

7.1 Introduction

The creation of healthy, socially inclusive communities is a cross cutting theme of the Development Plan. The County faces a number of challenges in particular the unsustainable levels of out bound commuting which is having significant impacts on community building and volunteerism. The spatial implementation of the Meath Economic Strategy focuses on the creation of 'live work' communities by promoting economic development in tandem with an inclusive and diverse community structure. This will allow people not just to live in the County, but also to invest in, work in and learn in Meath. Only then will citizens be able to enjoy the benefits of the rich cultural and natural environment of the County. A community's quality of life does not solely depend on housing, employment and infrastructure support, but also on social and personal enhancement.

Understanding the County's demographic structure is central to preparing a strategy which will address future community needs. The average age in the County in 2016 was 35.2 years (33.8 in 2011) in comparison to 37.4 for the State (36.1 in 2011). 83.4% of the population in the County is below the age of 65. This compares with an average of 79.6% for the State. Child dependency¹ in the County is the highest in the State with 39% of the population under the age of 14 in comparison to an average of 32.3% for the State. Old dependency² in the County increased from 13.5% in 2011 to 16.6% in 2016. However this remains substantially below the figure for the State, which stood at 20.4%.

In summary the age profile of the County's population is young when compared with the state, therefore generating immediate requirements for additional childcare, educational facilities, playgrounds etc. In line with national population trends the County's population is ageing which will require specific responses to ensure we deliver age friendly communities into the future. This response will influence design of housing, delivery of transport and community facilities etc.

7.2 Statutory Context

Section 10(2) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, sets out a list of mandatory objectives to be included in a Development Plan. A number of these objectives relate to social infrastructure, either directly or indirectly.

The Local Government Reform Act, 2014 gives legislative effect to the proposals contained in the Government's document 'Putting People First, Action Programme for Local Government' 2012 and provides for a range of changes to the organisation and work of Local Authorities. The Local Government Reform Act recognises the importance of economic and community integration and includes a requirement for Councils to prepare a Local Economic and Community Plan, (LECP) every six years.

7.3 Policy Context

In working towards establishing viable and sustainable communities, it is important to ensure that the Plan is underpinned by policies and proposals that are consistent with overarching national guidance and policies in respect of social and community development.

National Planning Framework, (NPF)

The NPF in Chapter 6 'People, Homes and Communities' outlines how location, place and accessibility influence the quality of life that people enjoy.

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

The RSES addresses a wide range of issues including education, health, sports and community facilities. The RSES aims to address mis-alignment in the Region across a range of factors including school provision, facilities and child-friendly amenities. RPO 9.16: In areas where significant new housing

Relevant additional national guidance and policies to be considered are as follows:

- Putting People First Action Programme for Effective Local Government, 2012, Dept. of Environment, Community and Local Government.
- National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan 2013-2015, National Disability Strategy Implementation Group.
- National Women's Strategy 2007-2016, Department of Justice and Equality.
- Building for Everyone: A Universal Design Approach, 2012, National Disability Authority.
- Get Ireland Active, National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland, 2016.
- Charter for Rural Ireland, 2016 Department of Environment, Community and Local Government.
- Our Communities: A Framework Policy for Local and Community Development in Ireland, 2015, Department of Environment, Community and Local Government.

This chapter reflects the overarching principles of the aforementioned national policy documents.

7.4 Local Community Development Committees and Local Economic and Community Plans

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 required the establishment of Local Community Development Committees (LCDC's) within all Local Authorities. The Meath Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) was established in 2014 to develop, coordinate and implement a coherent and integrated approach to local and community development. County and City Development Boards (CDBs) were abolished in June 2014 under the 2014 Act. Local and community development activity previously undertaken by the Meath County Development Board generally now comes within the remit of the LCDC. One of the primary functions of the LCDCs is to develop, implement and monitor a six-year Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) for the Local Authority administrative area. Central to the Meath LECP 2016-2021 is the understanding that economic, local and community development is mutually supportive in building sustainable communities with strong local economies. The purpose of the LECP is therefore to identify objectives and implement actions to strengthen and develop both the economic and community dimensions of the County over a six year period.

The Plan is based on and seeks to progress the following values:

- Community;
- Community development;
- Equality and Human Rights;
- Sustainability;
- Sense of Place;
- Partnership.

The Development Plan and the Local Economic and Community Plan effectively operate along parallel and supportive lines. The LECP provides a supporting framework for economic and local community development of Meath, whereas the County Development Plan provides an overarching strategy and statutory policy support for the proper planning and sustainable development of the County at a spatial level. Consequently the statutory policies and objectives of the County Development Plan must be complementary to and consistent with the high level goals and objectives of the LECP.

The LECP sets out five goals:

- To promote and secure the wellbeing of all people and communities in the County.
- To stimulate and support a dynamic competitive economy to best meet the needs and aspirations of the people and communities in the County.
- To build and enable the resilience of all people and communities in the County.
- To stimulate and empower a flourishing for all people and communities in the County.
- To develop and implement ongoing renewal in public sector bodies that addresses how they fulfil their mandates and work with other stakeholders.

The foregoing goals are reflected in the policies and objectives of this chapter. The LECP is now required to be reviewed to ensure compliance with the adopted RSES

7.4.1 Joint Policing Committees

The Garda Síochána Act, 2005 established Joint Policing Committees (JPCS), whose function is ‘To serve as a forum for consultations, discussions and recommendations on matters affecting the policing of the Local Authority’s administrative area’.

JPCs are a successful example of how a collaborative approach between Local authorities, An Garda Síochána and the community & voluntary sector can support policing and enhance community safety.

Key functions of the JPC, as cited in section 36(2) of the Garda Síochána Act are as follows:

(a) Keep under review:

- (i) The levels and patterns of crime, disorder and anti social behaviour in that area (including the patterns and levels of misuse of alcohol and drugs), and
- (ii) The factors underlying and contributing to the levels of crime, disorder and anti social behaviour in the area.

JPCs are required to approach their work strategically, so as to ensure a coordinated and focused approach in tackling crime, disorder and anti social behaviour within their administrative areas. Accordingly, JPC s must develop a six year strategic plan, and to report on their implementation in Annual Reports to the Policing Authority. The Meath JPC is implementing the Joint Policing Committee Strategy 2015-2020.

7.5 Vision for Community Building

To enable our communities to have sufficient resources to support economic, social and environmental wellbeing, the creativity to flourish, and the strength to be resilient. This will in turn support the creation of a vibrant, sustainable, and competitive economy, based on shared goals and collaboration between statutory, community, voluntary, environmental and private sectors.

7.6 Social Inclusion

One of the overall aims of the Plan is the promotion of social inclusion. Social inclusion can be defined in many different ways but one of the most common understandings is that, through acting inclusively, society can ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate in, and contribute to, community life – regardless of their age, ability, nationality, religion or any of the many other characteristics which makes society diverse. It is, therefore, important that our living, working and leisure environments are designed and maintained in a manner that is accessible to all.

At a local level the Council, through its Social Inclusion Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2022 and considered policies, encourages and proactively promotes an ethos of social inclusion.

The Development Plan policies and objectives which advocate the development of sustainable communities with good quality public realm, access to housing, community facilities and public transport are central to the promotion of social inclusion in the County. The Plan also seeks to promote equality of opportunity and protection of human rights enshrined in the UN charter. The Council is fully committed to developing a more socially inclusive society and promoting participation and access for all.

7.6.1 Community Participation

The community and voluntary sector has always played a considerable and positive role in promoting community development in the County. Public Participation Networks (PPN) have been introduced throughout Ireland as part of Local Government reform. Meath PPN is the link through which the Council connects to and engages with the community, voluntary, social inclusion and environmental sectors Countywide, for consultation and information sharing. The PPN enables the public to take an active role in influencing plans and policies of the Council. Membership of the PPN is open to all community and voluntary groups in the County. Currently there are over 550 member groups from the community and voluntary, social inclusion and environmental sectors across the County. (2017)

The Meath LECP, the NPF and RSES encourage community participation and endeavour to equip local communities with the necessary tools and resources to problem solve, address challenges and flourish.

The Pride of Place Initiative is one example of active community participation in the County whereby communities' work in partnership with the Council to encourage best practice, innovation and leadership in providing vibrant sustainable communities that improve the quality of life for all through environmental improvements to towns and villages.

7.6.2 Diverse and Inclusive Communities

There are several groups considered to have specific planning and design needs. These include children, young people, and people with a disability or illness, lone parent young families, older people, travellers and members of ethnic minority groups. It is a policy of the Council to recognise that people with special needs have access to and enjoy an appropriate living environment and the Council supports the provision of facilities for people with special needs.

7.6.2.1 Children and Young People

The birth rate in the County declined from 3,527 in the 2011 Census to 2,805 in 2016. There was a 10.1% reduction in the pre-school population in the same period.³ However, the County experienced a 14.4% increase in the primary school population to 27,198 persons, the second highest in the Country. There was a significant increase of 18.1 % in the secondary school population in the County, also the second highest in the Country. The County, with an average of 1.51 children per family, was also recorded as having the highest average number of children per family in the Country in 2016. These figures will inform decision-making on present and future needs for facilities such as childcare facilities, play areas, sports facilities, schools, health centres etc in the County.

According to the 2016 Census commuting times rose in every County with Meath having one of the longest average commute times nationally, of almost 35 minutes. One in five parents in the County of 0-4 year-old child had a commute of over one hour. This has a major impact on quality of life, community participation, volunteerism and community building in the County.

Meath Children and Young Peoples Services Committee (CYPSC) bring together the main statutory, community and voluntary providers of services to children and young people in the County. They provide a forum for joint planning and co-ordination of activities to ensure that children, young people and their families receive improved and accessible services. The Council is a member of the CYPSC committee and works closely with other agencies to implement actions that respond to children and young people's needs.

Meath Comhairle na nÓg provides a forum for young people (aged between 12-18) in the County to discuss local and national issues of relevance to them. Comhairle na nÓg is recognized as the

official structure for participation by young people in the development of policies and services. Meath Comhairle na nÓg is represented on a number of boards locally and at Dáil na nÓg nationally and is under the direction of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

7.6.2.2 Older People

While the population of Meath increased by 12.9% from 195,044 in 2016 to 220,296 in 2022, there was a 30% increase in the persons aged 65 and over, one of the largest increases in the country. The changing demographics and the ageing of the County's population profile pose challenges for the development of responsive social policies. The 'Age Friendly Ireland' Initiative is a key policy document that provides leadership and guidance in identifying the needs and opportunities of an ageing population and is now embedded within the local government system. Meath County Council hosts the National Age Friendly Ireland Shared Service Centre on behalf of all local authorities. It supports and provides technical guidance to the 31 local authority-led, multi-agency Age Friendly City and County Programmes and drives policy change in the provision of services to an aging population. The Council is committed to this initiative and the current Meath Age Friendly County Strategy 2023-2028 sets out solution focussed commitments for improvement to 8 specific themes to benefit older people, such as outdoor spaces and public buildings, transportation, housing, respect and social inclusion, social participation, communication and information, civic participation and employment and community support and health services. The strategy provides an overall response to the issues being experienced by this group across the County.

Engagement with the Age Friendly initiative means that Meath will seek to obtain the following outcomes for its citizens:

- Be a great place to live, work and grow older.
- Ensure critical services are accessible and timely, and delivered in a cost effective and efficient manner.
- Have easily accessible public buildings, shops and services.
- Incorporate older people's views into significant decision-making processes.
- Promote a positive attitude to ageing and address negative stereotypes regarding older people.
- Create opportunities for older people to be engaged with their County socially, as employees and volunteers.

High quality public realm can create inclusive communities and age-friendly spaces. When public realm is attractive and accessible, older people, and indeed people of all ages, can enjoy more active and connected lives. Practical changes and age friendly led design thinking can help to

create environments which provide enhanced access for all. Design and maintenance in the context of public realm can make the difference between a healthy and active lifestyle, or one characterised by limited mobility and high levels of social isolation. The Council fully recognises the contribution an age friendly approach to the design of public realm can make to older people's quality of life.

Please refer to Chapter 11 Development Management Standards and Land Use Zoning Objectives for further information on public realm.

Housing is a key social policy functional area that needs to adapt in order to meet the changing needs of older people. The NPF supports national policy to assist older people to live with dignity and independence in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. In particular it highlights the need for well-designed lifetime adaptable infill and brownfield development close to existing services and facilities, supported by universal design and improved urban amenities.

It is the policy of the Council that proposals for accommodation for older people should be located in existing residential areas well served by social infrastructure and amenities such as footpath networks, public transport (where possible) and local facilities and services to allow for better care in the community, independence and access and ensure that residents are not isolated. In order to provide suitable housing for older people throughout the County, the Council will continue to work closely with other housing bodies and agencies associated with the provision of housing for older people and/or assisted living accommodation.

The National Quality Standards for Residential Care Settings for Older People in Ireland, 2009 sets standards for the provision of care facilities for older people in relation to the design and layout of the internal and external environment of care facilities.

Refer to Chapter 11 Development Management Standards and Land Use Zoning Objectives for further information.

In accordance with the requirements of National Policy Objective 30 of the NPF, which states 'Local planning, housing, transport/accessibility and leisure policies will be developed with a focus on meeting the needs and opportunities of an ageing population along with the inclusion of specific projections, supported by clear proposals in respect of ageing communities as part of the core strategy of city and county development plans, relevant information and analysis is included in Chapter 2 Core Strategy which sets out in greater detail the accommodation needs of this demographic.

7.6.2.3 People with Disabilities

People with disabilities and the mobility impaired face particular physical barriers to access and movement not only in buildings, but on footpaths, streetscapes, open spaces etc. The Council will encourage integration of accommodation within a mix of housing types providing mobility and access for people with disabilities in order to remove barriers to involvement in community and employment activities.

Furthermore, the Council will also promote the provision of 'Changing Places Facilities' in certain instances. Standard accessible toilets do not meet the needs of all people with a disability. Some people often need extra equipment and space to allow them to use toilets safely and comfortably. These needs are met by 'Changing Places' facilities. The provision of these facilities should be provided in any new build large building development where the public have access in numbers and/ or where the public might be expected to spend longer periods of time, for example, educational establishments, health facilities, civic centres, public libraries, cultural buildings, motorway services, sport and leisure facilities, including large hotels.

All proposals for development shall have regard to the provisions of the National Disability Authority's document 'Building for Everyone: A Universal Design Approach – Planning and Policy' (2012) in order to ensure that access and movement through the development is available to all users of the development.

7.6.2.4 Traveller Community

Meath's Traveller Accommodation Programme 2014-2018 assessed the need for Traveller accommodation in the County and sets out the Council's policy regarding the provision of same. According to the 2016 Census, 971 members of the Travelling Community are living in Meath. The Council will, as necessary, continue to update its accommodation programme for the Travelling Community and will promote the use of mainstream public services that are accessible, relevant and welcoming to enable the Travelling Community to integrate fully and participate in wider society.

7.6.2.5 Migration and Diversity

Meath is becoming an increasingly diverse County. According to the Census 2016, non-Irish nationals account for 10.1% of County's population in comparison to 11.6% nationally. Certain areas of the County have a more ethnic or culturally diverse population than others and service provision and community facilities in these areas should reflect the varying needs of the community.

Cultúr, a community organisation, works with ethnic minorities in the County, including immigrants, migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees. The Cultúr Strategic Plan 2015-2018 aims to promote the empowerment, participation, self determination and rights of ethnic minorities who experience or are at risk of poverty, social exclusion or racism.

Migrant integration is a dynamic, multi-faceted and long term process aimed at mutual accommodation and acceptance by both the migrant and host populations. The process of migrant integration involves and affects migrants, Local Government institutions, and the local community. Meath and Louth County Councils are currently preparing a Joint Migrant Integration Strategy, 2019-2022 which will reflect the National Migrant Integration Strategy, National Policy Objectives and the Meath and Louth LECPs. The strategy will ensure that integration issues continue to be reflected in strategic policy documents.

The strategy focuses on a number of thematic objectives as follows:

- Employment and economic Activity;
- Education and Training;
- Active civic and civil participation;
- Social inclusion-engaging and interacting with service providers, expressing culture and identity and addressing discrimination.

7.7 Social Infrastructure

Community infrastructure is an essential part of all communities. Facilities such as community centres, sports centres, libraries and playgrounds can serve as a focal point for communities they serve, and provide venues for local sporting, cultural, community, education and social events. The Council recognises that the provision of good quality community facilities in existing and developing areas is a key element in the development of sustainable, healthy communities across the County. There are a large number of voluntary agencies and community initiatives that continue to play a central role in contributing to the delivery of a wide variety of local social infrastructure.

The Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines (2024) emphasise the need to integrate housing with the provision of supporting community and social infrastructure. The Guidelines acknowledge that community facilities should be located within, or close to, neighbourhood centres and be well served by public transport.

Different levels of service provision are appropriate to settlements of different sizes, it is therefore important that the Council ensures that an appropriate range of community facilities are provided in all communities, taking account of the population profile and growth targets identified in the Core Strategy.

7.7.1 Community Hubs

In designing new facilities it is essential to ensure that they are adaptable over time to meet the changing needs of the population and to provide potential for maximising their dual usage during evenings/weekends/school holidays. When considering proposals for development, the Planning Authority may take into account benefits to the public in the form of community facilities. Where new social and community facilities are being retrofitted into established neighbourhoods, the issue of potential adverse impacts on residential amenity and increased pressures on limited on-

street car parking spaces will be addressed in a sensitive manner. The Council will also support improvements to and/or redevelopment of existing community facilities throughout the County as appropriate. All such proposals should have regard to the provisions set out above and the guidance provided within Chapter 11 Development Management Standards and Land Use Zoning Objectives.

7.7.2 Social Infrastructure Assessments

As a result of the rapid population growth experienced in County Meath in recent decades, the provision of facilities which contribute to community building is challenging. The Healthy Meath Strategy⁴ 2019-2021 seeks to ensure that all citizens have good physical and mental health. Availability of suitable facilities is a part of this overall strategy. It is essential that in those areas identified as priority areas for development in the Core Strategy sufficient and suitable community facilities are provided in tandem with new development, where possible.

Therefore, it is a requirement of the Council that planning applications for multiple developments (i.e. 50 residential units or greater) be accompanied by a Social Infrastructure Assessment (SIA) undertaken by the developer, to determine if facilities in the area are sufficient to provide for the needs of the future residents (of all age cohorts) and where deficiencies are identified, proposals will be required to either rectify the deficiency (through direct provision or development contributions) or suitably restrict or phase the development in accordance with the capacity of existing or planned services. The assessment should identify membership and non-membership facilities which allow access for all groups. Where facilities are deemed to be required, the type of facility shall be determined by the Planning Authority through the Development Management process.

Please refer to Chapter 11 Development Management Standards and Land Use Zoning Objectives for further information.

It is the policy of the Council:

SOC POL 1

To promote and facilitate the delivery of the objectives and actions set out in the Meath Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021. (or any subsequent replacement).

SOC POL 2

To support the provision and distribution of a range of community infrastructure facilities in accordance with the Settlement and Core Strategies to meet the needs of the County's population in conjunction with other statutory, voluntary, private sector and community groups.

SOC POL 3

To ensure that, where practicable, community, recreational and open space facilities are clustered, with the community facilities being located in local centres or combined with school facilities, as appropriate. Community facilities should be located close to or within walking distance of housing, accessible to all sectors of the community and facilitate multi-use functions through their design and layout.

SOC POL 4

To ensure the delivery of community facilities commensurate with the needs of the resident population is done in tandem with new residential developments in the interests of the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, and to assist in the delivery of such facilities.

SOC POL 5

To require, as part of all new large residential and commercial developments, and in existing developments, where appropriate, that provision is made for facilities including local/neighbourhood shops, childcare facilities, schools and recreational facilities, and to seek their provision concurrent with development.

SOC POL 6

To require that all new residential development applications of 50 units or more on zoned lands are accompanied by a Social Infrastructure Assessment (SIA) to determine if social and community facilities in the area are sufficient to provide for the needs of the future residents (of all age cohorts). This should include details regarding the following essential facilities: Playgrounds, parks and other green spaces, education, childcare, health and others such as shops, banks, post offices, community meeting rooms/centres and recreational facilities. The assessment should identify membership and non-membership facilities which allow access for all groups. Where deficiencies are identified, proposals will be required to accompany the Planning application to address the deficiency. In certain cases however, residential development under these thresholds may, at the discretion of the Planning Authority, require the submission of a SIA. (Please refer to Chapter 11 Development Management Standards for further information).

SOC POL 7

To promote and encourage social inclusion through universal access to services and facilities and to encourage the upgrade of community facilities.

SOC POL 8.

To continue to provide care facilities for older people, such as own homes (designed to meet the needs of older people), sheltered housing, day-care facilities, nursing homes and specialised care units at appropriate locations throughout the County

SOC POL 9

To provide and promote adaptability and flexibility in the design of homes and community facilities.

SOC POL 10

To require that all residential care facilities for the elderly comply with all relevant standards set out in the 'National Quality Standards for Residential Care Settings for Older People in Ireland' published by the Health Information and Quality Authority (February 2009) or the relevant standards for any subsequent national guidelines.

SOC POL 11

To support the implementation of the Meath County Age Friendly Strategy, 2017-2020 (or its replacement) in consultation with the relevant agencies and authorities.

SOC POL 12

To support the implementation of the Meath Joint Policing Strategy, 2015-2020 (or its replacement) in consultation with the relevant agencies and authorities.

SOC POL 13

To ensure that all buildings, public and open spaces, recreational and amenity areas are accessible for people with disabilities, having regard to the Building Regulations, the objectives of 'Building for Everyone' (National Disability Authority) and 'Access for the Disabled' (No. 1 to 3)(National Rehabilitation Board).

SOC POL 14

To support the implementation of the Joint Migrant Integration Strategy, 2019-2022 (or its replacement) in consultation with the relevant agencies and authorities.

It is an objective of the Council:

SOC OBJ 1

To assist in the provision of community and resource centres and youth clubs/cafes and other facilities for younger people by the identification and reservation of suitably located sites, including sites within the landbanks of the Local Authorities and by assisting in the provision of finance, where possible. A centrally located youth premises (to accommodate various youth agencies/organisations and services) should be considered, and where viable outreach support centres should also be considered.

SOC OBJ 2

To promote and assist in the provision of lifetime adaptable housing units to meet the needs of all in society taking account of climate change.

SOC OBJ3

To facilitate the development and improvement of new and existing residential and day care facilities throughout the County.

7.7.3 Education Facilities

The Economic Development Strategy for County Meath 2014-2022 acknowledges that the level of educational attainment among the County's outbound commuters exceeds that of the Country as a whole and these skillsets are one of the principle advantages the County has in terms of attracting both indigenous employment and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Educational attainment outside of this group is relatively low when compared with the national average. Therefore, access to good quality educational facilities for all citizens of the County is a key requirement to encourage the economy of the County to continue to grow. Educational facilities have an important role to play in sustaining our town centres and in developing sustainable and balanced communities. These facilities function as important public buildings in the County. The Department of Education is responsible for the delivery of educational facilities and services. The Council works proactively with the Department of Education on an ongoing basis to identify educational needs and the spatial and land use implications of same as they arise. Under a nationally agreed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), the Council assists in identifying and promoting sites for new primary and post-primary schools in conjunction with the Department through regular meetings and communications

There are 114 primary schools in the County (2016). The total number of students attending Meath Primary Schools in 2015-2016 was 26,320. There are 22 post primary schools in the County, catering for 14,443 pupils, (2016).

7.7.3.1 Additional Primary and Post Primary Educational Requirements

A 'Code of Practice on the Provision of Schools and the Planning System', prepared jointly by the DoEHLG and the Department of Education and Science in 2008, provides guidelines for the forecasting of future planning for schools nationally.

The Department of Education has identified that the following areas are likely to require additional school facilities/ reservation of sites over the plan period:

- A new primary school in Ashbourne, Navan, Dunboyne, Dunshaughlin, Ratoath, Trim and Kilcock Environs.
- A new post primary school in Drogheda Environs, Ashbourne, Navan, Dunboyne, Enfield, Trim and Ratoath.
- A new third level (PLC) facility for Dunboyne.

In addition to the above locations, the Plan makes provision for future educational facilities through the identification and reservation of potential new sites/ sites to accommodate the potential future expansion /relocation of existing facilities. In the identification of sites, consideration needs to be given both to the co-location of childcare provision and the potential use of school facilities by the wider community outside of school hours and during school holidays. Future school provision, within new growth areas specifically, will be planned and implemented in tandem with residential development. The age profile of the County is of particular relevance and it is likely that additional schools provision will be required over the plan period.

In addition to new school development, the Council will support the appropriate development and/or redevelopment of existing schools within the County that will enhance existing facilities, including sports facilities, on site. All planning applications received for school developments should have regard to any requirements set out by the Department of Education and standard planning criteria (Refer also to Chapter 11 Development Management Standards).

While the reservation of sites for educational use does not in itself guarantee the timely provision of necessary educational facilities, the Council will continue to liaise with the Department of Education, the Louth Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB) and other stakeholders to assist, where possible, in the development of suitable educational facilities.

7.7.3.2 Third Level Education and Further Education

The Council recognises the important role of higher education in providing for the economic and social wellbeing of the County's population. Great effort has been made, on the part of the Council, and various other organisations within the County to develop third level initiatives. The LMETB promote Adult Learning Services, Community Education, Back to Education Initiative, Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme and Adult Guidance. In addition, Meath Local Enterprise Office offers business information and advice, business skills training and mentoring support as well as other skills and training options to support businesses in the County.

The only third level college operating in the County at present is located in Dunboyne. The college is enjoying great success and as a result has outgrown its current premises. A site to accommodate the college is required. The development of further linkages between new and existing employers with the College of Further Education will add to the attractiveness of the area for investors due to the availability of potential future employees with the necessary skills locally.

It is the policy of the Council:

SOC POL 15

To facilitate the development of preschool, primary, post primary, third level, outreach, research, adult and further educational facilities to meet the educational needs of the citizens of the County.

SOC POL 16

To ensure the provision of preschool, primary and post primary education facilities in conjunction with the planning and development of residential areas, maximises opportunities for use of walking, cycling and use of public transport.

SOC POL 17

To ensure that adequate lands and services are zoned and reserved to cater for the establishment, improvement or expansion of all educational facilities in the County. The Council also supports the concept of multi-campus educational facilities.

SOC POL 18

To continue to support and promote existing schools serving communities in town and village centres.

SOC POL 19

To encourage, support and develop opportunities to open up schools to wider community usage in conjunction with the Department of Education and other stakeholders.

It is an objective of the Council:

SOC OBJ 4

To facilitate the Department of Education, LMETB, other statutory and non-statutory agencies in the necessary provision of preschool, primary, post primary and third level educational facilities throughout the County by reserving lands for such uses.

7.7.3.3 Childcare Facilities

The provision of childcare facilities is recognised as a key piece of social infrastructure required to enable people to participate in accessing employment, education and social networks. There continues to be a growth in demand for childcare services and the provision of good quality and affordable services close to local communities is supported by the Development Plan.

The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme provides early childhood care and education for children of pre-school age. All children are entitled to 2 full academic years or 76 weeks from September 2018 under this scheme. The recent addition of a second ECCE scheme year has increased demand for pre-school services. There are 5,864 ECCE registered children (free preschool places) in County. (2017). Areas with the highest demand include Ashbourne, East Meath and Trim. Meath County Childcare Committee assists in the development and coordination of preschool services in the County. 89% of childcare facilities in the County are privately owned and 11% are community based services which are non-profit and run by voluntary management committees. Community based services have 526 children registered under the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme.

The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government's produced Planning Guidelines on Childcare Facilities in 2001 which set out guidance on policies and objectives to be included in the Development Plan in respect of childcare provision. These guidelines identify appropriate locations for childcare facilities including in the vicinity of concentrations of work places, of schools, of neighbourhood, district and town centres and adjacent to public transport corridors, park-and-ride facilities, pedestrian routes and dedicated cycle ways. The Guidelines advocate a more pro-active role by Planning Authorities in the promotion of increased childcare provision while at the same time protecting amenities. New childcare facilities, whether in existing or developing areas, should not create a nuisance for the existing and future residents. In particular, set down/pickup areas, parking places and play areas are key considerations when planning new or extending existing childcare facilities. The Council will continue to be proactive in promoting and sustaining childcare facilities in the County. Detailed requirements and standards with childcare development projects are set out in Chapter 11 Development Management Standards.

It is the policy of the Council:

SOC POL 20

To encourage, promote and facilitate the provision of quality affordable childcare facilities in accordance with national policy and relevant guidelines and in consultation with Meath County Childcare Committee.

SOC POL 21

To support the provision of childcare facilities of an appropriate type and scale at the following locations:

- Areas of concentrated employment and business parks;
- Neighbourhood centres;

- Large retail developments;
- Schools or major educational facilities;
- Adjacent to public transport nodes;
- Villages and Rural Nodes; and
- Within new and existing residential developments.

SOC POL 22

To permit childcare facilities in existing residential areas provided that they do not have a significant negative impact on the character or amenities of an area, particularly with regard to car parking, traffic generation and noise disturbance.

SOC POL 23

To promote childcare facilities, of appropriate size and scale, in villages and rural nodes, and/or adjacent to community and educational facilities provided:

- the proposed development will not have a significant impact on the character or amenities of an area, particularly with regard to car parking, traffic generation and noise disturbance;
- the proposed development satisfies environmental standards;
- the proposed development addresses the needs of the community.

Where feasible facilities will generally be required to locate within community/educational campuses, where purpose built childcare facilities are being provided.

7.7.4 Healthcare Facilities

The Planning Authority has a significant role in supporting suitable healthcare provision through ensuring that there are sufficient lands reserved in the Development Plan to accommodate the development of adequate healthcare facilities for the population of an area.

Healthcare and medical facilities are provided by a range of public, private and voluntary agencies. The Health Service Executive (HSE) is the primary organisation responsible for the delivery of health care and personal social services to the people of Meath. Our Lady's Hospital in Navan is an acute hospital for the north-east region whilst St. Joseph's Hospital in Trim is a district facility. The residents of the County also have access to hospitals in the surrounding counties – Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda, the Midland Regional Hospital in Mullingar, Cavan General Hospital, James Connolly Hospital, Blanchardstown etc.

The HSE provides disability services and services for older people, which include daycare and residential facilities. Child Care services include child protection, fostering and long term care and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

The Department of Health and Children published 'The Primary Care Strategy' in 2001 which promotes a team-based approach to service provision, designed to make available a fully integrated primary care service. Primary care centres provide a mix of the following services at each centre: Psychology; Occupational Therapy; Physiotherapy; Speech and Language Therapy; Public Health Nursing; Social Work; Primary Care Counselling; Podiatry; Dietetics. Some centres also provide community Mental Health Services and Palliative Care. The centres also accommodate local G.P. Practices.

Primary Care centre locations in Meath (2018) are as follows: Kells, Trim, Summerhill, Dunshaughlin and Ashbourne. Primary Care Centres are under consideration for Navan and East Meath.

The ability of Primary Care Centres to provide local and integrated facilities, in line with the Government's Primary Care Strategy, is acknowledged and supported by the Council. The Plan seeks to locate these facilities, together with community support services, on suitably zoned lands in close proximity to new and existing residential areas to allow communities access to multi-disciplinary health care, mental health and wellbeing services in easily accessible locations throughout the County.

The Council will continue to work closely with the HSE to ensure that there is adequate land zoned to accommodate health care facilities when the requirement arises in accordance with best planning practice.

7.7.4.1 Regional Hospital

The Health Partnership Report published in 2008 identified Navan as the optimum location for the development of a Regional Hospital for the North East Region. In response, the Council engaged Planning and Environmental Consultants to examine potentially suitable sites throughout the town and to identify a suitable location for a Regional Hospital. This process identified 3 sites in the town as being potentially viable, including:

1. Nevinstown
2. Balreask Old & Limekilnhill (part)
3. Limekilnhill

The Navan Development Plan 2009 subsequently identified Nevinstown to provide for the proposed new Regional Hospital and ancillary healthcare uses. SOC OBJ 3 of that Plan states that it is an objective of Meath County Council "To investigate and reserve in consultation with the Health Service Executive a suitable site for a Regional Hospital in Navan (possible suitable locations include Nevinstown, Limekilnhill and Balreask Old & Limekilnhill (part))". The recommendations of this report are acknowledged in the 2010 Regional Planning Guidelines. The County Development Plan 2013-2019 contained the following policy: "To facilitate and support the Health Service Executive and the Department of Health in the provision of a new Regional Hospital in Navan" and

the following objective SOC OBJ 4: 'To investigate and reserve in consultation with the Health Service Executive Dublin North East Region and other statutory agencies and Navan Town Council a suitable site for a Regional Hospital in Navan.' The RSES also includes a policy to 'support development of a regional hospital to serve the north east of the country'. The development of a regional hospital in Navan has the potential to have a very significant positive impact on the town and region's economy.

It is the policy of the Council:

SOC POL 24

To co-operate with the Health Service Executive and other statutory and voluntary agencies and the private sector in the provision of appropriate health care facilities covering the full spectrum of such care from hospitals to the provision of community based care facilities subject to proper planning considerations and the principles of sustainable development.

SOC POL 25

To encourage the integration of healthcare facilities within new and existing communities and to discourage proposals that would cause unnecessary isolation or other access difficulties, particularly for the disabled, older people and children.

SOC POL 26

To ensure that adequate lands and services are available for the improvement, establishment and expansion of health services.

SOC POL 27

To consider change of use applications from residential to health care facilities/surgeries only where the privacy and amenity of adjacent occupiers can be preserved and the proposal does not have a detrimental effect on local amenity. The full conversion of semi-detached or terraced type dwellings will not normally be permitted.

SOC POL 28

To facilitate and support the Health Service Executive and the Department of Health in the provision of a new Regional Hospital in Navan.

SOC POL 29

To support and co-operate with promoters or operators of public and private health care facilities by facilitating and encouraging the provision of improved health care facilities in appropriate locations.

SOC POL 30

To support the provision of 'one stop' primary care medical centres and GP practices at locations easily accessible to members of the wider community.

It is an objective of the Council:

SOC OBJ 5

To facilitate the Health Service Executive and the Department of Health in the provision of health centres and other health related facilities throughout the County through various initiatives including the reservation of lands for such uses.

SOC OBJ 6

To facilitate and support the Health Service Executive and the Department of Health in the provision of a Regional Hospital in Navan on a site identified at Nevinstown, or Balreask Old and Limekilnhill (part). The availability of adequate capacity in piped water services and roads infrastructure will be taken into account in the final site selection process as will environmental sensitivities including likely significant effects on European Sites (SACs and SPAs).

7.7.5 Healthy Communities

Sporting, leisure and recreational facilities are essential to promoting good health, social cohesion, a sense of community and enhancing quality of life and well being. Nationally there has been, in recent years, an increased focus on fitness, sports and recreation generally. Therefore the provision of facilities for sports and recreation to serve our growing communities has become an increasingly important planning issue. Thus, the appropriate provision of these facilities is a key issue for Development Plans.

Meath Local Sports Partnership (LSP)⁵ Strategic Plan 2013-2017 aims to increase participation in sports and physical activity throughout the County and to provide more quality sports and physical activity opportunities, participation and resources available to and enjoyed by all citizens.

“Healthy Ireland” is a Government initiative which seeks to improve the health and wellbeing of the citizens of Ireland. World Health Organisation priorities for a healthier world are set out in Health 2020. NPO 26 of the NPF seeks to support the objectives of public health policy including Healthy Ireland and the National Physical Activity Plan, through integrating such policies, where appropriate and at the applicable scale, with planning policy.

The Healthy Meath Strategy⁶ 2019-2021 is currently being prepared. The vision of this strategy is for a Healthy County where everyone can enjoy a good standard of physical and mental health and wellbeing to their full potential, where wellbeing is valued and supported at every level of society and is everyone’s responsibility. The Plan has two key objectives:

- To create the appropriate environmental conditions to enable citizens to make healthier lifestyle choices;
- To inform, support and encourage citizens to take responsibility for their own health by making healthier lifestyle choices.

7.7.6 Existing Sport and Leisure Infrastructure

Sport is an important contributor to the life of the citizens of Meath, ranging from a proud Gaelic football tradition (resulting in seven All-Ireland Senior Football Titles) to horse racing at Fairyhouse, Navan, Bellewstown and Laytown, to baseball and cricket in Ashbourne.

There are 10 equestrian centres and 18 golf courses within the County. There are also a number of walking routes such as the Boyne towpath, extensive beaches at Bettystown-Laytown and public swimming pools at Navan, Trim and Kells as well as private facilities in hotels.

Progress has also been made in developing greenways: along the disused Navan to Kingscourt rail line, along the Royal Canal from the Kildare border at McLoughlin Bridge to the Westmeath Border and along the Oldbridge road from Drogheda Ramparts to Oldbridge Estate. Refer to Chapter 5 Movement Strategy for more information.

The presence of beaches, watercourses, equestrian and related activities, along with golfing facilities and swimming pools etc., has a growing and an important role to play in the tourism economy.

Specific objectives are contained in Volume 2 of the Development Plan where the provision of sporting and leisure infrastructure will be directly linked to the development of certain areas, to address existing deficiencies and ensure balanced sustainable development.

It is the policy of the Council:

SOC POL 31

To support the implementation of the Healthy Meath Strategy 2019-2021 in consultation with the relevant agencies and authorities.

SOC POL 32

To encourage and support local sports, community groups and other groups in the provision and development of outdoor and indoor sporting and community facilities.

SOC POL 33

To support local sports groups, community groups and other groups in the development of facilities through the reservation of suitable land and the provision of funding where available and appropriate.

SOC POL 34

To cater for the sporting and recreational needs of all sectors and ages of the community and promote the integration of those with special needs into the sporting and recreational environment.

SOC POL 35

To require the provision of alternative open space, leisure and sporting facilities provision where such existing facilities are being discontinued as part of development proposals.

SOC POL 36

To ensure that new leisure facilities, where possible, are located in proximity to public transportation routes and where they can best meet the needs of the community that the facilities are intended to serve.

SOC POL 37

To facilitate the development of children's play areas and playgrounds in proximity to existing and proposed neighbourhoods, where feasible.

It is an objective of the Council:

SOC OBJ 7

To implement the recommendations of current and proposed Meath County Council Play Policy in conjunction with all relevant agencies.

SOC OBJ 8

To support Meath Local Sports Partnership in the delivery of relevant strategies and plans.

SOC OBJ 9

To support the provision of multi-purpose sports halls, all-weather playing pitches and associated facilities in appropriate locations.

SOC OBJ 10

To investigate in conjunction with the OPW the feasibility of the provision of a playground at the Battle of the Boyne Site.

7.7.7 Open Space

Public open space is a critical element in the creation of a quality and distinctive urban environment, offering opportunities for both passive and active recreation, contributing to the quality of life of residents and visitors alike.

Accessible, useable, dedicated open spaces and recreational facilities to meet both passive and active recreational needs offer environmental and ecological benefits and improve building energy performance. There are significant health benefits for communities with access to green spaces and blue spaces (rivers, lakes and canals).

The RSES supports the preparation of open space and parks strategies by local authorities, and for enhanced cross boundary collaboration to provide for a hierarchy of open space provision including regional scale open space and recreational facilities.

Open space can be categorised as having a regional, county or local function. It is important to ensure that the County is well served by an adequate network of open spaces. The Key town of Navan has a regional park, Ashbourne and Dunboyne will also require the provision of regional scale parkland type facilities. Sites for regional parks in Dunboyne and Ashbourne have been identified in the written statement of these towns in Volume 2. The Regional Growth Centre of Drogheda will also require the provision of a regional park and lands have been identified which can accommodate same in the Southern Environs. In respect of residential development, in all cases the development site area (which shall make provision for open space) cannot include lands zoned FI Open Space, G1 Community Infrastructure and H1 High Amenity.

Development Plans have tended in the past to emphasise detailed quantitative standards, but there is now an increasing focus on the quality of public open space, which ensures that the reasonable expectations of users are more likely to be fulfilled. The qualitative standards set out in 'Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines', 2024, relating to

design, accessibility, variety, shared use, biodiversity, sustainable urban drainage systems and the provision of allotments and community gardens should be adhered to in all planning applications for new residential developments.

Private open space provision is a fundamental element of residential amenity, offering the resident an opportunity for safe and private recreation.

Public and private open space standards are set out in Chapter 11 Development Management Standards and Land Use Zoning Objectives. It is a requirement that all planning applications for residential development demonstrate compliance with same.

It is the policy of the Council:

SOC POL 38

To promote the development of a wide variety of high quality accessible open space areas, for both active and passive use, and formal and informal activities in accordance with the Core Strategy and Settlement Strategy and the standards set out in Chapter 11 Development Management Standards and Land Use Zoning Objective taking into account any environmental sensitivities including likely significant effects on European Sites (SACs and SPAs).

SOC POL 39

To protect the integrity of Natura 2000 sites during the identification of suitable sites for recreation, in particular in terms of their design and use.

SOC POL 40

To resist the loss of existing public open space, unless alternative recreational facilities are provided in a suitable location.

SOC POL 41

Identify free from development, lands that are the subject of a deed of dedication identified in a grant of planning permission as public open space, to ensure the availability of community and recreational facilities for the residents of the area.

It is an objective of the Council:

SOC OBJ 11

To carry out an audit of all public open space assets in the County over the life of the Development Plan.

SOC OBJ 12

To prioritise the delivery of town parks at regional scale in Drogheda Southern Environs, Dunboyne and Ashbourne.

SOC OBJ 13

In respect of residential development, in all cases the development site area cannot include lands zoned FI Open Space, G1 Community Infrastructure and H1 High Amenity.(i.e. the open space requirements shall be provided for within the development site area.)

SOC OBJ 14

To examine existing public open spaces and carry out improvements where necessary to increase their usefulness as recreational spaces.

SOC OBJ 15

To ensure public open space is accessible, and designed so that passive surveillance is provided.

SOC OBJ 16.

To provide multifunctional open spaces at locations deemed appropriate providing for both passive and active uses

SOC OBJ 17

To ensure permeability and connections between public open spaces including connections between new and existing spaces, in consultation to include residents.

7.7.8 Libraries

The library service provided by the Council is playing a very important community, information, cultural and outreach facility role within the County. The public library service has for many years provided an important means of access to information and to (leisure) reading facilities and has played a major role in the advancement of the arts, education and local history throughout the County. Libraries have also become an important venue for cultural activities. This cultural role is recognised by the central role libraries occupy in the delivery of cultural projects such as the decade of centenaries and the Creative Ireland programme.

The Council manages and operates the County's public library service from its headquarters in Navan. In addition there are 12 branches throughout the County. (Louth County Council delivers a mobile service to East Meath in partnership with Meath County Council.)

Over half a million items were issued across the County in 2018. Free membership and the abolition of fines in 2019 will ensure that the library service is available to all. Over €500,000 has been invested in ICT in libraries across the county in 2017 and 2018. This has enabled the introduction of RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) self-service and the development of a wide range of new digital services at each location. These services include new initiatives like the 'The Magic Table /Tovertafel' which is specifically designed for people with dementia and autism.

Laytown/Bettystown/Mornington/Donacarney is the third largest settlement in the County, addressing the deficiencies in library facilities in this area is a key priority. The Development Plan for the library service in Meath 2005-2009 sets out a number of measures to be implemented. It provides for new libraries in Ballivor, Laytown/Bettystown and Kells. Major upgrades were completed at Athboy (2018), Slane (2019) and Kells (2019) Nobber (2020) and Oldcastle (2020) Libraries. Minor works have also been carried out in Dunshaughlin Library and the remaining works are planned for completion in 2021. Works are also proposed for Navan Library. Trim Library is the second busiest library in the County and it is proposed to combine Trim Library and the adjoining church to create a larger library with an Arts/Theatre space on the extended site. The 'My Open Library' initiative went live at Trim in February 2019. This allows members of the library

to use the services out of hours seven days a week (8am – 10pm). It is proposed to review uptake at Trim with a view to extending the service to other branches in line with national policy and funding schedules.

The Council intends to commence a review of the 2005-2009 Plan for the library service in the near future to coincide with the review of the national strategy for the library service - 'Our Public Libraries 2022 – Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities.'

It is the policy of Meath County Council:

SOC POL 42

To continue to expand and improve the library service to meet the needs of the community, in line with the objectives and priorities of the Library Development Plan 2005-2009 (or as otherwise amended) and subject to the availability of finance.

It is an objective of the Council:

SOC OBJ 18

To enhance library facilities in Navan, and to retain and develop its function as the library headquarters for the County.

SOC OBJ 19

To investigate and if feasible to provide a new library in the Laytown/Bettystown area and in Kells.

SOC OBJ 20.

To investigate and if feasible to provide a library facility in Ballivor. To explore the restoration and renovation of St. Kenneth's Church to accommodate such a use.

SOC OBJ 21

To provide and improve existing library facilities and services and to encourage an integrated approach to the delivery of library, arts and other related services.

7.7.9 Burial Grounds

Local Authorities are responsible for ensuring that there are adequate burial facilities, including the reservation and acquisition of lands for such facilities, where necessary. In 2011, the Council completed a survey/needs analysis of burial grounds and identified 231 burial grounds in the County.

Changes in society have resulted in the need to provide multi-denominational graveyards. New sites are developed as burial gardens, where the site is aesthetically pleasing through use of careful landscaping and use of sustainable products as well as providing a number of burial options for customers and a full range of services such as car parking, toilet facilities, etc. It is also recognised that burial gardens have a potential amenity value and there are options to create facilities such as a loop walk through or around sites.

A multi denominational burial garden was opened in Derrockstown, Dunshaughlin in May 2016. The ethos of Derrockstown burial garden as ‘a place for respect, reflection and remembrance’ will be reflected in future developments which will also be developed in a garden style and will offer a number of options for burials and cremated remains including green burials, traditional burials, columbarium walls, burial of ashes, etc. It is proposed to develop future sites in a sustainable, climate action friendly manner using natural products and low carbon construction and it is a goal to make the sites self sufficient in energy needs. It is recognised that burial gardens also have an amenity benefit and any surplus land purchased for burial gardens will be used for tree planting and the creation of a bio-diversity areas, this is supported by the Climate Action Strategy for the County.

The Council is currently searching for geologically suitable sites for burial grounds in Dunboyne, Trim and Stamullen, and their environs.

There are no proposals currently for a crematorium in Meath, however, it is likely to become a requirement in the near future given the population growth and lack of burial ground space. The Council may also have to consider, in the context of the scarcity of environmentally suitable land and the restricted availability of funding, possible regional based solutions to the provision of burial space at some time in the future.

It is the policy of the Council:

SOC POL 43

To facilitate and support the development of multi-denominational burial grounds, taking cognisance of the needs of multi-faith and non-religious communities and evolving trends in end of life management.

SOC POL 44

To facilitate the provision of new burial grounds, facilities and the extension of existing cemeteries, as appropriate, to cater for the needs of the County.

SOC POL 45

To encourage local community groups to develop, manage and maintain burial facilities.

SOC POL 46

To protect the cultural heritage of historical burial grounds within the County and to encourage their management and maintenance in accordance with best conservation practice. (Please also refer to Chapter 8 Cultural and Natural Heritage).⁷

It is the objective of the Council:

SOC OBJ 22

To facilitate the development of new or extended burial grounds and crematoria by reservation of land at suitable locations and provision of local authority burial grounds subject to appropriate safeguards with regard to ground and surface water, environmental, noise and traffic impacts.

7.7.10 Places of Worship

As the population of the County becomes more diverse there has been an increase in the number of faith communities in the County. This has given rise to demand for worship spaces. Community centres may provide temporary solutions, as communities become more established and/or numbers increase, a dedicated place of worship may be required. The Council will encourage appropriate, easily accessible locations which comply with the Council's standards with regard to design, vehicular movement/parking and landscaping etc.

Please refer also to Chapter 11 (Section 11.9.4) Development Management Standards and Land Use Zoning Objectives.

It is the policy of the Council:

SOC POL 47

To encourage and facilitate the development of places of worship in appropriate locations in urban centres and proximate to residential communities.

7.7.11 Fire Stations

Fire fighting and other rescue services are vital public safety services provided by the Council. There are seven fire stations throughout the County: Navan (the headquarters of the network), Trim, Kells, Oldcastle, Nobber, Dunshaughlin and Ashbourne.

The role and functions of the fire service are intertwined with other core services of the Council such as planning, housing, water services and roads. It is important, therefore, for the benefit of the community, that there are effective working relationships and co-operation between the fire service and the other local authority services on a continuous basis.

The Council adopted a 'Fire Service Operations Plan, 2015-2019' and this Plan sets out a number of recommendations in relation to the fire service. Capital funding for the development of the Fire Service and the purchase of capital equipment is provided by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. Dunshaughlin, Oldcastle and Nobber fire stations have been approved for capital funding for extensions and upgrade works. These works are expected to be completed during the life of this Plan. Navan Fire Station has sought funding for provision of an office building.

Policies

It is the policy of the Council:

SOC POL 48

To ensure communities are adequately serviced by a modern and effective Fire Service.

SOC POL 49

To facilitate the accommodation of fire service facilities in locations that allow ease of access and safe functioning with respect to the road network.

SOC POL 50

To facilitate the implementation of the 'Fire Service Operations Plan 2015-2019', or as otherwise amended.

It is an objective of the Council:

SOC OBJ 23

To support the upgrade and extension of fire stations as appropriate, including Dunshaughlin, Oldcastle, Nobber and Navan, to cater for the needs of the County.

SOC OBJ 24

To examine the feasibility of providing a new fire station in the Laytown/Bettystown area, to ensure that this growing community is adequately serviced.

7.7.12 Arts and Cultural Facilities

Arts and cultural facilities not only contribute to the artistic, social and general quality of life of communities, they are also significant contributors to the economy of the County by attracting visitors, investment and job creation. Arts and cultural facilities are wide ranging and include arts centres, museums, theatres, galleries, community venues, music venues and studio and workspace for artists. Libraries can also serve as arts and cultural outlets.

The arts sector in Meath is a very vibrant one, which encompasses a broad range of people, places and activities. There is a considerable pool of artistic talent and enterprise in the County. The Council, through its Arts Office, seeks to further develop and promote the cultural life of the County and to increase accessibility to arts and culture facilities by audiences, participants and practitioners. The County Arts Development Plan 2019-2024 identifies four Strategic Priorities with a specific set of goals and actions to be achieved during the life of the Plan.

- Strategic Priority 1 – To nurture and support Artists and Creators,
- Strategic Priority 2 – To enhance our local cultural and creative infrastructure,
- Strategic Priority 3- To provide children and young people access to high quality participatory arts experiences, and
- Strategic Priority 4-To promote inclusivity and diversity through the arts.

The County Development Plan takes cognisance of the four Strategic Priorities and the relevant goals and actions. The Solstice Arts Centre in Navan is Meath's only multi-disciplinary arts centre.

Through its programme, Solstice aims to inspire, entertain, enthrall, challenge and connect. The centre provides a hub for cultural and arts activity. As well as presenting theatre, music, dance, comedy and visual art, Solstice facilitates workshops and lectures to cater for all interests.

The Council is currently investigating the potential development of the County Library and the Solstice Arts Centre into a Cultural Quarter. If developed the Solstice Arts Centre and County Library would function as a destination multi-use space. Furthermore, the Council secured Urban Regeneration funding to prepare a Master Plan on adjacent lands for the former Meath County Council headquarters site. Funding was also secured for the preparation of a conservation plan for the restoration of the Former St Patrick's Classical School for use as a County Archive, genealogy research centre and performance and study space. The former St Patrick's Classical School has been described as one of the most unusual pieces of historic architecture in the Country. The building is a detached seven-bay two-storey former school, c. 1840 with elliptical plan, inclined buttresses, classical niches, eaves course of paired timber brackets and tripartite sash windows which was converted to a furniture factory c. 1975. The building has been disused for some time and its regeneration and reuse as the home of the County Archive will make a significant contribution to the Cultural Quarter at this location.

The Council is also exploring possibilities and planning for the development of further cultural facilities/hubs across the County including:

- Trim Theatre Project - plans to develop Trim library with the adjoining church to create a community theatre space while expanding Trim Library.
- Kells Creative Placemaking Project which includes –Kells Tourism & Cultural Hub at the Courthouse Kells; Kells Printworks; the Convent Chapel Cinema and Convent Artists' Studios.
- Dunshaughlin Courthouse multi-purpose community arts space.
- Slane Cottages development – plans to explore the possibility of developing a writer's retreat using the existing cottages.

The County Arts Development Plan 2019 – 2024 provides for the continued development of an arts service that is inclusive, accessible and sustainable for the County's communities. In doing so, the Arts Plan focuses on the creation of a sustainable environment and provision of appropriate facilities for the development, creation, making, production, performance and exhibition of work. The planned development of a number of Creative/Cultural hubs in the County combined with the support and enhancement of existing facilities will provide a focus for local, professional, amateur and community arts initiatives and the creative and economic benefits generated as a result. It will also provide a stable base for high quality artistic endeavour and space for dialogue re same.

The proposed 'Hubs' will also support the implementation of the Meath Culture & Creativity Strategy 2018-2022 and the national Creative Ireland Programme as they will align with the operating principles of collaboration and communication, community empowerment and internationalisation.

7.7.12.1 Public Art

Public Art can assist in developing a sense of place and provides an identity and character to a community that is distinctive and unique. The Council will continue to identify and implement new Per Cent for Art Schemes attaching to Capital projects, as appropriate, and will continue to broaden the scope of commissions to include a variety of arts disciplines.

The Council will also continue to implement the Private Developer Public Art Scheme through the planning process and in consultation with the Arts Office, please refer to Chapter 11 Development Management Standards and Land Use Zoning Objectives for further details. (Sections 11.7.12 and 11.8.2)

Policies

It is the policy of Meath County Council:

SOC POL 51

To continue to recognise the importance of the Arts in areas of personal development, community development, economic development and tourism and to endeavour to create opportunities in each of these areas.

SOC POL 52

To continue to enhance the range and quality of arts infrastructural provision in the County and to support the ongoing development of cultural infrastructure throughout the County in particular those parts of the County where such provision has been identified as an enabler for growth in the creative industries sector.

SOC POL 53

To support the development, provision and sustainability of arts and cultural infrastructure e.g. festivals at appropriate locations throughout on the success and support the clustering of the film and audio visual sector in the County and, where appropriate, in association with libraries.

SOC POL 54

To promote the provision of public art, including temporary art and sculpture, through such mechanisms, as appropriate.

SOC POL 55

To encourage and support the creation and display of works of art in public areas, including appropriate locations within the streetscape, provided no unacceptable environmental, amenity, traffic or other problems are created.

SOC POL 56

To implement the County Arts Development Plan 2019-2024 and in doing so to recognise the economic value and contribution of arts and cultural facilities to the County.

Objective

It is an objective of the Council:

SOC OBJ 25

To explore and promote measures to enhance the Arts and Cultural offering with particular economic value in conjunction with the Arts Office.

SOC OBJ 26

To support and seek to secure additional funding for the restoration of the Former St Patrick's Classical School for use as a County Archive, genealogy research centre and performance and study space.

SOC OBJ 27

To support and encourage the development of Creative Hubs throughout the County in particular the Kells Creative Placemaking Project; Trim Community Theatre & Library; Dunshaughlin Courthouse Community Arts space and to seek and secure additional funding for same.

SOC OBJ 28

To continue to explore the opportunities to provide a writers retreat in Slane.

SOC OBJ 29

To incorporate works of public art into the overall scheme of major new infrastructural, employment and residential developments in the County in order to enhance the amenities of the local environment. (Please refer also to Chapter 11 Development Management Standards and Land Use Zoning Objectives.)

SOC OBJ 30

To seek to build on the success and support the clustering of the film and audio visual sector in the Dublin and Wicklow areas and to support training of film workers and crew around the region, as well as exploiting opportunities for the industry outside of these hubs with particular reference to the recently permitted Film Studio Development in Ashbourne.

1- Persons aged 0-14 (Source: CSO Census 2016)

2- Persons aged 65+(Source: CSO Census 2016)

3- Source: Census 2016

4- Local Community & Development Committee and Meath Local Sports Partnership joint initiative.

5- Established in July 2002 under the direction of the Irish Sports Council to plan, lead and co-ordinate the development of sport and physical activity in Meath.

6- Local Community Development Committee and Meath Local Sports Partnership joint initiative.

7 - Guidance for the Care, Conservation and Recording of Historic Graveyards (2011)