

CHAPTER 4

**Economy and
Employment Strategy**

4.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the economic vision for the County for the period 2020-2026. Continued economic development and job creation will be supported by the work of the Planning and Economic Development Directorate and the Local Enterprise Office (LEO) guided by this Plan via a range of policies and objectives. These policies and objectives have been developed cognisant of the forthcoming economic challenges that the County will face during the Plan period.

The Council's staff have an excellent record of delivery, local knowledge, skills and experience necessary to address these challenges. The preparation of an Economic Strategy for the County sets out key targets which support continued economic development. The Economic Strategy for County Meath 2014-2022 a first of its kind, recognises Meath's significant strategic location within the Eastern Midland region and the county's unique competitive advantage within Ireland. This Plan seeks to promote the County as a nationally and internationally attractive and distinctive location in which to conduct business. The policies and objectives of this Plan seek to continue the successful implementation of the Economic Strategy which has facilitated the delivery of a number of significant F.D.I and indigenous projects since its inception.

The National Planning Framework (NPF) acknowledges the opportunities for growth of *urban areas and well connected towns that are accessible to significant population catchments*.¹ It also recognises the interdependencies between cities and their surrounding Metropolitan Areas and the importance of the Metropolitan Areas in contributing to the economic success of a city.

This is clearly acknowledged by the inclusion of an objective within the NPF that a Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) is to be prepared for the cities of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway, and Waterford.²

At a regional level the NPF is implemented through the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES). Due to the diversity and scale of the Eastern and Midlands Region the RSES sets out a vision for future growth and development at both a Strategic Planning Area level and a regional level. The RSES has a much greater focus on economic development and potential than the previous Regional Planning Guidelines. This greater economic focus is intended to strengthen links between Planning policy and economic trends.

The RSES identifies that improving the alignment between the location of residential development and employment is one of the key challenges facing the region. Thus the RSES fully supports the Council's approach to economic development which established the central importance of 'live work' communities as a panacea to positively manage the extent of outbound commuting from the Mid East.

Plan

A targeted evidence based Plan led approach has been applied to this chapter which identifies a number of strategically important sites intended to attract specific employment sectors based on a number of variables such as: the strategic location of the sites within the County; the proximity of the sites to a critical mass of skilled workers and public transport and the level of critical infrastructure provision at each location. This targeted Plan led approach endorsed by a strong marketing strategy based around the 'Make it Meath' brand and supported by a multidisciplinary Planning and

¹ For further information see Section 4.4 of the National Planning Framework

² National Policy Objective 67 of the National Planning Framework

economic development team within the Council will provide a platform for the County to be promoted County as an attractive business base for both FDI and SME's over the life of the Plan and beyond.

The need to identify additional strategic economic development sites in those centres which are experiencing significant out bound commuting due to the extent of their resident populations and the lack of local employment opportunities is a key objective of this Development Plan. Thus building on the notable successes already achieved in the implementation of the Economic Strategy.

4.2 Statutory Context

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 gives legislative effect to the proposals contained in 'Putting People First', and provides for a range of changes to the organisation and work of local authorities. Local Authorities are now required to develop a Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) which seeks to establish an integrated approach to economic and local community development at county level, while Regional Assemblies are in turn required to produce Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies. Further changes include the establishment of the Local Community Development Committees (LCDC's), and Local Enterprise Offices (LEO's) within Local Authorities. A new Regional Assembly Structure has been established reducing the total number of regions to 3; Meath is located within the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA).

4.3 Policy Context

4.3.1 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2031

The EMRA Region provides more than half of what is produced and is home to one in every two people living in the Country, therefore the economic Regional Policy Objectives are central to ensuring this economic powerhouse continues to function effectively. The economic vision is to facilitate sustainable, competitive, inclusive and resilient growth. The economic strategy focuses on a number of key objectives which are as follows:

- Smart Specialisation;
- Clustering;
- Orderly Growth;
- Placemaking;
- Future Proofing and Risk Management.

The strategy sets out a number of guiding principles for the identification of locations for strategic employment growth at Metropolitan, Regional and Local level. These include:

- A focus on technology and innovation poles located at Institutes of Technology and Universities;
- Current employment locations, density of workers, land take and resource/ infrastructure dependency;
- Locations for expansion of existing enterprises;
- Locations for new enterprises based on whether they are people intensive/space intensive, tied to a particular resource or dependant on a particular piece of infrastructure;
- Locations for potential relocation of enterprises that may be better suited to

alternative locations and whether such a move would facilitate the release of urban land for more efficient uses;

- Within large urban areas locations where significant job location can be catered for through infrastructure servicing and proximity to public transport corridors.

The foregoing principles have been considered in the drafting of this economic strategy. Having regard to the plentiful supply of land designated for employment uses in suitable locations in County Meath, there is potential to accommodate some enterprises seeking to relocate from Dublin City and thus make available urban land in the city for redevelopment. Bearing this in mind it is intended to target specific employment uses which align with the principles of the Economic Strategy and direct same to suitable locations.

A number of the guiding principles for investment priorities have relevance to the challenges to be addressed in this strategy including availability of human capital, proximity to third level institutions, availability of transport infrastructure and broadband, capacity of place and impact of commuting, alignment with NPF in respect of Data Centre locations etc.

The Dublin- Belfast Economic corridor is a key element of the RSES strategy and its importance to the economic success of the region is emphasised. The role of Key Towns in the region in the provision of a strong employment base for their resident population and hinterlands is also acknowledged.

In respect of the rural economy RPO 6.5 advocates the identification of measures in LECP's for the regeneration in small town and village cores. The strategy advocates the exploring of options to co-locate housing in rural towns and villages with incubator space

near Institutes of Technology to facilitate technological spill over. The strategy fully supports the enhancement of the agriculture, food, forestry, energy sectors in tandem with encouraging diversification in the context of landscape and heritage protection.

4.3.2 Putting People First – Action Programme for Effective Local Government

Putting People First – Action Programme for Effective Local Government sets out the plans for the greater alignment of local government and local development. It seeks to provide Local Authorities with more autonomy in the support of enterprise and the promotion of wider economic development, thereby creating and sustaining jobs. It's four key objectives are:

- *Doing more for the economy, enterprise and the local economy*
- *Building a local government system for the 21st Century*
- *Local Government that is soundly funded, working better and serving the community*
- *Good governance, strong leadership and democratic accountability*

4.3.3 Action Plan for Jobs 2017

This document is a high level, ambitious, all-of-Government initiative designed to mainstream creativity in the life of the nation so that individually and collectively, Irish people at home and abroad, can realise their full creative potential. The purpose of the document is to respond to the immediate challenge of the UK's decision to leave the EU and also to inform the Government's response to a more

volatile and changing external environment by strengthening the resilience and agility of the Country's enterprise base.

4.3.4 Action Plan for Jobs: Mid East Region 2016-2017 (DBEI)

Since the "Action Plan for Jobs" process commenced in 2012 a number of Regional Reports have been published. The Government has published the "Action Plan for Jobs: Mid East Region". This plan covers Counties Kildare, Meath and Wicklow. The plan identifies that the region has significant existing enterprise strengths and assets. It notes that increased collaboration can be facilitated by building on the recent reforms such as:

- *The growing impact of LEO;*
- *The new mandate of Education and Training Boards;*
- *The strengthening of Regional Offices of the IDA and Enterprise Ireland;*
- *The reform of Local Government with emphasis on economic development role;*
- *The blueprint of a stronger policy framework to underpin sectoral opportunities.*

4.3.5 Winning: Foreign Direct Investment, 2015-2019, (IDA)

This strategy aims to increase foreign direct investment at a regional level, more evenly throughout the Irish economy which positively impacts indigenous business and regional locations. The strategy seeks to continue winning investments and see the benefits flow as widely as possible in economic terms throughout Ireland. Ambitious targets include; 80,000 new jobs; 900 investments; €3bn R&D

investments and balanced regional growth. The core role of IDA Ireland set out in this document is 'to create employment with economic and social benefits for the Irish people'.

4.3.6 Meath Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021

As outlined above the Council is obliged under the Local Government Reform Act 2014 to develop a 6-year LECP for the County. This Plan is required to be consistent with the RPGs and the County Development Plan (and the National Planning Framework and future Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy). It provides economic and community objectives that promote and support the economic and local community development of the County. Tourism and recreation are noted as key sectors in both the economic and social development of the County, providing opportunities for employment and wealth generation, and also facilities and infrastructure that enhance the quality of life for residents. This is reflected within the policy framework of the Meath LECP. The LECP is now required to be reviewed ensure compliance with the adopted RSES.

4.4 Vision for the Economy and Employment Strategy

It is a cross cutting theme of this Plan to enhance the competitiveness and attractiveness of the County in order to make it one of Ireland's prime locations for indigenous and foreign economic and employment generating investment. It is the policy of this Plan to promote the County as a cost-competitive and well-connected investment location in

the Greater Dublin Area. This vision will guide ongoing external engagement process between the Council and the IDA, Enterprise Ireland and other agencies, now and in the years ahead.

It is a policy of the Council:

ED POL 1

To facilitate and support the continued growth of the economy in the County in a sustainable manner and in accordance with the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES).

4.5 Economic Development Strategy for County Meath 2014-2022

Since the adoption of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 the Council has taken a very proactive approach to leading economic development in the County, which includes the establishment of the Meath Economic Forum in 2013 and the publication of the Economic Development Strategy for County Meath 2014-2022. The Strategy sets evidence based measures aimed at accelerating the economic transformation, revitalisation and sustainable development of the County. The Strategy contains 8 no. key actions/recommendations designed to achieve the projected level of employment growth in the County by 2022 of an additional 7,500 jobs in order to broaden the County's economic base by growing the share of employment taken up by knowledge-orientated

activities and thus growing both indigenous and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) enterprises in the County.

The promotion of economic development requires a multi-pronged approach, the key components of which are as follows:

- Identifying key strategic sites for employment generation in County Meath for the promotion of economic growth locally;
- Reserving sufficient employment zoned land in suitable locations for industry and enterprise uses;
- Offering a good quality of life encouraging and providing a sustainable "live work" development model in the County, thereby reducing unsustainable long distance commuting patterns for employment;
- Providing and facilitating the provision of requisite physical infrastructure;
- Facilitating relevant bodies regarding the availability of high-speed telecommunications;
- Facilitating relevant energy suppliers regarding the availability of clean and reliable sources of energy;
- Promoting and facilitating appropriate educational/training measures to ensure a suitably skilled local workforce;
- Providing for appropriate zoned lands at strategic locations to accommodate synergies between third level institutions and business enterprises including start up companies;
- Forging mutually-beneficial linkages and partnerships with the business and third level institutions including research and development facilities;
- Securing high standards of landscape and environmental protection/enhancement;

- Ensuring that towns and villages remain attractive to investment, and;
- Recognising the critical role tourism and related activity plays in the economic base of the County and to support the continued investment in this key indigenous industry.

The measures recommended within the Economic Development Strategy seek to promote County Meath to fulfil its economic potential and to prosper as a successful, diverse and vibrant social, civic, commercial, and residential centre that will be recognised locally, nationally and internationally as a highly attractive and distinctive location in which to live and conduct business.

The Economic Development Strategy recognises that the County has an unparalleled and unique competitive advantage within Ireland, due to its:

- strategic location within the fastest growing region in Ireland;
- proximity to the Dublin Metropolitan Area and its markets;
- proximity to Dublin Airport and Dublin Port;
- location within the Dublin – Belfast Economic Corridor;
- highly skilled labour force;
- high quality built and natural environment, and;
- lower housing prices.

These advantages offer distinctive economic and commercial investment opportunities. Notwithstanding this, the Strategy also identifies existing trends within the County which impact on the economic performance of the County including:

- Narrow base of economic activities in

largely traditional areas;

- FDI deficit;
- Low penetration of knowledge orientated activities and;
- Substantial skills leakage due to commuting trends from the County.

The key aim of the Economic Strategy is to positively address these trends, providing for a more robust economic base within the county in order to improve the county's economic resilience to changes in the geo political sphere both nationally and internationally.

The sites contained in the Economic Strategy are listed below, and illustrated in Map 4.1,

- Navan (IDA Business & Technology Park)
- South Drogheda (IDA Business & Technology Park and lands in private ownership)
- Dunboyne North (Lands adjacent to the M3 Parkway Rail Head)
- Ashbourne (Lands north of the Rath Roundabout)
- Kells Business Park

4.5.1 Economic Variation to County Development Plan 2013-2019

In order to enable the spatial implementation of this Strategy it was necessary to align the policies and objectives of the Plan to the tenets of the Strategy as they relate to statutory land use planning.

The implementation of the 8 no. specific actions contained in the Strategy was the primary response of the Local Authority to seek to improve the number of local employment opportunities available to the resident

population. In particular Action 3 of the Strategy identified a number of revisions required to the County Development Plan 2013-2019 to positively provide the framework for investment and employment creation while at the same time removing non-essential potential barriers to employment generating development. The requirements arising from Action 3 of the Strategy were a key reason for the preparation of Variation no. 3, therefore a comprehensive review of the County Development Plan was undertaken.

On the 23rd May 2016 Meath County Council Members voted to adopt Variation no. 3 to the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019 and therefore commenced the process which has instigated the economic successes within the County to date.

4.6 Changing Economic Climate

The economy has emerged from a difficult period and is forecast to achieve healthy, sustainable growth rates over the medium-term. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has outpaced all other European economies with year on year growth of 8.2% in Ireland recorded in 2018⁵. This figure is forecasted to remain robust over the coming years with the headline GDP rate forecast to increase by 4.9% in 2019 and 3.1% in 2020.⁶

The most significant threat to the stability of the Irish economy is generally accepted to be BREXIT. A number of scenarios can be considered in relation to same, irrespective of the final outcomes of negotiations, it will undoubtedly affect our economy significantly. In this regard the NPF stresses *'the cross-border*

*and all-island dimension of spatial strategy. The continued strengthening of the economic relationship between Dublin and Belfast can help reinforce the competitiveness of the Eastern and Midland Region, while also helping to mitigate the adverse effects of Brexit*⁸.

Irish based companies who rely on the UK for exports may be adversely affected by increases in the cost of doing business as a result of tariffs or currency depreciations and will be required to diversify their markets in order to maintain healthy trading levels. In line with the government's commitment to facilitate European trade InterTrade Ireland will continue their supports for SME's trading across the Border and Enterprise Ireland will continue supports for access to foreign markets. Fortunately for the County a significant number of companies assisted by the Local Enterprise Office based within the County trade towards Dublin and this is likely to lessen the impact of BREXIT in respect of these businesses. However those businesses with a high dependence on the UK for imports of raw materials or exports of goods and services will face significant challenges and uncertainties associated with the introduction of tariffs or regulatory divergence between the EU and UK as part of any Withdrawal Agreement.

While the County must future proof against any ill effects from BREXIT there are potential gains which may emerge. Ireland is in a strong position to attract FDI from the UK, in 2015 the Country had 3% of the net inward Global FDI, this amounted to half that in the UK – an extraordinarily high proportion for Ireland given the much smaller size of its economy and population compared to that of the UK. The level of US investment and other non-EU investment in the UK is expected to decline post-Brexit as the investors involved will seek

⁵ CSO National Income and Expenditure 2018

⁶ Quarterly Economic Commentary, Autumn 2019, ESRI

⁸ National Development Plan 2018-2027

a base in the EU (a much larger market than the UK, even when the UK leaves the EU). This presents an opportunity for Ireland and for the County in particular, given the County's strategic location adjacent to the National Gateway and the availability of a highly educated and skilled workforce.

4.6.1 Successes and Projecting beyond 2022

Since the launch of the Economic Strategy, positive outcomes have been delivered - not by coincidence but as a result of the implementation of the actions set out in the Economic Development Strategy. Employment rates have increased by 1.47% on an annual basis with 2,935 additional jobs within the County, which equates to an 8% increase in employment. County The Council has played a leading role in the implementation of the actions, which were deliberately kept limited in number and targeted on key areas reflecting the comparative strengths of the County and the issues that need to be addressed;

- 1) Increasing the jobs-to-population ratio,
- 2) Reducing the economic leakages in the form of outward commuting and
- 3) Reducing retail loss and broadening the employment base of the County by facilitating more high quality, knowledge-oriented employment.

Recent successes include the Facebook data centre developments, Shire (Takeda) Pharma Group and the Avoca development at Dunboyne which will jointly provide more than 550 jobs to the County in the near future. The development of EMeRI Nutrition in the IDA Business Park is a welcome indicator of additional employment activity in Navan.

The timeframe of the current Economic Strategy is to 2022, however it is projected that the long term issues outlined above in terms of the current narrow base of economic activities, FDI deficit etc., will be as relevant post 2022 as they are currently. It is also predicted that there will be improvements in the trend in these metrics, in favour of Meath, with particular improvements to the local economic base. In order to reach the target of 7,500 jobs identified in the Strategy by 2022 a rise in employment growth to a rate of 1.74% is required. Given that annual employment growth rate within the State is 2.16% it is considered that this target is achievable and it is anticipated that the target will be met prior to 2022.

While much attention has been given to FDI and the successes achieved since the preparation of the Economic Development Strategy, the more traditional economic base of the County must continue to be supported, including extractive activities (mining and quarrying), meat processing, other agri-food, engineering and furniture making etc. The indigenous sector has seen an increase in employment from 11.4% of total jobs in the County in 2011 to 15.4% in 2016. Such has been the growth in employment in Enterprise Ireland (EI) clients that the County ranked 5th among all counties in the country in the latter year in terms of the number of jobs provided. Increases have also been seen in Údarás client firms in the County rising from 0.4% to 0.5% of total employment. These statistics are a positive performance indicator for the County because EI client companies are relatively large and have access to international markets. The County's advantage in this regard relative to the State has remained strong with a widening gap of 6.6 percentage points in 2016. Accordingly the employment prospects are likely to remain positive for larger Irish-owned companies based in the County.

4.7 Development Plan Economic & Employment Strategy

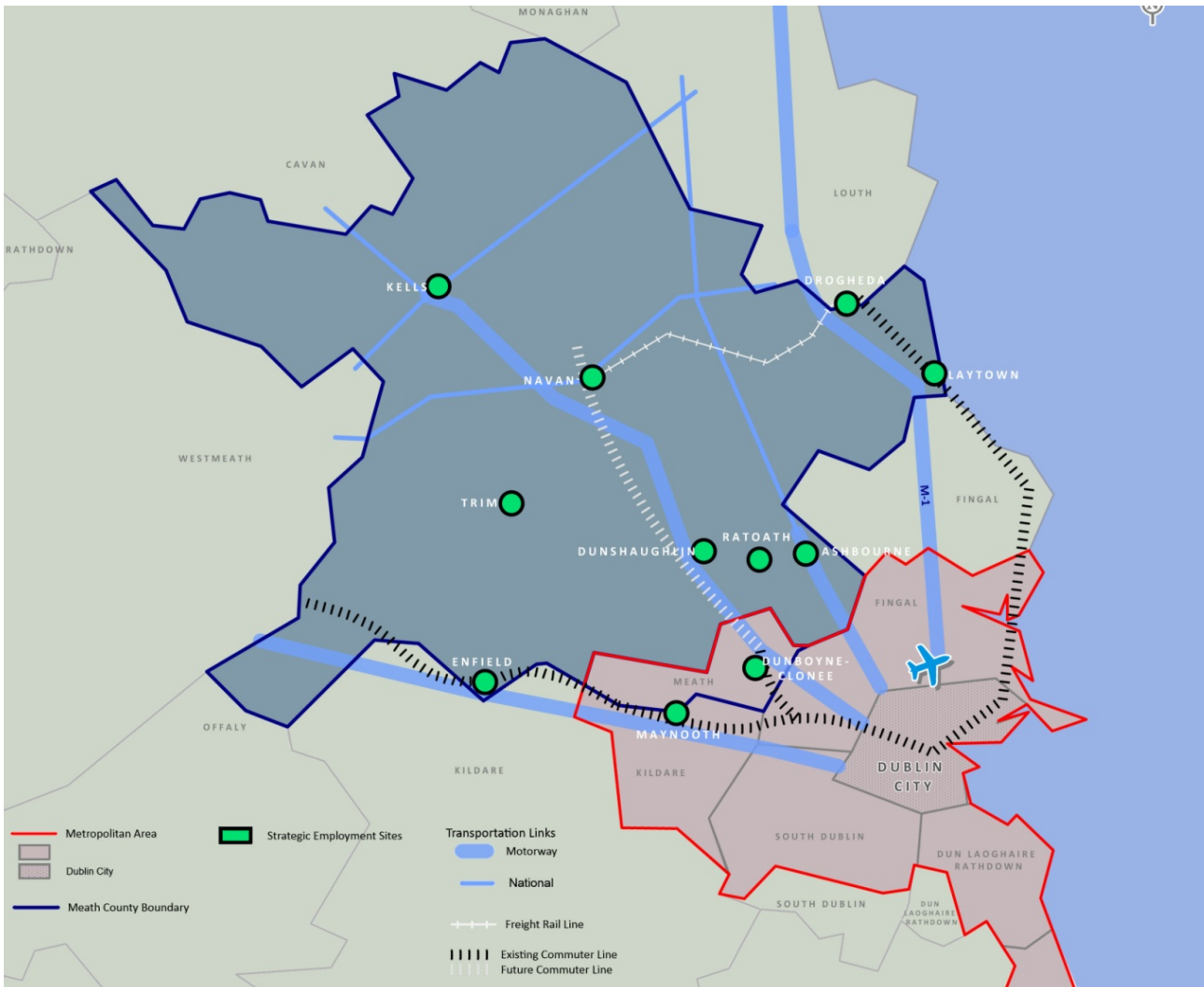
Building on the momentum of the successful implementation of the Economic Strategy and having regard to the need identified in the RSES to address the disconnect experienced most acutely in the Mid East between where people live and work the Council is setting out an ambitious programme for the delivery of a wider spread of economic growth throughout the County. The successful implementation of the Strategy to date could not have been achieved without significant support from national employment support agencies particularly the IDA/EI. The focus in this strategy will be on securing the 'build out' of the remaining strategic sites originally designated in the Economic Strategy complimented by additional sites. Support for this process comes from the RSES which has strongly endorsed the 'live work' community development model championed in the spatial implementation of the Meath Economic Strategy. The strategic employment sites identified support the development of compact settlements linked by multi-modal corridors and are in accordance with the criteria for employment growth as set out in Section 4.4 of the NPF, in that these sites are located proximate to a critical mass of skilled workers; can be served by readily available infrastructure in terms of water supply, waste water capacity, electricity and fibre optic connections; and all locations have the potential for expansion of existing large industry and the provision of lands which could facilitate co-location of similar industry.

In addition to the 5 Strategic Employment Sites identified in the Economic Strategy 2014-2022, this Plan has identified an additional 7 sites

that have been potential to deliver economic development and support the creation of sustainable communities. These sites are a combination of new and existing zoned lands. The intention in designating these sites as strategic employment sites is to facilitate a similar approach to the marketing of the sites originally designated in the Economic Strategy. This focus is required to stimulate development on these lands. The location of these lands are identified in Map 4.1 overleaf and are as follows:

- Trim Road lands, Navan identified for High Technology Uses and Warehousing and Distribution⁹;
- Maynooth Environs (existing and additional employment land);
- Ratoath, lands between the existing build up area of Ratoath and Fairyhouse/ Tattersalls Equestrian complex, for the creation of an equestrian based employment hub (existing employment land, additional lands identified);
- Kells, lands opposite Headfort Golf Club (existing employment land);
- Laytown, lands adjacent to Laytown Train Station (existing employment land, additional lands identified);
- Enfield, lands to the east of the built up area of Enfield (existing employment land);
- Dunshaughlin, lands to the south of the town centre (existing and additional employment land).

⁹Part of these lands were identified for employment uses under Variation 3 of the Navan Development Plan. This Variation was adopted in Q4 2019.



Map 4.1 Strategic Employment Sites

It is the policy of the Council:

ED POL 2

To support and facilitate the economic development of the county in accordance with the Economic Strategy 2014-2022 or its replacement. There will be a general presumption against development that would prejudice the implementation of the Economic Strategy.

ED POL 3

To encourage the provision of 'live work' communities, in which employment, residency and sustainable transport facilities are located in close proximity to each other, to reduce long distance commuter trends and congestion.

ED POL 4

To identify and promote a range of

locations within the County for different types of enterprise activity including international business and technology parks, small and medium enterprises (SME) and micro enterprise centres.

ED POL 5

To co-operate with local and national development agencies and engage with existing and future employers in order to maximise job opportunities in the County.

ED POL 6

To ensure that people intensive developments are located close to strategic public transport networks.

ED POL 7

To support start-up businesses and small scale industrial enterprises throughout the County.

ED POL 8

To encourage and facilitate small indigenous industries, at appropriate locations with good communication infrastructure, in recognition of their increasing importance in providing local employment and helping to stimulate economic activity within small communities.

ED POL 9

To support the use of town centre locations for new service focused enterprises.

ED POL 10

To ensure that zoning for employment uses will be carried out in a manner which protects investment in the national road network, in accordance with Chapter 2 of the DECLG guidelines on 'Spatial Planning and National Roads.

ED POL 11

To require that all new developments with over 100 employees shall have a mobility management Plan, (Refer to Chapter 11 Development Management Standards and Land Use Zoning Objectives)

ED POL 12

To support appropriately considered events on the County's beaches which do not impact on sensitive coastal environments (e.g. dune systems, coastal wetlands and estuaries) and are compliant with the requirements of the Habitats Directive and other environmental considerations.

It is an objective of the Council:

ED OBJ 1

To address the rate of out bound commuting, the highest of any County in the State, with the provision of 'live work' communities in strategic settlements served by sustainable transport, thereby improving quality of life, encouraging volunteerism and community engagement.

ED OBJ 2

To continue to promote Meath as a strategically located economic and employment hub within the Greater Dublin Area.

ED OBJ 3

To continue to work with key state agencies and other stakeholders to develop opportunities for employment creation in the County.

ED OBJ 4

To identify suitable locations and support the provision of co-working facilities, digital hubs/eHubs and eWorking centres throughout the County that function as outreach hubs for city-based employers and promote flexible working arrangements.

ED OBJ 5

To work with Irish Water and other infrastructure providers, to support the

provision of services and facilities to accommodate the future economic growth of the County and to seek to reserve infrastructure capacity for employment generating uses.

ED OBJ 6

To acquire suitable land (subject to the availability of funding), including where appropriate, disused sites in State ownership, for creative and innovative entrepreneurial initiatives and the provision of clustered incubator units.

4.7.1 Economic Areas – Metropolitan Area

4.7.1.1 Dunboyne

It remains a priority for the Council to deliver on the very significant potential presented by the lands adjacent to the M3 Parkway in Dunboyne North as one of the five key strategic employment sites identified within the Economic Development Strategy for County Meath. The area is intended for high technology employment opportunities mixed with other complementary and supporting land uses such as residential and community built on the sustainable community model. The Council remains fully committed to the delivery of a vibrant 'live work' community at this location in accordance with the RSES. Having regard to the limited area of land in County Meath located within the Metropolitan area of Dublin it is critical that these lands are prioritised for services and infrastructure in order to deliver the Planned quantum of

mixed use development as set out in the RSES. Furthermore, development of these lands would build on the significant public financial investment already made in the area to create a public transport interchange and is intended to reduce the significant out bound commuter rate of 77% in this area¹². This area is identified as one with the potential to accommodate increased building height, (Refer to Chapter 11 Development Management Standards and Land Use Zoning Objectives)

The Facebook data centre developments on the enterprise and employment lands at Portan Clonee have been a notable success for County Meath. Given the proximity of these lands to the T50 fibre optic cable and the access to high voltage electricity, there is an opportunity to generate further economic investment in the area by identifying additional lands for enterprise and employment uses . These additional lands will promote clustering and agglomeration effects of similar format developments at this location. National and Regional policy supports the accommodation of 'land hungry' developments NPF /RSES policies support the accommodation of 'land hungry' development at such locations.

ED OBJ 7

To promote an educational partnership with accessible third level institutions such as NUI Maynooth, UCD, Trinity, Blanchardstown DIT and Dunboyne College of Further Education and existing and future businesses and the Council. To promote Dunboyne as an employment base with direct access to a pool of skilled graduates and encourage the location of start up businesses in the area.

ED OBJ 8

Encourage mixed use settlement forms and sustainable centres, in which employment, residency, education and local services / amenities are located in close proximity to each other.

ED OBJ 9

To encourage the development of synergies between Dunboyne North and Maynooth in relation to complementary Life Science / SMART Park campuses in partnership and collaboration with established third level institutions.

4.7.1.2 Maynooth

Maynooth Environs in County Meath is located on the northern periphery of the dynamic university town of Maynooth. These lands comprise of 139 hectares approximately 1.5km to the north east of the town centre. The lands enjoy an attractive setting and character in proximity to the Carton House Estate on which there is a high quality hotel used for business and recreational purposes. The town has a growing student and residential population with established rail and motorway links to Dublin and the West.

The RSES acknowledges the potential of Maynooth to accommodate significant employment and residential growth with its designation as a Key Town. The RSES states that in order to enhance co-ordination of development in Maynooth, including its environs in County Meath, the preparation and adoption of a Joint Local Area Plan (LAP) should be carried

¹² Data obtained from POWSCAR 2017.

out by Kildare and Meath County Councils, (RPO 4.35 refers). This RPO sets out that the joint LAP will set a boundary for the town and will identify strategic housing and employment development areas, infrastructural investment requirements and promote greater co-ordination and sequential development of serviced lands for development. Therefore, the preparation of the joint LAP will allow the Meath Environs of Maynooth to play an active supporting role in the further development of this university town.

The development of the Meath Environs of Maynooth is envisaged by the Council as a natural extension to the town. The Council intend to pursue the 'live work' development model, as supported in the RSES, with significant emphasis on the delivery of strategic employment uses and housing at this location. Given the proximity of the Maynooth Environs to the University campus, the accommodation model could provide for an element of student accommodation. The lands adjacent to Carton present an opportunity to further enhance a successful tourism product at this location.

The RSES emphasises that there are significant opportunities to further develop knowledge-based employment focusing on ICT and manufacturing through the development of a research and technology campus to the west of the existing university campus in Co Kildare. The further development of Maynooth University as a leading third level research and educational facility is critical for the economic development of the town and the region with potential synergies to large established employers such as Intel and Hewlett Packard. Lands at Moygaddy within the Maynooth Environs of County Meath have also been identified by the RSES for Science and Technology based employment. The County Development Plan sets out that the Environs will be a focal point for science

and technology employment with potential for additional tourism related uses. Employment uses are based on the Economic Strategy objectives which focus on the development of Life Sciences, High Tech, Bio Tech, ICT, Research & Development and seeks to benefit from synergies with third level institutions which may include Maynooth University (MU) and major employers already established in the sub Region (Intel, Hewlett Packard). The Economic Strategy seeks to brand this area as a centre of excellence in the knowledge based economy, particularly having regard to its location viz a viz the M4 Knowledge Corridor. The objective is to foster a 'dynamic partnership' between multinational companies, indigenous Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME's), and third level institutions which may include NUI Maynooth University (MU), in a campus style environment of exceptional high quality design. The Council is aware that there is interest in the development of a private hospital and associated medical related uses in the Maynooth Environs. A development of this type would contribute significant levels of employment to the locality and may possibly also include medical research type uses.

RPO 4.33 of the RSES acknowledges the need for co-ordinated delivery of strategic infrastructure by stating as follows: '*Support the continued development of Maynooth, co-ordinated with the delivery of strategic infrastructure including pedestrian and cycle linkages within the town and to the Royal Canal Greenway, DART expansion and road linkages forming part of the Maynooth Outer Orbital Route in a manner which supports future development and population growth and builds on synergies with Maynooth University promoting a knowledge-based economy.*'

This Development Plan contains supporting

objectives for the delivery of the Maynooth Outer Orbital Route located in the Meath Environs, refer to Chapter 5, Movement Strategy. Part of this orbital route in County Kildare has received LIHAF funding. A critical component of any development proposals in the Maynooth Environs will be the ability to deliver sustainable connections to the train station. The RSES identifies Maynooth as a key settlement on the north- west corridor and considers that the electrification of the Maynooth line, to be delivered by 2027 will support sequential growth in Leixlip and Maynooth.¹³

The MASP supports employment generation at strategic locations within the metropolitan area to strengthen the local employment base and reduce pressure on the metropolitan transport network, including; future employment districts in Swords and Dublin Airport/South Fingal; Maynooth; Bray; Greystones; Dunboyne-Portan; and Leixlip.

ED OBJ 10

In accordance with RPO 4.33 of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, to support the continued development of Maynooth, co-ordinated with the delivery of strategic infrastructure including pedestrian and cycle linkages within the town and to the Royal Canal Greenway, DART expansion and road linkages forming part of the Maynooth Outer Orbital Route in a manner which supports future development and population growth and builds on synergies with Maynooth University promoting a knowledge-based economy.

ED OBJ 11

To further key linkages and partnerships with Maynooth University including the branding of the area as a centre of excellence in the knowledge based economy.

ED OBJ 12

To work with Kildare County Council to further develop the area as an attractor for Life Sciences, High Tech, Bio Tech, ICT, Research & Development employment. The council in conjunction with Kildare County Council will work with Irish Water and other agencies to ensure the delivery of key infrastructure to facilitate future development.

ED OBJ 13

To promote the development of high quality tourism, leisure and complementary activities that can build on and complement the existing attractions in the area which include Carton House and Demense, the town of Maynooth and Maynooth University to provide a destination venue of national significance.

ED OBJ 14

It is a priority for the Council to deliver on the significant potential of the lands in the Maynooth Environs, a designated strategic employment site to create a unique employment hub centred on a high tech/ bio tech campus within the lands, supported by a 'live work' community with

a mixture of employment, residential, community, medical and tourism uses to be progressed following the preparation of Master Plans. Said Master Plans shall be agreed in writing with the Executive of Meath County Council in advance of the lodgement any planning application. This area can accommodate increased building height which shall be addressed as part of the Master Plans. (Please refer to Volume Maynooth Environs Written Statement for detailed requirements in respect of Master Plans)

4.7.2 Economic Areas – Core Area

4.7.2.1 Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor

The Dublin – Belfast Economic corridor is acknowledged within the NPF as the ‘largest economic agglomeration on the island of Ireland’. This corridor is the national entry point to the island and it is a policy of the NPF to support and ‘promote the economic potential of the corridor and develop it as a distinct spatial area’.

This Corridor connects the two main cities of scale on the Island and its area of influence hosts a combined population, between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, of more than 3.3 million people of which Drogheda, Dundalk and Newry are part. The Corridor has the capacity to provide the only potential paired city growth pole of scale on the Island reaching a European benchmark 5 million population target to compete with similar city regions in the EU. The imperative to counteract BREXIT with

a proactive spatial economic policy adds to the international significance of the Corridor. It also provides opportunities to further Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), for example with the Louth Pharma hub at the centre of the Corridor, and the e-payments cluster. By increasing its critical mass, population and jobs growth will take place in a sustainable growth pattern focused on clusters and smart specialisation, in line with the Region’s Economic and Settlement Strategy set out in the RSES. The Corridor also offers extended strategic connections throughout the Island through links with the TEN-T network and the Dublin- Rosslare route.

4.7.2.2 Regional Growth Centre – Drogheda

The RSES sets out the function and role of a Regional Growth Centre, which is to act as a focal point for population growth and economic development and to enhance national and regional growth.

The designation of Drogheda as a Regional Growth Centre in the NPF is a recognition of the strategic location of the settlement along the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor and its potential to attract jobs and investment. Its connectivity with Dublin and Belfast in addition to Dundalk and Newry highlights the opportunities there are to develop synergies and economic links along this corridor.

The RSES also acknowledges the potential of lands in the Southern Environs of Drogheda to accommodate economic investment in section 4.5 of the Strategy where it states that support is given to *“the sustainable development of existing zoned lands in the Northern and Southern Environs of the town with particular emphasis on the promotion of the IDA Business Park as a location for economic investment ...”*¹⁴

In addition there is a large parcel of employment lands at Bryanstown that have the potential to make a significant contribution to the economic development of the area.

The Council is committed to the development of a Joint Urban Plan for this area with Louth County Council and to develop the area in partnership in a coordinated and complimentary manner. The economic potential of these lands is evident in the growth of employment rates in this area during the inter-census period in which persons employed grew by 44%.¹⁵

With regard to port facilities in the area, the RSES supports the role of Drogheda Port in RPO 4.12. The RPGs supported the examination of the expansion of Dublin Port for a new Port facility on the east coast however this was not continued in the RSES. There have been previous proposals for the development of a world class deepwater port, logistics centre and business park at Gormonston, County Meath.¹⁶ The potential economic benefits of such a facility in this location are recognised.

The economic development objectives for this area positioned on the M1 which is identified within the NPF as the national entry point to the island include:

ED OBJ 15

To develop in conjunction with Louth County Council and other stakeholders a strategy for the expansion and economic development of Drogheda as part of a joint vision and Urban Plan for Drogheda¹⁸.

ED OBJ 16

To continue to support and promote the inherent economic potential of the M1 corridor, building upon existing strengths. There will be a focus on developing the corridor as a distinct spatial area with international visibility.

ED OBJ 17

To develop the Drogheda IDA Business Park (Donore Road) and adjoining land as a location for economic investment. There is significant scope in the IDA Business Park for further expansion which will be prioritised by the Council in conjunction with the IDA.

ED OBJ 18

To promote an educational partnership with accessible third level institutions such as Dundalk DIT and Drogheda Institute of Further Education and existing businesses and the Council.

ED OBJ 19

To promote the Southern Environs of Drogheda as an employment base and encourage the location of start up businesses in the area.

ED OBJ 20

To encourage the development of employment lands at Bryanstown and Mill

¹⁴ Written Statement for Drogheda in Section 4.5 of the RSES page 64

¹⁵ Data obtained from POWSCAR 2016

¹⁶ Section 4.1.5 of the Meath County Development Plan 2013-2019 'M1 Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor & Provision of Deepwater Port Facility at East Meath' indicated that this project is at the pre-feasibility and environmental assessment stage. At the time of writing there have been no further developments with regard to this project.

¹⁸ As required by the boundary committee review.

Road/Marsh Road as part of a 'live –work' community at these locations.

ED OBJ 21

To encourage the further development of high value added employment and financial services in the Drogheda Environs.

ED OBJ 22

To seek to maximise the tourism potential of the significant tourism hub within the Boyne Valley region which includes the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Brú na Bóinne, the Battle of the Boyne Site at Oldbridge and the coastal area of East Meath stretching from Mornington to Gormonston whilst ensuring the environmental protection of sensitive and protected coastal habitats and landscape.

4.7.2.2 Key Town - Navan

Rail connectivity to Dublin is critical to significantly strengthen the attractiveness of Navan as an investment and employment centre and would therefore in turn have a positive impact on growing the population of the town which is expected to increase to 50,000 in the longer term.

This development strategy seeks to rebalance the provision of jobs so that residents of Navan have access to opportunities for employment within easy distance from their homes, thereby reducing levels of commuting in the area as

a whole. The Strategy will ensure that the primacy of Navan is recognised, protected and promoted whilst ensuring that over time, a number of other major supporting employment centres as outlined above are developed which provide balance to the location of employment opportunities across the County. Navan, in appropriate locations having regard to adjoining land uses, pattern and character of development, can accommodate increased building height which shall be addressed as part of the future LAP.

The IDA Business and Technology Park within Navan is one of the key strategic employment sites within the County. The Strategy identified that approximately 23.5ha of land is available for development within the IDA Park and these lands have the potential to accommodate both people and product intensive economic activity including E1 High Technology – knowledge orientated services and manufacturing. Further employment lands were identified at Farganstown Navan (circa 40 hectares) which could accommodate similar types of development to include land intensive development such as a data centre. Strategic employment lands have been identified to the south of the town off the Trim Rd. RPO 47 of the RSES states as follows: *'Support the development of strategic employment lands on the Trim Rd in Navan, subject to the outcome of appropriate environmental assessment and the Planning process.'*

The Economic Strategy seeks to build on the success of the Mullaghboy Industrial Park and Liscarton Industrial lands and additional lands have been identified adjacent to these sites to facilitate the continued growth in the indigenous and SME sectors.

A proactive approach to marketing and delivery

of economic development on these lands is strongly promoted within the Economic

ED OBJ 23

To promote the Key Town of Navan as a primary centre of employment in the County so that its significant residential population will have employment opportunities within easy distance of their homes, thereby reducing outbound commuting.

ED OBJ 24

To implement the extension of the Dunboyne/M3 Parkway rail line to Navan during the Midterm review of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, in accordance with Table 8.2 of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.²⁰

ED OBJ 25

To recognise the significance of the Regional Hospital as a catalyst for significant employment opportunities in accordance with RPO 4.44 of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

ED OBJ 26

In accordance with RPO 4.42 of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, to support the delivery of road infrastructure to release strategic residential and employment lands for sustainable development and to improve connectivity

and the efficient movement of people and services in Navan.

ED OBJ 27

To promote Navan as an employment base and encourage the location of start up businesses in the area.

ED OBJ 28

To promote an educational partnership with accessible third level institutions such as UCD, Trinity, DCU, DKIT and Blanchardstown IT and existing businesses, future employers and the Council.

ED OBJ 29

To promote the further development of the Navan IDA Business & Technology Park as one of the strategic sites for economic investment in Meath as identified in the Economic Development Strategy 2014-2022.

ED OBJ 30

In accordance with RPO 4.47 of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, support the development of strategic employment lands at the Trim Road in Navan, subject to the outcome of appropriate environmental assessments and the Planning process.

²⁰ Subject of a Draft Ministerial Direction, August 2019

ED OBJ 31

To promote the development of the Strategic Employment lands at Farganstown for high technology general enterprise and employment uses (E1/E2 zoning).

ED OBJ 32

To continue to develop Navan as a Level II Town Centre and primary retail location within the County. A variety of comparison shopping will be encouraged within the town in order to stem the comparison retail leakage to the wider region.

ED OBJ 33

To support the implementation of the Public Realm Plan 'Navan 2030' to make the town a more attractive place to live, shop, visit and do business in accordance with RPO 4.43 of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

ED OBJ 34

To support the future redevelopment of Pairc Tailteann as a modern sports hub which will be an important economic, sporting and cultural asset for the County and the Region comprising an upgraded Pairc Tailteann, to include associated and complementary uses in accordance with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

ED OBJ 35

To facilitate the appropriate expansion of the Liscarton and Mullaghboy Industrial Estates.

Development Strategy.

It is an objective of the Council:

4.7.3 Self Sustaining Growth Towns

4.7.3.1 Ashbourne

Located on the border with Fingal, Ashbourne is the second largest town in Meath, and is one of the fastest growing towns in the County.

Between 2011-2016 the population increased by 11.7%, bringing the total population to 12,679. It is an important employment and service centre in that it supports almost 2,000 jobs, which is c.5% of the total jobs in the County. Many of these jobs are concentrated in the recently redeveloped town centre and a number of business and industrial parks in the northern part of the town. Transport, distribution and logistics, and retailing and wholesaling are important sectors for the town, reflecting its favourable location, including its proximity to Dublin Port and Dublin Airport. Ashbourne's competitive advantage is based on its unique location on the boundary of Fingal and County Meath. The town is close to Dublin Airport with excellent transport links that rapidly connect the town to Dublin city centre.

The Council recognises that there are opportunities to further enhance the economic performance of Ashbourne by capitalising on its proximity to Dublin Airport and the associated

national and international connectivity that this provides. As previously indicated, there are a number of business/industrial parks in the town that benefit from access to the M2 Motorway.

The importance of Ashbourne as a centre for employment growth in Meath is demonstrated by its inclusion as one of 5 strategically important settlements designated to attract FDI in the Economic Development Strategy. The Strategy identifies employment lands at the Rath roundabout as a strategic site for major inward investment. The Council has prepared a Master Plan to ensure a planned approach to the site's development and the lands are being marketed by the Council's Economic Development Team to potential investors in conjunction with external employment partner agencies. It is noteworthy that currently zoned strategic employment lands identified by Fingal at Ballymadun are adjacent to the strategic employment site in Ashbourne. Due to the configuration of the lands, access to the Ballymadun employment lands in Fingal, can only be provided via the Rath roundabout.

The Regional Planning Guidelines, 2010-2022 acknowledged the potential for Ashbourne to capitalise on opportunities for economic growth due to its proximity to Dublin Airport and the Dublin Metropolitan Area and identified the town as a 'Secondary Economic Growth Town'. These Guidelines support the consolidation of economic development in Ashbourne that would assist in the creation of a more sustainable settlement. Reference is also made to the creation of synergy between Ashbourne and Ratoath that would optimise local employment opportunities by availing and utilising the highly skilled workforce that reside in these towns. Section 3.7.5 of the Regional Planning Guidelines stated that Ashbourne is: *"transitioning away from a dormitory hinterland context to a more urbanised, metropolitan character."* The RSES acknowledges

that Ashbourne²¹ is one of the towns in the region which recorded the highest growth rates in the Country over the last 10 years (>32%) which have lower levels of employment.

The RSES notes that *'such towns are important employment and service centres. In addition some of these settlements, such as Ashbourne and Ratoath have the potential to strengthen their employment base and develop as important centres of employment due to their strategic location, connectivity with surrounding settlements, and the availability of a skilled workforce.* In recognition of the delivery of Metro North to Swords during the lifetime of the National Planning Framework, the Council will support the strengthening of links and connectivity between Ashbourne and Swords, in order to further improve the links between Ashbourne and Dublin City centre whilst also promoting more sustainable modes of transport by facilitating the use of the Metro for commuters travelling to Dublin City centre and Airport for employment.

The delivery of the rail to Navan will include provision of a station in Dunshaughlin, an alignment east of Dunshaughlin would facilitate a future spur to serve Ashbourne/Ratoath thereby further supporting the economic viability of the rail project and creating sustainable communities in these towns containing a future population of circa 40,000, please refer to ED OBI 40.

ED OBJ 36

To promote the development of the key strategic employment site identified in the Economic Development Strategy for County Meath – employment zoned lands to the north of the Rath Roundabout in Ashbourne.

ED OBJ 37

To continue to attract new employment development to Ashbourne which capitalises on the quality of road infrastructure at this location and its proximity to the M50, Dublin Airport and Dublin Port.

4.7.3.2 Dunshaughlin

Dunshaughlin's future potential is intrinsically linked to the delivery of Phase 2 of the Dublin-Navan Rail Project. The construction of the Rail Line will result in Dunshaughlin becoming a hub for economic and residential growth due to its location on a multi-modal corridor with direct road and rail links to Dublin and the wider region.

The combination of the potential delivery of the Rail Line and the proximity of the town to the Dublin Metropolitan Area makes the town an attractive location to potential investors as a place of employment whilst the connectivity of the town to Dublin and Navan via the local road network and frequent bus service makes the town an attractive location for the general population as a place to live.

In order to ensure the viability of the Navan Rail Line, it is essential that there is a critical mass of population living along the rail corridor. The location of the future rail station will be central to the future usage of the line i.e an eastern alignment is more accessible from the town. As part of the rail project the station

location will be examined. Continued population growth in Dunshaughlin is required to support the delivery of the Rail Line. It is essential however that employment delivery is balanced with population growth to create a 'live work' community in the town.

Employment lands in Dunshaughlin are concentrated in the southern part of the town with additional lands available to accommodate expansion. The existing Business Park and Industrial Estate are important locations for local employment.

In order to ensure employment opportunities are commensurate with population growth, it is proposed to designate and extend the employment land to the south west of Dunshaughlin as a strategic employment site. This designation will facilitate the comprehensive marketing of these lands by the Council's Economic Development Team and the delivery of a major distributor road connecting the town to the M3 Motorway.

In addition to supporting the delivery of the Rail Line, the Council also support the review of the Railway Order for the project by ensuring any Rail Station is optimally located to promote

ED OBJ 38

To promote the development of the key strategic employment site – employment zoned lands to the south west of Dunshaughlin.

ED OBJ 39

To explore in conjunction with Irish Rail and other stakeholders the feasibility of

a future rail spur off the Navan-Dublin Rail line from Dunshaughlin to serve Ashbourne and Ratoath.

ED OBJ 40

To support the continued development of the existing business park in Dunshaughlin.

walking and cycling from the town centre and residential lands in addition to serving surrounding settlements including Ratoath and Ashbourne.

4.7.3.3 Kells and Trim

Kells acts as a major economic development centre in the north of the County. The Economic Strategy identifies lands at Kells Business Park as one of 5 key strategy sites within the County. The lands are designated as an Assisted Area in the Regional Aid Map for Europe 2014-2020. A Strategic Employment Zone of circa 33 hectares was zoned E1/E3 in 2016 in conjunction with the spatial implementation of the Economic Strategy for County Meath 2014-2022. The lands are located to the south east of Kells easily accessible to the M3 motorway and are identified for high end technology/ manufacturing and major campus style office based employment as well as providing for potential logistics, warehousing, distribution and supply chain management uses. The development of these lands will provide a balance of employment opportunities for the area of north Meath.

Trim is a self-sustaining growth town with a

unique cultural and built heritage identified in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) as a medieval heritage town. With a 'Jobs: Resident' Workforce ratio of 0.67 and 2,500 jobs in 2016, Trim is the second largest centre for employment in the County behind Navan. The vision going forward for Trim is to maximise the number of local job opportunities while investing and expanding in the tourist product in the town. A variation to the Trim Development Plan adopted in Q3 of 2019 supported the continued economic development of the town through the facilitation of the development of a live work community including a key piece of road infrastructure for the town. Trim is designated as being eligible for the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) (as a town of fewer than 10,000 people but with more than 2,500 jobs) which will present opportunities for funding going forward. In

ED OBJ 41

To encourage the development of Kells and Trim as a tourism cluster with improvement in the connectivity between both centres. Each town to develop a strategy for niche tourism as integral part of their overall development strategy e.g. culinary tourism, regional food hub, creative industries, etc. Continue the ongoing protection of the intrinsic built and natural heritage of Kells and Trim and their promotion as a basis of tourism;

ED OBJ 42

To promote the further development of the Kells Business Park which is identified

as one of the five key strategic sites for economic investment in the County in the Economic Development Strategy for County Meath 2014-2022;

ED OBJ 43

To promote and support the development of the strategic site located on the southern side of the strategically important R147 (Navan Road) in Kells where lands with an E1/E3 land use zoning objective have been identified.

ED OBJ 44

To continue to support and promote existing industries and enterprises in Kells and build upon the status of Kells as part of an EU designated Regional Aid area and to explore funding streams such as the REDZ initiative to support enterprise within the County;

ED OBJ 45

To further develop the indigenous enterprise, logistics, manufacturing and retail base in Kells.

ED OBJ 46

To encourage and facilitate the successful development of the Oaktree and Scurlockstown Business Parks.

ED OBJ 47

To promote sustainable economic development in Trim Town and Environs through the promotion of identified economic growth areas which provide employment opportunities locally and reduce the volume of long distance commuting.

ED OBJ 48

To provide for the development of high-end Business and/or Corporate Headquarters including FDI, at Navan Road, Trim.

ED OBJ 49

To work with and support the Office of Public Works, Fáilte Ireland and other relevant stakeholders in facilitating the development of visitor centre services at the Market House premises on Castle Street for the promotion and development of visitor facilities in Trim and the wider Boyne Valley region including the Trim Castle attraction.

ED OBJ 50

To seek funding for underused areas, through the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, for the town of Trim.

this regard, the Council has taken a proactive approach in securing funding to obtain Planning approval to develop Trim Library and Cultural Centre.

It is an objective of the Council:

4.7.4 Self Sustaining Towns

4.7.4.1 Laytown/Bettystown

The vision for Laytown/Bettystown seeks to facilitate the development of Bettystown as a vibrant town centre while redefining Laytown to function as a support centre. The residential expansion of the Laytown/Bettystown area in the absence of any employment generating development has resulted in the settlements having a weak employment base. In 2016 the Jobs: Workforce ratio in East Meath was 0.16, which was the lowest recorded in the County. Due to the proximity of the area to Drogheda and Dublin, it would be challenging to attract a large scale employer however there are opportunities to attract small-medium sized enterprises that could avail of the skilled workforce and the connectivity that the area provides to Dublin and Drogheda. Such employment would be vital to improving the jobs ratio and creating a more sustainable settlement.

In order for the settlement to function in a sustainable manner, the town's retail offer needs to be broadened. The Council recognises the importance of a high quality public realm in attracting new businesses into the area and creating a desirable living and working environment and has embarked on the preparation of a Public Realm Plan. Plan Further, a proactive approach is being taken by the Council to improve the Public Realm through the acquisition of land at the entrance to Bettystown

beach for the development of a landmark building providing amenities and services at the beach for the local community and tourists.

A key element of the development strategy for Laytown/Bettystown is the construction of the north-south spine road connecting the R150 at Scoil an Spioraid Naomh Primary School to the Eastham road roundabout. This will reduce traffic congestion along the Coast road and improve traffic movements in the town centre thereby improving the Public Realm.

The Council has identified a strategic employment site in Laytown to address the sustainability issues currently experienced in this area . These lands could accommodate a potential people intensive enterprise opportunity. This would help redress the current commuter levels from the area. It is also intended that these employment lands would support a greater use of the train station in Laytown along with the provision of a public car park. This would allow for the redevelopment of the existing carpark adjacent to the playground. Potential uses of this central space adjacent to a High Amenity area on the banks of the River Nanny could be a Public Park/amenity area for the general public in line with the Public Realm Plan once completed. This would provide

ED OBJ 51

To promote East Meath as an employment base and encourage the location of start up businesses in the area.

ED OBJ 52

To support the development of industrial, manufacturing, distribution, warehousing,

technology and campus style office based employment on the strategic employment lands to the northern side of the R150, immediately west of Laytown rail station. Enterprise and employment proposals shall be developed in tandem with park and ride facilities and enhanced pedestrian connectivity between the rail station and the residential development further north in Laytown all to facilitate the development of a sustainable live work community in order to address outbound commuting from the Laytown/Bettystown area.

ED OBJ 53

To continue to support the delivery of the North-South Spine Road linking Bettystown and Laytown.

ED OBJ 54

To implement the Public Realm Strategy for Bettystown and Laytown.

ED OBJ 55

To facilitate the provision of a new Park and Ride Facility at Laytown Train Station in conjunction with the National Transport Authority and Irish Rail.

ED OBJ 56

To support the design and construction of a Beach Facilities building of high architectural quality at the entrance

to Bettystown beach that will improve the provision of amenities and services available at the beach.

a central hub for the community creating an improved sense of community in Laytown and in turn creating a better live work environment while also promoting the tourism sector creating further employment in the area.

It is an objective of the Council:

4.7.4.2 Ratoath

Ratoath is currently the fourth largest town in County Meath. As recognised in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy Ratoath is one of the towns recording the highest population growth rates in the country over the last ten years (>32%) which has a lower level of employment provision. It operates primarily as a commuter settlement, with almost 75% of the workforce travelling outside Meath for employment in 2016²², with 70% of these people travelling to the Dublin Region and 36% travelling to Dublin City Centre. This confirms the close inter-relationship between Ratoath and the Dublin Metropolitan Area. Reducing the volume of commuting from Ratoath and expanding the employment base is one of the key challenges facing the town. A unique opportunity to strengthen the relationship between Ratoath and the equine industry, including Fairyhouse Racecourse and the Tattersalls International Equestrian facilities, which are important equine assets of national and international significance, has been identified as an area where future employment opportunities could be generated.

The key Planning challenge for Ratoath is to

²² CSO POWSCAR, 2016

facilitate a Plan led evidence based transition from an unsustainable commuter settlement to a sustainable settlement based on the 'live work' community model championed by the Economic Strategy for County Meath 2014-2022. This will enable the town to capitalise on the existing highly skilled and educated work force currently resident within the town. An alignment of the Navan- Dublin rail line to the east of Dunshaughlin would facilitate a future spur to serve Ashbourne/Ratoath thereby further supporting the economic viability of the rail project and creating sustainable communities in these towns containing a future population of circa 40,000, please refer to ED OBJ 40.

The RSES recognises the towns potential to strengthen its employment base and develop as an important centre of employment due to its strategic location, connectivity with surrounding settlements, and the availability of a skilled workforce. Future growth will promote and support the development of further visitor and tourist facilities at Fairyhouse and Tattersalls to develop an internationally significant Equine Hub at this location. Future development will focus on brown field/infill development in the town centre to reduce vacancy levels. Provision will also be made for the sustainable expansion of the town centre to support employment growth and service provision for existing and

ED OBJ 57

To seek to develop Ratoath as an employment hub in recognition of its highly skilled and educated workforce.

ED OBJ 58

To support the development of an equestrian hub at Ratoath that maximises the internationally recognised equine facilities at Tattersalls and Fairyhouse and ensures the County continues to be a leader in the Irish and International sport horse industry, including breeding, racing, competing, and training.

ED OBJ 59

To promote and, support the development of strategic employment lands between Ratoath and the National and International equine hub at Fairyhouse.

future residents. In summary the development strategy for Ratoath will give emphasis to the creation of jobs and the provision of social and community infrastructure that is essential in the creation of a vibrant and active sustainable community.

It is an objective of the Council:

4.7.4.3 Enfield

Enfield functions largely as a commuter town with settlement growth influenced by its proximity and accessibility to Dublin City and its metropolitan city economy, with strategic road and rail commuter connections to the Capital and the northwest as part of the national Dublin-Sligo rail line. The population of Enfield increased significantly during the last inter census period, from 2,929 persons in 2011 to 3,239 persons in 2016. This 10.6% increase was the largest increase to occur across the 'Small Towns' and is well above the 3.8% national

average growth. Some 44% of the town's population make up the labour force, of which, 66% are in employment, a figure higher than the County average. 37.2% of the workforce living in Enfield (530 persons) commute to Dublin City and suburbs, with an average journey time of 55 minutes.

Given the strategic location of Enfield proximate to the M4 knowledge corridor, there is a significant opportunity for economic and commercial development growth in the town. In this regard, a large site on the eastern edge of the town has been designated as a strategic employment site (c. 31 hectares), suitable for development and use as a data centre or other use compatible with the E1/E3 zoning objective, based on the strategic position of the town and the proximity of the site to the national fibre network optic cable. Further, there are two sites in the centre of the town which

ED OBJ 60

To encourage the development of Knowledge orientated enterprise, High Tech, Bio Tech, ICT, Research & Development synergies with third level institutions which may include Maynooth University (MU²³), and major employers already established in the sub region (Intel, Hewlett Packard);

ED OBJ 61

To further key linkages and partnerships with Maynooth University including the branding of the area as a centre of excellence in the knowledge based economy;

ED OBJ 62

To facilitate the location of emerging employment sectors including (but not limited to) industrial, Engineering, ICT, Science, Data Analytics, Data Centre and Business and Financial Service, and other Foreign Direct Investment on the strategic employment lands zoned E1/E3 to the east of the town.

ED OBJ 63

To work with Eirgrid, as far as practicable, to ensure power infrastructure is available for the development of zoned employment lands within the M4 corridor.

ED OBJ 64

To promote, encourage and facilitate economic development and diversification of Enfield and to support the development of the Royal Canal Greenway and the potential spin off enterprises generated from this facility.

would support consolidation in the urban core.. There is sufficient capacity in the existing Enfield Business Park to accommodate industrial and enterprise development. Employment growth is subject to the capacity of infrastructure and quality of environment to support it.

It is an objective of the Council:

²³ Maynooth University (MU) formerly NUIM

4.7.4.4 Stamullen

Stamullen has developed as a commuter settlement primarily due to its proximity to Dublin and associated road and rail links via the M1 Dublin-Belfast Motorway and Gormanstown Rail Station.

The town functions as a local employment centre that serves the wider East Meath area. The City North Business Park has capacity for further expansion. The location of this Business Park, which includes a hotel with conference facilities, along the M1 Dublin to Belfast Economic Corridor makes it an attractive location for investment due to its transport links with regional and national growth centres. Thus there is significant potential for economic development given the strategic location of the town on the Dublin-Belfast Economic corridor which will address out bound commuting levels.

The development strategy for Stamullen will

ED OBJ 65

To facilitate development of employment lands at the City North Business Park in tandem with the development of the necessary link road from these lands to the Gormanstown Road.

ED OBJ 66

To continue to support and promote the inherent economic potential of the M1 corridor, building upon existing strengths. There will be a focus on developing the corridor as a distinct spatial area with international visibility.

focus on the development of the settlement as a local service and employment centre.

The City North Business Campus is strategically located off the M1 at Junction 7 however the absence of a direct road link to the campus from Stamullen has inhibited the creation of a synergy between the town and this employment zone.

It is an objective of the Council:

4.8 Data Centres

Recent years have seen a marked increase in the number of new data centres constructed worldwide and this trend is expected to continue into the foreseeable future. The demand has been fuelled by a dramatic surge in data management requirements caused by, amongst other factors, the growth of IT requirements, web-based services and emerging technologies.

Data centres by nature, are land intensive developments and can have differing locational requirements depending on the type of data accessibility speeds they cater for. All data centres have common infrastructure requirements such as access to high voltage electricity lines, high powered fibre optic cables, good site security and accessibility. Given the infrastructural requirements for data centres the Council's Planning and Economic team have liaised extensively with industry leaders and stakeholders and have pioneered a Plan led approach to the identification of specific suitable sites for data centres within the County. High speed retrieval speeds are more appropriately located within close proximity to the Metropolitan Area where direct access can be provided to the T50 fibre optic cable

and high voltage electricity, both of which are present on lands identified at Dunboyne and Dunboyne North. The location of these less people intensive uses outside of the M50 ring and separate from but connected to the existing built up area is a key growth enabler for Dublin and the policy position is endorsed within the NPF²⁴ Alternative sites deemed suitable for such development include but are not limited to: employment lands at appropriately zoned lands in the Southern Environs of Drogheda

ED POL 13

To support and facilitate the development of data centres on suitable sites with supporting infrastructure subject to obtaining the relevant consents.

the identification of suitable sites for data centre development.

ED OBJ 67

To continue to identify suitable sites for the development of data centres and ICT related development within the County.

ED OBJ 68

To promote and support the development of lands within the Metropolitan Area for the provision of data centre and ICT related development.

It is the policy of the Council:

It is the objective of the Council:

4.9 Quantum of Available Zoned Employment Generating Land

Planning for future employment development requires a more broadly based approach than planning for other sectors due to the increasingly diverse nature and requirements of development in the economic and employment sector. In order to respond to the diverse nature and requirements of this sector the council has employed a targeted approach to the selection of lands within the County, ensuring that there is sufficient variety and quantum of zoned lands to achieve sustainable and balanced growth within the County.

It is acknowledged within the NPF that certain employment sectors have very specific locational attractions and requirements. In particular, those related to the information economy and knowledge development, tend to be very place specific. These sectors tend to locate in urban areas which have *'a denser, more skilled workforce and have a steady stream of local talent and innovation associated with third level research institutions'*.²⁵ They also tend to have good international connectivity and are located

²⁵ Page 56 of the National Planning Framework.

in close proximity to international airports. The Council has been responsive to these trends as outlined in the NPF and in 2014 developed a targeted approach to these issues via the preparation of the Economic Strategy for County Meath 2014-2022.

In order to facilitate the implementation of the Economic Strategy, Variation no. 3 was adopted to the Meath County Development 2013-2019 which provided for the spatial implementation of the economic strategy for the County. The Council promoted a highly selective approach to the zoning of land for specific employment sectors and continues this plan led approach to the identification of employment lands within the County in this Plan.

4.9.1 Summary

Overall the Economic Development Strategy of this Plan seeks to facilitate the provision of adequate land for employment uses, having regard to spatial planning, infrastructural, environmental and transportation requirements and their compatibility with adjoining land uses.

ED POL 14

To ensure that there is sufficient land zoned within the County for economic activity in line with the requirements of the Economic Strategy 2014-2022 and any replacement/updated Strategy. Such land will be protected from inappropriate development that would prejudice its long term development for employment and economic activity.

Chapter 11 Development Management Standards and Land Use Zoning Objectives sets out in detail the land use zoning objectives which are applicable to all statutory land use Plans in County Meath.

4.10 Green Economy

The Green Economy refers to an increasingly sustainable approach in undertaking economic activity by reducing the reliance on fossil fuels and upgrading inefficient buildings, and the need to do so in order to attract investment. The term Green Economy covers a wide range of sectors that have in common the objective of *'providing goods and services in a sustainable way that reduces impact on the environment and contributes to the circular economy'*²⁶. In Ireland, this covers activities such as sustainable food production, tourism, green financial services, green products and services, waste and water management, renewable energy and energy efficiency. The NPF recognises and supports the development of the circular and bio economy.

The Government's Action Plan for Jobs 2017 outlines that there is a *'strong economic dimension to the transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy'*. The Council recognises the significant role the 'Green Economy' has to play in the competitiveness of the County and the country

²⁶ DJEI Action Plan for Jobs 2017

²⁷ For more information on Meath County Council's policy on green house gas reduction, refer to chapter?

as a whole²⁷. The growing international emphasis on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving resource efficiency presents a major opportunity for indigenous enterprises to grow and export innovative products and services.

The geographical location of the County adjacent to the national Gateway and the proximity of the routes, through which significant energy transmission networks

ED POL 15

To seek to support and facilitate both existing and new businesses who seek to maximise the re-use and recycling of resources, create new business models and promote innovation and efficiency.

comes from their specific sites and the export of surplus energy to the national grid.

It is the policy of the Council:

ED OBJ 69

To work in partnership with relevant stakeholders to ensure that a sustainable approach is taken to enterprise development and employment creation across all sectors of the Meath economy in accordance with the Green Economy national frameworks relevant to each sector.

ED OBJ 70

Engage with all relevant government stakeholders, enterprise agencies and sectoral representatives in pursuing 'green' approaches to economic

development, and actively collaborate with key industry and educational bodies to promote Meath based initiatives across the economic sectors.

4.11 Rural Economy

The development and maintenance of the rural economy is a complex issue, and one which the government is committed to supporting. This is reflected in the number of government initiatives currently available to promote and assist enterprise within the rural economy. The NPF recognises the 'role rural areas play in driving our economy and our high quality environment' and seeks to encourage and attract entrepreneurship and innovation development in these areas, particularly where low carbon outputs can be achieved²⁸. In order to create future employment opportunities in the rural economy measures are required to support rural entrepreneurship and innovative rural SMEs. The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund established as part of Project Ireland 2040 will assist in revitalising the rural economy.

At present, through the 'Action Plan for Jobs 2017' the Government has committed to provide up to €60 million in competitive funding over the period to 2020 to support collaborative initiatives. The Government is also committed to the implementation of the Action Plan for Rural Development (2017) and will deliver the 2014-2020 EU LEADER Programme which has a total budget of €250 million and includes up to €30 million per annum for other rural development schemes such as Town & Village Renewal, CLÁR and the Rural Recreation programme. The REDZ

²⁸ Page 139 Draft National Planning Framework

(Rural Economic Development Zone) initiative is classified within the CEDRA (Commission for Economic Development in Rural Areas) and are intended to complement the Town and Village Renewal Scheme and cater for projects between the towns and surrounding hinterland that maximise local assets in areas such as tourism, culture, heritage and other areas that support rural economic activity.

Investment under the National Development Plan 2018-2027 will allow an *tÚdarás na Gaeltachta to continue to play its important role in employment creation in Gaeltacht areas over the period of the Plan*. There are existing Údarás funded projects in both Baile Ghib and Rathcairn and it is an objective of this Plan in conjunction with Údarás na Gaeltachta and Gaeltacht na Mí Economic forum to continue to support economic development in the Gaeltacht areas of the County.

The Meath Local Enterprise Office (LEO) works in conjunction with the aforementioned initiatives in providing support to existing businesses and start ups which includes financial assistance, training, mentoring and management development programmes.

The NPF also recognises the important role of telecommunications in the development of the rural economy. It acknowledges that as digital links and opportunities for remote working and new enterprises continue to grow, they will increasingly have the capacity to accommodate employment focused on ICT based industries, multi/media and creative sectors in areas such as agri-tech, tourism, transport and in particular, an added value bio-economy and circular economy.

In order maintain competitiveness and connectivity in rural areas, the Government is supporting the delivery of high speed

broadband services to all businesses, farms, and households in Ireland through the National Broadband Plan.²⁹

The government has acknowledged the specific issues posed by BREXIT to the rural economy and is seeking to support vulnerable businesses in their response to the changing economic climate through initiatives such as the BREXIT fund.

Much of the larger indigenous employment in the County occurs in traditional manufacturing industries, as noted in the Economic Development Strategy. These activities depend to a large extent on the UK market (including NI), which raises the uncertainty posed by Brexit and the likelihood that the exports from the County may become more expensive to the UK in the post-Brexit environment (due to the probability of the UK leaving the Common Market and the Customs Union and from leaving the EU's External Tariff). In order to highlight the attractiveness of the County as a business base, rural networking, clustering and branding will be promoted and supported by the Council, in order to target smaller niche FDI investment into rural areas of the County and increase the share of export business already exporting and those with potential to export.

No single economic sector offers the total solution to the challenges facing rural areas. The optimal response most likely lies in the development of a variety of measures to tap into the potential that individual rural areas possess. In all areas of the County, there is a role for rural development in contributing to the general economic growth of the County. The Council will encourage diversification by promoting the unique assets of the County, its strategic location within the GDA, the availability of an indigenous highly skilled workforce coupled

²⁹ In November 2019 the Government approved the appointment of a preferred bidder to deliver this project.

with the benefits of living in the gateway to Ireland's Ancient East promoting appropriate forms of rural employment development such as agriculture (arable, dairy, sheep, horticulture and organic), equine, forestry, tourism (walking, cycling, leisure, fishing, golfing, water based activities, beach and cultural heritage), mineral extraction and rural enterprises. In summary this Plan promotes and encourages economic development to meet the needs of rural areas whilst recognising and seeking to protect their environmental character and heritage.

4.11.1 Rural Enterprise

It is the policy of the NPF *'to enhance the competitiveness of rural areas by supporting innovation in rural economic development and enterprise through the sustainable diversification of the rural economy into new sectors and in particular those with a low or zero carbon output'*. This Plan accepts that there is a need to develop a rural economy that offers viable and sustainable employment for existing communities. There is also a need to strengthen the provision / retention of services, regenerate rural communities and promote the economic development of rural areas. This manifests itself in the need to both acknowledge the need for, and promote the development of, small scale enterprises in rural areas. Given the County's strategic location within the GDA its excellent transport links, proximity to a multiplicity of third level institutions providing a steady stream of skilled workers and its access to urban centres served by high speed communications infrastructure the County is ideally located to attract and grow new and innovative employment sectors into its rural areas. The Council provides a comprehensive, multidisciplinary support system to businesses who seek to locate in the County.

It is the policy of the Council to support the location of once off medium to large scale rural enterprise if it is demonstrated, to the satisfaction of the council, that the enterprise can be more readily accommodated in a rural setting than provided in a designated settlement centre and subject to standard development management considerations being applied. It is equally accepted that there are certain types of rural enterprises, especially those that involve processing of natural resources, which serve rural communities which have a critical role to play in sustainable rural development. There are already a number of successful enterprises of this nature existing in the County in the food processing and development areas.

The promotion and facilitation of micro enterprises (up to a maximum of 10 employees) is a key area for the generation of sustainable employment opportunities in rural areas. The Council will seek to facilitate the development of this sector by ensuring that incubator units for micro enterprises are provided in lower tier centres (Small Towns and Villages) as well as considering their individual appropriateness in rural nodes and possibly, the open countryside. In particular, the reuse of redundant agricultural buildings and the development of new buildings to accommodate such diversification / enterprise, within an overall farmyard complex, will be considered on their individual merits.

The Government's Action Plan for Rural Development *"Realising our Rural Potential"* highlights the potential of activity tourism to contribute to economic growth in rural areas. It states that *"Outdoor adventure tourism is a key growth sector worldwide and has been identified as a priority for Irish tourism in future years. The development and promotion of this sector provides opportunities for growth, in rural areas in particular, by facilitating businesses to leverage*

the tourism assets in their area in a sustainable way to support recreational activities such as canoeing, cycling, angling and hill walking". The development of a new Greenways Strategy to support activity tourism in rural areas is specifically identified as an action point in the Action Plan. Given the rich cultural heritage and rural tourism present in the County, it is well placed to continue the development of its tourism product and place itself as one of the top destinations for diversity of choice in this sector.

It is the policy of the Council:

ED POL 16

To support the location of a once off medium to large scale rural enterprise only in instances where it is demonstrated, to the satisfaction of the Council, that the enterprise can be more readily accommodated in a rural setting than in a designated settlement centre and subject to standard development management considerations being applied.

ED POL 17

To support in conjunction with Meath LEO and other agencies the development of indigenous industry and business start-ups in rural employment centres (villages and settlements) in the County, subject to compliance with siting, design and environmental considerations.

ED POL 18

To support rural entrepreneurship and the development of micro businesses (generally less than 10 no. employees) in rural areas where environmental and landscape impact is minimal and such developments do not generate significant or undue traffic. This policy shall not apply to sites accessed from the National Road Network.

ED POL 19

To support and facilitate sustainable agriculture, agri-food, horticulture, forestry, renewable energy and other rural enterprises at suitable locations in the County.

ED POL 20

To support the implementation of the new LEADER Rural Development Strategy 2014-2020 and any subsequent amended/ updated Strategy for the County.

ED POL 21

To support the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in the identification of other potential REDZ zones across the County and assist local communities to prepare for future funding opportunities.

ED POL 22

To support all relevant stakeholders in the development of a programme of Agri-Innovation/ Agri-Tech, Agri-Green, Food Innovation, and Niche Food for consumers.

ED POL 23

To support the development of activity tourism facilities, in appropriate locations, within the County subject to standard development management considerations being applied.

ED POL 24

To consider, on their individual merits, the reuse of redundant agricultural buildings and the development of new buildings to accommodate farm diversification / enterprise within an overall farmyard complex.

the sector through increased employment with integration and diversification of equine facilities for related leisure and sporting activities.

ED POL 25

To support and promote the equine industry in the County as an economic and employment provider.

ED POL 26

To support the racecourses and associated facilities at Fairyhouse, Navan, Bellewstown and race event at Laytown to ensure that these centres remain viable for long-term development for employment and economic activity.

Please refer to Chapter 9 Rural Development Strategy for further information regarding rural enterprise. Chapter 11 Development Management Standards and Land Use Zoning Objectives provides further information regarding permitted uses in RA Rural Areas and RN Rural Nodes zones.

4.11.1.1 Equine Industry

There are a considerable number of people employed both directly and indirectly in the equine industry which is an important economic contributor to County Meath. There are three race courses located at Fairyhouse, Navan and Bellewstown along with the annual beach races at Laytown. In addition, there are a number of stud farms located throughout the County and the Tattersalls International Equestrian facility near Ratoath. The equine industry in the County presents an opportunity to sustain and grow

4.12 Retail

4.12.1 Introduction

The importance of the retail sector to the national economy is hugely significant delivering 270,000 jobs and constitutes³¹, the largest share of sectoral employment. The sector plays a pivotal role in the growth of the domestic economy as it is the only sector to have a presence in practically every town and village in the country. A strong retail sector has the

³¹ Action Plan for Jobs 2015, January 2015, Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, pg. 121.

multiple benefits of drawing people into centres to interact with their community (thereby reducing social isolation), supporting local employment, and obviating the need for people to travel long distances for essential shopping needs, thereby reducing car dependency. The current Retail Strategy for Meath has been undertaken at a time of growth within this sector compared to the previous Retail Strategy conducted for the 2013-2019 Development Plan. At that time the economy had experienced continuous contraction in which the retail sector was significantly affected. Recent forecasts indicate recovering employment rates and increases in consumer disposable income levels, both of these factors are already having a significant positive effect on the growth of the sector. It is the policy of this Plan to promote expansion of growth levels in the retail sector and to provide a clear Plan led approach for future development.

Please refer to Chapter 11 Development Management Standards and Land Use zoning Objectives and Appendix 4 Retail Strategy for further information.

4.13 Policy Context

The policy context for the Plan in relation to retail is informed by retail guidance documents at national and regional levels. These include the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, Guidelines for Planning Authorities: Retail Planning issued in 2012 by the DoECLG; and the Retail Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area, 2008-2016, published in 2008 on behalf of the Dublin and Mid East Regional Authorities.

4.13.1 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, 2019-2031

The RSES acknowledges that retail is a significant contributor to economic activity and employment in the region. The 2008 Retail strategy for the Greater Dublin Area has not yet been updated and the RSES states that EMRA will 'support and drive the preparation of a new retail strategy which will update the retail hierarchy and floor space requirements. RPO 6:10 states:

'EMRA will support the preparation of a Retail Strategy/Strategies for the Region in accordance with the Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2012, or any subsequent updates, to update the retail hierarchy and apply floorspace requirements for the Region.'

Table 6.1 of the RSES sets out the Retail Hierarchy for the Region. Navan, Maynooth and Drogheda are designated Level 2 centres (major town centres and County town centres), Ashbourne, Dunshaughlin, Kells, Trim and Laytown/Bettystown are designated as Level 3 centres (town and/or district centres and sub-County town centres).

4.13.2 Guidelines for Planning Authorities: Retail Planning (DECLG) 2012

In order for Planning to support the retail sector through the provision of retail development and the maintenance of vibrancy in towns, the Retail Planning Guidelines outline 5 overriding objectives which include:

- Ensuring retail development is Plan led
- Use of the sequential approach within towns

- Securing competitiveness in the retailing sector through quality designed suitably located projects
- Increasing access to retailing opportunities through more sustainable forms of transport
- Delivering quality urban design outcomes.

The 2012 Retail Planning Guidelines are accompanied by the Retail Design Manual (April 2012). The Manual provides Planning authorities, developers and designers with evidence based quality principles to ensure that future Planning for the retail sector is focussed on the creation of vibrant, quality places.

4.13.3 Retail Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (2008)

The current GDA Retail Strategy covers the period 2008-2016 and provides guidance and policies for retail development at a strategic level and aims to ensure a co-ordinated and sustainable approach to the assessment and provision of retail development in the Greater Dublin Area. The strategy was based on economic conditions prior to the recession. It is a requirement of the Retail Planning Guidelines that a Retail Strategy is prepared for the GDA. Given that the current strategy has passed its expiry date it is anticipated that a Retail Strategy for the Eastern & Midlands Regional Assembly will be developed within the life of the Plan. In the absence of any updates to the Retail Strategy the current document applies.

In relation to Meath the current Retail Strategy for the GDA, 2008-2016 supports the continued development of Navan as the main retail centre in the county (Level 2 Major Town Centre & County Town Centre). The Strategy identifies

Dunboyne, Ashbourne, Dunshaughlin, Kells, Trim, Laytown/Bettystown & Enfield as Level 3 centres (Town and/or District Centres and Sub-County Town Centres). The Retail Strategy 2008 provides that Dunboyne will gradually develop to Level 2 status by 2028. The Strategy states as follows: *To provide for the future development of Dunboyne from Level 3 to a Level 2 centre over a 15-20 year time frame alongside the development of the rail line and associated future population growth, with this growth guided by the Integrated Framework Plan for Landuse and Transportation Plan and the Local Area Plan for Dunboyne.'*

4.14 Development Plan Vision

The overriding aim of the retail strategy for the County is to create the appropriate conditions to foster a healthy and vibrant retail environment in the County over the life of the Plan and beyond. The in depth review of the current situation and consideration of future environmental improvements, to include public realm improvements and floor space provision will be framed within the national and regional context to ensure appropriate and optimal retail activity throughout the County.

Please refer to Chapter 11 Development Management Standards and Land Use Zoning Objectives for more information regarding town centre renewal/public realm/placemaking.

4.15 Meath Retail Strategy

The previous County Retail Strategy was prepared during a time when the national retail

market was experiencing a significant decline due to the recession and national economic downturn. The current strategy has been prepared in the context of national economic recovery in which the retail market is showing signs of improvement, with marked increases in the volume of recorded sales. This optimism within the market must be tempered within the context of a level of uncertainty derived from geo-political events and a sustained period of the 'price conscious shopper'. In addition the growth of online shopping is a feature that continues to be apparent in the retail sector and is an area that retailers must engage in if they are to remain competitive.

The strategy aims to sustain and improve the retail competitiveness of the County, address retail expenditure leakage and ensure an equitable, efficient and sustainable spatial distribution of retail floorspace across the County. The emphasis of the Retail Strategy is on ensuring that the County sustains its role and importance in the shopping patterns of local people, the region and nationally. This should be largely driven by the continuing improvement of the County's comparison shopping offer particularly in its main centres. It is important to note that the Council will undertake a joint Retail Strategy with Louth County Council for Drogheda. This is will be an integral part of the joint vision and Joint Urban Plan for the town of Drogheda³².

4.16 Survey & Analysis – Key Findings

A comprehensive survey of households in the County was undertaken in June 2017³³ to establish existing shopping patterns as was a

detailed Health Check survey of all the high tier settlements. Ratoath was included in this Health Check exercise due to its high population and its evolution as a dormitory town within the GDA. The survey highlights continued significant levels of comparison expenditure leakage from the County, however, improvements have been noted in the settlements of Navan, Kells and Trim where the survey indicated that the majority of respondents remained in the County for comparison shopping. 90% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their experience of shopping in Navan.

This demonstrates that improvements to the diversity of uses available and improvements to public realm have impacted positively on the retail sector in the town. Variety of goods was stated as the main reason for people to leave the County, as was convenience and proximity of other centres to their home.

Convenience (Main Food & Grocery Shopping) - Highlights

- » 78.56% retention of convenience expenditure within the County, which is up from 77% at the time of the previous retail strategy
- » Kells (high) retains 97.56% compared to Bettystown (low) retaining only 50% within the County.
- » Drogheda attracts 50% shoppers from the East Meath area
- » 93% of respondents undertake their top up shopping locally within the County at their local and nearest convenience store.

Main reason cited for selection of shopping venue is geographical proximity. It is noted from the surveys carried out that towns in the County do not provide a significant attraction outside of their immediate catchment area.

³² See report of Drogheda Boundary Review, February 2017, and RSES.

³³ Publication of Meath County Development Plan delayed by Planning and Development Act 2018.

People tend to travel for an experience a 'day out' and this type of destination shopping is lacking in the County.

Comparison (Clothes & Footwear) - Highlights

- » 64.5% of respondents carry out their main comparison shopping outside of the County which is an increase from the 58.9% recorded at the time of the last survey.
- » Navan fulfils a sub regional comparison retail role – 62.5% retention within its own catchment which is a decrease from the 70% recorded at the time of the last survey and attracts 55% & 68% expenditure from Trim and Kells catchments. Kells percentage has seen significant improvement from the 37% recorded at the time of the last survey.
- » Ashbourne retains 27% comparison goods expenditure in its own catchment area which is a significant improvement from the previous retail strategy where it only retained c.11% - the main attraction remains as Blanchardstown (29%).
- » Almost all comparison expenditure from the east coast settlements leaves the county primarily to Drogheda (63%), this has reduced from 78.8% at the time of the previous retail strategy.
- » The main reason cited for shopping outside of County is to avail of a more varied product range.

Bulky Goods Shopping - Furniture and Electrical Goods – Highlights

- » Expenditure leakage for bulky goods was 57.5%.

- » Geographical trends evident in comparison goods expenditure leakage are reaffirmed, with Blanchardstown being the most popular destination.
- » Navan performs quite well retaining 77% of expenditure for bulky goods and 67.5% of Kells area expenditure in this category which is a large improvement from 48.65% recorded in the previous survey.
- » The majority of survey respondents in Trim stated that they conduct their shopping between Navan (17.07%) and Trim (46.34%).
- » Ashbourne catchment – 57.5% of bulky goods takes place outside the County with Blanchardstown satisfying 26% of this.
- » Bettystown catchment – retention of expenditure within the County in this area is an issue with 75% taking place in Drogheda, however it will be difficult to address this in any significant way given the population size of this area and its close proximity to Drogheda.
- » However as per the previous strategy, the Southern Environs of Drogheda continue to perform well.

4.16.1 Commentary

The survey confirms that the continued leakage of comparison and bulky goods expenditure from the east Meath catchment to Drogheda and from the Ashbourne catchment to Blanchardstown is based largely on geographical proximity. The Retail Strategy indicates that this is not surprising given their geographical proximity. Blanchardstown has an influential pull on shopping trends, with the centre being named as the most frequented competing centre outside of the County. The majority of trips generated to Blanchardstown, Dublin City

and Liffey Valley are for comparison goods shopping. The results of the household survey demonstrate a requirement for an increase in the variety and range of comparison stores provided within the County. This would help reduce the leakage to external centres.

4.17 Retail Hierarchy

The County Retail Strategy confirms a retail hierarchy, as set out in Table 3.1 overleaf. This hierarchy is consistent with the Retail Hierarchy contained in the Retail Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area completed in 2008.

Level	Type of Centre	Centre	Type of services
Level 1		None	
Level 2	Major town centre/County Town	Navan	Level 2 centres should offer a full range of types of retail services from newsagents to specialist shops, large department stores, convenience stores of all types, shopping centres and a high level of mixed uses. Level 2 centres should be well serviced by public transport.
Level 3	Town And/Or District Centres and Sub County Town Centres	Ashbourne, Dunboyne*, Dunshaughlin, Kells, Trim, Laytown/ Bettystown, Enfield	Level 3 centres will vary in terms of scale of provision and the size of catchment. Generally where the town is not close to a major town such as Ashbourne/Dunboyne/ Enfield and there is a large catchment there should be a good range of comparison shopping with a mix of uses and services. At least one supermarket and smaller scale comparison department store to cater for local needs.
Level 4	Small towns, village and local centres	Various locations within the county including (although not exclusively) Athboy, Ballivor, Clonee, Duleek, Kilmessan, Nobber, Oldcastle, Ratoath, Slane and Stamullen.	Level 4 centres should generally provide for one supermarket ranging in size with a limited range of local shops, supporting services such as a health centre, community facilities and recreation uses. This type of centre should meet the day to day needs of the local population and surrounding catchment.
Level 5	Small villages	Various locations	These centres should meet the basic day to day needs of the surrounding residents. These shops can present as a rural focal point with a local post office near to the local primary school or GAA club or as a small terrace of shops in an urban area such as Blackcastle Shopping centre in Navan.
Other		Southern Environs of Drogheda	Drogheda environs contain a relatively large quantum of retail development due to its association with Drogheda, a second tier centre in the national retail hierarchy. Southgate Shopping Centre (District Centre) is located at Colpe Cross on the southern fringe of Drogheda and includes a significant office component. The retail provision in Drogheda environs performs an important function in serving the needs of the local and surrounding communities.

*Dunboyne will gradually develop over the next 20 years towards a Level 2 Centre in recognition of the status affirmed in the Retail Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area

4.18 E-commerce

Online shopping, or 'e-commerce' has a major presence in the Irish retail market, with most multiples having a significant online presence. E-commerce Europe estimates that 82% of Ireland's population of 15 years and older use the internet and 1.9 million of this population shop online, spending €3,143 per year, representing €5.9bn in 2015³⁴.

Visa's Irish Consumer Spending Index has recorded sales in all payment types since 2014. In January 2017, the Visa Index highlighted the contrasting fortunes of online sales versus face-to-face sales with spend on the latter decreasing -0.7% year-on-year - a marginal reduction, but the fourth in as many months. In contrast, online shopping continued to record strong growth in expenditure. Spending was up +12.3% year-on-year, with the rate of expansion in double-digits for the sixth month running.³⁵

Online shopping is therefore one of the most significant growth areas in the retail market in the past decade. While this represents an opportunity for retailers as an additional sales platform, many traditional retailers have suffered loss of sales and in this way, online sales or 'e-commerce' represents a significant competitor. In recognition of this, many retailers are adapting by co-locating leisure uses (particularly food and beverage) alongside retail to provide an 'experience' that cannot be replicated in an online setting. On the main street where floorplates are generally not large, leisure uses such as restaurants and cafes have tended to replace vacant former retail units.

While online shopping is a major factor in loss of sales, there is an opportunity for town centres to provide something that is not possible online, a market-place where experience and social interaction is possible.

4.19 Identification of Core Retail Areas and Opportunity Sites

In accordance with the guidance set out within the Retail Planning Guidelines, the County Retail Strategy identifies Core Retail Areas for the first and second level centres within the County Retail Hierarchy. The Retail Strategy also identifies a number of Opportunity Sites within each town which are considered to be suitable locations for retail development. In accordance with the objectives of the Retail Planning Guidelines, new retail development should be located within or close to these identified core retail areas, where possible.

4.20 The Requirement for Additional Retail Floorspace

One of the key requirements of the *Retail Planning Guidelines* is that retail strategies should provide a broad assessment of the additional retail floorspace required in counties over the lifetime of their strategies. The requirement for additional retail floorspace within the County is estimated having regard to the changes to the population, population forecasts, updated information on expenditure, retail floorspace, extant planning permissions and the findings of the 2017 household and shopper surveys.

The County Retail Strategy sets out broad guidance on the type and amount of additional floorspace that will be required to accommodate additional expenditure over the timescale of the Strategy. This is summarized in Table 4.2 below:

³⁴ <https://www.ecommerce-europe.eu/research-figure/ireland/>

³⁵ <https://www.visa.ie/about-us/press-releases/irish-consumer-spending-increases-plus-4-percent-year-on-year-in-january-1801988?returnUrl=/about-us/press-releases/listing>

Table 4.2: County Meath Floorspace Potential

Year	Convenience sq. m.	Comparison sq. m. Scenario 1	Comparison sq. m. Scenario 2	Bulky Goods sq. m.
2011	15,431	124	124	-19,983
2019	31,071	13,723	38,527	-7,614
2022	35,617	20,368	48,446	-1,570

It is noted that there are a number of extant permissions for town centre schemes which have not been implemented and which have not been included within the above floorspace figures. The permissions pertaining to these sites predominantly refer to the provision of supermarkets. For example, a major town centre scheme has been permitted in Kells, however given the limited level of retail floorspace required in the town it is unlikely that this permitted floorspace will come to fruition in the format and scale as originally planned.³⁶ Changing retail formats and patterns in recent years will influence the implementation of historic retail grants of planning permissions.

The Council remains committed to promoting retail development at an appropriate scale on key sites. A case by case consideration of the relevant pipeline floorspace will be necessary in considering any significant retail development. The key consideration in assessing future planning applications is the location of the proposed retail floorspace. The appropriate redevelopment and revitalization of town centres lands should continue to be promoted as a priority.

The results of the household and shopper's surveys undertaken to inform the retail strategy identify a significant degree of leakage of comparison expenditure from the County. A key objective is to reduce this level of leakage throughout the lifetime of the retail strategy.

4.21 Strategic Guidance on the Distribution of Retail Floorspace

The County Retail Strategy provides a strategic policy framework for the spatial distribution of new retail floorspace within the County. The assessment takes account of both emerging trends in the retail market and general estimates of future demand, based on projected changes in the local population, consumer spending and turnover potential. The focus of this is to provide strategic guidance on the location and scale of major retail development. New retail floorspace for comparison retail uses will be promoted in particular within Navan and Dunboyne balanced with incentives to address vacancy.

Enhancing the range and quality of comparison floorspace within the County is essential in ensuring that the County enhances its retail offer and attraction and claws back some of the leakage of expenditure that is occurring to competing centres such as Blanchardstown. As the County Town Centre, Navan, in particular, should be promoted and developed as a centre for higher order comparison floorspace.

In terms of convenience retail provision, it is evident that certain centres most notably Dunboyne and Enfield are under provided for in

³⁶ Current Planning permission due to expire in 2020.

terms of convenience offer, however planning permissions granted in 2017 will significantly address this issue. Convenience retail development will in particular be promoted in these urban centres in order to improve competition choice and diversity in the retail market. A large convenience store has opened in Dunboyne (2018) which will make significant inroads in convenience leakage from this centre. In terms of retail warehouse development, the County is well served. There are two large retail warehouse parks in Navan and a further retail park in Ashbourne. Vacancy levels are reduced low levels in Navan but remain high in Ashbourne. The retail strategy has outlined that there is no current need for additional floorspace of this type within the County. A very cautious approach will be taken regarding further such development over the period of the Plan other than completion of existing parks and existing areas identified in Volume 2.

Tables 4.3 and 4.4 set out the indicative potential for additional convenience and comparison floorspace in the main towns within the County in accordance with the role of each settlement within the County Retail Hierarchy, emerging trends in the retail market and general estimates of future demand, based on projected changes in the local population, consumer spending and turnover potential.

For both convenience and comparison goods retailing, Navan, as the Key Town in the County is to receive approximately one third of the total allocated additional retail floorspace potential. Navan's population has risen to above 30,000 and continues to grow at a strong rate.

Dunboyne is allocated the next largest share of potential floorspace. As a Large Growth Town II, Dunboyne has grown (from 2011-2016) at a lower rate when compared to Navan,

Table 4.3: Indicative Convenience Floorspace Potential

Centre	2026
Navan	4,000-8,806
Trim	1,000-1,450
Kells	800-1,250
Ashbourne	1,000-1,872
Dunshaughlin	1,200-2,322
Dunboyne	2,000-4,744
Enfield	1,000-1,450
Laytown-Bettystown	1,000-1,450
Ratoath	500-1,545
Stamullen	500-895
Other	1,000-1,125
Total	14,000-26,909

Table 4.4 Indicative Comparison Floorspace Potential

Centre	2026
Navan	4,000-6,388
Trim	1,250-1,750
Kells	1,000-1,500
Ashbourne	1,500-2,100
Dunshaughlin	700-977
Dunboyne	1,640-3,200
Enfield	400-500
Laytown/Bettystown	400-500
Ratoath	200-876
Stamullen	200-226
Other	500-768
Total	11,790-18,785

however it is envisaged that the settlement will grow significantly during the lifetime of the Development Plan as part of the Dublin Metropolitan Area.

The allocations shown in Table 4.3 & 4.4 for additional convenience and comparison retail floorspace in Kells, Trim and Ashbourne reflect their status and their projected growth over the life of the Plan. Dunshaughlin's relatively low population growth rate between 2011-2016 and the higher vacancy levels recorded in the land use survey for this retail strategy indicate that significant additional retail floorspace potential is less likely in Dunshaughlin than in Navan and Dunboyne. A convenience foodstore completed in Dunshughlin in 2018 has enhanced the retail offering in the town centre. Notwithstanding the significant level of recent residential activity in Dunshaughlin and the likely corresponding increase in population significant additional floorspace is not likely to be required over the Plan period.

Both Enfield and Laytown/Bettystown have recorded a high population growth in the Census 2016 and Planning permissions granted in 2017 will address any significant deficits in retail floorspace for these areas. Construction of the convenience foodstore in Laytown commenced in 2019. An additional quantum of floorspace is proposed for these settlements also in line with future population growth projections. In areas where there has been limited organic growth, the Council will for limited additional floor space to accommodate qualitative improvements in the retail offer to existing residents. There are a number of challenges for the Bettystown/Laytown area over the Plan period including the sustainable completion of the town centre development in Bettystown, the implementation of the public realm strategy and the development of a hub

for beach related services over the Plan period, all of which will contribute significantly to the regeneration of the area.

Ratoath's large population base and low vacancy rate is acknowledged by a higher allocation of additional convenience and comparison retail floorspace potential to serve the existing population while Stamullen will continue to operate as a small settlement in retailing terms.

In considering the potential for additional retail floorspace within the County, the figures contained in Tables 4.3 and 4.4 above should not be considered as upper limits, merely as indicative of the scale of new floorspace required to meet the needs of existing and future organic population growth and expenditure within the County. The figures represent the potential additional floorspace over that existing and do not include unimplemented permitted retail schemes in the County. The figures set out within Tables 4.3 and 4.4 may be subject to further analysis in the context of future Town Development or Local Area Plans. Additional new floorspace may be proposed and this could replace some existing outdated or poorly located retail floorspace.

4.22 Criteria for the Assessment of Retail Developments

In accordance with the Retail Planning – Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (April 2012), new significant development should be directed primarily into the town centres in the County (Level 2&3). New development in small towns and villages (Level 4&5) should be of an appropriate scale and offer to sufficiently meet local retailing needs only.

Retail development in Level 2 and 3 centres should be located within the core retail areas identified for these centres. Retail development outside of the identified core areas will only be considered in exceptional circumstances where the Planning Authority is satisfied that there are no other sites available and the development is necessary to serve the needs of the area. In all instances when assessing new retail developments, the sequential approach shall be applied. This will maintain the retail importance of the town centre and protect the viability and vitality of our town centres. Promotion of an appropriate mix of day and night time uses to include residential, civic, cultural, recreational, commercial and social uses is a critical aspect in this regard. Developments which make a positive contribution to the area in terms of adding value and diversity will be encouraged by the Planning Authority.

The Council will require a high standard of design in all retail developments. This is of particular importance due to the visual role which retail plays in a town or village streetscape.

Chapter 11 Development Management Standards and Land Use Zoning Objectives provide guidance for Retail Development whilst individual Town Statements and future Local Areas Plans will include a range of design principles and policies which respond to local circumstances.

4.23 Shop Fronts

The shop front forms an important part of a street's character as it constitutes a highly visible part of the building at street level. Shop fronts which are well designed and well maintained make for a more attractive street experience

for the shopper and passer-by. All proposals for retail development should have regard to Meath County Councils Shop Front and Signage Guidelines 2017.

Refer also to Chapter 11 Development Management Standards and Land Use Zoning Objectives for further requirements in respect of shop fronts.

It is the policy of the Council:

ED POL 27

To implement the Meath County Retail Strategy 2020-2026.

ED POL 28

To have regard to the policies and objectives of the Retail Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2008-2016 and any replacement document.

ED POL 29

To promote and encourage Navan to sustain its competitiveness and importance as a Level 2 County Town Centre in the Eastern and Midland Region.

ED POL 30

To support the vitality and viability of existing designated centres and to work in conjunction with Retail Excellence Ireland, DJEI and all relevant stakeholders to facilitate a competitive and healthy environment for the retailing industry into the future.

ED POL 31

To ensure that future growth in retail floorspace responds to the identified retail settlement hierarchy.

ED POL 32

To support the development of Core Retail Areas in each of the retail settlement areas as identified within the County Meath Retail Strategy and reinforce the role and function of the Core Retail Areas.

ED POL 33

To adhere to the Sequential Approach principle in the consideration of retail applications located outside of core retail areas.

ED POL 34

To facilitate the development of key opportunity sites as identified in all existing retail centres by the County Meath Retail Strategy 2020-2026.

ED POL 35

To promote the reuse or reactivation of vacant and under-utilised properties/ shop units in order to assist within the regeneration of streets and settlements in the County.

ED POL 36

To encourage a healthy diversity of retail types and scales, as well as uses that are complementary to retail, in particular leisure uses, within all Core Retail Areas.

ED OBJ 37

To facilitate LEO in supporting all existing retail business with an on-street presence in all Core Retail Areas to establish an online sales platform.

It is an objective of Meath County Council:

ED OBJ 71

To continue to implement and facilitate environmental, amenity and recreational improvements to the public realm, including the restriction where appropriate of vehicle use in existing Core Retail Areas.

ED OBJ 72

To promote and facilitate on-street activities including festivals, events, street markets and farmers / country markets in all existing retail centres.

4.24 Tourism

4.24.1 Introduction

The County has much to offer as a tourist destination, in particular its rich heritage, quality rural landscape, attractive towns and villages, and its appealing coastline. The promotion of Ireland as a tourism destination in overseas markets has a multifaceted impact on the Country. Successful tourism marketing not only increases visitor numbers and revenue to the Country, the positive message that it conveys about the Country's natural environment and friendly people support the Government in other areas of economic development such as the attraction of foreign direct investment. Tourism has played a significant role in the economic recovery in recent years and is fundamental in terms of the opportunities it generates for businesses and employment throughout the country. The government is seeking to expand on this growth through the marketing of 'Ireland's Ancient East' as a tourist destination. The Boyne Valley is identified as the birth place of Ireland's Ancient East and the County in particular is the gateway to this destination, with its unique collection of pre-historic sites and monuments in particular the Brú na Bóinne UNESCO World Heritage Site. The County is marketed by Fáilte Ireland as a destination to tell the story of Ireland through a diverse range of authentic and exciting visitor experiences.³⁷

While the County is a particularly attractive location for day-trippers, additional enhancement of the visitor experience is needed to increase dwell time to ensure the County fully benefits from growth in the tourism sector. The implementation of strategies and programmes by the tourism agencies aims to ensure that

visitors are aware of, and directed to, a broad range of attractions across the County, thereby better managing visitor numbers at sites.

4.25 Policy Context

4.25.1 Boyne Valley Tourism Strategy 2020, (Boyne Valley Tourist Office 2016)

The Boyne Valley Tourism Plan has been created to focus on areas of growth potential, identify key projects that will act as a stimulus for tourism development and bring the Boyne Valley brand to the next level through marketing innovation. The immediate goal of the plan is to support the creation of employment through increased tourism activity. The introduction of Ireland's Ancient East programme and the increasing awareness of the Boyne Valley as a national tourism destination highlight the immediate scope for tourism growth within the region. The plan seeks to capitalise on this in order to grow the tourism product of the region to its full potential.

4.25.2 People Place and Policy - Growing Tourism to 2025, (DTTAS, 2014)

This document is a policy framework for the development of tourism within the Country. It seeks to provide a basis for the prioritisation of investment in order to maximise the return from tourism in the long term. It examines the role of people, places, Local Authorities, Central Government, Europe and international policy. The framework has a strong focus on developing the sector to attract 10 million overseas visitors, create a range of direct and indirect enterprise

³⁷ People, Place and Policy; Growing Tourism to 2025.

opportunities and to grow employment in the sector to 250,000 persons by 2025. A Tourism Action Plan (2016-2018) has been created by the Tourism Leadership Group and sets out actions required in the period to 2018, to achieve the overall objectives of People Place and Policy – Growing tourism to 2025.

4.25.3 Tourism Development and Innovation – A strategy for Investment 2016-2022, (Fáilte Ireland, 2016)

In order to stimulate innovation in the tourism product, and to improve international competitiveness, Fáilte Ireland has launched a significant new Tourism Development and Innovation fund which will be the main source of funding in the sector over the next five years. This strategy sets out the framework and mechanism for the delivery of investment to cities, towns, villages, communities and businesses across the country. It identifies priorities to support innovation in the sector to retain and grow the country's competitiveness in the marketplace. Its ultimate aim is to strengthen the appeal of Ireland for international visitors.

4.25.4 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, 2019-2031

The RSES sets out that three of Fáilte Ireland's regional tourism brands are based in the EMRA region. Tourism is a strong contributor to the economy of the region and the RSES seeks to support Fáilte Ireland and other organisations to deliver greater tourism benefits to the Region.

4.26 Development Plan Vision for Tourism

The Plan seeks to facilitate the further development of the County as the gateway to Ireland's Ancient East. It is proposed to promote and facilitate the development of sustainable tourism and recreation and support the development of the Boyne Valley Bucket list³⁸ through the provision of a diverse range of activities, historic sites and accommodation types within the County. Improvements to the tourist experience of the County and increases in overnight stays will positively influence the creation of new and varied employment opportunities throughout the County.

ED POL 38

To co-operate with Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland, Boyne Valley Tourism, Louth County Council, and any other relevant bodies in the implementation of the Boyne Valley Tourism Strategy 2016-2020 and Ireland's Ancient East Programme.

4.27 Tourist Infrastructure

Fáilte Ireland research has shown that overseas tourists want to visit a destination with a variety of experiences to offer. This has formed the basis for the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East campaigns. The marketing of themes for locations in the County supported by softer route enhancements such as food and local culture is an objective of this Plan. The Plan will seek to support the development

³⁸ Fáilte Ireland marketing campaign for Ireland Ancient East

of a number of initiatives within the County including the Boyne Valley Food Series and Kells Cultural Quarter and Arts Collective and seeks to facilitate any associated development arising from these initiatives in appropriate locations. The Council will endeavour to facilitate new tourist attractions which are sensitive to the rural character and heritage of the area, such as the opening of historic houses or gardens to the public, farm visits, museums and interpretative centres.

ED POL 39

To facilitate the development of tourism infrastructure such as accommodation, restaurants, car and coach parking and toilet facilities in the designated hubs throughout the County.

ED POL 40

To promote the development of sustainable tourism and encourage the provision of a comprehensive range of tourism facilities, subject to satisfactory location, siting and design criteria, the protection of environmentally sensitive areas and areas identified as sensitive landscapes in the Landscape Character Assessment for the County. (Refer to Chapter 8 Cultural Heritage, Natural Heritage, Landscape and Green Infrastructure and Appendix 5 Landscape Character Assessment)

ED POL 41

To support the development of new

tourist facilities or upgrading/ extension of existing tourist facilities at tourist sites within the County such as the Hill of Tara, Loughcrew and Trim Castle in accordance with proper Planning and sustainable development principles. These facilities should avail of shared infrastructure and services where possible, and will be designed to the highest architectural and design standards.

ED POL 42

To encourage new and high quality investment in the tourism industry in the County with specific reference to leisure activities (including walking, cycling, angling, equestrian and family focused activities) and accommodation in terms of choice, location and quality of product.

ED POL 43

To work with all relevant stakeholders and Fáilte Ireland to facilitate the erection of standardised signage for tourism facilities and tourist attractions as part of National and Regional initiatives.

ED POL 44

To encourage the clustering of tourism products and services within identified hubs and nodes to facilitate the sharing of infrastructure and services where possible, to increase linkages within and reduce leakage from the local economy.

ED POL 45

To support the use of the Kells Court House building for tourism and arts related activities.

ED POL 46

To encourage and support the development of the Boyne Valley Food Series, Kells Cultural Quarter and Kells Arts Collective.

ED POL 47

To encourage and support the development of the former Town Hall to use as a Visitors Centre for Trim Castle.

ED POL 48

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.

It is the objective of the Council:

ED OBJ 73

To support the development of sustainable tourism and encourage the provision of a comprehensive range of tourism facilities, subject to satisfactory location, siting and design criteria, the protection of environmentally

sensitive areas and areas identified as sensitive landscapes in the Landscape Character Assessment for the County. (Refer to Chapter 8 Cultural Heritage, Natural Heritage, Landscape and Green Infrastructure and Appendix 5 Landscape Character Assessment)

4.28 Tourism Sectors

4.28.1 Agri-Food

The agri-food sector has been credited with playing an integral role in the national economic recovery in recent years. The sector is the country's largest indigenous industry, with an estimated turnover of €26 billion and providing 170,000 jobs or 9% of the total employment figure. The sector makes a significant contribution to employment in rural areas, being a pivotal source of enterprise creation and opportunities.

Meath Food Series are a group of businesses – restaurants, hoteliers, food producers and visitor attractions – who are passionate about food, keen to celebrate its journey from producer to the table, and to link it to the rich heritage of this region. Through this medium food producers organise many free and family events throughout the County which include gourmet cycles and farm walks. The focus of this medium is to market the multitude of food experiences there are in the County and in doing so to positively impact growth in this sector. Food tourism has significant potential within the county and provides an alternative experience for visitors. It is a policy of this Plan to support the expansion and growth of food enterprises and associated tourist development

in appropriate areas in the County.

It is the policy of the Council:

ED POL 49

To facilitate and support the development of the Boyne Valley Food Series and associated development in the County at appropriate locations and to encourage co-location of enterprises at suitable sites.

4.28.2 Festivals and Events

Fáilte Ireland recognises the importance of festivals and events with regard to the attraction of both domestic and overseas visitors. The economic and community benefits of such events are well documented. The County has a number of annual festivals and events such as Hinterland book festival, Kells type trail and Guth Gafa film festival all located in Kells, Nobber Harp festival, Spirits of Meath throughout the County and many more. It is a policy of this plan to support the development of festivals and events throughout the County at appropriate locations and subject to any relevant consent required. Refurbishments of existing buildings for such events will be encouraged within the County, at appropriate locations, such as the refurbishment of the Heritage Centre in Kells and the Town Hall in Duleek.

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.

ED POL 50

To support and promote existing festivals and sporting events to increase the cultural, heritage and lifestyle profile of the County, and where appropriate to promote and facilitate the development of new events and venues to host these events.

It is the objective of the Council:

ED OBJ 74

To support and promote existing festivals and sporting events to increase the cultural, heritage and lifestyle profile of the County, subject to the satisfactory location, access, parking provision and protection of the surrounding environment.

4.28.3 Multi-Experience Attractions

The provision of multi experience facilities, particularly family friendly attractions such as those developed at Tayto Park, Slane Castle and Causey Farm, is supported by the policies and objectives of this development plan. The discerning modern tourist wants a variety of experiences suitable for both families and adults in a variety of settings.

The development of significant family attractions such as Tayto Park at Curragha, Ashbourne, Irish Military War Museum in Starinagh and Causey Farm at Fordstown has had a positive impact in attracting a different target market

to the County, who, when visiting these sites, create spin off revenue for local shops, hotels and other commercial businesses. The addition of Tayto Park in particular, has provided a new national tourist attraction deviating from the traditional attractions based on heritage and culture. The Plan acknowledges this regional amenity and the tourism role for the County and supports the sustainable development of these parks, farms and complexes at suitable locations throughout the County.

Slane Distillery has provided a further form of tourism diversification within the County which attracts a different target market not previously captured by the County. The development of Slane Demesne as a multi experience tourism destination is supported by this Plan subject to the protection of the integrity of the protected structure and it's setting for future generations.

ED POL 51

To enable, facilitate and encourage the growth and sustainability of the tourism sector through the provision of tourism enterprise developments in rural areas including open farms subject to the provision of adequate infrastructure and compliance with normal Planning considerations. (Refer to Chapter 8 Cultural Heritage, Natural Heritage, Landscape and Green Infrastructure and Appendix 5 Landscape Character Assessment)

ED POL 52

To promote Tayto Park in Curragha as a flagship family visitor attraction in the

County, subject to the normal development management standards. The Council will support and encourage further appropriate sustainable development of the integrated tourism product at Tayto Park subject to the provision or upgrade of the requisite physical infrastructure.

ED POL 53

To promote Slane Castle as a multi experience tourism destination and attraction in the County, subject to the normal development management standards. The Council will support and encourage further appropriate development of the integrated tourism product at Slane Castle subject to the provision or upgrade of the requisite physical infrastructure and the protection of the integrity of the projected structure and its surrounds, including the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC and SPA.

ED POL 54

To promote Causey Farm as a rural multi-experience tourism attraction in the County. The Council will support further appropriate development at Causey Farm subject to the provision of adequate infrastructure and compliance with normal Planning considerations.

ED POL 55

To promote the Irish Military War Museum

as a rural multi-experience tourism attraction in the County. The Council will support further appropriate development at the Irish Military War Museum, subject to the provision of adequate infrastructure and compliance with normal Planning considerations.

future tourist value in any way, particularly in and proximate to the Brú na Boinne and Hill of Tara areas.

4.28.4 Culture & Heritage

The Boyne Valley is identified as the birth place of Ireland's Ancient East and the County in particular is the gateway to this destination, with its unique collection of pre-historic sites and monuments in particular the Brú na Bóinne UNESCO World Heritage Site³⁹.

It is recognised that there is a need for improved and new tourist facilities within the County in particular at Loughcrew, Hill of Tara, Trim Castle, Newgrange, Knowth and Hill of Slane. The development of tourist facilities at these locations and within the wider county should respect the outstanding quality and variety of the natural and built environment in the County and should not damage the resource or prejudice its future tourist value in any way. In assessing such proposals regard will be had to the Landscape Character Assessment for the County.

It is the policy of the Council:

ED POL 56

To support the development and improvement of tourist facilities at historical sites in the County only in instances where the development does not damage the resource or prejudice its

4.28.5 Walking and Cycling Routes

Greenways offer a unique opportunity to develop a further strand in tourism for the County, through the provision of infrastructure for adventure tourism which has demonstrable economic benefits. In 2015, Fáilte Ireland estimated that 355,000 of overseas visitors engaged in cycling representing 7% of the overall overseas tourist market. Greenways also provide opportunities for active travel which supports sustainable transport policy⁴⁰ and recreation in the localities along their routes and can also provide economic, social, environmental and health benefits.

As mentioned in Section 4.25 above, the Government's Tourism policy statement "People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025", recognises the importance of investing in the visitor experience in order to continue to grow tourism including investment in facilities for visitor activities such as greenways and other outdoor recreational activities. This Plan recognises the important role that suitable cycle and pedestrian routes have in the attraction of tourists to the County. The Council will endeavour to assist in the delivery of such routes and, in particular, the delivery of the Royal Canal Greenway which is currently under construction, the Boyne Valley Greenway (Trim – Navan – Slane – Drogheda- Newbridge House), Boyne Valley - Lakelands Greenway (Navan – Kingscourt - Monaghan), subject to appropriate assessments and consents. (Refer to Chapter 5

³⁹ See Built Heritage Chapter for more details on the Bru na Boinne

⁴⁰ See Section 8.16 Public Rights of Way

Movement Strategy).

Pedestrian walks, such as the Royal Canal, and the Navan Ramparts will also be improved and maintained subject to obtaining the relevant consents. Other routes that arise from time to time will also be supported. Public rights of way which contribute generally to the amenities of the county and local areas will be protected and maintained⁴¹.

It is the policy of the Council:

ED POL 57

To work with the National Transport Authority (in conjunction with relevant objectives in Chapter 5 Movement Strategy of this Development Plan), Boyne Valley Tourism, Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland and all stakeholders to develop a co-ordinated approach to the selection, delivery and servicing of future greenways, blueways, trails and routes throughout the County.

ED POL 58

To support developments which will enable and encourage countryside recreation and an increased appreciation of the natural environment, through facilitating the development of community walks, off road trails / rural trail developments, parks and other outdoor amenities and recreational infrastructure. All proposals will require screening to determine if a full Appropriate Assessment of the likely significant effects on Natura 2000 sites, is required.

ED POL 59

To encourage and support sensitive development which provides for the appreciation, interpretation, upgrade and provision of access to natural habitats, scenic vistas and heritage features for the benefit of rural tourism subject to normal Planning and nature conservation considerations.

It is the objective of the Council:

ED OBJ 75

- a)** To promote and develop the upgrade of the towpaths along the Ramparts at Navan to Stackallen.
- b)** To deliver the Boyne Greenway from Oldbridge to Navan via Slane in conjunction with the NTA, Fáilte Ireland and all relevant stakeholders and subject to obtaining all relevant assessments and consents.
- c)** To deliver the Royal Canal Greenway as part of the Dublin to Galway Greenway project in co-operation with Waterways Ireland, and neighbouring Local Authorities and all relevant stakeholders, and subject to obtaining all relevant assessments and consents.
- d)** To deliver the Lakelands Greenway (Navan-Kingscourt-Monaghan) in co-operation with Irish Rail and neighbouring Local Authorities and subject to obtaining all relevant assessments and consents

The delivery of these Greenways and the upgrade of these towpaths will be subject

⁴¹ See Chapter 5 Movement for additional policies and objectives on walking and cycling

to the outcome of the Appropriate Assessment process. Where adverse effects on European Sites are identified, alternative locations and/or designs will be developed to ensure that the upgrades will not adversely affect the integrity of any European Sites, either alone or in-combination with any other Plans or projects. Considering the general location provided for these upgrades, and the ecological information and assessment required to be carried out to inform their design, it is reasonable to assume that at the detailed design stage any potential for a project element to impact on the European Site could, and will, be resolved through the exploration of alternative locations or designs. If, despite the implementation of mitigation measures, there remains a risk that the proposals will adversely affect the integrity of the European site, the project will not be progressed unless an alternative solution can be implemented which avoids/reduces the impact to a level that the integrity of the European Site(s) is (are) unaffected.

ED OBJ 76

To explore the provision of sustainable medium and long distance walking routes.

ED OBJ 77

To explore the feasibility of developing the Turas Columbanus walking trail in conjunction with all relevant stakeholders and neighbouring Local Authorities and subject to obtaining all relevant assessments and consents.

4.29 Accommodation

Managing the provision of tourist accommodation is essential to ensuring the delivery of a sustainable tourism strategy. It is acknowledged within the Boyne Valley Tourism Strategy that there is a significant deficit in accommodation within the County. The provision of new quality hotels is outlined as a requirement of the strategy in order to attract over night dwellers and increase the County's benefit from tourism. While the provision of new hotels in appropriate locations will be supported by the Planning Authority, the County must broaden the type of bed night stock through the provision of more contemporary forms of accommodation and the development of rural based tourism enterprise. The redevelopment of outbuildings as part of such a rural enterprise for accommodation purposes would be considered in appropriate locations.

4.29.1 Caravan / Camping grounds

The Council recognises the potential and growth nationally of sites for caravans, motor homes and camping. This sector is an important element in the overall accommodation provision of all holiday makers. Such developments should ideally be located within or at the edge of development centres within the County in order to provide ease of access to services for tourists. It is an objective of the Plan to ensure that the design, operation and impact of such tourist and visitor accommodation do not unreasonably affect the amenity of the surrounding landscape.

4.29.2 Holiday Homes

With the possible exception of the coastal strip,

the County is not under significant pressure for second home or holiday home development. It is recognised that there is a market for small short term let holiday home complexes associated with a particular tourist attraction in areas such as the equine industry. Applications for such developments will only be considered in suitable locations including towns, villages and rural nodes and where there is an existing established visitor attraction in operation.

It is the policy of the Council:

ED POL 60

To facilitate the development of a variety of quality tourist accommodation tourist types, at suitable locations, throughout the County.

ED POL 61

To positively consider the development of new hotels in existing settlements, with particular preference for locations in larger settlements such as Navan. In rural locations (i.e villages / rural nodes), it must be demonstrated that:

- (i)** the area proposed to be served by the new development has high visitor nos associated with an existing attraction / facility;
- (ii)** a need for new / additional hotel type accommodation for these visitors has been identified having regard to the profile of the visitor and the availability and proximity of existing hotels in the area; and
- (iii)** The distance of the location from a significant settlement is such that visitors to the area/attraction are unlikely to avail of existing hotel facilities.

ED POL 62

To positively consider the development of a new hotel at an appropriate location in Navan, subject to the provision of required infrastructure and compliance with Development Management Standards.

ED POL 63

To encourage touring/holiday vehicles, caravan, and camping sites to locate adjacent to or within existing settlements or established tourism facilities, having due regard to surrounding land uses and proper Planning and development of the area.

ED POL 64

To positively consider the (part) conversion of existing dwellings to Bed & Breakfasts (B&Bs) and Guesthouses, to be operated by the owner-occupier of the dwelling. Applications for new build B&Bs /guesthouses will in the first instance be evaluated as private dwellings and the objectives and standards applicable in that area type (e.g. large town, rural town, rural area etc) will be applied.

ED POL 65

To facilitate, where appropriate, the conversion of former demesnes or estate dwellings and their outbuildings into tourism facilities subject to good Planning and architectural conservation practice.

(Refer to Chapter 8 Cultural Heritage, Natural Heritage, Landscape and Green Infrastructure and Appendix 5)

ED POL 66

To ensure that the provision any accommodation (ED POL 65 refers) , shall not be occupied as permanent place of residence. This accommodation type will in any event only be considered favourably in the case of refurbishment and adaptation of a Protected Structure or group of structures within attendant grounds for tourism use.

ED POL 67

To encourage proposals to reinstate, conserve and/or replace existing ruinous or disused dwellings for holiday home purposes subject to normal Planning considerations relating to design, safe access and provision of any necessary wastewater disposal facilities.

ED POL 68

To require new holiday home / self-catering developments to locate within either established settlements or at established tourism / recreation facilities, other than those developments involving the renovation / conversion of existing buildings.

ED POL 69

Holiday home / self-catering

developments on a farm holding shall be provided by farmhouse extension or by the utilisation of other existing dwellings / structures on the property. Only where it has been demonstrated that these are not viable options, will permission be considered for new build development. Any new build development shall be in close proximity to the existing farmhouse.

ED POL 70

To facilitate the development of hostels along established walking / hiking routes and adjacent to existing tourism / recreation facilities, subject to normal Planning criteria.

4.30 Town and Village Enhancements

The important role that towns and villages throughout the County play as tourist centres and the facilities and services they can provide are recognised by Government, which through 'Realising our Rural Potential' seeks to revitalise town and village centres through the implementation of initiatives such as the Town and Village renewal scheme and others set out within Section 4.11 above.

The Council has sought to improve the overall appearance of the County's towns and villages in recent years through Pride of Place Initiatives, Tidy Towns Initiative and through policies contained within Local Area Plans and through effective development management and enforcement.

The Council has included a policy to work closely

with local communities in implementing village design plans that have been prepared in a public consultation process whilst ensuring that such plans are consistent with adopted Local Area Plans and development objectives contained in the County Development Plan.

ED POL 71

To facilitate and support in the implementation of Village Design Plans and other community led projects to enhance village environments that have been prepared through a public consultation process whilst ensuring that such Plans are consistent with adopted Local Area Plans for such centres and town/village development objectives contained in the County Development Plan.

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