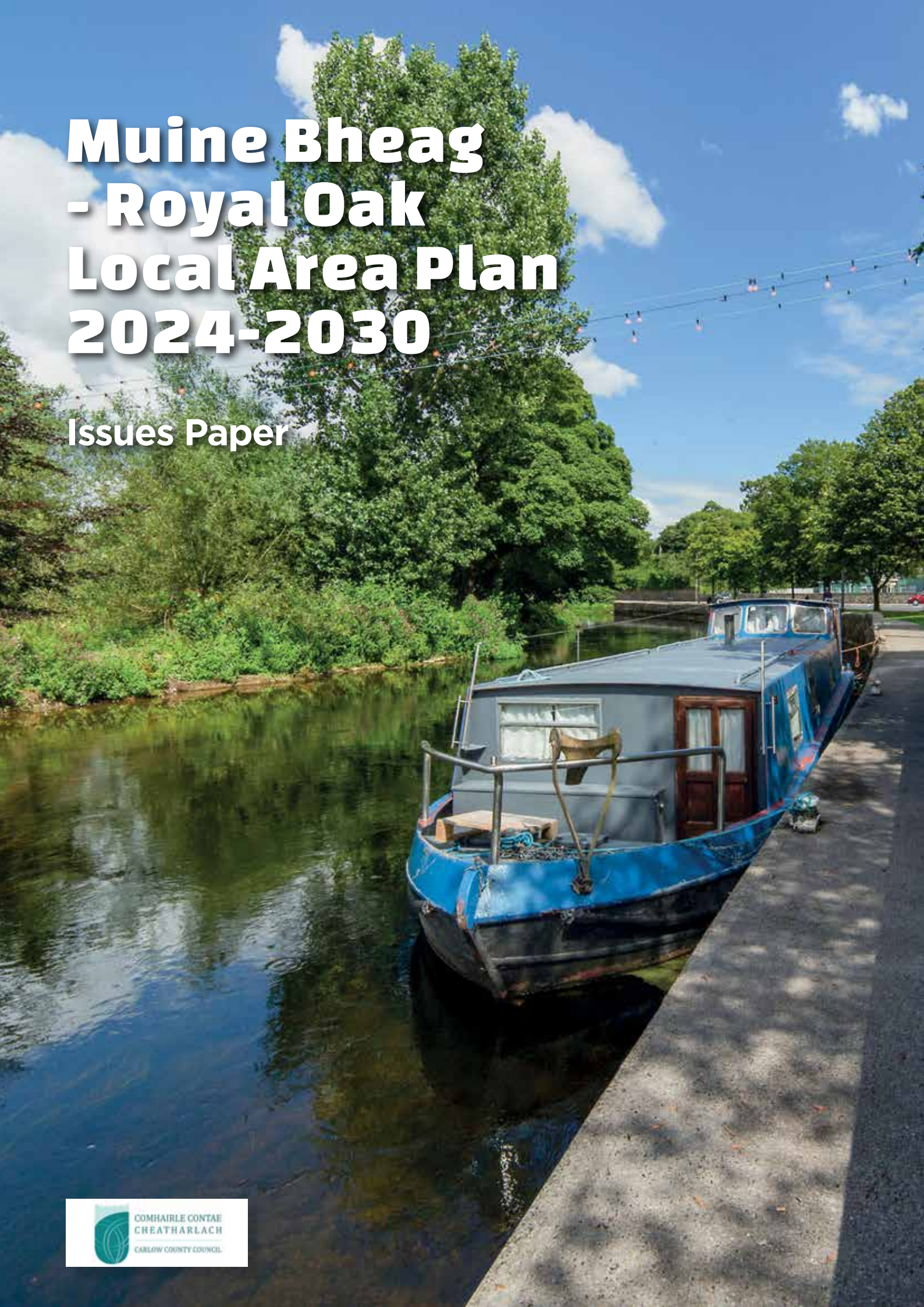


Muine Bheag - Royal Oak Local Area Plan 2024-2030

Issues Paper





Map 1: Muine Bheag – Royal Oak LAP Boundary

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HAVE YOUR SAY

If you are interested in planning and development issues in the Muine Bheag – Royal Oak local area and wish to contribute to the shaping of its future, please make a submission to the Planning Authority at this stage before 5pm, 6th March 2024.

An information session for members of the public will be held on the following date:

PUBLIC INFORMATION SESSION	DATE	TIME
MUINE BHEAG		
Muine Bheag Library, Main Street Muine Bheag	15th February 2024	14:30-17:00

Should any member of the public wish to make a specific appointment during the information session, please arrange to do so by phone on 059 9170307 or by email to: MuineBheagRoyalOakLAP@carlowcoco.ie

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Athy Road
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Next Steps

Following the Pre-Draft consultation process, a report on submissions received during the public consultation period will be prepared and presented to the Elected Members of Carlow County Council.

Following this, a Draft Local Area Plan (LAP) will be prepared for publication in Q2 of 2024. A further period of public consultation will take place following the issue of this Draft LAP document.

It is anticipated that the Muine Bheag – Royal Oak LAP will be adopted Q4 of 2024.

1. Introduction

Carlow County Council is commencing a review of Muine Bheag – Royal Oak Local Area Plan 2017 – 2023 (as extended).

The new Muine Bheag – Royal Oak Local Area Plan 2024-2030 will set out a land use strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. It will consist of a written statement and maps indicating objectives for purposes such as the zoning of land, economic and community development; residential development; heritage and culture; open space and recreation; transportation and infrastructure; urban design; and environmental protection.

The LAP process will involve public consultation at three stages:

- 1 Pre-Draft;**
- 2 Draft Plan; and**
- 3 Proposed Amendments stage.**

As part of the first stage, the Planning Authority is now engaging in Pre-Draft Consultation with the general public, stakeholders and interest groups. To inform the process this booklet has been prepared in order to give a broad overview of the main development issues currently impacting on the Muine Bheag – Royal Oak local area and identifies the issues that the next LAP could address.



2. Overview of Local Area Plan Process

A Local Area Plan (LAP) is a strategic document that guides the future development of an area in a sustainable manner over a 6 year period. The LAP document contains a written statement and maps (including zoning maps) detailing the various objectives of the LAP.

There are 3 no. separate stages involved in making and adoption of a LAP. These are as follows:



STAGE 1

Pre Draft

This is the first stage of the LAP process and involves the Planning Authority publishing an Issues Paper to inform the public that it intends to draft an LAP of the area and request submissions/ observations to inform the content of the LAP.

Essentially, the Planning Authority is seeking input from the public to identify if there are any key or local issues in the area that could be addressed in the making of the LAP.



STAGE 2

Draft LAP

At this stage the Planning Authority publishes a Draft LAP and requests public submissions on the content and objectives of the draft LAP. On completion of the public submission period, a Chief Executive's (CE) Report on the submissions received at Stage 2 is presented to the Elected Members for their consideration.

On review of the Draft LAP and CE Report, the Elected Members may decide to adopt the LAP or propose material alterations (amendments) to the Draft LAP.

If the elected Members decide to adopt the LAP, no further stages are required in the LAP process.



STAGE 3

Proposed Material Alterations to Draft LAP

If the Elected Members propose material alterations to the Draft LAP, these material alterations are put on public display and members of the public are invited to make submissions on these material alterations.

On completion of this public consultation period, a CE Report on the submissions received at Stage 3 is presented to the Elected Members for consideration.

The LAP is adopted or made at this final stage.

An integral part of the LAP process, involves the completion of three key environmental assessments on the contents of the LAP. These assessments comprise:

- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)
- Appropriate Assessment (AA)
- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)

These assessments cumulatively consider the potential effects of the LAP on the environment, habitats or species protected by EU designation.

3. Future Vision for Muine Bheag – Royal Oak

Muine Bheag - Royal Oak is designated as a ‘District Town’ in the Settlement Hierarchy of the Carlow County Development Plan 2022-2028 (CCDP). District towns are defined as well-developed serviced settlements with a moderate level of jobs supporting services and community facilities with good transport links and capacity for continued commensurate growth to become more self-sustaining.

The town has a strategic location given its proximity to the M9 Dublin to Waterford Motorway and its location on the Dublin -Waterford rail line. The River Barrow runs along the town’s western boundary.



The vision for the town, as stated in the current Muine Bheag – Royal Oak LAP 2017- 2023, is;

‘To build on Muine Bheag / Royal Oak’s unique strengths including its distinct character of built and natural heritage and to provide a focused approach to planning for future growth in a coherent, sustainable, spatial fashion. The Plan aims to achieve a more consolidated urban form that facilitates a sustainable economic base and creates sustainable and integrated communities while balancing future development with the conservation and enhancement of the town’s natural and built environment’.



KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What is your vision for the Muine Bheag – Royal Oak LAP over the plan period 2024-2030.
- What could the LAP target to assist in achieving this vision.

4. Strategic Planning

The preparation of the Muine Bheag – Royal Oak LAP will be informed by policies and objectives established in higher level planning documents including the National Planning Framework, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region and the Carlow County Development Plan (CCDP).



While guided by the overarching national and regional planning documents, Muine Bheag – Royal Oak LAP functional area, is also guided by the following settlement hierarchy policies set out in CCDP (Policies CS P6 - P9:)

- CS P6: 'Promote consolidation and growth with targeted investment to improve local employment, services and sustainable transport options, building on existing assets.'
- CS P7: 'Promote social and economic development and new homes in accordance with the requirements of the settlement hierarchy and the population targets of the Core Strategy.'
- CS P8: 'Promote compact growth, sustainable development, and urban regeneration through maximising the delivery of new homes and development on brownfield and infill land and in locations with strong sustainable transport links.'
- CS P9: To support continued growth and sustainable development with appropriate levels of growth as provided in Table 2.7 Core Strategy. Sustainable compact growth of town centre zoned sites will be prioritised together with a renewed focus on the town centre first principles and the appropriate development of regeneration / opportunity sites.

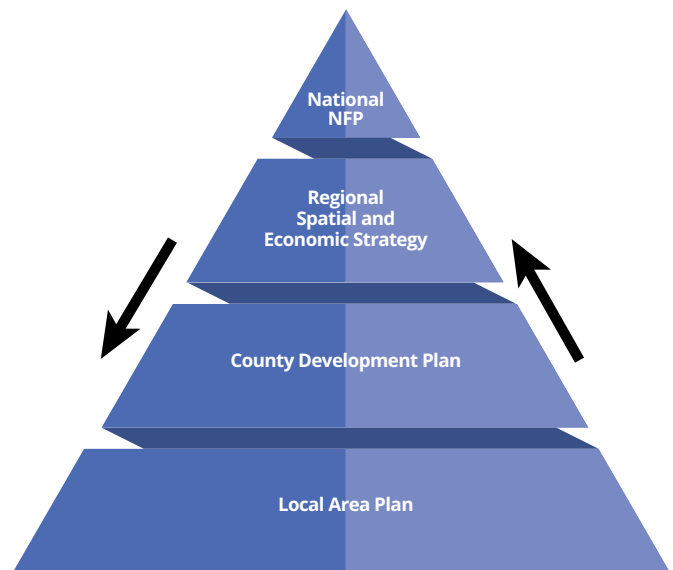


Figure 1: Spatial Planning Hierarchy

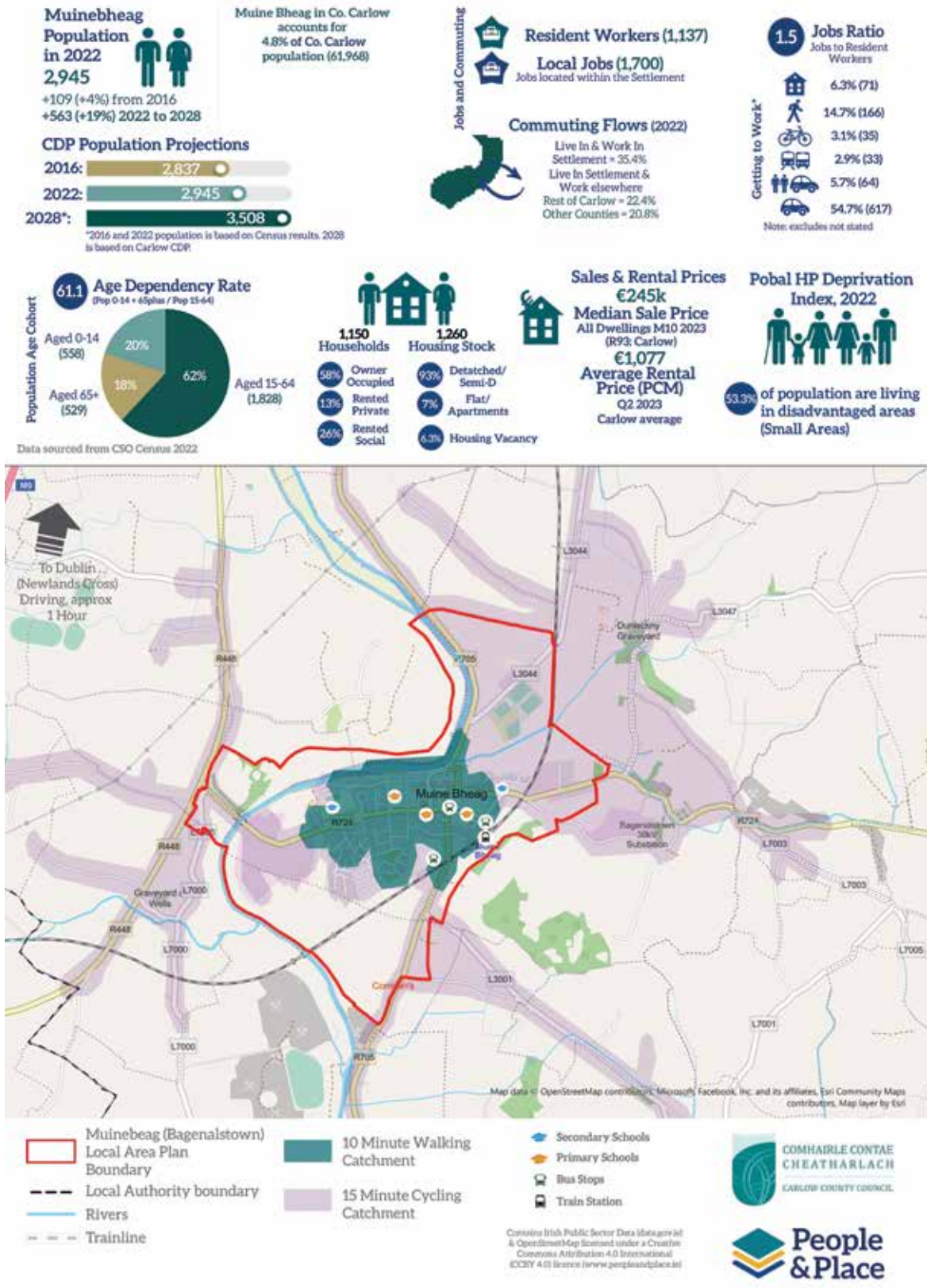


KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What do you think is needed to deliver on the Strategic Policies outlined above?
- How can the town be improved to make it a more attractive place to live, work and invest in?
- How can the Muine Bheag – Royal Oak LAP best contribute to supporting its designation as a District Town?

5. Overview of Muine Bheag-Royal Oak - Census 2022

The review of the Muine Bheag-Royal Oak Local Area 2024-2030 will be informed by Census 2022 results. The following graphic summarises data published to-date for the Muine Bheag-Royal Oak area. Any further results published during the preparation of the Draft LAP, will also be considered as appropriate.



6. Population and Housing

Population

Census 2022 data indicates the town's population in 2022 was 2,945 persons (Table 1) representing an increase of 3.8% over the Census 2016 figure.

Census	Muine Bheag - Population
2011	2,950
2016	2,837 (-3.8%)
2022	2,945 (+3.8%)

Table 1: Population of Muine Bheag (Source: CSO Census 2022)

Levels of growth are significantly below the national and county levels at 8% nationally and 9% at a county level between the period 2016 and 2022.

The figure below provide a breakdown of the Town's population in the 2022 Census by Age and Sex.



Figure 2: Population of Muine Bheag by Sex and Age (Source: CSO Census 2022)

Housing

The Core Strategy of the CCDP sets out the housing requirements for the County up to 2028. With respect to Muine Bheag-Royal Oak, the Core Strategy has allocated a housing target of 295 residential units. Projecting out the housing allocation for an additional 2 years, to take account of the lifetime of the Draft LAP, this equates to a housing target of 393 residential units up to 2030.

Since the adoption of the CCDP in July 2022, approximately 42 housing units have been completed to-date.

Capacity constraints in the town's wastewater infrastructure has impacted on the potential to deliver residential development. To address this capacity issue, Irish Water are currently upgrading the existing wastewater treatment plant. It is anticipated that these works will be completed early in 2025, increasing the treatment capacity from a population equivalent of 4,500 to 9,800.



KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Where should new housing be developed in Muine Bheag?
- How can we ensure residential development gives rise to compact and sustainable patterns of development?
- What type and size of new housing is required in Muine Bheag to ensure the housing needs of all sectors (including the elderly, mobility impaired and single person households) of our community will be adequately addressed?
- How can new developments contribute to the creation of sustainable communities?
- How can new private and social housing be successfully integrated into existing and new communities?

7. Economic Development, Tourism and Retail

Muine Bheag is designated as a ‘District Town’ in the current CCDP and the third largest settlement in the County. In this context, Muine Bheag - Royal Oak is considered a well-developed serviced town with employment supporting services and community facilities.

Muine Bheag’s job to resident workers ratio is the highest in the County at 1.5, as outlined in Census 2022. This ratio indicates that there is net in-flow of workers to the town and it has a wider employment role. Key industries in the town include specialist engineering and manufacturing firms, distribution and logistics firms and brewing/distillery enterprises.

Major industry sectors in Muine Bheag are outlined in Table 2.

Industry Sectors in Muine Bheag	
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	1%
Building and construction	5%
Manufacturing industries	20%
Commerce and trade	26%
Transport and communications	7%
Public administration	4%
Professional services	22%
Other	15%

Table 2: Industry Sectors in Muine Bheag (Source: Census 2022)

A key objective of the new LAP will continue to support the role of Muine Bheag- Royal Oak as an employment hub within the County and to attract targeted investment to improve local employment, services and sustainable transport options while building on existing assets, in order to strengthen the strong employment base.

With respect to economic development, the Draft LAP will seek to ensure that sufficient serviced lands are zoned for employment purposes, to facilitate the development of enterprises at appropriate locations to enable clustering and specialisation of industries to further stimulate economic growth in the town.

A key focus of the LAP will seek to address vacancy and dereliction together with the use of underutilised lands within the town centre. A core objective of the Draft LAP will be to encourage investment that will facilitate the creation of new jobs in the town, and in doing so assist / contribute to regeneration of the town by addressing dereliction, underutilisation of buildings / sites, and / or the re-purposing of buildings.



Retail

The Carlow Retail Strategy (contained within the CCDP) highlights the need to protect the localised retail functions of Muine Bheag-Royal Oak. The town has a good convenience offer i.e. food, beverages and non-durable household goods. The recent completion of Lidl Store on Royal Oak Road has further bolstered the convenience offer of the town.



The Retail Strategy notes that Muine Bheag would benefit from additional comparison retailing, particularly with respect to ladies and children clothing shops, and footwear stores.

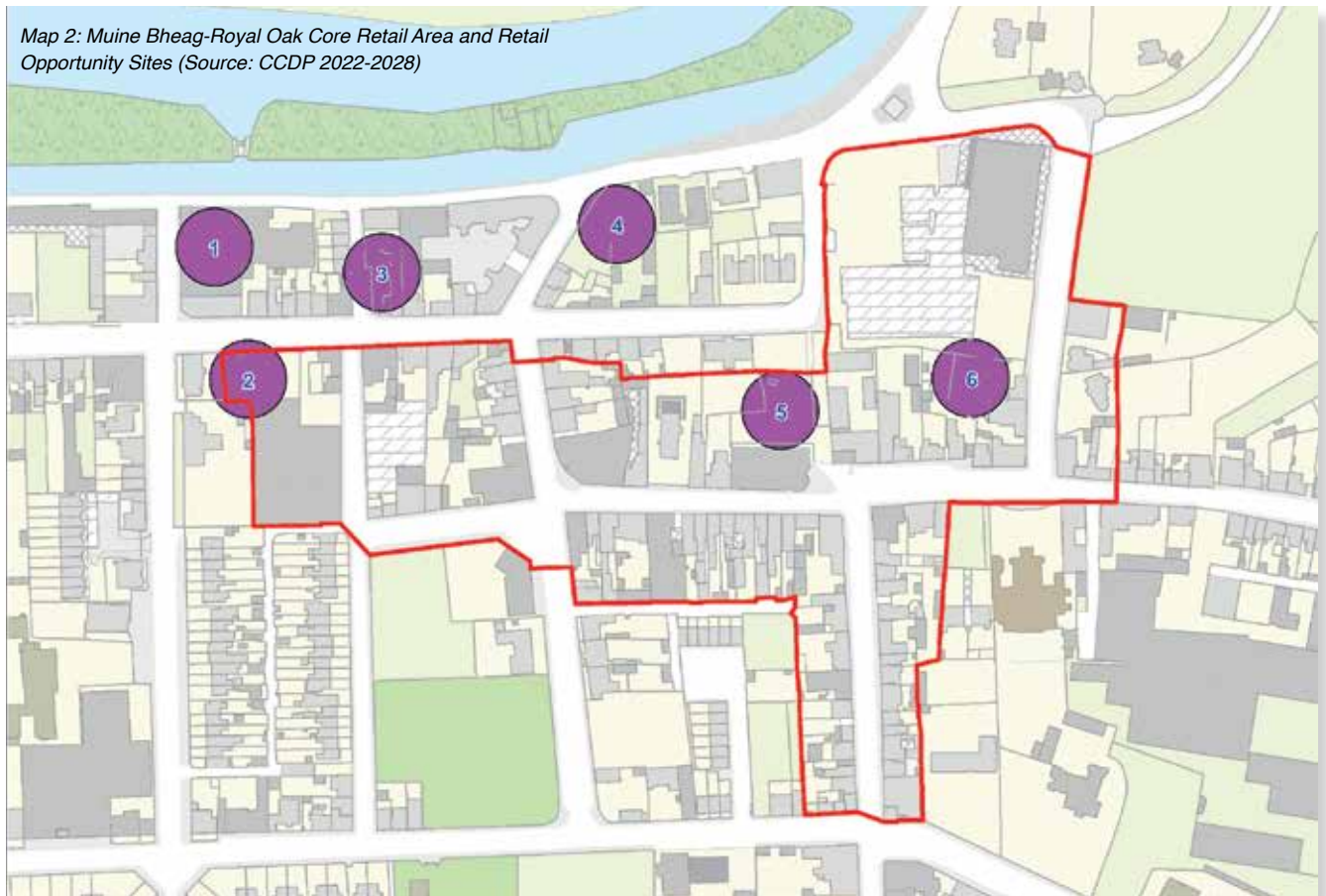
The Retail Strategy highlights the need for the development of a strong mixed-use town centre with complementary uses such as cafes and restaurants required to tap into the tourism potential of the town.



The objectives and policies of the Draft LAP will seek to protect the town's retail function by facilitating additional retail floorspace within the Core Retail Area which encompasses Main Street, High Street, Fair Green North, Pump Street, Killree Street and The Parade (outlined in red on Map 2).

The Retail Strategy identifies 6 no. retail opportunity sites (highlighted in purple on Map 2) where redevelopment provides an opportunity to improve the Core Retail Area and town centre but also enhance the permeability and access to the River Barrow.

Coupled with the need to bolster and enhance the retail offer, the Draft LAP will seek to improve the pedestrian/cycling accessibility and encourage public realm improvements in the town centre with a view to enhancing the connectivity, safety and attractiveness of the area.





Tourism

Tourism has significant potential to contribute to the future economic development of Muine Bheag-Royal Oak. The town currently has a limited tourism offer and it is considered that an enhancement of tourism facilities coupled with public realm improvements could greatly assist in the creation of a vibrant town centre for the benefit of the community and local businesses alike.

Key unique assets and characteristics of the town include the River Barrow which meanders along the western boundary of the town, the distinctive grid pattern of the streets and the history/heritage of the town. Muine Bheag-Royal Oak also has a unique opportunity given the presence of a Distillery and Breweries in the town. Food Tourism is a growing sector within the tourism market and the town is well placed to tap into this area of growth.

The Draft LAP will seek to promote and support the unique and underutilised tourism potential of Muine Bheag-Royal Oak and encourage the development and enhancement of tourist facilities including signage, visitor infrastructure and improving the public realm in the town.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What policies should the Plan include to promote enterprise and employment in the town?
- What other type of industry / employment opportunities should be encouraged?
- What policies should be introduced to further support town centre retailing and commercial activities, in order to enhance vitality and vibrancy of the town?
- How can this LAP support the development of the tourism potential of Muine Bheag?
- How can this LAP help to create/foster a vibrant and resilient town centre?

8. Compact Growth, Urban Design and Regeneration

Compact Growth

One of the guiding principles of compact growth is to promote and facilitate the regeneration of underutilised brownfield /infill /derelict and vacant sites within town centre locations.

Compact growth supports sustainable mobility, healthy communities, successful urban living and is delivered through high-quality built environment and public realm improvements.



The Council will seek to focus investment and development on ‘Compact Growth’ and a ‘Town Centre First’ approach over the lifetime of this new LAP. This approach is in line with national, regional and local policy.



Urban Design

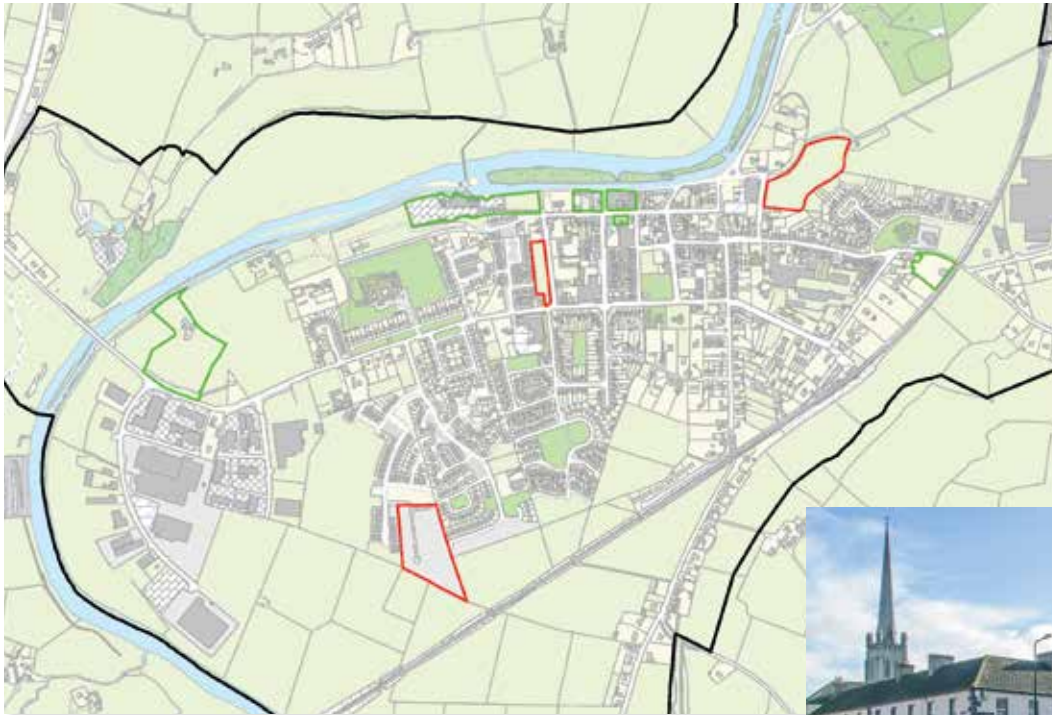
Urban Design is key element involved in the creation of healthy and attractive places to live, work and socialise. It examines all the elements that contribute to place – such as buildings, uses, streets, footpaths and open spaces, and ensuring that these elements are blended harmoniously to create an attractive and distinctive physical environment.

It is important to balance the protection of Muine Bheag’s distinctive built heritage and character while enhancing the quality of the built environment so as to enable people to continue living in attractive and safe surroundings, and to ensure a similar standard for future generations.

The Draft LAP will set out policies and objectives guiding Urban Design to ensure that Muine Bheag - Royal Oak is an attractive, high quality and sustainable place to live, work and socialise.



Figure 3: Key Urban Design Principles for Quality Placemaking



Map 3: Regeneration Sites
(Source: CCDP 2022-2028)

Regeneration and Settlement Consolidation

The current CCDP has identified sites within the town which are considered priority sites for regeneration and consolidation.

Three regeneration sites front directly onto the River Barrow along The Barrow Way with another site located in the town centre to the west of the Core Retail Area. The remaining sites are situated at peripheral locations, one to the west of the town, in close proximity to the Royal Oak Bridge with the other adjacent to the railway line along Kilcarrig Street. The regeneration sites are outlined in green on Map 3.

Three no. Settlement Consolidation sites are located within the town; adjacent to the Core Retail Area to the east of The Parade, opposite the Queen of the Universe National School (along Long Range) and to the south west of the town backing onto the Pairc Gleann Na Bearu housing estate at Ashfield. The settlement consolidation sites are identified in red on Map 3.

The development of these sites is considered a priority within the lifetime of the new LAP. The Council will promote and facilitate development on these sites at an appropriate scale to address dereliction and vacancy within the town centre and outer town locations.



Public Realm Recent Projects

In 2022, Carlow County Council was successful in obtaining funding under the Department of Rural and Community - Town and Village Renewal Scheme. This funding has been allocated for public realm improvements in the town.

The proposed works which are currently subject to Part 8 consultation are located within the area between Main Street, Market Square and Bachelor's Walk and include the installation of; new footpaths, pedestrian crossings, lighting, street furniture, seating areas and landscaping.

Details of the proposed works are available on Carlow County Council's online consultation portal under the following link: consult.carlow.ie/en/consultation/part-8-bagenalstown-public-realm-project-bagenalstown-co-carlow.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What are the key design issues relating to the built environment in Muine Bheag- Royal Oak?
- What criteria should inform good quality living environments?
- How can this LAP help to revitalise and regenerate the town centre?
- What opportunity / regeneration sites, if developed, would contribute most to a more sustainable urban environment?
- What are the unique features of the urban environment that should inform future policy?

9. Sustainable Transport and Infrastructure

An integrated approach to land use and transport planning, including policies which support realistic walking and cycling distances from residential, employment, educational, shopping and amenity areas, will be a key mechanism to support the development of a sustainable, healthy and low carbon urban area.

A key principle of the new LAP will be to develop the town in a more sustainable manner by promoting the reduction in the dependency of the private car and the transition to more sustainable modes of transport including public transport, cycling and walking.

Road and Rail

Muine Bheag - Royal Oak has a strategic location with the M9 motorway running in a north-south axis to the west of the town and a network of regional roads intersecting in close proximity to the town centre.

Muine Bheag - Royal Oak also has a railway station which is situated on the Dublin / Waterford rail line.

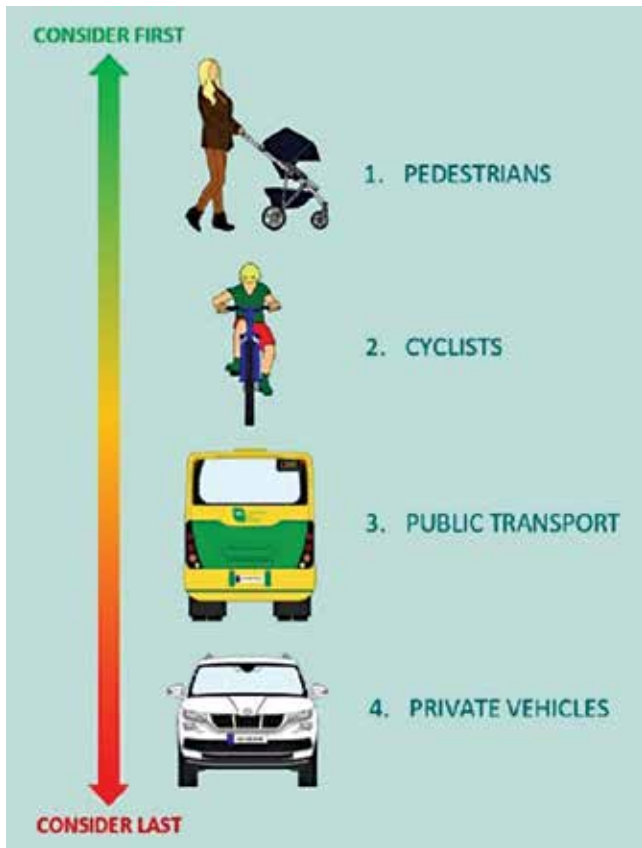
The Department of Transport in conjunction with the Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland is currently undertaking 'All-Island Strategic Rail Review' of the rail infrastructure across the island of Ireland. One of the recommendations as part of this review includes the potential upgrade of the existing rail line from a single track to a double-tracked electrified railway between Waterford and Kildare. If completed, this would reduce travel times for commuters from the town using rail services along this railway line.

The new LAP will aim to promote the development of an enhanced public transport system capitalising on the town's existing transport infrastructure in order to provide a viable alternative to the private car.



Active Travel

The creation of a comprehensive walking and cycling network will help create a resilient, low carbon transport network for Muine Bheag - Royal Oak.



The guiding principles of any such network is that it prioritises safety and is user friendly, it caters for multiple users including; children, the mobility impaired and the elderly, and it promotes healthy streetscapes.

Table 3 illustrates the modes of transport for residents in the Muine Bheag- Royal Oak as recorded in Census 2022 when traveling to work, school or college. The car is the principal mode of transport which accounted for approximately 55%, with Walking and Cycling making up 18% of all travel.

Modes of Travel to Work, School and College for residents – Muine Bheag-Royal Oak	
On Foot	14.7%
Bicycle	3.1%
Bus, Train	2.9%
Car	54.7%
Car Passenger	5.7%
Work mainly at home	6.3%

Table 3: Modes of Travel to Work, School and College for residents Muine Bheag-Royal Oak (Source: Census 2022)

The River Barrow Way is a key recreational asset within the town, however there is scope to further enhance connectivity, thereby supporting and promoting a modal shift to more active travel options improving connectivity to employment, education, retail and leisure opportunities.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What are the key transport issues/infrastructural deficiencies in Muine Bheag-Royal Oak and how should the LAP address them?
- What measures could be included in the LAP to promote and encourage a reduction in car dependency in and around Muine Bheag?
- What are the key movement and active travel issues affecting residents, workers, and visitors?
- How can we create more successful streets that easily facilitate the needs of vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians?
- Are there areas of the town that would benefit from new / improved walking routes, cycle ways or linkages to improve the mobility through Muine Bheag-Royal Oak?
- How can the local streets be improved?

10. Climate Change and the Environment

Climate Change and the impact on the environment is playing an increasingly important role in how cities and towns develop.



The impacts of climate change permeate through all aspects of our built and natural environments. Consequently, adapting to and mitigating the effects of climate change will be a key consideration when formulating the policies and objectives for the town.

Carlow County Council has recently prepared a Climate Action Plan 2024-2029 to facilitate the transition of County Carlow to a low carbon and climate resilient County. This will be achieved by delivering and promoting best practice in climate action at local level.

One of the key actions of this Climate Action Plan with respect to Muine Bheag-Royal Oak is to complete a Transport Plan for the town having due regard to the potential to create climate action co-benefits, and environmental protection.

Measures to support the transition to a low carbon climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy will be of critical importance in the development of the town over the lifetime of the LAP and beyond.

Figure 4: Mitigation and Adaptation Actions
(Source: Eastern and Midland Climate Action Regional Office - CARO)



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How can the LAP support Muine Bheag-Royal Oak in its transition to a low carbon climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy?
- What are the key environmental issues currently impacting Muine Bheag-Royal Oak?
- What are the opportunities and challenges for the town in light of climate change?
- What forms of renewable energy sources should be promoted in the LAP with respect to residential, commercial and industrial developments etc.

11. Sustainable Communities

Carlow County Council recognises the importance of promoting, developing and maintaining sustainable communities where people can live, work and have access to a range of services and amenities within their locality. The provision of and the availability of access to, community services, healthcare services and recreational and cultural amenities is key to fostering sustainable communities and the delivery of successful places.

The town has several established community and health services including the Bagenalstown Family Resource Centre, the Bagenalstown Health Centre and St. Lazerian’s House Nursing Home.



In terms of recreation and community amenities, Muine Bheag Royal Oak has a unique offering with an outdoor heated swimming pool adjacent to the River Barrow. In addition to the recreational walkways along the River Barrow, the town possesses several recreational clubs including: Soccer, GAA and Cricket Clubs, a Kayak and Stand Up Paddle-Boarding Club, a Pitch and Putt Course.

The new LAP will seek to develop policies and objectives to support and enhance the existing community facilities and develop additional quality facilities, as considered appropriate, for Muine Bheag-Royal Oak.

Figure 5: Elements Supporting Quality of Life
Source: National Planning Framework (NPF)



Social Inclusion

Social inclusion is an important component in developing and sustaining local communities. Social inclusion refers to the manner in which all members of a community regardless of their ability, age, nationality, religion, background or personal circumstances has equal access to key community services, and can freely participate and contribute to community life, in order to fulfil their potential in life. Promoting and supporting social inclusion and community participation will be a key aim of the new LAP.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How can the LAP assist in meeting the community infrastructural needs of its residents?
- Does the existing range of community facilities, recreational/cultural amenities adequately cater for the existing and future residents in Muine Bheag-Royal Oak?
- What policies should be included in the LAP to support the delivery of education, healthcare and childcare facilities?
- How can the LAP assist in promoting support of social inclusion in the town?

12. Heritage and Green Infrastructure

Muine Bheag-Royal Oak has a rich built heritage. It comprises of streets laid out in a distinctive grid pattern, coupled with various buildings of architectural and historical significance. There are several buildings of note including the Court House, St. Andrew's Church and St. Mary's Church of Ireland and the Railway Station.

In terms of natural heritage the River Barrow borders to the north and west of the town and is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the European Habitats Directive.

There are five designated archaeological sites within Muine Bheag-Royal Oak's boundary which are the surviving material remains of human presence in the landscape left by past societies and cultures.

The preservation of both built and natural heritage assets is considered an important element in the future development of the town. In this regard, the LAP will contain policies and objectives seeking to protect and preserve this unique heritage while guiding new development in a sympathetic manner or re-development opportunities at appropriate locations.





Green Infrastructure

In broad terms 'Green Infrastructure' refers to the integration and interconnection of natural and semi-natural areas that sustain environmental quality and in turn enrich the quality of life. Potential green infrastructure can include areas of biodiversity, rivers, woodlands, grassland and amenity spaces such as play areas, playing fields, parks and domestic gardens. The LAP will seek to increase awareness, support and enhance the important role of green infrastructure for the community of Muine Bheag-Royal Oak.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How can we achieve a balance between protecting the built heritage of Muine Bheag-Royal Oak whilst also facilitating the regeneration of the town?
- Are there any buildings, group of buildings, amenity areas, views that you consider to be of merit and should be afforded protection?
- How can we best promote, support, and increase awareness of the benefits of Green Infrastructure?
- What type of Green Infrastructure would Muine Bheag-Royal Oak benefit from?

HAVE YOUR SAY

If you are interested in planning and development issues in the Muine Bheag – Royal Oak local area and wish to contribute to the shaping of its future, please make a submission to the Planning Authority at this stage before 5pm, 6th March 2024.

An information session for members of the public will be held on the following date:

PUBLIC INFORMATION SESSION	DATE	TIME
MUINE BHEAG		
Muine Bheag Library, Main Street Muine Bheag	15th February 2024	14:30-17:00

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It is anticipated that the Muine Bheag – Royal Oak LAP will be adopted Q4 of 2024.



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