

1.0 Introduction

This written statement provides a brief description and development strategy for Oldcastle. A detailed Local Area Plan for the town will be prepared during the life of this Plan.

2.0 Context and Character

Located within the Municipal District of Kells and close to the Cavan border, Oldcastle is a historic market town functioning as an important service centre to an established urban area and rural catchment. The town has developed around the traditional 'Town Square' defined by the intersection of two locally important roads which forms the commercial town-centre.

Oldcastle has developed on a more sustainable basis than most other towns and villages in the County, predicated on a robust traditional manufacturing basis (furniture and engineering) but also with a strong service employment sector. Commercial activity in the town has developed around, and remains focused on, the Square and the entrance roads approaching same. Distinct uses organised on a geographical basis have developed in Oldcastle including an industry cluster to the north and primarily residential areas to the south.

Position in Settlement Hierarchy	Small Town
2016 Population	1,383
2011 Population	1,383
Percentage Change 2011-2016	0%
Housing stock 2016	596
Number of units completed 2016-2019	16
Committed units not yet built	0

Core Strategy Household Allocation 2020-2027	166 units
Population Projection 2027	1,733
Resident Workers 2016	490
Job – Workforce Ratio 2016	1.32
Education Facilities	St Oliver’s Post Primary School; Oldcastle Mixed National School, 1no. registered crèche; and, a Montessori facility.
Community Facilities	11
Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs)	Oldcastle Architectural Conservation Area
Protected Structures	61
Zone of Archaeological Potential	There are two zones of Archaeological Potential within the settlement boundary.
Natura 2000 Sites	The nearest Natura 2000 site is the River Boyne & River Blackwater SPA and SAC which is located approximately 6.98km to the east.

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	There is available capacity in the current water supply sourced from Kells / Oldcastle supply. There is also available capacity in the waste water treatment plant located in Oldcastle. However, some network constraints exist.

3.0 Vision

To maintain and support the function and success of Oldcastle as an established employment and service centre for North Meath and the surrounding rural hinterland, whilst facilitating indigenous enterprise, and encouraging improved quality of life and urban environment.

4.0 Opportunities

- Focus on the visual amenity provided by an intact compact historic Town Centre with high quality built form providing opportunities for regeneration.
- Develop a unique Public Realm in line with the Public Realm Plan.
- Strong well established economic sector which can support enhanced economic development and job creation.
- Enhance connectivity within the town centre and in particular between Gilson Park and adjoining recreational and open space development and between the town centre and the Fair Green car park.
- Oldcastle has potential to attract visitors and tourists to the town given the proximity of Sliabh na gCailliagh.
- A vibrant community sector in the town provides opportunities to maintain and deliver additional recreational and community facilities.

5.0 Land Use Strategy

The aim of the land use strategy for Oldcastle is to consolidate and strengthen the town centre and promote the sensitive redevelopment of strategically located lands surrounding the historic core. The County Development Plan seeks to provide for future growth in a sustainable manner integrated with the town's built environment which enables a vibrant settlement that can cater for its current and future population needs.

5.1 Settlement and Housing

The population of Oldcastle remained relatively static in the last inter census period, 1,384 persons were recorded in 2011 and 1,383 persons in 2016. Of the population aged 15 years and over, 48% are in employment. Unemployment is higher than the County and National average at 15%. The manufacturing industry represents the largest employment sector in Oldcastle (36% of those employed) which is higher than the County average of 12%.

The strong presence of manufacturing industry in the town clearly influences travel to work times, with 55% of the population with journey times to work / education of within 15 minutes. The total housing stock for Oldcastle as recorded in the 2016 Census is 596 dwellings. The Council is currently constructing 16 units¹ to add to the provision of social housing at a central location just east of the town centre. 71% of the households within the settlement boundary have internet access which is 10% below the County average.

This Plan identifies four sites for new residential development which are sufficient to meet the projected housing requirements during the Plan period. These sites have been selected based on their geographical spread across the town, their ability to consolidate the existing urban form whilst utilizing the availability of existing infrastructure and, which are 'connected' to existing residential areas. The Planning Authority is satisfied that sufficient lands have been identified to accommodate the household allocation.

5.2 Economy and Employment

Defined as a 'Level 4' retail centre in the County Retail hierarchy, Oldcastle functions as a 'service centre' to the town and its surrounding rural hinterland. With no significant out-of-town shopping

¹ Part 8 reference number: P8 18004

development, the town has managed to sustain the business of a traditional group of retail shops and services, expected to be found in any small town. Most of the buildings are owned by the proprietors operating their businesses from the ground floor, all who collectively contribute to the character of this vibrant urban centre.

Oldcastle has a strong manufacturing base providing local employment with a number of indigenous manufacturers and engineering firms clustered primarily within the northern area of the town – a short distance from the town centre with lands adjacent available for expansion if required. An additional land bank for employment use is proposed on the Kells road adjacent to the development boundary south of existing employment lands. These lands have been selected as appropriate given their location adjoining the Kells road.

5.3 Water Services Infrastructure

Oldcastle is served by the following water services infrastructure:

Water: Water supply to the town is provided from the 'Kells/Oldcastle' water supply scheme, with water sourced and treated at Lough Bane. This treatment plant was upgraded in 2017 and has sufficient capacity to facilitate the development and growth provided for in this County Development Plan.

Wastewater: The Oldcastle Wastewater Treatment Plant was commissioned in 2014. It has sufficient spare capacity to facilitate the development and growth provided for in this County Development Plan.

5.4 Movement

The Council has prepared a Public Realm Plan for Oldcastle which will provide a basis for town centre enhancement addressing all publicly accessible spaces between buildings thus including car parking, pedestrian and cycleways, street lighting, road surfaces, etc. As part of the implementing of the Public Realm Plan the movement of people around the town square will be examined and enhanced.

Improving the pedestrian links between the Town Square and the car parks, particularly the Fair Green car park, would help to encourage usage of this car park and is a priority of this plan.

Oldcastle is serviced by the National Bus Network (Bus Eireann) and private operator (Meath Accessible Transport) offering local connections to other settlements

5.5 Cultural and Natural Heritage

Oldcastle is rich in built and archaeological heritage with many Recorded Monuments and Protected Structures. The richness of the built heritage is acknowledged by designation of the Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) that spans from the central market square at the crossroads, out along five roads which radiate from 'The Square' which could be more correctly described as a triangle. The ACA incorporates primarily the eighteenth and nineteenth century building fabric of the town and terminates generally where post-war twentieth century developments begins.

Although the market function of 'The Square' in the town has declined, there is a healthy and varied mix of uses within the town core ACA including residential, commercial and ecclesiastical uses. A number of traditional retail shops and services remain which contribute to the character of the town centre. The general scale and pattern of street front development and plot sizes remain generally unchanged.

Loughcrew is located circa 7km outside of the town centre and while Oldcastle has a supporting role in terms of visitor facilities serving this site, it is recognised that there is a need for improved and new tourist facilities at Loughcrew. It is an objective of this Plan to support the development of appropriate tourist facilities at this location and within the surrounding area.

5.6 Green Infrastructure

Natural and managed open spaces within Oldcastle including the pitch and park, groups of trees and landscaped areas, are features of 'Green Infrastructure' which collectively, contribute towards enhanced urban quality and provision of amenities for residents. This Green Infrastructure should be enhanced to provide connectivity between features resulting in 'greenways' and 'green routes' which can then be used to enhance the amenity of the town and to provide appropriate habitats to support flora and fauna contributing toward ecological biodiversity throughout the urban area. The existing Cow plot on the outskirts of the town has potential to provide a community amenity for the town and it will be an objective of this Plan to explore potential uses of this land.

5.7 Social Infrastructure

Oldcastle has a well-established social and community infrastructure. Whilst the town benefits from a large central amenity park (Gilson Park) comprising pitches and adjacent playground and private operated 'pitch and putt' course, the town is deficient in the provision of passive recreational open space.

One of the greatest aspects of Oldcastle's social infrastructure provision is the established community, sports and interest groups in the town and their proven ability to work together for the collective benefit of Oldcastle. In 2013, under the working umbrella of the 'Oldcastle Renaissance Working Group', a broad section of the community was represented for the purpose of formulating a Community Plan. This Plan sought to identify and advance specific projects that would be of economic, physical, social and environmental benefit to Oldcastle.

It is an objective of this Plan to identify suitable locations for improved provision of passive recreational space within Oldcastle consistent with best practice standards.

5.8 Urban Design and Public Realm

The quality of the physical fabric and townscape of Oldcastle is mixed. The approach to new development will be to consolidate the existing settlement form through effective use of serviced developable land and to provide for enhanced permeability through and between existing and new development areas.

The Public Realm Plan will provide a robust strategy for the urban landscape of Oldcastle into the future.

6.0 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:

OLD POL 1

To maintain and support the function and success of Oldcastle as an established employment and service centre for North Meath and the surrounding rural hinterland, whilst facilitating indigenous enterprise, and encouraging improved quality of life and urban environment

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council:

Settlement and Housing

OLD OBJ 1

To encourage the re-development of backland infill sites within the town that includes residential uses

Economy and Employment

OLD OBJ 2

To facilitate growth in the established manufacturing base, whilst encouraging continued diversity in enterprise and employment activities on enterprise zoned land, north of the town.

OLD OBJ 3

To facilitate the provision of new convenience retail offer within the defined town centre in accordance with the Retail Strategy.

OLD OBJ 4

To encourage the use of upper floors within the town centre for a diversity of living and working uses where such uses would contribute to the function and vibrancy of the town centre.

Movement

OLD OBJ 5

To require new residential development to provide safe and convenient vehicular, pedestrian and cycling provision, circulation and accessibility through new developments, and with the town centre.

OLD OBJ 6

To explore opportunities with relevant landowners to provide pedestrian/cycle route between Ardfraile Close and the Square via lands adjacent and to the rear of St. Bride's Church of Ireland.

OLD OBJ 7

To provide for new/enhanced pedestrian connectivity and footpaths on Coughlan Road, Copplers Road and Parkview in order to enhance the accessibility between Gilson Park (area), the town centre, and other neighbourhoods.

OLD OBJ 8

To provide for new/enhanced pedestrian connectivity and footpaths between playground, the town centre, and other neighbourhoods.

OLD OBJ 9

To work with the National Transport Authority, Bus Éireann and other relevant organisations to improve the public transport connectivity from Oldcastle to the County Town and onto Regional and City Centres.

Cultural and Natural Heritage

OLD OBJ 10

To encourage the provision of multi-functional and interconnected green spaces, routes, and corridors within the existing urban area, and as part of new development proposals, for the management and enhancement of urban and rural resources and for the benefit of residents.

OLD OBJ 11

To protect and maintain; the trees identified for preservation on the Heritage Designations Map, and areas of functional and passive open-space.

Social

OLD OBJ 12

To explore the feasibility of using the 'Market House' for community uses.

OLD OBJ 13

To support the Oldcastle 'Renaissance Working Group' and other groups/interests to implement the community projects identified in the Oldcastle Community Plan (2013)' where they would contribute to the wider objectives of this Plan, and subject to availability of resources.

Urban Design and Public Realm**OLD OBJ 14**

To preserve the character of 'The Square' inclusive of the group of structures and its townscape setting, which are considered of special interest and value, by way of Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) designation.

OLD OBJ 15

To encourage reuse and adaptation of historical buildings within the ACA including contemporary design interventions, where such uses respect and reflect the historical grain of development, established townscape character, existing plot size, building heights and proportions.

OLD OBJ 16

To implement and ensure compliance with the Public Realm Plan for Oldcastle which provides for a themed strategy for the provision of street furniture, planting, traffic movement and parking, lighting, building colours, signage (local and tourist) and surface materials etc. within the town.

OLD OBJ 17

To encourage more intensive use of Gilson Park and the adjacent lands identified on the land use zoning objectives map for sport, recreational, amenity and community uses for the benefit of the town.

OLD OBJ 18

To explore potential for the existing "Cow Plot" on the outskirts of the town to provide a community amenity for the town.