

Chapter 1 Introduction and Vision

1.0 Preamble

This plan is a land use plan and overall strategy for the development of Tullamore town and environs over the period 2010 - 2016.

For the purposes of this joint plan, "Councils" refers to Tullamore Town Council and Offaly County Council working in partnership. For the purposes of this plan, "Tullamore" refers to both the area of Tullamore town boundary and Tullamore environs boundary together i.e. Tullamore town and environs (refer to Map 1.2).

This plan contains...

Written Statement

The written statement is divided into 15 chapters and sets out the vision, aims, goals and strategy for Tullamore over the plan period, in addition to the Council's policies and objectives under the following headings:

<p>Ch. 1 <u>Introduction and Vision</u> Regional & County Context Overall Vision & Aim</p> <p>Ch. 2 <u>Tullamore – Midlands Linked Gateway Town</u></p> <p>Ch. 3 <u>Context and Challenges</u></p> <p>Ch. 4 <u>Overall Strategy</u> Settlement Strategy Housing including housing strategy summary Masterplan Areas (summary) Strategic Goals</p> <p>Ch. 5 <u>Masterplans</u></p>	<p>Ch. 6 <u>Employment, Economy and Enterprise</u></p> <p>Ch. 7 <u>Town Centre, Renewal and Retail</u></p> <p>Ch. 8 <u>Transport, Movement and Accessibility</u></p> <p>Ch. 9 <u>Tourism</u></p> <p>Ch. 10 <u>Infrastructure and Environment</u></p> <p>Ch. 11 <u>Community, Social, Cultural and Sports Development</u></p> <p>Ch. 12 <u>Built Heritage.</u></p> <p>Ch. 13 <u>Natural Heritage, Landscape and Amenities.</u></p> <p>Ch. 14 <u>Development Standards</u></p> <p>Ch. 15 <u>Land-Use and Zoning</u></p>
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The written statement is to be read in conjunction with the following appendices:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <u>Offaly County Housing Strategy (Adopted 2008)*</u> ▪ <u>Offaly County Retail Strategy</u> (Adopted in 2009 by Offaly County Council and in 2010 by Tullamore Town Council)* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <u>Tullamore Town Record of Protected Structures*</u> ▪ <u>Tullamore Strategic Environmental Assessment</u>
Prepared and (adopted) as part of the plan review process |
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1.1 Introduction

This Tullamore Town and Environs Development Plan 2010-2016 was adopted by the Elected Members of both Tullamore Town Council and Offaly County Council on **13th and 17th May 2010** respectively and outlines an overall strategy for the **proper planning and sustainable development** of Tullamore town and environs over the period 2010 – 2016.

Put simply, **proper planning** is:

The right development or land use...
in the right place...
at the right time!

and **sustainable development** is:

"..development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (1987 'Bruntland Report')

This plan is set within a framework of **National, Regional and County policy**, as is a requirement of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 – 2009 and will replace the Tullamore Town and Environs Development Plan 2004–2010. The Plan is prepared over a two year period in accordance with the requirements of the Planning and Development Acts and will remain in force until (June 2016), unless varied or reviewed in the interim*.

* Consult with Councils in relation to subsequent variations to this plan or these strategies.

Functional Area

This plan relates to the functional area of Tullamore Town Council (Tullamore town boundary) and part of the functional area of Offaly County Council (Tullamore environs boundary) which is within County Offaly (refer to Map 1.2). The successful implementation of this plan will have a positive impact on Tullamore and will compliment the County Development Plan 2009-2015 by enhancing the town and providing spin off benefits for its hinterland in Central Offaly.

1.2 Settlement Profile

1.2.1 Location and Population

Tullamore is situated in the Midlands of Ireland and is County Offaly's primary urban centre (refer to Map 1.1). The town provides "Key Services" to its rural hinterland, to other centres within the County and also plays a pivotal role within the central part of the Midlands Region. The population of the town and environs in 2006 was 12,927, which represents a 16.5% population increase between 2002 and 2006 and a 22.3% increase between 1996 and 2006 (refer to Chapter 3).

Tullamore is reasonably accessible from all parts of the Country in that it is conveniently located in proximity to the new M6 (Dublin- Galway) national primary route, is located on the N52 (Dundalk-Nenagh) national secondary route which provide links to Birr in the west of the County and Athlone (Westmeath) via the N6. In addition, Tullamore is also located on the N80 which links to Portlaoise (Laois) and to the southeast. Accessibility is further enhanced by train services that operate to/from Dublin and to/from stations to the West of the Country in counties Galway and Mayo as well as the linked gateway town of Athlone (refer to Chapter 8).

Another dimension of accessibility is that Tullamore is currently served by high quality broadband infrastructure. Tullamore has its own high grade resilient Metropolitan Area Network (MAN) which was constructed by Offaly County Council under the Government sponsored Regional Broadband Scheme. The town is on the main national fibre grid and is locally serviced by a number of businesses providing modern Information and Communication Technology (ICT) solutions.

1.2.2 Physical Features

Tullamore comprises both an urban and rural landscape. The urban landscape displays a predominantly traditional urban form and low rise townscape. The Tullamore River and the Grand Canal dissect the centre of the town as both flow in an east-west direction.

The Environs area is characterised by a relatively level expanse of agricultural land traversed by the Eiscir Riada (Esker system) to the north of the town and bisected by a number of road routes radiating from the town centre. The environs area envelops the central urban area and accommodates the Tullamore River and Grand Canal both east and west of the central urban area and comprises also the mature parkland area of Charleville Demesne to the south west of the central urban area. The extremity of the environs area predominantly comprises relatively level agricultural lands with low density dwelling within the open countryside.

1.3 Main Policy Considerations in the Preparation of this Plan

This plan has been prepared having regard to National and Regional plans/policies in addition to the Offaly County Development Plan 2009-2015 and other policies.

1.3.1 National Spatial Strategy

In the preparation of this plan, the Councils have recognised that the vision for Tullamore must extend beyond the year 2016, in line with the **National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020 (NSS)**. The NSS is a twenty-year planning framework designed to achieve a better balance of social, economic, physical development and population growth between regions and to inform decisions as to where development (and Government investment) should take place. Its focus is on people, on places and on building communities and sets a framework for the balanced development of Ireland with ambitious targets for the development of the Midland Region.

The NSS recognises the need for the closer matching of where people live, with where they work, thereby sustaining:

- “A better quality of life for people
 - A strong, competitive economic position
 - An environment of the highest quality”
- (NSS Section 1.1)

‘Core messages’ of the NSS are:

- a wider range of work opportunities
 - a better quality of life
 - effective urban and rural planning
- (NSS Summary Guide)

The NSS highlights Tullamore as a linked ‘Gateway’ with Athlone and Mullingar (Westmeath) within the Midland region of Ireland – one of only nine urban settlements so designated. The Midlands Gateway will mean that Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar will collectively be the driver for growth in the Midland Region. Tullamore is well placed to contribute effectively to the development of the Gateway, particularly in light of its location, accessibility, existing population and employment opportunities. Further, Tullamore is committed to meet any challenges that may arise in the continued development, creation, implementation and operation of a successful Midlands Gateway. Priorities for the Gateway and subsequently, Tullamore, centre on employment, people, communities, education, environment and services.

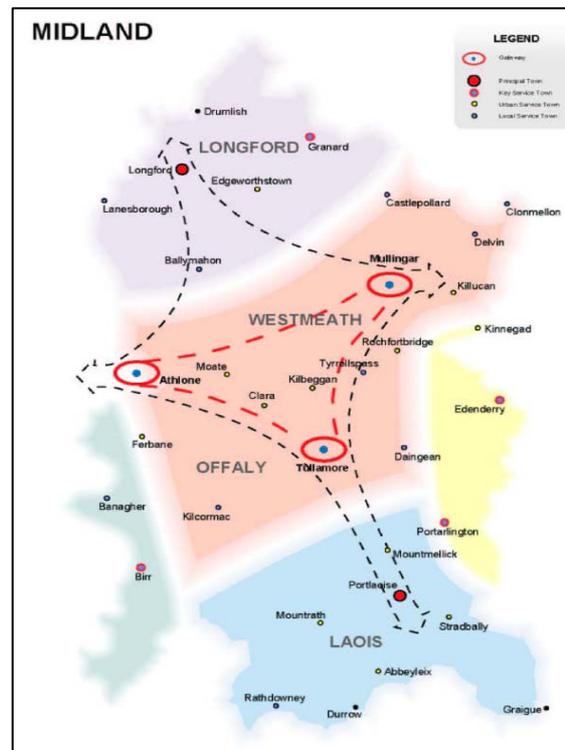
1.3.2 Midland Regional Planning Guidelines (MRPGs, 2004)

The Council has subscribed to the principles of the NSS by adopting, in conjunction with Laois, Longford and Westmeath County Councils, the **Midland Regional Planning Guidelines (MRPGs) (2004)** which are consistent with the NSS.

The MRPGs (2004) planned for an increase in population within the Midland region from the 2002 level of 225,000 in 2002 to 325,000 in 2020 and a considerable strengthening of the larger urban centres of Athlone, **Tullamore** and Mullingar, to attract economic development, services and to sustain this increased population which otherwise might gravitate towards the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), or indeed other regions. This figure has been revised upwards in light of the results of Census 2006 and optimistic government forecasts for national population growth. Tullamore’s important inclusion as part of the linked gateway with Athlone and Mullingar means that the Town has a pivotal role in the achievement of the development aspirations of the region.

Arising from the MRPGs population target, it was prescribed that **Tullamore**, as part of the ‘Central Development Area’ of the Midland region and part of the Linked Gateway should account for a very significant proportion of the population growth estimated for County Offaly i.e. from 2006 population of 70,868 to approximately **93,000** by the year 2020- an increase of approximately 14,000 over 2006 population figures.

Map 1.3 Midlands Region in Context (MRPGs)



Source: *Midland Regional Planning Guidelines (2004)*

Population targets for the Midlands Gateway are set out in the current Midland Regional Planning Guidelines. Refer to Chapter 4, Section 4.8.1.

1.3.3 Offaly County Development Plan 2009-2015

The County Offaly Development Plan 2009-2015 was adopted on 19th January 2009. The aim of the plan is to achieve a strategic and coordinated plan-led approach to the future development of the County. Therefore, strategic planning issues relating to Tullamore are also included in the County Plan.

The Councils have prepared the Tullamore Town and Environs Development Plan 2010-2016 in a manner that is consistent with the Offaly County Development Plan 2009-2015 and related policy documents such as the County Housing Strategy and the County Retail Strategy.

It is extremely important that this plan conforms to these documents as they set **strategies, policies, objectives and an overall vision for the County as whole**, which is a key part to the future development of Tullamore. This plan embraces Tullamore’s status as part of a **“Linked Gateway”** and its position at the pinnacle of the County Settlement Hierarchy.

Table 1.1 Offaly’s Settlement Hierarchy as adopted in the Offaly County Development Plan 2009-2015

County Offaly Settlement Hierarchy
Linked Gateway Town/County Town
Tullamore
Large Towns
Birr, Edenderry, Portarlinton (combined with Laois side)
Medium Towns
Clara [supporting Gateway town]
Local Service Towns
Banagher, Ferbane, Kilcormac, Daingean
Villages [23 no.]
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.
Sraids [25 no.]
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.
Open Countryside

Table 1.2 Extract from Offaly’s Settlement Hierarchy in Source: County Development Plan 2009-2015 Chapter 4 Settlement Strategy.

Tier 1 – Linked Gateway Town – Tullamore



At a Regional Level, the Midlands Linked ‘Gateway’ comprises Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar which together aim to form a strong, linked urban centre and act as a **‘driver’** for the Midlands Region. The ‘Midlands linked Gateway’ as identified in the National Spatial Strategy and MRPGs, is to become a nationally significant urban centre which requires a critical mass necessary to sustain strong levels of economic growth and prosperity. Its identified role seeks the need to compete as a region for development, for people, for jobs and for services at a National, European and International level.

At a Local Level, Tullamore forms part of the ‘Midlands Linked Gateway’ and will continue in being the **largest settlement within Offaly**, providing the majority of employment and sustaining a large portion of the population for the county. As per Census 2006, Tullamore’s population was **c. 12,927**. Having regard to recent development activity, it is estimated that its population is currently **c. 14,000** (2008).

1.3.4 A Strategic Development Framework for the Midlands Gateway

In seeking to ensure the full implementation of the provisions of both the NSS and the MRPGs, Offaly and Westmeath County Councils jointly commissioned a report detailing an effective strategic development framework for the Midlands Linked Gateway. This report, prepared by Indecon Consulting, was published in 2006 and is entitled **A Strategic Development Framework for the Midlands Gateway - Developing a World Class Knowledge-Based Competitive Gateway**, (The 'Indecon Report'), refer to Chapter 2 for further information on The Indecon Report.

The 'Vision' for the Midlands Linked Gateway presented in this report builds upon that contained in the MRPGs and is summarised as follows:

The development of a world class, knowledge based and competitive Gateway, underpinned by a quality urban structure and environment, excellent infrastructure and a visionary leadership which maximise quality of life for all its citizens.

In seeking to achieve this vision, the report stresses the need to develop the **size and concentration of the population** of the three key settlements of the Midlands Linked Gateway (Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar) in order to enable a range of services and facilities to be supported. This is considered as essential in providing the 'critical mass' necessary to facilitate the realisation of the vision of the Midlands Linked Gateway as presented in both the NSS and MRPGs.

The Council is working with Westmeath County Council and other agencies and interests to implement the strategy (principally through the Midlands Gateway Implementation Forum).

In recognition of the foregoing, the Councils have looked towards the 2022 MRPG targets and worked back to 2016 to set a planning framework to achieve the following:

- (i) Secure the NSS/MRPG objectives and
- (ii) Ensure that growth is measurable against the MRPGs over this plan period.

1.3.5 National Development Plan 2007-2013

In preparing this plan, the Councils also had regard to the **National Development Plan 2007–2013 (NDP)** which sets out a programme for national investment in infrastructure, community development etc. The NDP aims at further improving quality of life in Ireland and strengthening the country's economic success within the overall planning framework as set out by the National Spatial Strategy. Harnessing the investment that is directly beneficial to Offaly through a planning framework that allows the greatest potential for the sustainable development of Tullamore, is a challenge for this plan.

1.3.6 Strategic Environmental Assessment

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a systematic process of predicting and evaluating the likely environmental effects of implementing a proposed plan, or other strategic action, in order to ensure that these effects are appropriately addressed at the earliest appropriate stage of decision-making on a par with economic and social considerations. The SEA is being carried out in order to comply with the provisions of the SEA Regulations and in order to improve planning and environmental management in Tullamore. This draft plan should be read in conjunction with the draft Environmental Report of the SEA. An SEA Statement will be prepared once the plan is adopted in 2010 to inform how the SEA process influenced and contributed to the evolution of the final adopted plan.

1.3.7 Habitats Directive Assessment

The purpose of the HDA, in this context, is to determine whether plans or projects have implications for any Natura 2000 sites in Tullamore (refer to Chapter 13) and to ascertain whether there will be adverse impacts on the integrity of these sites.

Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive states:

“Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site’s conservation objectives. In the light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public”.

Where relevant, projects and masterplans arising from this plan should be screened by the applicant for the need to undertake Appropriate Assessment under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive.

1.3.8 Other Plans

The Tullamore Town and Environs Development Plan must also link closely to the Offaly County Development Board Strategy entitled *“Bringing the Future into Focus – A Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development”*, which is in place for the period 2002–2012 and focuses on quality of life.

The Councils have also had regard to the BMW (Border Midlands & Western) Regional Assembly Operational Programme 2007-2013.

1.4 Planning Framework

The boundary of Tullamore Environs, and as such, the development limits for the foreseeable future have been already determined by previous Development Plans and in particular through Variation No. 4 of the 2004-2010 Development Plan. The environs area defined was established from the following physical determinants:

- North – The Esker Ridge and Sliver River. This is a natural boundary that gives backdrop for the towns setting.
- East and South – The bypass route creates a well defined and highly visible edge to the town.
- South and West – The south and west boundaries of Charleville Demesne give a legible definition to the town and environs in this area.
- West – The boundary is completed by returning from the north west corner of Charleville Demesne to the Silver River and is delineated by appropriate natural features and field boundaries.

The lands included within the Tullamore and Environs defined boundaries are extensive and provide for both zoned, serviced lands and unzoned unserviced lands on the extremities. In addition, the boundary of the environs is determined by the location of various features including Charleville Estate, Tullamore bypass and Esker systems. It is within the environs boundary that development of the Gateway Town will take place within this plan period and beyond.

Having regard to the context of Tullamore as part of the Midlands Linked Gateway, Variation No. 4 of the previous Tullamore Town and Environs Development Plan 2004-2010 represented a considered planning response to the requirements of the National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020, the provisions and population projections of the Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines and the Strategic Development Framework for the Midlands Gateway (prepared by Indecon). Critically, this variation provided for additional zoned lands within Tullamore providing a planning framework that would look to develop the size and concentration of population of Tullamore and enable a range of services and facilities to be supported, not only within the lifetime of the proposed plan (up to 2016), but beyond. This draft development plan retains the planning framework for the development of the town as previously adopted through Variation no. 4.

1.5 Overall Vision

The Offaly County Development Strategy and the Offaly County Council Corporate Strategy share the same “**vision statement**”, and the Councils’ aim is to apply this vision in terms of its land use and planning implications through the implementation of this Town and Environs Development Plan. It reads:

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

For Tullamore Town and Environs Development Plan 2010-2016, this means having regard to:

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

It is intended that this vision will act as a “prompt” for all associated strategies, as well as the policies and objectives of this plan.

The policy framework and “overall vision” mentioned above give rise to significant planning challenges for the Councils over the plan period and beyond. The following chapter lists these challenges, which arise from an examination of demographic issues (refer to Chapter 3) and overall planning issues, which act as supporting information and rationale for the challenges listed.

1.6 Overall Plan Aim

The overall plan aim of this development plan is:

To set out a framework for the physical development of the Linked Gateway town of Tullamore and its Environs, so that growth may take place in a sensitive, co-ordinated and orderly manner, while at the same time conserving the town’s character and intrinsic heritage value.

