Chapter 2: Core Strategy, Settlement Strategy and Housing Strategy

2.1 Topic 1: Core Strategy

2.1.1 Aim

To ensure that the development objectives of this Plan are consistent with national and regional development objectives as set out in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region (2019).

2.1.2 Context

This chapter is prepared in the context of Section 10(2A) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), the Guidance Note on Core Strategies 2010, the National Planning Framework (NPF), the Implementation Roadmap for the NPF, the RSES, and Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines such as the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines, Sustainable Development in Urban Area Guidelines, Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments, and the Urban Development and Building Heights Guidelines. These documents set the basis for guiding future growth within the county. In line with the provisions of the Act, the Core Strategy includes a written statement, a Core Strategy Map and a Core Strategy Table.

2.1.3 Purpose

The purpose of the Core Strategy is to articulate a medium to longer-term quantitatively based strategy for the spatial development of the county and in so doing to demonstrate that the Development Plan and its objectives are consistent with national and regional development objectives set out in the NPF, the RSES, and specific planning policy requirements in Section 28 Guidelines. The amount of land and the level of housing for the Plan period that is identified in the Core Strategy must be in line with that specified for County Offaly.

The Core Strategy provides a transparent evidence-based rationale for the amount of land proposed to be zoned residential and a mix of residential and other uses in the Development Plan. It identifies the quantum, location and phasing of development for the Plan period linked back to a county population target, in the form of a settlement hierarchy.

2.1.4   Principles for Growth

This Development Plan identifies the following list as *principles for growth* upon which to encourage the focus of new development:

(i)   **Compact growth**, by targeting at least 30% of all new homes that are proposed in settlements within their existing built-up footprints, with a focus on **infill / brownfield** lands, rather than continually sprawling outwards;

(ii)   Making better use of under-utilised land and buildings including **vacant**, derelict and under-occupied buildings;

(iii)   Supporting, facilitating and promoting a transition to a **low carbon society**;

(iv)   Strengthening **town and village centres** to meet their full potential;

(v)   **Aligning** population, employment, community and housing growth in a balanced fashion;

(vi)   Renewal and rejuvenation of all settlements by identifying significant **regeneration areas** in the existing built-up areas of our towns and villages as well as rural regeneration opportunities;

(vii)   Moving towards **self-sustaining rather than long distance commuter driven** activity;

(viii) In order to achieve more **balanced and sustainable** development, some settlements need to attract increased population, whereas others need more jobs, amenities or better transport links;

(ix)   Addressing the legacy of rapid unplanned growth, by facilitating amenities, jobs and services **catch-up**, together with a slower rate of population growth in recently expanded commuter settlements;

(x)   **Sequential** provision of housing and infrastructure;

(xi)   Managing **urban generated growth** in rural areas under strong urban influence and stronger rural areas and **reverse the decline** or stagnation of many rural villages;

(xii)   Developing the designated **Key Town of Tullamore** of sufficient scale and quality to be a driver of regional growth, investment and prosperity, followed by Self-Sustaining Growth Towns and Self-Sustaining Towns to grow to a sustainable level. Other towns need to be promoted for regeneration, local employment and managed levels of growth, and the rural area which includes villages, Sráids and the open countryside, shall be promoted for regeneration and local employment and services with targeted rural housing policies;

(xiii) Developing **serviced zoned land and serviceable zoned land** within the life of this County Development Plan;

(xiv)   Compliance with **government policy and Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines** including specific planning policy requirements;

(xv)   Reducing car dependency, promoting sustainable mobility and regional accessibility, and **integrating transportation and landuse;**

(xvi)   Towns and villages to become more attractive, well-designed, of high quality design and 'liveable' through **healthy place-making**;

(xvii) Promoting **economic development** and enterprise activity;

(xviii) Protecting assets by **preserving the quality of the landscape**, open space, recreational resources, biodiversity, architectural, archaeological and cultural heritage and material assets in the county;

(xix)   Promoting **social inclusion**; and

(xx)   **Collaboration** between key stakeholders in land amalgamation and coordination.

The above principles stem from the NPF (2018) and RSES (2019) and have been crucial in the formation of the Core Strategy Table and Core Strategy Map. They are significant guiding principles not only in the making of the Core Strategy but also in the remainder of the County Development Plan.

2.1.5   Approach

The approach to realise County Offaly's population target as set out in the NPF Implementation roadmap, and the provision of this within the settlements and countryside of County Offaly is set out in a robust evidence based analysis of demand, past delivery and the potential of the county's settlements. This involved an analysis of the capacity of towns and villages throughout the county to accommodate future growth to support the settlement strategy and which examined key issues including:

- Strategic Environmental Assessment of this Plan;

- NPF, National Development Plan (NDP) and RSES;

- Existing population base and other demographic factors;

- Availability of social and physical infrastructure; existing and planned;

- Environmental constraints;

- Settlement form;

- Vacancy, dereliction, brownfield / infill sites, unfinished housing developments;

- Planning history; and

- Potential for economic and social development.

Density

As part of the Core Strategy, the scale and location of settlements has been considered and accordingly the requisite nature and scale of development appropriate to these locations has been evaluated. In this regard, higher densities are applied to higher order settlements i.e. the Key Town of Tullamore, with a graded reduction in residential densities for Self-Sustaining Growth Towns and Self-Sustaining Towns, and other towns and villages that is commensurate to the existing built environment.

Towns in the lower tiers will provide for commensurate population and employment growth, providing for natural increase and becoming more economically self-sustaining in line with the equality and capacity of public transport, services and infrastructure available.

NPF, RSES, Guidelines, Population

In accordance with National Policy Objective 9 of the NPF, a settlement that is not a city / associated suburb or regional growth centre may be identified for significant (i.e. 30% or more above 2016 population levels to 2040) rates of population growth provided it aligns with investment in infrastructure and the provision of employment, amenities and services. The Key Town of Tullamore lends itself to significant rates of population growth in this instance.

As set out in the RSES (2019), urban-generated development in rural areas needs to be managed in such a way so as to safeguard the integrity of rural areas and to support the accommodation of urban-generated development within urban areas.

The Urban Development and Building Heights Guidelines for Planning Authorities, December 2019 state that it is a specific planning policy requirement that in planning the future development of greenfield or edge of city / town locations for housing purposes, planning authorities must secure the minimum densities for such locations set out in the 'Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas' Guidelines or any amending or replacement Guidelines.

In accordance with the Water Services Guidelines for Planning Authorities, the quantum, location and distribution of new development will have regard to the capacity of public water services and seek to make efficient use of and maximise the capacity of existing and planned water services infrastructure. Parcels of land are identified for strategic residential reserve which will be considered for development in future Development Plans, for example, when service infrastructure may become available.

Green House Gas Emissions from Transport

The Core Strategy has been prepared to reduce the impact of land use on modal split and transport greenhouse gas emissions as follows;

• The allocation of population growth to the settlements on a sustainable tiered approach based on the settlement hierarchy set out in the RSES (2019), the infrastructural services, demand, past delivery and potential growth means that the settlements will grow at an appropriate rate and at a more self-sufficient level, thereby reducing the need to commute;

• The distribution of many land use zoning types within settlement boundaries including a mix of uses in the centre of the settlements will facilitate reduced travel demand, and also increased usage of sustainable modes of transport;

- At least 30% of housing within the settlements is to be within the existing built-up footprint area in the interest of compact sustainable growth, in conjunction with the sequential development of the settlements. This contributes to the integration of landuse and transportation;

- Many different land uses are permitted or open for consideration in the land use zonings within the settlements. This allows for the integration of various uses in proximity to each other, thereby reducing the need to travel in the first instance, and secondly encourages walking and cycling; and

- The Strategic Environmental Assessment carried out as part of this County Development Plan takes climate adaptation and mitigation into account.

Residential land in Previous County Development Plan

Section 10(2A)(c) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) states that 'A core strategy shall in respect of the area in the development plan already zoned for residential use or a mixture of residential and other uses, provide details of –

(i)   The size of the area in hectares, and
(ii)   The proposed number of housing units to be included in the area.

The term 'already zoned' is taken to mean the County Development Plan that was in effect (2014-2020 as extended) during the time of the preparation of the new Development Plan (2021-2027). The following table sets out the area of land zoned for residential use in the County Development Plan 2014-2020, together with the number of housing units allocated for these lands.

Table 2.1: Residential Land

Plan	Mixed Use Zoning	Residential Zoning
Offaly County Development Plan 2014-2020 as extended	110.74	468.2
Tullamore Town Plan 2016-2010 as extended	58.77	682.96
Birr Town Plan 2016-2010 as extended	26.81	243.03
Edenderry Local Area Plan 2017-2023	23.25	137.41
Portarlington Joint Local Area Plan 2018-2024	28.31	143.93
Total hectares	**247.88**	**1675.53**

The County Development Plan 2014-2020 (as extended) did not allocate a residential unit figure to zonings for a mixture of residential and other uses. The amount of land that was zoned mixed use (which included developed and undeveloped land) was 110.74 hectares. The number of units allocated to the residential zoned figure under the County Development Plan 2014-2020 was 3163.

Going forward, it will be simpler to compare the new residential zonings and undeveloped mixed use zonings of this County Development Plan 2021-2027 with the next County Development Plan 2027-2033.

Where the amount of land that was zoned residential under the 2014-2020 County Development Plan (as extended) is surplus to the amount of land that is required to meet the needs of the current Plan period (2021-2027), the following approaches are available to address the difference:

- designation of lands as 'strategic residential reserve';
- zoning of lands for an alternative use; or
- dezoning of lands.

These measures are to ensure that towns grow at a sustainable level appropriate to their position in the settlement hierarchy, as required by the NPF and RSES.

Committed Land

The Core Strategy Table as set out in Table 2.2 does not deduct population that would be catered for in committed land by way of extant planning permissions or Part VIII approval.

Sequential Approach

In order to maximise the utility of existing and future infrastructure provision and promote the achievement of sustainability, a logical sequential approach was taken to the zoning of land for development: (i) Zoning extends outwards from the centre of an urban area, with undeveloped lands closest to the core and public transport routes given preference (i.e. 'leapfrogging' to more remote areas has been avoided); (ii) A strong emphasis is placed on encouraging infill opportunities and better use of under-utilised lands; and (iii) Areas zoned are contiguous to existing zoned development lands.

Employment, Retail and Regeneration

There is a need to encourage population growth in strong employment and service centres of all sizes, supported by continued employment growth. Sufficient lands are zoned for employment purposes within the settlements through various zoning types. Chapter 5 Economic Development Strategy sets out the policies and objectives of the Council in promoting and facilitating employment growth and enterprise activity in the county both in an urban and rural context.

In setting out objectives regarding retail development in Chapter 7 Retail and Town Centre and Regeneration, adherence to Section 28 Retail Planning Guidelines has been had, in particular in relation to;

- The retail hierarchy

- Core retail areas

- Criteria for assessing retail development

- Categories of retail development

- Sequential approach

- Design and layout

Chapter 7 also includes policies and objectives relating to regeneration and an outline of a number of Opportunity Sites that are considered appropriate for significant improvement, many of which are brownfield, infill, vacant, derelict or underutilised. The individual settlement plans also contain sites considered suitable for regeneration purposes.

Ecosystem Services

In preparing this Plan and developing policies and objectives, the Council have followed these Ecosystem Services[1] Approach principles:

a)   Consideration of natural systems - by using knowledge of interactions in nature and how ecosystems function (including in Chapter 3 Climate Action and Energy).

b)   Taking into account the services that ecosystems provide - including those that underpin social and economic well-being, such as flood and climate regulation (including in Chapter 3 Climate Action and Energy), resources for food, fibre or fuel (including in Chapter 5 Economic Development Strategy), or for recreation, culture and quality of life (including in Chapter 4 Biodiversity and Landscape, Chapter 6 Tourism and Recreational Development, and Chapter 10 Built Heritage).

c)   Involving people - those who benefit from the ecosystem services and those managing them need to be involved in decisions that affect them. Public consultation has informed the preparation of the Plan.

The Council will promote an Ecosystem Services Approach, following the above principles, in its decision-making processes, including those relating to the preparation of statutory land use plans.

In recognition of the need to manage natural capital[2], provisions have been integrated into the Plan that will contribute towards management of air quality, noise pollution, light pollution, water quality and integrated catchment management.

2.1.6   Core Strategy Map

As required by the Core Strategy Guidance 2010, the Core Strategy must contain the classification of differing rural area types in map format in accordance with the 2005 Planning Guidelines on Sustainable Rural Housing. These areas constitute:

1.   Rural Areas under strong urban influence

These areas exhibit characteristics such as:

- Proximity to immediate environs or close commuting catchment of cities / large towns

- Rapidly rising population

- Pressure for residential development due to proximity to urban area / major transport corridors

- Pressure on infrastructure

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[1] Ecosystems are multifunctional communities of living organisms interacting with each other and their environment. Ecosystems provide a series of services for human well-being (ecosystem services) either directly or indirectly contributing towards human wellbeing.

[2] Renewable and non-renewable resources (for example, plants, animals, air, water, soils, minerals).

2.   Stronger rural areas

These areas exhibit characteristics such as:

- Stable or rising population within a well-developed town and village structure

- Supported by strong agricultural base

- Level of individual housing tends to be relatively low and confined to certain areas.

3.   Structurally weaker rural areas

These areas exhibit characteristics such as:

- Persistent / significant population decline

- Weaker economic structure based on indices of income, employment and economic growth

4.   Areas with clustered settlement patterns

- Such rural areas are generally associated with the western Irish seaboard and do not feature in County Offaly.

In order to establish the rural area type, each Electoral Division was assessed against a range of data, criteria and trends in relation to planning applications for rural housing, urban zones of influence[3] population change, and other demographic information, for example, Pobal Deprivation Indices.

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[3] Established by AIRO using census data 2016 to identify the Electoral Divisions that experienced 15% of its workforce commute to a settlement of 10,000+ population or a settlement with 2,500+ jobs.
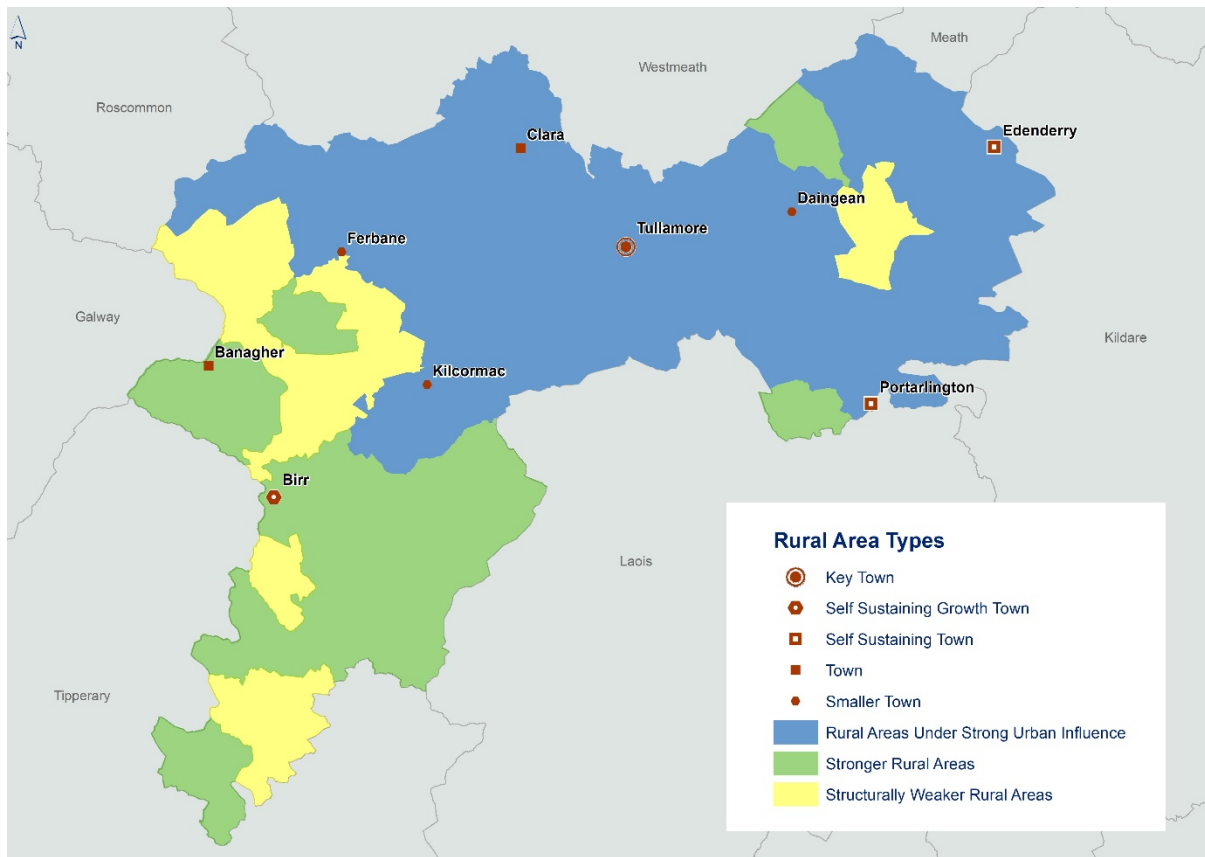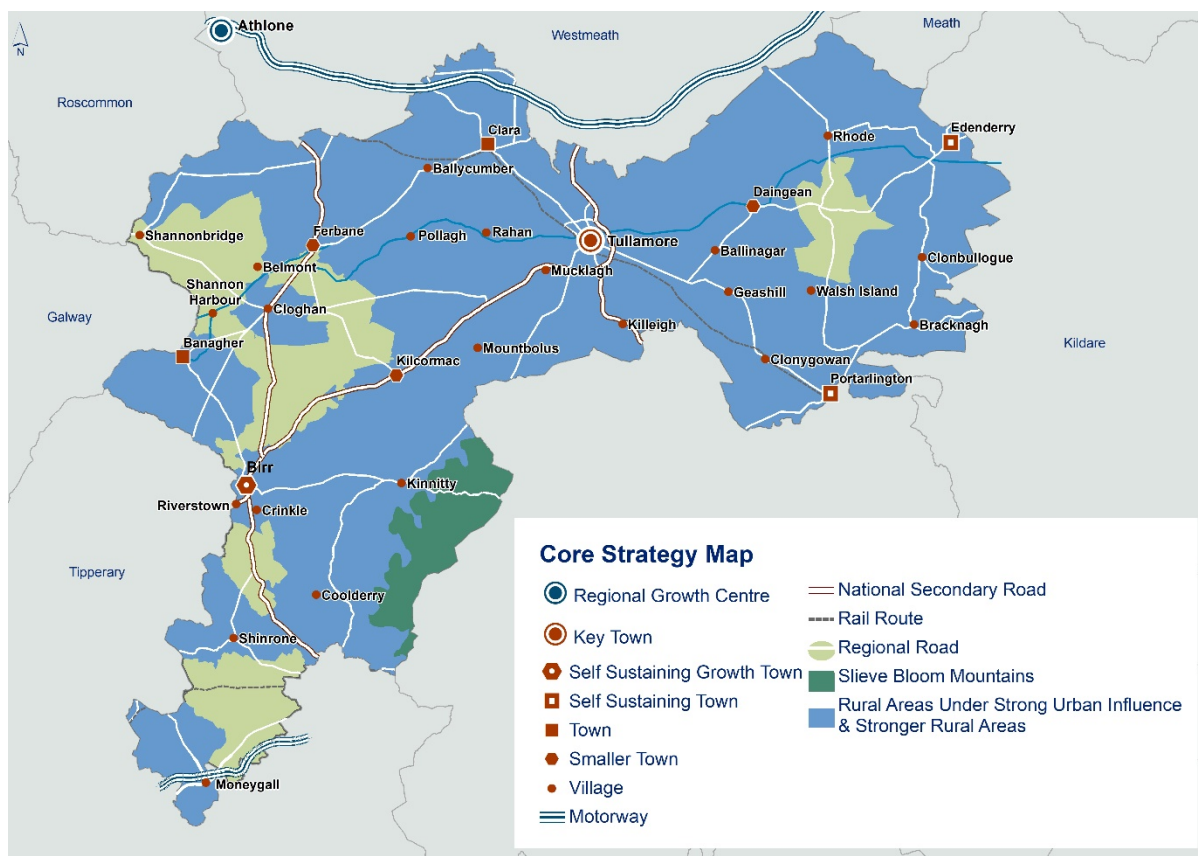
Figure 2.1 Rural Area Types

Figure 2.2 Core Strategy Map

The land use zoning maps in Volume 2 of the Plan and in Local Area Plans (subsequent new LAPs and varied LAPs to reflect the Core Strategy in this plan), illustrate the allocation, extent and location of land zoned to accommodate residential development for each of the settlement areas. The open countryside including Sráids are not zoned settlement areas. It is considered that the lands identified to accommodate residential development are sufficient to meet the population targets as set out in the Core Strategy Table and reflect each settlement's role in the Settlement Hierarchy.

2.1.7   Core Strategy Table

The Core Strategy Table as set out below indicates the distribution of future population and housing across the county's settlements in the form of a settlement hierarchy.

Table 2.2 Core Strategy Table

Typology	Settlement	Population 2016 Census	Projected Population increase	Housing Supply Target 2021-2027 (total based on Dept spreadsheet)	Quantum of land in hectares zoned mixed use and town / village centre including Opportunity Sites that can accommodate an element of residential	20% of the quantum of land zoned mixed use and / town / village centre including Opportunity Sites that can accommodate residential	Potential number of residential units to be delivered on mixed use and town / village centre zoning including Opportunity Sites	Residual number of residential units required 2021-2027	Quantum of land required to be zoned 'New Residential' to cater for number of residential units required	Quantum of land zoned 'New Residential' in the Plan *	Number of residential units that can be accommodated on brownfield / infill sites	Residential units that can be accommodated on brownfield / infill sites as a percentage of all proposed residential units in the settlement (in order to strive to satisfy 30% within
Key Town	Tullamore	14607	4,382	1379	12	2.40	84	1295	37.0	43.81	1392	101%
Self Sustaining Growth Town	Birr & Crinkill	5052	1263	441	3.8	0.76	23	418	13.9	14.4	313	71%
Self Sustaining Town	Edenderry	7359	721	323	4.03	0.81	24	299	10.0	requires new LAP	requires new LAP	requires new LAP
Self Sustaining Town	Portarlington	1989	207	140	0.63	0.13	4	137	4.6	requires new LAP	requires new LAP	requires new LAP
Town	Banagher	1760	317	158	1.42	0.28	7	151	6.0	6.4	51	32%
Town	Clara	3336	534	213	1.9	0.38	10	203	8.1	9.06	114	54%
Smaller Town	Daingean	1077	172	64	1.3	0.26	5	59	2.9	2.9	64	100%
Smaller Town	Ferbane	1191	214	119	3.83	0.77	15	104	5.2	5.26	77	65%
Smaller Town	Kilcormac	935	155	57	0.62	0.12	2	54	2.7	2.7	56	98%
Rural	Villages	7749	962	425	9.38	1.876	28	396	26.4	30.16		n/a
Rural	Straids and Open Countryside	33506	312	659	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a		n/a
Total		77961	9,239	3978	38.91	7.78	202.54	3116	116.9	114.69	2067	n/a

Occupancy Rate

The occupancy rate applied in the Core Strategy Table is a graduated range of average household sizes falling from 2.84 in 2016 to 2.62 in 2027. This variable rate of occupancy was produced with regard to alignment with the NPF rate of 2.5 by 2040, however, on review of historic rates of change within the County, there was sufficient evidence to support a quicker pace of decline. Occupancy in each settlement typology was then aligned with this County-level trajectory between 2017 and 2027. The number of additional households formed per annum was calculated using the applicable year's average household size.

Table 2.3 Assessment of Average Household Sizes and Forecasted Options

Offaly	2016
All private households (HHs)	77,755
All persons in private HHs	27,343
Total Population	77,961

Avg. HH Size (AHS)	1971	1981	1991	2002	2006	2011	2016
State	3.94	3.68	3.34	2.95	2.81	2.73	2.75
Offaly	4.08	3.88	3.55	3.10	2.93	2.90	2.84369

% Change in AHS	1981	1991	2002	2006	2011	2016
State	-6.6%	-9.2%	-11.7%	-4.7%	-2.8%	0.6%
Offaly	-4.9%	-8.5%	-12.7%	-5.5%	-1.0%	-1.9%

# Intercensal Years	1971	1981	1991	2002	2006	2011	2016
Years	-	10	10	11	4	5	5

Annualised Change	1971	1981	1991	2002	2006	2011	2016
State	-	-0.7%	-0.9%	-1.1%	-1.2%	-0.6%	0.1%
Offaly	-	-0.5%	-0.9%	-1.2%	-1.4%	-0.2%	-0.4%

Trends in AHS	AHS
Avg. Rate 1981-2016: State	-0.71%
Avg. Rate 1981-2016: Offaly	-0.74%

NPF Target	AHS
2040 (National)	2.5
Difference between 2016 & 2040	0.34
Number of years	24
Annualised Change	0.014320

Forecasted Changes OFFALY	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
Option 1: Maintain Fixed 2016	2.84	2.84	2.84	2.84	2.84	2.84	2.84	2.84	2.84	2.84	2.84	2.84	2.84
Option 2: Alignment with NPF	2.84	2.83	2.82	2.80	2.79	2.77	2.76	2.74	2.73	2.71	2.70	2.69	2.67
Option 3: Trend Adjustment	2.84	2.82	2.80	2.78	2.76	2.74	2.72	2.70	2.68	2.66	2.64	2.62	2.60
Option 4: Target Adjustment	2.84	2.84	2.83	2.82	2.81	2.80	2.79	2.78	2.78	2.77	2.76	2.75	2.75

Forecasted Changes STATE	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
Option 1: Maintain Fixed 2016	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75
Option 2: Alignment with NPF	2.75	2.73	2.72	2.70	2.69	2.68	2.66	2.65	2.63	2.62	2.60	2.59	2.58
Option 3: Trend Adjustment	2.75	2.73	2.71	2.69	2.67	2.65	2.63	2.61	2.59	2.58	2.56	2.54	2.52

Forecasted Changes OFFALY	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036	2037	2038	2039	2040
Option 1: Maintain Fixed 2016	2.84	2.84	2.84	2.84	2.84	2.84	2.84	2.84	2.84	2.84	2.84	2.84
Option 2: Alignment with NPF	2.66	2.64	2.63	2.61	2.60	2.59	2.57	2.56	2.54	2.53	2.51	2.50
Option 3: Trend Adjustment	2.58	2.56	2.54	2.52	2.51	2.49	2.47	2.45	2.43	2.41	2.40	2.38
Option 4: Target Adjustment	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75

Forecasted Changes STATE	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036	2037	2038	2039	2040
Option 1: Maintain Fixed 2016	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75
Option 2: Alignment with NPF	2.56	2.55	2.53	2.52	2.50	2.49	2.48	2.46	2.45	2.43	2.42	2.50
Option 3: Trend Adjustment	2.50	2.49	2.47	2.45	2.43	2.42	2.40	2.38	2.36	2.35	2.33	2.31

Settlement Hierarchy

The Settlement Hierarchy is located within Topic 3 Settlement Strategy.

Monitoring and Management

With the adoption of specific population targets for the county and each settlement / settlement typology, the monitoring of the extent of residential development is required to ensure that development occurs in a coherent, reasoned and evidence based manner. The delivery of all residential development will be carefully monitored during the lifetime of this Plan to ensure it does not cumulatively result in the housing units and population been exceeded.

2.2   Core Strategy Policies

CSP-01 It is Council policy to implement the Core Strategy for Offaly in order to be consistent with policies at a national and regional level, in particular population targets and distribution.

CSP-02 It is Council policy to support the compact growth of towns and villages to ensure that development proceeds sustainably and at an appropriate scale, density and sequence and in line with the Core Strategy Table.

CSP-03 It is Council policy not to exceed, through the facilitation of residential development, the allocated housing requirements set out in the Core Strategy. In this regard, development shall not be permitted where it conflicts with the Core Strategy.

2.3   Core Strategy Objectives

CSO-01 It is an objective of the Council to monitor and manage the delivery of residential development in County Offaly through the development management process to ensure it is in line with the Core Strategy. In this respect, the Planning Authority shall maintain a record of residential development permitted in the open countryside, sráids and individual settlements in order to ensure compliance with the population allocations defined by the Core Strategy Table.

CSO-02 It is an objective of the Council to zone an appropriate amount of lands within the settlement areas to accommodate the projected population growth as set out in the Core Strategy, including the undertaking of variations or reviews of Portarlington Joint Local Area Plan and Edenderry Local Area Plan which will be prioritised in view of legislation requirements to ensure consistency with the provisions of the Core Strategy.

CSO-03 Where any ambiguity arises between the Core Strategy of the County Development Plan and residential proposals on land zoned to accommodate residential development in Local Area Plans, the County Development Plan shall take precedence, including during the transitional period before the variation of Local Area Plans.

CSO-04 It is an objective of the Council to make Local Area Plans for Tullamore and Birr during the plan period of the County Development Plan 2021-2027. During the transition period between adoption of this County Development Plan and the adoption of the Local Area Plans for Tullamore and Birr, the

objectives (including zoning objectives), policies and standards in this County Development Plan shall apply to Tullamore and Birr.

CSO-05 It is an objective of the Council that development proposed on new residential zoned land and on mixed use / town or village centre zoning should proceed on a sequential basis with priority given to lands closest to the centre and / or closest to key transport infrastructure.

2.4 Topic 2: Settlement Strategy

2.4.1 Aim

To provide for sustainable population growth and to manage development pressure within both the urban and rural environment in accordance with the Core Strategy whilst achieving a balance between social, economic, cultural and environmental factors.

2.4.2 Purpose

A Settlement Strategy is a spatial expression of sustainable population distribution, settlement hierarchy and settlement role. It provides a strategic direction to the appropriate management of growth, investment and resources in accordance with the Core Strategy in a climate resilient manner.

With the identification of projected population growth for County Offaly within the lifetime of this Plan and the identification of the relevant tiers of the settlement hierarchy, housing land has been allocated to deliver new homes to meet a growing population in a sustainable manner. In terms of the settlements, this land can be viewed on the Land Use Zoning Maps in Volume 2 of this plan, and in Local Area Plans.

2.4.3 Regional Context

County Offaly is located within the Midland Region Strategic Planning Area of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly area as depicted below.

Figure 2.3 Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly Area split into 3 Strategic Planning Areas.

To achieve effective regional development, Dublin and the Regional Growth Centre of Athlone, will be supported by the complementary development and regeneration of a small number of selected Key Towns such as Tullamore. Regional Growth Centres, such as Athlone, are large towns with a high level of self-sustaining employment and services that act as regional economic drivers and play a significant role for a wide catchment area. They will accommodate significant new investment in housing, transport and employment generating activity, and capitalise on their strategic location and high-quality connections to Dublin.

The RSES (2019) sets out functional areas comprising of the Dublin Metropolitan Area, Core Region and Gateway Region. County Offaly is part located within the latter two areas as evidenced in the map below. The Core Region includes Electoral Divisions where at least 15% of the workforce are working in the Dublin Metropolitan Area. The Core Region includes the peri-urban 'hinterlands' in the commuter catchment around Dublin, whilst the Gateway Region acts as an inter-regional gateway to the rest of the island.
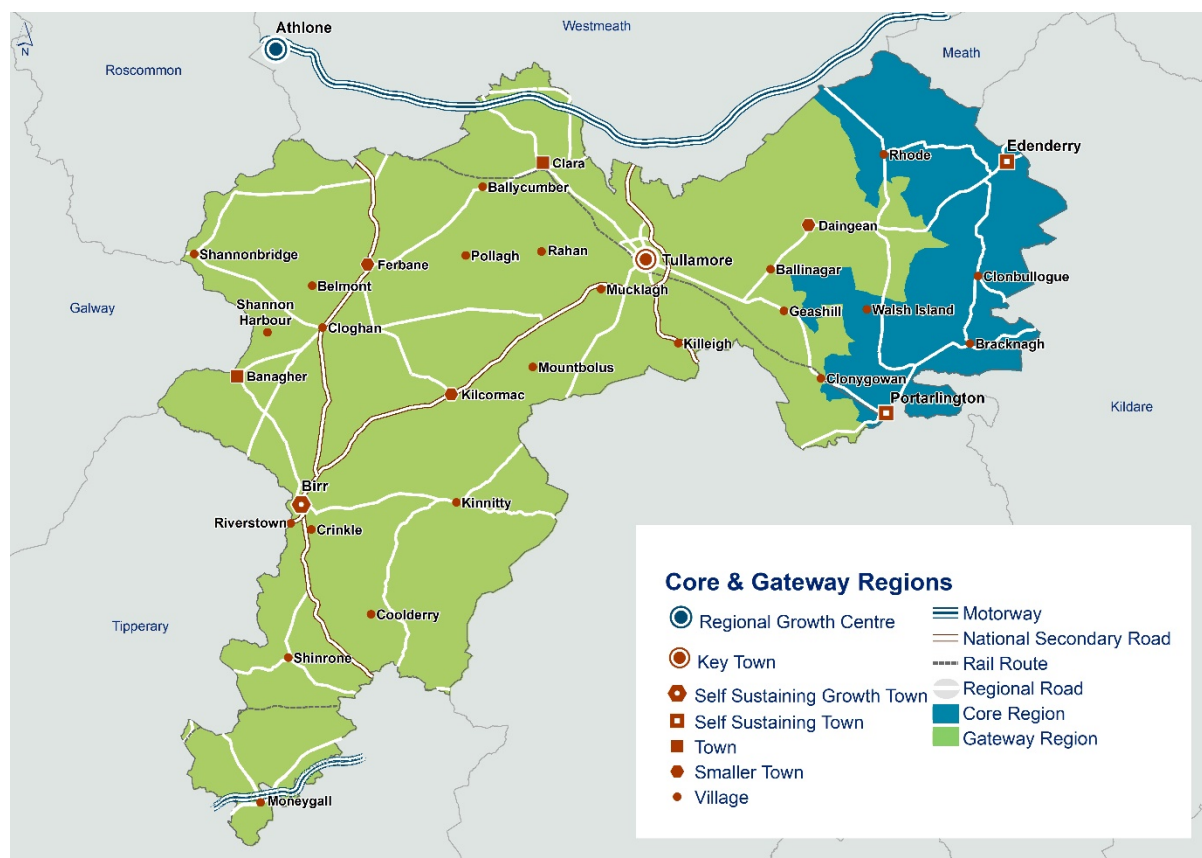

Figure 2.4 Core and Gateway Region within Offaly

Aim of the **Core Region** of the Eastern and Midland Region (includes east County Offaly):

- To promote continued growth at more sustainable rates, while providing for increased employment and improved local economies, services and functions to allow towns become more self-sustaining and to create the quality of life to attract investment.

- 'Catch up' investment to promote consolidation and improvement in the sustainability of those areas that have experienced significant population growth but have a weak level of services and employment for their residents.

- Promote the region for tourism, leisure and recreational activities including development of an integrated greenway network while ensuring that high value assets and amenities are protected and enhanced.

Aim of the **Gateway Region** of the Eastern and Midland Region (includes the remainder of County Offaly):

- Tullamore Key Town plays a regional role in providing key employment and services for its own extensive hinterland.

- An extensive network of towns and villages have varying assets, and support the wider rural and agricultural area.

2.4.4   County Context

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) defines '*rural*' as the areas outside settlements with a population of 1,500 or more people. This includes smaller settlements of fewer than 1,500 people and individual dwellings in the countryside. The CSO defines a settlement of more than 1,500 people as '*urban*'. These definitions have been carried through into the NPF.

A significant majority of housing planning permissions in County Offaly has been in the open countryside. 34%[4] of housing units granted in the county have been one-off houses in the open countryside, which has contributed to spatial and social imbalances and the decline in population of smaller settlements. As a result, many key services have closed, in part due to population decline, leaving more marginalised and vulnerable citizens without access to those services. In light of this, there is a need to focus on building up Offaly's towns and villages. Development sprawl at every settlement level has manifested as scattered development, 'leapfrogging' and linear patterns of ribbon development, which has made it costly to align and invest in infrastructure delivery, has hampered an effective response to climate change, compounded issues such as congestion and pollution, increased commuting times and has had an overall negative impact on people's health and wellbeing.

2.4.5   Strategic Approach to Future Growth

Complying with the '*Principles for Growth*' as set out in the Core Strategy is crucial in terms of the spatial approach to sustainably developing County Offaly. Future development will be directed in the following manner:

- Compact growth, by targeting at least 30% of all new homes that are proposed in settlements within their existing built-up footprints, with a focus on infill / brownfield lands, rather than continually sprawling outwards.

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[4] Between January 2014 and December 2019

- Making better use of under-utilised land and buildings including vacant, derelict and under-occupied buildings.

- Supporting, facilitating and promoting a transition to a low carbon society.

- Strengthening town and village centres to meet their full potential.

- Aligning population, employment, community and housing growth in a balanced fashion.

- Sequential provision of housing and infrastructure.

- Reversing the decline or stagnation of many villages.

- Develop the designated Key Town of Tullamore of sufficient scale and quality to be a driver of regional growth, investment and prosperity, followed by Self-Sustaining Growth Towns and Self-Sustaining Towns to grow to a sustainable level. Other towns need to be promoted for regeneration, local employment and managed levels of growth, and the rural area which includes smaller towns, villages, Sráids and the countryside shall be promoted for regeneration and local employment and services with targeted rural housing policies.

- Housing can still be located in our towns, villages, Sráids including the open countryside, but at an appropriate scale that does not detract from the capacity of our larger towns to deliver homes more sustainably.

Divergence between the places people live and work leads to long-distance commuting and congestion, which has a negative impact on quality of life. To address this, the Council promotes sustainable growth in the right locations and 'catch up' investment and consolidation in local services, amenities and employment in areas that have experienced large scale commuter driven housing development. The county's most significant place-making challenge will be to plan and deliver future development in a way that moves more towards self-sustaining, rather than commuter driven activity, therefore allowing its towns, villages and rural components to play to their strengths, while above all, moving from a sprawl-led development model.

2.4.6   Urban

The Settlement Strategy seeks to strengthen the urban fabric of the county, with an emphasis on building critical mass in the Key Town of Tullamore, the Self-Sustaining Growth Town and Self-Sustaining Towns. The focus is on achieving the consolidated growth of the settlements, with a significantly high proportion of housing in the existing built-up footprints of each settlement, strengthening town centres to their full potential by utilising under-utilised land and buildings and developing the settlements in a sequential manner.

2.4.7   Rural

Rural population will continue to be supported through the smaller towns, villages and Sráids and through a sustainable approach to maintaining the rural economy and population, balanced against responsible environmental protection. Support for housing and repopulation, as necessary, taking place within towns and villages will help to act as a viable alternative to one-off housing in the open

countryside and will contribute to the principle of compact growth. A national programme will be developed for 'new homes in small towns and villages' with local authorities, public infrastructure agencies such as Irish Water, and local communities providing serviced sites with appropriate infrastructure acting as a viable alternative to houses in the open countryside[5]. The open countryside is and will continue to be, a living and lived-in landscape focusing on the requirements of rural economies and rural communities, based on agriculture, forestry, tourism and rural enterprise, while at the same time avoiding ribbon and over-spill development from urban areas and protecting environmental qualities. The Council will ensure that development of the open countryside takes place in a way that is compatible with the protection of key economic, environmental, biodiversity and cultural / heritage assets such as the road network, water quality and important landscapes.

In accordance with the RSES, it will be necessary to demonstrate a *'functional economic or social requirement'* for housing need in Rural Areas under Strong Urban Influence and Stronger Rural Areas, which are identified in the Core Strategy Map. This will assist in sustaining more fragile rural communities and in overall terms, will need to be related to the viability of towns and villages.

2.4.8 Settlement Typology and Function

The settlement strategy seeks to elaborate further on the role / function of each settlement tier in order to manage future growth appropriately. Set out below is the settlement typology and function of the settlements in County Offaly, which is based on the RSES (2019).

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[5] As stated in National Policy Objective 18b of the National Planning Framework 2018

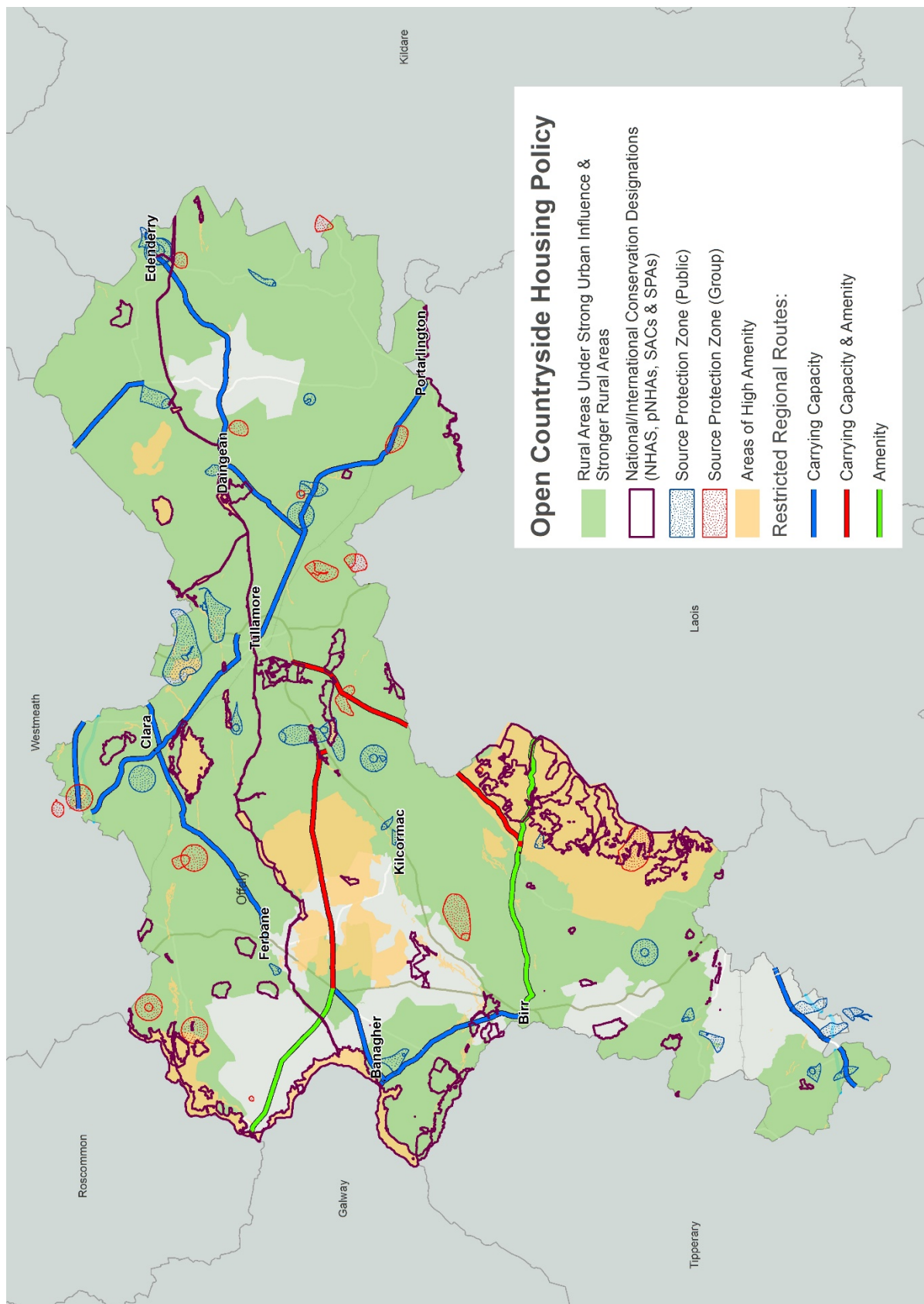**Figure 2.5 Settlement Hierarchy**

Figure 2.6 Open Countryside Housing Policy Map

In assessing settlements in Offaly, several core factors have been considered, as presented in Table 2.4 below.

Table 2.4: Summary of criteria utilised to develop the settlement hierarchy for Offaly 2021-2027

Data Indicator	Description	Rationale
SCALE – Centres of scale which have the critical mass to drive growth		
Population (CSO 2016)	Population resident within CSO defined settlement boundary	Settlements with critical mass of population to drive county and regional development.
% 10-year Growth rate (CSO 2006, 2016)	% Growth rate between 2006-2016	Growth rate will determine capacity for future growth. Towns that have experienced high growth rates may require additional investment in services, infrastructure and employment.
NPF Designation	Settlements designated for growth in the NPF include Dublin City and suburbs and Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns	The NPF identifies a number of centres of scale, which have the potential to meet the critical mass to drive regional growth. These include the Key Town of Tullamore, the identification of which is based on the scale of the settlement's population, growth rates and local ambition for sustainable compact growth including availability of serviced lands.
Large town (as defined by NPF)	Large towns defined by the NPF as >10,000 population and /or >2,500 jobs	Large towns, as defined by the NPF, are eligible for funding under the URDF, supporting more compact and sustainable development. Tullamore, identified as a Key Town in the RSES, with a population of 14,607

		(Census 2016), 8,259 jobs (Census 2016) and a jobs to resident worker ratio of 1.48.
FUNCTION – Functional role and level of employment provision		
Functional Urban Area	The total population within the 'Functional Urban Area' (FUA) or 'hinterland' of a settlement, based on Electoral Divisions with at least 15% of the workforce within the principle urban core area (defined by the National Transport Authority methodology and derived from OECD definition). This is supplemented by AIRO mapping of FUAs for Dublin and large towns.	The mapping of FUAs is useful in determining the commuter catchment or spread of the influence of that settlement. The size of the FUA, relative to the core, gives clear indications of the influence of urban centres over their surrounding hinterlands. Functional Urban Areas (FUA) mapping, provided by AIRO, have been used to inform the settlement hierarchy for Offaly.
Commuter trips	Journey times from home to place of work.	Looking at commuter data for urban cores within the county and regionally, particularly commuter flows to Dublin, assists in identifying urban centres that are self-sufficient and those which are commuter focused, which in turn assists in formulating the settlement hierarchy for the county. For Offaly, apart from Tullamore, which is defined as a Key Town under the NPF, the remaining levels of the settlement hierarchy must be in line with the settlement typologies defined under the RSES, i.e. Self-Sustaining Growth Town, Self-Sustaining Town, Town, Village and Rural.
Retail Hierarchy	The Retail Hierarchy for Offaly is in line with the RSES and Settlement Hierarchy of the Core Strategy. Until such a time as a retail strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region is prepared as provided for under the RSES, the retail development strategy for	Designated settlements provide a good retail mix as reflected in their position in the settlement hierarchy within the county and region.

	the 2021-2027 Offaly County Development Plan will be informed by the provisions of the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012.	
Local Jobs	Employment numbers within the CSO settlement boundary.	Settlements with a critical mass of employment to drive regional development. Tullamore, identified as a Key Town in the NPF, has 8,259 jobs (Census 2016) and a jobs to resident worker ratio of 1.48.
Jobs to resident workers ratio	The number of jobs located in a settlement compared to the number of resident workers indicates the economic function of that settlement. The RSES notes that a ratio of 0.7 or above indicates a strong economic function.	Designated settlements provide strong economic function for their residents and for their hinterlands. Analysis of jobs to resident workers' ratio can assist in identifying commuter focused towns, which may require investment in local employment to further improve their economic function. Maximise proximity and connectivity between populations and locations for employment, retail, services and amenities. The formulation of the settlement hierarchy has also been cognisant that strong rural-urban interdependencies are a feature of the county and region, with positive correlations between rural economic performance and regional accessibility.
HUMAN CAPITAL – Education, talent and skills attraction		
Higher Education Institutions	Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) including Universities, Institutes of Technology and other publicly funded colleges.	Economic growth is underpinned by access to skills and talent and linked to the proximity of Higher Education Institutes. Midland Regional Hospital Tullamore is a Teaching/University hospital for a number of institutions including University College Dublin and University of Limerick, acting as a strong economic driver for the

		town and also providing a springboard for further linkages to existing and new med-tech businesses and research facilities. I-LOFAR - Irish Low Frequency Array (I-LOFAR), run by a consortium of Irish astrophysicists, computer engineers and data scientists, and lead by Trinity College Dublin, with partners from University College Dublin, Dublin City University, Athlone Institute of Technology, the National University of Ireland Galway, University College Cork, the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies and Armagh Observatory.
Education Attainment	Educational attainment levels of those population >15 years who have completed their education across the region.	The progressive improvement in education attainment supports increased access to socio economic opportunity.
HEALTHY PLACEMAKING – High quality public spaces and enhanced quality of life		
Community Facilities and Services	Sustainable neighbourhoods require a range of community facilities, including schools, childcare, community centres, healthcare facilities, arts and culture, shops, and financial services such as credit unions and banks.	Quality of life factors and placemaking are increasingly recognised as key to developing attractive places in which to invest, live, study, visit and work including access to amenities, facilities, arts, culture and heritage. The provision and extent of local services in a settlement will determine the appeal of that settlement to attract and retain a critical mass of population.
Healthcare	Highest level healthcare provision including Primary Care Health Centre and HSE Hospital.	Access to healthcare services to support good quality of life. Midland Regional Hospital Tullamore provides an important health care function for the county and broader region. Primary Care Centres also deliver an important service for the residents of Offaly, including new

		centres in Tullamore and Banagher, providing a single point of contact to the health system.
Pobal HP Deprivation Index	The Deprivation Index is based on three dimensions of affluence/disadvantage; demographic profile, social class composition and labour market situation and provides two statistical outputs; the Absolute Index (useful for comparing overtime) and the Relative Index Scores (providing a snapshot at a particular time).	The Pobal HP Deprivation Index is the main measurement of affluence and disadvantage in Ireland. Areas with a relatively low score may require investment to improve access to social and economic opportunity and improve quality of life.
Funding	Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF), supporting more compact and sustainable development.	Leveraging of URDF funding to drive growth and improve quality of life in designated towns, including Tullamore, a Key Town, with a population of > 10,000 persons.
	Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF), supporting job creation in rural areas, addressing de-population of rural communities and supporting improvements in towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000, and outlying areas.	The RRDF funding stream is applicable to the majority of settlements in Offaly, with all towns, apart from Tullamore, having populations below 10,000 persons.
	Town and Village Renewal scheme, the purpose of which is to revitalise towns and villages; improve the living and working environment of rural communities; and increase the potential for increased economic activity into the future. The scheme has a particular focus on towns and villages with populations less than 5,000 persons.	The Town and Village Renewal scheme is an important funding stream for towns and villages in Offaly.
ENTERPRISE ECOSYSTEM – Economic assets and enterprise clusters		
Economic Assets	Higher Education Centres, Business Incubation and Innovation Centres, Technology Gateways and Research Centres,	The location of strategic employment development and enterprise investment are influenced by the location of

	IDA Business Parks and strategic employment development.	economic assets upon which to build.
		A diverse local sectoral mix is a strong determinant for entrepreneurship, and therefore economic growth. Growth of an enterprise is positively affected by the size of employment in the same sector, for example, employment growth in high-tech Small - Medium Enterprises has been found to be much faster in clusters, but that the spatial scale over which the clustering benefit operates differs across sectors.
		Harnessing Offaly's urban and rural based economic assets (for example, new Strategic Employment Zones for Tullamore), including natural assets (for example, peatlands), will assist in driving the economy forward and sustaining a critical mass of population in the main urban centres.
CONNECTIVITY – Transport capacity, accessibility and trip profiles		
Public transport	Proximity to high quality public transport (train and bus)	Transport infrastructure influences people by determining the places in which they both live and work. Dispersed settlement patterns present challenges in relation to service provision, accessibility and rural isolation while compact settlements are more efficient in terms of provision of public transport, greenways and cycleways, which can enhance areas, contributing to liveable places.
		Access to transport infrastructure influences the location of housing and employment growth, with compact settlements more efficient in terms of maximising returns on transport investment.
		Rail and bus services / connections, greenway

		infrastructure, and walking / cycling permeability within a settlement are key considerations.
Mode Share	% Mode share of work and education trips (Origin) by Active Travel (walk, cycle), Public Transport (Bus, train, DART, LUAS), Car (driver, passenger). Eastern and Midland Region averages: active travel (21%), Public transport (14%) and Car (56%).	Measurement and monitoring of the mode share split will indicate progress on achieving a shift away from private car usage to more sustainable modes of transport. Mode share data indicates the extent of car dependency in a settlement. Places that are typified by poor connectivity and lower residential and employment densities are characterised by lower rates of walking and cycling and a significantly higher rate of private car travel than their denser counterparts.
NATURAL CAPITAL – Environmental capacity, sensitivities and assets (Strategic Environmental Assessment)		
Sensitive sites and assets	Environmentally designated sites (NHA, pNHA, SPA, SAC), Listed Habitats and other sensitive/heritage sites and assets.	Integration of SEA/SFRA/AA supporting the development of Green Infrastructure networks and eco-system services approach.
Resource management	Waste, energy and extractive industries and pollution control licences.	Indicates significant resource potential of renewable energy, circular economy and the bio economy.
Water Quality	Compliance with Water Framework Directive (WFD) and Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (UWWTD). Water Bodies Status and Risk, Compliance with UWWTD and Discharge Licences.	Indicates degree of water capacity and compliance with WFD /UWWTD.
Flood Risk	Flood Risk Summary of settlements from SEA Environmental Report. Includes Flood Zones, constraints and measures identified in the Flood Risk Management Plan along with	Future development and flood risk assessment will need to consider and address flood risk at settlement level. Zoning maps for each settlement include a 'Constrained Land Use'

	assessment of climate change and adaptation measures.	layer, informed by empirical data on past flood events and future risk associated with climate change.
INFRASTRUCTURE – Enabling infrastructure to drive regional growth		
Infrastructure availability and capacity	Wastewater treatment plant capacity; potable water supply; roads infrastructure (including footpaths and lighting); broadband.	Indicates degree of infrastructure capacity to support the targeted growth of settlements.

Source: Based on the Asset Based Approach set out in Appendix A of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

Table 2.5 Settlement Hierarchy

Settlement Typology	Function / policy response based on RSES	Settlement
Key Town	A large economically active county town that provides employment for its surrounding area and with high quality transport links and the capacity to act as a growth driver to complement the Regional Growth Centre of Athlone. It has potential to accommodate commensurate levels of population and employment growth facilitated by its location on high quality public transport corridors and aligned with requisite investment in services, amenities and sustainable transport.

It has undergone relatively sustainable levels of growth in recent decades, where the ratio of jobs to resident workforce has remained high due to a more sustainable balance of employment and population. It shall act as an economic driver and provide for strategic employment locations to improve its economic base by increasing the ratio of jobs to workers.

It requires sustainable, compact, sequential growth and urban regeneration in the town centre by consolidating the built-up footprint through a focus on regeneration and development of identified key town centre infill / brownfield sites, and encouraging regeneration of underutilised, vacant and derelict town centre lands for mixed use including residential development to facilitate population growth. | Tullamore |

Self-Sustaining Growth Town	A sub-county market town that has significant employment and service functions relative to its regional and local catchment, has good regional transport links and has the capacity for continued commensurate growth to become more self-sustaining. It supports the regional driver role of Tullamore, and acts as an important local driver providing a range of functions for its resident population and its surrounding catchment including housing, employment, services, retail and leisure opportunities. The town should grow at a sustainable level appropriate to its position in the settlement hierarchy.	Birr including Crinkill
Self-Sustaining Towns	These towns support the regional driver role of Tullamore, and act as important local drivers providing a range of functions for their resident population and their surrounding catchments including housing, employment, services, retail and leisure opportunities. These towns have experienced rapid population growth with high levels of commuter focused residential expansion without equivalent increase in jobs and services. They require consolidation and targeted 'catch up' investment in services, infrastructure, suitable transport options, amenities and local employment whilst balancing housing delivery and focusing on consolidation to become more self-sustaining.	Portarlington Edenderry
Towns	The towns have a local service and employment function. There is a need to promote regeneration and revitalisation of towns and support local enterprise and employment opportunities to ensure their viability as service centres for the surrounding rural areas. Those in proximity to the larger urban centres have experienced significant growth and urban generated pressures and require the levels of growth to be managed and to ensure that there is a requisite service level for the existing population.	Clara Banagher
Rural	'Rural' encompasses smaller towns (population less than 1,500 persons), villages, Sráids and the wider open countryside. There may not be good public transport or regional connections and may be highly car dependent. Promote and identify regeneration and revitalisation projects for villages and support local employment and services and targeted rural housing policies.	**Smaller Towns:** Daingean Ferbane Kilcormac **Villages:** Ballinagar Ballycumber Belmont

	Improve connectivity, support job creation particularly in a more diverse range of sectors. Protect rural resources. The open countryside provides for rural economies and rural communities, based on agriculture, forestry, tourism and rural enterprise. This should be facilitated while avoiding over-spill development from urban areas and urban generated housing. The sustainable development of the open countryside will be supported.	Bracknagh Cloghan Clonbullogue Cloneygowan Coolderry Geashill Killeigh Kinnitty Moneygall Mountbolus Mucklagh Pollagh/Lemanaghan Rahan Rhode Riverstown Shannon Harbour Shannonbridge Shinrone Walsh Island **Sráids:** Ballinamere Ballyboy Ballycommon Ballyfore Blueball Boher Boora (Leabeg) Brosna Cadamstown Clareen Clonfinlough Croghan Doon Dunkerrin Durrow Fivealley Garryhinch High Street Horseleap Kilclonfert Killina Killurin Killyon Lusmagh Rath Roscomroe Tober

		Open countryside: This is land outside the boundaries of the above settlements.

2.5   Settlement Strategy Policies

Note

- *Policies set out in the <u>Core Strategy</u> and <u>Housing Strategy</u> are relevant to the Settlement Strategy and should be read in conjunction with the policies hereunder.*

- *Residential Development standards are located within Chapter 13 <u>Development Management Standards</u>.*

Countywide

SSP-01 It is Council policy to develop the county in accordance with the Settlement Hierarchy and to require future residential development to locate at and be of a scale appropriate to the settlement tiers and levels identified in the Core Strategy Table.

SSP-02 It is Council policy to require at least 30% of all new homes that are targeted in settlements to be located within the existing built-up footprint of the settlements[6] in an effort to make settlements more compact and reduce unsustainable urban sprawl and ribbon development.

SSP-03 It is Council policy to strengthen the core of settlements and encourage the compact growth of settlements by way of the development of infill sites, brownfield lands, under-utilised land / buildings, vacant sites, and derelict sites within the existing built-up footprint of the settlements, and develop outwards from the centre in a sequential manner.

SSP-04 It is Council policy to arrest the decline and stagnation in areas that have experienced low population growth or decline in recent decades and manage the growth of rural areas that are under strong urban influence and stronger rural areas to avoid over-development, whilst sustaining vibrant urban communities.

SSP-05 It is Council policy that residential development proposals shall be prepared, designed and laid out in accordance with the standards as set out in Chapter 13 Development Management Standards and Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines. This includes promoting densities, high quality design, layout and public realm for new residential development appropriate to its location and surrounding context, while recognising the need to protect existing residential communities and the established character of the area.

Key Town (Tullamore)

SSP-06 It is Council policy to strategically prioritise the development of Tullamore to underpin its role as a designated Key Town and driver of economic development for the county.

SSP-07 It is Council policy to require sustainable, compact, sequential growth and urban regeneration in Tullamore by consolidating the built-up footprint through a focus on regeneration and development of town centre infill and brownfield sites, and encouraging regeneration of underutilised, vacant and derelict lands for residential development and mixed use to facilitate population growth.

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[6] National Policy Objective 3c of the National Planning Framework 2018 states 'Deliver at least 30% of all new homes that are targeted in settlements other than the five Cities and their suburbs, within their existing built-up footprints'.

Self-Sustaining Growth Town (Birr)

SSP-08 It is Council policy that Birr, a Self-Sustaining Growth Town, continues to grow at a sustainable level and at a commensurate scale in accordance with the Core Strategy Table in an effort to become more self-sustaining.

SSP-09 It is Council policy to reinforce the attractive rural character of Crinkill, which exists at present, by permitting appropriate and sensitively designed new development.

Self-Sustaining Towns (Edenderry and Portarlington)

SSP-10 It is Council policy that Edenderry and Portarlington, Self-Sustaining Towns which have experienced high levels of commuter driven population growth and have weak employment bases, are developed to deliver population growth at a rate to achieve a sustainable balancing effect that is in line with the Core Strategy Table, and to deliver consolidation and targeted 'catch up' investment in services, infrastructure, amenities and local employment in order to become more self-sustaining.

Towns (Banagher, Clara)

SSP-11 It is Council policy to support housing and repopulation taking place within towns in a consolidated, sustainable and sequential manner, whilst also managing the levels of growth at an appropriate scale to ensure compliance with the Core Strategy Table.

SSP-12 It is Council policy to promote the regeneration and revitalisation of towns and support local enterprise and employment opportunities to ensure their viability as service centres for the surrounding rural areas.

Rural (Smaller Towns, Villages, Sráids and Open Countryside)

(A) Smaller Towns (Daingean, Ferbane, Kilcormac)

SSP-13 It is Council policy to support housing and repopulation taking place within smaller towns in a consolidated, sustainable and sequential manner, and to promote the provision of serviced sites supported by Irish Water in order to attract people to build their own homes and live in small towns, as an alternative to one-off housing whilst also managing the levels of growth at an appropriate scale to ensure compliance with the Core Strategy Table.

SSP-14 It is Council policy to facilitate the expansion of and provision of new mixed-use and employment-generating development within smaller towns at an appropriate size and scale subject to normal planning requirements.

SSP-15 It is Council policy to promote the regeneration and revitalisation of smaller towns and support local enterprise and employment opportunities to ensure their viability as service centres for the surrounding rural areas.

SSP-16 It is Council policy to be proactive in piloting combined local authority and private investment to stimulate high quality individual housing or private site development to attract population growth and further investment in smaller towns, subject to resources.

(B) Villages (listed in the Settlement Hierarchy)

SSP-17 It is Council policy to support housing and repopulation taking place within villages in a consolidated, sustainable and sequential manner, and to promote the provision of serviced sites supported by Irish Water in order to attract people to build their own homes and live in villages as an alternative to one-off housing, whilst also managing the levels of growth at an appropriate scale to ensure compliance with the Core Strategy Table.

SSP-18 It is Council policy to facilitate the expansion of and provision of new mixed-use and employment-generating development within villages at an appropriate size and scale subject to normal planning requirements.

SSP-19 It is Council policy that there will be a presumption in favour of small developments of differing scale and character rather than larger, more homogenous urban-scaled housing 'estates'. (For example 3 separately designed 10-house developments would generally be preferable to a single homogenous suburban style 30-house development). This approach would be more likely to create a sense of individualism and differing aspirations to each development.

SSP-20 It is Council policy to be proactive in piloting combined local authority and private investment to stimulate high quality individual housing or private site development to attract population growth and further investment in villages, subject to resources.

(C) Sráids (listed in the Settlement Hierarchy)

SSP-21 It is Council policy to support housing taking place within Sráids to act as a viable alternative to one-off housing in the open countryside but with limited scope for small-scale multi-house developments of up to 4 houses only.

SSP-22 Within the designated development limits of the Sráids, development will be permitted where it involves infilling, conversion, single site housing development, or the use of derelict or underutilised land or premises, subject to siting, design, protection of residential amenities and normal development management criteria.

SSP-23 It is Council policy to encourage the sustainable, balanced development of the Sráids in an incremental manner, with the emphasis on small scale development over a medium to long-term period, in keeping with the character of the settlement.

SSP-24 It is Council policy that where a multi-unit residential development (2 to 4 houses) is proposed within the boundary of a Sráid, the onus will be on the developer to justify the demand for housing proposed.

SSP-25 It is Council policy that any development shall be centred on the focal point of the settlement assisting in creating a 'centre' with a greater sense of place, and shall be subject to the satisfactory provision of infrastructure and services.

SSP-26 It is Council policy to facilitate the provision of appropriately scaled commercial development within Sráids. This may include limited new mixed-use development, including employment generating development, childcare and other appropriate commercial development.

(D) Open Countryside

Housing in Rural Areas under Strong Urban Influence and Stronger Rural Areas, and Areas of Special Control

Rural Areas under Strong Urban Influence and Stronger Rural Areas include:

- Electoral Divisions where at least 15% of their workforce commute to a town of population over 10,000 or a town with more than 2,500 jobs.

Areas of Special Control include:

- National/International Conservation Designations (Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, Natural Heritage Areas)

- Areas of High Amenity

- Source Protection Zones

- Restricted Regional Roads

Refer to Figure 2.6

SSP-27 Having regard to the need to protect County Offaly's natural resources, environment, landscape and infrastructure, it is Council policy to consider a single dwelling for the permanent occupation of an applicant in Rural Areas under Strong Urban Influence and Stronger Rural Areas and Areas of Special Control where **all** of the following (**1-4**) can be demonstrated:

1. The applicant has a **functional economic or social requirement** to reside in this particular rural area in accordance with (i) or (ii):

 (i) Economic requirements will normally encompass persons referred to in the revision to the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines 2005 and, if applicable, circulars. Pending the making of the revised Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines by the Minister, a Functional Economic Requirement in County Offaly shall be taken as including persons who by the nature of their work have a functional economic need to reside in the local rural area close to their place of work. It includes persons involved in full-time farming, horticulture or forestry as well as similar rural-based part-time occupations where it can be demonstrated that it is the predominant occupation. The 'local rural area' is defined as the area generally within 8km radius (5km radius particular to Areas of Special Control) of the place of work.

Or

(ii) Social requirements will normally encompass persons referred to in the revision to the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines 2005 and, if applicable, circulars. Pending the making of the revised Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines by the Minister, a Functional Social Requirement in County Offaly shall be taken as including (a) or (b) below:

(a) The applicant was born within the **local rural area**, or is living or has lived in the local rural area for a minimum of 5 years (15 years particular to Areas of Special Control) at any stage prior to making the planning application. It includes returning emigrants seeking a permanent home in their local rural area. The 'Local Rural Area' for the purpose of this policy is defined as the area generally within an 8km radius (5km radius particular to Areas of Special Control) of where the applicant was born, living

or has lived. For the purpose of this policy, the rural area is taken to include 'Villages' listed in the Settlement Hierarchy, but excludes Tullamore, Birr, Edenderry, Portarlington, Banagher, Clara, Daingean, Ferbane and Kilcormac (i.e. the Key Town, Self-Sustaining Growth Town, Self-Sustaining Towns, Towns and Smaller Towns listed in the Settlement Hierarchy.

Or

(b) Special consideration shall be given in cases of **exceptional health circumstances** - supported by relevant documentation from a registered medical practitioner and a disability organisation proving that a person requires to live in a particular environment or close to family support, or requires a close family member to live in close proximity to that person.

2.   The applicant does **not already own** or has not owned a house in the open countryside.

3.   If the site is located within an Area of Special Control, there is no **alternative site** outside of Areas of Special Control.

4.   High quality **siting and design**.

Housing outside of Rural Areas under Strong Urban Influence, Stronger Rural Areas and outside of Areas of Special Control

SSP-28 It is Council policy that within areas of the open countryside identified as being:

- Not within a Rural Area under Strong Urban Influence or not in a Stronger Rural Area

- Not in an Area of Special Control

(Refer to Figure 2.6)

there will be a presumption in favour of applications for single houses by persons from within or outside these areas who seek a permanent dwelling and will therefore contribute to the social and economic wellbeing of the area, subject to high quality siting and design.

It is the policy of the Planning Authority to prohibit speculative development in these areas. Any application for a single permanent dwelling must be made in the name of the person for whom it is intended and a condition will be attached to any permission granted requiring them to occupy the house in the first instance.

Refurbishment of a Derelict Dwelling in the Open Countryside

SSP–29 It is Council policy to encourage the sensitive refurbishment of existing derelict dwelling houses (policies SSP27 and SSP-28 do not apply) which have fallen derelict subject to fulfilling the following criteria:

- The refurbishment provides for quality design, scale, form, material and finishes;

- The refurbishment does not detract negatively from the original character of the derelict dwelling;

- The existing derelict dwelling house must exhibit all the essential characteristics of a dwelling house; and

- The existing derelict dwelling house must have last been used, as a dwelling house.

Refurbishment and / or Reuse of and Existing Structure as a Dwelling in the Open Countryside

SSP-30 It is Council policy to favourably consider applications (policies SSP27 and SSP-28 do not apply) for the refurbishment and/or reuse of older building stock subject to fulfilling the following criteria:

- The external walls and roof are substantially intact;

- The design of the proposal does not erode the siting and design qualities of the building which makes it attractive in the first instance;

- The size of any extension takes account of the siting and size of the existing building;

- The design, scale and materials used in the refurbishment and/or extension are in keeping and sympathetic with the existing structure;

- Mature landscape features are retained and enhanced, as appropriate; and

- Normal planning considerations i.e. road safety, amenities, public health, design etc. shall take precedence over the 'principle' of encouraging such development.

Replacement of Derelict Dwelling in the Open Countryside

SSP-31 It is Council policy to favourably consider applications for the replacement of derelict dwellings in the open countryside (SSP-27 and SSP-28 do not apply) subject to fulfilling the following criteria:

- The derelict building was last used as a dwelling house which exhibits all the essential characteristics of a dwelling house;

- The siting of a replacement dwelling should be within the same curtilage as the existing building;

- The derelict dwelling or parts of the derelict dwelling is not of special, architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest; and

- The derelict dwelling was not inappropriately sited in the first instance; for example, located in an area at flood risk or located in an area which would result in public health or traffic hazard issues.

Replacement of Habitable House in the Open Countryside

SSP-32 It is Council policy to consider applications (policies SSP27 and SSP-28 do not apply) for replacement of a habitable dwelling with a new single dwelling subject to fulfilling the following criteria:

- The existing dwelling house must exhibit all the essential characteristics of a dwelling house;

- The existing dwelling house must be in use, or have last been used, as a dwelling house. This use must not have been abandoned or changed from another use, without previous planning permission;

- The existing dwelling or parts of the dwelling must not be of special, architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest.; and

- Acceptable environmental, siting (be within the same curtilage of the existing dwelling house), design and layout standards must be proposed.

Ribbon Development

SSP-33 It is Council policy to consider applications for housing that fall under the description of 'ribbon development' against Appendix 4 of the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2005, or any subsequent Guidelines.

2.6   Topic 3: Housing Strategy

2.6.1   Aim

To ensure that there is sufficient land zoned to cater for the projected housing demands within the county.

2.6.2   Context

In accordance with Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended, this Plan includes a Housing Strategy including a Housing Need Demand Assessment in the form of a separate document. Its purpose is to ensure that the overall supply of housing is sufficient to meet the needs of the existing and future population of County Offaly. It further considers the potential need for single one-off dwellings in the open countryside over the plan period, through the application of the Housing Need Demand Assessment. There is a need now for accelerated delivery of housing, particularly in the growth settlements in the county.

The Council has a role in formulating policies offering a range of options regarding direct housing provision and assistance to persons unable to house themselves from their own resources.

Further particulars relating to housing provision are to be found in:

- the **Development Management Standards Chapter** which includes standards in relation to housing, and

- the **Core Strategy and Settlement Strategy** which includes policies and sets out the extent of housing provision to serve the county's existing and future population in locations that comply with the Settlement Hierarchy.

The proposed population increase in County Offaly during the Plan period is 9,239 persons for which a wide range of differing housing needs will be required to be met. There is sufficient and suitable land zoned residential or a mixture of residential and other uses in this plan to meet the requirements of the Housing Strategy and to ensure that a scarcity of such land does not occur at any time during the period of the Development Plan.

Rebuilding Ireland, Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, (July 2016) encourages an acceleration in the supply of housing to help address the current pent-up demand. It comprises five pillars of concerted actions right across Government addressing;

Pillar 1 – Address Homelessness

Pillar 2 – Accelerate Social Housing

Pillar 3 – Build More Homes

Pillar 4 – Improve the Rental Sector

Pillar 5 – Utilise Existing Housing

Vision as per the National Planning Framework

The vision for our housing future aims to balance the provision of good quality housing that meets the needs of a diverse population, in a way that makes our towns, villages and rural areas good places to live now and in the future.

Priorities and Principles for Future Housing as per the National Planning Framework

- Building resilience into our housing stock through: Reuse, energy efficiency, lifetime adaptability, sustainable accessibility, and integration to ensure vibrant sustainable communities.

- Develop a Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA).

- Consistently excellent design and place-making.

- Allow for choice in housing location (within the context of the Core Strategy), type, tenure and accommodation.

- Prioritise the location of housing in existing settlements and in accordance with the Core Strategy as a means to maximising a better quality of life for people through accessing services, ensuring a more efficient use of land and allowing for greater integration with existing infrastructure.

- Tailor the scale and nature of future housing provision to the size and type of settlement.

- Sufficient supply and affordability.

- Ensure there is a mixture of house types and sizes developed to reasonably match the requirements of the different categories of households.

2.6.3 Specific Needs Housing

Social Housing

The provision by Government of housing supports for those unable to provide for accommodation from within their own resources is a key social policy. It is essential to ensure that all members of society have access to accommodation that is suitable for their needs. Diverse neighbourhoods with a balance of public and private housing create the healthiest communities.

Student Accommodation

Regional Policy Objective 4.70 in the RSES (2019) states that the potential for complementary third level outreach educational facilities at Tullamore, particularly with regard to support for Midland Regional Hospital Tullamore and where appropriate its continued development as a Teaching / University Hospital need to be examined. In the eventuality of a university or out-reach campus being developed in Tullamore, the location of purpose-built student accommodation will need to be as proximate as possible to the centre of education by foot, bicycle and / or public transport.

Affordable Homes

Affordable homes need to be built for sale or rent, particularly in towns and villages, enabling people to choose to live within their communities and closer to where they work. This can be facilitated through more proactive land management and coordinated and efficient provision of enabling infrastructure.

Housing Needs of Older People, People with Disabilities and/or Learning Disabilities

The Council continues to address particular identified needs through the provision of residential units built on the principles of universal design and lifelong adaptability. In an effort to ensure social inclusion the preferred locations are within settlements and with easy access to public transport, community facilities, retail and other amenities.

For older people, the following housing types should be addressed considering our aging population; smaller residential units for those who wish to downsize (which releases larger houses on to the market for young families), sheltered housing, nursing homes and other residential facilities.

The Travelling Community

Offaly County Council recognises the needs of the Travelling Community within the county. These are addressed and delivered within the context of an adopted Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019-2024 and subsequent programmes, subject to funding.

The Local Authority options and resources on the provision of accommodation will include:

a)   Standard Social Housing (Local Authority and Approved Housing Bodies)

b)   Group Housing Scheme

c)   Halting Site

d)   Leasing Scheme and Rental Accommodation Scheme

e)   Private Rented Accommodation supported via Housing Assistance Payment

f)   Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan

g)   Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme

h)   Housing Adaptation Grants

i)   Improvement Works in Lieu of Housing

j)   Special Traveller Grant

k)   Housing Transfers

Homelessness

The Council will continue to work in conjunction with voluntary groups and other agencies in the provision of emergency accommodation for the homeless and for those in need of crisis facilities.

2.6.4   Part V Provision

Part V housing refers to social and affordable housing. Section 94 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) provides that a specified percentage, not being more than 10% of land zoned for residential use, or for a mixture of residential and other uses, shall be reserved for the provision of social and affordable housing, in an effort to address housing segregation. This shall be provided through a Part V Agreement, through one of the specified options in accordance with Section 96 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) unless deemed exempted under Section 97.

The Housing Strategy addresses the following key issues:

- The identification of housing need within County Offaly;
- The identification of social and specialist housing needs within County Offaly;
- The identification of supply side requirements to satisfy identified needs; and
- The consideration of specific policy responses to the above.

2.7   Housing Policies

HP-01 It is Council policy to facilitate the housing needs of the existing and future population of County Offaly through the management of housing development in the county in accordance with the Housing Need Demand Assessment, Core Strategy and Settlement Strategy.

HP-02 It is Council policy to seek to ensure that groups with special housing needs, such as older people (in accordance with the Age Friendly Strategy for Offaly 2018-2021 and any subsequent editions), single person households, persons with physical and / or learning disabilities, the homeless, the travelling community, asylum seekers and refugees, and those in emergency accommodation are accompanied in a way suitable to their specific needs.

HP-03 It is Council policy to encourage the reuse of upper floors above commercial premises for residential accommodation.

HP-04 It is Council policy to promote the retention of town centre residential units and to discourage their conversion into non-residential uses.

HP-05 It is Council policy to promote social integration and to counteract undue segregation in housing between persons of different social backgrounds.

HP-06 It is Council policy to ensure that new social and affordable housing developments are designed and constructed on the principles of universal design and life-long adaptability, are energy efficient, and of excellent design and contribute to healthy place-making.

HP-07 It is Council policy to ensure that a mixture of house types, tenures and sizes is developed to reasonably match the requirements of different categories of households, and ensure that the special requirements of older persons, persons with disabilities and persons with learning difficulties are developed in convenient, easily accessible and permeable locations.

HP-08 It is Council policy as required under Section 95 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) that 10% of all land zoned for residential or for a mixture of residential and other uses shall be reserved for the provision of housing for the purposes of meeting social and affordable housing need arising in the county.

HP-09 It is Council policy to promote social inclusion by ensuring that new social and affordable housing developments are strongly integrated into the structure of existing settlements at locations with access to public transport services and community facilities, to ensure that settlements grow in a manner that is self-sustaining with sufficient social and economic infrastructure.

HP-10 It is Council policy to support the work of voluntary and cooperative housing associations in County Offaly.

HP-11 It is Council policy to ensure that there is a balanced supply of private, social and affordable housing such that no settlement in the county experiences an over-concentration of any one type of accommodation.

HP-12 It is Council policy to work with all relevant stakeholders to implement the Midland Housing First Initiative 2020, and any subsequent initiatives to address the accommodation needs of homeless persons.

HP-13 It is Council policy to work with all relevant stakeholders to secure the satisfactory completion of unfinished housing developments in the county.

HP-14 It is Council policy to encourage purpose-built student accommodation proximate to any third level educational facility in County Offaly by foot, bicycle and / or public transport.

HP-15 It is Council policy to reserve sufficient lands to facilitate and implement the Housing Strategy and its policies, as informed by the Housing Need Demand Assessment undertaken as part of this Plan.

HP-16 It is Council policy to provide social housing through a combination of mechanisms including through Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), through direct build subject to funding, turnkey developments and the acquisition of second-hand housing in accordance with the county's settlement hierarchy to meet the identified social housing needs outlined in the Council's Housing Strategy.

HP-17 It is Council policy to encourage the compact growth of settlements; to promote healthy place-making; to increase the liveability factor of a place; to encourage the most efficient use of land; to ensure a mixture of residential unit types that are designed and constructed on the principles of universal design, life-long adaptability and energy efficiency; to support permeability and sustainable mobility with priority for pedestrians and cyclists; and in general to support the transition to a low carbon economy by way of reduction of greenhouse gases.

2.8   Housing Objectives

HO-01 It is an objective of the Council to procure vacant homes to ensure their continued use for residential purposes into the future, and develop housing in infill and brownfield sites within town and village centres for social and affordable housing provision.

HO-02 It is an objective of the Council to monitor the effectiveness of the Housing Strategy in meeting and resolving identified housing needs, and to review and revise the Housing Strategy as necessary should a variation to this Plan be made or if Part V planning legislation is amended during the lifetime of this plan.

HO-03 It is an objective of the Council to support the ongoing monitoring and review of the Housing Need Demand Assessment (HNDA) in accordance with a forthcoming HNDA methodology to be issued by Central Government.   Furthermore, it is an objective of the Council to monitor and maintain a record of residential development permitted in the open countryside, sráids and individual settlements in accordance with forthcoming Departmental guidance around the establishment of a Housing Need Demand Assessment Coordination and Monitoring Unit and related implementation of a centralised spatial database for local authority housing.

HO-04 It is an objective of the Council to increase and effectively manage the stock of social housing within the county in order to meet the long-term housing needs of those households on the local authority housing list.

HO-05 It is an objective of the Council to provide suitable housing accommodation and living conditions for the Traveller community in accordance with the Offaly Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019 – 2024, and any subsequent programme adopted by the Council.

HO-06 It is an objective of the Council to secure implementation of the Part V Housing Strategy in accordance with Section 95(1) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), in particular, through the reservation of 10% of all land zoned solely for residential use, or for a mixture of residential or other uses, to be made available for the provision of social and affordable housing referred to in Section 94(4)(c) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and shall be provided in accordance with an Agreement referred to in Section 96 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and in accordance with Part V Ministerial Guidance or any future revised Guidance.