

## Chapter 2 Tullamore – Midlands Linked Gateway Town

### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter looks at the background and context in which Tullamore has been designated as part of the Midlands Linked Gateway in conjunction with Athlone and Mullingar (refer to Map 2.1). The overall approach between Offaly Local Authorities and Westmeath Local Authorities in fostering a solid partnership to ensure the success of the Midlands Gateway is also outlined. A profile of the town's physical and social infrastructure illustrates that Tullamore is well placed to contribute strongly and successful development of the Gateway, particularly in light of its location, accessibility, existing population and employment opportunities. Strategic Goals outlined at the end of the chapter look to continue ongoing efforts to contribute to the success of the Gateway and the Midland Region.

### 2.1 Background to Linked Gateway Status

The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) 2002-2020 set out Government policy in relation to achieving balanced Regional Development in Ireland. The NSS is a planning framework aimed at achieving a better balance of social, economic, physical development and population growth between the Regions. Balanced Regional Development is a fundamental part of the strategy. In order to achieve this, the NSS identified Tullamore as a linked 'Gateway' along with Athlone and Mullingar (Westmeath). This designation builds on the town's strategic and central location within the Midland Region of Ireland. The strategy indicates how each region will participate in the NSS and the principal messages within the NSS of particular relevance to the Midland Region can be summarised as follows:

- The Region needs to boost its critical mass, become more self-sustaining and build on its central location, its proximity to Dublin, its quality of life and natural and cultural heritage attributes.
- The Region needs to focus on the implementation of the linked gateway (Athlone, Tullamore, and Mullingar).
- The role of the linked gateway needs to be partnered by a focus on the development and role of other significant towns in the Region.
- The Region must benefit strongly from improving transport and communications infrastructure, improving the connectivity, cohesion and identity of the Region.
- The vitality of rural communities should be maintained in tandem with a strengthened network of towns and villages.

The Midland Regional Planning Guidelines (MRPG) issued in 2004, are designed to implement the provisions of the NSS by establishing a framework at a Regional level to further coordinate and integrate the Development Plans of Planning Authorities in the Region. The MRPGs set out a strategic approach to guide the planning and development of the Midlands Region. There are 4 key areas of focus:

- **Building the Critical Mass of the Region – not only in terms of population but also of the regional economy, employment and education.**
- **Developing and maintaining the identity of the region.**
  - **Connectivity to other regions.**
  - **Balance between rural and urban areas.**

The MRPGs identify key objectives for each of the above areas of focus but largely prescribe that much of the development, which is to take place in the Midland Region, should be centred on the Midlands 'Gateway' of Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar. This linked gateway should be considered as a collective **'driver for growth'** in the Midlands Region. These towns forming a strong, linked urban centre and 'driver' for the Midlands Region will provide that the Gateway will compete for development, for people, for jobs and for services at a national and international level.

Population targets for the Midlands Gateway are set out in the current Midland Regional Planning Guidelines. Refer to Chapter 4, Section 4.8.1. This gives rise to distinctive challenges for Tullamore Town which are highlighted in Chapter 3.

It is evident from both the NSS and the MRPGs that Tullamore is a crucial component of the Midlands Gateway. The role of Tullamore is seen as pivotal to balanced regional development. However, coupled with the approach to balanced regional development, is also the balanced development of County Offaly, where it must not be overlooked that Tullamore provides the bulk of employment and services in the county and sustains a large portion of the population of the county.

## 2.2 Midlands Gateway: Overall Approach by Offaly and Westmeath Local Authorities

Building on the National Spatial Strategy, Regional Planning Guidelines and ongoing investment under the National Development Plan 2007-2013 (to implement strategic objectives for Midlands Linked Gateway), Offaly and Westmeath Local Authorities are working together and with other agencies and interests to maximise the development potential of the Midlands Linked Gateway. **Partnership** is vital to the success of the **implementation** of the provisions of the foregoing policy statements.

Offaly and Westmeath Local Authorities are co-operating 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 growth as opposed to commuter led growth which has happened in the past. This will be achieved through the following actions/measures:

- Building up a strong critical mass of population within the linked gateway at the heart of the region. Population targets for the Midlands Gateway are set out in the current Midland Regional Planning Guidelines. Refer to Chapter 4, Section 4.8.1.
- 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 within the Gateway.
- **Improving the physical infrastructure** of the towns in the Linked Gateway 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 linked gateway towns in particular, including where appropriate, integration with new development, where appropriate, 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.

### 2.2.1 Strategic Development Framework for the Midland Gateway

To energise the promotion and development of the Midlands Gateway, Offaly and Westmeath Local Authorities commissioned a Strategic Development Framework for the Midlands Gateway entitled – Developing a World Class Knowledge based Competitive Gateway. This report prepared by Indecon Consulting and published in 2006, represented a major step in strengthening collaboration between the Local Authorities.

The report presents an effective strategic development framework for the linked Midland Gateway and forms the basis for the development of a world class, knowledge based and competitive Gateway. The strategy was designed to formulate and guide an integrated linked Gateway comprising Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar together with other towns in the Region to achieve its potential as an internally competitive Gateway. The designation of the Midlands Gateway and, moreover its development, will provide the basis to develop a range of high quality employment and education opportunities with excellent accessibility and mobility. The strategy has also been formulated to ensure the availability of choice in residential, retail, leisure and tourist facilities based on the principle of **quality of life** and **environmental enhancement**.

The report identified ten priority areas which must be addressed in order to build on the strengths and address identified weaknesses. The priority areas require progress to further implement policies and programmes to address the issues and guidance is given in the report also. The ten priority areas and their associated indicators include:

Key Elements in Plan	Performance Indicator
<b>1. Population Growth and Critical Mass</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Development of 3 Key towns Interlinked Strategic development Towns and Development of a new Strategic Development Zone</li> <li>➤ Development of Balanced Residential Growth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Co-ordinated Development plans with a common gateway chapter</li> <li>➤ Development of new Strategic Development Zone</li> <li>➤ Increase in population as per Agreed Targets for Gateway</li> </ul>
<b>2. Infrastructure and Connectivity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Priority Investments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Funding approval for investments</li> <li>➤ Planning Permission / Commencement of Construction</li> </ul>
<b>3. Productivity Gap</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Development Agencies to promote high value added activities</li> <li>➤ Development of ICT, manufacturing and educational sectors in Athlone</li> <li>➤ Development of engineering, consumer products financial services in Mullingar</li> <li>➤ Development of engineering, consumer products financial services in Mullingar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Significant increase in value added per employee in manufacturing and international services in gateway</li> <li>➤ Increase in number of new projects in sectors</li> <li>➤ Expansion of existing projects</li> </ul>
<b>4. Third and Fourth Lower Institutions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Increased investment in Athlone Institute of Technology / other third level institutions</li> <li>➤ Building 4 Development Research Centres in Gateway</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ AIT/ other third level entities to secure an increased share of R&amp;D / Research Funding</li> <li>➤ Funding Approval for Projects from AIT</li> </ul>
<b>5. Skills / Educational Attraction</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Implementation of Plan to increase progression of Students into 3<sup>rd</sup> Level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Increase in percentage of population studying at 3<sup>rd</sup> level</li> </ul>
<b>6. Tourism Development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Development of Tourism Product and Infrastructure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Increased Investment in Tourism</li> </ul>
<b>7. Retail and Distribution Activities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Promotion of Midlands Gateway for retail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Increased investment in retail and distribution</li> </ul>
<b>8. Quality of Life</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Investment in recreational and community facilities in Gateway</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Establishment of separate sub-heading</li> <li>➤ Support for specific projects</li> </ul>
<b>9. Cost Competitiveness</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Policies to Ensure Midlands do not Fail Competitive Disadvantage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Comparative costs facing residents and businesses</li> </ul>
<b>10. Effective Branding</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Marketing and Branding Strategy for Region</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Implementation of Marketing Plan</li> </ul>

Source: Indecon/KSA

Looking to the findings and conclusions of the framework and subsequent implementation requirements, Offaly and Westmeath Local Authorities agree on the following 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 coordinated 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 **coordinated 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 coordinated approach to the 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 Linked Gateway.
- 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 through the establishment of, for example, a joint Gateway Sub-committee of the Offaly and Westmeath County Development Boards. Private sector participation in the Gateway project is a vital component for success in **winning investment** and the Local Authorities will encourage a strategic approach by business and community interests in working with the Local Authorities to agree planning and development policies and investment priorities that will deliver the critical mass and complementary attractions across the towns in 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,
- 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.

### 2.2.2 Midland Gateway Implementation Forum

The Gateway Implementation Forum was established in 2007 in response to a recommendation within the Indecon Report to establish a three-tier approach for the strategic development of the Midlands Linked Gateway. The Forum seeks to provide and promote an interagency focus on the progression of the Indecon recommendations and membership comprises representatives from the following: Westmeath County Council; Offaly County Council; The Midland Regional Authority; The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DOEHLG); Athlone IT; The Midland Chamber of Commerce; Enterprise Ireland; FÁS; IDA, the HSE and Fáilte Ireland.

### 2.2.3 Gateway Innovation Fund

Through the National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-2013, the Government announced the establishment of the Gateway Innovation Fund (GIF) as a strategic targeted intervention to stimulate Gateway development in the context of the National Spatial Strategy (NSS). Funding in the amount of €300 million was allocated for projects that could initiate and progress joined-up strategies and action at Gateway level by helping to fund targeted strategic projects that could trigger the accelerated development of the Gateways and their wider regions. Offaly County Council, in cooperation with Westmeath County Council and Athlone Institute of Technology, made a submission to avail of funding in 2007 in order to contribute to further progressing the advancement of the Midlands Gateway. At present, the GIF fund has been suspended in light of the current economic climate.

### 2.2.4 Developing Areas Initiative

The Department for Housing, Urban Renewal and Developing Areas, under the DoEHLG, introduced the Developing Areas Initiative (DAI) in 2008. Designed to provide a partnership approach to the integrated delivery of both hard and soft infrastructure, such as water and wastewater services, roads and public transport, schools and sports and community facilities, the DAI emphasises that the roll out of infrastructure should not only match, but should anticipate, development and that improved integration between the provision of services and the community should be a pre-requisite. The Councils submitted a proposal under this initiative in relation to the linked Gateway town of Tullamore in 2008. This initiative is continuing to be progressed by the DoEHLG who have undertaken the initial analysis on proposals received.

The Councils remain committed to pursuing funding options for the advancement of the linked Gateway status of Tullamore, where they become available.

## 2.3 Tullamore Gateway Profile

### 2.3.1 Infrastructure

#### 2.3.1.1 Transport and Accessibility

##### Road Infrastructure

Tullamore enjoys a central location not only within County Offaly, but also within the Midland Region of Ireland and as a result, is accessible to and from all parts of the Country. The town is located on the N52 National Secondary route which serves to link Dundalk (Co. Louth) in the east of the Country to Nenagh (County Tipperary) to the south west region of the Country. The N80 national secondary route traverses the town with a south east, north-west axis linking the south east of the Country to the Midland Region and in particular, to the Midland linked Gateway towns. Accessibility to Dublin has been vastly improved in recent times by the opening of the new M6 Motorway to which access can be gained north of Tullamore from two locations from the N52 and the N80. Accessibility to the west of the Country is also available from the M6 (refer to Map 2.1).

In the context of roads infrastructure and location, Tullamore is very well positioned as a key centre for economic growth within the Midland Region and the construction of major infrastructural projects, such as the new Tullamore Bypass (N52) located to the east of the town is a strategic step for Tullamore on many levels i.e. relieving the town of unnecessary through-traffic, promoting connectivity within the Midlands Linked Gateway, contributing a significant improvement in accessibility to areas within Tullamore and County Offaly while clearly illustrating a continued approach to the improvement of the competitive edge of the Midlands Linked Gateway.

**Plate 2.1 Tullamore bypass**



**Plate 2.2 Sculptures on the bypass**



Source: Roads Department and Arts Office, Offaly County Council

The promotion of connectivity is considered vital by Offaly Local Authorities and this is clearly demonstrated by the fact that while the eastern bypass of Tullamore Town is completed, plans are evolving for the provision of a western bypass/relief road linking the N52, to the south west of the town, to the N80 to the north west of Tullamore town.

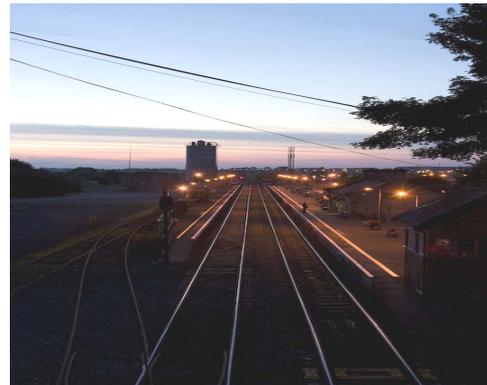
The development of new transport linkages coupled with the upgrade of existing road infrastructure will further strengthen connectivity and contribute quite significantly to the success of Tullamore as part of the Midlands linked Gateway. This will require a level of co-operation between relevant bodies and agencies with Offaly Local Authorities which have been undertaken successfully and efficiently in the past and the Councils will endeavour to continue with (refer to Chapter 8).

#### Rail Infrastructure

Tullamore has an established rail infrastructure that provides for linkages to Dublin City in the east, Galway City and Mayo to the west via the linked gateway town of Athlone in the Midlands. The frequent service provided reflects the level of demand and the Councils will co-operate with the relevant bodies and agencies to continue to improve and upgrade services where necessary and appropriate.

It is acknowledged that the upgrading of the existing rail linkages between the midland towns is important. It is further recognised that the development of the rail network in the Midland Region could play a very positive role in the social and economic development of the area and would contribute positively to balanced regional development. The provision of a second line between Portarlinton and Galway would facilitate the development of Tullamore greatly. In addition, there 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. The opportunity for rail infrastructure to benefit Tullamore, the surrounding hinterland, the County, the Linked Gateway and the wider region is acknowledged and encouraged (refer to Chapter 8).

#### Plates 2.3 & 2.4: Tullamore Railway Station



Source: Andy Mason

#### 2.3.1.2 Water Services

Tullamore's waste water treatment plant is located to the west of the railway line between the Tullamore River and the Grand Canal. The upgrade of the Tullamore Wastewater Treatment Plant from 16,000 p.e. to 45,000 p.e. is currently under construction (2010) and is due to be operational in 2012. Under the WSIP 2010-2012, the upgrade of the Tullamore sewerage scheme collection network and pumping stations is at planning stage.

Water supply is derived from the Clonaslee plant, six wells including the Sillogue Well and from boreholes in Arden. Tullamore Water Supply Scheme is included in the Water Services Investment Programme (WSIP) 2010-2012 for improvement/upgrade works. It is proposed to upgrade the water treatment plant at Clonaslee, provide additional storage at Clonminch and Ardan and provide key trunk and distribution mains (refer to Chapter 10).

#### 2.3.1.3 Energy and Communications

##### Electricity

Electricity demand for County Offaly is distributed from a number of points in different Counties including Thornsberry, within the environs of Tullamore. Currently, improvement works are being undertaken that will improve standby to Tullamore and this comes in the form of a new 110kv Line from the Cushaling station into Tullamore.

### Gas

Natural gas is the cleanest of all fossil fuels and its chemical composition makes it a more environmentally friendly fuel than oil, coal or peat. Tullamore Town is served from the gas network and connections are widely available within existing established areas of the town. Connection is also available when required for new and establishing areas.

### Telecommunications

The provision of telecommunication services is widely available in the Tullamore area.

### Broadband

Tullamore can boast of its high quality broadband infrastructure. It has its own high grade resilient Metropolitan Area Network (MAN) which was constructed by Offaly County Council under the Government sponsored Regional Broadband Scheme. Map 2.2 shows the location of the MAN around Tullamore. Also there are other reliable broadband services (wireless and wired) within the town. 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. The MAN loop around Tullamore has ample capacity to accommodate new linkages.

## 2.3.2 Enhancing the Urban Environment

Tullamore displays a traditional form in its layout and streetscapes. The town is rich in heritage and possesses many buildings and structures that contribute towards the character of the town. There are opportunities to enhance the appearance of the town e.g. through improvements to buildings, streetscapes, rejuvenation of areas, creation and usage of civic/amenity areas and other methods of presenting the town in an attractive way making it an desirable place to work in, to visit and to live in.

### Plates 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7: O'Connor Square, Grand Canal Harbour and Tullamore Courthouse, examples of built heritage in Tullamore



Source: Andy Mason for plates 2.5 and 2.7

The process of continuing to enhance Tullamore involves the planning and delivery of a range of key projects that ultimately result in an evolving place and image that attracts businesses and people for various different reasons. Enhancing the urban environment requires a link between development, land-use change and associated economic, environmental and social impact.

Tullamore has a number of such projects, firstly in the development of the swimming pool and associated facilities at Cloncollig. This valuable facility now not only meets the needs of people in the town, but is an attraction for people from a wider catchment as a social and recreational outlet. A similar successful project is the re-development of Lloyd Town Park and serves to demonstrate how social and community facilities contribute to place making and enhance the living environment.

**Plates 2.8 and 2.9: Lloyd Town Park and Tullamore Leisure Centre.**

Source: Tullamore Town Council for plate 2.8

### 2.3.3 Business/Technology

In the area of business and technology, Tullamore has promoted, continues to promote and facilitates the location of business park type areas within the town. Further, other suitable areas have been identified for the development of business/technology uses providing for the creation of employment and enterprise (refer to Chapter 5 and to the land use zoning map). At the Sragh Business and Technology Park, the existing Business and Technology Park offers high specification advanced technology building designs and office accommodation including greenfield site for future development. The layout of the park is completed and is maintained to an extremely high standard.

Located to the south west of the town at Clonminch, a large area has been identified for Business and Technology use (refer to land use map accompanying this plan). This area already comprises a number of existing office based developments and possesses a unique and an extremely high level of potential to attract wide ranging high end businesses in a high quality park-like setting that will be an attractive place to work and visit. This area is already served by the high grade MAN enhancing vital connectivity for any business that may wish to locate here.

In addition to the high specification Business and Technology areas, Tullamore possesses a number of industrial and commercial areas facilitating the requirements of a multitude of industrial and commercial business developments. The Axis and Burlington Business Parks in Tullamore are examples of modern high quality industrial/commercial park developments in strategic locations with good road and communication links.

Established industrial areas within the town are generally proving to be flexible in facilitating existing developments. Importantly though, where expansion of industrial/commercial developments is sometimes restricted in existing industrial areas, Tullamore can offer a choice of other suitably located industrial/commercial areas.

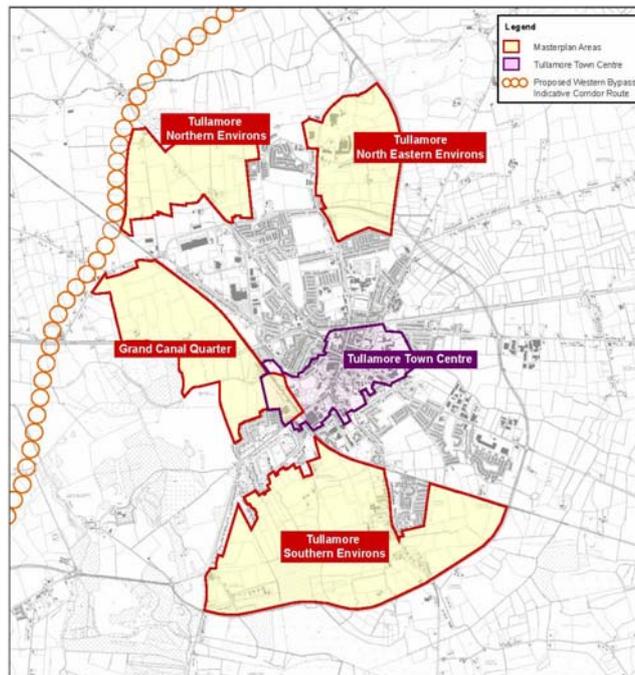
**Plates 2.10, 2.11 and 2.12: Technological processes for medical devices.**

Source: Andy Mason

### 2.3.4 New Communities

The growing and development of Tullamore must be carried out in a planned and structured manner. It has been determined through the NSS and the MRPGs that Tullamore is targeted to grow to a population of approximately 24,500 by 2022 from 13,000 in 2006. This is not to say that Tullamore must channel its energy into only providing housing to accommodate 24,500 but rather to build new opportunities for communities including employment. Plans exist in the form of 4 Masterplan areas that provide the planning framework for the development of these new communities. The strategic location of the 4 Masterplan areas, along with their sizes and characteristics, provides an opportunity to facilitate the orderly and sequential expansion of Tullamore in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area as guided from the NSS and the MRPGs (refer to Chapter 5 for masterplan areas).

**Map 2.3: Location of Masterplan Areas – New Communities.**



### 2.3.5 Land use/Planning Framework

Variation no. 4 of the 2004 -2010 Tullamore and Environs Development Plan represented a considered planning response to the requirements of the NSS, the provisions and population projections of the MRPGs and the Strategic Development Framework for the Midlands Gateway (prepared by Indecon) which saw the zoning of additional lands in Tullamore. The zoned areas could, subject to phasing, conservatively deliver a population of 14,000 persons (additional to the existing population of almost 13,000). The additional zoned areas provides for masterplan areas (refer to Chapter 5) which set out a framework for the sequential development of Tullamore. Critically, this variation provided for additional zoned lands within Tullamore providing a planning framework that would look to develop the size and concentration of the 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.

### 2.3.6 Healthcare

Tullamore has an established legacy of developments associated with Healthcare. The Midland Regional Hospital in Tullamore has been long established and is a major employer within the town and County Offaly. The new Midland Regional Hospital opened recently provides for further attentive care in special health areas.

**Plate 2.13: Midland Regional Hospital Tullamore**

Source: Andy Mason

Coupled with the existing healthcare profile of the town, Tullamore has attracted overseas companies with significant associated healthcare operations in Tullamore including *Covidien* (medical devices) *Sennheiser Ireland* (headphones) *GeneMedix* (biogeneric pharmaceutical products) and *Isotron Ireland* (ETO sterilisation). The Councils will continue to support and encourage the delivery of healthcare services in Tullamore and will facilitate and develop, where appropriate, the further development of the town's 'healthcare' profile.

### 2.3.7 Amenity and Tourism

Tullamore has a wealth of amenities which it offers to both residents and visitors to the town. Sport and recreational facilities of both a private and public nature are widely dispersed throughout the town. The Grand Canal is also used for walks along the adjoining tow paths and for boating. The town can boast a popular town park (Lloyd Town Park) in a central location with facilities that cater for all age groups.

**Plates 2.14 and 2.15 Grand Canal**

Source: Andy Mason

Tourists are attracted to Tullamore for a number of reasons. Its location on the Grand Canal is a fundamental asset for attracting visitors. Tullamore is a solid base for visiting County Offaly and the Midland Region. Within Tullamore visiting attractions include the Tullamore Dew Heritage Centre and Charleville Castle.

The social calendar of Tullamore is punctuated with major events. Tullamore has held the National Livestock Show on an annual basis as well as the National Ploughing Championship. The All Ireland Fleadh has been held in the town since 2007 and highlights the ability of the town to absorb, facilitate and accommodate extremely large numbers of people. The Phoenix festival is an annual attraction in Tullamore which was inspired by the great balloon fire in the town (1785) which is a three day event. Tullamore's central location is a key asset in attracting, in particular, national events.

Conference facilities in Tullamore are provided to a high standard predominantly within local hotels and draws large numbers of people and businesses from all over the Country.

### Plates 2.16 and 2.17: Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2007, Tullamore



Source: Andy Mason

#### 2.3.8 Partnership

The key to the continuing growth and development of Tullamore is co-operation with other agencies at local, regional and national level. The Local Authorities have a wide ranging remit to lobby, encourage, facilitate and promote development in Tullamore. The Councils have established working relationships with numerous organisations such as Westmeath County Council, the County Development Board, the IDA, HSE, Tourism Authorities, Iarnród Éireann and many others and will continue to co-operate with such organisations in achieving the maximum potential of Tullamore as a Linked Gateway Town.

### 2.3 Progressing Tullamore and the Linked Gateway

In order to fully support the NSS and the MRPGs objectives to promote the development of the Midland Linked Gateway as a 'driver' of development within the Midlands, it is necessary to encourage the growth of Tullamore to its full potential both economically and socially. Central to this is the implementation of the MRPGs which forecast a population of 24,500 for Tullamore by 2022.

Working from the solid platform already created, Tullamore can look to the future with great anticipation and is well poised to seize opportunities as they arise or are pursued. Staying ahead on fundamental projects will be of paramount importance in keeping the existing encouraging momentum going while maintaining a clear focus on the strategic important role that Tullamore has been conferred with. The Strategic Goals outlined in section 2.4 represent the direction proposed in this regard.

### 2.4 Strategic Goals for Tullamore

- To strengthen the ability of Tullamore to facilitate the sustainable development of the town and environs area to meet economic, social and demographic growth requirements of Tullamore Town in accordance with the provisions of the NSS and MRPGs by the provision of adequate zoned land in an orderly manner.
- To strengthen the existing physical development of Tullamore and Environs area so that the future sustainable growth of the town is underpinned by excellent infrastructure, responds to current and future development requirements and occurs in the co-ordinated manner which promotes a good quality of life for those who live and work in Tullamore both at present and in the future.
- To encourage the development of Tullamore in a sequential manner and in accordance with the planning framework identified in the plan. This would provide for the sequential expansion of the town from central areas into the environs areas (masterplan areas – refer to Chapter 5) in a coherent manner which will facilitate complete integration between the town and environs.

- To develop and plan continually for strategic transportation links including N52/N80 and western bypass between Tullamore and Athlone and Mullingar to enable the Midlands Linked Gateway to function effectively and competitively.
- To maintain and further enhance the role of Tullamore as an important centre of socio-economic activity in the Midland Linked Gateway and as the main administrative centre of County Offaly.
- To provide and maintain adequate water supply, drainage and waste water services. This will be undertaken in a manner which protects and enhances the natural environment, whilst providing for economic and urban development purposes.
- To facilitate the provision of sufficient and adequate employment opportunities to cater for the needs of the population of the town and its hinterland and to attract new population.
- Promote industrial and commercial development including Research and Development facilities to build on existing educational strengths and existing industry to promote a coherent and integrated approach to economic growth.
- To allow for the extension and development of educational facilities in the town as necessary and promote the provision of third level education facilities and courses that are aligned with the skill set needs and research and development activities of targeted industry sectors.
- To encourage the continued commercial development of the town and to further its role as a shopping and commercial centre for the County and for the Midland Region.
- To ensure that sufficient and suitably located land is allocated to satisfy the requirements of a multitude of functions in the town which in turn, would be attractive and flexible to accommodate the requirements of a wide a range of operators ranging from local level to international level.
- To promote the town's role within the Region as a Healthcare centre and to seek to provide further healthcare facilities in designated areas.
- To ensure that the necessary public utilities and services are available in the future to satisfy the needs of Tullamore linking in with surrounding areas.
- To facilitate the provision of improved amenities within the town and to secure the appropriate re-development, renewal and improvement of areas within the town.
- To facilitate the development and promotion of Tullamore as a tourism destination and base.
- To renew, consolidate and develop the existing fabric of the town and to encourage a high quality of design in new development.
- To ensure that the development of Tullamore will not adversely compromise the natural environment.