OFFALY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN 2022 - 2027

Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí
Offaly County Council

Offaly Economic Development Strategy & Action Plan 2022 - 2027

A history in science, energy and connection to industry means that from the legacy of old, comes the inspiration of the new – more global and more connected but still local.

Offaly has a positive future ahead – it can place itself at the forefront of significant challenges in the Irish economy in terms of energy, construction, remote healthcare, food and a new form of Tourism. To achieve this, the county will have to evolve from the traditional industries to build on the existing assets in the county, forge a renewed identity that is distinctive at a national and international level and builds out sustainable businesses that will evolve over time providing high quality employment to the people of Offaly.

I-LOFAR is a cutting-edge astrophysics observing facility in Birr Castle, Co. Offaly, which connects Ireland to the International LOFAR Telescope

The Theme of this Economic Development Strategy & Plan

1.1 Standing Up to Power Ireland's Net Zero Mandate

The theme of this Strategy and Plan is "Standing up to power Ireland's Net Zero Ambition" which shows how Offaly, within itself and working with others, can show the ambition and matching appetite to stand up and create new national leadership positions in the various sectors that are legacy strengths in the county. This theme is about creating new from the old and allowing the county to become a recognised reference site for some leading technologies within Ireland and internationally.

This Strategy recognises that most categories of technology (mechanical, electronic, chemical, digital) refer to what is created or produced. However, the technology base in Offaly enables significant improvements in better environmental and economic outcomes, such as reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, or improving land, water, and air quality and the wellbeing of people[1].

Given the urgency of the climate change mandates internationally, and the regulatory policies in place to support those mandates, almost every technology company worldwide is exploring ways to become a company that supports zero carbon ambitions, for example by expanding their product lines or making incremental improvements such as installing solar panels to power production, recycling wastewater to transitioning to biodegradable packaging. Large industry is pivoting to cleaner operations and exploring zero carbon related projects and opportunities and SMEs are compelling the switch to making sustainability a feature of life.

This Strategy and Plan places Offaly in the top 5 counties in Ireland in the next decade and as an internationally recognised centre of innovation for *specific sectors* with a vibrant and innovative SME and micro business sector. All the details live in the legacy of agricultural, nature, water, energy generation and power. At the time of writing, the county still generates the most renewable power output in the country[2], stores comparably high energy levels and has a natural ecological history that enables it play into new industries. It is also the home to scientific discoveries which have been referenced throughout the world.

[1] It is noted that this definition is broader than those used by some other agencies in Ireland. However, this definition is that used by other leading clusters around the world such as Canada, Finland, Sweden etc.

[2] Offaly has 538MW of operational or currently under-construction renewables (wind). 435MW of solar developments have been consented. Approx. 400MW of wind developments and approx. 690MW of solar developments are currently at various stages of the planning process i.e. from early public consultation to planning applications. Lumcloon Energy has two BESS (Battery Energy Storage Systems) operational in West Offaly – Shannonbridge 100MW BESS and Lumcloon 100MW BESS. Both are the largest energy storage facilities in Ireland to date. A further 200MW of BESS is consented within the county. 125MW in Synchronous Compensators are consented in addition to 15MW of Methanisation plant and a 5MW pilot Hydrogen plant. The existing, consented and 'pipeline' of additional projects may raise the total to over 1.5 GW of renewable energy, storage and grid systems services facilities in Offaly.

Figure 1: Offaly Greatest Market Opportunities

This Strategy and Plan specifically references County Offaly being the national home of distinct technology competencies, competitive advantages, and ecosystem players to understand the greatest opportunities for:

1. Rapid scale-up of technologies that support zero carbon ambitions, including commercialisation, industry adoption, investment attraction and export market development in distinct areas.
2. Solving specific industry challenges including decoupling growth from emissions, repurposing used assets materials and creating diversified added value products across six sectors.

Figure 2: Six Core Focus Areas

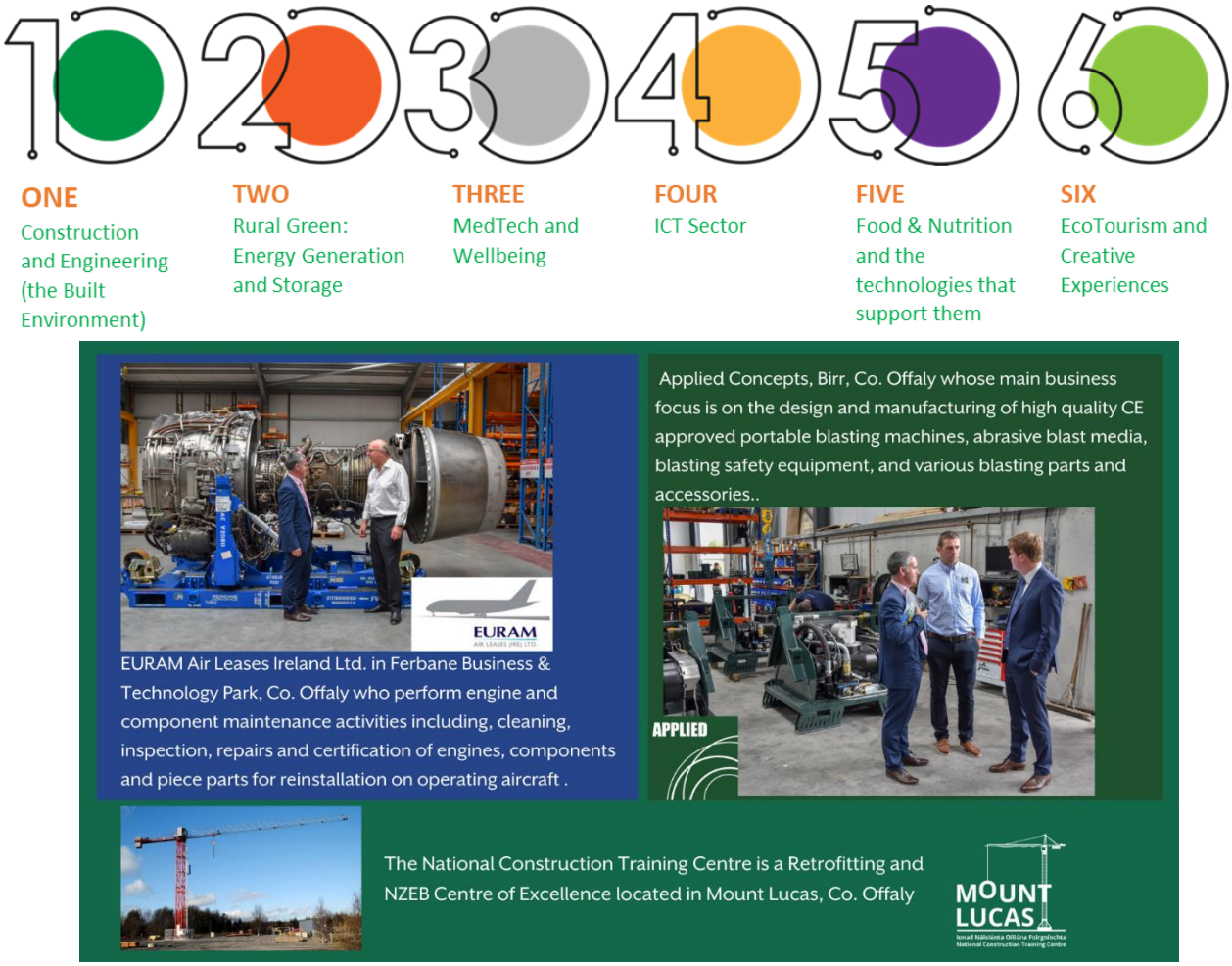
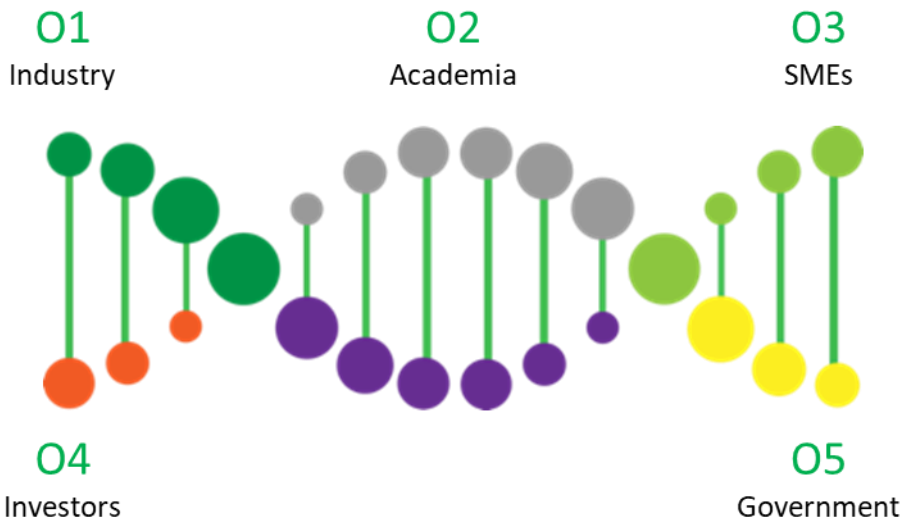


Table 1: The Rationale of the Six Areas of focus

Focus area	Rationale
Construction and Engineering (The Built Environment)	The significance of the Built Environment for residential and commercial is becoming greater throughout the world. The advent of zero carbon building is achievable and in the Mount Lucas National Construction Centre, Offaly already possesses an asset to develop and evolve a greater national and international role. This report proposes a distinct area of focus for the industry to secure the Offaly position in the industry.
Rural green	The development of rural energy and conservation technologies is essential to be trialled and tested in scale operations. Offaly already possesses the Rhode Green Energy Park which can be used as a fulcrum for such national and international activities. A green economy is one that provides economic opportunities and improved human well-being in harmony with the sustainable management of all natural resources. The transition to green rural economies is about improving people's lives and livelihoods in rural areas, balancing natural resource use with maintaining incomes, and trading the risks of making a change with the opportunities that change will bring.
MedTech and Wellbeing	In the coming decades, elderly people will account for an increasingly important share of the European population. At the same time, working age population will proportionately shrink. As a result, old-age dependency ratio will increase, that is, fewer working age people will have to support more seniors. These factors combined with budget constraints require new innovative solutions to keep ensuring high quality of seniors' life. Tullamore General Hospital is a fulcrum of the Midlands Healthcare system and an ideal position to pioneer the development of sustained living at home for elderly patients.
ICT Sector	Ireland is currently the EMEA headquarters for many of the world's largest tech companies. The fundamental driver in the industry is skills and this remains the core bottleneck in the industry worldwide. The new technologies mean that skills unique to humans such as creativity, teamwork, empathy, and innovative thinking will become increasingly more valued by employers. The Remote Working Strategy for Business whilst targeted at all sectors sees a natural synergy with the ICT sector and could be an important steppingstone for business model changes in the next years as it is unlikely that full central office usage will resume. Offaly needs to "pitch" this opportunity in a pragmatic but structured manner to ICT companies throughout Ireland. At the same time, there must be a shift in the industry – academia engagement moving beyond skills provision to research that drives innovation in the community and becomes attractive for companies to engage in Offaly as a place for their business.
Food and Nutrition & the technologies that support them	The Food industry has undergone significant changes in the past decades with changing consumer sentiment pushing an agenda for food that opens real possibilities for the future of Food production and packaging. Technology is rapidly being integrated into every part of the food industry. But accelerating adoption of existing technologies, as well a suite of new technologies emerging, creates both opportunities and challenges for food businesses. Data analytics and digital platforms offer businesses the opportunity to understand customer preferences in a way that was not previously possible. One area where technology can enable businesses to better fulfil consumer preferences is through personalised catering en masse. This is especially important in the context of increasingly complex consumer dietary requirements. Offaly is at the centre of the Midlands Food potential and the combination of the industry working with technology provides the ideal opportunity for novel products and services. The anchor for such an initiative should be the Ferbane Food Campus. The development of the zero-carbon dairy and beef farm is remarkably close.
EcoTourism & the Creative Arts	Tourism, as an industry, has changed. This is in the global context of growing tourism worldwide which are compelled by several factors. These factors are changing how tourism value is realised and in truth, some types of tourists are simply worth more than others. The analysis of Mastercard aggregated data worldwide showed that the tourism sector comprising hotels, restaurants and other hospitality services made up 30% of expenditures on a trip. The remainder were experiences – sport, leisure, arts, crafts, and healthy living. This was also related to a timing question of vacation time with most of the spending coming after day 3 in a location and increasing thereafter. Offaly needs to reposition itself in this sector – offering experiences and sport opportunities to Tourists who will spend more.

This strategy and plan work because it brings together a 5 Helix set of operators ensuring that each has a complementary role in determining the future of Offaly and the resumption of its national leading position.

Figure 3: The 5 Helix of Actors in the Offaly Enterprise Strategy and Plan



The achievement of the elements of this plan will raise employment, improve skills, develop, and sustain new industries and improve the GVA performance of the county whilst still enabling it to be a great place to work, live and play.

Lough Boora Discovery Park

2 Why This Strategy and Plan Now

Offaly has experienced a legacy challenge due to the cessation of industries like turf cutting and traditional energy generation. These industries played a national role, while providing employment for the local population and economy. Now the challenge is to find industries that relate to the legacy strengths of the county but are oriented towards the future and can bring economic resilience and growth to the county and play a national and international role.

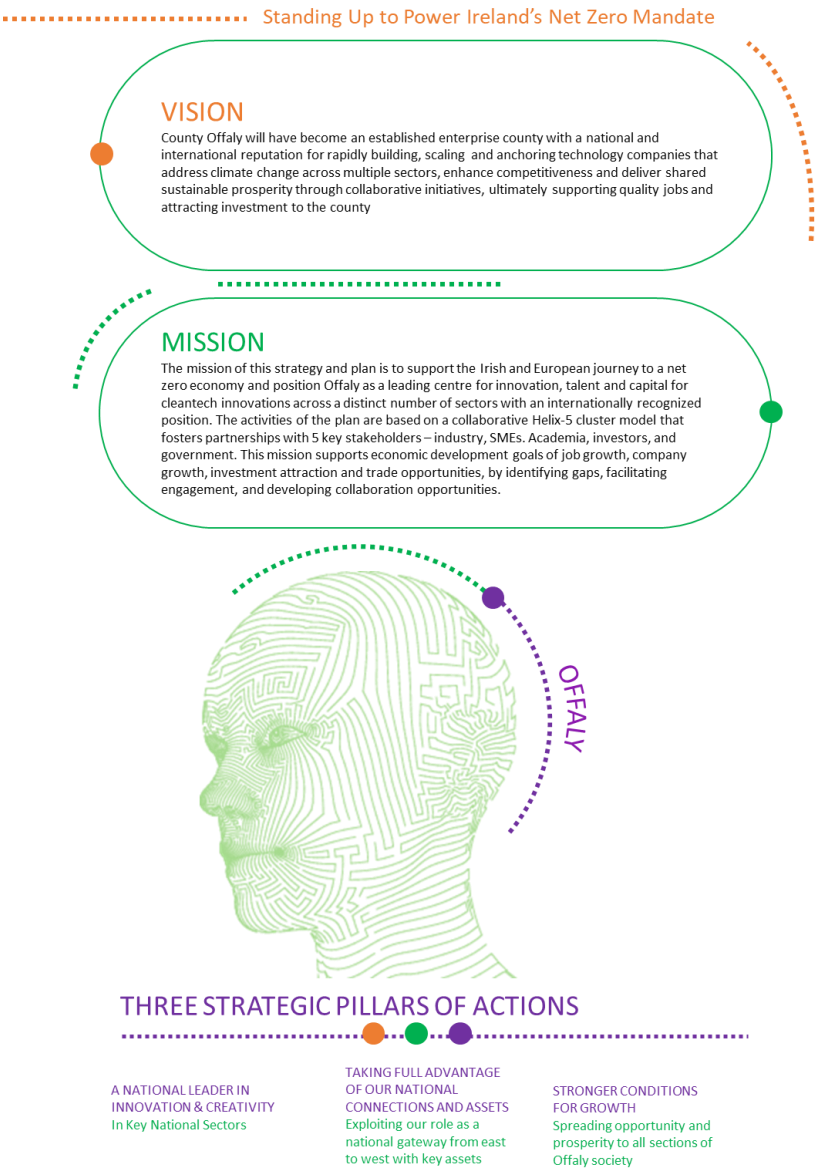
There have been initiatives taken through Offaly County Council, the Local Enterprise Office, and the state agencies of Enterprise Ireland, Bord Bia, Bord Na Mona, Laois Offaly Education and Training Board (ETB) alongside multiple regional development initiatives which are manifest in the multiple activities that are already underway in the county. All these activities are recognised and acknowledged as essential and relevant.

The county has also produced successful companies such as Glenisk, Grant Engineering and innovative new companies such as Lumcloon Energy, Applied Concepts amongst others that show that companies can establish in Offaly and be capable of exporting and developing new markets – from Offaly. The development of Rhode Green Energy Park, the Food campus in Ferbane, the Shannonbridge Energy Storage developments, I-LOFAR in Birr, Co-working Hubs, and the County Council Robotics projects which is brought into secondary schools etc. show that the county has grasped the need for change – and is pursuing that change.

This current plan builds on the excellent work of the previous Local-Economic-and-Community-Plan[3] which has created platforms of potential growth alongside these bodies. The plan then establishes a vibrant, robust, productive, and diversified economy by reconstructing the framework within which the sectors of Offaly are transformed into a new engine of growth. This plan also builds on the work of other Midland and Offaly plans that propose activities in critical sectors such as Green Energy, Food, etc. The plan aims to change the narrative about Offaly – and move it from a place you leave to one to go to.

[3] Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021

Figure 4: Mission, Vision & Strategy



The entire plan is predicated on 3 strategic pillars of activity which work with government agencies, various industries and push academia to attain sustained enterprise growth and value, expand business activity within the SME sectors, generate more and better employment opportunities and attract in new talents and skills, enhance the competitiveness of the sector in order to increase exports, accentuate the development of human resources in tandem with the selected sectors, increase foreign direct investment inflows and improve the governance of the local economy.

Figure 5: The Pillars of this Strategy and Plan

Each pillar has a distinct set of actions that move the county from the current situation to that of being a recognised national leader in the distinct areas and internationally recognised by being connected to the Irish and international ambitions in the sector. To achieve this, Offaly must secure this national position, sustain the national and international connections, and build a framework for the conditions for growth in Offaly to ensure the benefits are seen and felt within the county. Standing Up means ensuring gains are achieved for the county whilst supporting and assisting others.

Contact Us

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Space to Live

Space to Invest

Space to Work

Space to Grow

Space to Innovate