

Please note that this is the Original Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 (adopted on the 22nd September, 2021). Following the adoption of Variation No. 1 & Variation No. 2 on the 13th May, 2024, this Plan has now been superseded by the Consolidated version.

The Consolidated version of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 (incl. Variations 1 & 2) is available to view at this link:

[Consolidated Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 incl. Variations 1 and 2](#)

1.0 Village Context and Character

Rathcairn is located in the centre of County Meath. It is one of two Gaeltacht areas in the county, with the other being Baile Ghib (Gibbstown). It is located along a narrow local road network, between the R154 Athboy / Trim Regional road, and the N51 Athboy / Navan Road approximately 3.5km east of Athboy. Rathcairn has two distinctive character areas, the village core centred around the shop, church, town hall and GAA grounds and the enterprise and employment zone at the entrance to the village to the north. Interspersed between the two character areas are historic Land Commission dwellings and more modern dwellings. The Primary School is located at the entrance to the village from the south, and the Secondary School, Coláiste Pobail is located between the village centre and the enterprise zone.

Position in Settlement Hierarchy	Village
2016 Population	156 (estimate no census data available)
2011 Population	133 (estimate no census data available)
Percentage Change 2011-2016	37.00%
Housing stock 2016	52
Number of units completed 2016-2019	2
Committed units not yet built	0
Population Projection 2027	226

Education Facilities	Post Primary School: Coláiste Pobail Rath Cairn, Primary School: Bunscoil Ráth Coláiste Na bhFiann
Community Facilities	10
Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs)	None
Protected Structures	None
Zone of Archaeological Potential	None
Natura 2000 Sites	The nearest Natura 2000 site is the River Boyne & River Blackwater SPA and SAC which is located approximately 2.28km to the south west.
Strategic Flood Risk Assessment	Manage flood risk and development in line with approved policies and objectives as set out in Vol. 1 Chapter 6: Infrastructure.
Water Services Infrastructure/Capacity	Rathcairn is supplied by the Athboy Water Supply Scheme – limited capacity available. Wastewater is discharged to Athboy for treatment – capacity is limited.

2.0 Vision

To promote the linguistic and cultural heritage of Rathcairn Gaeltacht and build on the distinctive character and sense of place of the village by strengthening its identity in a manner that enhances its linguistic and cultural distinctiveness, while also providing for development which will allow Rathcairn to develop in a sustainable manner, as an attractive place to live, work, recreate and visit, while reflecting its Gaeltacht distinctiveness. Only natural/organic residential growth will be encouraged over the lifetime of the Development Plan in line with the Development Plan Core Strategy.

3.0 Opportunities

- There is an opportunity to develop the significant tourist potential of the village as a distinctive Gaeltacht, to contribute to the sustainable development of the village, and also as a place to promote the development of the Irish Language and culture generally.
- There is potential to enhance the entrances to the village which will improve the attractiveness of Rathcairn for potential new enterprise and employment uses, also through consolidation of the village centre.
- Gaeltacht na Mí Economic Development Forum promotes the special economic status of Rathcairn and aims to support measures aimed at driving economic growth in the village.

4.0 Land Use Strategy

In order to facilitate the delivery of the Vision for Rathcairn, a village strategy is proposed which builds on the opportunities within the village. There are a number of key elements to the Strategy; to define the gate ways to the village from north and south in the form of public realm improvements to boundaries and the use of branding and signage for the Gaeltacht area; also public realm improvement at the entrance to the enterprise zone, and within the village core, including rationalisation of parking; and provision of pedestrian paths that connect with new pedestrian routes within and around the village.

4.1 Settlement and Housing

Rathcairn has developed as a low-density settlement comprising detached dwellings within individual garden plots. New residential development in the village has followed this model, and it is

this particular form of development that is encouraged, which is cognisant of the traditional building form and styles in the area.

The area identified to accommodate new residential development is at the village centre adjacent to the village cross roads, together with village centre uses to consolidate the commercial village core, and also to the rear of the shop adjoining the GAA grounds.

Low density residential development clustered adjoining the village core is considered most appropriate to provide a sustainable alternative to one off housing and to retain the overall rural character of the area.

Dwelling design that is appropriate to the area which takes cognizance of the traditional built forms associated with the Gaeltacht will be required. An appropriate dwelling form may comprise gable and parallel configuration of simple building form. It is proposed that future development should integrate new paths connecting the new residential areas to the village core.

4.2 Economy and Employment

Rathcairn is identified as a Level 5 retail centre in the County Retail Hierarchy. It has a small range of retail services, primarily a local convenience shop. The village would benefit from having a greater range and variety of facilities to serve the immediate needs of the village and rural catchment. However, the close proximity of the village to Navan and Athboy provide a broader range of services. This strategy promotes the consolidation of the village centre to the south east and north east of the crossroads for potential mixed-use development to integrate with potential new residential areas.

The enterprise zoned lands at the entrance to the village to the north has continued to support the operation of a number of industrial uses. The area identified for potential expansion is currently in agricultural use. The public realm is poor within and at the entrance to the estate, and in particular the cottage and out buildings are in poor condition, which would benefit from upgrading. This strategy promotes the enhancement of the public realm, including road and footpath finishes and boundary treatments, upgrading of the existing cottage, in order to enhance the overall visual appearance and presentation of the estate. Further expansion of the enterprise zone is promoted in this strategy. As previously noted, Gaeltacht na Mí Economic Development Forum promotes the

special economic status of Rathcairn and will continue to support measures aimed at driving economic growth in the village.

4.3 Water Service Infrastructure

Rathcairn is served by the following water service infrastructure:

Water: Rathcairn is supplied by the Athboy Water Supply Scheme. It is on the periphery of this scheme and hence, network constraints limit spare capacity.

Wastewater: Wastewater from Rathcairn is pumped to Athboy Treatment Plant. There is limited spare capacity at this plant. All development proposals will be considered in the context of available capacity.

4.4 Movement

The village of Rathcairn is located close to the national and regional road systems (N51 and R154). The village however is defined by local roads and cul-de-sacs. The built-up area of Rathcairn is largely contained within a 400m walk band from the village centre, that includes community, educational and residential uses. The industrial estate is within an 800m walk band. There is poor pedestrian connectivity between the village centre and the industrial area.

The plan promotes sustainable modes of transport such as walking and cycling, through the development of new paths connecting the village centre, to the village park, **and to** the industrial area. Also, the enhancement of pedestrian facilities is permitted in the village centre, through rationalisation of car parking, and extension of pedestrian zones to create a village square or space at the cross roads of the village centre.

The Plan also promotes the provision of public / private bus services to connect with the adjoining towns and villages.

4.5 Cultural and Natural Heritage

Rathcairn was designated a Gaeltacht in the 1930's when migrants predominantly from Connemara, Co. Galway settled in the area. This migration to Rathcairn took place as a result of the Land Commission's work in providing migrants with a better quality of life than the lands on the western Atlantic coast and to halt the decline in the native Irish language. Sufficient agricultural land was not available and convenient to their homesteads in the west of Ireland while suitable estates were more readily available in the east of Ireland for sub-division. In 1935, in the order of forty families

were relocated to what is now Rathcairn village. The identity of this Gaeltacht has largely been preserved, benefiting from its rural location, the size of the community and the development of employment and community initiatives that protect and enhance the Irish language and culture of the area. The recent development of the village park reinforces this identity.

The built heritage creates a particular sense of place that is unique to Rathcairn and future development should retain and enhance this heritage in future development forms, while protecting the distinction between the urban and rural areas. A contemporary interpretation of the local building style using modern material and technology is encouraged. Details of appropriate house types and materials will form part of the future Rural Design Guide. This will assist in maintaining the particular identity of Rathcairn that is derived from local traditions.

4.6 Green Infrastructure

The landscape surrounding Rathcairn is generally flat rising to the south. This strategy promotes the creation of distinctive entrances to the village, to demarcate the urban and rural development areas, and to promote the protection of a green edge separating the urban area from the rural area in order to protect the overall rural setting of the village.

4.7 Social Infrastructure

Community uses in Rathcairn are centrally located and include the community centre and clubhouse (An Bradán Feasea), the library, church and GAA football field. The primary school, (Scoil Uí Ghramhnaigh) is located at the entrance to the village from the south / Trim Road, and the secondary school (Coláiste Phobail Rath Cairn) is located between the village centre and the recently development village park. There are two public amenity areas in the village centre adjoining the church and the village park to the north of the village.

As Rathcairn develops existing community and recreational facilities should be enhanced to meet the needs of the existing and future population. Lands are provided to facilitate further expansion of the community uses within the village adjoining the existing community facilities.

4.8 Urban Design and Public Realm

Rathcairn has evolved from one off dispersed Land Commission dwellings, centered on the local shop, church and community. While the village has a dispersed built form, it retains a rural character, with centres of development at the existing industrial area to the north, the village core

and the primary school to the south. This strategy promotes the development of improved boundary treatment generally throughout in order to enhance the overall visual appearance of the village, and to give it overall coherence. Also, this strategy promotes the definition of the entrances to the village, and the creation of two public spaces; in the village centre, potentially alongside the consolidation of the village centre, with new mixed use and residential development, and secondly at the entrance to the industrial estate, as a measure to enhance its visual appearance, and improve its identity and place for potential future business. New pedestrian paths are proposed to connect the facilities within the village, and together with coordinated lighting, this has the potential to give coherence in the appearance and identity of the village.

5.0 Village Development Policies and Objectives

The Policies and Objectives set out below are in addition to those included in the Written Statement in Volume One of the County Development Plan. To avoid repetition Policies and Objectives have only been restated where they have particular relevance to the settlement. These Policies and Objectives should therefore be read in conjunction with the Policies and Objectives and Development Standards in Volume One of the County Development Plan.

Policy

It is the policy of the Council:

RATHC POL 1

To promote the linguistic and cultural heritage of Rathcairn Gaeltacht and build on the distinctive character and sense of place of the village in a manner that enhances its linguistic and cultural distinctiveness, while also providing for development which will allow Rathcairn to develop in a sustainable manner, as an attractive place to live, work, recreate and visit, while reflecting its Gaeltacht distinctiveness.

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council:

Settlement and Housing

RATHC OBJ 1

To secure the implementation of the Core Strategy of the County Development Plan, in so far as is practicable, by ensuring the household allocation for Rathcairn as set out in Table 2.12 of the Core Strategy is not exceeded.

RATHC OBJ 2

To support and encourage residential development on under-utilised land and/or vacant lands including 'infill' and 'brownfield' sites, subject to a high standard of design and layout being achieved.

RATHC OBJ 3

To encourage the consolidation of existing residential areas within the village, in the form of clustered housing the design and layout of which is consistent with the character of the village.

RATHC OBJ 4

To require that a 'Language Impact Study' be carried out before any application for housing (single and multiple housing developments) is considered in the area. Such a study, by reference to its linguistic background of intended users or occupants, or identification of its relationship with linguistic or cultural development objectives of groups associated or charged with the development of Gaeltacht areas will need to provide that a given proposal will have a positive impact upon the promotion and use of Irish as the language of the community.

Economy and Employment

RATHC OBJ 5

To support Údarás na Gaeltachta, Gaeltacht na Mí Economic Development Forum and other relevant bodies and agencies in developing sustainable and Irish language based economic uses in the Gaeltacht area.

RATHC OBJ 6

To create a sense of place at the entrance to Rathcairn, and the enterprise and employment zone, in order to attract new business to the existing industrial area.

RATHC OBJ 7

To examine the feasibility of an Irish language and cultural experience product across local Gaeltachts in partnership with the relevant stakeholders.

Infrastructure**RATHC OBJ 8**

To liaise with and support Irish Water to endeavour to provide adequate water services to meet the development needs of the Village within the Plan period.

Movement**RATHC OBJ 9**

To promote the use of more sustainable forms of transport, and encourage pedestrian and cycle use, through the provision of pedestrian and cycle routes within the village connecting the village facilities.

RATHC OBJ 10

To facilitate the development of public / private bus connections to nearby towns, and to develop safe pick up and drop off points for buses in the village core.

RATHC OBJ 11

To rationalize car parking and pedestrian zones in the village centre.

Cultural and Natural Heritage**RATHC OBJ 12**

To promote the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Gaeltacht.

RATHC OBJ 13

To maintain an open character within the village, retaining views to the countryside, while ensuring that the urban and rural boundaries between the village and the adjoining farmland are distinct.

Social

RATHC OBJ 14

To promote the development of a village space at the village core to include environmental improvements in association with the Urban Design and Public Realm objectives.

Urban Design and Public Realm

RATHC OBJ 15

To support the development of a village square / community space in the village centre to include improved delineation of pedestrian and parking areas, public lighting and landscaping to create a high-quality village square and focus for the village and a space for residents and visitor to interact and linger.

RATHC OBJ 16

To support the development of an entrance space to the enterprise and employment zone to include improved delineation of pedestrian entrance to the estate, public lighting and landscaping to create a high-quality entrance to the employment zone.

RATHC OBJ 17

To ensure that all new development respects the scale, form and cultural identity of the village.