

1.0 Introduction

This written statement will provide an overview of the development strategy for Kells. A detailed Local Area Plan for the town will be prepared during the life of this Plan.

2.0 Town Context/Character

Kells is a town of historic importance with significant heritage which makes it a unique settlement in the County. This history and heritage makes it an important tourist destination in 'Ireland's Ancient East' and the Boyne Valley.

Located adjacent to the M3 Motorway and to the south-east of the border with County Cavan, the town is also a busy local service centre with a strong and diverse economy that makes it a key employment centre in the north of the County.

The recent designation of the Kells Municipal District as a Regional Economic Development Zone (REDZ) has raised the economic profile of Kells and made the town a more attractive location for investment.

Position in Settlement Hierarchy	Self-Sustaining Growth Town
2016 Population	6,135
2011 Population	5,888
Percentage Change 2011-2016	4%
Housing stock 2016	2,522
Number of units completed 2016-2019	48

Committed units not yet built	391
Core Strategy Household Allocation 2020-2027¹	452 units
Population Projection 20	7,135
Resident Workers 2016	2,306
Total Jobs 2016	1,543
Job – Workforce Ratio 2016	0.66
Education Facilities;	4 primary schools and 2 post primary schools
Community Facilities	10 including a health centre, park and playground, sports clubs, swimming pool, tennis club, golf club and pitch and putt, Garda station, people’s resource centre, and childcare options
Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs)	Kells Historic Core; Headfort Place; and, Headfort Demesne
Protected Structures	102

Zone of Archaeological Potential	There are a number of National Monument Services Zones of Archaeological Notification within the settlement area.
Natura 2000 Sites	Yes, the River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA and SAC is located in close proximity to the northern extent of the settlement area.
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	Sufficient capacity in the water supply. Wastewater capacity limited.
Modal Share Targets for 2026	
Modal Share for Walking	24% (Increasing from 19% in 2016)
Modal Share for Cycling	4% (Increasing from 1% in 2016)
Modal Share for Bus	13% (Unchanged from 13% in 2016)
Reduction Target for Car Use	54% (reduction from 62% in 2016)

3.0 Vision

“For Kells to be recognised as a strategic economic centre for north Meath with a vibrant mix of employment, businesses, retail, services and tourism opportunities, intrinsically linked to its rich historical and cultural heritage and character.”

4.0 Opportunities

- To continue to work closely with local businesses in improving the town centre by participating in projects such as the ‘Kickstart’ Scheme, which was a national pilot project funded by the Irish Walled Town Network that supported local businesses in painting buildings and carrying out minor conservation repairs.
- Encourage and support proactive development on vacant sites which would improve vibrancy in the town and bring under-utilised lands back into use.
- Create a more compact settlement by supporting the redevelopment of the ‘Frontlands’ and ‘Backlands’. The central location of these lands provides an opportunity for the creation of a sustainable neighbourhood within walking distance of the town centre.
- There is a vibrant arts and cultural sector in Kells that has helped to support a number of high-profile international film and literary festivals. Tapping in to this resource will provide an opportunity for Kells to develop as a cultural hub that would generate employment opportunities and strengthen community identity in the town.
- There are opportunities to continue to develop and promote Kells as a tourist destination in the Boyne Valley Tourism Region by supporting enhancements to the public realm and investment in tourist related activities.

5.0 Land Use Strategy

The development strategy for Kells is to strengthen the function of the town as a service centre in the north of the county by supporting economic development and consolidating population growth in the urban core whilst also managing development so that it complements the unique heritage of the town.

5.1 Settlement and Housing

Kells is an attractive historic town characterised by a medieval street pattern with buildings of significant heritage quality strategically positioned in various locations along the primary streets of

the town. Outside of the town centre there is a network of residential developments with a broad mix of house types.

Population and residential growth in the town has been modest in recent years. As the economy has recovered, construction activity in the residential sector in the town has slowly increased, with a residential development consisting of 74 no. units on the Moynalty Road having commenced in 2019. A Meath County Council Housing Scheme consisting of 40 no. units also commenced in the first quarter of 2019.

The future development of Kells will focus on consolidation of the existing urban footprint and the provision of a balanced and well-connected environment that has an appropriate mix of housing and uses that will ensure the town can meet the needs of its residents and wider community.

The existing residentially zoned lands together with the mixed-use lands in the Frontlands and Backlands sites have the capacity to ensure the required number of residential units can be delivered during the life of this Plan.

5.2 Kells 'Backlands' and 'Frontlands'

To the east and west of Bective Street there are two large parcels of land with potential to accommodate a significant quantum of development in proximity to the urban core of the town. Lands to the east of Bective Street are known as the 'Backlands' and lands to the west are known as the 'Frontlands'.

These lands are a critical element of the long-term growth strategy for the town due to their potential to deliver a range of uses including, commercial, residential, community, and recreational uses in proximity to the town centre.

5.2.1 Future Retail Requirement in Kells

In 2010 a 10-year permission was granted for a mixed-use development consisting of commercial and residential uses on the 'Backlands'. Over 15,000m² of commercial and retail floorspace was granted under this permission. The changing economic circumstances and associated changes to consumer behaviour over the past decade would indicate that it is unlikely that this development will be implemented in its current format.

The County Retail Strategy for this Plan identified a requirement for an additional 800-1,250m² convenience floorspace and 1,000-1,500m² comparison floorspace in the town up to 2027.

The quantum of floorspace granted in the Kells Backlands is significantly in excess of that required to meet the retail needs of the town.

Taking into account the recommended additional floorspace requirements for Kells as identified in the Retail Strategy, the land use zoning and Master Plan objectives for Backlands and Frontlands will be updated and the criteria for the Master Plans on these lands amended to reflect the current and future needs of the town.

5.2.2 Land Use Strategy for the 'Backlands'

The 'Backlands' have been identified for residential, tourism, open space, and commercial uses. Any commercial development shall be complementary to the town centre and shall ensure permeability and connectivity with the key shopping streets in the town.

Residential development shall meet the changing needs of the residents of Kells and shall ensure there is an appropriate choice in accommodation. This accommodation shall be designed and orientated to maximise proximity to the open space lands, which will ensure there is surveillance of this open space whilst also promoting an active lifestyle in a town centre location.

As Kells continues to develop as a tourist destination there is an opportunity to provide lands for tourism related uses in proximity to the town centre. The provision of such facilities would assist in the economic development of the town.

5.2.3 Land Use Strategy for the 'Frontlands'

Within the Kells Frontlands there is an opportunity to provide a mix of residential, community, and open spaces within walking distance of the town centre. The residential lands should be developed around an urban park/amenity area that would be accessible for all residents of the town. St. Columba's Well and the Newrath Stream could be a focal point for this park. Community facilities could include independent living units for older people, where such a facility would benefit from its connectivity with the town centre. The development of the 'Frontlands' area would require the construction of a road linking Bective Street and the Cavan Road which was granted permission by An Bord Pleanála in 2020. The Master Plan for the 'Frontlands' area while not designated with a specific prescribed zoning for the totality of the Master Plan lands, retains the option of delivering land uses more appropriate to the needs of Kells as set out in the subject Master Plan objective.

5.3 Economy and Employment

Kells is an economic focal point for north Meath. Its influence reaches beyond its immediate hinterland to neighbouring Westmeath, Cavan and Louth. In recognition of the potential for Kells to provide additional employment and taking account of the increased interest/take up of businesses choosing to locate in Kells following the REDZ designation additional employment lands were provided in the town in 2017 as part of Variation no.1 of the Kells Development Plan 2013-19.

Approximately 33 hectares of land to the south of the Navan Road was zoned for a strategic employment use, including high end technology and major campus style office-based development as well as to facilitate logistics, warehousing, distribution, and supply chain management. A Master Plan (MP 28) will be required to be prepared as part of the development of these lands.

Additional employment lands were zoned adjacent to the Kells Business Park, whilst lands to the rear of the Aldi food store off the Cavan Road, were zoned for a retail warehousing use.

These additional zonings will ensure there are adequate lands available to meet the employment needs of Kells during the lifetime of this Plan.

5.4 Water Services Infrastructure

Water: Water supply for Kells is sourced from the Kells/Oldcastle Supply. There is capacity in this water supply to accommodate growth during the lifetime of the Plan. However, there are localised network constraints.

Wastewater: Wastewater is discharged to a Treatment Plant on the Headfort Road. Spare capacity at this Treatment Plant is currently limited. Irish Water plans to upgrade this treatment plant from its present capacity of 8,000 p.e. to 13,500 p.e. It is anticipated that this will upgrade will be completed during the lifetime of this Plan.

5.5 Flooding

The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment identified a number of areas in the town that are at risk of flooding. This includes developed and undeveloped lands. The lands at risk of flooding are identified in the associated land use zoning map. A risk-based approach to flood management in accordance with the provisions set out in “The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities” (2009) will be implemented in order to prevent or minimise future flood risk.

5.6 Movement

Kells has an attractive and compact core, which promotes high levels of walking. There is a regular bus service to Dublin and surrounding towns. This bus service, in addition to the location of the town along the national and regional road network (via the M3/N3 and the N52) ensures the town is well connected to the Greater Dublin Area, Midlands, and Border Counties.

5.7 Cultural, Natural and Built Heritage

Kells originated as a Monastic settlement, dedicated to St. Columba, and is one of the most culturally significant historic towns in the country. This is recognised by the inclusion of Kells on Ireland's Tentative World Heritage List as part of the Early Medieval Monastic Sites. In addition, Kells is part of the Heritage Towns of Ireland network, which consists of a select group of 'Heritage Towns'.

There are two Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs) in the town; the Historic Core ACA and Headfort Place ACA.

The religious influence of the Historic Core ACA is evident by the position of the Church and Monastery at the top of the town. The built form of this ACA dates back to the late 18th and early 19th century with Georgian architecture and buildings prevalent in the streetscape.

The linear form of Headfort Place ACA, which consists of an enclosure of the space between the principle buildings in the town (former court house, town hall, church, convent, and large townhouses) contrasts with the narrower medieval streets of the historic core.

In addition to the Architectural Conservation Areas, there are 102 no. structures listed in the Record of Protected Structures for Kells.

The Council has recently completed a streetscape conservation study for the town core. This focused on repair and restoration works required to vernacular buildings and the associated building techniques required to implement these works.

This Plan recognises the importance of the archaeological and built heritage of Kells and will seek to protect the character and integrity of Architectural Conservation Areas and Protected Structures in the town in order to preserve the heritage character of the settlement.

5.8 Green Infrastructure and Open Space

Green Infrastructure is the network of green spaces, habitats, and ecosystems that intersperse towns and villages. It includes open spaces, waterways, gardens, woodlands, green corridors, wildlife habitats, street trees, natural heritage, and the open countryside. The purpose of identifying green infrastructure is to ensure a co-ordinated approach is taken to the management of this infrastructure that would be mutually beneficial to people and local ecosystems and habitats.

‘The Peoples Park’, which is a public park surrounding the Tower of Lloyd is an important piece of green infrastructure and open space in the town.

The River Blackwater, which flows towards Navan along the northern boundary of the town is rich in heritage and ecosystems however its public amenity potential is limited. There is an opportunity to explore the feasibility of developing a publicly accessible linear park with provision for walking and cycling between Mabels Bridge and Maudlin Bridge and to the Headfort Road.

Lands within Headfort Golf course are rich in green infrastructure. These lands are privately owned.

The main areas of public open space in Kells are ‘The Peoples Park’ and the public park along Carrick Street/Circular Road. There are also communal areas of open space in existing residential developments.

The development of the ‘Frontlands’ and ‘Backlands’ sites in the centre of the town provide opportunities to include an urban/linear park as part of the future development of these lands.

5.9 Social Infrastructure

Kells is generally well served with community infrastructure including sporting clubs, a public swimming pool, public health care facilities, childcare facilities, and four primary schools and two post-primary schools. Eureka Secondary School has relocated to a new school campus on the Cavan Road which will have the capacity to accommodate 800 students. This school opened in September 2019.

This Plan will continue to support the provision of facilities and services to meet the needs of the entire community in appropriate locations in the town.

5.10 Urban Design and Public Realm

Kells benefits from its historic built form along with its wide streets and footpaths. Recent investment in the public realm includes the enhancement of pedestrian spaces by installing high quality paving, tree planting, and the creation of flower beds at Farrell Street and Headfort Place.

While Headfort Place is not within the retail core, it plays a central role in accommodating visitors to the town. Farrell Street is one of the more vibrant retail destinations in the town centre. Investment in the public realm is important to improve the experience of visitors to Kells and support local economic development.

Any development of the 'Frontlands' or Backlands' sites must have regard to the character and context of Kells and the relationship of these lands with the historic streetscape and Georgian character of the town.

6.0 Master Plans

There are 4 Master Plan areas identified in Kells. The purpose of a Master Plan is to ensure an integrated approach is taken to the phasing, management, and development of lands within the Master Plan Area. A planning application will not be considered in the absence of the Master Plan being agreed in writing with the Executive of the Planning Authority.

Master Plan	Description	Status
MP 25	The lands in this 'Backlands' Master Plan area are located to the south of the town centre and are zoned for residential, recreational, commercial, and community uses. The distribution of the land uses within the Master Plan area shall be agreed with the Planning Authority as part of the preparation of the Master Plan and shall be in accordance with the following requirements:	Awaiting preparation

Master Plan	Description	Status
	i. No more than 35% of the Master Plan area shall be identified for 'New Residential' development ii. At least 20% of the Master Plan Area shall be identified as an Area of Active Open Space iii. No more than 45% of the Master Plan Area shall be identified for commercial and tourism uses. Whilst a residential use may be acceptable on the commercial/town centre lands, this use must be ancillary to any retail/commercial or office type use such as 'above ground' or 'Living Over the Shop' accommodation. The design, layout, and scale of any development on these lands shall be complimentary to the historic town centre and shall ensure that the traditional town centre remains the Core Retail Area of the town. Residential development shall include an appropriate mix of house types that will cater for all residents of the town and shall be designed and orientated to maximise its proximity to the recreational area/urban park to be provided in the Master Plan Area. Any recreational area shall include a landscaped park and associated paths. The development of the lands shall be on a phased basis to be agreed as part of the preparation of the Master Plan. The landscaped park and recreational area shall be developed in the early phases of any development, with no more than 40% of the commercial or residential	

Master Plan	Description	Status
MP 26	properties being occupied prior to the completion of this park and recreational area. This Master Plan for the 'Frontlands' area consists of lands to the west of Bective Street/Bective Square/Suffolk Street and is referred to as the Kells 'Frontlands'. The Master Plan has a total area of c.15 hectares and incorporates lands zoned for residential, commercial, White Land and open space/recreational uses. The Master Plan for the 'Frontlands' area retains the option of delivering land uses more appropriate to the needs of Kells as set out in the subject Master Plan objectives included below. The distribution of the land uses within the Master Plan area shall be agreed with the Planning Authority as part of the preparation of the Master Plan and shall be in accordance with the following requirements: i. No more than 25% of the Master Plan area shall be identified for 'New Residential' development ii. At least 25% of the Master Plan Area shall be identified for Community Infrastructure iii. At least 30% of the Master Plan Area shall be identified as an Area of Active Open Space iv. No more than 20% of the Master Plan Area shall be identified for Commercial/Town Centre uses. Whilst a residential use may be acceptable on	Awaiting preparation

Master Plan	Description	Status
	the commercial/town centre lands, this use must be ancillary to any retail/commercial or office type use such as 'above ground' or 'Living Over the Shop' accommodation. The development of these lands should include an appropriate balance of residential, community, and open space/recreational uses that will support the creation of a compact settlement and meet the needs of the local community. Community uses on these lands could include independent living for older people. The creation of an urban/linear park that would be available to the entire community is a central element of the development of these lands. St. Columba's Well and the Newrath Stream could be a focal point for this park. Any development of these lands would require the construction of a road linking Bective Street and the Cavan Road. The development of the lands shall be on a phased basis to be agreed as part of the preparation of the Master Plan. The Urban/Linear Park shall be developed in the early phases of any development, with no more than 40% of the commercial or residential properties being occupied prior to the completion of this park and recreational area.	

Master Plan	Description	Status
MP 27	This Master Plan relates to undeveloped lands with an area of c.33ha in Kells Business Park on the eastern side of the R147 that are zoned for Enterprise and Employment uses. The development of these strategic lands shall facilitate the provision of industrial, manufacturing, distribution, warehousing, and other general employment/enterprise uses in a high quality and pleasant environment.	Awaiting preparation
MP 28	This Master Plan has an area of c.33.5ha and relates to lands on the southern side of the Navan Road and is to facilitate the provision of high-end technology/manufacturing and major campus style office-based employment and/or to facilitate logistics, warehousing, distribution, and supply chain management.	Awaiting preparation

7.0 Town 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:

KEL POL 1

To continue to support the sustainable growth of Kells by encouraging high quality development in appropriate locations that enhances the built environment, meets the needs of all sections of the community, respects the heritage status of the town, and allows the town to fulfil its designation as an important employment and service centre in the north of the County.

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council:

Settlement and Housing

KEL OBJ 1

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.

KEL OBJ 2

To support and facilitate town centre living, including the concept of 'living over the shop'.

KEL OBJ 3

To facilitate the development of the following lands subject to the preparation of a Master Plan:

- i) Lands to the east of Farrell Street/Bective Street/Kenlis Place, known locally as the 'Backlands'. ii) Lands to the west of Bective Street/Bective Square/Suffolk Street known locally as the 'Frontlands'.
- ii)
- iii) iii) Lands to the south of the Cavan Road zoned for Retail Warehouse uses.
- iv) iv) The undeveloped lands in Kells Business Park.
- v) v) The Strategic Employment Zone on lands to the south of the Navan Road.

Economy and Employment

KEL OBJ 4

To support the promotion of the town as a visitor and tourism destination and facilitate the delivery of new and innovative visitor experiences and festivals.

KEL OBJ 5

To develop and promote cultural facilities and support the establishment of a Kells Creative Hub and Kells Paintworks.

KEL OBJ 6

To support the implementation of the recommendations of the Boyne Valley Tourism Strategy as it relates to Kells.

KEL OBJ 7

To encourage and support the appropriate development of the town centre retail core including adaptive reuse of historic buildings as the primary focus for all retail development.

KEL OBJ 8

To facilitate the Identification and development of an appropriate type and scaled tourism offer/experience to the west of the town on the open space and tourism zoned lands, that respects and complements the heritage of the town.

KEL OBJ 9

To support and facilitate complementary uses such as retail and leisure to locate adjacent to tourist attractions.

KEL OBJ 10

To require high quality design along the frontage of enterprise and employment lands where they interface with the main road from Navan entering into Kells via Headfort Place.

Infrastructure

KEL OBJ 11

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

KEL OBJ 12

To manage flood risk and development in Kells in accordance with policies and objectives set out in section 6.10 of Volume 1 of the County Development Plan 'Surface Water and Flood Risk Management'.

KEL OBJ 13

To support and facilitate the implementation of pedestrian enhancements to the following town centre junctions: R164 Oliver Plunkett Road and the R147 Carrick Street; R941 Maudlin Road and the R147 Carrick Street; R164 Farrell Street and the R163 Market Street and Kenlis Place.

KEL OBJ 14

To support and facilitate the implementation of pedestrian enhancements to the N52 on a phased basis in conjunction with relevant stakeholders.

KEL OBJ 15

To examine, in conjunction with relevant stakeholders' the potential for the provision of a new access to the site located to the south east of Kells' Town Centre and zoned B1 ('Backland' site), via the R163 on Headfort Place.

KEL OBJ 16

To support and facilitate the implementation of a new street to serve lands zoned C1 ('Frontlands' site), located to the south west of the town centre.

KEL OBJ 17

To support and facilitate the implementation of cycle lanes and associated cycle infrastructure upgrades as identified within the Greater Dublin Area Cycle Network Plan, within the town centre in partnership with the National Transport Authority and other relevant stakeholders.

KEL OBJ 18

To promote and facilitate the delivering of a link road between the R163 and R147 at the Town parks, Zoned D1 Tourism, north of the Navan Road, in conjunction with a tourism related development. The specific location of the link road will be determined as part of any future planning application.

KEL OBJ 19

Meath County Council, together with the promoter of the project, will undertake a detailed evidence-based assessment for a retail outlet in Kells, on a zoned site within or immediately adjacent the town centre that can generate commercial synergies with the established town centre, having regard to the provisions of the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012 and all relevant national and regional guidance and policy documents. The outcome of the assessments will be incorporated in the Draft Kells LAP, or a variation of the County Development Plan, as may be appropriate.

Cultural, Natural and Heritage

KEL OBJ 20

To preserve the character of Architectural Conservation Areas in Kells.

KEL OBJ 21

To require that new development proposals have regard to the history, heritage and architectural importance of the town in order to protect and enhance these qualities.

KEL OBJ 22

To facilitate engagement with property owners through heritage-led regeneration initiatives (e.g. 'Kickstart') to support investment, renewal and improvement of the towns architecture, historic built-form and urban fabric.

KEL OBJ 23

To support and encourage the nomination of Kells as part of the Early Medieval Monastic Sites for inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

KEL OBJ 24

To support the community and all key stakeholders to implement the Kells Community Biodiversity Plan 2016-2020 *and any revisions thereof*.

KELOBJ 25

To require large scale developments to consider and maximise opportunities to develop and enhance existing green infrastructure, create new habitats and improve connectivity with the wider countryside.

KELOBJ 26

To explore the feasibility of developing a publicly accessible linear park with provision for walking and cycling between Mabes Bridge and Maudlin Bridge and to the Headfort Road.

Social Infrastructure

KEL OBJ 27

To ensure that appropriate provision is made for additional education, health and recreation facilities in advance of residential population growth.

KEL OBJ 28

To support and facilitate the provision of recreation facilities in the town centre.

KEL OBJ 29

To identify the feasibility of expanding the existing recreation facilities on lands close to Kells Swimming Pool with direct pedestrian access to the town centre from Headfort Place or Kenlis Place.

Urban Design and Public Realm

KEL OBJ 30

To prepare a public realm plan for Kells during the lifetime of this Plan.

KEL OBJ 31

To support and facilitate the improvements to the public realm including pedestrian crossings at key locations particularly to support tourism attractions.