

1.0 Introduction

This written statement provides a brief description and development strategy for Athboy. 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 Kells Municipal District in the north west of the county, Athboy is a small town situated in close proximity to the border with County Westmeath. The population of Athboy was 2,596 in 2022, a 6% increase which is below the national average of 8%.

Athboy is approximately 17km west of Navan and 11km northwest of Trim. Dominated by the convergence of national, regional and third-class roads the town is well connected to the surrounding hinterland, with the Main Street comprising the N51 national secondary road.

With a relatively compact Main Street, the amenity, heritage qualities and character of Athboy are largely derived from development fronting onto the elongated Main Street of the town. There are significant infill opportunities to the rear of the Main Street, as the backland area has not experienced any significant redevelopment and largely retains its 19th Century footprints. The town in recent times has extended along the main approach roads, with significant residential development evident on the Oldcastle, Kells and Mullingar roads. Whilst residential growth and development has been strong, development within lands identified for enterprise and employment uses off the Trim Road has been limited.

Position in Settlement Hierarchy	Small Town
2022 Population	2,596
2016 Population	2,445
Percentage Change 2016-2022	6.17%
Housing stock 2016	989

Number of units completed 2016-2019	34
Committed units not yet built	127
Core Strategy Household Allocation 2020-2027	290 units This includes 173 extant units not built at the time of writing
Population Projection 2027	2,720
Resident Workers 2016	970
Total Jobs 2016	489
Job – Workforce Ratio 2016	0.5
Education Facilities	6
Community Facilities	15
Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs)	Athboy Architectural Conservation Areas
Protected Structures	37
Zone of Archaeological Potential	There is a of National Monument Service Zone of Archaeological Notification within the settlement.

Natura 2000 Sites	Yes - the River Boyne & River Blackwater SPA and SAC is located within 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. Development proposals within the backlands must consider the sequential approach and allocate water compatible development within Flood Zones A and some/all of Zone B where possible. Planning applications in this area must be accompanied by an appropriately detailed FRA, setting out the above approach that clearly assesses flood risks, management measures and demonstrates compliance with the Planning Guidelines.
Water Services Infrastructure/Capacity	Athboy Water Supply Scheme and Sewerage Scheme have capacity but there may be some localised network constraints.
Modal Share Targets for 2026	
Modal Share Targets for Walking	22% (Increasing from 16% in 2016)
Modal Share Target for Cycling	4% (Increasing from 1% in 2016)
Modal Share Target for Bus	12% (Unchanged from 12% in 2016)
Modal Share Target for Rail	1% (Unchanged from 1% in 2016)

Reduction Target for Car Use	56% (Reducing from 65% in 2016)
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3.0 Vision

‘To consolidate and strengthen the town, through the redevelopment of backland, infill and neglected lands for residential use in the town centre, whilst promoting Athboy’s natural environmental and built heritage qualities and curtailment of the sprawling urban form through a redefinition of the development boundary’.

4.0 Opportunities

- To facilitate compact growth with a consolidation of the town centre by the redevelopment of key backland, infill and brownfield lands, addressing vacancy and dereliction.
- Develop a unique Public Realm in line with the Public Realm Plan.
- Potential to create a green infrastructure network by integrating the Athboy Heritage Trail into existing public open spaces and high amenity areas.
- A vibrant community sector in the town provides opportunities to maintain and deliver additional recreational and community facilities.
- Further develop the tourism sector in the town given key heritage/tourist assets in the vicinity including Hill of Ward and Causey Farm.
- Linguistic and cultural heritage given the town’s location proximate to the Meath Gaeltachts, potential to function as a Gaeltacht Service Town.
- The inaugural Púca festival, to be held in 2019, celebrating Ireland as the birthplace of Halloween with venues in Trim, Athboy and Drogheda aims to attract international visitors to Ireland in October and November. It is intended that this would become an annual event and will be supported by the establishment of a headquarters building in Athboy.

5.0 Land Use Strategy

The development strategy for Athboy is to consolidate the existing town centre to address dereliction. There will be a focus on broadening the economic base of the town to facilitate local job

creation as unemployment in the town in 2016 was higher than the county average (7.19%) at 10%. The strategy will also seek to increase the role of tourism in the economy of the town.

6.0 Settlement and Housing

The total housing stock for Athboy as recorded in the 2016 Census was 989 dwellings. To date, new residential development has largely taken place on outer greenfield sites removed from the town centre along the approach roads into the town.

The Core Strategy (Table 2.12) of the Plan together with the supplementary table introduced as part of this variation to accommodate the updated housing supply targets as set out in the NPF Implementation Guidelines 2025 provides a housing allocation of 290 units to Athboy over the 2020 - 2027 period. A review of planning history within the town has determined that there are 173 committed units. In addition to this land, up to 50% of the backland town centre land identified can be developed for residential purposes, potentially yielding an additional 100 residential units within the town.

The Planning Authority is therefore satisfied that sufficient lands have been identified to accommodate the household allocation.

All new residential development should be as close as possible to the town centre area thus promoting sustainable land use where walking, cycling and public transport uses can be promoted, along with the integration of open space and public facilities.

7.0 Economy and Employment

Two enterprise and employment sites are located within the town's development boundary and can facilitate the creation and development of small-scale services and local enterprises. The Athboy Business Park on the Trim Road has been identified to accommodate future enterprise and employment uses, development has been slow resulting in a substantial area of undeveloped land. It is important that this land is developed in the future in a coordinated manner.

The other enterprise and employment site is located on the Cloran Road west of the town centre. This site is largely developed although there is a small area of undeveloped land remaining at the rear to facilitate limited future expansion.

7.1 Retail

Athboy is identified as a Level 4 retail centre in the County Retail hierarchy which seeks to deliver local / neighbourhood retail services, serving the immediate population only.

8.0 Water Services

Water: Athboy is served by local groundwater boreholes and treatment plants. These also serve Rathcairn and Kildalkey. There is considered to be adequate space capacity to serve the development and growth provided for in this 2021-2027 CDP. However, there are some localised network constraints that may require developer contributions to address.

9.0 Flooding

The Athboy River flows through the town. The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment prepared for the County has identified lands at risk of flooding. 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.¹

10.0 Movement

The town is dominated by the N51 National secondary route which forms the main street of the town. There are currently no plans for a Bypass of Athboy i.e. it has not been referenced in the National Development Plan. However, although a bypass of Athboy is not a priority scheme for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), a further study to examine the national secondary network in the context of the National Planning Framework and connectivity of the regional centres is to be carried out by the TII in due course. This could be significant for Athboy in terms of re-examining the N51 and potential investment opportunities that could arise. In the meantime, the Public Realm Plan for the town, currently being prepared² addresses movement issues including bus facilities and car parking within the town.

11.0 Cultural and Natural Heritage

Athboy contains an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) extending from Lower Bridge Street to O'Growney Street and includes all of the town centre's land plots on both sides of the Main Street.

¹ Further details regarding Flood Risk Management are set out in Chapter 6 Infrastructure Strategy

² August 2018

This designation recognises the special significance of the built heritage which characterises Athboy and that care must be taken with regard to any future proposals in this area. Information on ACAs is set down in Volume 1 of this Plan and further information on Athboy ACA is detailed in the Character Statement available under the Heritage section of the Council's website. Future commercial and retail development will need to respect the existing vernacular design traits evident within the town in order to protect its character and that of the ACA that it is included within. The roof pitches; façade and fenestration details must respect this setting.

Athboy contains two sites of archaeological interest. The town centre area outlines the initial early development of the town comprising of Connaught Street, Main Street, and Lower and Upper Bridge Street. The second zone of archaeological interest surrounds the complex of buildings of Danes Court to the south of St James' Church of Ireland. The town also contains approximately 13 items identified on the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). These items highlight the extensive length of human occupation in the town and are arranged around a number of separate historical areas, specifically Danes Court, the St James' Church of Ireland ecclesiastical complex, St James' Holy Well and the town's former defences located along Main Street and the Kildalkey Road.

The topography of the landscape surrounding Athboy is generally flat. As a result, only one notable view and prospect has been identified. This view and prospect of special amenity value includes:

- A view running from north to south from the northern extremity of the Townparks area into the floodplain of the Yellow Ford River and the open space area to the rear of those buildings to the north of Main Street. This has been identified on the land use zoning objectives map.

A heritage trail has been developed within the town centre and this trail could be further extended to link in with other natural features in the town. Given Athboy's important built heritage and the longevity of settlement at this location, there is potential for the town to cater for a greater share of the tourism market within the County. Athboy could function in conjunction with other associated heritage towns and villages and develop as a distinctive service centre within the network of heritage towns and tourism centres in the County.

12.0 Green Infrastructure

Athboy has the benefit of a number of significant green spaces, including the Fairgreen in the centre of the town, green space and playground at Townparks. The potential to create a green

infrastructure network by integrating the Athboy Heritage Trail into existing public open spaces and high amenity areas is a key objective of this plan and will be explored further in the Local Area Plan.

13.0 Urban Design and Public Realm

A Public Realm Strategy has been prepared for the town and will provide a robust strategy for the future development of the urban landscape of Athboy. It presents an opportunity to engage with the local community to identify the main qualities and issues facing the town centre and establish a broad shared vision in order to make Athboy a more attractive place to live, work and visit.

14.0 Town Development 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, objectives have only been restated where they have particular relevance to the settlement. These objectives should therefore be read in conjunction with the Objectives and Development Standards in Volume One of the County Development Plan.

Policy

It is the policy of the Council:

ATH POL 1

To consolidate and strengthen the town, through the redevelopment of backland, infill and brownfield lands based on the principles of sustainable community and the creation of a high-quality urban environment.

Objective

It is an objective of the Council:

ATH OBJ 1

To provide for appropriate mixed-use development at an appropriate scale which compliments the character of the town and which enhances local services and community facilities.

ATH OBJ 2

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

ATH OBJ 3

To require high-quality design in all new developments.

ATH OBJ 4

To protect and maintain the trees identified for preservation on the Land Use Zoning Objectives Map.

ATH OBJ 5

To support and encourage the development of the town as a tourism hub as a focus for employment generation in conjunction with relevant stakeholders.

ATH OBJ 6

To support and encourage the further development of linguistic and cultural heritage and to explore the towns potential to function as a Gaeltacht Service Town, in conjunction with relevant stakeholders.

ATH OBJ 7

To support and promote existing and proposed festivals including the Púca Festival (including the establishment of a festival headquarters in the town) to increase the cultural, heritage and lifestyle profile of Athboy, subject to the satisfactory location, access, parking provision and protection of the surrounding environment.

ATH OBJ 8

To explore the potential to create a green infrastructure network by integrating the Athboy Heritage Trail into existing public open spaces and amenity areas.

ATH OBJ 9

To improve traffic circulation in the town by facilitating the development of bus pull in areas in conjunction with Bus Éireann.

ATH OBJ 10

To support the enhancement and development of the Athboy Convent Community Centre and other community facilities in the town.

ATH OBJ 11

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