

CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION AND  
CONTEXT

# Chapter 1 Introduction and Context

## Vision

The Vision for County Carlow is to champion quality of life through local employment provision, high quality development, healthy placemaking and transformational regeneration, to grow and attract a diverse innovative economy, to support the transition from a linear to a circular economy, and to a low carbon climate resilient environment, to embrace inclusiveness and enhance our natural and built environment for future generations.

## 1.0 Introduction

The County Development Plan guides future growth and development in the County. The new Carlow County Development Plan sets out the strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the County over the plan period from 2022 to 2028. It contains development management standards, policies and objectives and references statutory guidelines which will inform decision making over the period of the Plan. The approach is centred on the core principle of sustainability with a focus on regeneration, economic development supported by vibrant, liveable, climate resilient communities. This Plan is consistent with both the 'National Planning Framework' (2018) (NPF) and the 'Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy' (2020) (RSES).

This Chapter sets out the legislative background to the Plan and the context in

which the Plan is produced. The overarching Vision is underpinned by Strategic Objectives which inform policies and objectives throughout the Plan.

## 1.1 Plan Making Process

This Plan has been prepared following three periods of consultation which took the form of public and virtual displays, meetings with stakeholders and service providers, written submissions, briefing sessions for Elected Members, Special Council Meetings and the preparation of three Chief Executive's Reports on the submissions received. The process of reviewing the 2015-2021 County Development Plan and preparation of the new Plan formally commenced in June 2020 with an eight-week Pre-Draft public consultation phase. An 'Issues paper' was prepared and widely circulated. Submissions were invited, and the Executive prepared a Chief Executive's Report summarising these submissions and making recommendations on what should be contained in the Draft Plan. A Special Council Meeting was held with the Elected Members of the Council and a number of Directions were issued requesting strategic matters to be addressed in the Draft Plan. A Chief Executive's Draft Plan was circulated to the Elected Members in May 2021 and was subsequently amended by the Elected Members. The Draft Plan then went on public display from 21<sup>st</sup> July to 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021. The Draft Plan consultation process generated 130 submissions from the public, statutory consultees and other stakeholders. Amendments to the Draft Plan - which went out on public consultation in February 2022 generated 35 submissions. This 'Finalised' County Development Plan was duly adopted by the Elected Members at a Special Council

Meeting held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2022 and came into force from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2022.

## 1.2 Legislative Background

The County Development Plan has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended ('The Act'). The legislative basis for the preparation and adoption of a Development Plan is set out in Sections 9 to 12 of The Act. Section 10(1) provides that the Development Plan shall set out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area and shall consist of a Written Statement and a Plan or Plans indicating the development objectives for the area. The Act sets out the mandatory requirements which must be included in a Development Plan and these include objectives for inter alia: the zoning of land; the provision of infrastructure; the conservation and protection of the environment; and, the integration of planning and sustainable development with the social, community and cultural requirements of the area and its population.

Section 10(1A) of The Act provides that the Written Statement of the Development Plan shall include a Core Strategy which shows that the development objectives in the Plan are consistent, as far as practicable, with national and regional development objectives as set out in the NPF, the RSES and with Specific Planning Policy Requirements (SPPRs) set out in Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines. The requirement for the Development Plan to be consistent with inter alia the NPF, RSES and Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines is woven throughout the planning legislation that pertains to the review of an existing and the making of a new County Development Plan. Section 11(1A) of The Act states that the review of the Plan and preparation of the new

Plan shall take account of the "statutory obligations" of any Local Authority in the area and any relevant policies or objectives for the time being of the Government or of any Minister of the Government. Section 12(11) of The Act refers to the making of the Development Plan and similarly states that in making the Plan that members shall be restricted to considering the proper planning and sustainable development of the area to which the Development Plan relates, the statutory obligations of any Local Authority in the area, and any relevant policies or objectives for the time being of the Government or any Minister of the Government.

Section 28(1) of The Act provides that the Minister may, at any time, issue Guidelines to Planning Authorities under Section 28 of The Act regarding any of their functions and, as such, this Plan must be read in conjunction with any new Section 28 Guidelines that maybe published during the life of this Plan.

In accordance with European and national legislation a Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Plan; Appropriate Assessment under the Habitats Directive; and a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment have been prepared, all of which informed the preparation of the County Development Plan.

### 1.2.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment

Environmental assessment is a procedure that ensures that the environmental implications of decisions are considered before such decisions are made. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is the term which has been given to the environmental assessment of plans and programmes, which help determine the nature and location of individual projects taking place. SEA is a systematic process of predicting and evaluating the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a

proposed plan or programme, in order to ensure that these effects are adequately addressed at the earliest stages of decision-making, in tandem with economic, social and other considerations. All plans and programmes<sup>1</sup> to be adopted by the Council shall comply with the requirements set out in the SEA Directive (Directive 2001/42/EC) and transposing Regulations. The SEA process was integrated into the preparation of the County Development Plan and the SEA Environmental Report is contained as a separate document accompanying the Plan (Appendix I).

It is the policy of the Council to:

SEA P1: Implement the monitoring programme as set out in the SEA Environmental Report and Statement, in conjunction with the Regional Assembly and other sources as relevant. This will include the preparation of standalone SEA Monitoring Reports to accompany:

- a) The report required of the Chief Executive under section 15(2) of the Act, including information in relation to progress on, and the results of, monitoring the significant environmental effects of implementation of the development plan;
- b) In advance of the beginning of the review of the next County Development Plan (2028 – 2032) on the significant environmental effects of implementing this Plan.

### 1.2.2 Appropriate Assessment

In accordance with requirements under the EU Habitats Directive (43/92/EEC), the EU Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) and Section 177 of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010, the impacts of the

policies and objectives of all statutory land use plans on certain sites designated for the protection of nature under European legislation, must be assessed as part of the preparation of the Plan. This process, known as Appropriate Assessment, is to determine whether or not the implementation of plan policies or objectives could have negative consequences for the habitats or species for which these sites are designated. Appropriate Assessment was undertaken as part of the plan-making process and a Natura Impact Report is contained as a separate document accompanying the Plan (Appendix II).

### 1.2.3 Strategic Flood Assessment

A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) is an area-wide assessment of the existing risks of flooding and the impact of those risks arising from proposed spatial planning decisions. The national Guidelines 'The Planning System and Flood Risk Management' (2009) state that Planning Authorities are required to introduce flood risk assessment as an integral and leading element of their Development Plan functions. Plans must establish the flood risk assessment requirements for their functional area. The Guidelines further state that flood risk management should be integrated into spatial planning policies at all levels to enhance certainty and clarity in the overall planning process. In conjunction with the SEA process, the Council carried out a SFRA of the County Development Plan. This SFRA is included as Appendix III of the Plan.

### 1.3 Structure of the Plan

The County Development Plan comprises a series of separate, but closely linked and interrelated elements. The Plan comprises two volumes:

<sup>1</sup> As defined by Article 2(a) of the SEA Directive, 'plans and programmes' shall mean plans and programmes, including those co-financed by the European Community, as well as any modifications to them: — which are subject to preparation and/or adoption by an

authority at national, regional or local level or which are prepared by an authority for adoption, through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government, and — which are required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions

Volume 1: Written Statement with accompanying maps

Volume 2: Supporting Appendices

### 1.3.1 Written Statement

The Written Statement comprises the main policy document of the County Development Plan. In the event of any conflict or ambiguity between what is contained within the Written Statement and the supporting maps, the Written Statement will take precedence. The structure of the Written Statement is as follows:

Chapter	Title
Chapter 1	Introduction and Context
Chapter 2	Core Strategy and Settlement Strategy
Chapter 3	Housing
Chapter 4	Enterprise and Employment
Chapter 5	Sustainable Travel and Transport
Chapter 6	Infrastructure and Environmental Management
Chapter 7	Climate Action and Energy
Chapter 8	Community Development
Chapter 9	Landscape and Green Infrastructure
Chapter 10	Natural and Built Heritage
Chapter 11	Tourism and Recreation
Chapter 12	Urban Design and Placemaking
Chapter 13	Rural Design Guide
Chapter 14	Rural Development
Chapter 15	Town and Village Plans / Rural Nodes
Chapter 16	Development Management Standards

Table 1.1: Layout of Plan

### 1.3.2 Appendices

The primary Written Statement is accompanied by a separate volume of Appendices (I – XI) which incorporate a series of complementary and supporting documents, data-sets and guidelines that help inform and clarify the broader strategic context of the Written Statement. The Appendices of the Plan are as follows:

Appendices	Title
Appendix I	Strategic Environmental Assessment
Appendix II	Appropriate Assessment
Appendix III	Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
Appendix IV	Housing Strategy / HNDA
Appendix V	Retail Strategy
Appendix VI	Renewable Energy Strategy
Appendix VII	Landscape Character Assessment
Appendix VIII	Record of Protected Structures
Appendix IX	Section 28 Statement
Appendix X	Infrastructure Assessment
Appendix XI	Policy Context

Table 1.2: Appendices

### 1.4 Strategic Context

Since the adoption of the 2015-2021 County Development Plan, there have been a number of legislative and policy changes in the area of planning, including the adoption of The National Planning Framework and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy setting out the regional framework for implementation and delivery of the NPF. The County Development Plan seeks to combine the overarching ‘top-down’ policy framework at the national and regional level with a ‘bottom-up’ approach to policy development at the local level.

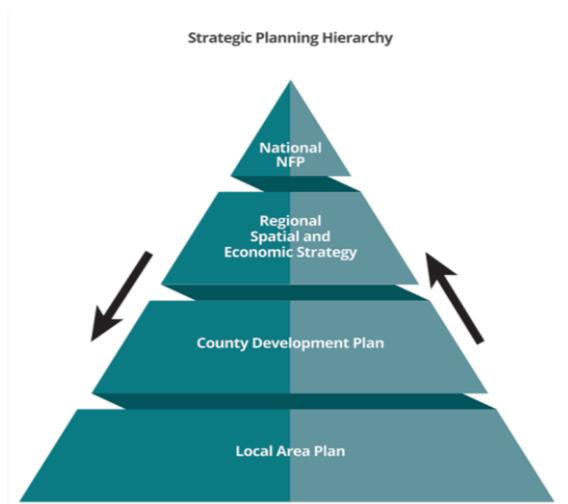


Fig. 1.1 Spatial Planning Hierarchy (NPF)

### 1.4.1 National Planning Framework (NPF)

The NPF sets out the Government’s high-level strategic vision for shaping future growth and development in Ireland up to the year 2040. The companion document, the National Development Plan, provides the accompanying investment strategy that aligns with the strategic objectives of the NPF.

The NPF identifies a set of goals built around the themes of wellbeing, equality and opportunity. These are expressed as National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) and are aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which underpin the overarching vision for the Country (See Fig. 1.2 National Strategic Outcomes).



Fig 1.2: National Strategic Outcomes (Source NPF)

### NPF- Policy

It is the policy of the Council to:

NPF P1: Ensure consistency with and support the achievement of the National Strategic Outcomes and National Policy Objectives of the National Planning Framework.

#### 1.4.2 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

The RSES for the Southern Region 2020-2032 seeks to implement the NPF at regional level and is based on a vision to:

- Nurture all places to realise their full potential;
- Protect and enhance the environment;
- Work to achieve economic prosperity and improve quality of life for all;
- Accommodate expanded growth and development in suitable locations; and
- Promote the region's international reputation as one of Europe's most creative, innovative and greenest liveable regions.

The RSES for the Southern Region aims to build upon the strengths and potential of the Region to become a more stable, productive, climate-resilient and desirable place for the benefit of the population. The RSES sets out 11 no. Strategy Statements which seek to build a strong, resilient and sustainable region (See Fig. 1.3 RSES Strategy Statement).

#### RSES- Policy

It is the policy of the Council to:

RSES P1: Ensure consistency with and support the achievement of the Regional Spatial Objectives (RSOs) and Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region.



Fig 1.3: RSES Strategy Statement (Source RSES)

**Key strategic issues for Carlow as contained in the RSES include:**

- Designation of Carlow Town as a key Town to function as an economic self-sustaining regional driver and a focus of significant growth within the county. The inter-regional role of Carlow is acknowledged given its location to the north of the Southern Region and adjacent to the Eastern Midlands Regional Assembly Region.
- Recognition of the opportunities afforded to Carlow as part of a network of regionally significant drivers of collaboration and growth located on the Waterford-Kilkenny-Carlow-Dublin M9/Rail Network/Axis.
- Supporting the preparation of a cross-boundary Joint Urban Area Plan with Laois County Council for the Greater Carlow Graigueoullen Urban Area.
- Acknowledging Carlow as an important regional center of education and research, supporting the establishment of a Multi-Campus Technological University for the South East.
- Population target of 63,000 (+8,000 (10%) by 2026 and 65,500 (+8,500 (14%) by 2031).
- Supporting the strong network of towns, villages and diverse rural areas in achieving the objectives of the NPF.

**1.4.3 Climate Action**

National Government policy has increasingly recognised the key strategic challenge of climate change. The Government has published the ‘Climate Action Plan 2019 and 2021’, the ‘National Adaptation Framework’ (2018), and the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, all of which combine to comprise a strong legislative and policy framework for climate action. At a local level, the Council has adopted the ‘Carlow Climate Adaptation Strategy 2019’ and is a signatory of the Climate Action Charter that commits Local Government to driving forward meaningful climate action in their communities.

**1.4.4 Sustainable Development Goals**

The 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out a holistic approach to achieving a sustainable future for all. Ireland is committed to achieving the SDGs as set out in the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment ‘The Sustainable

Development Goals National Implementation Plan 2018-2020’ (2018).

Carlow County Council is the current local authority sector Champion for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The purpose of the SDG Champions Programme is firstly to raise public awareness of the SDGs, and secondly to illustrate practical ways in which organisations and individuals can contribute to achieving the SDGs, using Champion organisations’ practices as examples. The UN Sustainable Development Goals have informed the preparation of this Plan.

**Sustainable Development Goals - Policy**

It is the policy of the Council to:

SDG P1: Contribute, as practicable, via this Plan, towards achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



Fig. 1.4 UN Sustainable Development Goals (Source UN)

## 1.5 County Carlow in Context

Carlow is strategically located in the north of the southern region with strong links to the Midlands and the Greater Dublin Area. It extends to 897km<sup>2</sup> and borders Counties Kildare, Laois, Kilkenny, Wexford and Wicklow.

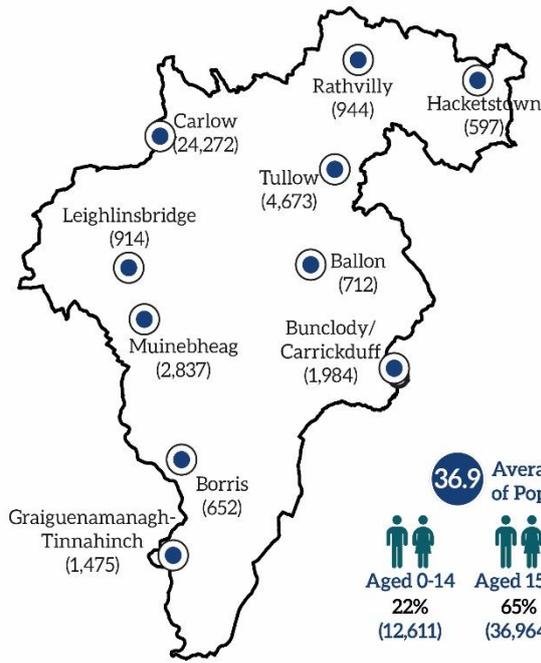
In 2016, the County had a population of 56,932 (+4.1% since 2011). The County's population has grown consistently and steadily since 1996. Carlow had the highest percentage growth of the Counties in the South East (SPA) between 2011-2016. Carlow has a relatively young population with just under half (47.7%) of its population under 34 years of age.

Within the County 48% of the population reside in urban areas (i.e. towns with population in excess of 1,500). Carlow town is the County's largest urban centre and thirteenth largest town in the Country. It accounts for over 35% of the County population and is the predominant driver of

employment with a very significant employment base. It is strategically positioned on the M9 and N80 road network and on the Dublin to Waterford rail line.

Tullow and Muine Bheag are classified as District Towns and comprise well developed serviced settlements with jobs supporting services and community facilities. These are important towns at a district level and have capacity for continued commensurate growth to become more self-sustaining.

County Carlow also possesses a network of attractive towns and villages, with varied landscapes and a high-quality natural environment. The County has a rich and varied natural and built heritage which contributes to the County's character, identity and sense of place. Resources in the County must be carefully managed to develop our society, economy and people in a sustainable manner. The profile of the County is outlined in Fig 1.5.



**Population in 2016**  
56,931

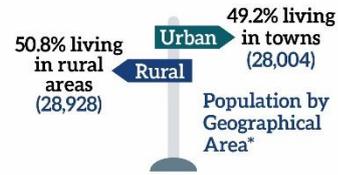
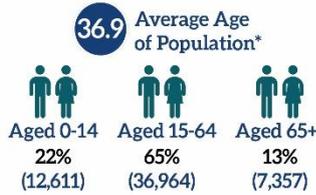


+2,320 (+4.2%) from 2011  
+6,583 (+13.1%) from 2006

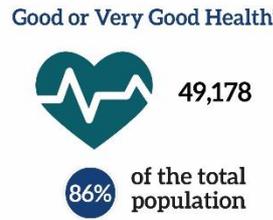
+8,068 (+14.2%) 2016 to 2031

1.2% of State (4.76m)

4th Lowest Population in State



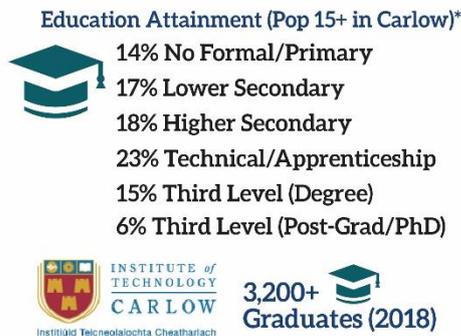
Our Community



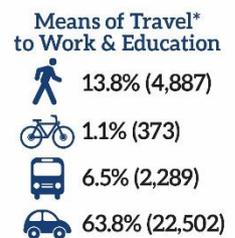
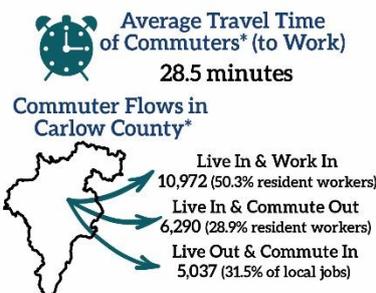
Homes & Housing



Education



Getting to Work



\* Data sourced from CSO Census 2016

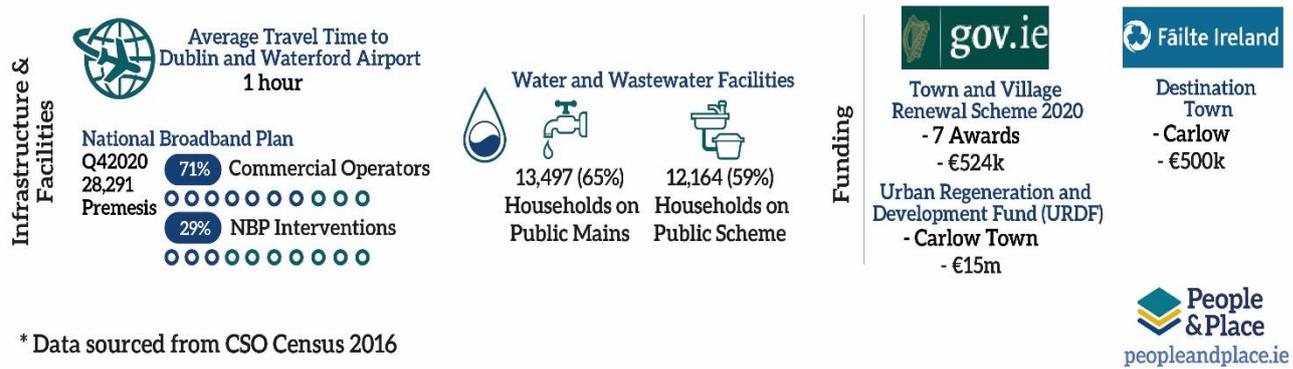
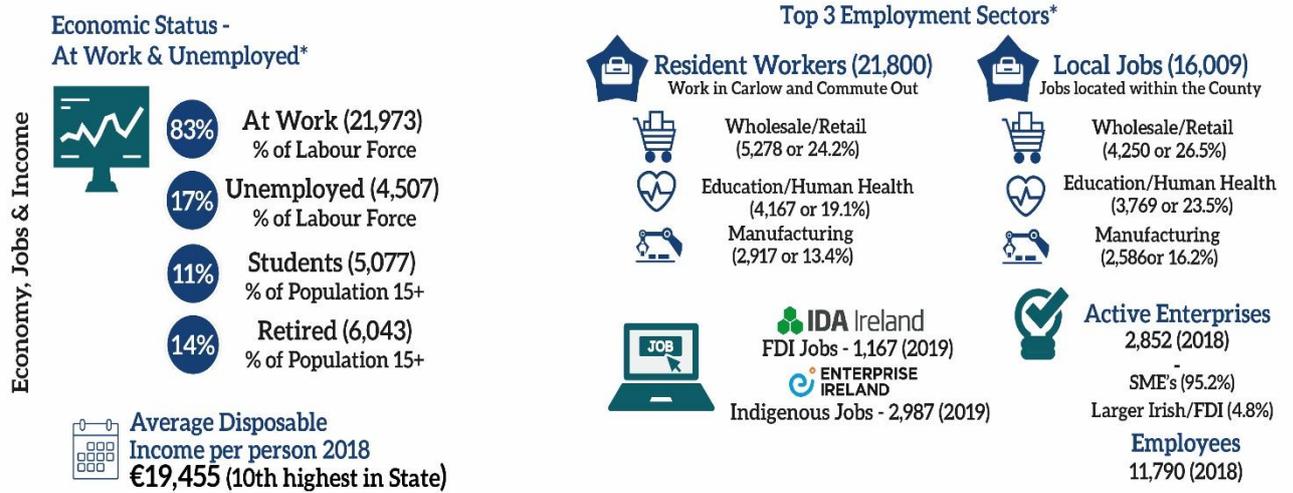


Fig: 1.5 County Carlow - Profile

### 1.5.1 Carlow Town

The RSES for the Southern Region recognises the strategic role of Carlow Town which has been designated a Key Town within the region and as a regional and inter-regional economic growth driver. Carlow Town is a regional centre for education, healthcare, public services, shopping and arts, culture, leisure and recreation for a wide area. It is also a dynamic base for education, learning and development with two Institutions of Higher Education, the Institute of Technology Carlow and Carlow College, St. Patrick's.

A key objective of this Plan is to promote the sustainable and compact growth of Carlow Town and strengthen its position as a self-sustaining regional and inter-regional economic driver. This plan incorporates various policies and objectives that support regeneration of the town centre, economic development, creation of sustainable healthy communities and contribute to compact growth.

The zoning map for the former Town Council area of Carlow Town is contained in Chapter 15. A Joint Urban Area Plan will be prepared following the adoption of this County Development Plan.

Strategic objectives for the future development of Carlow Town comprise:

**(i) Regeneration:** "Project Carlow 2040 A Vision for Regeneration" is a strategy containing transformational and aspiring ideas for sustainable development and the creation of a vibrant connected town centre. The long-term vision of the Regeneration Strategy is to transform Carlow Town into a sustainable high-quality urban environment that will offer business opportunities and a better quality of life for all. Through the

implementation of the Strategy Carlow Town will become:

- A town that prioritises the wellbeing of its visitors and residents.
- A centre for education, cutting edge business and high-quality retailing.
- An innovative, ambitious, and successful place.

The Strategy focuses development on the Town Centre and identifies opportunities in the built environment and the public realm which can be developed to the benefit of the community and the local economy. In this regard it includes a number of interventions which will act as a catalyst for the regeneration of the Town. Each intervention incorporates key ideas locally within each area, while being aware of the part each intervention will play in the broader Regeneration Strategy for the Town.

The Strategy also contains Guiding Principles that seek to address the existing challenges facing Carlow Town by building on its many assets and attractors. The Town Centre has a range of great features and how these features are used will define the future of the Town. Town Centre vibrancy will be enhanced through diversity of use including retail, commercial, start-up, education, hospitality, social and recreation spaces.

**(ii) Economic Development:** Carlow Town is the principal centre of economic activity in County Carlow and one of the larger Key Towns in the Southern Region. It has many economic attributes such as its third level education provision and other educational institutes, proximity to Dublin, the River Barrow, tourism, retail services and cultural facilities. It has a role as a major employment, retail and services centre. Development of Carlow Town as a regional

and inter-regional growth driver will require a significant increase in job opportunities to sustain the existing and growing population. This Plan sets out an economic strategy to deliver on the regional and inter regional role for Carlow Town.

**(iii) Residential Development:** As a designated Key Town, Carlow Town is to play a critical role in underpinning the RSES and ensuring a consolidated spread of growth beyond cities to the sub-regional level. The success of Carlow as a Key Town will be dependent on the delivery of targeted compact growth of a minimum of 30%, through regeneration and redevelopment of vacant, infill and/or brownfield sites. In this regard, the Project Carlow 2040 Regeneration Strategy also seeks to re-establish a residential population within the Town Centre through the promotion of and provision for Town Centre living, as well as improved public realm spaces and better access and promotion of civic uses.

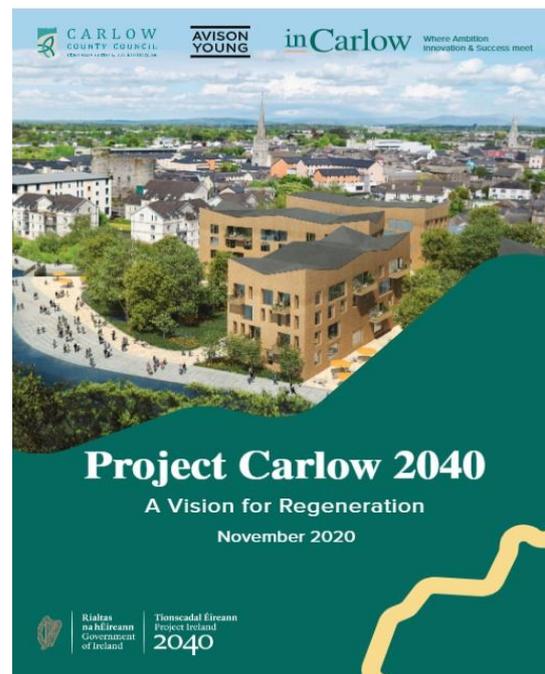
**(iv) Tourism Development:** In 2019 Fáilte Ireland launched its 'Destination Towns' initiative, which included a €15.5 million funding programme from which €500,000 was allocated to each successful Local Authority in two rounds (in 2019 and 2020). The Council was successful in its application to Fáilte Ireland for this funding for Carlow Town, which will contribute towards enhancing public spaces together with wayfinding in the town in a way that develops tourism by engaging visitors and enhancing their experiences.

**(v) Enabling Infrastructure:** The goal of achieving compact growth will require improved accessibility, sustainable mobility, and the requisite infrastructure to enable Carlow Town to grow as a Key Town. The importance of protecting and investing in

road, rail, water, wastewater, and energy infrastructure is recognised in this Plan in order to facilitate the sustainable development of Carlow Town as a Key Town.

**(vi) Urban Area Plan (UAP)/Local Area Plan (LAP):** A statutory joint UAP/LAP will be prepared for Greater Carlow Urban Area by Carlow County Council and Laois County Council during the lifetime of this Plan. The UAP will incorporate Carlow Environs and the Graiguecullen Urban Area. The Joint UAP will be informed by a Local Transport Plan. It will provide a coordinated planning framework to identify and deliver strategic sites and regeneration areas for the future physical, economic and social development of Carlow Town to ensure it achieves targeted compact growth and to ensure that it has the capacity to grow sustainably and secure investment as a Key Town.

(See Policies CSP 1 – CSP 5 Carlow Town Policies)

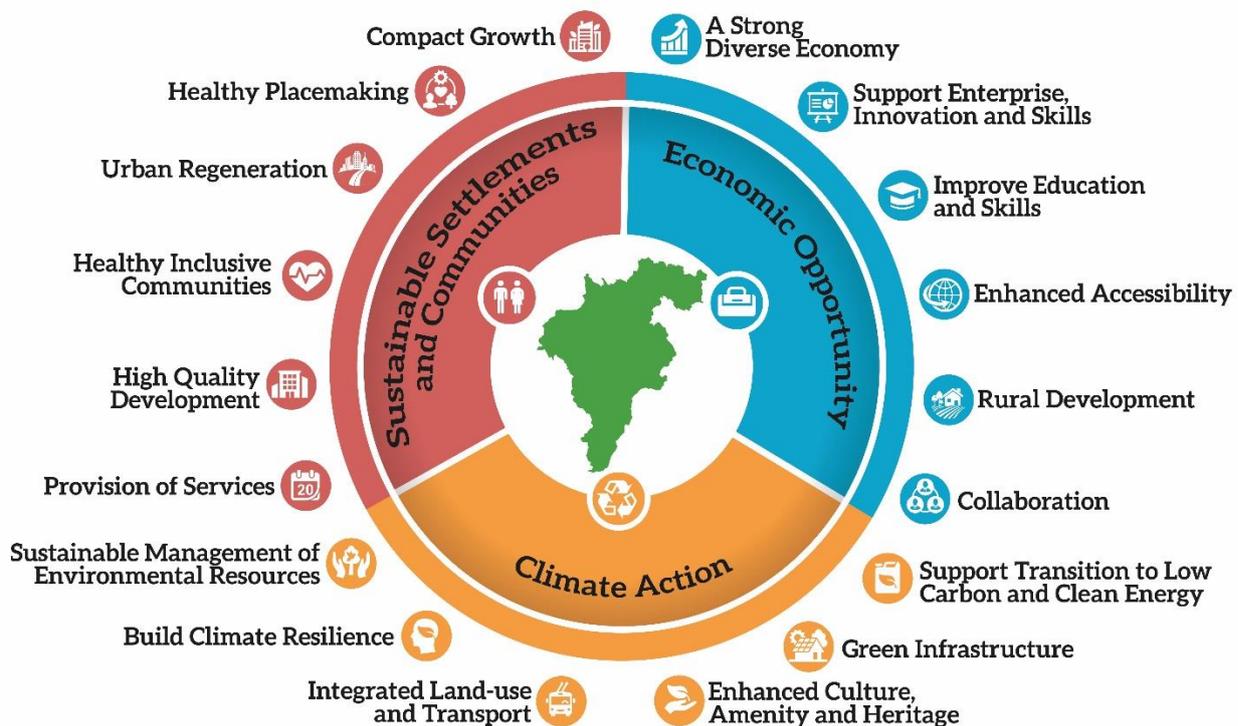


<https://www.localenterprise.ie/Carlow/Enterprise-Development/Project-Carlow-2040/>

## 1.6 Strategic Themes and Objectives

The Vision for County Carlow is to *champion quality of life through local employment provision, high quality development, healthy placemaking and transformational regeneration, to grow and attract a diverse innovative economy, to support the transition from a linear to a circular economy, and to a low carbon climate resilient environment delivering in a manner that embraces inclusiveness and enhances our natural and built environment for future generations.*

Carlow County Council will work for the common good of the people of County Carlow in partnership with the communities and relevant agencies to deliver quality services and to promote sustainable economic, social and cultural development for current and future generations. To deliver on the Development Plan Vision over the lifetime of the Plan there are a number of key cross cutting and interrelated themes which underpin the Plan as follows:



## Strategic Objectives

It is a strategic objective of the Council to:

- S O1: Direct new development in accordance with the Core and Settlement Strategies which will provide for the sustainable development of the County for the period 2022-2028 in accordance with the principles of compact growth, consolidation and regeneration.
- S O2: Support and promote the role of Carlow Town as a Regional and Inter-regional economic growth driver and to fulfil its role as a Key Town, focussed on regeneration, implementation of Project Carlow 2040 A Vision for Regeneration, sustainable development, quality of life and economic investment.
- S O3: Support and facilitate the development and further expansion of IT Carlow, its links with industry and its transition with IT Waterford to the Technological University of the South East which is critical for the optimum social and economic development of the region.
- S O4: Promote consolidation and growth in the District Towns of Tullow and Muine Bheag along with targeted investment to improve local employment, services and sustainable transport options, building on existing assets.
- S O5: Maintain and promote a broad economic and employment base in the County which seeks to maximise the economic assets of the County, including third level institutes, the strategic location of Carlow proximate to Dublin and Waterford Cities along the M9 and the Midlands along the N80.
- S O6: Support the role of rural areas with an increased emphasis on the renewal of smaller towns and villages and to seek to sustain the livelihood of rural communities by promoting the development of the wider rural economy while recognising the need to sustainably manage land and resources.
- S O7: Protect and enhance the unique character and identity of Carlow's towns and villages and improve quality of life and well-being through regeneration, healthy placemaking, good quality design with the creation of attractive public spaces that are vibrant, distinctive, safe and accessible and which promote and facilitate positive social interaction.
- S O8: Transition to a low carbon and climate resilient County by developing renewable indigenous energy resources, by supporting energy efficiency, reducing energy demand, and by implementing mitigation and adaptation responses to climate change.
- S O9: Afford suitable protection to the environment, built, cultural and natural heritage assets of Carlow, to ensure their survival for future generations and to ensure they contribute to the future sustainable development of the County.
- S O10: Conserve protect and enhance the County's Green Infrastructure

including ecosystems and habitats) and associated biodiversity and so provide communities with a wide range of environmental, social and economic benefits (ecosystem services).

S O11: Promote the provision and maintenance of high quality infrastructure and infrastructural networks and environmental services which seek to complement the overall economic and settlement strategy and contribute to the sustainable development of the area.

S O12: Ensure the proper integration of transportation and land use planning through the increased use of sustainable transport modes and the minimisation of travel demand to

achieve a sustainable, integrated and low carbon transport system.

S O13: Promote, develop and maintain sustainable communities in the County, through the provision of a range of facilities and services to meet the diverse and expanding needs of all residents including the needs of younger persons, thereby supporting community participation and social inclusion, and improving the quality of life for everyone.

S O14: Support and promote tourism in the county as a key economic driver in a sustainable manner that is compatible with the sensitivity of rural areas, the existing quality of life, and the protection and enhancement of the county's natural environment.

