

# 2 Core Strategy

**Aim:** To respond in a coherent sustainable spatial manner to the development of Athy providing a more focused approach to planning for future development. The core strategy seeks to promote a more consolidated and compact urban form; to create and promote new employment opportunities; to create sustainable and integrated communities while balancing the protection of the natural and built heritage with sustainable and appropriate development

## 2.1 Strategy

The core strategy for Athy has been prepared with reference to the Athy Development Plan 2006-2012, the National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020, the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area 2010-2022 and the core strategy of the Draft Kildare County Development Plan 2011-2017. It sets out a strategic approach to the management of growth and resources in Athy and is expanded upon in the policies and objectives contained within the remainder of this Plan. The strategy seeks to facilitate the sustainable development of the town over the six year period of the Development Plan and beyond.

In developing a strategy for the future planning and development of the town it is recognised that Athy is the largest town in south Kildare and the sixth largest in County Kildare. It is also identified as a Moderate Sustainable Growth Town in the Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) and as a Secondary Economic Growth Centre in the Greater Dublin Area.

The aims and objectives of the core strategy are to:

- (i) Recognise and promote the role of Athy as a Moderate Sustainable Growth Town having an interacting and supporting role servicing the

rural hinterland area of south Kildare.

- (ii) Facilitate future population growth of Athy in line with the RPGs and the Draft County Development Plan 2011-2017, through the consolidation of the town centre and adjoining residential areas.
- (iii) Support the development of Athy as a secondary economic growth centre providing an important role in developing economic growth and sectoral interests.
- (iv) Encourage and support the delivery of key infrastructural projects to ensure that future development needs are met in a sustainable and coordinated manner.
- (v) Promote and encourage major enhancement and expansion of the retail offer and town centre retail functions of Athy in line with its designation as a Sub County Town Centre in south Kildare.
- (vi) Develop a compact urban form with particular emphasis on the orderly redevelopment and regeneration of key areas within the town centre.
- (vii) Protect local assets by preserving the quality of the landscape, open space, architectural, archaeological and cultural heritage and material assets of the town.

## 2.2 Historical Context and Status

The name Athy dates back to the second century when Ae the son of Dearthabail was slain in a battle between the men of Munster and

the men of Leinster. The battle was fought at a Ford on the River Barrow hence called Ath-Ae, the Ford of Ae, which was later anglicised into Athy.

The town itself developed as part of the Anglo-Norman settlement in Ireland. Woodstock Castle was built in the early years of the thirteenth century near the ancient river crossing of Ath-Ae. The Priory of St Thomas and Hospital of St John was founded in the thirteenth century on rising ground above the river on its west side while, on the east bank, just south of the crossing, a Dominican friary was established in 1253 in the area known as the Abbey. The town has developed from a relatively compact urban structure containing an historic core with many fine buildings of architectural merit which contribute to the overall heritage value of the town.

The River Barrow is an important feature in the town and flows through the town centre in a north/south direction. The town's main vehicular axis runs east/west along the N78 National Secondary route and forms part of the main street. The town serves a large hinterland in southern Kildare and Laois and is proximate to a number of major employment, retail and leisure development centres including Dublin, Carlow, Kilkenny, Portlaoise, Newbridge and Naas.

### **2.3 Athy within its Regional and County Context**

The Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022 (RPGs) outlines the strategic planning framework for all development plans within the GDA. The guidelines identifies two planning policy zones, the Metropolitan Area and the Hinterland Area. These planning policy zones are supported by a settlement hierarchy with the identification of key growth towns to be consolidated, developed and supported within a sustainable urban form.

The RPG settlement strategy and the Draft Kildare County Development Plan 2011-2017 designates Athy, Kildare, Monasterevin and

Kilcullen as Moderate Sustainable Growth Towns within the hinterland area. These strategically placed, strong and dynamic urban centres are to accommodate significant population growth in the hinterland area acting as key centres for the provision of services for surrounding smaller towns in rural areas.

Athy is also designated as a secondary economic growth centre providing an important supporting and complementary role in the development of economic growth in tandem with the primary economic growth towns of Naas, Maynooth and Leixlip. The long term objective for Athy is to consolidate existing employment and service sectors and create new employment opportunities, particularly in the areas of high value added manufacturing and internationally traded sectors in tandem with I.D.A. support around transport corridors and routes.

In terms of retail, Athy along with Clane and Kildare are designated as Level 3 Sub County Town Centres in the GDA Regional Retail Hierarchy and a Hinterland Area Tier 1 Level 3 Sub County Town Centre in the County Retail Hierarchy. These centres play an important strategic role in the shopping patterns of their generally extensive hinterlands. Athy is the main retail centre in the south of the County however there are deficiencies in the retail offer of Athy which is undermining the town delivering its strategic role and potential. It is an important priority that, over the timescale of the Development Plan and beyond, Athy fully develops into its designated role in the County Retail Hierarchy.

### **2.4 Socio-Economic profile**

#### **2.4.1 Total Population**

Changes in population and household patterns are important concepts in Development Plans in order to estimate land and services required for residential development, community facilities, employment, infrastructure etc. Table 2.1 below

shows the pattern of population change in Athy from 1996- 2006.

**Table 2.1** Population Change in Athy 1996-2006

	1996	2002	2006
<b>Population</b>	5306	6058	7943
<b>Households</b>	1683	2056	2852
<b>Average Household Size</b>	3.15	2.9	2.7

*Source: CSO Census of Population*

The census 2006 illustrates a period of unprecedented population growth in Athy with a 31% increase between 2002 and 2006 and a 50% increase over the period 1996 to 2006. In comparison the population of County Kildare increased from 134,881 in 1996 to 186,335 in 2006, representing a growth of 38%. The population growth in Athy equates to almost three times the national population increase of 17% between 1996 and 2006. Since 2006 there has been limited population growth and arising from a land availability study carried out in 2010 it is estimated that the population of Athy is currently c. 9,950

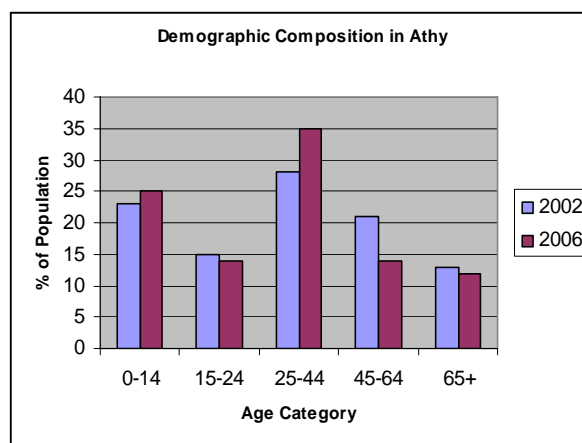
### 2.4.2 Households and Household Sizes

The total number of households in Athy increased from 1,683 in 1996 to 2,852 in 2006. The average household size decreased from 3.15 in 1996 to 2.7 in 2006 (refer Table 2.1).

The average household size is significantly below the average for the county as a whole which was recorded at 3.07 in 2006. The decreasing household sizes are consistent with the trend at a national level. Changes in household sizes will have implications for the nature of housing provision within the town.

### 2.4.3 Demographic Profile

The demographic profile in Athy changed significantly over the period 2002-2006. The most significant increase occurred in the 25-44 age cohort (+7%) followed by the 0-14 age cohort (+ 2 %). The 45-64 year age cohort decreased significantly over the same period by -7%. Both the 15-24 and the 65+ categories decreased by -1%. The decrease in the 65+ cohort is in contrast to the national trend which is experiencing an ageing of the population. This suggests that many young couples / new households have established homes in the town bringing pressures for childcare, educational provision and employment opportunities.



### 2.4.4 Labour Force and Commuting

The CSO 2006 indicates that 4,014 workers lived in Athy. Of this figure 2,176 people were employed within the town and 3,445<sup>1</sup> residents were available for employment. Education, health and social work, commerce and manufacturing accounted for 77% of the jobs. Table 2.2 outlines the number of people employed in each category in Athy.

<sup>1</sup> Persons who are employed, unemployed and first time job seekers.

**Table 2.2** Employment in Athy by Industry

Industry Category	Jobs
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing	17
Commerce	602
Construction	103
Education, Health, Social Work	625
Manufacturing Industries	444
Public Administration & Defence	81
Transport, Storage & Communications	52
Other	252
<b>Total No. of Jobs</b>	<b>2,176</b>

Source: CSO Census 2006

In 2006 it was estimated that 1,691 workers commute from Athy to their place of work representing 42% of the available workforce in Athy. This figure demonstrates the need to provide suitable employment opportunities within the town to cater for the residents of Athy and its surrounding areas.

## 2.5 Assessment of Future Growth and Needs

In order to estimate land, services and infrastructural requirements for particular landuses including residential development, community facilities and employment provision an assessment of future growth is required.

### 2.5.1 Future Population Growth and Housing Targets

The Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area 2010-2022 indicates that County Kildare is to plan for continued strong

levels of population growth towards a target of 252,640 by 2022, an increase of 66,305 persons or 33.8% increase, in addition to the number recorded in 2006. The Draft County Development Plan 2011-2017 allocates 35% of the population / unit target growth to the Metropolitan towns in the north east with 32.5% allocated to the hinterland towns of Naas, Newbridge, Kildare, Athy, Monasterevin and Kilcullen and the remaining 32.5% to smaller towns, villages and the rural countryside. Arising from the allocation, a growth target of 10,679 population / 1,252 units for Athy is prescribed for the period 2006-2017. This represents 4.2% of the allocated growth for the County over this period. The population / housing unit target has been extrapolated forward to project the additional population / unit target to be catered for over the period of this Plan (2012-2018). These figures are outlined in Table 2.3.

**Table 2.3** Housing and Population Allocation 2012-2018.

Athy Town	Population
2006 Population Census	7,943
2010 Population Estimate <sup>2</sup>	9,950
2018 Population Target	10,819
Projected population increase 2006-2018	2,876 (36% increase)
2006-2018 Housing Unit Target	1,389
2006-2010 Units Constructed	702
2011-2018 Housing unit target	687 / 85 units per yr

In order to plan for the potential growth as outlined above, an understanding of the existing development capacity of the town is required. Under the Athy Development Plan 2006-2012 the town currently has 203.4ha of undeveloped land zoned for residential purposes<sup>3</sup> of which 24ha is subject to valid permissions for residential developments (402 residential units). With reference to the targets as outlined in Table 2.3 it is estimated that the Plan must provide sufficient zoning to accommodate a total of 628 units<sup>4</sup>. This requires the provision of approx. 28ha of lands for residential purposes. Athy is therefore significantly overzoned for residential

<sup>2</sup> 2010 Population estimate is calculated by adding the number of new households residing in new housing units completed since April 2006 to the 2006 Census population.

<sup>3</sup> Excludes town centre zoned sites.

<sup>4</sup> 1030 units (150% provision DoEHLG Guidelines – 402 (committed units) = 628

purposes and remains so in this Draft Athy Development Plan 2012-2018.

It should also be noted that the *National Survey of Ongoing Housing Development* conducted by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in 2010 estimated that 145 units are constructed and unoccupied in Athy. There is therefore an existing supply of units to cater for demand over the short to medium term.

### 2.5.2 Future Employment Requirements

As outlined in section 2.4.4, 42% of the working population commute from Athy to their place of employment. While it is recognized that a certain proportion of commuting will continue into the future, this level of commuting is unsustainable in the longer term. In order to make the town more self sufficient and improve the quality of life of residents, it will be necessary to promote an increase in the number of jobs available in the town. Table 2.4 provides a broad assessment of Athy's employment requirements up to 2018. In light of the current economic climate and job losses within the town it is the goal of this Plan to achieve a job ratio<sup>5</sup> of 0.62 by 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Jobs ratio relates to the number of jobs based in the town area divided by the resident workforce; it does not factor in employees commuting in or out of the town to work.

**Table 2.4** Future Employment Requirements

Athy	2006	2018	Increase 2006-2018
Population	7,943	10,676	2,733
Total Labour Force <sup>6</sup>	4,014	5,446	1,432
% of population economically active	51%	62%	No Change
Labour Force Participation Rate	64%	64%	No Change
Number of Jobs existing/required in Athy <sup>7</sup>	2,176	3377	1201
Job Index	54 %	62%	8% increase
<b>Extra jobs required by 2018</b>		<b>1201</b>	

Source: CSO POWCAR Data by DTO (2009)

## 2.8 Infrastructural Deficiencies

The development targets for Athy will be subject to the capacity of necessary physical infrastructure including transportation infrastructure, potable water, wastewater and surface water drainage to cater for such developments. While the new link from Athy to the M9 represents a significant opportunity for the town, the N78 serves as the principal commercial thoroughfare and vehicular route

<sup>6</sup> Estimates based on same proportion evident in 2006

<sup>7</sup> Source: Derived from CSO POWCAR data by DTO (2009)

through the town. It is subject to frequent delays, which in the absence of further road infrastructure will pose an impediment to the future economic development of Athy. Upgrading of the wastewater and water supply network are also required to facilitate the future expansion of the town.

## 2.9 Delivering the Core Strategy

The aims and objectives of the core strategy as outlined in section 2.1 will be achieved through the implementation of strategic policies supported by more detailed policies and objectives outlined in the remaining chapters of this draft plan. The core strategy is outlined on Map 2.1 and focuses on five key areas:

- Athy as a Moderate Sustainable Growth Town.
- Economic Development.
- Town Centre Development.
- Creation of sustainable and integrated communities.
- Balancing the environment with sustainable and appropriate development.

### 2.9.1 Strategy for Athy as a Moderate Sustainable Growth Town

The overall function of Athy as a Moderate Sustainable Growth Town is to develop in a self-sufficient manner, reducing commuting levels and ensuring sustainable levels of housing growth. A full range of local services adequate to meet local needs and for surrounding rural areas is required. The provision of strong social infrastructure in tandem with growth in population, particularly in relation to schools and leisure facilities is also required.



It is the policy of the Council:

- CS 1: To facilitate sustainable levels of housing growth at appropriate locations within the town in tandem with social / community infrastructure and local services adequate to meet the needs of the population of the town and surrounding rural area.
- CS 2: To facilitate greater co-ordination of residential and employment provision with the delivery of public infrastructure, amenities, community facilities, schools, public transport etc.

### 2.9.2 Economic Development

Athy is designated as a secondary economic growth town in the hinterland area providing an important role in developing economic growth and sectoral strengths in the GDA. It will seek to complement the regionally important primary economic growth towns within the county of Naas, Maynooth and Leixlip.

It is the policy of the Council:

- CS 3: To encourage and facilitate new employment opportunities within the town and to seek to attract higher order knowledge based enterprise and economic development.
- CS 4: To focus sectoral opportunities on the development of high value added manufacturing, SMEs, agri-business, agriculture and tourism.
- CS 5: To address commuting patterns by building up the local economy to a more sustainable level.

### 2.9.3 Town Centre Strategy

The overriding principle of the town centre strategy is to seek the consolidation of the town centre by the regeneration and redevelopment of under utilized areas particularly backland

areas, vacant units and brownfield sites. High quality urban development is advocated within the town centre, while ensuring that new development respects the existing unique built form and residential amenity of the area.

It is the policy of the Council:

- CS 6: To support, protect and reinforce the role of the town centre as the central retailing and service area of Athy through the intensification, consolidation and appropriate redevelopment of the town centre.
- CS 7: To facilitate the provision of high level and broad ranging uses, and to enhance and develop the urban fabric of the town centre.
- CS 8: To promote the appropriate use and re-use of town centre backland and under-utilised sites to promote the regeneration of areas in need of renewal.

### 2.9.4 Creation of Sustainable Integrated Communities

In parallel with the provision of a more consolidated and compact urban, together with the provision of employment opportunities, is the need to create sustainable and more socially inclusive integrated communities. In this regard, the development of quality homes, mixed tenure neighbourhoods supported by infrastructure including social and community infrastructure is required. In order to achieve this, a number of key principles are identified to ensure that infrastructure such as schools, retail, childcare and open space facilities are provided in a concurrent manner. The Draft Plan seeks to create a vibrant and bustling town with a diverse mix of activities and the creation of sustainable and integrated communities.



It is the policy of the Council:

- CS 9: To promote and facilitate the development of sustainable communities through land use planning, by providing for land uses capable of accommodating employment, community, leisure, recreational and cultural facilities, accessible to and meeting the needs of all individuals and local community groups, in tandem with the delivery of residential and physical infrastructure to create quality environments in which to live.
- CS 10: To ensure that developments are accessible to meet the needs of all individuals and local community groups.
- CS 11: To seek the delivery of physical and community infrastructure in conjunction with high quality residential developments to create quality living environments.

### **2.9.5 Balancing the Environment with Sustainable and Appropriate Development**

The built and natural heritage of Athy is recognised as an important environmental and economic resource and its conservation and

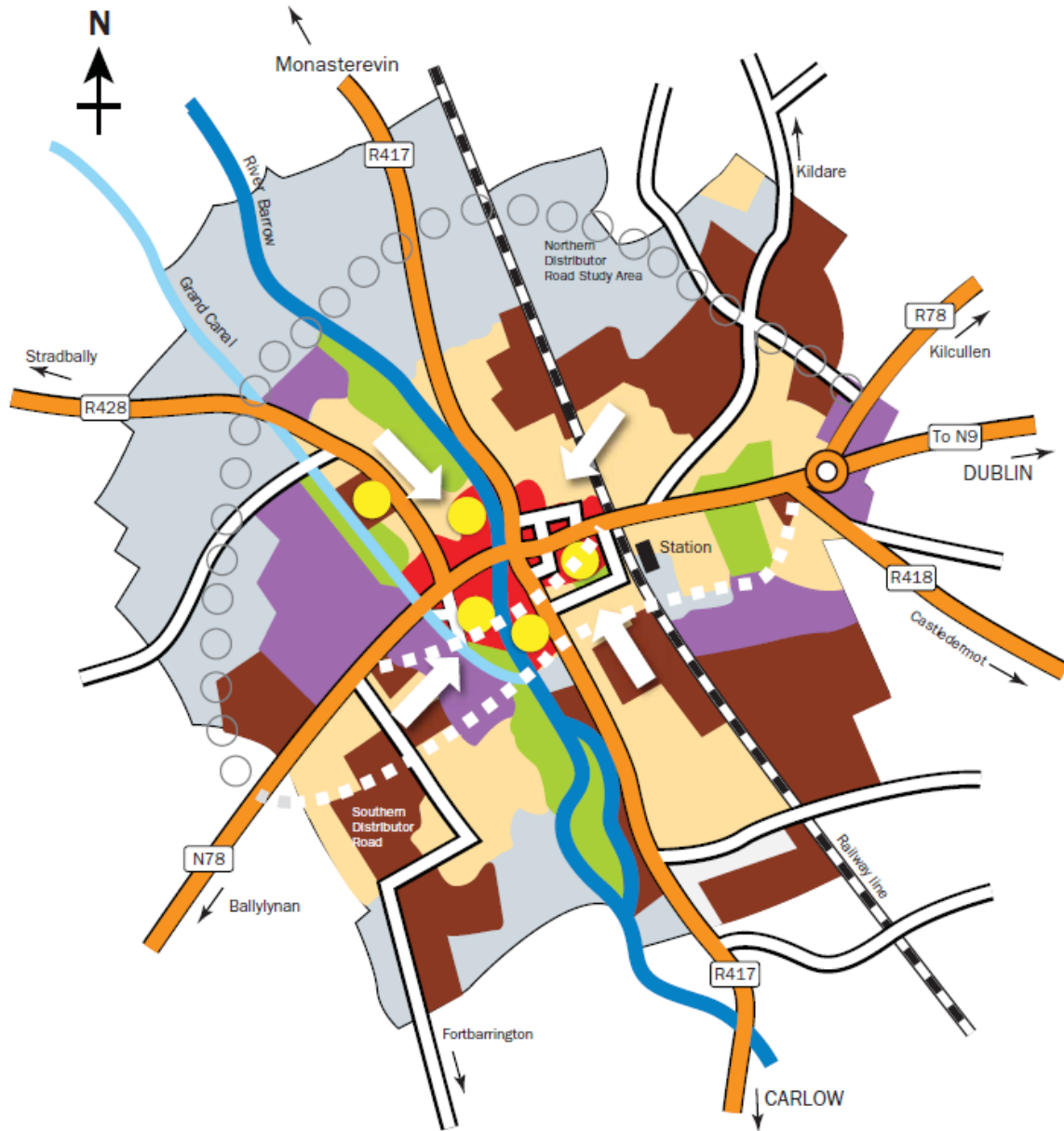
enhancement is a key objective of this Development Plan. A key challenge is to balance the protection of the natural and built environment with the pressure for development. There is a need to protect local assets and to identify elements of key importance to the unique identity and character of Athy Town and also to enhance, conserve and protect these as appropriate.

It is the policy of the Council:

- CS 12: To protect and conserve buildings, areas, structures, sites and features of special architectural, historic, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest and to protect features of natural heritage, including the Canal, watercourses and habitats.
- CS 13: To protect and conserve the natural environment.
- CS 14: To protect and conserve nationally important and EU designated sites.
- CS 15: To promote and enhance biodiversity.



## MAP 2.1 CORE STRATEGY



### Athy - Moderate Sustainable Growth Town

#### Legend

- |                            |                                      |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Athy Town Council Boundary | Northern Distributor Road Study Area |
| Existing Built Area        | Main Road Network                    |
| Key Employment Areas       | Local Roads                          |
| New Residential Areas      | Proposed Road                        |
| Green/Amenity Areas        | Railway Station                      |
| Town Centre                | Railway                              |
| Agriculture                | Opportunity Areas                    |
| River Barrow               | Consolidated Town Centre             |
| Grand Canal                |                                      |

