historic and archaeological sites and areas subject to environment / conservation designations.
- The entire mountain area is identified as being an environment park and has the largest unbroken area of upland blanket peat in Ireland.
- Housing should be very low impact in design, scale, mass and site selection. Robust, well screened sites should be chosen over unscreened elevated sites in order to restrict the visual impact to as small an area as possible.

Sensitivities:

- This area is extremely sensitive to all categories of development, and the upland area itself is visible from extensive surrounding areas. It is particularly sensitive to large agricultural structures, sporadic housing, major afforestation proposals and masts.
- Softening of the coniferous edge with native deciduous planting is recommended and new recreational facilities associated with forestry should be developed using natural materials, while not more than 32% of the mountain area should be subject to tree planting.
- Car parking should be set within existing tree canopies where it will not cause visual intrusion from / to viewpoints.

E) CROGHAN HILL AND ITS ENVIRONS**Characteristics:**

- Croghan Hill and its environs including Raheenmore Bog (which was designated a nature reserve under the Wildlife Act 1976) and Cannakill Deserted Medieval Village, are the main elements of this high amenity area.
- Croghan Hill is an extinct volcano which lies 234 metres above sea level and commands views over north and east Offaly and the surrounding counties.

Sensitivities

- This is an area of archaeological and high amenity value and is highly sensitive to new developments.
- Croghan Hill, due to its elevated nature in comparison to its surrounding flat landscape, impacts on the visual quality of the surrounding area and is highly sensitive to developments of any nature, in particular sand and gravel extraction.
- The Council recognises the scenic quality and recreational value of the Croghan Hill area including Croghan Hill, Raheenmore Bog and Cannakill Deserted Medieval Village.

F) BOGLAND AREAS**Characteristics:**

- County Offaly contains a number of raised and blanket boglands.
- Clara bog, an important Natural Heritage Area (NHA), is also important for its visual amenities and scenic qualities.
- Other important bogland areas include the All Saints Bog, Sharavogue Bog, Slieve Bloom Blanket Bog and Raheenmore Bog.

Sensitivities

- Offaly County Council has a strong policy of conservation of a representative sample of peatlands and the protection of peatland habitats.

G) THE ESKER LANDSCAPE**Characteristics**

- Eskers were built up under the ice cap about ten thousand years ago and also have archaeological significance, as they formed the early highways in Ireland.
- In old Irish, 'eiscir' means divide while 'riada' means road.

Sensitivities

- The eskers have geomorphologic, scientific, historical, cultural, recreational and amenity value and uniqueness.
- In particular, the esker system north of Clara bog is critically important, as it is most likely the source of nutrient rich water, which feeds the bogs soak systems.
- Eskers are also of economic importance and there is a need to balance the conservation of the important landscape features associated with eskers providing educational / tourism and recreational potential with the requirements of aggregate extraction and economic development. Hence, the esker landscape is highly sensitive to any future development and the opening up of new pits for sand and gravel extraction will be strongly resisted (refer to Chapter 2, Economic Development Strategy).

H) ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL LANDSCAPES**Characteristics**

- County Offaly is rich in landscapes of archaeological and historic interests as is shown in Map 7.16. This ranges from large ecclesiastical sites such as Clonmacnoise and Durrow Abbey to archaeological features such as the Durrow High Cross.
- Section 7.18, Built Heritage of this plan provides further policies and objectives concerning the county's archaeological and historical landscapes. These primarily include Clonmacnoise, Durrow, Killeigh, Leamonaghan and Rahan.

Sensitivities

- These landscapes are highly sensitive to new developments, which could potentially damage the historical character and the cultural and social importance of the area.
- The Council shall endeavour to ensure that planning applications for development, refurbishment and restoration works etc. within close proximity to these areas are sympathetic to the sensitive nature of the landscape.

7.12 Amenities

7.12.1 Views and Prospects

The designation of Areas of High Amenity and scenic amenity routes within County Offaly provide a basis for the protection of views and prospects of certain visually vulnerable features. However, there may be a number of individual views and prospects which warrant protection within the county. The protection of these views will be implemented on a case-by-case basis through the development management process, as appropriate. In particular, Table 7.11.6 lists the protected views within the county. This table and accompanying map (Map 7.18) lists the views 'from' i.e. the specific road and/or townlands from which the view is experienced and 'to' the particular amenity or area which is visible from that view. Site assessments, within the development management process will finally determine if the protected view will be affected by a proposed development. The protection of a view, and its application through the development management process is solely to protect that view and not to cross over with other policies, for example the single rural house policy.

Table 7.11.5 County Offaly - Views and Prospects of Special Amenity Value or Special Interest

Views and Prospects of Special Amenity Value or Special Interest		
Map Ref.	View From	View To
V1	N80 in the townland of Ballynasragh, Pigeonhouse, Killeigh, Derryclure, Derrybeg and Cloncon.	South-West Slieve Bloom Mountains and Killeigh Village
V2	Road No. L-08003 in the Slieve Bloom Mountains, townlands of Clough, Ballykelly, Coolcreen, Glenletter, Glenregan, Castletown, Forelacka and Glinsk.	Slieve Bloom Mountains, River Shannon northwards over lowlands
V3	Pilgrims Road (Road No. L-07013) in the townlands of Clonmacnoise, Clonascra, Ballyduff and Bloomhill.	Clonmacnoise and River Shannon, Eskers, Mongan Bog and Finlough.
V4	Road No. R444 in the townlands of Clonmacnoise, Creevagh.	River Shannon and boglands
V5	N52 in the townland of Heath, Bunaterin, Derrydolney, Ballywilliam, Curraghmore, Ballynacard, Bally na Curra.	Slieve Bloom Mountains
V6	R356 and Road No. L-07014 in the townlands of Cushcallow, Park, Mullaghakeeraun and Curralahan.	River Shannon and Boglands
V7	Road No. L-01018 in the townlands of Cannakill and Croghan Demesne.	Slieve Bloom Mountains
V8	Townlands of Barnan, Kilduff, Old Croghan, Croghan Demesne, Down.	Views towards Croghan Hill and Boglands.
V9	Townlands of Grovesend and Coole.	South to boglands
V10	Road No. L-03004 in the townlands of Skehannagh, Killagally Glebe, Ballyclare.	Southwards towards Slieve Bloom Mountains
V11	Regional Road R357 in the townlands of Lumcloon, Bun, Rin, Leabeg and Leamore.	Southwards towards Slieve Bloom Mountains
V12	Road No. L-07009 in the townland of Stonestown.	Over boglands and Slieve Bloom Mountains
V13	Road No. L-03012 in the townlands of Glaster, Ballynasrah, Newtown, Kilmochoona.	Over Little Brosna and Callows
V14	R440 in the townlands of Kyle, Cloghanmore, Streamstown, Ballinree, Killaun.	Towards Slieve Bloom Mountains
V15	Road No. L-04006 in the townland of Knock.	Slieve Bloom Mountains, Leap Castle
V16	Road No. L-04025 in the townlands of Clonee, Cumber Lower.	Westward over farmland
V17	Road No. L-06034 in the townlands of Knockhill and Drinagh.	Towards North East and North West over lowlands
V18	Road No. L-08008 in the townlands of Grange, Belhill, Longford Big and Church Land.	Views towards Seir Keiran Monastic Site
V19	Road No. L-02011 in the townlands of Rahan Demesne, Newtown.	Churches and Earthworks.

7.12.2 Protection of Key Scenic Amenity Routes

County Offaly contains a number of valuable scenic amenity routes which offer a very attractive cross-sectional view and overall impression of differing landscapes within Offaly as one traverses the county. The enjoyment of such varying landscapes for the visitor who regularly traverses the county and/or the local person can be lessened by both insensitive and/or excessive levels of roadside development. However, the Council acknowledges that in certain circumstances, some development may be necessary. In this regard, appropriate location, siting and design criteria should strictly apply in accordance with policies as contained in Chapter 1, Core Strategy and Settlement Strategy (refer also to Chapter 4, Infrastructure and Environment Strategy, Section 4.6 Sustainable Transport and Accessibility Policy. Also refer to Chapter 8 Development Management Standards). The following routes are designated as scenic amenity routes within Offaly (see Map 7.19 and Map 4.1 of Chapter 4, Infrastructure and Environment Strategy).

R357 Blueball to Shannonbridge

This route links the N52 at Blueball to Shannonbridge. It passes through esker landscape, peatlands, undulating agricultural lands, Lough Boora Parklands and the callows area of the River Shannon in particular.

R440 and R421 Birr to Kinitty and Ballard to Kinitty

This route provides an attractive drive within the open countryside to the attractions of the Slieve Bloom Mountains and around the foothills of the mountains themselves.

7.12.3 Field Boundaries

Field boundaries, particularly along roadside verges contribute to the overall natural qualities and amenities of an area. Where a roadside boundary is required to be set back to provide a visibility splay, the field boundary should be retained and relocated along the new boundary line to ensure its continuity and enhancement, where feasible (refer to Chapter 8, Development Management Standards). Where trees can be safely retained within the visibility splay, the lower branches should be lopped to raise the crown to a height of three metres from ground level.

7.12.4 Trees, Hedgerows, Traditional Stonewalls

A hedgerow survey for County Offaly was undertaken in 2005. Hedgerows and stone walls should be retained or translocated within a development proposal where this protects or conserves the value or functions for which they are being retained, for example, a) field pattern they reflect, b) continuity of habitat as a wildlife corridor or c) the function is as a landmark or a habitat. Should this be unfeasible (in terms of public safety) proposals to replace with native species of local provenance is required.

The conservation of mature trees is also necessary and their presence enhances the overall aesthetic quality an area. Where sites contain trees, a tree survey may be required that identifies all trees on the subject site and reports on their condition. This report should indicate whether such trees are proposed for retention and any works which may be necessary to the trees to allow them to grow without conflicting with the use of the land (for example, over shadow windows, have their root growth impeded to the extent that the tree may die and/or pose risk to human safety).

7.12.5 Railways

It is acknowledged that Offaly's strong tradition associated with the peatlands has resulted in some attractive industrial rail lines which cross some of the county's local roads and afford scenic qualities and remnants of our past. Some continue to be utilised by Bord na Móna. Consideration should be given to reserving the line of such railways / rights of way for possible future re-use.

The national rail network which traverses the county also provides an opportunity for individuals to attain an overall perspective of the quality of the landscape of Offaly. Any development proposed adjacent to or within such a location where it may be visible from the rail lines in the county must address this feature as part of its design proposal.

7.12.6 Cycleways

The Council recognises the resurgence in the growth of cycling as a means of recreational activity. County Offaly provides ideal terrain for cycling. The Council acknowledges that provisions for cyclists including where appropriate dedicated cycleways, should be provided as resources permit. Smarter Travel Policies which are embedded in the Plan support the provision

of cycleways across the county, (see Sustainable Transport and Accessible section of Chapter 4, Infrastructure and Environment Strategy).

The Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines (MRPGs), Section 5.2.3 highlights the opportunity for Regional cycle routes.

7.12.7 Areas of High Amenity

Table 7.11.6 below identifies landscape areas that are designated as Areas of High Amenity within County Offaly (also identified as areas of high sensitivity within the county's landscape characterisation – refer also to section 7.11).

Table 7.11.6: Areas of High Amenity

Areas of High Sensitivity and Areas of High Amenity
<u>Waterways, Wetlands</u>
River Shannon
Grand Canal
Lough Boora Parklands ¹³
Pallas Lake
<u>Upland Areas</u>
Slieve Bloom Mountains
Croghan Hill ¹⁴
<u>Peatlands</u>
Clara Bog
Raheenmore Bog
<u>Eskers</u>
Eiscir Riada
Clara Eskers
Other Eskers
<u>Archaeological and Historical</u>
Clonmacnoise
Durrow Monastic Site and Demesne

¹³ Lough Boora Parklands designation also includes boglands, agricultural lands, ecological, biodiversity, historical site

¹⁴ Croghan Hill designation also includes archaeological and historic interest.

7.13 Landscape and Amenity Policies

LAP-01	<p>It is Council policy that landscape considerations will be an important factor in all land use policy and decision making for the county, ensuring that a pro-active view of development is undertaken whilst maintaining respect for the environment and heritage, as per the general principles of sustainable development. Further it is policy to conserve, protect and enhance the landscape of Offaly at a number of levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The value of the landscape itself, as open countryside and the associated form and character of settlements. - The value of the landscape as a resource for economic growth in accordance with its physical and visual attributes. - The value of the landscape and its role with habitats and species whose diversity enriches the environment.
LAP-02	It is Council policy to control development as per the county's landscape classification listed in Tables 7.11.1-7.11.4
LAP-03	It is Council policy to protect the county's scenic amenity routes from insensitive levels of roadside development and excessive levels of development. For development directly accessing onto restricted regional routes (key amenity routes) as shown on Map 7.19 (Chapter 4, Infrastructure and Environment Strategy) and on map 4.1, restrictions as per policy STAP-19 will apply.
LAP-04	It is Council policy that existing local landscape features, including hedgerows, shelter belts and stone walls are retained, protected and enhanced where appropriate, so as to preserve the local landscape and character of an area, whilst providing for future development.
LAP-05	It is Council policy to protect the landscape comprising the River Shannon and flood plain including the callows and views of special interest from inappropriate development. However, appropriate development within settlements adjacent to the Shannon and its callows and which act as focal points for both residential and commercial / business, industry and recreation will be positively considered.
LAP-06	It is Council policy that new development should ensure the protection of mature trees, hedgerows and the conservation of existing stone walls, and their integration into new development. Where the provision of new boundaries is required, these should comprise native hedgerow planting of Irish provenance, or stone walls which consist of stone found in the locality. Where comprehensive new development occurs, it should take into account the pattern of existing hedgerows and incorporate same into layouts or plant connecting hedgerows where hedgerow removal to facilitate development works is necessary. The Council will require that all new development will respect the existing character of the settlement, in particular through the provision of sensitive landscaping schemes. In the event that the removal of tree(s) is deemed to be necessary, it will be generally conditional on replacement with appropriate species.
LAP-07	It is Council policy to protect formal and informal open spaces which contribute to the landscape and scenic amenity of the county and/or act as a 'green buffer' within settlements in particular.
LAP-08	It is Council policy to make provisions for the reservation of land which will allow for the development of public open space, where appropriate.
LAP-09	It is Council policy to require that any necessary assessments, including landscape and visual impact assessments are provided when undertaking, authorising, or approving development in high sensitivity areas.

7.14 Landscape and Amenity Objectives¹⁵

LAO-01	It is an objective of the Council to preserve and enhance the character of the county's landscape where, and to the extent that in the opinion of Offaly County Council, the proper planning and sustainable of the area requires it.
LAO-02	It is an objective of the Council to preserve scenic views and prospects throughout the county which will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, as part of the development management process. (Views are listed in Table 7.11.5 and shown on Map 7.18).
LAO-03	It is an objective to the Council to make provisions for cyclists and long distance walkers including where appropriate, dedicated cycleways, subject to availability of finance.
LAO-04	It is an objective of the Council to investigate the feasibility of preparing a Landscape Character Assessment during the lifetime of this plan.
LAO-05	It is an objective to investigate the feasibility of preparing a Historic Landscape Characterisation and utilise the results to complement and contribute to comprehensive Landscape Character Assessment (LCA).
LAO-06	It is an objective of the Council to review the Landscape Character Assessment for the county, subject to available resources and in accordance with emerging National Guidance on Landscape Character Assessment.

¹⁵ The order of listing of objectives is not intended to indicate priorities. Subject to the availability of resources, it is the Council's aim to monitor and accomplish the objectives listed in this section within the period of the plan.

7.15 Public Rights of Way

7.15.1 Introduction

Offaly is an 'open' county in terms of the many established walking and hiking routes across the county's varied countryside, from the Grand Canal line to the Slieve Bloom trails. The Council has a history of working with landowners, occupiers, agencies, and stakeholders in improving the recreational walkways in the county.

7.15.2 Context

The Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, states that a Development Plan shall include an objective for 'the preservation of public rights of way which give access to seashore, mountain, lakeshore, riverbank or other place of natural beauty or recreational utility, which public rights of way shall be identified both by marking them on at least one of the maps forming part of the development plan and by indicating their location on a list appended to the development plan'.

7.15.3 Public Rights of Way - Offaly

The types of Right of Way (ROW) that may be relevant in Offaly are established ROWs in areas such as the Slieve Blooms, along rivers and the Grand Canal, access over farmland to national monuments or other monuments of historical, archaeological or scientific interest, existing parks, forests and bogs with recreation walkways provided, some farmland where there are existing routes such as the Offaly Way and similar established walking routes.

Offaly has an extensive network of long-distance waymarked walks, pilgrim paths and forest walks in the county which include:

- **Slieve Bloom Way (An 84km long, circular walking trail, which includes Six key Trailheads.)**

- **Offaly Way**

- **The Grand Canal Way**

- **Slí Mór - Pilgrims Path**

- **Slí Na Sláinte; Cloughan & Tullamore**

Refer to:

www.offaly.ie/eng/Services/Walking/Walking_Routes/

Off-road walkways can be established by various means, through informal agreements with landowners, through formal agreements or acquisition. In many instances walkways follow public rights of way established by custom and practice.

The council recognises that properly developed and maintained walking routes are of considerable benefit to the economies of the areas through which they run as well as providing an invaluable educational, recreational and conservation role. The council recognises that these routes cannot come into existence or remain in existence without the full co-operation of the owners of private property on the routes.

There are significant stretches of land that were formerly in use as railway lines. To the extent that these are engineering works negotiating difficult topographical obstacles, they constitute significant resources, with potential for use as corridors for amenity access, free from motorised traffic, and even have potential for a revived railway use. It will be the policy of the council to consider proposals for development in these areas for local heritage and outdoor activities including the provision of recreational walkways or cycling routes. Please refer to the Tourism Section of Chapter 2, Economic Development Strategy for more on walking routes.

7.16 Public Rights of Way Policies

- ROWP-01** It is a policy of the Council to promote sustainable outdoor recreation in the form of walking and cycling and improve the recreational and tourist potential of walking and cycling routes in the county whilst ensuring the protection of the environment.
- ROWP-02** It is a policy of the Council to engage and co-operate with representative bodies, local groups, landowners and where relevant adjoining local authorities, in order to support the sustainable development of walking and cycling routes.
- ROWP-03** It is a policy of the Council to promote the development of riverside walking routes, whilst protecting areas of ecological value and ensuring that any development takes cognisance of the aims and objectives of the Water Framework Directive and ensuring that all development is undertaken in compliance with Articles 6 and Article 10 of the Habitats Directive.
- ROWP-04** It is the policy of the Council to consider proposals for development along former railway lines for local heritage and outdoor activities including the provision of recreational walkways or cycling routes, subject to feasibility and availability of funding.

7.17 Public Right of Way Objectives¹⁶

- ROWO-01** It is an objective of the Council to examine the feasibility of identifying and mapping Public Rights of way in the recreational and amenity areas of the county in the context of emerging national guidance.
- ROWO-02** It is an objective of the Council to protect potential 'greenway' routes along and in proximity to abandoned rail lines from inappropriate development that could compromise the delivery of a cycling or walking route in the future.

¹⁶ The order of listing of objectives is not intended to indicate priorities. Subject to the availability of resources, it is the Council's aim to monitor and accomplish the objectives listed in this section within the period of the plan.

7.18 Built Heritage

7.18.1 Aim

The Council will seek to protect, conserve and enhance buildings, areas, structures, sites and features of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest. The Council will aim to strike a reasonable balance between conservation and development objectives in the interests of the proper planning and sustainable development of the county.

7.18.2 Context

‘Built heritage’ is the term used to describe buildings, places and sites which have acquired special interest and values through time and as such, warrant protection and preservation, where feasible. It is our duty within society to try and pass on this heritage to future generations, whilst being sympathetic to possible re-use if this is the only possible way that ensures the survival of such heritage.

The European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (Valetta, 1992)

The Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines, published by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) in 2004.

International principles for Conservation of Built Heritage stem from the Athens Charter of 1931.¹⁷ The European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (Valetta, 1992).

The European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage requires that archaeological heritage is taken account of in the development process. This convention also includes the setting and context of archaeological sites as part of the archaeological heritage that requires protection.

¹⁷ The first time that agreed international principles were laid down was in the Athens Charter of 1931. The Charter was reviewed and updated in 1964 in the Venice Charter, which deals with the conservation of historic buildings, the Burra Charter for the conservation of places of cultural significance (1979) and the Washington Charter of 1987 which deals with historic towns and districts. These charters were published by ICOMOS (the International Committee for Monuments and Sites).

Ireland ratified this Convention in 1997, and as such is legally bound by it.

National Monuments Acts

The National Monuments Act 1930, as amended, provides for the protection of archaeological heritage. The Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) was established under Section 12 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994 and structures, features, objects or sites listed in this record are known as Recorded Monuments. As well as extending protection to all known sites, the National Monuments Acts 1930 – 2004 extends protection to all previously unknown archaeological items and sites that are uncovered through ground disturbance or the accidental discovery of sites located underwater. Where necessary, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government will issue preservation orders to ensure protection is afforded to sites believed to be under threat.

National Heritage Plan 2002

A key objective of the National Heritage Plan (2002) seeks to “*place heritage at the heart of public life*”. The plan recognises that heritage is communal and we all share a responsibility to protect it. Protection of heritage must begin at local level enabling everybody to become actively involved in preserving and enhancing the heritage of County Offaly.

Offaly Heritage Plan 2012-2016

The Offaly Heritage Plan is the third heritage plan to be prepared and published for the county and it outlines a five-year, specific action plan of work to be carried out in County Offaly, overseen by the Offaly Heritage Forum. The programme delivery is co-ordinated by the Offaly Heritage Office and lists a number of actions to be undertaken over the Heritage Plan Period. The Council will continue to work with the Heritage Forum in relation to achieving its targets over this County Development Plan period.

Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines

The Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines, published by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) in 2004 give guidance to planning authorities on the application of Part IV of the Act and deal with protected structures and Architectural Conservation Areas in considerable detail.

Offaly County Council is committed to identifying and protecting the built heritage of the county and will continue to do so in line with the relevant guidelines and plans as outlined above.

7.18.3 Architectural Conservation

Protected Structures

The Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, states the Planning Authority's obligation in relation to structures that are worthy of protection.

For the purpose of protecting structures, or parts of structures, which form part of the architectural heritage and which are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest, every development plan shall include a record of protected structures, and shall include in that record every structure which is, in the opinion of the planning authority, of such interest within its functional area¹⁸.

Where a structure is protected by its inclusion within the Record of Protected Structures, planning permission is required for any alteration internally or externally, which affects its character. Owners or occupiers may seek a Section 57 Declaration from the Planning Authority as to the type of work which the Planning Authority considers would not materially affect the character of the structure. Owners or occupiers are encouraged to consult with the Planning Authority in good time as to the appropriateness of proposed works and, as necessary, to seek competent advice on the best practice for carrying out such works. Under current legislation, protected structure status automatically includes the curtilage of the buildings listed and other structures within its curtilage. There is a record of protected structures for County Offaly which forms part of the County Development Plan (refer to Record of Protected Structure which accompanies this plan).

Alterations / Extension of Protected Structures

The Council will ensure that the alteration or extensions to protected buildings and structures will only be permitted if the proposals are in keeping with the character of the building and preserve the architectural and historic features of the building or

structure. The Planning & Development Act 2000, as amended, removes exempted development rights where works to a protected structure will materially affect the character of the structure. Planning permission will be required where such works are proposed.

Change of Use of Protected Structures

The Council will favourably consider the change of use of any building listed for protection provided that such a change of use does not seriously impact on its intrinsic character, notwithstanding other planning and environmental standards and requirements.

Demolition of Protected Structures

The Council will strongly resist the demolition of any buildings or structure listed for protection; unless the Council is satisfied that exceptional circumstances exist.

Planning permission is necessary to demolish a protected structure and this presumption exists within the context of any application for planning permission for any protected structure and is governed by the Planning & Development Act 2000, as amended.

Architectural Conservation Areas

Architectural Conservation Areas (ACA) comprise a place, an area, or group of structures or part of a townscape, which is of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest or contributes to the appreciation of protected structures; and which is listed as such an area in the County Development Plan. It may or may not include protected structures. An ACA may consist for example, of a terrace of houses, a street, town centre or a cluster of structures associated with a specific building such as a mill or country house. Unless a structure is also included on the Record of Protected Structures, the protected status afforded from inclusion in an ACA only applies to the exterior and streetscape.

Any works which would have a material effect on the special character of an ACA need planning permission. Piecemeal alterations on individual non protected structures can have a significant cumulative effect on a streetscape.

Objectives to preserve the character of ACAs may be included in a Development Plan where considered

¹⁸ Planning and Development Acts 2000, as amended , Part IV, Section 51(1)

necessary to preserve their character. Offaly County Council will examine the need to designate areas as Architectural Conservation Areas during the period of the plan.

7.18.4 Vernacular Structures

In towns, and rural areas, older structures, which may not be listed in the Record of Protected Structures or part of an ACA, may, individually or as part of a group of buildings or street, contribute positively to the character of the area or townscape, or rural setting, which can be diminished by their loss. The Council will seek to retain these structures where feasible. Examples of such structures include the Grand Canal, mills, thatched structures, old industrial buildings, farm houses, and farm complexes.

A number of publications in relation to the county's vernacular heritage are available and include the following:

- Thatch
- Mill sites
- Bridges
- Industrial heritage sites

7.18.5 Heritage Gardens

The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht have carried out a desktop survey of the Historic Gardens and Demesnes in Ireland and have identified approximately 200 such sites in Offaly. This survey can be viewed at www.buildingsofireland.ie.

7.18.6 Archaeological Conservation

Archaeology

Offaly has a rich and diverse archaeological heritage, which dates back to the Mesolithic period (7,000 B.C.) for example Lough Boora.

Whilst all recorded monuments which are listed in the Record of Monuments and Places are protected by law under the National Monuments Act 2004, it is also Council policy to protect its archaeological heritage from damage. There are currently upwards of 4,000 archaeological sites identified within Offaly. However, it is accepted that many other sites may remain beneath the surface and possibly may become uncovered following development / excavation work.

The Council will take cognisance of the advice and recommendations of the Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government, 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.

The Council will ensure that all planning applications for development, refurbishment, restoration works, etc. shall be referred on receipt to National Monuments and Architectural Protection Division (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government).

The Council will facilitate pre-planning consultations in relation to the archaeological heritage with the Planning Authority in its capacity of being charged with the implementation of the National Monuments Acts.

Wherever practicable, the Council will encourage the provision of public access to sites identified in the Record of Monuments and Places.

Under section 12.3 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994, a person proposing to carry out works at or close to a Recorded Monument is obliged to give notice of such intention to the Minister of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Development, either above or below ground within the vicinity of a site of archaeological interest will not be detrimental to the character of the archaeological site or its setting. Regard will be given to the *"Framework and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage"*.

7.18.7 Sites and Monuments Record

A full record of Sites and Monuments (SMR) is available at Offaly County Council offices and should be consulted in cases of all developments on, adjacent to or within the setting of sites of archaeological interest or within zones of archaeological potential. In relation to all such sites, whether Recorded Monuments or those carrying a higher status, the Planning Authority recommends that potential developers consult as early as possible with the relevant agencies (such as the National Monuments Service of the Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government) and the Planning Authority in order to ensure that archaeological

concerns can be specified and if appropriate, integrated into development proposals at as early a stage as possible.

Zones of Archaeological Potential

In 1986, an Urban Archaeology Study was undertaken by the Department of the Environment. This study informed the designation of Zones of Archaeological Potential in the county including the following areas:

- Banagher
- Birr
- Daingean
- Dunkerrin
- Seir Kieran

7.18.8 Monuments in State and Council Ownership in County Offaly

Offaly County Council will seek to conserve monuments in its ownership, in consultation with the Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government, where resources permit (refer to Table 7.17.1)

All excavation, digging, ploughing or disturbance of the ground in proximity to National Monuments in state ownership or guardianship of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government or of the Local Authority requires the consent in writing of the Minister (Section 14 as substituted by Section 5 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 2004). Where necessary, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government will issue preservation orders to ensure protection is afforded to sites believed to be under threat.

Table 7.17.1 National Monuments in State Ownership in County Offaly

Monument	Townland	National Monument Registration Number
High Cross and Grave Slab	Durrow Demesne	313
High Cross and Remains of Church, Kinnitty	Castletown and Glinsk	510
Sier Kieran Monastic Church and Settlement	Clonmore and Churchtown	497
Earthwork	Clonin	532
Churches, Two Round Towers, Crosses, slabs	Clonmacnoise	81
Two Churches	Rahan Demesne	82
Land at Clonmacnoise (9 Acres, 7 roods and 37 perches)	Clonmacnoise	601
Medieval Deserted Village	Cannakill	617

Table 7.17.2 National Monuments in Guardianship of the State: County Offaly.

Monument	Townland	National Monument Registration Number
Clonfinlough Stone	Clonfinlough	336
Church and Slabs	Gallen	505

Table 7.17.3 Monuments Protected By Preservation Order County Offaly

No. of Preservation Order	Monument	Townland	Effective Date of Order
8	Crannog (Ballinaderry Lough)	Ballinahinch	5/1/33
49	Cooile Castle	Kilcolgan	1/1/37
86	Clonony Castle	Clonony More	15/10/40
6/56	Ringfort	Broughal	22/2/56
1/57	Ballykean Ring Barrow (O' Dempsey's Ring)	Ballykean	23/1/57
3/86	Motte Castle Earthworks	Rathlihen	12/9/86
23/76	Hillfort (excluding School and Rectory bldgs.)	Glebe and Ballycurragh	4/6/76
5/2000	Cemetery and Enclosure	Derryvilla	
TPO 12.01	Ecclesiastical Remains	Clonmacnoise	19/10/01

Copies of the Record of Monuments and Places are available for public consultation in the Council's planning department and throughout the network of libraries in County Offaly (refer to Map 7.20).

7.18.9 Development Assessment Criteria

In considering developments which impact on Archaeology, the Planning Authority will:

- Seek archaeological impact assessments as part of the planning submission when a proposed development could affect a Recorded Monument, a Zone of Archaeological Potential, or an as yet unidentified element of archaeological heritage, or their setting, and will,
- Ensure that a suitably qualified archaeologist carries out all archaeological works required when permission is granted for development that require mitigation of impacts on the archaeological heritage.

7.18.10 Monastic Sites

There are twenty three recorded Early Christian Monasteries in the county. Conservation Management Plans have been prepared for Clonmacnoise, Leamanaghan, Durrow and Rahan. The Council will have regard to these plans when considering development within their boundaries.

7.18.11 Clonmacnoise

Clonmacnoise is one of Ireland's foremost national monuments and is of international importance as a spiritual, historic, archaeological and cultural centre. The unique atmosphere and attractiveness of Clonmacnoise derives not only from the monastic site itself but its relationship to the River Shannon and the callows together with the sense of enclosure provided by the eskers. The effect is heightened by the unfolding of the site as it is approached either from the river or any of the three approach roads (refer to Map 7.21 Clonmacnoise Heritage zone).

The Council is conscious of the fact that the interaction of all these elements contributes significantly to the impact of the area and that it is necessary to preserve and protect these fully in order to retain the unique and special character of Clonmacnoise. In addition to the monastic site, the area surrounding Clonmacnoise, including Mongans Bog, Fin Lough and Clonmacnoise Callows, are designated sites of international and national

conservation importance. A Draft Management Plan for Clonmacnoise was prepared by the OPW in 2009.

7.18.12 Durrow

The remains of the monastery of Durrow are situated within Durrow Abbey Demesne. The monastery was founded by St. Columcille in 587 A.D. The site was used as a burial place for bishops, abbots and the nobles of the Midlands and Munster. The most elaborate feature at the site is the mid-ninth century high cross but it also has a number of other features of archaeological significance including the monastic enclosure, St. Columcille's Island and the Augustinian Priory and Nunnery.

A conservation plan was commissioned by the Office of Public Works for Durrow Abbey and the surrounding thirty-one hectares of land acquired by the state in 2003. The Planning Authority will have regard to this plan when assessing applications that are within this area or in close proximity to this area.

7.18.13 Rahan

The monastic site of Rahan lies in flat pasture land on the south bank of the Clodiagh River, seven miles west of Tullamore on the road from Rahan to Killina. The Grand Canal passes to the south of the site. In the fifth century Camelacus was appointed by St. Patrick to establish a monastery at Rahan. The monastic site was re-founded by St. Carthage in the sixth century. The monastery is contained within a large D-shaped enclosure with the Clodiagh River forming the straight section on its northern side. A Conservation Plan for Rahan has been prepared as per an action of the Offaly Heritage Plan 2007 – 2011 and the Planning Authority will have regard to this plan in relation to the assessing of applications in the vicinity of the site. Policy.

7.18.14 Killeigh

Killeigh has been a site of historical importance since the early days of Christianity in Ireland. St. Senchell is credited with founding the first church at Killeigh at the beginning of the sixth century. The village contains a number of key sites of archaeological significance including the site of the Franciscan Friary, the site of the Augustinian Priory, the site of the Augustinian Nunnery and the Holy Wells.

An Historic Landscape Character Assessment for Killeigh was carried out in 2006. The Planning

Authority had regard to this study when preparing the village plan for Killeigh (refer to Volume 2). The Planning Authority will have regard to this village plan when assessing applications within and adjacent to sites of archaeological significance.

7.18.15 Lemanaghan

The historic complex at Lemanaghan, with its focus at the early monastic site dedicated to St Managhan, is situated on the R436 between Ballycumber and Ferbane at the junction of the road to Pollagh. These monuments occupy an upland area in Lemanaghan Bog which is bordered to the south by the callows of the River Brosna. Surrounding them is an exceptional number of archaeological find sites, many relating to a complex infrastructure of trackways or toghers, which were built and repaired over several centuries. It consists of a two-room, 19th-century schoolhouse, now redundant, and a cluster of relatively small dwellings, the largest of which, Lemanaghan House, is to the south-west of the monastic site. The Heritage Council prepared a Conservation Plan for Lemanaghan in 2007. The Planning Authority will have regard to this plan when assessing applications that are within this area or in close proximity to this area.

7.18.16 The Grand Canal

The Grand Canal, constructed between 1756 and 1793, carried both passengers and commercial boats until the 1850's with the latter continuing until the 1960's. The recreational value of the Grand Canal is recognised and it is intended to preserve its attractiveness by carefully controlling development in order to protect its amenity and tourism potential. The development of the canal in relation to walking, cycling, coarse fishing and cruising will however be encouraged. Offaly County Council will have regard to the Waterway Corridor Study 2002.

7.19 Architectural and Archaeological Heritage Policies

- AAHP-01** It is Council policy to ensure that the alteration or extensions to protected buildings and structures will only be permitted if the proposals are in keeping with the character of the building and preserve the architectural and historic features of the buildings or structures.
- AAHP-02** It is Council policy to encourage the retention, sympathetic maintenance, and appropriate re-use of the vernacular buildings, in both the towns and rural areas of the county, including the retention of the original fabric, such as windows, renders, shop fronts, gates, yards, boundary walls and other significant features where possible, to discourage the replacement of good quality vernacular buildings with modern structures;
- AAHP-03** It is Council policy to ensure that new build adjoining, and extensions to, vernacular buildings are of an appropriate design and do not detract from the building's character.
- AAHP-04** It is Council policy to apply the following principles to the archaeological heritage:
- To facilitate appropriate guidance in relation to the protection of the county's archaeological heritage.
 - To promote public awareness of the rich archaeological heritage in this area.
 - To protect and enhance archaeological monuments and their settings and Zones of Archaeological Potential.
- AAHP-05** It is Council policy that the area comprising the National Monument at Clonmacnoise, enclosing Eskers, Mongans Bog, Clonmacnoise Callows, Fin Lough and the limestone pavement at Clorhane shall retain its nominated status as the "Clonmacnoise Heritage Zone", in accordance with the recommendations of the study of the area carried out by the Environmental Sciences Unit of Trinity College, Dublin and as indicated on Map 7.21.
- AAHP-06** It is Council policy that, in the primary control zone around the National Monument, development will be strictly curtailed, so as to preserve and protect the unique character and distinctive quality of this area. The boundaries of the secondary control area correspond with that of the Shannon Area of High Amenity. Within this secondary area the controls applicable to Areas of Special Control will apply together with a further requirement that the Planning Authority must be satisfied that the particular purpose of the proposal justifies the location proposed.
- AAHP-07** It is policy of the Council to promote awareness of, and access to, the archaeological inheritance of Offaly.
- AAHP-08** It is Council policy to ensure that development in the immediate vicinity of a recorded monument is sensitively sited and designed so that it does not significantly detract from the monument. Where upstanding remains exist, a visual impact assessment may be required.
- AAHP-09** It is Council policy to inform and seek guidance from the National Museum of Ireland if an unrecorded archaeological object is discovered, or the National Monuments Service of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in the case of the discovery of an unrecorded archaeological site, in accordance with National Monuments legislation.
- AAHP-10** It is Council policy to 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 the archaeological heritage.

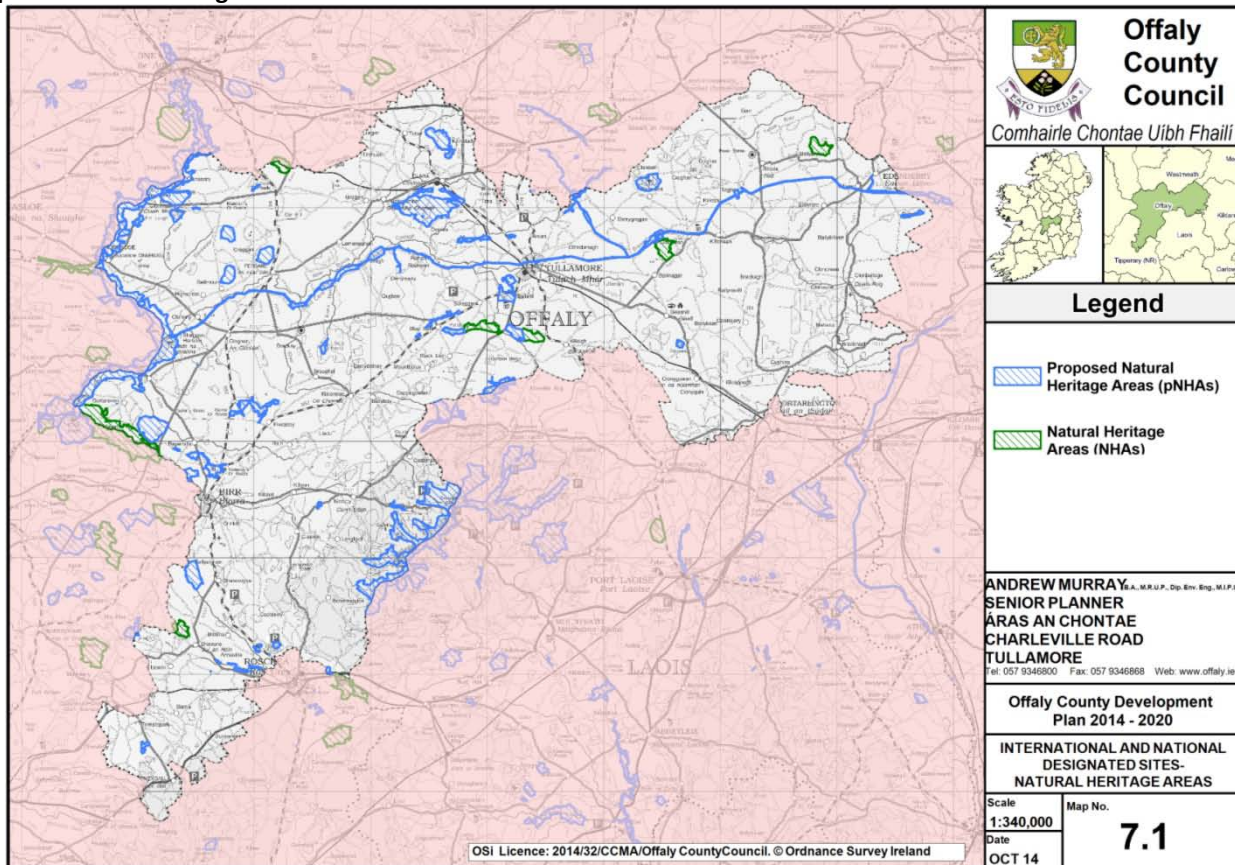
AAHP-11	It is Council policy to ensure that all development proposals affecting sites specified in the Record of Monuments and Places or Zones of Archaeological Potential are referred to the prescribed bodies (as set out in the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended) and to have regard to the advice and recommendations of the prescribed bodies in relation to undertaking, approving or authorising development.
AAHP-12	It is Council policy to ensure that when an unrecorded archaeological object or site is discovered, any works that threaten the object or site are immediately suspended and that the appropriate Government agency is informed.
AAHP-13	It is Council policy to protect historical burial grounds within Offaly and encourage their maintenance in accordance with conservation principles.
AAHP-14	It is Council policy to facilitate appropriate guidance in relation to the protection of the archaeological heritage in the area covered by the plan.
AAHP-15	It is Council policy that developments, which require vehicular access from public roads that were formerly towpaths or from existing towpaths along the Grand Canal, are very strictly controlled. This is in addition to restrictions relevant to the Canal's designation as a Natural Heritage Area and consequently as an Area of Special Control. It is policy to consider housing applications for established families* only along roads that were formerly towpaths along the Grand Canal and that such developments will be strictly controlled.
	<i>*Families for the purpose of this policy are defined as husband, wife and their children, siblings of the husband and wife and their sons and daughters.</i>
AAHP-16	It is Council policy to encourage the protection, promotion and enhancement of heritage gardens and parks in the county and support public awareness, enjoyment of and access to these sites.
AAHP-17	It is Council policy to protect archaeological sites and monuments, underwater archaeology, and archaeological objects, which are listed in the Record of Monuments and Places, and to seek their preservation in situ (or at a minimum, preservation by record) through the planning process. It is Council policy to seek to protect important archaeological landscapes from inappropriate development.
AAHP-18	It is Council policy to encourage and promote the appropriate management and maintenance of the County's archaeological heritage, including historical burial grounds, in accordance with conservation principles and best practice guidelines.
AAHP-19	It is Council policy to continue to develop the Council's advisory/educational role with regard to heritage matters and to promote awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the architectural heritage of Offaly.
AAHP-20	It is Council policy to encourage, where appropriate, the adaptive re-use of existing buildings and sites in a manner compatible with their character and significance.
AAHP-21	It is Council policy to identify places of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest and where appropriate to define them as Architectural Conservation Areas.
AAHP-22	It is Council policy to require that all development proposals within an ACA should be appropriate to the character of the area, inclusive of its general scale and materials, and are appropriately sited and sensitively designed having regard to the advice given in the Statements of Character for each area.

7.20 Architectural and Archaeological Heritage Objectives¹⁹

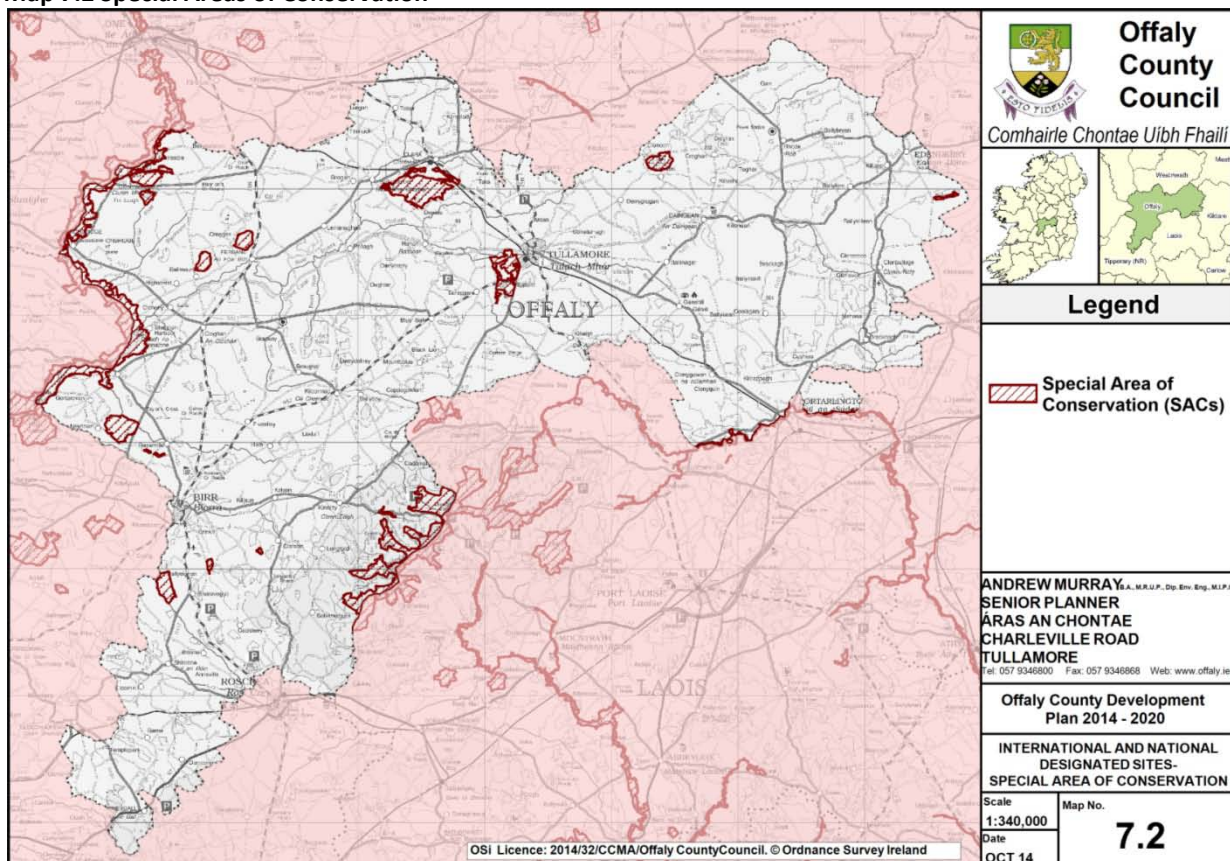
AAHO-01	It is an objective of the Council to examine the feasibility of designating Architectural Conservation Areas in the county over the plan period.
AAHO-02	It is an objective of the Council to protect all structures listed in the Record of Protected Structures, that are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest throughout the county.
AAHO-03	It is an objective of the Council to protect the Slí Mór and Slí Dála routes and sign post them where appropriate.
AAHO-04	It is an objective of the Council to secure the protection (i.e. preservation in situ or at a minimum protection by record) of all archaeological monuments included in the Record of Monuments and Places as established under Section 12 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994, and their setting.
AAHO-05	It is an objective of the Council to protect and preserve archaeological sites and their settings discovered since the publication of the Record of Monuments and Places and the publication of the Urban Archaeology Survey.
AAHO-06	It is an objective of the Council to protect the Zones of Archaeological Potential identified in the Record of Monuments and Places.
AAHO-07	It is an objective of the Council to prohibit the demolition of a structure that positively contributes to the character of an ACA, except in exceptional circumstances. The Council will require such applications to be accompanied by a measured and photographic survey, condition report and architectural heritage assessment of the structure. Where permission for demolition is granted within an ACA, an assessment of the impact of the replacement building on the character of the ACA will be required.
AAHO-08	It is an objective of the Council to ensure that any new development within or contiguous to an ACA is sympathetic to the character of the area and that the design is appropriate in terms of scale, height, plot density, layout, materials and finishes.
AAHO-09	The council acknowledges the nomination by the Government of Ireland, of two Monastic sites, Clonmacnoise and Durrow, on the tentative list for inclusion to the UNESCO World Heritage sites list. It is an objective of the Council to explore potential of further designating the Monastic Sites at Clonmacnoise and Durrow as prospective UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

¹⁹ The order of listing of objectives is not intended to indicate priorities. Subject to the availability of resources, it is the Council's aim to monitor and accomplish the objectives listed in this section within the period of the plan.

Map 7.1 Natural Heritage Areas



Map 7.2 Special Areas of Conservation



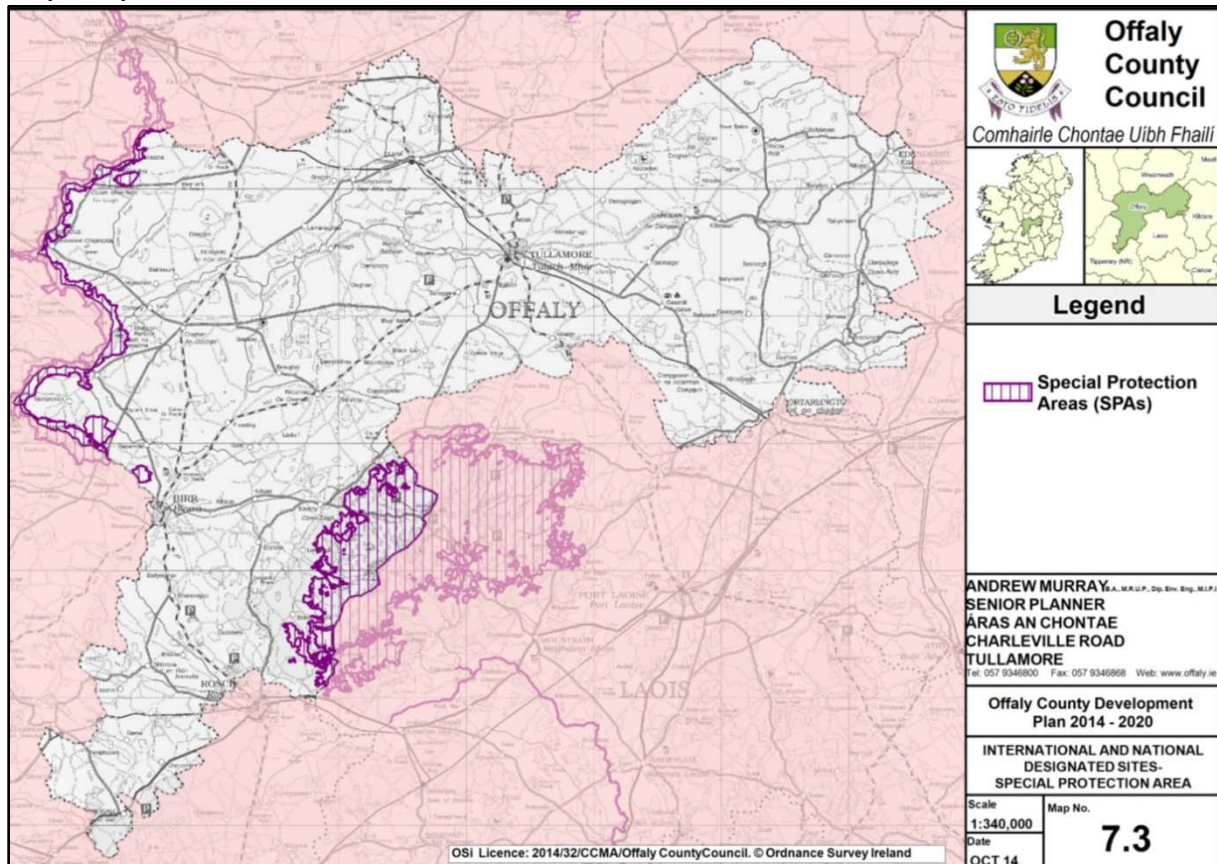
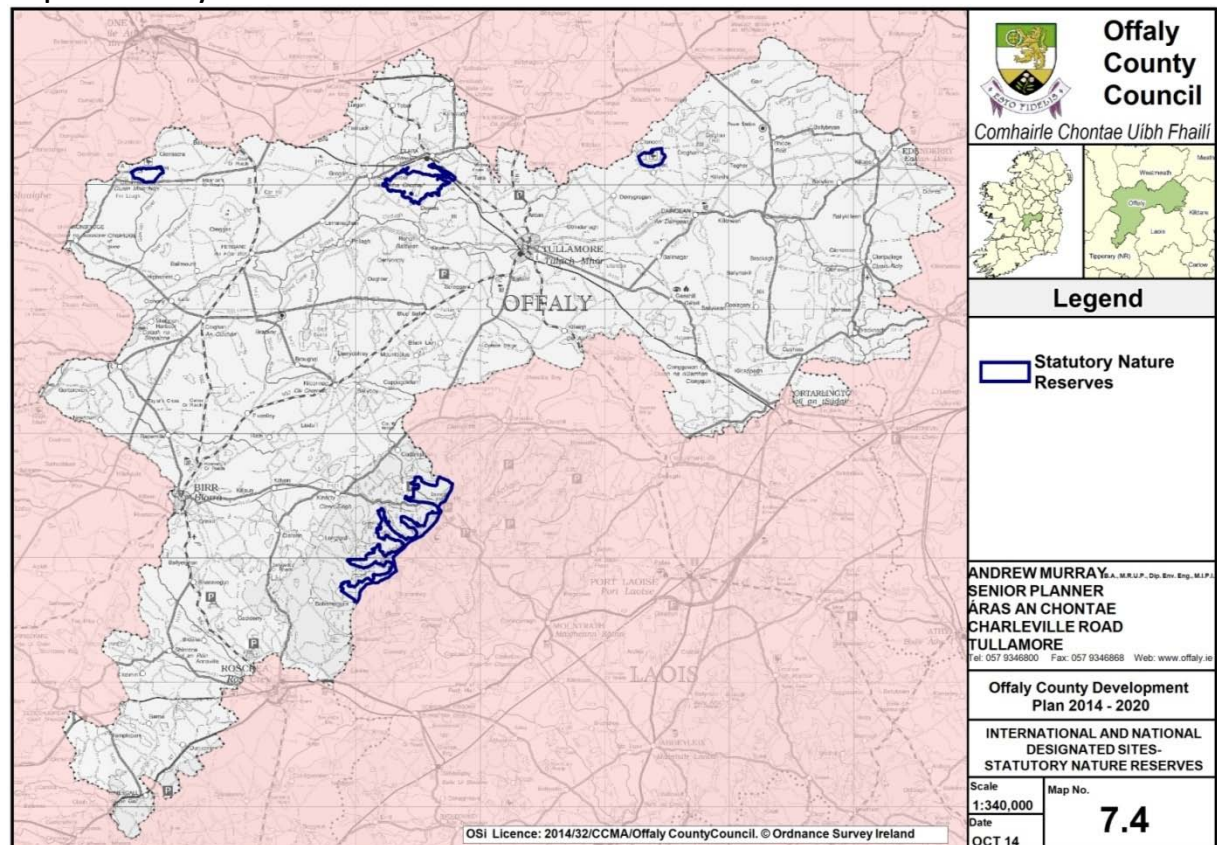
Map 7.3 Special Protection Areas

Map 7.4 Statutory Nature Reserves


Table 7.5 Ramsar Sites

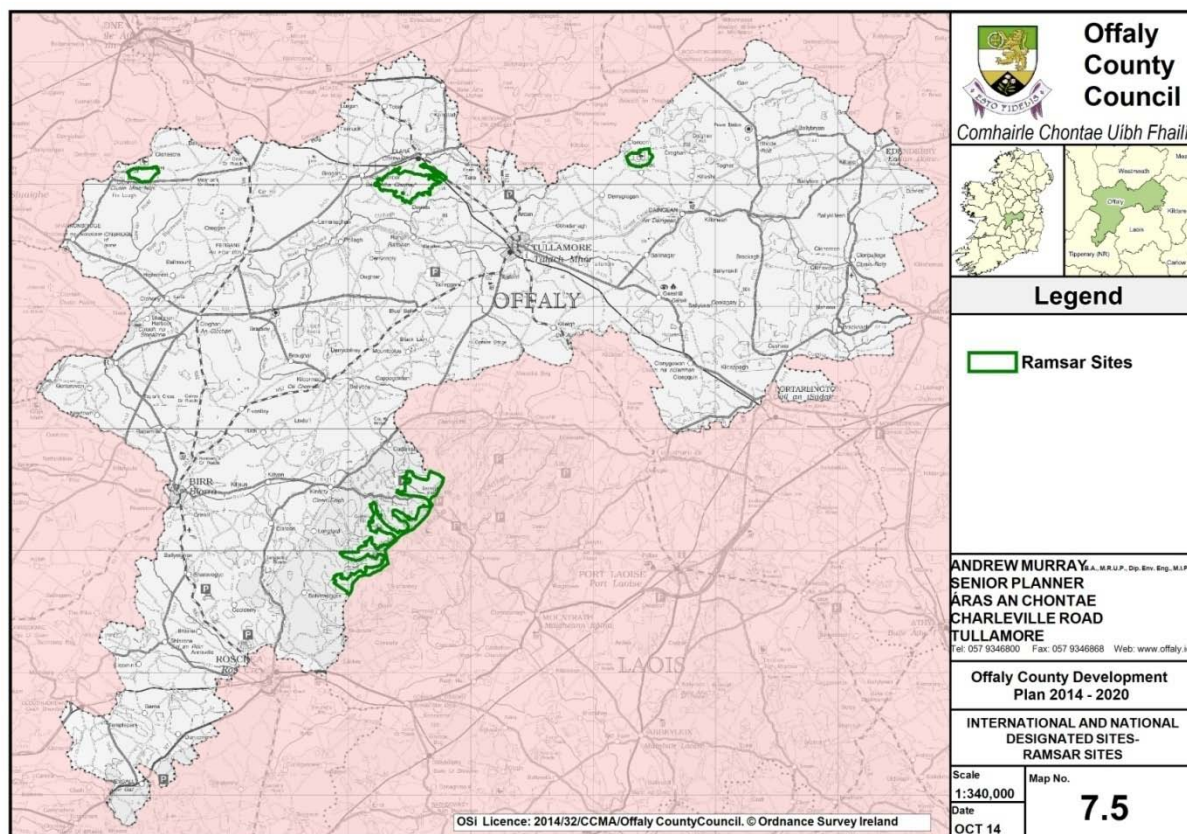


Table: 7.6 Biogentic Reserves

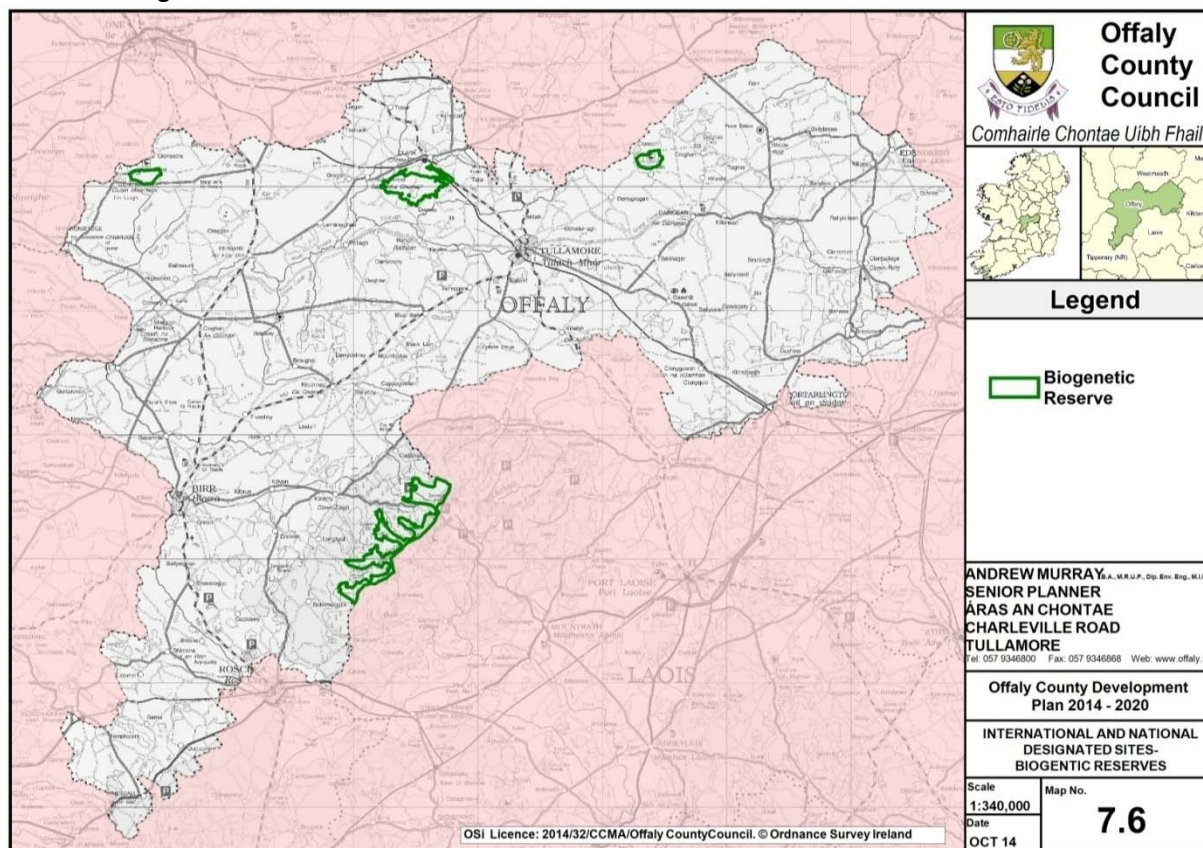


Table 7.7 Peatlands

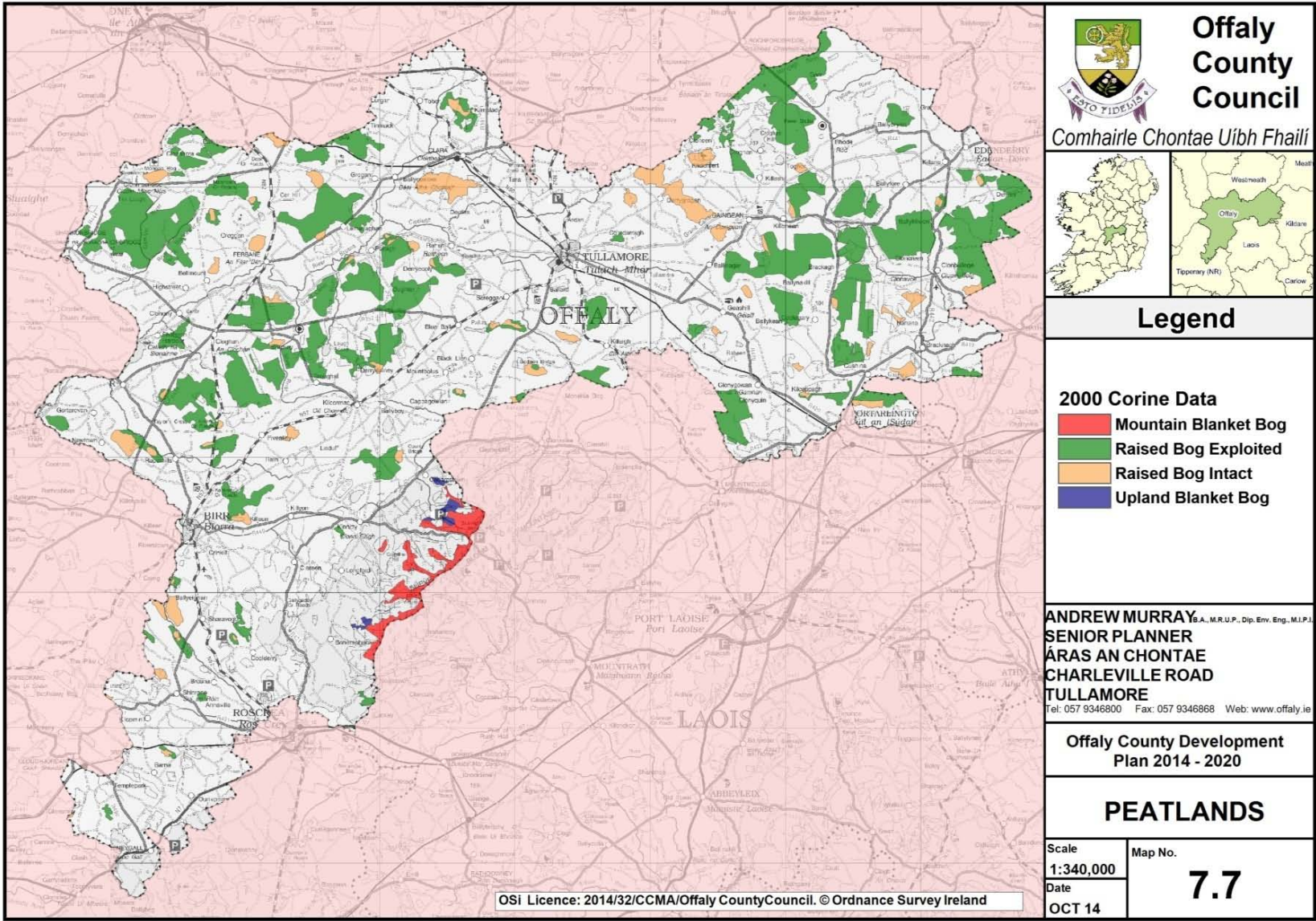


Table 7.8 Eskers

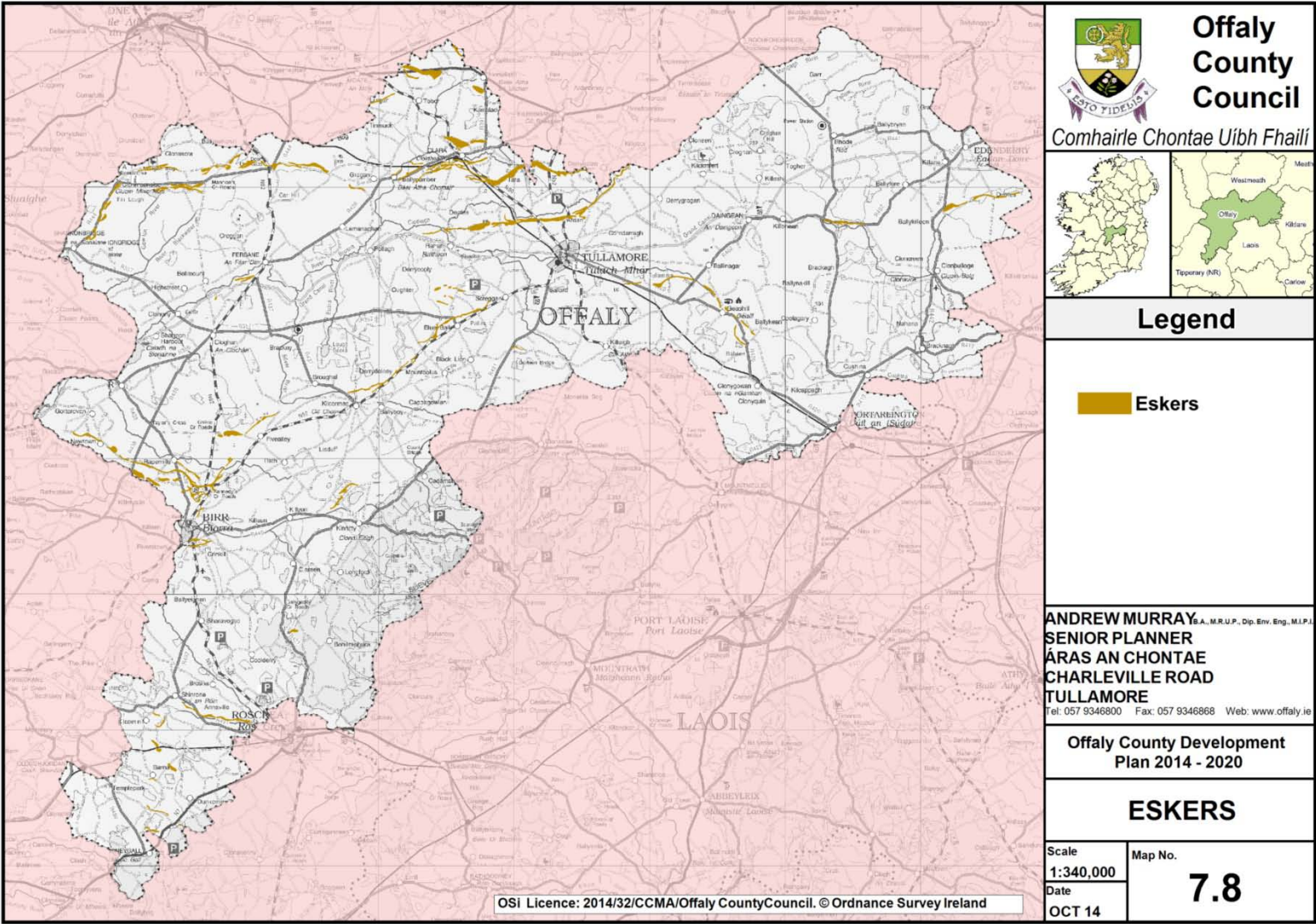


Table 7.9 Topography

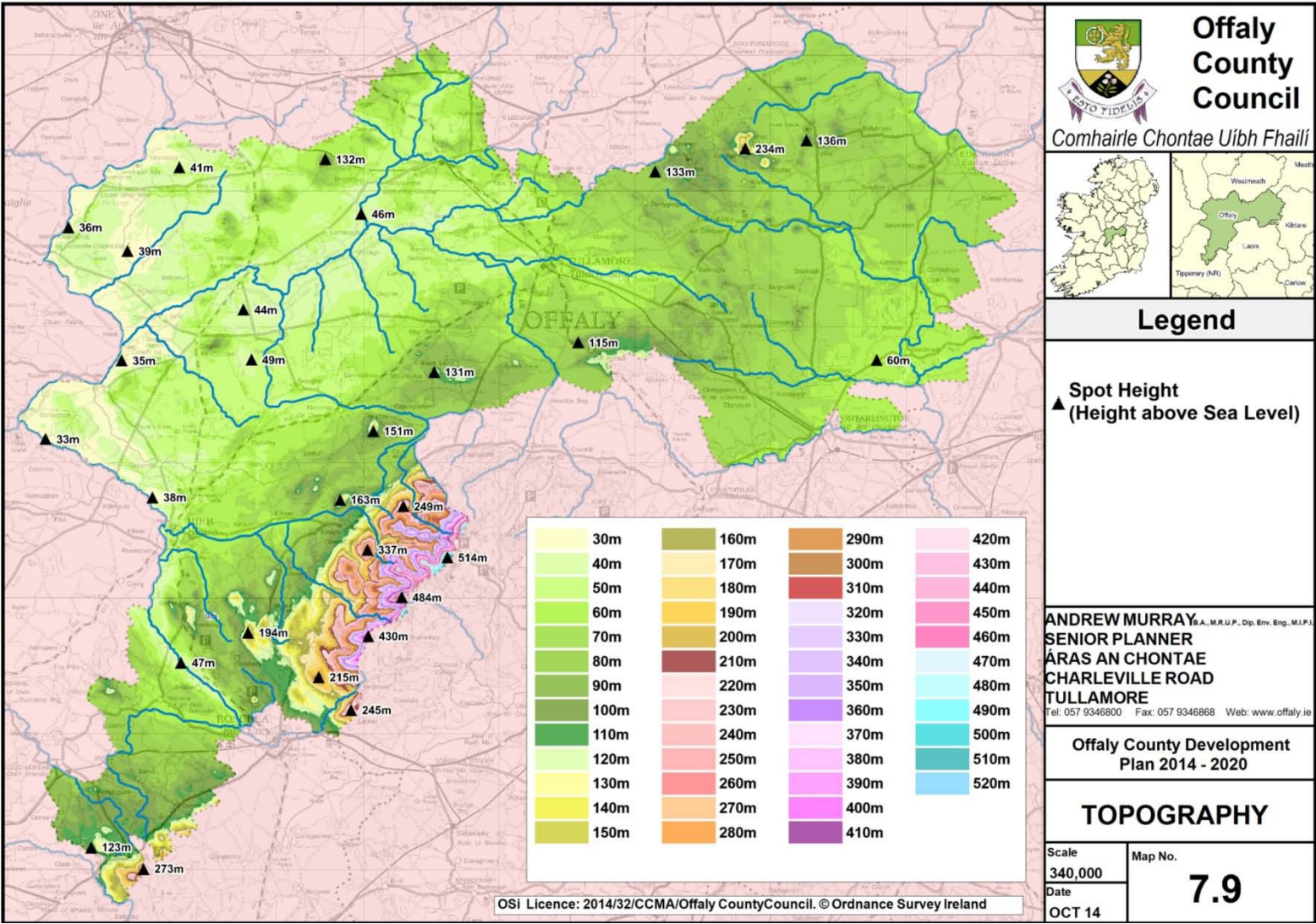


Table 7.10 Uplands

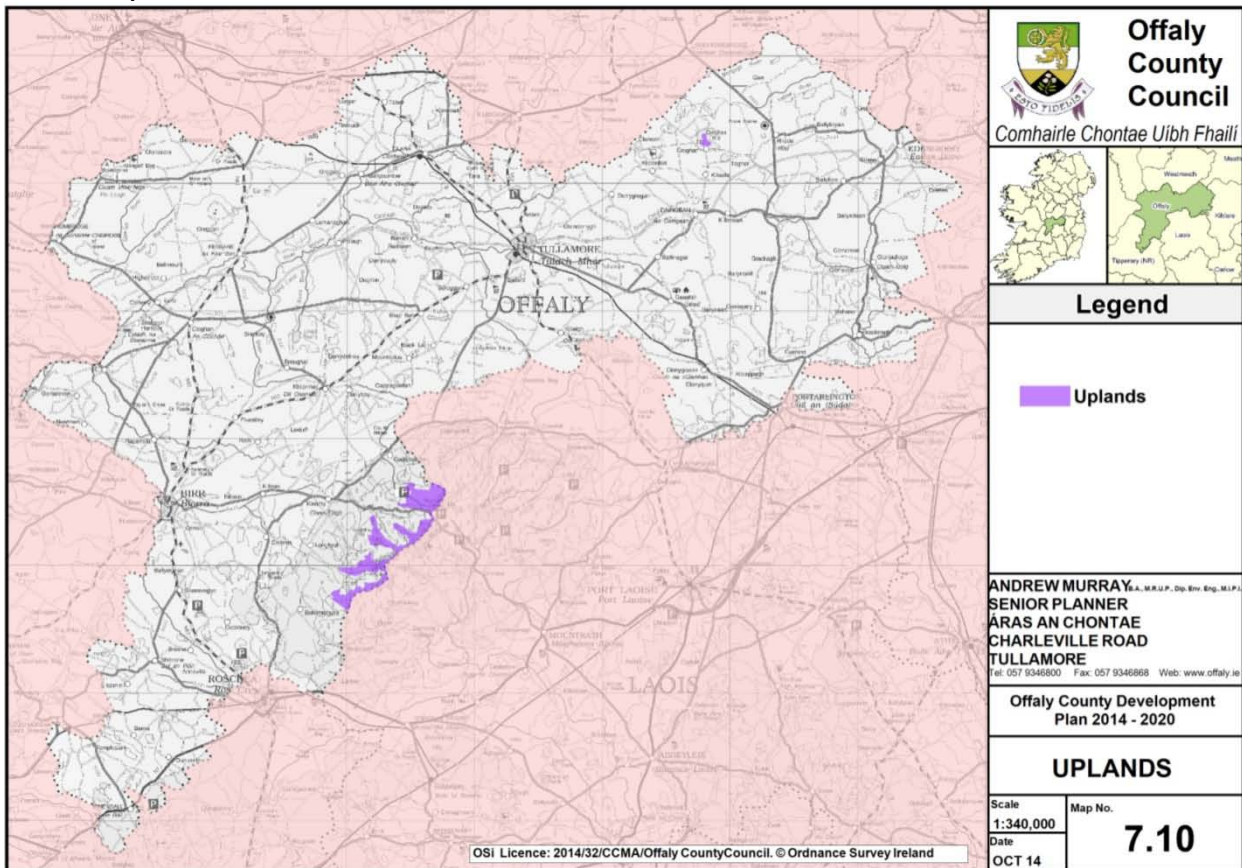


Table 7.11 Wetlands

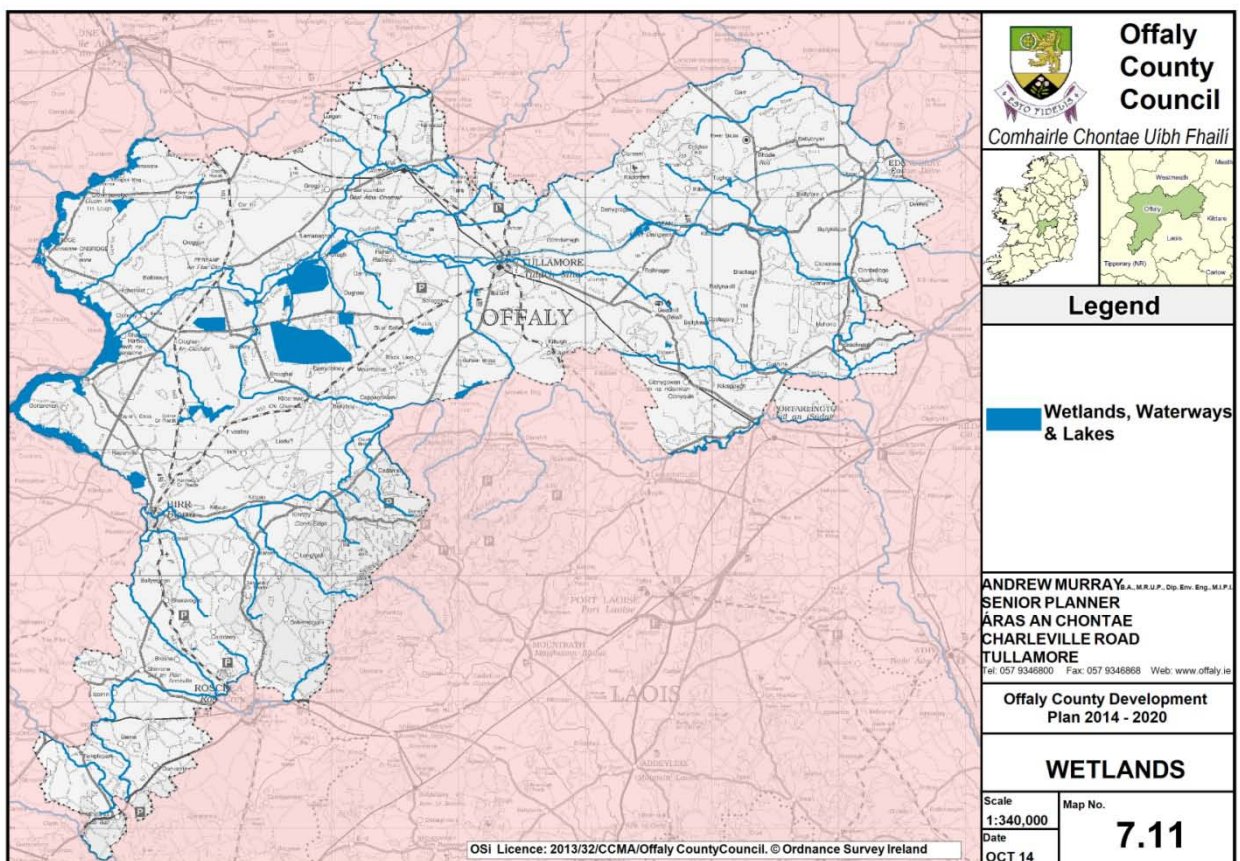


Table 7.12 Forest Cover

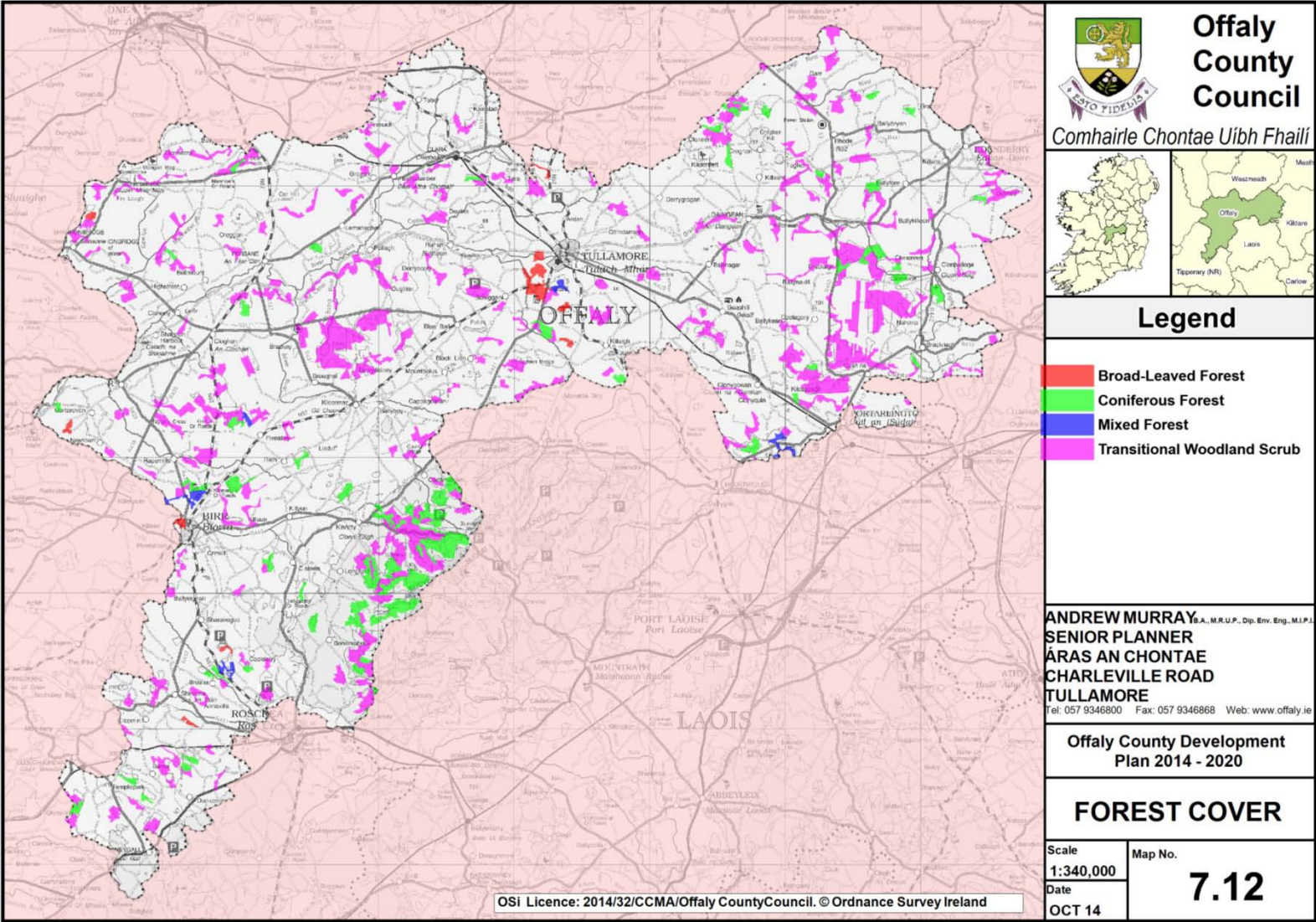


Table 7.14 Amenity Trees

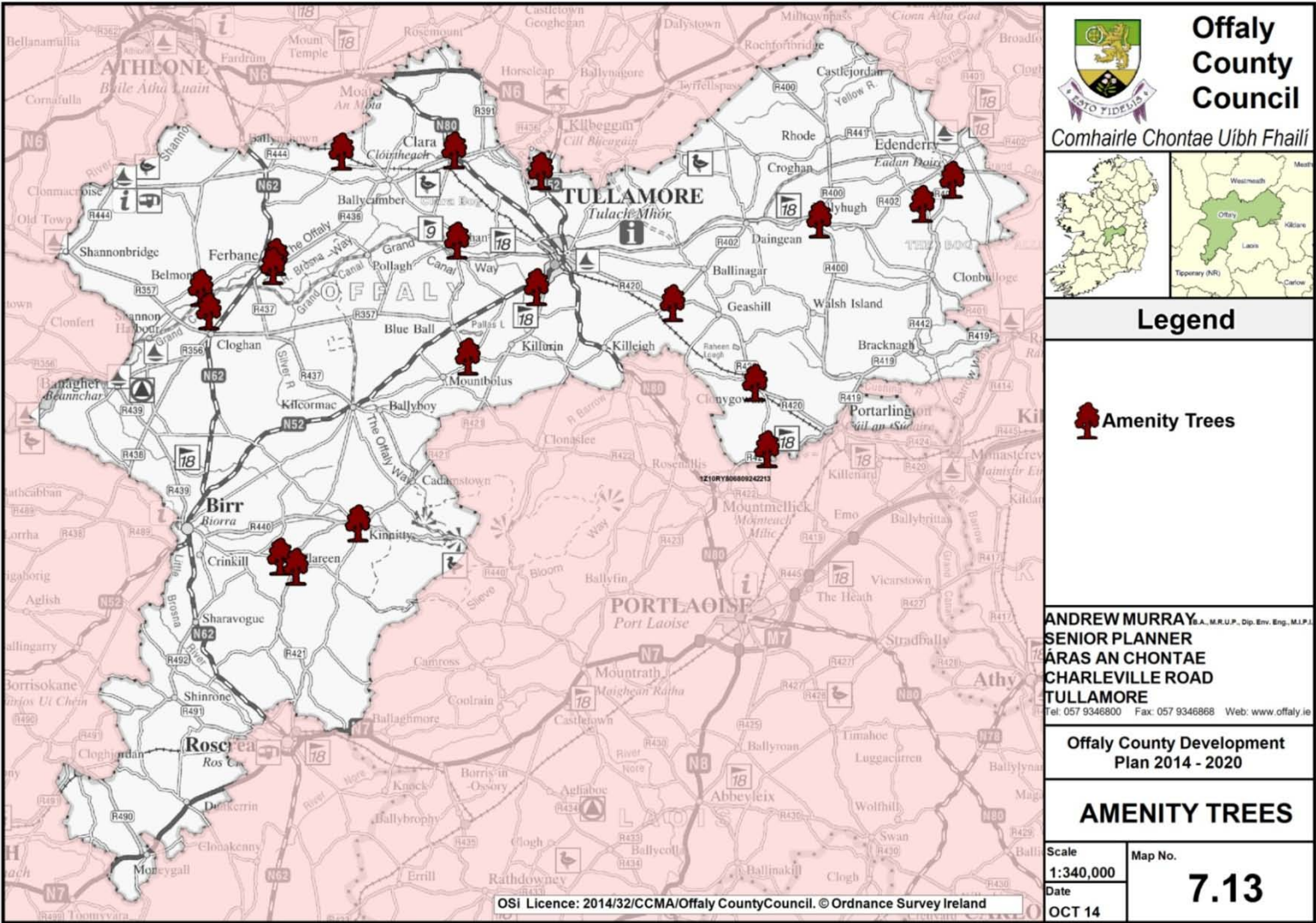


Table 7.14 Green Infrastructure

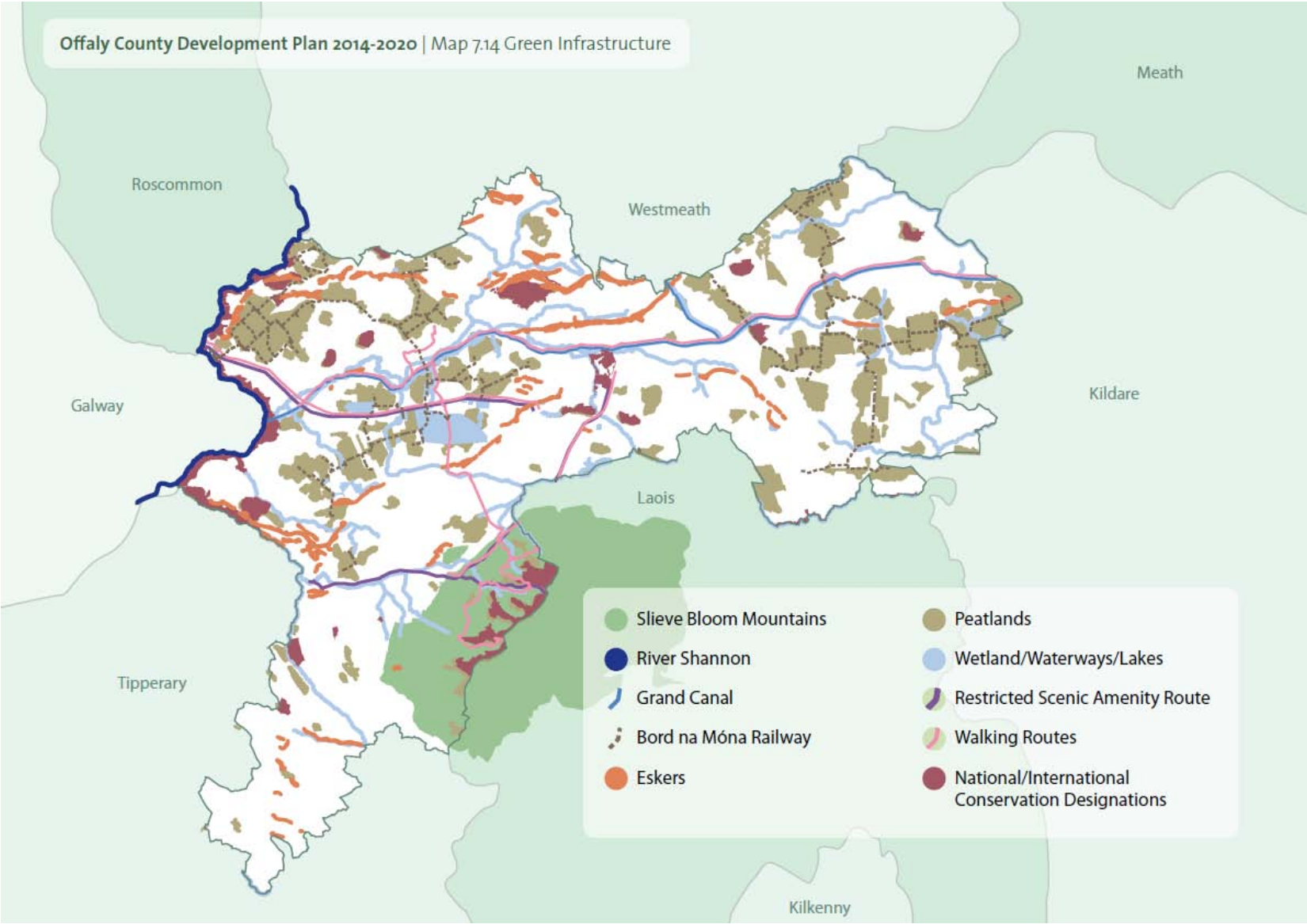


Table 7.15 Landscape Classification

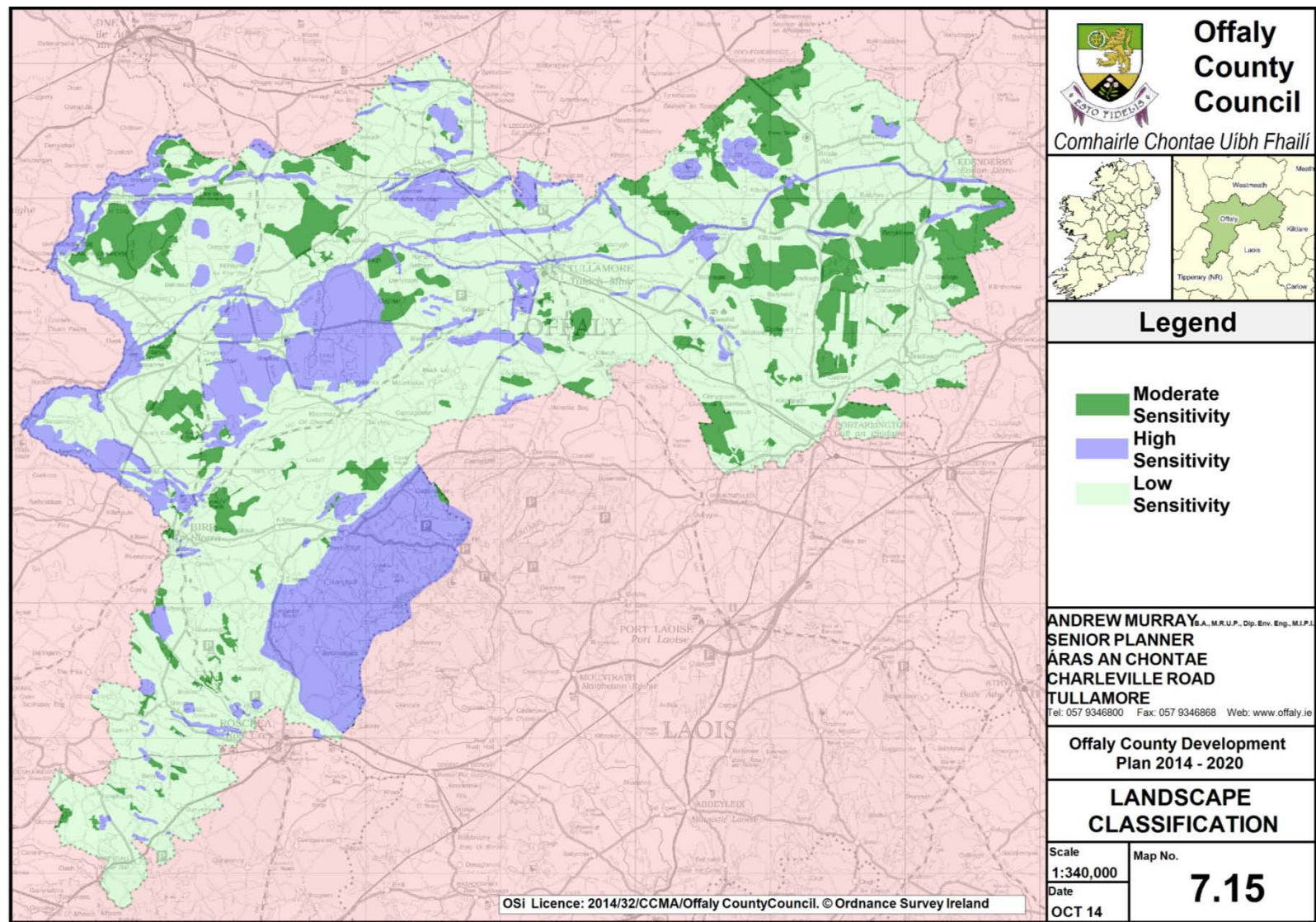


Table 7.16 Archaeological & Historical Landscapes

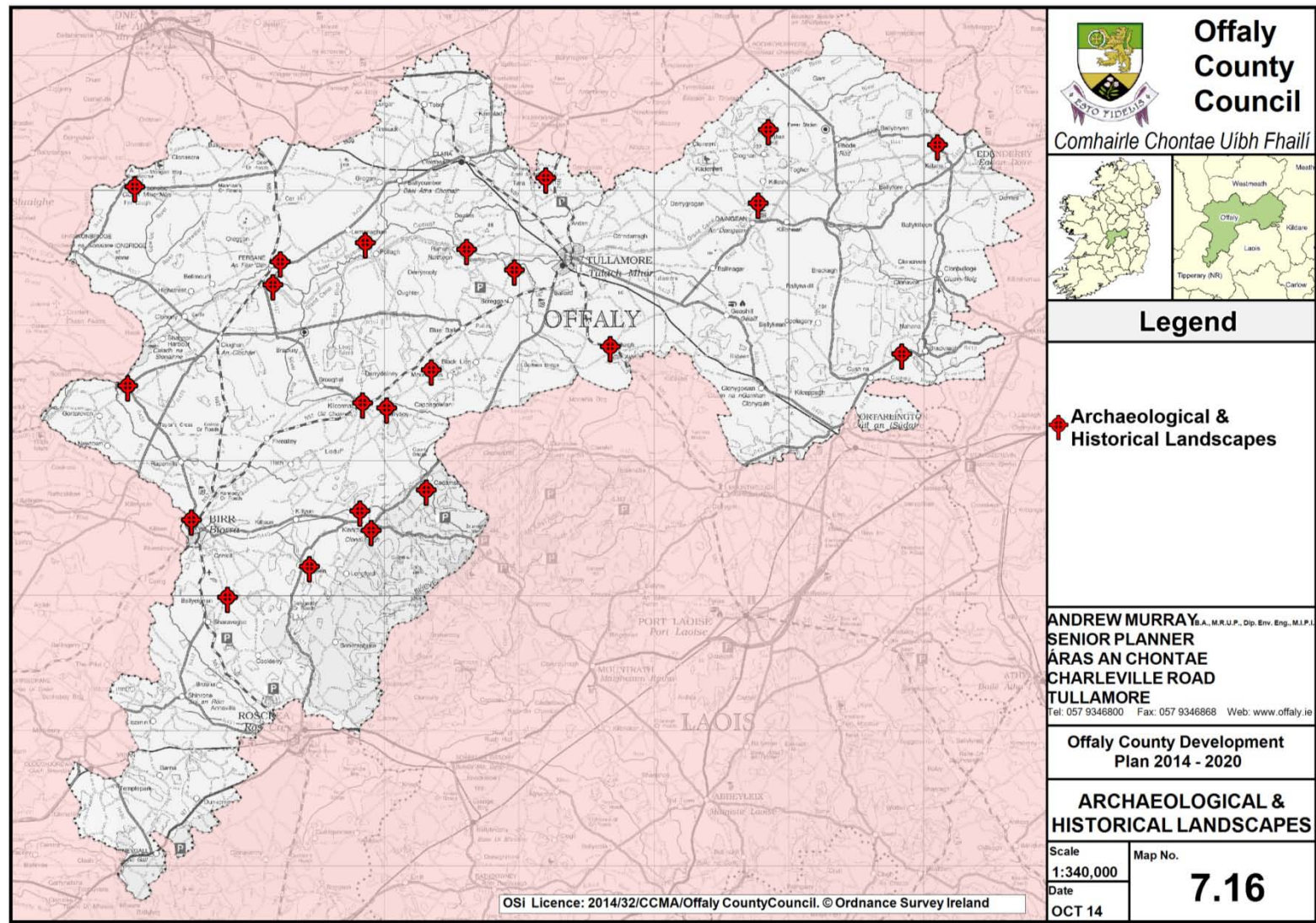


Table 7. 17 Areas of High Amenity

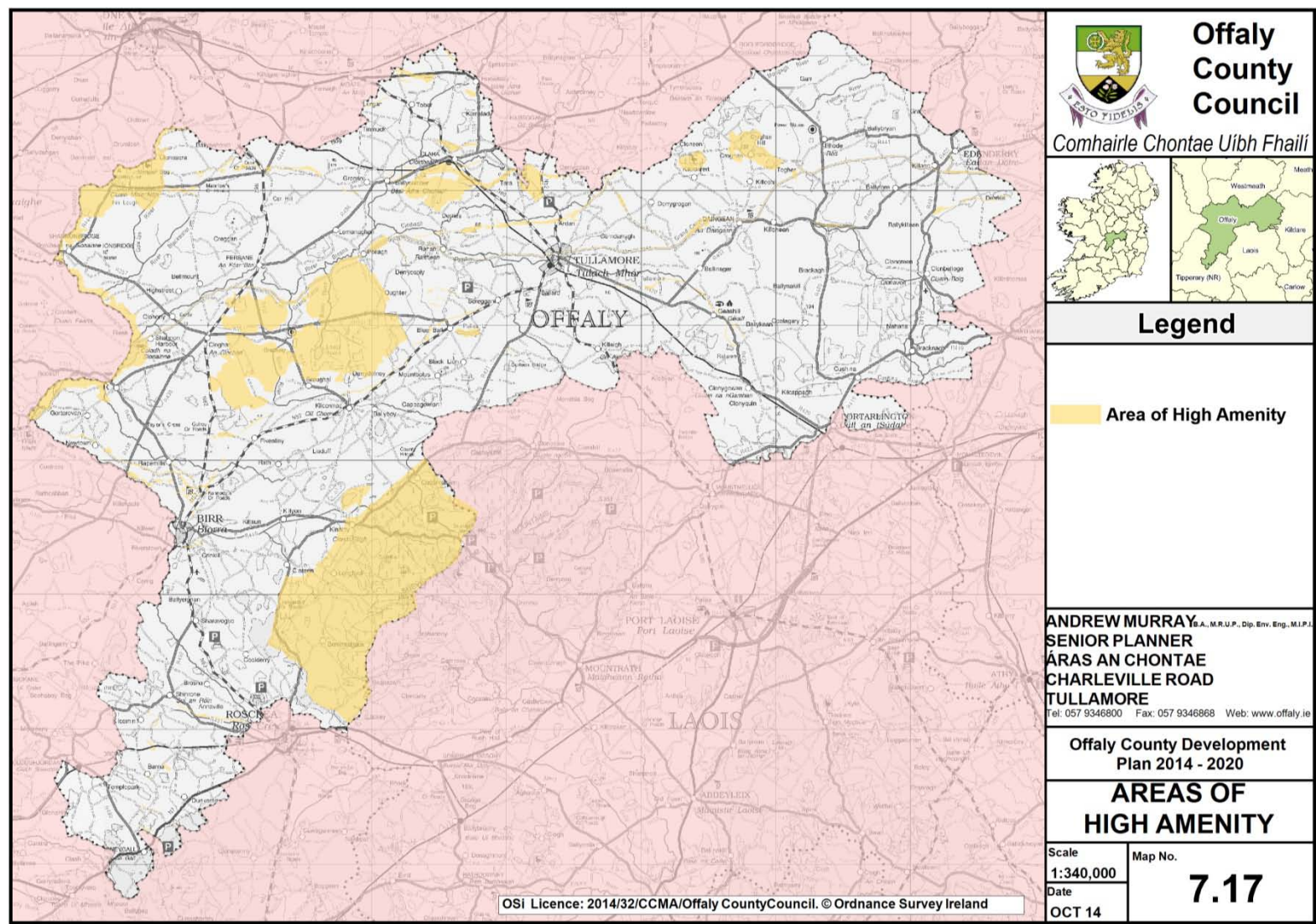


Table 7.18 Protected Views

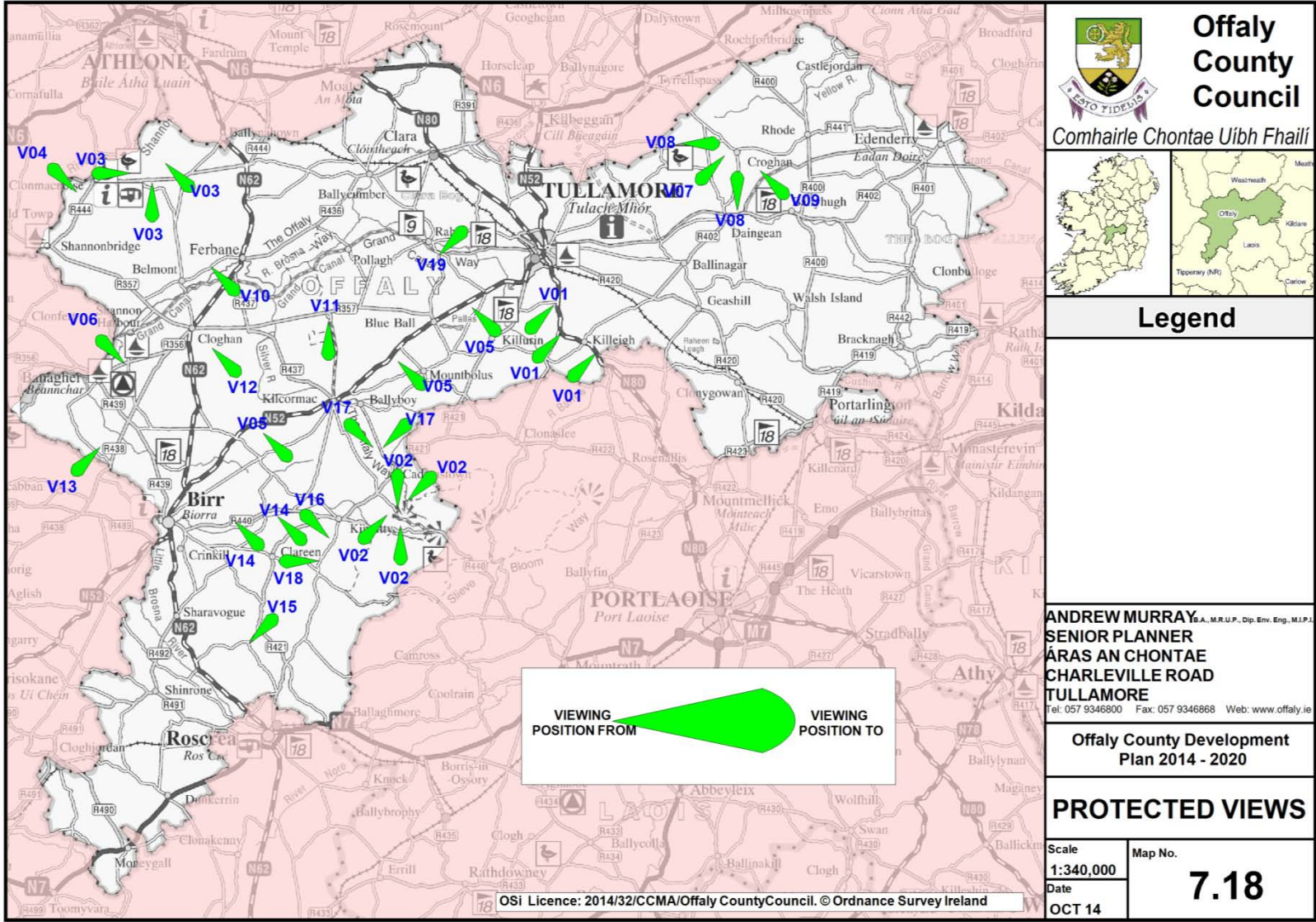


Table 7.19 Scenic Routes

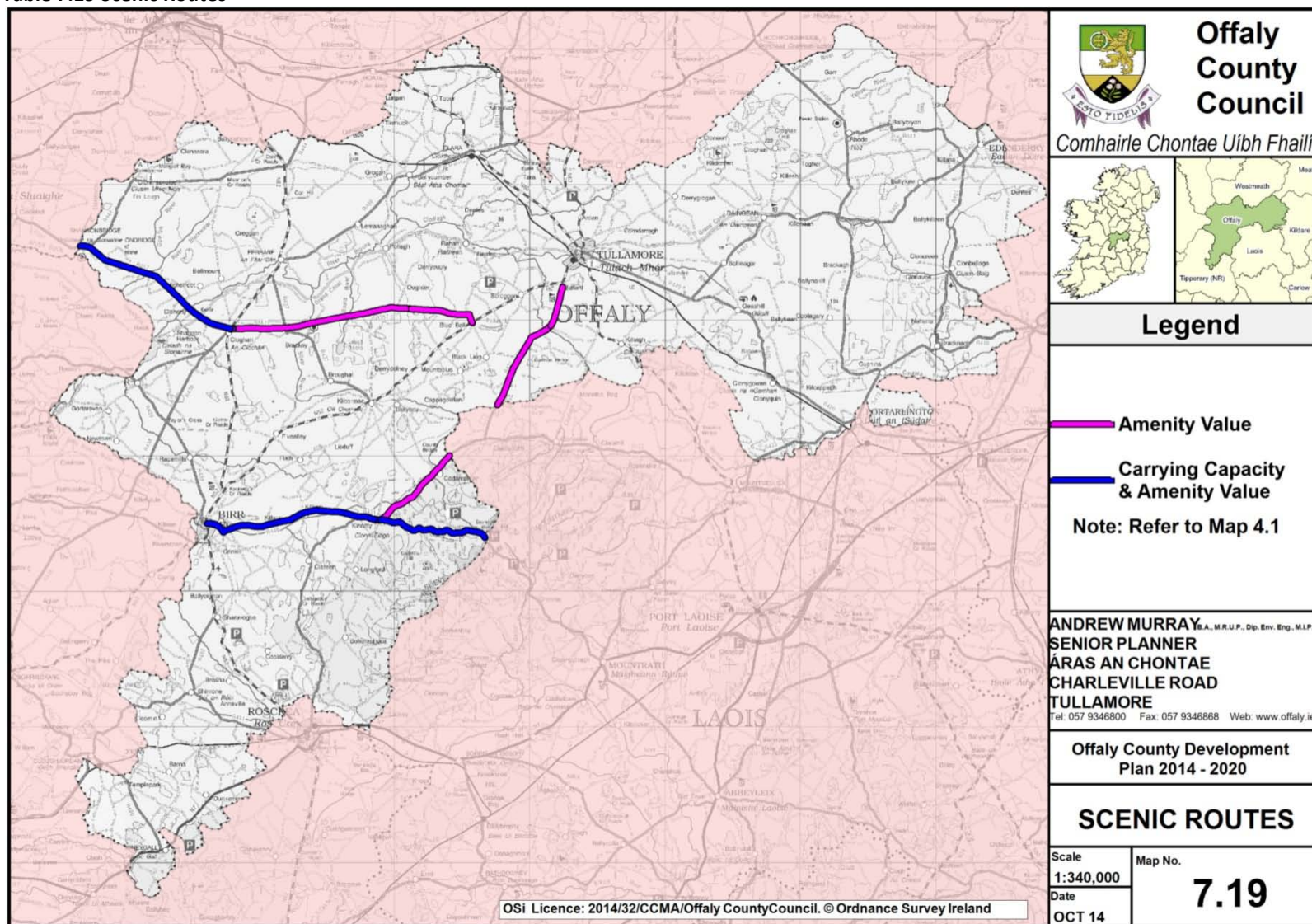


Table 7.20 Monuments and Places of Archaeological Interest

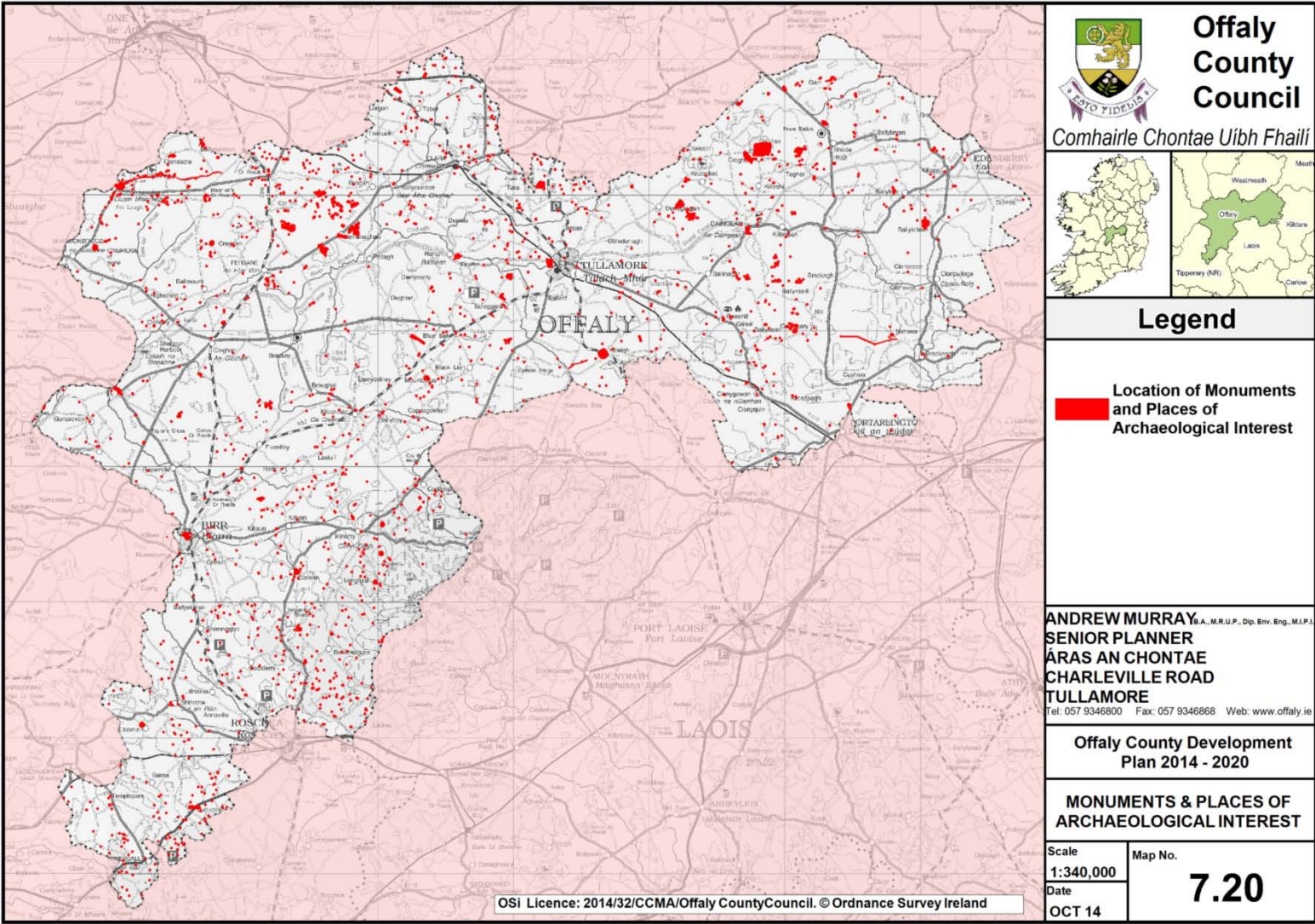
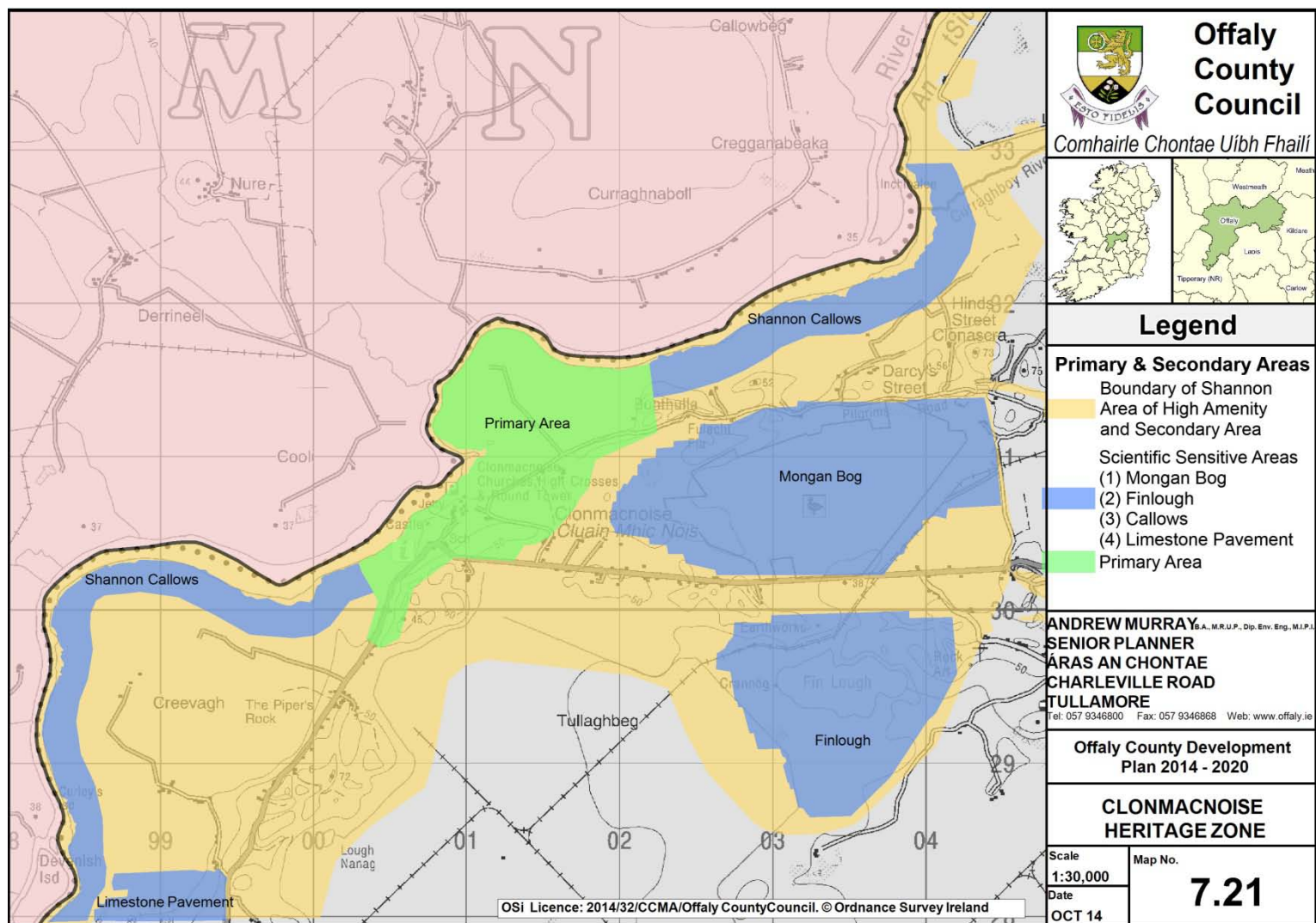


Table 7.21 Clonmacnoise Heritage Zone



Chapter 8: Development Management Standards

8.1 Aim

To promote, guide and enforce high standards of development quality in urban and rural areas throughout the county having regard to quality of life, the environment, community, and the economy and surrounding areas.

This chapter is prepared in the context of the following documents:

- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and projects in Ireland- Guidelines for Planning Authorities, NPWS, 2009.
- DEHLG's Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas, Guidelines for Planning Authorities & Best practice Urban Design Manual May 09.
- Smarter Travel Policies – 2009.
- Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets, Department of Transport Tourism and Sport, 2013.
- The Offaly Local Anti-Poverty Strategy 2008-2013.
- Part M of the Building Regulations (S.I. No. 179 of 2000)
- Part L of the Building Regulations (S.I. No. of 2011).
- DEHLG's, Childcare Facilities Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2001.
- National Disability Authority's Building For Everyone Planning Guidance (Booklet 9, 2009)
- DECLG's 'Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities – Best Practice Guidelines for Delivering Homes Sustaining Communities' (2007).
- Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities by the DEHLG, 2012 & Retail Design Manual Appendix.
- DEHLG's Quarries and Ancillary Activities, Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2004.
- OCC Rural Design Guidelines – '*Designing houses-Creating homes*'.
- Shop Front Design and Signage Leaflet OCC.
 - Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures –Guidelines for Planning Authorities issued by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in July 1996 and Circular Letter PL07/12 (Telecommunication Antennae and Support Structures).
- Wind Energy Development Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2006.
- Code of Practice – Waste Water treatment and disposal systems, EPA.2009

8.2 Appropriate Assessment (AA)

Plans and projects which have potential to impact on European Sites must be screened for Appropriate Assessment (AA) and full Appropriate Assessment must be carried out unless it can be established through screening that the plan or project in question will not have a significant effect on any European Sites (refer to Chapter 7 for European Sites).

8.3 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is the process by which environmental considerations are required to be fully integrated into the preparation of plans and programmes and prior to their final adoption. The objectives of the SEA process are to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to promote sustainable development by contributing to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of specified plans and programmes.

The requirement for SEA derives from the SEA Directive (2001/42/EC). Eleven sectors are specified in the Directive and competent authorities (Planning Authority) must subject specific plans and programmes for these sectors to an environmental assessment where they are likely to have significant effects on the environment.

8.4 Planning Guidelines – DoECLG

The Department produces a range of guidelines designed to help planning authorities, An Bord Pleanála, developers and the general public. They cover a wide range of issues amongst others, architectural heritage, child care facilities, landscape, quarries and residential density, which can be viewed on the DECLG website.

<http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/PlanningDevelopment/Planning/>

All of these in particular those that are produced under Section 28 Guidelines,¹ are relevant to and applicable to development proposals in Offaly.

The development management standards outlined therein are a minimum and in some cases the Development Management Standards outlined below will supersede Department guidelines. Some of the more relevant Guidelines and Policy documents are listed below.

8.5 Strategy

The purpose of this chapter is to encourage the creation of living and working environments of the highest quality by ensuring high standards of design and layout, to conserve and build upon positive elements in the built and natural environment, and to protect amenities.

¹ Under Section 28 of the Planning Act 2000, as Amended, the Minister may at anytime issue guidelines to planning authorities regarding any of their functions under the Planning Act. Planning Authorities (and the Board where applicable) must have regard to these in the performance of their functions.

These development standards are designed to give the plan a strategic focus for recurring forms of development in the area. It is intended that reference to these development standards will provide guidance and assistance to those who seek permission for development. These standards support and inform the implementation of planning policies and objectives.

8.5.1 Offaly Settlement Hierarchy

The settlement hierarchy outlined in the Core Strategy (Chapter 1) will determine the scale and density of new residential developments in our towns and villages. The scale of new residential schemes for development should be appropriate to the pattern and grain of existing development. Chapter 6 '*Small Towns and Villages*' of the Sustainable Residential Developments in Urban Areas Guidelines should guide all proposals in Local Service Towns and Villages identified in Volume 2 of this plan.

8.6 Residential Development – Multiple Housing Schemes

Housing developments are new communities or extensions to existing communities and the Planning Authority considers that all such developments should strive for high standards. It is the over-arching aim of the Council to produce high quality homes and neighbourhoods, where people want to live, to work and raise families, now and into the future. In particular, the form, scale and design of developments should respect and enhance their context.

In this regard all multiple housing schemes must have regard to the DEHLG, Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Developments in Urban Areas (Cities, Towns & Villages) and the accompanying Urban Design Manual, A Best Practice Guide (May 2009).

Significantly for County Offaly these guidelines give specific guidance on residential development for towns and villages acknowledging that different solutions are required to meet different scales and patterns of development.

A high quality of architectural design and layout are the main criteria for achieving a high quality living environment and all housing developments will be

assessed against the policies, objectives and standards of this County Development Plan.

8.6.1 Role of Design

To achieve good urban design in residential developments, (including apartment developments), the *12 Urban Design Principles* set out in the Urban Design Manual – A Best Practice Guide (2009) should be taken into account in designing schemes. Proposals for residential developments must include a design brief/statement which demonstrates in detail how the proposal addresses the 12 criteria.

The following standards apply to residential developments in conjunction with the Sustainable Residential Developments Guidelines and Best Practice Manual.

8.6.2 Overshadowing

The Council will require daylight and shadow projection diagrams to be submitted in all proposals where buildings of a significant height are involved or where new buildings are located very close to adjoining buildings. This will provide an element of control in situations where overlooking occurs.

8.6.3 Open Space (Low Density Housing)

A relaxation of Open Space standards may be considered where the overall density of a proposal is <8 dwellings per hectare as the provision of space within the dwelling curtilages over and above the minimum required may be taken into account. The Planning Authority will also have regard to any current recreation and play strategies adopted by the Council.

8.6.4 Private Open Space (Residential Development)

All houses (terraced, semi-detached, detached) shall have an area of private open space behind the building line of at least 60-75 m² for 3-5 bedroomed houses. In the case of 1 and 2 bedroom houses, a slightly reduced standard may be acceptable; however this should not be less than 48 m² per dwelling.

In the case of apartment and duplex style schemes, private open space is to be provided in the form of landscaped areas, courtyards, terraces/patios and balconies. Roof gardens should also be considered. The recommended minimum standards for private open

space in this situation will depend on the location of such. For instance, one bedroomed apartments close to town centres will require 20m² and two or three bedroomed apartments will require 25-30m².

8.6.5 Screen Walls and Boundaries

Screen walls constructed of brick/stone/rendered block work, 1.8 metres in height and constructed in accordance with current standards and regulations shall be provided to enclose private open space and where the boundaries of the sites abut roads, pedestrian ways or open spaces.

A uniform treatment for the boundaries of individual sites shall be implemented throughout a residential development. In general, front boundaries shall be defined by walls or fences at least 0.5 metres high in keeping with the house design. Open plan front gardens will generally be discouraged and will only be acceptable in innovative layouts and where a high level of safety is achieved. Open plan gardens will not be allowed on main access roads.

The walls shall be capped and the design and finish should be consistent with the design/finish of the house design. Post and wire or timber panel fencing shall not be permitted.

8.6.6 Space around Buildings

Generally a minimum distance of 2.5m for single storey, and 3m for two-storey buildings will be required to be maintained between the side walls of adjacent dwellings or dwelling blocks each having a minimum of 1 metre (from the dwelling to the boundary). This standard may be relaxed where the dwelling incorporates a single storey structure to the side.

A rear garden area with a minimum depth of 11 metres will be required, except in the case of infill developments in towns and villages where shorter garden lengths may be permitted. In the event of high quality design being achieved, these standards may be relaxed.

Overlooking and overshadowing of adjacent residences should be avoided/minimised in order to preserve residential amenity. In general there should be a distance of 22 metres between opposing first floor

windows. This separation distance will be increased for developments over two storeys in height.

8.6.7 Side Windows

Generally windows in the gable/side walls of dwellings will not be permitted where the windows would closely overlook the curtilage of an adjoining dwelling. In the case of single storey dwelling, gable/side windows which are more than 6 metres from a properly screened common boundary may be permitted.

8.6.8 Phasing of Residential Developments

A phasing programme is required for large/medium sized housing development (50+ units) detailing proposals for completing roads, open space, public lighting etc. in line with house completions.

8.6.9 Masterplans

Where large scale developments are proposed, the developer should submit a Masterplan of the site in conjunction with surrounding lands. This provides the knowledge and assistance in that the layout of the site can develop in an integrated coherent fashion with adjacent lands.

8.6.10 Bin Storage and Recycling

Adequate provision needs to be made for the storage and collection of waste materials. Each house shall have adequate storage space for three wheeled bins.

Waste storage facilities should be provided for all forms of development in accordance with national policy and the relevant Waste Management Plan. In residential schemes, bin storage areas should be provided to the front of terraced dwellings. These areas should be screened and the design integrated with the dwelling. Apartment developments should make provision for waste segregation and recycling. Shared bin storage areas shall be located conveniently for the residents of the development and collection service providers.

In assessing planning applications, regard will be had to the waste produced by proposed developments including the nature and amount produced and the proposed method of management. Developments should ensure that production/management methods do not give rise to environmental pollution, result in

undue loss of amenity or be detrimental to public health.

In assessing all significant construction/demolition projects, the developer shall include construction and demolition waste management plans. These plans should seek to focus on waste minimisation in general and optimise waste prevention, re-use and recycling opportunities. These plans are required for developments of ten or more housing units or commercial or industrial developments on sites in excess of 0.5 hectares.

Provision shall be made for 'bring centres' in large-scale developments, except in exceptional circumstances and shall be provided for in accordance with the requirements of the Council's Environment Department (refer to policy EP-14 Chapter 4, Infrastructure and Environment). The design of all dwellings shall take account of the Environment Section's requirement for segregated collections of dry recyclable goods and organic waste.

8.6.11 Access - Part M of Building Regulations

The Council recognises the need for universal equality of access to all aspects of the built and external environment as an essential prerequisite of equal opportunity and the development of an inclusive society.

Part M of the Building Regulations (S.I. No. 179 of 2000 & 2010) sets out standards to ensure that buildings are accessible to and usable by everyone, including older people, people with disabilities and people with children. The Technical Guidance Document in relation to Part M provides guidance on the access requirements for public buildings and for residential dwellings.

The Council will have regard to the National Disability Authority's Building For Everyone Planning Guidance (Booklet 9, 2009), the UK Lifetime Homes Standards, and will seek to encourage the implementation of best practice standards with regard to access in both indoor and outdoor environments.

8.6.12 Energy Efficiency & Part L Building Regulations

Layout and building design must conform to the highest possible standards of energy efficiency and as many dwellings as possible must have access to sunlight and make use of passive solar design. New developments will be encouraged to optimise usage of orientation and natural sun lighting with single aspect housing being discouraged, particularly where it has a northerly aspect, and multiple aspects will be encouraged in apartment type development.

Part L of the Building Regulations states that a building shall be designed and constructed so as to ensure that the energy performance of the building is such as to limit the amount of energy required for the operation of the building and the amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions associated with this energy use insofar as is reasonably practicable.

There are various new technologies, which provide for more efficient heating, lighting and air conditioning of houses and save on energy costs. These include wood pellet burners, geothermal heat pumps, solar thermal panels, renewable electricity e.g. domestic wind turbines. Further information on these and other systems is available on the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland website: www.seai.ie. Under the Planning and Development Regulations 2007 – Micro Renewable Energy Technologies, some of these systems are exempt from requiring planning permission subject to compliance with certain conditions. Offaly County Council are generally in favour of the use of renewable energy systems (refer to Chapter 3, Energy Strategy).

8.6.13 Home Based Economic Activity

Home based economic activity is defined as small scale commercial activity carried out by residents of a house, being subordinate to the use of the house as a single dwelling unit and including working from home. The Council recognises that such working arrangements can benefit individuals, families and the local community in addition to contributing to more sustainable landuse patterns by reducing the need for commuting. There is no objection to minor changes of use to allow for this provided the use remains ancillary to the main residential use, the applicant continues to

reside in the house and the use has no adverse impact on the amenities of neighbouring dwellings.

In determining applications for developments involving working from home, Offaly County Council will have regard to the following considerations:

- The nature and extent of the work;
- The effects on the amenities of adjoining occupiers;
- The effects on the amenities of adjoining occupiers, particularly in relation to hours of work, noise and general disturbance;
- The effects on the amenities of adjoining occupiers, particularly in relation to hours of work, noise and general disturbance;
- Anticipated levels of traffic generated by the proposed development and the potential increased demand for parking;
- Arrangements for the storage of refuse and collection of waste.

There will be a presumption in favour of this type of use in residential areas. However, such use will not normally be permitted in apartments except in the case of own-door units accessed from street level.

8.6.14 Playground Facilities

All residential schemes in excess of 20 units should incorporate playground facilities which should be provided at a rate of 5sq.m per residential unit. Playground Facilities should cater for a defined age groups and provide for a variety of facilities and play opportunities.

8.6.15 Family Flats / Granny Flats

The creation of a family flat, generically referred to as granny flats, to be occupied by a member of the occupant's family, is generally acceptable, provided it is not a separate detached unit, and it is possible to provide direct access to the remainder of the house. There shall be no permanent sub division of the garden/private amenity space. The flat shall not be let, sold or otherwise transferred, other than as part of the overall property and shall revert to being part of the original house when no longer occupied by the family member. The design should ensure that the flat forms an integral part of the main dwelling unit capable of reintegration for single family use and, from public view, retains the appearance of a single dwelling unit. Family flats are accepted in principle in urban and rural areas.

8.6.16 Allotments

The Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, describes an allotment as *'an area of land comprising not more than 1,000 square metres let or available for letting to and cultivation by one or more than one person who is a member of the local community and lives adjacent or near to the allotment, for the purpose of the production of vegetables or fruit mainly for consumption by the person or a member of his or her family.'*

The Planning & Development Act, 2000, as amended, also allows for a local authority to indicate in a Development Plan an intention to reserve land for use and cultivation as allotments and regulating, promoting, facilitating or controlling the provision of land for that use.

8.6.17 Green Infrastructure in residential developments

Existing Green Infrastructure (Green Corridors) should be identified at the initial stages of the planning process for development and should guide the design of an appropriate site layout. These may comprise linear open spaces along paths, water courses, planting or other natural features, and provide opportunities for walking and cycling, informal recreation, and biodiversity and wildlife migration. The landscaping plan submitted with an application should clearly illustrate how existing green infrastructure, and

opportunities to create more linkages outside the site, have informed and been incorporated into the development, layout and, if appropriate, management proposals. Green corridors do not form part of the public open space provision. Refer to section on Green Infrastructure, Chapter 7.

The Planning Authority will encourage the protection of all mature trees and hedgerows, which occur on development sites and roads.

All trees, hedgerow and landscape features to be retained shall be identified and appropriately protected with suitably secure fencing prior to commencement of development, details of which shall be agreed with the Planning Authority. Please see Table 8.4 for a full list of native trees, plants and shrubs.

8.6.18 Crime Prevention through Design

A reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour can be achieved through the careful consideration of the building layout and the environmental design of a development. Consideration of how a proposed scheme may work and the early identification of areas of potential concern should be undertaken at the outset to identify any potential problems. Contact with the local Garda Crime Prevention Officer is advisable for larger developments.

The following should be considered when designing new developments in terms of crime prevention:

- Layout, design and lighting of roads and footpaths,
- Car parking, both surface and underground,
- Through-roads and cul-de-sacs,
- Planting and seating next to a footpath,
- Communal areas,
- Dwelling boundaries as well as side and rear boundaries to other premises,
- Access gates to rear gardens as well as rear access paths/laneways,
- Layout and orientation of dwellings,
- Gable end walls,
- Climbing aids,
- Passive surveillance of open space, streets and circulation routes.

8.6.19 Taking in Charge of Estates

The document 'Offaly County Council Policy for Taking in Charge Policy of Housing Developments', adopted by Offaly County Council 2009, outlines the Council's taking in charge policy for private housing developments. Implementation by planning authorities of the requirements set out in Circular PD1/08 falls within the statutory scope of these Guidelines and is therefore covered by the provisions of Section 28 of the Planning and Development Acts.

8.6.20 Unfinished Housing Estates

The 2012 National Housing Development Survey using the categorisation of "seriously problematic condition" identified a no. of unfinished housing estates in Offaly. Emphasis will be placed on successfully completing and consolidating these estates in line with the relevant Site Resolution Plans in place. Appropriate density controls, phasing, and high design standards will be required in all settlements for future residential developments.

8.6.21 Building Regulations

All new dwellings must comply with the Building Regulations which set out standards for new build and workmanship on topics such as Part B (Fire Safety), Part F (Ventilation), Part L (Conservation of Fuel & Energy), and Part M (Access for People with Disabilities).

A grant of planning permission does not necessarily mean that any proposed structure complies with the Building Regulations, given that the Planning and Building Regulations are independent of each other.

It is important that the Building Regulations inform and direct the pre-planning of any new structure as attempting to implement the Building Regulations at a later stage could significantly compromise any grant of planning permission.

8.6.22 Other

Applicants for multiple housing developments should also have regard to the sections in this chapter on roads, carparking, archaeology and biodiversity.

8.7 Single Houses in the Countryside

All rural dwellings shall comply with the settlement location policy as set out in the Core Strategy and Settlement Strategy, Chapter 1

8.7.1 Siting and Design

The Planning Authority will require that all planning applications for single houses in the countryside demonstrate a high standard of siting and design. To assist applicants in this regard, the Planning Authority has design guidelines for the County (*Designing houses creating homes*) which are available from the Council and include advice on a number of issues including:

- Site location and site layout;
- Scale and form;
- Design;
- Material finishes and colour;
- Roadside boundary treatment;
- Landscaping;
- Sustainability and Energy Efficiency;
- Accessibility, lifetime adaptability and exteriors;

Additional to the above, full consideration should be given to solar gain and orientation within the proposed development to maximise energy efficiency and thereby reduce the carbon dioxide emissions resulting from the houses energy consumption.

8.7.2 Site Size

In order to accommodate a wastewater treatment system and associated percolation area, a minimum site area of 0.2ha (0.5 acres) is required. In the case of sites served by a bored well the minimum site size is 0.3 ha (0.75 acres). However, the Council's guidelines on siting and design of houses in the countryside also show that larger houses may need large sites on siting grounds.

8.7.3 Road Frontage

While generally a road frontage of 30 metres is required, the Council's design guidelines for houses in the countryside advocate building back from the road. This standard may be relaxed where it can be demonstrated that a proposal is in keeping with the

spirit of these guidelines and it will not give rise to an existing or future loss of residential or visual amenity. In tandem with this, applicants should also have regard to the considerations in this chapter on roads, wastewater treatment, archaeology and biodiversity.

8.7.4 Roadside Boundaries

The Council will normally require that hedgerows and other distinctive boundary treatments such as stone walls be retained as far as possible in rural areas. However, front boundary fencing will be required to be set back where:

- It is necessary to ensure safe entry and exit from a site and/or
- It is necessary to facilitate road realignment anticipated to take place within a reasonable period of time. Where appropriate, the provision of a similar type boundary, such as a masonry wall or hedgerow to replace that which has been removed, will be required. It is accepted, that where traffic considerations allow, the existing roadside boundary should be retained in the interests of amenity and of minimising the overall impact of a development, particularly in sensitive landscapes.
- Planning applications shall be accompanied by details of the proposed entrance including details of gates, piers, wing walls etc. as well as of front boundary treatment.

8.7.5 Waste Water Treatment

Applications for dwelling houses on unserved sites must comply with the EPA, Code of Practice for Wastewater Treatment Systems for Single Dwellings.

8.7.6 Building Lines

It is the policy of the Council that developments where permitted in **rural areas** along National, Regional and County Roads conform to the minimum setbacks listed in the table below. Other building lines may be specified in recognition of local conditions. In situations where there is an established building line, new houses will be expected to conform to that line, where appropriate.

Table 8.1 Building Line Requirements

Route Type	Minimum Distance between Building Line and Road
National (Primary and Secondary)	35 metres from centre of road
Regional	30 metres from centre of road
County	25 metres from centre of road

8.8 Extensions

On unserviced sites, where an extension increases the potential occupancy of a house, the adequacy of the sewage treatment and disposal facilities should be demonstrated by the applicant. It may be necessary with significant extensions to relocate an existing septic tank or proprietary system and percolation area to comply with the EPA, Code of Practice for Wastewater Treatment Systems for Single Dwellings.

Proposed extensions to residential dwellings should complement the main house.

8.9 Infill

The following guidelines relate to the provision of residential developments within existing residential or mixed use developments including along streets in towns and villages. These are particularly encouraged by the Planning Authority particularly where they eliminate a derelict structure. The following guidelines should be applied to infill sites in street locations:

- Site density, coverage and open space requirements will be considered on a site-specific basis to permit a development to integrate with the existing adjoining development. The development management

standards set out for new residential developments may be relaxed in the case of infill developments.

- Design, height, scale, materials and finishes utilised should be compatible with existing adjacent properties.
- The height of the building should be broadly similar to adjoining properties, particularly in relation to eaves and ridge roof levels.
- Boundary treatment should ensure an effective screen between proposed and existing development.
- Private open space should provide space for bin and fuel storage areas.
- Car parking should be provided in accordance with standards outlined in this chapter. In cases where this is not possible, a contribution to the Local Authority towards the provision or improvement of alternative car parking in the area will be conditioned in the event of a grant of planning permission.

8.10 Employment Uses

Industrial and commercial development will be required to satisfy minimum requirements for design, layout, access, landscaping, tree planting, boundary treatment, water supply, surface water disposal, waste water disposal, solid waste, screened storage areas, fire safety, odour control, emissions control, lighting, parking, manoeuvring space, loading and unloading space, energy efficiency and biodiversity.

Care should be taken in the laying out of parking areas to avoid conflict between the movements of customer's vehicles, goods vehicles and pedestrians.

The Planning Authority will assess applications for industrial/commercial development against the following criteria:

- Zoning;
- Neighbouring uses - whether or not the proposed development will have a significant detrimental effect on the amenities of the surrounding areas;
- Site coverage- provision of public open space to a minimum of 10-15% of site area;
- Achievement of an appropriate density and scale of development;
- Design - high quality design requirement that protects but also enhances the architectural character of the county, particularly in relation to landmark structures and viewpoints;
- Height, massing and form
- Hours of operation;
- Services;
- Traffic - The potential impact of traffic movement, parking provision and whether or not consideration has been given to a Mobility Strategy and Traffic Impact Assessment (TIA);
- Smarter travel policies;
- Pedestrian and cycle connections;
- Access arrangements, circulation and parking;
- Boundary treatment and landscaping;
- Storage- loading and open storage areas shall be visually unobtrusive from public roadways and screened or preferably located behind the building line;
- Fuel and waste storage – the quality of waste management proposals;
- Lighting and noise;

- Energy efficiency and overall sustainability of the development;
- Associated advertising - multiple unit developments shall implement ordered naming and signage schemes to avoid visual clutter.

Applications for multi-unit industrial / office / warehousing / business park schemes shall illustrate the phasing for the development. Phasing proposals shall ensure that open space and infrastructure to serve units in a given phase e.g. public lighting, footpaths, is completed to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority, prior to the initiation of the succeeding phase.

8.10.1 Small Scale Businesses in Residential Areas

The scale and nature of operations will be taken into account. Uses such as the repair of vehicles will not normally be permitted in a residential area. The level of customers/callers will be taken into account. The Planning Authority shall consider such small scale businesses where:

- The use of the house for business purposes is secondary to its use as a dwelling and the floor area of the business should reflect this;
- Adequate parking requirements are satisfied;
- No loss of residential amenity to adjoining residences in terms of general disturbance, noise, traffic generation etc.

Permission will be subject to normal environmental and planning criteria. Any subsequent change or proposed expansion of the business will need to be re-considered by the Planning Authority to assess whether the premises are still acceptable.

8.10.2 Small Scale Home-Based Businesses in Rural Areas

In determining applications for developments involving working from home, Offaly County Council will have regard to the following considerations:

- The nature and extent of the work;
- The effects on the amenities of adjoining occupiers, particularly in relation to hours of work, noise and general disturbance;

- Anticipated levels of traffic generated by the proposed development and the potential increased demand for parking;
- Arrangements for the storage of refuse and collection of waste;
- Appropriate levels of screening / landscaping.

8.11 Retail

In assessing planning applications for retail development, the Planning Authority will have regard to the Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities by the DEHLG, 2012 the Retail Design Manual, 2012 and the provisions of Chapter 5 – Retail and Town Centres.

8.11.1 Market /Casual Trading

Farmers' or local country markets are an increasingly popular retail element of towns and villages, providing an effective means of selling locally sourced produce and opportunities to expand the rural economic base. The Council will seek to protect the economic and social benefits such markets offer on account of their ability to sustain and reinforce rural areas and support their role as visitor attractions. In consideration applications for such facilities, the Council will have regard to the following:

- The impact the market would have on town centre vitality and viability and retail policy provisions for that area.
- The likely impact on residential amenity, conservation areas, the general environment or existing shops.
- The capacity of the existing road structure to take any additional traffic generated by the proposal and parking requirements.
- Arrangements for customers'/traders' parking, servicing, storage, disposal and recycling of refuse and storage of stalls.
- The Casual Trading Act of 1995 and specifically any Bye-Laws made by Offaly County Council under Section 6 of the Act.

8.11.2 Shopfronts

Traditional shop front designs and name plates over shop windows should be preserved. The Council will generally require that new shop front designs be in

keeping with the existing character, especially in town centres and villages. Large areas of glass shall be subdivided by vertical glazing bars and shop windows shall generally have a minimum stall riser height of 0.7 metres above ground level. The Council will actively discourage the removal of features or alterations to existing shop fronts where they are considered to be of historical or architectural interest.

A sympathetic well-designed modern intervention will usually be preferable to an ill-proportioned imitation of a traditional shopfront.

Please refer to '*Guide to Shop fronts and Signs*' leaflet, Offaly County Council also.

8.11.3 Advertising Signage

A licence is required from the planning authority where the sign is on or along a public road, while planning permission is required where the sign is on a private road / structure.

Advertising signs will normally be permitted in commercial, business and industrial areas, provided the following criteria are met:

- They are in character and harmony with their surroundings and if applicable buildings on which they are displayed – in terms of size, scale, materials, finishes, and colour;
- The amenities of the area will not be impaired;
- Traffic signs will not be obscured;
- The safety and free flow of vehicular and pedestrian traffic is not interfered with;
- They do not project above the skyline;
- They do not interfere with windows or other features of the building façade;
- They do not detract from the special interest or visual amenity of Protected Structures;
- They would not lead to a cluttered appearance;
- They do not effect Buildings of Historical importance, ACAs or protected structures.
- They do not contribute to visual clutter.

In terms of sign types the Council will assess their suitability against the following criteria:

- Traditional hanging hand painted signs are encouraged rather than internally lit plastic box signs;
- Large advertising hoardings (bill boards) are prohibited in the countryside and will only be considered as temporary structures in towns and villages where they screen derelict sites;
- Advance signs at the entrance to industrial estates etc. are more acceptable than a proliferation of separate stand alone signs at each premises.

Applications for advertisement structures will be refused where they give rise to a potential traffic hazard. In general, advertisement structures will not be permitted at roundabouts, at traffic signalised junctions, at locations where they obstruct sight lines, compete with other traffic signs, give rise to confusion for road users or endanger traffic safety.

Applications for advertisement structures along national routes and along approach roads to towns and villages will generally not be permitted except for tourist attractions of national or regional importance. All such signage will require the written consent of the National Roads Authority, where appropriate.

Applications for advertisement structures shall comply with the requirements of the "Traffic Signs Manual" published by Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and the "Policy on the Provision of Tourist and Leisure Signage on National Roads" published by the National Roads Authority (or any such other relevant standards and legislation that may be enacted). All lettering, logos and symbols are subject to the approval of Offaly County Council. In general, the use of the standard brown background and white lettering will be preferred.

The use of electronic variable messaging signs commonly known as "VMS signs" shall be reserved strictly for use in roadwork activities, hazard information and or as part of an approved event traffic management plan. Advanced written consent of Offaly

County Council will be required prior to installation and usage of such signage.

Outdoor advertising hoardings shall not be permitted where it would detract from the visual quality of the setting of protected structures.

In all other cases, regard to the visual impact of a proposed advertising hoarding and traffic safety.

8.11.4 Finger Post Signage

The erection of fingerpost signs may require a licence or planning permission from Offaly County Council and should comply with the following:

- Directional signs for major tourist attractions and community purposes will be considered but product advertising will not be permitted;
- Signs must have a standard size and colour, and;
- Signs which interfere with the Local Authority's directional signs or which contribute to visual clutter will not be permitted.

8.12 Agricultural Development

Agricultural buildings and associated works, while accepting the need to be functional, are required to be sympathetic to their surroundings, in terms of scale, materials, finishes, and siting.

Agricultural developments should be designed in accordance with the standards of the Department of Agriculture Food and Marine. In assessing planning applications for agricultural development the Council will have regard to the European Communities (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations, 2006.

It is essential that applications for agricultural developments make provision for the satisfactory collection, storage, distribution and disposal of waste generated by the proposed development.

Proposals for Agricultural Developments should refer to;

- DAFM website; Farm Building and Structures Specifications;
- PL 6 - Agricultural & Farm Development - The Planning Issues- DEHLG, 2002.

8.12.1 Land Reclamation

Any proposal for land reclamations and/or drainage of wetlands are required to comply with the Planning and Development (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2011. The Planning Authority will have regard to the draft Guidance for Planning Authorities on Drainage and Reclamation of Wetlands, or any amendment to those regulations over the lifetime of the plan.

8.12.2 Forestry

Forest developments should follow current best practice and the Forest Service's "Forestry and the Landscape Guidelines" (July 2000) where landscape objectives should focus on compatibility with, and enhancement of, existing local landscape character. Landscape design plans should be prepared where sensitive high amenity areas are concerned.

Afforestation projects should be designed and implemented in a manner likely to enhance existing local amenities. Any adverse impacts of afforestation

on watercourses and sources of water supply should be prevented.

Forest owners should prepare and maintain a forest fire defence strategy, including provision and maintenance of adequate prescribed firebreaks, water supply reservoirs and forest access. Fire plans should be prepared for each forest and reviewed annually. The Council will not favour the development of forestry in locations which would adversely impact upon Protected/Listed Views within the county, or would adversely impact upon recorded monuments.

8.13 Extractive Industries

The Planning Authority will have regard to the DEHLG's Quarries and Ancillary Activities, Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2004 when assessing quarry related proposals. Particular constraint will be exercised in areas of archaeological importance, recorded monuments, areas of ecological importance and other environmentally sensitive designated areas.

All developments should have regard to and comply with the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) publication '*Environmental Management in the Extractive Industry (non-scheduled minerals)*', 2006, the ICF Environmental Code of October 2006, the Wildlife, Habitats and the Extractive Industry (Notice Nature/ Irish Concrete Federation / NPWS 2010) and the Geological Heritage Guidelines for the Extractive Industry (GSI / Irish Concrete Federation / Planet Earth 2008).

An Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) Licence from the EPA is required for metal mining, for quarries associated with cement, lime and ceramic manufacture, and for the extraction of other minerals covered by the Minerals Development Acts which exceed threshold levels as set out in the Protection of the Environment Act, 2003. Such a licence covers noise, emissions to air and water, and waste management.

The Council favours the use of existing licensed quarries over proposals for extraction from green field sites. There is a presumption against new quarry developments on the County's Eskers. Refer to Quarry Section of Economic Strategy, Chapter 5.

8.14 Community Facilities

8.14.1 Childcare Facilities

Childcare is taken to mean full day-care and sessional facilities and services for pre-school children and school-going children out of school hours. It includes services involving care, education and socialisation opportunities for children. These services can include pre-schools, naíonraí (Irish language playgroups), day-care services, crèches, playgroups, and after-school groups (refer also to Chapter 6, Community, Social and Cultural Development).

When assessing planning applications for childcare facilities, the Planning Authority will have regard to the DEHLG's Childcare Facilities Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2001. The appropriate locations for childcare facilities include:

- New communities/larger new housing developments;
- In the vicinity of concentrations of work places, such as industrial estates, business parks and any other locations where there are significant numbers working;
- In the vicinity of schools;
- Neighbourhood, district and town centres;
- Adjacent to public transport corridors, park-and-ride facilities, pedestrian routes and dedicated cycle ways.

The information that should be submitted with planning applications for childcare facilities (as a minimum) is as follows:

- Nature of the facility e.g. full day care, sessional, drop in, after school care;
- Number and age range of children being catered for and number of staff;
- Parking provision for both customers and staff;
- Proposed hours of operation;
- Open space provision in the form of play areas and measures for its management.

8.14.2 Access for People with Disabilities

Refer to section 8.6.11 above.

8.14.3 Nursing Homes

In general, these facilities should be located close to a range of easily accessible facilities in towns and villages where the residents can more easily access local services.

In determining planning applications for change of use of a residential dwelling or other building to nursing/older persons care home, the following factors should be considered:

- The affect on the amenities of adjoining properties;
- Adequacy of off street car parking;
- Suitable private open space;
- Proximity to local services and facilities, and;
- The size and scale of the facility proposed – the scale must be appropriate to the area.

Comprehensive landscaping plans must be prepared by a fully qualified landscape architect and shall be submitted at application stage.

8.14.4 Educational Facilities

Sites required for schools shall comply with the requirements of 'The Provision of Schools and the Planning System A Code of Practice for Planning Authorities, the Department of Education and Science, and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government' (Department of Education and Science, and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government', 2008).

In the design of education facilities consideration should be given to provision of multi-campus and multi-use element with a flexible approach demonstrated to allow for different users at different times of the day and throughout the calendar year.

8.15 Environment and Heritage

8.15.1 Development in Environmentally Designated Areas

Environmental designations in the county, as outlined in Chapter 7, Heritage and Landscape do not imply a total ban on development. However, developments likely to seriously impact on these areas will be carefully controlled in line with sustainable policies and objectives. The overall emphasis in amenity areas will be quality of design and integration of development into its surroundings. Proposals which have potential to impact on European Sites should include Appropriate Assessment or Appropriate Assessment Screening (refer to section 8.2).

8.15.2 Development in Areas of Archaeological Potential

Refer also to the Built Heritage Section of Chapter 7. The Planning Authority will refer all planning applications within Zones of Archaeological Potential and in sites on or abutting Monuments identified by the Sites and Monuments Record to the National Monuments Service of the DEHLG for their recommendation. Their recommendations may include seeking the applicant / developer to:

- Employ a licensed archaeologist at the applicant's expense to carry out trial excavations in advance of development, or alternatively compile an Archaeological Impact Assessment – either prior to commencement of development or during the course of the planning application;
- Retain a licensed archaeologist on site to monitor all site works, and in certain circumstances the preservation of archaeological elements found will be required;
- Inform the planning authority and the DoEHLG of any archaeological material found so as to facilitate its recording. Developers should familiarise themselves with 'Archaeology and Development: Guidelines for Good Practice for Developers' prepared for the Heritage Council by the ICOMOS Irish Committee Consortium, 2000.

In relation to development proposals, the planning authority will adopt a policy of archaeological monitoring which will be required for developments where the scale and nature of such developments may, in the opinion of the planning authority, have a negative impact on previously unknown archaeological features / artifacts.

8.15.3 Protected Structures

Where an application relates to a development which would consist of, or comprise the carrying out of works to a protected structure or proposed protected structure, the Planning Authority will have regard to the 'Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (2004) by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the following should accompany the planning application:

- Drawings of elevations of the main features of any buildings within the curtilage of the protected structure, which would be materially affected by the proposed development;
- Photographs, plans and other particulars as are necessary to show how the development would affect the character of the structure;
- Brief written statement describing and justifying the proposed works and the philosophy that informs their methodology;
- Photographs sufficient to describe (i) the overall appearance of the exterior of the protected structure, including all exposed sides, its setting and its relationship with surrounding structures (ii) any interior spaces or features that it is proposed to change (iii) details of the exterior and interior sufficient to describe its character and materials of construction;
- A Conservation Impact Statement from a qualified and experienced Conservation Architect, which should include a condition report on the protected structure.

The Council will not normally permit development, which would adversely affect the setting of a Protected Structure.

8.15.4 Biodiversity / Riparian (River) Buffer Zones

It is important to identify and integrate into any design, habitats and features of the site where present. This includes existing mature trees, hedgerows, watercourses, random rubble stonewalls and any other habitats. It is vital to protect biodiversity and enhance it through for example, buffer zones around wetlands, rivers, ponds etc, wildlife corridors allowing interconnectivity, adequate fencing around trees (see section on tree and hedgerow protection) and the use of native plant species. Refer to Table 8.4

Where development is proposed adjacent to waterways and notwithstanding the consideration of setback distances to mitigate against flooding, the Planning Authority will generally seek a setback distance of between 30 metres to 50 metres from the waterway's edge. The Planning Authority may reduce or increase this setback depending on the size of the site and the nature of the development proposed (refer also to Chapter 7, Natural Heritage).

Where the Planning Authority deems it necessary, it shall be a requirement to carry out an ecological assessment of a site where the Authority believes there is significant evidence of biodiversity within the site boundaries. This assessment may also be requested where developments pertain to existing structures or buildings. Certain construction / restoration / demolition work shall have regard to nesting periods of the year of any species inhabiting the site/building e.g. badgers; roof nesting birds, bats, barn owls, amphibians.

Regard will be had to the Biodiversity Action Strategy for Offaly contained in the Heritage Plan of Offaly 2012-2106, and any subsequent Offaly Biodiversity Action Plans.

8.16 Infrastructure

8.16.1 Smarter Travel Overview

Smarter Travel – *A Sustainable Transport Future*, is a policy document from the Department of Transport, which promotes and encourages a more sustainable approach to our daily travel patterns and highlights the benefits to our health, the environment and economic competitiveness and overall quality of life that this can achieve. Central to this policy is the reduction of car usage and the promotion of cycling, walking and public transport in favour of taking the car.

Development proposals which have potential to generate significant vehicular movements will be required to demonstrate how they have regard to Smarter Travel Policies (refer to Sustainable Transport and Accessibility Section, Chapter 4).

8.16.2 Car Parking Standards

All new developments will normally be required to provide adequate off-street car parking facilities and suitable manoeuvring space. Provision of car parking spaces to meet the needs of persons with disabilities should be made. Landscaping shall be provided within surface car parking areas to soften the visual impact. Spaces for coaches, cycle parking and staff parking shall be provided where necessary. In terms of industrial or commercial developments, loading / unloading facilities shall be provided. Spaces shall be clearly demarcated and provided with adequate lighting. Refer to Table 8.2 below.

Size of Car Parking Spaces

In all parking areas, car parking bays shall be at least 4.8m x 2.5m with circulation lanes at least 6m wide. Where a development requires a large parking area, it shall be landscaped and planted to the Council's specification.

Exceptions/Further application of Car Parking Standards

In the case of defined town and village centres, the car parking requirements may be relaxed provided adequate and suitably located off-street public car parks are available or proposed. In this event, the developer will be required to make a payment towards the provision of car parking by the Planning Authority.

In the event of a shortfall of car parking, the Planning Authority will require a contribution in lieu of car parking for the particular application site.

This charge will be related to the type of development proposed and the cost of the provision of the car park. The developer will be liable to pay the charge prior to the commencement of the development or in such a manner as the Planning Authority may require.

A reduction in the car-parking standards outlined in Table 8.2 including a dispensation from payment of contribution in lieu of shortfall may be deemed acceptable by the Planning Authority when an application for development can demonstrate a reasonable reduction in the number of car parking space being provided on grounds including:

- Adequate car parking within the control of the applicant exists in close proximity to the site of the application.
- Complementary uses are proposed on the site, taking into consideration daytime and night time uses.
- Level of car parking being provided on site is in accordance with a specifically designed Transport Mobility Plan² for a particular development.
- No significant increase in demand or pressure on existing on-street or public car parking.

For the avoidance of doubt, it should be noted that every development should demonstrate full compliance with car parking requirements for the residential content of any scheme. No provision for car parking at all for residential development will incur the application of a financial contribution in lieu of the shortfall of car parking spaces required.

8.16.3 Cycle Parking

In compliance with Smarter Travel Policies, secure cycle parking facilities shall be provided in new office, residential, retail and employment generating developments. Bicycle racks shall be provided in all cases where Offaly County Council deems bicycle

² Also referred to as Mobility Management Plans – please refer to Smarter Travel - A sustainable Transport Future (Policy for Ireland 2009-2020).

parking necessary. Such facilities should be within 25 metres of a destination for short-term parking, (shops) and 50 metres for long term parking (school, college, and office). The number of stands required will be a third of the number of car spaces required for the development, subject to a minimum of one stand.

All cycle facilities in multi-storey car parks shall be at ground floor level and segregated from vehicle traffic. Cyclists should also have designated entry and exit routes at the car park. Cycle parking facilities shall be conveniently located, secure, easy to use, adequately lit and well posted. Weather protected facilities should be considered where appropriate. In addition, parking should be placed within a populated, well-supervised area, and monitored by CCTV where possible. All long-term (more than three hours) cycle racks shall be protected from the weather.

8.16.4 Electrically Operated Vehicles

In line with Smarter Travel Initiatives, and in order to encourage the use of electrically operated cars/vans etc., in line with Council and National Policy, non-residential developments shall provide facilities for battery operated cars to be recharged at a rate of 10% of the total car parking spaces (metered fast-charging 220-240V, 32A three phase). The remainder of the parking spaces, as for all residential parking spaces including parking spaces for the disabled, shall be constructed to be capable of accommodating future charging points as required - residential space facilities to be coded/metered, slow charging 220-240V, 13A single phase.

8.16.5 Road Layout, Design and Traffic Management

Road widths, speed management and traffic calming will generally be required to comply with the current edition Traffic Management Guidelines published by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Dublin Transportation Office and the Department of Transport, unless specified otherwise in these development control guidelines.

Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets - DoTTS & DoECLG, March 2013. DMURS provides guidance relating to the design of urban roads and streets. These should be referenced for all proposals which will have potential to impact on the streets roads and junctions in traffic towns and villages. The Design

Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) shall not henceforth apply to urban roads and streets other than in exceptional circumstances.

Road construction and other services will generally be required to comply with the current edition of the Recommendations for Site Development Works in Housing Areas of the Department of the Environment & Local Government, November 1998 and any subsequent amendments. The Planning Authority may require road safety audits, transport impact assessments or traffic and transport assessments where necessary. (See also policy STAP-21, Chapter 4 Sustainable Transport and Accessibility section).

In the case of development proposals at the edge of settlements where there are no footpaths or lighting, the Planning Authority will require suitable proposals to connect to the existing network in order to ensure that pedestrian safety is not compromised.

8.16.6 Transport and Traffic Assessments

Developers will be required to provide a detailed Traffic and Transport Assessment, as carried out by competent professionals in this field, where new developments will have a significant effect (see below) on travel demand and on the capacity of surrounding transport links. Where a Traffic and Transport Assessment identifies necessary on and off site improvements for the development to be able to proceed, the developer will be expected to fund the improvements by entering into a formal agreement with the Council. Traffic and Transport Assessment (TTA) and Road Safety Audits (RSA) shall be used in preparing planning applications for major developments affecting roads, particularly national roads. In doing so, reference shall be made to the NRA's 'Design Manual for Roads and Bridges' and the 'Traffic Management Guidelines' prepared by the Department of Transport and the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government.

Reference shall also be made to the Traffic and Transport Assessment Guidelines (TTA) in the preparation of the Traffic and Transport Assessments.

8.17 Flood Risk Management

Planning applications for development in areas where flood risk may be present will be assessed in accordance with the provisions of 'The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines, 2009', issued by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Office of Public Works (OPW), 2008. (Refer also to Infrastructure and Environment Strategy, Chapter 4)

8.17.1 Access for Drainage Maintenance on River Channels

In line with item 6 of Part 1 of the first schedule of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, the Council will seek to preserve a strip 10m wide along the banks of large drainage channels (greater than 5m wide) and a 5m strip elsewhere. This policy will not prevent the development of riverside walks and other amenities that do not compromise future access for drainage purpose.

8.17.2 Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems

To make certain the sustainable management of surface water and its proper discharge/disposal, all developments in the county should make provision for the inclusion of Sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDs), in accordance with best management practices of same. Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDs) comprise methods which replicate the natural greenfield characteristics of rainfall attenuation and runoff from any site, even developed sites. SUDs techniques and facilities comprise a flexible series of options, which allow the drainage designer to select systems that best suit the circumstances of the site in order to avoid instances of localised flooding. Refer to Chapter 4 Infrastructure and Environmental Strategy.

8.17.3 Waste Water Disposal

In order to avoid pollution of surface water and ground water, it is important to ensure that the site is suitable for the safe disposal of waste water.

Where there is a public sewer, proposed development shall be required to connect into it and in appropriate cases; developers may be required to extend the public sewer to the site. In rural areas and where no public sewerage exists, waste water treatment systems and

associated percolation areas will be permitted, subject to the capacity of the ground to accept treated effluent.

The Council will normally require that each dwelling in rural areas be served by an individual proprietary effluent treatment system, to be located within the site curtilage, and by either a piped water supply or bored well. A septic tank, when combined with an approved appropriate secondary treatment system will also be permitted. In the case of supply by means of a well, the source shall be located on lands in the control of the developer. In areas where there is a piped water supply and a connection is available individual bored wells will not be permitted.

In the case of single rural houses the Planning Authority requires that a site suitability assessment, including assessment of groundwater vulnerability, percolation and water table tests are carried out by the Environment Section of the Council and the results submitted with any planning application.

Further information on treatment systems, testing, separation distances from dwellings / boundaries of watercourses can be obtained from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Code of Practice for Wastewater Treatment Systems for Single Dwellings.

The standard for the use of communal proprietary waste water treatment systems where permitted can be obtained in the EPA Manual: Treatment Systems for Small Communities, Businesses, Leisure Centres and Hotels.

8.18 Water Supply

The provision of a safe and reliable water supply is a requirement of development. Where a site is served by mains water, a connection must be made and a bored well is not permitted. If the water is supplied by a group water scheme, any planning application must be accompanied by a letter of consent to connection from the secretary of the scheme and in certain circumstances; the developer may be required to extend the main to the site. Where a bored well is necessary, details of separation distances from treatment systems can be obtained from the EPA Manual referred to above.

8.18.1 Private Bore Holes

Private Bore Holes should comply with the Guidelines from Institute of Geologist of Ireland publication 'Water Well Construction'. (www.igi.ie)

8.19 Waste

If the proposed development involves the disposal/reuse/recycle of construction or demolition waste then a Waste Management Plan, with proposals for dealing with construction/demolition waste on and off site, should be submitted to the Planning Authority, as required. Refer to the Policy section of Chapter 4 Infrastructure and Environmental Strategy.

Regard should be had to Best Practice Guidelines on the Preparation of Waste Management Plans for Construction and Demolition projects by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. There is a need to acquire a waste permit under the Waste Management Act 1996-2011 if waste material is removed off-site.

8.20 Lighting

The following are the Council's requirements in terms of lighting:

- Within multiple housing schemes, lighting should be in accordance with the E.S.B.'s publication 'Public Lighting in Residential Estates'.
- Along public roads, lighting shall be provided in accordance with guidelines contained in 'Recommendations for Site Development Works in Housing Areas' by DEHLG, 1998.
- All external lighting on shopfronts shall be cowled and directed away from the public roadway.
- Flood lighting of structures will be discouraged.

8.21 Cables and Servicing

The Planning Authority will require that telephone, electricity, communal television cables, broadband,

individual cable and wire connections be located underground. In areas where communal television services do not exist at present, but where the provision of such service is anticipated within a reasonable time, the Planning Authority will require that ducting is provided in order to permit the future provision of the service, without disturbance to roads, footpaths or to other underground services.

8.22 Telecommunications Masts

The Planning Authority in assessing planning applications for telecommunication apparatus shall have regard to the DEHLG's publication 'The Planning Authority in assessing planning applications for telecommunication apparatus shall have regard to the DEHLG's publication Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures, Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 1996 and Circular Letter PL07/12 (Telecommunication Antennae and Support Structures)' or any future guidelines.

Chapter 3, Energy Strategy, contains policy in relation to telecommunications masts. Telecommunications cables and wire connections shall be located underground. Particular constraint will be exercised in areas of archaeological importance, recorded monuments, areas of ecological importance and other environmentally sensitive designated areas (refer to Chapter 7, for Natural Heritage and Built Heritage sections). Masts should be designed and located so as to cause minimum impact on the landscape, and where possible should be located within forest plantations. Operators should seek to co-locate their services by sharing a single mast, or if necessary, locating additional masts in cluster form.

8.23 Wind Farm Development

All planning applications for wind energy turbines or windfarms shall be assessed against the DEHLG's publication Wind Energy Development Guidelines, 2006, (and any subsequent guidelines) and Offaly County Council's Wind Strategy (refer also to Chapter 3, Energy Strategy).

8.24 Environmental Impact

Assessments

An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) may be required in respect of a proposed development, depending on the nature and extent of the proposed development. The relevant thresholds for the requirement of submission of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) are set out in Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended.

An EIS may be required for development proposals below this statutory threshold at the discretion of the Council. If the proposed development is sub-threshold, and the Planning Authority considers that the proposal is likely to have significant effects on the environment, then an EIS must be submitted to the Planning Authority. The Planning Authority will have regard to Schedule 7 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001, as amended, in deciding whether a proposed development is likely to have significant effects on the environment, and also the supporting guidelines Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Guidance for Consent Authorities regarding sub threshold development by the DEHLG, 2003. Prospective developers are advised to have regard to the Guidelines on the information to be contained in Environmental Impact Statements, by the EPA, 2002 which supports Schedule 6 of the Planning and Development Regulations.

8.25 Development Contributions and Bonds

Section 48 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, requires planning authorities to make a Development Contribution Scheme. A condition is attached to most planning permissions requiring the payment of a contribution towards the cost of public infrastructure and facilities (e.g. water treatment facilities, sewers, roads, open spaces and community facilities etc.), which benefits the area. The contribution rates, which are subject to annual adjustment using the Wholesale Price Indices – Building and Construction Capital Goods published by the Central Statistics Offices are set out in the Development Contribution Scheme adopted by Offaly

County Council and can be viewed on the council's website.

The Planning Authority may, in addition to the terms of the General Development Contribution Scheme, require the payment of a special contribution in respect of a particular development where specific exceptional costs not covered by a scheme are incurred in respect of public infrastructure and facilities which benefit the proposed development. In such cases the condition will specify the particular works carried out or proposed to be carried out by the Council.

To ensure the satisfactory completion and maintenance of larger scale development undertaken by private developers, the Planning Authority will impose, as a condition of permission, that a cash deposit or security bond is lodged with the Planning Authority, prior to commencement of development.

The Planning Authority will have regard to the DECLG, Development Contribution Schemes – Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2013.

Table 8.2 Car Parking Standards

DEVELOPMENT TYPE	CAR PARKING STANDARD
Dwelling house and apartments	2 spaces per unit
Shops/ Takeaways	1 space per 23 sq. m. gross floor area
Offices / financial / professional services	1 space per 23 sq. m. gross floor area
Industry	1 space per 50 sq. m. gross floor area
Retail warehousing	1 space per 25 sq. m. gross floor area
Warehousing	1 space per 100 sq. m. gross floor area
Theatres/ cinemas/ stadia/ churches/ public halls	1 space per 5 seats
Sports halls / leisure Centres	1 space per 25 sq. m. gross floor area
Childcare facilities	1 space per employee and 1 space per 4 children
Nursing Home	1 space per employee and 1 space per 4 residents
Ballroom, Disco	1 space per 10 sq. m. gross floor space
Lounge / function room / bar	1 space per 10 sq. m. gross floor space
Restaurant	1 space per 10 sq. m. gross floor space
Hotel and guesthouses	1 space per bed
Hospital	1.5 spaces per bed
Clinics/ surgeries/ health care	1 space per staff and 3 spaces per consulting room
Playing pitches	25 spaces per pitch
School	1 space per teaching staff and 1 space per classroom
Libraries/ galleries/ museums	1 space per 30 sq. m. gross floor area
Funeral home	1 space per 5 sq. m.

8.26 Landuse and Zoning

8.26.1 Aim

To provide guidance in identifying particular landuses at the most appropriate locations for possible new development.

8.26.2 Context

Part II of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) requires that Development Plans comprise objectives for the zoning of land for particular purposes, in the interests of proper planning and sustainable development.

The land use zoning objectives and the zoning matrix;

- Lists the land use activities referred to under each zoning objective, and
- Indicates the acceptability or otherwise in principle of the specified land uses in each zone.

Note: This section should be read in conjunction with Development Standards in particular.

8.26.3 Strategy

Zoning Principles

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

- Sufficient zoned lands should be provided at appropriate locations throughout the county to facilitate the envisaged land use requirements for the period 2014-2020.
- Encourage sustainable development and the use / redevelopment of brownfield sites within established settlements.
- Landuse zoning objectives are set out in order to assist individuals in accessing 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.

Zoning Matrix³

The land use zoning matrix (Table 8.3) details the most common forms of development land uses in accordance with the county's zoning objectives. This matrix lists the more common forms of development and classifies under three categories as to whether a proposed use is generally permitted in principle or otherwise.

1. 'Permitted in Principle' - Proposed use is **generally accepted** subject to the normal planning process and compliance with the relevant policies and objectives, standards and requirements as set out in the County Development Plan, and by other government bodies / sections, 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' - Proposed use **may** be permitted where the Local Authority is satisfied that it is in compliance with the zoning objective, other relevant policies and objectives, standards and requirements as set out in the County Development Plan and by other government bodies / sections, 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' - Proposed use 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. This may be due to envisaged negative impact on existing and permitted uses, incompatibility with policies and objectives contained in the County Development Plan or that it may be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

³ Note: Zoning Matrix is for general guidance only and each application will be accessed on its individual merit.

8.26.4 Zoning Objectives

The following are the **zoning objectives** of the plan and they apply to the land use zoning contained in the Town and Village Plans contained in Volume 2.

Business / Employment Zoning Objective

The use of land as 'Business/Employment' shall be taken to include the use of land for primarily commercial and business use, including light industry / warehousing and the facilitation of enterprise park / office park type use, as appropriate. It is important to reserve these lands for possible commercial / business uses and therefore, to re-direct other uses where it is considered that such uses would be more appropriately sited within other land zoning categories for example 'town/village centre mixed use' and 'industry'.

This will provide for uses that are compatible with, or reinforce, the commercial/business function of the subject area as a whole. Retailing is open to consideration within this zoning objective, subject to appropriateness in applying the sequential test on identifying the optimum location, in accordance with proper planning and sustainable development.

The development of inappropriate uses, such as heavy industry and retailing which would be more appropriately located in 'industrial zoned lands' and 'town/village centre mixed use' in particular will not normally be permitted. Proposals, particularly those involving retail uses, will need to be assessed in relation to a number of considerations and their impact on the vibrancy and importance of town and village centres. By their nature, proposals for these areas involve large-scale buildings and require a high degree of accessibility and parking space for car users and delivery vehicles.

Industry Zoning Objective

The use of land as 'Industry' shall be taken to include the use of land for industry/manufacturing, repairs, warehousing, distribution, open-storage, waste materials treatment and recovery and transport operating centres. The development of inappropriate mixes of uses, such as 'office-based development' and 'retailing' will not normally be encouraged.

Local Employment/Services Lands Zoning Objective

The use of land as 'Local Employment/Services Lands' shall be taken to include the use of land within **villages** to which no specific preferred land use is being assigned but to where distinct development opportunities exist to provide development that contributes positively to the location or to a wider area. Within this zoning, therefore, appropriate development proposals for any type of land use set out in the matrix in Table 8.3 is open to consideration, subject to site suitability and consideration of impacts (if any) on the amenities and character of the village, amenities of adjacent or adjoining residential properties and the development potential of adjacent or adjoining lands.

The priority will be to ensure that the existing character of the settlement is maintained by a high standard of design, and where possible, be reinforced further whilst also seeking to support and strengthen the service base. Where community facilities i.e. churches, schools, community centres etc. have not been specifically zoned as such (i.e. Public/Community/Educational), this zoning objective facilitates their protection and allows for the expansion of these important facilities, where appropriate. **Multiple residential developments i.e. residential development of more than one house or residential unit, will not be permitted within the land use zoning.** Notwithstanding, the restriction on multiple residential developments, the housing needs of more than one family member of established landowners may be accommodated on Local Employment/Services Lands. In such cases, applicants will be required to demonstrate that they meet and comply with all normal planning criteria for individual dwellings including the following:

- Landownership is established in the family name i.e. 5 years or more.
- Housing need (i.e. applicant does not own their own dwelling at another location) is required to meet applicant's accommodation needs.

The applicant(s) should note that an occupancy clause may be attached by way of condition to a grant of permission for any house granted permission on Local Employment/Services Lands. This is to comply with the

provisions of the Core Strategy and Settlement Strategy of the plan and to ensure the integrity of same.

Public / Community / Education Zoning Objective

The use of land as 'Public/ Community/Education' shall be taken to include the use of land for the above stated uses, which generally include community related development (including the provision of schools, community halls, health care institutions, utilities, libraries and development for other community uses). Ancillary facilities such as dedicated open space or sports facilities will normally be facilitated within this zoning objective.

Open Space Zoning Objective

The use of land as 'Open Space' shall be taken to include the use of land for; afforestation, playgrounds, housing estate open spaces, parks and development incidental to the enjoyment of open space including sports centres, outdoor recreation centres and landscaped areas, the provision of shelters, walks, walls, 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.

Residential Zoning Objective

The use 'Residential' shall be taken to primarily include the use of land for domestic dwellings (including group housing for members of the travelling community), convents and civic institutions. 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, crèches, local convenience store, doctor/dental surgeries, open space (formal and informal) etc.

Town/Village Centre Mixed Use Zoning Objective

The use of land as Town/Village Centre Mixed Use shall be taken to include the use of land for a mix of uses, making provisions, where appropriate for "primary" uses i.e. primarily commercial/retail and combined with other compatible uses e.g. residential as "secondary". These secondary uses will be considered by the Local Authority, having regard to the particular character of the area. A diversity of uses for both day and evening is encouraged. These areas require high

levels of accessibility, including pedestrian, cyclists and public transport (where feasible).

Compatible uses within this zoning objective include;- banks and other financial institutions, cafes, community buildings, civic buildings, entertainment, hotels, leisure and recreation, offices, professional/specialist services, restaurants etc. **The Council will continue to ensure that any development proposed is in the interests of proper planning and sustainable development, and serves to reinforce the vitality and viability of town and village centres, whilst meeting the needs of its community and surrounding hinterland.**

Development proposals should be of a use, scale, form and design that accords with the role, function and size of the location in both the Settlement Hierarchy and the Retail Hierarchy of the plan i.e. town centre setting or a village centre setting.

Other Uses

Proposed land uses which are not listed within the land use zoning matrix will be considered on an **individual basis**.

Regard will be afforded to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area and compliance with the relevant policies and objectives, standards and requirements as set out in the County Development Plan, guidelines issued by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and other government bodies / sections.

White Lands

These lands are immediately adjacent to (and generally outside of) the delineated boundary of the county's settlements. These lands are largely in agricultural use, demonstrate rural characteristics and may contain some isolated development which is not zoned for a specific use at this time.

White lands also display favourable characteristics of lower land values and larger, unconstrained tracts of land. However, the following considerations apply for proposals seeking to locate on 'White Lands' over lands more suitably zoned and serviced within urban areas:

- The objective for urban areas is to direct and focus growth and investment.

- Providing for development proposals in rural areas runs counter to efforts to focus and direct development to suitably zoned and serviced urban areas.
- Services are not generally provided in 'White Lands' in a manner to attract urban type development.

Rural economic activities or development may be considered on 'White Lands' where the activity or development can demonstrate:

- (a) A need to locate in a particular location.
- (b) That there is no conflict with the objective for growth in any urban area, and,
- (c) Long term sustainability in the rural area.

Examples of rural economic activities suitable for consideration on 'White Lands' include:

- **Rural employment:** Help preserve rural-based economies and lifestyles and assist small-scale, rural-based employment, self-employment, and work from home activities.
- **Agriculture Promotion:** Support long-term solutions for the sustainability of small scale, intensive agriculture within rural areas including agricultural processing, and value-added activities, greenhouse/nurseries, etc.
- **Recreation and tourist-based businesses:** Attract enterprises that will not compromise the unique ecological function of rural areas.
- **Rural character and business promotion:** Encourage efforts to maintain rural character while promoting locally-owned small businesses and their unique or indigenous products.
- **Existing established employment hubs in the rural areas:** These are recognised as locations for the provision of jobs and services in the rural area they provide already and maybe suitable for the location and expansion of rural-based industries, commerce, and services. These areas should not be considered in the same category as industrial areas

Established Use / Non Conforming Use

Where an established use does not conform with the designated land use zoning objective of the area as set out in the County Development 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 be consistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. It is not intended that existing uses within the zones outlined in this plan which appear to be inconsistent with the primary use zoning objective should be curtailed.

Explanatory Terms

- Map annotation is contained on zoning or development envelope (Sráid) maps (Volume 2) and detailed in the written statement of the settlement plans. There is also a brief description of envisaged future development of an identified area within a settlement. Annotations may include a summary of the key points required to be addressed in the case of individual land parcels/settlements.
- Access arrows contained on zoning or development envelope (Sráid) maps (Volume 2) indicate the preferred locations for **some** identified possible future access points, making provisions for a 'joined-up' approach to the future development of individual settlements.

8.27 Landuse Zoning Policies

LUZP-01	It is Council policy, generally that a sequential approach is adopted in the development of the county's settlements (i.e. development from the centre most point of a settlement outwards), where feasible.
LUZP-02	It is Council policy to facilitate the development of the county's settlements and ensure that any development proposed is in the interests of proper planning and sustainable development. In particular, it is Council policy in the case of town centre zoning, to prohibit a proliferation of any individual use which in the opinion of the Planning Authority, does not contribute to the vitality and viability of town centres.
LUZP-03	It is Council policy to encourage the natural growth of the county's towns and villages. In the case of the development of zoned greenfield sites, a mix of uses may be required as opposed to excessive homogenous developments. This will ensure the proper planning and sustainable development of these areas, providing necessary services and adding vitality and viability to their future use.
LUZP-04	<p>Multiple residential developments i.e. residential development of more than one house or residential unit, will not be permitted on Local Employment/Services Lands zoning objective except in instances where the housing needs of more than one family member of established landowners is required to be accommodated. In such cases, applicants will be required to demonstrate that they meet and comply with all normal planning criteria for individual dwellings including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landownership is established in the family name i.e. 5 years or more. • Housing need (i.e. applicant does not own their own dwelling at another location) is required to meet applicant's accommodation needs.
LUZP-05	<p>Rural economic activities or development may be considered on 'White Lands' where the activity or development can demonstrate:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) A need to locate in a particular location. (b) That there is no conflict with the objective for growth in any urban area, and, (c) Long term sustainability in the rural area.

8.28 Landuse Zoning Objectives⁴

LUZO-01	It is an objective of the Council that sufficient zoned lands be provided at appropriate locations throughout the county to accommodate the expected land use requirements within the lifetime of the County Development Plan i.e. 2014-2020.
LUZO-02	It is an objective of the Council to ensure that development progresses in accordance with the landuse zoning objectives set out within this chapter.

⁴ The order of listing of objectives is not intended to indicate priorities. Subject to the availability of resources, it is the Council's aim to monitor and accomplish the objectives listed in this section within the period of the plan.

Landuse Zoning Matrix: Table 8.3

√ - Normally Permitted O - Open for Consideration X - Not normally Permitted		Zoning Objectives							
		Town Centre/ Mixed	Residential	Business/ Employment	Industry	Public/ Community/ Education	Open Space	Local Employment /Services	White Land
	PROPOSED USE								
A	Abattoir	X	X	X	O	X	X	X	O
	Advertising & Advertising Structures	O	X	√	√	X	X	O	X
	Agricultural Buildings	X	X	X	X	X	O	O	√
	Amusement Arcade/Fair	O	X	O	X	X	X	O	X
	Apartments	√	√	O	X	X	X	X	O
	Aerodrome/ Airfield	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	O
B	Bank/Building Society	√	O	O	X	X	X	O	X
	Betting Office	O	X	X	X	X	X	O	X
	Boarding Kennels	X	X	X	O	X	X	O	O
	Bring Banks	√	√	√	√	√	O	√	O
C	Caravan Park - Holiday	X	O	X	X	X	X	O	O
	Car Sales/Repair	O	X	O	√	X	X	O	O
	Car Park	√	O	O	O	X	X	O	O
	Cash & Carry/Wholesale Outlet	O	X	√	√	X	X	O	O
	Cemetery	X	O	X	X	√	X	O	√
	Childcare Facilities - Crèche, Nursery, Playschool	√	√	√	O	O	O	√	O
	Cinema	√	X	√	X	O	X	O	X
	Civic Amenity Sites	O	X	O	√	X	X	O	O
	Cultural Use	√	√	O	X	√	O	√	O
	Community Facility (Hall/Centre/Recreation)	√	√	√	O	√	O	O	O
	Club House & Associated Facilities	O	O	O	X	O	O	O	O
	Conference Centre	√	X	√	X	X	X	O	O
	Concrete, Asphalt, Plant etc.	X	X	X	O	X	X	O	X
	Craft Industry	√	O	O	√	O	X	√	O
D	Dance Hall/Discotheque	O	X	O	X	X	X	O	X
	Dentist Surgery/Doctor Surgery	√	√	√	X	O	X	√	O
	Drive-through Restaurant	O	X	O	X	X	X	O	X
E	Education (School)	O	√	O	X	√	O	√	O
	Extractive Industry	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	O
F	Funeral Home	√	O	O	X	O	X	√	O
G	Garden Centre	O	O	O	O	X	X	O	O
	Guesthouse	√	O	O	X	X	X	O	O

H	Hair Dressing Salon	√	O	O	X	X	X	√	O
	Halting Sites	O	√	O	O	X	X	√	O
	Hazardous Waste Depot	X	X	X	O	X	X	X	O
	Health Centre/Clinic	√	O	O	X	√	X	√	X
	Heavy Vehicle Park	X	X	X	√	X	X	X	O
	Holiday Homes	√	√	X	X	X	X	O	O
	Hospital	√	O	O	X	√	X	O	X
	Hostel	√	O	O	X	O	X	O	O
	Hotel/Motel	√	O	√	O	X	X	√	O
I	Industry-General	O	X	O	√	X	X	O	O
	Industry-Light	O	O	O	√	X	X	O	O
L	Landfill	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	O
	Library	√	O	O	X	√	X	√	X
	Licensed Premises (Public House)	√	O	O	X	X	X	√	O
M	Motor Sales Outlet/Showroom	O	X	O	√	X	X	O	X
	Municipal Waste Incinerator	X	X	X	√	X	X	X	O
	Materials Recovery Facility/Composting/Waste Transfer Station	X	X	X	√	X	X	X	O
O	Office based-Industry	√	O	√	O	O	X	O	X
	Open Space/Playground (Outdoor)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	O
R	Recreational Facility/Sports Club	O	O	O	X	√	O	O	O
	Residential Multiple*	√	√	O	X	X	X	X	O
	Residential Single	√	√	O	X	X	X	√	O
	Restaurant/Cafe	√	O	O	O	O	X	√	O
	Retail Warehouse	O	X	√	O	X	X	O	O
	Retirement Home/Village	√	√	O	X	O	X	√	O
S	Science & Technology Based Enterprise	√	X	√	√	X	X	O	O
	Scrapyard	X	X	X	O	X	X	X	O
	Service Station (Petrol)	O	O	√	O	X	X	O	O
	Service Garage	O	X	O	√	X	X	O	O
	Shop (Large, including supermarket)	√	X	√	X	X	X	O	X
	Shop (Local)	√	O	√	O	X	X	√	O
	Swimming Pool	√	O	O	O	√	O	√	X
T	Take-away	O	X	O	X	X	X	O	X
	Training Centre	O	X	O	O	X	X	O	O
	Transport Depot	X	X	O	√	X	X	O	O
V	Veterinary Surgery	√	O	O	X	X	X	√	O
W	Warehousing	X	X	O	√	X	X	O	O
	Warehousing (Retail/Non-food, max. 5000sqm)	X	X	O	√	X	X	O	O
	Workshops	O	X	√	√	X	X	O	O

*Residential Multiple refers to two or more residential units

8.29 Table 8.4 List of Native Trees and Shrubs

Common Name	Latin Name	Height (Max)	Suitable For Open Spaces	Suitable for Streets and confined spaces	Suitable for tubs, raised beds etc	Guide to planting
Alder	<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	22m	Yes	No	Yes	A D P S
Alder buckthorn	<i>Frangula alnus</i>	6m	Yes	No	Yes	D Restricted distribution. Not commonly available.
Arbutus (strawberry tree)	<i>Arbutus unedo</i>	8m	Yes	No	Yes	Not frost hardy
Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	28m	Yes	No	No	A D I P S
Aspen	<i>Populus tremula</i>	24m	Yes	No	No	DPSV Not close to buildings or any services
Bramble	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	2m	No	No	No	C/H note: tends to be invasive
Broom	<i>Cytisus scoparius</i>	2m	Yes	No	Yes	*
Burnet rose	<i>Rosa pimpinellifolia</i>	2m	Yes	No	Yes, but vigorous	C/H Restricted distribution. Not commonly available.
Common (or European) gorse	<i>Ulex europeus</i>	2.5m	Yes	No	In a rural setting	H V
Crab apple	<i>Malus sylvestris</i>	6m	Yes	No	No	A H I P
Dog rose	<i>Rosa canina</i>	2m	Yes	No	Yes. Vigorous	C/H
Downy birch	<i>Betula pubescens</i>	18m	Yes	Yes	Yes	A D I P
Elder	<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	6m	In hedge	No	No	V
Guelder rose	<i>Viburnum opulus</i>	4.5m	Yes	No	No	D H
Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	9m	Yes	Yes	Yes	A H I P S
Hazel	<i>Corylus avellana</i>	6m	Yes	No	No	A H S
Holly	<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>	15m	Yes	Yes	Yes	A H P S
Honeysuckle	<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>	climber	Yes	On walls	No	C

Ivy	Hedera helix	climber	Yes	Yes	Yes	C
Juniper	Juniperus communis	6m	Yes	No	No	S
Pedunculate oak	Quercus robur	30m	Yes	No	No	AI only suitable for large spaces
Privet	Ligustrum vulgare	3m	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Rowan or mountain ash	Sorbus aucuparia	9m	Yes	Yes	Yes	A D H I P
Scots pine	Pinus sylvestris	24m	Yes	No	No	A I
Sessile oak	Quercus petraea	30m	Yes	No	No	AI only suitable for large spaces
Silver birch	Betula pendula	18m	Yes	Yes	Yes	A D I P
Sloe, blackthorn	Prunus spinosa	3m	Yes	No	No	A H P V
Spindle	Euonymus europaeus	7.5m	Yes	No	No	H
Western (or mountain) gorse	Ulex gallii	1.5m	Yes	No	Yes	* Restricted distribution. Not commonly available.
Whitebeam spp.	Sorbus aria	12m	Yes	Yes	Yes	I P S
Wild cherry	Prunus avium	15m	Yes	Yes	Yes	A H I
Willow spp.	Salix spp.	6m	Some	No	No	V Not suitable near buildings or services
Wych elm	Ulmus glabra	30m	Yes		No	P S
Yew	Taxus baccata	14m	Yes	No	Yes	A I P S

Key

H – Suitable for hedging	I – Suitable as an individual tree	P – Tolerates smoke or pollution
S – Tolerates shade	V – Invasive,	* – Tolerates dry conditions
A – Grows in a wide variety of soils	C – Climber	D – Tolerates or prefers damp conditions

