



Chapter 4

Economic Development, Retail and Tourism

Chapter 4: Economic Development, Retail and Tourism

Aim: To support the sustainable economic development of Carlow-Graigucullen, by leveraging its strategic location, accessibility, and Key Town designation to build a competitive, innovative, and productive urban economy, and by protecting and enhancing its tourism product and its role as a regional centre for retailing.

4.0 Introduction

The National Planning Framework (NPF) identifies a strong economy supported by enterprise, innovation, and skills as one of ten National Strategic Outcomes or goals which can be achieved by building regional economic drivers and leveraging the potential of places. In line with this national policy the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) for the Southern Region and Eastern and Midlands Region (EMRA) have designated Carlow-Graigucullen a large-scale Key Town based on attributes including:

- A significant population scale.
- An urban centre functioning as a self-sustaining regional driver.
- A strategically located urban centre with accessibility and significant influence in an inter-regional context.
- A large economically active service and/or county town and regional economic driver.
- A diverse employment base.
- A higher order retail function and strong retail sector.

The Economic Strategies for the Southern Region and the EMRA are based on several key principles shown in figure 4.1. The challenge for Carlow-Graigucullen in this regard will be to ensure that the conditions to support its Key Town designation including a competitive, innovative, and productive urban economy, are embraced, and developed. Central to the future economic growth of the joint urban area will be support for placemaking, for enterprise and for employment, through the implementation of Project Carlow 2040 and the delivery of the six Intervention Areas set out in the regeneration strategy. Co-ordinating investment in placemaking with the development of existing economic attributes such as third level education provision, a proximity to Dublin and Waterford, the River Barrow, retail and tourism, cultural facilities, and the identification of locations for strategic employment development will also be critical in ensuring future economic competitiveness and enterprise growth.



Figure 4.1: Economic Strategy Principles – Combined details from the RSES for the Southern Region & the RSES for the Eastern and Midlands Region (EMRA)

4.1 Economic Assets and Employment Profile

The economic landscape of Carlow-Graiguecullen, given its resources and strategic location, has the potential to maximise the formation of new enterprises and business and the continued success and development of existing ones. Table 4.1 below outlines the key economic assets of the joint urban area.

TABLE 4.1: ECONOMIC ASSETS OF CARLOW-GRAIGUECULLEN

Scale	With a Key Town designation and a population of 27,351 Carlow-Graiguecullen has critical mass to be an attractive base for employers. The existing employment base of 11,492 jobs based on Census 2022 is significant and diverse across several categories including manufacturing, commerce and trade, public administration, transport and communications, and professional services.
Function	Carlow-Graiguecullen is strategically located on the boundary of the South-East and Eastern and Midlands regions, with a pivotal inter-regional role and with strong links to the Greater Dublin Area, all supported by good access to transport infrastructure. Carlow Town is a regional centre for education, healthcare, public services, shopping and arts, culture, leisure, and recreation.
Human Capital	The availability of higher education is an important component to attract enterprise and employment to an area. There is a long history of higher-level education and research in the joint urban area, with two institutes of higher education comprising Carlow SETU and Carlow College St. Patricks, and with Teagasc Research Centre in Oak Park. Further education and training are also available through the Carlow Institute of Further Education and Training, which is the largest provider of courses in the region.
Placemaking	Carlow-Graiguecullen is an attractive place to live and work, offering excellent quality of life, affordable living costs, a range of amenities and distinct natural, built, and cultural heritage. The implementation of Project Carlow 2040 through the delivery of the six Intervention Areas set out in the regeneration strategy will be central to supporting the development of the local economy.
Enterprise Ecosystem	A number of significant enterprises such as MSD, Netwatch, Unum Ireland, and more recently NUA, have a strong presence in the area. These enterprises present



opportunities for further clustering and for new spin off sectors, ensuring the area becomes an attractive destination and a driver of business and innovation. The opportunity also exists to build on and develop synergies between Carlow SETU and Carlow College St. Patricks and existing and future enterprises.

Connectivity

The joint urban area benefits from road network connectivity to Dublin and Waterford via the M9, and to the Midlands and South-East via the N80. Carlow Railway Station also provides rail connectivity to Dublin and Waterford. There is also strong international connectivity with direct access routes to the Ports of Waterford and Rosslare, Dublin, and Waterford Airports.

Telecommunications are also a critical component for digital connectivity, connecting people, places and ideas through digital networks which are vital for continued economic growth. Carlow-Graiguecullen is well placed with a network of communications services, ensuring both high speed and resilient connectivity.

Natural Capital


Natural assets such as the River Barrow and Burren River contribute to healthy placemaking as green and blue areas for leisure and amenity, and also provide important ecosystem services which adapt to climate change. Project Carlow 2040 recognises the potential to better utilise these assets in a way that fully realises their amenity value, and in a manner that will improve connectivity to the town centre and enhance the public realm.

Critical Infrastructure

As a designated Key Town, Carlow-Graiguecullen has the necessary key infrastructure and services to support economic development. In addition to the road, rail and telecommunications infrastructure referred to under the section 'Connectivity', the Area Based Transport Assessment (ABTA) carried out alongside this JULAP also identifies a number of strategy options to support new and improved active travel infrastructure, and to enhance connectivity between the town centre, residential areas, and key employment sites.

As already discussed in Chapter 2 of this JULAP, the economy of the urban area is driving and shaping the economic profile of much of County Carlow, and particularly the villages and rural areas that adjoin it, including those settlements proximate to the urban area in County Laois. The key employment data revealed from Census

2022 is outlined separately in Chapter 2. For the purposes of this chapter Figure 4.2 illustrates the type of occupations/industry that the residents of Carlow-Graiguecullen are employed in, based on a comparison of Census 2016 and 2022 data. Commerce and trade represented the highest employment sector with 2,762. In view of the



commercial and retail profile of Carlow-Graiguecullen, it is unsurprising that the combined commerce/trade and professional service sectors account for almost half of the working population. Below commerce/trade and professional services, manufacturing industries accounted for the next largest working population in Census 2022. On a positive note overall, a comparison of the two Census periods reveals an increase in the working population of all industries from 2016 to 2022, and most notably for professional services, commerce/trade, and manufacturing industries.

Traditionally, Carlow-Graiguecullen had a strong manufacturing and industrial activities which provided a strong employment base for the joint urban area. The town was home to large employers such as the Carlow Sugar Factory and its sister company Erin Foods, in addition to Braun, Lapple and Hydro Hoist. Companies such as the Sugar Factory and Lapple were committed to the upskilling and education of their workers and this also left a lasting skill base and a wealth of entrepreneurs in Carlow-Graiguecullen. The legacy of these factories has created the basis for the establishment of other industries which have developed and are located in Carlow Town such as Burnside Autocyl and MSD.

The growing pharma industry is now one of the largest employers following the opening of the MSD factory in 2008. Other significant enterprises operating in the area include Netwatch Unum Ireland, and more recently NUA have occupied the former Braun factory. The former Lapple factory on the O'Brien Road is now occupied by Moore Environmental and Central Engineering, and the former Hydro Hoist site is occupied by the REL Group. All these existing enterprises have developed as important

employers, ensuring that the area continues to have a strong employment base. They also present opportunities for further clustering and for new spin off sectors, contributing to the joint urban area becoming an attractive destination and a driver of enterprise and innovation.

In addition to the foregoing, the IDA have recently completed (in 2023) the development of an Advance Factory Building on the Dublin Road at the northeast end of the joint urban area. This building will provide light industrial, office and ancillary support areas, and has been designed to provide the potential for future expansion and flexibility in use. Carlow and Laois County Councils and the IDA will continue to promote the availability of serviced industrial sites and buildings to appropriate industries where available.

The public and semi-state sector also makes a large contribution to the economy of the Carlow-Graiguecullen area including significant employers such as Carlow SETU, Carlow College St. Patricks, Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment, Carlow County Council, Teagasc, and the HSE.

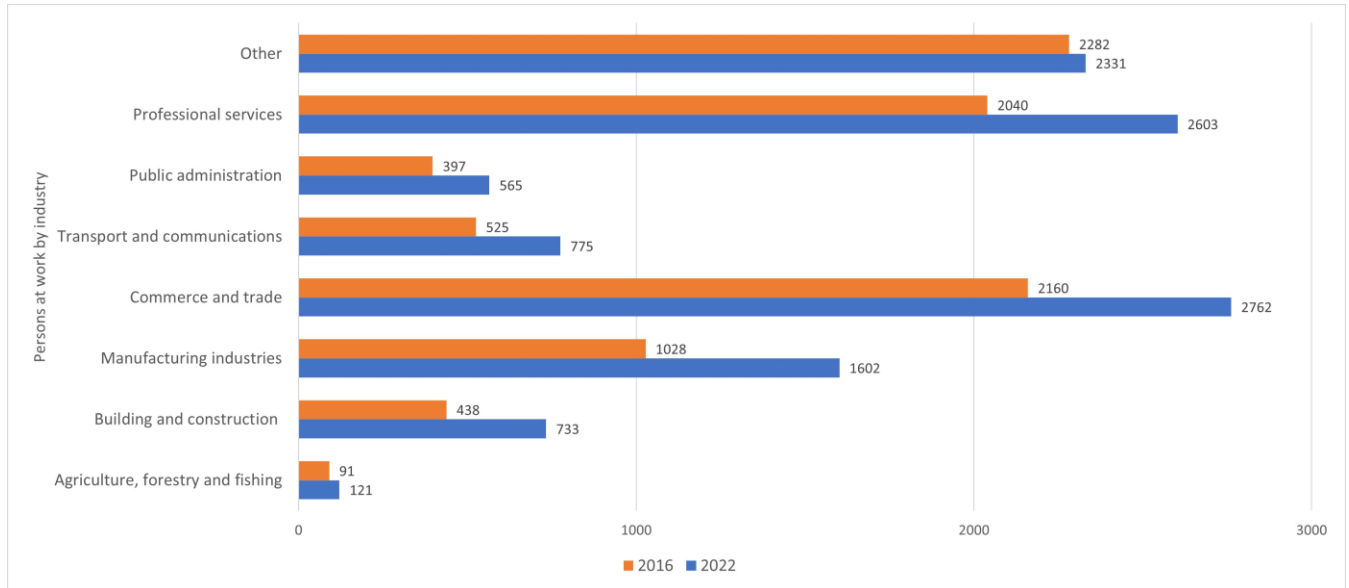


Figure 4.2: Persons at work by industry in Carlow-Graiguecullen (Source: Census 2016)

4.2 Economic Development Strategy

Carlow-Graiguecullen has many positive economic attributes as already outlined in Table 4.1. These attributes are grounded in its Key Town designation, strategic regional location, significant employment base, transport connectivity, and third level education provision. At the same time, the joint urban area, like other comparable regional and county towns, faces challenges such as town centre vitality, vacancy, the underutilisation of land and buildings, and retail competitiveness.

This JULAP therefore recognises that key to the economic development of Carlow-Graiguecullen will be the ability for it to maximise its existing economic assets and overcome those challenges that could inhibit economic growth. It is also recognised that one of the key enablers in attracting new investment and employment to Carlow-Graiguecullen will be the availability of appropriately zoned lands. In this regard, Carlow County Council and Laois County Council will aim

to ensure that sufficient land is zoned to accommodate and support a diverse economic base.

The strategy to support economic development will be achieved by:

- Providing the infrastructure and zoned land necessary to attract economic development in recognition of the status of Carlow-Graiguecullen as a Key Town.
- Protecting zoned land for employment generating uses from inappropriate development that would negate future economic activity.
- Promoting Carlow-Graiguecullen as a self-sustaining regional and inter-regional economic growth centre.
- Recognising the strong and functional economic ties between Carlow Town (Town Centre) and Graiguecullen.
- Maximising existing economic assets as outlined in Table 4.1.
- Prioritising sectors likely to support significant economic growth in Carlow-Graiguecullen, including construction and manufacturing, commerce, professional services, and retail.
- Supporting all forms of employment generation subject to compliance with proper planning and environmental considerations.
- Capitalising on existing significant infrastructure to further strengthen the local employment base, including connectivity along the M9, the N80 and the Dublin-Waterford Railway Line, and strong international connectivity with direct access routes to the Ports of Waterford and Rosslare and Dublin and Waterford Airports.
- Facilitating the implementation of Project Carlow 2040 – A Vision for Regeneration as set out in its Regeneration Action Plan and Urban Design and Implementation Plan, in order to support the vitality of the town centre and ensure it becomes an attractive destination and driver for commerce/retail and innovation.
- Addressing vacancy, dereliction and the underutilisation of lands and property.
- Supporting the development of an economic quarter and transport interchange on underutilised lands around Carlow Railway Station subject to compliance with proper planning and environmental considerations.
- Continuing to protect, strengthen, and develop the retail functions of Carlow-Graiguecullen in accordance with the Retail Strategy for County Carlow 2022-2028 and the Retail Strategy for County Laois 2021-2027.
- Progressing the delivery of the proposed measures and interventions in the Carlow-Graiguecullen Area Based Transport Assessment (ABTA) to support a shift towards sustainable travel and transport, including public transport and walking and cycling infrastructure, and permeability/connections.
- Supporting the intensification, renewal, and modernisation of existing industrial and enterprise floorspace in the joint urban area subject to compliance with proper planning and environmental considerations.
- Supporting proposals for foreign direct investment and indigenous investment.
- Guiding enterprise and employment developments to strategic employment lands in the joint urban area.
- Developing potential economic opportunities through consultation with Carlow and Laois County Council’s Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs), the IDA, the OPW, and Carlow Chamber of Commerce and Laois Chamber Alliance.
- Developing the tourism economy of Carlow-Graiguecullen in a manner that improves its profile as a tourism destination, grows tourism related employment, and enhances its tourist product offering and visitor experience.

4.2.1 Locations for Economic Development

The Infrastructural Assessment (IA) accompanying the JULAP has informed the zoning of lands for economic development. The IA ensures that all land zoned for development can be serviced within the lifetime of the Plan. While employment related uses can be facilitated on a number of land use zonings, there will be a specific focus in the JULAP on lands zoned Town Centre, Enterprise and Employment, and Business and Innovation. Notwithstanding the Town Centre First approach, it is also acknowledged that there are many economic lands uses that may not be appropriate in a town centre location for reasons relating to their size, nature of the activity or access / road network requirements. Therefore, the land use zonings have also been carefully considered to ensure that they are compatible with the wider area and take cognisance of ensuring the delivery of consolidated and compact growth.

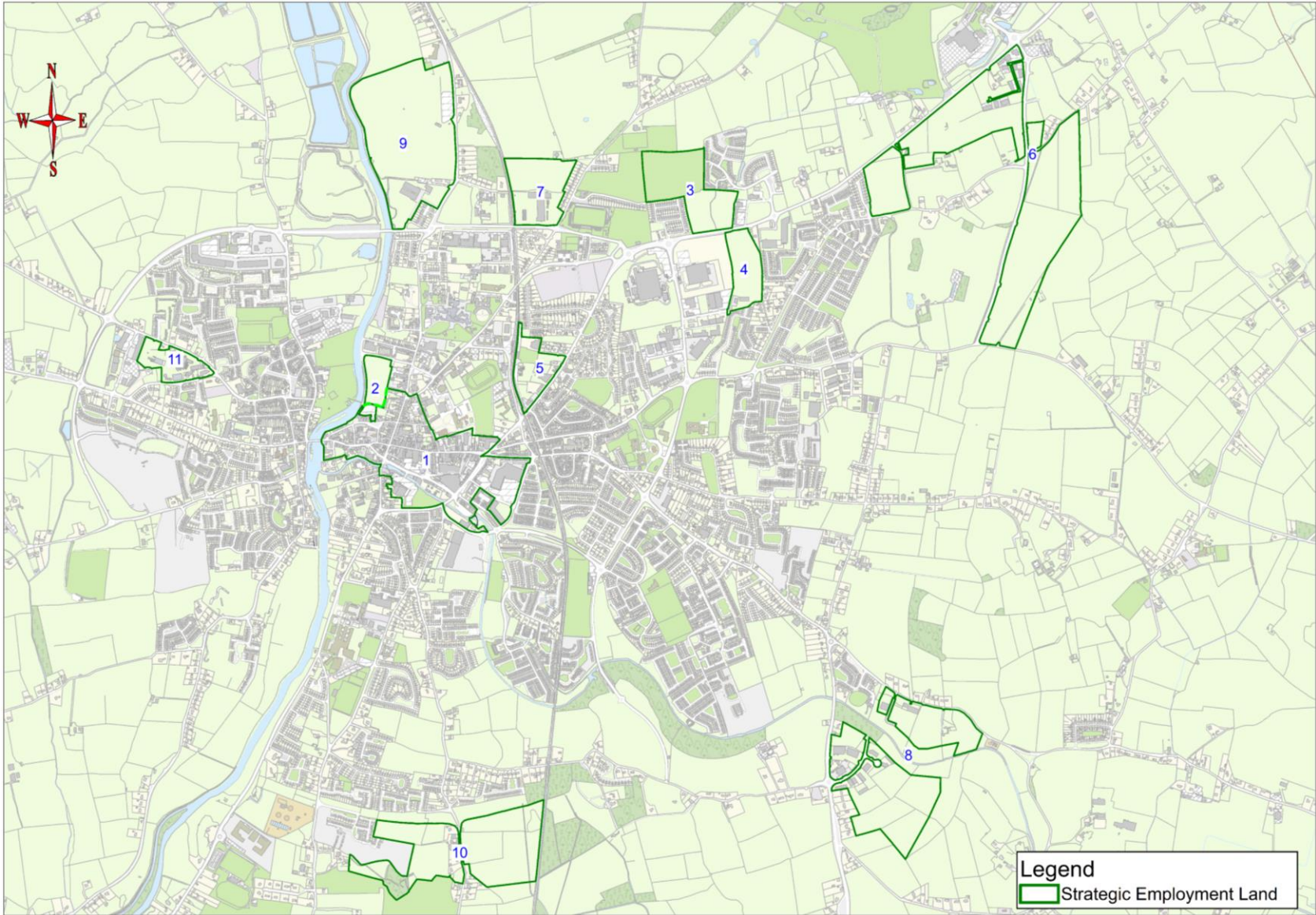
The land zoned for economic development will ensure Carlow-Graiguecullen has the ability to maintain, increase and diversify its employment base in a manner that reinforces its Key Town designation, and at the same time ensuring that it is well positioned to capitalise on and accommodate unexpected economic development opportunities that may arise during the plan period.

A total of c. 219 hectares of land is zoned for 'Enterprise and Employment' uses in this JULAP, and c. 40 hectares is zoned for 'Business and Innovation' uses. Of these two figures combined and the lands they encompass, a total of c. 160

hectares is undeveloped. In terms of the area of Graiguecullen in Co. Laois, c. 11 hectares of land is zoned for Enterprise and Employment uses, c. 1.5 hectares of which is undeveloped. These lands, in conjunction with other mixed-use zonings such as Town Centre, are considered adequate to serve the needs of a wide range of enterprise and employment opportunities over the lifetime of the JULAP and beyond.

4.3 Strategic Employment Land

Map 4.1 and Table 4.2 identifies strategic employment lands in Carlow-Graiguecullen. For further details also refer to Land Use Zoning Map 12.1 and Table 12.1: Land Use Zoning Categories, and Objectives and Land Use Acceptability as provided in Chapter 12. The layout and design of development proposals on these strategic land banks shall be of a high standard and quality. Carlow County Council and Laois County Council will support employment generating development proposals on these lands subject to compliance with proper planning and environmental criteria.



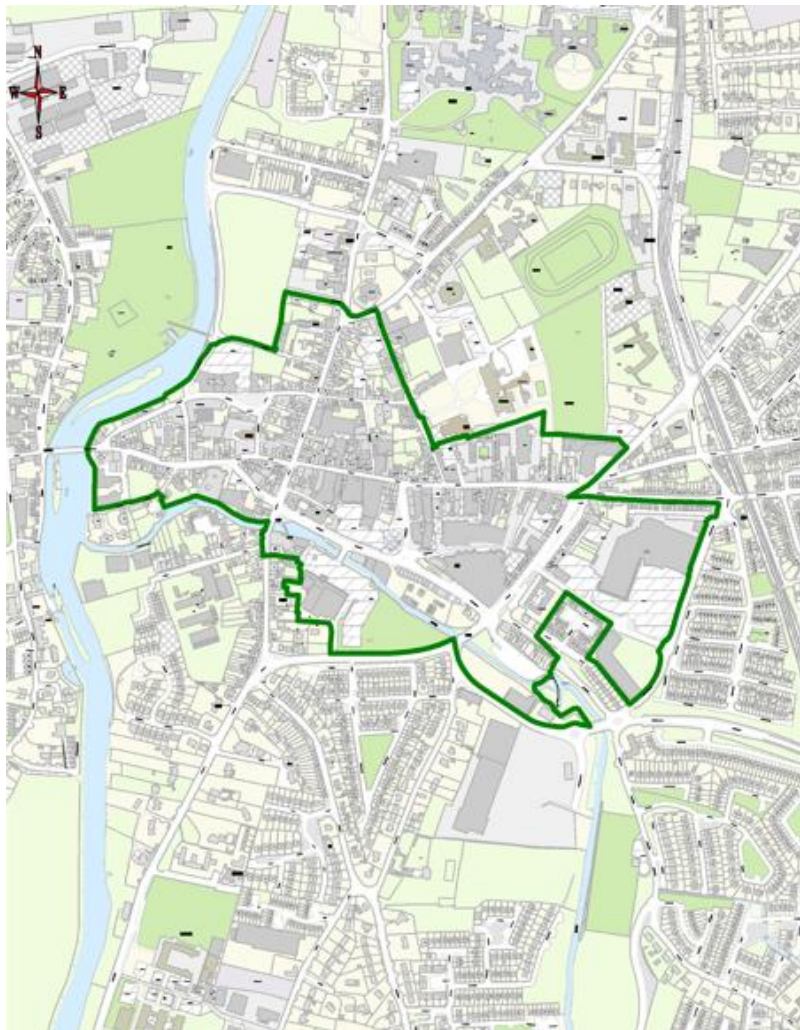
Map 4.1: Strategic Employment Land Carlow-Graigecullen

TABLE 4.2: STRATEGIC EMPLOYMENT LAND

1-Core Retail Area

The retail offer on the Town Centre zoned land is distributed between the traditional commercial core located along Tullow Street, Dublin Street and the Potato Market and the more recent shopping centres. Retail units on Tullow Street and Dublin Street tend to be of a relatively small-scale accommodating uses such as independent retailers, boutiques, cafés, and restaurants while the newer shopping centres (Carlow Shopping Centre and Fairgreen Shopping Centre) provide larger floor plates making them more attractive to multiples and chain stores.

The Core Retail Area forms a central part of the overall Town Centre land use zoning. This is the preferred area for retailing to ensure the vibrancy and vitality of the town centre. However, in recognition of the on-going changes to retailing formats, the consolidation of the footprint of the town centre will also be encouraged to include a range of other functions including those relating to office, enterprise, tourism and culture, and hospitality uses, as well as live/work units, residential, and remote working hubs. Retail is discussed in further detail under Section 4.4.



2-Land adjoining Barrow Track

This area comprises c. 3.5 hectares of land at the western end of the Town Centre zoning, adjoining the Barrow Track to the west and the rear of properties fronting Dublin Street to the east. The land has frontage along the Barrow Track (to the west), Cox's Lane (to the south), and Andy Murphy Road (to the north). It is partly within and adjoining the designated Core Retail Area for Carlow Town and represents an important opportunity to consolidate and develop the town centre at its western end by incorporating a high-quality mixed-use development with commercial uses, which facilitates new connections to the town centre and provides a new innovative and vibrant urban quarter integrated with adjoining land uses and addressing the River Barrow.

The preparation of a masterplan shall accompany any development proposal on this land, which shall take account of the provisions of Project Carlow 2040 – A Vision for Regeneration in relation to the Barrow Track/Civic Spine Intervention Area. The masterplan shall include a vision for the overall land parcel to ensure development does not take place in a piecemeal manner and suitably integrates with existing development and infrastructure.

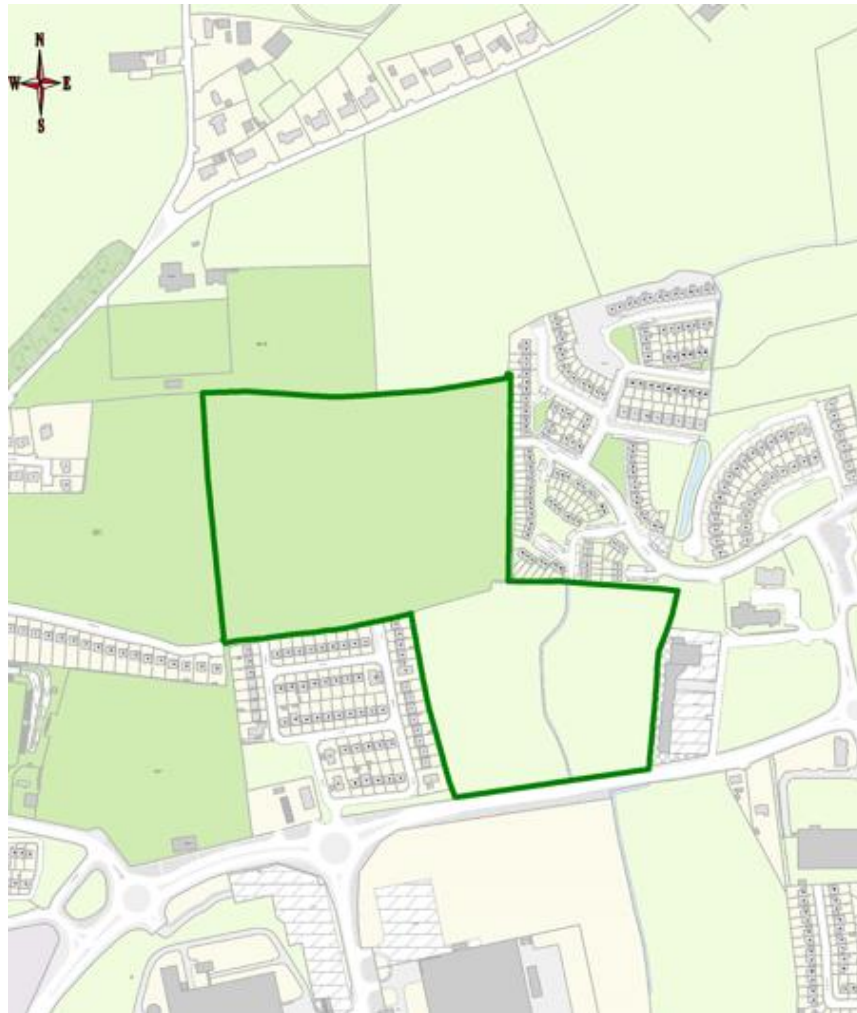
Development proposals will also be required to carefully consider potential flood risk impacts and potential impacts on River Barrow and River Nore SAC, through Flood Risk Assessment and Appropriate Assessment Screening/Natura Impact Statement (NIS).



3- Land adjoining Dublin Road (R448)

These lands are zoned Enterprise and Employment at the northern end of the joint urban area adjoining the Dublin Road (R448) and comprise a total area of c. 12.4 hectares. The southern portion of the land, c. 4 hectares, is occupied by the IDA's recently completed Advance Factory Building which will provide light industrial, office and ancillary support areas. The land to the rear (north) of the Advance Factory Building extends to c. 7.5 hectares and is undeveloped.

This strategic employment land bank is accessible from the Dublin Road (R448) and the O'Brien Road (N80). Both the R448 and N80 provide important and proximate linkages to the M9, and connections to the Eastern and Midlands Region and Southern Region. The land is also close to an existing concentration of established enterprise, employment, and industrial land uses along the O'Brien Road, including the former Braun site (now occupied by NUA) and the former Lapple site (now occupied by Moore Environmental and Central Engineering).



4-Land adjoining Dublin Road (R448) and accessible from O'Brien Road (N80)

These lands are located at the southern side of the Dublin Road (R448) extending to an area of c. 6 hectares. The southern end of the land is occupied by a multi-unit commercial building and the Carlow NCT Centre and is accessible via an access road leading directly from the O'Brien Road (N80). The said access road serves a number of existing developments including the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment (Workplace Relations Commission) and Burnside Eurocyl Ltd. The land is zoned Enterprise and Employment and has the potential to provide enhanced connectivity between the Dublin Road (R448) and the O'Brien Road (N80), and to accommodate complimentary enterprise and employment uses. Key to any new development proposal on the land which gives rise to significant car trip potential would be the preparation of a Traffic and Transport Assessment to assess, the transport impacts of a proposed development on the N80, incorporating any subsequent measures necessary to ensure roads and junctions and other transport infrastructure in the vicinity of the development remain fit for purpose and encourages a modal shift towards more sustainable travel modes.



5-Land adjoining and around Carlow Railway Station

Includes underutilised, greenfield, and centrally located land amounting to c. 6 hectares which is situated to the north, south and east of Carlow Railway Station and the Dublin to Waterford Railway Line. The land also encompasses commercial properties fronting Green Lane (R448). There are two existing access points (x 2) to the land from the R448.

The land is zoned Business and Innovation, and the Carlow County Development Plan 2022-2028. Policy ED. P11 of the County Development Plan identifies it as a location for the development of an economic quarter and transport interchange. The Business and Innovation land use zoning provides for high-technology related office-based industry.

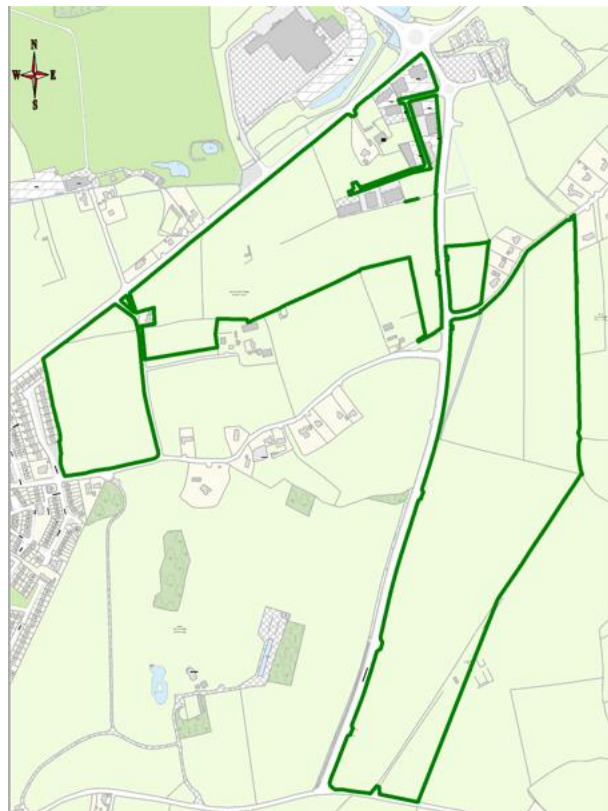


6-Land adjoining Dublin Road (R448) and Eastern Relief Road

This is strategically located land occupying prominent roadside frontage along the Eastern Relief Road and the Dublin Road (R448) at the northeastern end of the joint urban area. It comprises a significant land bank totalling c. 53.97 hectares, c. 6 hectares of which is developed and occupied by Deerpark Business Complex. The land is zoned Enterprise and Employment and represents a significant opportunity to consolidate enterprise and employment development at this location, which is to the immediate south of MSD Carlow, and on a primary approach to the joint urban area from the Eastern and Dublin regions. The land is also within easy access of M9 Junction 4.

Having regard to its significance in terms of a location next to a primary approach route to the joint urban area and beside the Eastern Relief Road, as well as the character and use of existing developed lands in the surrounding area, the land has been zoned Enterprise and Employment. This zoning provides for a mix of uses including high-end research and development, business, science and technology-based industry, financial services, call centres/telemarketing, software development, enterprise and incubator units, small/medium manufacturing, corporate offices in high quality campus/park type development.

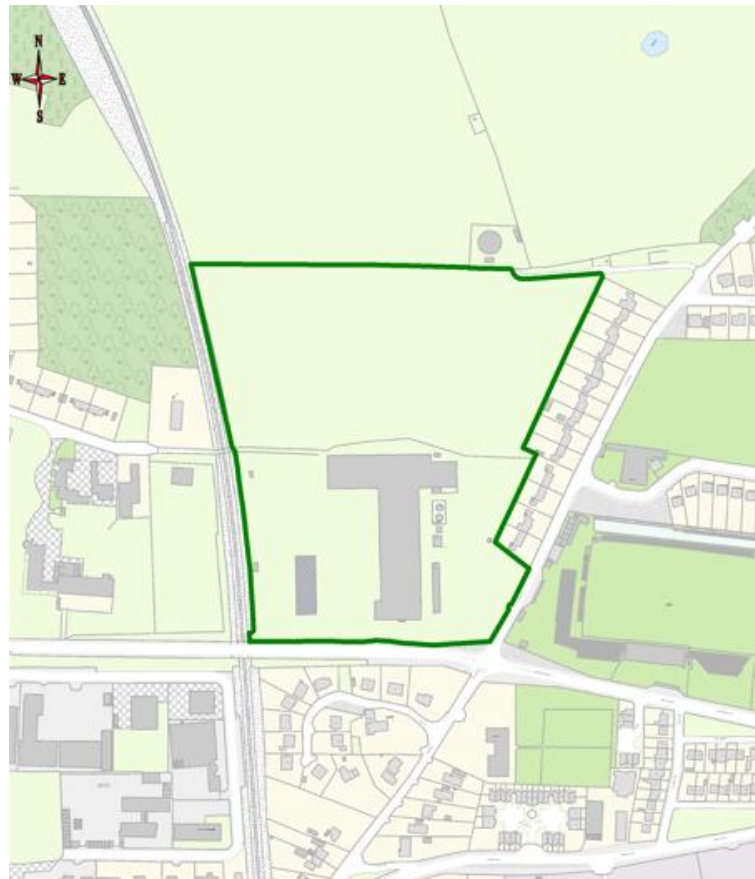
The preparation of a masterplan should accompany any development proposal on this land, to include a vision for the overall land parcel to ensure development does not take place in a piecemeal manner and suitably integrates with existing development and infrastructure.



7-Land adjoining Cannery Road (N80)

This land parcel is c. 10 hectares in area and has an existing established access on to the Cannery Road (N80). The land is adjoined to the east by the Oak Park Road and to the west of the Railway Line. The southern half of the land was the site of the former Erin Foods Factory and is now occupied by a waste management company (Ray Whelan Ltd.). The rear (northern) half of the land is undeveloped.

The land is located in a strategic position with direct access to the Cannery Road (N80) and is proximate to the Strawhall Industrial Estate and Carlow Gateway Business Centre. The land is zoned Enterprise and Employment, is currently underutilised, and represents an opportunity to accommodate higher order commercial, light industrial, office, and research and development uses. Key to any new development proposal on the land which gives rise to significant car trip potential would be the preparation of a Traffic and Transport Assessment to assess, the transport impacts of a proposed development on the N80, incorporating any subsequent measures necessary to ensure roads and junctions and other transport infrastructure in the vicinity of the development remain fit for purpose and encourages a modal shift towards more sustainable travel modes.



8-Land adjoining Wexford Road Business Park (N80)

Two land parcels zoned Enterprise and Employment and totalling c. 30.5 hectares.

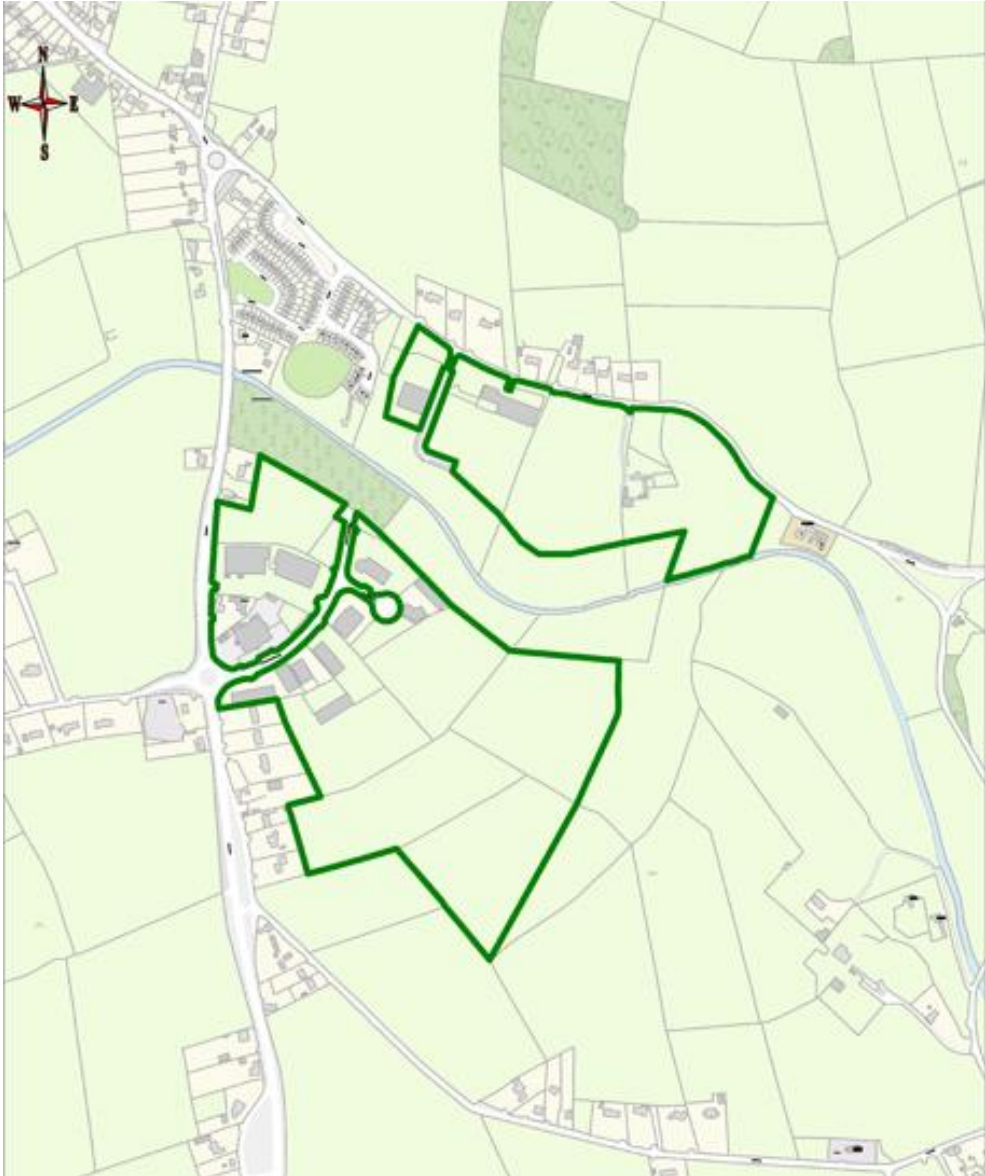
The northern land parcel is at the other (northern) side of the Burren River where it adjoins and is accessed from the Tullow Road (R725). Existing development on this land parcel includes the Dolmen Business Park, currently occupied by John Dargan & Sons Ltd. and a vacant car dealership site and building.

The southern land parcel is accessed from the Wexford Road (N80) and is occupied by the Wexford Road Business Park, which accommodate a mix of commercial, retail, professional service, and light industrial uses e.g., Nissan Carlow, Carlow Tyre Centre, Brealey Windows and Doors, Steeltech Sheds, Fine Framers, Ken Black Toy Store, Seamus Byrne Electrical Ltd., Kehoe Architectural Design, and Stone Systems. An undeveloped area to the south of the Wexford Road Business Park extends to c. 12 hectares.

The land benefits from a strategic location beside a primary approach route to the joint urban area from the southern region (the N80) and beside the indicative route of the Southern Relief Road. The land is also proximate to M9 Junction 5 at Rathcrogue.

Key to any development proposal on the land would be the preparation of a Traffic and Transport Assessment focusing on minimising impacts on the N80, and a layout and design that does not compromise or impact on the future delivery of the Southern Relief Road and suitably integrates with existing development and infrastructure.

In view of the location of the Burren River, development proposals will also be required, where applicable, to carefully consider potential flood risk impacts and potential impacts on the River Barrow and River Nore SAC, through Flood Risk Assessment and Appropriate Assessment Screening/Natura Impact Statement (NIS).



**9-Former
Sugar Factory
Land**

This substantial land parcel totals c. 30.5 hectares, is located to the north of the joint urban area and includes the site of the former Greencore Sugar Factory. The land is directly linked to the town centre by the R417 Athy Road, which is sited along its entire eastern boundary. Apart from the southernmost portion of the land which is occupied by existing commercial and light industrial enterprises, most of the land is a vacant brownfield site. Significant remediation (decontamination) works have been carried out on the land to date to render it suitable for uses other than industrial, the scope and progress of which have been overseen by the EPA through their licensing process.

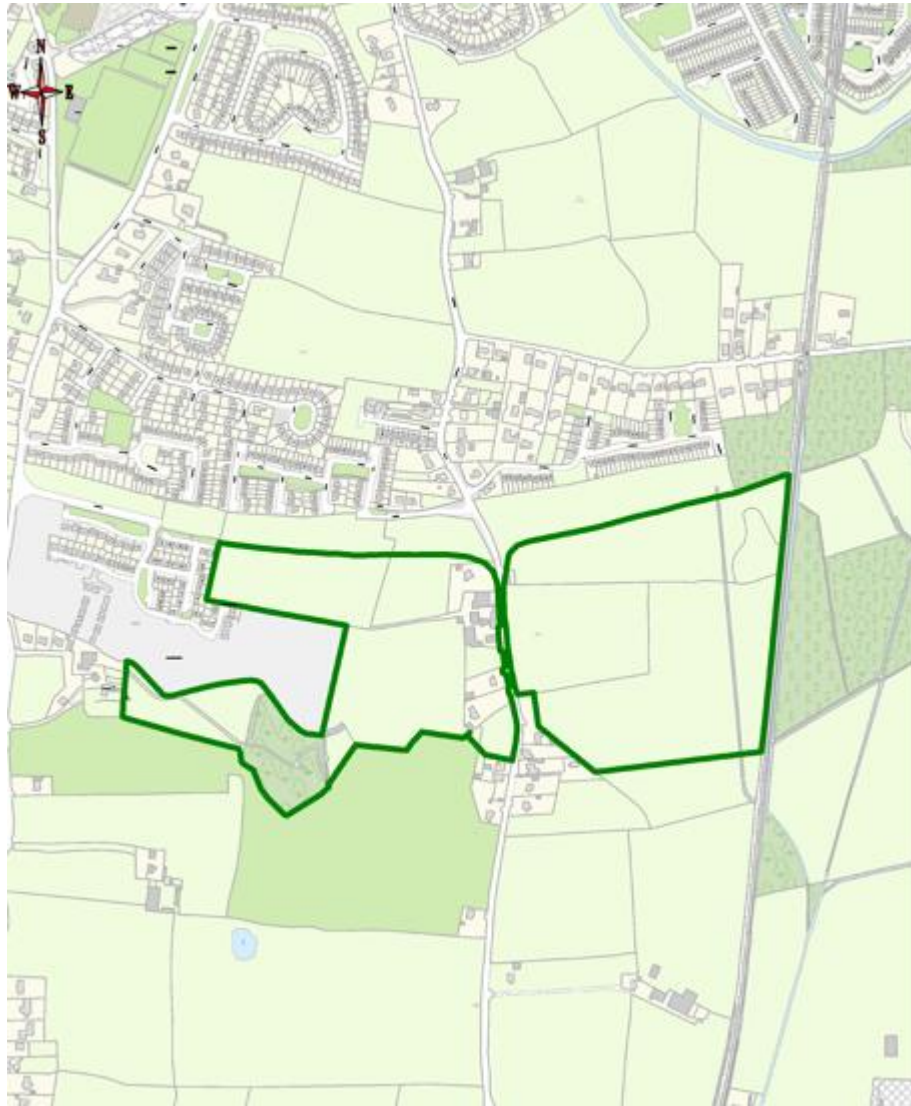
The preparation of a masterplan should accompany any development proposal on this land, to include a vision for the overall land parcel to ensure development does not take place in a piecemeal manner and suitably integrates with existing development and infrastructure.



**10-Land at
Quinagh**

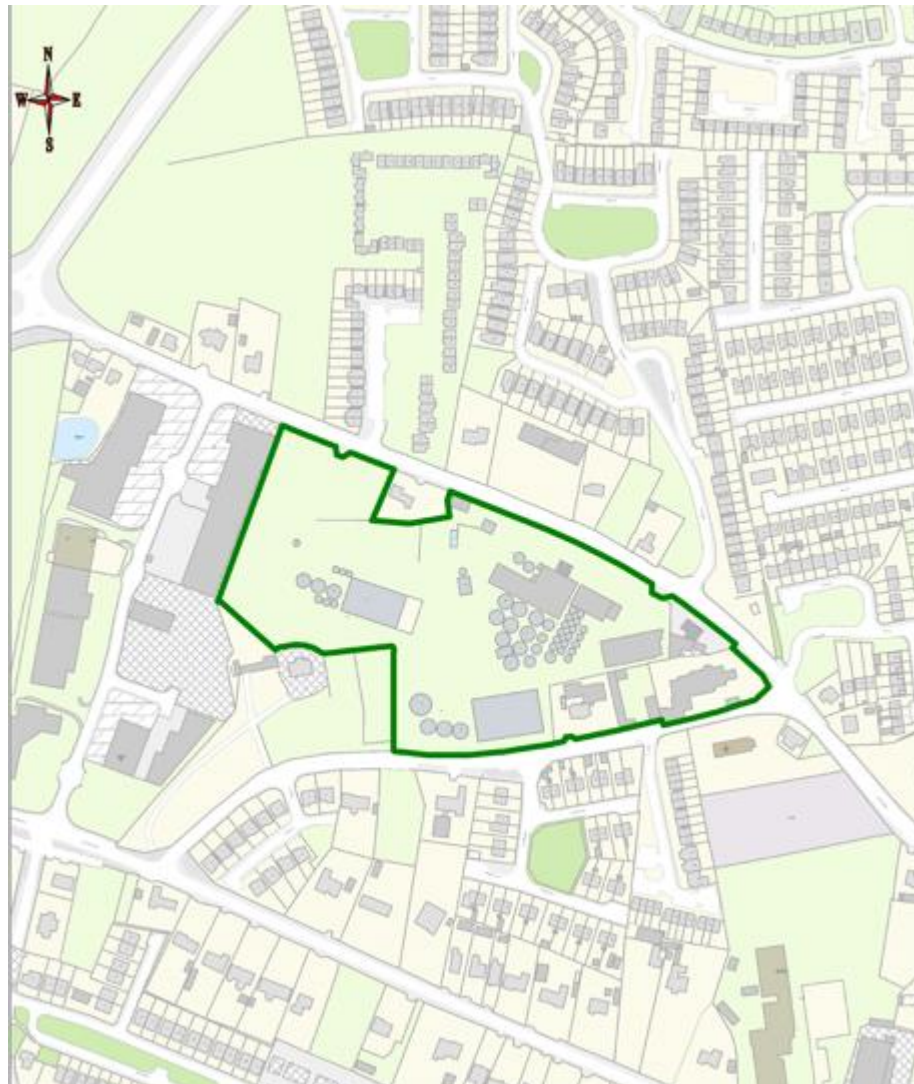
Two land parcels zoned Business and Innovation are located to the south of the joint urban area, and either side (east and west) of the Blackbog Road. The land is also strategically positioned along the indicative route of the proposed Southern Relief Road.

The Business and Innovation land use zoning provides for high-technology related office-based industry. Any development proposal on the land should not compromise or impact on the future delivery of the Southern Relief Road and suitably integrate with existing development and infrastructure, taking particular cognisance of the need to protect the amenity of adjoining residential properties.



**11-Tirlán
(Glanbia)
Land**

This land parcel comprises c. 4.98 hectares and is located in Graiguecullen, fronting the R924 (Ballickmoyler Road) to the north and Church Road to the south. The land is occupied and in commercial use by Tirlán. The commercial use includes a farm (agricultural supplies) shop and depot. A large part of the land that was formerly in use as a grain store remains underutilised. The land benefits from an accessible location proximate to the N80 (Northern Relief Road), and next to the existing Shamrock Business Park. Any redevelopment of the land must be sensitive to the character and setting of Graiguecullen Church of Ireland to the immediate east. The land represents an opportunity to accommodate higher order commercial, light industrial and office uses.



Economic Development – Policies

It is the policy of Carlow County Council and Laois County Council to:

EE. P1: Maximise the economic development potential of Carlow-Graiguecullen by capitalising on its economic assets as outlined in Table 4.1, including Key Town designation, locational advantage along the M9, the N80, and Dublin-Waterford Railway Line, higher level education offer, and by promoting and marketing the area for significant economic investment and employment growth.

EE. P2: Promote Carlow-Graiguecullen as a regional and inter-regional economic growth centre, through support for the expansion of its existing enterprise ecosystems, and through the provision of zoned lands and physical infrastructure to realise the delivery of strategic employment lands and to ensure the joint urban area has the ability to maintain, increase, and diversify its employment base, to reduce outbound commuting, and to ensure new employment development contributes towards reducing carbon output.

EE. P3: Support the role of the Waterford-Kilkenny-Carlow-Dublin M9/Rail Network/Axis as a regional and sub-regional driver for collaboration and growth, which can harness the combined economic strengths of settlements along the route and contribute to the creation of an inter-urban network of collaboration and growth in accordance with RPO 30 in the

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region.

EE. P4: Promote and support the diversification of the construction and manufacturing industries in Carlow-Graiguecullen, focusing on the attraction and expansion of businesses that operate in the field of building innovation, development, and the manufacturing of construction materials, and particularly in the context of sustainable development and nearly zero energy buildings.

EE. P5: Encourage and support opportunities in Carlow-Graiguecullen for further clustering and new spin-off sectors arising from existing multinational corporations, to ensure the joint urban area becomes an attractive destination and driver of business and innovation.

EE. P6: Support economic development by maximising the efficiency of zoned lands and by advocating for and facilitating the provision, upgrade, or refurbishment of necessary supporting physical infrastructure.

EE. P7: Ensure that lands zoned for employment generating uses in Carlow-Graiguecullen are kept free from inappropriate development that would prejudice future economic growth and activity.

EE. P8: Encourage and support the development of strategic employment lands in a comprehensive and sequential manner which uses existing infrastructure effectively and efficiently, ensuring development proposals are designed to the highest architectural and landscaping standards, with natural site features such as trees and hedgerows to

be retained and enhanced as an integral part of any scheme.

- EE. P9:** Encourage and support the re-use of vacant and underutilised lands and buildings, including the redevelopment of brownfield lands, for new employment generating developments, including those identified as strategic employment lands in Table 4.2.
- EE. P10:** Promote opportunities for the creation of research and development synergies between Carlow SETU, Carlow College St. Patrick's, and existing and future manufacturing related companies.
- EE. P11:** Ensure town centre lands become an attractive destination and driver of enterprise, employment, and innovation, through the implementation of Project Carlow 2040 – A Vision for Regeneration.
- EE. P12:** Support employment generating uses on land zoned Town Centre as a key driver of urban regeneration.
- EE. P13:** Seek to address vacancy, dereliction, and the underutilisation of land and buildings in the town centre by supporting an appropriate mix of other alternative uses such as enterprise and business start-ups, offices, tourism and culture, hospitality, residential etc., subject to compliance with proper planning and environmental considerations.
- EE. P14:** Support the development of an economic quarter and transport interchange on underutilised lands around Carlow railway station subject to

compliance with proper planning and environmental considerations.

- EE. P15:** Engage with IDA Ireland and the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment in seeking to develop and attract potential economic opportunities into suitably zoned employment lands in the joint urban area.
- EE. P16:** Promote and support the role of Carlow and Laois County Councils' Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) in driving the development of local enterprise and job creation in Carlow-Graiguecullen.

Economic Development - Objectives

It is an objective of Carlow County Council and Laois County Council to:

- EE. O1:** Support the preparation of new Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs) for County Carlow and County Laois to ensure the local level framework is in place for the joint urban area to support economic growth and community improvements.
- EE. O2:** Seek to advance and secure the implementation of Project Carlow 2040 - A Vision for Regeneration through the development of the strategic Intervention Areas in the strategy, to drive the economic development of Carlow Town as an investment location.

4.4 Retail

The retail industry has undergone significant transformation in recent years, driven by consumers' use and retailers' adoption of digital technologies and the need for new solutions for traditional 'bricks and mortar' retail. Strengthening the retail sector in Carlow-Graiguecullen and particularly in support of town centre vitality, now requires a broad-based approach. In this regard, it is now more than ever recognised that retailing is not a solitary experience but can be combined with other activities and services such as relating to entertainment, food and drink, and tourism and culture. Ensuring the survival of retailing in the town centre can therefore be achieved by encouraging these activities and services alongside town centre living, to provide a greater mix of complimentary uses. An increased focus on placemaking is also required. The viability of retail stores in the future will be heavily reliant on being located in a quality urban setting with an experience which attracts consumers and increases dwell time.

4.4.1 Existing Retail Environment

4.4.1.1 Carlow Town

The quality and quantum of retailing on offer in Carlow Town reflects its Level 1 County Town Centre retail hierarchy designation in the Retail Strategy for County Carlow 2022-2028, and its Key Town status in the RSES for the Southern Region. Within Carlow Town the traditional town centre is recognised as Tullow Street and Dublin Street. However, in the past 20 years or so development in the Town Centre has been concentrated to the southeast of the traditional Town Core. Past Government tax incentives, such as the urban renewal schemes, also contributed to the expansion of the Town Centre

in an easterly direction including the development of the Carlow Shopping Centre, the Fairgreen Shopping Centre, and the Carlow Retail Park further south. This has resulted in a geographical shift from the traditional core retail area of the Town and has led to issues with integration and accessibility between the traditional core and the newer retail areas.

The smaller traditional sized units within the Town Centre along Tullow Street and Barrack Street generally accommodate independent and family-owned shops with the notable exception of the large Shaw's Department Store on Tullow Street. These are considered as a vital component of the retail mix of the Town as they add diversity to the Town's retail profile and enhance the overall vitality and viability of the core.

While the Town has a strong offer in terms of the number of multiples operating, its independent retailers maintain a strong presence within the core retail area. In terms of convenience retail provision, the Town is served by Tesco in Fairgreen Shopping Centre, Aldi on Hanover Road, Lidl on Tullow Road and SuperValu to the east of the Town anchoring the Sandhills Neighbourhood Centre on the Hacketstown Road. There is also an Aldi on Church Street in Graiguecullen within the functional area of Carlow County Council. A network of smaller scale convenience floorspace also serves the environs area of the Town.

Carlow Town is also well served in terms of retail warehouse provision, including Carlow Retail Park to the southeast of the town centre and west of Hanover Road, the Four Lakes Retail Park fronting the Dublin Road (R448) in the environs to the northeast, and Deerpark Business Complex opposite MSD Carlow on the Dublin Road (R448).

The breakdown of the existing net retail floorspace for Carlow Town in 2021 is set out in Table 4.3 and incorporates net retail floorspace from the County Laois side of the joint urban area i.e., Graiguecullen.

Table 4.3: Carlow Town & Graiguecullen Existing Retail Floorspace 2021 – Net (sq.m)		
Convenience	Non-Bulky Comparison	Bulky Comparison
12,569	27,060	35,689

The Retail Strategy for County Carlow 2022-2028 highlights a lack of permeability between the traditional town core retail area of Dublin Street and Tullow Street and the more recent modern additions to the Town Centre, specifically Fairgreen Shopping Centre. The Fairgreen Shopping Centre has poor pedestrian linkages to Tullow Street and lacks profile and visibility from Barrack Street. This lack of permeability has resulted in the weakening of the role and function of the traditional core shopping streets and issues with vacancy in the traditional Town Core, especially the western end of Tullow Street.

In terms of vacancy levels, the number of underutilised/vacant sites within Carlow Town has increased in recent years. This increase has negatively impacted the vitality and vibrancy of the Town, permeability within it, as well as resulted in a lack of a sense of a core. The GeoView Commercial Q2 2020 Report on Commercial Property estimated that Carlow Town had a vacancy rate of 18.2%, which was notably above the then national average of 13.5%.

Project Carlow 2040: A Vision for Regeneration puts in place a regeneration vision for the Town, central to which are the six Intervention Areas

that include inter alia Town Centre - Potato Market and Barrack Street and the Link Streets (Dublin Street and Tullow Street). These interventions will deliver improved Town Centre linkages and increased pedestrian mobility through the enhancement of existing streets to make them more pedestrian friendly as well as the provision of additional routes around the Town Centre to improve overall circulation. The delivery of these interventions will support the vitality of the Town Centre as the retail/commercial core while delivering the visual uplift that will unify the overall Town Centre.

Carlow Town Centre should continue to be the prime focus for future retail development and in particular the development of high order comparison retail floorspace should be located here. All types of retail floorspace are considered to be appropriate within Carlow Town as a Level 1 Centre in the Carlow County retail hierarchy, specifically comparison floorspace that is centrally located. With respect to the Core Retail Area of the Town Centre, key considerations are as follows:

- There is a need to enhance the retail role and function of the streets in the traditional core.
- Consideration must be given to emerging retail trends and how the Core Retail Area of Carlow Town can be positioned to not just respond to but benefit from these.
- The need for increased permeability between the traditional retail core and the newer south-eastern town centre expansion area.

4.4.1.2 Graiguecullen

Graiguecullen forms the western environs of Carlow Town, on the west side of the River Barrow and within the functional area of Carlow and Laois County Councils. Graiguecullen is

designated as a Level 3 Key Service Centre in the retail hierarchy set out in the Laois County Retail Strategy 2021-2027, the listed action for which is to *“Provide for shopping, amenity, commercial and community facilities of a scale and type to serve residents living within the district without undermining Carlow Town Centre”*.

Historically development was located around Chapel Street and Chaff Street in Graiguecullen. On the County Laois side, there has been significant development in terms of both housing and retail warehousing. These developments have been assisted by major road construction including the Northern Relief Road. The Shamrock Business Park and Barrow Valley Retail Park have both been developed in more recent years.

The Barrow Valley Retail Park is anchored by a Dunnes Stores and includes the Talbot Hotel and Dome Bowling Alley and Arcade. There are a mix of other commercial, retail, and professional services uses in the Retail Park, including a medical/doctor’s clinic, physiotherapy clinic, car sales, hardware and furniture stores, and gym.

The Shamrock Business Park includes Doyle’s Hardware/Builders Merchants, and a number of other retail warehousing units. It is also occupied by Graigue Village Shopping Centre fronting the Castlecomer Road (R430), which consists of neighbourhood facilities such as a Spar, takeaway restaurants, a dental clinic, as well as the National Driver Licence Service. The northern side of Barrowside Business Park off the Sleaty Road is within the functional area of County Laois, and includes a number of retail warehouse units, including furniture and car sales.

The shopping provision within Graiguecullen contributes towards Carlow Town’s ability to compete with other centres including Portlaoise,

Kilkenny and Newbridge. The existing and emerging convenience and comparison retail representation in Graiguecullen reflects its role in the Laois County Settlement Hierarchy as a District Centre. It is evident that residents do need to travel to larger shopping centres in order to fulfil their comparison-shopping needs and given the proximity to Carlow Town it is important that the future retail development of Graiguecullen complements that of the town and does not adversely impact the town centre Core Retail Area.

4.5 Promoting the Role of the Town Centre

4.5.1. Town Centre Living

Promoting Town Centre living will contribute to a more sustainable urban core where there are facilities, services, amenities and where they are generally proximate to employment. This in turn brings a renewed sense of vitality and viability to a place as people choose to stay local and are likely to be less reliant on cars. It can also encourage new business to meet a renewed local demand which in turn could have significant positive impacts on vacancy levels.

4.5.2 Key Town Centre Retail Opportunity Sites

The Retail Strategy for County Carlow 2022-2028 identifies six opportunity sites within the designated Core Retail Area. The redevelopment of these sites not only provides the opportunity to consolidate and strengthen the Core Retail Area and wider Town Centre, but also present opportunities for enhanced permeability and public realm improvements. It should also be noted that the Opportunity Sites, as outlined in Table 4.4 and as shown in Figure 4.2 with the designated Core Retail Area, provide a general location only. At this strategic

level it would not be appropriate to provide exact site boundaries as flexibility will be required to allow for (inter alia) site ownership, site assembly, and rights of way.

TABLE 4.4: TOWN CENTRE KEY RETAIL OPPORTUNITY SITES

TABLE 4.4: TOWN CENTRE KEY RETAIL OPPORTUNITY SITES	
<p>OPPORTUNITY SITE 1</p> <p>Penney’s Site and Hanover Shopping Centre, Kennedy Avenue</p>	<p>This site is located to the south of Carlow Town Centre off Kennedy Avenue, within the Core Retail Area. The site is triangular in shape and adjoined by Kennedy Avenue to the north and the main Kilkenny Road to the south. The site is bound to the north by the Burren River, a tributary of the River Barrow, which separates it from Kennedy Avenue. To the east is Hanover Park, a triangular public park flanked by the Kilkenny Road along one boundary and the Burren River to the north.</p> <p>While the return of Penney’s and an active retail use to the site is welcomed, there is significant scope to develop other unoccupied vacant units for a mix of uses. Such a redevelopment would present a significant opportunity to improve the multi-functionality of the Core Retail Area. In addition, given its central location, the redevelopment of the vacant units would also deliver significant benefits to the vitality and viability of the core retail area of Carlow. It would also offer potential placemaking benefits in combination with the pedestrianisation and public realm upgrades that form part of the Potato Market Intervention Area outlined in Project Carlow 2040; A Vision for Regeneration, as well as opportunities to provide an appropriate frontage to Kennedy Avenue that would integrate with the Barrack Street Intervention Area.</p>
<p>OPPORTUNITY SITE 2</p> <p>Barrack Street</p>	<p>Barrack Street is part of the traditional Core Retail Area of the Town Centre. The street presents a number of opportunities for redevelopment of existing sites, improvement to the public realm and enhanced linkages within the Town Centre. Barrack Street is central to increasing pedestrian mobility and the delivery of better management of cars and pedestrians to improve the overall quality of the space and serve to reinstate and support a more vibrant town centre.</p> <p>Project Carlow 2040: A Vision for Regeneration states that the improved connections between Potato Market and Barrack Street would provide additional routes around the Town Centre and enhanced overall circulation leading to a better experience of the area.</p>
<p>OPPORTUNITY SITE 3</p>	<p>The redevelopment of the site provides a key opportunity to integrate the traditional Town Centre focused on Dublin Street, Tullow Street, Barrack Street and Potato Market with the newer shopping areas at Fairgreen and</p>

<p>Plas na Saoirse, Kennedy Avenue</p>	<p>Carlow Shopping Centres, through the enhancement of pedestrian linkages across Kennedy Avenue.</p> <p>There are opportunities for pedestrianisation and for public realm upgrades that would integrate with the proposed Potato Market Intervention Area as outlined in Project Carlow 2040; A Vision for Regeneration. The redevelopment also offers opportunities to provide an appropriate frontage to Kennedy Avenue</p>
<p>OPPORTUNITY SITE 4</p> <p>Stonemason's/Crotty's Site</p>	<p>This is a backland area zoned Town Centre and located to the rear of Tullow Street, Charlotte Street, and College Street. Access to the site is currently restricted and the site comprises vacant two storey properties which front onto Charlotte Street and Tullow Street and a gated entrance from College Street.</p> <p>The site is a suitable location for infill development to consolidate the existing built form of the Town Centre. The redevelopment of the site also provides opportunities for the creation of new linkages between College Street and Charlotte Street.</p>
<p>OPPORTUNITY SITE 5</p> <p>Penny Lane Building, Tullow Street</p>	<p>This site is located on the northern side of Tullow Street, directly opposite the entrance to the Carlow Shopping Centre multi-storey car park. There is an existing two storey building on site occupied by a Home Savers store and surrounded by surface car parking. There is also a parade of small retail units along the western boundary of the site.</p> <p>This site comprises underutilised land in a Town Centre zoned area, and has a prominent position on a main shopping street i.e. Tullow Street. The redevelopment of the site has the potential to provide a range of uses, would bring increased footfall and much needed investment to the eastern end of Tullow Street.</p>
<p>OPPORTUNITY SITE 6</p> <p>Tullow Street</p>	<p>Tullow Street is a primary retail street in the Town Centre, with independent shops, restaurants, cafés, and pubs. The Street also contains a number of vacant units, with the group of buildings adjoining the entrance to the Carlow Shopping Centre multi-storey car park of particular note. These vacant units detract from the overall amenity of the Street and give an impression of dereliction at its eastern end.</p> <p>Project Carlow 2040: A Vision for Regeneration includes Tullow Street along with Dublin Street as the Link Street Intervention stating that: <i>"This Intervention seeks to support the vitality of the Town Centre as the retail/commercial core while delivering the visual uplift that will unify the overall Town Centre... The upgrading of the urban environment and public realm along these streets also provides the opportunity to address existing traffic and pedestrian safety issues."</i></p>

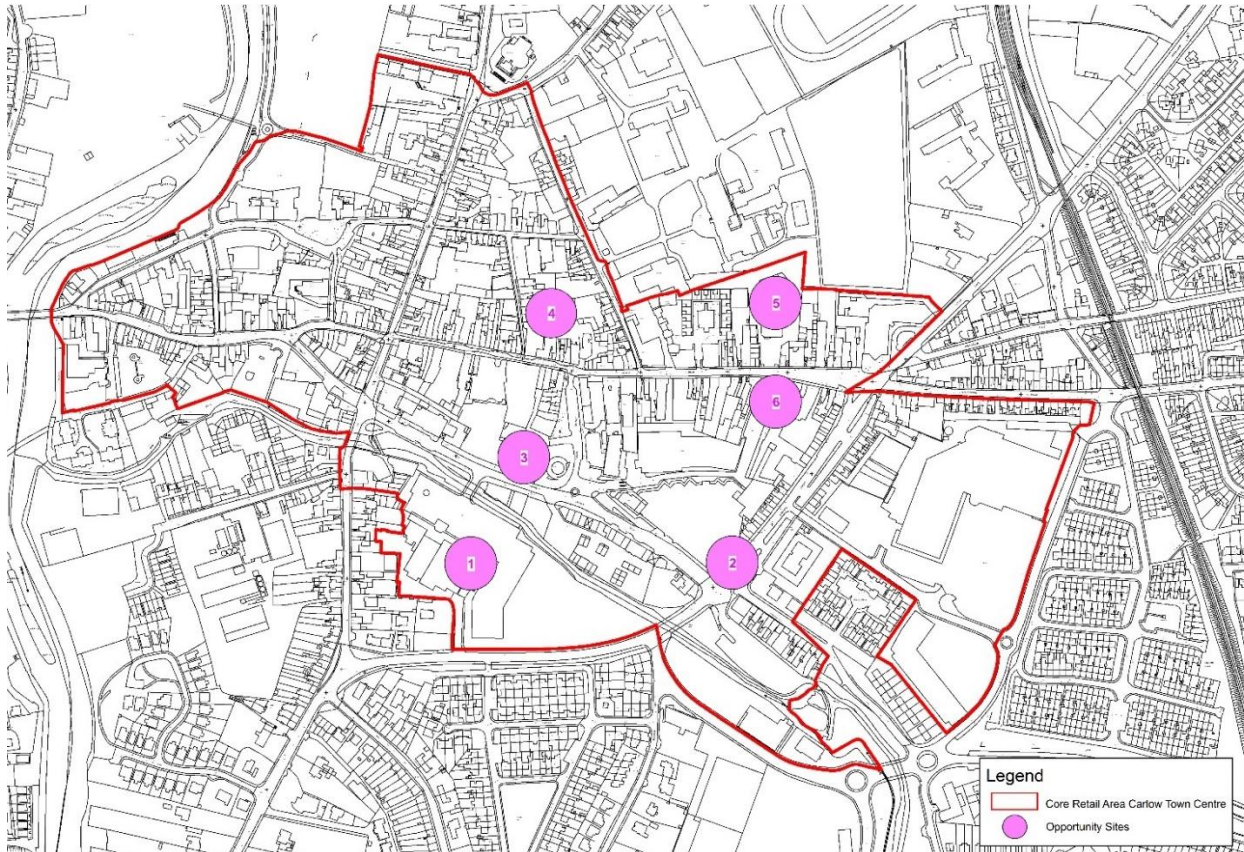


Figure 4.2: Core Retail Area & Opportunities Sites

4.5.3 Revitalisation of Vacant and Derelict Buildings

Vacant and derelict units not only adversely impact the vitality and viability of the Town Centre, but in most instances they also have a negative impact on its visual appearance and in turn its attraction to both consumers as well as businesses. The redevelopment and re-use of vacant and derelict properties is supported by this JULAP, including:

- Proposals that, in the first instance, seek to reuse vacant/derelict buildings in the Town Centre zoned area and bring them back into active use on a ‘long term’ basis.
- The use of empty units, on a temporary basis, as spaces to promote cultural and community events i.e. pop-up shops for artists, local community groups etc. and for other pop-up uses such as restaurants and cafes.
- The visual enhancement of vacant/derelict units through the treatment of empty windows so they become an attraction rather than an eyesore or other measures such as painting to improve their visual appearance including short or interim measures.
- Innovation and creativity in relation to the use of vacant buildings and derelict sites for different public activities and events where appropriate e.g., pop-up parks. The opening of Carlow Exchange at Potato Market by Carlow County Council is a recent example of this.
- A co-ordinated programme for building maintenance and development, as well as

the identification of specific buildings and sites that need to be targeted immediately.

4.5.4 Enhance the Public Realm

The creation and maintenance of a high quality, safe, attractive, and healthy public realm is increasing in importance. On-going environmental improvements to the public realm will continue to be promoted and encouraged. Project Carlow 2040: A Vision for Regeneration has a central role to play in delivering this for Carlow Town and positioning it for the future.

4.5.5 Design and Shopfront Guidance

Traditional shopfronts and signage are important contributors to the character and visual attraction of the Town Centre. The use of traditional shopfronts, signage and lettering will continue to be promoted and supported, and there will be a presumption against inappropriate shop front design. The implementation of the 'Streetscape Enhancement Scheme' in order to enhance the streetscape environment of the Town Centre will also be supported to encourage owners of local retail and commercial premises to improve their individual shopfronts

4.5.6 Promote Combined Niche Retailing, Local Industries and Tourism

Niche retailing that works with and utilises the existing unique assets and attributes of the Town Centre will be promoted as both an integral part of the retail offer as well as a tourism attraction.

4.5.7 Evening and Night-Time Economy

A diverse, vibrant, and sustainable night-time economy is an important part of any Town Centre and its vitality and viability. It has become even more important as people's pattern of shopping changes, with the combination of retail and

hospitality at the heart of experiential retailing and the renewed interest in and attraction of Town Centres.

The delivery of a multifunctional Town Centre will therefore be encouraged through the development of mixed-use schemes and the locating of complementary uses in and adjacent to the Core Retail Area. In this regard the integration of retail, leisure, restaurants, and bars is essential not only to the promotion of a vibrant evening and night-time economy but in attracting and retaining tourists who will want places to go and things to do in the evenings and at night.

4.5.8 Festivals, Events and Street Markets

Festivals, events, and markets are not only important in enhancing the attractiveness of town centres as places to visit but in many instances they are part of the history of a settlement and are central to maintaining a link to the past. Festivals, events, and markets will continue to be supported and encouraged, and the recently completed Carlow Exchange development is a specific example of this.

Retail – Policies

It is the policy of Carlow County Council and Laois County Council to:

RT. P1: Promote the enhancement of retail floorspace, primarily comparison goods and town centre functions in Carlow Town, to sustain its competitiveness and importance as the only Level 1 Centre within the Carlow County Retail Hierarchy.

RT. P2: Provide for retail facilities of a scale and type to serve residents living in Gaiguecullen within the functional area

of County Laois and without undermining the competitiveness and importance of Carlow Town Centre as a Level 1 Centre in the Carlow County Retail Hierarchy.

RT. P3: Put ‘placemaking’ as a priority for Carlow Town Centre in accordance with the provisions of Project Carlow 2040 – A Vision for Regeneration, to create a memorable experience that goes beyond traditional shopping and seeks to combine elements of public realm, retail mix and curated events to create distinct experiences.

RT. P4: Ensure that retail development proposals shall accord to the policies, objectives and related criteria for retail development as outlined in Chapters 4 and 12 of the Carlow County Development Plan 2022-2028 as applying to Carlow Town functional area of County Carlow, and Chapter 7 of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 as applying to Graiguecullen functional area in County Laois, and are assessed in accordance with the provision of the Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012). This includes the type, quantum, and location of future retail floorspace in the joint urban area.

RT. P5: Reduce floorspace vacancy within Carlow Town Centre through the identification of alternative uses for existing vacant floorspace where appropriate.

RT. P6: Prohibit significant new retail development that due to its scale and / or location would negatively impact,

either individually or cumulatively, on the vitality and viability of Carlow Town Centre.

RT. P7: Work with local industries in the promotion of specialist and small-scale tourist related retail outlets which will increase the potential to benefit from existing assets and attract event shoppers and tourists to Carlow-Graiguecullen.

RT. P8: Ensure that Carlow Town Centre stakeholders, including retailers, fully utilise all available ICT infrastructure to re-imagine the retail core experience, enhance its attractiveness, and embrace technological advances.

RT. P9: Promote the implementation of the ‘Streetscape Enhancement Scheme’ and ensure that new shop front and signage design contributes positively to and enhances the streetscape, and particularly the character and visual attraction of the Town Centre.

RT. P10: Support and facilitate the development of retail, retail services and niche retailing in the Town Centre, including new/infill development and redevelopment of an appropriate scale.

Retail – Objectives

It is an objective of Carlow County Council and Laois County Council to:

RT. O1: Promote, support, and prioritise the redevelopment of the 6 no. Town Centre Opportunity Sites detailed in the Carlow County Retail Strategy 2022-2028, in order to consolidate and strengthen the Core Retail Area and wider Town Centre and to present opportunities for

enhanced permeability and public realm improvements:

1. Penney's Site and Hanover Shopping Centre, Kennedy Avenue
2. Barrack Street
3. Plas na Saoirse, Kennedy Avenue
4. Stonemason's/Crotty's Site
5. Penny Lane Building, Tullow Street
6. Tullow Street

RT. O2: Support the Town Centre Core Retail Area as the primary focus and preferred location for new retail development. Within this area there is a need to reinstate the role and function of the traditional retail core of the Town which is centred on Tullow Street, Dublin Street, Potato Market, and the future Barrack Street link.

RT. O3: Promote and facilitate the revitalisation and reuse of vacant and derelict properties/shop units in the joint urban area for retail and other town centre uses, including alternative or short-term measures to improve their visual appearance.

RT. O4: Support the multifunctional role of Carlow Town Centre including the provision of uses such as cafes, recreational and leisure facilities, restaurants, and other complementary uses that not only meet the needs of existing and future residents, but which also make the Town Centre attractive to visitors and tourists alike.

RT. O5: Support and facilitate the development of retail-led tourism associated with the natural and built heritage assets Carlow-Graiguecullen.

RT. O6: Introduce measures to improve the accessibility of Carlow Town Centre, including those that prioritise pedestrians and cyclists, and where feasible those that separate pedestrian and cycle traffic from vehicular traffic.

RT. O7: Encourage the active use of the upper floors of retail and commercial premises in the Town Centre, including the 'living over the shop' initiative.

RT. O8: Prevent over-development (proliferation) of non-retail uses / lower order commercial uses that would detract from the vitality and viability of the Town Centre Core Retail Area, such as fast-food takeaways and betting offices.

RT. O9: Promote activities and uses that enliven the Town Centre and improve the mix of uses within it, including town centre living, the evening and night-time economy, and festivals, events, and street markets in each town.

RT. O10: Ensure that applicants for significant new retail development undertake a thorough assessment of the quality and suitability of existing and available floorspace in the context of their proposals.

RT. O11: Support opportunities for the enhancement of pedestrian permeability in the Town Centre retail core in line with the recommendations of the walking strategy contained in Project Carlow 2040: A Vision for Regeneration, including improvements to the width and condition of existing footpaths, the implementation of safe crossings that reflect pedestrian desire

lines and proposals to upgrade junction arrangements to reduce delays to pedestrians.

RT. O12: Support and facilitate further public realm upgrades within Carlow Town Centre, particularly along Dublin Street and Tullow Street, which would benefit from enhanced landscaping and pavement improvements. The provision of street furniture such as benches, and the delivery of the 30km/hr zone will enhance the experience, safety and comfort of pedestrians living in, studying, working, and visiting the Town Centre.

RT. O12: Support the role and use of the Carlow Exchange at Potato Market as a community event space, including the continued development of the Carlow Farmer's Market.

RT. P13: Support shopping, commercial, amenity and community facilities on District Centre zoned land of a scale and type that does not undermine the role, and vitality and viability of Carlow Town Centre.

4.6 Tourism

Considering the richness of the natural and built heritage of Carlow-Graiguecullen, coupled with its highly accessible location by road and rail, it is in an excellent position to capitalise on and develop its existing tourism assets and potential and provide locally based employment opportunities.

This JULAP seeks to support existing tourism assets such as the River Barrow and Carlow Castle, seeking to improve these and others through the enhancement of the public realm.

This will deliver improved public spaces, enhanced linkages, appropriate signage, and an overall improvement to the quality of the area and its attraction as a tourism destination.

Carlow County Council and Laois County Council will look favourably on tourism development proposals and related infrastructure, which is consistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of the joint urban area.

4.6.1 Recreation Tourism

4.6.1.1 River Barrow and Burren River

Natural heritage amenities such as the River Barrow and Burren River, can together act as a major attractor and significant tourist asset for Carlow-Graiguecullen. Given the location, extent, and quality of the River Barrow, which is fully navigable through the joint urban area, there is enormous potential for the development of waterways tourism as a prime tourist asset for the area. The river and the accessible tow path (Barrow Track) can accommodate many activities such as boating, walking, cycling, and fishing.

The River Barrow also represents one of the most significant industrial heritage monuments in the country with bridges, locks and lock-houses, and this history alone is an equally important tourism resource. The joint urban area grew up around the fortification (Carlow Castle) on the crossing of the river. In the 18th and 19th centuries commercial traffic on the river was at its peak, and this traffic remained on the river until the 1960s.

The development by Carlow County Council of the Town Park, marina (floating pontoon and slip), and pedestrian bridge at the River Barrow, have contributed to encouraging greater interaction with the river for visitors and residents. This will be further enhanced by

Carlow County Council’s development of the River Barrow Water Activity Centre on land beside the Town Park.

The Burren River is a tributary of the River Barrow and flows into the latter at Pembroke in Carlow Town. The Burren River runs south-east to north-west through Carlow Town, providing a ‘blue’ connection parallel to the Town Centre that offers an alternative route through and within the Town. It benefits from an accessible Linear Park along its east bank, which extends to c. 2km in length and comprises a hard surfaced walking and cycling route. In accordance with the provisions of Project Carlow 2040: A Vision for Regeneration, the intervention vision for the Burren River includes the delivery of a usable blue connection and ecological corridor that runs to the River Barrow, incorporating pedestrian links along the riverfront and a new connection with the historic Carlow Castle.

Carlow County Council and Laois County Council are committed to working with relevant stakeholders in order to harness the potential of the River Barrow and Burren River sensitively and appropriately as tourist attractions for boat users, for fishing and walking/cycling, and for nature and history enthusiasts.

4.6.1.2 Oak Park Forest Park

Oak Park Forest Park is a mature, mixed species woodland of over 120 acres with a predominance of beech, oak, scots pine, silver fir, larch, and sycamore. Boasting a rich diversity of wildlife, the lakes and their surrounds provide a habitat for swans and ducks, while the islands shelter many wild and game birds. Extending over four kilometres the walks include Butlers Wood Loop (700 metres), the Lake Path (800 metres), Fox Covert Track (1,100 metres) and Sally Island Trail (1,700 metres). Facilities at the

Forest Park include a universally accessible playground, outdoor exercise equipment, outdoor picnic tables, wheelchair accessible walkways and toilets, large car park, bat sanctuary and bird-watching area.

4.6.1.3 Delta Sensory Gardens

The award-winning gardens are situated on a 2.5-acre site on land at Strawhall Estate and were designed to provide a multi-sensory experience through the sight, touch, smell, and sound of plants, water features and other elements. The Gardens were officially opened in May 2007 and consist of 16 interconnecting gardens including a health and wellness garden. The gardens have a therapeutic focus and benefit people of all abilities with a mix of formal and informal landscaping.

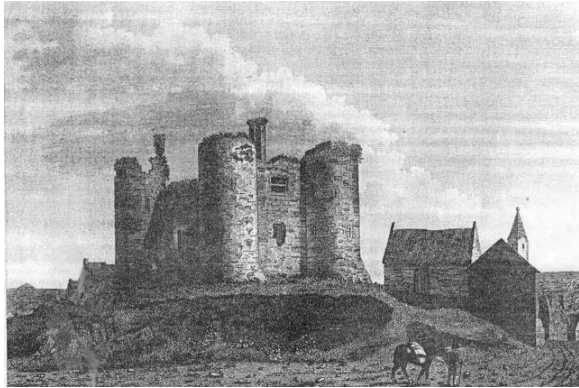
4.6.2 Cultural and Heritage Tourism

Carlow-Graiguecullen is located within Ireland’s Ancient East, which is Failte Ireland’s regional tourist experience brand to promote the history and culture of the 15 eastern counties of Ireland. The joint urban area’s unique architectural and historical attributes, including those attributes located in the surrounding hinterlands in County Carlow and County Laois, provide a solid basis to capitalise on this regional tourism brand and unlock the cultural and heritage tourism potential of the area. Some of the more notable attributes include:

4.6.2.1 Medieval Town & Carlow Castle

The town was founded by the Anglo-Normans and developed under the protection of Carlow Castle, which was built in the early 13th century. The medieval town included Dublin Street, the western part of Tullow Street, Castle Street, and Charlotte Street. The construction of Carlow Castle to defend a crossing point of the River

Barrow was likely the beginning for the development of Carlow Town and later Graiguecullen as a suburb of same.



17th Century Sketch of Carlow Castle (Thomas Dineley's Journal 1680)

Now in a ruinous state, Carlow Castle is located on the eastern side of the River Barrow. Located approximately 100 metres from the River Barrow and less than 100 metres from the Burren River, this landmark building is situated in the heart of the historic town core and is the only known surviving medieval building in the area. It is also one of the most important Anglo-Norman castles in Ireland.

Parts of Graiguecullen bridge, itself of historic significance, date back to the sixteenth century.

4.6.2.2 Brownhill Dolmen

The Brownhill Dolmen is a megalithic tomb dating from c.3,500BC and has a capstone weighing over 100 tonnes and recognised as being the largest of its kind found in Europe. The Dolmen is a significant landscape feature in the demesne landscape to the east of the joint urban area.

4.6.2.3 Carlow County Museum

Carlow County Museum is an award-winning museum located in Carlow's Cultural Quarter in the Town Centre. The museum spans four

galleries and houses a wide collection of items including the hand carved 19th century wooden pulpit from Carlow Cathedral (one of the top 100 objects to view in an Irish museum), the gallows trap door from Carlow Gaol used in 19th century public executions, an exhibition on the Carlow Sugar Factory, which was opened in 1926, and archaeological finds from the Carlow M9 bypass including the country's first ring brooch.

4.6.2.4 County Carlow Military Museum

The County Carlow Military Museum is dedicated to the collection, preservation, and display of military memorabilia heritage. The museum is housed in a late 19th century former church building on the grounds of St. Dymphna's Hospital/Carlow District Hospital. All artefacts in the Military Museum are donated by families of former service men and women and show their careers involving local, national, and international events in which they participated. A range of over 4,500 items cover all periods from Carlow Castle, 1798 Rebellion, 1916 Rising and World War 1 and 2.

4.6.2.5 Croppies Grave

The Croppies Grave is an historic landmark and monument, in Graiguecullen, to the 640 Carlow insurgents killed in the disastrous rising of the United Irishmen in 1798. The monument rises above the site of an old sand pit, where in the aftermath of the rising, the bodies of the Carlow insurgents were thrown and covered in quicklime in a mass grave.

4.6.2.6 Cultural Quarter

The Cultural Quarter is an area within the Town Centre which contains a number of cultural and heritage related uses including the VISUAL Centre for Contemporary Art and The George Bernard Shaw Theatre, Carlow College, the

Carlow County Museum, Carlow Cathedral, Carlow Tourism Office, and Carlow County Library.

The Tourist Hub/Linger Space project to the front of the VISUAL as already referred to in Section 4.7.1, will contribute to the enhancement of the role of the Cultural Quarter as a tourist destination. Carlow County Council are also exploring the potential of regenerating Carlow County Library and the Presentation Buildings along Tullow Street. Incorporating the Library, County Archive, Genealogy Centre, County Museum, Tourist Information Centre and Civic and Learning Space, the Presentation Buildings are a key community asset where residents and tourists frequent and spend time. The regeneration of these buildings into a modern cultural and heritage destination will support the development of the tourism product for the area.

4.6.2.7 Hinterland Assets

This JULAP recognises that the architectural, historical, and cultural assets accessible in the surrounding hinterlands to Carlow-Graigucullen can also be capitalised on to enhance the tourism potential of the joint urban area. Some examples of these assets include:

- Ducketts Grove Walled Gardens
- Killeshin Waterworks Reservoir Amenity Park
- Killeshin Church Romanesque Doorway and Graveyard
- Oisín Park Viewing Point Killeshin

4.6.3 The Arts

Carlow is a centre for the arts and cultural activities, accommodating significant modern arts and performance spaces as well as hosting renowned events.

4.6.3.1 Carlow Arts Festival

The Carlow Arts Festival is an annual multi-disciplinary arts festival which takes place in Carlow each June and is the first of the summer arts festivals in Ireland. Formerly Éigse Carlow Arts Festival (Éigse meaning ‘a gathering by poets’), Carlow Arts Festival began in 1979 as a community initiative, celebrating Irish heritage through Irish language, poetry, music and dance. The Festival has continued to evolve and is now one of only six strategically funded multi-disciplinary Arts Council funded festivals in the country and a highlight of the Irish cultural calendar. The focus on visual arts and presentation of international work through the Festival paved the way for the realisation and construction of the VISUAL Centre for Contemporary Art & The George Bernard Shaw Theatre.

4.6.3.2 The VISUAL

The VISUAL Centre for Contemporary Art & The George Bernard Shaw Theatre is one of Ireland’s leading contemporary art spaces situated in the heart of Carlow Town and opened in 2009. It houses a 335-seat theatre and the largest white cube gallery space in the country where it produces a programme of both commissioned and existing high-quality national and international contemporary art, plus a host of performances and events in multiple disciplines, including theatre, dance, film, comedy, literature and music. This €18 million development was a joint project funded by Carlow County Council with a grant of €3.17 million from the Department of Arts, Sport & Tourism under the ACCESS Programme. The site of the VISUAL was generously donated by Carlow College and is situated within its expansive eighteenth-century campus.

4.7 Food Tourism

This JULAP recognises that food can also play a role in tourism and visitor experiences in Carlow-Graiguecullen and provide an important platform for supporting and expanding local economic development.

Carlow Farmers' Market, founded in 2004, is one of the largest farmers' markets in the South-East and prides itself as one of the few authentic farmers' markets where the producers are all local, produce their own goods and sell mainly their own produce. The market trades every Saturday in and around the Carlow Exchange at Potato Market and offers both locals and tourists the chance to mingle with artisan suppliers and farmers who are passionate about their food, while learning the background of each individual product and receiving advice on how to make the best use of the extensive range available.

Tourism – Policies

It is the policy of Carlow County Council and Laois County Council to:

TD. P1: Support and facilitate the development of the tourism industry in Carlow-Graiguecullen with an emphasis on utilising and harnessing the potential of the natural and built heritage of the joint urban area, subject to compliance with normal planning and environmental criteria.

TD. P2: Support tourism initiatives including Fáilte Ireland's 'Ireland's Ancient East' tourism marketing platform which promotes Carlow-Graiguecullen as a visitor destination.

TD. P3: Support and collaborate with relevant agencies and bodies such as Carlow

Tourism, Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and The Arts Council, and key stakeholders and local communities, to further understand the needs of visitors to Carlow-Graiguecullen and to develop, promote and maximise the tourism potential of the joint urban area, and to ensure that tourism facilities are accessible to people with mobility issues, learning disabilities, people with visual or hearing impairments, young and elderly people.

TD. P4: Work with key stakeholders, including Carlow Tourism, Fáilte Ireland, the OPW, the Arts Council, the Heritage Council, and key stakeholders, businesses, and local communities, to support the sustainable development and promotion of heritage tourism in Carlow-Graiguecullen.

TD. P5: Protect and conserve the natural and built heritage of Carlow-Graiguecullen upon which the tourism industry is based, including landscapes, designated sites, habitats and species, water quality, archaeology and historic buildings and structures.

TD. P6: Promote Carlow Castle as a tourist attraction in conjunction with Fáilte Ireland, the OPW and relevant stakeholders, and to facilitate sustainable proposals to enhance the visitor experience at the castle, through the provision of improved access, signage, and associated infrastructure, as appropriate and as resources allow.

TD. P7: Develop and maximise the tourism potential of Carlow-Graiguecullen by facilitating the appropriate expansion of

existing facilities and the provision of new universally accessible and sustainable tourist attractions, facilities, and infrastructure in the joint urban area, while ensuring the protection of the environment and subject to compliance with normal planning and environmental criteria.

TD. P8: Support and promote the tourism role of the Cultural Quarter in the Town Centre.

TD. P9: Support the development of the transformational public realm projects that will enhance the aesthetics of the built and natural heritage of Carlow-Graiguecullen and improve the overall ambience and visitor experience of the joint urban area.

TD. P10: Maximise, enhance, and support opportunities for the use of the River Barrow and Burren River as tourism and recreational amenities, and engage with relevant agencies, bodies, and key stakeholders in this regard, including Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland, National Parks and Wildlife Service, and local communities, to develop the infrastructure, quality and amenity of these natural assets.

TD. P11: Support the provision of ancillary infrastructure and services that enhance the user experience of the River Barrow and Burren River and which increase tourism activity associated with water-based activities, where appropriate and feasible to do so and subject to normal planning and environmental criteria.


TD. P12: Facilitate, where appropriate, increased access to the River Barrow and Burren River, subject to compliance with normal planning and environmental criteria.

TD. P13: Promote and support the role and continued expression of local culture, arts and entertainment in Carlow-Graiguecullen, and to facilitate and where appropriate to encourage the use of public spaces in the joint urban area for art events and performances.

TD. P14: Continue to promote and support the role of the VISUAL Centre for Contemporary Art and George Bernard Shaw Theatre as a regional and County arts asset venue of national significance.

TD. P15: Support and promote existing events and festivals in Carlow-Graiguecullen, including the Carlow Arts Festival, to increase the tourism, heritage, and cultural profile of the joint urban area, and where appropriate, promote and facilitate the development of new events and festivals, and venues to host same.**TD. P16:** Encourage and support an improved night-time economy in Carlow-Graiguecullen through the increased use of existing and temporary spaces for Culture, Arts and Entertainment uses including through extended opening hours for existing attractions, subject to compliance with normal planning and environmental criteria.

TD. P17: Protect the environmental amenities of Carlow-Graiguecullen from insensitive or inappropriate development, particularly any development that threatens the



tourism resources of the joint urban area.

TD. P18: Support tourism initiatives which develop the tourism potential of the rural hinterland of Carlow-Graiguecullen while recognising and enhancing the quality and values of the rural area.

TD. P19: Facilitate the provision of standardised signage and interpretation for tourism facilities and tourist attractions throughout the joint urban area.

TD. P20: Promote and support the development of the food sector in Carlow-Graiguecullen, including the role of the Carlow Farmers' Market, and work in collaboration with relevant stakeholders to facilitate growth in this sector.

Tourism – Objectives

It is an objective of Carlow County Council and Laois County Council to:

TD. O1: Support, promote and maximise the role of Carlow Town as a designated Ireland's Ancient East 'Destination Town', and to engage with Fáilte Ireland in developing and promoting future tourism initiatives in the town, including enhancement of public space, the development of a way finding project and welcome signage, transport links, accommodation, the night-time economy, and the sustainable development of our natural and built heritage, in order to capitalise on the potential benefit of the funding for the town.